

Wood and Broom Fires

Ritual Change in Southern Italy

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Festivals with fires are still common in Southern Italy, and many have a long tradition. This continuity is related to their possibility of adaptation. The differences between broom and wood fires in the mountain town Calvello, points to an elder system of protection, which largely faded away with the decline of the agrarian society, after the Second World War. However, change, and even the spread of fire rituals already started from the beginning of the 19th century. Long term developments show that social changes influence the meaning of these fire rituals. It is not the ritual itself that changes as a direct response to changing circumstances, but the overall rituals in which they are embedded, and which are related to symbols like saints.

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"All over Europe the peasants have been accustomed from time immemorial to kindle bonfires on certain days of the year, and to dance round or leap over them. Customs of this kind can be traced back on historical evidence to the Middle Ages, and their analogy to similar customs observed in antiquity goes with strong internal evidence to prove that their origin must be sought in a period long prior to the spread of Christianity. Indeed the earliest proof of observance in Northern Europe is furnished by the attempts made by Christian synods in the eighth century to put them down as heathenish rites" (Frazer 1922: 609).

So goes the prosaic introduction of "The Fire-festivals of Europe". Although, this chapter of "The Golden Bough" contains interesting material for comparison, what one lacks in Frazer's argument, is an answer to how it is possible that such fire rites continue? Not only during the 19th century or till 1922, but even today there are festivals with fires, as in Italy (cf. Colangeli 1977; De Simone & Rossi 1977; Pavese 1950; Rivera 1988; Silverman 1975). In Frazer's analysis there is nothing about development or change. The discussion on "solar

theory" versus "purificatory theory", makes this clear. The last one is preferred, because informants confirmed it. Indeed, Frazer's interest was on "primary" and "original" of these rituals, however, he did not really consider the thesis that one could have been developed out of the other, and by reducing them, he underestimated their complexity.

After "The Golden Bough", ritual change did not become a subject which caused great anthropological interest, till recently. This is, amongst other reasons, due to the character of continuity which rituals seem to have (cf. Bloch 1986; Kerzer 1988). Today, there is a growing interest in the invention, revival and revitalization of rituals, especially festivals (cf. Boissevain 1983; 1988; 1992), but this does not consider ritual change on the long term. However, for understanding ritual in depth, such a historical approach is necessary (cf. Bloch 1986).

The focus of this essay is on the ritual fires of a Southern Italian mountain town, during two centuries. It starts from the down to earth assumption that if a society develops, this should influence the rituals it performs. First it de-



Fig. 1. Men talking at the wood fire in front of the chapel of Saint Anthony the Abbot on 17th of January. Photo: Helène Steehouder (1991).

scribes the meaning and performance of these fire rituals today. From there it goes back in time, and shows how these fires were part of a complex ritual defending system, itself a product of history. Then it follows changes that have taken place.

This method causes some related problems. Rituals are related to symbols, in this case to Catholic saints; universal saints which became localized during time. Rituals are also connected with other rituals. Today, fire rituals are part of festivals, which are themselves ritual performances, and can contain other, though related rituals. They are also related to other rituals in the annual cycle. To isolate them is artificial, it deprives us not only of the complexity of their meaning, but also of the possibility to analyze how they change.

Under the Volturino

The mountain town Calvello is situated in the Southern Italian region of Basilicata, in the province of Potenza, by road 40 kilometers below the capital with the same name. The village has about two thousand inhabitants. Like many Italian places, it is a nucleated settlement with a civic character. One lives in town, the country is largely unpopulated (cf. Blok & Driessen 1984).

Till the fifties Calvello was characterized by a pastoral agrarian society, with small estates, communal grounds, alpine meadows and woods. The fascist politics of autarky and migration ban, were obstacles to the development of local society. The limits of local economy were, thanks to population growth, already reached during the middle of the nineteenth century. After the Italian unification, when the village had 5800 inhabitants, a migration started, which, among other things, caused a sharp demographic decline.

From the sixties a growing prosperity ruled out *la miseria*. Today economic resources are the subsidies on agriculture, cattle breeding, mountain community (to prevent depopulation), and the village's repair after the earthquakes (1980; 1990); relief work of the government; pensions; and the money of migrants and remigrants.

Calvello lies at 730 meters in a valley, where the panorama is dominated by the mountain, the Volturino (1836 m.). The old center is built on a hill. On the top there is the Castello, a former ducal building erected in a sober Renaissance style. Its foundations show traces of an older fortification (cf. Masini 1990). Next to it there is a small church, dedicated to Saint Nicholas, one of the two patron saints. Against the south side, the present center, called the Piazza, is situated. Here, one finds the parish church and, since the sixties, the town hall. It has new development and most of the shops. On the east side lies the neighbourhood the Piano, with its old Roman church and convent.¹ On the south side, across the river La Terra, the neighbourhood Sant'Antuono is situated, named after the medieval chapel, dedicated to Saint Anthony the Abbot. Another

frazione (isolated neighbourhood), is Trinità (Holy Trinity), on the west side of Calvello, named after the chapel which is situated on that side of the village. And outside this neighbourhood lies the chapel of Saint Joseph.

Calvello has, besides three churches, thirteen chapels, of which eight are on the border or outside the nucleal settlement. This points to the mental map of the peasants, based on territoriality. The chapels outside the nucleus of the village, were not only sacred places but also marking points. Today, some of them are half ruins. However, the important ones are connected to festivals and fires.

Calvello's festival cycle consists of about 30 festivals, from tiny to big ones. Eight of them include fires. This cycle, which is as well connected with the agrarian year as with the clerical calendar, can be divided into a winter and summer half. In the winter part there are three festivals with a wood fire, and in the summer part five with broom fires. In contrast to the wood fires, the broom fires are still important today. To understand why, one needs insight into the meaning and developments of these ritual fires.

Wood fires

The first fire in winter is for Saint Anthony the Abbot on the sixteenth of January. On that day there is a wood fire in the neighbourhood of Sant' Antuono, in front of the saint's chapel. In January 1991, this fire was lit at eight in the morning. In the chapel two Masses were said, at eight and at ten. During the day, a group of men stood talking around the fire, which burned till midnight. Till some years ago, the fire was lit on the eve of the festival. Up to the fifties, people brought loads of wood on the backs of mules, as a gift to the saint.

