Along the Shepherd's Tracks
Tratturi and Transumanza
By Lucio D'Andrea

People who have had the pleasure of visiting Abruzzo and Molise in recent years and traveled on state or rural roads connecting various villages and towns, have noticed something new – occasional markers placed on the shoulder of these roads reminding travelers that they are approaching a "tratturo", or tracks, not easily discernible, that, over time, formed paths in the seasonal migration of sheep and other animals, referred to as the "transumanza". The term derives from the Latin "trans" (across) and "humus" (ground). Each marker provides a graphic description and history of a particular "tratturo".

Since ancient times, the story of Abruzzo and Molise and its people, going as far back as the Samnites and the Romans has been shaped in large measure by the harsh mountainous character of their territory. Abruzzo, with two of the highest peaks in the Apennines mountain range - the Gran Sasso, at an altitude exceeding 9,500 feet, and La Majella, to the south, also over 9,000 feet. In Molise, there is the Matese, with elevations of over 4,000 feet. For some 3,000 years, the territory of these two regions and its people has been continuously conditioned by the traditions and life-style of sheep-rearing communities. The high altitude

valleys, rocky slopes and bleak, barren mountainous plains have been the ideal environment for sheep grazing.

For centuries, sheep-rearing provided a livelihood for more than half of the population of Abruzzo and Molise, and from pre-Roman times it constituted the basis of their economy, social fabric and culture. Sheep-rearing also provided the regions with particular characteristics and the earliest routes for travel and communication. An important part of this form of social development was the exploitation of the terrain for grazing – high-altitude green pastures prevalent in the regions, not suitable for grazing in the winter (too cold) but lush green with grass in the summer. In contrast, the low-lying grasslands south of these two regions, in Puglia and, to a lesser extent Campania and Lazio, provided excellent conditions in the winter months. These ideal conditions gave rise to a system known as **transumanza**, the seasonal migration of people and animals at the end of spring and the beginning of autumn, between grazing areas, covered on foot, under the watchful eye of sheep herders. These annual migrations occurred along a regulated system of wide grassy tracks, known as **tratturi**. Historical research that continues to this day has identified five main "traturri" in the regions: L'Aquila-Foggia; Centarelle-Montesecco; Celano-Foggia; Pescasseroli-Candela; and Ateleta-Biferno.

These "tratturi" were about 350 to 400 feet wide and extended for distances of 250 to 300 kilometers, connected to inland areas of Abruzzo and Molise. The "traturri" followed well-developed routes, established over centuries of regular use. From the Roman period onward, and in particular during the reign of the Aragonese (Spanish occupation of parts of Italy in the 11th to 15th centuries), these routes were rigidly determined and legally protected by edicts issued by governors of the regions.

The phenomenon of the transumanza was not unique to Italy. It developed and was practiced in many parts of Europe. Although there were cultural and technical differences, the underlying practice of taking advantage of remote seasonal pastures was similar. I have been fortunate to observe this form of seasonal migration, on a smaller scale, hiking the Swiss Alps, while living in Geneva. In Switzerland this form of migration was and still is prevalent with the rearing and grazing of cattle. They are taken during the spring and summer to pastures in higher elevations of the Alps, 8,000 to 10,000 feet, and to the lower valleys in the winter. One of the marvelous moments during those hikes was to hear the sound of cow bells. The cows were left to graze for days, and the bell served as a sort of GPS, to help locate the cows for the daily milking. Growing up in my native village of Roccamandolfi, located in the foothills of the Matese, a

rather wealthy family by the name of Lombardi owned thousands of sheep that

grazed in the high altitude plateaus and valleys of the Matese. With the approach

of winter, the sheep were herded through our village on their way to Puglia. The

stench left behind by the sheep as they moved through the village was awful!

