

TRAVEL HISTORY CULTURE PEOPLE FOOD

ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE



**The Forgotten
Nativity of Lanciano**

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**Pescocostanzo: Baroque
splendour and ski runs**

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Special Supplement Inside:

**54 Christmas markets,
Nativities, and special
festive experiences
in Abruzzo**

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ON THE COVER:

Pescocostanzo/Getty Images. Read the story on page 15.

LEFT:

Pescocostanzo. Photos by Anna Lebedeva. Read the story on page 15.

ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE

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Editor's Note

Every December, I look back at the year's ABRUZZISSIMO issues to see how many stories we have brought to you, how many places we have travelled through together, and how many people we have met along the way. Each time, I realise just how much remains untold. People often ask, "Don't you run out of things to write about?" Never. Abruzzo is so big, so layered in history, tradition and local genius, that we could fill thousands of pages and still find new paths, new voices, new wonders waiting for us.

As we turn the page on another year of discoveries, one story in particular leads us into the heart of Abruzzo's heritage. In the Franciscan Convent of Sant'Angelo della Pace in **Lanciano (CH)**, a magnificent seventeenth-century Nativity set lies in storage waiting to be brought back into the light. Giacomo de Crecchio and his son Gaetano rediscovered it fifteen years ago and say that the *Presepe* Antinori, with its 107 with exquisite details, is a rarity the public deserves to see.

In the spirit of the season, we make our way to **Pescocostanzo (AQ)**, long beloved by ski enthusiasts. After the recent snowfalls, the town glows like a life-size nativity scene framed by white peaks.

To add another touch of festive enchantment, we share the tale of Nicolas Gentile and the Tolkien-inspired Shire he built in **Bucchianico (CH)**, where visitors may enter only if they come dressed as Hobbits – a requirement that has never discouraged anyone.

Our premium subscribers will find a free supplement at the end of the issue, a tradition we continue every year, featuring seasonal recipes, 54 Christmas markets, Nativities, and special festive experiences across Abruzzo.

And if you are searching for a thoughtful present, remember that you can gift a [digital subscription](#) to the Abruzzo-curious in your life, inviting them to join this ongoing journey through a region that never stops offering new stories. You can also support our work with a small [gift donation](#), helping us continue to follow those paths and voices that make Abruzzo an endless source of discovery.

The next issue will be sent out on February 5, as we take a short break to recharge and plan the upcoming editions.

Buon Natale and Happy Holidays!

Anna Lebedeva
Founder & Editor

DIGEST OF RECENT REGIONAL NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS FROM ABRUZZO NEWSPAPERS



ABRUZZO COMEDY WINS AUDIENCE AWARD ABROAD

A World Apart (*Un Mondo Aparte*) has won the Audience Award for Best Narrative at the Teaneck International Film Festival in New Jersey, its first international accolade. The Italian comedy follows a teacher who leaves Rome for a remote Abruzzo mountain village, rallying the community to save their tiny local school from closure. Filmed in **Opi**, **Pescasseroli**, **Barrea**, and the ghost town of **Sperone**, the movie features local residents alongside professional actors and has been a box office hit in Italy. Watch for announcements on its upcoming English-language screenings in the U.S.

OVER 100 AND COUNTING

Abruzzo ranks sixth in Italy for centenarians, with nearly 50 people per 100,000 residents reaching 100, according to Italy's National Institute of Statistics' 2025 report. While trailing Umbria and Tuscany, the region boasts a notable longevity culture. For those over 105, Abruzzo falls to tenth, counting just 20, down from previous years. Chieti leads the province tally with eight supercentenarians, followed by **Pescara** (7), **Teramo** (3), and **L'Aquila** (2). Nationwide, Italy now has 23,548 centenarians, a sharp rise from 10,158 in 2009, with women making up 83% of this remarkable population.



LEARN, LISTEN, EXPLORE: ABRUZZISSIMO WEBINARS 2026

Next year, ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine will launch a series of free webinars offering a closer look at Abruzzo's history and traditions. Many readers have requested this, and we're excited to make it happen. Across several online sessions, we will invite local experts who will guide you through the region's dialect, remarkable traditions, and some fascinating historical events. The first webinar is set for January, so watch your inbox for dates and details. Have an idea for a webinar or want to collaborate as a host? Reach out to us at editor@abruzzissimo.com.

