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## PREFACE

*by Emiliano Migliorini*

The understanding of what we have defined as “peasant civilization,” namely the set of knowledge, practices, habits, rituals, and ways of interpreting the world typical of the Italian agro-pastoral culture, also passes through works like the one Domenico Cornacchia has condensed in this rich volume, contributing a comprehensive and very clear depiction of a “peasant” and “pastoral” context of a specific place in Teramo. The author is a witness in the truest sense of the word: he collects the experiences and memories of those who came before him, connects them to his own, and presents them through a smooth and lucid writing style in a coherent discourse with narrative elements. He starts from the stories of his family, from the memories of his small community located on the borders between Marche and Abruzzo. He does not interpret this way of seeing and thinking about the world, but rather concretizes it, transferring it onto paper. And the narrative is rich in humanity, with characters who are real people who participated in shaping a narrow mountainous universe. Those familiar with these territories and the people who inhabit them can find themselves in it, recognizing signs of a culture (that of the central Apennines) that, despite countless and distinct local specificities, shares common traits and recurring elements. Recognition is also possible through

the accompanying and embellishing photographic images in the text: family photos, glimpses of lives and ever-changing places. The book covers various themes, ranging from the family sphere to the social and more specifically historical one, which, however, is never detached from the life stories of the protagonists. It describes the internal dynamics of the family, neighborhood relationships, and then ritual practices, customs, and the distribution of labor (defining, for example, the relationship between landlords and sharecroppers), the major wars of the 20th century, and recent transformations. Everything is treated with great expertise, seemingly with familiarity, using precise terminology and a deep understanding of “things” (tools, objects, environments, processes). The words stem from the author’s personal experiences, as he himself is a protagonist in this story. The descriptions of certain culinary preparations (such as cooking sheep in a callara), working the land (harvesting, haying), the hardships of shepherding, artisanal knowledge (e.g., working with stone for dry stone walls, cheesemaking), and numerous other aspects are rich in detail and extremely specific. They often carry thoughts and concepts of those who performed those actions, allowing for a deeper penetration of the topics discussed: “Stone is something that should be respected; you should never offend it. To work with stone, you must know it and only speak to it. Stone is the art of someone who goes all the way.”

The world that Cornacchia depicts seems both distant and close, but the need to fix it on the page is probably also linked to the fact that the author begins to perceive it as “other,” as a system that is rapidly changing and deteriorat-

ing, to the point of risking - as he himself states - not being understood anymore (exemplified by the chapter dedicated to changing times). This need is further reinforced by the awareness that something of that way of living and facing life (of which Cornacchia, without prejudiced positions, does not hesitate to highlight contradictions and limitations) should be preserved and transmitted, becoming a value, but without nostalgic or rhetorical intentions.



## INTRODUCTION

Today, perhaps more than ever, the commitment of the younger generations lies not only in looking to the future but also in preserving the past.

With this book, I would like to preserve and safeguard my roots before the sources of information disappear. I want to try to transcribe the experiences lived by the people in my village: the oral tradition, the myths, and the adventures of those who represented an important part of the life of a simple boy. The people I interviewed are indeed the last witnesses of a culture passed down orally for centuries, which, if not put down in writing, will gradually disappear. Many activities that were once essential have become superfluous in today's world, and often we can no longer even understand them.

We are in the small hamlet of Santa Rufina in the municipality of Valle Castellana, in the province of Teramo, with a church at the center of a series of villages belonging to the same parish. In 2021, there are five people still living here, and they are all part of my family: my mother Nunzia, my father Remo, my brother Federico, my grandmother Filomena, and myself. Until 2017, there were six of us, including my grandfather Domenico.

My family has been part of the Tirafum lineage for a long time. Even today, on the doorstep of my grandfather's house, there is a chestnut wood board carved with the name of the lineage. The name Tirafum was first attributed to Ignazio D'Ignazio - born even before the Unification of Italy - who became a sharecropper of the Santa Rufina par-

ish, and then passed down from generation to generation until my mother. Unfortunately, I have no other sources to go back in time and understand who we were before the Tirafulum, who my ancestors were, where they came from, and what they looked like. It all starts from here.

