TRAVEL HISTORY CULTURE PEOPLE FOOD

ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE

L' Aquila Italian Capital of Culture 2026 *page 5*

End-of-Winter Pagan Rite in Alfedena and Scontrone *page 9*

Gessopalena, a Town that Remembers *page 13*

CONTENTS

02. EDITOR'S NOTE
03. NEWS AND EVENTS
05. L' AQUILA ITALIAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE 2026: A CITY OF REBIRTH AND FORGIVENESS
08. L' AQUILA 2026: PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS
09. GESSOPALENA, A TOWN THAT REMEMBERS
13. END-OF-WINTER PAGAN RITE IN ALFEDENA AND SCONTRONE
20.APPIGNANO FEELS LIKE FAMILY
23. SPEAKING ABRUZZESE: DE CHI SI LE FIJE?
24. QUICK STOP, EASY TRAILS
25. BEST EATS: PURELY ITALIAN, PROUDLY ABRUZZO
26. TRADITIONAL RECIPES: NONNA PEPPINA'S CARNIVAL CHIACCHIERE, LE LOFFE FROM SANT'OMERO

ON THE COVER:

Gessopalena. Photos by Anna Lebedeva. Read the story on page 9.

LEFT:

Gessopalena. Photos by Anna Lebedeva. Read the story on page 9.

ABRUZZISSIMO MAGAZINE

www.abruzzissimo.com
editor@abruzzissimo.com

EDITOR & PUBLISHER
Anna Lebedeva
editor@abruzzissimo.com

COPY EDITOR
Linda Dini Jenkins

CONTRIBUTORS

Angelo De Nicola
Teresa Mastrobuono
Barbara Summa
Anna Swann

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.

Editor's Note

We are starting the year with two new sections in the magazine: *L'Aquila 2026* and *Speaking Abruzzese*.

This year **L'Aquila** has been chosen as Italian Capital of Culture 2026. The city's historic centre ranks sixth in Italy for the number of monuments within its old walls, and yet the city remains little known outside Italy. In each issue we will talk about the city, its history, people, and distinctive culture. In this issue, we begin with Angelo De Nicola's article on what makes **L'Aquila** unique, along with an overview of the city's year-long cultural programme.

Our new column, *Speaking Abruzzese*, will explore dialect words, phrases, and the traditions behind them. One in ten Abruzzese still speaks dialect at home, so it is far from a dead language, and the success of our first ABRUZZISSIMO webinar — with more than 60 of you attending and many of you sending emails to thank us — has shown that those who love Abruzzo want to know more about the local vernacular.

The webinar also made me realise there is a desire within our community to connect beyond the PDF issues we send ten times a year. You want more frequent interaction and the chance to exchange stories and experiences with other Abruzzo-loving souls. We will do our best to make that happen.

In each issue we continue to bring you closer to the region itself. This month, we visit **Gessopalena (CH)** the town built on shining gypsum rocks, where the ruins of its historic centre have been preserved and transformed into an open-air museum.

ABRUZZISSIMO loves shining a light on local traditions that rarely reach beyond their towns, and in this issue we travel to **Scontrone (AQ)** and **Alfedena (AQ)** to explore unusual rites held in honour of the pagan goddess Dea Pomona.

As it is the Carnival time in Abruzzo, we share two traditional recipes for fried desserts (have you heard of *le loffe di Sant'Omero*?). Do you have a family recipe you would like to share? Send it to us at editor@abruzzissimo.com

Anna Lebedeva
Founder & Editor

DIGEST OF RECENT REGIONAL NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS FROM ABRUZZO NEWSPAPERS

MUNDA RETURNS HOME

After 16 years following the 2009 earthquake, the **Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo** **(MuNDA**) returns to its home in **L'Aquila**'s 15-century castle, Forte Spagnolo, where it was first opened in 1951. Over 7,000 people visited the museum in its first month after reopening. Partially reopened, the museum offers a modern, chronologically arranged journey through medieval to 16-century art, enriched with immersive installations and glass-printed floors mapping the city's history. Works are safeguarded by seismic and anti-vibration systems, while new technologies enhance storytelling and accessibility. The remaining collections, including archaeology and later art, will return by 2027.

ONE OF THE HOTTEST, DRIEST YEARS ON RECORD

A recent report by Cetemps, the University of L'Aquila's Centre for Climate and Environmental Studies, shows that 2025 was the fourth hottest year in Abruzzo since 1974, with temperatures averaging 1°C above the 1991–2020 reference period. Rainfall was 8% below normal, making it the 22nd driest year on record. Extremes included Campotosto at +2.0°C and Castel del Monte with 59% less rainfall.

LOVE IN THE HIGH PASTURES – WEBINAR

The first event in our ABRUZZISSIMO webinar series — *Di chi se fije?* — was a great success, with more than 60 participants exploring the rich world of Abruzzese dialects. We were especially grateful for the many messages thanking the magazine and our speaker, Barbara Summa, and sharing how much you enjoyed the session.

Our next webinar, *Romance and Rituals in the Times of Transumanza*, will take place on February 14 and will feature dialect love expressions, songs, and romantic traditions. We will be sending the link to the virtual meeting room in the coming days.

Have an idea for a session or want to collaborate as a host? Reach out to us at editor@abruzzissimo.com.

BUCCHIANICO DEMOLISHES DECADES-OLD EYESORE

Bucchianico (CH) has finally said goodbye to the notorious "Palazzaccio," a 1970s building erected on the site of the historic Palazzo Caracciolo. Intended as a hospital, it never opened and stood decaying for decades, disrupting the style of Piazza San Camillo de Lellis. A new building (rendered in the photo), designed to resemble the original Palazzo Caracciolo, will replace it and host socio-cultural and administrative offices. The project will restore the piazza's historic character, reopen views of the surrounding hills, and make it once again one of Abruzzo's most beautiful squares.

ABRUZZO EXPORTS SURGE

A recent report summarising last year's performance shows Abruzzo's exports rose 9% year-on-year, surpassing €7.8 billion and accounting for 1.6% of Italy's total. The province of L'Aquila led growth with a 51% jump, reaching €2.2 billion, largely driven by pharmaceuticals to the US, which make up 81% of its exports. While the automotive industry, once a regional export driver, has declined sharply, chemical and pharmaceutical products are now propelling Abruzzo to the top ranks nationally.

CARNIVAL IN CITTÀ SANT'ANGELO

Città Sant'Angelo (PE) is gearing up for the 28th edition of **Carnevale 'Ndirucce**, one of Abruzzo's most iconic carnival events. Running from 15–17 February 2026, the festival turns the historic centre into an open-air stage, where nine *contrade* compete with parades, street theatre, and satirical performances. This year's theme, "Facci ridere!", celebrates the liberating power of laughter, blending classic and contemporary comic characters. Read more about the famous Carnival on ABRUZZISSIMO website.

In this round-up you can learn about other Carnival celebrations around the region.

DID YOU KNOW?

