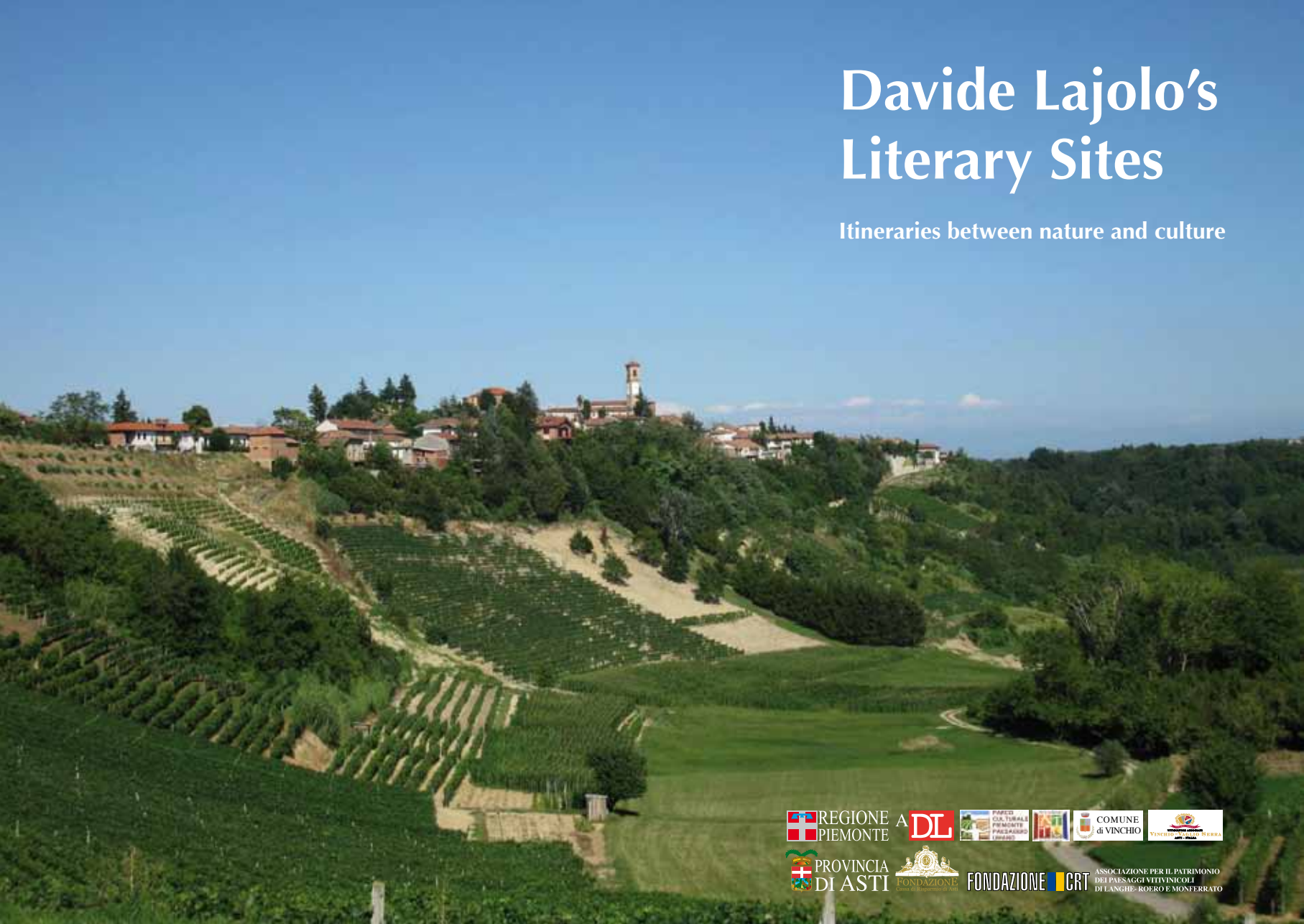


# Daide Lajolo's Literary Sites

Itineraries between nature and culture



# Daide Lajolo's Literary Sites

Itineraries between nature and culture by **Valentina Mazzola**

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### *Yearly Events*

#### **Last Saturday In June To the fifty-year Rock**

Trek starting at 5 p.m. from the Bricco di S.Michele (St. Michael's Rock), the site Lajolo chose to take stock of his life (Sul bricco dei cinquant'anni, On the Fifty-Year Rock) to the partisan lair of Noche, where Commander Ulisse found refuge during the Nazi-Fascist round-up of December 1944, through the barbera pathways among the vineyards of the Roero road to the Associated Wine Growers' Cellar of Vinchio and Vaglio, to follow