



GAL BMG



GAL Distretto Rurale
Barbagia Mandrolisai Gennargentu:

a land to discover



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FONDO EUROPEO AGRICOLO PER LO SVILUPPO RURALE: L'EUROPA INVESTE NELLE ZONE RURALI

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SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN RURAL AREAS (CUP: H19E18000230009)
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Introduction

The 'LEADER' territory of the Local Action Group (LAG) Rural District Barbagia Mandrolisai Gennargentu (BMG) consists of the Union of the Municipalities of Barbagia and the Gennargentu Mandrolisai Mountain Community.

The territory thus comprises of 19 municipalities, covering a total surface area of 854.30 square kilometres with a resident population of around 22,000 inhabitants: Aritzo, Atzara, Austis, Belvì, Desulo, Gadoni, Gavoi, Lodine, Meana Sardo, Ollolai, Oniferi, Olzai, Ortueri, Ovodda, Sarule, Sorgono, Teti, Tiana, Tonara.

The LAG Rural District BMG, established in 2009, is a Public Participation Foundation composed of 22 public members and over 200 private ones, representing the key institutional, economic and social components of the territory.

The foundation has the aim to improve the quality of life and wellbeing of communities in these historical regions of Barbagia, Mandrolisai and Gennargentu through the enhancement of local resources. The main areas and priorities identified by the LAG for the implementation of its Local Development Strategy 2014-2020 are sustainable tourism and development and innovation of supply chains and local production systems.

The Project

“ENPORTβ - AN INTEGRATED APPROACH FOR DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN RURAL AREAS” is a transnational cooperation project aimed at the creation and promotion of hospitality models and tourist packages based on the principles of sustainable development (social, environmental and economic).

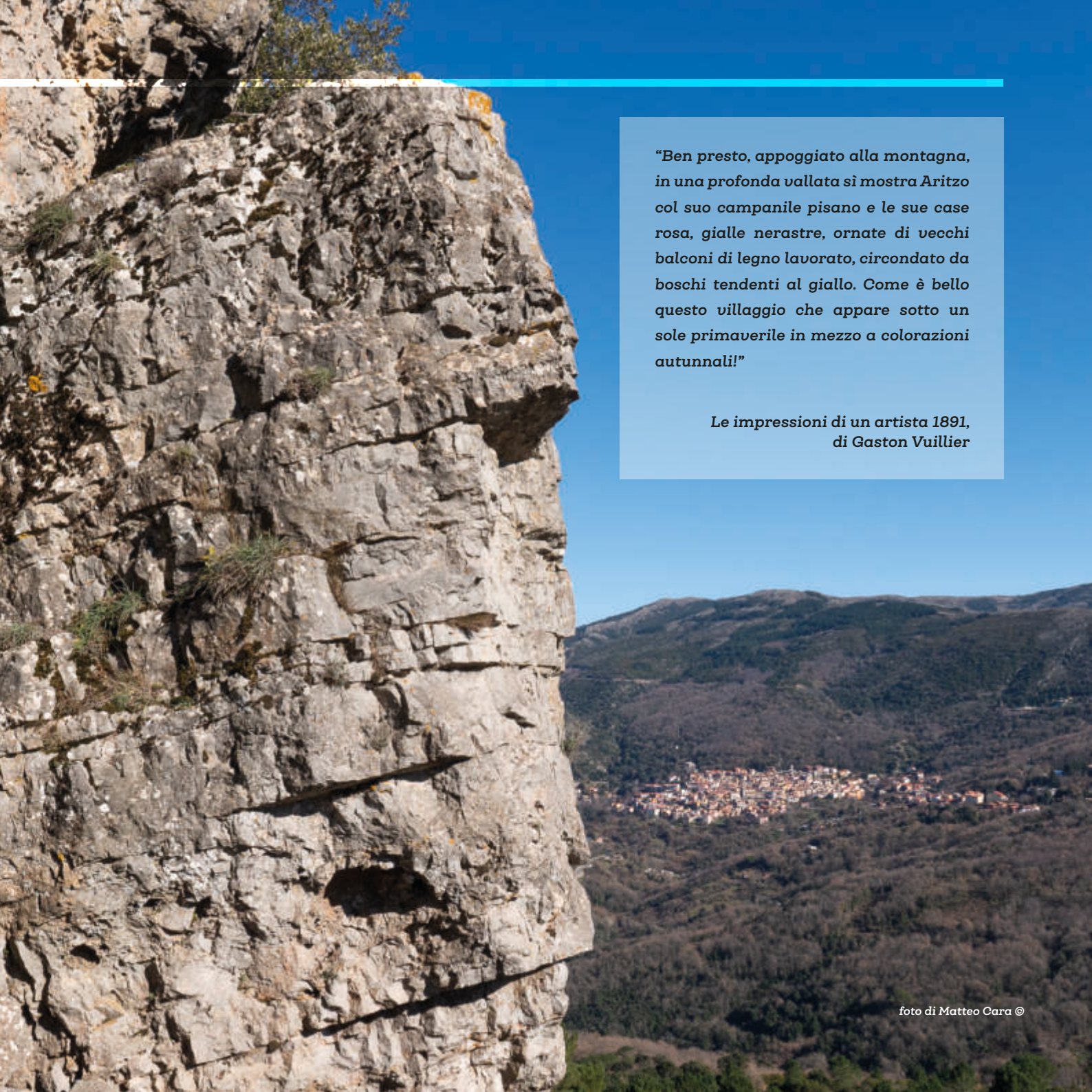
The project is coordinated by the LAG BMG, involving eight Italian, Romanian, French and Bulgarian LAG's and envisages local and joint training activities, data collection and analysis, communication, creation and promotion of themed tourism packages and the exchange of good practices.

The Sub-measure 19.3 of the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme, finances interterritorial and transnational cooperation projects capable of strengthening the strategies implemented by LAG's through the 'Local Action Plans', in order to foster the building of partnerships and relations between territories, improve the planning and relational potential of the LAGs, enhance the exchange of experiences between public and private actors of the territories and encourage the joint implementation of concrete actions for local development and the promotion of rural territories.

This specific action includes the creation of contents, in Italian and English, on the tourism destination GAL Barbagia Mandrolisai Gennargentu.



Aritzo is the perfect example of how generous a mountain can be. Indeed, from it, the village, enclosed between the slopes of the valley, has taken the most valuable tools for its own development. The perfect blend of human and natural architecture has fascinated all visitors who realise this is a privileged destination. The valley in which Aritzo is located has the peculiarity of being entirely covered with dense chestnut and hazelnut groves, where many springs of clear and fresh water gush. The *Is Alinos*, *Pastissu* and *Mammai* springs are just three of the many to be found between the village and the surrounding area. Overlooking the green postcard is the **Gennargentu** massif, a hiking destination that contains ancient oaks, old shepherds' huts, and of course, incredible views, such as the one that opens up from Punta **Funtana Cungiada**. If the forests are, to this day, dispensers of tasty **chestnuts** and **hazelnuts** (to which the late October festival is dedicated), the highest points of the mountain proved to be a real **snow industry** from which emerged a business that marked the history of the community. The white treasure was collected by the so-called *niargios*, in deep wells called *domos de nie* (snow cellars), pressed and covered with ferns, logs and soil. As well as skilled builders, people from Aritzo proved to be equally able traders: the resulting blocks of ice, in fact, were used to produce **Sa Carapigna**, a local lemon sorbet sold in the warm season at festivals and fairs throughout Sardinia. This cake, which has now become famous for its uniqueness, still takes centre stage in numerous events, including a dedicated festival held in mid-August. The *domos de nie*, some of which date back to the 17th century, can still be seen among the ferns and junipers right at *Funtana Cungiada*, where the *niargios* carried on the business until the first half of the 20th century. The dense forests also provided the community with another product: lumber. The skill of local artisans brought out from the large logs, carved chests so valuable that they became known on the island as *Aritzo* or *Barbaricina* chests. Some ancient models of these particular artefacts are included in the extensive collection of objects and instruments representative of the agro-pastoral culture, preserved at the **Museum of the Sardinian Mountain**, in the municipal park of *Pastissu* or in the aristocratic **Casa Devilla**, dating back to the 17th century, and in the **Arangino Castle**, built in 1917 in a medieval style, as was the trend at the time for stately homes. The heart of the town is dominated by the **church of San Michele Arcangelo**, where restoration works carried out over time have been well integrated with the older design of Gothic-Aragonese architecture. The exterior of the church deserves a proper stop: from here, in fact, the gaze plunges into the valley to peer into the distance at the unmistakable **Tacco di Texile**. Around this dolomite rock, which is recognized as a natural monument, develop interesting paths that allow visitors to discover the remains of the pre-Nuragic period. The tomb complex, **Forros**, is composed of two *domus de janas*. The adventure through the **Borgo Autentico** (authentic village) continues with **Sa Bovida**. This was an ancient Spanish prison that witnessed the rule of the Iberian crown in Sardinia. These prisons, in operation until the 1940s, now house **Bruxas**, an itinerary dedicated to magic and witchcraft in Sardinia between the 15th and 17th centuries. The narrow lanes of the centre also tell another story, that of **Bachis Sulis**. This was a poet-bandit who denounced power and the clergy, to whom a mural is dedicated, while the rooms of the Town Hall house the works of another illustrious gentleman of Aritzo, the painter **Antonio Mura**.



