

Occitania

Occitania is a historical-geographical area of Europe not delimited by specific borders, which includes territories in the south of France, the Val d'Aran in Catalonia and some areas of Italy. In Italy, Occitania includes a small area of Liguria, in the province of Imperia, some Piedmontese valleys in the provinces of Turin and Cuneo and Guardia Piemontese in Calabria.

Today there are around 3 million who speak the Occitan language and in Italy it was recognized as a linguistic minority in 1999 with law 482.

Occitan language

Occitan or langue d'oc (as Dante defined it in *De vulgari eloquentia*), is a Gallo-Romance language that was widespread in medieval Europe, second in literary use only to Latin. This is demonstrated by the intense activity of the troubadours, those itinerant poets and musicians who sang stories of heroes and chivalric love in Occitan.

The only language that appears in Dante's Divine Comedy is Occitan: there are 8 verses of Purgatory, canto XXVI, 140-147, when Dante meets the great Provençal poet Arnaut Daniel, who does not address him in the vernacular, but in his language, Occitan precisely.

Even in the use of the language we understand the revolutionary conceptions of faith of the Waldensian movement: while the Catholic Church continued to maintain the exclusive use of Latin in homilies and the hegemonic power of the clergy, the only one who could read and interpret the Word of God, the Waldensian church did not foresee hierarchies and believed in everyone's right to relate to sacred texts independently. This could also happen thanks to the use of a common and widespread language among the people, such as Occitan.

Although the Waldensians were forbidden to speak their language, Occitan was saved from oblivion and was passed down from generation to generation.

The Occitan hymn

Se Chanta is considered to all intents and purposes the Occitan hymn. It is attributed by tradition to Gaston Phoebus, Count of Foix. From Languedoc it spread to the various Occitan territories, taking on shades of meaning and adapting to the various places. In fact, if in the original version there is a mountain setting, in Nantes for example the story takes place on the city bridge. The song spread throughout the Occitan valleys in 1977, thanks to the musicians of the Occitan Conservatory of Toulouse.

Some Occitan musical groups, such as Lou Dalfin, usually end their concerts with this hymn, with its poignant melody and strong symbolic meaning.

A first reading sees it as a love hymn, a nostalgic serenade for the distant beloved. A second, more profound interpretation is the one proposed by Gérard de Sedes in the volume *Le sang des Cathares*, associating it with the persecution that the Cathar-Albigensians suffered at the beginning of the 13th century. In this sense it would therefore be a song of resistance, to gain courage, full of symbolic meanings: in the black night of Cathar repression, the song of a nightingale is heard, a mystical symbol for the Cathars and emblem of the persecution suffered, which sings only for those can understand it, or for those who wish to elevate themselves spiritually. There are material obstacles, "those mountains that are so high", which prevent one from practicing one's religion, and internal obstacles, which make the ascent of the soul towards purity difficult, but faith is capable of overcoming all obstacles.

*Devant de ma fenèstra i a un aucelon tota la nuech chanta chanta sa chanson.
Se chanta que chante chanta pas per iu chanta per ma mia qu'es da luenh de iu.
Aquelas montanhas que tan autas son m'empachon de veire mis amors ont son.
Baissatz-vos montanhas plana levatz-vos perquè pòsque veire mis amors ont son.*

The hurdy-gurdy

The hurdy-gurdy is a stringed musical instrument of medieval origin, used by troubadour who went to the courts of Europe to sing and act in Occitan.

The sound is produced by rubbing the various strings through a wooden wheel, covered in pitch, which is operated by a crank, and it is possible to modulate it through a keyboard.

This polyphonic instrument derives from the *organistrum*, used around the year 1000 in monastic settings for the teaching of music and the performance of sacred pieces, which had considerable dimensions. As can be seen from some depictions, the most famous is that of the Portico of Glory in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, which had considerable dimensions and therefore had to be played by two people at the same time. The evolution of the *organistrum* would then be the *symphonia* in the 13th century, smaller in size and suitable for use by wandering minstrels. Until the beginning of the 18th century, when it became one of the favorite instruments of the French aristocracy. The luthier Henri Bâton will determine the external appearance as we know it today and refine its sound, contributing to its diffusion. Today it is still used in many popular festivals and by folk musical groups, but not only.