THE GHOSTS OF CRECCHIO CASTLE

The **Castle of Crecchio**, rising above the town in the province of Chieti, dates to the Norman–Swabian period, between the 11th and 12th centuries. Little is known about its origins, but historians believe it was built around an earlier watchtower known as the Torre dell'Ulivo, from which the original fortification developed, guarding this part of Abruzzo against incursions from the coast. Over time, additional towers, walls, and Gothic-style interiors were added, particularly during the 15th century.

Alongside its historical evolution, the castle is also known for its legends. According to one story, before the noble De Riseis family turned the fortress into a residence in the 18th century, a ruthless lord ruled the area with cruelty, executing his enemies atop the watchtower. Locals say the souls of his victims never left. Some people who have climbed the 55 stone steps leading to the ancient Torre dell'Ulivo claim to have heard muffled cries from within the walls and felt an unseen presence just behind them. Visitors have also reported the sound of heavy footsteps followed by the clinking of metal, and occasional sightings of a silent, beautiful woman moving swiftly through the upper floors. Others swear that on still nights, the shadows of the De Riseis family themselves move across the walls, repeating scenes from their earthly lives.

Since 1995, the Castle of Crecchio has housed the Museum of Byzantine and Early Medieval Abruzzo. Its two floors display artefacts unearthed in the surrounding area, along with a permanent exhibition on the Etruscans in Abruzzo and a section devoted to the castle's own history.

L’AQUILA ITALIAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE 2026: A CITY OF REBIRTH AND FORGIVENESS

Angelo De Nicola (in conversation with Anna Lebedeva)

L’Aquila has always defined itself through culture, but its designation as Italian Capital of Culture 2026 arrives not as a celebration of a finished story, but as an invitation to understand a city still shaping its future.

As someone who was born in L’Aquila and has lived here all my life, I, like many other Aquilani, feel proud that my city has received the title of Italian Capital of Culture 2026. It is a recognition of the immense efforts made since the devastating earthquake of 2009, and at the same time a tremendous opportunity to show the world what L’Aquila has to offer.

What sets L’Aquila apart from other cities that have held this title? Italy is rich in beautiful cities, each with its own heritage, yet L’Aquila remains less known internationally despite its extraordinary artistic and architectural wealth. Its historic centre ranks sixth in Italy for the number of monuments within its old walls, a figure that is remarkable even by international standards and gives the city a cultural weight far greater than its visibility might suggest.

Photos: the Italian Capital of Culture inauguration event in L’Aquila. Photo courtesy of L’Aquila 2026/Facebook

REBUILT FOR THE FUTURE

The city's most distinctive trait is its almost miraculous rebirth. Its medieval centre was rebuilt after the earthquake to modern seismic standards. Seventeen years have passed since the earthquake, and the scale of what has been done is staggering. Private reconstruction is nearly complete — around 93 percent of homes have been restored.

Public reconstruction, however, lags far behind, largely due to bureaucratic hurdles and legal disputes. Only about 40 percent of public buildings have been rebuilt. Large parts remain unfinished: all the churches in the centre are still to be rebuilt, and none of the public schools in the historic core have been restored. This gap is felt deeply because a city's heart cannot truly come alive without essential services and especially schools for young people, many of whom are still in temporary modular structures.

NEW OPENINGS AND MISSING SPACES

The historic centre will only fully revive if it is animated — not just as a tourist attraction but as a living urban space. Ironically, the abundance of around 900 bed and breakfasts and holiday homes sometimes overshadows public reconstruction, and somewhat reduces space available for community life. L'Aquila can now host visitors seeking an authentic historic experience, but for the city itself to thrive, it needs both culture and everyday life to coexist in the same spaces. The inauguration of the Capital of Culture on January 17 had to be held at the Guardia di Finanza barracks in the outskirts, rather than in the historic centre, precisely because there are currently no suitable cultural venues for large events.

But 2026 will bring some exciting openings: the Teatro San Filippo, a former deconsecrated church in the historic centre, is scheduled to reopen this year, and the Teatro Comunale is planned to welcome audiences again by November. After a

Piazza Duomo in L'Aquila. Raboe001/CC BY-SA 3.0

major restoration, the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo (MuNDA) has finally returned to its original venue at the Forte Spagnolo.

BEYOND THE POSTCARD NARRATIVE

There is a real risk that L'Aquila as the Capital of Culture 2026 might be presented superficially, like a postcard. To avoid that, we must combine external tourism promotion with genuine local cultural growth. The city's story cannot be reduced to symbols alone; it requires engagement with its history, its art, and its living community.

For anyone wanting to understand L'Aquila as the 2026 Capital of Culture, I would start with Celestino V, because L'Aquila is his city, and La Perdonanza is its deepest legacy. It is a yearly rite born from the Bull of Forgiveness he issued in 1294, granting pardon to anyone who entered the basilica with a sincere heart.

When his successor Boniface VIII tried to destroy that document, the city protected it, kept it alive, and built its future around it. From that act came trade fairs, European connections, wool and saffron routes, and the growth of a city that, in the 15th century, became second only to Naples in the Kingdom. Starting from Celestino means understanding how this community has always chosen forgiveness over power, continuity over ruin. We were reduced to rubble, almost erased, and yet today L'Aquila stands again, not perfect, but whole enough to speak to Italy and beyond.

Angelo De Nicola is a journalist and author. His latest book, The First Jubilee in History: The Perdonanza of Celestino V*, has been translated into English and is available on Amazon.*

Read more about Pope Celestino V in the April 2025 issue of ABRUZZISSIMO available here.

Basilica di Santa Maria di Collemaggio in L'Aquila

L'AQUILA 2026: PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

L'Aquila has officially stepped into its role as Italy's Capital of Culture 2026. The programme spans 300 days and features over 300 initiatives across more than 100 locations, combining visual arts, music, theatre, dance, cinema, conferences, and workshops. Its scope reaches beyond the historic centre, drawing in neighbourhoods, surrounding towns, and inland areas while connecting cultural institutions, universities, research centres, academies, and local creative enterprises.

MODERN ART AND ARCHITECTURE

The **MAXXI L'Aquila** will be hosting a project, *Convergenze e continuità. Architetture e paesaggi urbani in Abruzzo 1930–1960,* at the restored Palazzo ONMI from June to December. The exhibition investigates modern architecture and urban landscapes in Abruzzo, intertwining the city's past with artistic production.

INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITIONS AND PROJECTS

The international festival *ItARTS – Back to L'Aquila* concludes a global tour across Asia and Europe with performances in L'Aquila at landmark venues such as the **Auditorium del Parco Renzo** Piano and the **Teatro dell'Accademia di Belle Arti**. It will bring together six Italian academies from L'Aquila, Rome, Naples, Brera, Carrara, and Ravenna.

Chinese artist Liu Bolin will create three new performative photographic works in iconic locations including the **Basilica di Santa Maria di Collemaggio** and **Rocca Calascio**.

Opening in April 2026 at **Palazzo Ardinghelli**, **MAXXI L'Aquila**, *Aftershock* spans five decades of work by Ai Weiwei, a Chinese contemporary artist and activist. Through film, photography, sculpture and installation, it reflects on the lasting imprint of disaster, conflict and human-made tragedy.

