

# THE LEGACY OF TRANSHUMANCE IN THE NATIONAL PARK OF ABRUZZO, LAZIO AND MOLISE (ITALY): REDISCOVERY AND EXPLOITATION

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**ABSTRACT:** Pastoral practice of transhumance, or the seasonal migration of flocks along fixed routes known as "*tratturi*", which in Southern Italy has ancient origins, has profoundly shaped the social landscape and the culture of many southern Italian regions. The territories of ancient transhumance in Southern Italy are nowadays affected by new economic cultures and transhumance has been replaced by sedentary forms of sheep-breeding integrated with agriculture. Nevertheless, the cultural and territorial heritage still exists: this ancient heritage has left signs in the territorial and cultural spheres of these areas, signs that can be still easily understood, read, interpreted. In this context, particularly interesting are the initiatives undertaken by the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise (PNALM), which are conceived to combine the recovery of this important historical legacy with PNALM institutional policies of environmental protection and sustainable tourist promotion. **Keywords:** Southern Italy, transhumance, heritage, National Park, tourism.

**RESUMEN:** LA práctica pastoral de la trashumancia, o migración de rebaños a lo largo de rutas fijas, conocidas como "*tratturi*", con orígenes ancestrales en el sur de Italia, marcó profundamente el paisaje social y la cultura de muchas regiones meridionales de Italia. Los territorios de la antigua trashumancia en el sur de Italia están siendo actualmente afectados por nuevas formas de organización social y económica, y la trashumancia se está sustituyendo por formas sedentarias de producción de ganado ovino y caprino, integrada en la agricultura. No obstante, el legado cultural y territorial de la trashumancia sigue vivo: este antiguo legado dejó sus huellas en el territorio y en las esferas culturales de esas regiones, huellas que pueden fácilmente ser entendidas, leídas e interpretadas. En este contexto, son particularmente interesantes las iniciativas emprendidas por el Parque Nacional de Abruzzo, Lazio y Molise (PNALM), concebidas de modo a integrar la recuperación de este importante patrimonio histórico en las políticas institucionales del PNALM de protección ambiental y de promoción del turismo sostenible. **Palabras clave:** Sur de Italia, trashumancia, patrimonio, Parque Nacional, turismo.

**RESUMO:** A prática pastoral da transumância, ou a migração sazonal de rebanhos ao longo de rotas fixas, conhecidas como "*tratturi*", com origens ancestrais no Sul da Itália, marcou profundamente a paisagem social e a cultura de muitas regiões meridionais da Itália. Os territórios da antiga transumância no Sul da Itália estão a ser actualmente afectados por novas

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formas de organização social e económica, e a transumância tem sido substituída por formas sedentárias de produção de gado ovino e caprino, integrada na agricultura. Não obstante, o legado cultural e territorial da transumância continua vivo: este antigo legado deixou as suas marcas no território e nas esferas culturais dessas regiões, marcas essas que podem facilmente ser entendidas, lidas e interpretadas. Neste contexto, são particularmente interessantes as iniciativas empreendidas pelo Parque Nacional de Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise (PNALM), que foram concebidas de modo a integrar a recuperação deste importante património histórico nas políticas institucionais do PNALM de proteção ambiental e de promoção do turismo sustentável. **Palavras chave:** Sul da Itália, transumância, património, Parque Nacional, turismo.

## INTRODUCTION

Pastoral practice of transhumance, or the seasonal migration of flocks along fixed routes known as “*tratturi*”, which in Southern Italy has ancient origins, has profoundly shaped the social landscape and culture of many southern Italian regions, in an often decisive influence on the economic structure, the road network, the human settlements. Activities related to transhumance developed in the areas of departure and arrival of the herds and many service settlements arose along the sheep tracks.

Currently there is a new consciousness of the cultural value of this ancient practice, which is perceived as historical heritage and identity factor, as well as a tourist resource to promote and exploit. In this paper we will try to trace briefly the history and the importance of transhumance in Southern Italy, and then we will analyze the several initiatives, aimed at the exploitation of this cultural feature, which are being undertaken in the area of the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise (PNALM), one of the first Italian national parks, established in 1923 and considered a case of “good practice” in the field of tourist management of protected areas.