In Abruzzo and Molise, the stability for the seasonal movement of flocks

between the two regions and Puglia was provided by the institution of laws, "Lex

Agraria Epigraphis" (agrarian laws) instituted by the Romans, designed to regulate

the use of public grazing lands and routes for the movement of livestock or

"calles", later known in Italian as "tratturi". During the Middle Ages, seasonal

migration came practically to a halt, due to political destabilization and feudal

conflicts, making the "tratturi" unsafe. "Transumanza" surfaced again under the

Normans in the 1,000 to 1,100 centuries, in particular under the influence of the

Benedictine monks. In Abruzzo, it was the Benedictines who had the greatest

impact on the social, economic and cultural development of the region. The

Benedictines contributed greatly to the promotion of the raising of sheep, making

the region Europe's leading producer of wool. The intrusion of government

regulation on such successful enterprises surfaced under the rule the Spanish King

Alfonso I of Aragon, who established in Foggia, Puglia, a "dogana", or custom

house, used for the collection of taxes and duties from the use of the tratturi and

grazing rights for the sheep. Regulations were also established as to the time of the year the livestock was permitted to migrate. In early May, all forms of livestock migrated to the Appenine pasture, whereas the migration to the south, toward Puglia, was more diversified: sheep and goats entered Puglia in mid-September, and cattle in mid-December. For a sense of the incredible numbers of sheep that grazed in Abruzzo in the past, research suggests that as many as 3 million sheep were grazing in the pastures of Abruzzo.

In the beginning of the 15th to 16th century, sheep-rearing began to decline, accelerated by a shift in land use from grazing to farming, as laws were enacted to encourage the growing of crops. The economic transformation began to destroy the traditional interdependent system of agriculture and sheep-rearing on which the economies of the two regions had been based for centuries. Many villages that once were mainly devoted to the raising of sheep, wool, cheese, etc., began to be de-populated and in some cases were abandoned all together.

The main economic activity of Abruzzo and Molise, which for centuries, shaped its life-style and culture, has left its mark on the regions. A concerted public appreciation and awareness of the "traturri" has given an impetus to restore their historical significance to the regions' rich cultural heritages. They offer

unique tourist attractions for trekking and horseback riding that has become very common in recent years. Interesting enough, it was a German tourist who took an interest, learning more about "tratturi" and "transumanza" and encouraged the two regions to re-discover this heritage.

Let me offer some brief observations on the shepherds – these sturdy, dedicated men who cared for the animals. During the seasonal migration, shepherds would walk hundreds of kilometers in the company of their livestock, a walk that would average three weeks ore more to reach the grazing pastures. The shepherds were obliged to share their living conditions with their flocks. It is a rugged life, lived in isolation, in the open, physically bound to the caring of their flocks for 10 to 11 months out of the year, and conditioned by the grazing needs of their flocks and available pastures. The diet of the shepherds was very simple and austere. Bread (not the kind we enjoy today) was essential to sustain them, complemented by herbs and vegetables, such as cicoria, regula, onions, and plenty of salt. Beside a meager wage, shepherds were given a kilo of bread daily, which they could exchange for 50 kilos of grain, a kilo of salt and a liter of oil, on a monthly basis. In one of our frequent visits to Roccamandolfi, we went on a hike to Campitello del Matese and ran into a shepherd caring for a flock of sheep. We stopped and initiated a conversation. We learned that he had immigrated from

Macedonia. We were told by village elders that Macedonians make the best

shepherds: they are very reliable, and they do not mind the hard life and isolation.

A faithful companion of these shepherds is the sheep dog or mastiff, which

Abruzzo claims is the best breed in the world with a natural instinct to protect

sheep and other animals against predators. These dogs are also easily trained to

control the movement of sheep. The legacy of the "antichi tratturi" that Abruzzo,

Molise and Puglia have preserved in an exemplary way, have made the use of the

"transumanza" an original and unique patrimony. This legacy is being manifested

by Molise in proposing that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and

Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designate "Tratturi and Transumanza" a World

Heritage site.

It has been a pleasure to share with you a bit of history of my and Edvige's

beloved Abruzzo and Molise. Thank you.