*“Ben presto, appoggiato alla montagna,
in una profonda vallata si mostra Aritzo
col suo campanile pisano e le sue case
rosa, gialle nerastre, ornate di vecchi
balconi di legno lavorato, circondato da
boschi tendenti al giallo. Come è bello
questo villaggio che appare sotto un
sole primaverile in mezzo a colorazioni
autunnali!”*

*Le impressioni di un artista 1891,
di Gaston Vuillier*

The work in the fields, the expressions and manners of the inhabitants, the landscape that gives each season a different postcard are probably the elements that more than any other have fascinated artists, intellectuals and painters, making **Atzara** a great **inspirational muse**. We are in a hilly area dotted with vineyards where Bovale, Cannonau and Monica grapes ripen: the careful blending of these historic grapes makes it possible for all of us to enjoy one of Sardinia's finest wines today, the **Mandrolisai**. What makes this nectar an excellent DOC, named after the historical region in which it was born, is certainly the passion that the winemakers of Atzara keep in their craft. Generation after generation, from the 1400's to the present day, have transferred knowledge and techniques, adapting and improving with time. The care and attention they put into the cultivation of the vines can be glimpsed in every step of production: from the plowing, performed with tame oxen yokes, to the harvest, which is considered a real feast, up to the moment when the must is placed in oak barrels and left to rest, and finally the tasting, when you find out if the great effort done in these lands has paid off. On this landscape, included in the National Register of the **Historic Rural Landscapes**, man and millennia have worked respectfully, creating an environment that has allowed visitors to trace a path through the historical vineyards protected by the **Longevitas** label. This beautiful trek allows you to plunge in the delightful landscape enriching your heart, soul and lungs. Here history has the **nuraghe Abba Gadda** as a worthy representative, a natural monument rising among the rolling hills and the dominant peak of **Sa Costa**, covered with dense forests and inhabited by a rich plant and animal life. Getting into the **alleys** of Atzara means truly immersing oneself in a noble past: the oldest neighborhoods preserve an architecture that dates back to Catalan times, with small granite dwellings and chiseled decorations on doors, with balconies and windows that reveal the artistic soul of the place. This village, considered among **"I Più Belli d'Italia"** (the Most Beautiful in Italy), is even more valuable thanks to the skilled artisans who populate the region. These master craftsmen, able to decorate tapestries and carpets created on the loom and embroider the elegant details of the traditional dress, embody the talent of the area. It was certainly the combination of these elements, which fascinated and inspired the works of the painters *Eduardo Chicharro y Agüera* and *Antonio Ortiz Echagüe*. The two Spanish costumbristas, who discovered the village in the early part of the last century, were so enchanted by the local clothing and folk traditions that they made them the favorite subjects for their works, ushering a long period where the village served as a training centre for important artists. In the **Museum of Contemporary Art MAMA**, named after Echagüe, you get a glimpse of the fervent cultural life of the 20th Century: the works of Ballero and Delitala, are exhibited along with those of the great Sardinian, Italian and foreign painters of the 20th Century, offering an interesting overview of the artistic trends of the time and the painting movement that the village helped to form, the School of Atzara. And here it is Atzara, like a huge tapestry enriched by fine decorations where aspects of its historical identity are interwoven, a town to be discovered perhaps with a glass of ruby red wine during the joyous civil and religious events that mark the time. Cheers, Cheers!



La sua attenzione [del colono atzaresè]
è rivolta principalmente alle vigne, che
egli reputa il più importante capo delle
sue risorse [...] Le uve quasi tutte sono
nere[...] ma è certo che grandissima è la
sua quantità, la quale non solo basta al
consumo prodigioso, che se ne fa nel
paese, ma ancora a provvedere ai
villaggi circonvicini.

Città e villaggi della Sardegna
dell'Ottocento, Vittorio Angius, 1833.

Water, winds and millennia have given **Austis** a setting with an unmistakable rugged, within which enormous rocks curiously shaped by time continue to tell an ancient story and keep legends alive.

Forests of cork and holm oaks accompany the granite plateau on which the village rises, while, scattered throughout the area, enormous rocky boulders carved by inexorable work of the natural elements make their way. On these stones the human imagination, guided by the particular shapes of the boulders, has traced the features of eagles (this is the case of Sa Conca de Su Cannizzu) and women, as for **Sa Crabarissa**, a natural monument and symbol of the territory. The features of women in traditional dress have also made the majestic block of granite the source of a fascinating myth: from time immemorial, in fact, the story has been handed down of a young maiden from Cabras - hence the name - who was petrified with grief upon discovering that her promised spouse had chosen another woman.

Equally enchantment emanates from the forest of **Tànnoro**, in which there are many paths to explore on foot, by bicycle or horseback, while ancient pitches made by charcoal burners - Sas Fogaia - and historic sheepfolds made of stone and branches evoke the presence of man. If through these constructions we have hints of a recent past, a more remote and distant past emerges from the Nuragic monuments. Evidence of the Sardinian civilization that inhabited the area since the Bronze Age is entrusted to the nuraghi *Lughia*, *Turria* and *Istecori* and the dolmen of **Perda Longa**.

Austis was founded in Roman times as a staging post along the road that, passing through *Forum Traiani* (present-day Fordongianus) connected Cagliari and Olbia. Today it is a **Borgo Antico** (Authentic Village), where the lanes of the historic center are clustered around the main church. The building, dedicated to the **Beata Vergine dell'Assunta**, dates back to the second half of the 16th century and houses majestic wooden sculptures by the local artist Elio Antonio Sanna. On the other hand, the country church that rises on the *Sa Sedda de Basiloccu* plateau is consecrated to **Sant'Antonio da Padova**; here, every year, on the third Sunday of September, the saint is celebrated with the traditional community rites that include heart-felt "round dances".

Traditional local dishes derive from activities related to the countryside, such as *sa fregula istuvada*, a semolina pasta, topped with cow's milk cheese (and sometimes with tomato sauce) and baked in the oven, cheeses and the various types of **bread**. From *su Pane Fresa* to *Pane cun patata* (with potatoes), via the *Pintau* bread, finely decorated and the key component of the most important ceremonies: each variant, made by hand, corresponds to a defined moment in daily life or the festive calendar, going hand in hand with what was the most important tool for marking time, the agricultural calendar. Among the traditional sweets, *Su Pabassinu* and *Sa Pane Manna*, is the one that accompanies the bonfire of **Sant'Antonio Abate** (Saint Anthony Abbot): the particular product is made on the evening of January 16 and, after the blessing, it is shared with the community around the fire. In addition to the aforementioned religious festivals, the **Autumn in Barbagia** event - during which the village creates a fine spectacle - provides another opportunity to explore the delightful past and present. The pagan past is remembered and celebrated, through the *Sos Colonganos* and *S'Urtzu*, the typical masks of the **Carnival** in Austis. These appear annually in Sant'Antonio. The movements and dynamics enacted by these figures trace the model of the Barbagia Carnivals, where the rituals were functional to ensure a good year, reminding us of the eternal love-hate relationship between man and nature; however, compared to the others, they differ in the elements that make up the mask: animal bones on the shoulders instead of cowbells, and arbutus branches attached to cork on the face.



Fizu meu istimau, chi illuminas su chelu
a mesunote, fizu de emigraos, chi su
coro lassau a sa partentzia, ant in sa
terra natia po intzertu destinu.

Da Fizu meu t'iscRIO,
Benedetto Pitzeri, poeta.

The scenery that accompanies the succession of bends and mountains, after almost two centuries since the *Angius-Casalis Dictionary* was written, still arouses the same emotion: it is astoundingly impressive. To be embraced by the lush nature that surrounds **Belvi** and follows the profile of the Gennargentu slopes is to feel nature at its best.

We are in the Barbagia region that takes its name from this small village, evidence of its important position in the history of this area. Narrow lanes, stairways and ancient shale houses form the historic core, which turns out to be a real gem where a skilful renovation of the houses integrates well with the original mountain architecture.

The walk through the alleyways is guided by the **Museo all'Aperto di Arte Contemporanea** (open-air museum of Contemporary Art **MAAC**), with works of art lining the streets and walls. This route is the result of the *Sonos de Linna Festival*, the art symposium, which brings sculptors, poets and musicians to Belvi to meet and inspire each other.

Amid installations and beautiful views, one finds oneself at the **Municipal Park** a few steps away from which is the **Natural Science Museum**, which houses a collection of Sardinian natural artefacts. Sacred art sees its greatest expression in the wooden altars preserved in the parish church of St. Agostino, in the centre of the village, and in the one kept in the church of St. Sebastian, where the fire of the festivity together with those for Saint Anthony, warm the January in Belvi.

In the surrounding area, the forests are immense, coloured with shades of green holly berries and scented with cistus and broom; they offer walnuts, hazelnuts and chestnuts and are home to centuries-old trees, and are also said to be inhabited by legendary creatures.

Creeping through the mountainsides, 'the strange railway darts over the hills and down the valleys around sudden curves', as D.H. Lawrence described, in his "Sea and Sardinia", the single-track line that, starting from Cagliari, culminated in Sorgono. Today, to let us breathe a little of that Grand Tour atmosphere, is the tourist **Trenino Verde** (little green train) that, crossing the territory, reaches the small station of Belvi-Aritzo, one of the best preserved stations in Sardinia. Honouring the skill of the builders at the end of the 19th century is also the **railway bridge over the Rio Occile**, with the wide stone arches and **S'Arcu** tunnel (999 metres, the longest railway tunnel on the island) that accompany the railway road that skirts Sardinia's most important massif, blending perfectly into the territory without ever appearing intrusive.

The desire to discover the natural heritage is provided by the numerous trails that thread their way through fairy-tale scenery, the picnic areas or the natural oasis of **Pitz'e Pranu** included in the Site of Community Interest (SIC) of **Su de Maccioni-Textile** of Aritzo. Following the proposed pathways, visitors pass numerous archaeological sites that bear witness to human settlement in the area since Neolithic times: the necropolis of *Nadalia*, *Genna Ua*, *Perd'e Leone* and the *Perda Dudda* site are among the most attractive. The undulating land takes centre stage again during the **Belvi Trail**. This trail is beautiful to walk and ideal for mountain biking.

