

# Art, Worship and Culture



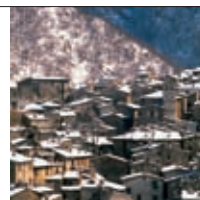




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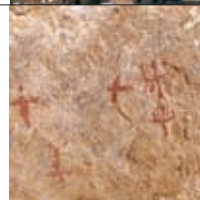
Abruzzo, All About  
Preservation



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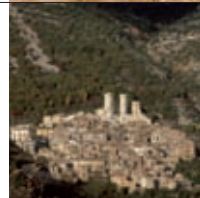
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**Abruzzo is a region that knows about preservation: that is the best way to sum up its spirit and approach. Discovering the extraordinary landscape, strolling through the stately ancient towns and villages that have stood on hilltops since time immemorial, the most immediate impact is of a region that has successfully preserved many of its original features, in an untouched environment where human presence is rooted in the mists of time, proving that a reciprocal and respectful balance has emerged.**

# ABRUZZO, all about



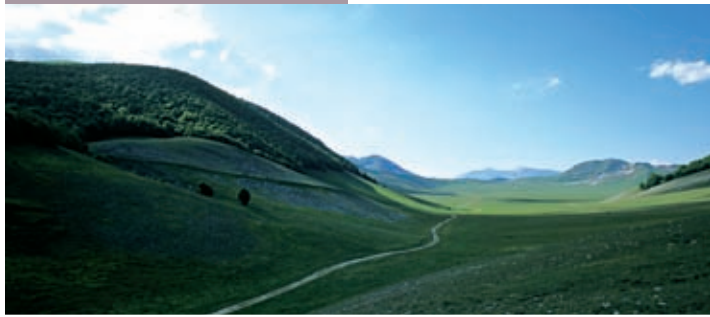


The magic of Abruzzo derives precisely from the measured equilibrium of a landscape dominated by Nature and a stratified human presence, which can be seen in the theory of villages dotted around the countryside, the architectural might of churches, castles and mansions, precious works of art, the countless examples of applied arts and ageless rural traditions. What better enticement for the keen, attentive visitor to

explore Abruzzo and seek out the typical features of splendour that make this such a unique region. Above all, Nature is a protected resource in Abruzzo, with one third of the territory designated as parkland, so the region not only achieves a cultural and civil record in environmental protection, but emerges as Europe's largest nature area: the real green heart of the Mediterranean.

# preservation





### **Abruzzo, anthology of the Mediterranean landscape**

A concise description of nature in Abruzzo would be most correct with a definition of it as an anthology of the Euro-Mediterranean landscape, since its boundaries embrace a concentration of natural environments that have no paragon in the rest of Europe, if we consider any other equally limited territory: there is a Mediterranean coast with the most varied habitat (sandy shores, dunes, marshes, pine groves, shoreline maquis, cliffs, stacks, low pebbly shores); a hill belt with every level of human settlement, precious wetlands (river and lake oases) and fascinating geological features; a vast mountain zone, often with intact nature, also with a wide variety of habitats (forests, prairies, mountain lakes, enormous karstic highlands, canyons, cascades, grottoes, peaks and high-altitude environments that are quite alpine in nature, glaciers, volcanisms). This astonishing array of unspoiled and often wild habitats are the home to rare and precious species that Abruzzo's Parks are committed to protecting, so the region is an extraordinary biolaboratory for the preservation of nature and ecosystems, far ahead of the rest of the world in the courage and determination of its decisions.

Abruzzo has, however, been a shrewd administrator of its environment, especially inland, protecting its heritage of towns and villages, farmlands, monuments, art and culture assets, traditions. The writer Ignazio Silone, one of the greatest interpreters of regional identity, said that "the Abruzzese have been embraced by a quite unique shared fate, typified by the tenacious devotion to their economic and social methods, even beyond any practical use, which would be inexplicable if it were not taken into account that the constant factor of their existence is precisely the most primitive and stable of elements: Nature." A few striking words, closely-woven with concepts, that outline how this "ability to preserve" is deep-rooted in thousands of years of contact with a tough, challenging environment that can change swiftly from a mother into a stepmother unless its inhabitants avoid overexploiting it. This is the real secret of this region.





### **Abruzzo, a permanent immense open-air museum**

This extensive ability to protect natural and anthropical (in other words crafted by humans) landscapes and habitats, has given Abruzzo territory an overall (including the cultural and environmental heritage that is safeguarded here) trait — quite evident to those who journey through it. The region resembles a multisite museum, a “permanent open-air exhibition” of a wide range of themes: ecology, geology and geomorphology, history of human settlement of the territory, of ancient urban planning and spontaneous architecture, the history of farming and the countryside, the history of military and defensive architecture, religious architecture, monastic communities, sheep-rearing. There are countless types of landmark or monument, be it a castle or an ancient village, an old centre or an outlying building, a church or a monastery, a hermitage or a shepherd settlement, an agrarian or pastoral landscape, a natural monument or a biotope, and they are not only varied but also well-preserved, and above all, still generally part of their original scenario, in other words, the context — also well-preserved — where they were created. This is a rare, quite unique trait, because it allows us to understand at a glance the underlying meaning behind the relationship that binds each landmark to its setting: a country church and a sheep track, a dominant castle and the territory that it watches over; a shepherd settlement and pastures, a watch tower and its pass, a feudal mansion and its village, farming settlements and their county, are just some examples, a puzzle of pieces integrated into the landscape in a very obvious and unexpected way.





A large, ancient stone statue of a warrior, known as the Warrior of Capistrano. The statue is shown from the chest up, facing right. It has a large, rounded head with a prominent nose and a small, circular opening for an eye. The torso is decorated with intricate carvings and some red pigment. The statue is set against a dark, textured background.

# TRACES

The solemn *Warrior of Capistrano*, the enigmatic tomb statue of an Italic prince from 2,500 years ago (now exhibited at the Museo Archeologico Nazionale d'Abruzzo, in Chieti), is a real symbol of ancient Abruzzo. Nor is this the only testimony of the 500,000 years and more of stable, uninterrupted human presence in this region. From the first groups of hunters, who had already settled these lands in the earliest Stone Age, to the great Italic tribes and the great season of Rome, ancient Abruzzo has been a crossroads for many different peoples, populations and cultures. This sustained human mingling leave significant traces, which archaeology now studies attentively and shares with visitors thanks to lavish museums and countless open-air sites.

The oldest evidence comes from plots and excavations whose relics are preserved mainly by the region's numerous archaeological museums, the most important being the Museo Archeologico Nazionale d'Abruzzo, in Chieti. One site that is enthralling, even today, is Valle Giumentina, on Mount Majella, and which was originally a lake that was one of Abruzzo's first human





# of The Past

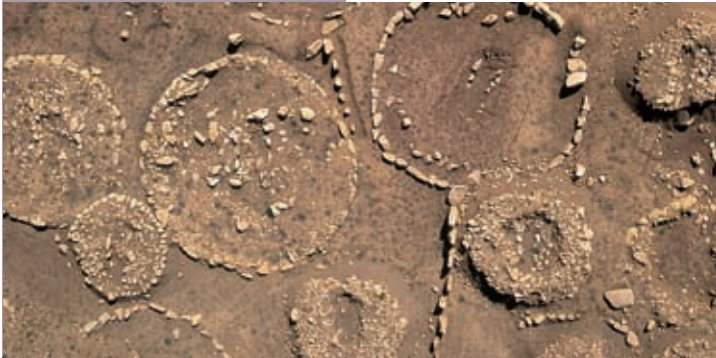


settlements, in the Palaeolithic period. Then there are the numerous grottoes used by prehistoric peoples as refuges and as places of burial and sacred ceremonies, for instance those on Majella (two lovely and accessible sites are the Grotta dei Piccioni, in the Orta gorge near Bolognano, and the Grotta del Colle, near Rapino), the Fucino grottoes, of which the most striking is at Ortucchio, and the Grotta a Male of Assergi.

Nevertheless, it is in the metal periods (Bronze and Iron), the momentous passage from prehistory to protohistory, that Abruzzo's ethnic and cultural matrices can be pinpointed. The Indo-European peoples who arrived became the shepherd-farmers with warrior tendencies and forefathers of the Italic tribes that spread across Abruzzo territory. A combined livestock-crop farming economy then took root and was consolidated in the centuries that followed, conditioned by the mountainous nature of the area and of which transhumant shepherding was a feature. If the Warrior of Capestrano is the most spectacular and significant symbol of the pride of the indomitable tribes that resisted Rome,







the most marvellous, interesting testimonies come from their numerous necropolises, which have given forth magnificent, truly significant grave-goods. Just yesterday, the protohistoric necropolis of Campovalano brought forth stunning objects that we can still see in the museum at Campoli. Now, new excavations are bringing to light magnificently preserved sites like the prehistoric pile-dwelling village and annexed necropolis at Paludi di Celano, or the Fossa (AQ) necropolis. Here the chamber tombs of the Hellenistic era contained precious, intact burial beds, laminated in bone, but the older graves, still perfectly delimited by circles and marked by rows of stones, date back to the ninth century BC!

