



TO KNOW ANCIENT BUILDINGS THAT AIMED TO EXPLOIT, IN A RATIONAL AND PROFITABLE WAY, THE REGION OF ALTO SALENTO

HOLIDAYS IN “MASSERIA”

**Ancient structures aimed at exploiting, in a rational and profitable way,
the territory of Alto Salento**

They are now holiday farms, B&B or beauty farms; but what were they in ancient times? Like a big fresco with red and white spots, closely integrated into the surrounding agricultural landscape, the masseria is a unique structure in the cultural heritage of Puglia. In the region of Ostuni various masserie (about 300) are the precious and living evidence of the economic life, the rural civilisation and history of Pugliese culture.

CULTURA, PROFUMI, COLORI, SAPORI

Ogni masseria fornisce una straordinaria opportunità di conoscere la cultura e le tradizioni contadine: visite dei luoghi tipici (trappeti e palmenti), restaurati e restituiti all'antico splendore, sono un tuffo completo nel passato; passeggiate nei giardini ben curati, in cui il profumo e il colore dei frutti donano momenti di riposo per il corpo e per lo spirito, offrono piacevoli momenti di relax; le peculiarità della cucina, che utilizza prodotti freschi dell'orto, talvolta messo a disposizione del turista, soddisfano anche i peccati di gola; e poi viali alberati, cene all'aperto, passeggiate a cavallo (in quelle masserie dotate di maneggio) offrono una vacanza indimenticabile. In sintesi, il soggiorno in una masseria, che sia diventata un agriturismo o B&B o un hotel, fornisce al turista un

contatto con le tradizioni e la storia di questa terra più concreto di qualunque descrizione. Al turista quindi la capacità di cogliere le occasioni di una rivisitazione di un mondo ormai profondamente mutato, ma non scomparso.

Established in far-off times and connected to a kind of extensive agriculture, the masseria, whose name comes from "massa"- piece of land originated by the fragmentation of large estates and run by the "massari"- represented a profitable structure, unchanged for centuries up to the middle of 1900, dedicated to the exploitation of the land.

The masserie were built with the habitual separation of the rooms intended for the owners' residence (landowners or ecclesiastics) from the ones where workers and servants used to live and work. Uniformly spread over the territory, the masserie differed from one another because of the structure and architecture of their buildings: from simple rural ones to fortified structures. Often the layout of the complex presented a central courtyard surrounded by the various buildings: the massaro's dwelling, animal enclosures and barns, buildings for processing and storage of products of the land and livestock.

The most ancient masserie, dating from the 13 and 14 centuries, were often erected on the sites of old Byzantine farmhouses and preserved some remains of them, such as watch-towers. Actually, in ancient times the region of Puglia was exposed to assaults by Arabs and Turks from the sea, and by brigands from the inland; this is why the countryside was provided with fortified towers to defend the crop.

Among these ancient and fortified masserie there are the well-known Masseria di Montalbano Vecchio and Masseria Lo Spagnuolo, immersed in the olive groves of the marine landscape of Ostuni. Afterwards the fortified towers were enlarged to host the farmers not only during the harvest, but all the year round. So the masseria became a self-sufficient agricultural centre, including hundreds of hectares of land and a population of farmers and shepherds that in harvest-time could even be doubled in number.

Many masserie also had some hypogea, dug in earlier times for the Christian cult in order to provide safety from external assaults. Later, after the persecution times, the worship continued in small churches built on purpose next to the masserie to let the owners, the workers and also the neighbours attend the religious cult. More hypogea were realized to press olives in underground oil mills or presses, like in the beautiful and famous Masseria Rialbo di Sopra and Masseria Brancati, or to conserve the perishable goods under the snow, so pressed as to become ice. In the masserie that used to produce wine (Masseria Certosa) you could find a tub for pressing grapes. Almost each masseria had a fenced area for gardening and often for citrus trees (Masseria Il Frantoio): they were real "horti conclusi", to separate this area from the productive ones and shelter the fragile fruit trees from the wind. There used to be also a fenced area to grow vegetables and spices for cooking.

Starting from the 18th century the masserie changed their use from a productive purpose into holiday residences, where the working activity was definitely separated from the resting country life of the owners: so they became masserie-villa or masserie-casino (Pezza La Spina). The owners paid more attention to the aesthetics of the buildings that, besides being a visual testimony of local history, also became real architectural monuments with external and internal decorations: coats of arms, festoons, bas-reliefs, epigraphs, banisters and flights of steps, arches, cornices, cross vaults and star vaults, rich portals, frescoes (Masseria Refrigerio), balconies and belvederes. Also the small churches were enriched with plaster and stucco altars in imitation of the marble ones (Masseria S. Andrea) and the buildings were often plastered in red tones (Masseria S. Lucia, Masseria Incalzi, Masseria Mogale Piccolo).

At present some masserie can be visited, while others are in ruins and some others, after being completely demolished, have been replaced by modern farms. But what is great is that many of them, thanks to their owners' wisdom, after a perfect restoration, provide an interesting hospitality to any type of tourist.

Anyone who wants to venture out to discover the region will be welcomed in the fortified masserie, while the tourists who would like to enjoy the sea can breathe an atmosphere of relaxation and tranquillity in the masserie along the coast, where the pleasant scenery of the seaside perfectly harmonises with the idyllic landscape of the country.

CULTURE, FRAGRANCES, COLOURS, FLAVOURS

Every masseria offers a remarkable opportunity to get in touch with the culture and the traditions of the country: visits to ancient places, restored and returned to their original look, are a dive in the past; strolls through the gardens, where the scent and colour of fruits give moments of rest for body and soul; the peculiarities of the cuisine, rich in fresh produce from the garden, that can even meet the sins of gluttony. Then lined boulevards, outdoor dining, horseback riding offer an unforgettable vacation. In short, staying in a masseria, now become a B & B, a farmhouse or a hotel, provides the tourist with a real contact with the traditions and history of this land, a world deeply changed but never vanished over the time.