the footsteps of the region's farming culture. Readings, discussions, traditional music, tasting superior barbera wine and treats from the farms along the route.

#### **First Saturday in July With the moon in the Saracen woods**

Night-time trek under the light of the full moon in the Natural Reservation of Valsarmassa through the Serralunga paths to the Valletta della Morte (Little Valley of Death), where the Marquis of Aleramo defeated the Saracens in 935, among the fossil shell hills. Readings, theater show in the wood, tasting specialties.

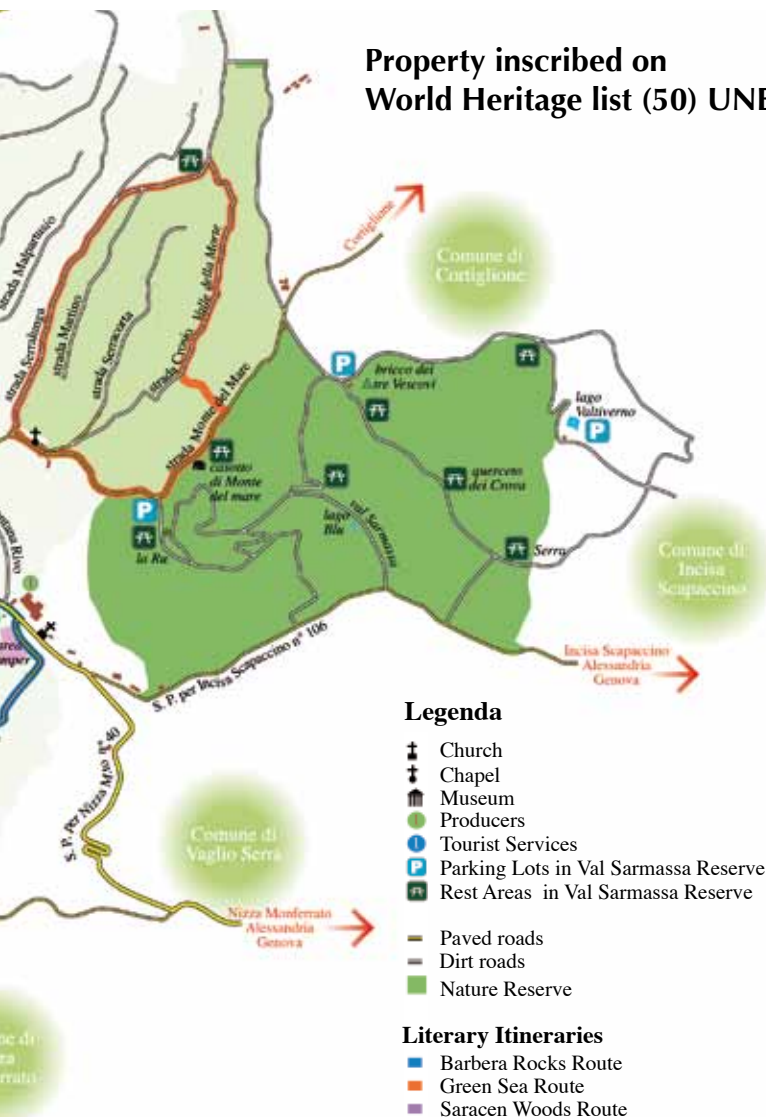
**Last Saturday in August Ulisse on the hills** - nature, music, art, poetry feast of the Natural Reservation of Valsarmassa and of the Associated Wine Growers' Cellar of Vinchio and Vaglio