MAXXI L'AQUILA. Palazzo Ardinghelli

The names of many other international artists participating throughout the year will be announced soon.

HISTORIC PALAZZI

The programme also celebrates the city's rich private heritage. On the ast Sunday of each month, dozens of noble *palazzi* and historic houses will open their doors to the public. Each date features a rotating selection of the city's most significant residences, such as **Palazzo Nardis**, **Palazzo Pica Alfieri**, **Palazzo Dragonetti**, and **Casino Branconio** will be accessible through guided tours, while others open courtyards and magnificent halls for self-guided visits, offering a clear and practical way to explore parts of the city that are rarely accessible.

URBAN SPACES

There will be many free open-air concerts, exhibitions, contemporary dance and art performances that will turn urban spaces into stages.

BEYOND THE CITY

Within the main programme, the city of **Rieti**, which was part of the province of L'Aquila until 1927, will offer its own cultural itineraries. Visitors can explore the **province of Rieti** on foot, horseback, or by bike. These routes will lead through lesser-known towns, archaeological sites, and natural landscapes.

See the full programme with the main events on the official website L'Aquila 2026. The upcoming events are also published several weeks in advance on the L'Aquila blog

GESSOPALENA, A TOWN THAT REMEMBERS

Text and photos by Anna Lebedeva

Gessopalena, a small town in the province of Chieti, commands sweeping views of the eastern slopes of the Maiella and the green stretch of the Aventino Valley. What sets the town apart is not just the views, but a choice: to let the war-shattered ruins of the old borgo remain part of its present.

As you enter Gessopalena, it greets you with wide, tidy streets and rather characterless modern buildings. Its central Piazza Roma with a monumental fountain depicting Italy as a voluptuous, beautiful woman, is sun-lit and always buzzes with children playing and locals chatting on the benches. Continue along the main road, following the signs for the *borgo medievale*, away from the bars and chatter and deeper into the quiet of the old streets, you step into Terravecchia, the abandoned old part of Gessopalena, a maze of crumbled walls and windows gaping into the blue sky.

Photo: borgo medievale in Gessopalena

SPARKLING STONE

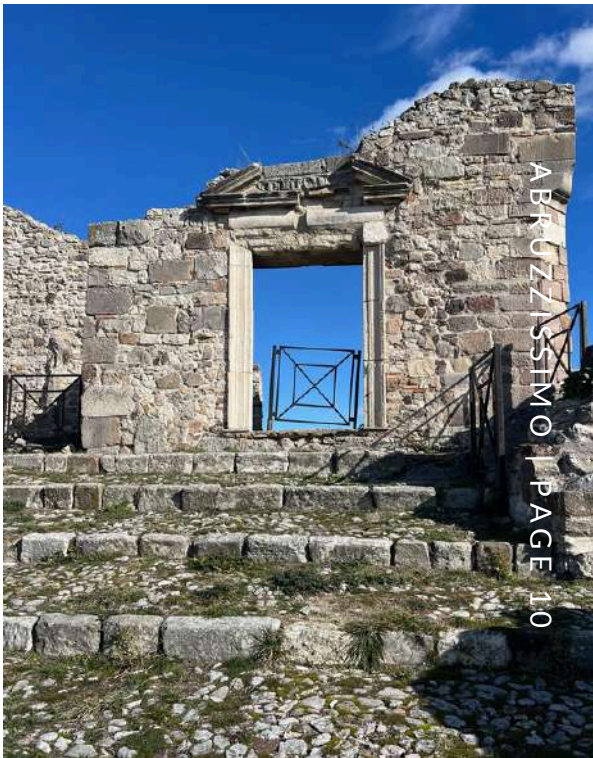
Geographically, Gessopalena sits on the edge of the Aventino Valley, facing the formidable eastern folds of the Majella massif. The valley opens wide below, while the town itself rises on a great gypsum spur, a natural outcrop that has shaped its economy, its architecture and even its name. Locals, known as *gessani*, have long called their home *Preta Lucente*, the sparkling stone. The selenite crystals embedded in the gypsum reflect sunlight like small mirrors giving the ruins their sparkle on a sunny day.

The town's name, Gessopalena, derives from gypsum, a sedimentary rock formed by the evaporation of ancient seas or lakes. Early documents refer to *Gesso prope Palenam*, gypsum near Palena, a description that over time condensed into Gessopalena, or *Lu Jesse* in the local dialect. Even today, the municipal coat of arms carries the Latin motto *E proprio lapide*, from its own rock, a succinct summary of place and identity.

History here begins at least in the tenth century. Records from the abbey of Montecassino mention the *Castellum de Gessi*, a fortress perched on the cliff to control movement through the Aventino Valley. Over the centuries, Gessopalena passed through a succession of feudal hands. It became part of the County of Palena under Ferdinand of Aragon, later ruled by Matteo di Capua, and eventually by the Caracciolo di San Buono family, until feudalism was abolished in 1806. The town's fortunes rose and fell with these transitions, but its material life remained tied to stone.

Gypsum defined daily labour for centuries here, providing livelihood for many families. The communal right allowed them to extract stone in local quarries, which they then baked in kilns, crushed with heavy wooden mallets and sifted into fine powder. The *gessaioli* (those who worked gypsum) sold it for construction or plasterwork in neighbouring towns. The activity endured until the late 1970s, when industrial materials finally brought it to an end.

Photos: (below) the ruins of the borgo medievale in Gessopalena; (right) crystals of gypsum stone



WAR DESTRUCTION

Gessopalena lies in a highly seismic zone and has endured repeated earthquakes. The earthquakes of 1456, 1706, 1933, plus a massive landslide in the late 18th century all left scars, forcing repairs, rebuilds, and emigration. Yet none of these events proved as final as what arrived in the winter of 1943. During the night between 4 and 5 December, as German troops were retreating, they mined and destroyed the entire historic centre of Gessopalena. Allied air raids, mortar fire, and artillery exchanges had already devastated the town, but the Nazis' deliberate demolition turned the *paese vecchio* to rubble. After the war, only a handful of residents returned to the old part. Most began building a new settlement nearby. By the late 1950s, *Terravecchia* was abandoned entirely.

Memory, however, was not. In the 1990s, a decision was made to recover the medieval borgo without rebuilding it. The ruins would remain as they were left in 1943. A few buildings and the façade of the medieval church of Sant'Egidio were reconstructed, and in what was once the town's centre — now an open-air theatre — a Monument to the Resistance was built, dedicated to the men and women who, during the Second World War, fought to free their land from the Nazi-Fascist occupiers.