## HISTORICAL OUTLINE

The need to find adequate grazing for the flocks, that the plains were not able to supply during the summer (usually between May and September) and the mountains during the winter (because of the snow and the weather conditions), has given rise to the practice of transhumance, that has played a role of paramount importance for the history of this part of Southern Italy and the transformation of its landscape.

Actually, transhumance can be both vertical (from mountain to plain and vice versa) and horizontal (from a region to another), and has taken place in several Italian regions (especially Abruzzo, Molise, Puglia, Campania, Basilicata, Lazio) and different other European countries and regions: Spain, France, Germany, the Balkans etc. In Southern Italy, essentially, it developed as a seasonal flocks commuting between the mountainous regions of the Apennines and the Tavoliere, the wide plain of Apulia.

The origin of pastoral practice is uncertain. Sedentary forms of sheep-breeding already existed among the Samnites, an ancient Italic people, as proved by archaeological excavations, and reported from Latin georgics, that tell of a still limited practice because of the road system and the wars. With the advent of the Romans, the first regulation of the economics of alternate pastures and its strengthening occurred. The phenomenon was able to grow, aided by the fact that the spaces were scarcely occupied by human settlements (so small and far apart). Indeed, those few human settlements found a benefit in the exchange of goods and knowledge related to the transhumance.

Long-distance sheep migration and its economic impact found a new recognition by the Swains (1231) and especially by the Aragons (1447), who gave birth to a very complex administrative structure, which attended to routes maintenance, common pastures and tax collection through the “Dogana della Mena delle Pecore di Puglia” (the Apulia Sheep Custom).

During the Modern Age the typical landscape of transhumance arose, focused on small communities and large plots, and on complementarities among extensive agriculture, livestock grazing and forestry.

Transhumance began to decline four centuries after, in 1806, following the abolition of the Custom. It recorded a stalemate in the aftermath of Italian unification, when the wool industry ceased to be a resource for the South, and then disappeared completely after the Second World War.