Trek from the Cellar, through the Natural Reservation to the Bricco dei Tre Vescovi (Three Bishops' Rock), with its beautiful view and its pristine environment, to the Bricco di Monte of the Mare, of interest for its farm work and partisan freedom, with art installations, concerts and poetry. On to La Ru, a centuries-old oak, natural monument of the Reservation, where a short story by Daide Lajolo is read.

Tasting quality wines from the Cellar and specialties from the Pro loco.



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## 4 THE BARBERA ROCKS

**Travel time:** on foot (3 hours), on horseback (2 hours), by bicycle (1 and a half hours), by car (30 minutes at 30 - 40 Km/h) distance 6.5 Km. **Shorter route on foot** (2 hours), on horseback (1 hour), by bicycle (45 minutes), by car (18 minutes at 30 - 40 Km/h)

To travel along this route starting from Vinchio, we have to move on by car (5 minutes) or on foot (15 minutes), towards Mombercelli until we reach the parking lot near the Vinchio graveyard, where we can park and continue on foot, on horseback, by bicycle, or with our car. Now, facing the road, we turn left in the direction of Noche, where we can admire a sequence of rocks that are very rich in vines and vegetation.

*“The hill’s endless horizon closes as in a spoon. Suddenly, I clearly hear a sharp crack. It is the elm tree, planted at the bottom of the path of the foot of the hill, whose trunk was split asunder: frost gutted it.*

*A sharp crack like a rifle shot. I aim the light of my torch at its white wound. I have a vision of it in summer time, its branches lush and green. The defenseless elm could not withstand the treacherous onslaught of frost. It dies with the new year, tonight, at the bottom of the hill.*

*I have turned back to trod the road in the midst of the fog that envelops me, but the crashing elm called me back to strength, to the only way I can endure, in search of the man.*

*The hill does not shake. It remains solemn, in the darkness of the night. Even the elm, stricken and with its trunk torn apart, will return in the spring, stubbornly, to sprout its green branches next to its trunk.*



*Life endures. Under the grey snow covering the meadows, grass will sprout yet again. Spring's green grass. So mankind, too, must defeat violence".*

To the Fifty-Year Rock (*I Mé*)

Along the road, on the left, some boards indicate the first of the four areas of the farming museum ("Earth's Rest", "Work when Nature Awakens", "The Harvest Cycle" "The virtual reconstruction of the Castle" - along our route, we will find three of them), called "Earth's Rest", which starts from the work after St. Martin's Day and the time of sowing, i.e. the winter season. The Farming Museum in the midst of the wine hills was designed as a living, productive museum that tells the story of farming work and its seasons, explaining the traditional chores of winegrowing and wine-making. The boards are situated in the rest areas of *Davide Lajolo's Literary Itineraries*, allowing visitors to keep referencing back and forth between literature and farming culture.

In particular, one board located at the right side of the area, provides more detailed information about Lajolo's relationship with his farming family and his hometown. Not much farther on, to the right, we see a chapel and climbing slightly, where a white house stands today with a shed almost hidden behind it, the bricco di San Michele (Saint Michael's Rock) in the vine of his nephew Severo Lajolo, where Lajolo took stock of his life.