A DOCTOR AND A PARTISAN

Gessopalena, despite its minuscule size, has a theatre with a busy programme of music concerts, plays, and local dialect shows. The theatre bears the name of one of the town's most illustrious sons, Gennaro Finamore. Born here in 1836, he trained as a doctor in Naples and returned in 1865 to practise medicine. He treated patients by day and, by night, turned his attention to local dialect and folk culture. He published books about traditional songs, the town's economic conditions, and the area's vernacular. Finamore used his medical rounds as fieldwork, speaking with farmers and shepherds, recording stories, proverbs, and rituals from largely illiterate communities. Disappointed by a lack of recognition, he eventually left both medicine and his hometown, spending his final decades in Lanciano as a teacher and headmaster, collaborating with cultural journals. Today he is considered one of the "fathers" of ethnography and cultural anthropology, disciplines that were not yet formally established in his time. To this day, his book *Credenze, usi e costumi abruzzesi* remains one of the richest collections of stories, proverbs and Abruzzese folklore for anyone who loves the region.

Another figure Gessopalena is proud of is Domenico Troilo, vice commander of the Brigata Maiella, the partisan formation that emerged from this part of Abruzzo during the Second World War. In 1943, as

Photos: (below) the Monument to the Resistance; (right) the belltower of the Chiesa di Santa Maria dei Raccomandati

German troops tightened their grip on the Sangro–Aventino area, Troilo led a small group of armed volunteers from Gessopalena, operating where violence against civilians was at its harshest. The group later became part of the Brigata Maiella, the only Italian partisan formation to be awarded the Gold Medal for Military Valour and one of the very few republican units formally integrated with Allied forces. Troilo was knownfor his tactical skill and courage, was wounded twice, and continued to fight as the brigade advanced north with the Allies, from Abruzzo to the liberation of Bologna and on to the Asiago plateau. He was awarded the Silver Medal for Military Valour and the Cross of Valour with Swords by the Polish II Corps. Today, a square near his former home bears his name.

ANCIENT GRAPE

Another thread connecting Gessopalena with its past is an ancient black grape, known locally as *Nero Antico*. It survived thanks to a handful of vines preserved by two local farming families through calamities and the Nazi destruction. After Montepulciano, *Nero Antico* is the second native black grape in Abruzzo to be entered into the national register. Last year, Cantina Orsogna, which had planted a small vineyard with the variety, released just 100 bottles of *Spumante Nero Antico di Pretalucente* and hosted a tasting among the ruins of the borgo medievale in Gessopalena.

Photos: (from top right) on the streets of Gessopalena; (below) La Morgia rock spur

THE MASSACRE OF SANT'AGATA

In the winter of 1943-44, the Sangro–Aventino area lay in the path of a retreating German army. It was a season of fear: raids, looting, forced deportations and extreme brutality became part of daily life. What happened at Sant'Agata would come to define the violence of that winter.

Sant'Agata was a small cluster of farmhouses scattered across the countryside between the Aventino River and Gessopalena. Many civilians who had fled nearby Torricella Peligna sought refuge there, hoping for safety. On 20 January 1944, an ambush by the newly formed Brigata Maiella resulted in the deaths of two German soldiers and the wounding of two others. At dawn the following day, retaliation followed.

German troops entered Sant'Agata and ordered everyone to gather inside a single farmhouse. They sealed the doors from the outside and hurled thirty hand grenades into the building. Most of those trapped inside died instantly or suffocated beneath the rubble. The victims were mostly women, children, and elderly people.

The soldiers later returned, setting the building on fire to erase evidence and to ensure that no survivors remained. It is believed that 42 civilians were killed, but not all victims were later identified and no one was formally held accountable.

A few weeks later, young men from Gessopalena, organized by the British, went to Sant'Agata to give the victims a rushed burial, their bodies already ravaged by bombs and wild animals. Only a few decades later, the Comune of Torricella held a proper funeral, attended by citizens and officials, offering a measure of dignity to the dead.

Two siblings survived the massacre. Nicoletta and Antonio Di Luzio hid beneath the dead and managed to escape to Gessopalena, where they were treated before being taken to hospital in Vasto.

The ruins of the farmhouse where the massacre happened and a plaque

Their testimony would later help reconstruct the events. Nicoletta, the last survivor, died two years ago in Rome. Always reluctant to be interviewed, she agreed only rarely to speak publicly. One interview was published, while on another occasion she asked for a recorded video interview, already filmed, to be withdrawn, finding it too difficult to speak about the ordeal. About 15 years before her death, she wrote a few pages recounting that morning of blood and terror. She remained haunted by the cries of her younger brother Leonardo, who died there. The final line of her manuscript asks the question that stayed with her all her life: "Where was God that day?"

Today, the site of the massacre in Sant'Agata is marked only by a modest memorial stone, and the crumbling remains of the farmhouse itself.

WHAT TO DO AND SEE IN GESSOPALENA

EXPLORE THE TERRAVECCHIA

Follow the signs for the *borgo medievale* to reach the ruins of the town's old quarter. From the belvedere, enjoy sweeping views of the surrounding mountains and countryside. Stop at the deli counter of Central Market on Piazza Roma to pick up a fresh panino beforehand, then settle at one of the few picnic tables in the borgo medievale and enjoy your lunch surrounded by history and the stunning panorama.

ROCK, BLUES, WINE, AND SAINTS

At Easter, the ruins of the *borgo medievale* provide a striking backdrop for the theatrical **Sacred Representation of the Passion of Christ**, drawing spectators from across the region. The full programme is published on the Pro Loco's page.

Late July brings the **L'Aventino rock and blues festival**, when the central Piazza Roma fills with leading Italian artists from both genres. Food stalls line the streets and the town buzzes with excitement.

In mid-August, the town honours Sant'Emidio, San Rocco, and the Madonna de' Raccomandati with marching bands, religious processions, live concerts, and fireworks. The programme is published on the festival committee's page.

At the end of August, the **Gessi diVini** event brings together tastings of local wines and produce, guided visits of the town, and concerts among the ruins of the old borgo. You can enjoy spectacular sunsets with a glass of good vino and get a chance to taste the rare Nero Antico di Pretalucente.

ART AND THEATRE

For art lovers, the town has two little gems: a colourful statue by the famous Abruzzese artist Franco Summa that stands beside the Chiesa di Santa Maria Maggiore and an installation, *Orizzonti*, by Costas Varotsos on the rocky spur of La Morgia, a short distance from Gessopalena. You can catch a show at the town's theatre which has an excellent programme of concerts and plays during the season from December through April.

WALK THE PATH OF MEMORY

This easy 10-kilometre circular trail starts from the *borgo medievale* and winds through the surrounding countryside. Along the route, you can follow quiet country roads that offer magnificent views of the old town. It takes you to the La Morgia rocky spur and the site of the Sant'Agata massacre. The trail loops back to Gessopalena, taking about three hours to complete. See the indications here or on the information board beside the Franco Summa's statue near Piazza Roma.

Photos: (below) the fountain in Piazza Roma; (right) Fanciulla by Franco Summa

END-OF-WINTER PAGAN RITE IN ALFEDENA AND SCONTRONE

By Anna Lebedeva

In the neighbouring towns of Alfedena (AQ) and Scontrone (AQ), an ancient pagan rite that ushers away winter and welcomes spring has survived for centuries. While there are distinctive differences between the tradition in the towns, they are both dedicated to one goddess: Dea Pomona.