The calendar is punctuated by religious festivals while the fruits of the earth, such as hazelnuts and chestnuts, and the most distinctive aspects of Belvi's culture are celebrated in the **"Autunno in Barbagia"** stage (Autumn in Barbagia). The event is also an opportunity to get to know the Belvi dessert that has few equals in terms of its delicacy: **is caschettes**, consisting of a very fine, almost transparent sheet of violada pastry that encloses a tasty paste of hazelnuts, honey and flavourings. The result is so elegant and delicate that its consumption could only be to celebrate the love of two newlyweds and the most important moments for the community.

“Per la degradazione dei colori e loro
diversità, e per la meravigliosa forza
che ha la vegetazione, e dal suolo e dal
cielo offresi all'occhio come la delizia
d'una bellissima pittoresca prospettiva”

Dizionario Angius-Casalis, 1833



Desulo

Over time, the flamboyant colors of **Desulo's** traditional dress have surpassed the highest peaks of the Gennargentu massif to reach other lands, revealing the brilliant soul of a village nestled among the mountains. The yellow, royal blue and scarlet red - which make Desulo women's appearance among the most distinctive in Sardinia - have enchanted painters, photographers, sculptors, fashion designers and travelers throughout history. Each of them, following their own art, has told the story of the delicacy of the fine embroideries made on fine fabrics, capturing the attention of the cultural and creative circles that characterized the 20th century. The beauty and delicacy is appreciated so much so that they have earned a dedicated place among the halls of museums around the world. How elegant and impressive these garments are, but more importantly, how much patience, care and skill went into making them, can be understood by taking part to the most important religious rites, such as **Palm Sunday or Corpus Christi**. During these festivities, a crowded procession, in which women are dressed in their most precious garments, passes through the narrow streets of the village, exuding a strong suggestion. The architecture of the center was also determined by the altitude on which the village is located: narrow streets, high schist houses, wooden and wrought-iron balconies, and blue-trimmed windows still define the ancient wards of **Asuai, Issiria, and Ovolaccio**, guarded in the arms of a majestic yet protective mountain, while the late Gothic lines of the **church of Sant'Antonio Abate**, stand out above it all. On the other hand, a short distance from the Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, in the heart of the **Ovolaccio** ward, honor is paid to one of Desulo's most illustrious sons: the poet **Antioco Casula**, known as **Montanaru**, after whom a literary prize and the **Ethnographic Museum**, housed in the house where the poet lived, are named.

Strolling through the rooms dedicated to the daily activities and arts of the community and looking out into the library-studio where is kept an interesting archive of his writings, allows to know a little more about the history and culture of the Desulesi, but it also allows us to understand how much that mountain could be an inspiration for the delicate art of poetry in limba (in Sardinian language). Every element that defines Desulo, then, cannot but be closely related to the territory that hosts it, where pastures and forests alternate between the ridges of the Gennargentu mountains and the valley at its foot, while courageous junipers and barren stony ground line the highest peaks. Some say that the spirit of Maria de Idussà, a young woman who preferred to disappear into the mountains rather than marry, still lives among these mountains; her story still creeps among the centuries-old holm oaks of the **Girgini Forest**, to reach the **Tascusì Pass** and the lofty peaks of **Bruncu Spina** and **Punta La Marmora** from which the view spreads over the whole island. The paths that wind through these places reach shelters, ancient cuiles (sheepfolds) and even a small church, the one dedicated to **Madonna della Neve**. But shepherds and devotees were not the only men to make of these rugged places their own safe world: before them, in fact, the ancient Sardinian civilization chose these mountains to live and develop, leaving us interesting traces such as the nuraghi **Calavrighe** and **Ura 'e Sole** (or **Bruncu Nuraghe**), whose position, at 1331 mt, makes it the highest in Sardinia; the domus de **janas** of **Occile** and the **Giants' tomb sa Sedda 'e s'Ena**.

The cuisine reflects the pastoral tradition on which it is based, where products such as bread (in the form of small flatbreads) and cured meats stand out. One of the country's most important events is dedicated to the Gennargentu: **La Montagna Produce** which started in 1991, now included in the "Autunno in Barbagia" network.

"Fiera e ruzza, in mesu a sos castanzos
seculares, ses posta o bidda mia,
Attacada a sos usos de una ia, Generosa,
ospitale a sos istranzos"

A Desulo,
Antioco Casula Montanaru, poeta.



Rugged pinnacles rising towards the sky, peaks emerging from the woods, canyons designed by the millennial flow of water and walls that accompany sparkling waterfalls. This is Gadoni.

Shaping the landscape in which the village is set is the *Flumendosa* river that, descending towards the valley, leaves behind incredible dense forests, expanses of hazel, chestnut and walnut trees and semi-hidden fairy oasis. Rocks further define the identity of this place: be it the flanks of the *Lattinazzu* plateau, which plunges sheer into the valley below, or the **Su Campalini** spire, sculpted by the incessant work of time, towering 80 metres above it.

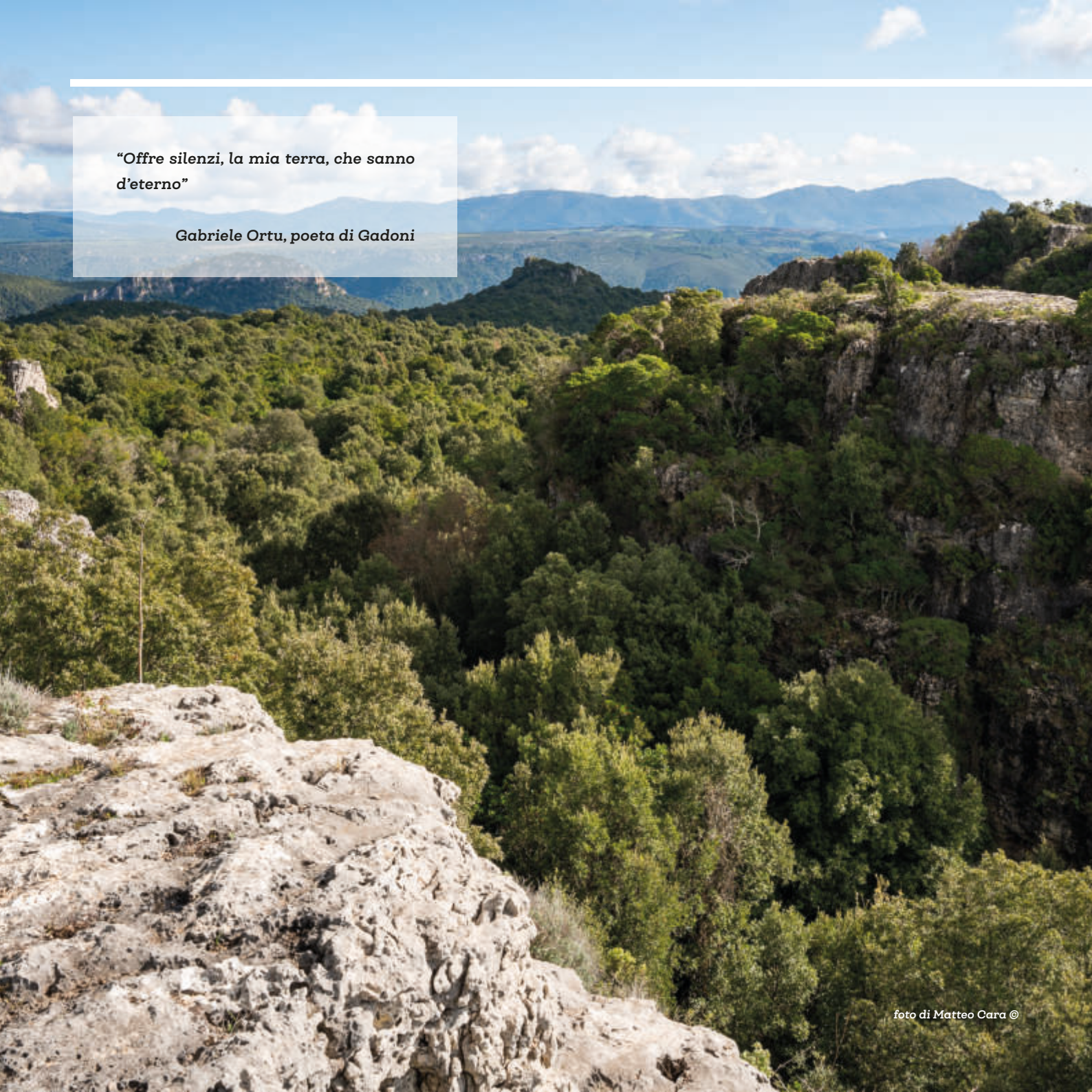
The scent of the wet earth, the rustling in the foliage and the trickle of water caressing the walls of caves and ravines make up the paths that wind through the **Corongia Forest. Is Breccas** is one such pathway, where unusual shapes and passages between stones seem to form a mythological labyrinth. And then there is the enchantment of the embrace between the river and the surrounding slopes, where millennia have created incredible scenery, such as that of the **Arredelusu** natural pools or those of **Is Caddaias**, between the territories of Gadoni and Seulo, where the emerald contrast of the waters with the surrounding vegetation is striking.