Campovalano, Fossa, Amplero, Comino, Celano (to mention just a few) are now the cornerstones of research for understanding the customs of our proud, warrior forefathers, and their magnificent remains are part of stunning exhibits in the respective museums. Then, across the territory, visitors should stop and look at the fortified villages, with their mighty walls made of enormous stones: the most spectacular is *Pallanum*, in the mid-Val di Sangro, near Tornareccio, but the Italic walls of Colle Mitra, Alfedena, Castel di





Sangro, Colle del Vento are also fascinating.

The Italic people were amongst the first, proudest and most dangerous antagonists of the Romans, whom they opposed strenuously, setting up the Italic League, with a capital at Corfinio (near Sulmona). It was precisely here in Abruzzo that the keystone of the national identity was laid, coining the actual name Italia, but the irresistible rise of Rome was too much even for them.

When the Romans were at the height of their power, superb towns developed, often built over the remains of the existing Italic settlements, with monumental forums, baths, temples, theatres and amphitheatres, whose remains can still be admired. We think some of the most charming ruins are those found at *Alba Fucens*, near Avezzano, *Juvanum*, near Torricella Peligna, *Peltuinum* and *Amiternum*, near L'Aquila. Many of these towns were destroyed and abandoned when the Empire came to an end, although future medieval settlements were built over the most important of the old Roman structures, and have survived to our era, alive and important, for instance: Chieti, Lanciano, Atri, Penne, Teramo, Sulmona, Vasto.







Abruzzo has countless villages: tiny settlements of brick and stone houses that huddle together, with miniscule humpback lanes, solid wood doors whose lintels are carved with family bearings and often very ancient dates, steps worn down by centuries of homecomings, with archways and vaulted passages, ceilings blackened by smoke. Villages resembling little families of houses where relatives lived for centuries, and friends stayed friends from one generation to the next; where each family had a witty, often wicked, sobriquet, passed down to descendants over so many years that no one could remember why grandfather's grandfather earned it in the first place. Almost all of Abruzzo's inland settlements, crouching closed on their peaks, were built at least as early as the Middle Ages, but many of them are even older and date back to the Italic-Roman period. Many place name prefixes in Abruzzo suggest these more ancient origins, like *Pesco* (fortified high place), *Castro* (fortified settlement), *Villa* (farming village), *Civita* (township). Then there are others that reveal Longobard origins, like *Fara* (fief) or *Scerne* (rice paddy, water meadow). In a great many instances, the toponym points to the defensive

# The Ancient Villages





nature of the settlements and their high-altitude location: *Rocca* (fortress), *Castel* (castle), *Penna* (foothill), *Pizzo* (peak), *Colle* (hill).

So the Abruzzo we know today was “moulded” in the Middle Ages: in fact, over the many centuries of the medieval period, the region acquired the unique, striking appearance that it has somehow preserved unaltered to the present day, and which makes its landscape so special, as if suspended in time. Abruzzo’s ancient mountain and inland villages were built in hard stone and mortar, without any visible wood, expressing the bond with stone that was so typical of Mediterranean construction culture. The result is often stunning: a perfect fusion of bare mountain stones and the towns that emerged amongst them, camouflaged perfectly, the physical expression of the union between nature and humankind. The exposed stone houses, seemingly interlocked to create a great, compact wall of protection, creates this look of a fortified settlement, telling us of the urgent, endless need for defence, so typical of Abruzzo’s long Middle Ages that for specific historical reasons linked to the area, continued almost to the end of the eighteenth century. These houses, also called *case-mura* (houses that form a wall), are easily recognizable as they have very few external windows, and those they do have are found on the higher floors. The urban plan is similar in all these settlements: at the top we usually find the castle, then lower down, a square with the main parish church. From this pinnacle, terraces of houses huddling together as if for protection, sharing side walls, wind down towards the valley. The settlement, with its groups of houses and narrow lanes, would become one with the castle in times of enemy attack. If stone is the main construction material used in the inland areas, as we travel out towards the coast and discover the beautiful, farmed hillsides rolling down to the sea, we pass

# of Abruzzo





through villages where the stone slowly makes way for brick. The hillside villages, including those looking out to sea, have medieval origins and may even date back to the Italic-Roman period, although their evolution has been more distinctive than that of the inland settlements. Here the sea has fostered the development of trade and the Renaissance also left its mark, influencing above all architecture and town planning, but always in harmony with the traditional spirit of these places. Walls and gateways protect quaint villages, characterized by the warm colour of their ancient brickwork. Countless handsome aristocratic mansions, churches and private houses stand side by side, leading to squares, which may be large and noisy, or tiny and snug, built around a water fountain. Today, a visit to these ancient villages is a journey to a world suspended in time, for they are places where the passing hours are cadenced by the ticking of the belfry clock. Here, to find something or someone, you just ask the first person you meet in the street or knock on any door, which will always have the key left out in the lock. Here, everyone is on first name terms and the down-to-earth attitude of the locals will allow you to mix freely and informally with them all. Here, the pace of life will let you rediscover forgotten pleasures, and local cuisine





and delicacies are a memorable surprise. This is a compact world, where the leisurely, time-honoured way of life is always warm and welcoming, even on a freezing winter's night redolent with aromas of logs burning in the hearth, and where human warmth, so scant elsewhere, still reigns supreme. A visit to an Abruzzo town or village is a really meaningful experience: it will offer you a different perspective of life and the chance to leave behind the pace of the city, to empower yourself of your time once more. Here, you will rediscover the forgotten feeling of a walk along the lanes, steeped in the scent of smouldering wood, sauce simmering on the stove, freshly-baked bread, flower-laden balconies. Here, you can stop and chat with strangers and be invited in for coffee and homemade cake, or even to stay for lunch. Here, you can sit on a wall in the square and bask in spring sun, chatting with the old folk who will tell you all the latest gossip. Here, you will soon feel like one of the locals. Then there is the food: traditional dishes made with local produce, which people are used to eating every day. Here, you can meet the craftsmen in their tiny workshops, selling the objects they make using ancient local methods and techniques passed down from generation to generation.



**I Borghi  
più belli  
d'Italia**

#### **Anversa degli Abruzzi**

**Bugnara  
Castel del Monte  
Castelli  
Città Sant'Angelo  
Civitella del Tronto  
Guardiagrele  
Introdacqua  
Navelli  
Pacentro  
Pescocostanzo  
Pettorano sul Gizio  
Pietracamela  
Rocca San Giovanni  
S. Stefano di Sessanio  
Scanno  
Tagliacozzo  
Villalago**



# ABRUZZO



The fact that Abruzzo is one of the few Italian regions to have been inhabited uninterruptedly for at least 300,000 years cannot be a mere coincidence. Though accommodating and benign in the resources it has always offered for sustenance, it is nonetheless naturally protected and arduous to penetrate because of the forceful, complex nature of its mountains. Thus it represents a paradigmatic example of human settlement continuity, always offering two elements essential for long-term survival: food and shelter; that is to say resources and protection.

Consequently, since prehistoric times human beings have given Abruzzo a preference when settling, obviously attracted by the environmental resources these lands could offer: an extremely varied seasonal climate, thanks to its tall peaks, as well as a number of watercourses, great forests with abundant fauna, sheltered narrow valleys, vast intramountain tablelands, and fertile land with lakes and plains.

The protective, maternal nature of this territory has therefore favoured the permanent settlement of human communities, who





# Castles



have organized themselves in well-supplied and suitably defended permanent towns since very ancient times. Several defensive fortifications, dating back to Italic times, such as Pallanum soaring over the Sangro Valley, or Colle del Vento near Piano Vomano, are an eloquent testimony of this.

After the Roman Empire fell, those long centuries of *pax romana*, which had reduced and subdued the natural bellicosity of the Italic people, were replaced by a new, extremely long period of political and military instability, causing myriad castles and enclosed citadels

to rise all over Abruzzo territory, to provide both urban and rural populations with a sure refuge in case of attack or other dangers. That is why, whatever road in Abruzzo we may be driving along today, a castle will always be keeping a friendly eye out. Whether they are merely romantic ruins or restored constructions converted to museum use, they represent one of the region's most fascinating cultural attractions and offer themed itineraries along virtually any available path. Their shapes and typologies vary enormously, but overall they constitute a real "open-air museum" of military















architecture, showing practically all possible configurations: from the most basic and archaic isolated watchtowers to the mightiest and most "recent" 1700–1800s fortresses, including fortified towers, urban towers, castles of all shapes and locations, fortified hamlets, refuges, defence walls, urban walls, citadels, fortified palaces, convents and farms, coastal towers, forts and fortresses. Every existing typology, every stage in the historical development of military defence architecture is represented in Abruzzo, and always by examples of good, when not exceptional quality.