On the last day of February, as winter loosens its hold on the Upper Sangro Valley, two neighbouring mountain towns observe an ancient rite that marks the transition between seasons. In Alfedena and Scontrone, a few kilometres apart, residents take to the streets with bells, chants, and small processions to bid farewell to winter and welcome the return of spring. The ritual, which has survived largely unchanged for centuries, is dedicated to Dea Pomona, a little-known Italic-Roman goddess associated with fertility and abundance.

A TE PUMBA MÈ

In Alfedena, the ritual unfolds as a procession through the historic centre. On 28 February, families with children and teenagers walk through the streets ringing cowbells and improvised noise-making instruments. The intention is to *spaventare l'inverno*, to frighten winter away. As they move through the village, the group chants a traditional verse in dialect:

Photos: Children with Dea Pomona during the Alfedena celebrations

A te Pumba mè, ecco Marz mo se nè vè,
è venuto e Febbraio se n'è iut…

A te Pumba mè, here comes March now,
it has arrived and February has gone...

The chant announces the arrival of March and the departure of February, signalling the seasonal shift that once governed agricultural life in this mountainous area. The repetition of the verse, combined with the constant sound of bells, creates a collective rhythm that involves the entire village. After the procession, everyone gathers around a bonfire to share *Lullit e fasciuol*—a simple, hearty pasta and bean dish accompanied by traditional songs.

"Almost every child in Alfedena has a bell," says Leondina Crispi, a local resident who has spent years researching the origins of the celebration. "Each family passes one down, usually a cowbell, and gives it to the youngest child to use for *A te Pumba mè.*"

According to Crispi, the chant and the noisy procession are rooted in a pagan tradition. "Most likely, it is an ancient rite of pagan origin," she explains, "addressed to Dea Pomona, the goddess of fertility and abundance, already venerated by the Samnites." The ceremony was meant to invoke the return of spring after the long, cold winters typical of the Upper Sangro.

In recent decades, Alfedena has added a visual element to the ritual. A decorated allegorical cart now accompanies the procession. Draped in green fabrics and adorned with garlands of fruit and flowers, it carries a young woman from the village representing Dea Pomona. In the past, the cart was pulled by animals; today, it is moved using modern vehicles, but its symbolic role remains unchanged.

PAGAN GODDESS

Pomona is a deity of very ancient Italic origin, whose cult declined well before the height of the Roman imperial period. Her name derives from pomum, meaning fruit, and she was traditionally associated with orchards rather than fields or forests.

Very little is known about formal celebrations dedicated to her. Ancient calendars do not record festivals known as Pomonalia, and classical authors offer only limited references. Some historians suggest that any festival associated with Pomona would have coincided with the ripening of fruit, placing it around August or September or the beginning of autumn, although no direct evidence of such celebrations has survived. Ovid, in his

The allegorical cart in Alfedena

Metamorphoses, describes Pomona holding a pruning knife or sickle, emphasising her connection to cultivation and care rather than to the harvest itself. For this reason, the survival of a ritual dedicated to Pomona in Alfedena and Scontrone is curious and unusual. “There are historical and literary references that point to a local manifestation dedicated to Dea Pomona,” says Crispi. “This places the ritual within a very ancient framework.” Her research began in 1993, when she herself portrayed Pomona on the allegorical cart, drawing inspiration from Ovid’s account.

Crispi notes that documentary evidence suggests the ritual was already known in the early 19th century. She points to a 19th-century book that refers to an ancient stone inscription once found in Alfedena, which mentioned the tradition indirectly. “The inscription did not celebrate Dea Pomona,” she explains, “but instead urged travellers to embrace the new religion that was arriving and the magnificence of Catholicism, and to abandon the rite dedicated to Pomona, which was considered inappropriate and incompatible with Christianity.” The inscription itself has not survived and may have been destroyed during the Second World War bombings that devastated much of Alfedena’s historic centre.

BURNING EFFIGIES

Just four kilometres from Alfedena, Scontrone celebrates the same goddess in a slightly different way. Although the two towns once shared the ritual, over time their traditions diverged.

In Scontrone, the celebrations extend over the last three evenings of February. Archaeologist Erika Iacobucci, who lives in the village and has taken part in the ritual since childhood, describes it as a collective evening walk through the narrow streets. “For the last three days of February, in the evenings, we go around the village singing a song and ringing small bells,” she says. “On the final evening, we burn effigies that represent winter, as a way of making room for spring.”

Dea Pomona, Museo archeologico di Napoli

In Scontrone, the name of the goddess has gradually changed in popular usage. Pomona became Cumpa, a linguistic shift reflected in the chant sung during the procession: *A te Cumpà me, ecco Marz mo se nè vè, è venuto e Febbraio se n’è iut…*

The small scale of the celebration is dearly loved within the town’s close-knit community. “We are only about 100 inhabitants,” says Iacobucci. “This ritual expresses our attachment to our traditions,

our roots and our Samnite origins." Participation is broad and informal, involving children, young people, and adults alike and is open to everyone, including visitors. In recent years, a small number of tourists have begun to take part.

OPEN FOR ALL

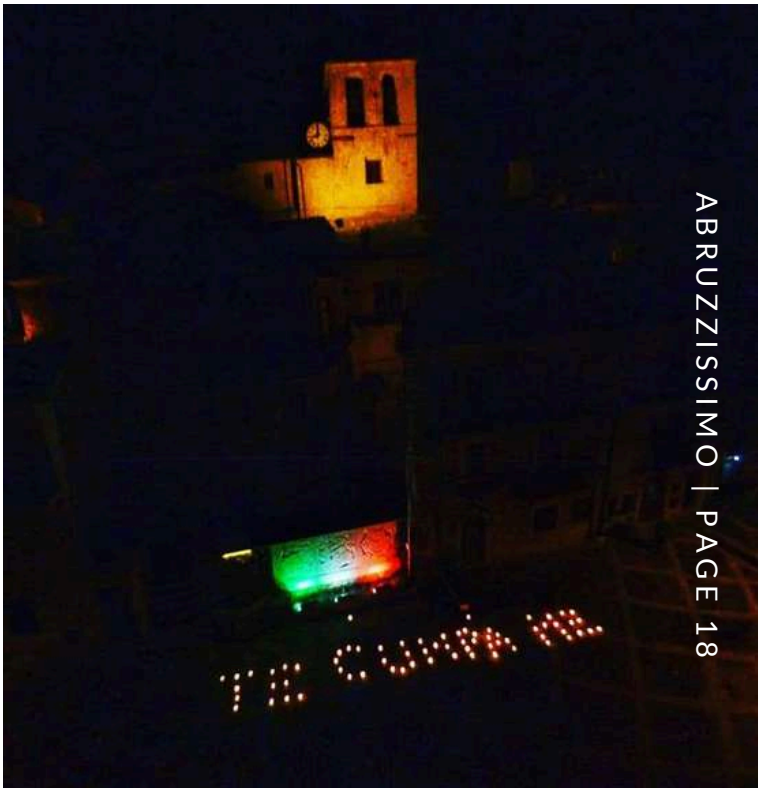
Neither Alfedena nor Scontrone has turned the ritual into a large public event. Crispi notes that there have been discussions about including it within wider cultural programmes, such as the town's winter festival, Borgo d'Inverno, that attracted almost 4,000 visitors last year.

