

Le fiabe sono vere... Storia popolare italiana

Fairy Tales Are True... Italian Folk History

In Depth (summaries)

5. TERRESTRIAL LANDSCAPE: STORIES OF AGRICULTURE AND RUGGED ARCHITECTURES

Environment and Resources: Earth Overshoot Day

Imagine a world where time itself seems to accelerate, where each passing day pulls us further away from harmony with nature. In this world, there is a date—Earth Overshoot Day—that marks the moment when our demand for resources exceeds the planet’s ability to regenerate them. It is as if the Earth itself were telling us: *“You have taken too much, too fast”*. This day, arriving earlier each year, serves as a stark reminder of our impact on the planet. A calculation that is, in reality, a warning cry against deforested landscapes, polluted seas, and skies choked by greenhouse gases. Could a renewed focus on traditional economies inspire a more sustainable model of consumption?

Ploughs and Yokes

Like the yoke, the plough is a humble tool, born from the need to cultivate and nourish. Initially a simple wooden blade that carved into the earth, it later evolved into an iron ploughshare capable of turning the soil. It was a precursor to the domestication of landscapes, marking a historical turning point in humanity’s relationship with nature.

Architectures of Boundaries: The Borders of Land

Every boundary tells a story. Every stone, every wall, every pathway carries the weight of ancient knowledge. Borders are not merely lines drawn on maps; they are expressions of identity, ways of inhabiting a space. They define the inside and the outside, the known and the unknown, shaping both landscapes and their symbolic meanings. There are different types of boundaries: natural (mountains, rivers), artificial (walls, roads), symbolic, and administrative. Dry stone masonry sculpts the land, and the architectures of boundaries serve as markers of identity and connection, narrating histories of adaptation and coexistence.

Folk Heraldry and Embedded Borders

Every community has its own way of telling its story—one that transcends words and is rooted in popular memory. This narrative takes shape in heraldic symbols: nicknames, epithets, and emblems that become integral to both people and place. In the town of Sonnino, for example, shaped by the historical border between the Papal States and the Kingdom of Naples, the local population is identified by a *blasone* tied to the *macèra*—a dry-stone wall of limestone. More than a simple structure, this wall is a defining feature of the landscape and a marker of belonging, preserving the memory of past generations. Folk heraldry thus becomes a form of collective storytelling, and the dry-stone wall transforms into a living monument—imbued with the labour and experiences of those who shaped it over time.

Domestication

In distant times, interactions between humans and animals were marked by fear and aggression. Then, some animals, drawn by food scraps or the shelter of human settlements, began to venture closer, gradually learning to tolerate human presence. The process of domestication started with the keeping of livestock for food and the use of animals as hunting decoys, but true domestication occurred when species became dependent on coexistence with humans and began reproducing under their care.

The dog appears to have been the first domesticated animal, followed by the pig. Later came goats, sheep, and cattle, whose husbandry spread widely due to their many uses—for food, ploughing fields, and transport. The horse was among the last quadrupeds to be domesticated, initially in nomadic societies, before becoming indispensable to both agriculture and travel. In alpine and rugged terrains, mules and donkeys were the preferred working animals.

Still on Domestication: The Celebration of Oxen

Imagine a celebration that transcends time, where humans and animals honour an ancient pact. In Italy, this tradition comes to life through festive processions, reenacting a millennia-old bond in which oxen, flowers, and decorated carts take centre stage. In towns such as Atri, Larino, and Arbus, entire communities come together to honour their patron saints, celebrating the partnership between humans and animals. While the men, keepers of ancestral gestures, tend to and train the animals, the women craft decorations and prepare ritual foods. These processions, marked by song, dance, and prayer, sacralise the space between cultivated fields and villages, renewing the dialogue between the human and the wild. More than just a remembrance of the past, these festivals become an act of responsibility toward the land and all who inhabit it.

The Wild Path

Just as the human mind has a hidden yet essential part—the unconscious—so too does our planet, in what is known as the *Third Landscape*. These overlooked and abandoned places are the unconscious of our vital landscapes, where life manifests itself in spontaneous and untamed ways. Landscape architect Gilles Clément urges us to rediscover these hidden worlds—havens of biodiversity where plants, small creatures, and even wolves, boars, and deer act as explorers of the uncultivated, constantly journeying, carried by the wind or other animals, searching for a place to root. Amid apparent disorder lies extraordinary biological richness: hedgerows, borders, scrublands, and heathlands form invisible pathways through which life spreads and thrives. These ecological corridors are essential to the survival of countless species and to the overall health of our planet.

Agrarian Rituals as Practices of Sustainability

Rooted in the myth of Demeter and Kore, agrarian rituals celebrate the cycle of life. These ceremonies, reinterpretations of ancient stories, live on through seasonal traditions that reflect an environmentalism championed by thinkers such as Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway, who view humans as one species among many. Agrarian rites, ecological philosophies, and contemporary sustainability practices each offer different pathways to an alternative model of resource use—one that fosters balance between humans and non-humans, where people become caretakers and collaborators of the landscapes they co-inhabit.