There are also real pearls, like Ortucchio's coastal citadel with its fortified dockyard on the shores of what used to be Lake Fucino; the triangular towers (practically unique) of Polegra, near Bussi, and Montegualtieri, in the province of Teramo; the defence walls of San Pio delle Camere and Roccasale, with their rare mid-slope mountain position and their triangular plan whose donjon at the uppermost vertex seems to guide the walls out towards the valley and enclose the area being protected; finally, one of the most beautiful castles in Europe, both for its shape (perfect: a real "icon") and for its location (isolated like an eagle's nest on the summit of a mountain that dominates an extremely vast, spectacular territory): the *Rocca Calascio*. Overall, whether they are ruins with an evocative, romantic atmosphere, or functional restored constructions, their strength lies in the fact that they are perfectly integrated into the landscape, a feature which is common to most monuments in Abruzzo. Indeed, it can be said that almost every castle in Abruzzo preserves its walls, as well as its own context and original environment: this is a noteworthy peculiarity, allowing us to comprehend completely the relationship between the defence construction and the military territory it protected, thus intuitively highlighting its historical function and meaning.









Abruzzo was one of the first Italian regions to experience the driving impact of Christianization, and the revolutionary impact of Benedictine monasticism immediately after that. Indeed, it can be said that within the severe frame of its mountains and harsh living conditions they forced on humanity, it was mainly Christianity that moulded Abruzzo's cultural and spiritual character. From the Middle Ages, the decisive prevalence of this culture over lay and civil society in outlining the regional identity did not only depend on Abruzzo's strong primitive Nature (which has always compelled its inhabitants to face the mystery of transcendence), but also, and above all, on the lack of important noble retinues in the region and on the territory's lack of political clout in the eyes of the Kingdom of Naples' power centres.

# Religious architecture





The succession of feudatories – almost always foreign and often not even resident – who governed the Kingdom's fortified villages, had very little influence on the region's civil life, so the real driving forces of Abruzzo history were not their residences, but in convents and abbeys.

It is for this reason that religious architecture has always prevailed immensely over civil architecture in Abruzzo: it is a prevalence mainly of number, since there are countless religious buildings of all sorts, both urban and rural, and not comparable with the quantities of civil buildings (mainly urban). But it is also a qualitative prevalence, for again it was Christianity that introduced and developed, in a manner so typical of the area, new languages and new experiences in European







architecture. As Ignazio Silone tell us: "In the period between 1007 and 1019, several Benedictine masters left the convent of San Liberatore della Majella, and spread the word of a type of architecture in which Latin and Lombard elements blended in a simple yet original way; in the twelfth century the monks of Valva developed Romanesque architecture; the Cistercians, from France, later introduced Gothic forms from Burgundy; lastly, in the thirteenth century, when several local schools flourished, competing artistically with one another, thanks to the friars of Atri, Teramo, Chieti, L'Aquila, Sulmona, Lanciano and the Marsica area, and despite their lavish, differing – or eclectic – style, and absence of exceptional individual features, they still reveal a rather lofty mutual style, a clear propensity for sobriety, clarity and strength." This supremacy manifested itself in a great number of religious monuments of sheer impact and beauty, often known at international level, found both in major towns and in smaller villages, or isolated and set into the landscape like gems of spirituality. These monuments have diverse forms and features: they may be proud urban cathedrals integrated into major historical centres or small village parish churches, solitary rural churches along sheep tracks harmoniously integrated into the landscape, small ascetic mountain chapels or severe fortified monasteries. But each of them represents a source of religious belief and art treasures. A heritage that originated mainly in the Middle Ages, supported by the increasing wealth that was flowing into the local church and middle classes, thanks to the most important business in the region: sheep farming.





### Great urban churches

Urban churches have always represented the preferred method in any community for expressing the entire gamut of values: religion, culture, wealth, social integration, collective memory. Thus the commitment to rendering them magnificent and memorable is evident. Moreover, in Abruzzo these churches have systematically represented the main point of reference for layout and articulation of the urban fabric, even more crucially than noble residences and public buildings. In other words, they played a leading role in town planning and in the creation of design and trends. The quintessential example – not only on a local level – is the development of the city of L'Aquila, founded and erected in a few decades during the first half of the thirteenth century, developing around as many squares and churches as were the castelli (towns) that federated in order to bring it to life.

### Suburban churches

The suburban or extra moenia churches (that is, "outside the walls", or outside a built-up area: therefore mainly convents, but also country churches, chapels situated along sheep tracks and remote oratories) represent, for number and quality, one of the distinctive peculiarities of Abruzzo: in a land of transhumant shepherds, used to covering every inch of the territory in every direction, these remote churches, dotted along the various routes, provided both support and comfort, as well as means for living and working.













# HERMITAGES

## in Abruzzo



A feature and unique component of religion in Abruzzo in the Middle Ages, when the region was formed, was the onset of the hermit phenomenon, a specific austere expression of Christianity. This current of spiritual practice, emerging from the Christian horizon, is firmly rooted in the mists of time, bound to ancestral types of worship. In fact, Abruzzo's tough mountain environment had always induced its inhabitants to face up to the mysteries of the spiritual sphere. For thousands of years, generation after generation, people living in Abruzzo were totally at the mercy of the region's most primitive and stable conditioning factor: mighty, overpowering Nature. It was Nature that had forged with Abruzzo's ancient peoples a relationship of religious and filial subordination. The preferred sites for these cults were caves,

Mother Earth's symbolic wombs, and prehistoric theatres of ancestral ritual. Later, in the Dark Ages, these caves and the great Italic-Roman sanctuaries, witnessed the arrival of the first communities of monks and hermits, as Christianity began to penetrate Abruzzo, creating a truly unique continuity of the sacredness of these places.

So a close-knit network of strikingly evocative sanctuaries and hermitages developed, and many are still difficult to reach, even today. A visit to Abruzzo's hermitages, set in their natural milieu, is a memorable experience. Surrounded by the vast mountain ranges, lost in the hush of pure Nature, the retreats appear from nowhere and are icons of sheer ascetic peace.





# THE HERMITAGE OF SAN BARTOLOMEO IN LEGIO



On Majella's northern slopes, clinging like some Mexican pueblo to the rock of the Santo Spirito ravine, in Roccamorice territory, we find one of the most spectacular retreats in Abruzzo: San Bartolomeo in Legio.

The path leading to the ravine and its sanctuary are marked by ancient iron crosses. Once past the third cross, the sanctuary is accessed through a large gap in the rock, with steps carved into the bare rock. Sheltered by a compact ridge, the façade of the tiny chapel then appears, to astonishing effect, set in the ledge that runs along the rock face like a balcony.

From the chapel two steep sets of stairs lead to the lovely underlying strand also etched into the bare rock. The events linked to this sanctuary are also closely linked to the famous figure of Pietro Angeleri, the Majella hermit who was elected pope in 1294 with the name of Celestine V, and who often retreated to this mountain in the late 13th century, to pray with his disciples.

Inside, the little church is almost completely carved out the rock: only the outer wall is in brickwork. In a niche

above the 1500s altar there is a painted wooden statue of St. Bartholomew, a modest 19th-century opus but greatly venerated and not only by local devotees. Each 25 August, in the morning, hundreds of believers climb up to the little church and after hearing mass, they carry the statue of the saint in a procession as far as Roccamorice parish church, where it is the focus of great festivities.

The devout also turn to St. Bartholomew at other times of year, borrowing the statue's knife, using it to exorcize illnesses and beseeching the intercession of the saint.

However, the popular cult is also linked to the presumed curative and miraculous powers of the water that springs from a source at the bottom of the ravine.

A small door next to the altar leads to a cell that is used as a sacristy and was once used by hermits as a shelter.

The rear exit leads onto a stunning view over the ravine's terraces. Nearby there is another rock shelter, very similar to the hermitage, brought to light by archaeologists who discovered a Stone Age village dating back to the Neolithic period.





