

Transhumance and local breeds

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The Podolian breed and transhumance in Southern Italy

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This is a brief history

The curiosity to know the reality of transhumance, as mythologized as it is forgotten and unknown, as well as the inner strength that supports farmers in the decision to leave, to always move, whenever the animals need to eat, made me live an extraordinary experience. In the last fifteen years I have spent entire days with men and animals walking on the lands of a small region of Southern Italy, I have lived their times (Transhumance. Images from Basilicata in the XXI century, by Rocco Giorgio)

Basilicata is a small region in Southern Italy



- Area 10.073 km²
- Population 537.577
- Number of municipalities 131
- Population density 56/km²

Transhumance in Basilicata in the XXI century



It is practiced by almost 200 cattle farms, mainly of the Podolica breed. There are few farms and sheep and goats.

40% are young people under the age of 40

Over 12,000 head of cattle

Almost the entire regional territory is affected

The particular orography of Basilicata allows seasonal travel throughout its territory. In addition, transhumant farms also arrive from neighboring regions for a total of about 15,000 head of cattle.

Podolica



Consistency:

Italy 37.000 animals

Basilicata 15.000 (40%)

Features:

high rusticity: it is pasture-grown 24 hours a day, in marginal and less fertile areas;

high maternal capacity: the calf grazes with its mother, suckles until 7-8 months; his mother defends him from predators and dangers;

good production of milk and meat, depending on the luxuriance of the pasture.

Three fundamental elements of transhumance: men, animals, spaces



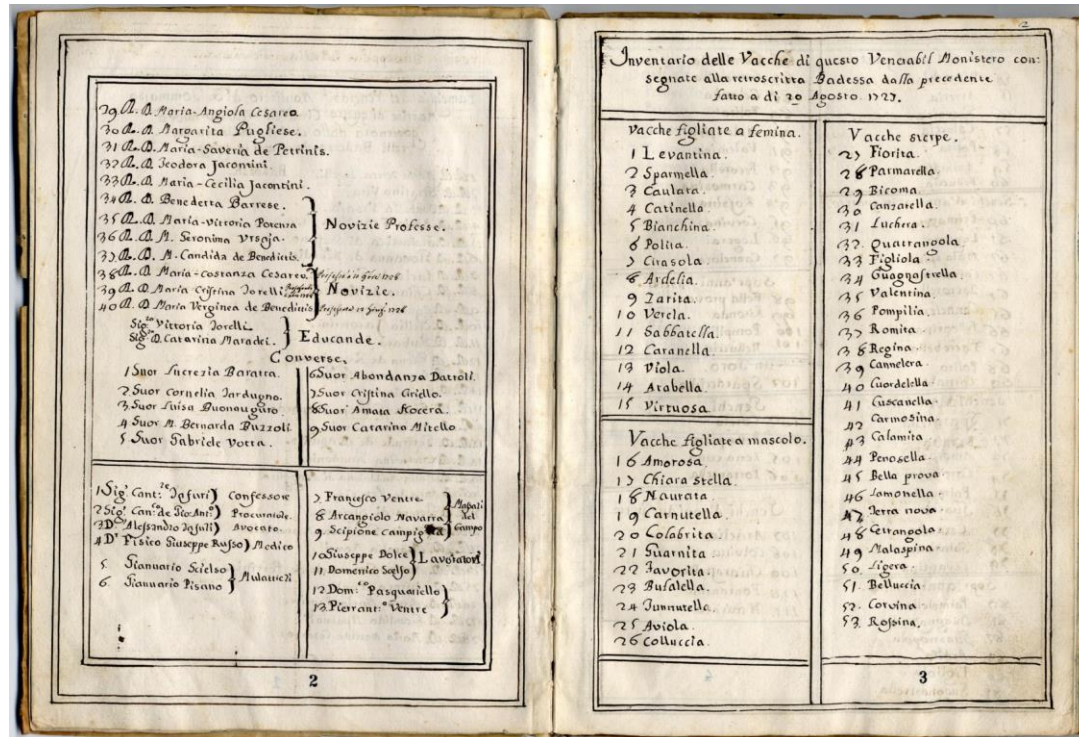
Human-animal symbiosis: man adapts to the needs of the animal.

"I move when the animals have to eat, I follow their time."

We forget the rhythms and times of our daily lives; here man follows the rhythm and whims of the seasons; He must understand where there is the best grass to feed the animals, which always live outdoors, under the sky, and are not guaranteed the same amount of food every day of the year. It all depends on how the weather goes and then you have to be ready to resist in times of famine due to drought or cold.

Man has a direct and constant daily relationship with animals; he knows them thoroughly in their nature and productive aptitudes. He calls them by name.

Every cow has a name



The man calls the cows by name, adapting the timbre and intensity of the call to the circumstance.

Names, as for people, are handed down from generation to generation.

In the account book of 1727 of the female Benedictine monastery of St. Thomas, in Marsico Nuovo in Basilicata, the abbess reported the names of the cow animals in a list next to that of the nuns who resided in the monastery! The names of the cows are the same as today!