TRATTURI e TRANSUMANZA

(Shepherds' Tracks and Transhumance)

I Pastori by Gabriele d'Annunzio

Settembre, andiamo. È tempo di mig...
Ora in terra d'Abruzzi i miei pastori
lascian gli stazzi e vanno verso il ma...
scendono all'Adriatico selvaggio
che verde è come i pascoli dei mont...

Han bevuto profondamente ai fonti
alpestri, che sapor d'acqua natìa
rimanga ne' cuori esuli a conforto,
che lungo illuda la lor sete in via.
Rinnovato hanno verga d'avellano.

E vanno pel tratturo antico al piano,
quasi per un erbal fiume silente,
su le vestigia degli antichi padri.
O voce di colui che primamente
conosce il tremolar della marina!

Ora lungh'esso il litoral cammina
la greggia. Senza mutamento è l'aria.
Il sole imbionda sì la viva lana
che quasi dalla sabbia non divaria.
Isciacquìo, calpestìo, dolci romori.

Ah perché non son io co' miei pastor...

I *Pastori* by Gabriele d'Annunzio

Settembre, andiamo. È tempo di migrare.
Ora in terra d'Abruzzi i miei pastori
lascian gli stazzi e vanno verso il mare:
scendono all'Adriatico selvaggio
che verde è come i pascoli dei monti.

Campo Imperatore

Main seasonal migration routes

The Capestrano Warrior

Remains of Peltuinum

Bas-relief from Roman times

List of towns along a Tratturo

Regio Tratturo

che da principio a Celano, passa per Aielli, Cerchio, Colle
Armelo, Castel Vecchio, Castello di Jeri, Guriano Sicoli,
Raiano, Prezza, Pratola Feudo di S. Spirito, Sulmona
Pettorano, Rocca Valle Scura, Rivisondoli, Rocca Raso,
Rocca cinque miglia, Pietra Insiera, S. Pietro della Vellana
Feudo di monte miglio, d'Agata Florino di Rocca Raso, Feu-
do delli Bralli del Duca Vasto Girardi Feudo di Santo

On this page: a drawing of the *tratturo* from the Atlante dei Regi Tratturi *restored in 1712 by Alfonso Crivelli (Foggia State Archives).*