Both festivals are small and little-known outside the towns, but the celebrations are open and welcoming. The deeper layers of meaning of these joyful gatherings may be difficult for outsiders to grasp fully, but anyone can appreciate the spirit of the small communities. Just bring your own bells and join the procession through the streets, chanting *A te Pumba mè, ecco Marz mo se nè vè, è venuto e Febbraio se n'è iut…*

Photos: the celebration in Scontrone. Photos courtesy of Erika Iacobucci

IF YOU GO

For programme details, contact the **Escursionisti Scontrone** association and the municipality of Alfedena at 0039 086 487114. The events usually take place in the evening, are largely spontaneous, and are not widely advertised — but everyone is welcome to join. Take a look at these videos from Scontrone and Alfedena to see the celebrations.



Plan a perfect ABRUZZO ADVENTURE

Book a trip-planning consultation with ABRUZZISSIMO

"Planning a trip to Abruzzo can be time-consuming. Treat 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

BOOK A PERSONALISED ABRUZZO TRIP-PLANNING CONSULTATION

APPIGNANO FEELS LIKE FAMILY

By Teresa Mastrobuono

In 2020, in the midst of the COVID pandemic, Joyce Foderaro and John Fonseca made the bold decision to purchase a house in a small town in Abruzzo. What began as a leap during a global crisis soon became a journey of restoring a home, tending the land, forging new friendships, and embracing the simple pleasures of small-town life.

Joyce is a second-generation Italian-American who had obtained her Italian citizenship via her grandparents' birth in Calabria. John, her husband, was as enthusiastic as she was to embrace Italian life. Because of travel restrictions imposed by COVID, the search for a property in Italy was done entirely online – with a checklist of criteria to guide them. One that was important for John, a California native, was that the location be within 45 minutes of the sea and the mountains, as it is in the San Francisco Bay Area where he grew up. A panoramic vista that reminded them of the area was a must.

FINDING THE RIGHT PLACE

Although they searched in several regions of Italy, Abruzzo was particularly intriguing to them. John says that he was fascinated not only by its geography, but by its history. "Chieti", he marvels, "is older than Rome. Abruzzo is a very special combination and influence of ethnicities — Celts, Moors, Germanic groups."

Early in 2020, a house that fit their desires popped up in photos — it was the house outside of Appignano, in the province of Teramo, in which they now live. Appignano is a tiny burg that is part of the municipality of Castiglione Messer Raimondo where many of the rural properties are scattered on hills.

Joyce and John did not lay eyes on their house in person until they closed in February, 2021, but they knew it was "the one".

When Joyce and John moved in, the house was already livable, but it lacked care and vision. "The interior needed renovating," Joyce says, starting with

Joyce Foderaro and John Fonseca on their terrace in Appignano

washing years of dust from the wooden ceiling beams and replastering every wall. John replaced uneven tiles with new floors, a decision she admits they hesitated over because of the cost and scale of the work, but at the end it "made the whole house come together."

They took on the work themselves, living with dust, tools, and slow progress for a full year. "John repainted the house in a traditional rose clay colour and built a wooden pergola over the cement patio, which he finished with travertine tiles," Joyce explains. New bathroom fixtures, a Murano glass pendant light, and an olive wood

coffee table they made for the living room completed the transformation, turning the house into the Italian home they had long dreamt about, shaped by their own hands.

VIEW THAT SOLD

The cliché' of "location, location, location!" is fitting in their case. "It was the view that sold us on the house," says Joyce.

From the loggia in front of the main entrance to the house, the view is an unobstructed one of farmed, rolling hills and an unlimited, direct line of sight to the majestic Gran Sasso mountains. When sitting outside sipping a morning coffee or afternoon *aperitivo*, they can see cows dotting the fields and hills, grazing peacefully. There is a feeling of relaxation and easing into the day.

"Every day the cows are milked. That same day the milk is picked up and taken to a dairy within five kilometres from here," says John. "Every Tuesday Franco, the delivery guy, brings us milk and cheese to buy that comes from those cows. It's the freshest, best tasting dairy we've ever had."

Joyce and John also have an olive grove. When they purchased the house, they were told there were 60 trees; there turned out to be 100, all in terrible shape due to neglect. Over two years, Joyce and John trimmed, pruned, and coaxed the trees back to health. "Every year the trees have produced between 30 and 50 liters of very fine Castiglionese olive oil," says Joyce. "We hope now that our trees have been topped and pruned we will produce a larger quantity which we share with family and friends."

MAKING FRIENDS

The couple made friends with local *frantoio* (olive press) owners, farmers, and farm store owners. The long process of completely remodeling the interior of the house also cemented ties with local

Joyce in the couple's olive grove

merchants, builders, electricians, and officials. "We made a point of never buying anything outside the area. We felt it was important to invest in the community," says John. Joyce recounts how this led to becoming friends with the family that owns Castiglione Messer Raimondo's local *ferramenta* (hardware store) – Antonio, Simone, Filiberto, and Ludovica. The family volunteered to take their olives to the frantoio once there were enough to press.

"We had only known them for two months at that point," recalls Joyce, "They refused to take any money for the service or for gas. But Filberto begged John to make him some pulled pork sandwiches. Instead of just giving sandwiches, we invited the whole family to come for a whole dinner built around pulled pork."

John and Joyce's house sits almost exactly halfway between Castiglione Messer Raimondo and Bisenti, so they have made friends in both towns. Rita, one of the owners of Castiglione's Bar La Lanterna, often prepares lunch for John when he's in town picking up building supplies. In return, they frequently bring her the surplus vegetables from their garden. An exceptional cook, Rita often goes a step further, sending them home with specially prepared dinners.

Nearby Bisenti is where they go for many of their needs. It offers a good *macelleria* (butcher shop), three grocery stores, two produce stores, and a shop that sells tools, pet food, and plants. There is a doctor within easy access, and a dentist, Piero.

"He is retiring though", John laments. "I asked his daughter if she would be taking over the business. She cannot. When I remarked that it was sad that it would not remain in the family, she said, 'Yes…dentistry has been part of our family for 500 years."

Besides the ability to forge close friendships, Joyce and John enjoy the tranquility of their location and the slow pace of life. The oft-spoken adage of *"piano, piano*," urging people to slow down and take their time, is refreshing. The cost of living is also an appealing factor.

AFFORDABLE LIVING

John calculates that they spend "about 120 euro weekly" on groceries. "We also produce a lot of what we eat – zucchini, tomatoes, peppers, fave, strawberries. We have cherry, apricot, lemon, orange, and apple trees," he adds, showing how their garden supplements daily life. Even dining out is more economical than what they were used to in the US; John estimates that a meal for two at a local restaurant averages about 36 euro, including wine.