CASOURIA EARNS DOCG STATUS

Abruzzo has a new DOCG, the highest Italian wine classification, with Casauria now officially recognised for Montepulciano d'Abruzzo. Already featured on the labels of wines from this year's harvest by nine wineries, including Guardiani Farchione, Nic Tartaglia, Pasetti, Castorani and several other, the designation spans 18 communes in Pescara province, from **Bolognano** and **Castiglione a Casauria** to **Torre dei Passeri** and **Turrivalignani**. It joins Colline Teramane and Tollo as Abruzzo's top-tier DOCG wines.

Made in Abruzzo

HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine has gathered a new collection of thoughtful presents, from handcrafted jewellery and artisanal ceramics to Italian language courses, an eBook, unusual perfumes, and sustainable wool knits made from Abruzzo's own sheep.



SULMONA IN A SCENT

Confetti are a sweet treat in Sulmona, and for Barbara Traficante – born and raised in the city, and enchanted by confetti as a child – they became the inspiration for a fragrance to savour. In 2008, she brought her childhood dream to life with **Sulmona Essenza**, a perfume rooted in her city's historic *confetti* tradition.

Delicate notes of almond, icing sugar, jasmine, and orange blossom mingle with Tahitian vanilla and musk, creating a subtle, harmonious scent that evokes the nostalgic sweetness of Sulmona's *confetti*. The perfume can be ordered [online](#).

WOOL WITH A STORY

After a decade in the fashion industry, Benedetta Morucci moved to the Abruzzese mountains to found **Lamantera**, a company that transforms local sheep wool – often discarded – into luxurious, sustainable knits. She oversees every stage, from shearing to spinning, and works exclusively with Italian mills that use slow, low-impact processes.

The [Lamantera collection](#) includes hats, scarves, cosy socks, bed throws, baby blankets, and yarn for knitters, with colours in either the natural tones of the wool or subtly dyed with plants. Every piece is made from 100% sheep wool sourced from local Abruzzese flocks.



ONLINE ITALIAN LESSONS

Know someone who wants to learn Italian? A new online language course kicks off in January with Barbara Summa, Abruzzese-born teacher, author, and regular contributor to Abruzzissimo. Her Italian classes combine grammar and conversation with real-life vocabulary about home, Abruzzese cuisine, and community life, with stories about the region making them the perfect gift for anyone dreaming of moving to Abruzzo or feeling truly at home in Italy. The lessons are scheduled to fit comfortably across multiple time zones (Europe, East Coast, and West Coast). See Barbara's website for [details](#).



JEWELLERY INSPIRED BY ABRUZZO'S PAST

Abruzzese artisan Dantina Grosso of **Artidealab** creates silver jewellery that draws inspiration from the region's rich history. Her pendants, earrings, bracelets, and necklaces feature motifs such as ancient chimeras, letters from the Oscan-Samnite alphabet, and ornamental elements uncovered in excavations across Abruzzo's Samnite territories. Many designs are modelled on archaeological treasures held in museums like those in Chieti, Alfedena, and Campobasso, as well as unique local carvings such as the wooden dragon in one of Pescocostanzo's churches. Each piece is crafted using ancient almost-forgotten silversmithing techniques. Dantina's creations can be purchased in her shop in Civitella Alfedena (AQ) (Via Nazionale 5) or browse her [online catalogue](#) and order at +39 3397023672.

A CHRISTMAS BAUBLE WITH A TWIST

Evandra De Rosa's **Pallina di Natale Imbottigliata** turns the classic Christmas bauble into a treat twice over. Each hand-painted ceramic sphere is filled with Abruzzo's finest flavours, from artisanal liqueurs and ratafia to rich olive oil, gin, and creamy infusions. Once the contents are enjoyed, the magic continues. A metal hook inside the box transforms the bauble into a decoration for the tree, and its patented design allows it to stand upright and serve as a room diffuser with wooden sticks and essential oils.

Crafted in her workshop in Isola del Gran Sasso (TE), Evandra's bauble/bottles can be order via her [website](#) (delivery Italy only).



A FESTIVE READ FOR FOOD LOVERS

For anyone drawn to the warmth of holiday traditions and dishes with a past, **The Taste of Christmas in Abruzzo** makes a thoughtful gift. Written by Marianna Colantoni, a regular contributor to ABRUZZISSIMO, it brings together 34 authentic festive recipes along with the stories, memories, and ingredients that define this time of year. Inside, you'll find dishes such as *maccheroni alla chitarra* with tiny meatballs, *brodetto alla vastese* for Christmas Eve, and *pecora alla callara*, a dish that reflects the region's pastoral roots. Available as an English-language [ebook](#) or as an Italian [paperback](#).