*"Fifty years, stacked one on top of the other, don't make up a mountain yet, but they do amount to a good sized hill, almost a rock.*

*From the top of this rock you can already have a wide horizon and, if you can gaze calmly, quietly, at what is ahead and what is behind, you can come to understand. Understand so many things and so many changes of mind on your past experiences; then, keeping your feet solidly planted on the rock soil, you can even gaze into the future, without repeating the desires and dreams that grew out of your boyhood imagination, on Saint Lawrence nights, when the stars looked so close you felt they would fall into our hair. If your feet are grounded, if you know the soil that supports you, you will understand how you spent your years, like those on which the rock was formed.*

*I am one of those people who recognize themselves among the hills, who discover themselves in front of their impassive sight, who respect themselves in that atmosphere, because they are finally honest with themselves.*

*The atmosphere of the hill and the closer sky and the wordless trees and the small*



*faraway things and the men, the farmers who don't walk in bunches but one after the other, silently, even when they are father and son, walking to the same vineyard, shouldering their hoes. All this discards rhetoric, much like the chaff is separated from the wheat, and I feel at one with my vices and virtues, my burden of past mistakes, my colored balloons of enthusiasm, and my bag of things I was able to accomplish.*

*Pressing my foot down on the earth of the rock of my fifty years, I measure with certainty the years I have thrown about, pell-mell, one on top of the other, any which way, like rags. They are not few, I can count them, with heavy heart, on the chalkboard of my memory”.*

To the Fifty-Year Rock (*I Mé*)

Continuing on, we can see on our right Mombercelli in the distance, then on the left the Beruito hill. Just before reaching Noche, we see the Nivasco valley on the right. Immediately after it, on the left we see a climbing path, to the lair once used by Lajolo as a hideaway during the terrible Nazi and Fascist round-up of December 2, 1944 against the local partisans. Where the road begins, there is a board that

recounts the event as seen by Lajolo, who at the time was a partisan leader with the fighting name of *Ulisse*. On the side we can see one of the panels positioned along the “Paths of Freedom” that take us through some of the most significant events in our history. On our right, we can see the Reginin Winery, where we can decide to continue our route along the main paved road or take the shortcut through the Settevie road, rich in truffle-beds, on the left side, and then through the Fonda road. The two roads lead down to the Associated Wine Growers’ Cellar of Vinchio and Vaglio Serra.

Continuing along via Nizza, on the left we see the second area of the open-air farming Museum that illustrates the chores at nature’s awakening (spring) and the hot-sun chores (summer). On the right side there is a board illustrating the Resistance’s contribution in our area. Continuing in the direction of Vaglio Serra, on our left we can see Vinchio and a little farther on, on the same side, the Roeto Valley (Val di Roeto). Going past the Vaglio Serra sign, turning left we go down into the Roeto Valley along a country lane (not advisable only if it rains). Vineyards and hazelnut orchards follow truffle plants. We continue along the main road until we reach the end of the descent in the San Pancrazio area near the Associated Wine Growers’ Cellar, where we can stop briefly to taste and buy some good wine. We continue a turn left towards the town center. Along the way, in Vascirone on the right side we can see the third area of the open-air farming Museum dedicated to the harvest cycle (autumn).

We reach the town traveling through via Vaglio, via Fratel Teodoreto and then via Ramaudio until we reach our starting point, i.e. the parking lot near the graveyard on our left.



**Travel time on foot (2 hours), on horseback (1 hour), by bicycle (40 minutes), by car (20 minutes at 30 - 40 Km/h) - distance: 5 km**

Our starting point is in via Ramaudio, more specifically near the Moat just after Davide Lajolo's birthplace, In the direction of Mombercelli. Here, Lajolo's family and other townsfolk used to thresh wheat. This is how Davide remembers it:

*"We would build our own engine and thresher with pieces of wood and sheet metal, stealing the nails from the carpenter and coal from the ironsmith. The group that had the most ingenious person amongst its members was envied, because everyone would look when it would go around placing its thresher. In the town center, we had with us the son of the sharecropper of an engineer, who built bridges and lived around Savona. He was truly extraordinary: he learned everything immediately. Of course, he was the builder of our thresher, the chief engineer and the overall boss. He also assigned the others' tasks.*