Living immersed in the town has also eased everyday interactions. "Language really isn't a big problem," John says. "I've travelled a lot in my work and have learned to communicate, even when words don't come easily. When a community refers to you as *famiglia*, nothing seems to be a problem."

For Joyce and John, these small, everyday connections, shared meals, and the warmth of their neighbours have become the fabric of life here. Looking ahead, they hope to expand their family ties, in Appignano and beyond.

Teresa Mastrobuono is a professional actress, voice-over artist, and a regular contributor to ABRUZZISSIMO Magazine. Originally from the US, she now lives in Abruzzo, where she runs a guesthouse.

The view from John and Joyce's house

DE CHI SI LE FIJE?

By Barbara Summa

In Abruzzo, and more broadly in rural Southern Italy, one of the first questions older residents ask when they meet a new face in the local piazza is: "*De chi si le fije*?" or, as they say, for instance, in Arielli (CH) "*Chi si la fije?*" – "*Whose child are you?*"

There are many local variations in how the question is written or phrased. In some places, it's closer to "Whom do you belong to?" — a reminder that, for better or worse, you are part of a clan. You get the sense immediately.

This ancestral connection explains why Italian women traditionally keep their maiden names for life. My grandmother, for instance, was officially Silvestrone Settimia in Summa (later *vedova* Summa after my grandfather passed), but she remained, first and foremost, a daughter of her original line. This "village GPS" was so important that, for decades, many families were listed in the telephone book under the mother's maiden name. To find a number, you had to know the clan. The same applied if a woman opened a business — it would be under her maiden name.

Beyond surnames, nicknames are essential. Since cousins often share a grandfather's name, nicknames distinguish one branch of the family from another. This isn't idle curiosity: it immediately places you within local alliances — and old feuds. You might be blissfully unaware of your family's history, but in the village, everyone already knows exactly where you fit.

We'll explore nicknames in more detail in one of our upcoming webinars.

Barbara Summa, born in Abruzzo, is an interpreter, language teacher, and author who splits her time between Amsterdam and Ofena. She is one of the featured speakers in this year's ABRUZZISSIMO webinar series.

QUICK STOP

THE HOUSE OF OLD CRAFTS AND TRADES IN FARA SAN MARTINO

In the old centre of **Fara San Martino (CH)**, the association *Insieme per* runs a small museum, the *Casa degli Antichi Mestieri*. Spread across two compact rooms, it is densely filled with agricultural tools, kitchen utensils, and handwoven fabrics. During local festivals, the association's members appear in traditional dress and demonstrate crafts practised generations ago, from carding and spinning wool and hemp to beating flax by hand.

Many of the objects on display date back to the nineteenth century and tell the story of trades that once sustained the town. There was the *piattaro*, who repaired cracked plates with metal stitches, the itinerant knife sharpener, and the *boscaioli*, who prepared firewood for winter. Visitors learn how grain was weighed without scales, coffee ground without modern electric gadgets, and which ingenious tools were once used to deal with...ahm... constipation.

Among the exhibits there is a pair of undergarments worn by a married couple on the first night: a delicate, silk trimmed piece for the woman and white linen embroidered with flowers for the man. A credenza filled with finely woven household linens offers a glimpse into the dowry every woman was once expected to bring into marriage. An old loom, still in working order, shows how cloth was patiently woven by hand.

The association is led by Signora Clorinda and her husband Natale, both retired and brimming with energy. They are always ready to share stories, in Italian, about the past of Fara San Martino.

Visits can be arranged by contacting Signora Clorinda on +39 340 960 8937 or through the association's Facebook page.

EASY TRAILS

HERMITAGES OF SAN BARTOLOMEO IN ROCCAMORICE

- **Length:** about 2 km
- **Time:** 45 minutes one way
- **Starting Point:** Parking beside the Terrae Eremis bar (€2 in summer, free in low season)

A short walk blending history and panoramic views leads to one of the most remarkable hermitages of San Bartolomeo, where Pietro da Morrone, later Pope Celestine V, once stayed. The well-marked trail runs through woods and a patch of ferns before reaching the edge of a steep valley. A short, steep rock staircase brings you through a natural opening in the stone — a threshold into the hermitage terrace.

The hermitage itself is open year-round and consists of three distinct spaces: the small church (tag the rope on the belfry to ring the bell when you arrive!), a tiny antechamber, and a room likely used by the hermits. From the terrace, steep steps descend to the torrent, where a massive rock serves as a natural bridge.

Believed to predate the year 1000, the hermitage was rebuilt around 1250 by Pietro da Morrone. Frescoes above the entrance, thought to date from this period, are unfortunately in poor condition and badly in need of restoration. Part of the trail has no shade, so it is best to avoid walking during the hottest hours of summer. The trail gets busy on summer weekends, and early in the morning on 25 August, a procession of devotees from **Roccamorice (PE)** carries the statue of San Bartolomeo to the village.

For more about Celestino V read our article in the April 2025 issue.

PURELY ITALIAN, PROUDLY ABRUZZO

By Anna Swann

Abruzzo has long been synonymous with pasta. The town of Fara San Martino is often called the "capital of pasta," and it is home to some of Italy's most famous producers, such as *De Cecco, Cocco, Delverde*. This month, De Cecco announced that it had sold around 2.6 million quintals of products, with exports accounting for 58% of sales, cementing De Cecco's status as the third-largest pasta producer in the world. Yet, their pasta cannot be classified as 100% Italian.

While De Cecco's pasta is produced in Fara San Martino, not all of it is made entirely from Italian ingredients. A few years ago, the company faced legal trouble: the Tribunal of Chieti confirmed accusations of commercial fraud, alleging that the origin of the wheat used had been misrepresented. Some grain classified as "Pugliese" was in fact imported from France. The European Antitrust Authority also stepped in, highlighting that packaging from De Cecco and another Abruzzese producer, Cocco, suggested an entirely Italian provenance. In reality, the tiny print on the back revealed wheat sourced from EU and non-EU countries.

De Cecco has since amended its packaging, now stating: "The finest Italian grains and grains from around the world" and continues to rely on wheat from California, Arizona, France, or Australia. Cocco has excellent lines made exclusively with 100% Italian flour. EU law mandates that producers indicate both the origin of the grain and the milling process, so when buying what you think is Italian pasta, take a quick glance at the back of the pack tells the true story.

If you want the purest taste of Italy and Abruzzo in your pasta, these are some of the producers in Abruzzo that use not just 100% Italian flour and a few even source entirely from the region itself.

RUSTICHELLA D'ABRUZZO

With production facilities in **Pianella (PE)** and **Moscufo (PE)**, the company primarily uses high-quality Italian wheat, complemented by around 30% sourced from Canada, Australia, and the United States, though the goal is to reach 90% Italian grain. Their Primograno range celebrates ancient grain varieties such as Farro, Saragolla, and Senatore Cappelli, and is made with 100% abruzzese flour.

