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University of Nevada, Reno

**Between Lama dei Peligni and Colledimacine: A Regional Geography (of
Boundaries) of the Majella Massif and Aventino Valley, Abruzzo, Italy**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Science in
Geography

by

Patrick V. Barron

Dr. Paul F. Starrs, Advisor

August, 2004

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We recommend that the thesis prepared under our supervision by

PATRICK V. BARRON

entitled

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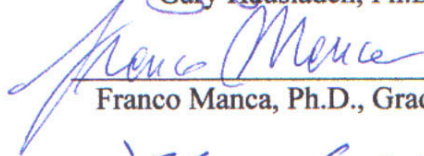
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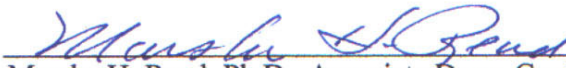
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August, 2004

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Abstract

This thesis examines the oftentimes porous boundaries that define space. Specifically, it is based on the form, function, and meaning of the boundaries of the Aventino Valley, the Majella Massif, Lama dei Peligni, and Colledimacine in Abruzzo, Italy, and emerges from the broad intersection of cultural geography, photography, literature, folklore, spatial theory, and boundary theory. In constructing a regional geographic portrait of the study area by analyzing its prominent and hidden edges, the thesis demonstrates how boundaries, as definers of physical space, are also key indicators of cultural activity. A central claim is that the analysis of a vernacular landscape's multifaceted human and nonhuman boundaries at once reveals and helps to interpret many subtle, overlapping processes and meanings of that landscape's intertwined natural and social spaces. It provides guidance through a particular, very localized portion of space, yet also encourages the exploration of vernacular landscapes of many types.

Acknowledgements

My deepest thanks to all those who gave me assistance, encouragement, and inspiration during the long process of bringing this project to fruition. I am particularly grateful to the many individuals I met in Lama dei Peligni and Colledimacine who so generously shared stories, poems, photographs, books, artwork, research, and remembrances with me, in particular Ugo Falcone, Giovanni Tabassi, Amelio Pezzetta, Enrico Del Pizzo, Giuseppe Del Pizzo, Ermanno Danese, Rosetta, Pasquale, Falcone, Barone, Antonio, and many members of the Cooperativa Majella, including Flora, Carlo, Marcello, and Luca; the members of my committee for their inestimable counsel, especially to my advisor Paul Starrs for his keen, enthusiastic guidance; to the Graduate Student Association at the University of Nevada, Reno for a Merit Grant and a Travel Grant, together which helped make this project possible; to Kalmia Smith, Byron Smith, Whitney Smith, Kenneth Karsten, Annie Blanton, Bridget Barron, and Vaughan Barron for their loving support and unfailing belief in me; and to Manuela Mariani for her many valuable editorial suggestions, and above all, for her love and wonderful companionship.

Chapter 1: Introduction: From Bologna to Lama dei Peligni

Looking out from Rome due eastward, beyond the nearer heights that bound the Campagna, vague shapes rise in the blue of the distance, cloudlike, part of the atmosphere that encircles the City that is a world, or, if the day so decree, clear and defined, like frontier sentinels on the watch. These masses and peaks are the rough edges of a wall that shuts in a land, strange, uncouth, primitive, little distant from Rome in mileage, incalculably distant in everything else. To cross its rugged frontier is to find yourself at but the first of its many defences against the life of to-day – the life of the plain. Penetrate but a little way, and from the higher slopes of triple-peaked Monte Velino you will descry the wonder and the terror of this land – the range upon range, the barrier on barrier, shutting off one high-pitched plain from another, making the folk of the narrow valleys and the lofty townships strangers each to each. (MacDonnell, *In the Abruzzi* 1)

Arrival

When I first arrived in the small mountain village of Lama dei Peligni in the summer of 1996, I did not come alone. Twenty-six Italian children came with me, and I – an American who had barely learned to communicate in Italian – was responsible for keeping the peace and making sure that they arrived safely. The journey, which had started in Bologna in the northern Italian region of Emilia Romagna at eight in the morning, with stops in Florence and Rome to pick up more children, and one in the small village of Villa Vallelonga near the National Park of Abruzzo to drop a large contingent of them off, had been a long and disorienting one. I had begun with a vague idea of where I was going, but had no map and had to contend with what at one point reached over sixty rowdy and/or homesick children. After Rome, when the bus began winding through the central Apennines, I soon lost complete track of precise geographic location. However, between brief talks with the kids and the odd attempt at lowering the ear-shattering volume of chatter that increased as time wore on and social familiarity exponentially increased, I was treated to an array of fleeting yet astoundingly beautiful Abruzzese landscapes. Traveling by bus along modern roads somewhat reduced the sublime



“wonder and terror of this land” described in the above 1908 passage by Anne MacDonnell; even so, Abruzzo struck me as a world apart, still very much a wild land populated by isolated settlements.

Abruzzo is, in fact, one of the most rugged and sparsely inhabited regions in Italy. It is roughly 12,000 square kilometers in area, and is more than two-thirds covered by mountainous terrain. Although the average height of the mountains along the Abruzzese Apennine ridge is generally under 2000 m, some of its major peaks extend well over this altitude, including the Gran Sasso (2912 m), the Majella (or Maiella, pronounced “my-ella”) (2793 m), and Monte Velino (2487 m). Apart from the narrow strip of coastal hills along the Adriatic Sea that roll off from the mountains, and the two medium-sized plains



Figure 1.2: A hilltop village in central Abruzzo. Note the tight compaction of the dwellings above, the small olive grove midway down the slope, and the lone white structure built at the base of the grove surrounded by a largely overgrown hillside.

of Fucino and Peligna, there is little low-elevation land suitable for wide-scale agriculture.¹ Instead, there are many small pockets of arable terrain located in the myriad, small valleys running between lower-lying mountains, which in turn offer extensive summer grazing land in the form of upland plains. Consequently, few significant urban centers have developed in Abruzzo apart from Pescara, which is situated on the coast.

¹ The largest of the two plains is Fucino, which is the former bed of a lake drained in 1854 to create farm land; it is approximately 120 square kilometers in area. For further reading on its history, refer to Russel King's *Land Reform: The Italian Experience*, 100-05.

These conditions in the past instead favored the growth of many small villages located throughout the region, based principally on small-scale agriculture and shepherding, which has long been the dominant use of the Abruzzese highlands.² Often these are fortified hilltop settlements, which sometimes include newer buildings, such as modern houses and the occasional cluster of businesses constructed on lower slopes or in valleys near roads. Starting in the mid-nineteenth century, and continuing in varying degrees to a peak at the close of the 1940s, extensive waves of emigration to northern Europe, Australia, and the US, as well as to large Italian urban centers, have led to the widespread depopulation of mountain communities throughout Abruzzo; government incentives and programs to slow this outmigration have had little effect (Romano 122). On the other hand, many species of wild flora and fauna have enjoyed a period of relative success. A number of rare animals, long extinct throughout the rest of the Italian peninsula – such as the Marsican brown bear, the freshwater otter, and the Apennine chamois – are still present, and in some cases, are gaining territory and numbers as the upland plains and marginal farmlands become increasingly abandoned, a process greatly accelerated in many places with the widespread destruction of villages along the Allied-Axis front during the Second World War.

As our bus passed through what I later discovered was the southeastern edge of the region – through Avezzano, near Mount Sirente, across Marsica and the Fucino plain, along the edge of the Morrone mountains, and around the Majella massif towards

² According to the Abruzzo Ente Regionale di Sviluppo Agricolo, as Nadia Forni reports, “[t]he total sheep and goat count for the region, at about 400,000 (mid-1990s), has not changed substantially for 50 years; the size of individual flocks and herds has increased while the number of herders has decreased. However, while the majority of sheep used to be engaged in long-distance transhumance, by 1995 only 75,000 were” (48).



Figure 1.3: Detail from *Provincia di Abruzzo Citra* by Mario Curtaro, 1612 (Maestri). In this early map of southern Abruzzo, the Majella massif is shown as the predominant topographical feature. The study area of this thesis, including Lama dei Peligni (Lama) and Colledimacine (Colle d'macine), is located directly to the southeast of the Majella along the Aventino River – drawn but not identified by name, except as a tributary of the Sangro River (Sanguine f.), into which it flows.

Roccaraso – I was surprised at the size and great number of forested peaks and steep valleys, and at the relative lack of human habitation: so Italy I then realized, famous for its Renaissance art, architecture, and city states (the roots of so much of current western urban reality) also had its share of untamed territory. As the sun was setting behind the mountains, just before the bus began its curving descent into the Aventino Valley, we passed a small and isolated, combination train station/truck stop situated at the edge

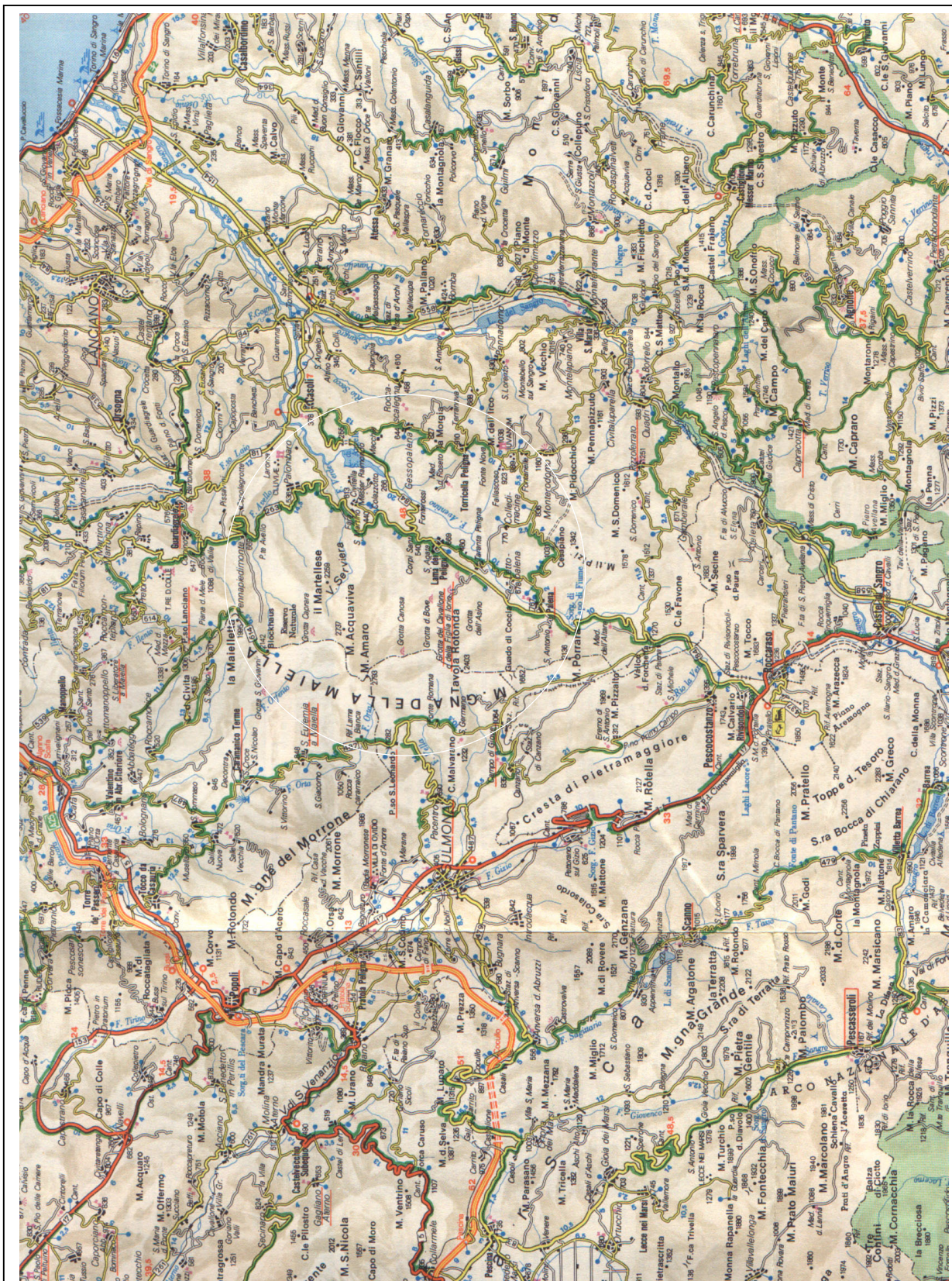
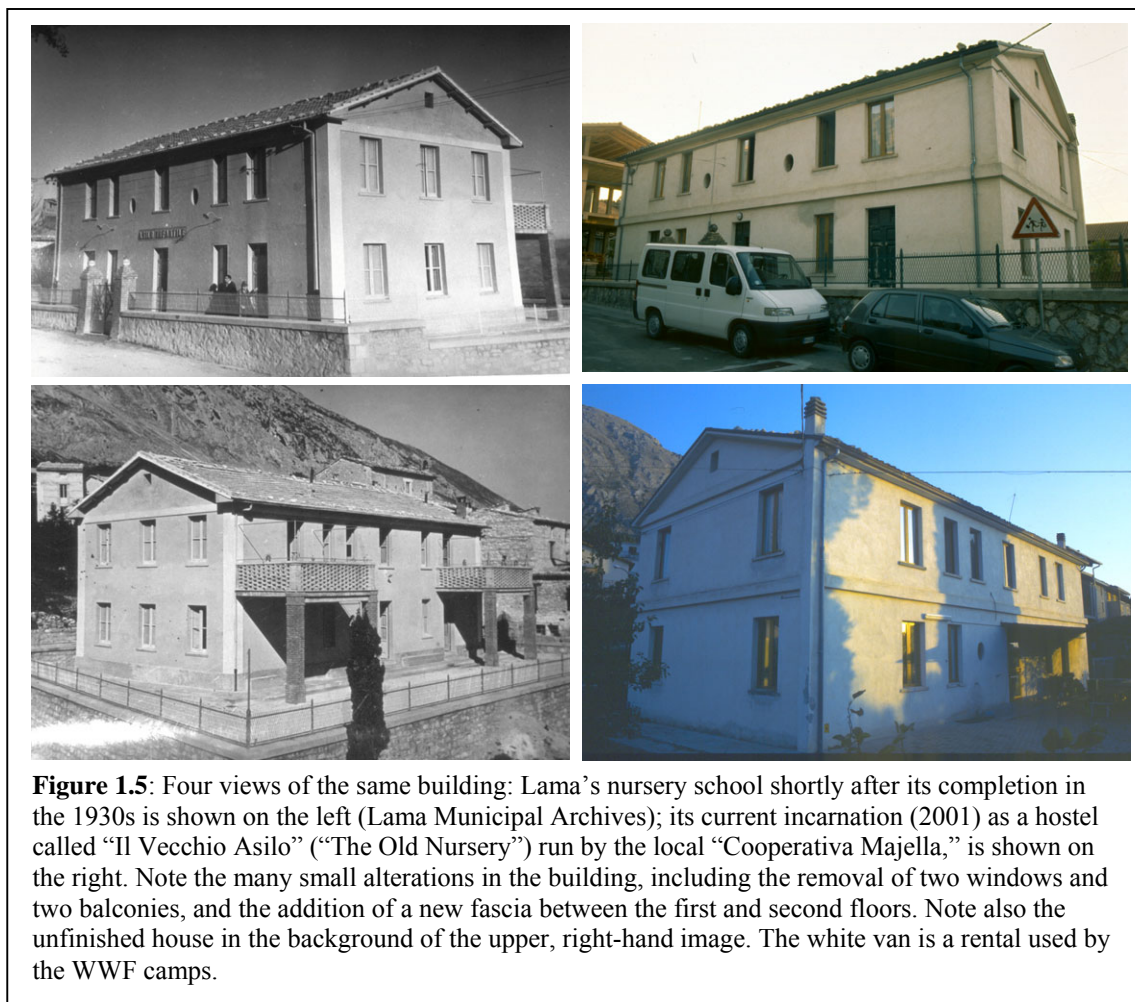


Figure 1.4: Map of the greater territory surrounding the study area (which falls within the white circle), roughly centered upon the Majella massif and including many of the same references to urban centers as Curtaro's 1612 map in Figure 1.3, from Scanno, Sulmona, and Pacentro, to Lanciano, Lama, and Colledimacine (ACI Carta).

of a slender upland plain with cattle grazing at one end and round bales of hay scattered throughout the other.

The secondary highway carried no traffic besides our bus. Also, the single set of narrow, rusty railroad tracks crossing our path looked perhaps as if it carried at most a train or two a day (a hunch confirmed later when I caught a three-car, diesel-powered mini-train direct to Naples – an artifact whose odd route stemmed in large part to the days of the Kingdom of Naples, which for years controlled the region; for many people in this part of south-central Abruzzo, all roads here did not necessarily lead to Rome, but to Naples). Only a few clients had parked outside of the station bar. For a moment the place seemed to have the air of some tiny outpost in the US West, perhaps one in Montana, the state in which I grew up. But I looked again and immediately had doubts. As the bus took a sharp corner and plunged into a densely forested, winding descent, I was left with the decidedly foreign image of a squat lorry balanced precariously on seemingly small tires parked nearby two men under a ragged, red and white “Peroni”-emblazoned umbrella drinking wine in the late afternoon sun.

My job in Lama dei Peligni was to help direct a summer environmental camp organized by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) for Italian children, aged eleven to sixteen, and to teach them both something about the surrounding area’s natural history (of which I initially knew very little, but luckily there were others who did), and how to kayak. When we arrived in town, in order to park as close as possible to our camp headquarters, the bus driver maneuvered around a tight switchback by pulling forward into an adjoining lane and then backing downhill very slowly through the village. The kids wanted out, but were somewhat disappointed with what they saw.



On our left was a sterile-looking, white-stuccoed modern building with black-barred windows and no sign of life (destined to become the new headquarters of the local Carabinieri, or national military police force), and on our right were a tiny triangular vacant lot with some sorry-looking fruit trees and a rusty fence, a partially collapsing stone house, the cement skeleton of a contemporary one that had been left unfinished, a large and dirty garbage dumpster, and the plain white building that was our destination. Someone loudly grumbled, “Questo paese fa schifo!” (“This place sucks!”), and one proper sounding girl said, “È squallido e brutto!” (“It’s wretched and ugly!”). Others were more preoccupied with getting off of the bus than with interpreting their new



Figure 1.6: View of the Aventino Valley from the lower slopes of the Majella, with Lama in the foreground, and the lineaments of Colledimacine perceptible in the background, situated on the long, flat outcropping in the upper, right-hand corner of the photo, just below to the middle of the two highest groupings of peaks marking the horizon.

surroundings, and simply said, “Facci scendere! Camminiamo!” (“Let us off! We’ll walk!”) or “Fermati o muoio!” (“Stop or I’m going to die!”).

Once on the ground I and a companion counselor, who had suddenly appeared as the luggage was being unloaded, herded the children into the building, the town’s former nursery school. The building had recently been transformed into a humble hostel of sorts that hosted children’s camps, the local spelunking club, and the odd private group of visitors. We were greeted by the lusty cries of the camp cook, a short, robust woman from southern Italy wielding a large wooden cooking spoon, whose strident voice rose well above the clamor of the children. Pizza was served and we went outside to a row of rustic wooden tables and benches placed under a long and narrow, jimmy-rigged canvas

awning in the dusty back courtyard. There, while finally standing on firm ground, I caught my first sustained glimpse of the Aventino Valley stretching out below us, and the distant, rocky peaks of the Monti Pizzi on the farthest limit of the valley's opposite ridge to the south – the last bit of land to catch the fading rays of the sunset.

Initiation

During that initial experience I was under the impression that after fifteen days – the duration of the camp – I would return home. However, things went well enough that when the counselor who was to replace me telephoned at the last minute saying that she was unable to come, I was asked to stay for another three camps. It was a grueling experience at times, with almost no free time (either during or between camps) and the need to constantly communicate in my rough-shod Italian, but a true baptism by fire. Surrounded by small hordes of children from various regions throughout the country, including Campania, Lombardia, Lazio, and the Veneto, I soon began to improve my spoken Italian while picking up a fair share of new (sometimes dialectal, often vulgar) expressions. During this period I also began to familiarize myself with the Aventino Valley and the southeastern flank of the Majella – an introduction that eventually developed into a long and continually evolving relationship.

As I slowly gained new knowledge of this area, frequently retracing the same paths with new groups of children, I also had to impart that knowledge. Similarly, the children discovered much on their own, and in turn taught me not only a great deal of the Italian language, but also much about the landscape. In essence, my acquisition of a foreign language closely paralleled my acquisition of a foreign landscape. It was in the



Figure 1.7: Via Frentana near the center of Lama. Most of the local business in Lama, including food markets, a bakery, a hardware store (whose goods are on display to the left), numerous bars, and a bank are located along this road. The balcony of the house in which I stayed during my fieldwork in the summer of 2001 is visible just above the creeping vines growing in the foreground.

Aventino Valley where I first became fluent in Italian (able to speak without hesitation, despite frequent minor – or sometimes major and comic – errors). This process without doubt was closely linked to my growing enthusiasm for and understanding of the area.³ I returned two additional summers to work at the camp (1997 and 1999), each time arriving at the same but always slightly altered landscape – one that has become increasingly imprinted in my memory and dear to me.

That I eventually chose to return to study the area more carefully seemed natural; through working at the camps, I felt that I had gained a basic understanding of the local geography and history, and had made a number of friends from Lama and other nearby

towns, some of whom were graduate students in the natural sciences doing research on the area (from its landslides to mountain geology). Others were members of a cooperative associated with the Majella National Park called “La Cooperative Majella,” responsible for running the recently built museum of local natural history and archeology (Il Museo Naturalistico e Archeologico “M. Locati”), and in part for managing the adjoining sector of the park. This initial contact proved invaluable during two later periods spent in the area doing fieldwork (the summers of 2001 and 2002). During this time I was generously granted access to archives, libraries, and other collections of documents, as well as treated to a host of personal observations and stories concerning the area.

In turning my attention wholeheartedly upon the local landscape, I also realized that many of the preliminary hypotheses that I had formed of the area in the past were off-track and needed substantial revision. Thanks in large part to extended visits to the area over a number of years both as a counselor and a fieldworker, this revision – based on continuing observation and reevaluation – has opened my eyes to a host of subtle processes and phenomena that would have been invisible and/or incomprehensible to me if I had confronted them during a single visit, especially an infamous “windshield survey.” This experience has in large part confirmed for me what James Parsons refers to as “the demonstration of how familiarity and continued exposure may lead to recognition of unexpected themes, problems and relationships within an area – especially an unfamiliar landscape and culture to which one comes with the fresh perspective of an outsider” (“Geography” 3). Carl Sauer is even more emphatic, and asserts that proper

³ Stuart Aitken’s article on doing fieldwork with children, “Playing with Children: Immediacy was their Cry,” offers keen insights into what he terms “children’s geographies,” including the ways in which children – especially disadvantaged ones – appropriate, name, and relate to public spaces (499).



Figure 1.8: View of houses in Lama demolished by the earthquake of September 26, 1933; soldiers sift through the debris at right, perhaps looking for survivors (Del Pizzo, Enrico, *La Linea* 120).

cultural geographical research “cannot be done by sample studies ranging wildly, but may require a lifetime given to learning one major context of nature and culture. One may thus extend one’s learning outward to the limits of a culture area and explore the contrasts on the other side of the boundary line” (*Land* 362). This is a distant goal for the limited parameters of this project, yet one to which it nevertheless aspires. However challenging Sauer’s call to action may be, it is true that as my knowledge of the chosen study area grows, so too does my enthusiasm; the realization-in-process that consciousness of the universal can be attained by an intimate awareness acquired over time of the particular, ordinary, and local (however seemingly drab), is indeed inspiring.

As the children noted at the end of that first bus journey, Lama dei Peligni, or Lama for short, is not an immediately attractive place. It is dominated by a mishmash of



Figure 1.9: Lower Taranta Peligna, an upriver village near Lama and Colledimacine. This entire complex of buildings has been abandoned due to slow yet immense land slippage over time – a problem in various forms experienced throughout the valley.

decidedly unaesthetic postwar buildings, which replaced those destroyed by the heavy bombardment of the Germans during the Second World War. Only a small core of historic buildings survive, clustered around the central piazza. A variety of natural disasters have also struck over the last century, including a massive earthquake on September 26, 1933 that ruined many of the village's oldest structures, especially those

located in its lowest, southeastern extremity (an area that is now abandoned).⁴ Numerous landslides of various sizes have also occurred on a regular basis throughout the valley, often damaging the foundations of buildings, either wrecking them outright or slowly undermining them, eventually rendering the structures permanently uninhabitable.

Lama, like many of the villages in the valley, such as nearby Colledimacine and Taranta Peligna, is extraordinarily ordinary, and considered by itself (if that is possible) somewhat homely. Without the draw of the nearby Majella National Park, whose border lies along the northwestern edge of town, and whose main local attraction is the immense cave called the Grotta del Cavalone, there would be little reason for tourists to bother stopping (few come as it is). This is the case for much of the surrounding area, which despite its natural grandeur, has never been a much of a tourist destination. Most visiting travel writers make it only so far as the opposite side of the Majella, whose inhabitants can boast of numerous seeming advantages, including easier access to and more dramatic views of the Majella; the beautiful town of Sulmona, the birthplace of Ovid; and the labyrinthine and well-preserved medieval village of Pacentro, the ancestral home of Madonna (the singer of “Material Girl,” not the mother of Christ).⁵

John Fante is one of the few American writers whom I know of to have visited the Aventino Valley; his impression however, was not glowing. When he came in 1960 to

⁴ As Pier Francesco Biagi describes it, “the region [surrounding the Majella] is characterized by high seismic activity; the most recent violent manifestation of this occurred during the period of seismic activity that started on September 26, 1933, whose initial tremor, centered in the vicinity of Lama dei Peligni, registered 9 on the Mercalli Scale (Del Pizzo, Enrico, *La Linea* 122); this, and all other translations of Italian-language texts are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁵ MacDonnell’s *In The Abruzzi* and Donald Hall’s 1956 *Eagle Argent: An Italian Journey* both follow this general pattern; one exception is Neapolitan botanist Michele Tenore’s 1831 account *Viaggio in Abruzzo Citeriore* (Journey to Hither Abruzzo), at least half which describes the Aventino Valley, including Lama dei Peligni. At the time the valley was near the northern boundary of the territory



Figure 1.10: Close-up view of central Pacentro, a village adjacent to the western slopes of the Majella, near Monte Morrone. Built on ground less susceptible to landslides than the terrain Lama sits upon, and largely untouched by recent warfare, Pacentro retains many of its older buildings – some of which date back to the early thirteenth century. It gives a rough idea of what Lama and Colledimacine might have looked like in the past.

visit his father's hometown of Torricella Peligna (which sits on the southeastern valley ridge directly opposite Lama), he was not impressed. As Stephen Cooper describes the encounter,

Toricella struck him as a wretched and unlivable place, at once familiar and as foreign as a bad dream. Except for the donkeys straining under their great loads, no one appeared to be employed. . . . There was something about them, a look of timelessness in their eyes, which suggested how little life had changed in the world where his father had been born. The sight was too depressing for words. Having seen his father's birthplace, the stone walls and dusty streets, Fante too wanted out. He turned the car around and headed back down the mountain. (Cooper 8)

belonging to the Kingdom of Naples; in essence, Tenore's book details the geography, botany, and natural history of the Kingdom's frontier.

Torricella is on par with Lama in terms of size, architecture, and attractiveness, but has the advantage of being situated on more level, marginally more stable ground, and being surrounded by gentler and more easily arable terrain – much more of which is still cultivated than the land adjoining Lama. Today there are few donkeys in the streets of either village, but the initial, spontaneous, and negative reaction of Fante to Torricella, and even that of the little girl to Lama who descried, “it’s wretched and ugly,” however exaggerated and ill-informed, again raise the central question of why I chose the Aventino Valley as the subject of this thesis, an examination of landscape through the window of boundaries.

Digging In

Personally I think that Lama is rather an agreeable little village, and not at all squalid. But this is besides the point. I chose to study it, the nearby, smaller Colledimacine, and the surrounding territory of the Aventino Valley and the Majella, not for their scenic value, but for their panoramic interest, in particular their multiplicity and great variety of boundaries of all shapes, sizes, and types – from field borders and roads, to the edges in the collective memories of the community as revealed in poems and stories. Because so many calamities have beset the area in the recent and distant past, from warfare to earthquakes, the cultural landscape has had to be remade again and again by its inhabitants – but at a pace greatly slowed, and at times nearly halted altogether, by periods of severe poverty and large scale emigration.

The result is a blurred palimpsest of a landscape, with remains from the past at times in plain view, at others embedded within new construction, and at still others buried



Figure 1.11: View of a side street in Colledimacine near its northwestern edge. Note the postwar repairs (from the patched wall at upper right, to the new story at center left), and recent extensions (perhaps for modern bathrooms). The vacant lot to the right is the site of a house destroyed during the Second World War that was never rebuilt.

beneath either rubble or vegetation. The multifarious edges between these diverse strata – what Lefebvre refers to as “fracture lines” – crop up continually and offer intriguing if labyrinthine puzzles for the cultural geographer (*The Production* 317). The Aventino Valley and southeastern flank of the Majella – like most ordinary spaces shaped by myriad, jumbled human and nonhuman forces – are difficult to read, not easy to always admire, and resistant to interpretation. However, when confronted as landscape rather than scenery, they offer virtually unlimited angles of multi-sensory observation and study. As Donald Meinig writes in his introduction to *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*,

every landscape is a scene, but landscape is not identical with *scenery*. The very idea of scenery is limited, a conscious selection of certain prospects, locales, or

kinds of country as having some attractive aesthetic qualities. Scenery has connotations of a set piece, a defined perspective, a focus upon certain features, a discrimination based upon some generally received idea of beauty; whereas landscape is ubiquitous and more inclusive, something to be observed but not necessarily admired. (2)

Once we directly experience any landscape and in turn, as Meinig writes, “become conscious of it,” the two-dimensional scene in front of us becomes a multi-dimensional panorama; the chance of discovering the unexpected within the quotidian is awakened (3).⁶

It is my central contention in this thesis that an effective method of instigating this shift from the scenic to the panoramic, and thereby awakening an active interest in (and hopefully also a meaningful understanding of) ordinary landscapes, is to examine the oftentimes porous boundaries that humans use to divide space. Specifically, this study is based on the form, function, and meaning of the boundaries within the upper Aventino Valley, and emerges from the broad intersection of cultural geography, photography, literature, and folklore. The project draws from techniques of regional geographic landscape depiction and interpretation, recent developments in spatial theory, and work on the nature of boundaries. It provides a regional geographic portrait made by way of analyzing an area’s prominent and hidden boundaries. It demonstrates an instance of how boundaries, as definers of physical space, are also key indicators of cultural activity. A

⁶ In his introduction to the book *Viaggio in Italia* – a collection of photographs of everyday Italian landscapes (something of an antithesis to stereotypical postcard/coffee-table book views of the country), art historian Arturo Carlo Quintavalle distinguishes between two decidedly “scenic” approaches to displaying the landscape within Italian photography: the monumentalist and pictorialist. The former, widely practiced both before and during Fascism, focuses on famous sites such as castles, cathedrals, and ancient buildings, to the exclusion of everyday landscapes; the latter, which developed in the post-Fascist realist tradition, tends to idealize rural, pastoral landscapes (often of southern Italy). The pictorialist tradition also largely ignores everyday landscapes, tending to cut out any reference to industrialization – which from the 1950s onward began to dominate much of Italian life. Henri Lefebvre offers related commentary on what he calls



Figure 1.12: View of the Majella from the east. Colledimacine is visible at center left as a narrow band of clustered buildings; on the opposite side of the valley, running parallel to the village, is the Via Frentana, the principal highway in the area. Lama is visible at center right, just below a narrow band of dark green vegetation. Two taller peaks of the massif are visible at upper right, but the summit (Monte Amaro) – even at this distance of roughly 8 km from Lama – is still hidden from view.

central claim is that analyzing the form, function, and meaning of a vernacular landscape’s boundaries provides a particularly useful “backdoor” to understanding the various, overlapping processes and meanings of that landscape’s particular social spaces.

I have chosen the word “boundary” as a general, relational term, from which many associated words and concepts stem: some of these include border, frontier, margin, edge, ecotone, and confine. Similar to such terms as border and frontier, which have multiple, specific spatial connotations, stretching from the linear to the volumetric, boundary can at once refer to what on paper is a clearly defined edge (even if in fact the

the “mirage effects” of landscape pictures, which include the strengthening of “the impression of transparency” and the reinforcement of “the illusion of a new life” (*The Production* 189).

edge is, when observed in the field, anything but clear), and yet can also refer in the most general sense to any sort of division in the landscape, however nebulous. Border may carry the territorial sense of borderlands, or it may refer to a distinct political borderline between two nations. Likewise, frontier may carry with it (as in the US West) the connotation of a wide swath of land (such as a zone of adjoining counties) with a certain maximum population per square mile – in essence an area of wild, largely unsettled territory. A slightly more inclusive term, boundary may refer to both natural and political divisions (many, but not all, with physical evidence of their presence, from a mountain range, river, or wall, to a legal lot line or abandoned pathway). The term, as I use it, thus refers to a wide range of both precise and amorphous zones or lines of separation within the cultural landscape. I will hone and expand this definition as I explore the term's myriad exemplars within the Aventino Valley landscape – and in so doing produce an analytic portrait of the area's complex, cultural geographic identity.

Boundaries, whether natural or human-imposed, are often, as Anne Spirn claims, “marked by extent of movement” (119). This movement (and cultural development) may be delimited by a boundary as arbitrary yet effective as the “[e]uclidean line drawn across the desert,” described by J. B. Jackson in his early essay “Chihuahua as We Might Have Been.” This is a political border between Chihuahua to the south and Texas and New Mexico to the north that he claims “has created two distinct human landscapes where before there was only one” (*Landscape* 41). The movement may also be delimited by a boundary as imposing and natural as the Majella, which in its isolating grandeur is an object of both love and scorn to the local inhabitants, who when upset at its climatic and geologic extremes – from sudden, unpredictable storms to avalanches (or simply angry



Figure 1.13: A view to the east of the Aventino Valley from within the Grotta di Sant’Angelo on the slopes of the Majella above Lama. The dark shape in the middle is one of last surviving walls of a Medieval monastery demolished in the seventeenth century by treasure hunters. Over the centuries, the cave has been often been used as a refuge by local residents – most recently during the Second World War to escape from marauding German troops. (See also figure 2.13)

about something in their personal lives) – can be heard exclaiming, “Mannaggia alla Majella!” or “Per la Majella!” (“Damn the Majella!”) while raising their fists to the omnipresent mountain to the northwest.

On the other hand, in addition to Spirn’s claim that “boundaries [are] limits to movement,” it also true, as Sauer writes, that “[b]oundaries rather than centers of physical

regions are likely to be centers of culture areas” (119; *Land* 363). Indeed, the Majella is in fact a center of a larger culture area, with its connecting summits and upland plains serving as meeting places for many local inhabitants: shepherds and monks in the recent and distant past, and hikers and skiers in the present. For example, its principal shelter near Monte Amaro, which is left open for the use of passing backpackers and mountain climbers, was built with the cooperation of local chapters of CAI (Club Alpino Italiano) from communities from around the massif’s base; in like manner, the national park that currently surrounds the massif is formed of many smaller, interconnected reserves, each managed in part by members of adjoining or nearby communities.

The Majella is without doubt the single most important, defining feature in the landscape for the many communities that surround it. Confirming Sauer’s statement, the Majella is indeed both a boundary and the center of a culture area. Yet, by way of extension, it is also the center of a larger physical area, defined as the entire massif and the many human-inhabited, minor watersheds extending off of it (an area of roughly 100 square km). As Lefebvre states, “[s]ocial spaces interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another. They are not *things*, which have mutually limiting boundaries and which collide because of their contours or as a result of inertia” (*The Production* 86-87). In following, the many human communities surrounding the Majella, whose (formerly municipally, now state-controlled) borders of political jurisdiction meet at a number of invisible apexes near the mountain’s roughly conjoined major summits, without doubt are superimposed upon one another. These legal borders, like a great many other boundaries within social space, rather than being “mutually

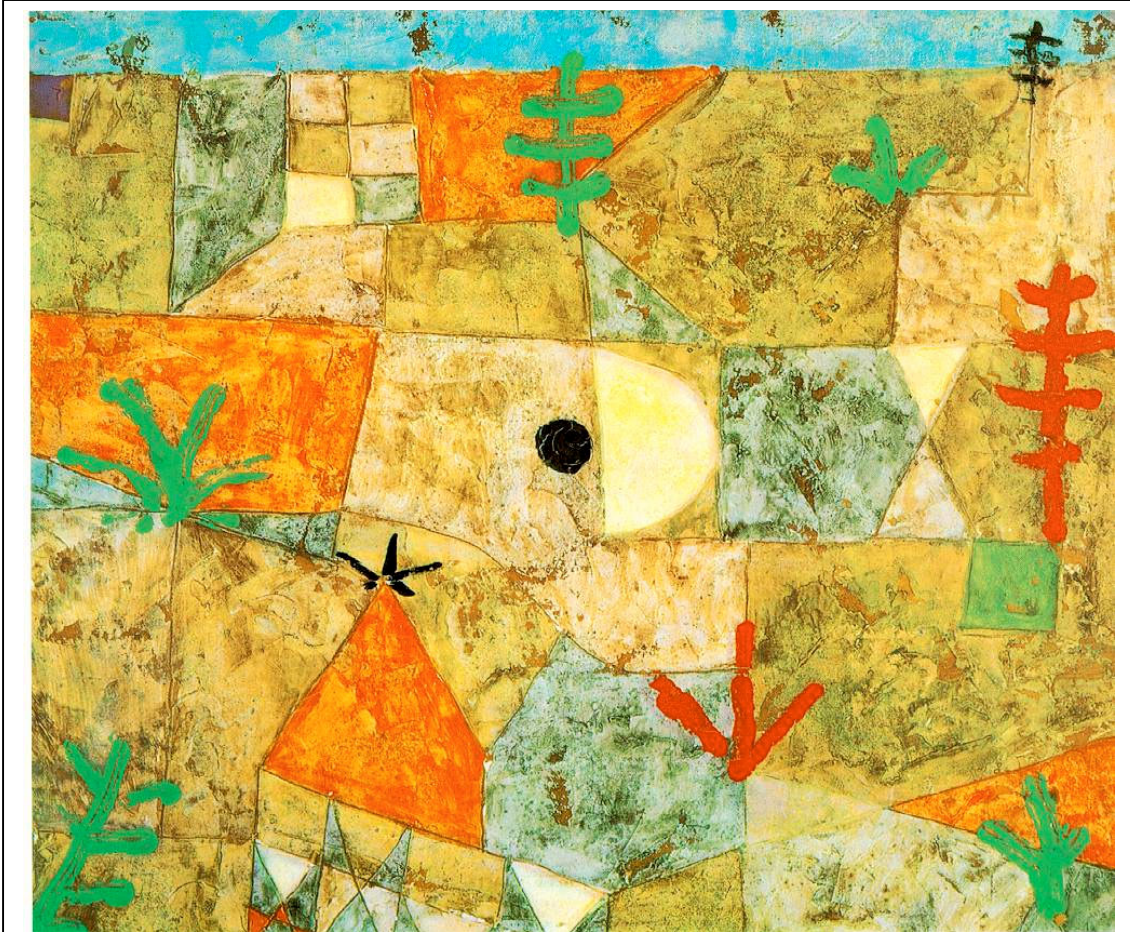


Figure 1.14: *Southern Gardens*, by Paul Klee, 1936. In this painting, Klee masterfully depicts various spaces within a human-shaped landscape divided by mutable boundaries incessantly crossed by underlying, splotchy and shady patterning. Many of his landscape paintings are of places in either Italy or northern Africa, similar in many respects to the study area of this thesis.

limiting,” instead tend to be porous and multi-functional, often hosting a great variety of forms of cultural exchange.

The Via Frentana, which is the principal highway running along the northwestern slope of the Aventino Valley, does exactly this. It is an important legal boundary, separating for much of its length national parkland above and to the northwest from human-inhabited, non-parkland below and to the southeast (as in the past it roughly separated grazing land above from agricultural land below). It also runs through the middle of a number of villages (including Lama), often dividing neighborhoods yet also

serving as a magnet for people who gather socially along its path – especially in the numerous bars that line its edges.⁷ People of all ages use nearby low walls for public seating, while others who live along the road place semi-private benches in front of their houses to be utilized by a wide variety of passing acquaintances.

In this sense, the Via Frentana acts in three, overlapping ways: as a separating boundary, a linking path of travel, and a public gathering place. Many social spaces within the cultural landscape adjacent to the highway do indeed, as Lefebvre explains such knotty phenomena, “interpenetrate one another” (86). Additionally, myriad other boundaries crisscross the roadway, from dirt paths and streams to neighborhoods and landslides. The result, rather than a patchwork of clearly demarcated spaces is, in Lefebvre’s words, “an ambiguous continuity” – one stretched over and between amorphously conjoined spaces (87). In this sense, as Spirn claims, “[p]aths, boundaries and gateways are conditions, not things, spatial patterns defined by processes” (119). As such, these spatial phenomena are not rigidly fixed, but constantly shift as the landscape itself inexorably changes over time. Boundaries can in this way be viewed as meaningful yet often evanescent (or at least highly corruptible) tracks or traces, markers of the processes to which Spirn refers (such as the settling of land, demarcating of property, movement of traffic, flow of rivers, and use of resources).

This thesis, in turn, explores these markers and their concomitant processes along a rough path that begins in the northwest corner of the study area at the summit of the Majella, and then moves chapter by chapter from the massif to Lama dei Peligni, from

⁷ In Italy, bars are combinations of cafés and pubs, functioning as important places of socializing often not restrictive to age or gender.

Lama to the Aventino Valley, and then from the valley to Colledimacine – in essence tracing a route of movement, observation, and analysis from one side of the study area to the other. Each chapter, thus based on a roughly delimited zone within the overall study area, corresponds to a particular social and natural space, all four of which overlap in varying degrees along and across a variety of political and natural boundaries. The effect of viewing the landscape in this way throws its myriad spaces and boundaries into relief – not however in the mode of a simplified color-coded political atlas drawn with solid, immutable-seeming borders, but rather in that of an abstract landscape painting, such as Paul Klee’s *Southern Gardens*, which subtly and playfully depicts the shadowy, often cryptic divisions in the landscape (see figure 1.14).

My intention in this thesis is not to produce a reductive definition of either the landscape or of the concept of boundaries, but rather to provide an elaborate, focused example of how cultural landscapes can be fruitfully described and better conceived by studying their boundaries – understood in this context to be phenomena that are highly complex, multifunctional, and neither readily identifiable nor perceptible (or even wholly existent). As J. B. Jackson writes, “[w]e would all agree that insofar as every landscape is a composition of space it is also a composition or web of boundaries. But here we must be cautious, for boundaries can serve a variety of functions” – from functioning as a porous “skin” to isolating in the mode of “a packaging” or “an envelope” (*Discovering* 13, 14). In following, this thesis is based on a careful, non-reductive approach to boundaries, which in its push to better comprehend the encompassing, panoramic landscape, considers a wide range of boundary functions – from those that Yi-Fu Tuan refers to as dividing space ethnocentrically, “distinguishing between the sacred and the



Figure 1.15: View of the boundary between the eastern edge of Colledimacine and the adjoining countryside, signaled in part by the road at far right, which now leads across the valley to Lama dei Peligni.

profane, center and periphery, the home estate and the common range,” to those in nature marked by “certain sharp gradients: for instance, between land and water, mountain and plain, forest and savanna” (*Topophilia* 15).

Before proceeding with the four main chapters described above, which focus in turn on the Majella, Lama dei Peligni, the Aventino Valley, and Colledimacine (or simply Colle), I discuss in the second chapter how I defined my study area, and the challenges I encountered during this process. The third chapter provides an overview of the study area. It is intended to give an extended general geographic and historic orientation to the reader – a foundation upon which the more specific ensuing chapters will be based. The fourth chapter then briefly widens the focus from the external study area to explicitly

include myself in the role of an internalizing observer. It describes the approach to fieldwork that I took, including the equipment that I employed and the specific methods that I used to gather information concerning the landscape, from archival documentation and transcribed stories, to photographs and maps. This chapter also outlines a number of graphic and narrative techniques that I employ throughout the thesis to better aid my analysis, including extensive walking of the study area and the observations/reflections that result from it; rephotography; sketching; the comparison of abstract landscape paintings by Paul Klee with related photographs and views of the study area; the comparison of local artists' renderings of the former and present landscape; reference to travel accounts from past visitors to the area, as well as to local histories and poetry; the collection of folktales and recollections of elderly residents; and, the comparison of various current and historic maps with the current landscape (including aerial photographs).

It is my hope that this project provides a useful means of both better perceiving and more affectionately apprehending the complex spaces that make up a range of vernacular landscapes. While it is limited in focus to a relatively small corner of Italy (in fact to a narrow swath of territory within an obscure valley), its relevance I believe should extend to any cultural geographic study of “natural rhythms” and their modification and “inscription in space by means of human actions” – regardless of exact locale or extent of area (Lefebvre, *The Production* 117). Boundaries are the tracings of this inscription, indicating the complex interplay between myriad human and nonhuman processes which together produce space. In their various guises as both subtle and blatant

separations, boundaries underlie or contain all of our movements upon the earth; we shape them as they shape us – whether we respect or transgress them.

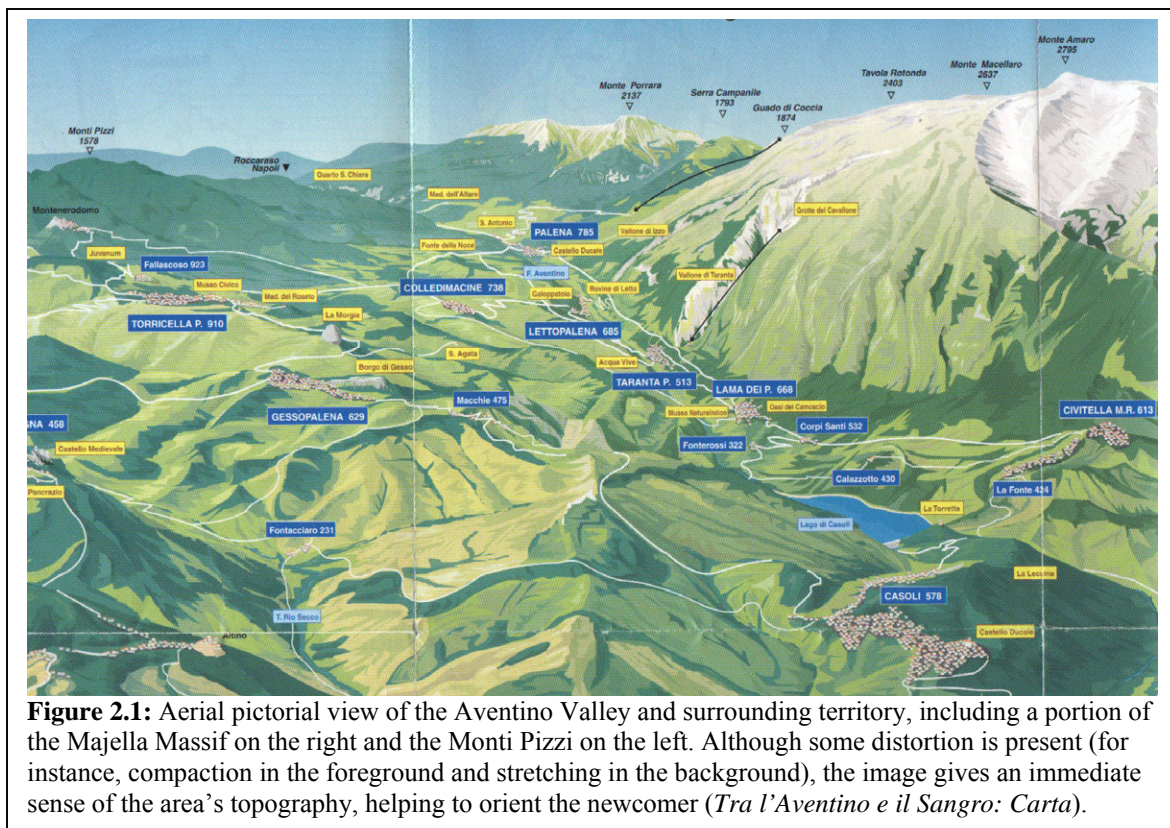
The lessons learned from their close study, instigated and guided by the methods that I here propose, richly illustrate the idea that landscape, as Meinig puts it, “is at once a panorama, a composition, a palimpsest, a microcosm: that in every prospect there can be more and more that meets the eye” (*The Interpretation* 6). Looking out across the Aventino Valley at sunset upon first arriving there as a camp counselor, I could only guess at what awaited me. Later, while tracing the area’s various edges and traversing its many conjoined spaces as a fieldworker, the number and variety of prospects increased dramatically, constantly challenging me to simultaneously take in and make sense of the input. These experiences at once corroborated Meinig’s claim, and also confirmed for me the fact that as long as we are compassionate and attentive, there is always something undiscovered – always an element of the unsuspected familiar, and always something of the surprising foreign – within the landscape stretching out in all directions from the observer.

Chapter 2: Defining the Study Area: An Endless Process

Knowledge of space wavers between description and dissection. Things in space, or pieces of space, are described. Part-spaces are carved out for inspection from social space as a whole. Thus we are offered a geographical space, an ethnological space, a demographic space, a space peculiar to the information sciences, and so on, *ad infinitum*. . . . What is always overlooked is the fact that this sort of fragmentation tallies not only with the tendency of language itself, not only with the wishes of specialists of all kinds, but also with the goals of existing society. (Lefebvre, *The Production* 91)

In all regional studies – and we equate regional geography and historical geography – a serious problem is in the definition of the term “area.” There has been so much inconclusive discussion of the term “region” or “area” that apparently no one definition suffices. (Sauer, *Land* 363)

In deciding upon a study area, I could have simply picked Lama and its immediate environs as the focus of this thesis. I was, after all, already familiar with this particular angle of the Majella’s southeastern flank, having been based there for all three of my summers working with the WWF. However, the most easily recognizable landscape phenomenon related to Lama and the villages within its purview – in terms of both cultural and physical geography – is the surrounding Aventino Valley, including a portion of the Majella, whose lower slopes form the northwestern side of the valley. As a geologic feature, it is quite distinct, being relatively narrow and to a large degree isolated on both sides by mountains; I have found that people inhabiting the valley, when asked where they live, generally first identify themselves by their native village, and then by the valley itself. There are also a number of local festivals identified with the valley, such as the “Aventino Blues Festival” – featuring an odd mix of groups, some American, but most Italian, including a few who even sing in local dialects – which takes place in the summer over three consecutive evenings, each in a different village. As a nobleman from Lama told me, “the villages [of the valley] have always gotten along relatively well. People move around a bit, especially when there is some sort of religious or musical



festival. People from Taranta, from Palena, will come over to listen to the music. But people from other areas surrounding the valley don't really come that much – I'd say that in this sense, there exists a certain detachment." Quite simply, I felt that I could not escape this larger area of local identification; it soon became apparent that I needed to consider areas adjoining Lama for many reasons, including the comparison and contrast of such factors as vernacular architecture, attitudes towards the land, and former agricultural practices. In short, I needed to extend my research to include a wider study area, but had to be careful not to overextend myself.

Taking on the valley's entire drainage, for example, would have been impossible given the limited parameters of this thesis and close focus that I desired. And yet, sticking

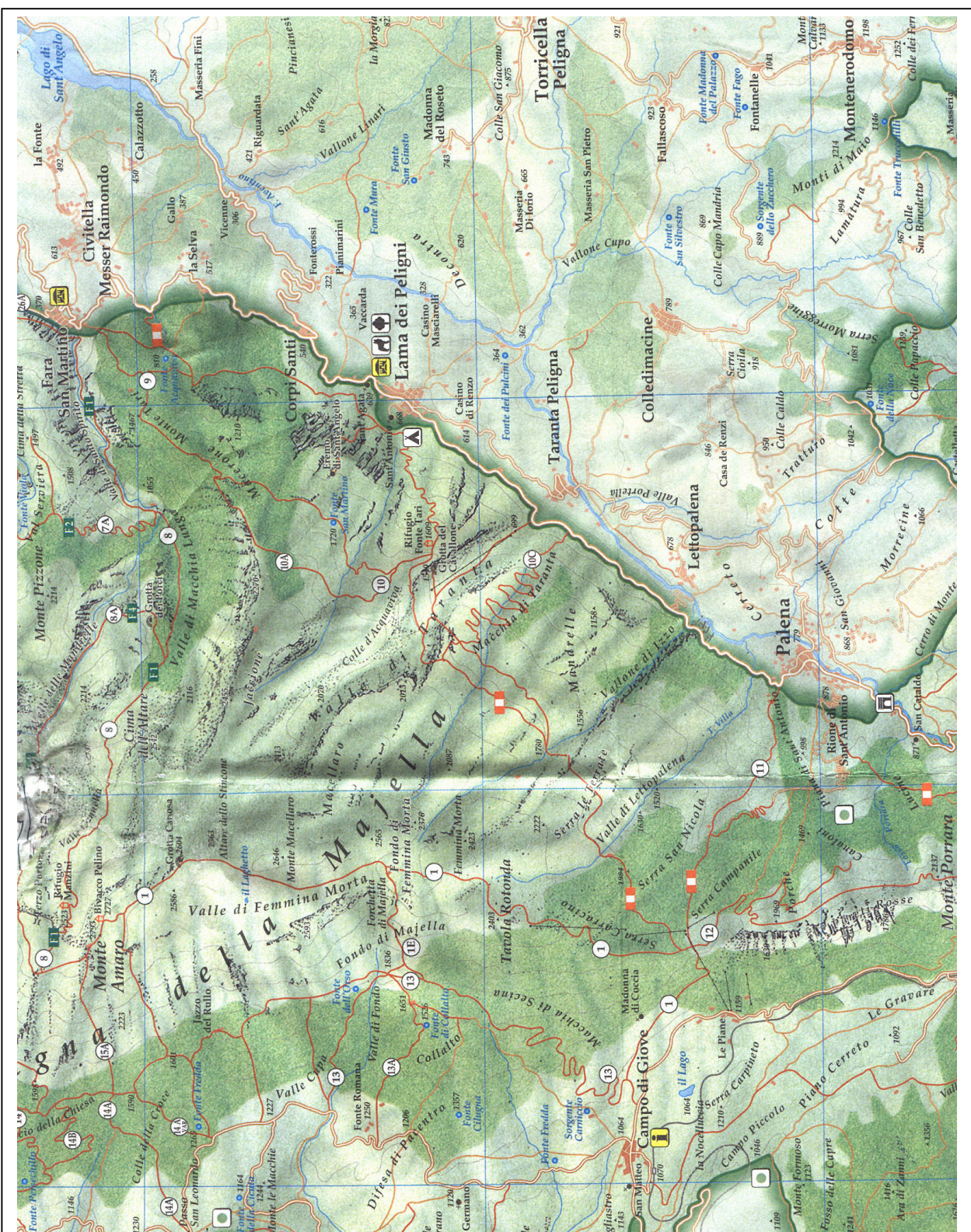


Figure 2.2: Detail of map showing study area and surrounding territory, including a portion of the southern Majella. Reading the map turned horizontally to the right, Monte Amaro is at upper left, the Valle di Macchia Lunga is at upper center, and the Aventino Valley, including Lama and Colle, is at right; on this map, Lago di Casoli (Lake Casoli) is called Lago di Sant' Angelo (*Parco*). Contour interval 200 m



Figure 2.3: Wide-angle view of the Aventino Valley from a dirt road connecting Colledimacine and Taranta Peligna, with a portion of Lago di Casoli (Casoli Lake) visible at upper center under the two-peaked, curving dark hill; the distant horizon is the Adriatic coastline. Although not pictured, Lama is to the left and Colle the right. Note also the small farmhouse at lower center, and just beyond it, the bottom of the valley near the point at which the road connecting Lama and Colle crosses the river.

with only a narrow portion of the northwestern slope of the valley – as would have been the case had I limited my study to Lama – would have presented a (literally) one-sided analysis of the immediately perceptible and accessible landscape confronting me at every move. An important factor to my final decision was, in fact, including as much territory as I could reasonably cover by walking in day. In the end, I chose to extend my research to Colledimacine, which was the closest village to Lama on the opposite side of the valley: easily visible and just within walking distance. However, it is true that many local residents thought I was a bit nuts to keep going back and forth between the two villages on foot. After enough people started to recognize me – and it didn't take long, since I was such an anomaly – once in a while I managed to hitch a ride. Even though I generally



Figure 2.4: Telephoto view of Colledimacine from Fonte Tari (Tari Spring) on the Majella (located near the Grotta del Cavallone, indicated in figures 2.1 and 2.2), with a portion of the meandering road connecting Colle and Lama visible on the left (see also figure 5.25). Note also the sparse cultivated fields, and Colle’s protected position on what is a long mass of calcareous rock seemingly floating on a sea of relatively unstable, predominantly clay terrain – whose dangers include the numerous mudslides visible on the right (which take the shape of flowing, grey streams) (see figure 8.12).

preferred walking, so as to better perceive the landscape up close, when it was hot and I actually wanted to get to Colledimacine before lunch in order to talk to people, I came to greatly appreciate the odd lift – which was in fact very odd, a phenomenon due not to unwilling drivers but to the fact that during the two-hour trek only about one car (but often none) would pass by.

By extending the study area in this way, I was able to focus my efforts on a continuous swath of territory running from the northwestern to the southeastern edge of the valley. This choice, even if somewhat arbitrary, seemed quite natural from the start – especially since in order to gain a clear perspective of Lama I had to go to Colle. Once



Figure 2.5: View of the Aventino Valley from the foundation walls of an abandoned house in lower Lama. The ledge that Colle rests upon is visible as a dark horizontal band in the distance just below the high clustering of the four peaks of the Monti Pizzi at center left. In this part of Lama it is difficult to determine with any certainty where the village exactly begins and ends, as many of the older structures here have either partially or completely collapsed, and then later been enveloped by mudslides.

there (which from afar had seemed to almost magically hover in the air above the valley along its rocky ledge) I became irreversibly infatuated – even if, up close, much of the promised charm of the village was not immediately forthcoming. Including Colle in the study area gave me a sense of unity (of place and of purpose), which even if mostly false (since no combination of locales would have proved a true “totality”), at least initially provided the project with much-needed momentum. More importantly, this extension allowed me to examine each side of the valley with what Edward Tufte calls micro/macro readings, which depend on the principle that “[p]anorama, vista, and prospect deliver to viewers the freedom of choice that derives from an overview, a capacity to compare and sort through detail” (*Envisioning* 38). Also, as I studied Lama and Colle more closely



Figure 2.6: Detail from a municipal property map from the Colledimacine village archives (circa 1953), showing numerous land holdings in a variety of forms, from narrow long-lots to larger, more irregularly shaped holdings. Also shown is the border between the lands pertaining to Colle at bottom and those to Lama at top (drawn as a thin, sometimes broken line running down the middle of the Aventino River at left, to the point it takes a right turn and heads down the middle of the Vallone Cupo, containing a tributary of the Aventino). The current road connecting Lama and Colle is here drawn as dead-ending at the edge of vast lot 27 bordering the Aventino River. Of interest is the dotted trail leading to isolated lot 24, the sole other property bordering the Aventino. Today almost none of the lots shown on this map are still perceptible on the ground; most have long been abandoned and subsequently overgrown with a combination of brambles, bushes, and young trees.

(which while similar in some respects, are very unlike in others), I was able to catch details that I would have certainly missed had I focused solely on Lama. This arrangement proved to be fruitful, yet did not come without its fair share of conceptual dangers (and physical challenges).

In fact, even though I soon decided that I wanted to study both Lama and Colle, I initially found it difficult to clearly define the parameters of the greater study area – a somewhat ironic predicament given the project’s focus on boundaries. To do so, I had to conceptualize a rough perimeter enclosing a portion of space – at first in only partial awareness of the existing borders of local jurisdiction pertaining to each village. The operation, in effect, came dangerously close to the sort of “dissection” Lefebvre



Figure 2.7: View of olive trees blowing in the wind near the bottom of the valley below Lama, in what was once a cultivated field but is now well on its way to becoming a young woods. In the distance other olive trees are visible amidst darker-colored trees – likely a mix dominated by downy oaks and black locusts. A few young downy oaks are also visible at the bottom left, bottom right, and top left corners.

condemns above, and was precariously based on the problematic, definition-resistant term “area,” as broached by Sauer. And yet it was a decision that I had to make in order to come to grips with how to define the “culture area,” and in turn, begin to piece together a hoped-for understanding of that area’s “genetic human geography” (Sauer, *Land* 367). I soon realized however, that these two processes – determining both the extent and nature of the area to observe and analyze – necessarily went (and are continuing) hand in hand.

This approximately rather than definitively conterminous approach is due in part to my conviction that the delimiting and analyzing of any landscape is most fruitful when

considered, in Charles Olson's words, as "process not goal" (*The Special* 49). I also found this fluid approach particularly well suited to the Aventino Valley, whose political and (former) cultural boundaries are often hard to trace, due to widespread emigration and the concomitant ceasing of many activities that once defined and maintained the agrarian cultural landscape. I discovered that many (now barely perceptible) boundaries that were once well-pronounced in the form of human-made obstacles, have subsequently and slowly disappeared due to the abandonment of farmland and small settlements. More than one thorn-ridden misadventure painfully illustrated this condition to me, proving (rather unnecessarily it seemed later) that natural boundaries now predominate over human-made ones.

Indeed, this area, as recently as the 1950s, was a highly managed and carefully arranged landscape; today the signs of former human activity upon the lands surrounding Lama and Colle – from intricate systems of paths to finely ordered patterns of field divisions – are hidden within dense vegetation. It is important to note, however, that these divisions may also remain concealed for years, only to spring suddenly to life due to increased human activity (farming, house construction, or road building) and the odd "neighborly" conflict or even internecine feuding that occasionally ensues. As Jackson writes, "[i]t is when we find ourselves in a landscape of well-built, well-maintained fences and hedges and walls, whether in New England or Europe or Mexico, that we realize that we are in a landscape where political identity is a matter of importance, a landscape where lawyers make a good living and everyone knows how much land he owns" (*Discovering* 15).



Figure 2.8: View of three adjacent structures from diverse time periods at the Roman settlement of Juventum: ruins of a Roman temple in the foreground; an abandoned stone farmhouse (circa 1700s-1800s?) at left; and the contemporary visitor's center at right, which is already showing signs of disuse, including shingles falling off its roof and rusted locks on its doors).