THE FORGOTTEN NATIVITY OF LANCIANO

By Giacomo de Crecchio

Hidden for centuries in a dusty storage room of the Franciscan Convent of Sant'Angelo della Pace in Lanciano (CH), the 17th-century Presepe Antinori is one of Italy's most remarkable nativity sets. After years of bureaucratic obstacles, this cultural treasure remains in storage, making it increasingly urgent to find a proper solution that lets the public view and safeguard this extraordinary collection.

Fifteen years ago, nothing in my research had prepared me for what we found in a storage room inside the Franciscan Convent of Sant'Angelo della Pace in Lanciano. The room had the stillness of a place rarely entered, its objects dulled under a thick layer of dust. Several chests were stacked one over the other, their fabrics worn, their locks stiff. Among them, one covered in orange velvet, fixed with gilt studs, caught our attention. It was heavy, its hinges protesting as we lifted the lid. Inside, wrapped in faded cloths, laid figures from what would reveal itself as the Presepe Antinori, one of the most important nativity sets in Italy.

Photo: Presepe Antinori figures found in a chest in Lanciano. Photo by Gaetano de Crecchio

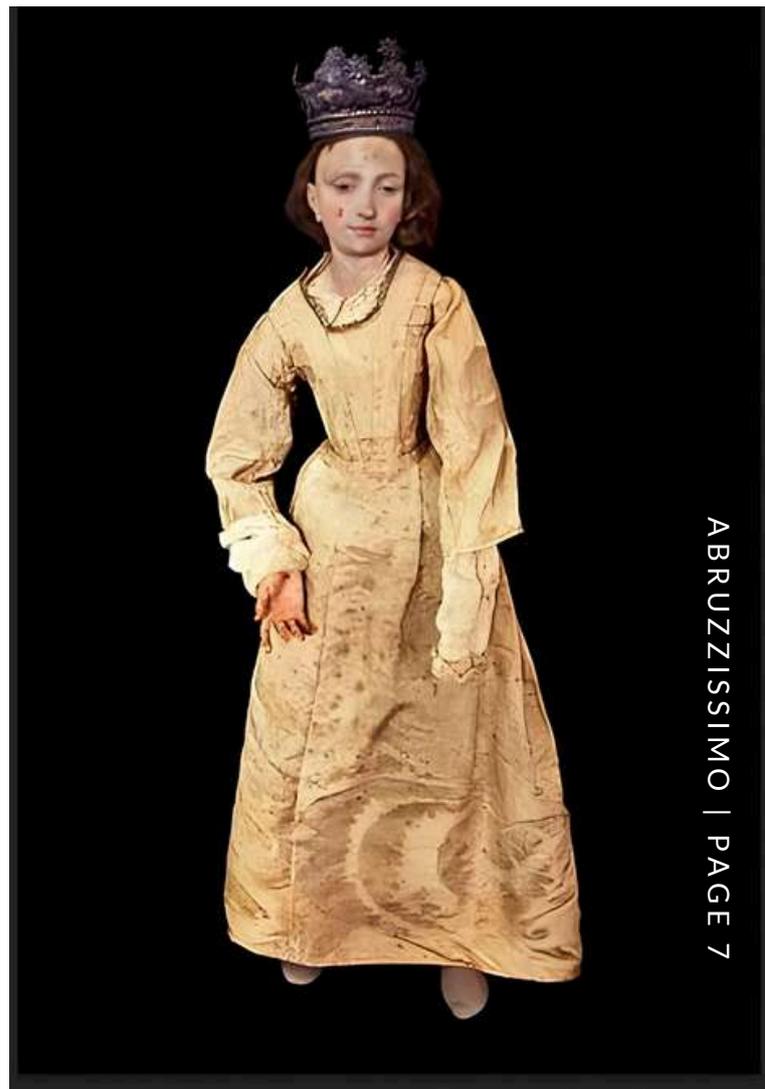
FROM DUST TO LIGHT

That first opening felt like breaking a long silence. My son Gaetano and I could not yet grasp the significance of what we were handling. Only later, with patient work, did we confirm that the complete set amounted to 108 pieces: 84 human figures and 24 animals, some in carved wood, others in papier-mâché. All were articulated, their limbs designed to bend through tiny internal mechanisms. Their clothes, hand-sewn in damask, silk, wool, and lace, spoke of refined craftsmanship. The tiny leather shoes held shaped stockings; some figures displayed signs of goitre, a reminder of nutritional deficiencies in certain regions at the time they were made. It was evident that this was not a simple devotional nativity, but an extraordinary artistic and social document from the end of the 1600s.