The land around Gadoni has always been generous. Although agriculture and pastoralism were fundamental to the livelihood of the community, unlike the other villages scattered across the territory, Gadoni's history has been closely linked to that of the **Funtana Raminosa mines**. The use of this site by man for the production of copper has been attested since the Nuragic period; since then, epochs and civilisations have followed one another, up to the present day, where the tunnels, machinery and small mining village have become an open-air museum, an integral part of the Geominerary Park of Sardinia.

A monument in the village is dedicated to the miners, where the narrow streets of the oldest centre intersect the parish church of the Assunta and the church of Santa Marta, celebrated at the end of July. Red and black stones, typically local, decorate the most characteristic alleys, topped by pergolas and cherry trees decorating the courtyards. But it is during religious processions, such as Corpus Christi, that the centre becomes even more beautiful, when the windows are adorned with the bright colours of *Sa Burra*, the woollen carpet woven on a horizontal loom by skilled women. Women of Gadoni are also entrusted with the secrets of the local cuisine, where the typical dishes of the agro-pastoral tradition are flanked by the elaborate *pani Pistoccu*, *Mustazzu a corrusu* and *sa Cocoli Erda*.

The tasting of these dishes becomes a must during the event **Prendas de Jerru**, a stage of "Autunno in Barbagia" (Autumn in Barbagia region). During this event, the ancient ritual of **Is Fraccheras** is also revived, where men from Gadoni carry large bundles of ferula and asphodel through the streets of the village, which are set on fire at one end. The performance recalls the ancient custom - now fallen into disuse - of 2nd November. By the light of the flame of *Sa Fracca*, which - according to the tradition - the most skilled boys would keep it burning, the wandering souls were accompanied out of the village.

The flavour of the most mysterious aspects becomes more intense during **Carnival**, recently rediscovered after decades of neglect. Through studies and historical memories, Gadoni too has rediscovered its own Dionysian ritual in the figures of *Maimoni*, *Straimoni* and *Grastula*, who enlivened the days of Shrove Thursday and Shrove Tuesday. The former, *su Maimoni*, was the central figure who roamed the streets of the village waving among people; it was up to the *Straimonis* to try to tame him, while *Sa Grastula*, of widowhood style, with spindle and distaff, completed the procession.



**“Offre silenzi, la mia terra, che sanno
d’eterno”**

Gabriele Ortu, poeta di Gadoni

We don't know if Lawrence, by 'the towers of Gavoi' was referring to the tall buildings of some of Gavoi's dwellings, but there was one for certain: the bell tower that rises above the church dedicated to San Gavino, which over time has become a true hallmark of the village.

It is exactly from that sacred and central place that the alleys penetrate the historic centre, one above all *Sa Carrela Majore - via Eleonora*, once the main artery leading to the heart of the village.

The recovery and careful enhancement of the historical centre has ensured that over the years the Barbagia village - awarded the Touring Club's Orange Flag - has stood out among the others, fascinating and winning over anyone who takes a walk through its narrow streets. Here, the narrow cobbled streets are framed by granite buildings decorated with flowered balconies, allowing glimpses of the red roofs, beautiful woods and the blue of Lake Gusana.

Gavoi is also the home of *Fiore Sardo*, an aged raw sheep's milk cheese of intense aromas and flavours. The cheese-making, in the hands of a few dozen shepherds, still follows traditional, artisanal procedures, giving the product such a high quality that it has been awarded the PDO and designated a "Slow Food Presidio" seal.

The great world that revolves around this cheese is revealed at the Museum of *Fiore Sardo*, where, through the shots of the Slovenian photographer Žiga Koritnik, the film "*Fiore Sardo*" by Fabio Olmi and the ancient and recent instruments of work, visitors take a journey through the green pastures, the semi-darkness of the seasoning warehouses, the ritual-like gestures and the intertwined lives of men, women and animals that are echoed not only in the family context, but also in the wider community.

On the other hand, the elegant rooms of the **Casa Porcu-Satta Museum**, an old Art Nouveau residence that belonged to the village doctor, Dr Porcu, and his wife, Rosina Satta, are dedicated to traditional dress, amulet jewellery and traditional games. The house itself, with its frescoes, furnishings by Francesco Ciusa and ancient architecture, makes the visit worthwhile.

A strong religious syncretism between ancient and more recent faiths inhabits the **Sanctuary dedicated to the Madonna d'Itria**. The site fascinates all those who visit for many reasons: the calm that you can breathe, the sounds of the surrounding countryside, the history it preserves, the architecture and sacredness, where Catholicism and ancient symbols of Nuragic spirituality coexist.

In the garden, the *menhir* stands imposingly tall, while in the surroundings *domus de janas*, *nuraghes*, villages and tombs of the giants peep out among the huge granite boulders.

Moving a few kilometres from the village, you can reach the **Lake of Gusana** where the calm and clear waters reflect the surrounding forests. The beautiful paths through the vegetation provide a good excuse for a walk and there is no shortage of possibilities for canoe and kayak trips, a dip in the archaeology or simply a picnic in the dedicated areas. As the seasons change, the changing landscape and thus the surrounding colours and scents make this place even more special.

Finally, there are many events to experience a bit of the Gavoesse atmosphere: from *sa Jovia Lardajola* - Fat Thursday - to the village festivals, passing through *L'Isola delle Storie*, the International Literature Festival, *Ospitalità nel cuore della Barbagia* (Hospitality in the Heart of Barbagia), *Biking Gavoi* and the small and large events that enrich the calendar.

«In front, on the broad summit, reared
the towers of Gavoi [...] We wound up
and up the looping road, and at last
entered the village.»

D.H. Lawrence, Sea and Sardinia.

A few handfuls of inhabitants, a history rooted in pre-Nuragic times, an enviable landscape and lots and lots of art.

Lodine, despite its small size, is a true concentration of colour and enchantment, immersed in an intimate atmosphere that makes it an interesting destination.

Its history is strongly intertwined with pastoral activities, but the community has carved out an exceptionally important role for itself through the local manufacture of **red tiles**. It was a seasonal activity that represented an important source of income for many families. Up until the early 20th century, many *Barbagia* houses saw the signature of Lodine's craftsmen on their roofs.

Much of its history can be found on the many murals that decorate the streets. But what is most striking is the singular project of "Serrandales" inaugurated in 2003 and still in progress today, thanks to which the anonymous, grey garage shutters come to life through the icons of many personalities who have marked the history of Sardinia and the entire world. The faces of Gramsci, Grazia Deledda, Frida Khalo, Nelson Mandela, and many others portrayed in these unusual canvases thus give a somewhat 'pop' soul to the small *Barbagia* village, neatly framed in every carefully curated corner of this place.

A visit to Lodine is not complete without a look out from one of the most beautiful viewpoints in *Barbagia*, the one that opens up from the square in front of the ancient church of **San Giorgio**, situated on a small rise overlooking an extraordinary landscape of the surrounding area. Near the same church are visible the remains of the **nuraghe Sas Trinta Battaglias**, one of the many archaeological remains that dot the surroundings of the village.

Just outside the village, in fact, it is possible to visit the **Domus de Janas Sas Argiolas or Tziu Andria**, but a special mention goes to the charming village of **Soroeni**, at a short distance from the sanctuary of *Sa Itria*. Here, the remains of ancient settlements are perfectly set among rocks shaped by water and wind and immersed in a forest of holm oaks and downy oaks, which, together with a soundtrack dictated by the rhythms of the cowbells of grazing flocks and breezes rustling through the foliage, make this a truly fascinating site. And speaking of forests, fragrances and regenerating views, here is the icing on the cake: the municipal park of **Puddis**, where cork and chestnut groves accompany the visitor up to the valley overlooking *Lake Gusana*.

Religious festivities, accompanied by sacred and civil ceremonies, are dedicated to Saints *Giorgio* and *Liberato*, while in early August there is the **Art Festival**, a three-day event with exhibitions, workshops and, of course, live painting on the garage shutters. Finally, the **Carnival** celebrations are unavoidable. In Lodine the carnival tradition takes the form of a puppet whose wooden mask, sculpted by a local craftsman-artist, shows the features of a character (usually a politician) who has distinguished himself, in recent history, for less than noble actions. The puppet, accompanied by a funeral procession made up mostly of men disguised as widows, is mocked for the duration of the carnival, until the trial and sentence that will see it burnt at the stake, thus defining the end of the most anarchic period of the year and the beginning of a new cycle that will lead to spring.

“[...] Tottus radunaiana in piatta a
festeggiare comente un’obbrigu,
Faghian bellas incunzas de trigu e ortos
gigantescos de patata [...]”

Salvatore Lai, poeta.

A fortress dominating from the highest peak, legends travelling among millenary stones and a remote, nuragic energy envelope **Meana** and its surroundings.

The profile of the highest peak of the su *Pranu* plateau was too peculiar to be a simple summit capped by a nuraghe: for Giovanni Lilliu, the father of Sardinian archaeology, that place was hiding something more, and it was not long before his intuition matched reality. Indeed, those millennial layers of earth were the protective shell of the regal majesty of the **Nuraghe Nolza**.

More than ten nuraghes, *domus de janas*, and the discovery of three statuettes representing the Mediterranean Mother Goddess, make this land an immense archaeological site, but it is in the *Nolza nuraghe* that one perceives the true magnificence of the ancient civilisation of the Sardinians: four angular towers connected by bastions and a central building surrounded by the remains of a village, make it one of the largest in Sardinia, and very similar to *Su Nuraxi in Barumini*.

The view that opens up from its summit allows visitors to embrace much of Sardinia, and one cannot help but be impressed and fascinated by the precision with which each stone was laid; the same precision that allows us, even today, to enjoy the play of light and shadow in the interior or to follow the luminous line that marks the dawn of the winter solstice and the sunset of the summer solstice, between the large boulders.