Each cow has a bell

Each animal is placed with a bell, of varying size depending on age. The cows that have to lead the herd in transhumance are given the larger bell called "scasatora" (from "scasare", to change house).

Bells



Men put the "burglar" before departure



Departure and counting of animals

At the first rigors of winter, a multitude of men and animals set off again from the mountains to the plains, fording rivers and crossing inhabited centers, and then climbing back up as summer approaches. With changes in climate and seasons, scarce pastures, there are no longer set dates for departure, we adapt to the availability of grass.

Animal Count



Departure



Tratturi and paths

Behind and in memory of the glorious era of the "Golden Fleece", when sheep farming was an economic and social power, today the history and protection of the sheep tracks are also a memory. Often the historical sheep tracks and the roads, actually traveled by animals today, do not correspond, because the sheep tracks, usurped by the actions of private individuals or public administrations, are impassable.



The journey

You cross arid, desertified lands, where climate change is most affected. Rivers forded

Nella terra dei calanchi



Guado del fiume



The journey

With the snow lashing your face and preventing you from keeping your eyes open, the journey continues.



The stop

Man and animal follow time, not the clock. Everything is dictated by the pace of the cows, their physical state, the need to rest, drink, eat, suckle the calf. And man adapts.



The stop

You follow the rhythm of time, not that of the clock.



You cross inhabited centers

The emotion and the long breath of history when you cross the places where transhumance is still very much felt and rooted in popular tradition.

Accettura: A town of transhumance and "Maggio", one of the most beautiful arboreal rituals in the Mediterranean



You cross inhabited centers

San Mauro Forte: Village of cowbells and transhumance.

The cowbells of San Mauro Forte break the quiet of the village from 15 to 19 January each year, with their dark but deafening sound on the occasion of Carnival. The rite, very ancient, coincides with the feast of Sant'Antonio Abate and gathers groups of men wrapped in wheel cloaks, straw hats on their heads, large "male" and "female" cowbells in their hands, for this symbol of fertility. Cowbells, according to popular belief, have an apotropaic and propitiatory function, with the task of warding off evil and favoring the good harvest of the earth. The festival of the Cowbells ends with the funeral and lament of the Carnival puppet burned in the square.



You cross inhabited centers

Tricarico: Country of anthropological masks.

The masks recall the figure of cows and bulls in transhumance. For the cow, the mask consists of a dress (knickers and raw wool sweater), boots with leggings and colored scarves tied to the knees and arms, waist and neck, a headdress consisting of a wide-brimmed hat with a white veil and multicolored ribbons. The bull wears an all-black suit, with black and red scarves and a hat with a veil and black ribbons and only one or two red ribbons.



Transhumants: who are they?

"This job is done out of passion, because it's in your blood, there's no profit."

The life of transhumant shepherds does not resemble the romantic idyll of a painting. We erase from our minds the sweetened image of joyful shepherds, wearing beautiful traditional clothes, as if they were going to a party; Let's forget the cinematographic image of cowboys on horseback, the setting for playful events clumsily recalling Lucanian and southern transhumance. The tradition remains, but the transhumance as it is described in the books no longer exists today, it has changed profoundly. With the hierarchical organization of the staff in the old farms gone, the men involved in moving the animals are the owners themselves, assisted by other breeders and professional people called for the occasion. Several times I have seen the enthusiastic participation of children, anxious to learn the trade and the irreplaceable presence of women, inconspicuous and often forgotten. Conformation to the unique cultural model offered to all men of the globe has not spared the pastors. Also approved with jeans and mobile phones, they lead the herd on foot, few use horses, everyone has a car or an off-road vehicle for transporting food and all work material and, if necessary, also to sleep at night.

Men

On horseback, more often on foot



Walking in the rain



Men

Before departure, under the scorching sun



Inside the snowstorm, the journey continues



Men

Between solitude and freedom



Women

A silent world, which emerges in every circumstance of daily life, with its diversity. Multidimensional lives, from domestic activities to grazing and animal care: mothers, partners, daughters, entrepreneurs, animal keepers, milkers, cheesemakers, transhumants.

Grandmother with granddaughter in transhumance



Mother with son collects animals



Women

Woman blocks cow



Woman in transhumance



Women

Woman guides and controls animals



Woman takes care of the calf in transhumance



Women

Woman cutting bread during stop



Woman collects milk after milking



Young people

Children of breeders, under the age of forty, sometimes graduates or high school graduates. They are 40% of the 200 transhumant breeders.

Young man with a collar and the "burglar" to put on the cow



Boy in transhumance



Young people

The step of the boy controlling the walking herd



Young man rescues a calf



The food of transhumance

Milk and meat from grazing Podolica cows

Stretched curd cheeses are obtained from milk: caciocavallo, scamorza, treccia, manteca.

An interregional association of breeders has been established for the enhancement of caciocavallo podolico and the request for recognition of the PDO brand.