Saint Anthony the Abbot is associated with fire. In his chapel there is a late Byzantine statue. He has a pig at his feet and in his left hand a book from which flames arise. According to iconographic literature, the pig points to Saint Anthony's pig, that walked around freely, was fed by everybody, and given to the poor after it was slaughtered. The flames indicate Saint Anthony's fire, before a feared dis-



Fig. 2. Devotional picture of Saint Anthony the Abbot.

ease. The saint's great popularity since the Middle Ages is to be attributed to his being the patron against contagious diseases among people and livestock (cf. Timmers 1978: 234–35).

Although, this iconographic reading is correct, it is not the only explanation. Religious symbols are results of developments, and universal saints became localized in the course of time. In Calvello, as in other Italian communities (cf. Rivera 1988), Saint Anthony's flames are associated with his struggle during his life as a hermit, against demons. Saint Anthony the Abbot is the protector from and of fire in Calvello. Which means, that he protects against fire risks and lightning strokes (cf. Thomas 1971: 28; 32–33). But, he is also the



Fig. 3. The procession of Saint Joseph passes the wood fire in front of his chapel at the village's border. Photo: Herman Tak (1991).

patron of fire: "Saint Anthony the Abbot has given us the fire".

The relation between saint and fire seems older than the one with the pig for Calvello. The wooden statue has a pig, but this is of tin plate and nailed against it. Also in Calvello Saint Anthony was a patron of animals. But, there is some symbolic confusion with the other Anthony, the one of Padua. Both are patron saints of livestock in Calvello. Till recently, cattle were blessed during his festival on the thirteenth of June, while the other livestock, in particular goats and sheep, were blessed on the seventeenth of January. In this period the cattle stayed on the coast of Apulia.

Calvello knew of an Anthony's pig, but it was dedicated to Saint Anthony of Padua. Till the fifties, a lot of wood was donated during his festival, which does not include a wood fire. Here is the symbolic confusion between the two saints. The wood was sold to the local potters, and the profit was used for the festival.

The blessing of cattle at Saint Anthony the Abbot has disappeared. At Saint Anthony of

Padua some horses and cows are blessed. Donations of wood have disappeared in both festivals. In 1991, the festival for Saint Anthony the Abbot, enjoyed a small revitalization. The neighbourhood of Sant' Antuono founded a committee, which organized, notwithstanding the freezing cold, a ball on the piazza in front of the chapel, and concluded it with fireworks.² Saint Joseph (19th of March) is the second festival in winter with a fire. In Calvello there was a wood fire on the 19th of March. It was lit in front of his chapel, a little outside the neighbourhood of Trinità. On the eve of the festival, men stood around it. They drank wine and ate *lupine*, yellow flat beans, which are still traditional food during this festival.³ This wood fire disappeared more than twenty years ago. Three years ago it was reintroduced. Here too, it was an initiative of the neighbourhood.

In contrast, the procession for Saint Joseph has enjoyed a long continuity. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the same course was followed as today. The procession, with the saint's statue, goes from the parish church



Fig. 4. The lighting of the pascal candle at Easter vigil in front of the mother church. Photo: Herman Tak (1991).

straight to the chapel of Saint Joseph, where Mass is said. After that it goes along Trinità, back to the church. Because the 19th of March is no longer an official holiday, the procession has been transferred to the closest Sunday. This removal has contributed to the decline of its importance.

The relation between Saint Joseph and fire is obscure. The festival has spread over Europe from the 15th century. Neither in the *Apocrypha* nor in his iconography is there a relation between him and fire. In Calvello his festival was connected with the arrival of the first herdsmen. Though the 19th of March is in winter, there were many aspects of spring in it. People wore their new clothes,⁴ and girls and young women wore white flowers in their hair, during the procession. The Mass in the chapel was an occasion for boys and girls to meet. With the decline of the pastoral agrarian econ-

omy, these aspects disappeared: "Today, it is feast every day", someone remarked.

Whether the wood fire was older than the festival, or was added to it, is unknown. The procession strengthened the ritual fire, but there has never been a symbolical identification on fire with the saint, as with Saint Anthony the Abbot. Today, Saint Joseph is a church performance. During the procession in March 1991, there was a new symbol added to it. One of the altar boys walked with a hammer, which symbolizes Saint Joseph the carpenter. It partly subscribed the official clerical meaning of the saint. Partly, because the feast of Saint Joseph the laborer is on the first of May, introduced by Pius XII in 1955 (cf. Giallombardo 1981). In fact, it shows the delocalization of this saint.

Finally, there is a wood fire on the Easter vigil. This Easter fire, which forms a part of a complex number of rituals in the Holy week, is lit in front of the parish church. As Frazer describes, the Easter candle is lit at it (cf. 1922: 614). The fire symbolizes life; the resurrection of Christ. After this clerical ritual, the fire burns up. I did not find direct indications of other meanings or of ancient origins for Calvello.

The wood fires for Saint Anthony the Abbot and Saint Joseph were connected with the agrarian pastoral economy. The decline of their importance, the disappearance of one for more than two decades, can be related to the decline of this economy. Today, the meaning of these two wood fires, seems more connected with the neighbourhoods which light them, than with the saints. In both festivals there have been attempts at revitalization.

Broom fires

Festivals with broom fires are in the summer part of the cycle. On the eve of five festivals, there is a procession past these fires. They are held for the Madonna del Monte Saraceno, the Madonna della Pietà,⁵ and Saint Anthony of Padua. The festivals for the Madonna del Monte are in May and September. On the second Sunday in May her statue is carried in procession to a sanctuary, on the border of the



Fig. 5. Children drag broom branches to Calvello. Photo: Peer de Wit (1991).

village territory, about 10 kilometers from the nucleus. On the eighth of September she is carried back. The other double festival is for the Pietà, the other village patron saint. On the first Sunday in June, and the third Sunday in September her statue is carried through the village. The same counts for Saint Anthony of Padua in June.

The five broom fire processions are almost identical. One walks past the fires, which are lit in the village. Days before, groups of children collect broom branches in the surroundings, and drag them in bundles, sometimes behind a bike, to their neighbourhoods. There they are put on piles, awaiting the eve of the festival.