This seems to have been the case in the Aventino Valley of the past, as it may very well be in that of the distant future, but for the moment the identification of many of these boundaries is more of an archeological matter than a contemporary, historical one. In any event, evidence of the cycles of land use and abandonment here, and their concomitant cultural groups, is certainly highly varied – including signs of human activity that date back to the Paleolithic. Many groups have made their mark here, from the Peligni to the Longobardi. One of the earliest settlements in the valley, from the Neolithic, is located in the vicinity of Fonte Rossi near Lama (Manzi 8). More recent and visible traces of former settlement date back to an intrusion by the Romans, who built the small colonial outpost of Juvanum. Its ruins are located 4 km to the east of Colledimacine



Figure 2.9: View of an abandoned farmhouse below Lama. Attempting to follow stone walls or old paths over such overgrown, thorny terrain is a rather unpleasant, oftentimes painful affair (the silhouette of the ruins shown in the foreground of figure 2.4 is visible along the horizon at far right).

(a site apparently never again used for significant urban activity after Roman authorities abandoned it).

One of the most effective means that I discovered to avoid falling into the traps that Lefebvre and Sauer warn of was to examine the boundaries in the study area so intensely that as they increased in resolution, their edges paradoxically lost definition.

Rather than appearing as rigid barriers to movement and understanding, the boundaries became pathways enmeshed within other pathways – centers of mobile attention, which collapsed into one another as the surrounding, panoramic landscape in turn opened up. This was the case even when I found myself literally trapped within brambles (which even if barriers to movement, were not rigid, but flexible and sharp – allowing passage at a certain price). Although the lot lines or terrace walls that I traced often for all practical purposes disappeared, other edges appeared, such as game trails, drainages, and recent mudslides. Even if the boundaries became thorny stems, I was forced, panting, to stop and stare. In those moments I could do little more except attempt to better comprehend that small corner of reality. In addition to worrying about an escape route (a fear that increased if I kept thrashing about), when I actually gained the presence of mind to be still, I began to understand what the land might become if allowed to go wild (and the forests to regenerate), as well as to viscerally imagine what it would be like to clear and farm the land – no easy task indeed.

Also important was not relying too heavily on any boundary in particular. From a distance and certain bureaucratic point of view, I found that political boundaries often took on more relevance and power (on paper) than they actually had (on the ground) – especially because the Aventino Valley is no longer widely cultivated. While offering fertile ground, the area is characterized by steep slopes that hinder easy access to large farm equipment, and that pose difficulties to the widespread cultivation of continuous fields – desirable for much current (often mono-crop) agriculture. When I examined particular sections of the valley at close range, the actual divisions that the political and property boundaries therein marked were often impossible to detect. These lines – of



Figure 2.10: View to the northeast of the Valle di Macchia Lunga from the upper slopes of the Majella. This photograph was taken while standing on the boundary marking the northern extent of the lands under Lama’s jurisdiction (in essence, the edge of the drop-off in the foreground). The boundary extends to the right out of the frame of the photograph, and then reappears as it curves back to the left, following the natural barrier to movement of the darkly forested ridgeline. The narrow and steep Valle di San Spirito (in effect, the lower extension of the Valle di Macchia Lunga) whose rocky upper walls are visible just to left of center, is characteristic of many canyons of the Majella, cut at intervals around its base into predominantly calcareous rock by the erosive powers of water and ice.

which there are thousands – would in essence, be tangible only if carefully surveyed and marked.

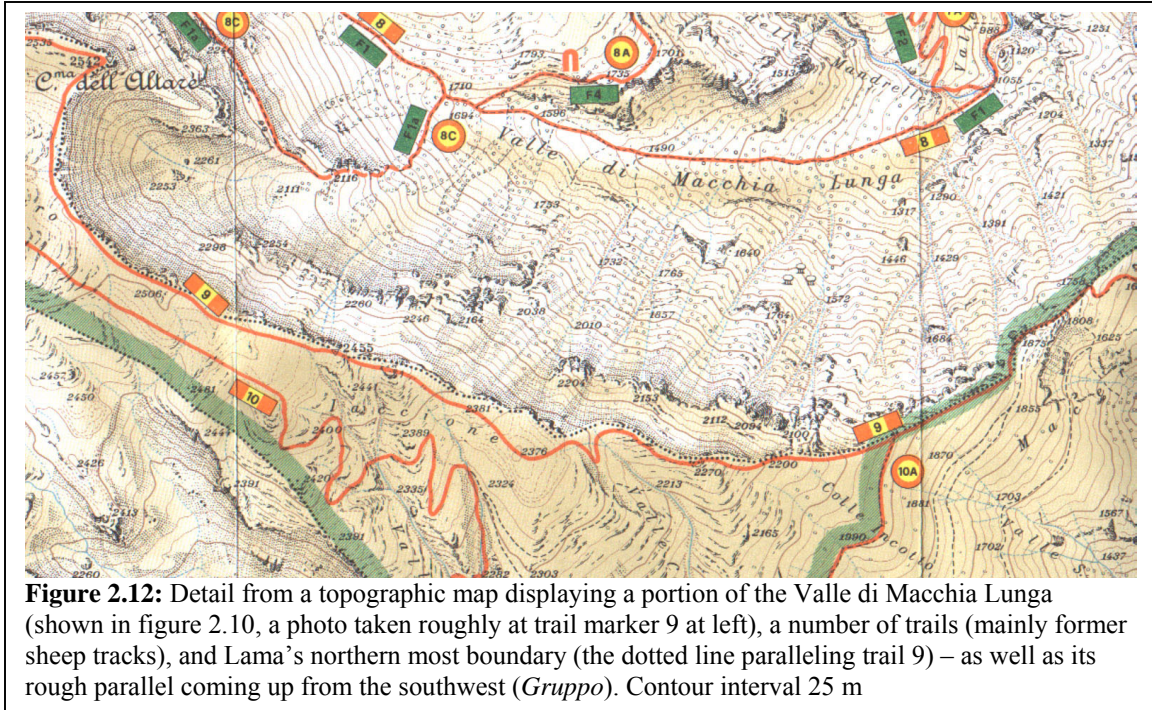
Even if such boundaries may be readily evident along certain stretches of their paths, in others they can be ghostlike. One example of this is the municipal border above Lama that traces the cliff edge overlooking the Valle di Macchia Lunga to the north; at a certain point to the northwest of Corpi Santi it suddenly makes a right turn and then runs a meandering course downhill to the valley bottom (there is no “floor” of any significant width to speak of along its upper reaches). At this point, it does not then follow the Aventino River as one might expect, but instead follows a small drainage on the opposite side of the valley to then haphazardly make its way across adjoining hillsides above the



Figure 2.11: View of the Valle di Santo Spirito, with the cliff edge from which the photograph in figure 2.10 was taken visible in the distant background. Note the group of people (children from a WWF camp based in Lama) visible at lower right, hiking their way up the valley on alluvial debris.

river. Now that few local inhabitants are involved in either pastoral or agricultural activities, there is also little need in zones of this type to maintain artificial boundary markers, such as paths, blazes, or cairns.

During my fieldwork I found that even if I could not locate exact political boundaries, myriad other subtler divisions instead became perceptible – many of which then helped to build in my mind an impression of the Aventino Valley’s particular manifestations of what Kent Ryden has called “the invisible landscape”: “an unseen layer of usage, memory, and significance . . . of imaginative landmarks – superimposed upon the geographical surface and the two-dimensional map” (40). These “unseen layers” are, of course, closely tied to the material “geographical surface,” and vary in perceptibility with changes in both the physical and cultural makeup of the landscape as a whole.



Thanks to local stories, sayings, and folktales that I either collected or found in print, I became aware of the significance of certain features in the landscape that I had previously overlooked – such as the “parite tunne,” an enormous mass of rock situated along the Via Frentana and precipitously leaning over Taranta Peligna.

The rough boundaries that I drew in my mind at first followed the most prominent natural ones in the landscape, such as the Aventino River, the Majella, and the ridge of the southeastern side of the Aventino Valley. These geological and fluvial obstacles partially envelop Lama and Colle, yet do not offer, apart from the river, unambiguous divisions.⁸ I next turned to the political boundaries marking the extent of the territories belonging to Lama and Colle, which while often roughly following natural obstacles in the landscape (such as rocky outcroppings, drainages, and ridge lines), many times seem

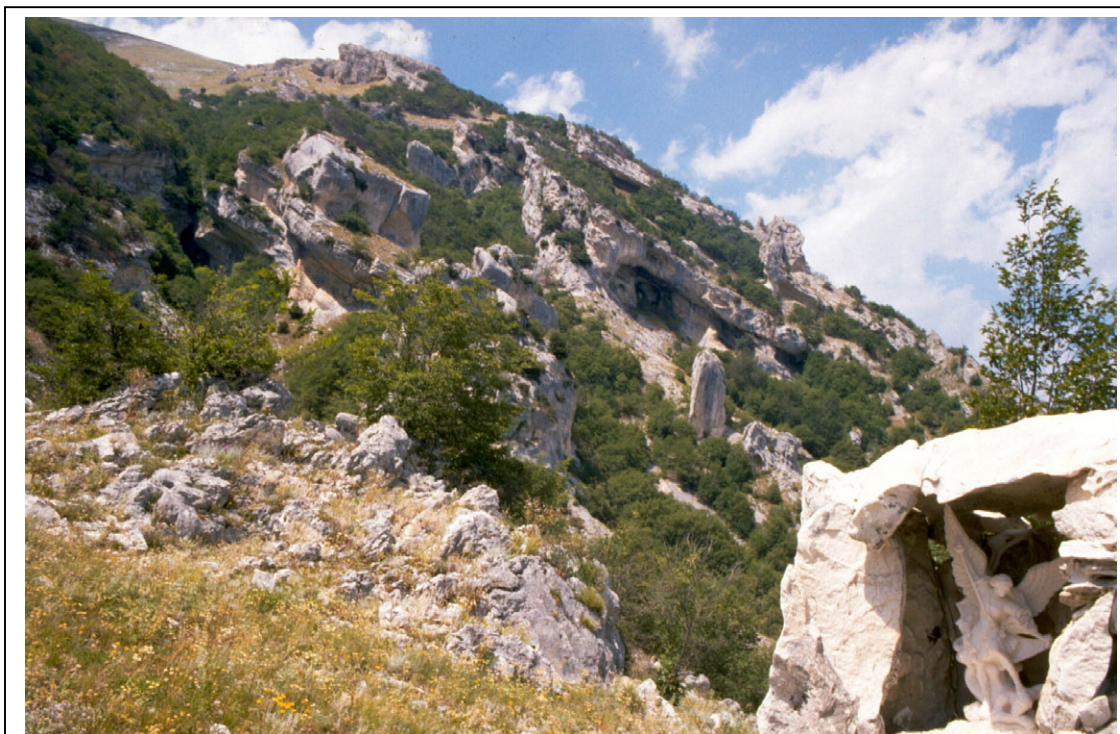


Figure 2.13: View of the Majella about 1½ km to the northwest of Lama. The Grotta di Sant’Angelo (Cave of Sant’Angelo), which contains the ruins of a Medieval monastery, is visible just above and right of center (the dark trapezoidal shape under a thick rocky slab). Also visible below and to the right of the cave is the tall, obelisk-shaped column of rock called the Pennuccia. It took me two attempts traversing this highly variegated terrain before finding the cave; the trail leading to it is quite steep, overgrown in many spots, and contains some unexpected surprises – such as the small statue at right of Sant’Angelo with sword in hand slaying the devil placed in a hand-built alcove of calcareous rock, and the cavernous gorge just over the drop-off in the foreground, which contains a hidden grove of very old beech trees, some of whose lower trunks measure over five feet in diameter.

rather arbitrary when crossing land lacking clearly perceptible natural edges. To complicate matters, since 1995, these boundaries of local jurisdiction have been crossed by the boundaries marking the extent of the Majella National Park, tangling ever more questions of land use authority.⁹ Neither of these two sets of boundaries (local/municipal

⁸ As I will discuss in more detail in chapter six, the river turned out to be much less of a physical boundary than I had originally thought; instead, it seemed in the past to have been more of a cultural mixing “buffer” often (but not always) running between adjoining communities.

⁹ For example, although grazing is technically prohibited within the park, I have run across a number of herds of both sheep and cattle – a number of which during the summers of 2001 and 2002 were in plain sight for all to see. It seemed to me that either “arrangements” had been made, or blind eyes turned (after all, the mountain had (legally) hosted livestock of local inhabitants for thousands of years).



Figure 2.14: Telephoto view of Lama briefly illuminated by the sun through a break in the clouds, taken from Colle. Also visible are nearby fields (some of which to the lower left are still cultivated with olive trees), and a portion of the lower Majella (the Grotta di Sant’Angelo, though not visible here, is located above and to the right of the sun-lit ridge at upper left).

or national/park) are particularly easy to see from the ground without recourse to a map – except for those approximately following the Via Frentana and the Aventino River.

In short, I have come to realize that definitively (and thus reductively) demarcating the edges of my study area is a nearly impossible task – and not only a futile but potentially dangerous one, as Lefebvre and Sauer both point out. However, loosely defining the boundaries of my study area along existing if largely hidden, local jurisdictional borders pertaining to Lama and Colle, while not perfect, is a satisfactory solution. Defining the study area with such permeable edges that in effect are largely neither any longer perceptible nor functional is in accord with my central thesis, which is directed at analyzing the multiplicity and overlapping nature of boundaries of many varieties, rather than at verifying the existence of principally political ones. In refusing to



Figure 2.15: View of the lower Aventino Valley from the Majella, including Lama at bottom right and Lago di Casoli at upper left; note also the increasing number of cultivated fields as the eye strays towards the distant lowlands, and the hazy Adriatic coastline just below the top edge of the photo.

rely on fixed or sharp boundaries to define the study area as either a narrow natural or cultural “sector,” I hope to avoid the trap that Sauer identifies as concealing, rather than answering “the dilemma of area by calling it a natural unit”; instead, as he puts it, “[t]he unit of observation must . . . be defined as the area over which a functionally coherent way of life dominates” (*Land* 364).

This is certainly true of my chosen study area (and also of each Lama and Colle, when observed at a “higher resolution”), and yet it is also true on the broader scale of the surrounding Aventino Valley. In following, I have not excluded considering evidence from neighboring villages and their adjoining lands – especially when it helps to better illustrate an aspect of the study area now greatly eroded or even destroyed (an example



Figure 2.16: View of an abandoned sheep enclosure made from stacked calcareous rocks, located on the Majella near the Valle di Femmina Morta (Valley of the Dead Woman), approximately 2450 m in elevation and facing north: an example of when boundaries meld back into the earth from which they were first created.

from chapter one is the reference to Taranta Peligna’s abandoned yet still largely intact lower complex, which is slowly sliding towards the river).

Such overlapping attention is inevitable, given the fact that culture areas, as Sauer writes, “may experience shifts of centers, peripheries, and changes of structure. They have the quality of gaining or losing territory and often of mobility of their centers of dominance. They are fields of energy, within which changes in dynamism may show characteristic shifts” (364). Lefebvre would seem to agree in an extended commentary on the nature of boundaries and social space, when he writes that “any social locus” (or culture area) “on one hand . . . would be mobilized, carried forward and sometimes

smashed apart by major (conflicting) tendencies; on the other hand, it would be penetrated by, and shot through with, the weaker tendencies characteristic of networks and pathways (*The Production* 87). Sauer and Lefebvre make it clear that culture areas are volatile, amorphous phenomena, which while often persisting in “organic continuity” in the face of immense change, are best studied dynamically as entities involved in the constant processes of spatial molting, “morphing,” and regrowth. As such, I envision my study area as a V-shaped field of overlapping spaces fused in dense buffer zones of interpenetrating cultural and natural boundaries. In essence these are porous “fracture lines,” along which – with the proper attention – the various divisions of the cultural landscape simultaneously open up and yet also seep into one another, forming an ever-changing yet integral regional geographic portrait.

With this extended caveat in mind, I now shift emphasis from the problematic issue of areal definition to the pressing matter of areal description. I offer in the following chapter a rather more deliberate orientation to the study area than that presented thus far, focused on a few basic details of its physical make-up and natural environment – specifically its topography, flora, fauna, climate, and, to a degree, its geology (which will, in any event, be addressed in greater detail in chapter five on the Majella). This brief foray provides a bare-bones yet essential introduction to the predominantly nonhuman forces and organisms of the area that once provided the base of the formerly dominant, agrarian landscape, and which are now, left largely unhindered, fast transforming that landscape into a much wilder creation of their own chaotic accord.

Chapter 3: Describing the Study Area: From Topography to Animal Life

It was a narrow view of geography which confined that science to delineation of terrestrial surface and outline, and to description of the relative position and magnitude of land and water. In its improved form, it embraces not only the globe itself, but the living things which vegetate or move upon it, the varied influences they exert upon each other, the reciprocal action and reaction between them and the earth they inhabit. Even if the end of geographical studies were only to obtain a knowledge of the external forms of the mineral and fluid masses which constitute the globe, it would still be necessary to take into account the element of life; for every plant, every animal, is a geographical agency, man a destructive, vegetables, and even wild beasts, restorative powers. (Marsh 53)

I begin this sketch of the study area's natural environment with an overview of the general scale and topography of the lands surrounding Lama and Colle – perhaps the most important aspects for initial orientation. I spend the remainder discussing a number of characteristic plants and animals found therein, touching on related climatological and geological features in the process. I hope here to give a rough idea of these nonhuman “elements,” helping to both widen and intensify the focus of this thesis. As a camp counselor for the WWF in the area I often encountered the following problem: that when viewed collectively from afar in generic groups (the “forest,” the “grassland,” the “mammals”), plants and animals may seem ordinary and thus easily, if cursorily, comprehensible to either nonchalant or openly resistant outsiders (in this case, adolescent children). And yet, phenomena such as the seemingly amorphous mass of mottled green vegetation stretching out from our bus's window or hostel's courtyard, when examined in their particulars, slowly began to reveal to myself and quite a few of the kids what we soon realized was an immeasurable array of life forms. Such close examination confirmed for me the idea that to better perceive what is unique to a landscape, it is often necessary to go beyond the façade of what seems familiar to discover what is lying –



Figure 3.1: A flock of goats grazing on the Majella at about 1200 m, two kilometers to the west of Palena: one of Marsh’s “geographical agents,” but one that is simultaneously “destructive” and “restorative.” Note the well-sheared grass, the dark edge of the forest in the background, the large oblong piles of stone (perhaps heaped up in order to clear the land), a number of animals clambering onto bushes to eat leaves, and the goat at bottom right facing me. Two large white maremma sheepdogs (not pictured) at the time of the photo were circling to the right, barking warnings.

either well hidden or oftentimes simply unseen but in plain sight – within one’s immediate purview.

This is certainly true of the landscape surrounding Lama and Colle, whose melange of sparse cultivated fields, plentiful bramble-plots, vast upland meadows, jumbled rocky cliffs, expanding pockets of fledgling forests, and meandering strips of riparian zones, all provide habitats for a wide range of easily overlooked plants and animals (as well as conceal the ruins of many human-built structures). These “vegetables” and “wild beasts” are indeed, as George Perkins Marsh claims in the above passage from *Man and Nature*, restorative “geographical agents,” constantly acting upon

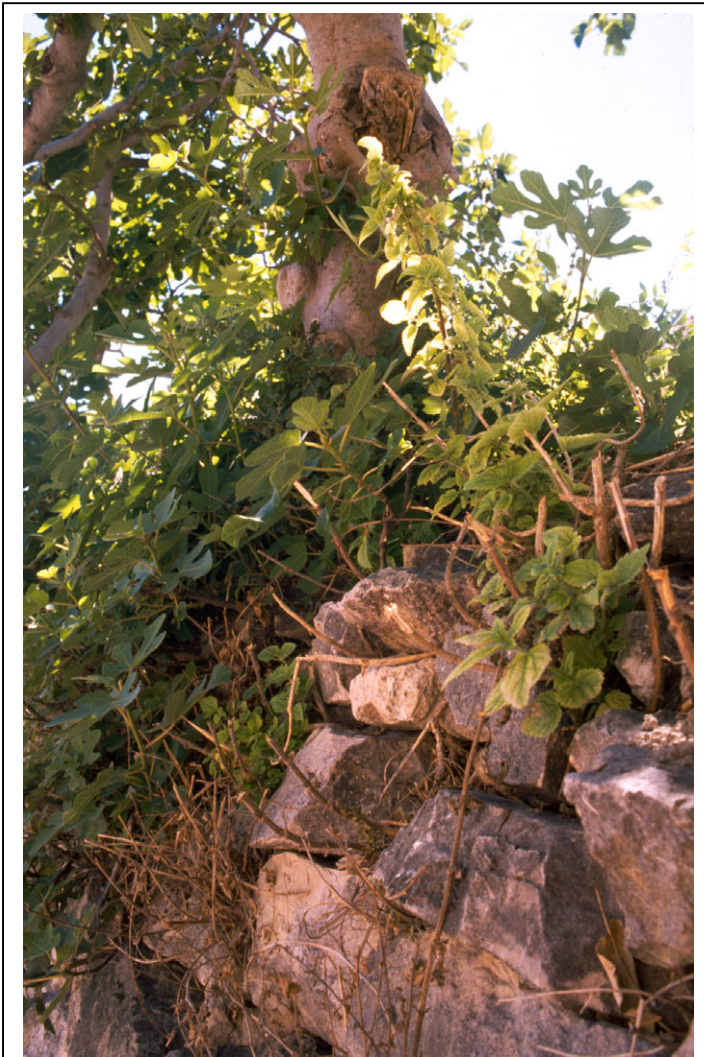


Figure 3.2: Plants growing out of a stone wall in Colle including a fig tree which, unlike most of its former neighbors (note the cut stems protruding from the wall), has been left to grow – despite the destructive action of its roots.

the landscape to pull its local ecologies back into chaotic, wild balance – a state towards which much of the countryside in the vicinity of Lama and Colle is fast advancing. The constant interaction (perhaps even tug-of-war) between human and nonhuman forces over the centuries, has, like a series of overlapping tides, left myriad edges indicating extent of use or habitat. Close attention to these species of boundaries (and conversely, boundaries of species), opens up the field considerably by increasing its resolution, helping one to



Figure 3.3: Collapsing fence made of branches and strips of black plastic, about a quarter mile below Lama along the road leading to Colle: a boundary effective for all practical purposes only in visual terms, and a tempting breach to cross in search of new paths. Note the rocky ground of the rough-hewn plot at right, cleared and hoed but apparently not planted for the current season; the adjoining plot at upper left center has been mowed in the last year, but left fallow. Just beyond this plot are two large cherry trees, and at far left hidden behind a clustering of smaller trees and bushes, a small white house – protected by a similarly small, yet “ferocious” dog who never failed to greet me with growlings.

better grasp what Marsh refers to as the “reciprocal action and reaction between [living things] and the earth they inhabit” (53).

To observe these complicated interactions I have found that planned encounters are generally out of the question; it seems best, rather, to follow Henry Thoreau’s eccentric method of route-choosing as defined in his essay “Walking”: to “go out of the house for a walk, uncertain as yet whither I will bend my steps, and submit myself to my instinct to decide for me . . . toward some particular wood or meadow or deserted pasture or hill” (2163). This is, I must admit, the way in which I predominantly examined the study area – by walking within its rough range without a clear idea of where I was going,



Figure 3.4: A new animal resident in a house abandoned by its former human occupants, located in the lower, slide-damaged quarter of Taranta Peligna. When I walked up to this stone house, which is beginning to split down the middle (see crack from roof through embedded arch to main door), I was surprised to discover that it had been turned into a rather grand if dilapidated chicken coop. The rooster (in the lower, right-hand corner of the door opening in the photo at left) stares back through a gate made of various improvised materials. The practice of using old structures as animal pens is actually quite common – and is probably connected to the tradition of incorporating animal stalls into the lower levels of houses (for the efficient protection of both the animals and humans under one roof, with added benefit of additional body heat in winter); animals were still commonly quartered in Aventino Valley villages until the mid-twentieth century.

hoping for chance encounters. I was not often disappointed – although it is true that I only witnessed a tiny fraction of the many species of life without doubt present and teeming (in the shadows or against the sun) all around me.

The scale of the study area facilitates this approach, which is just small enough to be traversed by foot in almost any direction in a single day, but large enough to challenge the fittest walker. It contains something along the lines of what Thoreau terms as a “harmony discoverable between the capabilities of the landscape within a circle of ten miles radius, or the limits of an afternoon walk, and the threescore years of human life. It

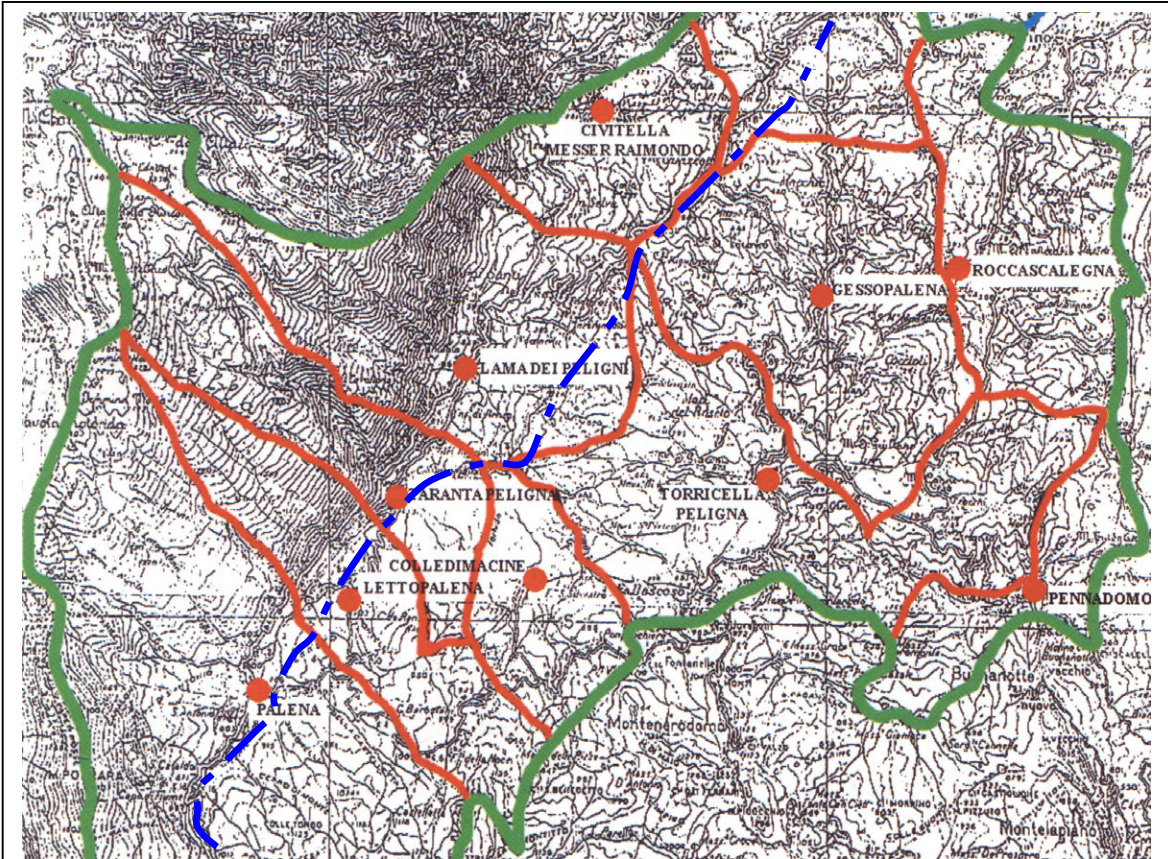


Figure 3.5: Detail of map showing the various comuni of Lama, Colle, and other nearby villages (*Martelli 14*). Note that all have access to both high and low terrain, and almost all have borders adjoining the Aventino River (added to the graphic as a blue dashed line) – with the sole exception of Roccascalegna and Pennadomo (which are not part of the Aventino Valley, but sit upon a ridge forming the western slope of the Sangro Valley to the southeast). Even the comune of Torricella seems to have a very short section of territory adjoining the river at the point it meets the comuni of Colle and Lama (but various property maps give disputing evidence); however, it and the comune of Colle share a boundary following the Vallone Cupo – which contains a large stream that was once an important irrigation source (see above, figures 3.6 and 3.8, and far right edge of figure 2.5).

will never become quite familiar to you” (2160). Rather than a circle, the study area resembles a highly irregular heptagon with its midriff tightly bound with a cord or belt. In all other respects, however, it certainly matches up to Thoreau’s description. Even if I cannot vouch for the effects of “threescore years of human life,” many older local residents voiced similar opinions to me of the inexhaustibility of their surrounding landscape within a single human lifetime.



Figure 3.6: View from the Majella of Colledimacine and the lower, northwestern extent of its comune, the borders of which follow the two drainages to the left (the Vallone Cupo) and right (the Vallone Torbido) of the curving road leading down from the edge of the village to the valley floor and then up again, eventually ending at Lama. The Aventino River flows into the photo just to left of center at bottom and meanders up and to the left, crossing under the new earthen and culvert bridge serving the Lama-Colle road. The tiny white rectangular shape located along the river as it makes its way down the valley and out of the photo at far left is a small hydroelectric plant.

But to be a bit more exact, the study area falls roughly within the borders of two “comuni,” zones of local political jurisdiction based around a central village and similar in many respects, at least in this part of Abruzzo, to English shires or, with some imagination, to large, mainly rural American municipalities surrounding small towns, such as Truckee, California (“comune” is the singular form of the noun; “comuni” is the plural). This unit of land is however, quite variable in size; in other areas of Italy, especially in less mountainous ones, comuni can range upward in size to include a central city and many small towns, somewhat resembling medium-sized, western US counties. The comune of Lama dei Peligni extends uphill in a narrow swath of territory to a



Figure 3.7: View of Lama (just below and right of center) and the upper, northwestern extent of its comune, the borders of which follow the two ridgelines of the Majella directly above it – and appear to meet at the apex of an inverted “V” tilted to the left. The Valle di Macchia Lunga, pictured in figures 2.10 and 2.11, lies on the opposite side of the upper right ridgeline. Colledimacine is visible at lower left.

maximum elevation of 2657 m, nearly reaching the highest point of the Majella (Monte Amaro, 2793 m), and stretches out downhill to the bottom of the Aventino Valley to a lowest elevation of 286 m along the Aventino River. At its longest direct span it measures roughly 9 km and at its widest 5 km.

The comune of Colledimacine abuts with that of Lama along a short, shared border of .75 km running parallel to the Aventino River. It varies much less in elevation than that of Lama, ranging from its lowest point of 362 m along the river to an upper height of nearly 1000 m along its southeastern edge, near the Monti di Maio on one end and the Serra Morreggine on the other. It is also smaller, measuring at its longest span roughly 6 km and at its widest about 4 km. Before a new bridge and extension of road was built in the late 1990s connecting Lama and Colledimacine, the only way to get from either village to the opposite side of the valley was to either drive to the southwest to

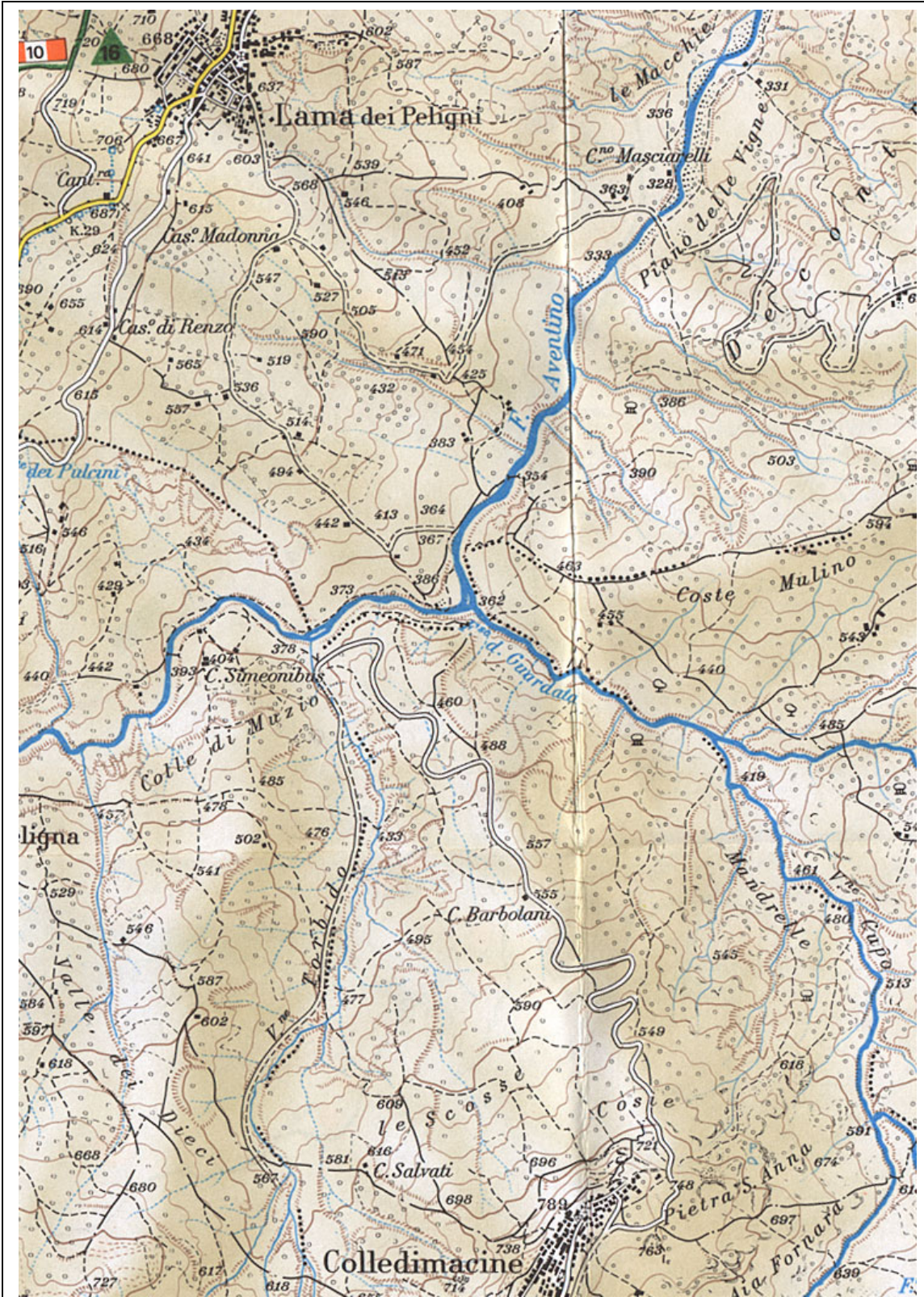


Figure 3.8: Detail from topographical map showing the territory between and including Lama and Colle; note that on this map (1960, updated 1991) the recent bridge across the river (located at approximately the 373 m mark) and added section of road linking Lama to Colle are not shown. Also note the dotted black lines indicating the boundaries between comuni (*Gruppo*). Contour interval 25 m

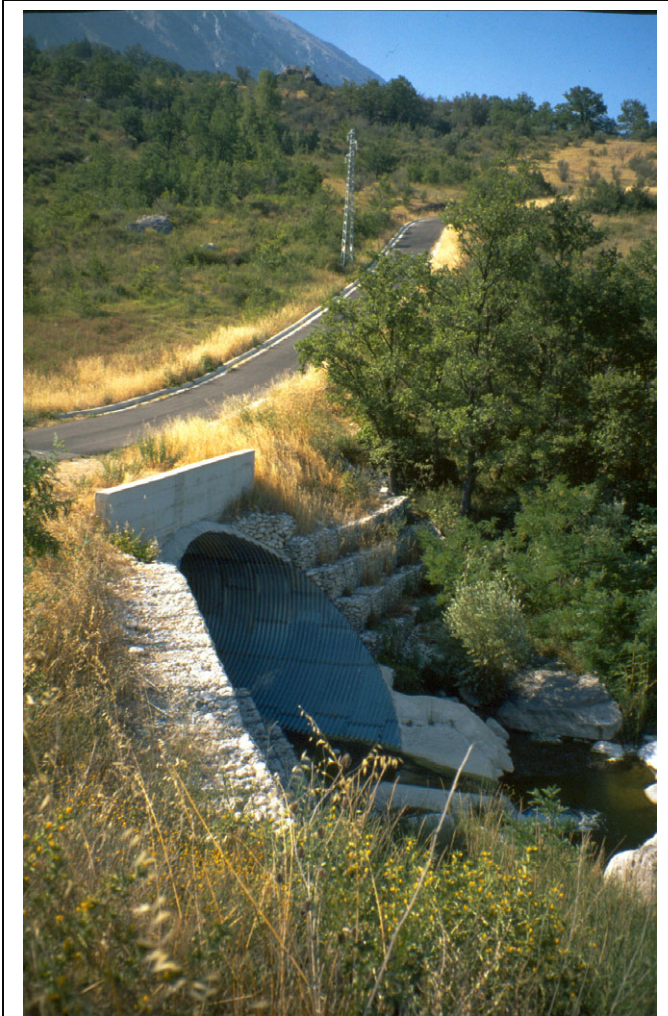


Figure 3.9: New section of road and earthen/culvert bridge over the Aventino River, which together complete the more direct connection between Lama and Colle. Photo is taken on the Colle side looking north towards the Majella.

Palena and around, or to the northeast towards Casoli and around through Torricella. For a period of about ten years following a massive flood in the late 1980s, which washed out a number of bridges crossing the Aventino River, getting from one side of the valley to the other required a long, circuitous drive. Repairs took this long, as might be expected, due to lack of funds (many small bridges, however, still remain down).

Now, though a steep, rough, and often slide-damaged road, the connection from Lama to Colledimacine cuts off a good half an hour or more from the next shortest



Figure 3.10: Large downy oaks blown by a strong wind on the Lama-Colle road on the northwest side of the valley; note the Majella at far left, whose thick cloud cover (which that day enveloped its entire summit) is dissipating to the right as its slopes decrease in elevation.

option.¹⁰ A walk from Lama (668 m) to Colledimacine (789 m) and back again on this road via the valley floor (373 m) is about 7 km each way, and includes a total elevation gain (and concomitant loss) of 711 m. On a hot day the trek is enough to tire out just about anyone, especially considering the sparse to nonexistent shade offered along the road by the odd mature roverella (downy oak, or *Quercia pubescente*) or robinia (black

¹⁰ The two roads from Lama and Colledimacine to the river were already in existence before the construction of the new bridge; the new section of road, about 1/2 km in length and cut through abandoned fields on the Lama side of the river, completed the connection. Because of the variability of the constantly shifting valley terrain, periodic massive flooding, and the abandonment of cultivated land, the pattern of roads steadily and somewhat unpredictably changes through time. For example, many valley roads indicated on the 1960 (partially revised 1991) topographic map *Gruppo della Majella*, have either been abandoned or had their routes altered.



Figure 3.11: View to the northwest near the bottom of the valley on the tailings of a slow, yet massive group of overlying mudslides that have carried away sections of Lama over time (the village's oldest and hardest hit quarter, now abandoned, is located atop the now overgrown ridge at upper center, beyond which rises the Majella). In the foreground are a variety of plants commonly found in the lower valley, including a large gorse bush with wild grapevines creeping on top. To the far right the branches of a burned olive tree extend upward: the immediate area was swept by fire about ten years ago.

locust, false acacia, or *Robinia pseudoacacia*).¹¹ A round-trip hike from Lama to Monte Amaro (12 km and 2125 m, each way), is an exhausting if exhilarating experience that I managed to do in its entirety only once. It left me shuffling about town the next day with a mild headache and stiff legs, but a vastly improved conception of the outlying area.

The many perspectives of the valley offered from the slopes of the Majella (as well as those from the ridges near Colle) are similar in many respects to aerial views – especially when taken in while looking over the edges of sharp drop-offs. While these

¹¹ When naming plants for the first time, I generally give a common Italian name first so as to give a sense of linguistic identity closer to the source, followed by a common English one paired with the proper Latin one in parentheses; afterward, for the ease of the reader, I use the common English name.



Figure 3.12: View to the southeast of burned olive trees near the site pictured in figure 3.11 (the white patch at the center of the photo is a slope of predominantly clay material, which forms the far bank of the Aventino River. The two olive trees on the right, while dead, have provided fertile ground for the growth of two gorse bushes; the larger one at far left survived the fire, and in large part has re-grown from its roots.

perspectives are not positioned directly above the earth's surface, and suffer in resolution the farther the eyes stray towards the opposite side of the valley, they do provide important information on the greater physical make-up of the area (see, for example, figures 2.3 and 2.13). One of the first aspects of the valley noticed by the observer standing on the slopes of the Majella is the patterning of widespread, dark green patches of dense shrubbery and trees mixed with occasional yellow clearings and the odd grove of olive trees – a view underscored by the teeming mix of alpine grasses and small flowers underfoot.



Figure 3.12: A lone example of hardy pino mugo (dwarf pine) growing on the Majella at around 1800 m. Colledimacine is visible just left of center (the white strip, seemingly tilted slightly to the left); the right (or southwestern) half of the wide valley above Colle, together with the adjoining, partially forested lands, comprise the southeastern extent of its comune, which extends roughly halfway up the Monti Pizzi at upper center. Visible just beyond and to the east are the hazy lineaments of the neighboring Sangro Valley.

These patternings, both near and far, contain a great variety of both native and introduced plants, including some endemic species.¹² A lower zone can be roughly defined as ranging from the bottom of the valley in the neighborhood of 280 m to an elevation of approximately 900 m. Falling within the sub-Mediterranean transitional climate area, and characterized by a mix of calcareous and clay soils, this vegetational zone contains a number of widespread tree species, including the orniello (flowering ash, or *Fraxinus ornus*), ailanto (ailanthus, or *Ailanthus altissima*), ginepro rosso (red juniper, prickly cedar, or *Juniperus oxycedrus*), ginepro comune (common juniper, or *Juniperus*

¹² The Museo Naturalistico e Archeologico “M. Locati” in Lama includes an extensive outdoor botanical garden with examples of plants from the bottom of the valley to the upper reaches of the Majella.



Figure 3.13: A dense beech forest in the lower Valle di Macchia Lunga on the Majella at about 1200 m; it extends in a wide, dark swath to a maximum elevation of about 2000 m.

communis), pino nero (black pine, or *Pinus nera* – a number of large, interconnecting groves of which were planted above Lama from the early to mid-twentieth century), olmo (elm, or *Ulmus minor*), maggiociondolo (laburnum, or *Laburnum anagyoides*), and carpino nero (hop-hornbeam, or *Ostrya carpinifolia*) (Martelli 21; Del Pizzo, G. 27; Pellegrini 112). Of special note is the downy oak mentioned briefly above, the dominant tree species in the valley whose wood was used for centuries by local inhabitants for a wide range of purposes, from utensils to beams used in construction. It is very well-



Figure 3.14: A rocky meadow on the Majella at about 1600 m in elevation. The small and dark, purple-tufted flowers, although I was unable to accurately identify them, seemed to be a variety of wild garlic: as I walked through them they gave off a telltale pungent odor.

adapted to climate, soil, and human-influenced conditions of the valley that cause particular challenges for plant life.

As described by Amelio Pezzetta, these conditions are: the disparate extremes of temperature and precipitation throughout the year (the wettest season is during the winter when the temperature is lowest, while the driest is during the summer when the temperature is highest); the excessive permeability of the predominantly calcareous soils, which reduces the available surface water for plants (this is much more the case on the Lama side of the valley than on the Colle side, which has a much higher percentage of clay than calcareous debris); and the inordinate amount of human pressure put on the landscape, in particular deforestation carried out to create more pastures and arable fields (*Casa 23*).

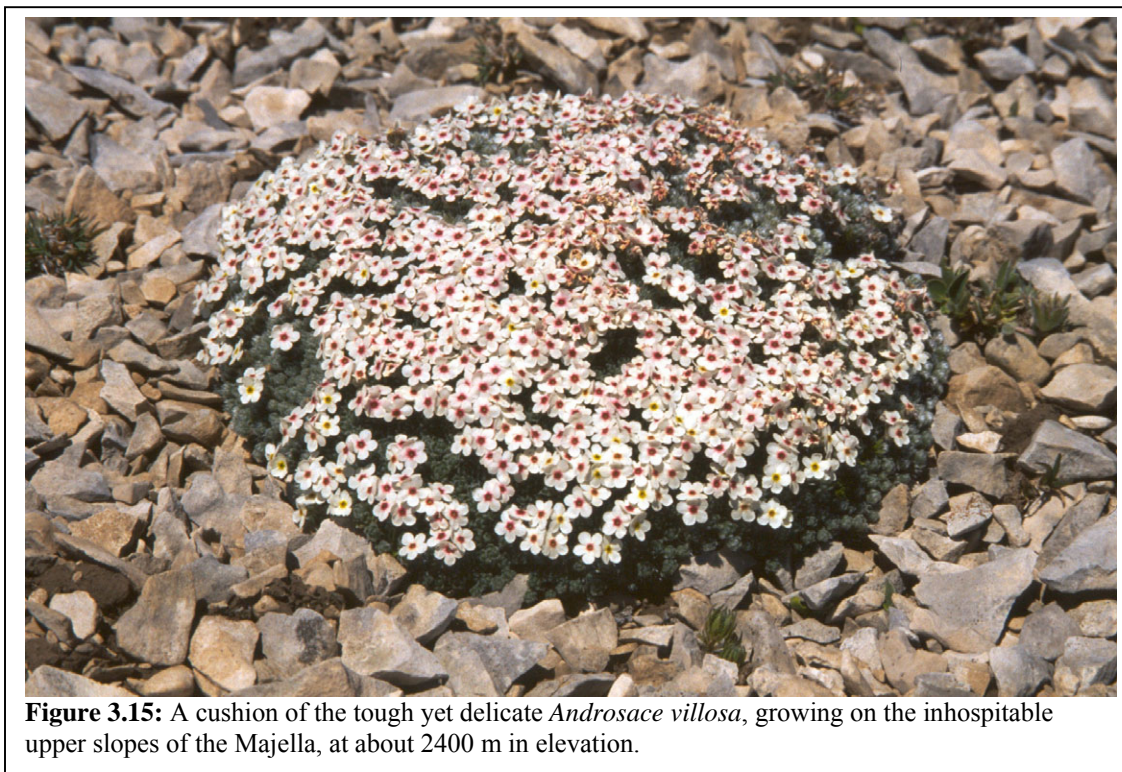


Figure 3.15: A cushion of the tough yet delicate *Androsace villosa*, growing on the inhospitable upper slopes of the Majella, at about 2400 m in elevation.

Some of the commonest bushes and shrubs of this zone to survive under these difficult conditions include ligustro (privet, or *Ligustrum vulgare*), clematide (clematis, or *Clematis vitalba*), nocciolo (hazel, filbert, or *Corylus avellana*), viburno (viburnum, wayfaring tree, or *Viburnum lantana*), ginestra (broom, gorse, or *Spartium junceum*), biancospino (hawthorn, or *Crateagus morogyna*), and rosmarino (rosemary, or *Rosmarinus officinalis*) (Martelli 23; Del Pizzo, G. 27; Pezzetta, “L’ambiente” 239).

Some of the many grasses include: *Teucrium flavum*, *Trifolium pratense*, *Galium molugo*, *Brachypodium pinnantum*, *Spartium junceum*, and *Taraxacum officinale* (Pezzetta 239).

Introduced or domesticated plant species – some of which have managed to survive and self-propagate even when abandoned – include fig trees, alfalfa, olive trees, grapevines, apple trees, and cherry trees. The banks of the Aventino River host diverse species drawn by the higher, more accessible water table, including various types of willows (*Salix alba*,



Figure 3.16: View of the path of destruction wreaked by an avalanche that occurred above Lama during the winter of 2001-02, which stopped only ten feet shy of hitting a road. The trees it knocked down were almost all black pines, planted in a large grove at mid-twentieth century.

Salix cinerea, *Salix viminalis*, *Salix pupurea*), alders, poplars (*Populus alba*, *Populus tremula*, *Populus nigra*), rushes, grasses, and reeds (Martelli 24; Pezzetta 240). This, of course, is only a tiny fraction of the rich variety of plants growing in this zone, whose great number precludes further elaboration.

Within this zone the climate varies somewhat from one side of the valley to the other – at least in terms of exposure to sunlight and protection from the wind. Lama, for instance, is broadly exposed to the weather in an arc from the northeast to the southwest – generally in line with the movement of the sun. For this reason, throughout the year it receives solar heat during most of the day, followed by a characteristic cooling off in the evenings (even in the summer). At its back is the Majella, which provides a certain



Figure 3.17: A rather shabby-looking pheasant making its way along the Colle-Lama road on the southeast side of the valley. First introduced to Italy by the ancient Romans, it has never been particularly successful in Abruzzo, even after repeated attempts to reintroduce it began in 1950. The few stable groups in the region capable of self-reproduction generally live below 1500 m in cultivated areas with readily available water (Febbo 158).

amount of protection from winds coming from the west and north (its nearby slopes, however, collect snow, which in the rare winter of heavy precipitation and prolonged periods of freezing temperatures, can pose avalanche dangers).¹³ Colle, on the other hand, perched on its long outcropping of rock, is exposed to the sun and the wind from all directions. As opposed to Lama, which is predominantly built on sloping terrain (according to Pezzetta an average of 12% [*Casa* 106]), Colle is relatively flat (apart from its narrow southeast edge) and is more compact, acting to a degree as a protective unit from the elements. This was certainly more the case in the past, when many of its now demolished structures were still standing and more tightly enmeshed.

¹³ During the winter of 2001-02, for example, heavy snow accumulation caused an avalanche above Lama, which tore a wide swath through a black pine woods (see figure 3.16).



Figure 3.18: An Abruzzese, or Apennine camoscio (chamois, or *Rupicapra pyrenaica ornata*), a species distinct from the more plentiful Alpine camoscio found in the Alps and Dolomites; its closest relative in North America is the mountain goat. A member of the bovine family, it survived into the twentieth century only in Abruzzo (in what is now the National Park of Abruzzo), and is distinguishable from cervids by a number of peculiar characteristics, including its horns, which both sexes carry. Made of corneous rather than osseous tissue, they do not fall off but continuously grow throughout the year, forming rings at their base that can be read to determine an individual animal's age (Febbo 57). In 1990 an internationally-funded program designed to reintroduce the species onto the Majella began on the mountain's lower slopes just above Lama dei Peligni. (Photograph by Stefano Ardito [Pellegrini 191])

In this lower zone the average annual temperature is between 10 and 15° C; the average temperature during the hottest month (July) is above 21° C; and the average temperature during the coldest month (January) is about 4° C. The average annual rate of precipitation is between 90 cm and 120 cm; the average rate of precipitation for the winter months (November, December, and January) is about 22 cm; and the average rate



Figure 3.19: A rare freshwater crab making its way across the Lama-Colle road – who, after agreeably posing for this photo, did not appear particularly pleased when I tried to move him from out of harm’s way. These crabs require extremely clean water to survive; although the Aventino River is relatively clean, the runoff from the villages (now more toxic than in the past) is anathema to these creatures. This crab’s habitat, I eventually discovered, was not far from the road: a year-round spring that has been used for centuries by local farmers (a few small garden plots still remain in this district, which is called “Purgatorio”).

of precipitation for the summer months (June, July, and August) is about 13 cm (Pezzetta, *Casa* 18-21; “L’Ambiente” 237). These averages proved the rule for the first four summers I spent in the valley, but 2002 was an uncharacteristically wet year – both in the winter (which brought heavy snows) and summer (which was marked by frequent showers). Most of the photos of the valley in this thesis were taken during the summers of 2001 and 2002 and are often distinguishable by the differing shadings of vegetation featured: faded light browns, yellows, and greens in photos from 2001, and intense, darker shades of these colors in photos from 2002. For example, July of 2001 was so dry that a large forest fire burned for almost a week on the southeast side of the valley just to the north of Colledimacine; whereas in the summer of 2002 a farmer I spoke to complained that his fruits and vegetables were slow to mature due to the lack of sun.



Figure 3.20: A wild European boar, a species whose numbers in Abruzzo have climbed dramatically since the 1960s due to reintroduction programs and a substantial increase in habitat following the abandonment of agricultural lands. A mature male boar can weigh as much as 120 kg, be as long as 180 cm, and stand as high at the withers as 70 cm (Febbo 71). When encountered in large groups, which can range upward to as many as 50 or more individuals (such as in extensive, upland beech forests), boars can make quite an impression. The one pictured above, perhaps a mother, is grunting threateningly after a great number of tan-striped baby boars had scattered into the bushes at high speed. The boar would have remained hidden had I not been lucky enough to have been walking with a companion with a severe case of the hiccups: at a certain point she hiccuped loudly – a sound to which the boar suddenly responded with a passionate, loud snort, thus making itself known to us.

A second vegetational zone extends up the Majella above Lama from 900 to 1800 m (which also is represented to a degree on the more heavily forested Monti Pizzi and other mountains to the south of Colle from 900 to 1612 m). On the Majella this zone is characterized by rocky outcroppings, talus slopes, and steep meadows scattered with increasingly isolated clusterings of trees such as flowering ash, hop-hornbeam, black pine, and beech. Most of this area – as well as the land above it – was cleared of vegetation in order to create pastures, and during some periods in the past of intense human activity (and dire need), even to practice agriculture (up to a maximum elevation of around 1600 m in certain areas of the Majella) (Pellegrini 112). Due to this and to the accumulative effects of elevation, the higher one goes the more barren the landscape



Figure 3.21: Cattle grazing on the lower slopes of the Majella, at about 900 m and one and a half kilometers to the west of Palena, doing their part to maintain a vestige of the local pastoral landscape.

appears. The many species of commoner smaller plants that occur here include: *Cistus salvaefolius*, *Drypis spinosa*, *Origanum officinalis*, *Anthyllis vulneraria*, *Euphorbia characias*, *Armeria magiellensis*, *Satureja montana*, and *Tunica saxifraga* (Pezzetta, “L’ambiente” 240; Martini 28-29). Some rare or endemic species include: *Potentilla caulescens*, *Campanula fragilis*, *Saxifraga australis*, *Malcomia orsiniana*, *Laserpitium garganicum*, and *Campanula spicata* (Pezzetta 240). This zone experiences an average temperature in July below 21 °C and in January one below 4 °C; however, as Pezzetta notes, on the barren slopes of the Majella above Lama (due to its exposure to the south-southwest, lack of arboreal cover, and many exposed rocks) the true value of these figures for this specific locale could easily be higher (238).

The final zone, from 1800 m to Monte Amaro at 2793 m, includes both subalpine (to 2400 m) and alpine vegetation (above 2400 m) (241). Once used extensively by shepherds for summer grazing, the rolling, upland plains of this area, while mostly devoid of arboreal growth, at their lower limits host a surprising number of rather hidden pockets of ground-hugging trees and bushes, such as ginepro nano (dwarf juniper, *Juniperus nana*), pino mugo (dwarf pine, locally known as “chiappine,” or *Pinus mugo turra*), sorbo alpino (alpine sorb), and l’uva d’orso (bear berry) (Pellegrini 114). Some of the many smaller plants found here include: *Biscutella laevigata*, *Grysimom majellense*, *Sesleria appennina*, *Pulsatilla alpina*, *Gentiana dinarica*, *Ranunculus magellensis*, *Adonis distorta*, *Androsace villosa*, and *Cerastium arvense* (Pezzetta, “L’Ambiente” 241-42; Martelli 29-32). This zone experiences average seasonal temperatures that are quite low, which in winter commonly dip well below 0° C and in summer rarely reach their average maximum of 20° C; in the areas nearest the summit sudden and violent storms frequently occur, with winds strong enough to drag about large fragments of rock (Pezzetta 238).

Animals that I have encountered in the study area range from wild boars and badgers on the ground to golden eagles and buzzards in the air. Many wild animals have profited from the abandonment of the land by humans for grazing and cultivation, including ravens, who were intentionally poisoned on a wide scale in Abruzzo until the late 1970s; their population, once near zero in the region, has slowly begun to recover (Febbo 176). Many other animals make their home in the valley and on the mountain, including hedgehogs, porcupines, wolves, feral dogs (whose inbreeding with wolves has caused some alarm), martens (some of whom have even taken up residence in abandoned



Figure 3.22: *Ad Marginem*, by Paul Klee, 1930. In this watercolor painting on heavily gessoed gauze, Klee subtly depicts the strange and fleeting forms of vegetable and animal life at the margins of what appears to be a pond with the sun reflecting on its surface – but with imagination could easily also be a field with the observer lying on the ground looking up at the sun. Along the borders of the painting teem impressions (glimpses given form) of mysterious living beings, some with comma- or period-like eyes.

houses in the area – including a few in the lower, oldest section of Lama), weasels, polecats, hares, foxes, dormice, voles, peregrine falcons, kestrels, tawny owls, wallcreepers, partridges, spotted salamanders, and the small Orsini vipers (which are endemic to the Abruzzese Apennines) (Pizzo, G. 30-31; Martelli 33; Febbo 195-97).

Other, rarer animals inhabiting the area include the Apennine chamois (which is undergoing reintroduction on the Majella in an operation based just above Lama), red-billed chough (which makes its nests in the high cliffs of the Majella), water ouzel (found along the Aventino River), Marsican brown bear (recent sightings of which have occurred near the Monti Pizzi above Colle), and arctic plover (whose summer nesting grounds on the Majella – an anomaly due to a fortuitous combination of altitude, terrain, and climate – constitute the only example in southern Europe) (Febbo 176-77; Martelli 35; Pellegrini 132).

Domesticated animals include various species of sheep, goats, horses, donkeys, chickens, and cattle, who, along with their human caretakers, have played significant roles in shaping the landscape. This has especially been the case with transhumant sheep and cattle rearing, which drastically altered many parts of Abruzzo including the study area. Now that its practice has dwindled, the pastoral landscapes it helped to form (including lowland winters pastures, highland summer ones, and connecting “tratturi” or sheep/cow tracks) are fast becoming obscured.¹⁴ The most noticeable signs of former transhumance near Colle and Lama to survive today are the still significantly deforested slopes (once closely “mown” pastures, now thick grassy meadows) of the Majella above Lama, and the odd section of tratturo still in use as a dirt road or hiking trail.

It was often along these paths or across adjoining, still-passable ex-fields or ex-pastures that I traveled, hoping to catch glimpses of a deeper nature (at once nonhuman

¹⁴ In their article “A Relict of Vegetational Landscape Related to Seasonal Migratory Grazing in the South of Italy,” R. Venazoni, F. Pedrotti, and A. Manzi discuss one of these landscapes: the Bosco dell’Incoronato, which is one of the last large-scale winter pastures in Puglia still used by transhumant shepherds from Abruzzo and Molise.

and human, wild and domesticated) that was often ephemeral or obscured: the plant and animal life lying within or just beyond the margins of the immediate panoramic space unavoidably apportioned by the limits of my own perception. A true 360-degree view of the landscape would constitute an impossibly wide-angled and contorted, wrap-around act of the observant, which can only vaguely be approximated photographically. Add the other senses and such all-embracing perception becomes something only roughly imaginable – such as in Klee’s painting *Ad Marginem* (see figure 3.22). And yet, the very appearances of our surroundings that we succeed in taking in and interpreting, however tentative and partial, do more than anything else, as writer Gianni Celati argues, to “provide the backing for representation of the external. . . . they are all we have to orient ourselves in space” (Ghirri 33).

It is precisely (or rather, approximately) this that I hope to accomplish in this thesis: an increasingly clarifying yet labyrinthine orientation for the outsider to the panoramic space of the study area. Each step, or chapter, should provide a slightly shifted, more focused perspective; as they accumulate, an ever-more complex and coherent (if fragmentary) portrait of the landscape should emerge. To better contextualize my particular observational standpoint – the basis of this portrait – in the next chapter I offer a brief overview of the approach to fieldwork that I took, including the equipment that I employed and the specific methods that I used to gather information.

Chapter 4: Fieldwork, “Data-Collection,” and Internalizing Observation

Let no one consider that historical geography can be content with what is found in archive and library. It calls, in addition, for exacting field work. One of the first steps is the ability to read the documents in the field. Take into the field, for instance, an account of an area written long ago and compare the places and their activities with the present, seeing where the habitations were and the lines of communication ran, where the forests and the fields stood, gradually getting a picture of the former cultural landscape concealed behind the present one. Thus one becomes aware of the nature and direction of changes that have taken place. (Sauer, *Land* 366)

The people of this world who made the maps in the map libraries did not spend their lives in the libraries but out in the field, where geographic action has always been. (Bunge, “The First” 6)

The lead page in my research journal, written while I was in transit to my first summer of fieldwork in the Aventino Valley, begins in this way:

7/5/01 In train from Bologna to Pescara – then on to Lama. Train passed Rimini 1/2 hour ago – inland a bit – strips of forest, mixed with cultivated fields – the rolling, wave-like hills of Romagna tapering out. In and out of a tunnel. . . . Geography from a train’s view: a village pops up – fields and little gardens right up to the doors of small apartment blocks and houses all brick, clay tile and tufo-block construction with terracotta roofs – peeling intonico dense habitations families packed in on one another. . . . Pesaro – typical humid, hazy day . . . geography from a train’s view – sight to the sides – interrupted by the gazes and “sights” of fellow passengers – no control over delays, stops/starts. Resignation and/or meditation or contemplation.

Above me, stuffed into a cantilevered steel luggage rack was a huge, worn, and dark blue backpack filled with clothes, books, a portable computer, and camera equipment; next to me a smaller pack lay on an empty seat, half-filled with the most immediately desirable items: a book, lunch, water, and maps. As the train slowly and almost imperceptibly curved towards, and then ran along the Adriatic coast, I did my best to make sense of the landscapes fleeting by to both sides (which while in sharp contrast to the ones I witnessed on my first journey to Abruzzo by bus from Rome on the opposite side of the Apennines, were somewhat familiar from past trips down the coast en route to Umbria and Puglia). I also tried to formulate a more coherent concept of what exactly I was intending to do as

an aspiring geographer in Abruzzo. The results of this deliberation, much like the immediate impressions gathered from the train's windows and limited by the ephemeral scenery, were laced with mild anxiety: the truth was, that despite much preparation and thought, I had only managed to form a vague plan of how I was going to proceed with my research once I arrived at the study area.