Such an impressive and mysterious formation, in a context rich in woods and springs, with the *Gennargentu* standing guard not far away, could not fail to inspire stories and legends as well. Precisely one of these connects the 'giant' to another important nuraghe, that of **Maria Incantada**, inhabited - according to popular belief - by a *jana* (a fairy, *Maria Incantada*) who every day while weaving at her golden loom, sang for her lover, held prisoner in the *Cuccuru Nolza*, exactly where the nuraghe of the same name stands.

The area is crossed by the historic **Trenino Verde** (little green train) railway, while in the heart of the **Ortuabis** forest, paths meander through the forest that bring back to an ancient everyday life. Amidst holm oaks, cork trees and mastic trees, at *Ortuabis*, it is possible to come across the old shepherds' shelters, *Is Pinnazzus*, or the lime kilns, testimonies of the small industry active until the second half of the 20th century.

In the centre of the village, Catalan-style houses can still be seen, with trachyte lintels carved by local craftsmen decorating the shale walls of the houses. The parish church is dedicated to **San Bartolomeo**, with a façade in Gothic-Aragonese style and a bell tower decorated with bas-reliefs of folk art. The religious heritage is completed with the churches of *San Salvatore*, *Sant'Antonio Abate* and *San Francesco Saverio*, the country church of *San Lussorio* and the remains of the church of *San Sebastiano*, of which only the access archway remains today.

The cultural and naturalistic richness also make *Meana Sardo* an interesting stop on the **Cammino di Santu Jacu**, the route that crosses the island and links the places of worship dedicated to St. James.

The wine that is born in the vineyards dotting the hills and the convivial spirit of the people of *Meana* make themselves known during the festivals held throughout the year, including **Domos Antigas**, an event of the *Autunno in Barbagia* event, a perfect opportunity to discover the village and its cultural peculiarities.



“Abbarbicato ad una collina si pavoneggia e si fa ammirare, pieno di fascino e di mistero, invitante. [...] La sua bellezza non muta, quando il sole d'estate lo investe, o il cielo vestito a festa lo avvolge; è tempo di sagre e di feste e di volti ritrovati. [...]”

Meana, Dora Casula

Discovering the history of a place allows us to be able to capture the most significant features of its essence, and **Ollolai** is no exception. Ollolai, whose historical importance is already evident from its name - that of one of the *Barbagie* of central Sardinia- was the capital of the so-called *civitates barbariae*, where people did not submit to the Romans first, and resisted the Byzantines later.

Their fortress was the land itself: a mountain covered with thick forests of centuries-old oaks and holm oaks, as that one of **San Basilio**, and tall windows overlooking the Island from which you can touch the sea with your gaze, such as **Su Nodu de s'Aschisorgiu** - the treasure rock. Evidence of ancient settlement can be seen amongst the *nuraghi*, villages and rock shelters, such as that of **Sa Conca Frabi'à**, which form the interesting nature trails that we can enjoy today.

We cannot say with certainty whether **Ospitone**, an ancient chief of the Barbagia people who resided in the area, accepted the request of Pope Gregory the Great, who invited him to encourage the conversion of "that pagan people". However, the fact remains that Christianity, did indeed arrive even in the deepest *Barbagia*. At the top of Mount San Basilio rises, in fact, the church of the same name, whose original structure dates back precisely to the Byzantine period. A short distance away, in the remains of an ancient Franciscan convent, further stories and legends are revealed, such as the one that saw, in the late 1400s, the discovery of the body of a young boy in the convent well. The friars were blamed for his murder, actually the result of a blood feud, and they were soon persecuted and forced to leave the country. Legend has it that friars put a curse, and two days after their departure, a violent fire destroyed the village.

From the evanescent tales to the tangible, hard granite solidity that characterises the historic centre of today's Ollolai: Narrow, picturesque lanes and dwellings that recall traditional architecture surround the parish church of **San Michele Arcangelo**: patron saint of the village honoured in late September. Exploring the interior of the church becomes a must, even if only to admire some paintings by Carmelo Floris, through which he gave immortal beauty to the Ollolai's women, dressed in their splendid traditional clothes.

It was Ollolai's women who were entrusted with the task of preserving and handing down **S'Iscrarionzu**, the ancient art of asphodel weaving. Thanks to skilled female hands, the wild plant gains new life in the forms of basket and corbulars. This activity, once fundamental to sustain the family economy and to which the Museum of **S'Iscrarionzu** is now dedicated, has over time earned a respectable place within the Sardinian basket-making tradition.

Ancestral is also the **Canto a Tenore** singing in four voices considered a UNESCO heritage, and **S'Istrumpa**, the Sardinian fight. This form of fighting, in particular, is very ancient, and although it has been handed down between generations for millennia, it has preserved its rules and techniques. Country festivals, military meetings and the most important events of country life used to be the favourite settings in which to compete in *s'istrumpa*, while today this role is mainly left to dedicated tournaments, which contribute to its popularity and appreciation.

Among the events, during which - needless to say - there is the opportunity to taste the most important traditional products (including Fiore sardo cheese), the rich calendar of the **Summer in the Land of Ospitone** stands out. During the course of the beautiful season, religious celebrations and major events alternate, including the now historic **Palio degli Asinelli** event, which, together with *Su Palu de sos Vihinaos*, the race held among representatives from every neighbourhood of the village - become a way of recognizing the importance of the donkey in local history and safeguard this species".



È bella la Barbagia, primordiale e vergine come solo poche regioni della vecchia Europa! [...] Il comune viaggiatore [...] non immagina che, al di là dei monti color acciaio che si ergono all'orizzonte, sonnecchiano magnifici boschi di querce e castagni e ruscelli dall'acqua freschissima sgorgano dalle rocce"

*Immagini di viaggio dalla Sardegna,
Max Leopold Wagner*

The generous and inspiring countryside of **Olzai** has allowed the small community to develop artists and intellectuals to find ideas for their works and thoughts.

The village, which recently joined the network of the **Borghi Autentici d'Italia** (Authentic Villages of Italy), is laid out in a fertile valley, hugged by centuries-old forests and protected by high ridges of rough granite. Its **historic centre**, with its paved alleys, two-story cottages, flowery balconies and the **Bisine River** that runs through the village, give it the name of "beautiful village". Places of faith are represented by the **Church of Santa Barbara**, which holds the *Retable of the Plague by the Master of Olzai*, the small **Church of Sant'Anastasio**, which houses instead, the *Retable of the Holy Family* and the **Church of San Giovanni Battista**, erected in the 15th century. Olzai has a strong agro-pastoral imprint: its development has been linked to wheat cultivation and pastoralism for centuries. Its inhabitants, in the twentieth century, has made the village earn the appellation of country of graduates for the low percentage of illiterate people and the very high number of graduates. The village itself has given birth to many notable personalities, such as **Carmelo Floris**, renowned artist of the last century. Floris knew every detail of his small village: he drew inspiration from every gesture, expression of religion or daily life, making his village modern, through his signature style. His 18th-century house is now a **House-Museum**: among the old architecture, the original furnishings but especially the works on display, it is possible to understand the deep connection the artist had with his community. The large windows of the studio located on the upper floor open to the village on one side and to the mountain on the other one: here it becomes easier to really understand how strongly evocative our surroundings can be.

In an almost fairy-tale aura, paths and old mule tracks indicate the way to the surrounding heights, from which there is a wide view of the Tirso valley and the Gennargentu mountains. Seventeen nuraghi, prehistoric burials such as the tomb of the giants of **S'Ena'e Sa Vacca**, and the mountains that served as a privileged vantage point make the Olzai area a place radiating with a remote past. The remains of a village and some pottery recall the presence of the Romans, while the granite blocks of a now-destroyed medieval castle testify to the presence of the Byzantines. It is likely that the legend surrounding the latter archaeological site was suggested by the area in which it is located, that is included in the **Gulana Municipal Park**: among the holm oak forests and wind-wrought rocks, tales are told of a treasure hidden among the underground tunnels of the noble residence. On the other hand, Bisine, is the setting for **Su Mulinu vetzu** (the old mill), a great example of pre-industrial architecture, expertly restored and once again functioning, that testifies to how important, in the *land of wheat*, the golden product was. Rounding out the trip to the area is **Lake Benzone**, built on the Taloro River for the production of electricity, and the surrounding countryside, which is still home to a high number of agro-pastoral farms producing high quality cheese. The sensitivity shown to the environment and vegetarianism, through the production of a cheese made with vegetable rennet, gave to this village *gouvernement*, the first **Certificate of Vegetarian Quality** in Sardinia.

Among the religious and civil rituals, the **Rites of Holy Week** and those of **Carnival**, - depicted in the typical masks of *Sos Maimones*, *Sos Intintos* e *sos Murronarzos*, - stand out in terms of faith and involvement, while the *Biennale dell'Incisione Italiana* "Carmelo Floris" (art biennial) is dedicated to the art and technique of woodcut.