### Discovering Abruzzo's Hermitages

The most famous of them all is **Santo Spirito a Majella**, near Roccamorice, an exquisitely beautiful national monument thanks to a perfect fusion of architecture and nature. It was founded in about 1244 and was Celestine's first stable settlement on Mount Majella. In later times, it was enlarged and constructed by exploiting in full the configuration of the sheer rock face that soars above it; the stone blocks used to build it merge perfectly with the natural relief and make use of all its niches and spurs. Thus the resulting sanctuary blends into the mountainside, symbolizing the ideal fusion between divinity and nature. A handsome façade opens into the small church and its annexed rooms, while a tunnel to the right leads to the rest of the complex, which has several floors and ends in a set of rooms called "casa del Principe" [the Prince's residence], with a chapel at the end of the Holy Stairs. The tiny hermitage of

**San Bartolomeo in Legio**, etched out of a long rocky ledge, is nearby, lower down the same valley. Even its entrance is spectacular, via a stairway dug out of bare stone and piercing the ledge's rocky roof. Viewed from the opposite slope, it is striking for its curious resemblance to American Pueblo rock villages. **Sant'Onofrio al Morrone** is the most famous of St Celestine's hermitages, known for its spectacular position, hugging the slopes of Mount Morrone, an outright eagle's nest overlooking the Valle Peligna. It takes about half an hour to reach, along a handy flight of steps dug out of the rock, which starts at the Italic-Roman sanctuary of Hercules Curino. Not to be missed in this great sanctuary are the oratory, with its 1300s frescoes, including a portrait of St Celestine, found on the left-hand wall, the Saint's cell and cave, which are located under the church; there is a terrace with a view that embraces Gran Sasso as far as Mount Sirente. Of course, there are many other hermitages





in Abruzzo, equally charming and interesting, and not all are necessarily connected with Pope Celestine V's life. **Sant'Onofrio**, above Serramonacesca, was almost certainly ruled by the nearby Benedictine abbey of San Liberatore, and was built in the eleventh-twelfth centuries. The solitary little church stands at the top of the unyielding Sant' Onofrio gorge, protected by an enormous rock that covers it as if it were a shack peeking out amidst the vegetation. The hermitages of **San Giovanni** and **Sant'Onofrio all'Orfento** are the most isolated and thrilling to reach. There are countless sanctuaries around the region dedicated to the worship of St Michael the Archangel, including the fascinating **Grotta Sant'Angelo**, just a few kilometres outside of the town of Palombaro, easily reached by car, exploring the suggestive scenario of the Palombaro gorge. Up in the Laga Mountains, the Salinello River's gullies separate the Fiori and the Campi peaks, with many

caves opening in the narrow canyon's steep slopes, used as dwellings by hermits in the past. The most renowned is **Sant'Angelo**, at Ripe di Civitella del Tronto. There are a number of hermitages linked to Fra Nicola on Gran Sasso: the most famous are **Santa Maria a Pagliara** and **Santa Colomba**, above Isola del Gran Sasso. The worship of water is the bond that ties the sanctuaries of **Sorgente di San Franco**, above Assergi, to that of **San Michele** at Bominaco. The great retreat of **San Venanzio**, near Raiano, deserves a special mention: it is suspended like a bridge connecting the two faces of the gully of the same name, along the course of the River Aterno. Some interesting religious legends have arisen over the centuries, related to the popularity of hermitages like **San Domenico**, at Villalago, looking out over the lovely artificial lake of that name, and **Sant'Angelo**, at the foot of Liscia, in the Vasto district, with its surviving water and rock worship.



# The WAYS of FAITH

Many visitors to Abruzzo come in search of its places of worship.

Alongside the better-known dedicated sanctuaries of the Miracolo Eucaristico in Lanciano, Volto Santo in Manoppello, San Gabriele in Isola del Gran Sasso, Madonna dei Miracoli in Casalbordino (immortalized by Gabriele D'Annunzio in his play, "Il trionfo della morte"), Madonna della Libera in Pratola Peligna, dozens of lesser-known places of worship are scattered around the region's lands. Mighty, primitive Nature has always spurred local people to explore the mysteries of transcendence. With the Christianization of Abruzzo territory, local caves – the prehistoric theatre of ancestral rites – were occupied by early monastic and hermit groups, while the great Italic and Roman sanctuaries were used as the foundations for the region's most important abbeys, including San Giovanni in Venere, San Clemente a Casauria, San Liberatore a Maiella and Santa Maria Arabona.

Thus a striking continuity of sacred places developed and represents one of the distinctive elements of this region, which has retained its traditions – even the most historical and distant – with such tenacity.

Every town or village in Abruzzo has a patron saint and the feast days, together with other religious celebrations, means there is a healthy calendar of events. Worthy of note are the Holy Week celebrations in Chieti, those for Easter in Sulmona, and the commemorations of St Pietro Celestino organized in the basilica of Santa Maria di Collemaggio, during L'Aquila's Perdonanza week. Then there are the suggestive rites in honour of St Anthony Abbot and St Dominic, which are still very popular in many mountain towns. St Anthony is honoured by the blessing of animals and the lighting of all types of fires, include the famous farchie. For St Dominic, Cocullo and other villages perform ancient snake rites. These are folk religion events that draw not only the faithful believer but also lay visitors who want to discover more about traditions and history.

Every year Isola del Gran Sasso is the venue that hosts tens of thousands of teenagers who come to pray





# THE HOLY DOOR OF L'AQUILA

The Perdonanza commemorates the first Christian Jubilee and was founded by Celestine V's personal papal bull, issued one month after his coronation in L'Aquila, in the basilica of Collemaggio, on 29 August 1294. The Pope intended to give complete absolution to all those who truly repented and confessed their sins, if they then visited the church of Santa Maria at Collemaggio from Vespers of 28 August to Vespers of 29 August, the annual feast day of the Beheading of St John the Baptist. The event is inaugurated each year with the opening of the "Holy Door" (the only other such door is in Rome) of the basilica of Collemaggio by a Cardinal designated by the Holy See. This opening of the Holy Door on the evening of 28 August is preceded by a long cortege of about 1,000 participants in period costume who come from the municipality of

L'Aquila's historical associations, similar groups from other Italian localities, and include members of public authorities and a government representative. The pageant begins in the early afternoon, starting out Palazzo Comunale and winding its way to Collemaggio. It is a striking feature of this religious event that since its origin, dating back over 700 years, it is proclaimed each year by the Mayor of L'Aquila, not by the Archbishop. This is due to the fact that since its emanation on 29 September 1294, the Bull of Pardon has been jealously guarded by the civic authorities. The foremost figures in the cortege are the Dama della Bolla, the Lady of the Bull who carries the pouch that contained the actual Bull of Pardon until 1997 (after its restoration in that year by the Istituto Centrale del Libro in Rome, the papal document is taken separately to the

Collemaggio basilica, as recommended by the restorers), and the Giovine Signore, the young lord who carries the olive branch that the Cardinal beats three times on the Holy Door and thus orders it to be opened. The olive branch, like the Bull and the keys to the Collemaggio basilica Holy Door (the church is also owned by the city authorities) are all kept in the civic tower safe.



# THE HOLY STAIRCASE OF CAMPLI



Campli is now a quiet foothill town on the Gemelli mountains, the first peaks of the Laga range, but centuries ago it was one of the most important border settlements between Teramo and Ascoli Piceno, so between the Bourbon Kingdom and the Papal State. A wealthy, prosperous town, the home of wealthy guilds of craftsmen and merchants, and its position had earned it ecclesiastical privileges that included the bishop's palace: Campli's heritage includes extensive traces of its splendours, like the 'Scala Santa' [Holy Stairs].

The Holy Stairs can be found at the edge of the main square, behind Palazzo Farnese. These are simply a set of 28 oak steps that the devout must climb on their knees – women must also cover their heads –, praying and asking forgiveness for their

sins. Believers are rewarded with absolution and, on some days of the year, even a plenary indulgence, which has the same value as that obtained by praying on the more famous Holy Stairs, in Rome's Basilica of St John Lateran.

The monument is dense with symbolism that motivates each single element. The believer must climb the stairs on their

knees, observed by the figures of six exceptional paintings – three to the right and three to the left of the staircase, which illustrate six significant moments of the Passion of Christ –, thus imitating the stages of Jesus' approach to the Cross, and symbolically experiencing His suffering. The final step leads to the 'Sancta Sanctorum', with the altar of the Saviour, Christ 'Salvator Mundi', who will free the sinner of their burden. After paying symbolic homage to Pope Clement and to St Elena, so convincing in the splendid colours of their life-size portraits, the believer's soul is purified and they can return to the light of day, but walking erect, accompanied by joyous Resurrection scenes, observed by smiling cherubs peeking over the roof.





at the tomb of St Gabriele dell'Addolorata, the protector of young Catholics, a saint who dedicated his life to the Church with such commitment and serenity that he is known as the saint of joy and smiles. Nearby, we find Campli and its "Holy Stairs".

L'Aquila, an art city known for its 99 churches and 99 fountains, is also famous for its splendid basilica at Collemaggio, bound to one of the most significant figures in the history of the church and religion in Abruzzo, the hermit Pietro da Morrone, who was elected pope with the name of Celestine V in 1294. In the unspoiled Valle Roveto (Balsorano) we find one of the most famous cave sanctuaries, the Grotta di Sant'Angelo, used for worship as early as the Imperial Roman period, with the first traces of Christianity dating back to the eleventh century.