*Since I could not digest Pythagoras' table at school, he didn't like me much. My task was the toughest of all: I had to imitate the engine's noise with my mouth, non-stop, until my lips would get dry and swollen. If I failed, I'd be kicked out of the group. Still, I liked it anyway so I'd give all I had; to this day, I don't know where I could possibly find all that breath and how I could digest so much dust. But I was proud because that task entitled me to stay right next to the engineer at all times.*

*By George, I was the voice of the engine!"*

The thresher game (*The country blackbird and the city blackbird*)



After reading the board on the left side at the bottom of the square, we descend in via Giardino Langa towards the valley by the same name. Once we get to the bottom, we find the panel The Tiglione Mulberry Trees, where Lajolo recalls mulberry-growing and silkworm farming. To the left, the Fabaro valley and to the right the Rio Langa whose banks we follow along our route.

*“The sun that gives its light to the green of the countryside is different from the one that shines on the sea. Different in its reflections: between light and shadow, it paints everything with Morandi’s enchanted metaphysics. A lizard stretches, motionless, as if to listen, contritely, to the conversation between the goldfinch and the blackbird, woven among the poplar leaves as a call, mysterious in its language and rhythm. When the heat gets sultry, the cicadas start their deafening concert. The birds are quiet; only the rooster from the coops, standing tall on his legs, his red crest high, responds with annoyance to so much chirping, as if it bothered his hens, crouching in the shade of the big, bitter-scented oleanders. The countryside sleeps; there is no whiff of a breeze, not even enough to send a shiver up the feather-light leaves of the acacias and of the willows, aligned in long rows on the ridges that lead to the valley. The hour is mine. I like to start my walks on the sleepy soil. The two dogs, Tobia and Argo, lead the way, their tongues lolling, until we reach the chestnut woods and we move into the shade, filled with forest scents”.*

The countryside sleeps (*The country blackbird the city blackbird*)

After crossing the Langa Valley, we come to a crossroads where we can turn left towards Mombercelli or right towards Belveglio, which will be the direction we take. We are in the Tiglione Valley in front of us and then, on the left side, Belveglio. When we reach a crossroads, we turn right in via Belveglio. Passing between the hills, we slowly climb.

On the left side, the Saracen Rock that recalls the historic episode of the battle of Aleramo. Towards the top, on the left, is located the birthplace of Venerable Brother Teodoreto. We keep going straight on the right side of the path, then we turn right and when we reach the next stop we continue on towards the town.

After a short distance, on the right, we return to our starting point.



## THE GREEN SEA

**Travel time:** on foot (30 minutes to 3 hours depending on the selected route) - **distance:** 1.5 to 10 Km

The visit the area Davide Lajolo loved to call “My green sea”, we have to move into the Special Natural Reservation of the Sarmassa Valley. Starting from Vinchio, we have to continue by car (5 minutes) or on foot (20 minutes), in the direction of Cortiglione, until we reach an open area where we see a wooden board indicating one of the accesses to the Reservation. Here, we can park and walk into the Protected Area. As soon as we step in it we are enveloped by the fascination of what Davide Lajolo called “my green sea”.

*“I would read on my grammar school books and, whenever I came here, or on the Saracen rock, I’d say to myself: “This is the way the sea must be, always the same as far as the eye can see” and, when I confronted the real sea and I sailed over it for days and nights in the spasm of war, I always yearned for the green sea of the Sermassa, the sea of my hometown.*

*And now, why should an American come in and steal that greenery and that dream from us? The red-haired man want to bring about a speculative tourist initiative in the Langhe, between Alba and Bossolasco. So even the hills richest in grapes and woods and greenery and oxygen and health, the most silent, solitary red and black earths of Italy will be infested by concrete?*

*Must Battistin della Sermassa and all farmers like him deny themselves and stop being farmers, wine growers and lumberjacks?*

*I know, I’ve known all the world’s storms, I’m in this one and I won’t withdraw, but right now I’m with the nightingale and I shiver with tenderness”.*