“Vestito, apersi la finestra e rimasi incantato dallo stupendo spettacolo che si offriva ai miei occhi. Dintorno, i monti verdeggianti chiudevano Olzai dentro un recinto fatato, in alto un cielo purissimo, tranquillo. Boschi lontani dormivano sotto la bianca luce del sole, picchi rocciosi sfolgoravano isolati sul verde tappeto di erbe”

*Nella Barbagia settentrionale.
Impressioni di viaggio, Fabio Nurra, 1896*

Oniferi is characterised by the things that keep the memory of an ancient agro-pastoral world alive: while adapting to modernity, this small community in the *Barbagia di Ollolai* region, has managed to preserve some of the most precious and fascinating aspects that trace its history. Starting with its **landscape**, amidst the wide pastures of the Sa Costa valley, the dense forests that surround the village and the distant profile of the Gennargentu mountains, there are numerous examples of its archaeological heritage. Among these, it is worth mentioning the archaeological sites of **Sas Concas e Brodu**. The first one is composed of about twenty *Domus de Janas*, including the precious **Tomba dell'Emiciclo** (Tomb of the Hemicycle), that make up the largest hypogeic necropolis of the ancient Sardinians, in the *Barbagia* region. The complex dates back to around the 3rd millennium B.C., and is preserved in a huge red trachyte casket. As legend goes, the enchantment emanating from these ancient fairy houses makes one deaf to the stressful sounds of everyday life. As an escape, our heart and soul are captured by the simple yet symbolic images on the walls: we are in front of the gates that mark the passage to the afterlife, imagined as an upside-down world. Guiding us are the engraved petroglyphs that show man upside-down, because upside-down would be life on the other side. A single-tower nuraghe and four hypogeum-burials make up the archaeological site *Brodu*, where the architecture and symbolic elements of the carved niches captivate the visitor. For thousands of years, at a short distance from *Sas Concas*, twelve blocks of granite and thirteen orders of trachyte have shaped the **Nuraghe Ola**. Here, at the time of the summer solstice, it is possible to witness the phenomenon of the sun penetrating through the apex hole when the star is at its zenith; in fact, a beam of light reaches the central niche, illuminating the circular room and everyone inside. The sacredness of the boundary between the worlds of life and death is undeniable, as well as the awe-inspiring respect for the perfection of the structures and the power they emanate despite standing still, while all around the world runs.

Among the ancient neighbourhoods and cobbled lanes that characterise the village, the parish church of **Sant'Anna**, whose first design dates back to 1400, and the 15th-century church dedicated to **San Gavino** stand out. In the shadow of the sacred places and on the most convivial occasions that bring the community together, the sounds of the oldest song, the **Tenor Singing**, echo. Oniferi, in fact, represents one of those villages where this particular form of art - recognised as a **UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage** - is alive and is still transmitted orally between generations. Joys, melancholies, political and social issues are transformed into music by the poetic and creative flair of a local author or they are improvised on the spot. The resulting sentiments and melodies make this ancestral four-voice song a true ritual of pastoralism. And speaking of rituals, that of **Su Ballu de sa Vargia** carves out a special place. It is also known as *Ballo delle vedove* (Widows' Ball), the mystical ceremonial that was used to heal those bitten by the Karakurt spider, a venomous spider that could cause convulsions and contortions in the hapless victim: only the widows of the village, singing and dancing around the unfortunate man, could help him recover. Progress has meant that it is no longer necessary to rely on this particular ritual, but there is no shortage of moments where the same is repeated, one of which is the event of **Autunno in Barbagia**. The ancestral combination of man and nature and the rituals made to ensure a good year are entrusted to *Sos Maimones*, the mask that characterises the Carnival of this village. The event concludes with the **Pentolaccia a Cavallo** (Horse Pentolaccia), where, together with *Su Palu de sos Vichinaos*, the characteristic donkey race, the great passion for equestrian culture of this community emerges.

A photograph of a stone tower, likely a Nuraghe, built from stacked stones with a small arched entrance. It stands in a dry, hilly landscape with sparse vegetation and a cloudy sky. The tower is covered in some moss and small plants.

Onieri ospitale e generosu / Dignu
cuncentramentu de isolanos / Tenes
una vajone cunscrada
Terra benigna tantu venerada / Incantu
de sa zente de sardigna / Ses venerada
ses terra benigna

De sa zente de sardigna ses s'incantu
Poeta locale, Oniferi

The soft, gentle line of the Mandrolisai Hills and that of the barren peaks of the Gennargentu in the distance, draw the landscape surrounding **Ortuveri**. Near the village, the rock *Sa conca 'e S'Isteddu*, located on the impervious *Pedrarba* rocky outcrop, marks the boundary of the territory, while in the centre, the top of the tower of the **church of San Nicola**, looks down over the built-up area from its 38 metres of height.

The majestic bell tower, second only to that of Mores-SS (47 metres), is even more imposing than the old houses attached to each other that surround the church and together make up the historic core, where through interesting lintels and stylistic features dating back to the Gothic-Catalan period, the distant past becomes visible.

The production of orbace and cork make the community an important point of reference in the craft sector; in particular, Ortuveri has become a renowned centre for the production and processing of **cork** for the wine and construction industries. This is an ancient work, careful and respectful of every single tree that makes up the dense cork forests that together with the vineyards form the beautiful landscape of the **Mandrolisai** region. Here grow side by side the *Monica*, *Bovale* and *Cannonau* vines, giving a **DOC** that is the result of the particular interweaving of flavours of this part of Sardinia, where each grape ensures a harmonious balance while maintaining its own identity.

The luxuriant cork oak forests are also home to the important **oasis of Mui Muscas**, where dozens of specimens of Sardinian donkey live. Established with the aim of safeguarding the native species at risk of extinction, the park is now one of the most important reference points in the field of onotherapy (pet therapy practised with donkeys), a result achieved also thanks to the careful work of protection and repopulation of the animal that has been carried out over the years. What is even more striking, however, is the beauty of a community that takes care of one of the most faithful animals and one that has worked most closely with man.

Unlike other villages occupying the *Barbagie* regions, Ortuveri preserves numerous traces of Roman times: the village itself, of medieval origin, grew up between the ancient localities of Travi and *Alas Ruinas* -the Roman colonies in the area - while the sites of **Pranu 'e Laccos** and **Pedra Litterada** are those that have yielded the most precious finds, such as the sarcophaguses containing inscriptions dedicated to the souls of the deceased (the *Mani gods* of the ancient Romans) and the stone with a funerary epigraph called indeed "*Pedra Litterada*", which has become part of the international heritage.

The heart of winter echoes with the bells of *Is Sonaggiaos* - which together with *S'Urtzu* represent the traditional masks of Dionysian call - while spring is filled with the fragrance of **Is Angules**, a votive bread prepared on the feast of St Nicholas. From year to year, the ritual involving the careful preparation of this sweet made of honey, semolina and saffron is renewed, and it refers to the meanings of gratitude to the earth and a good omen for the agricultural year. Finally, autumn scents and flavors are proposed during **Autunno in Barbagia**, the event dedicated to the excellences of the small villages of central Sardinia.

A grey donkey stands in a wooded area with trees and dry ground. The donkey is facing left, looking down. The ground is covered in dry leaves and twigs. The background shows several trees with green foliage.

“La vigna vi è prospera; i filari sono variati di viti diverse, e nelle felici esposizioni, dove i grappoli maturano bene, si ottiene un vino che vantasi per la bontà”

*Città e villaggi della Sardegna
dell'Ottocento - Vittorio Angius*

foto di Matteo Cara ©

Borgo autentico (authentic village), **village of bread and village of centenarians**. Over the years, Ovodda, in the centre of the *Barbagia di Ollolai* region bordering the *Mandrolisai*, has earned as many accolades as the elements that help to define its soul. Its history has deep roots and there are numerous imprints that trace its thread, starting from the most remote past, visible in the many archaeological sites scattered throughout the area: the **Osseli** and **Finonele nuraghi**, the tombs of the giants of **Lopene**, the menhirs of **Perdas Fittas**, along the valley of the *Rio Aratu* or the *Domus de Janas* **S'Abba Bogada** are only a few examples of the presence of the ancient people of Sardinia who inhabited this land.

The traces of villages and roads are memories of ancient Romans and medieval disputes. Since time immemorial, the area represented an important passage for pastoral transhumance route and for all those who had to cross the *Barbagie* region, and it was also chosen as part of the route of the Roman road **Ab Ulbia Caralis**, along which, in the locality of **Domus Novas**, stand the remains of a village.

The origins of the present village date back to medieval times. Since then, the passage of time and generations means that today we can enjoy the delightful alleys that make up the village. This charming village and its people lend themselves well to interesting excursions: an area characterised by **Punta Mi'inari** (also known as *Bruncu Muncinale*), **Sa Ho'ilesssa** (or *Bruncu Fogilesu*) and **Monte Orohole**, from which great vistas open up, enriched by forests of lush cork, holm oak and downy oak trees, and criss-crossed by numerous rivers and streams that, together with human engineering, gave rise to the Lake **Cucchinadorza**. Nearby is the **village Taloro**, once inhabited by workers employed in the nearby hydroelectric power station, that lived there together with their families.

Stories and legends still live on in the shrine sanctuary of *San Pietro*, a site that keeps the memory of the vanished village of *Oleri* alive. The last days of June are reserved for the celebrations of the saint and the honouring of the ancient soul of the old town, where religious and civil rituals continue. Wisdom, care and precision preserve the taste of recipes handed down through the generations, one above all is the traditional **bread**, so much so that it is considered the symbol of the village. Cheeses, including *Fiore Sardo*, sweets and the not-to-be-missed **Pitzudos** - a soft fried pastry stuffed with sheep's cheese and potatoes - enrich the Ovodda's cuisine, and needless to say, accompany the most special moments. Among these it is impossible not to mention **Su Mehuris de Lessia**, Ash Wednesday, the last day of Carnival considered 'out of the ordinary' par excellence.

Opening a profane procession is **Don Conte**, an enormous puppet personifying the evils of the year, who, accompanied by shouts, mockery and the inevitable generous sips of wine, is led to the stake. Nature and lifestyle are certainly part of the recipe for the elixir of life that also makes Ovodda the village of centenarians.

«Benidos de unu logu ue sa zente, oe
pius de antigu, d'esser barbaricina leat
vantu, chi sighit a cantare anninnias
melodiosas.»