Little less than a week before, I had been in Reno hurriedly preparing my bags and bulk-loading film at the last minute – a process that had been irritatingly extended by the unforeseen need to scratch ASA codes onto generic metal cartridges so that my one “automatic” camera could read them. Much of the week leading up to my flight had been spent ensuring that I had properly collected and prepared all the equipment I could think of in order to capture as much data as possible in the field. As a result, I was left with few moments for the sustained reanalysis of either the underlying cohesive purpose or actual practice of my research. I had of course been required (by grant applications and university protocol) to explain in detail my intended research plan; however, in reality I knew that my conjectured scheme would most likely change as soon as I came in close contact with the study area, and the actual field work began. How exactly my plan would change remained up to largely fruitless speculation, in which I found myself ever more involved as the train journey along the Adriatic coast progressed. I tried to sit back and do my best to simply trust in what James Parsons refers to as “area as the integrating concept, to the supremacy of observed geographical data over any pyramid of deductions or formal theories,” and in his idea that field experience

has the special virtue of lifting us quite decisively from the quagmire of definitions of our subject and from methodology and it gets us back into the open air. It reaffirms the spirit of geographical adventure and the validity of personal

observation and of intuitive knowledge. It may encourage the integration of large general themes, the weaving together of disparate stands into a tapestry of land and life in a regional context that is both satisfying and useful. (“Geography” 15)

I was certainly hoping that this integration and weaving would occur, and was nervously looking forward to reaching the study area so that I could begin to work towards this goal.

However, my battle with this issue was temporarily postponed when I arrived in Pescara and was faced with the immediately pressing matter of how I would get from the coastal train station to inland Lama. The schedules and routes of regional buses in Italy can be a challenge for a foreigner to understand, especially if one’s destination is rather distant and requires changing lines. Even if once in 1996 I had succeeded in catching a direct bus to Lama from Pescara (my sole previous attempt), this time it seemed, based on what I could gather from a number of drivers, as if the line no longer existed. I ended up taking a tiny local train to Lanciano and from there – after much deliberation and some counseling from local passersby – catching a bus to the town nearest my destination that I could reach by day’s end: Casoli, which is about 20 km from Lama. The trip helped to fill in many gaps in my conception of how the Aventino Valley topologically connected to the lower-lying rolling hills to its east, whose hazy, indistinct outlines I had many times seen from afar, usually from the slopes of the Majella.

In Casoli a few old men sitting on black plastic chairs and languidly smoking cigarettes told me that a bus to Lama might make a stop in about four hours, but none of them could say for sure. I decided to hitchhike and take my chances. I drank a coffee and ate an ice cream for inspiration at a bar in the tiny square where I had been let off, then began trudging off uphill to the southwest, saddled with the heavy weight of my pack and



Figure 4.1: What at first glance might seem to be an internet ad for “used technology,” is in fact a view of the equipment that I used in the field to collect images and stories: (front row, left to right) a Sony M-7 microcassette tape recorder; a Minolta XD11 35mm camera; a Pentax 90-WR 35mm camera; a bulk film loader; (back row, left to right) microcassettes; empty film cartridges; the case for a Nikon 775 digital camera (the camera I used for this image); a Nikon FE 35 mm camera; a selection of lenses (from 18 to 205 mm, including a polarized filter that was useful for taking pictures through glass); and a bulk film canister. Underneath the lenses and Nikon FE is a Toshiba T2400CS computer, which while old and temperamental (often requiring a whack on its side to inspire startup), allowed me to transcribe and translate interviews and stories I had tape-recorded. The Nikon FE was my workhorse camera, which I used for a wide range of subjects, from buildings to documents, while the Pentax 90-WR, being lightweight and water resistant, was useful for long alpine hikes. In 2002, the addition of the Minolta XD11 (a gift from my grandfather Kenneth Karsten) allowed me to use two SLRs at once, one with a telephoto lens or mid-range zoom and the other with a wide-angle, without the need to constantly change lenses. The bulk loader made professional-grade slide film more economical, but proved a harrowing device when I ended up loading over 50 roles of film well past midnight the morning of my flight for Italy. I used the Nikon 775 digital camera sparingly, mainly for backup shots and for pictures of documents and maps.

hoping vainly between gusts of wind not to soak my clothes with unseemly sweat (something of a turn-off for passing drivers). I headed to the end of town where two main roads met to form a local highway leading upvalley. Once at the junction, without having to wait very long, an older man from Lama gave me a lift in a small tan Fiat panda –

whose back seat barely accommodated my belongings. As we drove along, he proceeded to tell me about the last flooding of the Aventino River and about his experiences living and working in the valley, most recently as a barkeeper. It turned out that we knew a couple of people in common from my time at the WWF camps, and soon established an informal if brief rapport. He understood from what I said that I had returned to study the area's history and geography, which seemed to please (and somewhat amuse) him. I felt suddenly relieved, and oddly welcomed back to the area in my new guise as a student of landscape.

This, in effect, was the seemingly auspicious if rather haphazard beginning of my fieldwork, and a faint confirmation that I might be on the right track. It took a number of weeks of blindly feeling around and chasing down not a few false leads (both in my head and on the ground) before I began to piece together a very rudimentary understanding of the “tapestry of land and life in a regional context” of which Parsons speaks. I did my best to keep a constant awareness for and questioning attitude of what might constitute boundaries in the surrounding landscape, as well as to attempt to both define and describe the study area – processes that I have discussed at some length in the preceding chapters. Deep inside I agreed with the outward-seeking, adventurous ethos of William Bunge, especially his call for a return to active geographical exploration of not only what “would be perceptible on an aerial photograph,” but also the subtle traces within the human landscape that indicate “what we value” (“The First” 2). Likewise, I was inspired by Charles Olson's desire to “be an historian as Herodotus was, looking / for oneself for the evidence of / what is said” (*The Maximus* I.100). In short, I wanted to find out for myself through close contact what the landscape could teach me. Moreover, I was left with few

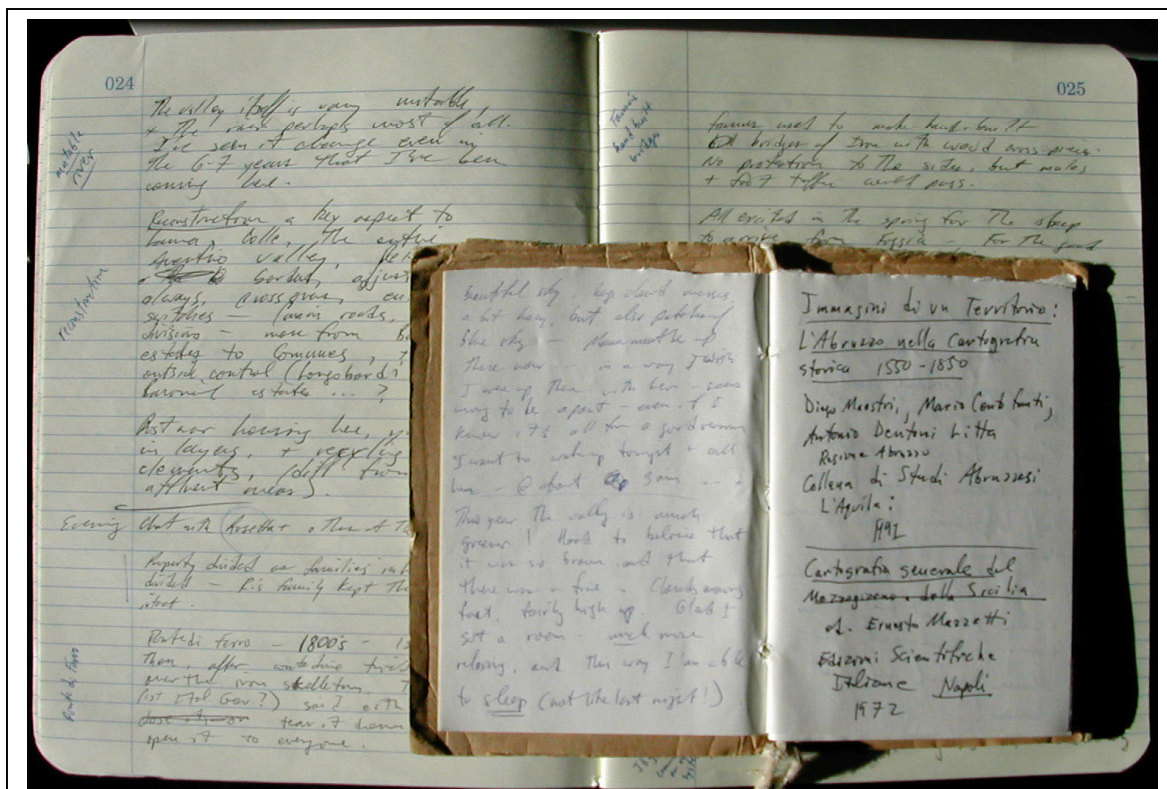


Figure 4.2: Field journals: the larger of the two was my main journal, which had wide left margins for later annotations, weather-resistant paper, and numbered pages; the smaller one (composed of cardboard, twine, and recycled paper, which I made with children at a WWF camp on a rainy day), was particularly useful for hikes and for keeping in my pocket for jotting down quick impressions while walking about without a backpack.

other options, given the relative paucity of historical accounts and surviving archival records concerning the study area.

And yet, during the first days of fieldwork I often found myself ruminating over what landscape study really entailed, and whether what I was doing was sufficient. A journal entry from July 11th reflecting these concerns reads:

I keep thinking about what Geography is, and how it relates to what I am doing here. Spatial relationships . . . the only way to begin to understand a place is to go there. I feel like I'm not the rabid fieldworker that I should be – I should always have my camera ready to shoot a picture, not feel uncomfortable, as if I am invading people's space (or at least overcome the hesitation that inhibits a full-on frontal information attack). But no, I am taking it slow, on foot, a couple of interviews a day. . . . There is no one, final picture, only elaborate and eloquent readings of the landscape (even simple, elusive ones) that I aspire after.

Gradually I began to accept that orienting myself as a fieldworker would be a slow yet continually evolving process, with both constant challenges and frequent moments of understanding. I also learned, as I firmed up a routine of self-directed research through specific information gathering techniques, that there existed alongside this rather formally organized approach a more elusive yet highly effective form of fieldwork, described by Wilbur Zelinsky as difficult to “pin down” because it is not “‘work’ at all but rather the casual, unstructured sensing of our surroundings or simply an ad hoc, impulsive exercise in getting one’s bearings” (6). This sort of fieldwork, he claims, “is altogether informal, sometimes hovering on the margins of consciousness, a sensibility ecumenically attuned to all innovations in the sensed environment, to every manner of loss, gain, and the unexpected, dedicated to absorbing a dynamic world without a set agenda” (7).

Learning to trust this type of hands-on discovery which, as Parsons claims, depends so much on “personal observation and intuitive knowledge,” led me to discover many key aspects of the Aventino Valley landscape that would most likely have escaped more rigidly organized or strictly theoretical approaches. These ranged from being invited into Lama’s last surviving nobleman’s “palazzo,” which contained many historic maps and documents (following a fortuitous meeting that occurred while I was wandering somewhat aimlessly about town), to stumbling across an abandoned and almost entirely overgrown settlement near the Aventino River (which I finally noticed only after having walked countless times along a nearby road). These discoveries were exciting, inspired

the development of my research, and helped, little by little, to increase the complexity, resolution, and coherency of my understanding of the study area.

As I gained my bearings in this way, the more formal aspect of the research took clearer shape, and I began to experiment with a number of methods of revealing the visual nature of the boundaries of my study area through photography (and by extension, also the visual arts, including sketching and painting). I also sought out stories and folklore that would help to uncover more subtly hidden boundaries within the study area, including recent ones that while in plain view often escaped my unaided attention. Many documentary sources surfaced (some in rather surprising places, such as residents' homes), which greatly assisted my attempts to detect boundaries of both the recent and deep past – such as former property lines and political borders, half-buried or forgotten Roman walls and roads, and the ex-routes of transhumance.

I soon came face to face with the problematic fact that the closer I examined the study area, the number of boundaries within it tended to proliferate endlessly. I realized that as an outsider without assistance from local residents, certain boundaries would remain largely hidden from me, while other boundaries, without recourse to historical documents studied in the field in the manner that Sauer recommends, would either remain obscured beyond simple recognition or invite avoidable misinterpretations. Through a combination of these approaches and by simply walking the land over and over again, I attempted to train my perceptive-analytical abilities to better identify and understand the manifold boundaries (both prominent and hidden) within the surrounding vernacular landscape. These edges appeared in various guises, which I often loosely grouped in

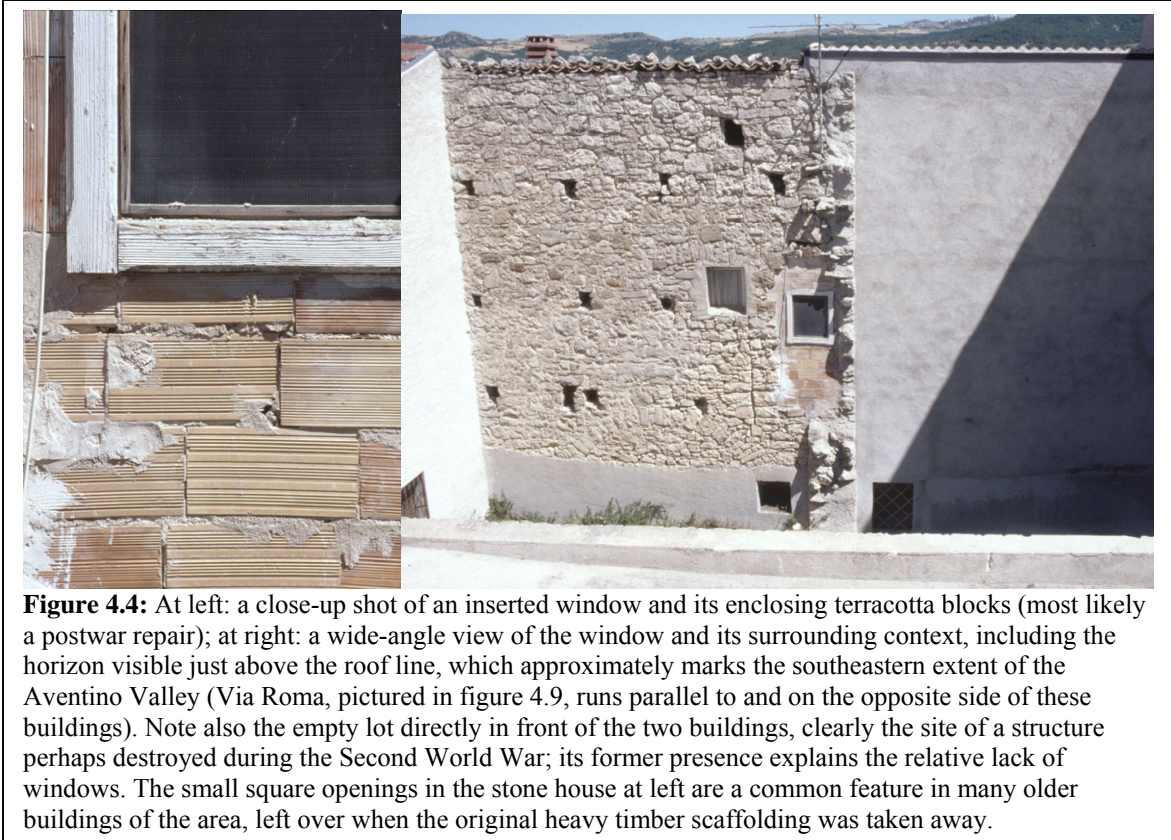


Figure 4.3: Line of travel through the oldest quarter of Lama, uphill towards the Majella and the rest of town, in a series of four consecutive photographs; the small white circles connected by thin grey lines indicate points in common. Details and overviews of this area also appear in figures 2.5, 2.9, 2.14, and 3.11

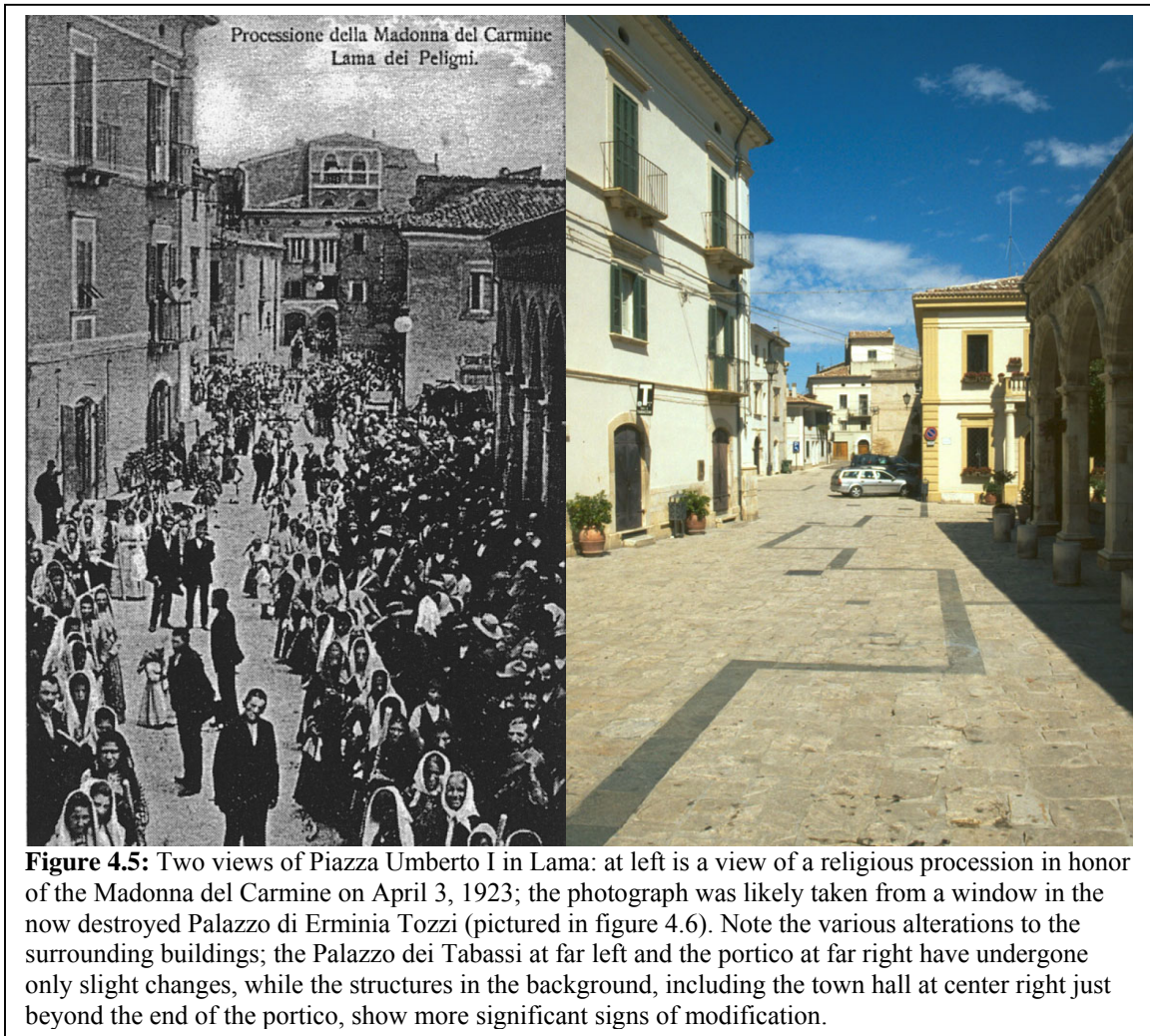
seemingly disparate pairings based on defining characteristics, such as the political and natural, urban and rural, historic and actual, public and private, and visible and invisible.

The graphic techniques that I employed to better comprehend and conceptually organize the plethora of boundaries encountered during my research included the pairing of photographs, maps, drawings, and paintings (some examples of which are illustrated in the preceding three chapters). These techniques greatly helped to hone my landscape-reading abilities and provided me with a more coherent sense of the spatial layout of the study area. This was especially the case once I returned home and had extended periods of time to carefully study and sometimes sketch the images and maps that I had collected in the field – often finding in the process connections previously overlooked while actually framing a shot or focusing my attention upon a few, randomly selected details of the surrounding panorama.

One of the first techniques that I employed, conceptualized before entering the field, entails the shooting of a series of photographs along a line of travel by foot; each photograph in the series contains an element in its background that then appears in the foreground of the proceeding photograph. I shot many of these, including routes through various neighborhoods in both Lama dei Peligni and Colledimacine, and from the summit of the Majella massif to the valley floor (see figure 4.3). In addition to helping orient the potential outsider-reader, these series forced me to slowly examine paths of movement through the space of the study area – focusing my attention on many nearly imperceptible shifts in the color, construction, age, and contents of the landscape. Also, these photographs often proved valuable later on as individual shots – which I would have never otherwise thought at the time to have taken.



Another, related technique, which I developed in the field, is the pairing of close-up photographs of boundaries with perspective photographs containing the surrounding context of the same boundaries. Its practice better attuned my perception of the surrounding landscape – especially to small-scale details that would otherwise have captured only minor attention at the time, and would have certainly almost entirely escaped my memory later on. Close-up photographs of such features as stone and brick walls helped me to imagine everything from former techniques of wall construction to identify such surprising details as fossils of former marine life embedded in limestone blocks; accompanying larger-scale photographs placed those details into overlying contexts I could recognize. An example of this is given in figure 4.4, in which a modern



window installed in an older stone dwelling is shown at close range, and then from far away.

Rephotography was especially helpful in gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the study area's former appearance. Finding historic photographs was a slow process, since I was able to locate only a few published in books. By chance I discovered some random, uncatalogued images in the town hall tucked between books, some hanging on the walls in residents' homes, some collected by the village priest in Lama, and some on curled postcards from the 1950s-1970s that were still for sale (being

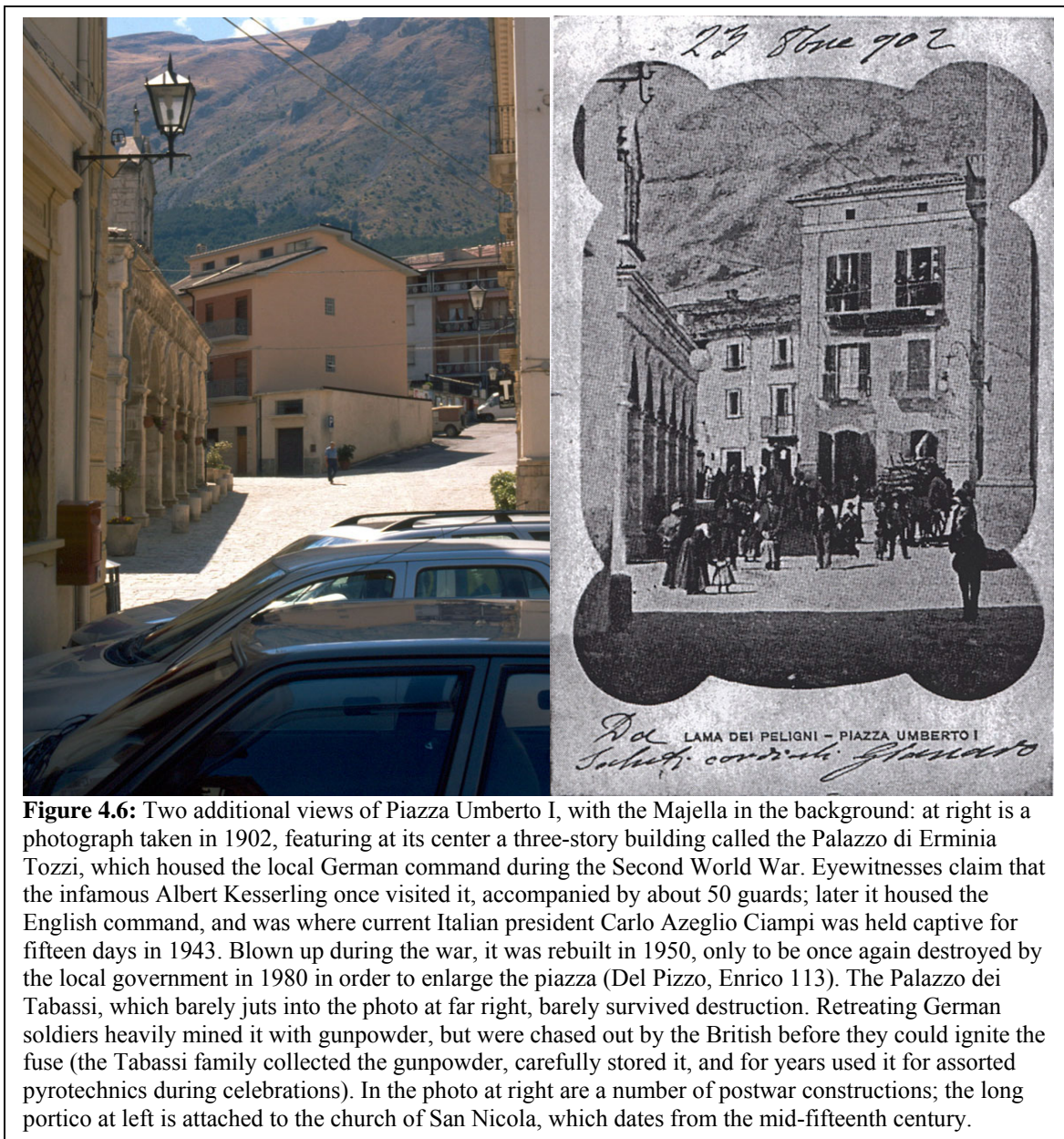
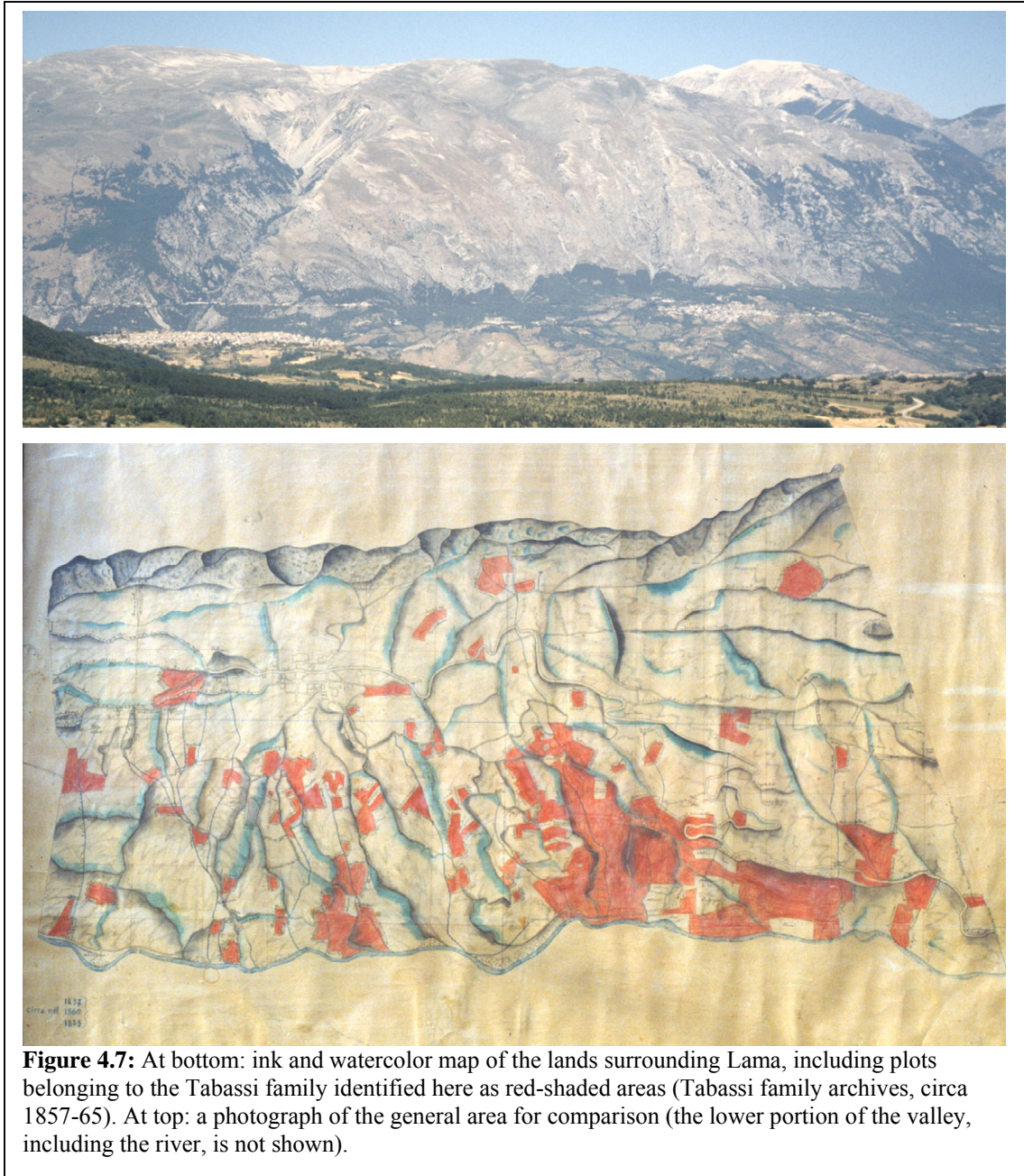
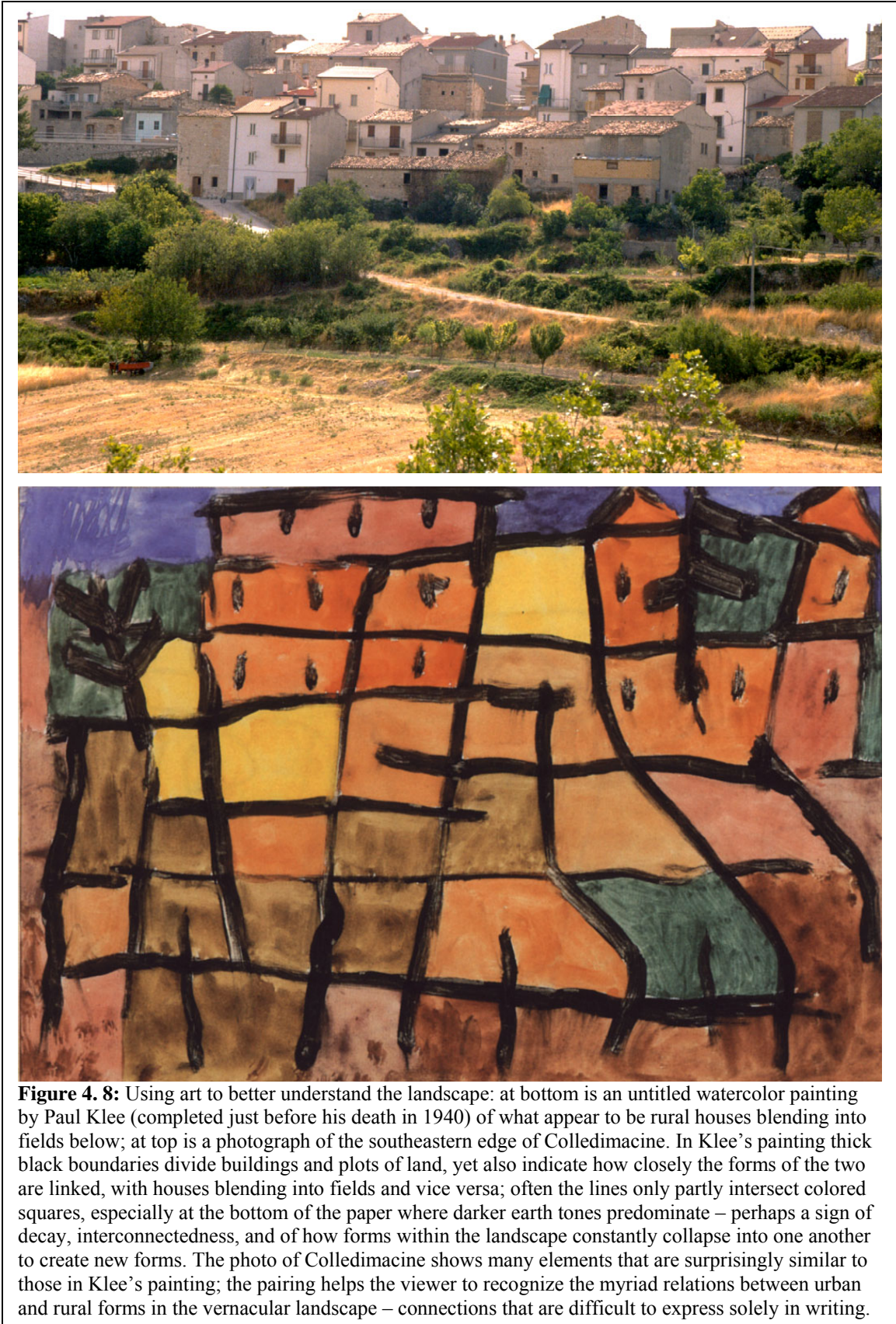


Figure 4.6: Two additional views of Piazza Umberto I, with the Majella in the background: at right is a photograph taken in 1902, featuring at its center a three-story building called the Palazzo di Erminia Tozzi, which housed the local German command during the Second World War. Eyewitnesses claim that the infamous Albert Kesserling once visited it, accompanied by about 50 guards; later it housed the English command, and was where current Italian president Carlo Azeglio Ciampi was held captive for fifteen days in 1943. Blown up during the war, it was rebuilt in 1950, only to be once again destroyed by the local government in 1980 in order to enlarge the piazza (Del Pizzo, Enrico 113). The Palazzo dei Tabassi, which barely juts into the photo at far right, barely survived destruction. Retreating German soldiers heavily mined it with gunpowder, but were chased out by the British before they could ignite the fuse (the Tabassi family collected the gunpowder, carefully stored it, and for years used it for assorted pyrotechnics during celebrations). In the photo at right are a number of postwar constructions; the long portico at left is attached to the church of San Nicola, which dates from the mid-fifteenth century.

rather unspectacular) at a local tobacconists. In order to accurately identify the locations of prewar images (many of which solely depicted now-demolished buildings), I needed to seek the help of older local residents. In their hands, these images in turn inspired the telling of many stories that helped give the photographs historical context and narrative depth (see figures 4.5 and 4.6).



The comparison of historic and current maps, alongside semi-aerial photographs (taken the upper slopes of nearby mountains) has been invaluable to learning to better read the landscape, especially those portions of it made nearly inaccessible by heavy undergrowth. The historic watercolor map shown in figure 4.7, which depicts the northwestern side of the valley surrounding Lama in the mid-1800s, was a particularly



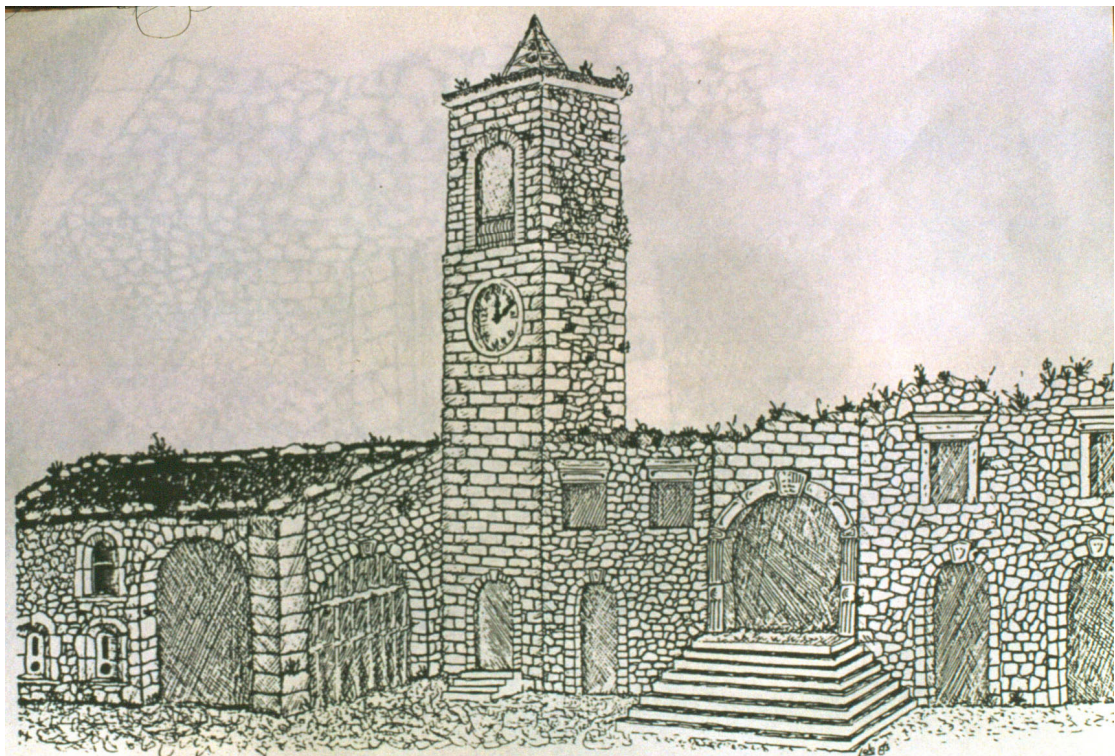


Figure 4.9: Two views of the same group of buildings facing Piazza Roma in Colledimacine: at top is a recent photograph, including a view down Via Roma to the south (with the outlines of the lower Monti Pizzi visible in the far distance); at bottom is an older resident's sketch done by memory of what the buildings looked like in the past, perhaps just after the Second World War (Falcone). Note the entirely rebuilt structures to the right and left of what is now an arched passageway, and the partially rebuilt structure to the left of the tower (the slotted opening at far left, perhaps designed to shoot arrows or guns through, was saved in the reconstruction; its twin to the right was bricked shut).

welcome find: my wife Manuela Mariani spotted it languishing in the dust atop a huge wardrobe while I was talking to Baron Tabassi in his palazzo. We were graciously allowed to take the framed map outside in the dying daylight to photograph it at close range (using a polarized filter to reduce glare). Comparing it to recent photographs and maps of the valley throws into relief many former aspects of the landscape, from disused roads and overgrown springs to largely abandoned settlements (such as Purgatorio near the Aventino River).

I have also used art to better understand the study area, comparing current photographic views with abstract landscape paintings (in large part by Paul Klee), and with local artists' renderings of both former and present versions of their surroundings (see figures 4.8 and 4.9). Klee's art has particularly helped me to recognize subtle patterns in the landscape, including the relations between urban and rural landscape uses, and the mutable appearance of boundaries both within human- and nonhuman-built environments – such as intricate “centripetal” road patterns (Jackson, *Discovering* 22-24). Local artists' work has been invaluable, helping especially to give a better sense of culturally important sites (beyond the monumental), and to envision what particular buildings and areas used to look like.

Most recently, I have assembled groups of three photographs of a particular locale taken from differing angles and distances, whose connections are illustrated through the identification of one or two ubiquitous details – such as the corners of buildings, trees, or rocky outcroppings. These details are marked with faint white circles in each photograph; the circles are then connected by thin grey lines. The technique opens up potentially flat photographs from two- to three-dimensions by encouraging micro-macro readings and by



Figure 4.10: Three photographs of the same area of Colle taken from differing angles and distances; the small white circles connected by thin grey lines indicate points in common, and help orient the viewer.

shifting range, scale, and perspective. It at once slows down time and directs the viewer's attention to the intense variability of a space's teeming appearances depending on position. Although this sort of graphic representation requires sustained attention and high resolution images on quality photographic to properly function, it can give effective hints of the illusive and intimate, multidimensional quality of what Lefebvre calls "spaces of representation" (*The Production* 33, 39) (see figure 4.10).

My experiences setting up and conducting interviews in order to gather narrative accounts and descriptions of the study area is best illustrated by telling a story. It recounts in somewhat imaginative yet pared-down fashion the first few days that I spent in Lama attempting to gain bearings by talking to people about the landscape. The stories told by a number of generous and considerate residents made me feel welcome, and helped reveal many subtle aspects of the study area, including hard-to-detect boundaries and differing surface content through time – from vegetation to buildings. Moreover, by listening to the recollections, concerns, and plans of local residents, I was able to envision – however temporarily and incompletely – what it might be like to actually live in the Aventino Valley. Indeed, one of the most lasting lessons that these stories brought was the importance of listening to uninterrupted local inhabitants' voices, which in turn bring both the following story and this chapter to an end (and by extension – in the form of an appendix containing a wide selection of interviews – also this thesis).

First Days of Fieldwork (A Slightly Fictionalized Account)¹⁵

The young man, who was not from that place, struck up a conversation with two workmen who were getting into a small car. He said that he was in search of stories of what the landscape used to be like, and asked where he could find some. The workmen said they did not know many stories, but that if the young man went to the church at the convent above the village for early morning mass, there he would find many old women who would be sure to know stories about the past. Waving, they drove off down the steep hill.

Above the young man's head was blue sky with strips of cloud slowly dissipating to the east, formed briefly over the large mountain upon whose slopes the village was built, but whose summit, too high and set back, remained always hidden from view.

The valley below, in the direction of the workmen's descent, seemed a vast scrub forest with faint stonewalls, the former patchwork of fields now long overgrown, and at bottom, the undulating windings of shadow and taller trees within which lay the river.

Looking long and hard through the heat-haze, the young man could make out what he thought were the ruins of houses lying amidst the thick vegetation. To get a better look, feeling assured that the next day at least he would have a chance at collecting some stories, he made his way down on foot into the valley along a narrow asphalt road

¹⁵ All of the events described in this short account actually occurred, but with some omissions and in somewhat different order: after the church scene I actually met a nobleman from Lama who was looking for rosemary (an encounter that I will describe later); also, I was told the exclamatory stories by the ex-shepherds a number of days later on, not the second day. I have taken this license to slightly fictionalize my experiences partially in the spirit of Gianni Celati, who writes that “[w]e believe that everything that people do from morning to night is an effort to come up with a credible account of the outside world, one that will make it bearable to at least some extent. We also think that this is a fiction, but a fiction in which it is necessary to believe. There are worlds of narrative at every point of space, appearances that alter at every blink of the eyes: they require above all a way of thinking and imaging the world that is not paralyzed by contempt for everything around us” (Ghirri 33); this story first appeared in *Ecopoetics* 2 (Fall 2002): 23-26.

with almost no traffic. In the half hour it took to reach the bottom, only a young boy on a smoking moped and an old man in a small white car passed by. The number of travelers in that time almost matched that of cultivated fields, which were no more than four. The rest was a wild mix of vines, young oaks, wild olive trees, grasses, flowers, and bushes of many types, all tightly woven together.

Beyond this edge, the young man could see little of the landscape, which was now also filled with the wavering, screeching of cicadas.

The river was about thirty feet wide and filled with a steady but shallow rush of very cold water. He slowly made his way upstream, relieved somewhat at this exit from the road and entrance into the valley's very bottom. Large boulders lay in the water and along the banks, which were composed of rough clay, gravel, and the occasional bunch of willow shrubs. It seemed as if the river had changed course frequently, and perhaps also flooded recently. Nothing that grew seemed very well rooted, and the banks were often worn down to the very earth.

At a certain point, the water suddenly diminished and thick vegetation dominated the riverbed. The land above, in the rough direction of the village, appeared to be recently abandoned fields. This attracted the young man, who thought that by cutting across he could reach the road and thereby see more of the elusive landscape.

Struggling up the steep riverbank, he found a narrow animal track and crept away from the river. Soon all trace of the path disappeared and he was forced to make his way through the brush. Although there were many spiny plants and woody vines with sharp edges, the young man was determined to cross. Breathing heavily and bleeding somewhat from scratches on his legs, he then came upon a wall of thorns. What had before seemed

to be old fields now showed few signs of that former use. He plunged ahead, hoping that the road was nearby. After crawling through a series of stamped-down holes, interspersed with moments of being completely entrapped, he found a large boulder barely rising above the vegetation. Sweating heavily and covered with many bloody scratches, he crept up onto its rocky surface.

From this vantage point, the young man could see only the same, thorny greenery extending in all directions broken by nothing but far-off trees and adjacent curvatures of the landscape. The river now seemed too distant to return to, especially considering what he would have to cross to get there. He felt a mixture of panic over his next step and relief at having found the boulder. When the lumpy surface he was sitting on became uncomfortable, he crept back into the brush, and again struggled uphill.

After much effort, he finally reached the road. Exhausted and mildly humiliated with himself, the young man felt the experience had proven that he really knew very little about this place. He could only walk along its roads and the river, beyond which he could see almost nothing. Proceeding in this manner, what could he possibly understand?

Early the next day he went to the church to try talking to the old women. His hopes were not high, mainly because he did not feel that comfortable about confronting people to collect stories.

He arrived just as the old women were entering the church, followed them, and sat in the back. During the initial chanting and ensuing mass, a few of the old women gave brief, quizzical looks in his direction. He felt out of place not only because he was a foreigner and had not attended church in years, but also because he was the only male in the room apart from the priest.

After the service ended, all of the old women got up and left rather quickly. The young man approached one of the stragglers, a very old, bent-over woman with a creeping gait. She seemed pleased with his company and began talking at once, but did not seem to hear or understand his questions. Nor did the young man understand what she was saying, because she spoke entirely in the village dialect. As they walked together, the old woman chatted amicably and the young man attempted to understand something, throwing in the odd “yes” and “oh” to not seem rude.

On his own again, the young man grew discouraged. Blocked the day before by the overgrown fields and today by an unknown language, the landscape and its people seemed frustratingly hidden. He could travel its edges, but not enter.

Later that morning, walking through the village, he met a number of other people, but they had little to say. Two elderly, self-described “old maids” heard his request for stories about what the landscape used to be like, but laughed and said, “No, no. We’re women. We don’t know much about that. We’ve always stayed at home. It’s better to talk to the men.” But the few old men he met said that they had moved to Germany and France just after the Second World War when the village was bombed, and had only recently returned. They said that they couldn’t remember much of what the place used to look like, and didn’t want to think about those hard times.

By lunchtime the shops were closed and the streets deserted. The young man went back to his rented room in an old house and took a nap, wondering why he had come.

Getting up with a headache, his room hot from the afternoon sun, he made a coffee and then went out again, but with no clear idea of what to do. He wandered the still-empty streets, and then rested in the shade of a small church. In a short while a

number of ex-shepherds sat down on the bench next to him. With little prompting, they began to talk:

“Before the war there were many sheep up on the mountain, and even some cows, even after the war for a while. I was a shepherd up there for 50 years. It was a beautiful life. And when we got old, there wasn’t even one young man who wanted to become a shepherd. They didn’t like it. They don’t like that sort of work anymore. Now they prefer to stay inside an office and write, have a car, mix with all the young ladies, all that sort of thing. But before, the world wasn’t so developed and people were used to different sorts of jobs.”

“Shepherding is a dirty job. But with fifty, one hundred head of sheep, you always had something to eat. Listen, always natural stuff. Animals that eat at that altitude, with fresh, clean air, have a good flavor. Natural meat, natural cheese. Because now if you go to one of those factories where they make cheese, it’s no good, they put in medicines.”

“It’s stuff you can eat, but it’s always medicated, all of that stuff. But raised up on the mountain, in the fresh air and good grass, brought immediately to the shops, THAT’S GOOD, that’s natural stuff, no medicines, nothing.”

“And now even the fruit, that’s full of medicines too, to keep it from going bad. Stuff to throw out. But now, in the countryside, without medicines, the fruit won’t come. The insects come and eat that flower, and every flower is a fruit!”

“And who wants to go to the moon! What the hell are you going to do there?! They’ve made many trips up there. Up there there’s not even a snake, not even a fly, there’s not anything up there . . . how can a person live up there? They

have to carry around a tank of oxygen. A bunch of countries got together to send men up there, and who knows why? If they find life up there, everyone can go. But there's NOTHING, and they'll never find ANYTHING! Because there's not even a snake, not even a bug, there's NOTH-, NOTH-, NOTHING! It's just a huge waste of money that'll never come back!"

Chapter 5: La Majella: “The Mother of Mountains”

Its earth and its people appeared to him transfigured, pulled from time, legendary and daunting, full of mysterious things, eternal and unnamable. A mountain arose from its center like a giant original fountainhead, breast-shaped, perpetually covered with snow; a mutable, somber sea bathed its sickle-shaped slopes and promontories sacred to the olive tree, carrying black or flame-colored sails. Paths wide as rivers, verdant with grass, scattered with boulders, and here and there marked by giant tracks, descended along the heights, leading the migrating herds to the plains below. There rites of dead and forgotten religions survived; incomprehensible symbols of long eclipsed powers remained intact; habits of archaic peoples persisted, transferred from generation to generation without change; rich, strange, and useless practices were there conserved as testimony to the nobility and beauty of a former life. (D’Annunzio 1154-56)¹⁶

The Majella is not a mountain whose shape is easily understood from afar. As one moves around it, at distances from its base varying from two hundred meters to ten kilometers, its summits remain largely hidden and its aspect constantly changes. It shows many faces, often appearing at intervals to the peripatetic outsider to have somehow transmogrified into another mountain altogether – a phenomenon seemingly confirmed by a number of early maps, which incorrectly show three or more large clusters of peaks separated by areas of blankness instead of the entire, overarching massif (see figures 5.1 and 5.2). On the other hand, to experience the Majella from only a limited area and at relatively low elevation is to become consumed with curiosity. For example, during the first two and a half months that I spent in Abruzzo in 1996, I could only form a vague idea of what the overall mountain might look like – due to the fact that from just about any position in the Aventino Valley only a small portion of it is visible, excluding a great

¹⁶ In this passage from “La terra d’Abruzzi” (The land of the Abruzzi), a section from the 1894 novel *Il trionfo della morte* (The triumph of death), Gabriele D’Annunzio describes the Majella from the point of view of the fictional character Giorgio Aurispa, an unquiet man who seeks spiritual and personal renewal in part by exploring his ties to the surrounding landscape, in particular the ancient and mysterious customs of its people (the pronoun “it” in the first two lines refers to Abruzzo). Of particular interest is his description of the wide tratturi (sheep tracks) of the upper Majella – today abandoned, overgrown, and for the most part impossible to individuate from afar.



Figure 5.1: Detail from a historic map (undated) that I found hanging on a wall of the Palazzo dei Tabassi in Lama dei Peligni. Here the Majella is erroneously drawn as comprising five distinct groupings of peaks, with what is presumably Monte Amaro at center left marking the path of a dotted territorial boundary, two smaller groups of peaks above it near Caramanico, another group situated between Palena and Lama, and a large massing of mountainous terrain below Guardiagrele. The error may have been due to the difficulty of comprehending the shape and position of the Majella from the ground, the mountain's tendency to present a multiplicity of faces (and thus seemingly dissimilar identities), and the indiscriminant borrowing by the cartographer of earlier (and inaccurate) written and graphic accounts of the area. Note that the name "Lama" seems to have been added to the map later by hand, perhaps by a member of the Tabassi family (it is at a slight angle, and lacks the design of a building featured next to all other indicated urban centers).

deal of its upper reaches and highest peak, Monte Amaro.

As the weeks passed, I grew ever more impatient to "get to the top" so that I could better understand the steep slopes that constantly and mysteriously loomed to the northwest. I eventually finished work with the camps in August and then hiked to Monte Acquaviva (2737 m) from the northern point of the Majelletta (Little Majella). While my immediate desire to obtain perspective was appeased, my curiosity was only deepened by



Figure 5.2: “Aprvtii Vltterioris Descriptio”: 1590 map of ulterior Abruzzo (Maestri). The Majella here appears as a roughly conical, double-peaked mountain at bottom center, with what appears to be a red boundary line running through its middle (or perhaps running invisibly beyond it, indicating the Pescara River, which flows along its northern edge). The other impressively sized mountains just south of the Majella may in fact be apart of it, and here mistakenly identified as distinct peaks (in similar fashion to the map in figure 5.1); however, with a chorographic map of such artistic nature, it is hard to tell.

what I saw: a seemingly unending chain of deep valleys and distant peaks woven together in a tortuous expanse of ridges capped by gleaming white limestone talus and fringed by plunging slopes of interspersed dense vegetation and rocky outcroppings.

Because the Majella is an incredibly complex, compact clustering of 61 peaks and 75 hills conjoined by steep ridges and upland plains, and covers over 250 square kilometers, the sensation that it is “not one but many” smacks of the truth: in fact, the Majella is widely considered to be at once a single mountain as well as a “unified” group



Figure 5.3: Aerial view of the northeastern corner of the Majella, showing the walls of the Murelle rising crookedly between the Montagna di Ugni and the various gorges and valleys above Pennapiedimonte (photo by Roberto Monasterio [Pellegrini 106-07]). The upper corner of the Aventino Valley is just visible at upper left; what appears to be snow along the upper ridges and summits is actually gleaming white limestone talus. The photo helps to give an idea of the extreme complexity of the Majella, especially considering that this view shows a relatively restricted portion of the massif.

of peaks. While individual summits are loosely identifiable at upper elevations, distinctions between them are rapidly lost as one progresses towards the base. From the air (or in the minds of those who know it well, having explored it from many sides) the Majella appears to be, as D’Annunzio describes it, a single “giant original fountainhead”; whereas, on the ground it stymies any such unifying vision with its maze of intertwined slopes, cliffs, valleys, canyons, ridges, upland plains, and summits.

An indication of this multiplicity, three common cartographic terms for it are: “Il Gruppo della Majella,” (The Majella Group), “Monte Majella” (Mount Majella), and “Il Massiccio della Majella” (The Majella Massif). Locals, on the other hand, prefer to

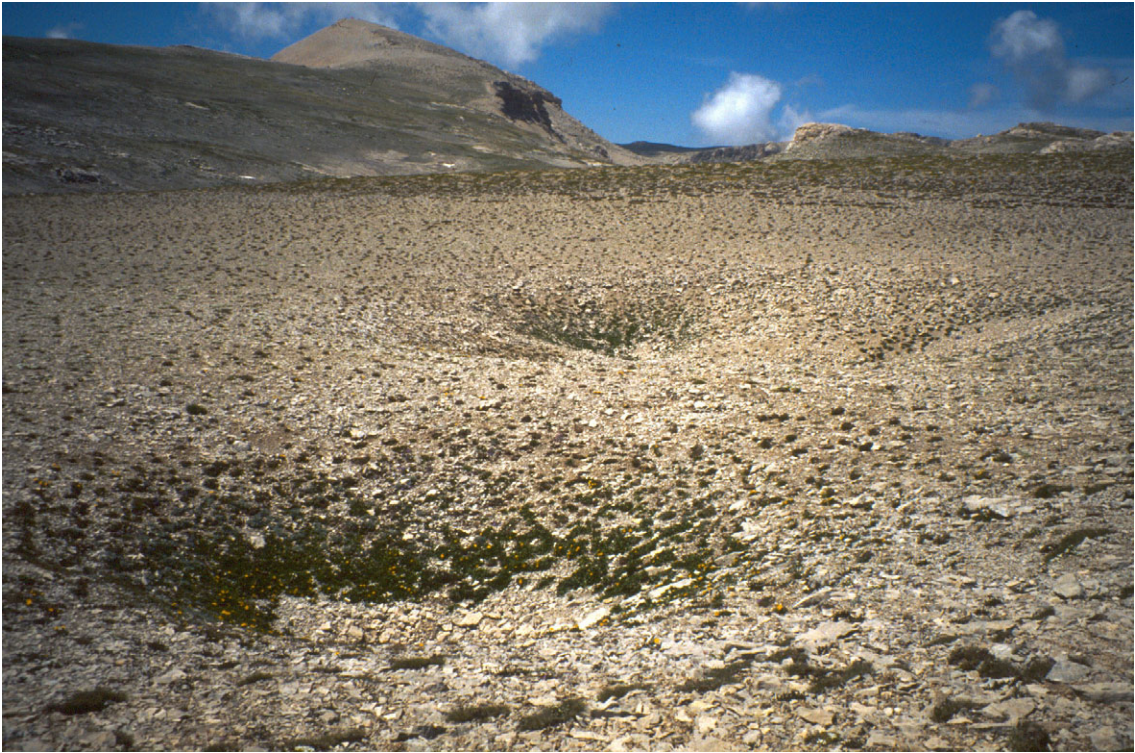


Figure 5.4: View of Monte Amaro (2793 m) and the rocky upland plain leading to it from the east, including a number of small dolines in the foreground ringed with concentrated patches of small, orange-flowering plants sustained by the recent snowmelt (and occasional, draining rainfall).

simply call it “La Majella,” or sometimes, perhaps stemming in part from the ancient pagan traditions to which D’Annunzio refers above, “La Madre Montagna” (The Mother Mountain).¹⁷ Ringed by numerous snaking ridges and deeply cut canyons, whose upper ends extend out of sight to eventually meld with one another at hidden rocky apexes, the Majella exudes a distinctly mysterious air – giving the impression that the surrounding lands and peoples are in fact its “offspring.”

Determining the exact extent and nature of the Majella is no easy task. As Fernand Braudel writes at the beginning of his magisterial *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, that in any attempt to define the mountains



Figure 5.5: View to the east (in the direction of the Aventino Valley, and eventually, the Adriatic Sea) of the boulder-strewn, karstic landscape near Monte Amaro; note the trail (CAI #1) meandering from bottom right to center right, which leads to Grotta Canosa, where a turn onto another, mostly overgrown trail (CAI #10), eventually leads to Lama.

of the Mediterranean Basin (of which the Majella is a prime example), “[w]hat should be reckoned are the uncertain human boundaries which cannot be easily shown on a map” (30).¹⁸ He rejects the proposal of drawing a line at 500 meters, above which all land would be considered mountainous, as “completely arbitrary” (30), and later states that “[i]n many cases it would be difficult to mark precisely, on a map, where the zone of

¹⁷ As Tim Jepson notes, “[t]he name Maiella is probably derived from Maia, mother of the god Mercury (Hermes in classical Greece), who was widely worshiped in the Adriatic” (149).

¹⁸ In *The Mediterranean* Braudel seeks to reverse the typical ordering process of “traditional” history and its priorities. Instead of initially focusing on individual human acts and events, such as wars and elections, he backs up and insists on beginning with what he terms the *histoire de longue durée* – the domain of humanity’s “biological, geo-physical and climatic circumstances, of humanity and its intimate relationship to the earth which bears and feeds it” (Clark 183). Only after addressing these critical factors of environmental features, physical surroundings, and climate, together with the patterns of human movement, settlement and communication produced by them, does the work move on to deal with five to



Figure 5.6: Doline with a small, fast-melting pocket of snow near Monte Amaro at midday; view is to the north (July 11, 2001).

lowland villages – often real towns – ends and the zone of mountain hamlets . . . begins” (32). This is certainly true of the Majella, whose slopes host many small urban centers, such as Lama dei Peligni and Colledimacine, which would be hard to classify as either mountain hamlets or lowland villages (they are, in fact, something in between the two). Along the Majella’s erratic base, myriad examples of Braudel’s “uncertain human boundaries” constantly crisscross from mountainous to lower-lying areas and back again – as well as run unpredictable, meandering paths upwards towards thinner air and snow.

Intimate fieldwork is clearly required to meaningfully track these edges, which contain traces of not only what D’Annunzio describes as the “rites of dead and forgotten religions” and the “habits of archaic peoples,” but also exiled elements in refuge from, as

fifty year trends of human economies, social structures, and political institutions. Individual human actors, the instant and the immediate, come last.



Figure 5.7: View of the upland plain directly to the southeast of Monte Amaro, in the direction of the Aventino Valley: the plain's sunlit edges to the right and left meeting in a large "V" form the uppermost apex of boundaries of the Comune di Lama (this furthest northwestern portion of the comune is visible on the map shown in figure 3.5).

well as nascent kernels ready to descend upon, lower-lying human civilization (sometimes these last two are the same, such as in the case of political revolutionaries and religious subversives). As Braudel mockingly writes, "[m]ore than one historian who has never left the towns and their archives would be surprised to discover [the mountains'] existence. And yet how can one ignore these conspicuous actors, the half-wild mountains, where man has taken root like a hardy plant; always semi-deserted, for man is constantly leaving them? How can one ignore them when often their sheer slopes come right down to the sea's edge?" (30).

I cannot help but agree with Braudel's assertion that "mountains come first," and in keeping with this central idea, here begin a route of more detailed analysis of the study area at its highest reaches (25). More specifically, my objective in this chapter is to



Figure 5.8: View of the immense, partially glacially-formed Valle di Femmina Morta (Valley of the Dead Woman), which is about 5 km in length and ranges from 1/4 to 1 km in width, ending in a giant doline approximately 1/2 km in diameter (photo is taken just to the right of figure 5.7). Note the irregular boundary formed along its left (or eastern) side by the lighter-colored, upper talus slopes struggling to maintain their angle of repose, and their lower, darker-colored bases just level enough to support patchy vegetation, which extends across the valley; this effect is inversely duplicated along the right (or western) edge, which descends precipitously towards the Montagne del Morrone, Pacentro, and eventually Sulmona. Down the middle of the valley runs a path closely paralleling the bottom of the karstically-eroded valley (which can be imagined as an elongated, meandering doline).

provide as accurate and suggestive a sketch of the Majella as possible by both examining it in the context of selected mountain-lore and also by focusing on its dual functions as both a large boundary and as a container of boundaries. In addition, I here initiate a gradual, southeastern path of movement from the top of the Majella to Lama, the bottom of the Aventino Valley, and then Colledimacine – in essence simulating a slow, circuitous journey across the study area by foot. In the previous four chapters I have provided numerous, zooming and spot-focused descriptions of the study area aimed at general orientation. In this and the proceeding three, I slow the pace down and center my attention upon specific zones in more sustained discussions of higher resolution.



Figure 5.9: View of the inner Valle di Femmina Morta, approaching its southern end (the portion furthest from the photographer in figure 5.8). Note the shadows cast by the setting sun hitting the valley's western ridge, running over and parallel to the trail; to the left is the dry and porous valley bottom.

The Meaning of Mountains

What do mountains mean to people? While there is no easy answer to this question, mountains are widely considered (by cultures around the world) as potentially and variously imposing, impenetrable, sacred, dangerous, sublime, unsightly, uninhabitable, beautiful, tumultuous, peaceful, and unpredictable phenomena. They are home to strange upland animals and plants, and are where soil runs thin and the rocky bones of the earth wildly cascade, splay, or jut out in chaotic arrays. They provide temporary (sometimes turning to permanent) refuge to persecuted groups of people, social misfits, and ascetic-



Figure 5.10: View to the east of the southern end of the Valle di Femmina Morta, which extends gradually upward to the left (or north): a giant, partially sunlit sinkhole basin, filled with a patchwork of many smaller dolines, and measuring roughly 1/2 km in diameter. A path taken directly ahead to the east crossing the far edge of this basin, then turning to the southeast, would lead down a steep, 2000 meter drop to the bottom of the Aventino Valley between Taranta Peligna and Lettopalena, directly below Colledimacine.

minded seekers of spiritual mediation. Embodied by contrasts, they at once protect and destroy, block out and close in, hold up and push down. As Yi-Fu Tuan writes,

[a]t an early stage in human history, the mountain was viewed with awe. It towered above the peopled plains; it was remote, difficult to approach, dangerous, and unassimilable to the workaday needs of man. People in widely different parts of the world regarded the mountain as the place where sky and earth met. It was the central point, the world's axis, the place impregnated with sacred power where the human spirit could pass from one cosmic level to another. (*Topophilia* 70)

Anne Spirn writes in similar fashion that “[m]ountains, in many cultures, are where gods and humans meet, the axis mundi where earth raises to meet sky, where the human is dwarfed into insignificance, where otherworldly light seems to glow” (142). Henri Lefebvre adds that “between what is above (mountains, highlands, celestial beings) and what is below (in grottos or caves) lie the surfaces of the sea and of earth’s flatlands,



Figure 5.11: Striated lines of rocky debris created by severe frost-heaving, interspersed with cushions of mixed yellow, orange, green, and purple alpine flowers: a natural mediation garden at the upper heights of the Majella, near Monte Amaro.

which thus constitute planes (or plains) that serve to both separate and to unite the heights and the depths. Here is the basis of representations of the Cosmos.” (*The Production* 194).