Between ten and eleven in the evening, the procession starts from the parish church. In contrast to day processions, the statue of the saint is not taken, but a *quadro*. This is an image of the statue, placed in a heavy wooden frame, decorated with small bulbs, fed by a battery placed on the back. The image is on a stick held by the carrier above his head. The right to carry the image is sold by auction. This means, that he who wants to carry, offers more than the one who is carrying. There are always groups of men who bid against each other, sometimes very aggressively. The amount may run to three hundred-thousand

lire. The auction continues to the chapel of Trinità, situated at one-third of the course.

The procession is crowded and untidy. Till Trinità, little children walk with candles in front, accompanied by their parents. Then the image follows, surrounded by men who participate in the auction under the direction of the festival committee. Behind them walks the brass band. Calvello does not have its own band, and one has to explain to the members the procedure of the ritual. At the back follows the crowd. Not all do the whole route. People come and go.

The procession goes clockwise through the village nucleus. The ritual performance is simple. People take care that the broom fire blazes up when the image arrives. Collecting broom, is a task for the youth, however adults, men and women, set it alight at the right moment. The image halts at the fire, and the carrier places the stick of the image on the ground. One waits, and the band plays a tune. After that the fire is passed on the right side. The ritual is repeated at about twenty-two fires. During this, people offer hand to mouth kisses to the image.⁶

Around one o'clock, the procession is finished. The image is placed, without any ceremony, back in the parish church. There, the payment of the auction takes place. People who finish the procession (many have stopped in

Fig. 6. Pushing up a broom fire before the image of the Madonna arrives. Photo: Peer de Wit (1991).



their own neighbourhood) go into the church to the statue of the saint. After that, all go home. Next morning there is a procession with the statue.

Neighbourhoods

There is rivalry between neighbourhoods, who makes the biggest fire. This only counts when the image stops. Some experience is required to make the broom fire flare at the right moment. Boys look out for the procession, and shout when it is coming. Then the elders throw bundles of broom on to the fire and push them up, so that the flames can get through. Just before the image arrives, the remaining bundles are thrown into the blaze. Flames can reach a height of ten meters.

In the narrow village alleys, it is a sport to hold up the procession. These delays happen, above all, in parts of the village where normally most of the villagers hardly ever come. If such a stop takes too long, it can cause irritation among people in the procession, and set the local residents off laughing. "And who will win?" people ask. The prize of winning is some honour for the neighbourhood with the highest fire. It is always the most isolated neighbourhoods which build up the biggest fires.

Till the fifties, the envy between neighbourhoods was much stronger than today. Youth

gangs were fighting each other, and there was a selective endogamy. Migration caused village exodus. Peasants became petit bourgeois. Many moved to the new village center. It has a higher status, is flatter and can be reached by car.

Notwithstanding, the broom fires still contains a ritualized form of the envy between neighbourhoods, and can serve as an outlet for frustrations. In May 1990, there was a little row during the fire procession for the Madonna del Monte, at Le Casette. A neighbourhood of temporary houses, built a little outside the village after the earthquake of 1980. The quarrel flamed up, because the brass band did not play and the image did not stop at the fire. Initially the festival committee did not want the procession to enter the neighbourhood. This caused a commotion, in which some town policemen had to keep hold of an aggressive man. An old woman cried for a hoe, with which she wanted to attack the members of the committee. One of the bystanders cynically replied: "Aha, they are still working here with hoes". Behind this event was the frustration of the residents, who had lived there for more than eight years, which they blamed on local politics. Besides, they felt excluded from the village. They associated themselves with the neighbouring neighbourhood the Piano, whose



Fig. 7. The brass band plays a tune when the image stops at a broom fire. Photo: Peer de Wit (1991).

rival the Piazza organizes the Madonna del Monte festival.

The rivalry between neighbourhoods is ambivalent, it is not always dominant. Of relevance is, that each time about twenty-two social groups, which identify themselves as neighbourhoods, however tiny they may be, feel the need to light a broom fire. Great value is attached to the stopping of the image at the fire, which implies a neighbourhood's blessing.

Auction

In the auction part of the procession (who carries the image?), there are also neighbourhood aspects. It is always small groups of men who compete in offering. They are burning to carry the image in their own neighbourhood. Once, one of them rushed ahead to light up the fire of his neighbourhood, and returned to take over the image.

During the September festival of the Madonna del Monte, many migrants return, and then they offer the highest. Migrants consider it an honour to carry the image. Older Calvellesi state that before, it was herdsmen who took part in the auction. They stayed outside the village most of the year. For them it was the opportunity to promote themselves and so is the case the migrants today. Through this ritual of carrying the image, these outsiders

can renew their place in the village community.

To carry the image gives some honour. It is a men's affair. Only once did we see a woman carrying it. She was a student who lived in Rome, and did the auction together with her brother and some cousins. Her mother was absolutely against it, and did not even come outside her house when she passed. "I could do this, because, I do not live here. Otherwise they would point after me for a long time".

There have been some gradual changes in the meaning of the ritual of carrying the image. Social change played its part. Through the decline of the pastoral economy, herdsmen disappeared as carriers. Migrants took over their place, and even women's liberation has played a role.⁷

Purification

In contrast to processions with statues, the clergy are absent at the broom fire rituals. According to the village priest, who has been in Calvello since 1933, the clergy have never been present at these night processions. In his view, the fires are lit in honor of the Madonna. Besides, older people have another explanation. The broom fires drive away evil spirits: "the light chases away the ghosts of the dark", and "the fires drive off the evil spirits". This points to the purificatory aspect of these broom fires

(cf. Frazer 1922: 647–50), which can be shown more clearly through the relation with other rituals in the festival cycle.

According to popular belief, a procession of the dead takes place at midnight on the eve of *fiesta dei morti* (All Souls' Day). The dead go through the village, and the last deceased walks in front and rings a little bell. One can only see this procession through the light of a candle, made of ear wax, placed in the window. Besides the relation between ear wax, as human waste, and death, the light of the candle points to life, and the night to the dead and spirits.

On Good Friday night, villagers go in procession to the cemetery. Here too the clergy are absent. The only lights are torches to light the paper from which the two precentors can sing their text. The chorus, "perdono mio Dio" (forgiveness my God), is sung by everybody in this large procession. Arriving at the walled cemetery, they walk from the left side three times around it. The procession is considered as homage to the dead, but there is also a sense of guilt among those who walk: "We are sinners". From the cemetery the procession returns to the parish church, where people walk on their knees, clockwise, three times to the sepulchre of Christ.⁸

This clockwise walking stands for purity: "The worshippers make a ritual circuit round the divine center, their right shoulders turned towards it (...) The right is the inside, the finite, assured well-being, and certain peace" (Hertz 1973: 13). The fact that one walks with the image to the right (against the clock) around the broom fire, points to its danger, its "perpetual menace of evil" (ibid). In contrast to this, all the fire processions, and nearly all the other village processions, go clockwise.