Vittorio Vacca, poet of Ovodda



The arrival in central Sardinia is heralded by the sight of its most representative peak, Mount **Gonare**, which, together with the *Gonareddu* and *Punta Lotzori*, stands as a guardian protecting the village of Sarule, located on its slopes.

Sarule is a small village, but its size fails to do justice to the importance of its culture of which it is the protector and witness. Above all, the making of the traditional **carpet stands as a cultural wonder**. The artifact - called *Sa Burra* - is a fine creation of sheep's wool: warp and weft interlock between the gears of the vertical loom, finely intertwining to compose one of the most spectacular examples of craftsmanship in Sardinia. Holders of this enormous knowledge are the women of the village, who have painstakingly handed down the processing techniques that today make the product a high expression of art. According to local tradition, *sa burra* was given to the eldest son for his engagement, and if the wedding went wrong, the carpet would be divided in half. At one time the distinctive set of colors (yellow and black) and the reproduced symbols inspired by daily life, while today its function is primarily aesthetic; on its canvas, numerous artists have posted their creativity, including Eugenio Tavolara, a designer, sculptor, illustrator, but above all a keen observer of Sardinian artistic reality. The **Museo della Tessitura** (The Weaving Museum) is named after it, where you get a glimpse of the skill and toil of craftswomen.

The strong agro-pastoral imprint has allowed the development of excellent quality local food such as **cheeses**, bread, typical sweets, including *Sa Casadina* and *S'aranzada*, and **oil**, the fruit of centuries-old olive trees that line the surrounding countryside, where you can taste a remote past. In addition to the nuraghi scattered throughout the area, **Altari Logula** also bears witness to an ancient era, a splendid Tomb of the Giants making a fine impression among the hills overlooking the old road to Ottana. The name itself indicates how sacred this piece of land was, and even today it is still possible to feel some of that fascinating energy emanating from it, amid the tinkling of the cowbells of grazing sheep and the flowering asphodels. If in the presence of the exemplary funerary structure we have a glimpse of the majesty of the Nuragic period, at the top of Gonare we breathe deeply of Christian devotion. On the summit of the mountain located on the border with Orani, stands the country shrine dedicated to the Madonna. The place, dear to both communities it overlooks, is also a pilgrimage destination for the faithful from all over the island. Its construction is linked to the legend according to which the Judge Gonarius of Torres, caught in a storm on his return from a journey to the Holy Land, promised Our Lady to build a church dedicated to her on the first place he saw. Salvation appeared then, in the unmistakable profile of our mountain. Since then, men, women and children of countless generations have walked the steep slope carved into the rock to reach the sacred site. What makes Gonare - defined as a **Site of Community Interest** - even more special are also the lush vegetation, the fauna that lives there and the incredible view that embrace, with just a glance, much of Sardinia, up to touching the two seas.

The great faith of the community can also be seen during the **Holy Week**, a legacy of the Spanish era, where *Sas Cunfrarias*, the confraternities composed of priors and prioresses retrace the rites of mourning and rebirth; however, during **Carnival**, pagan traditions revive. *Sa Maschera a Gattu* and *Sos Maimones* are the main figures of this recurrence: with the former wearing the garments of women's traditional dress, reference is made to the most important moments in life - birth, death and marriage; with *Sos Maimones*, whose peculiarity is the mask made from the dried leaf of the prickly pear, reference is made instead, to the figure of the puppet that once constituted a means of wishing good luck. The poem *A Diosa*, is considered the most beautiful declaration of love and soundtrack of the Island. In fact, the Barbagian village itself was the birthplace of Salvatore Badore Sini, the author of this text also known as **Non Potho Reposare**.



“Ses su sole ch’illuminad a mie, chi
m’esalta su coro ei sa mente; lizzu
vroridu, candidu che nie, semper in coro
meu ses presente”

A Diosa, Salvatore Sini.

Sorgono falls on the exact geographic centre of Sardinia, and according to the high concentration of archaeological sites dating back to the Nuragic times, it also seems to be the place where all the meanings of land, mother and life converge. And here, so many roads converge as well: those that climb between Gennargentu and the Barbagie mountains and those that descend into *Sarcidano* and *Campidano*. The centrality of the area and its naturalistic setting has facilitated human inhabitation since ancient times: *domus de janas*, numerous nuraghes (*Lò, Orrubiu, Bardacolo, Crebos* and *Talei*, to name but a few), Tombs of the Giants, remains of huts, dolmens and menhirs testify to the passage of a grandiose ancient civilization. Just a few kilometres from Sorgono we find the archaeological site of **Biru'e Concas**, whose excavations conducted at the end of the 20th century revealed the most extraordinary concentration of monoliths in the Mediterranean: dozens of menhirs have been rising from the earth toward the sky for thousands of years. We have no certainty as to what the actual dynamics of life and worship were but there is no doubt that *Biru'e Concas* represented something special and was considered so sacred; a charm and sacredness that still inhabits it today. In contrast to those strange granite statues stuck in the ground that celebrated lives and rebirths, a short distance from that site stands the **country shrine of San Mauro**, home to one of Sardinia's most famous festivals. In fact, the festivities to honour the saint have always been a good excuse to encourage men and women from all over Sardinia to meet to pray, exchange goods and compete in horse races. The *muristenes* - the small dwellings of the *novenanti* (pilgrims) - and the church, whose striking trachyte façade is decorated with the hugest Romanesque-style rose window of Sardinia, architecturally define the place surrounded by centuries-old trees and fertile *Mandrolisai* hills. And **Mandrolisai**, as it is known, also means **wine**: the myriad vineyards that accompany the territory, combined with the passion of the people who work them, give life to a ruby red distinguished by its characteristics so much so that it is recognized as DOC. The locally harvested ripe grapes, picked by hands of all ages, is the key ingredient of **Sa Innenna**. The "Wine&Sardinia" competition, on the other hand, is dedicated to the excellent wines of the island. Both events are included in the "Autumn in Barbagia" stage in October. While in January this centre is lit up with wine and the warmth of fire during the days of the 16th and 17th, where Catholic rites and those of Carnival spill over into **Sa Tuvera**. The great bonfire that is lit in honour of St. Anthony, provides light for the dances of the traditional masks *Is Arestes* and *s'Urtzu Pretistu*, on their first outing of the year.

Among the narrow streets of Sorgono, stand out the **House-Museum of the noble Luigi Serra** and the parish church of Santa Maria Assunta, while a 17th-century fountain *Funtana Lei*, introduces the **Museo dei Segni sul Legno** (Museum of Signs on Wood). The museum path winds through works and artefacts of different ages, preserved over time in the workshop of master Antonio Sau. These were later donated to the community, with the aim of giving due recognition to an activity, such as woodworking and its carving, that has helped so much the village to grow and develop. About Sorgono and the magic created by the dense vegetation in the last stretch of the railway line that from Cagliari through Isili and Mandas reaches the village, the Englishman D.H. Lawrence wrote extensively about it in his book "Sea and Sardinia". But Lawrence was not the only one to find himself enchanted by that journey. Between the nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century, there were many writers and travellers who experienced that narrow-gauge railway with Sorgono as its terminal, and today it is part of one of the most evocative routes of the **Trenino Verde** (Little Green Train).



“Look, look, Sorgono, nestling
beautifully among the wooded slopes
in front. Oh magic little town. Ah, you
terminus and ganglion of the inland
roads, we hope in you for a pleasant inn
and happy company”.

D.H.Lawrence - Mare e Sardegna

For a long time, the high hills on the slopes of the Gennargentu have guarded a treasure, but it was the determination of a young shepherd, prompted by premonitory dreams, to reveal what in years to come would make **Teti** an archaeological wonder all over Europe showcasing the great wealth of Nuragic society.

The time was the second half of the 19th century and the treasure was the **Nuragic sanctuary of Abini**: a village and a sacred area with a well for water worship. What made Abini an astonishing discovery was the large number of votive bronze objects and statuettes: devout offerers, animals, small ships, anthropomorphic figures and the famous demon-warrior with four eyes and as many arms. These creations testified to the great metallurgical skills of the time, making the site one of the most important meeting and prayer points of the Nuragic people. What also made it central was its position in a fertile countryside, lapped by the *Taloro* river, which was an obligatory passage point for those who travelled the livestock routes. The ancient peoples gathered here, while not far away stood nuraghi, tombs of giants - including that of *Atzadali*, which has yielded the oldest example of Sardinian art, a sleeping Venus from the Neolithic period - and the villages of *Su Ballu*, *Carratzu* and **S'Urbale**, the latter consisting of around fifty huts. The dynamics of daily life, construction techniques and the suggestion of bronze artefacts imbued with profound and sacred meanings are illustrated in the **Museo Archeologico Comprensionale** (Comprehensive Archaeological Museum), that brings together artefacts found in the surrounding area.

The statue of the demon hero, who has become one of the best-known figures among those produced by the craftsmen of antiquity, welcomes visitors to the village. Among the maze of narrow streets in the historic centre stands the church of **Santa Maria della Neve**, the patron saint celebrated at the beginning of August, while just outside the village is the sanctuary of **San Sebastiano**, with its typical *cumbessias* (small dwellings for pilgrims), which comes alive on the last Saturday of August. All around, the granite slopes of **Punta Sa Marghine** dominate the line of cork trees, chestnut trees and springs that gush in the woods as the rivers flow into the **Cucchinadorza** reservoir lake, the second of the artificial basins of the *Taloro* river.