In the case of the Majella, Lefebvre’s commentary is particularly apt, considering the mountain’s sprawling network of caves (many of which remain largely unexplored). This includes the immense Grotta del Cavallone, whose gaping mouth at 1475 meters in elevation is couched at the base of a cliff whose top forms the boundary between the Comune di Lama and Comune di Taranta Peligna. The subject of folklore as well as an important reference in D’Annunzio’s tragic play *La figlia di Iorio* (Iorio’s Daughter, 1904), the cave snakes its way gradually downward towards the mountain’s center, and is accessible by foot along paths and footbridges for about one kilometer; once inside, after



Figure 5.12: View down the Valle di Taranta, which ranges approximately from 1/4 to 1 kilometer in width, and from 150 to 300 meters in depth. The entrance to the Grotta del Cavallone is tucked between the two massive, shadowed cliffs just above and left of center; the trail leading to it is visible as light-tan, diagonal line leading up to the bottom edge of the cliff at left. The ridgeline above (at upper left) forms the territorial boundary between the Comune di Lama and the Comune di Taranta. A portion of Taranta is visible below; beyond it lies the upper Aventino Valley including the lower portion of the Comune di Colledimacine.

climbing up over 170 steps carved into the mountainside to reach the mouth, the visitor encounters peculiar phenomena such as the “galleria della devastazione” (tunnel of devastation) which, as Jepson notes, is “a fantastic complex of fissures and fractured rock, [and] provides evidence of major subterranean upheavals in the past. Piles of fallen stalactites lie on its floor, some massed like unicorn’s horns, others starting to grow anew in bizarre and mutant forms. Lakelets, springs and waterfalls complete a highly theatrical effect” (151).¹⁹ One can only guess at the unusual experiences of local villagers who used

¹⁹ Because the cave’s mouth and the small cableway that carries visitors to it from the parking lot just off the Via Frentana fall within the Comune di Taranta, but the cave itself is almost entirely underneath the Comune di Lama, the cave is cooperatively managed by citizens from both towns.



Figure 5.13: View of the upper Valle di Taranta. The vantage point of this photo is only a few meters uphill from the one in figure 5.12. Note the scattered patches of mid-July snow at upper left, and the sparse vegetation covering the immediate foreground, which is approximately 1600 meters in elevation. From this point, the long trail to Monte Amaro (still over 1000 vertical meters and 8 kilometers away), parallels the meandering edge of this valley to its top; from there, it crosses a seemingly unending series of steep, upland plains and rocky outcroppings. The summit of Monte Amaro only becomes visible at around 2500 meters in elevation.

the cave as a refuge from hostile invaders in the past, including during the Second World War. Its depths must have seemed at once a frightening and disorienting mundus full of dangers, and at the same time, a welcoming and womb-like (if cold and wet) den blocking out potentially fatal aggression. It must also have been entirely uncertain in the minds of refugees whether they would eventually emerge, reborn upon the earth's surface, or be forever swallowed by the mountain, taken back by the land from which they had originated.

In odd parallel to these imagined extremes, Tuan surveys various aesthetic responses to mountains in a number of early cultures, from the Hebrews who “beheld

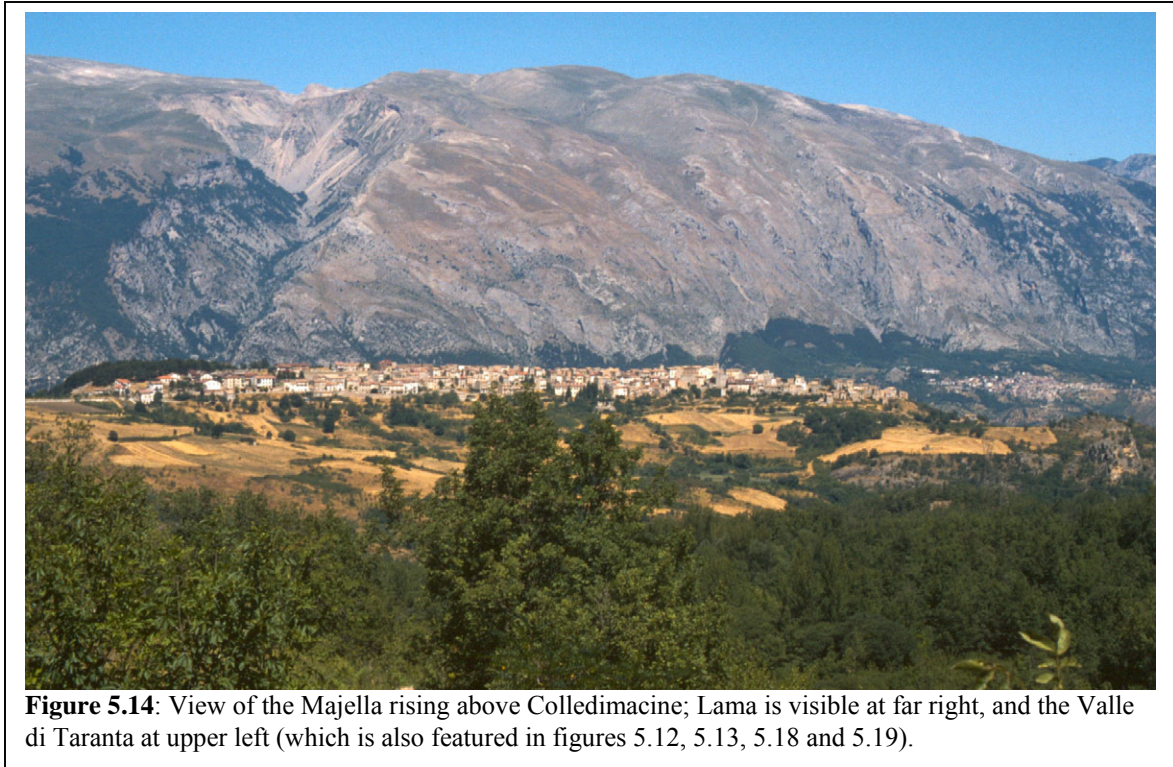


Figure 5.14: View of the Majella rising above Colledimacine; Lama is visible at far right, and the Valle di Taranta at upper left (which is also featured in figures 5.12, 5.13, 5.18 and 5.19).

them in confidence . . . as an index of the divine,” to the Greeks and Chinese who “viewed them with fear and aversion” (*Topophilia* 71). He then outlines a general sequence of shifting attitudes towards mountains over time (roughly held in common between China and the Occident), characterized by a change “from a religious attitude in which awe was combined with aversion, to an aesthetic attitude that shifted from a sense of the sublime to a feeling for the picturesque, to the modern evaluation of mountains as a recreational resource” (71).

The full range of these varying sensibilities can be detected in the past and present local populations surrounding the Majella, as well as in the heads of most outside observers – albeit in more abstract and distanced form. As “Brother Pio,” a resident of Lanciano, remarks to Donald Hall, “[t]here are legends for ever of the Maiella. It is feared for the storms that come from it; it is almost worshipped by the Abruzzesi, but it is



Figure 5.15: Aerial view of the steep and rocky Valle di Santo Spirito, which extends upward from the village of Fara San Martino at bottom left, home to the well known De Cecco pasta factory, which provides work to many residents of the Aventino Valley; the upper, more gradual Valle di Macchia Lunga, begins where the heavily forested slopes connect to form a flatter valley floor (photo by Roberto Monasterio [Pellegrini 157]). See also figures 2.10-2.12, 3.13, 5.20, and 5.21, which show more detailed views of the area.

also loved. In a sense it is still a mountain of sacrifice, which they say it once was” (Hall 42). Pushed to extremes, even a modern, well-educated person from an industrialized nation, with at minimum the vaguest agnostic tendencies, is capable of experiencing a mixture of spiritual fear and awe when encountering the mountain’s full range of powers



Figure 5.16: A cluster of four species of alpine flowers growing on the slopes of the Majella at about 2500 meters in elevation, rooted in a pocket of thin soil and calcareous rubble.

at close range. Stand long enough upon the actual edge of a summit featured in a postcard, and the picturesque may suddenly change into the sublime (or at least the panoramic). View the mountain with the current needs of its local population in mind accompanied by a pragmatic and generally ecologically-friendly point of view, and its most recent manifestation as a national park (and source of tourism-generated revenue) suddenly starts to make sense. Although this last, more rational vision of the mountain would be the most likely to occur in such a person's mind, the first two attitudes would without doubt lurk in the shadows of the consciousness, waiting to emerge in a moment of stress, elation, or doubt. To fully perceive a mountain is to be assailed by contrasting and competing thoughts and emotions, some with roots in the deep past and some of

relatively recent origin. As Anne MacDonell writes,

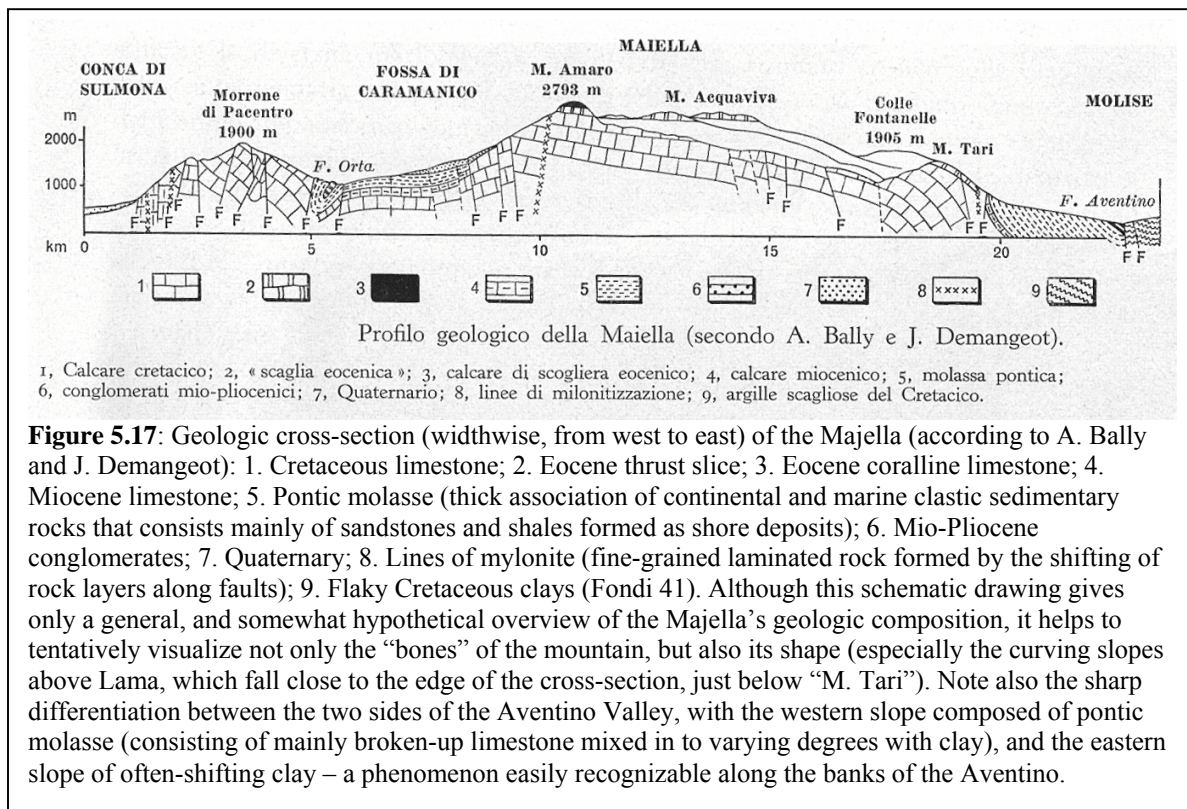
this land of peak and pit, of range and gully, red-brown as from the fires of a still kindled furnace, full of unquiet shapes of great silence, has its surprises for us. . . . sudden, the wilderness blossoms like a rose, and what seems like a hillside in the Inferno may prove the wall that guards an exquisite flowering cloister garden; or above some valley of uttermost desolation a cloud lifts, and we descry the hills of heaven. Many a time do we climb up and are hurled down ere we stand on the last height, some crag of the Majella, and look over the narrow strip of plain to the eastern sea. (2)

Physical Make-up

Emerging from the vast area falling between Pescara and the Aventino Valley, the Caramanico trough fault, and the undulating heights of the sub-Apennine Frentano, the Majella appears as an immense and irregular, anticlinal bulge, folded over upon itself in numerous directions (Fondi 40). It is marked by a gigantic 1600 meter fault to the west and another, reversed/thrust fault to the east on top of which Lama dei Peligni is roughly situated (Pellegrini 104).²⁰ The massif measures about thirty kilometers in length, and ranges in width from eight to twenty; its stretch from north to south is something of an anomaly in the Apennines, which in general are characterized by clusters of chains running lengthwise from the northwest to southeast – a consequence of the shifting and overstep of plates from the southwest to northeast during Miocene and Pliocene orogenesis (102).

The Majella is in large part formed of Tertiary materials, whose principal mass is composed of nummulitic Eocene limestone resting upon a heavily fault-ridden, Cretaceous limestone base (Fondi 40). The massif's current, rough form emerged for the

²⁰ However, as Gerardo Massimi notes, this eastern edge of the Majella could also be viewed as the front or face of its principal overstep (Pellegrini 104).



most part during the Pliocene, the result of a series of tectonic paroxysms alternated with periods of stasis, each leaving what are now jumbled signs of sudden growth and slow wearing away (Pellegrini 104). During this period, which was characterized by a predominantly arid climate, much of the karstic phenomena slowed to a near halt, accompanied by some fossilization; with the beginning in the Pleistocene, karstification renewed its vigorous role in shaping the mountain, theoretically intensifying during and just after periods of glaciation (107-08).

Traces of ancient marine life can be found at various locations on the mountain, including sharks' teeth embedded in a broken layer of concretized sediment jumbled with rocky debris and soil on the west flank (which, based on a hint from a friend, we eventually and victoriously found after hours of searching while surrounded by swarms



Figure 5.18: View of the Majella from the east (here presented in a series of three photos joined together, taken from the western edge of Colledimacine); note the Valle di Taranta at center, Lama at center right, and the mudflow at bottom left extending towards the center. The cross-section given in figure 5.17 runs down the middle of the Valle di Taranta in a direct line away from the photographer; the deeply incised valleys and canyons of the Majella have clearly aided geologists in determining the age and nature of the massif's lower strata.

of black flies). Also common are fossils of numerous hard-shelled, soft-bodied creatures (somewhat resembling current day mollusks), which can be found at various points throughout the massif, including along a number of ridges in the vicinity of the Cima delle Murelle.

Evidence of karstic activity, easily visible on all sides and summits of the Majella, includes various caves, dolines, underground streams, fissures, valleys, and canyons. Well into summer, patches of snow are commonly encountered resting on the north-facing edges of rifts and dolines, especially near the base of Monte Amaro. While walking the perimeters of some of these dolines during a hike in 2001, I couldn't help but imagine the strange paths of underground streams beginning at their gravelly drains and descending through the mountain, often emerging only at the bottom of bordering valleys. My experience teaching kayaking in the Aventino River is indelibly etched in my memory if for no other reason than the extremely cold snowmelt pouring forth from the mountain at its base: much of the water in which I had to stand thigh-deep for hours



Figure 5.19: Aerial view from the 1960s of the eastern flank of the Majella, showing the Valle di Taranta at center, Taranta Peligna at the valley's base, and Lama at center right (located where the Via Frentana appears to terminate) (photograph by J. Demangeot [Fondi 48]). Note also the wide, concave depression at bottom left, a sign of an immense landslide that occurred perhaps in late Roman times (a portion of the nearby village of Lettopalena is visible at bottom center); visible in this photo, zigzagging across the site of the landslide, is a now-abandoned path, formerly used as a tratturo (sheep track) providing access to the mountain for Lettopalena's herds. This site is also visible in figure 5.18 as a grey, vaguely trapezoidal shape covered with recent, patchy vegetation, located to the left of the sutured edge of the far left two photographs.

while my torso cooked in the sun, gushed out from a large spring located only a few hundred meters upstream.

Due to the close proximity of the Adriatic Sea, the exposure to masses of anticyclonic, relatively dry air, and the massif's moderate height (which was probably 200-300 meters lower during the Pleistocene), glaciation was likely somewhat subdued



Figure 5.20: View to the northwest in the late afternoon of the upper Valle di Macchia Lunga; note Cima dell'Altare (Altar Peak, 2542 m) at upper left, whose pulpit-like shape and commanding position clearly inspired its naming; in the distance at upper center is Monte Sant'Angelo (2669 m); at upper far right, is the lower of the two peaks of Monte Acquaviva.

and largely restricted to higher elevations; the exact range of glaciation is difficult to determine due to a number of interrelated reasons, including the dome-shaped overall summit encircled by very steep slopes that are poorly adapted to glacial formation, as well as the confusion caused by the abundance of Pleistocene breccia (rubble) mixed in with easily alterable Eocene limestone – a situation which makes it nearly impossible to distinguish between erosion caused by karstification and that by glaciation (Fondi 48-49).

During initial explorations of the Majella, I often wondered if glaciation had played much of a role in forming its oftentimes extremely steep and narrow canyons, such as the Valle di Santo Spirito and upper (somewhat gentler-sloped) Valle di Macchia Lunga. If there had once been telltale U-shaped valleys and scattered moraines on the



Figure 5.21: View from the southern rim of the Valle di Macchia Lunga: the nearest ridge leads upward out of the frame to Cima dell'Altare, the middle one leads to Monte Sant'Angelo, and the furthest, forming the horizon, is the twin-peaked Monte Acquaviva (2737 m).

Majella, subsequent erosion through the millennia due to the erosive action of water flowing over and through the mountain's largely calcareous mass has, in all but a few locations, mostly erased them. Not only have the signs of glaciation often been obscured, but also many of former human presence. For example, a monastery dedicated to San Martino near the base of the Valle di Santo Spirito, abandoned at the beginning of the nineteenth century, now lies buried under many meters of alluvial debris carried down from the mountain during a series violent storms and flash floods. The only part of the building remaining above ground is a portion of its upper bell tower, which bears silent witness to the Majella's capacity to suddenly and destructively change shape.

A Boundary and Container of Boundaries Leading to the Aventino

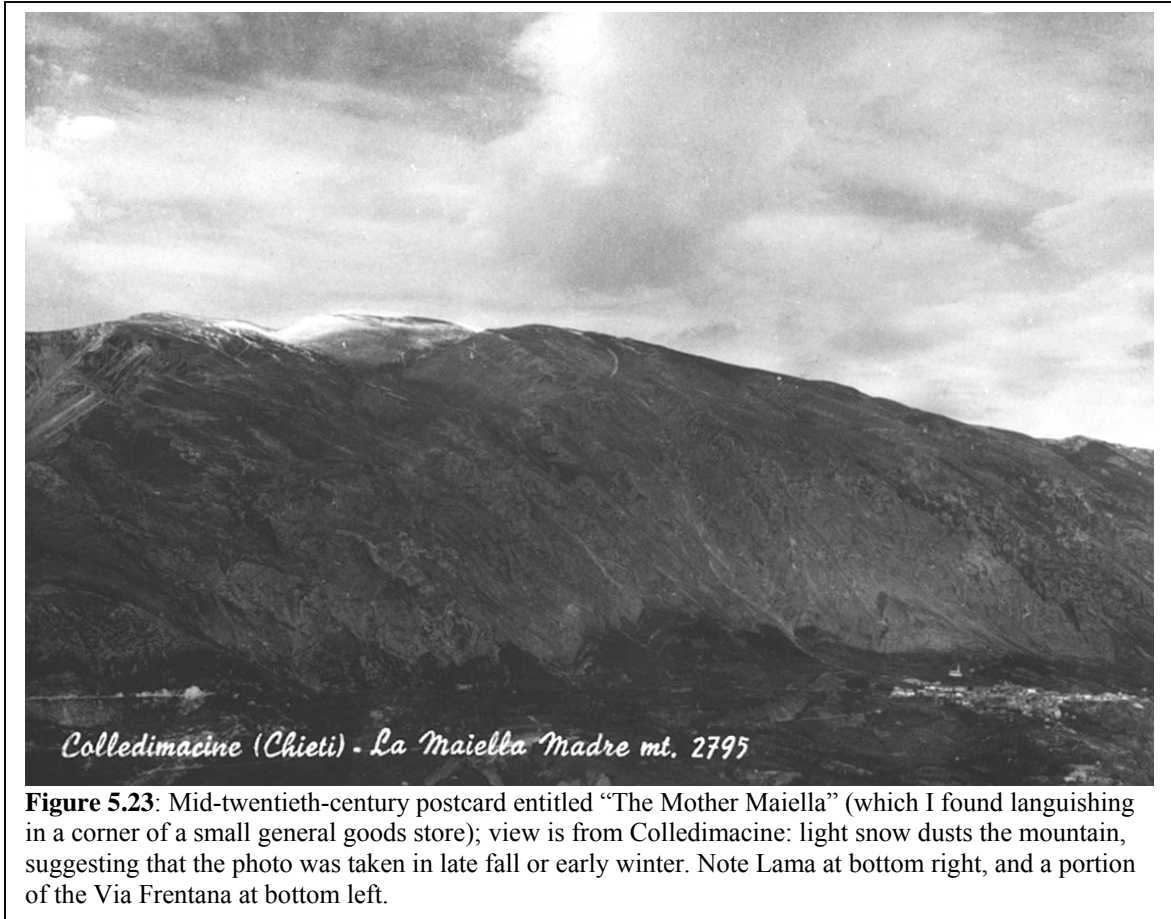
The Majella is without doubt an enormous natural boundary, at once separating the lands around it, yet also suturing them together: it may be difficult to travel from Sulmona on its western edge to Lama on its opposite eastern one, but local residents from each town look up and confront the same mountain (or at least, considering its multiplicity of appearances, confront diverse sides of a mountain with a common identity). For as far as it can be seen, the Majella exerts a strong influence on the Abruzzesi surrounding it – at once protectively welcoming and also ominously threatening them. With good reason they can be commonly heard to exclaim, “Managgia alla Majella!” (Damn the Majella!) – for the mountain, like a deity, is simultaneously capable of phenomenal beauty and severe destruction. As a bus driver from Chieti said,

[t]he Maiella; it’s a queer thing that mountain. We curse it sometimes, but we couldn’t live without it. . . . It seems alive; some say it is. It watches all the time. I was telling you about my wife; I wouldn’t say that she might have behaved differently while I was away, but she was born here and the fact is she knew that it had its eye on her. . . . Mind you, it works the same with the men; you can’t get up to any tricks around here. (Hall 45)

In addition to supposedly holding sway over such immediately personal matters, the “enormous ‘wall’ of the Majella,” as architect Enrico del Pizzo from Lama notes, while currently the object of much hope for “the well-being and prosperity expected to result from ‘eco-development,’ was also in centuries past the source of many problems and misfortunes for our ancestors. If it hadn’t been for this ‘natural barrier,’ German military tacticians clearly wouldn’t have transferred the ‘gustav front’ here in order to slow the advance of the allied troops from southern to northern Italy” (*La Linea* 5). Along



Figure 5.22: Above: final view of Monte Amaro at about 4 p.m. before descending the mountain back to Lama; the peak is lost to sight below an elevation of roughly 2500 meters along the southern rim of the Valle di Macchi Lunga; below: *The Niesen*, by Paul Klee, a watercolor painting that depicts a conical mountain surrounded at its base by a patchwork of multicolored shapes (perhaps fields, woods, and bits of scrubland), while encircling its top hang cosmic symbols.



with the extensive destruction caused by war due to the mountain’s strategic position, the effects of earthquakes and landslides come quickly to mind when surveying its encompassing landscape: the ruins of houses pulled down by collapsing slopes commonly fringe Aventino Valley villages, which are also pocked with vacant lots containing the remains of buildings either bombed or shaken to the ground.

As a marker of extent (and active delimiting) of movement, the Majella bears the signs of oftentimes violent collisions, involving both momentary and drawn-out, active clashes (or merely inconclusive confrontations) between people and the land, one cultural or societal group and another, and between various land masses sliding against or over one another. Changes to its overall shape occur very slowly (at least in terms of human



Figure 5.24: View from the lower Piano Amaro (Bitter Plain) to the east: the mountains in the far distance enclose both the Aventino Valley, and farther out, the Sangro Valley. Note the weathered outcroppings of rock, seemingly curving in a series of clustered arcs to the right.

time) and can be hypothetically determined through geologic study, while alterations in its surface (especially to its vegetative cover), while also slow, can be traced to an extent through memory and the photographic record. For example, the past hundred years have been marked by the large-scale abandonment of upland pastures and the subsequent regrowth of numerous species of plants, a process well-ingrained in the minds of the local populace above a certain age. As a resident of Lama told me, “the mountain has always been much like it is now. Before, much before, it was covered in woods, but from the time the shepherds came, the mountain was full of animals, sheep, goats, cows – the slopes were all cleaned, free of trees, the animals grazed everything. But now, since there are no more animals, little by little, the forest is coming back, with little trees here and there.”



Figure 5.25: Fonti Tari, located near the edge of the Comune di Lama at 1540 meters in elevation, directly above the entrance to the Grotta del Cavallone, was once an important source of water for shepherds and sheep alike. Its rustic accompanying shelter, with views over the Aventino Valley, can today be rented out by hikers.

In the end, the mountain remains dominant, if subtly altered – the central “hub” in myriad ways directing the progress (and bearing the brunt of the effects) of the teeming human and nonhuman movement around and within it. As Lefebvre notes, “[a]ctivity in space is restricted by that space; space ‘decides’ what activity may occur, but even this ‘decision’ has limits placed upon it. Space lays down the law because it implies a certain order – and hence a certain disorder. . . . Space commands bodies, prescribing or proscribing gestures, routes and distances to be covered” (*The Production* 143).

This is true of any space, whether “professionally” designed and urban, vernacular and rural, or wild – each with its unique set of navigational rules – but is commandingly evident in particularly stark and uncompromising terms in the case of the



Figure 5.26: View of the wide slope and ridgeline to the north of Fonti Tari: once well frequented and “mowed” pastureland, lower altitude meadows such as this by mid-summer grow dense and high with a wide variety of plants, including mullein (two examples are in the foreground), and thistle (one is at lower right), making off-trail – and sometimes on-trail – travel a rather slow and spiny affair.

Majella. Moving from base to summit can occur generally only along the tops of ridges or the bottoms of valleys, with little recourse to transverse movement of any great length (barring the use of ropes and rockclimbing equipment). Even so, with the sudden arrival of one of the many commonly occurring yet unpredictable storms, or with a lapse of attention while wandering off trail, walkers of its surface may easily become disoriented and lost. As Jepson writes, the landscape of the Majella “should be approached with caution. Distances are long, and the walks in the foothills laborious. Road and rail and the comforts of civilization are far away” (149).

The Majella also contains many surprises – odd quirks and unexpected throw-backs to former periods of time. For example, once while hiking with a group of children

from a WWF camp up the Valle di Santo Spirito I heard what sounded like many hoofed animals making their way across the chunky talus. Looking to the rear, I saw a large, ragtag herd of dark goats, a few sheep and two white maremma sheepdogs trotting behind a horseman dressed in an archaic habit of patched-together, heavily weathered wool and leather, with a rifle holstered near his thigh and two large hares strung off the backside of his saddle that bounced about with each step of the horse like long, misplaced ears. The vision was so odd that all I and my companion guide could do was shrug our shoulders in mild disbelief. The horseman, who seemed a fugitive brigand from the past, made no gesture to recognize our presence and soon disappeared with his animals up the valley in the direction of the Valle di Macchia Lunga.

This brief encounter recalls to mind a passage by Ignazio Silone from his book *L'avventura di un povero cristiano* (The Adventure of a poor Christian), an account of the aged medieval hermit Pietro Angelerio del Morrone, who to his great surprise (and later dismay) was called down from his airy retreat on the Majella to Rome to be crowned Pope Celestino V in 1294 by quarreling, largely corrupt cardinals and Vatican officials; he did not last long, unable to reconcile the demands of the spirit with the exigencies of office, and escaped – only to be captured and imprisoned for the rest of his short-remaining life. In his introduction to the book, Silone defines the Majella in terms of an oftentimes holy refuge:

No other mountain touches me like it. Extremely complex emotive elements join an admiration of its natural beauty. The Majella is Lebanon to us Abruzzesi. Its buttresses, caves, and passes are laden with memories. In the same places where once, as in a giant hermitage, there lived innumerable hermits, in more recent times hundreds upon hundreds of outlaws, escaped prisoners of war, and partisans have hidden – assisted in large part by the local populace. (11)



Figure 5.27: View of the Grotta Ciminiera above Lama en route to Fonti Tari, a deep hollow in the rock that was converted long ago by shepherds into a sheep enclosure and personal shelter: note the drystone wall curving along the base of the entrance.

Even if most current visitors to the mountain are merely escaping from the developed world for perhaps a day or two, rather than for months (if lucky) or years (if not) from military or police persecution, the Majella retains an aura of shelter. To enter the folds of such an enormous boundary is to meet innumerable smaller boundaries, each pointing

towards an increasingly chaotic sense of the wild infinite. Remain there long enough, and like the Chinese poet Han-shan, you may begin to mumble something along the lines that

My home was at Cold Mountain from the start,
Rambling among the hills, far from trouble.

Gone, and a million things leave no trace
Loosed, and it flows through the galaxies
A fountain of light, into the very mind –
Not a thing, and yet it appears before me:
Now I know the pearl of the Buddha-nature
Know its use: a boundless perfect sphere. (Snyder, *Riprap* 59)

If you were to choose the life of a hermit on the Majella, you would certainly have your pick of many bucolic (if crumbling) shelters, built and rebuilt from stone and sometimes wood over the centuries by generations of shepherds and the occasional monk. While the Majella may seem at first glance to be a vast and uninhabited, alpine realm, the ruins of many of these huts, enclosures, and improvised constructions within shallow caves, dot its slopes and upland plains – testimony to the mountain’s formerly integral role in the agricultural-pastoral economy of the villages encircling its base. Above Lama, the ruins of these shelters can be found in numerous places, including near Jaccione, Fonte Tari, Grotta Ciminiera, Valle dei Fontanili, La Portella, and above Corpi Santi. As Amelio Pezzetta writes, the most commonly occurring shelters were sheep-folds consisting of an irregularly shaped stonewall enclosure of about 25 to 30 meters in length, with one or more small stone huts roofed with vegetal matter near the entrance where the shepherds could take temporary refuge at night or during inclement weather (*Casa* 143-44) (see figure 2.16). A few of these were in use as recently as the 1970s by the last shepherds of Lama, including the men whose voices finish chapter four (see also appendix B).



Figure 5.28: Two views of the same “outlaw” herd of cattle, grazing the slopes of the Majella National Park above the Aventino Valley. Multiply this herd by many hundreds, and you approach the number of animals that once pastured here.

Locating these structures without guidance is a matter of dumb luck. For example, once while exploring the forested slopes of the Majella above Corpi Santi, a small village a few kilometers to the northeast of Lama, I stumbled upon a meticulously built trail, neatly paved and edged with heavy stone blocks, whose long disused walking surface was largely covered with young trees and shrubs. Following it uphill through heavy brush, including thick patches of gorse and prickly juniper, I eventually discovered an immense stone hut built of rocks stacked in an oblong dome resting between a giant boulder and the side of a cliff. It was still intact and filled with flies – as if some large animal (perhaps the current tenant) was lurking nearby. Despite the dank smell and aura of animal filth, I couldn't help but feel attracted to the place. Finding what seems to be a forgotten shelter (and thus a potential hideaway) can be highly satisfying: who knows when it might come in handy?

Now that the mountain falls almost entirely within the boundaries of a national park, evidence of its former use as pastureland, while still widespread, is becoming more difficult to identify. The commonest signs – the animals and their caretakers – are now nearly all gone (with some exceptions: see figure 5.28), while other evidence, such as fragile drywall constructions and the pastures themselves, is quickly receding as dense meadows and the forests slowly regain their footing. Such upland territory, unsuitable to permanent inhabitation and inhospitable to year-round use (even the shepherds descended in the fall), has always resisted human occupation.

The physical boundaries indicating human use in these areas are thus generally shorter lived and less permanent than in lower-lying regions – with the obvious



Figure 5.29: Moving ever downward towards the Aventino Valley: can you spot the overlapping zone of field patterns shared in both images? (A hint: look to the upper left in the top photo and to the upper right in the bottom one). Note also the large cave located along the upper left ridge in the bottom image – which was once converted (in similar fashion to the Grotta Ciminiera) into a shelter by shepherds.



Figure 5.30: View of the lower slopes of the Majella, with Colledimacine visible on the opposite side of the Aventino Valley (the narrow grey strip located at upper center between two large shadows cast by clouds), with the beginnings of the Monti Pizzi rising at top right.

exceptions of scars left by heavily extractive industries such as mining.²¹ As Lefebvre writes, “[w]hen we contemplate a field of wheat or maize, we are well aware that the furrows, the pattern of sowing, and boundaries, be they hedges or wire fences, designate relations of production and property. We also realize that this is much less true of uncultivated land, heath or forest” (*The Production* 83). And yet, because the Majella is now a national park, the boundary separating it from lower agricultural, urban, and industrial lands, has somewhat artificially created two zones – one actively inhabited and worked, and the other uninhabited and “untouched.”

²¹ Due to the Majella’s lack of economically valuable minerals, mining has never played a significant role in its history.



Figure 5.31: View of the Aventino Valley from a point roughly 1150 meters in elevation on the Majella: the sharp declivity of the distant foreground marks beginning of a particularly steep descent along this flank, marked with frequent, interconnected cliffs, which only softens at around 700 meters. Note the Lago di Casoli at upper center, and the Adriatic coastline, which forms the distant horizon.

As an object of beauty and preserve for wild plants and animals, the mountain is still a player in the region's economy: hopes are high that tourist money will begin to flow in as the park becomes better established and well-known. Many Italians and some foreigners now familiar with the area, such as myself, would have never been introduced to the area had the park not been founded – which after much work and with, for the first time in Italy, large local public support, occurred in 1995. The bringing of WWF camps to Lama began roughly at that time, and has at least brought a minor influx of money to the local economy (rent for the hostel, groceries, snacks, postcards, and mementos). Like the six or so Italian researchers in the natural sciences working in the area with whom I became acquainted, each time I come I rent a room and buy food and supplies.



Figure 5.32: Almost “home”: a view of Lama dei Peligni enveloped by the giant shadow cast by the sun setting behind the Majella.

For the first time in years (since the early twentieth century, when the Via Frentana was a well-traveled, cross-mountain road that required frequent, overnight stops) Lama recently opened the doors to a hotel. When I stayed there in the summer of 2003, I met a few initial, overnight visitors. Although those with whom I spoke to complained that there wasn’t much to do or see in the immediate area due to the lack of development and difficulty of access (all trails up the Majella are “goat trails,” while the Aventino River remains largely unadvertised and unsought with the exception of the odd kayaker), the fact remains that rooms were being rented and the restaurant modestly

frequented. Perhaps the much touted “eco-development” that accompanied the boosterism of the formerly-nascent park is finally taking root.²²

With all of this, however, it is important to remember, as Lefebvre warns, that

it is not at all easy to decide whether [‘nature parks’] are natural or artificial. The fact is that the once-prevalent characteristic ‘natural’ has grown indistinct and become a subordinate feature. Inversely, the social character of space – those social relations that it implies, contains and dissimulates – has begun *visibly* to dominate. This typical quality of visibility does not, however, imply decipherability of the inherent social relations. On the contrary, the analysis of these relations has become harder and more paradoxical. (83)

The slopes of the Majella above Lama, as a “natural-artificial” space, may indeed be subordinate (at least in human terms) to the deeply “social” space of the village itself and network of urban space to which via roads it is connected and as a frayed unit surrounds the park. However, once within the upper folds of the Majella where the lowlands are lost to sight, wandering along the barely legible tracings of trails that once, as a shepherd from Lama once told me, held up to six head of sheep walking abreast, it is difficult not to feel dwarfed by the mountain. The eerie feeling that part of it may come suddenly crashing down, or that somehow the mountain is able to sway your innermost thought and emotions, often comes welling up. And yet, this sensation is not lost once you descend again to the slopes of the Aventino Valley, but only mildly subdued; no matter where you are within its purview, the massif remains lurking and omnipresent.

As the form-giver to the Aventino Valley, the well-spring of most of its water, and the ancient source of much of its soil, the Majella continues to give – as well as take

²² This hopeful note should be tempered with the commentary of a resident from Colledimacine, who when asked if the park was a positive development, responded by saying, “You know, Colledimacine is a part of the park now, but we don’t have anything positive. Over there in Lama, yes, they have the chamois, and the mountain right there that gives life to this park. The park also comes around and contains these little villages here, and these forests here. But here, nobody visits, and the park gives us no work.”

back. Once host to innumerable flocks of sheep, goats, and cows – so thick that one elderly resident compared them to maggots swarming over a block of cheese – it is now home to an increasing variety and number of wild animals and plants. Moving down its slopes towards the Via Frentana, which sometimes straddles, sometimes parallels, the boundary between ethereal mountain park and mundane lowland valley, the distinctions between the two zones tend, however, to blur. The nagging, yet unanswerable question, “where does the valley begin and the mountain end?” comes easily to mind. Perhaps it is better to ask where the two meet, and then look for the innumerable and overlapping fragments of evidence. These links, like subtle tendons lying across the landscape binding it together, are splayed about almost everywhere one seeks them out.

Chapter 6: Lama dei Peligni: A Migrating, Constantly Reconstructed Town

The prospect of this glut of naked, rocky outcroppings is certainly not the most pleasing for the villages bordering and built upon them. And yet one cannot deny that, from the view so near the forbidding mountain crowned with clouds and audaciously challenging the fury of the elements, to the initial sensation of stupor, there grows within those who are confronted with this panorama an element of the sublime, which elevates the soul to its highest musings. This is the case with the traveler who approaches Lama. (Tenore 64)

Reading any urban landscape is never an easy task, especially because most of the space contained therein (the interiors of most private buildings) is off limits to the fieldworker.

Walking through a city means paralleling boundaries in the form of walls, fences, and portals that separate exterior space from interior space, public space from private space, and dwelling space from travelling, recreational, and commercial spaces. Religious space, which most commonly takes the form of churches and cemeteries, while usually public, falls somewhere in a hazy middle ground: outsiders are allowed in, but lack the familiarity necessary for full entrance (although this could also be said of many other varieties of public spaces). Streets, in effect, trace the web-like and/or grid-like patternings of legal boundaries established to at once separate and yet also conjoin various sectors of society. An observer is often left on the outside of these edges, straining to peer in, but with the tacit obligation to never stare too much; one must for the most part keep moving, remain polite yet insistent, nudge here and there, and hope that doors open.

My experiences attempting to read the landscape of Lama dei Peligni confirmed that such an approach could indeed, eventually lead to doors being opened – even if they didn't always take expected forms. While I was occasionally invited into a number of homes, I was more frequently treated to many stories and remembrances while sitting and

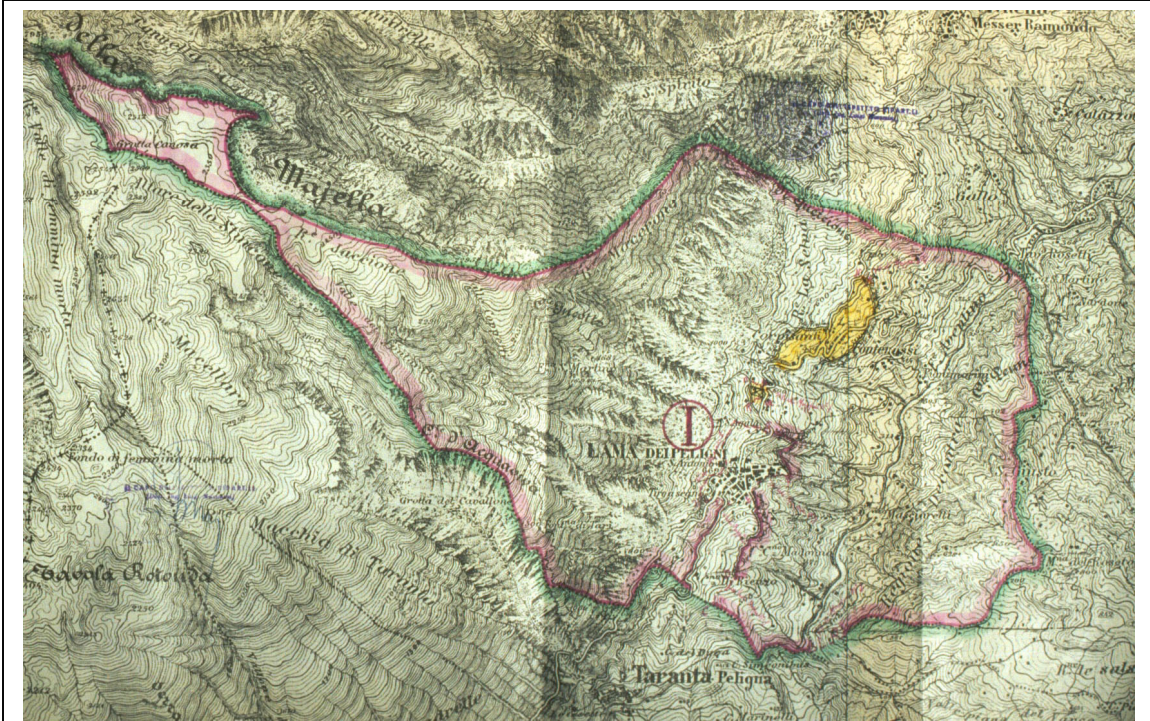


Figure 6.1: Detail from a 1954 Italian Forest Service map of the Comune of Lama, indicating “hydro-geological” restrictions on land use practices, from shepherding to farming (Comune of Lama dei Peligni Archives): the green buffer and accompanying dark green line indicate the territorial boundary of the comune; the dashed pink lines indicate corrected sections of the territorial boundary; the pink buffers and accompanying darker pink lines indicate the boundaries of areas with restrictions on their use (in essence, almost all of the comune); and the yellow zones indicate lands excluded from restrictions. A passage from one of a number of attached rather bureaucratic reports states in a somewhat surprising burst of regulatory enthusiasm, that in order to prevent “predicted damages” (perhaps landslides above all else), “we have come to the conclusion that [it is necessary] to prohibit in almost all of the Comune . . . irrational silvo-pastoral practices, the disorderly sowing of crops, [and] foolhardy tree-felling.” It is somewhat ironic that shortly after this detailed report and accompanying maps were completed and publicly exhibited for approval, their relevance was greatly undercut by the growing abandonment of pastoral and agricultural practices in most of the comune.

chatting with residents in either semi-public or public spaces: on benches placed next to houses along the edges of sidewalks, on the steps of buildings, outside of bars, and along the perimeters of piazzas. If initially I felt self-conscious walking up to (generally elderly) strangers, introducing myself, (often awkwardly) explaining what I was doing, and then asking if they would mind answering a few questions about the landscape, after a couple of weeks many residents knew who I was – which made the whole process much



Figure 6.2: A group of residents from Lama chatting in the morning along the side wall of the church of San Pietro; many of these men worked as shepherds, farmers, or stone masons before retiring – all professions now rarely practiced in town.

easier. People whom I had never before met even began to approach me, voluntarily proffering valuable tidbits of local history and geography.

In a short time I went from being a relatively unknown stranger to becoming a minor celebrity among the village's population of senior citizens. Toward the end of my first summer of fieldwork, I found it difficult to walk through town without being hailed by one group or another of pensioners ready to tell me stories – a phenomenon that intensified when my wife joined me at mid-stay. Her presence confirmed the authenticity of my shiny new wedding ring, and helped to turn the tables on me a bit: questions were now being posed to us concerning our future plans, including whether we would have children soon, and whether we would choose to live in the States or in Italy. We

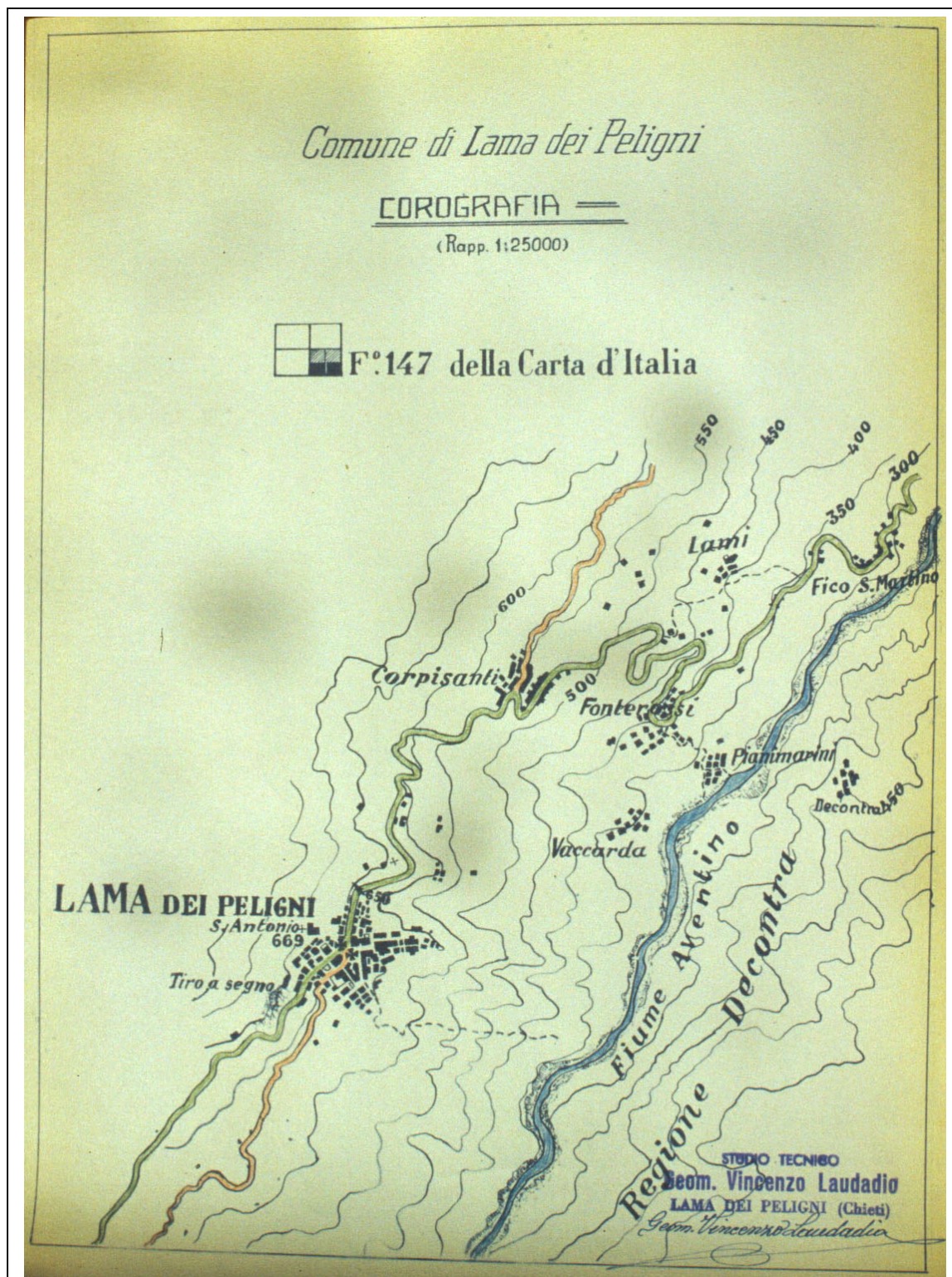


Figure 6.3: “Comune of Lama dei Peligni: Chorography,” by Vincenzo Laudadio (1950-1960?) (Comune of Lama dei Peligni Archives).



Figure 6.4: View of Lama from the Majella: note the convent at left, the now-abandoned quarter of “Old Lama” at upper center, the soccer pitch and swimming pool at lower center-right, and the edge running between the native mixed forest meeting the planted pine woods at bottom.

answered to the best of our abilities, doing our part to balance the conversation and to help build an easier, more friendly rapport.

And yet, despite this newfound familiarity, in my role as an aspiring landscape-reader I still felt, for the most part, very much an outsider on the periphery. As a long-time resident told me, after having shared a number of stories about a nearby rock formation: “there’s so much history here . . . you would need to stay here years to begin to make sense of it.” I suspect that in many ways she was correct (especially in terms of internal, or social history), and yet also believe that much can be learned of a foreign space by intently analyzing its myriad edges from a variety of perspectives. This, in fact, is one of the more relevant, potential advantages of the outsider: making the most of her or his relegated space, the margin.

The result is fragmentary, yet indicative of both visible and invisible processes of landscape formation. For example, when my forward-seeking perception was blocked by

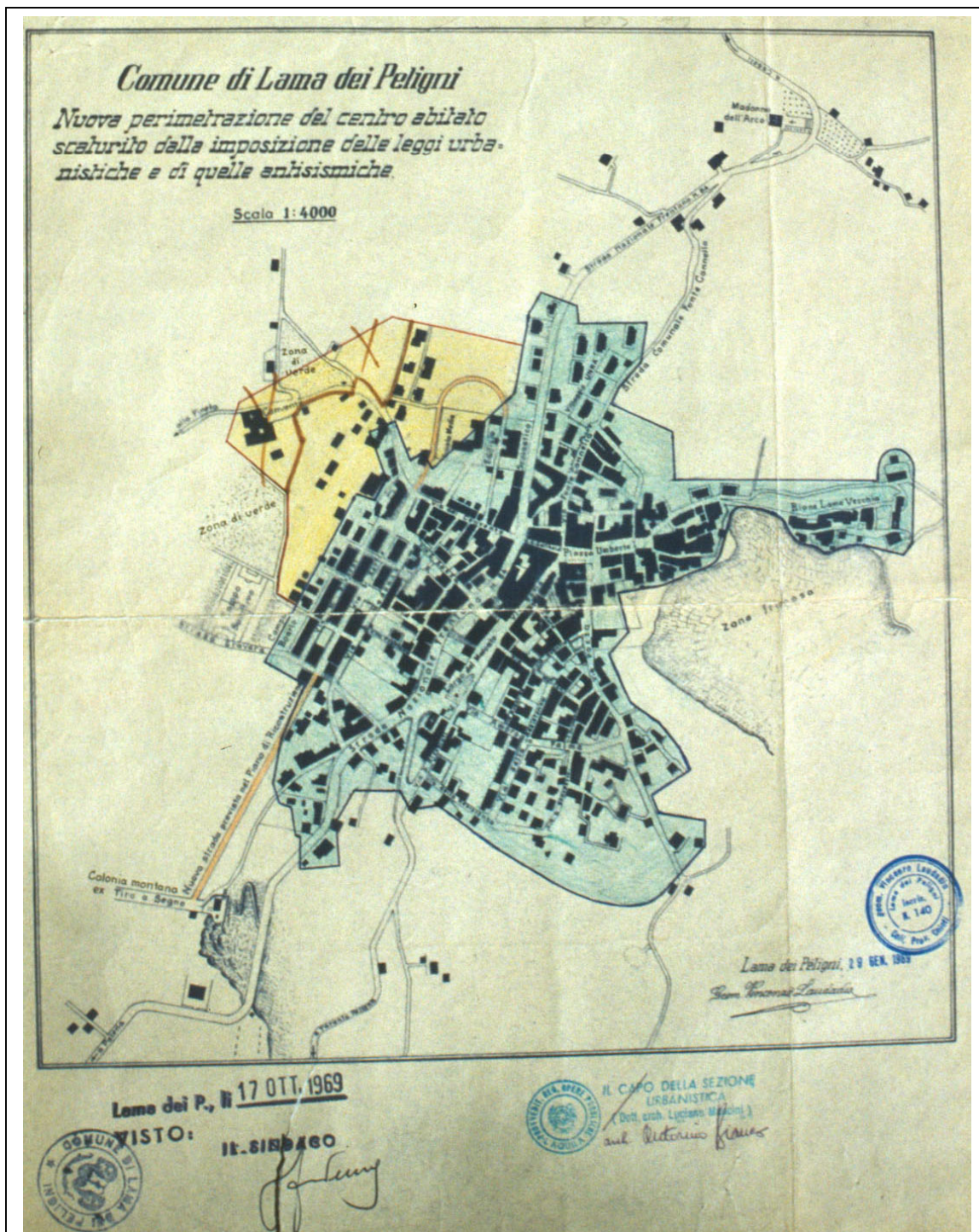


Figure 6.5: “Comune of Lama dei Peligni: New town perimeter resulting from the enforcement of both town-planning and anti-seismic laws,” by Vincenzo Laudadio (1969). This map shows a number of recent changes to the urban fabric, including a number of either partially or completely constructed new roads first proposed in the 1947-’48 Reconstruction Plan, shown in figure 6.11. The above map, however, indicates two sections of road proposed in this earlier plan (both colored orange), which have not yet been built. The upper yellow-shaded area may have been a newly-proposed extension of residentially-zoned land which, judging from the two “X’s,” was rejected – perhaps due to objections by the convent. Whatever the reason, there has been no development of this land (Comune of Lama dei Peligni Archives).



Figure 6.6: View of Lama from the Aventino Valley: note the convent at upper left, “Old Lama” at far right, the landslide area along the lower, right-hand edge of the village (beginning at the bare yellow patch and extending to the right and downhill all the way to the valley floor), and the scattered, mostly overgrown fields at bottom center.

physical obstacles, I found it best to hunker down, examine what was beneath my feet and within arm’s reach, and then carefully watch, listen to, smell, feel, and in the case of meals, even taste, what was around me. Even if I was confronted by an impassible division in the landscape – such as the wall of a building – I soon found that I was standing on top of or nearby many smaller, easily “transgressable” boundaries, from the pattern and type of paving stones underfoot to the faint tracings of prewar graffiti in front of my face (but which I had countless times formerly overlooked while traversing the village on foot).

And yet, to back up to a perspective view (such as those offered in figures 2.14 and 5.32), the initial boundary encountered by any first-time visitor to Lama, as botanist



Figure 6.7: Detail of map featured in figure 4.7, showing a rough outline of Lama at upper right, and various territorial divisions in the valley below; a portion of the Aventino River is visible at bottom right (Tabassi family archives, circa 1857-65).

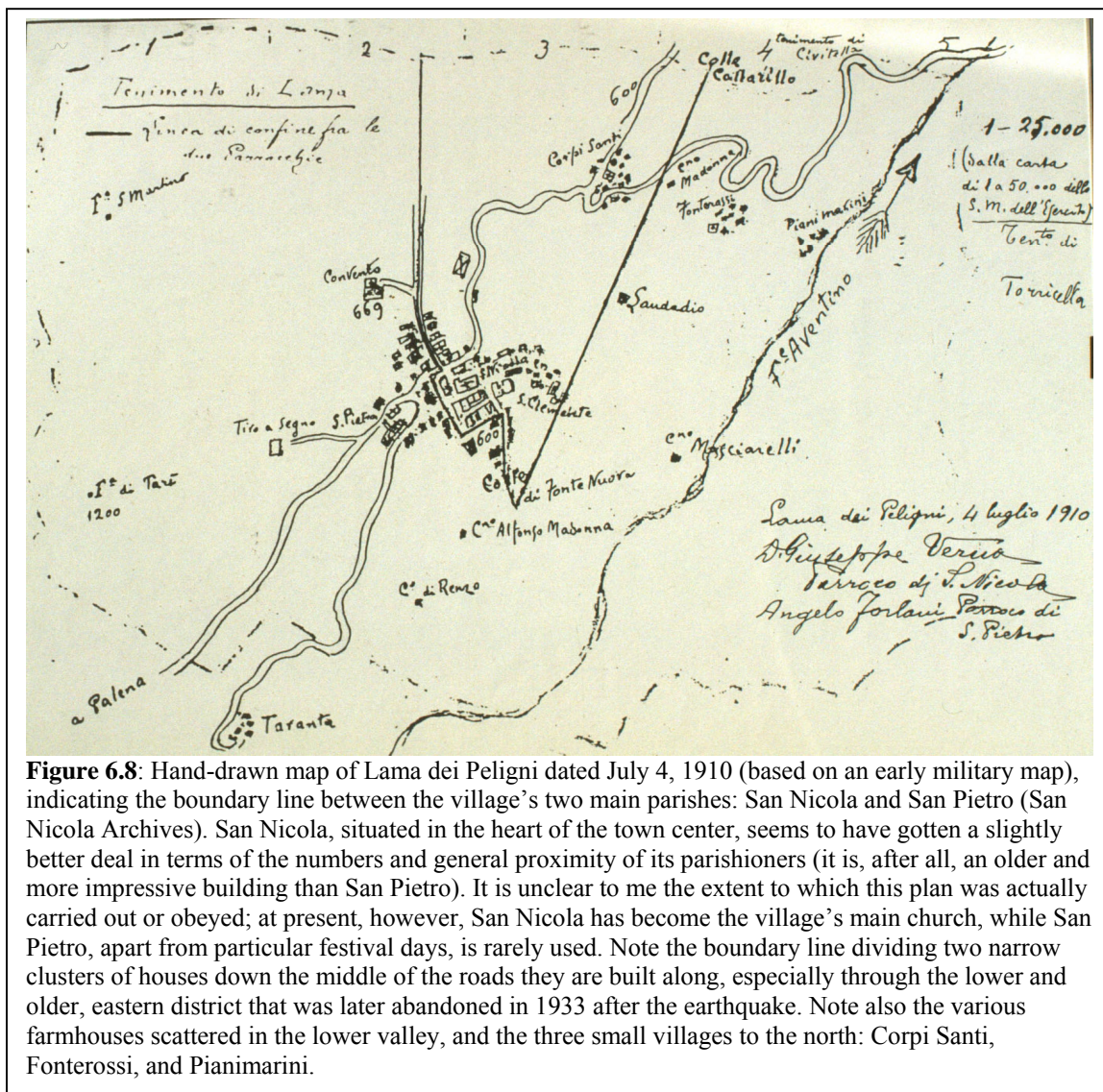


Figure 6.8: Hand-drawn map of Lama dei Peligni dated July 4, 1910 (based on an early military map), indicating the boundary line between the village’s two main parishes: San Nicola and San Pietro (San Nicola Archives). San Nicola, situated in the heart of the town center, seems to have gotten a slightly better deal in terms of the numbers and general proximity of its parishioners (it is, after all, an older and more impressive building than San Pietro). It is unclear to me the extent to which this plan was actually carried out or obeyed; at present, however, San Nicola has become the village’s main church, while San Pietro, apart from particular festival days, is rarely used. Note the boundary line dividing two narrow clusters of houses down the middle of the roads they are built along, especially through the lower and older, eastern district that was later abandoned in 1933 after the earthquake. Note also the various farmhouses scattered in the lower valley, and the three small villages to the north: Corpi Santi, Fonterossi, and Pianimarini.

Michele Tenore writes in the opening quotation to this chapter (a selection from his 1831 *Viaggio in Abruzzo Citeriore*), is the “glut of naked, rocky outcroppings” that Lama borders and is built upon. The Majella literally wraps around Lama from above, and also underpins it; the mountain’s rocky edges thus not only isolate Lama’s urban fabric from the surrounding countryside, but also extend underneath it, supporting the whole yet also frequently tearing parts of it down. The relationship between the mountain and village is



Figure 6.9: Preparations for a festival in Piazza Umberto I of Lama.

not easy to clearly demarcate. Rather than straightforward, it tends to be vague, meandering, and paradoxical.

What is now an abandoned peripheral zone to the east, was in fact only in Medieval times the thriving center. If viewed in an imaginary time-lapse film as an organism developing over the centuries, Lama would appear to creep slowly up the valley slope towards the rocky cliffs of the Majella – as newer buildings were erected uphill, and lower neighborhoods slid stone by stone towards the Aventino River. In its current position, Lama straddles an imaginary boundary between valley and mountain, which can be imagined as a rough band paralleling the edge along which the Majella’s cliffs sharply descend into the Aventino Valley’s slope – which in effect is a giant, continually layering and eroding accumulation of rocky debris, mixed in with clay and some sand. In essence,



Figure 6.10: Lama dei Peligni: Planimetria Stato Attuale (Current State Plan), June 27, 1947. The terms in the color-coded key at bottom left are, in descending order: Intact Buildings; Slightly Damaged Buildings; Seriously Damaged Buildings; Destroyed Buildings; Public Buildings; Damaged or Destroyed Buildings Already Rebuilt; Buildings Already Constructed for the Displaced (Current War); Buildings Already Constructed for the Displaced (Earthquake 9-26-1933).