The history of the chest and its contents unfolded gradually through archival work. The collection had belonged to the Antinori family of L'Aquila. One of the oldest and most distinguished Italian families, they originated in Tuscany and were renowned for their wine production as early as 1385. Less known, but no less significant, was their role as patrons of the arts. They supported Renaissance workshops, cultivated artistic talent and surrounded themselves with objects that reflected their cultural and intellectual standing.

THE ANTINORI

The Antinori nativity reached Abruzzo through a long and intricate family journey. An 1833 inventory compiled by a notary in L'Aquila listed 145 pieces, including 90 shepherds. The story begins even earlier with Orazio Antinori, who left Florence at the end of the 17th century and settled in Bologna. One branch of the family remained there, while another, with his son Giacinto, moved to L'Aquila shortly before the earthquake of 1703. Giacinto, entrusted with overseeing food supplies and salt-tax controls, travelled frequently to Naples. There he married and



Photos: Figures from the Antinori Nativity. Photos by Gaetano de Crecchio

raised numerous children. The eldest, Antonio Ludovico Maria, would become Archbishop of Lanciano and a respected historian. The youngest, Gennaro, would be the one to maintain the family line through his children Egidia Caterina, Giacinto, Agnese and Giuseppe.

AN INHERITED TREASURE

How did the presepe arrive in L'Aquila and then Lanciano? A decisive clue emerged from a letter written by Gennaro on 16 December 1768 to his cousin Luigi in Bologna. With Christmas approaching, he asked him to "send over the approximately 130 figures, each two palms high, and other shepherds, and the entire procession of the Magi with 12 horses and more", items worth "about 600 scudi". This document confirmed that a significant portion of the nativity had travelled to L'Aquila at Gennaro's request. Years later, his son Giuseppe would determine the set's fate. We found a deeply personal letter he wrote to his sister Egidia Caterina on 18 June 1833, shortly before his death. In it, he explained his wish to leave the nativity to Egidia's son, Luigi Stella Maranca of Lanciano, noting that their ancestor Giacinto had always guarded the set with special care. Luigi honoured that wish. After Giuseppe's death, he travelled to L'Aquila to collect what we now call the Presepe Antinori and bring it to Lanciano.

The Presepe Antinori in the chest when it was found.
Photo by Gaetano de Crecchio



Restored figures from the Presepe during the exhibition in 2017. Photo by Nicola Borgia

From that moment on, the nativity's history intertwined with the Stella-Maranca family and Lanciano. When the last descendants, Marianna and Assunta, received assistance from the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary in Lanciano, they left all their possessions to the institution, including the nativity. It was later entrusted to the Friars Minor of the city, who remain its custodians today. This long chain of inheritances, transfers, and forgotten rooms explains why such a treasure could lie unseen for decades inside a dusty convent storage space.

In 2012, when I wrote a book about our discovery, I counted 84 shepherds and 23 animals in the convent; a few years later, in the cell of a friar who had passed away some time before, we found a horse figurine from the presepe. It is reasonable to assume that, over the centuries, certain figures slipped out of sight. Whether they were misplaced or taken, we do not know.

LONG RESEARCH

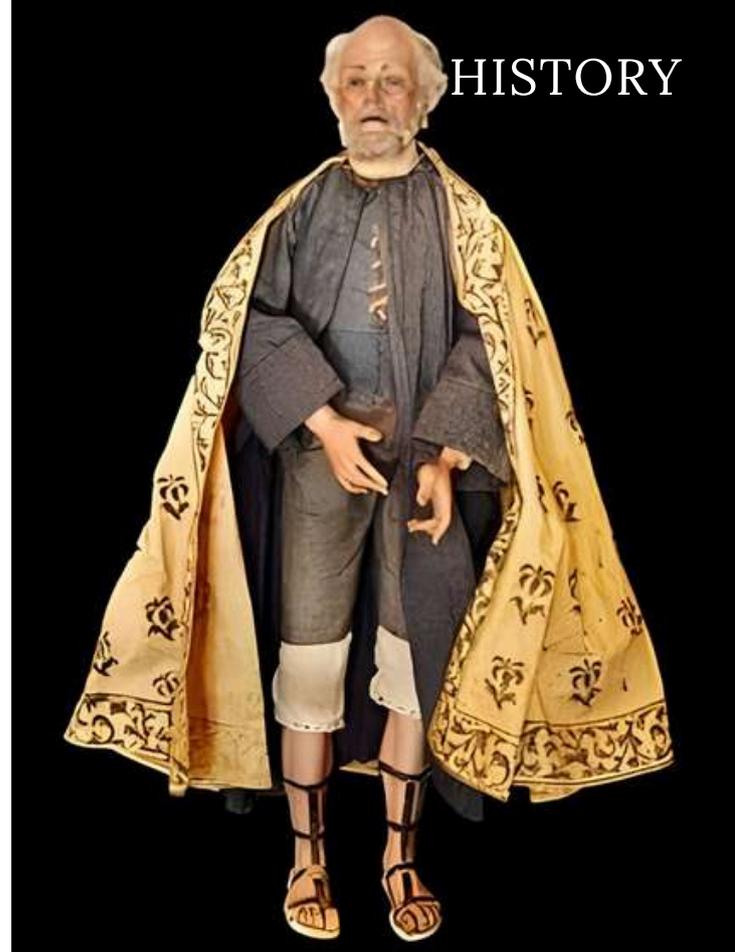
With patience, we reconstructed the nativity's full story using the archives of the convent once known as Sant'Angelo della Pace. The documents offered a fragmented trail, but through careful analysis we were able to retrace the movement of the figures from L'Aquila to Lanciano. We dedicated two years to this research, photographing every figure, documenting clothing and posture, and studying the signs left by artisans whose names are unknown. The result was our book, *I pastori che dormono. Il Presepe Antinori in viaggio da Aquila a Lanciano*, through which we hoped to return these figures to the attention of scholars and the community.