Not only the comments of informants, but also the performances at the broom fires, show that we are dealing with purification. The absence of the clergy, points to the tension between popular belief and the official one. However, a compromise seems to have taken place, namely in the shape of the image. When this was added is unknown. Today's performances point to the importance of the image. The ritual with the image at the fire is central, and is

seen as a blessing. It is, for example, the Madonna del Monte who gives this blessing, she has the magical power to do this, not the fires. Her importance is expressed in the hand to mouth kisses one offers to the image.

The ritual stop at the broom fires, has a double function. On one side, the presence of the image at the broom fires strengthens this purification ritual on the other hand, the image tames the fire and legitimizes this non-clerical ritual. The broom fire is a purification ritual, however, this meaning has become subordinate. The image has taken over the dominant position of the fires in this ritual. The fires chasten, but the image blesses.

Wood and broom fires

What are the differences and similarities between these wood and broom fires? Wood fires are in winter, broom fires in summer. A natural explanation, such as that broom burns better in summer, does not hold. But differences can be found in some features of the materials.

Wood is an important economic good. In Calvello it is a necessity, for heating houses. Today, in contrast to forty years ago, cooking is done with gas, delivered in gas cylinders. But in winter, pans are still hung above the fire, and potatoes, chestnuts and meat are roasted on it. Wood served as fuel for the formal local potteries. The gifts of wood to Saint Anthony of Padua, were sold to these potters. Calvello also knew local woodcutters, producers of barrels and spoons. All the antique and important images of saints are of wood.⁹

The donations of wood at Saint Anthony the Abbot, indicated the economic aspect of wood too. This saint was, besides being the protector of fire, also the patron saint of fire, and because of that, of the essential material wood. The importance of wood as an economic good, was also expressed in the custom, that a boy put a large half burned trunk or a bundle of wood, in front of the parental door of the girl he wanted to become engaged to.

An important difference between wood and broom fires can be found in the nature of these two types of ritual fire. Broom fires are enor-

mous, but brief. They flame high and are quickly extinguished. The wood fires are domesticated. They burn for many hours, and one has to take care. People stand around them to warm themselves. The broom fires have the contrary effect, they blaze on and give such a blistering heat, that one has to wait till this has disappeared. Though, peasants used broom to make baskets (cf. Molfese 1978), it has, in contrast to wood, hardly any economic value. As elsewhere, broom is associated with witches, who fly on it at night.

At first sight, it seems that broom fires are more related to the "spirits of the dark", than the wood fires. However, the fire for Saint Anthony the Abbot can be related to them, because of his struggle with evil spirits. Although, one could connect Saint Joseph the carpenter with wood, this sort of association seems to be absent.

Finally, there are the differences in place and number of the two types of fire. Five times in the summer period, there are more than twenty broom fires lit in the village. In winter there are only three wood fires. On the Easter vigil, one burns in front of the church: The other two burn on the village's periphery. The wood fire for Saint Anthony the Abbot, in Sant' Antuono, on the other side of the river, and the fire for Saint Joseph in front of his chapel, outside the neighbourhood of Trinità. There is a relation between these two periphery or border places, the lightning of these fires in the winter and the agrarian cycle.

Contrary to the practice in many Northern European countries, in many parts of Italy the peasants do not live in the countryside. The countryside is associated with notions of insecurity and danger, and is seen as uncivilized (cf. Davis 1969; Tak 1988; 1990). In Calvello the system that protects the village nucleus still exists. This is in the shape of chapels in the country, which are connected to rituals. Of importance here is, that there is a ritual withdrawal from the country to the village nucleus at the end of summer. In September, for example, the Madonna del Monte is brought back from her sanctuary to the village.

This ritual withdrawal corresponded to the agrarian activity. During summer, the country

was crowded with people. In winter it was abandoned, and therefore more dangerous and uncivilized. It is winter that is associated with death and spirits, which can be found in other rituals of this period.¹⁰ The wood fires of Saint Anthony and Joseph are related to it. They are lit on the village border, on the border of the civilized and uncivilized. The long standing of these fires and the nature of their fuel, point to their civilized character. They were symbolic marking points of a community surrounded by an empty, but dangerous country.

From this point of view, by relating them to the annual cycle, these wood fires can be seen as a form of ritual protection, reinforced by the symbols of two saints. Saint Anthony the Abbot himself is related to fires and spirits. For Saint Joseph this seems obscure. However, his procession from the parish church to the fire on the village's periphery and back, strengthens this ritual fire. These two wood fires can be related, to the wintry insecurity of the country and thus, as point of light to the local civilization, against the "spirits of the dark". They were counterpoints to the broom fires.

The place of these wood fires, as marking points, in the annual cycle seems clear. The decline of their meaning, and even the disappearance for some decades of one of them, was caused by the end of the local pastoral agrarian society. Today, the continuity of these fires is in the hands of neighbourhoods, and their will to revitalize them. Saint Joseph's procession is clerical and, leaning on local tradition, used by the clergy for their aims. Less clear is the place of the broom fires in the annual cycle. The problem to be solved is: why are there so many festivals with broom fires?

Broom fires in the festival cycle

"The seasons of the year when these bonfires are most commonly lit are spring and mid-summer; but in some places they are kindled also at the end of autumn or during the course of winter, particularly on Hallow E'en (the thirty-first of October), Christmas Day, and the Eve of the Twelfth Day" (Frazer 1922: 609).