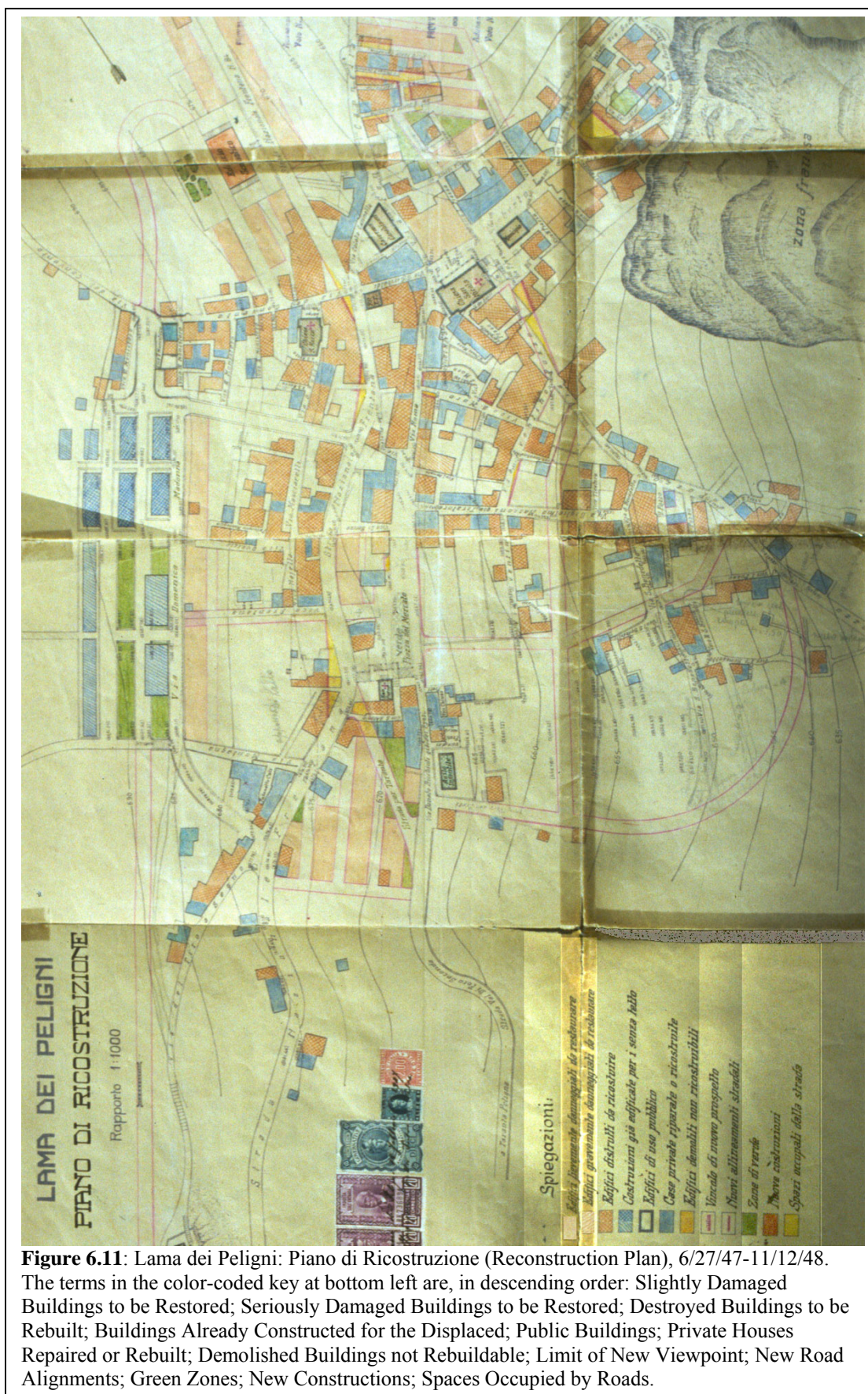


Figure 6.11: Lama dei Peligni: Piano di Ricostruzione (Reconstruction Plan), 6/27/47-11/12/48. The terms in the color-coded key at bottom left are, in descending order: Slightly Damaged Buildings to be Restored; Seriously Damaged Buildings to be Restored; Destroyed Buildings to be Rebuilt; Buildings Already Constructed for the Displaced; Public Buildings; Private Houses Repaired or Rebuilt; Demolished Buildings not Rebuildable; Limit of New Viewpoint; New Road Alignments; Green Zones; New Constructions; Spaces Occupied by Roads.

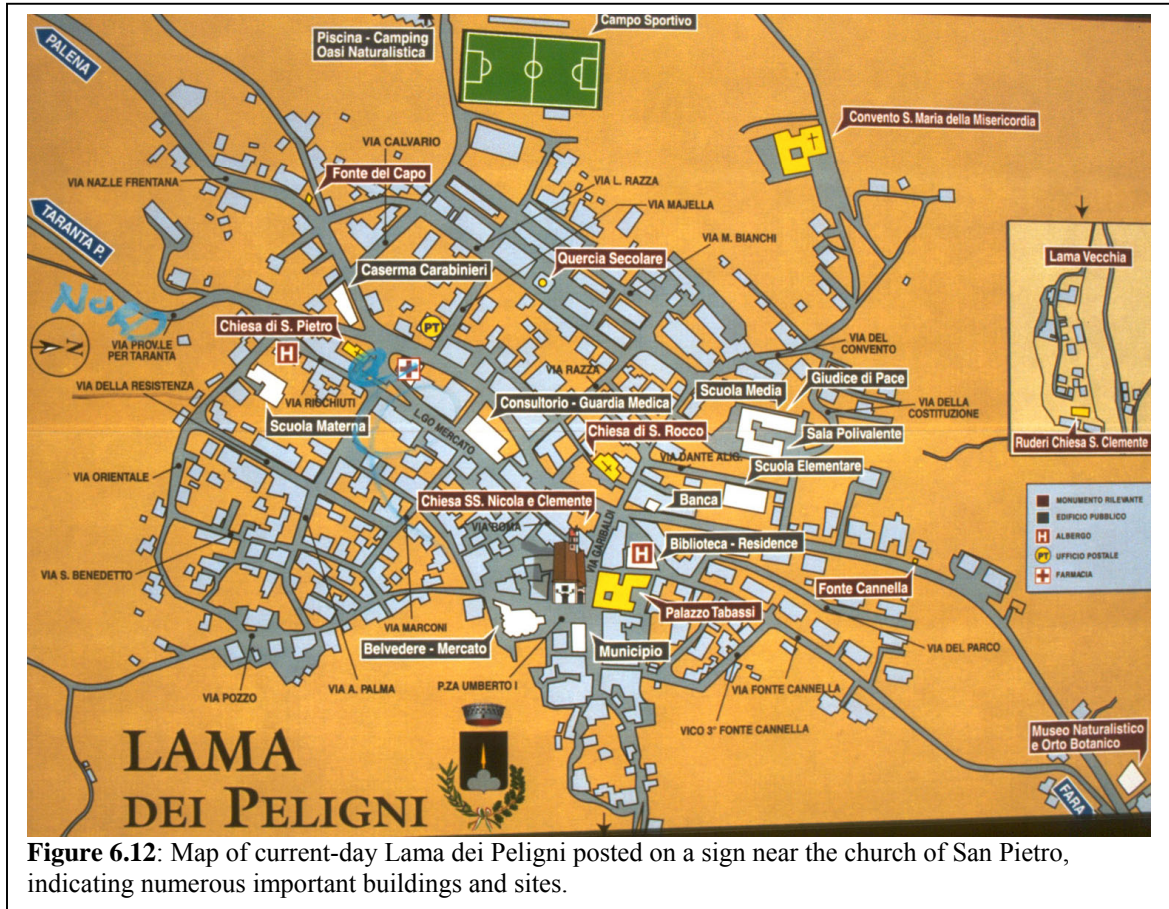


Figure 6.12: Map of current-day Lama dei Peligni posted on a sign near the church of San Pietro, indicating numerous important buildings and sites.

the village has “crawled” uphill as the slope upon which it exists has variously either slowly “crept” or suddenly “lurched” downhill. The most recent and evident sign of this phenomenon is the immense mudslide stretching from the southeastern extent of Lama to the valley floor three hundred meters downhill, which has carried myriad, jumbled remains of razed buildings to the Aventino River. These fragments are easy to find along the banks and in the water, and range from shards of hand-glazed terracotta tiles to misshapen chunks of bricks. The larger blocks of limestone from collapsed houses, originally quarried from the mountain, tend to have either been reused or have simply melded back into the slopes from which they originated.

Myth has it that Lama was initially established near the valley floor, and was only later on relocated to higher ground – perhaps due to flooding, the need for protection, and/or diseases related to perennially marshy land (Martelli 56). “Lama,” in fact, roughly means “land where water pools” or “land impregnated with water” – which could either indicate an early settlement on somewhat marshy ground near the Aventino River, or simply point to the fact that the entire northwestern valley slope is dotted with springs, whose waters flowing from the Majella are forced out through calcareous debris when they encounter thick, mainly impermeable layers of clay. The term does not, as it is often misinterpreted, mean “the edge of a blade” (figuratively meaning a steep mountain ridge), as the common Italian term “lama” would seem to indicate.

The time frame for this gradual uphill (if not even more complicated, scattered) movement is potentially very long; the earliest humanoid remains discovered in the immediate area date from 5000 to 8000 years ago. The most famous of these finds, located near Fonterossi not far from the Aventino River, was unearthed in 1913 by U. Rellini. Named “Uomo della Majella” (Man of the Majella), the cranium and partial skeleton were later determined to be those of a woman who lived in the approximate vicinity of 5480 BC (Del Pizzo, Giuseppe 11). While it is uncertain when Lama was first recognizably settled and given its current name, its distant roots go far back in time and space to the Stone Age.²³

²³ More recently, in pre-Roman times it appears that Lama was most likely inhabited by a mix of the Carecini (a Samnitic pastoral group) and the Frentani – both of Illyrian origin (as well perhaps, of the Peligni, Marruccini, and Pentri). From the Roman period until about 1000 AD little is known of Lama’s history; the Longobards, who dominated the area after the fall of the Roman Empire, were also responsible in large part for the diffusion of Christianity. After the Longobards came the Franks, incursions by various groups of Saracens, the Normans, and numerous feudal kingdoms. The second half of the village’s name,



Figure 6.13: Aging political graffiti on two walls in Lama: at left is a blue flame with the letters “MSI,” which stand for “Movimento Sociale Italiano” (the neo-fascist party, which was reborn as the Alleanza Nazionale in the early 1990s). Below this (as well as in the image to the right), is the word “VOTATE” (“VOTE!”) with an accompanying image of great Italian patriot Giuseppe Garibaldi’s face over a star; fading examples of this last image, applied to the walls of public buildings immediately following the Second World War, are common throughout Lama, but are easily overlooked.

Seen from afar, Lama at present seems to be a compact unit, with a number of tentacle-like extensions (see figure 6.4). In reality, it is much less dense than it was even one hundred years ago, and is divided into a number of loose-knit neighborhoods; in 1898 the population stood at 3689, whereas now it is roughly 1500 (46). If Lama had been originally built on a plain, the initial assumption might be that it slowly expanded outward from a central axis, located perhaps near the point where Piazza Umberto I and

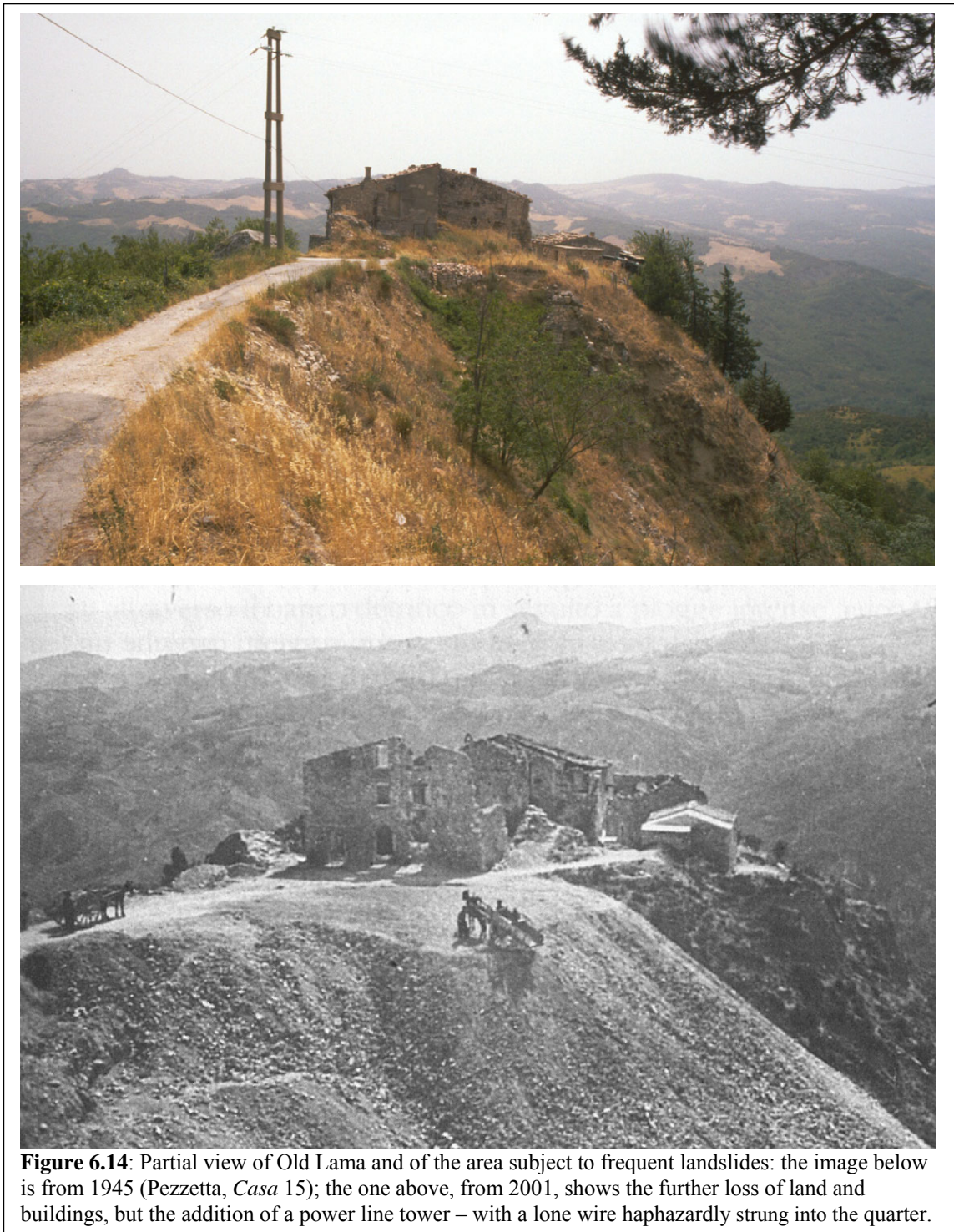
“dei Peligni” was only added in 1863, based on deliberations of the local government (Martelli 55-56; Del Pizzo, Giuseppe 44-45).

Via Frentana meet. However, in Medieval times, the village was composed of two distinct zones – a lower, inhabited one, and an upper one occupied almost solely by the Church of Santa Maria della Misericordia and its accompanying convent (which is still active and somewhat of a curiosity, being that it is coed, and thus the subject of generally lighthearted joking by some residents who imagine something other than purely pious activity taking place amongst the resident order of cenobites) (see the first image in figure 6.25). This division likely consisted primarily of agricultural lands with scattered farmhouses and outbuildings, and was crossed by numerous paths.

Although the older residential zone to the east had its fair share of churches (most of which have now either partially or completely collapsed), the division emphasized a lower, more mundane zone, and a higher, more sacred one (which to a degree still exists today: above the convent there is virtually no housing, only the Majella, while below it there remains an insulating swath of undeveloped land). The space encircling these combined areas (all territory outside the village and convent), as well as any major thoroughfares, might have been conceived in varying degrees as profane, with the obvious exception of the Majella, which was (and perhaps still is) widely considered to be something of a deity in and of itself.²⁴

If anything, it is now the Via Frentana (simultaneously a constant incursion of the outside world, yet also the active, axial core of the village – hosting most of its stores and bars), which has somewhat paradoxically become the dominant profane space of the village. The few churches, small altars and monuments remain sacred – along with the

²⁴ I here use the terms “sacred” and “profane,” in addition to their more standard definitions of “hallowed or consecrated” and “impure or worldly,” to roughly mean “central, intimate, and within bounds” and “peripheral, foreign, and beyond bounds.”



Majella, which of course also undergirds the entire village, making distinctions of this sort highly approximate. On this note, it is interesting to observe that a now mostly uninhabited area below Lama near the Aventino River is called Purgatorio – perhaps in



Figure 6.15: View of Lama in 1919, showing the split caused by frequent landslides, which have continued to the present; the portion at right, Old Lama, has now been almost completely carried away, while much of the portion at left has been repeatedly damaged or destroyed and then rebuilt (Del Pizzo, Enrico, *La Linea* 150).

reference to its lower, yet not rock-bottom position in the valley. This area, neither here nor there, is a mix of the profane and sacred, with hints of distant origins (being that this is where the village may have begun), as well as ends (being that the ultimate fate of most, if not all, of the village is to end up at the valley floor in the river).

The character of the landscape that has given rise to these hypothetical designations, however, has without doubt changed frequently over time as the village's fabric has been violently rent by natural (or human-caused) cataclysms, and then been remade by the Lamesi. An early recorded (but by no means the first) instance of this shape-shifting occurred in 1545, when a disastrous landslide caused a section of the southern flank of the village to collapse, destroying forty houses and the church of San Pietro, in essence dividing the village in two (Pezzetta, *Casa* 14; Del Pizzo, Giuseppe 46). The effect of this separation – exacerbated by later earthquakes and landslides, as well as construction in each surviving area – is visible in a photo from 1919 (see figure 6.15). What is now the current historical village center to the west of the older center was shortly thereafter greatly expanded and called “Borgo”; the heart of this area, located just to the east of and including Piazza Umberto I, is now not far from the edge of a large



Figure 6.16: A scene from the first night of the 2001 Aventino Blues Festival, held in Lama’s Piazza Umberto I; people from around the valley come to listen to both imported blues musicians (American in this case) and home-grown ones.

“zona franosa” (landslide area), which currently threatens many houses (see figures 6.5, 6.6, and 6.10).

Since this time, Lama has experienced many waves of destruction (a pattern that without doubt also extends far into the past). After an immense earthquake that was centered in the Majella struck in 1706, killing about 200 people and destroying many buildings (including four churches, and many houses to the east in what are now virtually nonexistent neighborhoods), the village rebuilt further uphill, slowly expanding in a rough band along the edges of the Via Frentana; another earthquake in 1742 caused further damage, adding insult to injury (Pezzetta, *Casa* 14; Del Pizzo, Giuseppe 46). When the 1933 earthquake occurred, destroying what was left of what is now termed “old Lama” (the lowest, or furthest eastern quarter), new, government-sponsored housing was built to the west of the Via Frentana in order to shelter the homeless. Likewise, more



Figure 6.17: View of partially destroyed walls and wall sections protruding from still standing buildings in Lama with the Majella in the background.

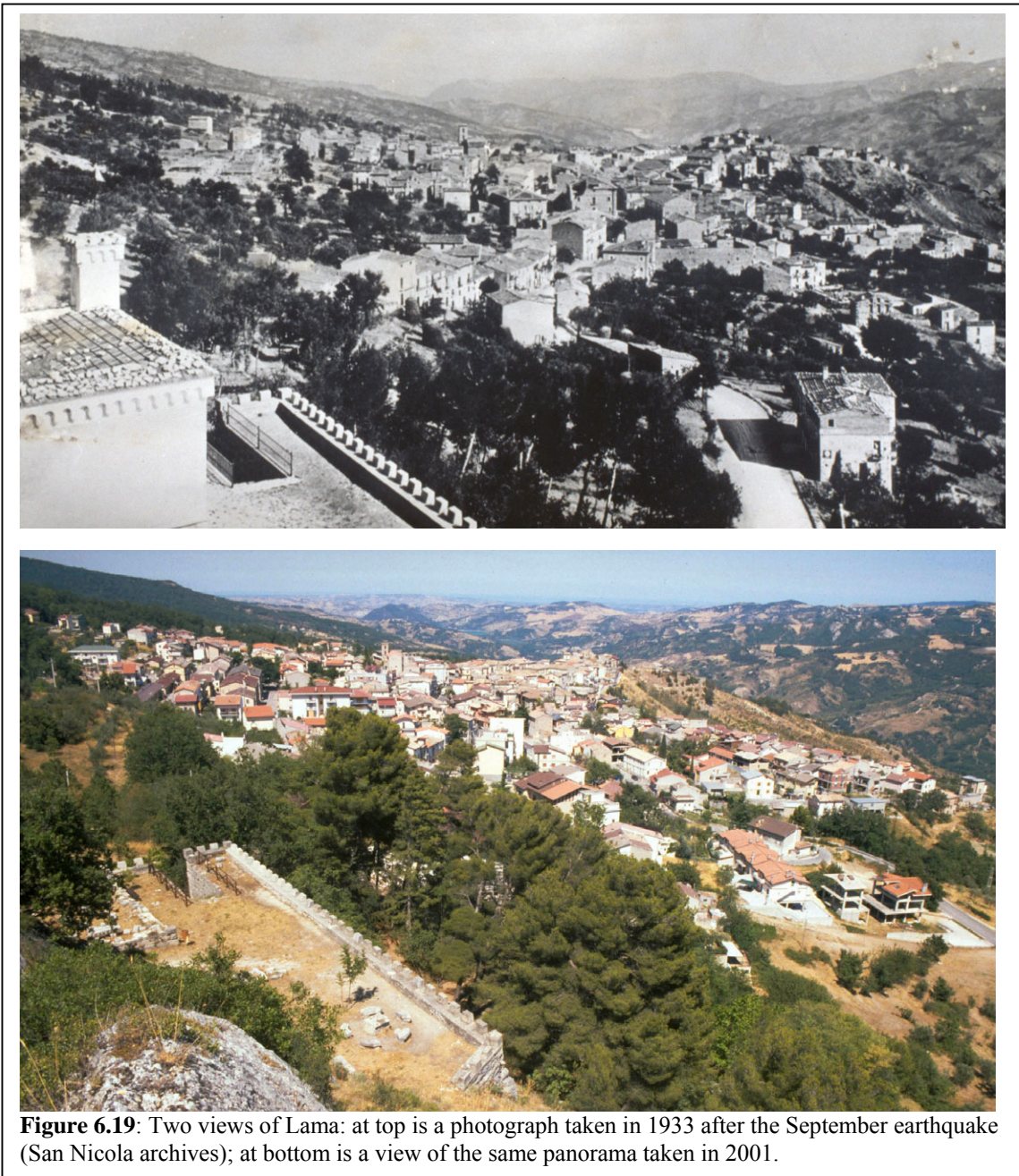
housing was added in this same area after the Second World War, when over ninety percent of the buildings in Lama were blown up by retreating German troops; most recently a small earthquake hit in 1984, which however only caused minor damage (46). With a track record this dismal, one can only guess when the next calamity will occur.

And yet, the village has survived, and even grown – if not necessarily in population, at least in terms of built-up space. One cause of this is the fact that many former emigrants have either maintained or rebuilt ancestral homes, and return for a short time in the summer, causing a temporary surge in the local population (this is a phenomenon common throughout the Aventino Valley – as well as in mountainous or



marginal villages throughout Italy). In the past forty years or so, new expansion has occurred in four zones – two uphill from the post-earthquake and postwar housing, one along the northern fringes of the exiting Via Frentana, and one along the southern edge of the village. The history of Lama is one of continual destruction and reconstruction. Almost without pause have its citizens been involved in one activity or another of recreating shelter that either has collapsed or is in the process of collapsing. Even the inhabitants of buildings that have miraculously survived over a number of centuries must face daily reminders of potential calamity in the form of ubiquitous ruins.

Lama is particularly interesting as a subject for geographical analysis, in part because it has been torn to pieces and rebuilt so often. It is about as far as can be imagined from being a static entity, somehow frozen in time and preserved for the benefit of tourists (although I doubt that such places even exist in any pure sense, for even towns that might qualify, such as San Gimignano in Toscana and Norcia in Umbria, are in a constant state of flux, albeit on a less massive scale than the continually wrecked and remade Lama). In myriad ways, Lama demonstrates what Lefebvre terms as the tendency of any social locus, on one hand, to “be mobilized, carried forward and sometimes smashed apart by major tendencies . . . which ‘interfere’ with one another,” and on the other to be “penetrated by, and shot through with, the weaker tendencies characteristic of networks and pathways” (*The Production* 87). In essence, Lama is full of rich examples of “the interpenetration and superimposition of social spaces,” which contain evidence of how “each fragment of space subjected to analysis masks not just one social relationship but a host of them that analysis can potentially disclose” (88). This is true of many of the



“fragments” that I consider, from the constantly patched and adjusted stone walls of buildings, to the unfinished skeletons of recent houses.

With these central points in mind, I have divided the remainder of this chapter into two sections, which focus in turn and in overlapping fashion on the following, rough categories of boundaries present in Lama: pathways and roads; neighborhoods and large

groupings of buildings; and individual buildings and building divisions. These are somewhat arbitrary categories, whose titles may either mask, or at best only falteringly indicate, myriad other, more subtle divisions in the urban landscape – which I will do my best to identify and discuss as I proceed. The progression from traveling overview (on roads) to encircling survey (within or around zones) to pausing observation (in front of or within specific sites), is a common approach of any outsider to a new urban center. Regardless of town, there always seems to be a form of what J. B. Jackson refers to as “the Stranger’s Path” – which certainly exists in Lama, and appears to me to be the most appropriate place (or route) from which to begin an investigation of its (unfamiliar) urban space (*Landscape* 19).²⁵ Investigations of aspects deeply couched within neighborhoods away from this route may then make more sense. Shifting geographical focus in this gradual way, from macro to micro resolution and back again, may even be useful to the insider in order to better reevaluate her or his own “home turf.”

Pathways and Roads

Lama contains a rich hodgepodge of both pathways and roads, each fit for a wide range of traffic, from people and (not long ago) donkeys to small autos and large trucks. Some narrow passageways seemingly off limit to vehicular traffic occasionally carry cars that temporarily usurp piazzas en route, while other, wider ones that seem dedicated solely to automobiles frequently host small hordes of afternoon or evening strollers who

²⁵ Although the Stranger’s Path in Lama, a town much smaller than the American cities of between twenty and fifty thousand people that Jackson examines, is somewhat difficult to trace, it certainly exists – albeit with varying points of origin, depending on where one enters: arriving by car means that you generally park along the path towards either end, by bus means that you are dropped off at its center (and perhaps end), and by foot means that you enter through an indeterminate peripheral zone.



Figure 6.20: A highway as gathering place: people strolling along or sitting nearby the Via Frentana in the early evening in Lama.

threaten to turn the roadway into a public gathering place. There are straight roads that were obviously designed by engineers on paper, and other highly irregular, curving ones that seem to lack any logical forethought at all. Evidence of bureaucratic urban planning meets that of chaotic vernacular meddling at almost every angle of town.

Lama in fact is host to two overlapping systems of road-building, what J. B. Jackson has defined as “the small, isolated centripetal system, subject to constant change, showing for so little on maps, and playing so insignificant a role in the history of material progress, and the impressive, widespread, permanent centrifugal system of highways which we associate with Rome and other empires” (*Discovering* 22). In its progression uphill, Lama has shifted from a labyrinthine clustering of narrow passageways bleeding vaguely at various points into the countryside, to a slightly more “orderly” and contained



Figure 6.21: View of the approach to Lama from the southwest along the Via Frentana, including the town sign announcing your arrival at “LAMA DEI PELIGNI,” and national park sign welcoming you to an official comune of the Parco Nazionale della Majella.

mesh of roads and pathways enveloping the Via Frentana – the major roadway of the valley (yet only a minor artery of the greater centrifugal highway system in Italy), which as we have seen currently cuts directly through the village’s center.

As outsiders, we would most likely approach Lama along this road from either the northwestern or southeastern edge of town – depending on whether we were traveling from the Adriatic coast or from the interior of the peninsula. Let us imagine that we are arriving in Lama from the interior (see figure 6.21). As the town becomes nearer, the road begins to descend somewhat, with a few initial houses scattered along the slope to the left-hand (or mountain) side of the road, and a very small chapel situated on edge of the right-hand side, overlooking the valley. As a large rocky mass looms to the left, a small rectangular sign – posted to the right above a handrailing-bordered, asphalt



Figure 6.22: View of the Via Frentana just around the distant curve shown in figure 6.21. Note the complex at left, which houses an Irish-styled pub, a bakery, and a combination hotel and restaurant called “Tiro a Segno.” The thin grey line continuing out of the frame at bottom connects two images of the same landscape feature – a road sign – which is here enclosed in a small white circle, and in the upper, right-hand photo of figure 6.23, is enclosed in a slightly larger circle (to indicate closer range).

sidewalk (that provides at least partial safe transit for residents walking to the just-passed chapel) and just in front of a large street lamp (obvious signs of civilization) – announces “LAMA DEI PELIGNI” in bold black letters on a white background. This sign is accompanied by a smaller and newer sign asserting that we are also now in a comune bordering the Parco Nazionale della Majella; it is decorated on one side with a cartoon wolf howling at a moon hanging over a mountain, and on the other by a circle of gold stars within a field of blue indicating membership in (as well as the financial support of) the European Economic Community. As of yet, the main town is still largely hidden from view by a thick clustering of trees and bushes.

How does such a “welcome” affect the newcomer? The main functions of the town sign are to demarcate a territorial boundary and to provide locational information; on the other hand, the park sign, rather than so much as indicate an edge, identifies the area as largely recreational land pertaining to greater Europe. The former, conforming to state regulations, is local in significance and bureaucratically perfunctory without warmth, while the latter, designed by park management, is simultaneously local and extra-regional, and overtly welcoming. The indication that beyond the signs lies a human community is reason to both relax and to become more wary: while places to stop, rest, and refresh oneself are likely to soon appear, they will also be accompanied by the inquisitive eyes of local residents attempting to determine the nature of the visitors with whom they are dealing (harmless or trouble-making, wealthy or poor, foreign or local, entertaining or boring, worthy of later gossip, or possibly even familiar). In addition to being a potential customer and tourist, to residents (especially those of smaller towns), the stranger is an object of curiosity to be examined and safely categorized – just as much as the town to the stranger is an oddity to be explored and efficiently utilized.

The first point of potential disembarkation, and thus of the beginning of the Stranger’s Path in Lama, lies just beyond these two signs: a recently constructed complex containing an Irish-styled pub (which has been a focal point for young adults throughout the valley since its opening in the mid-1990s), a bakery, a hotel (which began operation in 2001), and restaurant. This complex, located at the edge of the town, is evidence that, as Jackson states, “[e]very sizable community exists partly to satisfy the outsider who visits it. Not only that; there always evolves a special part of town devoted to this purpose. . . . [which] must be thought of in terms of movement along a pretty well



Figure 6.23: The Via Frentana as seen along a line of travel by foot in a series of interconnected photographs; each photograph in the series contains an element in its background that then appears in the foreground of the proceeding photograph (read images from left to right, as if in sentences). The small white circles connected by thin grey lines indicate points in common; the series continues in figure 6.24.



defined axis” (*Landscape 21*). In Lama, this special part, or Stranger’s Path, runs almost entirely (with a few exceptions) along the axis of the Via Frentana. There is no doubt that the complex of nascent businesses at this southwestern limit of the path, bankrolled by a shrewd, retired high school math teacher who has accumulated a great deal of property in town, was placed at the far end of the Via Frentana to take advantage of the (partly imagined, partly real) influx of arriving outside visitors. There is still much hope that more visitors to the park will arrive as facilities improve; however, many guests at this, the sole hotel in town, it seems are relatives of local residents in need of shelter beyond the means of their hosts’ homes who come mainly during summer vacation.

Proceeding past this point, there is a break in commercial activity along the road, which for a few hundred meters is lined with residential buildings – mainly respectable postwar constructions with rolling shutters, little sign of life, and front steps that haphazardly encroach at various angles to and distances from the curb (see the first two images in figure 6.23). The sidewalk thus is sometimes quite wide, but in many spots narrows down to less than two feet. Some ruins of houses have remained untouched since the war, while others have provided the foundations for the reconstruction of upper floors. Because the road curves sharply to the left in the distance, the end of this residential district is not yet visible. The newcomer parked in front of the hotel complex looking for refreshment or supplies might at this point, after having walked a short ways to no avail, go back to his or her car and tentatively proceed towards the hoped-for commercial center.

However, if the newcomer enjoys walking, and continues along the road, just around the formerly distant curve a church, phone booth, fountain, and gas station appear,

along with numerous small shops – from a pharmacy and bakery to hardware store and mini-supermarket tucked into a series of two- to four-story, postwar buildings (see the third through fifth images in figure 6.23). No bars or banks are yet visible, but soon appear, all clustered together in the space of about 100 meters or less surrounding the intersection of the Via Frentana and the upper edge of Piazza Umberto I; two bars alone occupy most of the ground level of a large postwar apartment building (see the last three images in figure 6.23). At this point, the stranger may very well end his or her path, having found at this terminus many if not all of the most desirable businesses to the passing traveler – namely places to eat, drink, and withdraw money.

A likely extension may lead through Piazza Umberto I to the town hall, the church of San Nicola, and perhaps even to the observation deck located on top of the covered marketplace across the street from the church (see the final three images in figure 6.26). Unlike the Stranger's Path of the typical small American city described by Jackson, Lama is neither large or prosperous enough to host a full transition from “skid row” (which does not properly exist, although poorer areas do) to “bank central” (there is only one bank) to “town hall” and finally to “snob hill”; however, the approximate lineaments of this general transition are in place. There are, of course, other businesses in Lama not located along the Via Frentana – including the only two butcher shops, another bar, and a very small grocery store. However, the visitor, even if not in a hurry and somewhat curious, will most likely stick to the general route described above. Going much farther would require walking either steeply downhill or uphill through what at first glance might appear to be rather nondescript neighborhoods: not a particularly appealing prospect for most people.



Figure 6.25: Line of travel through upper Lama, beginning in the first image with a view of the convent under the Majella, turning 180 degrees in the second image at the cross monument, and proceeding downhill along Via del Convento to the center of the area of post-earthquake and postwar public housing (see figure 6.44), and ending at the edge of a stairway and passageway below (called Vico Quercia) leading east towards the town center. (The grey line with two arrowheads connecting the fourth and fifth images indicates the approximate location of a point in common.)

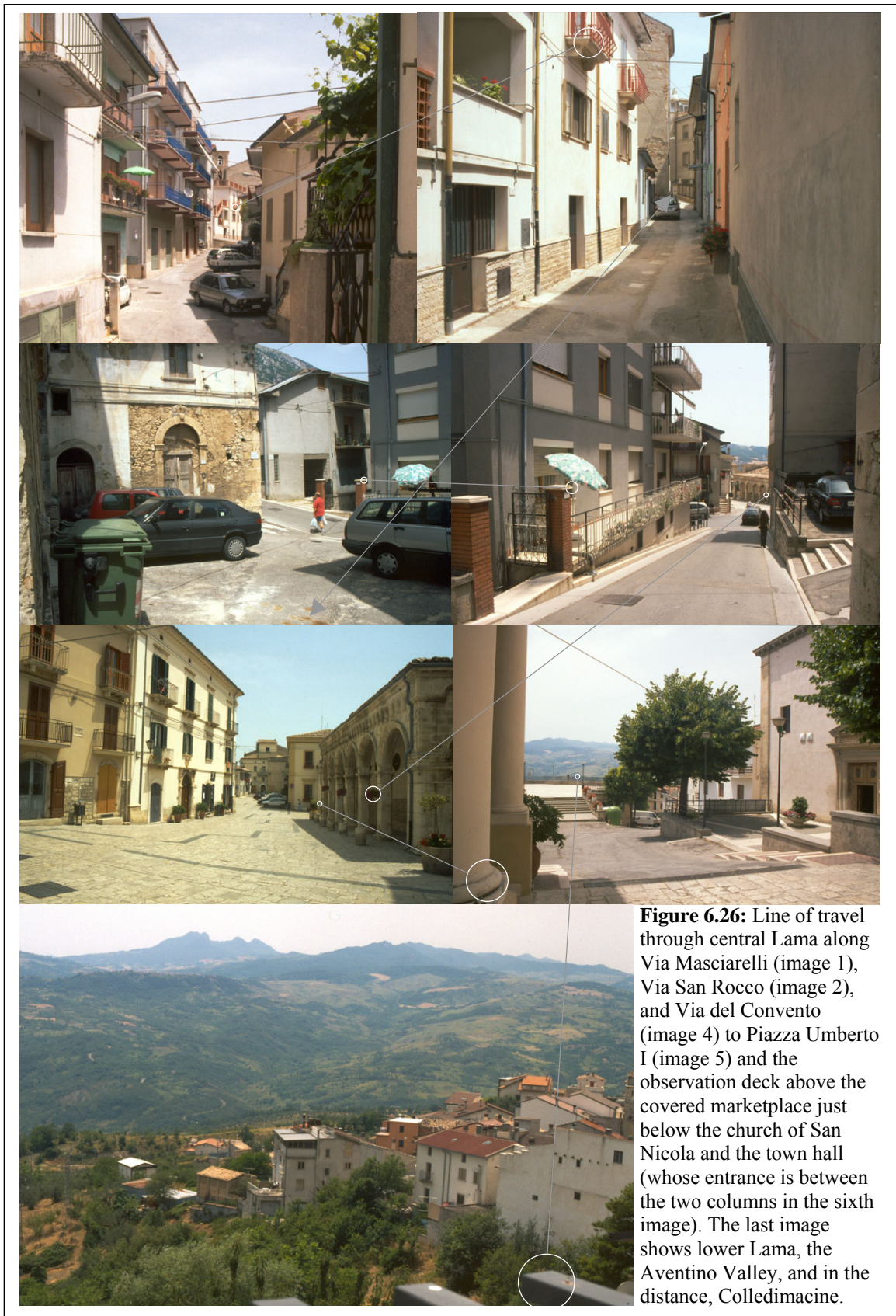


Figure 6.26: Line of travel through central Lama along Via Masciarelli (image 1), Via San Rocco (image 2), and Via del Convento (image 4) to Piazza Umberto I (image 5) and the observation deck above the covered marketplace just below the church of San Nicola and the town hall (whose entrance is between the two columns in the sixth image). The last image shows lower Lama, the Aventino Valley, and in the distance, Colledimacine.

The rest of the path, most likely traveled by car on one's way out of town, passes from this busy point through an area of scattered houses, vacant lots, one last grocery store, and finally the recent museum of natural history and archeology – which may occasion a visit (see the sixth image in figure 6.24). In turn, this experience may even inspire the visitor – now more knowledgeable of the area – to make a short detour in reverse back to the town center and then uphill along Via Convento to the edge of the national park under the cliffs of the Majella in order to view the small group of transplanted chamois kept within a fenced area for the purposes of breeding and later introduction into the wild (see figure 3.18). Even with this extension, only a little of the town is seen, much of which closely borders the countryside.

The edges of the space surrounding this Stranger's Path in Lama form what Lefebvre calls “membranes,” or porous walls, constituting a sort of “spatial envelope,” which “implies a barrier between inside and out” (*The Production* 176). Within this meandering corridor is a concentration of overlapping spaces dedicated to travel, gathering, and commerce – functioning for both locals and outsiders alike. Beyond are streets and minor squares that are officially public, but which are infrequently visited by strangers. As a result, public space in Lama (as, for that matter, in most towns – especially smaller, compact ones) is divided into two roughly overlapping zones – one that is openly public, generally axial and relatively narrow, and another that is scattered, marginal, and reservedly public. Although not contained within formally closed frontiers (there are of course no rigid physical barriers or agreed-upon codes restraining passage), this inner, openly public zone encapsulates what Lefebvre terms a “distinct body” formed of boundaries that are “always relative and, in the case of membranes, always permeable”



(176). Indeed, these boundaries are constantly shot through by the overlapping networks of both centrifugal and centripetal roads – which respectively in Lefebvre’s terminology roughly correspond to representations of space (“conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers”) and spaces of representation

(“space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’”) (38-39).

Venturing away from the Stranger’s Path into the peripheral zones of reservedly public space along narrow passageways, steep stairways, the odd wide yet rarely used “modern” street, and shortcuts through vacant lots, challenges the observer to embrace and make sense of the second, paradoxically “marginal-core” of the town, composed of ordinary, seemingly nondescript urban fabric: interwoven buildings, streets, and small squares that at first glance could be anywhere in south-central Italy (see figures 6.25 to 6.27). And yet, these spaces are almost exclusively used by residents; the wandering outsider is often looked upon with slight misgiving. After all, why would anyone be traipsing around such areas? “Why indeed,” I often asked myself while wandering around side streets of Lama feeling rather lost. Perhaps, if nothing else, aimlessly meandering observation of this sort helps to better conceptualize how, in Tuan’s words, landscape “is not to be defined by itemizing its parts. The parts are subsidiary clues to an integrated image. Landscape is such an image, a construct of the mind and feeling” (“Thought” 89).

In these “marginal-core” areas, it is in fact much more difficult to itemize particular buildings than in the actual center (where the urge to do so, however misleading, inevitably strikes) – as so few stand out as being either monumental or memorable. Crisscrossing the village’s various reservedly and openly public spaces along a mix of centrifugal and centripetal roads breaks down categorizing analysis, and forces one to identify and integrate scattered details into an evolving conception of the whole. Such observational movement also helps clarify one’s conception of what Tuan terms as landscape as “an ordering of reality from different angles. It is both a vertical and a side

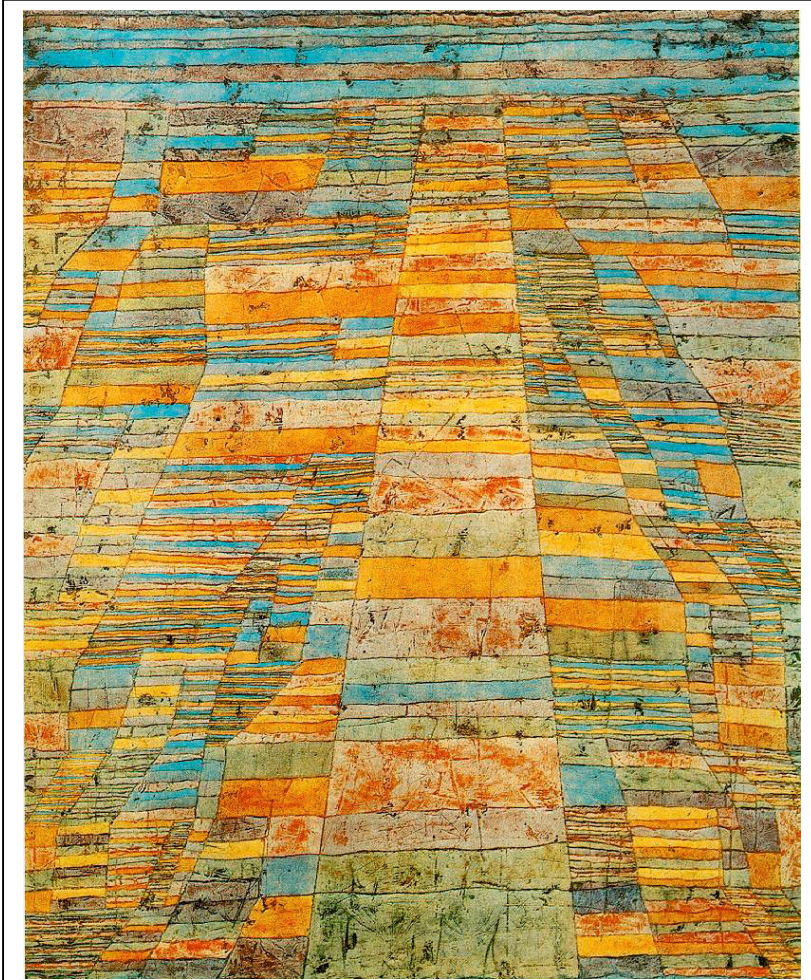


Figure 6.28: Klee’s masterful painting, *Highways and Byways*, is an illustrative example of Jackson’s concepts of centrifugal and centripetal road systems – albeit in what appears to be a landscape of plains, rather than mountains.

view. The vertical view sees landscape as domain, a work unit, or a natural system necessary to human livelihood in particular and to organic life in general. . . . The side view, in contrast, is personal, moral and aesthetic” (90). The mix of such vertical conceptions of the landscape, based often on cartographic, aerial, and functional analyses, with side conceptions, based on more subjective and direct experiences, is indeed imperative to inspiring a more accepting and perceptive, overall understanding of space. We know we are on the right track when, as Gianni Celati writes of photographer Luigi



Figure 6.29: Telephoto view of Lama from near the convent: from this angle the division created by the Via Frentana, which runs lengthwise from right to left through the middle of the buildings, is invisible. At upper left is the viewing platform visible in the last image in figure 6.26; at center left is the emerging, dark green crown of the giant downy oak visible in figure 6.33; and at bottom is the village soccer pitch.

Ghirri, we are able to “make a clean sweep of the usual intentions or reasons of looking,” and to find “a way of looking in which there are no spoils to be seized, there is no quest for extraordinary adventures, but one which discovers that everything can be interesting because it is part of existence” (Ghirri, *Paesaggio* 32).

From Neighborhoods to Buildings

I end this chapter with a closer look at a number of roughly identifiable clusterings of structures, and there within, at a few, for the most part randomly selected, private houses and (semi-) public buildings. In the preceding section I assumed the viewpoint of an uninitiated outsider; whereas here I take a step closer, and make the shift into the guise of a somewhat familiarized (and occasionally recognized) visitor – which is in fact my past,

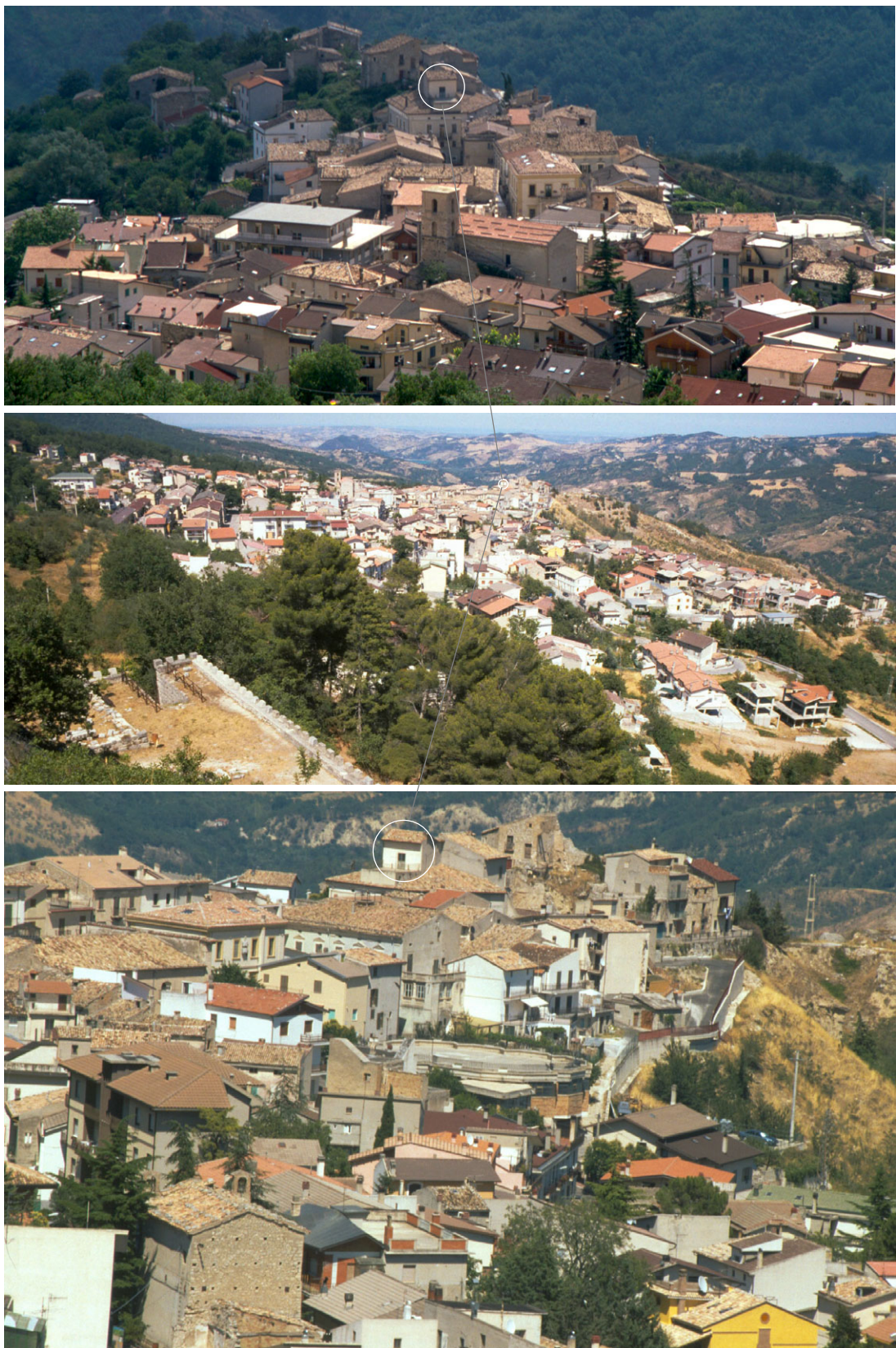


Figure 6.30: A group of three photographs of Lama taken from differing angles and distances, whose connections are illustrated through the identification of a single point in common – a small upper building story marked by small white circles connected to one another by thin grey lines.

and without doubt future (if only occasional), role in the village. By now it must be clear that I do not offer in this thesis a linear history of the study area, and make little attempt at cataloguing “dramatic” landscape details. I certainly do not offer a step by step tour of churches, monuments, and sites of historical events. Such methodical yet selective “tasting” of the immediately desirable landscape certainly has its place, but may limit attention to rather flat and scenic, rather than multidimensional and panoramic views.

Any given account of a landscape is by nature fragmentary – a realization that is becoming more and more evident as I continue to write. Only a portion of the geographic story can be told of any locale; in most cases (whether urban monographs or poetic narratives), only a small (yet hopefully integrated) sampling of a space can be described, analyzed, and/or re-envisioned. As Tuan states, “[L]andscape appears to us through an effort of the imagination exercised over a highly selected array of sense data” (“Thought” 90). I have certainly had to omit much in the writing of this thesis – the majority, in fact, of the information that I collected during the research process, from images and maps to stories and interviews. It is my hope, however, that in providing as rich a selection as possible of this foundational material, both embedded within chapters and in various appendices, that further insights may be drawn beyond those that I either offer or hint at.

The necessity to select is inherent in written accounts of both casual surveys of a few days as well as intense periods of fieldwork lasting from months to even years. “Exhaustive” studies may not be, upon further examination, complete at all. We need not perceive the whole to comprehend the whole; ably perceiving parts can lead to better comprehending numerous wholes. Uncovering every detail of any given landscape would clearly be impossible. On the other hand, it may be sufficient to attempt to panoramically

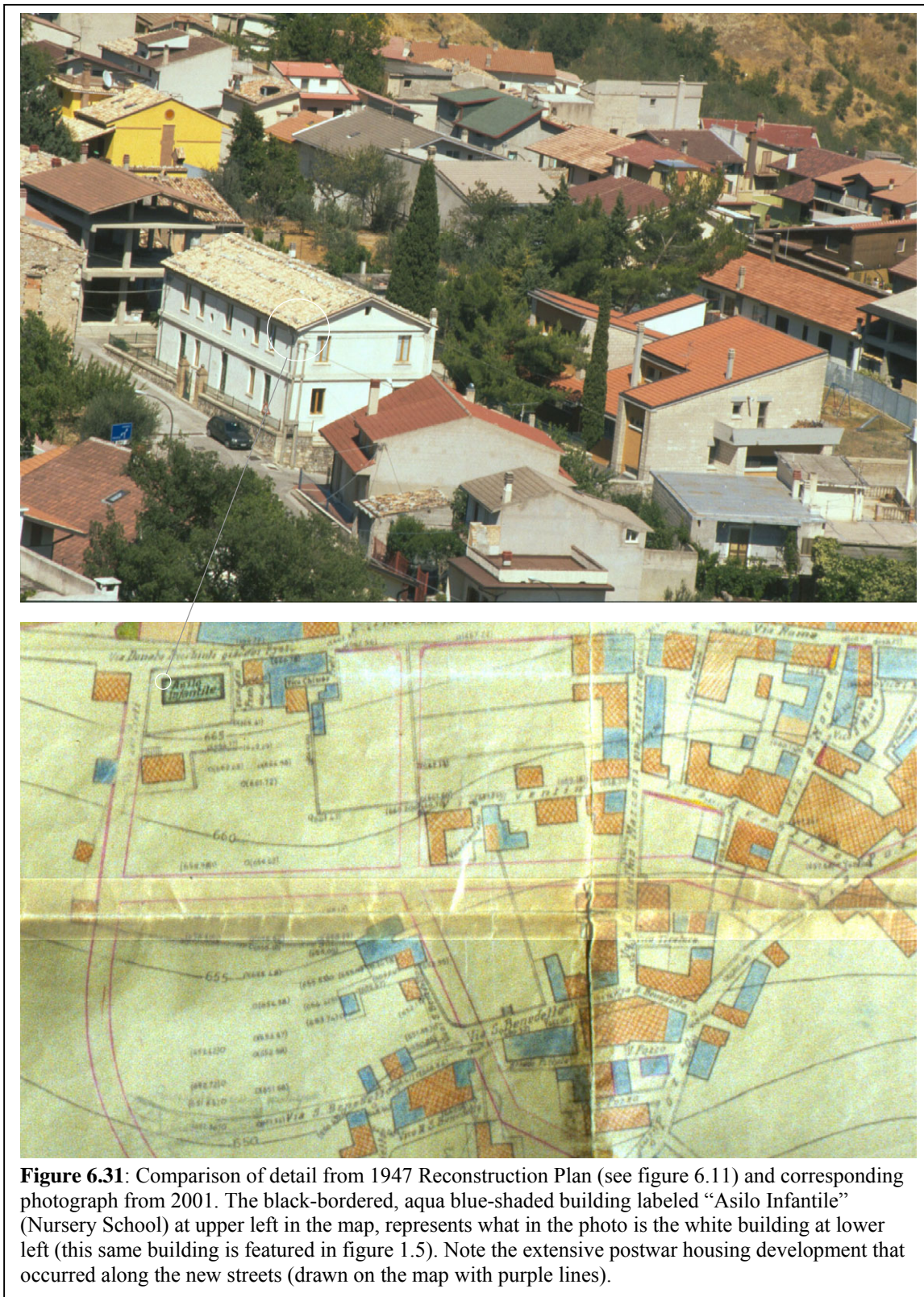




Figure 6.32: View of the Mercato Largo, host to a weekly public market in Lama, which extends from this area directly ahead, down Via Roma into Piazza Umberto I, and around the corner of San Nicola.

read any landscape by paying attention to scattered yet interrelated (both randomly encountered and pre-selected) components of that landscape. Often these components, from silent doorways and dusty sidewalks to screeching birds and heckling fruitsellers, are randomly encountered. However, after much observation and contemplation, a fieldworker can begin to discern their overlapping, highly complex interrelations.

These parts, properly correlated, may indeed illuminate the whole. This perceptual-analytical process, however fragmentary, may in turn potentially facilitate the panoramic reading of other landscapes. This at least is my hope as I near the end of this chapter (and thesis), realizing somewhat regretfully how much I have had to leave out despite what had initially appeared to be a relatively narrowly focused study area. Perhaps moving one's point of view upon the landscape with intelligent care and hard-



Figure 6.33: Comparison of detail from 1947 Reconstruction Plan (see figure 6.11) and corresponding photograph from 2001. Note the many new houses built in the empty spaces of the map, as well as in projected green spaces next to the housing built for the postwar homeless (diagonally blue striped boxes on map). The sole designated green space to survive (at bottom, just left of center on map) is home to a giant downy oak that was growing on the site well before expansion began in this area after the 1933 earthquake (the tree is much revered by residents: it and the piazza around it host a number of mainly politically left-leaning festivities). The dark red hatched boxes on the map indicate buildings destroyed during the Second World War, while the blue hatched boxes indicate housing built for the homeless after the 1933 earthquake. In blowing up as many of Lama's buildings as possible, the retreating Germans seemed to have missed this complex (which at the time would have been little over ten years old): it is the largest cluster of buildings (except perhaps, the monastery, which was defended by partisans) to have survived relatively unscathed from the war.



Figure 6.34: A makeshift yet effective urban-rural boundary: a garden gate and adjoining walls made of wood slats, scrap metal, strips of linoleum, baling wire, chicken wire, strips of rubber, tin ice cream advertisements, rope, pipe, a square metal post, a rusty bed spring, stones, and transparent fiberglass roofing material (Old Lama).

earned affection, at turns panning, zooming, and stopping for sustained prospects, may let us in on the geographical story just far enough in order to gather a meaningful if tentative framework-conception of the spatial make-up of a landscape. The mutable gaps can then be filled in – as part of a potentially endless process of ever more detailed and localized reckoning and emplacement.



Figure 6.35: Looking up: balcony detail with carved faces on a house along Vico V Monistero in Lama.

Such a framework, as I have been suggesting, often consists of various boundaries – especially those that we travel upon in the form of pathways, moving slowly from openly public, to reservedly public, to semi-private, to private spaces – and then back again across all four in increasingly mishmash order. What soon begins to form in the mind of the gradually familiarized outsider is a sense of direction based not only on pathways and monumental structures, but neighborhoods and ordinary (groups of) buildings. Subtler details soon emerge, making what might have initially seemed foreign yet “anyplace,” appear progressively more familiar and specific. Among these subtler details are hazy or partially erased boundaries. For example, Lama’s various neighborhoods, which while loosely grouped into sections defined by roads and areas of terrain unsuited to construction (because of being either too steep or subject to landslides), rarely exhibit definite or easily identifiable external (or for that matter,

internal) boundaries. Also, what one person may identify as the outer edge of a neighborhood, can often just as easily be said to be either the outer edge, or even the center, of another.

For example, while traveling through town on the Via Frentana, it is rather difficult to determine divisions between neighborhoods (as little of the rest of town is visible from the restricted perspective of this line of travel). And yet, given the unifying yet dividing nature of the road, the buffer zone of houses immediately to either side of it can be conceived as forming an elongated, narrow neighborhood, roughly split into three overlapping sections: one from the southwestern edge of town to the curve upon which San Pietro is situated (a point which more or less corresponds to the boundary given in the 1910 parochial map shown in figure 6.8); the second from this point through the central commercial “strip” to the sole bank and facing, final bar just northeast of Piazza Umberto I; and the third from this point to the far edge of town.

From another (and for the most part, an outsider’s) perspective, Lama could be conceived of as being divided into larger, more “block-like” units, consisting of three overlapping zones of similarly aged and constructed buildings, and divided by either major thoroughfares or strips of undeveloped land: a northwestern zone, comprised of the area above the Via Frentana and characterized by buildings constructed for the most part after the Second World War; a southeastern zone, comprised of the area below the Via Frentana and characterized by a mix of both pre- and postwar buildings; and an eastern zone, comprised of the oldest surviving buildings near the edge of the landslide area, linked by a tenuous strip of land to Old Lama (see figure 6.14). Although all these zones are simultaneously joined and divided by the central Via Frentana, all also contain a

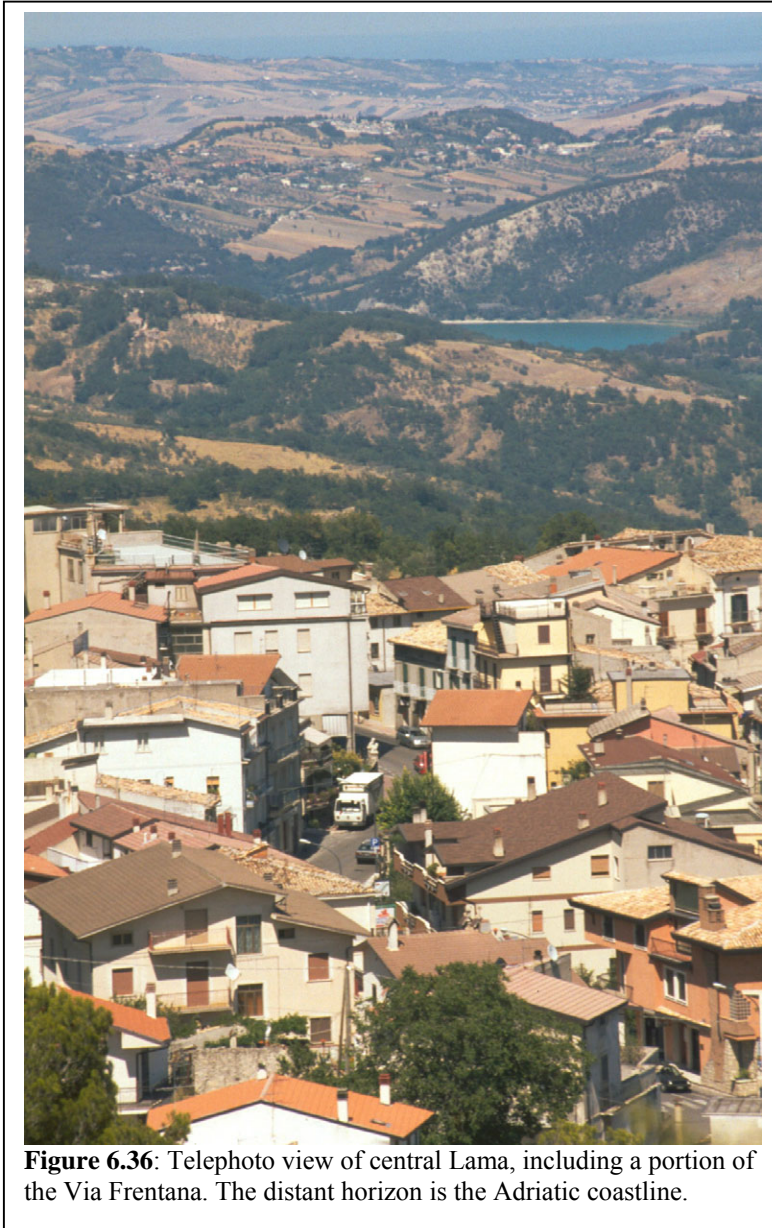


Figure 6.36: Telephoto view of central Lama, including a portion of the Via Frentana. The distant horizon is the Adriatic coastline.

number of internal public spaces, churches or chapels, and small businesses – which are more likely to be frequented by nearby than more distant residents.

And yet, attempting to subdivide the village in this way can be misleading, as each of these tentatively defined zones contains sub-neighborhoods – such as the roughly conjoined complexes of public housing built in the ‘30s and ‘40s, and scattered clusters of somewhat more expensive houses that seem to stand out rather than fit into their

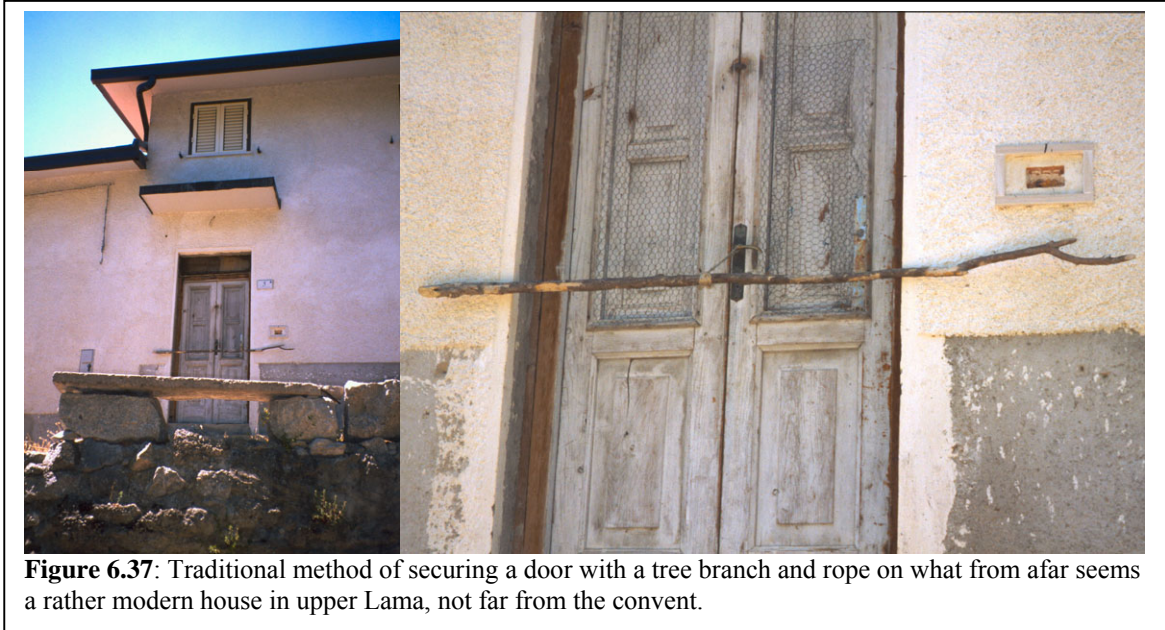


Figure 6.37: Traditional method of securing a door with a tree branch and rope on what from afar seems a rather modern house in upper Lama, not far from the convent.

surroundings. Also, unlike significantly larger towns such as Siena or Ferrara, Lama has no self-proclaimed “contrade” (districts or quarters). Additionally, because Lama has moved uphill in somewhat regular fashion over time, residents from the lowest areas damaged or destroyed by landslides have in large part moved to the opposite side of the village near its uppermost edge. As a result, there has been a significant amount of mixing of its populace in a number of areas.

