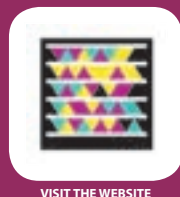


THE FESTA DELLA MACCHIA FEAST OF THE FOREST

Every year on the Sunday closest to August 20, there is a public holiday at Macchia Antonini in the municipality of Piteglio, which is now managed by a special office established at the provincial capital. This tradition dates back to 1828 when the provisions of Pellegrino Antonini's bequest were carried out. Upon his death, he left in his will adequate funds to help, over time, the workers of the mountains, whose poor conditions he had witnessed with his own eyes as the son of a wealthy businessman in the Pistoian forests. The young Pellegrino studied, reading texts that were forbidden at that time. The Forteguerriana Library of Pistoia, for example, houses the grand ducal authorization, granted to him upon specific request, to "hold and read" the works by the "politician" Machiavelli and by the "materialist" Lucretius. Antonini became a municipal engineer. With his inheritance, he acquired a large wooded area near Calamecca, on the ridge between the Valdnievole and Pistoia sides of the mountains. Among other things, he arranged for dowries to be given to poor girls and for a party with a rich feast to be prepared every year for the woodsmen. Although, over time, the Antonini bequest has been changed many times to adapt to changing legal conditions, the "*Festa della Macchia*," now a tourist attraction, remains. The chapel where Pellegrino Antonini wished to be buried can still be seen by attendees on the lawn in front of the building where the feast is held.



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ITINERARIES OF ART AND HISTORY

PITEGLIO AND POPIGLIO

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**AGENZIA
PER IL TURISMO**
ABETONE PISTOIA
MONTAGNA P.SE



Intervento realizzato all'interno delle azioni previste dal progetto interregionale (L.135/2001 art. 5) "Valorizzazione comprensorio sciistico tosco emiliano" cofinanziato da Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri - Dipartimento per lo sviluppo e la competitività del turismo - e dalla Regione Toscana



PITEGLIO AND POPIGLIO

During the classical age, the territory of Piteglio experienced events similar to those in a good part of Pistoia's mountains. It was occupied by the Ligurian tribes, as seen by a tomb from the II century B.C. and various place-names, and was involved in the Roman war against this warlike people. It had some primitive tracks used for crossing the Apennines. Lines of communication became more stable and travelled in medieval times: first, in the early Middle Ages from the Valdinievole through the Val di Forfora; then, during the Medieval Communal period, from Pistoia by way of Saturnana, San Mommè, Gavinana, San Marcello, and Piteglio. Neither route continued – like today – to Abetone, but crossed from Lizzano through the

Croce Arcana and Calanca passes. Like other mountain areas in the territory of Pistoia, Piteglio and Popiglio were tormented by the area's internal strife. As a result, in the course of one century, their populations – estimated at nearly 500 and almost 1000 inhabitants, respectively by the 1244 tax record – declined dramatically because of the fratricidal struggles; the banditry of those hiding out in the mountains where Vanni Fucci, the notorious *"ladro alla sacrestia dei belli arredi"*, carried out his evil deeds; and last of all, the plague. The final episode in the Middle Ages was that of Filippo Tedici who had opened the gates of Pistoia to Castruccio Castracani and, after the Luccan leader's death in 1328, had taken refuge in Lucchio. Attempt-

ing to return the territory of Pistoia to arms, he was stopped near the bridge over the Lima river that still today bears the name of Castruccio. Defeated, his head was severed from the torso and taken to Pistoia, nurturing for centuries the legend of the various stone heads placed in different parts of the city.

In those parts of the mountain, things did not fare much better in modern times. Vivid testimony of grand ducal misrule comes from the well-known, handwritten diary

of the parish priest Girolamo Magni, who held his office in Popiglio's church for forty years, in the second half of the XVI century. Oppressed by taxes and state prerogatives, the people had very few resources. They could not gather wood from the extensive forests as they were grand ducal property but had to collect whatever was dragged by the river floods. Nor could they fish. In fact, Magio and Guglielmo were caught poaching fish and then condemned to row in the galleys. The parish



priest added, with more than a hint of sympathy that "Magio died there immediately". Any attempt the poor residents made to remedy their situation – forbidden but done purely and simply out of a will to survive – was spied upon and denounced by bounty hunters like the Migliorini family who lived in the village named for them – the priest called them *"i Peggiorini"* (the "worst ones") – leading to the imprisonment,

torture, and banishment of those caught. Now Piteglio and Popiglio, two villages that face each other from either side of the Val di Lima, both with medieval towers (Piteglio's has become the church tower), are two tourist centers. The original and humble Romanesque features of its first church, from the year 1000, can still be seen along the old road that united them.