

migration to australia in the museum of carpineto romano by italo campagna¹

Carpineto Romano, a picturesque village set in breathtaking scenery in the middle of the Lepini mountains (province of Rome), is known as the hometown of Pope Leo XIII, the author of the groundbreaking encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, who was born there in 1810. In the nineteenth century, Carpineto's inhabitants, like those of many Italian villages, were mostly farmers, shepherds and artisans. The early years of the twentieth century saw many Carpinetani migrate to Canada, the United States and Argentina. In the 1950s, there was a second migratory wave and many of Carpineto's 7,000 inhabitants left for Canada, Europe (mostly with seasonal work contracts) and Australia. Australia became a destination for Carpinetano migrants following its 'discovery' by a small number of *paesani*, who were held here as prisoners of war in the years during and immediately after World War II. Migration from Italy to Australia was encouraged by political agreements between the two countries, and during that period many groups of Carpinetani left as sponsored migrants, embarking from the port of Naples on board ships built in the 1920s and utilised to transport troops during the War. At the end of the 1950s, Carpineto had lost almost 2,000 of its inhabitants, approximately 50% of whom went to Australia (especially Melbourne and Sydney).

This exodus remains largely unknown to this day and its memory is mainly preserved in the oral recollections of a dwindling number of migrants and in official statistics from the Comune and other Italian and foreign agencies. In recent years, there have been a few publications which document the story of Carpineto migration – Nazzareno Castrucci's studies on the migrant community in Canberra, *Emigrant Stories: Stories About European Migrants in Queanbeyan* (Queanbeyan: Queanbeyan Italian Pensioners Club, 2003) and *Second Generation of Migrants to Australia* (forthcoming), as well as Ana Alejandra Germani, 'Cercando l'America', Franco Caporossi, 'Emigrazione. Angoscia di intere generazioni' and 'Autobiografie e saluti dall'Australia' in Franca Fedeli Bernardini (ed), *La Reggia dei Volsci. Museo della Città di Carpineto Romano a Palazzo Aldobrandini* (Rome: Bonsignori Editore, 2006), pp. 219-240, 241-250, 251-253 respectively.



Fig. 1 View of Carpineto Romano. Image courtesy of Carla Torreggiani.

The *Comune* [Council] of Carpineto is sensitive to the need to preserve the memories and cultural heritage of Carpinetano communities abroad. To this effect, the *Comune* has tightened its links with the expatriate communities through public relations, civic and religious events, conferences and 'migration days', held especially in August as part of the rich programme of cultural and historical events around the feast of the Patron, Saint Augustine. The key event in the calendar is the *Pallio della carriera*, a picturesque horse race in historical costume. During this event, the seven historical *rioni* [districts] of Carpineto offer *ceri* [decorative liturgical candles] to the Patron. The eighth *rione* comprises the American and Australian diasporas, which take turns offering the *cero*, every year amid the warm applause of the spectators.

The recent opening of the local history museum 'La Reggia dei Volsci', housed in the palace of the Aldobrandini princes who were the dukes of Carpineto, marks an important event in the collection, study and preservation of Carpineto's migration history. The museum, which took ten years to set up, consists of nine sections which present a synopsis of the rich history, art and economy of Carpineto. The ninth section of the museum is devoted to the theme of migration: display cases house photographs, letters, passports, objects and tools which tell the story of Carpinetano migrants in Europe, America and Australia.

Australia is particularly well represented; on display are rocks and opal fragments dug up in the desert by the pioneer miner Tom Campagna, cane-cutting knives used in Queensland,

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donated by the Colaluca family, gadgets of the Carpinetano social clubs in Australia (the Carpineto – Regione Lazio Club in Sydney and the Carpineto Romano Club in Melbourne), the first banknotes earned by our migrants, the modest photographic cameras that they took on their journeys, the cardboard suitcases filled with nostalgia and hope. One of the most poignant objects of this section is an enlargement of a photograph of two women with their children on board a ship in the port of Naples as they bid farewell to their families on the wharf. The women and children are going to Australia (Fremantle and Sydney), where they will be reunited with their husbands and fathers.



Fig. 2 Luigia Pirri Gonnella in Nangwarry, South Australia. Image courtesy of the Museo della Città di Carpineto Romano.

The story of the subsequent economic and social success of our migrants is also told, especially in the fields of construction (on display are two bricks from the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games), hospitality and sport. One of the highlights of the museum's migration collection is a uniform of the Australian national soccer team, donated by the Victorian-born Vince Grella, a well-known sportsman now living in Italy, whose mother originates from Carpineto.

A whole room has been set up in the Migration section with the specific purpose of creating a multi-sensory experience. The theme of the experience is a symbolic arrival in New York, represented by iconic landmarks such as Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty, as well as characteristic alleyways, brick houses, dilapidated walls, fire escape stairs and artisans' shops. Passenger lists and poems about homesickness adorn the walls. The temperature in this room is artificially lowered so as to give visitors a sudden sense of psychological and physical discomfort, intended to increase the feeling of disorientation and displacement. Some migrants to Australia who visited the display commented on the efficacy and authenticity of the experience.

The Migration section of the museum also houses a library and archive organised by thematic files and special collections. Included in the special collections are letters, photographs, audio and video material covering life in Carpineto and in Australia and documenting the activities of the Australian clubs. The library, which is a branch of the Biblioteca Centralizzata Lepina [centralised library of the Lepini mountains], holds many publications on migration from Italy and from Lazio in particular.

The 'Reggia dei Volsci', which has been acknowledged as the first scientific migration museum in the Lazio region, functions also as a research centre. Staff are currently busy with the project of creating a database which will cover a century of Carpineto's migration history through the vital statistics of individuals, family trees and oral and written memoirs. The data relative to a few thousand individuals has already been collected, as well as some complete family histories which were assembled by collating data from the archives of the Comune and from various agencies abroad.

I would like to conclude with an excerpt from the memoir of a migrant to Australia: 'I had applied and I had obtained the required documents [...] so I was ready to leave. Every week a group of us would depart by ship from Naples. On our ship there were 11 of us from Carpineto. We were all young: nobody here worked in the fields or in the factories at Colferro. We left our families and embarked. [...] After many days of hope, as soon as we arrived in Melbourne they put us on a train to Bonegilla, in the state of Victoria. There was nothing we could do: there was no work in Australia either, despite the agreements. Bonegilla was a kind of post-war concentration camp. We were allowed to leave the camp, but we had nothing: no money, no food, no lodging. Australia had asked Italy for workers, and it gave us unemployment, food and lodging. Three months later we were moved to another camp, Stewart in Queensland.'



Fig. 3 Franco Macali's first house in Melbourne. Image courtesy of the Museo della Città di Carpineto Romano.

This was yesterday: today the Carpinetano community in Melbourne is flourishing in many fields, from entrepreneurship to the professions and services. Its community spirit is also strong, as witnessed by the activities of the Carpineto Romano Social Club and the Comitato Santa Maria del Popolo.

Carpineto is proud of its recent past and it has not forgotten its migrant sons and daughters. A bronze monument to migrants by well known artist Alessandro Kokocinski has been recently unveiled at the base of Carpineto's civic tower. It shows a young woman, with her child in her arms; she has large wings and she is flying bravely towards a home far away, held down by her battered suitcase.

Interested readers may consult the websites of the Comune of Carpineto Romano www.carpineto romano.it and of its local history museum, 'La Reggia dei Volsci' www.lareggiadeivolsci.it★



Fig. 4 Aerial view of Carpineto Romano. Image courtesy of the Museo della Città di Carpineto Romano.