Castle of Rocca Calascio and Campo Imperatore

A shepherd with his flock grazing on the Majella massif
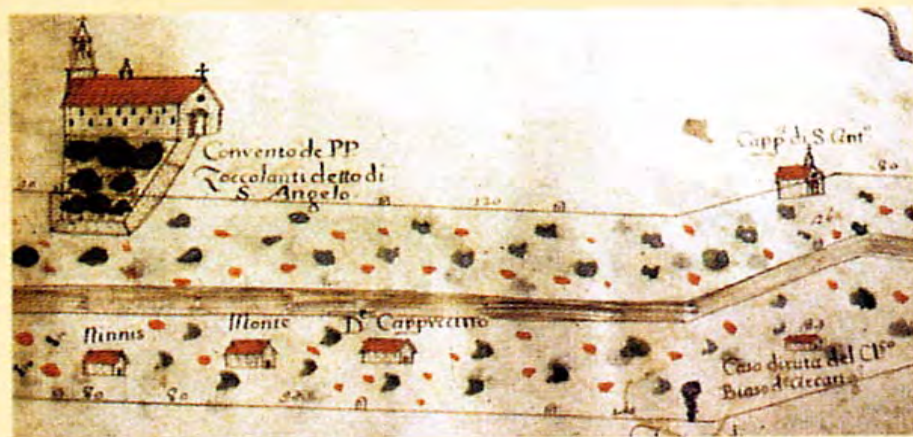