PASTIFICIO MASCIARELLI

In the small town of **Pratola Peligna (AQ)**, the family-run Pastificio Masciarelli has been crafting artisanal pasta (in the photo above) for nearly 150 years, preserving the traditional methods. Here, each pasta shape is crafted one at a time, pressed through bronze dies that give it a slightly rough texture, ideal for holding sauce, while low-temperature drying, around 40 degrees, preserves the delicate flavour and structure of the dough. Masciarelli uses only Italian flour, including a special range made from Farro grown in Abruzzo, allowing each bite to carry the essence of the region's soil and heritage.

PASTIFICIO MAIELLA

Founded in 1946, Pastificio Maiella is a family-run pasta maker from **Pretoro (CH).** For many of their pasta shapes they use bronze dies and slowly drying at low temperatures. The company offers several ranges made entirely from Italian flour: Senatore Cappelli, Farro Biologico, and Integrale.

NONNA PEPPINA'S CARNIVAL CHIACCHIERE

By Barbara Summa

When any festivity rolls around, the Abruzzese family mother has one certainty: she is going to deep-fry something. There is a deeply rooted comfort in frying and eating fried food, sweet or savoury, and no celebration feels truly festive without it. Carnival, of course, is the ultimate celebration for this tradition.

When I was studying in Canada, my professor, Marina Frescura, would host an annual party for her Italian students at York University. Most were of Italian descent, and the goal was to sample regional specialties. She coordinated the dishes, and one year, at Carnival, she wrote down what her students said they would bring: *frappe, galani, lattughe, chiacchiere, crostoli, bugie, cenci*. She was delighted by the variety — until, to everyone's surprise, it turned out they had all brought variations of the same thing: a thin strip of dough, knotted and fried, dusted with powdered sugar or drizzled with honey.

To celebrate the upcoming Carnival, I'm sharing my nonna Peppina's recipe for chiacchiere delle monache (nuns' chatter). I'm not sure if the name comes from the shape, which resembles a knotted tongue, but I like to think it does. In other parts of Abruzzo, they are called frappe, sfrappole, or simply chiacchiere.

INGREDIENTS

Makes about 40 chiacchiere

- 500g all-purpose flour
- 3 large eggs
- 50g granulated sugar
- 50g unsalted butter, softened (traditionally, we use lard)
- 30ml white wine (alternatively, use anise liqueur, Sambuca, Ouzo, or Marsala)
- zest of one lemon
- 1 pinch of salt
- Vegetable oil for frying (peanut or sunflower)
- Icing sugar for dusting or a few spoons of honey

PREPARATION

On a clean surface, make a mound with the flour and a hole in the centre. Pour in the eggs, sugar, softened butter, lemon zest, salt, and anise liqueur. I usually mix the eggs, butter, and liquor in a bowl first, then add the rest.

Knead vigorously for about 10 minutes until smooth and elastic, adding a splash of dry white wine if too dry. Wrap in plastic and let rest at room temperature for at least 30 minutes.

Divide the dough into smaller pieces and roll each very thin, using a rolling pin or pasta machine on the thinnest setting (we use my grandma's Imperia). Cut into rectangles about 10 cm long and 2 cm wide, make a slit in the center, and pull one end through to form a knot.

Some in Abruzzo prefer thicker dough and zig-zag cutters, but thin dough gives a lighter bite.
Heat oil to 175°C (350°F). Test with a wooden spoon—bubbles mean it's ready.

Fry a few chiacchiere at a time for 30–60 seconds per side, keeping a steady rhythm so the oil doesn't burn.

Drain on paper towels, then dust generously with powdered sugar or brush with a honey-thin glaze.

LE LOFFE DELLE MONACHE FROM SANT'OMERO

By Anna Swann

The first time I heard of *le loffe* of Sant'Omero (TE) was through a passing mention on *L'Abruzzese fuori sede*, the much-followed Facebook page curated by Gino Bucci. A dessert known only within the town and absent from conventional cookbooks and bakeries beyond it. After some patient searching through forgotten corners of the internet, a recipe surfaced, along with its story.

The origins of *le loffe* are traced to the *Figlie della Carità di San Vincenzo de' Paoli*, founded in 1623, whose convent once stood in Sant'Omero. Convent desserts were born in kitchens that were modest yet better supplied than most. Within cloistered walls, nuns and friars transformed simple ingredients into small indulgences. Over time, *le loffe* became a fixture at weddings and Carnival celebrations in the town, often fashioned from scraps of pasta dough left over from ravioli, fried and sweetened rather than wasted.

Today, this humble fritter is still prepared in family kitchens in Sant'Omero and nearby Poggio Morello, but rarely elsewhere. Its revival owes much to Renato "Fratò", the local pastry chef who has studied and championed le loffe for decades. At Fratò Bakery Caffè, they are fried in sunflower oil rather than the lard like in the past, but the custard is made the old way: no thickeners or starch.

INGREDIENTS

Makes 30-40 loffe

For the dough:

- 1 kg white flour 00
- 4 eggs
- 5 tbsps sugar
- 100ml grappa or anise liqueur
- 500ml whole milk
- Sunflower oil for frying

For the custard:

- 4 egg yolks
- 100g sugar
- 30g white flour
- 500ml whole milk
- Some vanilla or finely grated lemon zest

PREPARATION

To make the dough, arrange the flour in a mound on the work surface and make a well in the centre. Add the eggs, sugar, milk, and grappa, then knead until you obtain a soft, elastic dough.

Cover the dough with a clean cloth and let it rest for a few hours. Once rested, roll it out using a pasta machine, creating very thin sheets. The thinner the dough, the more delicate and crumbly the loffe will be.

Cut the sheets into small disks, 7-8cm in diameter. Fry in plenty of sunflower oil. Once lightly golden, put them on a layer of kitchen paper to dry and cool. To prepare the custard, work the egg yolks and sugar in a saucepan using a wooden spoon. Gradually add the flour, stirring continuously until the mixture is smooth.

Slowly pour in the boiling milk, flavoured with vanilla or lemon zest, stirring all the while. Place the saucepan over the heat and continue stirring, letting the custard simmer gently for 3 to 4 minutes (the recommended temperature to ensure a smooth texture is 82°C). Transfer the custard to a bowl and allow it to cool, stirring from time to time to prevent a skin forming on the surface.

Assemble the loffe by placing a small spoonful of custard on one dough disc, covering it with a second disc, and finishing with a dusting of icing sugar.

NEXT ISSUE
MARCH

ABRUZZISSIMO
MAGAZINE

ANVERSA DEGLI ABRUZZI AND CASTROVAVA

Gazing down the Sagittario Gorge

BORN OF 99 CASTLES

How L'Aquila was founded, legends and history

ABRUZZO IN FILM

Ridley Scott's new movie and other films shot in the region

EASY WALKS, TRAVEL TIPS, RECIPES

NEXT ISSUE IN YOUR INBOX ON MARCH 5

Subscribe to ABRUZZISSIMO here

DONATE TO SUPPORT ABRUZZISSIMO