In the Peligna valley, which separates Sulmona from Mount Morrone, there are various instances of ongoing religious activity, uninterrupted from the Middle Ages to the present day. Sulmona, the birthplace of the illustrious Latin poet Ovid and of Pope Innocence VII, has several places of worship, like the 1320 SS Annunziata complex, the Abbazia Morronese or Badia di Santo Spirito, an abbey built by Pope Celestine V, in 1259, as the mother house of his Celestinian monastic order. On the 'Peligno slope' of Mount Morrone we find the Sant'Onofrio hermitage, built by Pietro del Morrone in 1241, and clinging like an eagle's nest to the crags; nearby is a suggestive Via Crucis of 15 stations, realized in honour of Blessed Mariano da Roccasasale, declared by Pope John Paul II to be a symbol of welcome and hospitality for pilgrims.

Along one of the tratturi or sheep tracks that connected L'Aquila to Foggia, we find the abbey of San Clemente a Casauria, built in 871 by the Emperor Ludovic II. At Manoppello, we can admire the blessed Veronica veil, an acheropita or sacred image not painted by human hand, and found at the town's





# THE HOLY FACE OF MANOPPELLO

At the foot of Mount Majella's northern slope, near the ancient village of Manoppello, the Volto Santo sanctuary is visited by believers all year round but is the destination of a pilgrimage on the second Sunday in May. The sanctuary was built from 1617 to 1638 and much of it was rebuilt in the 1900s; it is the home of a delicate veil bearing the image of a male face, with long hair and a stranded beard, said to be Christ. This image, which is also unique in that it can be seen on both sides of the cloth, is called a "Veronica veil" (from "vera icona", or true icon). Traditionally it is said to have been to Manoppello scientist Giacomo Antonio Leonelli given by an angel disguised as a pilgrim, in the year 1506. In reality, the image appeared miraculously at the foot of Mount Majella and had already been described in the Holy Land by several Medieval chroniclers. Later it was displayed in the Basilica of St Peter during the Holy Year 1300, and Dante Alighieri mentions it in Cantic XXXI of his Paradise (verses 103-111). In Rome it was kept in a chapel, demolished in 1608, when it was stolen by breaking the glass on the reliquary. Recent studies by Professor H. Pfeiffer, suggest that this relic, alongside the Holy Shroud in Turin, are the only known examples of "acheropita" images of Christ, in other words, images not created by human hand. This would make the Manoppello veil and the Holy Shroud are true images of Christ.



# THE EUCHARISTIC MIRACLE IN LANCIANO

In the centre of Lanciano (ancient *Anxanum*), the church of San Francesco, built in 1258 in Burgundian Romanesque style and later refurbished to Baroque in the mid-1700s, is the location of the Catholic church's most ancient testimony of a eucharistic miracle. Some time in the 1700s, in the church of San Legonziano, a Basilian monk expressed his doubts as to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. During mass, however, the consecrated host and wine were transformed into real flesh and blood. The two relics were preserved first by the Basilian order and then by the Benedictines, finally passing to the Convent Minorites, and are now kept respectively in a monstrance (1713 - Neapolitan school) and in a crystal chalice. Now, as in the past, the relics comprise five drops of coagulated blood and a fine membrane of flesh resulting from the transformation of the host. Histological tests performed in 1971 and in 1981, in Arezzo Hospital, state that the relics are human blood and human heart tissue, which have never been subjected to any preserving process. Tens of thousands of believers visit the Miracolo Eucaristico sanctuary every year.





sanctuary. A nearby gem of Cistercian architecture is Santa Maria d'Arabona abbey and well worth visiting. A popular local saint is Camillo De Lellis, who was born at Bucchianico and who dedicated his life to assisting and comforting the sick, revolutionizing the approach to care of the infirm. St Camillo founded the Order of the Camillians and alongside St John of God is the universal patron of the sick, the infirm and of hospitals. On Easter Tuesday and on the feast of the Assumption, Orsogna is the scenario for the suggestive biblical tableaux performed in honour of the Black Madonna or Our Lady of the Refuge. The town is also home to the SS Annunziata convent, dating back to 1148.

Lanciano is home to the church of San Francesco and the first Eucharistic Miracle of Christian history, which came about in the eighth century. The town also offers a fascinating underground archaeology trail that connects the Diocleziano bridge – underpinning to the Madonna del Ponte cathedral – to the San Legonziano complex and the San Francesco church. Worth visiting is the Diocesan Museum, which displays important examples of religious art.

The Madonna dei Miracoli at Casalbordino is a sanctuary whose origins are linked to the miraculous apparition of the Blessed Virgin during Pentecost 1576, and each year thousands of pilgrims converge from all over Italy.

Vasto is deeply attached to the Madonna dell'Incoronata, originating from a miraculous episode of 1738.

The church of Santa Maria Maggiore has its own precious relic, a thorn from Christ's crown, given by Pope Pius IV to Alfonso d'Avalos, and which is seen to sprout a white down on Good Friday.

The combined efforts of Regional, Provincial and Municipal councils, as well as the local Archdioceses have promoted this great cultural and religious heritage over recent years.





# THE PILGRIMAGE OF ST THOMAS APOSTLE

For centuries Abruzzo has played an essential role as a historical and geographical connection between Europe and the Mediterranean. Abruzzo is central in the peninsula, near to Rome and a mandatory corridor for reaching the regions in the centre and south of Italy, so it was also crucial in spreading the Catholic faith. Historical reference to the passage of pilgrims and crusaders, who travelled along the Roman roads and ancient sheep tracks, maps out the original route through Abruzzo as part of the continental network of “Cammini d'Europa”, an extensive international tourist circuit that seeks out the ancient roots of modern Europe by following the roads used by pilgrims. The “Cammino di Tommaso” begins in Abruzzo because of the holy remains of St Thomas Apostle



that have been kept in Ortona cathedral since 1258. It is unique for the spirituality of places and people encountered along the way. A fascinating new way to approach the region using a trail that is suitable for motor vehicles but in various spots is perfect for walkers and cyclists. This is similar to the historical route for Santiago di Compostela, which is based on the fundamental aspect of perceiving the value of each place by lingering to

explore, before continuing the pilgrimage.

In Abruzzo the “Cammino” pilgrimage route crosses a magnificent landscape and embraces the most significant instances of faith and culture. Its theme is doubt because, of course, St Thomas expressed his doubts about the resurrection of Christ, but also because a Basilian monk doubted the transubstantiation of the Eucharist until he saw the sacred Host turned into flesh and wine (the Eucharistic Miracle of Lanciano). Moreover, the “Cammino” also touches on the profound ascetic and contemplative spirituality of Celestine V, who found Abruzzo to be the perfect place for its development. The great mysteries of Christianity are also to be discovered here, like the Holy Face, a veil depicting a face not painted by human hand, or the Apparition of the Virgin Mary. It is also possible to travel the pilgrim route to experience the heartfelt devotion expressed by the sanctuaries dedicated to Our Lady, as well as that of San Gabriele dell'Addolorata and San Camillo de Lellis. The St Thomas pilgrimage elevates the discovery of this land to a once-in-a-lifetime experience immersed in Nature, spirituality and faith, fostering a journey of personal contemplation and introspection.







Abruzzo's long history has left a legacy of countless artistic treasures, and perhaps it has been more successful than other regions in preserving this astounding patrimony, which may be due to the stubborn, tenacious nature of the people here, or to the unique layout of the territory and the long centuries of isolation it endured. Many of these treasures are the monuments, churches, buildings and archaeological sites to be found in every nook and cranny of the territory, towns and villages alike; on the other hand, many are artworks like paintings, statues, jewellery, instruments used daily, furnishings, all exhibited throughout the many museums in the region. There are also specialized museum structures dedicated to unique territorial aspects, like Nature, or specific crafts, famous figures, or typical food products. In a word, Abruzzo's museums are another attraction with plenty of choice on offer:

#### **Art Museums**

The evergreens are certainly the art museums, especially those focusing on religious art, as the region has a truly infinite catalogue of precious items. The museum offering is extensive and widespread, with displays often arranged inside monuments that are, in themselves, an element of attraction for the visitor. The

most famous is the **Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo**, located in the mighty Castello Cinquecentesco, a 1500s castle in the heart of L'Aquila, also called the Forte Spagnolo.

Also important are the **Museo Capitolare** in Atri, the **Museo Nazionale d'Arte Sacra della Marsica** in Celano, the civic museums of Sulmona, Penne, Lanciano and Vasto.