**Picture 1. Group of shepherds during transhumance**



*Source: Museum of Transhumance*

**Picture 2. The wives welcome the shepherds, 1920**

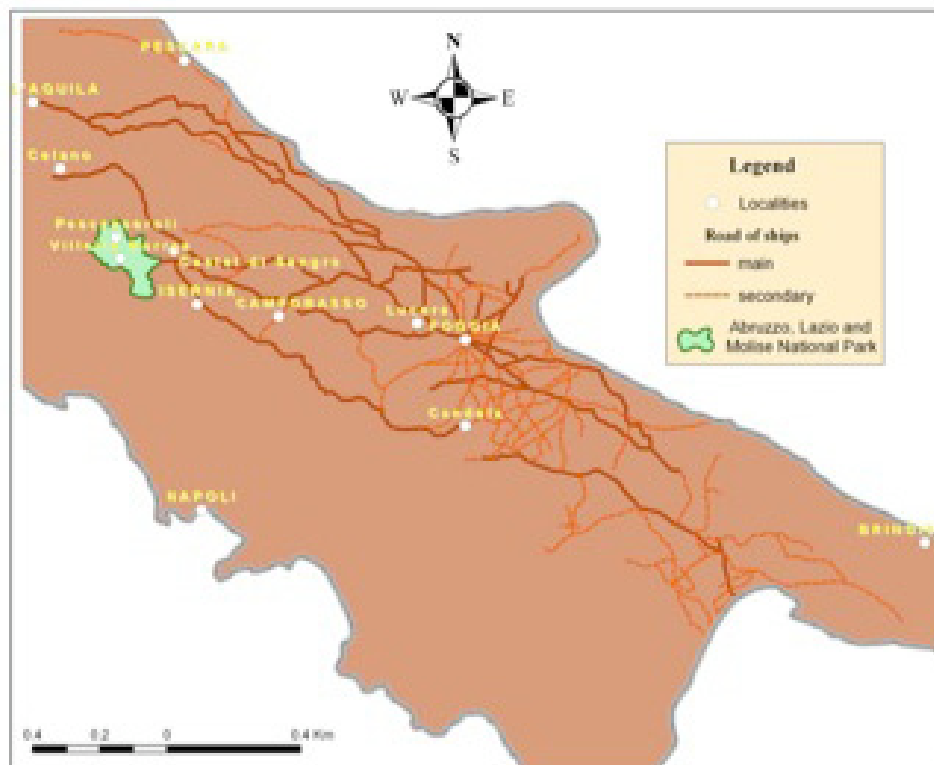


*Source: Museum of Transhumance*

## THE “TRATTURI”: THE ROUTES OF TRANSHUMANCE

The landscape of transhumance is first of all a natural one: it can be identified in the morphology and orography of central and southern Apennines that descend from Abruzzo towards the plains of Apulia. But it is also a human one: a complex landscape unified by the signs of the nomadic sheep-breeding with its “grassy roads” transhumance. In fact, transhumance would not have been possible without an intricate road network of sheep tracks, perfectly regulated, which has allowed the herds to achieve their long journeys. This road system is one of the most important cultural evidence of the transhumance. The road system of nomadic sheep-breeding was not conceived just for the simple displacement of herds, but also for their nourishment during the trip. From this we can understand the reason of their large size, so that they can be considered as extended pastures.

**Figure 1. The network of transhumance**



*Source: elaboration from Museum of Transhumance*



Depending on their width routes were classified into 3 groups:

*Tratturo* (cattle track): a real green highway, 111.6 m large;

*Tratturello*: (*small cattle track*): track of smaller width, could be 18.5, 27.75, or 37 m large;

*Braccio* (arm): small connection track among tratturi and tratturelli.

The extensive network of transhumance created in past centuries, and involving the five southern regions, has now almost completely disappeared. Molise is the region with broader historical traces, also because it was the only one to be almost fully crossed by it. The last survey carried out by Italian State Forest Authority verified the existence of: 11 *tratturi* for a total of 1,149.03 kilometers, 6 *tratturelli* for a total of 115.82 kilometers and 6 *bracci* for 79.13 kilometers, for a total length of 1,344 kilometers of restored network. Of these, only a 9% (123 km) is still used for the movement of livestock over short distances, demonstrating a progressive and irreversible loss of territory for transhumanance. From the town of L'Aquila southward (especially along the National Road no. 17, corresponding to a part of *Tratturo* no. 1 L'Aquila-Foggia), it's possible to see the surviving paths, some of them still used by shepherds with their small flock for short-distance horizontal displacements. You can still notice on either sides the rocks of white stone with the letters RT (*Regio Tratturo*) and the number of the track. Some of them are actually embedded in recent buildings.

## RECOVERY PROJECTS

Many actions can be carried out to promote the heritage of transhumance. Among these, it's possible to mention the following ones:

- educational activities for schools, young people, local institutions and stakeholders;
- artistic initiatives (movie and show productions);
- development of local handicraft linked to the pastoral world;

- economic measures, by using European financial programs to enhance European transhumance heritage, tourism and knowledge between European countries that have pastoral traditions;
- environmental actions, by spreading the knowledge of biodiversity of the pastoral culture and protecting its territory and landscape;
- social actions, by improving the living conditions of the shepherds, and organizing voluntary services to support educational, tourist, artistic actions;
- tourist activities through the development of museums in the area, guided excursions on sheep tracks, tasting of local gastronomy.