Calvello's annual festival cycle has broom fires at the eve of the Madonna del Monte,

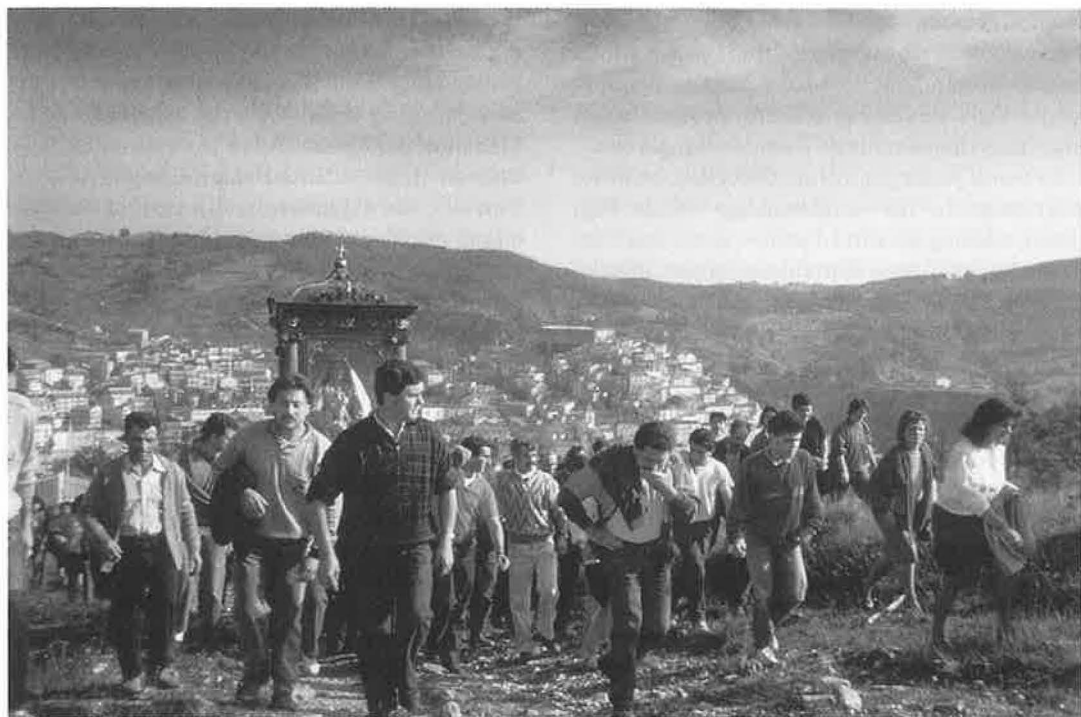


Fig. 8. On the second Sunday in May the Madonna del Monte Saraceno is brought from the village to her sanctuary at the border of the village's territory. Photo: Herman Tak (1989).

(second Sunday in May); the Pietà (first Sunday in June); Saint Anthony of Padua (13th of June); Madonna del Monte (8th of September); the Pietà (third Sunday in September). Although, the timing of fires matches, a little, to the ones Frazer mentioned, and the place of the wood fires has been made clear, the amount of broom fires is striking. In explanation of this, and in order not to get lost in a forest of opposition and meaning without much soil, an historical perspective is needed.

Today, the important festivals are those of the Madonna del Monte. From May till the beginning of September her statue stays in the sanctuary. "The Madonna is on holiday", the Cavellesi say. However, the concept of holiday is a recent phenomenon. Her stay was connected with the agrarian cycle. This Madonna protected the crop during the productive period of the year. Because, till the fifties Calvello had an agrarian economy, this could explain why her festivals are the most important ones today. However, all older informants state that the double festival for the Pietà was the main

one. Her festivals have broom fires, but there is no trace of a relation to the agrarian pastoral economy.

Examination of the local records shows, that these informants are right. That is to say, as far as they could know. The festivals for the Pietà were the most important, however, this only dates from the third decade of the last century. Before that they most certainly were not. There have been all sorts of ritual changes in Calvello. Changes which took place long before the fracture with the local pastoral agrarian society, halfway through the twentieth century.

Till 1820, the festivals for the Madonna del Monte were the most important.¹¹ The June festival for the Pietà was introduced around 1820, and her festivals took over the first place from the ones for the Madonna del Monte, which underwent a decline. In fact, her double festival was not celebrated for eight years. In 1857, the parish church collapsed during an earthquake, and the heavily damaged statue of the Madonna was brought for restoration to

Naples. Another reason for not celebrating her festivals was the Italian unification, which caused brigandage. In 1861 brigands even besieged Calvello (cf. Ferri 1886). Processions to and from the sanctuary were too dangerous.

In these years, however, Calvellesi went on pilgrimage to the neighbouring village Viggiano, which guaranteed police protection. Viggiano has the same festival model as Calvello. On the first Sunday in May, the Madonna of Viggiano is brought to a sanctuary, situated on a mountain, which borders the territory of Calvello. On the first Sunday in September she is brought back.

In 1866, when the Calvellesi re-introduced the festivals of the Madonna del Monte, they changed dates. Before 1857, the festivals had also taken place on the first Sunday in May and the first Sunday in September. The shift to the second Sunday in May and the eighth of September, can be related to the piety for the Madonna of Viggiano, who is called a sister of the Madonna del Monte. However, the eighth of September is the Nativity of the Virgin, which points also to the influence of the official liturgy in this change.

After this revival in 1866, a shift in the meaning of the Madonna del Monte occurred. The relation to the agrarian cycle still existed, however, it declined in importance. Especially the ritual relation to the other festivals became blurred. The Madonna del Monte was ritually connected to two other double festivals. The first, whose remnants still exist, is that of Saint Nicholas, the other village patron saint. On the first Thursday after the May procession of the Madonna del Monte, his statue is carried in procession from his church to the parish church, where he takes over her place. In the autumn he is brought back.¹²

The other double festival was for Madonna Potentissima. Her chapel is situated halfway between the village and the sanctuary. She was brought on the first Sunday in August to the village and brought back on the first Sunday in September, the same day as the Madonna del Monte came back to the village. After the 1866 revival, this double festival disappeared.¹³

This change points to the gradual downfall of

the ritual protection system, but also to changing relations between the local society and the Italian state. This is expressed in an important new meaning which became attached to the Madonna del Monte. After the Italian unification an unprecedented migration started. In Calvello, the departure and return of the Madonna del Monte was related to the departure of migrants, in which the longing for a quick return, played its part. Her star slowly rose again. Around the turn of the century, a procession with her statue through the village was added to her September return.

During the First and Second World Wars, the Madonna del Monte was also connected to the soldiers at the front. Thanks to post war migration (during fascism migration was forbidden), and clerical striving against communism (in 1947 the Madonna del Monte was officially crowned), her festivals took over the first place from those for the Pietà.