The hurdy-gurdy exhibited in the Museum was built by the master Jean Claude Boudet, heir to the famous and centuries-old violin making factory in Jenzat, a small Occitan town in the Auvergne region.

The beidana

The beidana was a sort of billhook that served mainly as an agricultural and deforestation tool, but could also be used as a kitchen knife for cutting hard bread. The blade is narrow near the handle and widens at the tip, where there is a perforated decoration, which almost resembles a heart, useful for hanging and fitting the tool if necessary. In the 17th century it was used during the years of resistance of the Waldensian peasants of Piedmont to the Savoy army, as they were forbidden to possess weapons.

In the case in which a reproduction of this tool is displayed, some artefacts are also preserved, found in Montalto together with human remains, presumably of Waldensians.

Waldesian settlements in Calabria

The Waldensians were present in the South of France, in Catalonia and in the Piedmont valleys but they did not have a city. Guardia Piemontese is the only town to have been founded entirely by the Waldenses. Before their arrival in the territory, which fell under the jurisdiction of the Marquis Spinelli of Fuscaldo, there was only a small castle with a watchtower for Saracen ships, which later gave its name to the town.

During the massacre of the Waldensians, Guardia was the only town to be partially spared. Other countries were cancelled; in the Cosenza area there were 5 Waldensian villages: pre-existing residential areas around which these groups had settled. San Sisto dei Valdesi was the first city to be destroyed, being completely set on fire, then Montalto, Santa Maria la Castagna (now a small fraction of the municipality of Montalto) and Vaccarizzo.

Chanforan Monument

In 1532 in Chanforan, in the Angrogna Valley, an assembly took place during which the Waldensians of Piedmont decided to join the Calvinist reform and publish a translation of the Bible, in French, accessible to all. The stele present inside the Museum is a reproduction of the commemorative monument that was erected in 1932 in this place.

The door with peephole

The door with peephole is one of the most iconic symbols of what the Waldensians were forced to endure after the massacre. After the massacre, the inhabitants who escaped the massacre were subjected to a whole series of restrictions: the obligation to recant, the obligation to wear the penitential habit for males (two strips of yellow

fabric, which fell over the chest and shoulders, with a red cross in the center), ban on gatherings of more than 6 people, ban on speaking the Occitan language, confiscation of property, obligation to attend Mass, demolition of the houses that had welcomed the *barba*.

The doors of the houses were equipped with a peephole, which opened from the outside. The Jesuits first and the Dominicans later could thus ensure that the imposed rules were respected and that heretical behavior was not carried out. The Bible, in particular, not only could not be read, but not even touched (the only ones who had permission to do so were the bishops at the end of the homily).

The hugenott cross

The hugenott cross is the religious symbol of the Waldensians. A Malta's cross, whose arms symbolize the 4 Gospels and end with 8 round points representing the 8 beatitudes of the Church. The arms are joined by French lilies, each with 3 petals, to form a total of 12 petals representing the 12 Apostles. Hanging from the Cross is a dove descending downwards, symbolizing the Holy Spirit.

Occitan flag

The Occitan flag consists of two golden yellow elements on a red background. In the foreground there is a Greek cross in which each arm ends with 3 circles which in total form 12 circles, or the number of the apostles. Around the year 1000 it became the noble coat of arms of the counts of Toulouse. The cross is accompanied by a small 7-pointed star, which represents the 7 historical regions of Occitania.

Miniature of the Waldese temple

The Waldese temple is located in Torre Pellice (TO). Every year, the synod meets there in the last week of August, inside the synod hall. At the head of this room there is the fresco of the **Tree of life** which represents the civil symbol of the Waldensians: a sturdy tree, an oak, cut down several times, but never defeated. The original fresco is designed by Paschetto, who is the author of the coat of arms of the Italian Republic. What is inside the Museum was donated by the Cetraro Art Institute.

In 2014, in collaboration with the University of Teramo and the LEM-Italia Association (Languages of Europe and the Mediterranean), it was decided to network with the world's French-speaking linguistic minorities. In 2014 the Occitan foundation of Guardia participated in displaying the first world flag of

linguistic rights. The flag depicts the phonetic alphabet with the hand representing sign language.