Dividing Lama into these arbitrary, if partially overlaying zones, while of questionable relevance to the way in which its residents actually territorially define themselves, helps the outsider – at least initially – to comprehend the potential, myriad ways in which the village’s landscape might be organized and used. As the field of perception is narrowed (transitioning from wide-angled to zoomed-in views), more details and boundaries make themselves evident, and complicate any neat attempt to categorize distinct districts. And yet, this more complex grappling with spatial reality



Figure 6.38: Two views of the same area: at top is Mercato Largo with San Pietro in the background; at bottom is the same, if mostly transformed neighborhood during the “Processione del Bambino Gesù” in the early 1950s (San Nicola archives) (see also figures 6.18 and 6.23).



Figure 6.39: Two views of the same, long-unfinished building in eastern Lama, exhibiting a confusing mix of repairs to what appears to have been the remains of a war-damaged house, with a hodgepodge of various building materials, some recycled and some new.

would not be possible without initial territorial generalizing. The micro view demands the macro, and vice versa.

Perhaps the two unit-types of districts most useful to reading Lama can be drawn from Jane Jacobs' chapter "The Uses of Neighborhoods" from her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Even though she focuses on cities close to home, many of her insights can be applied in a variety of ways to urban centers and locales worldwide. In particular, she states that "[l]ooking at city neighborhoods as organs of self-government, I can see evidence that only three kinds of neighborhoods are useful: (1) the city as a whole; (2) street neighborhoods; (and 3) districts of large, subcity size" (117). Even though Lama is too small to contain easily recognizable examples of the third category, being, as we have seen, troublesome to meaningfully subdivide into large component zones, the first two neighborhood types nonetheless are particularly useful. On the one hand, as Jacobs writes, "[t]he most obvious of the three, although it is seldom

called a neighborhood, is the city as a whole. We must never forget or minimize this parent community while thinking of a city's smaller parts" (118). On the other hand, as she later writes, are

a city's streets, and the minuscule neighborhoods they form. . . . wherever they work best, street neighborhoods have no beginnings and no ends setting them apart as distinct units. The size even differs for different people from the same spot, because some people range farther, or hang around more, or extend their street acquaintance farther than others. (119-20)

This insight into the enigmatically uninterrupted nature of such subsets of urban space (each of which blends into others to form the "city as a whole"), is echoed in Lefebvre's comment that "[v]isible boundaries, such as walls or enclosures in general, give rise for their part to an appearance of separation between spaces where in fact what exists is an ambiguous continuity" (*The Production* 87). This in large part is due to the multiplicity of boundaries that crisscross all space, very few of which run parallel to one another for significant distances – if at all. An imposing boundary (such as large road) may seem to divide a community into halves, but in reality be shot through by countless other minor boundaries (such as side streets and school districting lines) that separate smaller spaces yet also suture together portions of the two sides of the larger, more visible boundary. Often the phenomena that give a neighborhood its defining and cohesive characteristics extend through seemingly impassible obstacles. As Lefebvre states, "[t]he space of a room, bedroom, house, or garden may be cut off in a sense from social space by barriers and walls, by all the signs of private property, yet still remain fundamentally part of that space" (87).

And what of such smaller spaces, especially those constituted by individual buildings? Once we as observers become familiar enough with a given urban space to not



Figure 6.40: Three views of southeastern Lama, taken from differing angles and distances, whose connections are illustrated through the identification of a single point in common – the roof corner of a single building, marked by small white circles connected to one another by thin grey lines. The middle image reinforces the idea that this area could be considered as a neighborhood unit, while the top image shows its unification with the upper portions of town, and the bottom image demonstrates how it seeps into lower-lying farmhouses, which are as much connected to the valley below as the town above.



Figure 6.41: A group of three doors and accompanying windows in an older building complex bordering a small square in eastern Lama. It is difficult to tell if each of these sets of openings belong to individual houses, or if two or more are conjoined by inner passageways. The broom paradoxically suggests cleanliness despite the overall air of decay, while the rather hopeless sign announcing “VENDESI” (FOR SALE), points to the general state of (near) abandon.

only comfortably navigate along its openly public streets and smaller, reservedly public passageways, but to begin to recognize the ever-changing (expanding, concentrating, and shape-shifting) quality of its overlapping macro- and micro-neighborhoods, how do we then make sense of, for example, a small house within its enveloping context?

Contextually inseparable from its surroundings, yet individually distinct (as we might envision an organism is from its habitat, or perhaps a cell is from its body), such a structure begins to speak as might the personality of a small, living being. The older it is, the more disfigured, patched-up, and hunched-over it becomes – gaining in the process a

certain either venerable or disreputable character concurrent with the treatment received by its inhabitants.

A house may be understood to be the on-going expression of the people who build it, live in it, and progressively repair and/or rebuild it. As such, we might ask, can a house – especially one vernacularly (re-)constructed over long periods of time – suffer from multiple personality disorder? Can one appear schizophrenic? Can one appear morally upstanding yet somewhat standoffish? Can yet another appear well-adjusted and healthy – maverick yet well-respected? Perhaps the answer to all of these anthropomorphic questions is yes – for what more humanly-influenced structure is there but the house? As Gaston Bachelard writes, “[a] house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability. We are constantly re-imagining its reality: to distinguish all these images would be to describe the soul of the house; it would mean developing a veritable psychology of the house” (17).

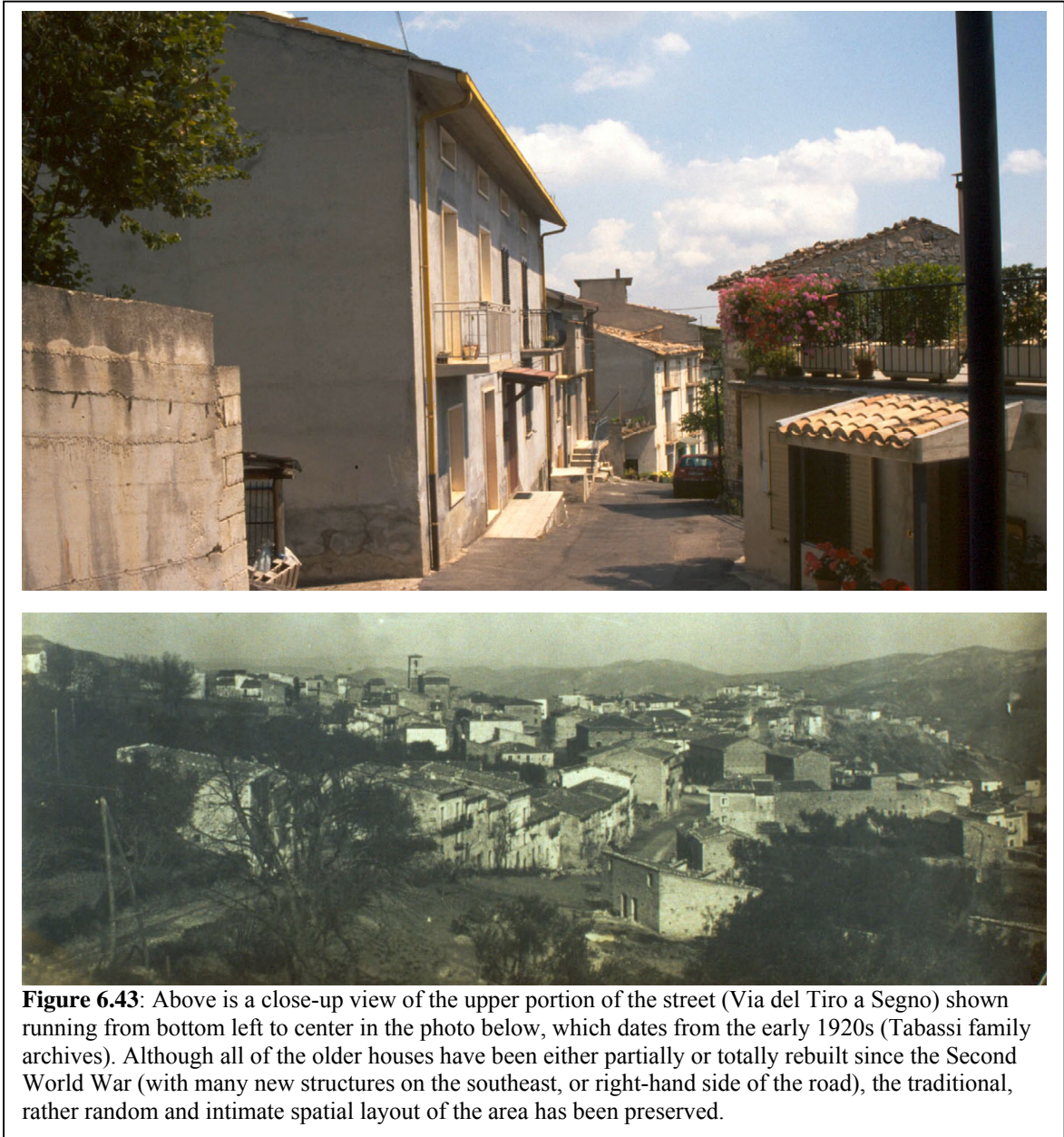
Such an undertaking is clearly beyond the scope of the present work, but indicates the complexity involved in analyzing the innumerable factors behind the on-going existence of any given house – including more pragmatic concerns such as climate, materials, slope, and soil conditions, as well as wider sociological influences, from traditional building practices to cultural taboos.²⁶ I close here with a few final words on houses, which in the proceeding chapter on the Aventino Valley sporadically appear as signposts signaling the extended presence of both Lama and Colle. They are, in effect, surviving elements of the once intimately mirrored designs of the village and the

²⁶ Amelio Pezzetta’s superb work *Casa rurale, ambiente, agricoltura e società a Lama dei Peligni dal 1700 ai giorni nostri* (Rural house construction, environment, agriculture and society in Lama dei Peligni from 1700 to current times), is of particular note in this regard.



Figure 6.42: A doorway along a steep side street in eastern Lama, with an uncertain boundary of peeling stucco above, seemingly splitting its header in two.

surrounding countryside, whose forms once bled much more than now into one another along myriad internal boundaries both towards the mountain and the river (see figure 4.8). Within the immediate fabric of Lama, these structures offer variously conflicting and harmonious evidence of where the village has been, where it may be going, and what it may mean. Indeed, heard together, their voices provide a collective tale of both origins (evidence of which lies scattered everywhere, including underfoot in the dust and within the zigzagging lines of mortar) and potential ends (which in the future may



simultaneously creep farther up the mountain, as well as fall deeper into the valley). But what of Lama's current structures?

At present there seem to be four main types of buildings in Lama: 1) surviving prewar, usually late sixteenth- to early twentieth-century, stone buildings; 2) rebuilt houses that were partially destroyed during the Second World War (with a mishmash of

whatever building materials happened to be on hand, some recycled and some new); 3) post-earthquake and postwar public housing, which is in the slow process of being transforming by its inhabitants from bureaucratically identical units within cleanly edged blocks, to weathered and individualized (or customized) dwellings within squarish clusterings; and, 4) new housing, built from contemporary materials, such as steel-reinforced cement beams and steel- and cement-reinforced terracotta block walls, according to architectural plans and in compliance with anti-seismic regulations.

Rarely in Lama are there sustained instances of assembly-line built, modular housing, what Lefebvre refers to as characteristic of “modern towns, their outskirts and new buildings,” where “everything here resembles everything else” (*The Production* 75). The sole three examples of such structures in Lama are the public housing blocks built for the homeless, and a more recent strip of contemporary row-houses along the town’s uppermost, western border. However, the former are already melding into the more irregular, vernacular structures that have cropped up around them (see figure 6.33), and the latter, while sticking out like a sore thumb, is not apt – judging on the village’s current, very slow state of economic growth – to proliferate widely, if at all.

While Lama may initially seem to lack “old world charm,” due to the predominance of newer structures and the relative paucity of centuries-old buildings, it cannot be said, as Lefebvre writes of recent mass-produced spaces, “that repetition has everywhere defeated uniqueness, that the artificial and contrived have driven all spontaneity and naturalness from the field, and, in short, that products have vanquished works” (75). On the contrary, throughout Lama are intimate, welcoming spaces that are well frequented by various Lamesi, who, as Celati writes of the denizens of a quarter

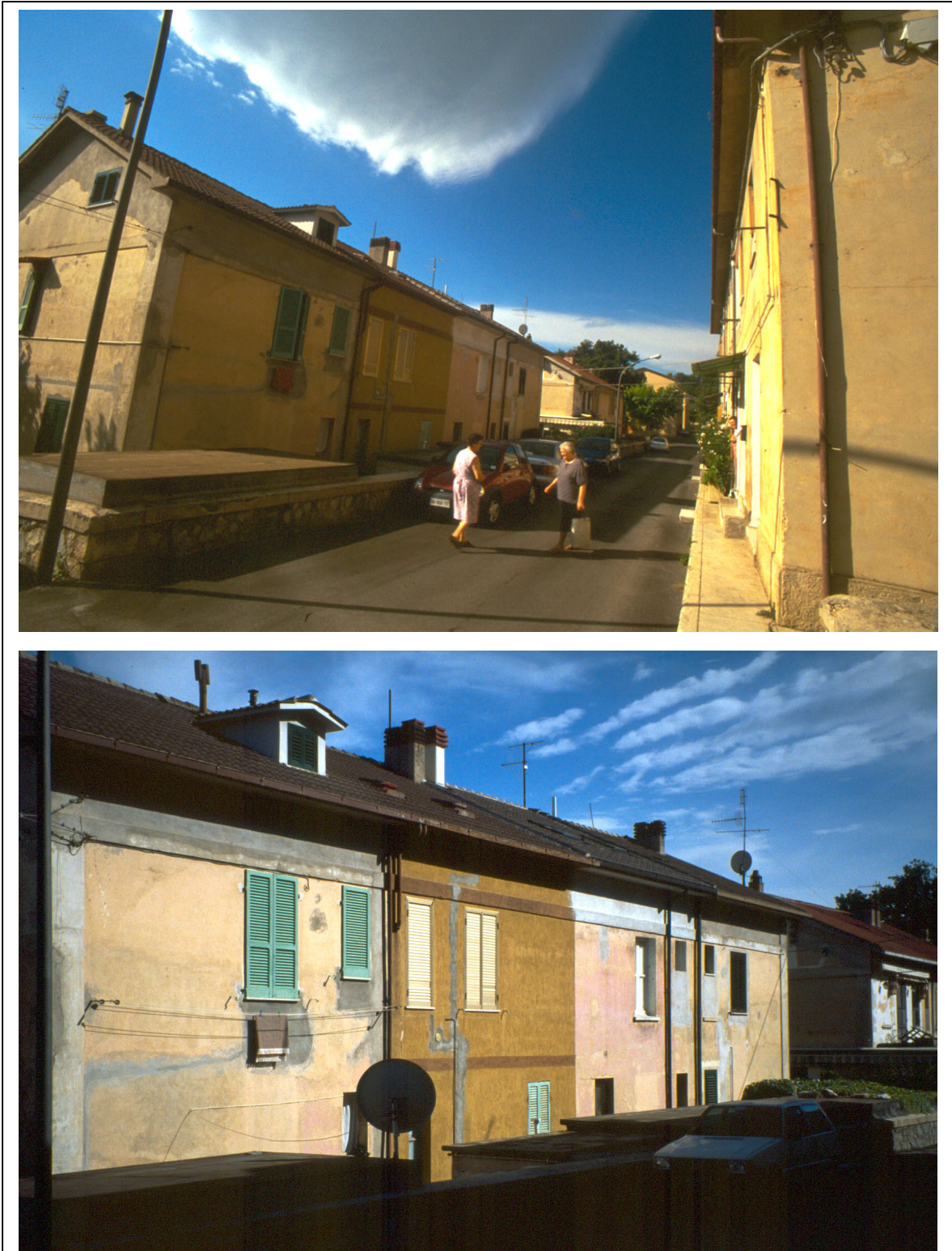


Figure 6.44: Two views of the same public housing complex erected in upper Lama to shelter the homeless after the 1933 earthquake (above is a view in the morning in 2002; below is one in the afternoon in 2001). Note how alterations/additions of windows, plastering to conceal repairs, and the application of paint have helped to delineate private space as well as give the complex a more intimate, lived-in appearance.

in the northern town of Benedetto, “inhabit their place, this small space, and are not occupants that could be anywhere, such as we who lack a place of belonging: you can tell by the way they move along the street” (*Verso* 64).

Even though most of Lama’s buildings are of relatively recent construction, most have been built to tightly fit the former imprints of their war-destroyed predecessors (see figure 6.44). Thus it is common, while wandering through town, to encounter seemingly paradoxical juxtapositions of vernacularly shaped urban spaces (streets, passageways, and squares) with contemporary, clean-faced buildings featuring sixties-styled metal balconies, garish aluminum windows, and shiny plastic rolling shutters. Such places, at first glance, may seem to have been wiped clean of most traces of the past, but upon further inspection, hold many subtle layers reaching far back in both time and space. Celati describes a similar phenomenon, created by a group of older houses in Codigoro along a river, that “open up the space in a sort of very wide cove and form a true place. Nothing abstract or planned, over there you see that time has become a form of space; one aspect has grown little by little upon the other, like the wrinkles of our skin” (96).

Although Lama has suffered numerous unplanned surgeries and face-lifts alike, the contours of its aging yet constantly remade body and deeper wrinkles remain – along with scattered new appendages that generally add, rather than take away from the whole. The overall effect is far from immediately aesthetically pleasing, but, like most slowly-evolving and ordinary, eminently lived spaces, is one that as it sinks in becomes gradually more satisfying and enigmatic.

Chapter 7: La Valle dell'Aventino: Briars and Abandoned Boundaries

I abandon Rome
 The peasants abandon the land
 The swallows
 abandon my town
 The faithful
 abandon the churches
 The millers
 abandon the mills
 The people of the mountains
 abandon the mountains
 Grace
 abandons men
 Some abandon everything (Guerra 22)

That this is the zenith (one can only hope) of the global age of the automobile is made gradually more apparent the further away from the centrifugal Via Frentana one travels along the small and winding centripetal series of potholed country roads leading from Lama dei Peligni to the Aventino River, and from there to Colledimacine. Very few cars pass by at any given time of day, a phenomenon evidenced in part by the colonizing weeds creeping up through cracks in the asphalt on either side of the road. If Lama owes much of its current (and to an extent, past) urban vigor to the fact that it is split down the middle by the well-traveled Via Frentana, the general state of abandonment of the lower-lying valley and nearby smaller villages such as Colledimacine, may be explained to a degree by the fact that these locales are either crossed by or accessed by minor roads leading to “no particular place.” Or perhaps I should say that on the contrary, these roads lead to a plethora of small-scale, very specific places with little or no readily detectable human activity.

For the outsider, simply locating the road from Lama to the Aventino River is rather difficult due to a lack of (consistent) signage, but in effect is a minor challenge



Figure 7.1: One of the few farmers from Lama still working a portion of the valley on his way down to the fields aboard a mini-tractor. Behind him in the shadows in front of the yellow and orange buildings is a large truck too long to maneuver around a tight corner. When I reached it on foot, the exasperated driver, having wedged the vehicle between two buildings and the inner curb of the hairpin curve, had almost given up trying to escape.

handily solved by heading faithfully downhill through town along any random, zigzagging sequence of streets. Eventually all asphalted surfaces funnel into a single channel, as houses slowly disappear and small garden plots, vacant lots, and swaths of open countryside begin to multiply and unify. If in Lama evidence of the past is not exactly forthcoming due to cycles of urban destruction and reconstruction, in the valley this dilemma is caused almost entirely by the abandonment and decay of human structures, and the slow regrowth of the forests. Demarcations between sections of property – whether olive groves, gardens, or hay fields – are occasionally evident (due to the rare, ongoing efforts of an older farmer), but for the most part remain partially or



Figure 7.2: View of Aventino Valley, with Lama visible at top left, and the Adriatic coastline in the far distance. Note the large semi-barren area at center left, the site of frequent landslides; patches of cultivated land, such as the field in the immediate foreground; and large expanses of formerly cultivated farmland, now overgrown with scrubby thickets.

wholly obscured within the prospects offered from the road's edge. Many entire houses, or the ruins of houses, lie masked behind thick undergrowth and young trees – sometimes wholly camouflaged even at a distance of ten yards or less. Stumbling upon them after thrashing about in the briars is a surprise, which at the moment may feel like a minor archaeological discovery. Most signs of former human activity, however, remain either hidden from view or inaccessible, surrounded by dense blankets of thorny vegetation.

How does one go about “conjuring up” past versions of such a space, especially when so many of the former human “scratchings” upon it have been rendered either illegible, or for all practical purposes (barring archeological excavation) invisible? One way to tentatively start, is to consider the potential former relationships that once existed between the town and country, based on generalized models of urban-rural mutual



Figure 7.3: A building in Old Lama, once part of a house at the center of town, now a patched together rural outbuilding along its distant periphery.

interdependence, which in turn are based on either well-documented or existing, parallel examples. Lefebvre writes that “[t]he town has a two-sided relationship to the country . . . first as an entity which draws off the surplus product of rural society, and secondly as an entity endowed with the administrative and military capacity to supply protection” (*The Production* 234). He goes on to say that

[a]s an image of the universe (*imago mundi*), urban space is reflected in the rural space that it possesses and indeed in a sense *contains*. Over and above its economic, religious and political content, therefore, this relationship already

embodies an element of symbolism, of image-and-reflection: the town perceives itself in its double, in its repercussions or echo; in self-affirmation, from the height of its towers, its gates and its campaniles, it contemplates itself in the countryside that it has shaped – that is to say, in its *work*. The town and its surroundings thus constitute a *texture*. (235)

While Lefebvre here seems to refer to larger urban centers – on the scale of nearby cities such as Sulmona or Chieti – his comments nonetheless throw light upon the now largely forgotten web of interconnected relations between the urban hub of Lama and the rural lands surrounding it. Lama may currently lack a system of formally constructed defenses, yet in the past it sported a small castle, walls, and a number of gates – the last of which was demolished in the mid-nineteenth century (Pezzetta, *Casa* 87-88). Certainly its elevated position offered a strategic advantage for the potential defense against outside aggressors – as well as a safe haven for the numerous farming families resident lower in the valley within the comune’s jurisdiction.

The few campaniles still standing in Lama are quite small and no towers survive; however, even in the past when such structures perhaps existed in greater numbers and were viewed with awe (rather than curiosity or nostalgia, as they tend to be now), the town’s inhabitants needed little aid in order to survey their surrounding territory, due to numerous vantage points offered by steep slopes, drop-offs, and the upper stories of buildings. Likewise, the town was almost always within view of the comune’s rural inhabitants – acting as a constant reminder of the focal point of their existence, where major festivities took place, church masses were conducted, various services offered, markets held, as well as products and goods either traded, sold, or delivered as rental payment (as in the case of sharecroppers).



Figure 7.4: Detail from Klee's 1926 painting *Florentine Villas*, in which houses or parts of houses are patched together with sections of overlapping fence- and garden-like patternings.

The “texture” of “image-and-reflection” that Lefebvre describes above existed for centuries within and surrounding Lama, weaving itself back and forth between hub and periphery following the paths and activities of various workers, including farmers, masons, weavers, and shepherds. Klee's painting *Florentine Villas* illustrates how the vegetal rural and the constructed urban are subtly interwoven in complex patternings, one dependent on the other. His untitled watercolor painting featured in figure 4.8, which shows the edges of what appears to be a small village melding or bleeding into those of the nearby countryside, provides another excellent illustration of this phenomenon of the incessant cross-fertilization of boundaries between country and city, or in other words, the ubiquitous and entangled, marginal evidence of the processes of urban-rural

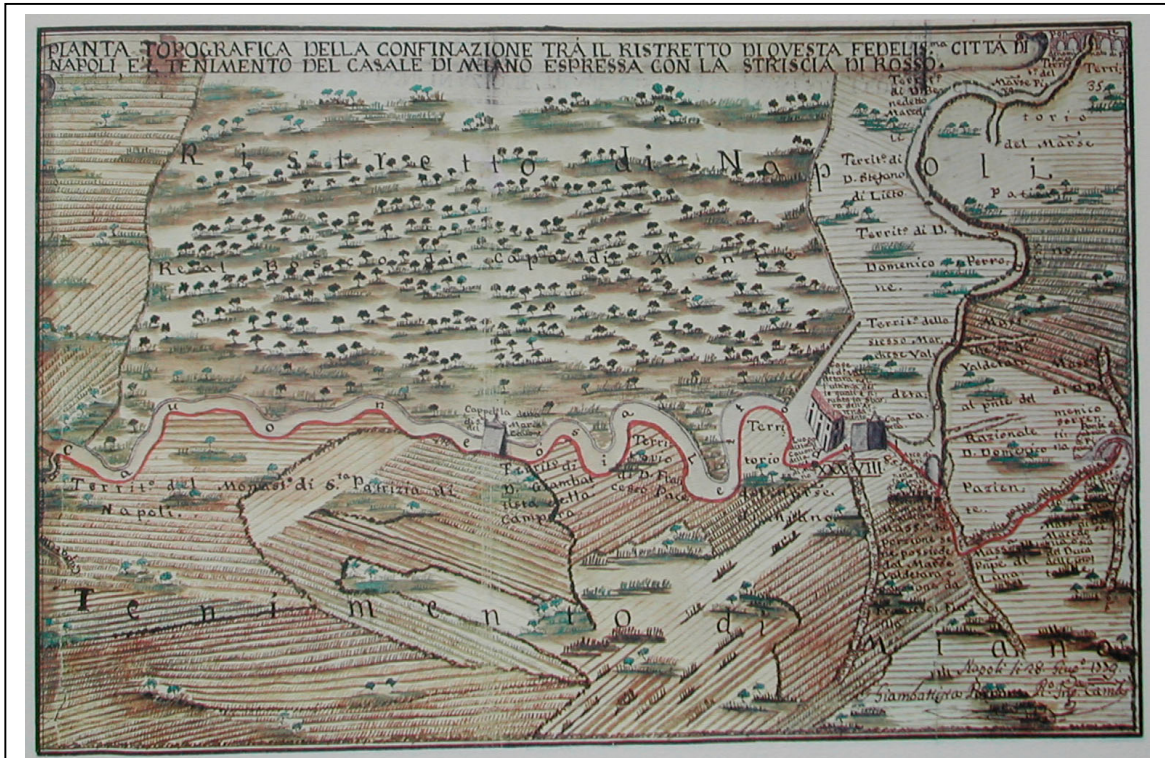


Figure 7.5: 1779 “Topographic Map” by Giambattista Porpora, indicating the boundary, drawn as a red line paralleling the river, between lands belonging to Napoli and Casale di Milano (Mazzetti). Note the “royal woods” at top, and the geometric patterning of the fields, which gives an idea of how well maintained and ordered the landscape of the Aventino Valley may have appeared in the past.

formation. Pezzetta provides insightful commentary on the former appearance of the now, much altered pattern of this mixed fabric, especially its visual quality:

[T]he agrarian landscape surrounding the urban center of Lama dei Peligni has changed in appearance as a consequence of socioeconomic transformations in the village. . . . Within [its] holdings, when agriculture was relatively well-diffused, the agrarian landscape appeared made up of a mixture of various shapes (trapezoids, rectangles, squares, etc.). Identifying them visually was possible by observing their colors and aspects – which bore witness to the various crops planted and the various interventions implemented by humans. The continuity of the agricultural fields was broken by country roads, footpaths, and hedges planted between roads and fields in order to defend against the intrusion of other people’s animals. (89)

Interestingly, Pezzetta reports that boundaries between neighboring farmers’ plots were not indicated by “any stable, prominent border, but by markers constituted by stones laid



Figure 7.6: View to the southeast at sunset of the upper Aventino Valley, near Palena. Note the slow expansion of boundary hedges into gradually larger patches of brushland, which if left untended will unify to become forests – as appears to be the case at far left, at far right, and to a degree at center.

down each a certain distance from the other, which in local dialect were called ‘termini’” (89).

These, of course, were among the subtlest boundaries of the agrarian landscape (subject to constant change), and the first to become obscured with the widescale abandonment of the fields, which began after the Second World War, and has gradually increased ever since. To give a rough idea of the shift from cultivated to abandoned land, in 1929 there were approximately 617 hectares of actively farmed land in the comune of Lama; whereas fifty years later in 1979, this amount had fallen to 148 (89). By now the figure is without doubt even lower. If the “termini” indicating individual plots (such as smaller olive groves within collective larger groves, which if viewed from a distance,



Figure 7.7: Close-up view of the southeastern side of the valley below Colledimacine, with the Vallone Torbido running from top right to bottom left (see also figures 3.6 and 3.8 for images of this area). Note that the few, still-cultivated fields are located within close proximity of maintained roads (either the Lama-Colle paved road at left, or the Colle-Taranta gravel road at right). The further away one moves from these arteries of human movement, the longer the fields are apt to have been abandoned, and the more advanced the expansion of the hedgerow boundaries from shrubby linear to more heavily wooded, patch-like shapes.

would have appeared as a single unit) have now long vanished, other boundaries, such as hedgerows, have instead expanded.

For instance, many pockets of woodland (once used for firewood and building material), have spread outward into former cropland, changing shape from relatively contained, dark-green geometrical shapes to amorphous, amoebae-like expanses of arboreal growth, which link along indeterminate edges with neighboring, thick patches of “macchia,” a tight clustering of shrubs and bushes similar to chaparral. On the other hand, smaller pathways that once spread out in intricate webs and provided the finer connective threads between fields, mule tracks, and country roads, have, like the termini, long ago been overgrown by pioneering plants, including gorse, blackberry, hawthorn, and juniper. The telltale colors and patternings of distinct crops have been replaced by the now-dominant, more chaotic shadings of dark green, a few surviving olive groves, and a



Figure 7.8: View of a cultivated plot of land in the upper Aventino Valley, near Taranta Peligna, with a crumbling wall of a ruined building in the immediate foreground, and recently abandoned farmland in the background. Note the mix of vegetables, grapevines, olive and fruit trees, and narrow strips of fallow land – together which give an idea of what the valley might have looked like during former periods of intensive cultivation.

scattering of either brown (newly plowed), lighter green (recently planted or recently abandoned), or yellow (harvested or fallow) patches indicating small plots of still-cultivated land.

Other signs of previous human land use that are occasionally perceptible within the tangled vegetation include sheds, hay-houses, and farmhouses. And yet, in addition to studying characteristic vernacular architectural typologies relating to site and culture, how can such rural structures be usefully perceived and analyzed? Certainly they are closely linked to both Lama and Colle, and partially replicate in rough form structures

within these urban hubs, but they also take much from the immediately surrounding countryside, often appearing to meld into a hillside or thick copse – an effect that is accentuated by, though by no means dependent on, disuse and decay. “A peasant dwelling,” as Lefebvre writes, “embodies and implies particular social relations; it shelters a family – a particular family belonging to a particular country, a particular region, a particular soil. . . . No matter how prosperous or humble such a dwelling may be, it . . . remains, to a greater or lesser degree, part of nature” (*The Production* 83).

This specificity (tending towards insularity) of place is accentuated by the lack of centrifugal roads that convey a constant influx of outside influence (such as occurs in Lama). But can we say that a farmhouse is more a part of nature than a village house? Certainly not in any absolute way, but in an immediate sense? I believe that the answer is inevitably yes, but one which must be accompanied by an acceptance of the highly complicated relation between rural dwellings to their rural landscapes. It is too easy to fall prey to misleading, stereotypical images of rural dwellings as focal points of idyllic pastoral scenes, without considering the complicated functions they embody as mediators between nature and culture. As Lefebvre states, such dwellings are objects “intermediate between work and product, between nature and labor, [and] between the realm of symbols and signs” – something between “a given” and an artifact (83).

Most the rural houses in the valley were (or still are) composed of an odd mixture of materials, built and rebuilt over time with whatever happened to be on hand (from large tree branches and other plant materials such as canes, to stones found on site and improvised mortars of mud and sand). Without regular maintenance (a process which also produces constant, fascinating transformations), decay comes faster in these than in



Figure 7.9: A small rural structure at the base of Taranta Peligna, built mainly from materials found nearby, which uses the cliff behind it as the main support for a makeshift back wall. While the large vertical stack of branches suggests continued use, inside a collapsing roof, rotting strands of braided garlic, bird droppings, and trash indicate abandonment within the last five to ten years. When this house eventually collapses, little will remain as evidence of its former existence apart from metal artifacts and a pile of stone interspersed with fragments of terracotta roof tiles.

more regularly constructed houses made of weather-resistant, usually highly processed materials. Although clearly human artifacts, they are, as Lefebvre indicates, “products” necessitating constant “work,” made of immediately available “natural” or “given” materials, which when left to their own devices rapidly meld back into their soon overgrown surroundings. Sometimes these rural structures housed year-round residents, while in other cases they served primarily as part-time shelters for farming families who also either owned or rented larger houses in a village. Currently the few that remain are used for the most part by older residents (mainly pensioners) who often maintain only a portion to store tools, eat lunch, and perhaps take naps.



Figure 7.10: Antonio tending his garden in the lower Aventino Valley in the area once known as Purgatorio.

While walking through an area of scattered dwellings near the valley bottom, a district that was commonly once referred to as Purgatorio, I had the luck to meet and talk with a man from Lama named Antonio.²⁷ I had many times in the past seen him tending his rows of plants (including tomatoes, beans, corn, and potatoes) while walking to the river with children from the camps. Before this, however, I had never managed to do more than wave (I was usually rather preoccupied with children, who by then having “smelled” the water, had begun to run wild). His plot, while not large, is one of the best tended and most visible along the road from Lama to the river.

With a cigarette in one hand and a small scythe in the other – two objects that seemed permanently rooted to his body – he explained that he was not really a “farmer,” but a retired stone mason. After a debilitating back injury sustained while building a

²⁷ Judging from the mid-nineteenth-century Tabassi family map (see figures 4.7 and 7.11), “Purgatorio” (or “Purgatoio,” [see Pezzetta, *Casa* 17]) may have become a generalized place-name thanks in part to the surname of a former landowner with widespread holdings; conversely, it may have (also) been a humorous epithet used by former inhabitants to refer not only to the somewhat less than ideal living

house many years in the past (which in effect also ended his career), his doctor warned him that he wouldn't be able to walk if he didn't regularly exercise. Determined to "keep his legs going," he decided to clear and plant a garden on his grandfather's plot of land – which had at the time, probably in the mid-'70s, been long overgrown. He then pointed downwards to the earth and said that the reason why the area was still cultivated by a few people was that there was water coming up from under the ground. After this, he showed me a gushing spring called "Fonte Purgo" less than twenty feet from the road, which I had always overlooked despite walking past it many times both alone and with the children. This is also when I finally realized where the freshwater crabs I had seen along the neighboring stretch of road had most likely been living and breeding, a place which before had seemed surprisingly far from the river for these creatures.

Purgatorio, Antonio said, was once home to over thirty families, and had been widely cultivated until the 1950s. Pointing to another house on the other side of the valley, he said that there you would also most likely find water. In fact, as Pezzetta notes, a rough idea can be formed, based solely on the location of rural houses or small farming settlements, of where the water table is fairly high (and wells easily dug), where cisterns can be built taking advantage of soil conditions and topography, or where the valley's naturally occurring springs randomly and ubiquitously percolate up through calcareous debris and sand along the surfaces of compacted layers of clay (*Casa* 18). While the valley may offer neither the best quality soil (being full of rocks and composed of mixed clay, sand, and pulverized limestone) nor an optimal climate (being unpredictable and

conditions of this particular zone (malaria was once common in areas nearer the river), but in general to inhabited areas lower down in the valley.



Figure 7.11: Detail from the mid-nineteenth-century Tabassi family map (see figure 4.17), showing a portion of the area known as Purgatorio, including Fonte Purgo (located at the point the middle strip of tangled thin blue lines begins, just to the lower left of the main intersection of roads at top center). The Aventino River runs along at bottom, from left to right (southwest to northeast).

permitting relatively short growing seasons for many crops), it has a virtually uninterrupted, if scattered supply of clean spring water flowing down from the heart of the Majella.

As I continue to write and to select and comment on photographs and maps, I am reminded again of the highly visual nature of this project, relying to a large degree on what Lefebvre warningly refers to as the misleading “trinity of readability-visibility-intelligibility” (*The Production* 96). Can we trust what we visualize of our surroundings through images and textual descriptions, however fragmented and arbitrarily selected, to either present a comprehensive portrait of a landscape, or as Lefebvre says, “to expose



Figure 7.12: At top is a view to the northwest of an olive tree, one of the most important and widespread cultivars in the valley, blowing in a strong wind with a portion of the Majella visible at top left; at bottom is a view upvalley (to the southwest) of one of the larger olive groves still worked below Lama.

errors concerning space”? (96). This criticism hits particularly acutely as I consider the valley. As most of its narrower passageways are now impassable, and as more paved roads come into being, there are fewer and fewer spaces across which humans can freely move. As a result, a new set of boundaries has been set up between the village, car, and road on one hand, and large swathes of the valley on the other. What we can see (either in person or in photographs) of the former may not communicate very much reliable or conclusive information about the latter.

The insights that older residents provide are invaluable, as is the commentary of other fieldworkers, such as Pezzetta (who is originally from Lama). And yet, even after many of my own firsthand explorations, the valley to me remains enigmatic and largely buried within the untamed growths or “accretions” – from plants and landslides to various excrescencies of decay and collapse – of the intertwined layers of accumulated space and time. Not that I feel totally stumped, simply held back at the edges. I can, of course, take hope in Olson’s assertion that “[t]here is no limit to what you can know. Or there is only in the sense that you don’t find out or don’t seek to know. . . . I see history as the one way to restore the familiar to us – to stop treating us cheap. Man is forever estranged to the degree that his stance toward reality disengages him from the familiar” (*The Special* 29). It may indeed be true, as Lefebvre asserts, that in order to “transgress the limits” of images (as well as “sounds,” “words,” and “bricks and mortar”), we need “a truth and a reality answering to criteria quite different from those of exactitude, clarity, readability and plasticity” (*The Production* 96). A decaying farmhouse surrounded by vines and bushes would indeed seem instead to respond to criteria of inexactitude, haziness, illegibility, and solidity. The odd detour into “projective,” experimental-

provincial poetry – being in large part based upon such enigmatic yet axial criteria – may in turn prove capable of responding back in some meaningful way to the “bones” of such human dwellings.

In his poem “Sedi e siti” (Settlements and sites), Italian poet Andrea Zanzotto provides one way to go about reading such a difficult and seemingly “mute” space – in this case the ruins of an abandoned house on the outskirts of his native village in the Veneto. In this, the third stanza of the poem, he simultaneously accelerates and slows down our perception of a fragment of wall inhabited now by clematises as well as other “inflorescences”:

Si accelera e pur s’acqueta
 il superfluo del grigiore-vitalbe
 così connaturato
 a questo – a quello – del
 luogo: vizza via d’inflorescenze
 o esclamazioni riarse,
 il superfluo così connaturato
 all’ispessirsi
 in testimonianze già sparse (*Meteo* 65)

The surplus of greyness-clematises
 quickens and yet quietens
 thus naturalized
 to this – to that – of the
 place: withered way of inflorescences
 or parched exclamations,
 the surplus thus naturalized
 in the thickening
 in the already sparse testimony

This poem does not contain straightforward definitions of space (or its subdivisions); instead, it offers suggestions of how we may better perceive space. In simple terms, Zanzotto describes the growth of clematises on a collapsing rock wall – a tiny niche of

his native landscape. In more complex terms, he examines the labyrinthine fabric of inhabited, everyday space, focusing on its paradoxical and ever-shifting mix of fecund, living “surplus” and its fading, remnant sparseness. As the clematises flourish, their tendrils dig into a fragment of human construction – most likely largely forgotten by nearby inhabitants. The clematises’ flowers, withering already, are indeed “parched exclamations,” tiny elements of what Zanzotto calls in the preceding stanza the “accanito raccogliersi-in-luogo / e intensità di luogo, testimone” (relentless gathering-in-place / and intensity of place, witness) (65). “Settlements and sites,” from Zanzotto’s point of view, may host both humans as well as nonhuman beings, whose remains – in a constant process of transformation – may be interpreted through the most modest seeming and recently arrived/descended “witnesses.”

With this thought in mind, let us move downhill a short distance from Antonio’s garden to a fork in the road, whose left-hand “prong” curves off towards the river and a small hydroelectric plant, and whose right-hand one (built in the late 1990s) leads over a slight rise to a new bridge and then on to Colledimacine (see figure 3.9). Couched within the V-shaped wedge of vegetation lying between the two roads are the remains of a small house that has almost entirely collapsed (see figures 7.13 and 7.14); a barely legible path meanders towards the structure through the brush. Within, only one small room survives with all four of its walls and roof still intact. It appears to have been the most recently (re-)constructed portion of the overall structure, and contains an interior door leading to what now are the ruins of a series of adjoining rooms. Perhaps this room had served as the kitchen/eating space, and the other rooms dedicated to sleeping, the quartering of animals in wintertime, and the storing of farm equipment – each being gradually



Figure 7.13: Abandoned house in Purgatorio at the bottom of the Aventino Valley.

constructed as time and resources permitted. Within is a handsome fireplace, two green-shuttered windows, two pictures hanging on the walls (one religious in theme and the other secular), a wine bottle half-filled with aging homemade olive oil (dated by hand 1987), a bottle-opener, a broom, two tables pushed together and covered in mouse turds and dust, and a odd variety of chairs – some upholstered with fake leather.

I had long been drawn to the place – initially out of a romantic attraction to ruins, and later on out of a rather ill-conceived notion of camping there rent-free for a portion of my fieldwork. When I first approached it, I thought that the place must have been abandoned long ago: a dense cluster of young oak trees (clumped together stoutly in the manner of bushes), accompanied by a wide assortment of thorny plants, had grown up next to the front door, blocking easy access. After having squeezed my way through, gaining a few new bloody scratches along the way, I found that the door was slightly ajar.



Figure 7.14: Partial interior view of the house shown in figure 7.13.

Feeling very much the trespasser, despite the advanced state of disuse, I pushed the door open on its rusted hinges and gingerly made my way inside (silently saluting any lingering spirits that might have otherwise taken offense).

Spotting the bottle of olive oil gave me a rough idea of the last time the house may have been used – around fourteen years ago. If so, perhaps an older farmer had continued to visit till age or death finally put an end to treks down from Lama in order to escape from home to tend a few remaining olive trees, and later, to simply clear a path to the front door and light a fire in order to clear the mind. The remains of an “Apecar” (literally “bee-car,” a three-wheeled farm truck that makes an insect-like buzz, similar to a scooter) lay under the house within a musty enclosure, but little evidence besides imagined routes within a certain close proximity to the house remained of where

encircling pathways might have existed. The process leading to the eventual complete abandonment of the house – consisting of the period of increasing disuse leading up to the point at which no one anymore visited on a regular basis to functionally use the structure – may have taken as long as ten years. If complete abandonment occurred, judging from the bottle, in the late 1980s, the thick undergrowth surrounding the house probably took from fifteen to twenty-five years to gather into its present, somewhat intimidating wall-effect (which increases in thickness and height as one moves along the sides towards the rear of the building).

The site is now burgeoning with interwoven “inflorescences” of the ilk Zanzotto describes above. These plants are the new settlers of the undergirding, surrounding landscape, which without doubt has witnessed countless cycles of human- and nonhuman-dominated inhabitation. The seeds of both are omnipresent – the former currently in temporary decline (but never to be discounted), and the latter wildly spreading forth. Depending on the era, each must be ready to begin again, awaiting a turn for the right combination of economic and social conditions in the villages above for either the clearing of the land and cultivation of edible crops, or the random scattering across deserted plots of wild plants and their succession into forests.

Not far from this site (backing up a bit uphill, in the direction of Fonte Purgio) are the ruins of another house – now virtually invisible from the road due to enveloping briars, bushes, trees, and vines (see figure 7.15). Once quite sizeable, boasting at least two stories, the house has now lost its roof and the greater part of its walls. Its four corners (reinforced with additional stonework) have resisted best, which protrude like scaly horns out of the ruins; one holds a chimney, still blackened inside. The pair of front



Figure 7.15: The ruins of a house in Purgatorio.

doors painted a fading light blue, which oddly enough faces not to the west and the (current) road, but to the east and the river, is now half-buried in fallen stone.

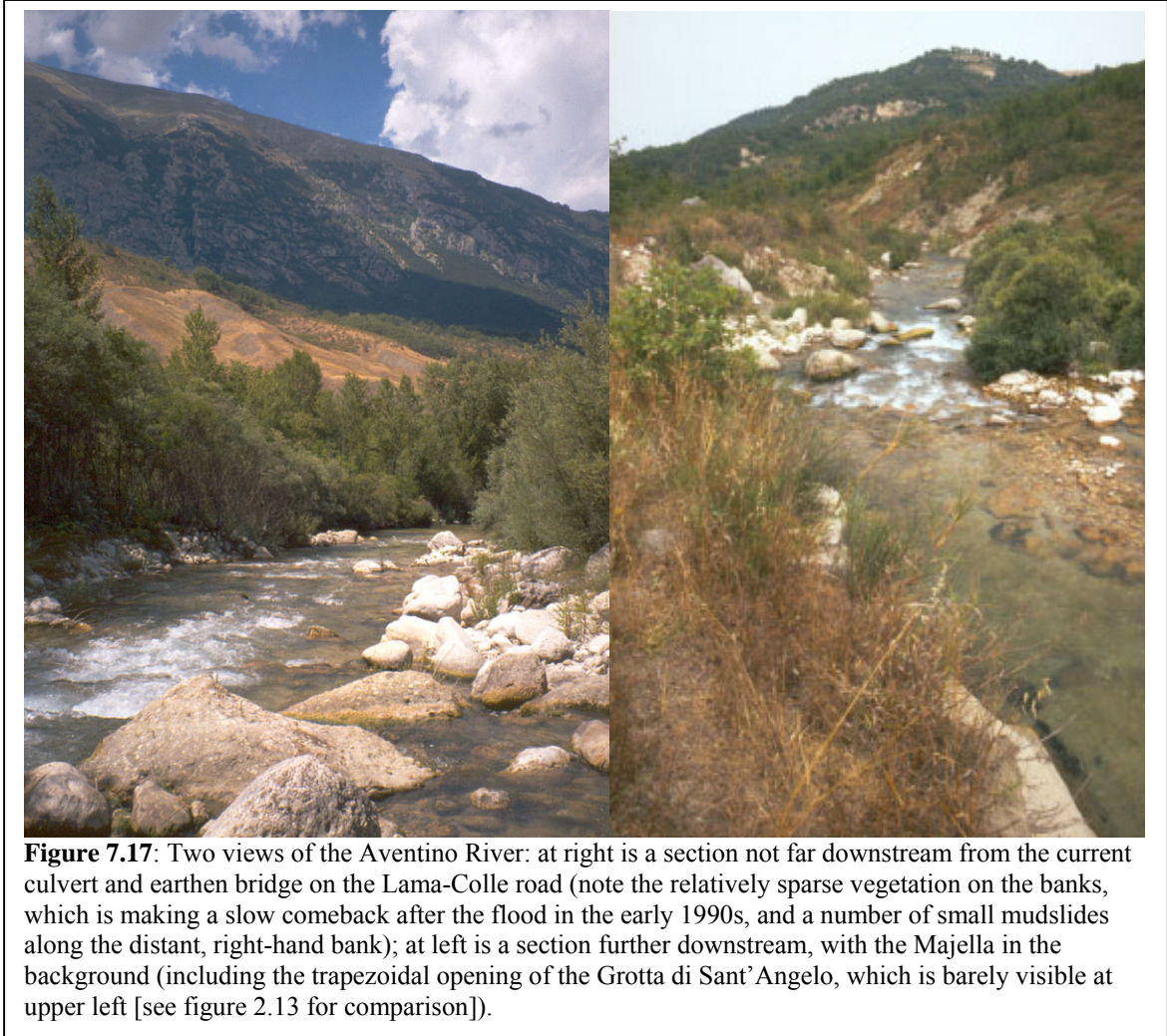
Picking at a bit of mortar, I found it highly friable – easy to crush with my fingertips. Without regular maintenance (as the ruins clearly demonstrate) such a structure would certainly not last long. Shortly after its roof went, a goodly portion of the



Figure 7.16: Two views of the same house in Purgatorio, including portions of nearby cultivated land. Fonte Purgo lies directly behind the photographer in the bottom image, and the Aventino River a short distance down the dirt road past the house in the upper photo.

And you lean out like silence
 you lean out into the silence,
 you generate, you are silence,
 YOU ARE HOUSE
 in the same idea, in the inane
 in-itself of the idea,
 YOU ARE COLLAPSE
 and freedom of fallen roofs
 and inviolate persistence of teeth
 that in you summon themselves
 YOU ARE FOLLY
 and in the greenest green
 of the tall hazelnuts – they too collapsing
 sprinkling themselves, from balconies,
 merry specters in transit and in accurate
 assiduous desires of residence
 and acclamations sottovoce you yield
 YOU ARE OBSERVATORY
 you let shine through a retail sale
 of sun and shade in points
 and nonpoints, rustling, dissolution
 of midday stars!
 of myriads, in bunches, of hazelnuts!
 ring-dances already-hazelnuts,
 already-invasions and abundances
 and all, all at San Roco
 benedictions!

Benedictions indeed! One will need them as the road bends up over a hill into the direct sunlight, around a corner, down to the river, across a bridge, and then up the long, steep, and sweaty climb to Colledimacine. But lingering at the river a short while is hard to pass up, especially if it is a hot summer day, with the screaming of cicadas wavering overhead through the thick dry air carrying the scent of parched grass, and the tempting prospect of shady patches and chilly pools beckoning from the erratic edge formed of ceaselessly flowing water meeting the slowly eroding shore – a boundary frequently interrupted by large, rounded boulders extending well into the current and perfect for stretching out for a (quick) catnap.



At this time of year the Aventino River may not seem to contain a great deal of water, or to pose many problems in creating long-lasting, serviceable bridges for automobile traffic. And yet, in times of severe flooding (which occur every 10-15 years or so – usually in the spring when heavy rain is combined with temperatures warm enough to suddenly melt a heavier than average snowpack on the Majella) – the river is capable of wreaking a great deal of havoc. The recent culvert and earthen bridge midway on the Lama to Colle road is evidence of the repairs needed after the damage caused by the most recent immense flood, which in the early 1990s carried away or severely

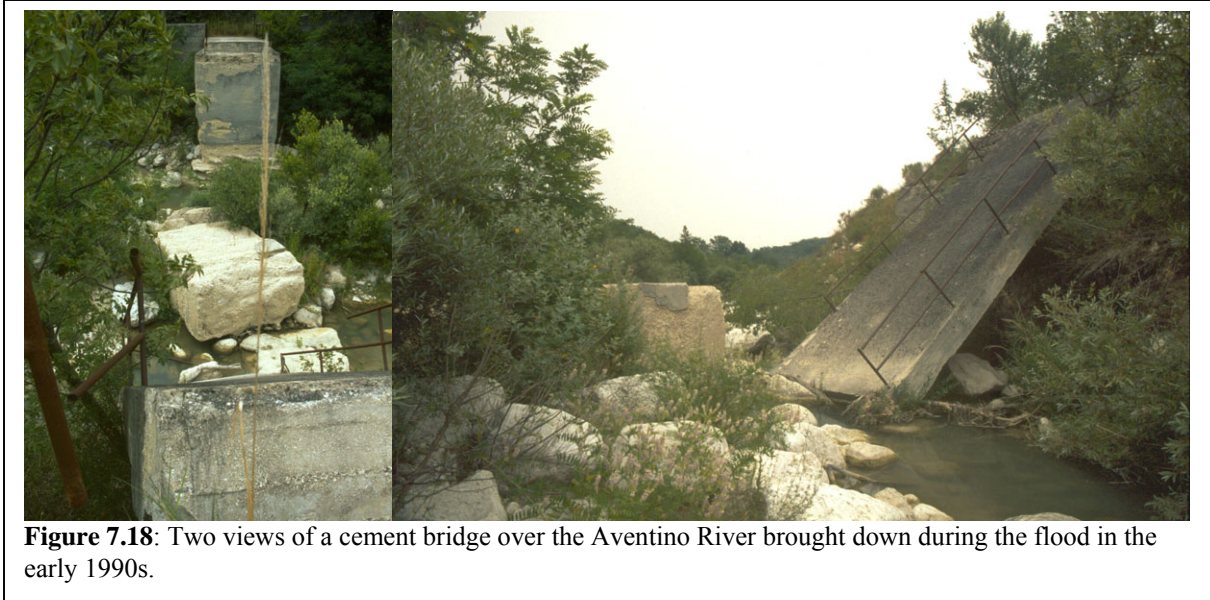


Figure 7.18: Two views of a cement bridge over the Aventino River brought down during the flood in the early 1990s.

damaged a number of bridges along the Aventino. One, a reinforced cement bridge just downstream from the new bridge, had its center support ripped out, and collapsed as a result (see figure 7.18). Another, a beautifully engineered metal, cement, and wood bridge constructed in the mid-nineteenth century another kilometer or so further downstream, called “Ponte di Ferro” (iron bridge), survived but lost most of the earth supporting one of its immense cement footings (see figure 7.19). It has since been repaired (a process that took a five or six years to complete) and is once again capable of carrying its daily traffic of a tractor or two daily. It is surfaced with large, rough-squared beams with rather wide spaces in between – a covering that proves to be a bit overly harrowing for all but the boldest drivers, who once across must face a long and tortuous gravel road leading to Torricella, with myriad potholes, ruts, and errant rocks. Having spent many days from morning to early evening teaching kayaking below the bridge, I can attest to the aging structure’s continuing, if meager service rendered to sporadic river-crossing travelers.

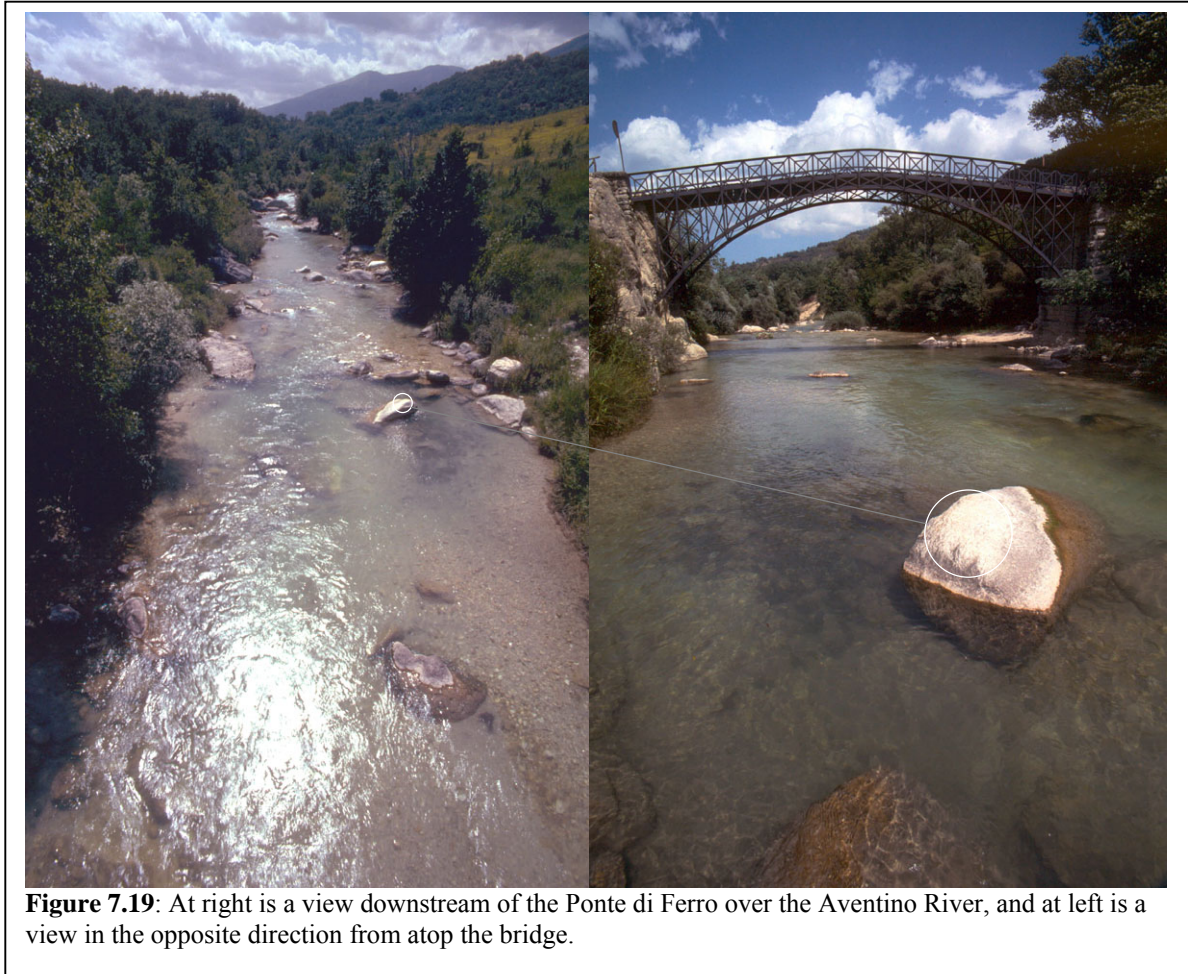


Figure 7.19: At right is a view downstream of the Ponte di Ferro over the Aventino River, and at left is a view in the opposite direction from atop the bridge.

Initially I had thought that the Aventino River in the past would have been one of the study area's most prominent boundaries, capable of effectively separating the populations of farming folk resident on either bank. After talking to a number of older residents, I understood how wrong I had been. On the contrary, the river had once served as a major zone of cultural mixing for the various groups of people living along or near its banks. Many makeshift, if precarious bridges capable of carrying donkey and foot traffic were erected at various, often seasonal locations by placing wooden planks over two iron or wooden beams – creating numerous points of crossover, which encouraged commercial exchange and social mixing. These were taken down and moved as floods

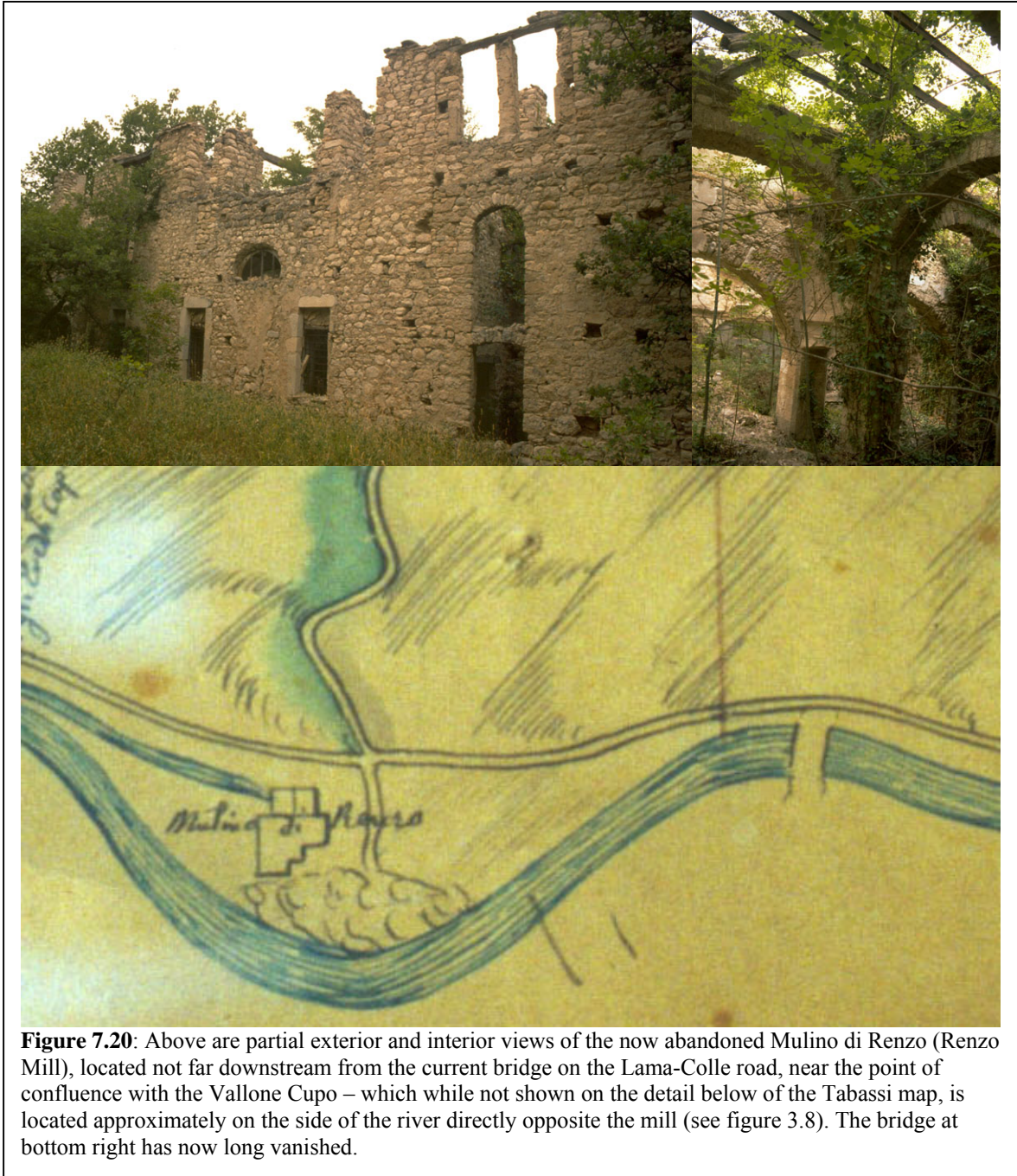


Figure 7.20: Above are partial exterior and interior views of the now abandoned Mulino di Renzo (Renzo Mill), located not far downstream from the current bridge on the Lama-Colle road, near the point of confluence with the Vallone Cupo – which while not shown on the detail below of the Tabassi map, is located approximately on the side of the river directly opposite the mill (see figure 3.8). The bridge at bottom right has now long vanished.

threatened, or if the banks became unstable due to erosion. According to one resident, after its construction, the Ponte di Ferro was initially held privately and operated as a toll bridge. In protest, local farmers tried climbing across its iron skeleton. Eventually, after many informal and formal complaints, the “authorities” (either the local or regional

government) intervened, threatening the owners to “either tear it down or open it up to everyone.”