The workmanship of the set remains extraordinary. Each figure is carved in wood with detailed anatomical accuracy. They can be repositioned like small artistic mannequins thanks to their internal joints. Their garments are real textiles, embroidered with gold and silver threads, embellished with coral necklaces, macramé lace, and even tiny undergarments. Some figures once held silver accessories, now lost. The group of Magi, with their 21-figure entourage, 12 horses, 20 sheep, the Madonna, Saint Joseph, and the Christ Child, dressed in damask and silk velvet – each element is impressive. It is an object that belongs not only to local heritage but to a broader Italian cultural tradition.

WHY THIS NATIVITY MATTERS TODAY

Much remains uncertain. Over 15 years of research, I have encountered scholars who argue that the figures do not belong to a Neapolitan workshop. Some suggest Ligurian or Tuscan origins; others point to Emilia Romagna. The truth may lie in a combination of influences, but the enigma only adds to the nativity's significance. What is evident, however, is its rarity. Experts confirm that, despite the fame of later Neapolitan nativity sets, the Antinori collection stands out for its age, workmanship, historical details and depth.

Some years ago, the first 18 figures underwent careful stabilisation treatment at the Soprintendenza BSAE in Naples, in the workshop of Antonio Cantone, one of the foremost specialists in the field. In 2017, the restored pieces were shown in an exhibition in L'Aquila. This was



One of the restored figures. Photo by Gaetano de Crecchio

an essential first step, but much remains to be done. The Friars Minor, who guard the nativity today, bear a considerable responsibility. They cannot be expected to manage such an immense, expensive conservation effort alone. The risk is that, without collective support, the Presepe Antinori will once again be forgotten, stashed away in a chest.

My hope is clear. I would like to see the nativity displayed in Lanciano in a dedicated space, protected and studied, accessible to all. It is too important a cultural heritage to remain hidden, and too fragile to endure without timely intervention. Through continued research, responsible restoration and public interest, we can ensure that the Antinori nativity does not return to the silence of that forgotten storage room but continues to speak to future generations.

Giacomo de Crecchio is a researcher and co-author of I pastori che dormono. Il Presepe Antinori in viaggio da Aquila a Lanciano.



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CONTEA GENTILE: FINDING MAGIC IN BUCCHIANICO

In the rolling hills of Bucchianico, a small town in the province Chieti, a Tolkien-style Shire comes to life where magic isn't about escape, but in everyday rural life, complete with hobbit-like houses and costumes.

Since I was a child, I've always escaped into imaginary worlds. While others let go of those fantasies as they grew up, I kept holding on to them. I became obsessed with *The Lord of the Rings* – the films, the books, everything I could get my hands on to feed that

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“Planning a trip to Abruzzo can be time-consuming. Treat a friend or yourself to an easier journey. I’ll help you save hours of research and find the local gems that guidebooks often miss. Living here gives me a deep knowledge of the region, so I can share practical, insider advice on where to stay, what to see, and how to make the most of your visit.”

Anna Lebedeva

Editor of Abruzzissimo Magazine

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FEBRUARY

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GESSOPALENA

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war memories, and an
ancient grape

DEA POMONE

An ancient rite of Alfedena

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