What do these changes in rituals and meaning say about the broom fires? Firstly, that the first festival for the Madonna del Monte was on the first Sunday in May, which corresponds to Frazer's notion, that the most important day for broom fires was on this day (1922: 609–10). This, and the fact that the festivals for the Madonna del Monte were the important ones around 1800, shows that they were Lenten fires. They marked the beginning of summer, the productive part of the year. They were not only lit in the village to purify it from the "spirits of the dark", but also as a signal that winter was over. With it, the country was made free for agrarian activity. It marked a movement from Calvello to the uncivilized and dangerous country. The counter movement took place with the withdrawal in the autumn.

It explains why broom, as a symbol of the countryside, is dragged into the nucleus, its opposite, and burned in an undomesticated fire. The broom fires were the opposite of the civilized wood fires, and the rituals connected with them.

The end of the summer period of the festival cycle, is less marked by the fires for the Madonna del Monte in September. These light the ritual and factual withdrawal from the countryside. The ritual transition takes place half a

year after the first Sunday in May, namely at 'Festa dei Morti'. On the eve of All Souls' Day the dead enter the village, according to popular belief. After the ritual withdrawal in September there is a ritual silence of about two months. Then, All Souls' Day marks the beginning of winter. The counterpoint to the procession of the dead through the village, is the night procession of villagers to the cemetery on Good Friday. With this, one leaves ritually the village nucleus. Now the living visit the dead.

The former place and meaning of the broom fires in the festival cycle, are made clear. They were part of a complex ritual protection system of the local community. One could hypothesize that the fire ritual is older than the Madonna del Monte, but, there is no proof. Frazer's notes could be helpful. He hardly mentions relations between fires and Christian symbols. However, this can be due to his focus on "primary" and "original", through which he left out such complexities. Important is the symbolical identification of the Madonna del Monte with the broom fires. This points to the gradual transformation, that have been taking place in the meaning of these broom fires, which led from purification fires to bonfires for the Madonna.

Manipulation of rituals

The broom fires for the Madonna del Monte are the eldest of Calvello. Local developments not only point to shifts in the meaning, but also to their spread. After 1822 the June festival for the Pietà was introduced. According to the legend, the Pietà had protected Calvello, by blinding a band of Bourbon soldiers, who were ordered to plunder and burn the village, because the Cavellesi did not want to pay tax.

The festival in June, is still called *la festa dei francesi*. It is a copy of the festival on the third Sunday in September, during which her statue is carried through the village, and broom fires are lit on it's eve. The miracle has all the aspects of state formation, but like the symbol of the Pietà, nothing to do with the "spirits of the dark". The extension of the broom fires, shows how this ritual was manipulated. There were some reasons for this to happen.

Calvello had religious fraternities. There

was an order of rank between them, expressed by the places they had during processions. This order was connected to local stratification. More than today, the mountain community was a stratified one. The village had an administrative elite. But, in the course of the second part of the eighteenth century, a new elite emerged. A group not built up of large landowners, but of local families who had accumulated capital (cf. Davis 1973). This elite disappeared in the fifties of our century. Their so called *palazzi* (cf. Burke 1987), with decorated portals, are still stone witnesses.

The confraternity of the Pietà was the most important one of Calvello, connected as it was with local administration and the church. Already in 1556, it had been founded, sanctioned by Pope Gregory XIII. This points to the official character of the devotion of the Pietà, itself a product of the late 13th century. But the boundaries between popular and official religion are blurred, as shown in the miracle she performed.

There was no fraternity for the Madonna del Monte. The rituals for this Madonna were connected to the agrarian annual cycle, and she was a patron saint of the peasantry. Through population pressures, a growing group of village poor developed, which resulted in the migration after the Italian unification. A development which added to her meaning. That Christ stopped at Eboli long before Carlo Levi did (1945), is clear. Calvello was not an isolated place. The developments in the wider Italian society had their influence on the evolution and involution of local society and its rituals. The festivals for the Pietà, were more or less connected to the local elite. An elite of small bourgeoisie, who were, as elsewhere in Europe, culture builders (cf. Frykman & Löfgren 1987), who placed themselves above, and as counterpart to the peasantry. An expression of that was, besides the ostentation of housing, their membership of confraternities. This does not mean, that the Pietà did not have wider support. The peasants also celebrated the Pietà.¹⁴ The Pietà was a vehicle of more meanings. This is a characteristic of such symbols, as well as for the rituals in which they are anchored: "They do not so much express meaning, as give

us the capacity to make meaning" (Cohen 1985: 15).

Rituals are suited to the carrying of political messages (cf. Kertzer 1988), and this is the reason for the development of the festivals for the Pietà in the first part of the nineteenth century. Her June festival, *fešta dei Francesi*, had a political side. The miracle which she performed was perhaps the product of a collective fantasy, its interpretation was levelled. For the peasants the focus was on the external threat, the capriciousness of influences above intervillage relations (cf. Tak 1990).¹⁵ But for the governmental local elite it became anti-french. That is to say, against the ideas which were introduced during the French occupation (1806–1814), and which led to the Italian *risorgimento*, the strife for unification, ideas which were received early in Calvello. In 1822, nine so called *carbonari*, among them Cavellesi, were executed in Calvello, because of conspiracy (cf. Racioppi 1902 II: 469–477).

The use of festivals for political purposes was not something new. In 1810 the French introduced two new festivals in Calvello. One on the 25th of August, birthday of the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, partly celebrated in the parish church. The other was for Joachim Murat, King of Naples, on 25th of March. For the last, the villagers were ordered to light enormous fires, to show their commitment to their sovereigns. The French regime with its reforms, like the abolition of feudalism, was very popular (ibid.: 454). Local government spent a lot of money on these festivals.

In 1814, these festivals were, of course, taken off the pay roll. However, one started to give money to other ones. The two festivals for the Madonna del Monte were subsidized, by a small amount. Much more money was spent on Corpus Christi. The local government had a Janus face, without internal changes it followed the new regime and its restoration. In 1815 it spent three times as much on the "festival of joy for the return of his Majesty Ferdinando II", than on the two festivals for the Madonna del Monte.

Of course, the local government was embarrassed, because of the local sympathy for the *risorgimento*. It continued to subsidize Corpus

Christi. In this procession, secular and ecclesiastical authority are symbolically united. The ritual was used to establish the legitimacy of the regime (cf. Kerzer 1988: 39). The church was, of course, not at all an advocate of the Unification. New on the local pay roll was the Pietà, especially her June festival, *fešta dei Francesi*.