#### **Castelli Pottery Museums**

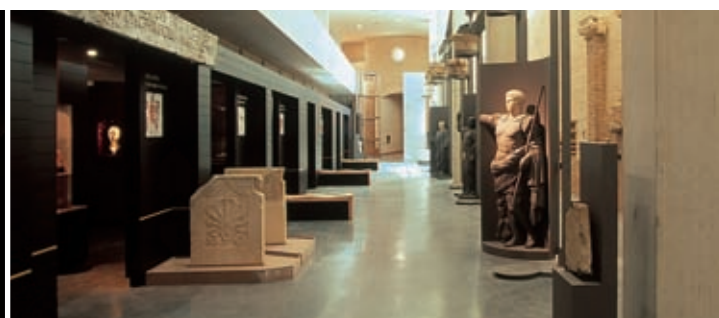
Abruzzo's museums dedicated to Castelli pottery are also noteworthy, showing hundreds of artistic majolica masterpieces produced in this tiny town from the 1500s onwards.

Two of these exhibition venues are in Castelli, where it is possible to visit the lavish **Museo della Ceramica**, with its marvellous items, including the original ceiling from the San Donato chapel, installed in the lovely old Franciscan convent; then there is the **international collection of contemporary ceramic art**, located in the Istituto Statale d'Arte, an art college with countless works of modern ceramic art.

In Chieti the **Museo d'Arte "Costantino Barbella"** has a fine display of Abruzzo majolica, but there are also paintings and bronzes. In Loreto Aprutino, visitors can take in the **Acerbo collection of historic Abruzzo pottery**, a fabulous private

# Artistic Heritage





collection assembled by Baron Giacomo **Acerbo** and boasting over 600 antique items of Castelli pottery. Lastly, in Pescara, the handsome Villa Urania is home to the civic collection **Paparella Treccia-Devlet**, with numerous priceless pieces of Castelli majolica.

### Modern Art Museums

Remaining in the art sector, Abruzzo offers numerous museums that are dedicated to modern and contemporary works: the **Pinacoteca Comunale "Vincenzo Bindi"** and the **Museo dello Splendore** in Giulianova; the **Pinacoteca "Michele e Basilio**

**Cascella"** in Ortona; the **Museo della Casa Natale di Gabriele D'Annunzio** and the **Museo Civico "Basilio Cascella"** in Pescara; the **Pinacoteca Civica "Costantino Barbella"** in Chieti.

### Archaeological Museums

Another strong feature in Abruzzo's range of museums is the sheer number of archaeological collections, widespread across the whole territory and incredibly rich in amazing relics, especially of the Italic and Roman periods, which derive from dozens of large burial grounds in the region and from the excavation of many Roman towns. The most renowned is certainly Chieti's **Museo**

# and Museums



**Archeologico Nazionale d'Abruzzo**, which is the home of Abruzzo's icon, the famous Italic statue known as the Warrior of Capistrano. Also in Chieti, we find the **Museo Archeologico della Civitella**. A visit to Campi should include a stop at the lavish **Museo Nazionale Archeologico**, exhibiting hundreds upon hundreds of findings from the immense Italic necropolis of nearby Campovalano. Crecchio has its **Museo dell'Abruzzo Bizantino ed Alto Medievale**; Teramo is the location of the large **Museo Civico Archeologico**; lastly, Vasto is the home of the historic Palazzo d'Avalos and its **Museo Civico**, with an archaeological section.

### Ethnographic Museums

The most famous and interesting is certainly the **Museo delle Genti d'Abruzzo**, dedicated to the region's peoples, located in Pescara's old centre, in the large Bagno Penale Borbonico premises. It has its own archaeological section but its focal point is the wealth of materials on show and the didactic detail, which

draw an effective in-depth picture of the region's socio-economic and cultural history, from its origins to the present day. Picciano's **Museo delle Tradizioni e Arti Contadine** is an interesting discovery of the tools and trades of Abruzzo's rural civilization. More expressly ethnographic are Casalincontrada's **Centro di documentazione permanente sulle case di terra cruda**; the **Museo Civico Diffuso** in Castel del Monte, where five old houses contain reconstructions of scenes from town and farm life in the area; the tiny but complete **Museo delle Tradizioni Popolari** at Fano Adriano; Scanno's wool museum - **Museo della Lana**; Tossicia's Museo delle Tradizioni Artigiane.

### Nature Museums

Such lavish, protected Nature as is the case in Abruzzo, with such a varied and fascinating landscape, are well-described and explained to tourists in various nature museums. Many of them are linked to parks and nature reserves, so they often also serve





as visitor centres, providing all the information needed raise that awareness that will allow tourists to enjoy to the full the marvels of Nature around them. Then there are other museums that have specialized by theme and are thus dedicated to specific aspects of Nature in Abruzzo. The museum systems that are especially well known are in Abruzzo's three National parks: **Museo Naturalistico "Paolo Barrasso"** at Caramanico Terme; the large **Museo Naturalistico Archeologico "Maurizio Locati"** at Lama dei Peligni; the **Museo Naturalistico-antropologico della Riserva Naturale Zompo lo Schioppo** at Morino, and the **Museo Naturalistico "Nicola De Leone"**, a visitor centre in the Penne Nature Oasis.

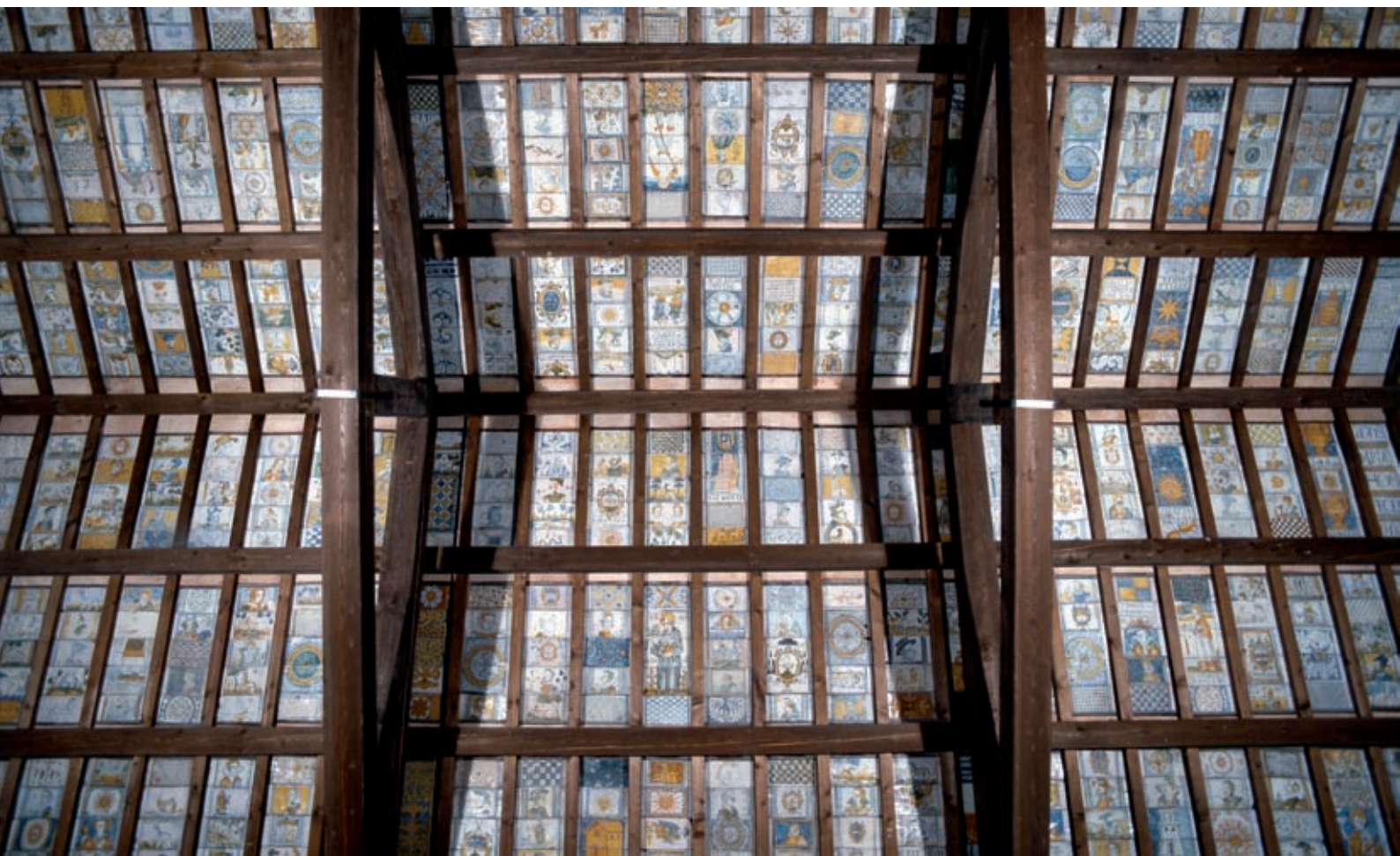
### Theme Museums

Abruzzo also offers the chance of visiting museums that do not fit into the usual scheme and are very intriguing, with ample surprises. One is Chieti's **Museo di storia delle scienze**

biomediche, another is L'Aquila's "**V. Rivera**" **Museo di Speleologia**. Civitella del Tronto has a museum dedicated to fortress weapons and maps (**Museo Storico delle Armi e delle Mappe della Fortezza**); Loreto Aprutino has two museums dedicated to olive oil; Ortona has the **Museo Musicale d'Abruzzo** and the **Museo della Battaglia**, a museum that commemorates the terrible World War II battle that turned the town into "the Stalingrad of Italy", in Churchill's words. Pescara is home to the **Centro Studi "Ignazio Silone"**, which houses the documents and private library of the writer, who was born here; the town also has the **Museo Mazzarino**, dedicated to Cardinal Mazarin (1602-1661), another son of Pescara, who later became Prime Minister of France. Sulmona has a unique museum dedicated to the art and technology of comfit production (**Museo dell'arte e della Tecnologia Confettiera**), and a good **Museo dell'Immagine**. L'Aquila's **Museo di Scienze Naturali e Umane di San Giuliano** is worth seeing for the variety of items on display.