*(I Mé)*

To the left and right there is a sequence of plants, vineyards that seem to go on forever. We are south of the Tanaro river between the towns of Incisa Scapaccino, Vaglio Serra and Vinchio in a protected area instituted in 1993 to protect a territory someone wanted to ruin with a speculative development project. With his

words, Davide Lajolo gives us a particular key to interpret the story. In his books he narrates the Resistance as he lived, in first person, in these places; he describes the environment of the Reservation through the deeds of his fellow townsfolk, whom he calls “*I Mè*” like the title of one of his books. Every site is the protagonist of a real or imaginary event that can communicate something to the visitor like the Rù (oak) we see along the path and to our left, natural monument of the Reservation since 2000, where Lajolo places the legend of Clelia and Ariosto, the sad love story of two young people cut short by the plague of the early seventeenth century, told in “*Veder l'erba dalla parte delle radici*” “Seeing the grass from the side of the roots”:

*“A man who had escaped a city that had been ravaged by the plague came by the town. That foreign traveler said: “You need to climb the trees; the higher you climb, the harder you make it for the plague to catch you”.*

*So the farmers, gullible and in despair, fled their homes with their families, holding their children by the hand, and walked to the woods where the tallest trees were. They climbed along the branches with their children in their arms, on their shoulders, lovingly placing them on the branches, tying the youngest ones by their legs and their body. They were like chicks in the nest when they cannot yet fly. The branches barely supported them. The woods, the vineyards where trees stood were teeming with people.*

*“The plague won’t make it up here!” cried the mothers to each other to delude each other with their hope.*

*But plague did reach them, inexorably. The spots on the faces and hands, vomiting, the sense that the end was near, the upended eyes of the children. Indeed, the children started to fall off the trees, stone dead, and the mothers screamed and dropped off the trees to try to save their little ones, but once they got down the mothers were infected too: their bones broken, their hands and faces spotted. The plague took them while they hugged their little ones. So the townsfolk died, one after the other.*

*The deacon had been touched by the fate that had befallen an engaged couple who did not want to die, whatever the cost: Clelia and Ariosto. They ran together, holding hands, out of the town to reach the tallest oak tree in the Sermassa woods.*

*Clelia ran but she was already nearly out of breath, her face ghostly pale. Ariosto kept turning back to look at her while he tried to move faster. He could feel Clelia’s hands get cold and shiver in his own, and the faster he tried to run the more Clelia faded in his arms. He lifted her in his arms then, and carried her running outside*

*the farmhouses, down the bend of the Saracen valley, climbing the rock that leads to Monte del Mare between the sand and the shells, rushing onwards, panting up the path on the ridge where the Sermassa woods stand. Then down headlong in the middle of the chestnut leaves, holding Clelia tightly in his arms as she breathed low, her eyes half-closed, until he found the oak where the sparrow-hawks nested. He laid her down gently on the dry leaves and he whispered on her mouth: “Clelia, we’ve made it; wait for me just a moment, the time to climb the tree to make you a bed by weaving some branches together.”*

*Climbing like a squirrel, Ariosto reached the top of the oak after ripping the leaves to make a pillow for Clelia’s head. From above he called her: “Clelia, your bed is ready, I have found you the leaves to make you a pillow, I’m coming down to get you”, and he rolled down hugging the branches. When he got down on the ground, Clelia’s eyes were already empty: she was already motionless, killed by the plague. The spots had invaded her legs and face and they were fouling her face.*

*“Clelia!” cried Ariosto throwing himself on top of her.*

*He grabbed her small hand but he felt it lifeless. Ariosto started to scream.*

*“He howled,” writes the deacon “louder than a wolf. He howled and from the Sermassa woods that voice swelled on the small houses of the town. A heart-rending voice that terrified the few people spared by the plague. The howling voice was transformed; it was no longer human, but the plague’s own lugubrious call.*

*Ariosto howled and howled, hugging his Clelia tight, from morning until night. He howled until the plague made him stop. They found them after a long time, still holding each other tight.”*