Due to the great historical importance of the transhumance, many initiatives for promotion, enhancement and protection of its heritage are being adopted. Of these, at the interregional level, it's possible to mention the program "*Le Vie dei Parchi*" (The Routes of the Parks): the idea is to build a network of "biological corridors", conceived as biological and landscape connections among the 3 National Parks of Abruzzo, the Regional Park of Matese (between Campania and Molise) and the National Park of Gargano (Apulia), amid the system of protected areas, in order to combine nature conservation and local development, promoting organic products, handicraft and new kinds of accommodation (bed & breakfast, "extended hotels", farmhouses). This initiative is linked to a similar macro-project promoted by Abruzzo Region together with Molise and Apulia, named "The Tangible and Intangible Paths of Transhumance", aimed at the recovery of the transhumance tracks, in the respect of the original size and materials.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2006, Italian Ministry of the Environment and Land Protection, together with the Regions Abruzzo, Apulia, Campania and Molise, submitted a nomination proposal for inclusion in UNESCO's World Heritage List of the above described transhumance network - together with the related cultural landscape – under the official denomination of "The Transhumance: The Royal Shepherd's Track". The proposal has been submitted

in consideration of the extraordinary coexistence of environmental, natural, historical and monumental values and according to criteria (ii)(iii)(x). At the moment, the nomination is still pending and the proposal is included in the UNESCO tentative list.

## THE ONGOING INITIATIVES IN PNALM

### *The Museum of Transhumance in Villetta Barrea*

Located in the small village of Villetta Barrea, in the center of PNALM, it is the oldest museum of transhumance in Italy, established in the nineties by a local cooperative and financed by the European transnational program Leader II. It is connected to the pastoral activities and to the places of the transhumance in the area. It is also part of an international network of museums and researchers on the civilization of transhumance, with which it actively collaborates.

When the museum was created, its aim was just that of preserving the memory of transhumance. For this reason the residents were asked to bring in the Museum tools and objects that shepherds traditionally used. Subsequently it assumed, in addition to the role of historical memory, a role of promoting the heritage of the civilization of transhumance: not only the activity of the shepherds, but every aspect of that civilization.

For this reason, the Museum of Transhumance can be described as a “widespread Museum”, a “Museum of the Territory”, whose objectives are:

- to inform about the discoveries concerning the peoples of the Iron Age and, in particular, the activities of the Italic peoples related to sheep-breeding and wool working;

- to make people familiar with the architectures of transhumance: fountains, stones, taverns, churches, mills, folds and cattle tracks; but also buildings, castles, monuments and activities related to the sheep-breeding;

- to promote handicraft traditions connected with pastoral world: wool dyeing with herbs; treatments with medical plants; weaving



plants to make baskets, cheese production, *zampogna* and *ciaramella* (traditional pipes) construction, woodwork, stonework etc.;

to acquire and spread the intangible heritage related to transhumance: festivals, traditions, habits, cuisine, dialect etc;

to inform about the historical evolution of the transhumance: the transition from walking to trucks, the arrival of foreign shepherds with their products (feta, yogurt), the sanitary rules and constraints at national and European levels, the qualitative and quantitative increase in cheese production, following an higher request from consumers etc.;

to make young people aware about the traditional crafts that can be coherent with current lifestyles and modern and innovative technologies.

Below are listed some exploitation activities carried out by the Museum of Transhumance:

- the cattle track as a laboratory: guided tours and activities aimed at discovering the landscape of transhumance (animal, vegetal and architectural signs; the intangible assets, like songs, proverbs, traditions; the degradation of the landscape);
- guided tasting of local products;
- the annual Festival of Transhumance: tastes of the transhumance; European workshop activities; choruses and dances from Abruzzo; flock procession; meetings among shepherds, stakeholders and researchers etc.;
- workshops with young people, to promote good practices and encourage entrepreneurship;
- workshops with the elderly, to recall the transhumance on foot and the blessing of the animals to S. Anthony;
- workshops with children, to teach pastoral activities and to go out to pasture with sheep and donkeys;
- voluntary service for school classes, associations and tourists;
- sports on the cattle tracks: nordic walking, yoga, bike, horse riding;
- creative activities: dyeing wool, use of herbs, pipe construction, weaving baskets, cheese processing, creation of sticks, restoration of dry stone walls;

- pastoral craft: wrought iron, wood, ceramics, fabrics and frame, stones, amulets and votive offerings;
- performances (e.g. Teatro Natura) and concerts (e.g. Ambrogio Sparagna and the bagpipes, the Orchestra of Transhumance);
- marketing and participation in international events (fairs and festivals of transhumance in Europe).