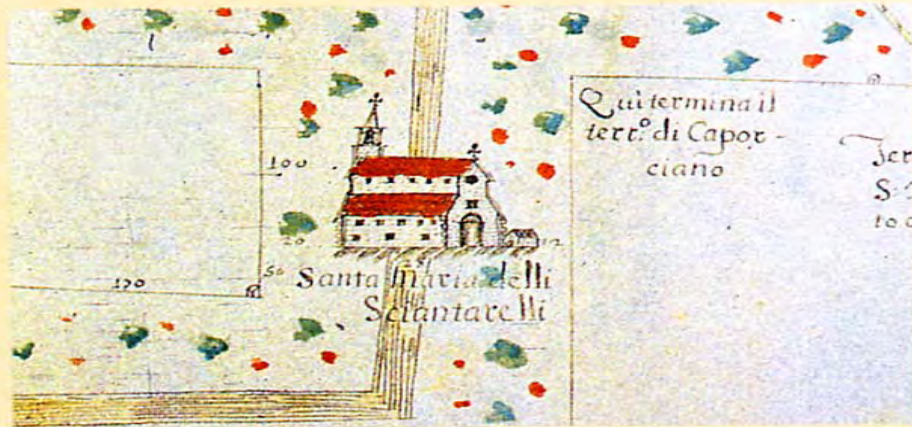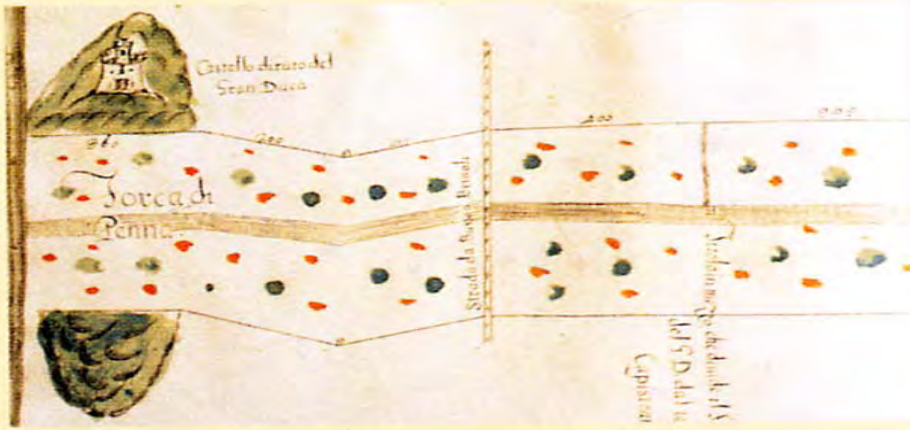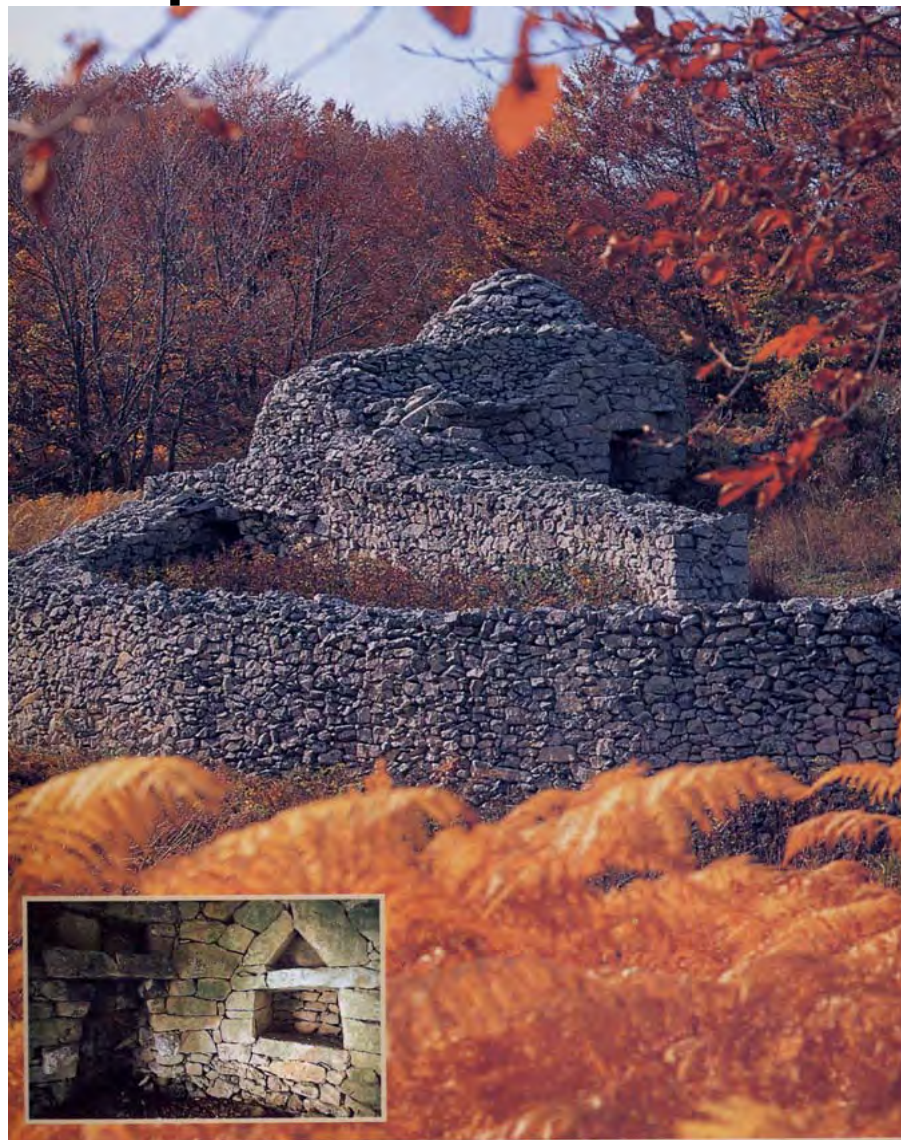
A flock on the Majella massif