The Pietà was a symbol with several meanings, which developed in the course of time. For the peasants she was a village patroness, a Madonna who protected them against the capriciousness of external threat.¹⁶ Besides this she was a vehicle of the official ecclesiastical religion, and for the village elite who placed themselves above the peasantry. The catalyst of her growing importance, however, was the political use of her symbol by the local government. Thus, religious rituals can serve political aims, "by producing bonds of solidarity without requiring uniformity of belief" (Kerzer 1988: 67).

The spread of broom fires

That the broom fires were also added to the September festival for the Pietà, around 1822, is unlikely. But, that they have been put out of their context and were placed in the June festival, *fešta dei Francesi*, is clear. The multiplication of the fire ritual, points to the decline of the domination of the purification aspect of these fires. Already at the beginning of the eighteenth century, there had been a shift in their meaning, which has been partly changed or enlarged to that of bonfires for the Madonnas. As with the Madonnas themselves, other meanings were added to them in the course of the last century.

The last festival with broom fires is that of Saint Anthony of Padua on the thirteenth of June. It is a recent example of the spread of the broom fires. At the beginning of the sixties this festival was revitalized, and made into a copy of the ones for the Pietà. The broom fires for Saint Anthony were introduced in this decade.

With this, the meaning of Saint Anthony of Padua has been rapidly transformed. The ritual relations in the annual cycle to the festival of Saint Anthony the Abbot, have largely dis-

appeared. A new relation developed to the ones for the two madonnas. But this became one of competition, and not a symbolic confusion and ritual spread, as before with Saint Anthony the Abbot. Neighbourhood rivalry played its part in the revitalization. The festival has its own committee, which identifies itself with the neighbourhood, the Piano. The processions, with the saint's image and statue pass through the whole village. However, they start from the Piano, and the feast is in this neighbourhood. The committee of the Piano competes with the one of the Piazza, which today organizes the festivals for the Madonna del Monte and the Pietà.¹⁷

Not only did the broom fires spread to other festivals, they also spread over the village itself. The relation between broom fires and the ritualized competition between neighbourhoods, is probably old. This competition, which includes play, stimulates the height of the fires and their number. In spite of the actual disappearance of rivalry, expressed in selective endogamy and fighting between neighbourhood youths, the aspect of neighbourhood identity still plays its role. In 1989, for example, the procession along the broom fires was extended to a new housing estate. Also at the beginning of this decade there was an expansion of the route to the estate of emergency houses. Thus, besides ritualized competition, there is also the need to be part of the village. The broom fires contribute to community spirit, to the "we" feeling of local society. The broom fire ritual has adapted itself even during the last decades.

Besides shifts in meaning, ritual developments on the longer term have taken place. The broom fires were, as purification rituals, the core of the festival that introduced the summer part of the festival and agrarian cycle. However, they altered into an introduction rite. Through this change or extensions of their meaning, their spread to other festivals became possible. Today the procession along the broom fires is the introduction ritual to five festivals, which are surrounded by music and fireworks. In fact, the scenario, about which anthropologists have written, seems less static than they have assumed.

Ritual change

"It has always been like this", is a local notion about Calvello's rituals. This is an important characteristic of rituals, they behave as if they are everlasting. Above all, this is an ideological aspect. Their apparent unchangeability give them, through their reference to the past, more weight or importance, also the reason for being copied. Long term developments, however, show that they are indeed subject to changes, which can be related to changing circumstances. Rituals are not only performed, but also modelled and manipulated by people. In Calvello new meanings have been added to the fire rituals. The broom fire ritual has been transformed, the image seems to have been added, and the broom fires have spread to other festivals. It is not the unchangeability or endlessness, but the adaptation of rituals that give them their continuity. If adaptation to changing circumstances fails, they linger on, waiting for revitalization, or disappear.

The question as to why the broom fires are so popular and the wood fires not, can only be answered from the perspective of long term change. They have been developed from purification rituals into bonfires, and spread to other festivals. They have plural meanings. Today, these are the ritualized envy between neighbourhoods; the game of making the highest fire; the honour of carrying the image; the character of the procession through which community feeling is increased. Their importance is stated by their expansion during the last decade.

Broom fires are lit on the eve of the most important festivals, which are all celebrated in the summer period, a period of holidays and the temporary return of many migrants. "The village is crowded in summer, but dead in winter", Calvellesi say. Although this is the exact opposite of the former peasant movement to the country in spring, and their withdrawal to the village in autumn, in both cases the first broom fires mark a joyful period, and the ones in September mark its closing.

In contrast the wood fires have adapted less easily to changes in social economical circumstances. They were more strongly related to

Calvello's agrarian and pastoral economy. That they are in winter, contributes to their lingering on. However, there have been attempts to revitalize them. This, involved a shift in meaning. Instead of being wintry marking points, they have become vehicles of neighbourhood identity.

These changes point, above all, to development in the meaning of the fire rituals. The rituals themselves seem rather stable. It is true that the broom fire ritual shifted from the core to the inauguration of the festivals, which meant an alteration from fire-festival into festivals with fires. But, one could state that the performance of the ritual continued over a long period. Besides, there are still wood fires in winter and broom fires in summer. Even parts of their old meanings continue. Right up till today, old people note their purification significance.

Looking at changes in rituals in the long term, one notices two levels (cf. Bloch 1986: 157). The first is changes in the domain of meaning. These can be related rather easily to changes in the social economic environment in which rituals are performed. The other level seems harder to grasp, these are the changes in the ritual itself. They seem in the long term to have continuous stability (ibid). The broom fire ritual was manipulated, and used for different sorts of reasons. This explains its expansion. The ritual was copied, and placed out of its context, but there was no creation of new rituals (ibid: 190).

Does this mean that rituals themselves are immune to history? This is a problem of perspective. If we isolate them they do not seem to alter a lot. But placed in their context, there is much more change. As pointed out in this essay, rituals are related to each other. They form part of the annual cycle, which itself can be seen as a big ritual, performed every year. It is in this overall ritual, that we can see ritual changes clearly. Changes which are responses to changing circumstances.