Lavorazione del latte



Caciocavalli podolici

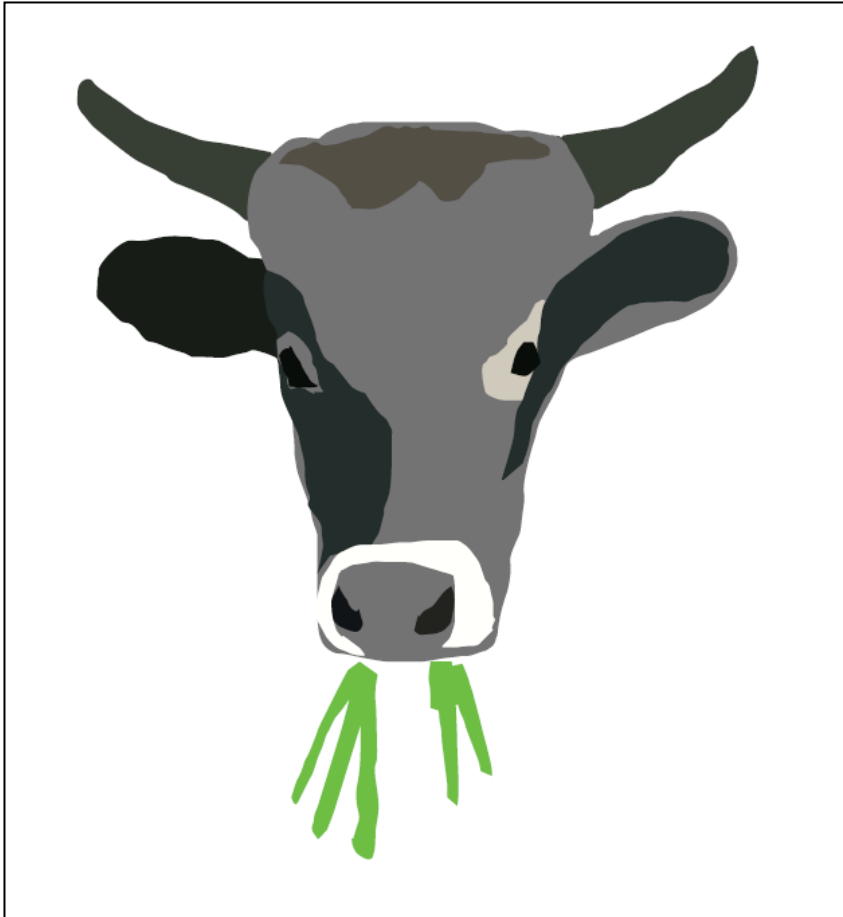


The food of transhumance

Meat production

Podolic cattle grazing

SQNZ (National Livestock Quality System) quality mark



Cows, bulls and calves are kept in the pasture, in the wild or semi-wild.

The calf is suckled naturally (until natural weaning), kept on pasture with its mothers for a period of not less than 6 months.

Growth face – fattening, from weaning up to 60 days prior to slaughter; it is preferably carried out on pasture but in adverse weather conditions or in the event of reduced pabular availability, it can be carried out with confined housing, with the integration of hay and concentrates.

Finishing in the barn: 60 days prior to slaughter, to ensure adequate growth and good deposition of intramuscular fat and covering.

The calf should be slaughtered between the ages of 12 and 20 months.

The food of transhumance

SQNZ Podolic cattle grazing



The calf up to six months must suckle from its mother and go to pasture

Extensive breeding points to a possible path for modern man

It is possible to produce food by saving water, without consuming the soil, preserving ecosystems and biodiversity, reconnecting man to Creation (Pope Francis' Encyclical "Laudato sii")

Several farmers have opened butchers and small dairies for direct sale: local food as an alternative and form of resistance for small communities. It is the fight of David against Goliath.

To change the paradigm, this world must come out of marginality and a folkloric vision, no longer be considered a "derogation" of regulations but a method of food production with equal dignity and consequent political and regulatory choices to support livestock and social services (water network, roads, internet, etc.) and business services (today there is a shortage of veterinarians in rural areas).

The Basilicata Region for extensive livestock farming

The Basilicata Region has approved Law No. 54 of 30 November 2021 "Rules for the discipline, protection and enhancement of pastoralism and transhumance, garrisons of the Lucanian territory".

Art. 1

The Basilicata Region recognizes and protects pastoralism and extensive breeding practiced in the wild and semi-wild and in transhumant form as a regional heritage.

These activities represent a permanent and irreplaceable garrison throughout the region, especially in protected natural areas, mountain areas, inland and disadvantaged areas, playing a strategic role in the protection of the environment, the landscape and agri-food production.

To this end, the Region recognizes the role of the shepherd presidium of the territory (the Regional List of shepherds presidium of the Lucanian territory has been established and, to date, over 400 shepherds are registered)

Art. 3

The Region:

adopts specific programs aimed at preserving and enhancing the cultural heritage of knowledge, techniques and customs related to pastoralism, extensive and transhumant breeding and agri-food production that rural communities have historically practiced;

supports technical-veterinary assistance activities in favor of livestock farms in the Region;

provides, within the framework of rural development programmes, intervention measures and priority criteria and rewards, in favour of shepherds who are presidiums of the territory