The story - between myth and reality - of the discovery of the great treasure of Teti is performed at Carnival with the figures of *Su Sennoreddu* and *sos de S'Iscusorzu*. The play is a tribute to an ancient fable and to a piece of local history: from time immemorial the legend was passed down that a treasure was hidden in the village of Abini and that guarding it was *Su Sennoreddu*, a sort of demon who would only allow the loot to be taken if he was defeated. *Sos de S'Iscusorzu* are the shepherds dressed in velvet and orphee, who, thanks to a chanting dance, succeed in deceiving the mythological guardian obtaining the treasure thus recalling that distant 1865, when a young boy and his friends actually discovered the treasure. Carnival festivities end on Ash Wednesday, with a more ancient rite where in the revelry of *sos Intintos*, a puppet in the shape of a rooster is burnt, representing the carnival itself and thus the death necessary for spring rebirth.

Another important fire for the community is the one in honour of *Sant'Antonio Abate*, in mid-January, when *su buffulittu*, the typical cake made with walnuts, hazelnuts and sultanas, is offered, while the **Autunno in Barbagia** event, a showcase of local traditions, fills the autumn in the village.



“Le immagini delle valli che si colorano di rosso, arancio, colori caldi della terra al tramonto, sono sempre presenti quando sono lontano; quel senso di libertà, di “respiro leggero”, che le strade di campagna mi hanno saputo dare fanno parte di me, è il privilegio di avere un territorio senza confini invalicabili”

Teti e altri racconti mitici, Ernest Riva

The recipe for longevity is not entirely clear yet, but we certainly know that **Tiana** has quite a few ingredients. We are in the village that entered the Guinness Book of Records in 2001 thanks to the 112 years (spread over three centuries) of *tiu Antoni Todde*, in a portion of Sardinia shaped by the torrent **Tino** and the **Torrei** stream, which, descending into the valley, leave thick forests and fertile land all around them.

The natural setting, therefore, created an excellent basis for long lives, and the men who inhabited it were adept at recognising their surroundings as valuable resources. And water, making its way through the forests of cork, holm and chestnut trees, was precisely one of these: in fact, as far back as the 18th century, numerous **mills and fulling mills** sprang up along the river banks, strongly linked to the livelihood of the community. Tiana was recognised as the *village of orbace*: here, numerous women and weavers came from all over the surrounding neighbourhoods to source the sheep's wool work that would be used in numerous handicrafts. What made orbace suitable for many uses, and therefore sought after, was it being waterproof and resistant, a characteristic that the fabric acquired through fulling. The latter was merely the felting process that took place in the fulling mill, which consisted of a mechanical system in which heavy weights beat on the fabric; the machine was driven by the force of running water, as in the hydraulic mill. The museum network "**Le Vie dell'Acqua**" (the Waterways) gives us an idea of the impressive work that this vital liquid and human engineering can do, as well as the fine ability of men to respectfully integrate into life: we are on the Rio Torreì, a short distance from the centre of the village, where a mill and two *gualchiere* are perfect examples of industrial and rural archaeology.

The luxuriant forests, which cover almost the entire surroundings, and the important mountains of *Sa Marghine*, *Punta Muncinale* and *Mungianeddu*, the last remnants of the Gennargentu massif, were also the backdrop to the life of the ancient civilisation of the Sardinians. This is clear with the **necropolis of Mancosu**, a complex of seven *domus de janas* excavated in the rock, and the remains of Nuragic settlements in the localities of **Sa Piraera and Tudulo**. The modest life of the recent past, on the other hand, is testified by the ancient houses and alleyways that compose the small centre, where a characteristic element appears: *is corzos*, a sort of covered walkway, at the top of which were created rooms that connected the houses opposite. Houses of worship are dedicated to **Saint Helen**, the patron saint celebrated in the second half of August, and to **San Leone Magno**, to whom a country church is dedicated. The latter building is a reconstruction of the ancient small church built in honour of the saint, protector of the now vanished village of *San Leo*. In the same place, excavations have brought to light the belongings of a knight of the Aragonese army, providing an image of the social and political dynamics on the medieval island. The sanctuary comes alive for festivities in the second week of September.

Religious rites, as in many other villages of central Sardinia, contrast with the pagan rites of Carnival. Tiana's festival, called **Coli-Coli**, is the moment of its celebration: Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, as in nearby Ovodda. During the day, *sos intintos*, the participants in the feast, wander the streets of the village taunting and dragging a puppet that will be thrown at the stake in the evening.

The cuisine of Tiana is made up of flavours that originate in the agro-pastoral tradition - such as **Is Pizzudas cun gherdas**, a bread stuffed with pork cracklings and onions - while in the field of confectionery, **sa Panemanna**, the cake prepared on the occasion of Saint Anthony's Day, the Easter **Pardulas**, the **Pabassinos** of All Saints' Day and the **Fruttini**, morsels of almond paste in the shape of fruit and covered in sugar, stand out. The surrounding forests are not only beautiful but also generous, especially in autumn, when hazelnuts and chestnuts along with other treasures of local biodiversity take centre stage not only on the table, but also in the "*Autunno in Barbagia*" (Autumn in Barbagia) event.



“Tiana, montagnina idda minore, chi
ses in mesu costa collocada de boscos e
de roccas circondada, haia ortos e
binzas a primore”.

Tiana, Felice Moro

In Sardinia, it is known, there is no countryside without the rhythm of cowbells hanging from grazing sheep nor important festivities without nougat. If such elements, during the island's history, have become original signs that mark festive and working time, we owe it to the artisans of **Tonara** who, even today, are the main points of reference precisely for the production of **nougat** and **cowbells**. But such peculiarities are not the only ones that bring honour to this land. Tonara is a small village that occupies a small piece of the *Barbagia di Belvì* region, in the foothills of the western Gennargentu Mountains. The village consists of four picturesque neighbourhoods: *Teliseri, Arasulè, Su Pranu* and *Toneri*, whose alleyways winding between two- and three-story houses, porches and steps, make it a **“Borgo Autentico d'Italia”** (Authentic Village of Italy).

The need to adapt to the mountainous landscape of the area induced the inhabitants of Tonara to create the typical architecture characterised by shale stone dwellings that, developing between opposite sides of the streets, are connected by wooden balconies and galleries. A striking example of such a structure is the **House-Museum Porru**, an ancient manor house consisting of dozens of rooms, each one dedicated to a specific family or work function. Murals, sculptures and fountains grace the streets of the ancient quarters: here the works of a variety of artists follow the route that touches on the many fountains including the 18th-century fountain of *Morù*, that one of *Latzarinu*, built to allow refreshment for those who passed through the countryside, or that one of *Galusè*, famous even outside the regional borders thanks to the poem that the poet **Peppinu Mereu** reserved for it.

Mereu, to whom works of masonry and sculptures arranged throughout the village are dedicated, was one of the most important poets in the Sardinian language at the end of the 19th century. His song *Nanneddu Meu* has become a true hymn of the island and is dedicated to his fraternal friend **Giovanni Sulis**, to whom is dedicated a House Museum. This ideal path among the fountains continues just outside the village, with the *Pitzirimasa* fountain, fed by the stream of the same name, on which once stood mills and gualchiere, crossing the ruins of the ancient village of **Idda intr'errios** (village between two rivers). In the surrounding countryside, the beauty is obvious: a huge expanse of dense, generous forests occupying the valley, topped by high, stony peaks over which paths climb and exceptional views open up, such as that one from **Mount Muggianeddu**; hazelnut and chestnut groves provide valuable resources, both as fruit and timber, which together with the myriad rivers and springs and remarkable biodiversity form the **Uatzo municipality Forest**. The area, that is one of the most important on the Island, is crossed by the Mandas-Sorgono railway line, where the imposing **bridges de su Sammucu**, - the highest on the Island - and **de Istinigoria**, blend perfectly with the lush nature around, making the route which is now part of the itineraries of Sardinia's **Trenino Verde (Green Train)**, among the most striking. But the bridges are but more or less recent examples of the human habitation in this area: bearing witness to the remote Nuragic period are the *domus de Janas* **Is Forreddos**, the monolith *S'Abbasantera*, and the remains of one of the highest nuraghi in Sardinia, **Su Nuratzu**, located on the hill of the same name from which the surrounding valleys are dominated. Catholic worship is defined not only in the parish church of **San Gabriele Arcangelo** - built with the material from the abandoned church, now a ruin, of *Sant'Anastasia* - but also in the country church of *San Sebastiano Martire*, which stands next to the abandoned village of **Ilalà**, and in the one dedicated to *Sant'Antonio da Padova*, patron saint of peddlers. In addition to the religious celebrations, the community, creator of the festive dessert could not fail to dedicate a day to this: during the Easter season, thousands of visitors are attracted by the **“Sagra del Torrone”** (Nougat Festival), while the autumn leg of **“Autunno in Barbagia”** (Autumn in Barbagia) is dedicated to the fruits of the woods.



Majestosas muntagnas / fizas de su
canudu Gennargentu, / ch'in sas virdes
campagnas / sas nucciolas bos faghent
ornamentu; / seculares castagnas, / chi
supervas halzades a su bentu / virdes
ramos umbrosos, / dulce nidu de
cantos pibiosos. |

A Tonara, Peppinu Mereu

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

A stylized, flat-design illustration of a landscape. In the foreground, a winding river flows from the bottom left towards the right, with a small patch of green bushes on the right bank. The river is composed of several shades of blue and teal. The surrounding land is depicted with rolling green hills and mountains in various shades of green. Several dark green, conical evergreen trees are scattered across the hills. In the background, more distant hills are visible, some with white patches suggesting snow or light-colored rock. The sky is a light, pale blue with soft, white, cloud-like shapes. The overall style is clean and modern, using solid colors and simple shapes.

GAL Distretto Rurale
Barbagia Mandrolisai Gennargentu:

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