### *The Museum of Wool in Scanno*

Located in the historical center of Scanno, one of the most important tourist destination in PNALM, in a building of the first years of XIX century originally used as an abattoir, the Museum of Wool promotes the knowledge of transhumance by means of temporary exhibitions focused on its history and culture. Currently, the Museum catalogues, exhibits and restore tools, habits and cults in order to reconstruct a specific moment in the history of transhumance: the crisis of sheep-breeding in the river Sagittario Valley under the pressure of the industrial culture (1880-1930). The Museum is entitled to the wool because Scanno was one of the leading centers for shearing and wool production.

### *The recovery of Regio Tratturo Pescasseroli-Candela*

The sheep-track, which had a total length of 211 km and a width of up to 111 m, connected the ancient Samnite cities of Auphidena (Alfedena), Aesernia (Isernia), Bovianum (Bojano) and Saepinum (Sepino), now in Abruzzo and Molise, with the Apulia (Puglia). It began in Campomizzo location, not far from the source of the river Sangro near Pescasseroli (the main town of PNALM), where it is said (but there is still no evidence) that there was an ancient temple, as it was usual near the sources of the rivers of the Italic area affected by transhumance.

To mark the beginning of the cattle track there was a stone called “*Titolo*” with the initials RT, for Regio (Royal) Tratturo.

**Picture 3. Titolo**

It is clearly impossible to recover the Regio Tratturo Pescasseroli-Candela in its original length. The aim pursued by PNALM is to make easier the transit on a section of the historical path, offering the tourists a “special” transhumance experience that recalls the traditional transhumance of the shepherds, ceased in the fifties of last century. In particular, in addition to the restoration of the path and of the dry stone walls that bordered it, noticeboards have been put in place that inform about the surrounding environment (trees, flowers, etc..) and the cultural landscape (an old mill, folds, etc..).

Along this recovered route are now organized guided educational excursions, designed to revive the ancient practice of transhumance through an experiential group journey.

#### *Guided excursions*

The cooperative Ecotur, based in Pescasseroli and active on the territory of PNALM, organizes several guided tours and excursions, of different length and difficulty, along the routes once used by flocks for their seasonal migration. During this excursion

sions, historical development as well as material and immaterial heritage of the transhumance civilization are explained and shown in the landscape. The longest and most challenging excursion program, named “Transhumance...!”, covers in 8 days the whole track of the Regio Tratturo “Pescasseroli-Candela” (211 km), from the heart of PNALM to the Tavoliere of Apulia.

## CONCLUSIONS

The territories of ancient transhumance in Southern Italy are nowadays affected by new economic cultures and transhumance has been replaced by sedentary forms of sheep-breeding integrated with agriculture. Nevertheless, the cultural and territorial heritage still exists: this ancient heritage has left signs in the territorial and cultural spheres of these areas, signs that can be still easily understood, read, interpreted: a limited part of the ancient sheep-track network, a valuable architecture, terminology, toponomy, cultural habits, gastronomy, literary traditions, handicraft, music, religiosity. A great heritage now widely recognized both by local people and authorities and whose value is now considered as an important factor for tourist management and cultural communication bound to a niche – but growing - tourist flow. Thus, in Southern Italy there are numerous and ongoing projects at various levels (accompanied by protection rules) for the recovery and the rehabilitation of sheep tracks as well as for the tourist exploitation of the “transhumance landscapes”, including a proposal for their inclusion in UNESCO’s World Heritage List. In our opinion, particularly interesting are the initiatives undertaken in the area of PNALM, which are conceived to combine the recovery of this important historical legacy with institutional policies of environmental protection and sustainable tourist promotion.

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