The fire rituals were part of a complex protection system, whose decline started, at least, at the beginning of the last century. This was due to the French occupation, the local reactions to the *risorgimento*, and the Italian state

formation. The local government used broom fires for its own purposes. A change took place in their symbolic content; another symbol, that of the Pietà was added to them. At a lower level of the social scale things changed too. In the middle of that century, Calvello's peasantry enlarged, through migration, its horizons beyond the level of intervillage and regional relations. Parts of the overall protection ritual disappeared. This included a shift in the meaning of one of the symbols of this ritual protection system. The Madonna del Monte developed into a symbol of this migration movement. However, this did not include a complete down fall of this overall ritual. Another meaning was added to it, but the agrarian pastoral society itself continued.

It was the end of the pastoral agrarian society in the fifties, that, not only broke down the meaning of the winter wood fires for Saint Anthony the Abbot and Saint Joseph, but also broke down the relation with the first saint and his symbolic twin brother Saint Anthony of Padua. The last became a vehicle for a neighbourhood identity and its strife against another neighbourhood. And Saint Anthony of Padua was added to the broom fires.

The rise of migration and holidays, after the Second World War, brought a new and expanded center of festivities in the summer part of the annual festival cycle. Through this, the relations with the agrarian pastoral cycle became more and more blurred. Long term developments in Calvello show fluctuations in the attention paid to festivals and their rituals and symbols, which can be attributed to changing circumstances. But above all, they show ritual change.

Notes

This article is based on field work and historical research, done in May and September 1989, and from February 1990 till March 1991. I would like to thank Carla Bianco, Jeremy Boissevain, Hans Sprangers and Helène Steehouder for their helpful suggestions. Peta Spierings improved the English, for which I thank her.

1. The Roman church and convent, now in restoration, were built by the Benedictines of Pulsano (Foggia) 1120–40 (Masini 1990: 34). Local and

regional historians, parroting each other, assume that these Benedictines, who left Calvello in 1379, have founded the village (cf. De Bonis 1982; Racioppi 1902).

2. Saint Anthony the Abbot is also the start of Carnival. "*Sant'Antuono maschere e suono*" (Saint Anthony, masks and music), is a local saying. Carnival does not amount to anything in Calvello. But, on the eve of Saint Anthony the Abbot, *fešta dei galli* (chicken feast) is celebrated. In this festival chickens, lambs and goats are, as a form of amusement, game and gambling, beheaded with a not too sharp sickle. Today, it is forbidden. But till the forties it was performed at many village street corners. Today, it is done in some stables. The chicken is a symbol of Carnival and can be recognized in Pulcinella, a traditional Carnival figure (cf. Lancelotti 1950).
3. Wood fires, winter, and ritual food are related, as can be observed too, by close reading of Frazer's chapters on fire-festivals (1922: 609–58).
4. As a counter point, new winter clothes were shown on the eighth of December, the Immaculate Conception. It was called *il trionfo dei cappotti*, the parade of the coats (cf. De Bonis 1982: 62).
5. According to local notions "Madonna del Monte Saraceno" is shortened into "Madonna del Monte", and "Madonna della Pietà", into "Pietà".
6. Hand to mouth kisses are a way of bringing over the magical power of the image to the believer, who touches first this sacred object with his right hand, or points in its direction, and brings the hand to his mouth. Often, this is done three times.
7. Auction itself has been restricted. *Asta*, auction, is a way of collecting money, and has an opposite in the, so-called, *questua*, the request for money by members of the festival committee. *Asta* and *questua* are based on the economic behaviour of the formal peasant society, in which reciprocity played an important role (cf. Tedeschi 1981). Till the end of the forties, all Calvello's processions included *asta*. This was abolished by the clergy, who did not think it proper that one should pay to carry sacred objects. The possibility of commotion during the auction also played its part.
8. This nocturnal procession to the cemetery cannot be very old. In Italy, cemeteries are situated outside the nucleus, this according to a law of 1817. In Calvello the cemetery was built in 1841 (cf. Pedio 1962: 213). So, this procession without clergy is an invention, or a mutation of an older ritual. Before, the dead were buried in the churches. The three rounds on the knees to the sepulchre of Christ, could have been for the dead too. Till recently, the dead played an important role in local perception. There are many stories in which they appear, and mourning rituals played an important role (cf. De Martino 1958).

In neighbouring villages, but also elsewhere in Italy, there are similar processions which go to the *Calvario* (Calvary), a place situated on the border or a little outside the village.

9. Statues made of papier-mâché date from the beginning of the 19th century. The ones of plaster are more recent.
10. Winter festivals related to spirits are Epiphany (a witch called Befana brings gifts); "Festa dei Galli" (cf. 3); and Carnival. Till forty years ago a straw figure was burned at Carnival. Today some people appear on Carnival eve as ghosts, dressed up in a white sheet.
11. The oldest record dates from 1748.
12. Two festivals for Saint Nicholas, one in spring and the other in autumn, were widespread (cf. Propp 1978: 31). Contrary to the Northern European countries, where he brings presents and is also transformed into Father Christmas, Saint Nicholas is an agrarian saint in Calvello. Before, during his May procession, people wore crowns of thorns, and the saint was asked for rain. People still sing the "Perdono mio Dio", as on Good Friday night. Which also indicates, that there are mourning aspects to this Lenten procession. Today, this Saint Nicholas is hardly celebrated, apart from this tiny procession which starts at dawn. His statue is brought back in the September procession of the Pietà.
13. The chapel of the Madonna Potentissima is situated halfway between the village and the sanctuary. Calvello is situated too low, to see the sanctuary. From the chapel one can see both. Potentissima functions as an intermediary. Today, one stops at the chapel during the processions from and to the sanctuary, and the Madonna del Monte is carried into the chapel.
14. The participation of the elite, and even of the clergy in the two festivals of the Madonna del Monte was minimal. This was due to the fact that it consisted of a procession along an unpaved, steep and 10 kilometer long road, to and from the sanctuary. It was a peasant devotional ritual. Older Calvellesi complained that, before, most of the priests preferred to stay at home.
15. This is expressed in some variations of the legend, in which brigands and Germans play, according to the succession of external threat, the role of the Bourbons.
16. Like the Italian unification, the French occupation caused brigandage. The neighbouring village Abriola was sacked by brigands in 1809 (cf. Racioppi 1902 II: 461–62).
17. The last confraternities disappeared before the Second World War. Till the eighties of the last century Calvello had three festival committees. One for the Pietà, one for Madonna del Monte and one for Saint Nicholas.

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