Today the river is rarely visited by either local residents or tourists, despite its potential allure as a place to relax and refresh oneself. Perhaps it is simply too far downhill to travel, too cold and shallow for most people to bear, too undeveloped to bother using (the area below Colle and Lama hosts a grand total of two picnic tables, no planned parking spaces, and no maintained paths), its banks too hot at mid-summer, and is perhaps too closely associated with the “boorish” farming past. Or perhaps people are simply too busy with their daily lives, work, and play to come down; after all, now that most younger adults have access to cars, the beach (about an hour and half drive away) is by far preferable to fighting brambles to reach freezing water and burning hot banks. As one resident from Lama told me,

[o]nce many families would go there; they would work the land down there, and so they would go swimming, would even drink the water. People would pass by on their mules and donkeys, and stop to drink. People never went to the sea, they didn't even know what it looked like – this was before the war. But even after, people would go down there, to the “Vallone,” as it was called, to take some sun, and go swimming. But now, hardly anyone goes down there anymore. Once it was familiar place, but not any longer. Now it's a place frequented by fishermen, and kayakers.

The WWF camps – drawn by the possibilities of kayaking, swimming, and the rudimentary study of aquatic and riparian biology – have brought back a bit of concentrated, if sporadic human activity to the river. During the first two summers that I spent in the area as a counselor, we bushwhacked a trail through the undergrowth along the river bank to a small rocky clearing – created by the then, fairly recent flood. After about three years, the area became so choked with thorny weeds (it was difficult to find



Figure 7.21: View of the Aventino River downstream from atop the Ponte di Ferro.

comfortable seating among the boulders for the twenty-five odd children) and the course of the water so changed (there were no more the same eddies and pools conducive to teaching), that after one quickly aborted attempt to use the area, we switched location to Ponte di Ferro. I had become somewhat attached to the old area, and found it mildly troubling that it had been altered in what at the time had seemed such subtle yet extensive ways – which of course in hindsight was a somewhat absurd reaction considering the highly mutable nature of riverine environments, but understandable on the other hand in light of the many dear memories that I had formed while working and playing with children there. However, after a short time I found the new environs just as attractive and fascinating, if not quite as wild (all that was required to reach this spot was walking over the bridge and down either side of the embankment).

Over the course of my numerous summers working for the camps, I became quite attached to the river, and would spend many hours with the children and other counselors wading downstream in search of boar and deer tracks (which we frequently found and sometimes made plaster casts of), water samples for later study under the microscope, insects, plants, and stones – among which we discovered a variety rich in iron oxides that when wet proved useful for drawing dark-red designs or messages on our backs and limbs. The mud, of a thick grey sort, was another excellent substance for body-painting. Later I was told that it had once been widely believed to contain healing properties, and that “people with certain ills, or pains, would go [to the river] for a couple of weeks, and in the morning for two or three hours, would cover themselves in mud and sit in the sun in order to cure themselves.” At the time I had no idea that our exploits into the muck were in fact the rough equivalent of mud-therapy sessions. I am sure that the kids would have been quite impressed had they known.

If much of the western bank of the river is composed of a mix of sand, gravel, rounded stones, boulders, and some clay, the eastern bank, which is quite steep in places, is primarily composed of clay with scattered stones (see figure 5.17). The clay is plainly evident within and above the river’s eastern cutbanks. As the swift current erodes the bases of the uphill slopes, it also helps in instigating frequent mudslides – a phenomenon widespread in various forms throughout the valley, from its bottom to Colle, Lama, and beyond. In these flow zones, the ground remains tightly packed when dry, but quickly softens during substantial rainfall – which in turn causes additional slippage. As a result, these areas are constantly in motion, and are moderately resistant to plant growth (at least of species much more “permanent” than grasses and small shrubs).



Figure 7.22: View along the road toward Colledimacine of the remains of a recent mudslide (most of which was bulldozed away after it had flowed into the roadway) piled on the ledges of a reinforcing wall made of stacked metal cages of stone.

As the road winds away from the river towards Colledimacine, it inevitably crosses – to its great peril – many of these slide zones. In one section of switchbacks midway from the river to Colledimacine, the road traverses the same mudflow in four consecutive places – the lowest of which requires constant rebuilding, despite reinforcement with cages made of galvanized iron and filled with rocks (see figures 7.22 and 7.23). Every winter, when the rains increase in frequency and quantity, the land begins once again to move, carrying with it sections of roadbed, houses, fields, and in the case of Colledimacine, parts of its old cemetery (and in the near future, likely the lower section of its new one as well).



Figure 7.23: Two views of the same section of road, roughly midway from Colledimacine to the Aventino River: above is a photo taken in the summer of 2001, when a landslide was just beginning to carry away a freshly laid section of asphalt; below is one taken a year later in the summer of 2002, after considerably more damage had been done and subsequent repairs carried out.



Figure 7.24: View of Colledimacine from below, near the road leading up from the Aventino River.

Observantly traversing the river and the ubiquitous mudflows emphasizes the extreme mutability of the landscape, and makes me feel as if nothing here is stable for long. And then, stumbling across the ruins of a centuries'-old building – such as the abandoned, rose-colored mill still barely standing along the road to Colledimacine – reminds me that older traces, while steadily decaying, nonetheless remain scattered throughout areas less susceptible to annual or more frequent total disintegration into the elements. The valley at times seems to threaten to envelop and erase all that humans once built (and continue to build) within it, and yet at others to promise fruitful if ever-shifting foundations for those who would dedicate their lives to intimately inhabiting it. Like the Majella above, the valley simultaneously holds up and pulls down, washing away all that becomes uprooted or knocked loose – and is not put back or repaired.

Looking up and out across the undulating mesh of fields, brush, and forest – interspersed with the isolated remains of stone walls and buildings – it is difficult not to feel in some small way part of the landscape's stitching, which like one's steps, slowly begins to unravel as soon as it is applied. Looking farther uphill, the lineaments of

Colledimacine appear, spread out along the edge of a long, irregular bluff. The village appears attractive if mysteriously cloistered, and promising of longer lasting human artifacts than my immediate surroundings. Held firmly in place by its immense rocky foundation, which also hides most of its contents, Colledimacine peers down from its ledge as I peer up from my shrubbery. I wipe the sweat from my brow, brush back the thorny plants from my path (a short digression from the main road), and begin to once again to trudge uphill, imagining what the village may hold.

Chapter 8: Conclusion: Colledimacine, At the End of a Road

“Perchè non vai a Colledimacine?” (“Why don’t you go to Colledimacine?”) – local saying²⁸

The first time that I really paid any close attention to Colledimacine was during my first week in Lama as a counselor for the WWF. I and another counselor had brought all twenty-five children attending the camp to a point just above Lama where much of the valley was visible in order to teach them map and compass skills. While giving instructions on how to take a bearing, I pointed my compass towards Colledimacine, which was directly in front of us on the other side of the valley, and said in all seriousness, “Perchè non andiamo a quel paese?” (“Why don’t we go to that village?”). Everyone started laughing, since in Italian the common saying “Vai a quel paese!” (“Go to that village!”) means “Go to hell!”

The funny thing (at least to me, if not to the later exhausted and moaning kids) was that a number of days later we actually did go to Colle – on foot. At that time (in 1996) the link completing the road from Lama to Colle was far from being finished, making the next shortest route by car to the other side of the valley – where there was a picnic area we intended on visiting – a trip of about thirty minutes each way. Faced with the rather loathsome prospect of making three return journeys in order to carry all of the children there in our small van, the notion of having the group walk to Colle via the

²⁸ This saying, as Ugo Falcone writes, in essence means “why not go and present yourself to San Vito” (the patron saint of Colledimacine) – so as to calm yourself down. San Vito is believed to have special attributes that can be invoked against poisonous snakes and rabid dogs – and by association even against irate and aggressive people: thus the origin of the saying, commonly heard in many villages of the Aventino Valley. Given the physical effort necessary to reach Colledimacine, as Falcone notes, “critics of today add that [in making the journey] one tires the body, yet rests the spirit.”



Figure 8.1: Road sign indicating the direction to Colle, located a few hundred meters below Lama at a fork in the road; just behind the sign are three downy oaks, beyond which is a small grove of olive trees.

valley bottom in order to meet the van driven by a counselor with our equipment for a much shorter bout of shuttling, seemed ideal.

The trip soon became even more tiring than it might have been: when faced with what at the time was the end of the road in the district of Purgatorio, we mistakenly bushwhacked our way down to the river too soon, crossed near the ruined cement bridge (see figure 7.18), and made our way up an extremely steep and narrow mule track (which ran along the ridge paralleling and just to the north of the Vallone Cupo). When I and my companion counselor, a heavysset and bearded Roman with a gruff voice but merry enough demeanor, realized our error, the cries of desperation increased dramatically, coupled with a few impressive displays of snake-like writhing upon the ground. Despite feeling somewhat foolish for having led the group astray, I secretly enjoyed the



Figure 8.2: Above is a west-facing, telephoto view of Colledimacine from a neighboring ridge; note the narrow dirt road at bottom left, which leads to Torricella; to the left of this is a large rocky outcropping called “Curth Vecchia” (see figure 8.27). The road from Lama, only a small portion of which is visible above as a tiny white patch (shown in detail in the connected image at right), comes up from the lower right and wraps around the steep and north-facing, forested edge of the village.



accidental discovery of the new territory, which offered fine prospects of the valley, including a view of the road that we clearly needed to take. I also (futilely) hoped that the exercise would definitively tire out some of the more hyperactive and histrionic types. My partner and I did our best to cheer up and prod along the lagging troupe as we made our way back to the river, which we then paralleled a short distance to the point at which the rudiments of the new bridge signaled the way up.

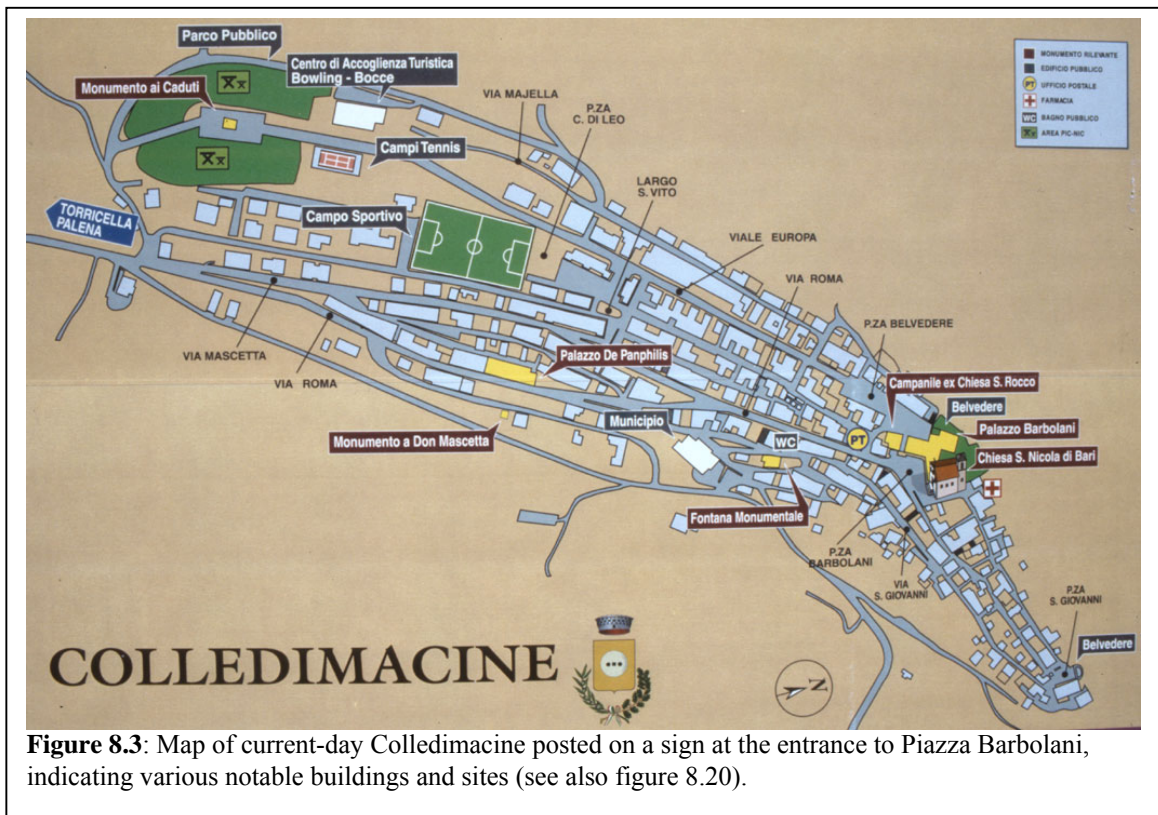


Figure 8.3: Map of current-day Colledimacine posted on a sign at the entrance to Piazza Barbolani, indicating various notable buildings and sites (see also figure 8.20).

Colle, after looming long above us on its narrow shelf of rock as we sweated our way uphill, then disappeared from view for the final few hundred meters of ascent as the road curved around and then behind the village's northeastern tip. Entry was somewhat haphazard, as there were no signs directing the traveler towards the center. All that greeted us were a few ill-maintained half-paved roads, dirt tracks, and stairways, which sporadically appeared along the village's southeastern length, and led through a marginal zone of bedraggled garden plots and improvised chicken coops into a dense if half-wrecked urban fabric of chaotically interconnected buildings and ruins (see figure 4.8).

While we failed to present ourselves to San Vito (lacking the foreknowledge and training to do so), by journey's end at the town's main piazza we did however seem to have at least temporarily both tired our bodies and – more importantly – calmed our spirits. The children were overjoyed to find a large public fountain, which was

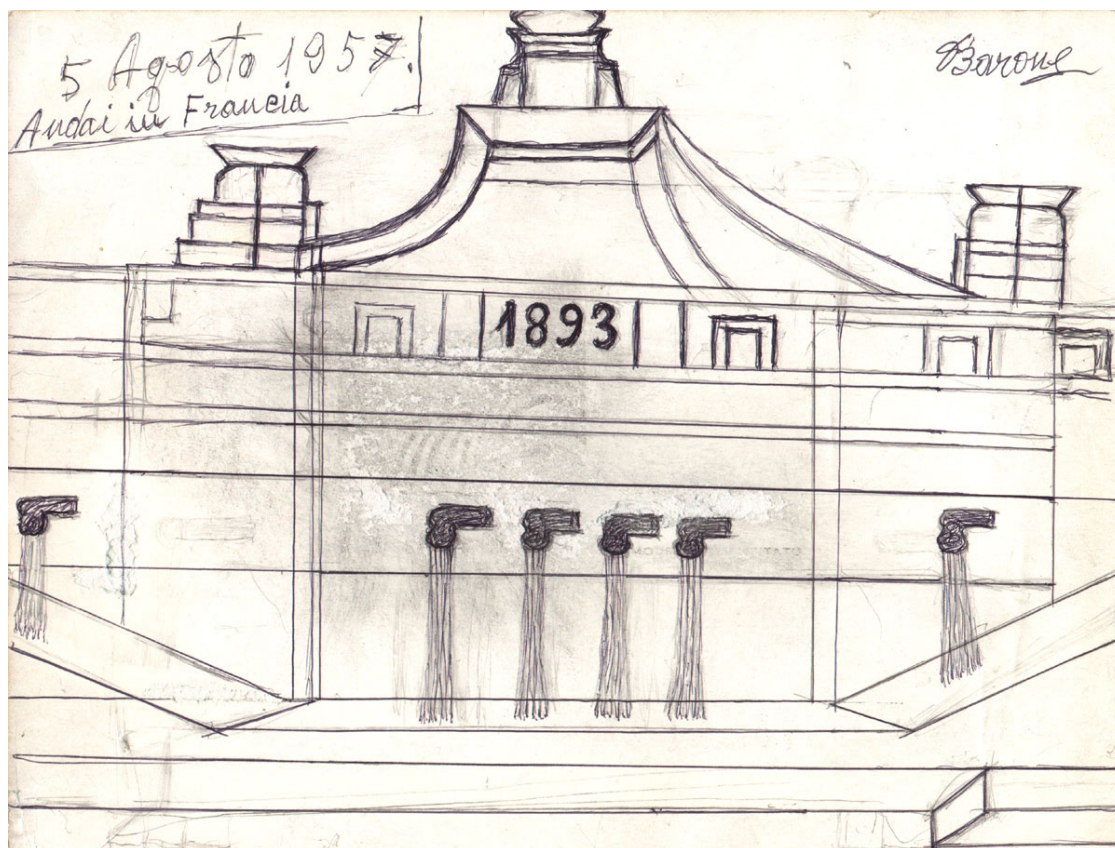


Figure 8.4: Two views of the monumental fountain along Via Roma close to Piazza Barbolani: at top is a contemporary photo with two local boys in the background; at bottom is a pen drawing on the back of calendar stock by local artist Mr. Barone, depicting the fountain's three sides in a fascinating, flattened out and geometrical style. At top left is a note indicating the date of the artist's immigration to France, which he jotted down on another drawing so as not to forget before generously giving me this one.

miraculously enough located along the path that we ended up taking. It was furnished with numerous, continuously gushing spouts – designed equally well for immediate drinking and for the filling of containers, including the group’s now-empty canteens. With cool water poured into their throats and splashed on their faces, the children soon forgot their recent travail (which hunger pains and related complaints quickly replaced).

Exploring the study area with various groups of children helped me to continually re-experience its rural-urban landscapes more spontaneously and directly. The children constantly drew my attention from distant vistas, to the creatures and objects within our immediate purview, including long columns of tiny ants, a giant stick-insect (which was over six inches long and almost impossible to tell apart from the slender branch upon which it clung), the opaque exoskeletons of cicadas, the remains of long-discarded farm tools, and the shards of glazed terracotta tiles bearing fragments of now-illegible script. As Y-Fu Tuan writes, “[t]he childlike enjoyment of nature places little importance on picturesqueness. . . . The composed view is sure to count less than particular objects and physical sensations. . . . Visual appreciation, discerning and reflective, creates aesthetic distance. For a young child the aesthetic distance is minimal” (*Topophilia* 96).

In the process of putting thoughts to paper while away from the field, there emerges a potentially ever-widening boundary separating immediate perception *in situ* of landscape from the abstract reckoning of it. Remembering the playful approach that I often took to both learning from and teaching the children something of the Aventino Valley, helps to bridge this gap – as well as throw the separation into sharp relief (or in other words, make it perceptible). Only with the recognition of the boundary between direct perception and distanced analysis, can landscape study then move towards



Figure 8.5: Two views of Colledimacine facing north, one at dawn (about 5 a.m. when a few lights are still on) and the other at midday with a surprising lack of heat-haze, which during the summer often obscures distant outlooks. Lama is just hidden behind and below the middle edge of Colledimacine; subtly visible on the Majella is the opening to the Grotta di Sant'Angelo at upper left (see figures 2.13 and 7.17) and the ridges of the Valle di Santo Spirito at upper right (see figure 5.15).

appreciating and better understanding our surroundings as multidimensional panoramas rather than the flattened out scenery.

It is easy to lapse into a fanciful aesthetic reverie of either an imagined bucolic paradise or an ideal incipient wilderness while wandering the lower valley's back roads –



Figure 8.6: Two arched stone doorways in central Colledimacine, which survived destruction during the Second World War. Whether they will survive abandonment is another matter.

as long as one keeps within the edges of the pavement. Once a step is taken into the brush, abstract contemplation disappears with the need to orient oneself within extremely tight, constantly changing and thorny quarters.²⁹ Perception shifts from an abstract focus on the frontal landscape to a concrete exploration of the encircling landscape; the going is not particularly easy along either path, yet each is made somewhat easier by the other. Figuratively speaking, shifting back and forth between fieldwork and textual (including graphic) work entails similar boundary-crossing – a mental-physical movement that is vital to making sense of any cultural landscape. In doing so, the ground is fast recognized

²⁹ Of course, as Charles Olson points out in the opening lines of his poem, “In Cold Hell, in Thicket,” overly abstract and distanced thought may rather ironically be imagined as being stuck in the bushes: “In cold hell, in thicket, how / abstract (as high mind, as not lust, as love is) how / strong (as strut or wing, as polytope, as things are / constellated) how / strung, how cold / can a man stay (can men) confronted / thus?” (*The Collected* 155).

as a text, and the page as a field. As Ann Spirn writes, “[t]he language of landscape can be spoken, written, read, and imagined . . . Landscape, as language, makes thought tangible and imagination possible” (15). Olson also stresses the connectedness of expression and surroundings, and exclaims that “[t]he meeting edge of man and the world is also his cutting edge. If man is active, it is exactly here where experience comes in that it is delivered back, and if he stays fresh at the coming in he will be fresh at his going out” (*Selected* 62).

Crossing from the scraggly fields into Colle along its jagged southeastern edge reinforces this chaotic, yet playful and circuited perception. It is difficult to tell where collapsing walls end and the (once) tilled earth begins. And yet, the rough, centuries-old boundaries of Colle appear much easier to locate than those of Lama. While Lama has constantly shifted location over the centuries as natural disasters have taken their toll, Colle has remained relatively fixed upon its enviably stable, massive outcropping of limestone (however, lack of historical documentation makes this statement largely speculative when considering the eighteenth century and earlier). Lama continues to boast of a vital population of well over a thousand both young and old residents, while Colle is home to a few hundred people, most of whom are pensioners. Colle has one church and one bar; Lama has four churches (of which two are active, one inactive but open to the public, and one closed) and five bars (including the “Irish” pub). Although there are many differences between the two villages, familiarity with one helps to better understand the other – just as knowledge of the Majella and the lower valley conjoins with this corresponding urban awareness to create an interactive/overlapping, zonal understanding of the overall study area – and beyond.



Figure 8.7: Three connected views of Colledimacine: the small white square in the top image roughly matches the middle image (both looking to the northwest), while the bottom image, taken from the opposite side of the town from lower down within the valley (looking to the southeast), connects to the middle image thanks to the prominence of the bell tower of the Chiesa di San Nicola.

One similarity between Colle and Lama is the fact that most of both villages' buildings were blown up by the retreating German troops during the Second World War – with the main difference being that many of Colle's were never rebuilt. The effect is that Colle seems at times to be the slowly decaying lower jaw of a giant animal (perhaps a crocodile, given its long and narrow shape) that is missing many of its teeth; whereas at others it exudes the air of a cemetery, wherein the bones of some inhabitants are only half-buried, and whose headstones are sinking at odd angles back into the earth. And yet, the village is far from dead – despite frequent appearances to the contrary. Sporadic signs of contemporary life crop up everywhere, from scattered, seemingly incongruous boxes made of bright yellow plastic strapped to signposts (often next to abandoned buildings) for the recycling of small household batteries, to the sounds of an electric guitar blaring power chords from within a small house with its windows opened to let air in and the sound out upon a main if empty thoroughfare.

I found it more difficult to locate historical documents relating to Colle than Lama, but eventually met residents who offered stories, photographs, and artifacts that helped fill in the gaps of my understanding of the village's mixed spatial and temporal past. Initially, while wandering the streets, I felt very much the outsider – more conspicuous due to the relative lack of people, yet for the same reason somewhat less carefully and frequently scrutinized. If at first Colle seemed on the verge of becoming a ghost town, my initial worries that my fieldwork there would prove unfruitful soon vanished. As long as I woke up early enough in Lama to walk across the valley to Colle in order to arrive before lunchtime, I would almost certainly be assured an audience with residents sitting outside their homes on benches near their front doors. On my first



Figure 8.8: Detail of early 1950s Comune di Colledimacine property map. Note what appears to be the old cemetery, lightly circled in blue pencil just below and slightly to the left of the town; the “strada provinciale” (regional highway) which when it reaches Colle splits into Via Mascetta and Via Roma; and various numbered sectors, which correspond to more detailed maps indicating the boundaries of private and public lots. At middle far right the word “Cupo” is visible, indicating the Vallone Cupo, which partially forms the comune’s northeastern border; whereas at bottom left the word “Torrente” is visible, indicating the Vallone Torbido, which partially forms the comune’s western border (see also figure 3.6).



Figure 8.9: A group of elderly residents sitting in the shade along Via Mascetta in Colledimacine.

morning there as a researcher, I arrived at about eleven in the morning and had the luck to meet a group of four elderly women, one of whom was in her nineties and had recently returned from Australia. Despite having lived abroad for many years, she still spoke primarily dialect with only a few Italian terms mixed in. As a result, I had to rely on a slightly younger friend of hers who spoke Italian and a bit of English to make sense of what she was saying.

While they were telling me about life in the village before the Second World War, when they had still worked the land below in the valley and took care of donkeys, chickens, and a few goats, a man in his forties with a sly grin carrying a power saw came strolling by. In a loud and jovial voice he made what I guessed was a joke in dialect to the women at my expense (I heard the word “americano” a number of times). They all

laughed, and then began chatting together. The man then directed a question at me, asking (in dialect again) something about “il Vallon” (the Aventino Valley/River). I didn’t quite understand what he was saying, which provided for more laughs. I felt embarrassed and tongue-tied. I wished that I knew more of the language, but could do little but put on a good-natured grin and sit it out.

The man then switched to Italian, and asked what I was doing. I gave him a brief summary and his face lit up with enthusiasm. He said that the history of the village had long been an pastime of his, and that he had some research that he would show me if I was interested. I thanked and took my leave of the women (to whom I returned and chatted with on a number of other occasions), and then walked with the man to his house, which he was in the process of gradually renovating. He pulled from out of a drawer of an old wooden cabinet a stack of papers, drawings, and photographs, which I soon learned constituted the well advanced manuscript of a study of Colledimacine’s history and folklore.

I could barely believe my luck at so unexpectedly being handed such a wealth of information, which I grew to appreciate even more when later I was unable, after a great deal of research, to find anything else in printed form of much substance concerning Colledimacine – beyond a few historical maps of the larger area and passing references to the village. The man, who had once been the mayor, generously photocopied the material for me, and met with me later on to show me more of the village and its surroundings. With his help, and the help of other residents, I was able to piece together a fuller if fragmentary understanding of Colle, its pathways, public and private spaces, and outer limits.



Figure 8.10: Funeral announcement posted on a wall facing Piazza Barbolani.

As in the chapter on Lama, I have here focused the remainder of my analysis on two overlapping themes (albeit here joined in a single section): one on pathways and roads, and the other, slightly altered to reflect differing urban conditions, on buildings and sites (Colle is so small that distinct neighborhoods are difficult, if not misleading, to attempt to delineate). In a closing section I then offer a few final comments on both this chapter and the study as a whole. I revisit and extend where possible my findings on the exploration of landscape through close attention to boundaries – a discussion that is “framed” from the somewhat imagined location of the northeastern extremity of Colle, where the village’s lengthwise roads combine and come to a halt at the edge of a

precipice overlooking the Aventino Valley, Lama, and the Majella. It is here that the accumulated prospects before me, if my project is successful, should conjure up a vestige of panoramic vitality in the minds of readers – despite their never having visited the study area. This vitality, which enables the student of landscape to constantly and fruitfully cross what Olson terms the “cutting edge” between the self and external reality, should then, I hope, be translatable from this small corner of south-central Italy to a wide variety of highly localized, yet equally infinitely mutable landscapes.

From Pathways and Roads to Buildings and Sites

There is both more and less to tell of Colledimacine than of neighboring villages that boast larger populations and closer proximity to well-traveled highways – more, because with less evidence and fewer living witnesses, speculation quickly becomes rife; less, because words other than your own are hard to come by, and the paths that cross the village in most directions soon leave it for the open country. There are two main roads that approach Colledimacine – one from the north, and one from the southwest. The former, less traveled one, which I briefly describe above, becomes badly rutted as it runs along the southeastern edge of town, at times lacking most of its thin covering of asphalt, which has crumbled away in irregular patches due to lack of maintenance. It eventually meets up with the latter road, which if taken out of town, meets a small highway that in turn carries the traveler to either Torricella (to the left, or northeast) or Palena (to the right, or southwest) (see figure 2.2). Backing up to this juncture, the hypothetical stranger approaching Colledimacine from the southwest along this slightly better maintained and





Figure 8.12: View to the southeast of the southwestern edge of Colledimacine (note the scattering of buildings along the horizon at left), the new cemetery (marked here by the long and narrow, white wall at top right), and the massive, periodically active mudslide that threatens to carry it away.

more frequented access road is treated to an intriguing and constantly changing vista the closer she or he travels to the village (which also entails a gradual descent).

A few hundred meters from the point at which the first houses cluster together at the village's southern extremity, a small fountain appears along the road. If you were to wait long enough, you might see a car, scooter, or bicyclist stop to fill up a few bottles. Otherwise traffic at most times of the day is virtually nonexistent. Scattered fields and young patches of woodland extend on either side of the road. The view of Colle here is somewhat restricted – as most of the village is hidden behind a low-rising knoll covered with tightly abutting, white-stuccoed houses. To the left a little further along is a smaller paved road, which after a few hundred feet turns to dirt and leads to the old, now abandoned cemetery – which is something of an oddity, lacking the family-sized funerary monuments built in the shape of miniature houses now found in graveyards throughout

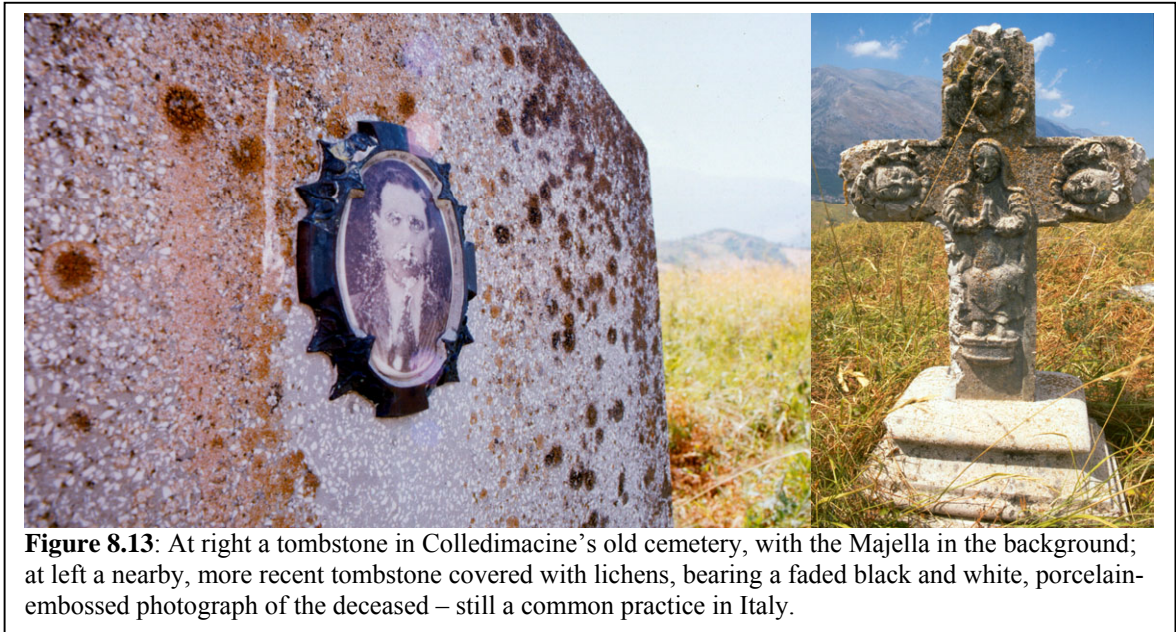


Figure 8.13: At right a tombstone in Colledimacine’s old cemetery, with the Majella in the background; at left a nearby, more recent tombstone covered with lichens, bearing a faded black and white, porcelain-embossed photograph of the deceased – still a common practice in Italy.

Italy. The new cemetery, built in this modern style, is located on the same slope, but is about a quarter of a kilometer closer to town – which makes the trek less arduous for the now predominantly older residents. It is, however, in danger of being carried away by a large landslide that periodically creeps towards its lower enclosing wall: in 2002 the distance between the two had narrowed to less than ten feet, while cracks in the wall’s masonry evidenced the weakening underground support (see figure 8.12).

Ranging about amongst the weeds and tilting funerary monuments in the old cemetery, one has the impression that the entire field in which the dead are planted has begun a slow descent towards the river; its surface is wildly irregular and pocked with the occasional wide hole masked by thick grass into which it is easy to stumble, calling to mind what Andrea Zanzotto terms in the title phrase of a poem “[c]erte forre circolari colme di piante – e poi buchi senza fondo” (certain circular chasms brimming with plants – and then holes without bottom) (*Il Galateo* 24). Looking out over the study area from

this vantage point, I soon began to feel as if not only were the remains of collapsed houses literally everywhere, but also the bones of the area's deceased inhabitants.

If Colledimacine's older cemetery, dating back perhaps to the early nineteenth century, is already in complete disuse and sinking back into the earth, how many other cemeteries might there be nearby – now forgotten and either overgrown or regularly plowed through (in the fashion of William Blake's famous proverb of hell: "Drive your cart and plow over the bones of the dead" [252])? In Carlo Levi's classic mid-1930s account of his exile as an anti-fascist political prisoner in a small village in southern Italy *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, after napping in a freshly dug grave in order to escape the heat and mosquitoes, Levi encounters an aged, cryptic gravedigger who offers him an insightful if disturbing perspective on the foundations of his ancient village, which in many respects resembles Colledimacine and Lama:

I climbed out of my ditch to speak to him and offered him a cigar, which he put into a blackened holder made from the right hind leg of a buck rabbit. As he leaned on his shovel—for he was always digging new graves—he bent over to pick up a human shoulder blade, which he held for a while in his hand while he talked and then tossed aside. The ground was littered with calcified bleached bones, flowering out of the graves and worn away by wind and sun. To the old man these bones, the dead, animals, and spirits were all familiar things, bound up, as indeed they were to every one in these parts, with simple everyday life. "The village is built of the bones of the dead," he said to me in his thick jargon, gurgling like a subterranean rivulet suddenly emerging among the stones, and twisting the toothless hole that served him for a mouth into what might have been meant for a smile. Whenever I tried to make him explain what he meant he paid no attention, but laughed and repeated exactly what he had said before, with not a word added to it; "That's it; the village is built of the bones of the dead." The old man was quite right, whether he meant these words literally or symbolically, as a figure of speech. (69)

The brief detour from the main road to the old cemetery traces a portion of an ever-fading pathway, shifting throughout the centuries as graves that reach a certain

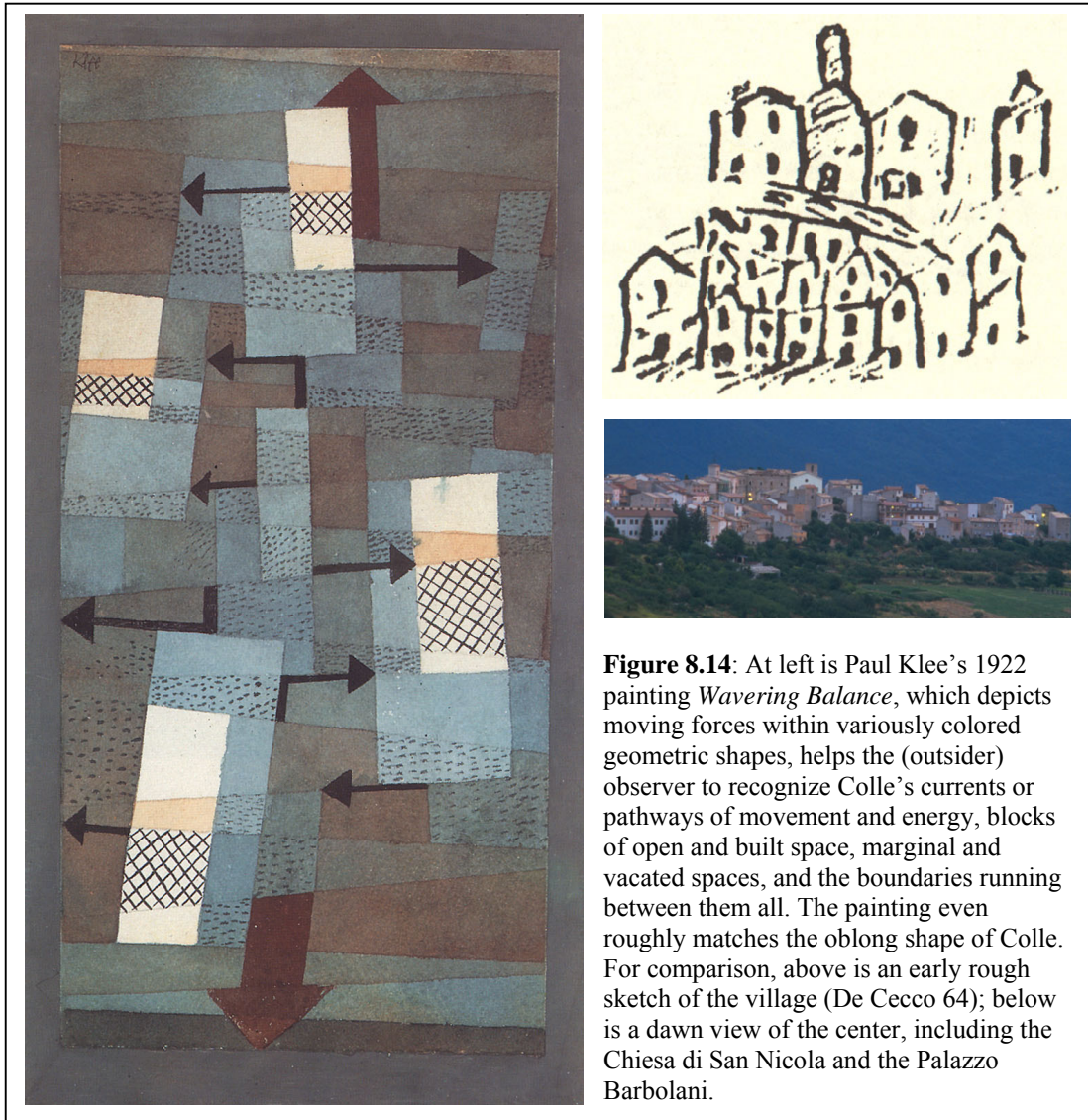


Figure 8.14: At left is Paul Klee's 1922 painting *Wavering Balance*, which depicts moving forces within variously colored geometric shapes, helps the (outsider) observer to recognize Colle's currents or pathways of movement and energy, blocks of open and built space, marginal and vacated spaces, and the boundaries running between them all. The painting even roughly matches the oblong shape of Colle. For comparison, above is an early rough sketch of the village (De Cecco 64); below is a dawn view of the center, including the Chiesa di San Nicola and the Palazzo Barbolani.

density and age are forgotten in favor of new burial grounds, into which most residents that die here are carried. The pathway to the new cemetery, connected through memory and lessening visits to the old grounds, extends more deeply and widely through a potentially infinite web of pathways, all leading into and out of the inner fabric of the village itself: in the words of Levi's gravedigger, "the bones of the dead." Seen in this way, the entire village threatens to become a "mundus," which as Henri Lefebvre explains, is

a sacred or accursed place in the middle of the Italiot township. A pit, originally – a dust hole, a public rubbish dump. Into it were cast trash and filth of every kind, along with those condemned to death. . . . A pit, then, “deep” above all in meaning. It connected the city, the space above ground, land-as-soil and land-as-territory, to the hidden, clandestine, subterranean spaces which were those of fertility and death, of the beginning and the end, of birth and burial. (*The Production* 242)

The boundaries between life and death, spun through the buildings, squares, pathways, roads, and surroundings fields, are thus incessantly etched in crisscrossing fashion over one another, creating a puzzling mesh that is always partially taut and new-sprung, and always partially sagging and decayed. And yet, while the tendency in Colle is currently towards the latter, it is difficult to predict whether a sudden resurgence may be in store within the next few decades (even if most current signs do not point in this direction).

Straying back across the lumpy and overgrown fields and then along the narrow dirt lane back to the main road, it strikes me that this patterning of edges, especially in the relative absence of living people, is lurking at every corner of every landscape. This mesh may be more readily apparent in a place as quiet and meditative as Colle than one (in comparison) as bustling as Lama, but the effect – when it hits you – drags your attention to both the minutest and the largest-looming details indicating separations of objects within the panoramic field extending in all directions from your moving stance upon the land. Awareness extends to include the small spaces between blades of grass overshadowed by thistles and red poppies framed by nearby fences and roads leading in meanders or zigzags to fields and dwellings lying under an undulating sky carrying dissipating clouds blown off the summits of the Majella.

Focusing this attention upon the point at which the outside road meets the edge of the village reveals a juncture containing a number of inward-leading streets, the two most



Figure 8.15: Various images of grindstones found throughout Colledimacine: at top are two images of grindstones, one within a coat of arms affixed above the front doors of the Chiesa di San Nicola, and another within a facing paving stone mosaic; at middle left are the two stones lying between Via Mascetta and Via Roma at the southern end of town; and at middle right and bottom is a monument to the Virgin Mary bearing a grindstone image (to the right of this Via Mascetta extends into town).

prominent of which – Via Mascetta and Via Roma – veer away from one another forming a narrow angle to lead, after a slight divergence, directly ahead to the north in roughly parallel paths down the greater length of the town. Within the narrow, triangular strip of earth separating the initial stretches of these streets lie two immense stone and iron grindstones, which, according to an older resident living nearby, came from a mill that once existed on the neighboring lot (but was demolished to make way for a new home, now only occasionally inhabited in the summer – as are many of the houses in the village – by owners who live abroad) (see figure 8.15).

The image of the grindstone features prominently on public buildings and monuments throughout Colledimacine, and may be traced back to the once widespread local practice of milling. There is an abundance of naturally occurring flint found nearby (which was commonly used in the construction of millstones); as Falcone notes, the village and its immediate environs are filled with the fast-disappearing remains of both water-driven and electric mills, which came into vogue in the early twentieth century. Often the inner workings of these mechanisms (the cogs, shafts and grindstones) are hidden within houses that have been partially rebuilt from ex-mills so as to mask their former function.

The activity of milling, in fact, may even be partially detectable within the etymology of the village's name. In Italian, "macina" means millstone or mill, and "colle" hill; thus Colledimacine (once Colle delle Macine) may be read literally to mean hill of the millstones or mills. But this simple translation may be misleading. The name, which in dialect is "Colle dj llh Mmacine," as Falcone states, seems to have come from the Latin "Collis Macinarum," with the latter term carrying the additional potential



Figure 8.16: A government-sponsored bus on Via Mascetta, carrying workers to factories in the lowlands near the Adriatic Coast. Without such means of transport, many residents would find it difficult to remain in upland villages that offer few job opportunities, such as Colledimacine.

meaning of “macchinario” (machinery) (see figure 8.15 for a stone monument to the Virgin Mary bearing an inscription of the Latin name). This interpretation seems to be backed up by the early usage “Colle di Machine” (hill of machines). But what machines? The reasons may again point to the usage of water-driven mills used to grind grain into flour, or perhaps, as Falcone speculates, to ancient war machines (given Colledimacine’s strategic position atop a readily-defensible rocky outcropping with views of much of the valley), or to machinery used in the construction of buildings. The village may even at one point have served as a manufacturing center of grindstones for export, but as Falcone notes, given the weight and difficulty of transporting these objects, this hypothesis has numerous weaknesses.



Figure 8.17: A scene on Via Roma in Colledimacine, where most of the social gathering in town takes place: at right is the sole bar, appropriately named (considering the many expatriates who return in the summer) “Euro Bar”; at left is a bocce court; just beyond is the outside seating area loosely connected to the bar; and in the far distance is the junction between Via Mascetta and Via Roma, between which lie two large grindstones – artifacts from a now-demolished mill (see figure 8.15).

Proceeding past this juncture, the stranger to Colledimacine may be confused as to where the center lies, and in turn, where food, drink, and shelter may be found. There are few posted indications, and little sign of life. In 1996 there was a small bar located in the second story of the first house encountered along the eastern side of the main access road, but it has since closed with no trace of its former existence. If Lama contains the rudiments of Jackson’s Stranger’s Path, in Colledimacine there is little evidence of an equivalent route. For example, if one takes Via Mascetta (the left-hand option), the sole alimentari (general goods store) appears not far before the reappearance of Via Roma, which in turn leads to the main square, Piazza (Conte U.) Barbolani (variously referred to Piazza Roma, perhaps in deference to national governmental powers) (see figures 8.20



Figure 8.18: View to the northeast of the bocce court near the Euro Bar; note the children riding down Via Roma at far left, a few spectators, and the brightly colored recycling bins accompanied by a broken plastic chair.

and 8.22). In the piazza there is a crumbling palace, rebuilt haphazardly by inhabitants after the Second World War (“they fixed it in their own way,” as one elderly woman dryly stated), a church with a plain façade, an assortment of new and old buildings (including a house built on the remains of a medieval fortress [see figure 4.9]), and a small fruit and vegetable shop. If one instead takes Via Roma (the right-hand option), the main gathering place of the village soon comes into view, and is composed of a small bar (the only one in the village), a bocce court, and, depending on the season, a number of tables covered with umbrellas arranged along the edge of the road overlooking the countryside to the east (see figure 8.17).



Figure 8.19: Two connected views down Via Mascetta in Colledimacine. Note the ruins of the house at left in the upper photo, and the Chiesa di San Nicola di Bari at the center of the lower image (see also figure 8.20 for a closer view of the church).

During the summer this area is where most people congregate: mixed groups at the tables under the umbrellas, old men playing bocce, and children gliding by on bikes sometimes chased by small barking dogs. When I once went into the bar to get a coffee and ice cream, the middle-aged woman behind the counter asked me where I was from. When she found out I was American, she clapped her hand to her head, and exclaimed “why, why did I come back here to this damned place?!” Apparently she had lived in Canada for a number of years, but then had decided to return in order to run the bar – a family inheritance, from what I could understand. Bored with the lack of life in Colledimacine, she pulled her face into a long expression and muttered something about leaving someday as she turned around to make my coffee. When a herd of children burst in, clambering over one another and shouting for ice cream, I left, making my way to an empty table outside.

From this point, numerous routes may be taken through town, which is so small that there is no risk of getting lost: sooner or later the street one takes meets an edge of village and countryside (often a cliff or steep wall), requiring a turn onto another road, another edge, another road, and so on, which together gradually bring the wanderer in a zigzagging circuit back through places previously visited – including perhaps the point of the walk’s origin (especially if one has grown thirsty). Most of the roads in Colle tend to be centripetal and seemingly unplanned, with the sole, potentially centrifugal road being Via Roma, which in fact, as its name indicates, connects the Piazza Barbolani along a relatively straight path to the external world and the busy highway system therein.

There are many small public sitting areas, often built by residents with donated materials and furniture upon the vacant lots of former, war-destroyed dwellings. There is



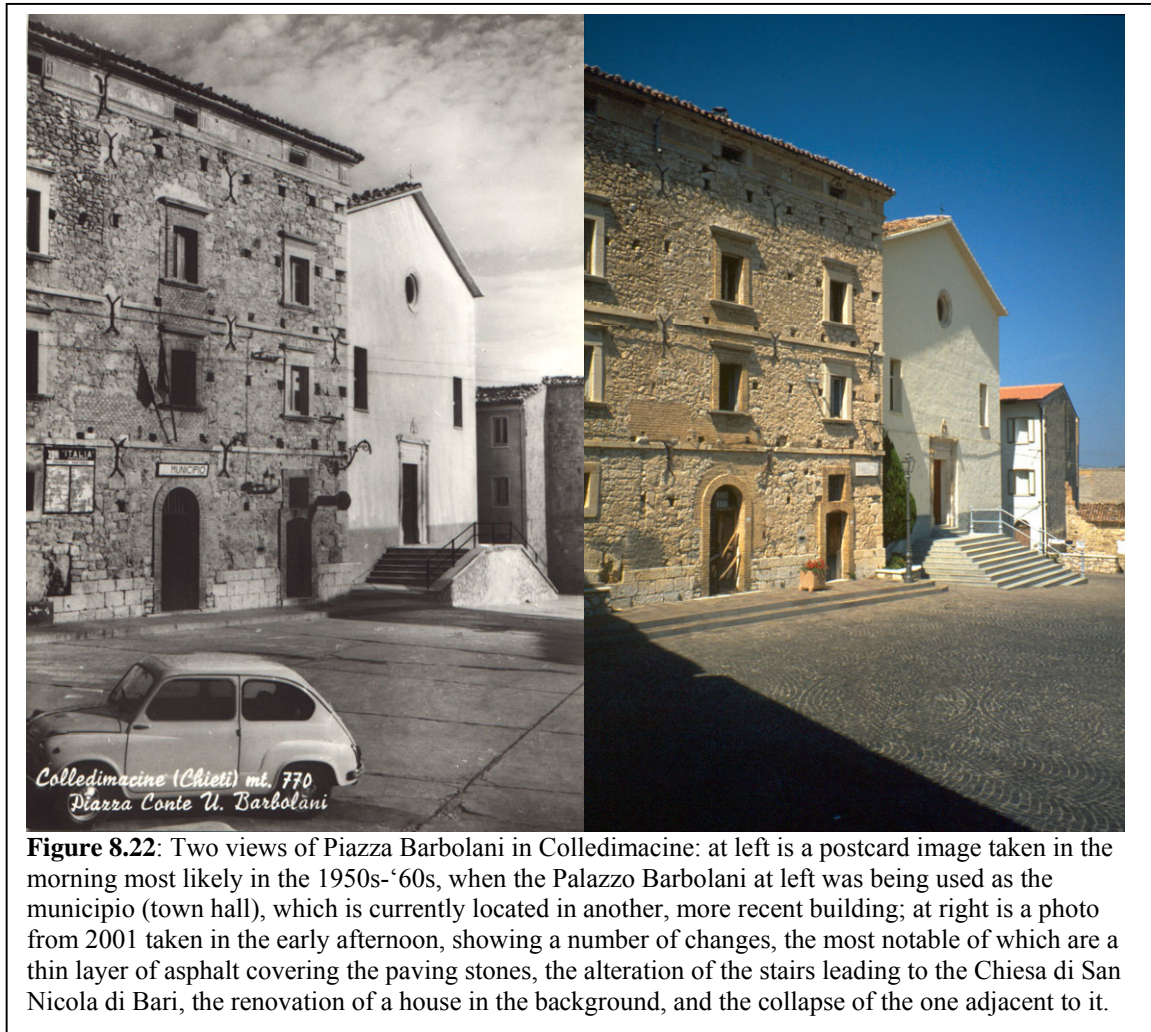
Figure 8.20: Line of travel series through an archway portal into and panning around Piazza Barbolani in Colledimacine. Note the fruit and vegetable shop cut in half between the third and fourth images, and the city map just right of center, which is featured in figure 8.3. For a view of the portion of the piazza located behind the photographer in the second, third and fourth images, see figure 4.9.

not as clear a distinction between public and reservedly public spaces as in Lama, but the areas of densest housing tend towards the latter, while the small seating areas, piazzas, and large green areas at the southwestern end of the village tend towards the former. Rather than being viewed by local inhabitants with suspicion, I felt that I was more often regarded with curiosity, if not relief at my providing a measure of novelty. Often I was approached by residents, who after asking what I was doing, invited me into their homes or onto outside benches for a coffee and chat.

Walking through Colle I felt unhurried, and was able to better examine the various indications of accumulated time's effects upon the surrounding space (and perhaps even vice versa – of accumulated space's effects on the surrounding time). The Germans' extensive bombing of the village some sixty years ago broke apart what once was without doubt a tightly knit and slowly-aged network of structures and open spaces – an event roughly imaginable as acid being poured over the entire town, with the result that the later reconstruction was stunted in places, and deformed in others. Despite this, Colle has retained myriad, interconnected spaces of representation built on former models, even as (or perhaps as a result of that fact that) the spatial practices of its inhabitants have slowed considerably – enough to escape the denigrating effects representations of space, wherein “[e]conomic space subordinates time to itself; political space expels it as threatening and dangerous (to power)” (Lefebvre, *The Production* 95). In Colledimacine there is little economy left, and as such, few pressing concerns over political power: the commodified world thus pays short shrift to such a non-productive place.



Figure 8.21: Line of travel series through central to northern Colledimacine, including an overview locator photo at bottom connected by reference to the tower in Piazza Barbolani (see figure 4.9). Note that during the time it took me to take the second and third photos, someone moved the red car from the east to the west side of the street into the shade. The fourth image includes a view of the Valle di Taranta on the Majella (see figures 5.12-14). The penultimate image shows Piazza Belvedere, at the end of which on the left is a small park overlooking the valley with views of Lama and the Majella.



The advantage of closely observing a village like Colle is that the interweavings of time and space are readily detectable; it unabashedly shows its age, displaying the signs of slowly accumulated growth and decay (or quickly wreaked destruction). It belongs to a bygone era in which, as Lefebvre writes, “each place . . . like a tree trunk, bore the mark of the years it had taken it to grow. Time was thus inscribed in space, and natural space was merely the lyrical and tragic script of natural time” (95). What is missing from Colledimacine is the disturbing contemporary phenomenon that “our time,” as Lefebvre disparagingly notes, “this most essential part of lived experience . . . is no



Figure 8.23: Two views of a building in Colledimacine: the close-up reveals what appears to be the rough boundary between two connected structures, lying somewhere between a stone and a brick doorway; the wide-angle image reveals the overall context.

longer visible to us, no longer intelligible. It cannot be constructed. It is consumed, exhausted, and that is all. It leaves no traces. It is concealed in space, hidden under a pile of debris to be disposed of as soon as possible” (95-96). And yet, despite its many richly time-layered, intimate and welcoming spaces, Colledimacine is a declining village with very few young residents and almost no jobs. Most of the summer clients at the bar are emigrants, living either abroad (commonly in Switzerland, Germany, or France), or in larger Italian cities (including Rome, Naples, and Chieti). The brief flowering of human activity here in June, July, and especially August, soon disappears come fall.

Because Colledimacine is so small, I have chosen to treat it as one large neighborhood – in correspondence with Jane Jacobs’s first category of neighborhoods: “the city as a whole” (*The Death* 117). It lacks commercial streets with shops and busy activity, and has only one example each of some of the commonest “institutions” found in most towns, including post offices, churches, grocery stores, bars, community centers,



Figure 8.24: Three images of a small urban park in southwestern Colledimacine. The photo at top left is from a late 1970s-era postcard that I found at the local general goods store in 2001; after a bit of wandering around, I eventually found the park looking quite similar, but with its few trees much larger and the postwar housing blocks in the background repainted (the photo at upper right). By the next year, however, significant changes had taken place, including a new and working fountain, freshly planted flowers, and spruced-up lawn.

and playing fields. The only structures that may appear distinctly separated from the rest of the village are, as in Lama, clusterings of small postwar apartment blocks built outside the older, more idiosyncratic footprint of the village. These buildings, which are located along the southwestern edge of town, after some snooping around, appear nonetheless relatively well integrated into the rest of the urban surroundings – one sign of which is an attractive, small public garden located between the apartment blocks and older (rebuilt)



Figure 8.25: Two images of a wall in central Colle, which most likely at one time formed the base of a house, perhaps destroyed during the Second World War. Later the space within seems to have served as a garden, which if the case has been abandoned for some time.

houses closer to the center of the village (see figure 8.24). This space, maintained and occasionally revamped by nearby residents, is a welcoming point of rest, conversation, and leisurely work. Its somewhat odd shape may reflect the outline of a former house, perhaps destroyed by war.

Familiarizing myself with Colledimacine reinforced in myriad ways that the process of learning to perceive a vernacular space depends, in large part, upon recognizing and examining boundaries – both from far away and at close range. In an urban context, these boundaries typically run between and through buildings, vacant lots, courtyards, pathways, and roads; each of these elements also constitutes a boundary; which in turn contain myriad other boundaries, such as the edges within walls indicating former (now bricked up) portals, the shifts in the age and type of paving stones, the hazy outline of a former garden plot, and the indeterminate lines across which a path becomes a road, which in turn later widens and becomes a piazza (see, for example, figure 8.21).

Actively attempting to read the landscape, switching often between micro and macro levels, forces the observer to confront both subtle and prominent fracture lines, which at once threaten to pull apart the landscape, yet also hold it together. Held within

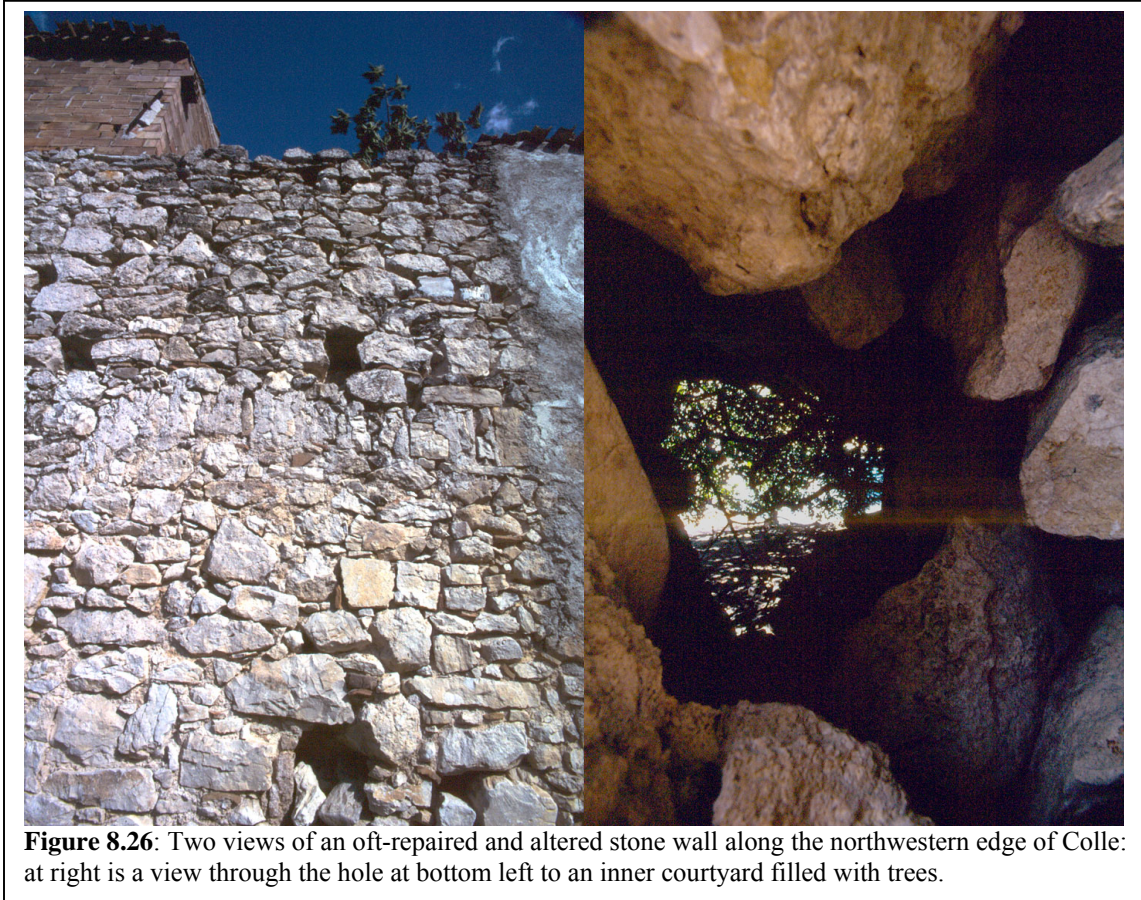


Figure 8.26: Two views of an oft-repaired and altered stone wall along the northwestern edge of Colle: at right is a view through the hole at bottom left to an inner courtyard filled with trees.

(or defined by) these lines are various public, private, and semi-public spaces, which carry various rules for entry and use. As Lefebvre point out, “[s]pace is divided up into designated (signified, specialized) areas and into areas that are prohibited (to one group or another). It is further subdivided into spaces for work and spaces for leisure, and into daytime and night-time spaces” (*The Production* 320). In Colledimacine these sorts of divisions are plentiful, but because the town’s population is so sparse and elderly, their prohibitive authority is relatively weak.

There are very few spaces still dedicated to work, apart from small garden plots and the occasional (re-)construction site; whereas potential leisure spaces are ubiquitous, which include almost all the streets, which carry so little car traffic that the few children

in town are free to ride their bikes and play wherever they please (depending, of course, on the severity and efficacy of their parents' restrictions). The outsider-observer may wander at will through the village across vacant lots half-filled with aging building materials and miscellaneous salvage, peer through the broken windows or cracked doors of long disused buildings, and contemplate rows of still-maintained but mostly empty houses with their shutters drawn tight – their owners no longer permanently resident in town. But what effect does this wandering have? One often feels shut out, passing along and across boundaries, which even if relatively easy to breach physically, remain prohibitive in other ways because of their relative muteness.

And yet, when residents give voice to what Zanzotto refers to as their “sedi e siti” (settlements and sites), they breach the surrounding stillness, making it possible for the outsider to make sense of the landscape's often barely perceptible scratchings of entangled time and space. Coupled with intense personal observation, these residents' stories and drawings render what may initially seem an unintelligible “text” at least partially legible. One of the most interesting stories that I stumbled upon concerns a large outcropping of rock a few hundred meters to the east of town, called “Corte Vecchia” (Curth Vecchia in dialect, or Old Court). I had never paid it much attention until I heard the following folktale about its former function as “an edge of no return,” told by an old woman I met one day sitting outside a house with some of her friends by the edge of town:

And then there's Corte Vecchia, where they used to throw all the old people. Down there, where there's a big “burrone” [a massive outcropping of rock with a cliff on one side]. At one time, when you got to a certain age, what age exactly it was, I'm not so sure, but anyway, it was the first son's responsibility to take his father and throw him over the edge down there, where they died. They had to take



them on their shoulders and throw them over the edge. And then, once, there came this man, or son, who had to take his father, and at a certain point, he just couldn't go any further. And the father said to his son, I had to stop here too, when I carried my father. And so, he carried his father back, and hid him in the house, because, you know, the law was like that. And so, for a long time, he had to stay hidden in the house. He told his son to keep quiet, but eventually, one of those people in the village who eventually come to know everything, found them out. There was a bit of controversy, but it turned out that other people had been hiding their parents at home as well, and so everyone decided that the law was no good anymore. And from that day on no one carried their old parents to the cliff anymore.