An ability to safeguard memories and traditions of the past, alongside a talent for skilled production, make Abruzzo an original, interesting place for applied arts too. This sector thrives in the region and boasts excellent traditional manufacturing that is known worldwide. For instance, we might consider Castelli pottery, which graced the noble tables and residences of all Europe in the Renaissance and later in the Baroque period. Now it is showcased in the world's most important art museums, from the British Museum to The Hermitage. Then there is goldsmithing, which was a skill as early as the Italic period, as we can see from the splendid tomb contents of the tribe's necropolises, and which expressed the genius of Nicola da Guardiagrele, who was on equal footing with Benvenuto Cellini as the greatest Italian artists of artistic metalworking. The long centuries of protected seclusion, enclosed by its mountains,

rendered Abruzzo the silent yet original witness of a very personal expressive development in the applied arts and crafts, which brought about original, local decorative structures and models that were barely influenced by neighbouring territories and traditions, and seem to have made frequent recourse to decorative style traditions rooted in its own past, recovering ancestral, enduring designs and embellishment.

Even today, the region's best crafts are distinguished by a shared characteristic in all productions, veined throughout with the evident tinge of ethnicity, a completely local, indigenous, originality.

Like the rest of Italy, all traditional materials and technologies are normally found in Abruzzo's applied arts and quality crafts scenario: pottery, iron, wood, stone, copper, precious metals, leather, textiles and yarns.

# Applied Arts







## Pottery

The art of pottery has been practiced in Abruzzo since its invention, but during the Renaissance a tiny, picturesque village on the slopes of Gran Sasso, called Castelli, made this region famous when it developed Italy's most refined, sophisticated production of majolica, creating a range of shapes and decorations that were quite specific to its kilns and potters (like the Pompei family).

Pieces are now found in important museums the world over. In Castelli, the potter's tradition and art have never ceased to exist over all these centuries: now they thrive as never before and are handed down in an enormous range of shapes and decorations. Castelli is not the only place in Abruzzo that produces pottery: excellent items come from the kilns of Anversa degli Abruzzi, Tagliacozzo, Lanciano, Bussi, Torre de' Passeri, Atri, L'Aquila, Rapino, Palena. Craft pottery production is also widespread around Rapino, at the foot of Mount Majella, where there is a good museum and several workshops.

## Gold and Silver

In Abruzzo the goldsmith's art reached its moment of splendour during the Renaissance, thanks to the extraordinary figure of Nicola da Guardiagrele and the important workshops of Sulmona and L'Aquila. However, the most extensive manufacturing was to be found in the sector of popular jewellery and trinkets, which generated very lavish, original and lovely typologies, in a symbolic competition amongst the goldsmiths of Pescocostanzo, Guardiagrele, Orsogna, Scanno, Sulmona, L'Aquila,

Casoli. One of the most typical techniques was filigree, used to make brooches, earrings, medallions and pendants; but plate embossed in the round was also crafted to make beads for weighty necklaces and chokers. Some of the most iconic jewels are the haughty *sciacquajje*, a huge half-moon earring that was finely chased and attached with pendants; the *presentosa*, a large but airy medallion, a love token of two central entwined hearts, given to wives or brides-to-be, or one heart for those not betrothed; the *cannatora*, a choker made with filigree or repoussé beads.

The goldsmith's art today stands as the most flourishing and widespread of the region's crafts, with excellent production at Pescocostanzo, Scanno, Guardiagrele, Orsogna, Castel di Sangro, L'Aquila, Sulmona, Pescara, Francavilla.

## Wrought iron and copper

Iron and copper have been fashioned throughout Abruzzo since ancient times.

Wrought iron is popular mainly for bedsteads, lamps, fences, gates, grids, shop signs, andirons and other fireplace implements, frames and mirrors, chandeliers and other furnishing items.

Copper is used for pots and pans, ladles and cauldrons, as well as for the distinctive urns once used by women to take water home from the mountains, carried on their heads. The capital of this artisan production is Guardiagrele, at the foot of Mount Majella, although good quality items are also produced at Pescocostanzo, Lanciano, Ortona, Vasto, Tossicia and Scanno.





### Stone

Majella limestone, known for its warm hues, is the absolute star of Abruzzo's fine medieval buildings. Even nowadays, stone carvers and sculptors play an important role in the economy of several towns at the foot of Abruzzo's "mother mountain", in particular Lettomanoppello, Pretoro, Pennapiedimonte and Pacentro. Softer and easier to model is Laga sandstone, which has also developed an interesting craft sector that produces fireplaces, door lintels and posts, shelves, capitals, floors and slabs, as well as furnishing items and accessories.

### Textiles

The abundant production of wool in Abruzzo meant that weaving was always an important regional trade. One item famous all over Italy is the *taranta*, a brightly coloured, heavy wool blanket made in Taranta Peligna, still decorated with ancient patterns. One of the most famous Abruzzo textile products is the elegant bolster lace from Pescocostanzo and Scanno, but produced also in L'Aquila, Canzano and Bucchianico.

### Musical Instruments

As well as several luthiers active in the region, the other famous traditional instrument made in Abruzzo is certainly the small hand accordion (known in dialect as the *'ddu 'bbotte*, literally "two thumps", describing the continuous to and fro movement of the bellows required to make sounds) made mainly in the province of Teramo, and very popular for playing lively music during regional festivals.

### Wood

The generous amounts of raw material found in the region's enormous forests enabled the development of a great woodworking tradition here: dressers, chests, chairs, tables, cupboards, but also mortars and bowls, ladles and spoons, forks and rolling pins, as well as the renowned *chitarra*, a tool for cutting handmade dough into strips of spaghetti.

All these items are still commonly found in many Abruzzo homes, often decorated with patterns and figures of ancient origins and shepherd tradition.

Pretoro and Arischia are two towns where this craft still flourishes, but woodworking is common in most small Abruzzo mountain towns.

### Leather

Abruzzo has been the homeland of livestock farmers since the dawn of history and the region has retained significant leather crafting industries.

The skilled hands of Abruzzo's craftsmen transform raw material into bags, belts and other objects, produced in many local regional towns.

The city of L'Aquila has a unique saddler tradition and local manufacturers are regular suppliers to the British royal family.





# Folklore and Traditions

Abruzzo's quintessential quality of successfully preserving its legacy, whose inhabitants never forget and are attached to their traditions "over and above any practical usefulness", as Ignazio Silone pointed out with his masterful insight, is demonstrated perfectly in its folklore events, an incessant mixing of ritual elements that range from the most ancestral forms of pre-Christian worship to the most deeply felt Christian devotion. Christianity in Abruzzo shows a completely syncretistic tendency, which is typical not only of a more general popular sentiment, but peculiar to these lands that for thousands of years have been subject to the subordination of a mighty element: Nature. It did not take long for this element to be considered by most of the Abruzzo population as the most evident and daily manifestation of God.

Abruzzo's many thousands of years of history and the extraordinary variety of its territory fostered the development and accumulation of its customs and traditions over the centuries, enhanced with external elements, and differentiated from one place to another; breathing life





# THE FARCHIE OF FARA FILIORUM PETRI



Fara Filiorum Petri, an old town of Longobard origins, with many of its ancient buildings still intact, owes its fame to the traditional festival called *Le Farchie*, held each January in honour of St. Anthony Abbot, who is much worshipped in the towns of Abruzzo for his intercession in protecting the good health of livestock.