Every village has its own characteristic and distinctive scent. The smell of roots, freshly hung laundry, the smell of the kitchen. It is here that I grew up freely, amidst scents and values. I am proud of my passion for nature, history, philosophy, and everything that contributes to restoring beauty and dignity to things buried by the relentless passage of time. And I am proud to still live here: the time is right to savor the flavors and the natural flow of hours.

Every time I come home and look around, I always say, "What a beautiful place." Silent, green, tranquil: a place for the spirit. And when I find myself outside, inevitably, I raise my eyes to the sky to observe the stars. This, as you know, is easier if one is fortunate enough to live in the countryside, where everything is deeper, sweeter, calmer. Immense.

This is a place where every child has many parents, and where every adult is a bit of a parent to other people's children; where grandparents are grandparents and uncles to everyone. I can say that in these places, I have known many life teachers, humble people who, without special education and without presumption, have been able to transmit all their knowledge and wisdom. Today, at thirty years old, after meeting many people along my path, I can affirm how rich these people were inside. Many of them are no longer here, but the memories remain indelible in the minds and hearts of those who knew them.

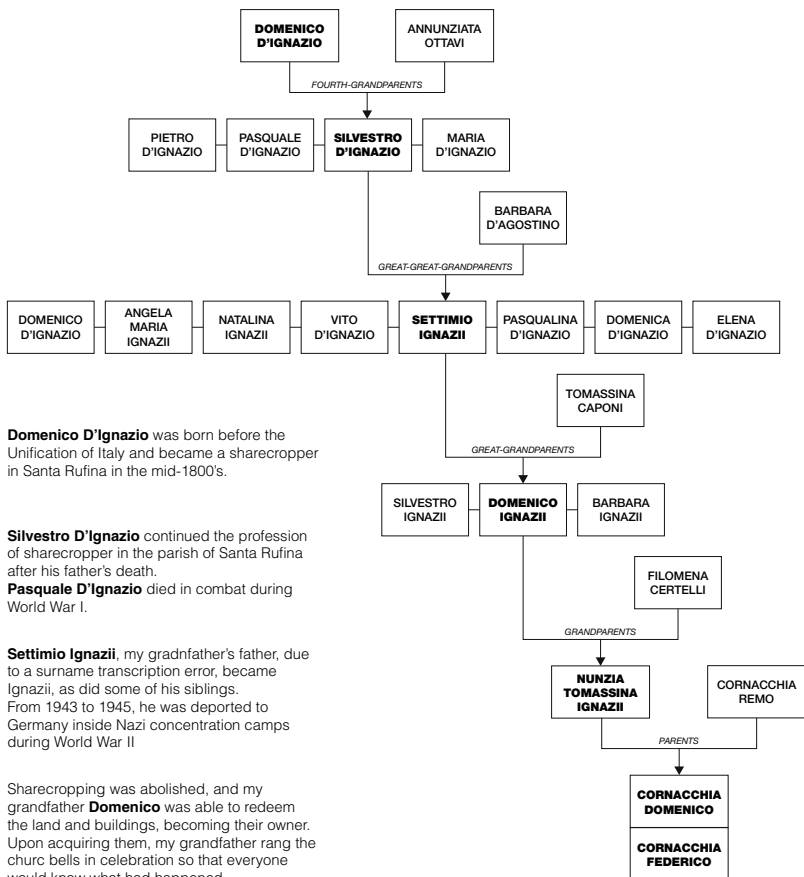


However, this book does not aim to be a vacuous exercise in nostalgia, but it is the only means I have to keep alive what is still honest and true in this small community on the border between Abruzzo and Marche.

Often, villages empty out, but I have always remained.

*Remembrance is a form of meeting.*

Khalil Gibran



*Family tree of the Tirafum lineage*