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Candidacy proposed by Italy, Austria and Greece



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(ANSA) - Rome, December 11 - Transhumance, the traditional farming practice of seasonal migration of livestock along storied tracks towards better climate conditions, was unanimously inserted Wednesday into UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage.

The successful bid was made by Italy, Austria and Greece.

With this new inclusion, Italy has overtaken Turkey and Belgium into top spot for rural and agri-food citations.

Some of the talismanic places include Trentino, Amatrice, Irpinia, and Puglia.

Transhumance - literally, "crossing ground" - sees herders, often on horseback and accompanied by dogs, drive sheep and sometimes cattle across the country in search of seasonal pastures. The tradition isn't unique to Italy, but the country remains one of the few in Europe to have preserved its ancient network of transhumance routes, some of which are still used by herders today.

Italian transhumance follows established paths, known as tratturi, that lead from the mountains where animals graze in summer to lowlands where they can escape the winter snow.

It is most closely associated with central and southern Italy, where four main routes run through Abruzzo, Lazio, Molise and Puglia. Known as the Royal or King's Pathways, they were protected by rulers in the late Middle Ages but date back far longer.

The custom also exists to a lesser extent in Italy's northern Alps, notably Lombardy and South Tyrol. The practice helped shape the land, with settlements springing up along the routes and swathes of Puglia - the most common winter destination - being cleared for grazing. It also contributed a rich tradition of folklore, songs and literature. "Transhumance as a cultural force, with a strong element of identity, has managed to create strong social and cultural bonds over the centuries between the people practising it and the places they pass through, as well as representing a sustainable economic activity characterized by a special relationship between man and nature whose symbolic force has influenced all fields of art," the Ministry of Agriculture said in filing the application.

I Pastori - The Shepherds - a poem by early 20th-century Abruzzo-born 'bard' Gabriele d'Annunzio, celebrates the autumn migration towards the sea. While transhumance has come close to dying out in modern times, some herders remain committed to keeping it alive. Laws to protect the trails were introduced in the 1970s, though many of them suffer from a lack of maintenance.

Tourism has helped the tradition survive, with some agrotourism associations offering visitors the chance to join shepherds on their summer trek.

Italy's last contribution to the world's intangible heritage, as defined by the UN's cultural body, was the Neapolitan art of pizza making. Traditional "pizzaiuolo" was added to Unesco's list in December 2017 after a passionate campaign by Naples' pizza chefs.

There has also been talk of submitting gelato, Italy's superlative ice cream, for Unesco heritage status, though no bid has yet been presented.

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