Thus, the inhabitants of Fara celebrate the feast day of St. Anthony by burning the *farchie*, enormous bundles of canes with a circumference in excess of a metre and often more than ten metres in height. Their name comes from an Arabic word, *afaca*, which means torch. Fire is used as a symbolic element in rites linked to the worship of St. Anthony Abbot, common throughout the Mediterranean, but the *farchie* of Fara are distinctive for their size, for their number – 12 in total, one for each town district – and for the huge number of people who take part in the event. The roots of this tradition lie in pre-Christian agricultural rites and probably originate in the cult of sacred fire, a ritual of purification and rebirth celebrated by the rural populations of ancient Abruzzo, which was then recovered through a historic event adopted into popular tradition.

This occurred between 1798 and 1799: the French armies that had arrived in Italy, in the wake of the Revolution, advanced swiftly along the peninsula. In about mid-December 1798 the military were about to enter Abruzzo, and more specifically Civitella del Tronto, in Teramo territory. The French were in no way intimidated by the Bourbon army attempting a resistance, and they proceeded

south without great difficulty. On Christmas eve of that year they entered Chieti. The inland area of the province organized resistance that ended in a massacre at Guardiagrele. It is on the Guardiagrele road that Fara Filiorum Petri lies, and the inhabitants, barricaded into their homes, awaited the enemy invasion. On the night of 16 January 1799, the miracle occurred: the woods that surround the town of Fara, at that time a feud of the Colonna princes, caught fire and the trees burning at sunset looked like enormous warriors. Confronted with this sight, the French preferred to bypass the town and headed off towards other locations; the people of Fara attributed this prodigy to the intercession of St. Anthony Abbot. From that moment on, every 16 January, the miraculous fire has been symbolically re-enacted during the *farchie* by the inhabitants of the 12 districts that make up the town. A few days before the event each district begins to build its own torch or *farchia*. Traditionally the canes must be procured in secret, so from early January the young men of the town begin to gather material, first from the countryside surrounding Pretoro, Roccamontepiano, Casacanditella, San Martino sulla Marrucina, Bucchianico, whilst others undertake to keep guard over it. During the cold January evenings, townsfolk gather to build the giant torches. Early in the afternoon of 16 January, each district begins to carry its torch to the small church dedicated to St. Anthony. In the past they would be transported on carts and even though tractors now are used, this in no way detracts from the festive atmosphere that engages adults and children alike. The event's various stages of preparation are accompanied by countless accordion players, who sing the orations of St. Anthony. Once the torches have reached the church, they are hoisted into place with the help of ropes, and then they are set alight, causing the firecrackers inside to explode. As night falls, the towering cane torches are a memorable sight and the rest of the evening is spent singing and dancing, amidst general merriment, with the traditional consumption of wine and biscuits. When the fire has destroyed most of the torches, festivities continue in each district, where the inhabitants gather around what remains of their *farchia*, and they collect the dead embers, which are kept as relics.





into absolutely original and suggestive rites. The origins of these rites are lost in the mists of time, linked in particular to that extraordinary cultural revolution that spawned agriculture, thus the development of that formidable corpus of cults embracing the fertility of Mother Earth and the steady changing of the seasons. Later, this all flowed seamlessly into the religious framework of Christianity, associated to liturgical practices and holy days, which are the strongest and most unwavering symbolic elements of that most ancient tradition.

So we find the sacred winter bonfires, that accompany major religious recurrences from December to January, and which hark back to the ancient solstice rituals to beg the return of the sun and fine weather; we have the fertility symbols that accompany the Easter rites, during the period when the Earth and its farming cycles are "reborn": symbolic confectionery like *pupa di Pasqua* (a large biscuit shaped like a girl and with an egg set into the middle); *serpente* and *uccelli* (phallic symbols in shape and in name, with various sweet fillings); *pani di Sant'Agata* (shaped like breasts!); *pizza dolce di Pasqua* (a ritual loaf filled with dried fruit and seeds, symbolizing a food that is able to reproduce





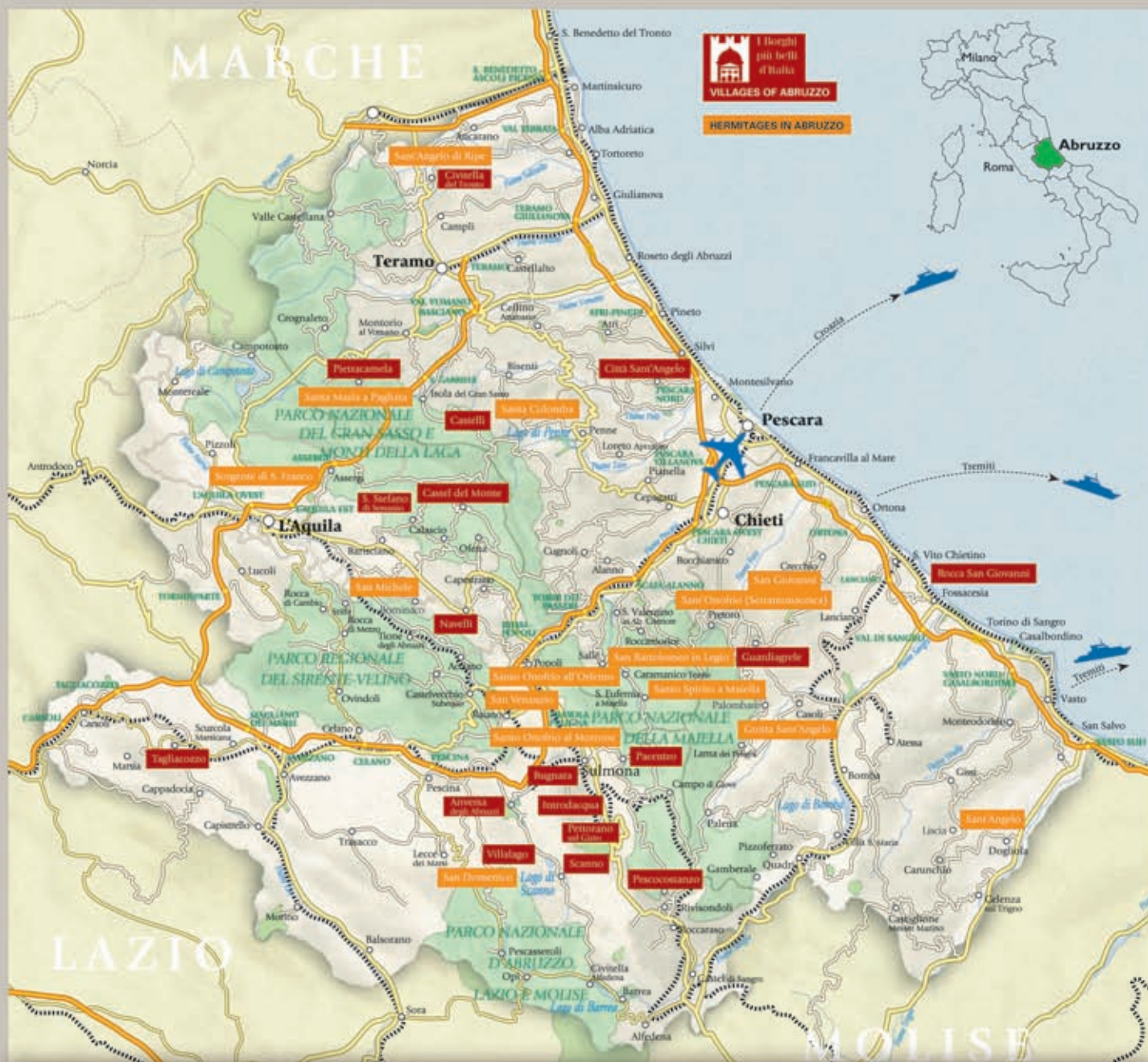
itself). Then there are the purification and chthonic water and rock cults, typically regenerating, preserved in the countless grotto hermitages and sanctuaries dedicated to St Michael the Archangel (a direct heir of pre-Christian Hercules, venerated in the same places). Or the serpents, a throwback to the Marsi tribe's ophidian worship ("snake charmers"; "immune to poisons" said the Romans of them), reappearing entwined around the statue of St Dominic at Cocullo during the feast procession. Or the ancestral rural rite of the kneeling ox (commemorating its subjugation, its domestication) during the farmers' festival of St Zopitus, at Loreto Aprutino. During the entire year, there are hosts of appointments with a folklore that is not only primitive, but astonishing, poignant, marvellously simple and essential, expressing fundamental emotions. Many are overtly spectacular; like St Dominic's snake charmers at Cocullo, the *farchie* bonfires at Fara Filiorum Petri, the wolf story at Pretoro, St Zopitus' ox at Loreto Aprutino, the *Perdonanza Celestiniana* procession at L'Aquila, the Easter Sunday Madonna dashing across Sulmona's main square.











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