The story is well known in town; I later heard a number of shorter versions of it, although they all tended more or less to follow the main details of the one repeated above. After the woman had finished speaking, I mentioned that I now intended on walking over to explore the site. The women together suddenly began warning me to be careful, because there were vipers and wild boars lurking in the bushes; she also said with a severe look on her face that I shouldn't be walking around the countryside with only shorts and sandals on. Although I politely accepted the advice, I had little intention of changing my habit of stumbling about in the bushes dressed for summer. I took my leave and walked to the northeast along the edge of town towards Curth Vecchia.

There no longer exists a clear path from the Lama-Colle road to the rugged knoll, and while beating my way through the bush I recalled the old women's warning, somewhat wishing that I had in fact worn trousers to protect my legs from thorns, if not from poisonous snakes and ferocious boars. After plunging through a rather thick patch of downy oaks mixed with blackberry vines, gorse, and other prickly plants, I emerged on a gradual slope covered with yellowing grass and assorted low-lying vegetation interspersed with rocky ledges. While on top, I wondered to myself why the place was

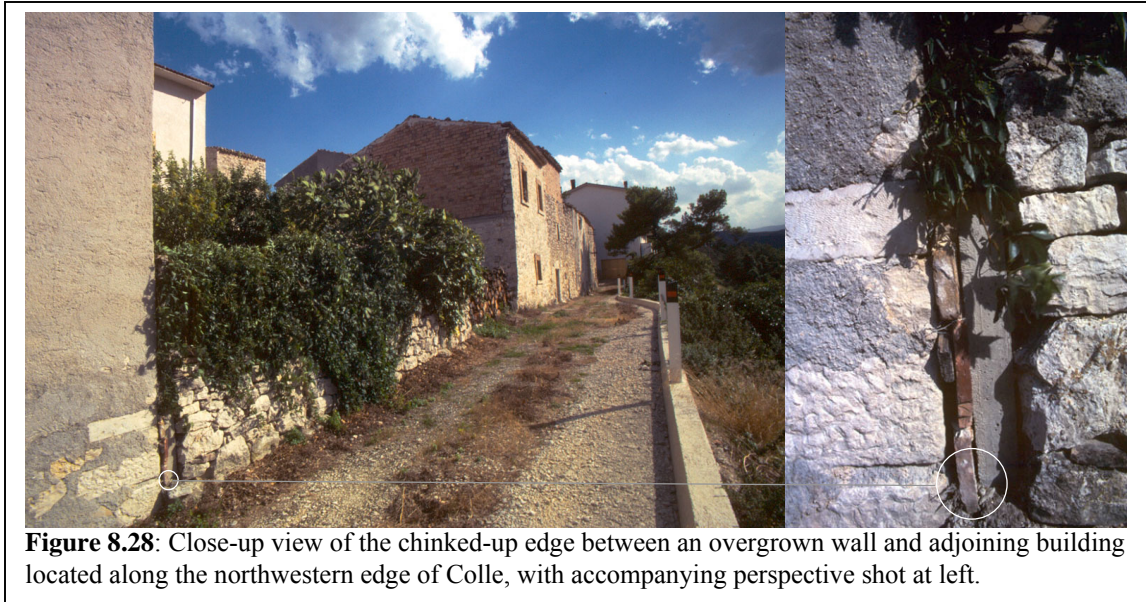


Figure 8.28: Close-up view of the chinked-up edge between an overgrown wall and adjoining building located along the northwestern edge of Colle, with accompanying perspective shot at left.

called “old court.” Perhaps it referred to the fact that the old people of the village had supposedly met their final judgement there.

Later, while reading through Ugo Falcone’s manuscript, I found another answer and a somewhat different interpretation of the site’s former function. He explains that, according to oral history transmitted through the generations, there once existed in the area tribunals of Lombardic origin composed of old men, who would meet as necessary at a site to hold court and administer the law – which in Colledimacine was Curth Vecchia. If someone was condemned to death, he or she was immediately brought to the summit of the outcropping and pushed off its eastern edge, which offers a free fall of about a hundred meters and a landing of jagged rocks: “No one returned!” as Falcone exclaims. “At least it is not easy to gather information in this sense. There the cadaver was miserably abandoned as prey to rapacious, carnivorous animals. Today what remains? Certainly not the bones, threadbare and eaten by time. There only remains the story, and to its testimony, CURTH vecchia.” Indeed, what remains of any landscape’s

former incarnations but traces of memory preserved in fast-altered words, and sparse, still-existent physical scratchings? In the case of Curth Vecchia, as Falcone writes, “the briars that surround it indicate that this practice [as a natural substitute for the gallows] is in disuse and belongs to the past, and that this place of pain and immediate justice has for a few hundred years served as a tranquil, natural residence in summer and winter alike for foxes on its upper reaches, and for wild boars along its base.”

Closing Comments

If as a stranger you wander through Colledimacine long enough, you eventually end up, due in large part to the enticing funnel-effect of the village’s oblong shape, at the extreme northeastern corner of town. Here a lone stone dwelling sits upon the edge of a steep drop-off, partially covered with ivy with its door held closed by a rope tied from a centrally-positioned handle to a bare tree branch braced in opposition against the jamb. A small adjacent piazza overgrown with grass and pioneering shrubs overlooks the Aventino Valley, Lama dei Peligni, and the Majella.

The last time I went to this place I sat down on the edge of the piazza close to the house with my legs dangling over the densely forested slopes below. I beheld a panorama of manifold familiar and unfamiliar boundaries of all shapes, sizes, and types, from field borders, paths, and roads, to the ruins of structures barely distinguishable from nearby piles of rocks. Behind me loomed the angled, silent prospect of Colledimacine, whose residents’ collective memories surely held untold and still vital, if fading connections between fields and dwellings – by now long obscured upon the ground. I thought, for example, of the highly original pen drawings by Mr. Barone, a local artist able to



Figure 8.29: Three views of the northeastern end of Colledimacine, connected by reference to the roof corner of a small disused building on the edge of town whose northwest-facing wall is covered with ivy. The top view is to the northwest down the Aventino valley towards the Adriatic (a section of the Lama-Colle road is visible at lower left); the middle, southeast-facing view was taken from the Lama-Colle road; and the bottom, northwest-facing view includes a portion of the Majella, just above Lama.

express aspects of Colledimacine's urban-rural geography that are difficult if not impossible to communicate in words, who one day generously invited me into his house (not far from the northeastern end of town) to view his work (see figures 8.4 and 8.30). I thought too, of "Falcone," an elderly man with green-tinted eyeglasses whom I met a few days previously on Via Mascetta sitting on a bench in the sun. His remembrances, repeated in part below, eloquently recount the geopolitical and cultural upheavals that Colledimacine – as well as many other villages of the Aventino Valley – have endured over the past eighty-odd years:

Before the war, we all did agricultural work, animals, cows, sheep, grain, vineyards, olives, all stuff of this sort. This was primarily a village of agricultural production, all stuff to eat. And since now we're all old, and the young people go to work in the big factories down there (indicates the east, towards the flatter lands by the sea), we old people are all pensioners and don't do anything anymore, and houses are left abandoned . . . and things have turned out like this. The young people rent a place down there, and return on Saturday, Sunday. There's a bus that is subsidized by the government, that goes down there, takes an hour and a half. It leaves at 6 in the morning, and if you have to be there by 6, it leaves at 4:30. Nobody is out of work. And agriculture is finished, finished. No more animals anymore either. Before, you know, here there were . . . 18 pairs of oxen, to work the earth. Horses, donkeys, goats, cows, everything. And all of this land here, belonged to this village here. Now it's all turned into forest, but before it was all cultivated. The story is long, and ugly. We suffered a lot, because here, no one ever thought that at Colledimacine they would have fought the war. The Germans, while we were hidden in the cave, and the woods, would come around, and if they found someone, would kill them. Atrocious, terrible . . . things were done very badly. You know, our place here, was ruined.

With these thoughts in mind of Colledimacine, once so intimately and actively inhabited and now in a seemingly ever-more progressive state of decay, Zanzotto's related following comments on the inextricable connections between place and time strike home particularly acutely: "When one speaks of places, one also necessarily speaks of times.



Figure 8.30: At bottom is a photograph of the local Colledimacine artist, Mr. Barone, holding his illuminating drawing of Colledimacine and the Majella; on the wall is another of his works, which depicts a portion of Piazza Barbolani (see also figure 4.9). At top is a close-up of the first drawing, along with a roughly corresponding photo of same scene. In this work, the village appears connected to the mountain by a fluid zone of white (perhaps indicating energy, spirit(s), snow, and/or water), while important landmarks, which are easily recognized from afar by locals but remain difficult for outsiders to see, are given special prominence – including Fonte Tari (the lone building shown here on the Majella [see figure 5.25]) and a number of small farmhouses. See also figure 8.4 for another of Mr. Barone’s works.

The catastrophe of places and of course dreams . . . is also the catastrophe of the fields – of memory – in which times are arranged according to an order” (*Le poesie* 1370-71).

And yet, if a meaningful familiarity can be regained with the spatial-temporal past of any ordinary landscape, then perhaps, regardless of the relative state of dereliction of the human artifacts therein, this catastrophe – which I interpret to mean geographical-historical-cultural ignorance coupled with extreme environmental degradation – can likewise in some way be averted. To briefly reiterate, the method of regaining this familiarity that I have herein proposed, is to examine the oftentimes porous boundaries that humans use to divide space – thereby awakening an active interest in and hopefully also a meaningful, panoramic understanding of our ordinary surroundings. As such, I have provided a regional geographic portrait of a small corner of south-central Italy by way of analyzing its prominent and hidden boundaries. In doing so, I hope to have demonstrated how boundaries, as definers of physical space, are also key indicators of cultural activity.

By analyzing the form, function, and meaning of this vernacular landscape’s (and by extension, potentially any landscape’s) boundaries, I hope to have also shown how one may thus begin to understand the various, overlapping processes and meanings of an area’s particular social spaces. If the experiment is successful, both precise and amorphous zones or lines of separation (and thus also overlap) will emerge (or, in other words, become perceptible) within the cultural landscape. Crossing and paralleling these boundaries, which often take the form of ephemeral and easily corruptible tracks or traces, illuminates their functions as markers of myriad processes, such as the settling of

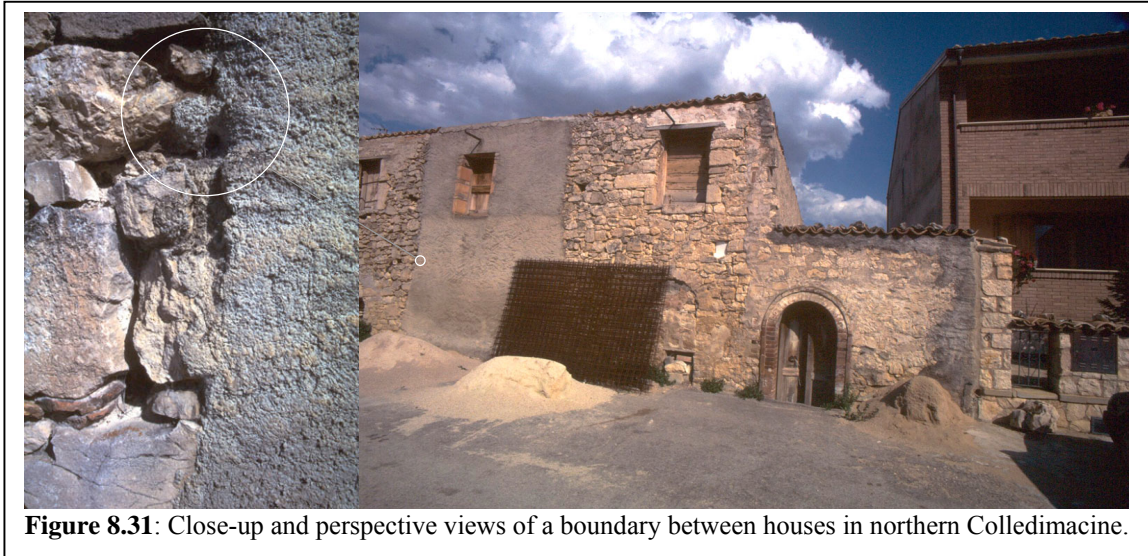


Figure 8.31: Close-up and perspective views of a boundary between houses in northern Colledimacine.

land, demarcating of property, movement of traffic, investment of meaning in specific locales, growth or loss of forests, and usufruct or abuse of resources.

One of the key lessons I have learned in the process – that of the impossibility of producing a simultaneously meaningful yet ultimately reductive scheme of landscape – is eloquently expressed by Zanzotto in the following passage from an essay on the Euganean Hills in the Veneto in northern Italy. Rather, as he suggests, landscapes, especially highly complex accretions of vernacular spaces roughly abutting or piled on top of one another like floating or layered islands, are multidimensional entities pulsating with endless concentrations of interconnecting spirits, energy, memories, and matter:

There truly exist certain places, or rather, certain concretions or archipelagos of places out of which – no matter how you penetrate them, and no matter how you think and rethink them, or gather them all together as a model studied in perspective from above – it is never possible to make a true “map” with fixed itineraries. The desire that such places insinuate is that of almost physically introjecting them, so intensely do they vibrate with interwoven and concentrated vitalities. . . . That which pushes to identify [such places] is truly an exclusive love, “fatal,” for the never-tiring violence with which it rises from the bottom of the depths and pushes like subterranean fire. (*Le Poesie* 1079)



Figure 8.32: Close-up and perspective views of a boundary between houses in western Colledimacine.

Making a verb out of the noun “introiezione” (introjection), Zanzotto here plays with the term’s literal definition (an unconscious incorporation of external ideas into one’s own mind or personality); instead of an unconscious process of mentally taking in aspects of external reality, here the verb implies a conscious action of the mind and body working together to almost physically incorporate places into the self. The ultimate boundary is thus challenged – that between the self and the world. Effectively breaching this edge so as to better understand the landscape lying in all directions beyond one’s body and mind requires, as Zanzotto states, deep affection and dedication – and perhaps an intimate and slowly acquired relationship with place through long-term inhabitation. I can only hope to aspire to such an entangled, driven, and connected knowledge of the Majella, Lama dei Peligni, the Aventino Valley, and Colledimacine – or for that matter of my actual, day to day surroundings, however familiar or unfamiliar they may initially, momentarily, or habitually appear.

Knowledge of this sort, which results from confronting the myriad and oftentimes nebulous boundaries within any landscape, offers no easy answers and often leads not into recognizable and clearly marked, but unexpectedly unfamiliar and labyrinthine zones wherein it is easy to become lost. Exploring any area fully requires a certain initial disorientation, an acceptance of the risk of becoming lost repeatedly over time. No maps, even highly detailed topographic ones, are capable of preventing their users from becoming bewildered; these documents can only act as rough guides. Crossing any boundary entails a potential certain risk, as well as a concomitant gain. Disorientation thus becomes a necessary counterpart to orientation, with the rich interplay between being lost and being located subtly underlying all of our movements through conjoined mental and physical space.

To end, I hope that the portrait I have here provided of the study area not only provides guidance through a particular, very localized portion of space, but also encourages exploration into, along, across, and beyond the known limits of landscapes of all imaginable types. I hope also to have here offered one more set of tools to the challenging task of embracing and understanding complex, overlaying fields of geographic awareness gained from a combination of interwoven fieldwork and bookwork. The intense explorations that such spatial knowledge requires, inspire us to strive towards realizing the tremendous potential we all have as readers of landscape to continually reconfigure the ways in which we make sense of, and in turn help to form, our ever-changing surroundings.

Appendix A: Additional Figures

Figure A.1: View of an avalanche chute on the west side of the Majella, above Fonte Romana. Note the pino mugo in the foreground, and the tree-line just below at about 1700 m. (See also figure 3.16 for comparison)



Figure A.2: View to the south of the west side of the Majella.



Figure A.3: View to the north of Monte Acquaviva on the Majella. (See also figure 5.21)





Figure A.5: View to the east from the Majella of the upper Aventino Valley, and beyond, of the Sangro Valley.



Figure A.6: View to the east from the Majella of the middle Aventino Valley; the Adriatic Coast is visible in the far distance.



Figure A.7: A brushfire burning on the southeastern side of the Aventino Valley, between Lama dei Peligni and Taranta Peligna (June, 2001).



Figure A.8: The Grotta di Sant'Angelo, with the remains of a Medieval monastery, located on the Majella above Lama. (See also figures 1.13 and 2.13)



Figure A.9: Detail of the Grotta di Sant'Angelo, on the Majella above Lama.



Figure A.10: Detail of the remaining fragments of a medieval painting hidden within the box behind the contemporary picture featured in figures A.8 and A.9.



Figure A.11: Cement retaining walls temporarily separating an area subject to frequent landslides from the rest of Lama. (See also bottom image in figure 6.30)



Figure A.12: Two overlapping views of Lama: below is a photograph of a religious procession in the early 1950s (Lama municipal archives); above is a shot of the same area from a lower perspective in 2001.



Figure A.13: Two views of Lama: above is a photograph of a religious procession in the early 1950s (San Nicola archives); below is a shot of the same area in 2001. (See also figure 6.18)



Figure A.14: Two views of Lama: below is a photograph of a group of boys in the 1920s (San Nicola archives); above is a shot of the same area in 2001. (See also figure 6.18)



Figure A.15: Two views of Lama: above is a 1920 photograph of “The Fountain” (Fonte Cannelle) with a group of women washing clothing and collecting water (Del Pizzo, Enrico, *La Linea* 118); below is a shot of the same area in 2001.



Figure A.16: Two views of Lama: below is a photograph of buildings under construction, soon to become housing for the homeless due to the 1933 earthquake (Lama municipal archives); above is a close-up shot of the buildings in 2001. (See also figure 6.33)



Figure A.17: Two views of Lama: above is a photograph of a funeral procession in front of San Pietro in what appears to be the 1940s or 1950s (San Nicola archives); below is a shot of the same scene in 2001. (See also figure 6.38)



Figure A.18: Two views of Lama: below is a photograph of men gathered near buses and surrounded by post-Second World War destruction along the Via Frentana in Lama ((Del Pizzo, Enrico, *La Linea* 119); above is a shot of the same scene in 2001.



Figure A.19: Two views of Piazza Umberto I in Lama: below is a photograph of a religious procession (undated, San Nicola archives); above is a shot of the same scene in 2001. (See also figures 4.5 and 4.6)

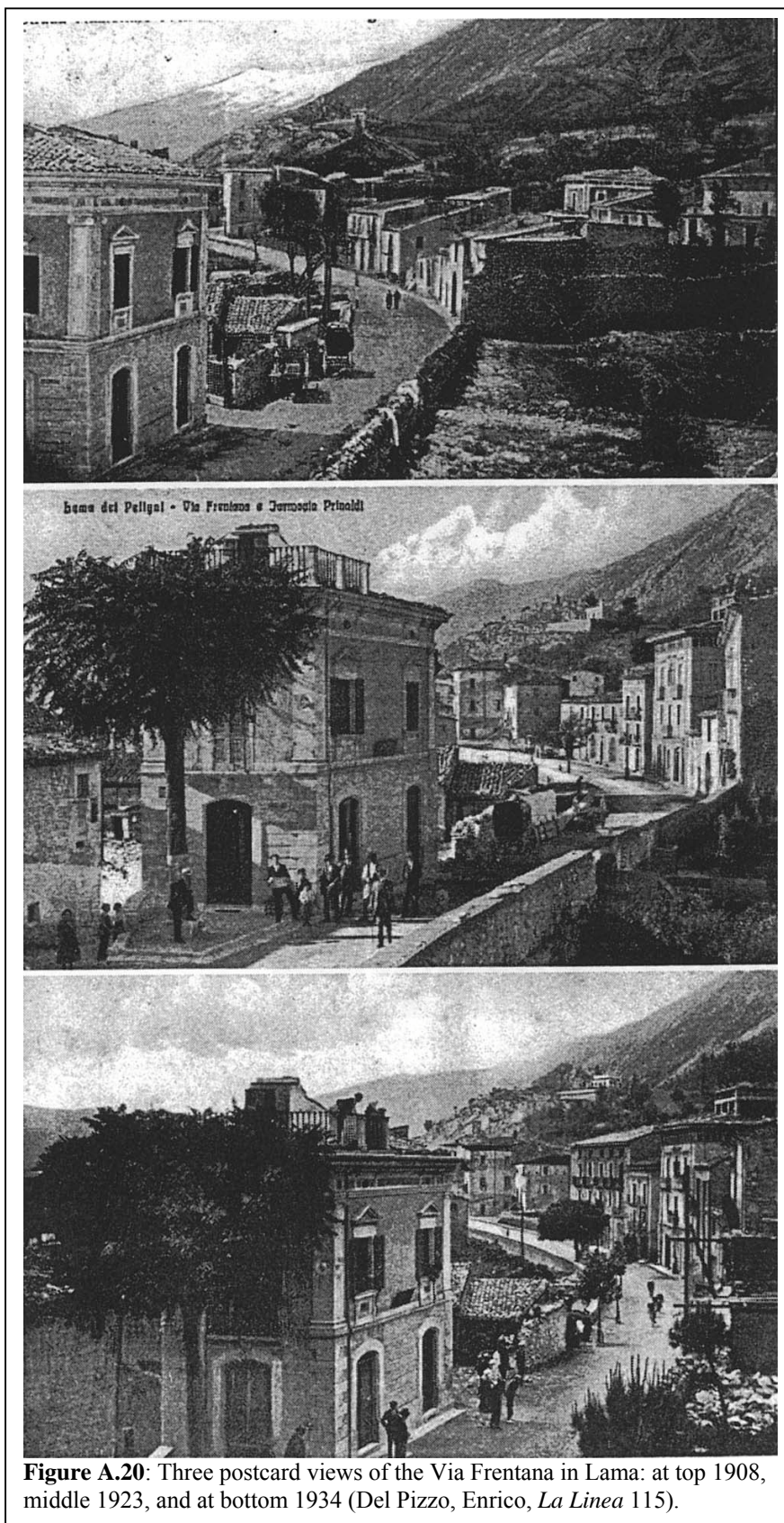


Figure A.20: Three postcard views of the Via Frentana in Lama: at top 1908, middle 1923, and at bottom 1934 (Del Pizzo, Enrico, *La Linea* 115).



Figure A.21: View in 2001 of the area of the Via Frentana featured in figure A.20.



Figure A.22: Lama dei Peligni cemetery, seen from the lower slopes of the Majella.



Figure A.23: Two views of Taranta Peligna, the Valle di Taranta, and the Majella: at top a view from perhaps the early twentieth century (Del Pizzo, Enrico, “Museo” 41); at bottom, a contemporary view from farther away, near Colledimacine, with a rusty “No Hunting” sign posted on a tree at upper right. (See also figures 5.12-14)



Figure A.24: A field cultivated with an experimental crop of truffles, located approximately halfway from the Aventino River to Colledimacine, along the Colle-Lama road.



Figure A.25: Old stone walls still visible on land apparently still used to some extent for grazing, with a few cultivated plots at upper center, about four kilometers southwest of Colledimacine.



Figure A.26: A long-uninhabited house in Colledimacine now used for storage, whose front yard serves as a modest garden plot.



Figure A.27: Two views of Piazza Barbolani in Colledimacine: at top is an early twentieth-century view (from the collection of “Fabio,” a resident of Colle); at bottom is a corresponding view from 2001.



Figure A.28: A woman sitting on the edge of Piazza Belvedere in Colledimacine observing the Majella covered in thick clouds through an opening between houses.



Figure A.29: Two views down Via Mascetta in Colledimacine: above is a postcard image (morning, 1970s-80s?); at bottom is a corresponding afternoon view in 2001.



Figure A.30: An anonymous, make-shift monument made from scrap metal and building debris along the southwestern edge of Colledimacine, apparently intended to commemorate the Second World War; note the top edge of a bench at bottom, the mini-tractor in the background, and beyond it, the Majella.

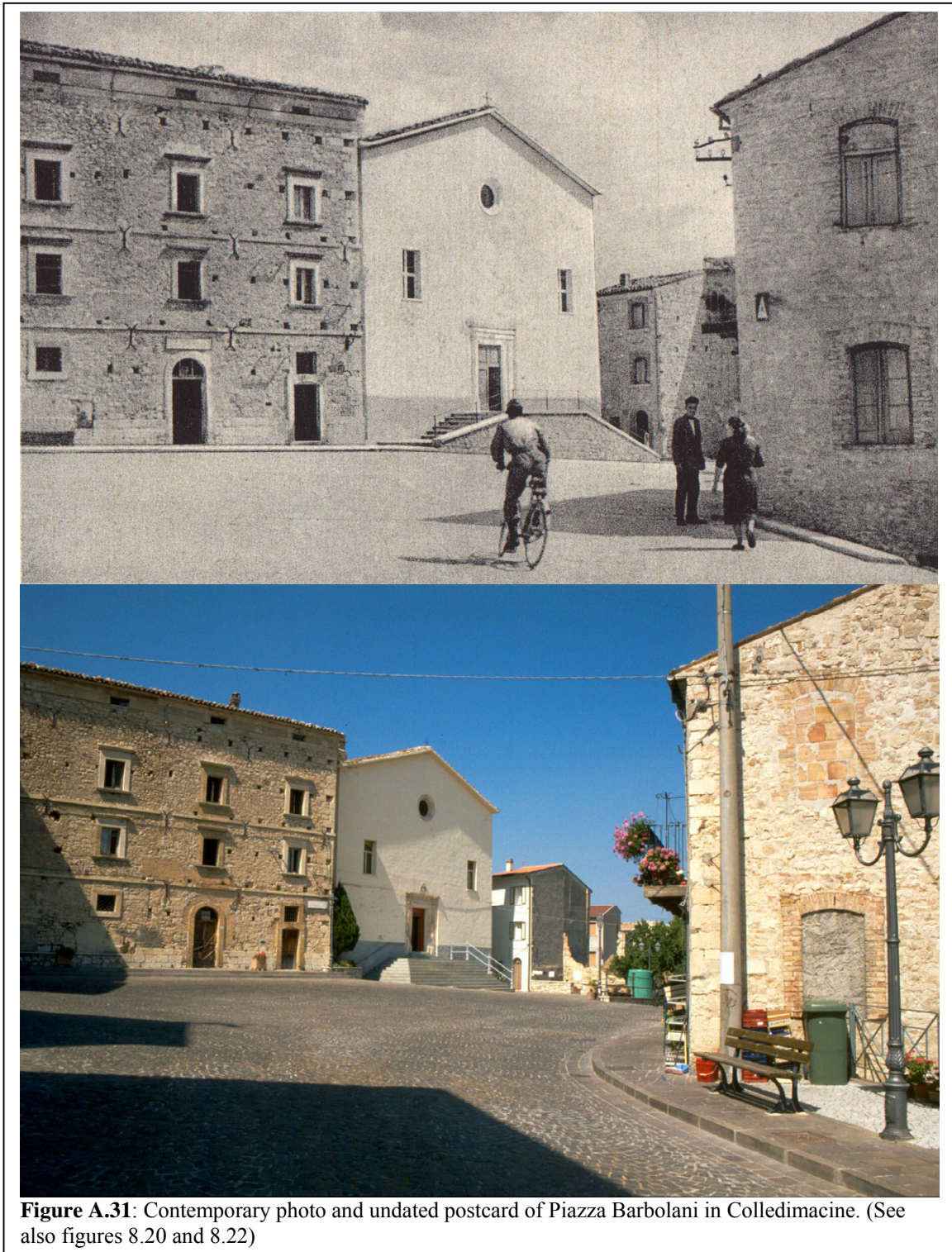


Figure A.31: Contemporary photo and undated postcard of Piazza Barbolani in Colledimacine. (See also figures 8.20 and 8.22)



Figure A.32: Contemporary photo and undated postcard of Piazza Barbolani in Colledimacine. (See also figures 8.20 and 8.22)



Figure A.33: Close-up and perspective views of a boundary between houses in western Colledimacine.

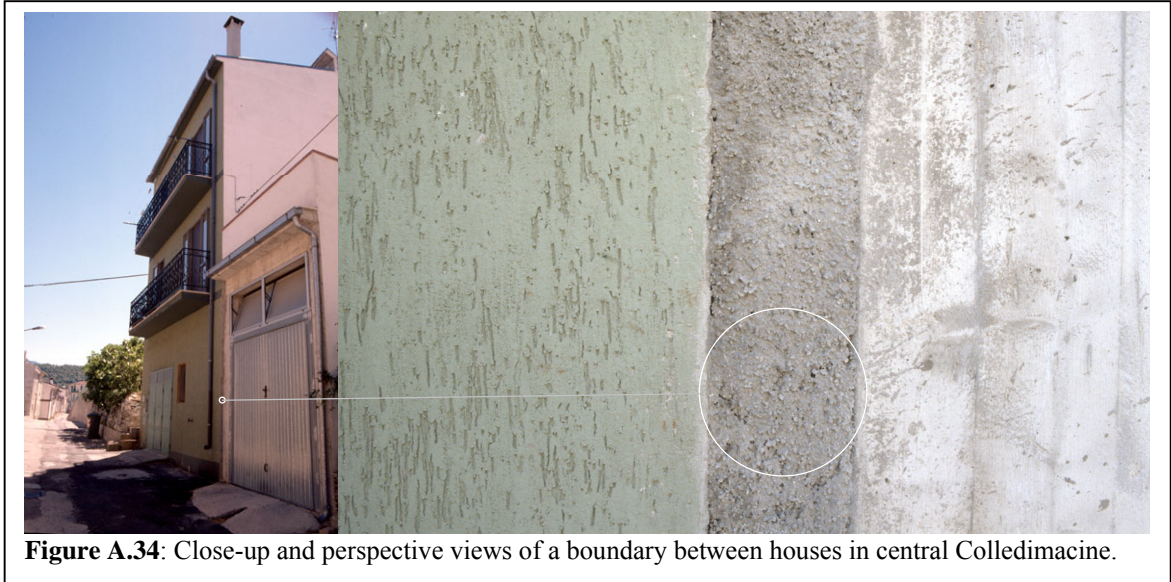
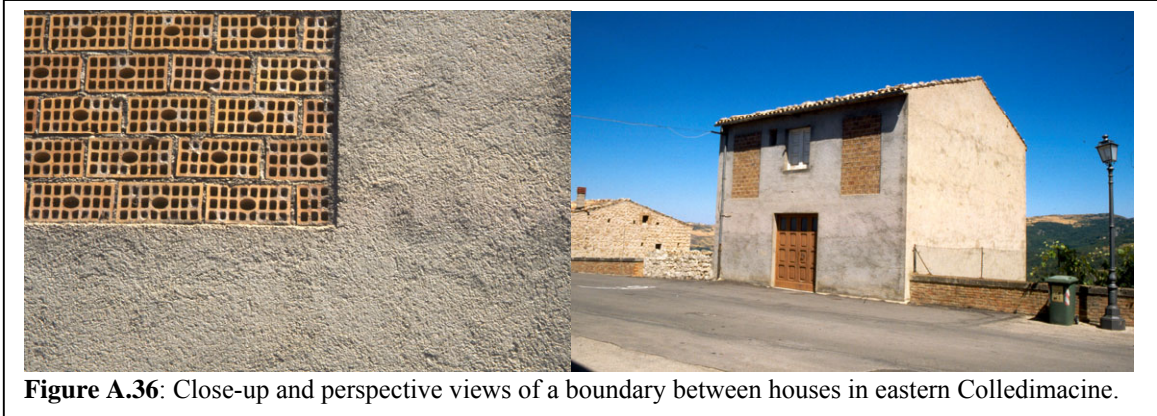


Figure A.34: Close-up and perspective views of a boundary between houses in central Colledimacine.



Figure A.35: Close-up and perspective views of a boundary between houses in central Colledimacine.



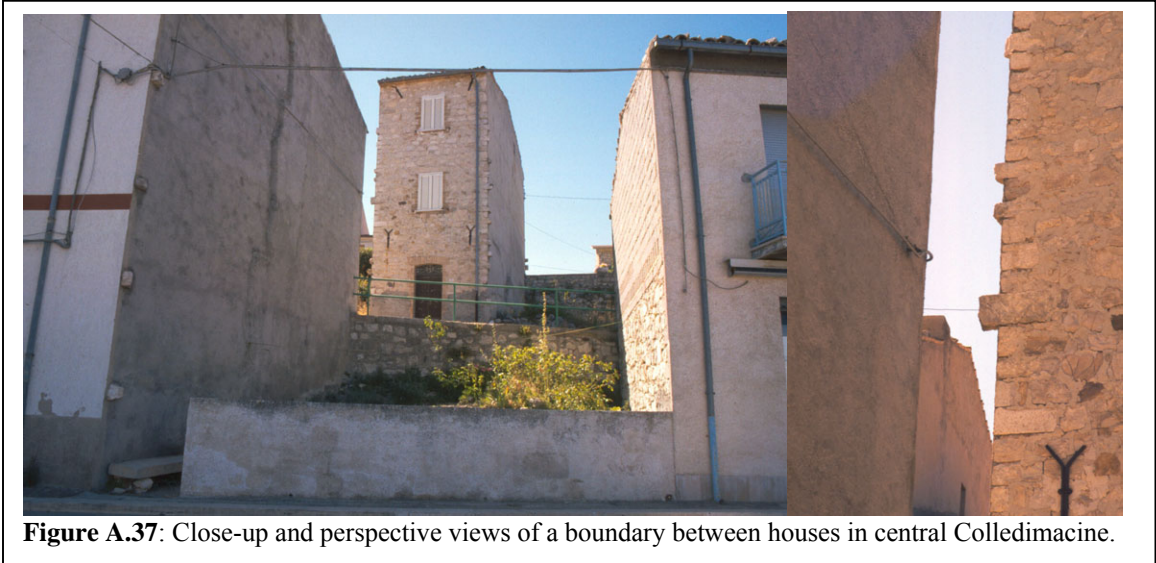


Figure A.37: Close-up and perspective views of a boundary between houses in central Colledimacine.

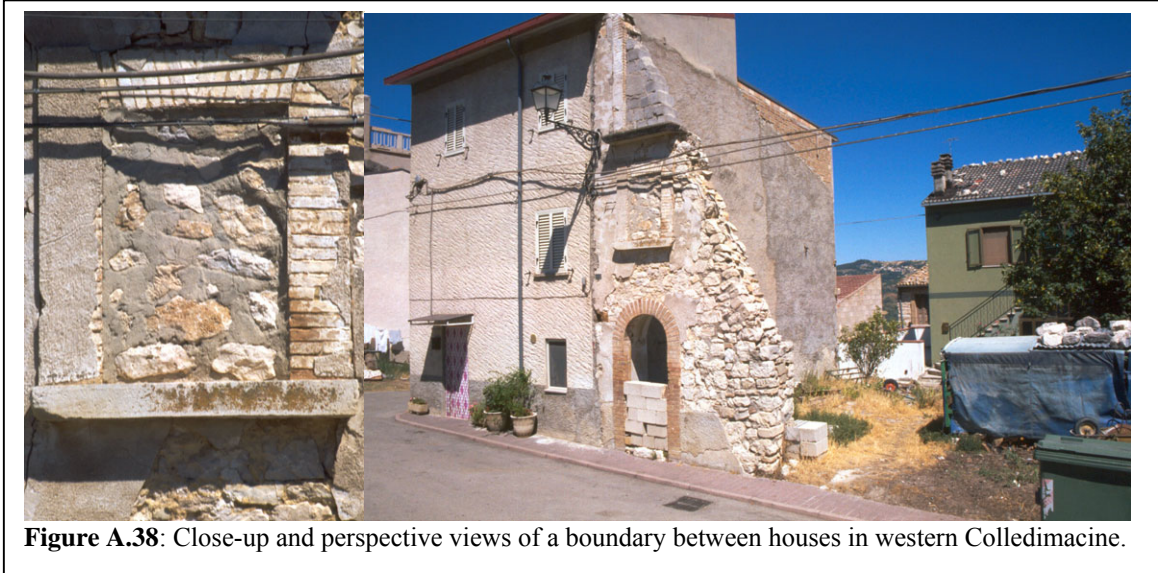


Figure A.38: Close-up and perspective views of a boundary between houses in western Colledimacine.

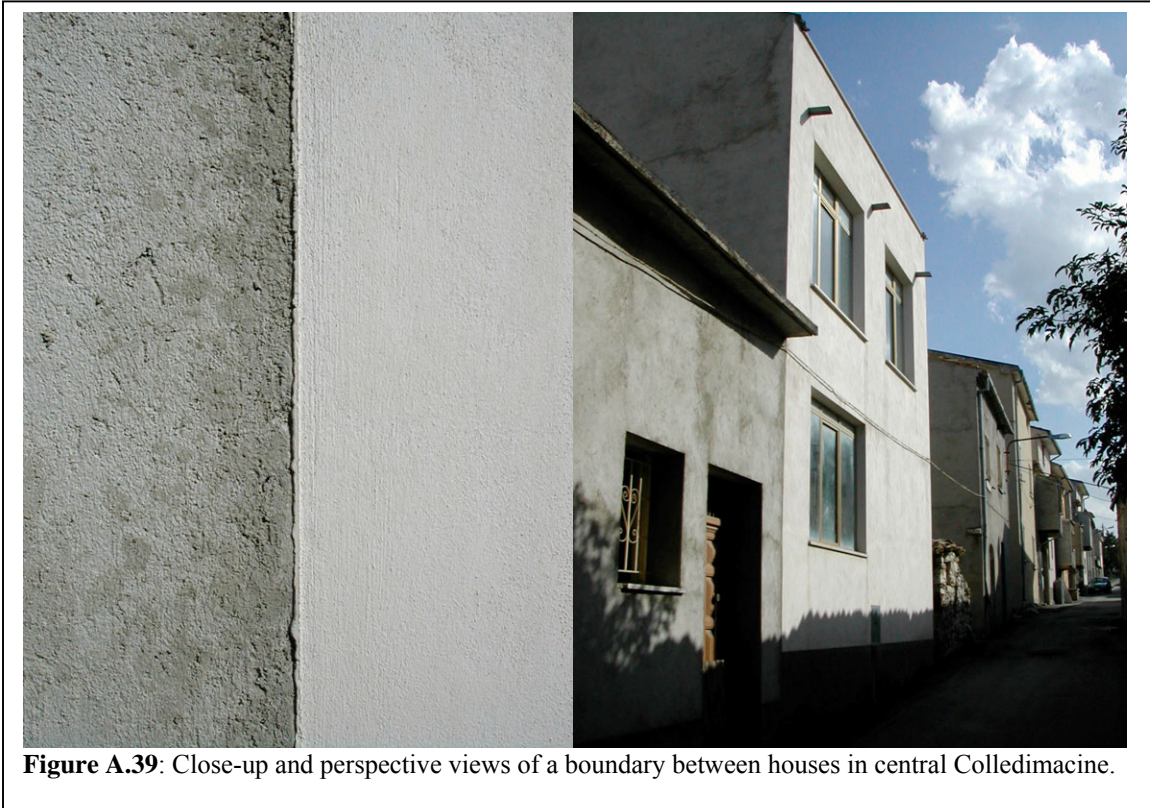


Figure A.39: Close-up and perspective views of a boundary between houses in central Colledimacine.



Figure A.40: Close-up and perspective views of a boundary between houses in western Colledimacine.

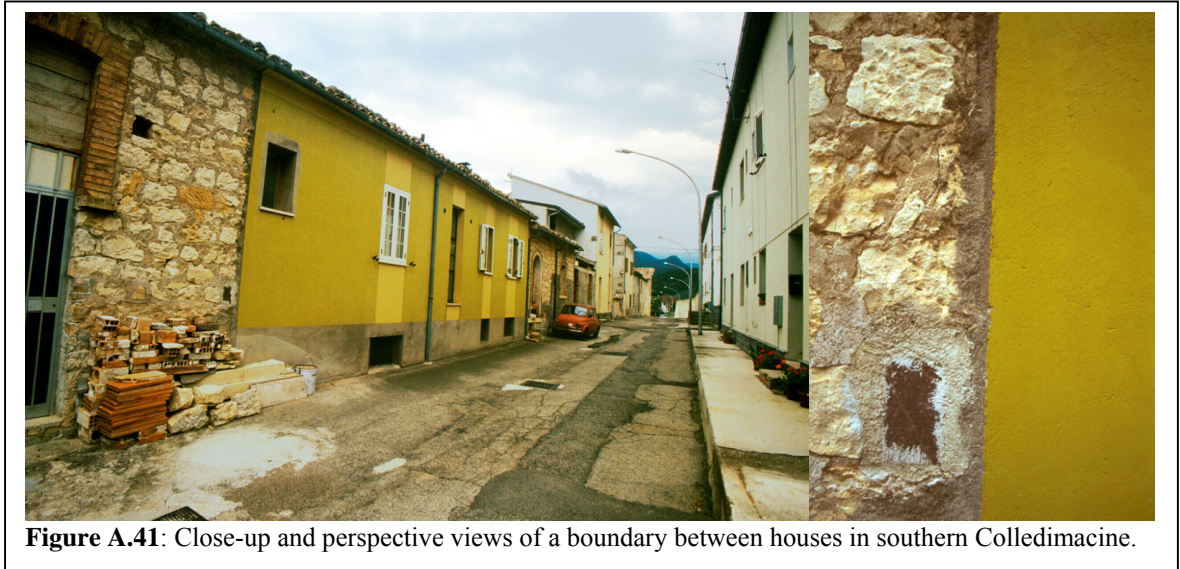


Figure A.41: Close-up and perspective views of a boundary between houses in southern Colledimacine.



Figure A.42: Manuela Mariani and her husband, Patrick Barron, the author, in the woods not far to the north of Lama dei Peligni (summer, 2001).

Appendix B: Selected Interviews with Local Residents

Lama dei Peligni, July, 2001 (Interview with a nobleman)

Is the park a positive or a negative development?

I would have to say that it is a positive one. As an old hunter, it seems that I would be to the contrary, but I gave up hunting many years ago, and have since changed my mentality. Nature is a very important thing for us, and humanity as a whole.

Has the park brought some new jobs to Lama?

Oh, yes, a bit of movement in the last few years. However, there's still much to be done in terms of organization, and how to best utilize the park. Not so many tourists are coming yet.

How has the valley changed in your lifetime?

Ah, the valley – well, I'd have to say, from the climatological viewpoint, with the addition of Lago di Casoli in the 1950s, the climate changed slightly from one that was hotter and drier to one that is milder. With the lake, there seems that it has become a bit more humid, but I can't say if this is really true or not.

In years past, were there more cultivated fields nearby?

Cultivated fields? Yes, at one time. This was principally an agricultural village, with many peasants tilling the earth. As our family is noble, at one time we owned many, many hectares of land, and rented many plots to sharecroppers for cultivation. In 1800, for example, we had over 125 sharecroppers. Their families would bring us grain, fruit, oil, whatever they were growing.

Were there shepherds also?

Oh yes, in an agricultural village of this sort, yes, and many of the pastures were on the mountain sides. Now there are no shepherds left. All are gone. // The pine woods just above Lama, that once was lower pasture land. The original pine woods was created thanks to my grandfather. Later, in time, it was slowly enlarged.

Was it planted for lumber?

Ah, well, it was really more for its own sake. In fact, years ago, when my grandfather went out to photograph lightning – he loved photography – and in the morning at dawn, after the storm, when there was bit of light, saw that open space, and was inspired to create a beautiful pine woods. At that time, my grandfather was a member of the town

council, not the mayor, but, well, involved in the local administration, and was able to gather support for the project. And it all came about when my father, after having spent the whole night on that spot to photograph the lightening, and having taken a walk around, thought that it would be a good spot for a pine woods.

Is the Aventino River a familiar place to the village, or one detached?

Once many families would go there; they would work the land down there, and so they would go swimming, would even drink that water. People would pass by on their mules and donkeys, and stop to drink. People never went to the sea, they didn't even know what it looked like – this was before the war. But even after, people would go down there, to the “Vallone,” as it was called, to take some sun, and go swimming. But now, hardly anyone goes down there anymore. Once it was familiar place, but not any longer. Now it's a place frequented by fishermen, and kayakers.

In the past, would people from other villages come down also?

I certainly think so – in fact, there once was a huge open pool, where people would go and take mud baths for their medicinal value – believing that it was good for you. People with certain ills, or pains, would go there for a couple of weeks, and in the morning for two or three hours, would cover themselves in mud and sit in the sun in order to cure themselves. And, effectively, it was a cure that did some good. In fact, once my grandfather, who was a doctor, had a patient with back pains. After examining him, my grandfather suggested that he go down to the river and try this cure, taking mud baths for about 15 to 20 days. And, in the end, the man felt much better, his back pains gone. Once people used to talk about this cure, but no more.

Would you say that the valley, with its river and its relatively unstable sides that come down every so often in mudslides, acts as a sort of boundary, or barrier – especially to a village such as Colledimacine?

Oh yes, the whole area is prone to mudslides, and in fact, some say that the name of the village Lama comes from the term “lamatura,” which means a zone prone to land/mud slides. Others say that the name means what seems obvious, “lama” – as on a knife blade or, ridge, but what seems more the case is that it comes from lamatura, which also means an area impregnated with water, that then slides down. For example, when the last large earthquake hit in the 1930s, the area of town where we met slid down the mountainside.

Are there villages more or less fortunate than others in the valley? For example, Taranta, or Lettopalena?

Oh, I'd say not; in Lettopalena, for example, very few people are left – at most 400. And in Taranta, maybe 1000 lived there, but not now – before they had a fairly important wool and blanket industry that employed most of the village, but now much of that is closed.

At a certain point competition was just too stiff from other places, mainly the larger cities. With today's market, you know . . .

Are there some divisions between the various villages of the valley?

They're relatively united – only when there's the odd soccer match . . . it happens that a bit of tousing takes place, when the people start throwing stones at each other! (laughter); No, but really, the villages have always gotten along relatively well. People move around a bit, especially when there is some sort of religious or musical festival. People from Taranta, from Palena, will come over to listen to the music. But people from other areas surrounding the valley don't really come that much – I'd say that in this sense, there exists a certain detachment.

Are people in Lama more attached to the Majella or to the Aventino?

The Majella, I'm sure, is more important, the mountain. People don't talk too much about the river – there isn't any particular affinity.

Do you know what the term "Majella" means?

No, I'm not sure.

I heard that it might mean Mother of the Mountains.

That could be – I think I've heard that said as well somewhere along the line.

From Lama you don't see so much of the mountain, do you?

No, from Lama, no. To see it, go to the covered market, and there you can see a little bit. But to get a better idea, you have to go to the other side of the valley – to the other villages, such as Torricella, or Colledimacine. From there, you can see it very well, and can study all of the valleys and ridges – a very beautiful panorama.

Would you say that people who live in villages on the other side of the valley understand the shape of the mountain better than people in Lama?

Certainly, because they can see so well so much more of the mountain.

You know, the very first year that I came here, I spent the entire time in Lama and down at the river, and I was so curious to see the top, and the other side, and in fact, at the end of the summer I finally went to the other side and hiked to the top.

So, you understood what it means to go around to the other side . . . When I used to go hunting, in order to understand a certain valley in which I wanted to hunt, for example, partridges, I would go to the other side of the valley on a walk, and would take a piece of

paper and a pencil, and would make a drawing of the mountain. I made many various drawings of this mountain. I would draw the many little roads, paths, hills, outcroppings of rock, bunches of shrubs and trees, and put down their names. Now, I've forgotten the names a bit. However, I used to take these drawings along with me when I went hunting, because I did a type of very meticulous hunting – of grouse, hare, partridge and the sort, I needed to know where all the little places and little draws were. From the other side, I could see everything, and drew it all. I would study a particular valley that came down, and in hidden angle where there was a little woods, I would make a special sign, a little hidden spot where you could find partridges or hares. Then, when I went there to go hunting, I would take the little map with me, and could remember in which part I needed to enter, and where to go to get to this little hidden corner of forest. It took a good deal of study, but only for hunting.

Has the mountain changed a lot in the past few decades?

The mountain has always been much like it is now. Before, much before, it was covered in woods, but from the time the shepherds came, the mountain was full of animals, sheep, goats, cows, the slopes were all cleaned, free of trees, the animals grazed everything. But now, since there are no more animals, little by little, the forest is coming back, with little trees here and there.

Do you think the reintroduced chamois will make any difference?

I'm not sure that these chamois even spend that much time on the mountain near Lama; in fact, I'm not even sure that they're so well adapted to this part. They seem to prefer areas such as the Valle di Fara, a beautiful valley, where the animals have many places where they can hide and take shelter.

Are there still any bears in the area?

Some, there have always been a few exemplars, here and there, during certain periods, but not always. In various valleys, there have been bears, such as in the Valle di Taranta, the Valle di Fara. I've seen them, various years ago, from a distance, from a distance. Perhaps, you would have a better chance if you went towards the other side, towards Sulmona, Campo di Giove, or the Valle dell'Orfento.

Do you think that young people in the area know much about local history?

They don't know anything. Honestly, with this last generation, they know nothing. Here they're many little stories, in Lama, from these very old people, of episodes, wonderful things, so much should be written down, of when people had to escape during the war, when they had to signal with sheets to let people know if they could come down. But with these young people, they know nothing, really nothing. All they want to do is play, what do you call them, video games.

Thank you very much.

Now I'd like offer you a sweet, and if you'd like, an aperitivo.

Lama dei Peligni, July, 2001 (Interview with a retired shepherd, with comments from a few of his friends)

Has Lama changed much since the war?

(a): Oh yes, during the war, all of these houses were destroyed, all in pieces on the ground. People had to leave, to go abroad, in order to earn enough money to rebuild. I went to Germany, him too. First, they killed us, and then they saved us.

(b): War doesn't joke around. Dangerous, war is no good.

(a): See up there? The Germans built a guard station up there, and could control all of the villages lower down. We had to hide in the caves, but if they found us out in the open, they would shoot us down.

(b): After the war, there were land mines everywhere, and a bomb squad had to come through and de-arm them all. But still, sometimes you'll come across one.

(c): I knew three young guys who died, playing with one of these old bombs. Where that house is right now.

Before the war, were there many sheep up on the mountain?

(a): Yes, sheep, many, and even cows. Even after the war, for a while. I was a shepherd, up there, for 50 years. It was a bella vita. And when we got old, there wasn't even one young man who wanted to become a shepherd. They didn't like it. They don't like that sort of work anymore. Now they prefer to stay inside an office and write, have a car, mix with all the young ladies, all that sort of thing. But before, the world wasn't so developed, and people were used to different sorts of jobs. Shepherding is a dirty job. But with 50, 100 head of sheep, you always had something to eat. Listen, always roba naturale (natural stuff). Animals that eat at that altitude, with fresh, clean air, have a good flavor, natural meat, natural cheese. Because now if you go to one of those factories where they make cheese, it's no good, they put in "medicines" (injections, steroids, pesticides).

It's stuff you can eat, but it's always "medicated," all of that stuff. But raised up on the mountain, in the fresh air and good grass, brought immediately to the shops, THAT'S GOOD, that's natural stuff, no medicines, nothing.

And now even the fruit, that's full of medicines too, to maintain it. Stuff to throw out. But now, in the countryside, without medicines, the fruit won't come. The insects come, and eat that flower, and every flower is a fruit. And who wants to go to the moon! What the hell are you going to do there?! They've made many trips up there. Up there there's not even a snake, not even a fly, there's not anything up there. . . How can a person live up there? They have to carry around a tank of oxygen. A bunch of countries got together to send men up there, and who knows why? If they find life up there, everyone can go. But there's NOTHING, and they'll never find ANYTHING! Because there's not even a snake, not even a bug, there's NOTH, NOTH, NOTHING! It's just a huge waste of money, that'll never return.

Did you used to keep dogs?

(a): Oh yes, I had many dogs, because you know, shepherds have to have them; wolves live up there. Many times they came down and attacked my flocks; more than once they came and massacred flocks up there, many times they massacred sheep. When they find the sheep alone, without a shepherd . . . and there are only dogs, if there are two or three wolves, the dogs just run away. We had Abruzzese Shepherd Dogs, and even German Shepherds.

Did they wear spiked iron collars?

(a): That's what you need! Wolves go straight for the neck, but with the collar, no. Also with sheep, straight for the neck. Once they killed 60, 70 sheep at one time. Two times, two times, they made two huge massacres. And once, they made 40 sheep jump off the cliff by the Grotta del Cavallone. There was a mother wolf with two young ones, who circled around, and the sheep just jumped right off the cliff. They threw themselves off the edge, right off the edge. Sure, and still there're wolves up there. They've even brought in chamois. No more sheep though. The town council put up a reserve. Along the road here – you've seen the signs? – well, below the road, hunters can go and shoot at hares, birds, but above no.

Colledimacine, July, 2001 (Interview with a group of older women sitting on a bench along a central street)

What sort of work did you do?

(a): Me? What sort of work did I do? I went out into the countryside to work.

Nearby?

(a): Even a long way away. I had a little donkey, sheep, chickens . . .

Are there still cultivated fields nearby?

(a): Yes, yes. Not many. Once they all were, mainly with wheat.

Did many people leave this area?

(b): People who moved away? Oh yes, there's no work; what do you eat? They move away first when they're young, and then make a family, and then . . . Here we're all pensioners.

But, si sta bene qua, no?

(a): Oh yes, we can't complain, for the love of God, it's a shame, unfortunately.

(b): Up on the Majella there's a beautiful, fresh spring.

(a): Yes, it's very beautiful.

(b): Go and fill up a bottle, and bring it back to America.

(a): One of our friends brought a bunch of little bottles of water from here to Australia, and gave them to her friends, wee little bottles. It's like a medicine! Oh, we like it, it does you good, that water.

(b): Ever go to the Park of Abruzzo? to the Majella? Bisogna andare con i piedi! (You need to go on foot!)

I went to Monte Amaro just the other day.

(a): Monte Amaro is beautiful, a beautiful high plain.

(b): Where are you staying, in a hotel?

No, in a small apartment in Lama.

(a): Lama's beautiful old village too, very old.

(b): Two of us lived for a long time in Australia, one is back for good, and the other is returning.

Do you prefer it there or here?

(a): There I had to stay all the time in a rest home. La Majella is more beautiful!

(b): Here there's a beautiful panorama. But if an earthquake comes along . . . at least we're safe, we're on a big cucco (outcropping of rock).

Better than Lama, or Taranta?

(a and b): Oh yes.

Are there still bears, or wolves around?

(a): Bears no, but wolves, (some say yes, some no . . ., then gen. consensus of yes). Sometimes they come down, and take a sheep or two, but they don't do any harm to anyone. They need to eat too. (laughter) . . . they need to eat too.

(b): Now there's the national park, and Colledimacine is a part of the park. Every so often they come around (wolves), but you just need to be careful.

(a): There used to be many shepherds, and cheese, sheeps, lambs, everything. They were in many places, but mainly up by the Pizzi. Now there're still a few, but not many. Before all the valley was full of animals, but not anymore.

(b): During the war all the houses were destroyed. Only the church, plus a few houses, but the rest, all destroyed. And then, just to live, we had to rebuild everything again. We got by with what we had, and managed somehow.

(a): A Count used to live in the old palace in the main square.

How many rooms were in it?

(a): 93.

(b): Now it's been rebuilt. Outside it was mainly still standing, but inside it was all destroyed. After the war it was rebuilt. They did it in their own way. For people who had no place to live after the war, they lived there for a while. 3, 4 families had to stay in one room. Life in those times was really tough, not so much for us, because we were little, but for our parents, who had to rebuilt the village. All we had to do was look for bread.

The Germans also took sheep?

(a): Yes, they even took people and killed them. Ah, but war is like that. Even when the Italians were in Germany, they took people and killed them. But war is like that. The Germans took many people over the pass there to Sulmona, even in bad weather, when it was snowing, and when old or sick people couldn't get up anymore, they killed them. They took many, many people over in that way. One old lady was able to escape, and ended up just above Taranta. She put a jacket under her butt, and slid all the way down on top of the river. If it hadn't been frozen, she would have fallen in.

(a little discussion about what I'm doing)

. . . and also to collect a few Abruzzese words – we don't really speak Italian here, but we make do. Every village has its own dialect.

Can you understand each other?

(a): Oh yes, we always figure out a way to talk. We understand each other well. But if you find a really old person, then you don't understand anything anymore.

Do you go down to the river sometimes?

(a): Ah, but what do want to do down there? It's dry!

But when there were more fields? Did you used to go down to the river?

(a): Oh yes, I'd go down to the little stream and take a bath in the salty water.

Colledimacine, July, 2001 (Interview with "Falcone," a man in his 80s or 90s with green-tinted glasses sitting on a bench along the edge of the main road into town)

On Sept. 8, 1943, the Germans came, and the whole village was abandoned. Since they had come to take people away, all the men were in hiding. All hidden. There were a few women. But then the day they attacked, everybody escaped. They put mines in houses and blew them up. Half the village was destroyed. I had already been in the war, in Russia, and had just come back, and then had to hide with everyone in the caves, because the Germans were shooting at us. They leveled these houses, and then on November 23, the Americans and English came – which was half lucky – because there were still Germans around. They shot down people in the countryside, whole families. Because in those times, in this place, there were these bands of partisans who had organized themselves and fought against these Germans. Houses blown up, people shot . . . And these Germans, the rest remained an ugly story. We had to rebuild all of these houses, all the villages in the valley had to rebuild, everyone emigrated overseas, to earn some money, in Germany, because here, there were hardly any resources. And so, little by little, some people were able to rebuild, and put their families back together. Just after the war, there was hardly anyone, no men at all. Everyone left the country to find work, in France, Germany, Australia. . . America, England . . . just about everywhere.

Before the war, we all did agricultural work, animals, cows, sheep, grain, vineyards, olives, all stuff of this sort. This was primarily a village of agricultural production, all stuff to eat. And since now we're all old, and the young people go to work in the big

factories down there (indicates the east, towards the flatter lands by the sea), we old people are all pensioners and don't do anything anymore, and houses are left abandoned . . . and things have turned out like this. The young people rent a place down there, and return on Saturday, Sunday. There's a bus that is subsidized by the government, that goes down there, takes an hour and a half. It leaves at 6 in the morning, and if you have to be there by 6, it leaves at 4:30. Nobody is out of work. And agriculture is finished, finished. No more animals anymore either. Before, you know, here, there were . . . 18 pairs of oxen, to work the earth. Horses, donkeys, goats, cows, everything. And all of this land here, belonged to this village here. Now it's all turned into forest, but before it was all cultivated. The story is long, and ugly. We suffered a lot, because here, no one ever thought that at Colledimacine they would have fought the war. The Germans, while we were hidden in the cave, and the woods, would come around, and if they found someone, would kill them. Atrocious, terrible, the things were done very badly. You know, our place here, was ruined.

I was called here in Abruzzo to be in the military, and went to Russia. Others went to Africa, to Greece, to Albania, all over the place; all places at war. While I was over there, it got down to 25 degrees below zero, with nothing to eat, without anything. We had to eat our mules to live, to get by. Then, after the war, all the villages were ruined. Me, in 1950, I went to Argentina. Three and a half years in Argentina. But even there, I couldn't think of stability, of putting together a family, a house. Too far away from home, you couldn't tell what was happening at home, so far away. And there it was too humid, and millions of mosquitoes that attacked you.

So, this little story, you'll write it down, record it?

Yes, sure.

(A short conversation follows about what I'm doing, and where I'm from.)

One other thing – do you think that the new park is a positive thing or not?

You know, Colledimacine is a part of the park now, but we don't have anything positive. Over there in Lama, yes, they have the chamois, and the mountain right there that gives life to this park. The park also comes around and contains these little villages here, and these forests here. But here, nobody visits, and the park gives us no work.

Colledimacine, July, 2001 (Interview with four older women: one from Sicily (c), one from Naples (d), and two from Colledimacine (a & b))

(a): When the men used to go out and work in the fields, they used to wear these things made of rubber to go over their feet, they were sewn together here, like this (indicates a

triangular fold with both sides of the fabric of her dress). It was all rubber, even the bottom. And sometime, when the seam blew out, your foot would shoot out and you would go flying. (laughter). And all the clothes were made of wool.

(b): And then there's Corte Vecchia, where they used to throw all the old people. Down there, where there's a big "burrone" [a massive outcropping of rock with a cliff on one side]. At one time, when you got to a certain age, what age exactly it was, I'm not so sure, but anyways, it was the first son's responsibility to take his father and throw him over the edge down there, where they died. They had to take them on their shoulders and throw them over the edge. And then, once, there came this man, or son, who had to take his father, and at a certain point, he just couldn't go any further. And the father said to his son, I had to stop here too, when I carried my father. And so, he carried his father back, and hid him in the house, because, you know, the law was like that. And so, for a long time, he had to stay hidden in the house. He told his son to keep quiet, but eventually, one of those people in the village who eventually come to know everything, found them out. There was a bit of controversy, but it turned out that other people had been hiding their parents at home as well, and so everyone decided that the law was no good anymore. And from that day on no one carried their old parents to the cliff anymore.

I went up there the other day, and saw how the land just drops away.

(a): Oh yes, but there are a lot of vipers up there, many, many. You need to watch out. Last year a wolf came around, and killed a bunch of goats just down there (indicates an area just outside the village to the east). Killed them all – it happened in the morning.

(b): Just last week I saw a wolf – it crossed the street just over there (indicates main road going out of town).

(c): I saw it too, but it was just a dog that looked like a wolf, with a really ugly face.

(b): Not a fox, it was too big, and anyway, foxes hold their tails up high, wolves theirs lower down. And this one held its tail down low, and had such an ugly face, really ugly!! And it was big.

(c): Naw, it wasn't even that big, it was even kind of small.

(b): No! (a bit of arguing and mixed discussion)

(a): Wolves don't come around so much, but foxes are always around. I keep some hens in a little coop just around the corner, and have to keep them closed in all the time. You need to be very careful.

(The oldest woman (b) continues to talk about wolves in a strong dialect, I can't understand much apart from her insistence that she did indeed see one, and that it held its tail low, just like a wolf).

(d): And some people, you know, abandon their dogs when they go away for vacation, or for other reasons, and these dogs wander around from village to village, and start to look really ugly. It's a shame that people do this. And then, they get sick, and just look awful.

(a): There used to be a windmill, down the road towards Lama. There also used to be one over there (indicates a place where there's now a bench and a couple of round stones used in a mill), but some people came back from Australia, tore it down, and built that white house. It used to be powered by the water that comes into town, all the way from those mountains over there, the Pizzi. Water from up there comes down and goes to all the villages around here – Gessopalena, Torricella – all of them, because there's so much.

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