Agricultural and sheep-rearing complex of La Valletta

VENEZIA

• BOLOGNA

ZE

ABRUZZO

ROMA

BARI

NAPOLI

PALERMO

ABRUZZO AIRPORT ✈
MARINAS ⚓
RAILWAYS
MOTORWAYS
ROADS

MAIN *TRATTURI*

L'AQUILA - FOGGIA

CENTURELLE - MONTESECCO

CELANO - FOGGIA

PESCASSEROLI - CANDELA

ATELETA - BIFERNO

N
O — E
S

ANCONA

Giulianova ⚓

A14

Roseto degli Abruzzi ⚓

TERAMO

Parco Nazio
del Gran Sass
Monti della

PIETRACAMELA

ISOLA DEL GRAN SASSO D'ITALIA

CASALE S. NICOLA

PESCARA ✈

ARISCHIA

Ortona ⚓

L'AQUILA

S. STEFANO
DI SESSANIO

CASTEL DEL MONTE

NOCCIANO

CHIETI

POGGIO DI ROIO

A24

CALASCIO

OFENA

CUGNOLI

ROSCIANO

BUCCHIANICO

S. Vito Chietino ⚓

S. DEM

BELVEDERE CALVISIO
CAPPELLE CALVISIO

VILLA S. LUCIA

ALANNO

S. PIO DELLE CAMERE

CAPORCIANO

CAPESTRANO

CASTIGLIONE A CASAURIA

LETTOMANOPPELLO

L'AQUILA

NAVELLI
COLLEPIETRO

S. VALENTINO

SERRAMONACESCA

LANCIANO

A25

BUSSI SUL TIRINO

TOCCO DA CASAURIA

PRETORO

ORSOGNA

S. BENEDETTO IN PERILLIS

ROCCAMORICE

GUARDIAGRELE

PAGLIETA

A14

POPOLI

CENTURELLE - MONTESECCO

Vasto ⚓

OVIN
CASTELVECCHIO SUBEQUO

ROCCACASALE

CARAMANICO TERME

PENNAPIEDIMONTE

CASALBORDINO

CASTEL DI IERI

PALOMBARO

POLLUTRI

ROMA

RAIANO

PRATOLA PELIGNA

SCERNI

ROCCO SICOLI

FARA S. MARTINO

MONTEODORISIO

VASTO

A25

COCULLO

SULMONA

PACENTRO

LAMA DEI PELIGNI

TORNARECCIO

FOGGIA

INTRODACQUA

CAMPO DI GIOVE

TARANTA PELIGNA

PALENA

PETTORANO SUL GIZIO

Parco Nazionale
della Majella

MONTENERODOMO

SCANNO

ROCCA PIA

CELENZA SUL TRIGNO

MELETA - BIFERNO

Parco Nazionale
d'Abruzzo

PESCOCOSTANZO

TORREBRUNA

PESCASSEROLI

RIVISONDOLI

ROCCARASO

CELANO - FOGGIA

CASTIGLIONE MESSER MARINO

OPI

VILLETTA BARREA

CASTEL DI SANGRO

CIVITELLA ALFEDENA

BARREA

SCONTRONE

PESCASSEROLI - CANDELA

ALFEDENA

An Abruzzo sheepdog pup

Basilica of Santa Maria di Collemaggio
on the hill where the great *Tratturo Magno* began

Ruins of the Church of Saint'Egidio

Ruins of the church of Sant'Egidio, Assergi

The Brancastello sheep-folds

Le Condole

The Castle of Rocca Calascio

Church of Santa Maria della Pieta'

Church of Santa Maria della Pietà

The *tratturo* going through the Roman town of *Peltuinum*

Here, a long stretch of the *tratturo* can be plainly seen as it goes through the Roman town of *Peltuinum* following exactly the line of the *decumanus* main street.

The ancient Roman roads and the sheep-tracks fell into disuse at the time of the Longobard invasions and seasonal migration and trade did not start up again until after the arrival of the Normans.

The Via degli Abruzzi, joining Florence and Naples in eleven sections, followed the old *tratturi* routes in several places. (In the photograph, a drawing of the *tratturo* from the *Atlante dei Regi Tratturi* restored in 1712 by Alfonso Crivelli).

Tratturo tower at Forca di Penne

This is without doubt the easiest mountain pass in the whole of the long, steep Gran Sasso chain, connecting the hinterland with the valleys leading down to the coast, and was therefore practically the only way for both travellers and migrating flocks along the L'Aquila-Foggia *tratturo*. The tower, rising up 20 metres from its rocky base, served both for defence and as a lookout tower, and is surrounded by the remains of walls and streets that indicate the site was once a proper hilltop village. Strengthened several times over the past centuries, this still impressive tower shows how important the pass once was.

The Roccatagliata mountain pass

Mt Roccatagliata rises to a height of about 1000 metres above sea level and is the last buttress of the Gran Sasso massif where it meets Mt Morrone near the Tre Monti gorge. The Roccatagliata pass, now called the Colle Sodo pass, was of considerable strategic importance, overlooking a wide area of seasonal-migration sheep-track: it was over this pass that the Centurelle-Montesecco *tratturo*, a secondary branch of the L'Aquila-Foggia track, wound its way.

Shepherds' caves in the valley of Palombaro

A drawing of a Tratturo from the Atlante of the Regi Tratturi

Romanorum Colonia, & Sabellorum Principum Sedes Speciosa Celanus.

The Fucino Basin

Piano delle Cinquemiglia

The Fara Tower

The Fara Tower

This isolated tower is situated near the course of the River Trigno. The name derives from the Longobardic *fara*, which suggests earlier occupation of the site by the Lombards.

The tower's position, near the Ateleta-Biferno *tratturo* and the Molise boundary, as well as its shape, indicate it was probably a defence or toll tower, similar to others dotted throughout the territory.

Its cylindrical structure has been carefully built up using irregular stones, with squared slabs for the door and narrow window frames. Inside, there are holes which must have served for the insertion of beams to support the wooden floors, which are now no longer present. The remarkably high tower is covered at the top by a low spherical vault.