Guardia Piemontese's traditional dress

The cultivation of mulberry trees and the production of silk were activities widely practiced by the Waldensians in Calabria, especially in Guardia and San Sisto de' Valdesi. Here the textile art reached very high levels and their precious products were sold in the markets of Cosenza and Montalto Uffugo. This enormous progress is also due to the close contacts that the Waldensians established with the Jews present in the area, who played a fundamental role in the production and trade of silk. Before the repression, in fact, the two communities lived in harmony and established stable economic relationships. The magnificent clothes preserved in one of the museum's rooms are proof of the remarkable quality achieved by the Waldensians in the art of weaving.

The female dress of Guardia dates back to the 15th century and certainly underwent an evolution compared to the heavier and more modest dress of women from the Piedmontese valleys. The higher temperatures, but above all better living conditions, the skilled art of weaving which was gradually refined and the use of fine yarns gave life to a precious dress with vibrant colours.

There were three types of dress: the daily dress, called Tramontana (from Ultramontani, the name used to indicate the Waldensians of Calabria), the wedding dress, which after the wedding was used as a party dress, called *Dournë*, and the mourning dress.

The particular headdress of Guardia's woman was the "penaglio", a unique one of its kind, which was made with ropes and covered with colored ribbons and held a decorated handkerchief, hiding the hair.

In the museum room there are both daily dresses and wedding dresses, the latter made of damadoro fabric, i.e. silk and gold threads. As many as six original dresses dating back to the 1800s are preserved, including a very cute baby dress, and faithful reproductions created by the seamstresses of the textile laboratory of the "Gian Luigi Pascale" Cultural Center.

The traditional Guardiolo dress was worn until 1991 by an elderly lady of the village.

The cultural clothes

Among the rooms of the museum, we also find the cultural clothes of the painter and designer Luigia Granata on display. The artist created six paintings linked to the historical-cultural events of Guardia Piemontese, then transposing the pictorial art onto colorful clothes made with the silk-screen technique. The themes covered

are among the most significant: the Occitan hymn with the writing *lux lucet in tenebris*, the way of weaving and the journey by land and sea of the Occitans, the culture of the Waldenses, the Bible and women, the massacre of Waldensians and the prehistoric fern *Woodwardia radicans*.

The weaving laboratory

The weaving laboratory was founded in 2011 with the aim of recovering and passing on the ancient cutting and sewing techniques for the creation of the traditional Guardiolo dress, which were now known only to a lady in the town. This lady made her knowledge available to a group of ladies from Guardia Piemontese who followed a specific course for a year and a half, creating around twenty dresses, displayed throughout Italy at cultural events.

Le “Tramontane” by Guardia Piemontese therefore carry forward the noble art of weaving which materializes not only in the typical clothes, but also in beautiful and precious objects made entirely on the loom. There are four looms inside the laboratory. There is the classic comb-heddle loom and the tubular comb-heddle loom. The laboratory also experiments with the weaving of unusual yarns such as nettle, banana, eucalyptus and bamboo and has recovered the ancient tradition of weaving ginestra. The yarns are then subjected to natural dyes, for example with onion peels, which give life to unique color shades.

Among the many valuable works created there is a precious and elegant stole which was produced with banana threads, silk and gold threads.

The laboratory therefore also hands down the ancient processing technique of **ginestra**, a spontaneous plant widespread in Calabria, whose processing dates back to the Greeks, who were the first to appreciate its resistant qualities, using it to make fabrics and navigation ropes.

The process begins with the collection of the largest stems, at the end of flowering, and then boiling them with the addition of ash or caustic soda to soften them. Tied in bundles, the stems are then soaked, possibly in running water, for about a week. Once upon a time this work was done in the rivers. This is followed by the defibering and beating phases to facilitate the separation of the fibers and the detachment of the woody parts of the plant and finally the carding and spinning. With the resistant yarn obtained, blankets, carpets, ropes and once upon a time “vertulas”, i.e. the saddlebags that were placed on the backs of donkeys to transport goods, can be made.

Testi a cura di Eulalia Palmieri

Responsabile beni culturali - Progetto Museo Virtuale Occitano

Traduzione inglese a cura di Maria Teresa Conte