Continuing along the path on the left we can see on the right-hand walls some fossil remains, bearing witness to the area's great importance not just from the historic, culture, naturalistic viewpoints, but also in terms of geo-paleontology. Is included in the highest part of the sedimentary complex known as Asti Pliocenic Basin. During a program of surveys and studies, sediments belonging to the formation of the Blue Clays and of the Sands of Asti were observed. The Clays represent the first deposit (Facies) of the Pliocene period (5-1.8 million years ago) and they are characterized by the return to a marine deposit environment that concludes the succession of lagoon and brackish facies of the chalky-sulfur formation (formation due to the gradual evaporation of the Mediterranean Sea, caused by the closing of the Straits of Gibraltar). They are made up of silty clays, easily identifiable by their grey-blue color. The Asti Sands are the consequence of the rise of the sea bottom that took place towards the end of the Pliocene, which caused a progressive shift from a "quiet" deposition of muddy deposit, to a "turbulent" accumulation of sands. This formation is characterized by yellowish sands that represent the product of marine deposits that took place at low depths (20-40 meters) and subjected to the intense action of the wave motion and of coastal currents. In the Sarmassa Valley it is possible to observe sandy walls that show numerous fossil remains of marine mollusks (bivalves, gastropods and scaphopods). After traveling a short distance within the Reservation, we return to the parking lot



and we continue on the paved road, taking the first path we meet on the right. Continuing along the path, we reach a fork where we go down on the right and then we find, on our left, the Lair also known as the Wizard's Castle, where Cisi lived as a recluse with his guilt feelings, in *"The country blackbird and the city blackbird"*.

*"Cisi's shelter had been called by everyone the wizard's castle (...). One day, with three friends, mustering all the courage we had, although we were already past grammar school, made up our minds - in the middle afternoon, of course, under the brightest sun of the day - to go meet Cisi with the hope that we could thus see the famous wizard's castle, since he had built it and lived in it. (...) We had just stopped nearly holding each other's hand, when suddenly Cisi's massive shape popped out of the woods. (...) Under the tufa had been dug out six large holds, as big as broom closets or small rooms, three above and three below. The top ones could be reached with stairs arranged any which way but straight, which could probably be climbed only by him. (...)*

*Cisi's story was truly grisly. (...) He was about thirty-five years old when, carrying home a hay cart pulled by an ox, with a five-year old nephew sitting on top of it, at a bend in the road a puff of wind, harbinger of a storm that bent the treetops, made the animal skittish. The ox raised himself on his front legs. All the hay moved to one side, then after being shaken again it toppled onto the road. The child fell right just ahead of the front wheel. The ox tugged on the ox and ran the child over. Cisi screamed even louder than child. He released the ox in a flash, he hit him with his stick until he ran away, the lifted the cart with his shoulder with tremendous strain and he succeeded in moving his nephew away from under the wheel. But the child's throat and belly had been ripped apart. He could barely breathe, he could not even moan; his eyes were fixed, stone-like, to look at his despairing uncle. Cisi took him in his arms. (...) He was more fond of the child than his mother and father were. Now he saw him suffer terribly. He could not bear the anguish, nor could he provide any relief so he took his sickle and he finished him. He gently laid him down on the hay, then he ran screaming into the woods, oblivious of the cart and ox. (...). Cisi was found in the woods by the carabinieri a week later. (...) Then there was the trial, the sentence to seven years because he was recognized as being mentally incapacitated, the hard jail time, the return to his town. (...) Afterwards, he built the wizard's castle and he totally isolated himself from people. (...) Since there were no boarding houses or homes for the elderly, Mamma Rosalia had made available a part of her house and above all her generosity. Cisi passed away in that house, clean, wearing new clothes, going out slowly like a candle".*

Il castello del mago (*Il merlo di campagna, il merlo di città*).





We go back up to the fork and we continue on our right; upon reaching another crossroads, we turn left. The wood in the higher part of the hills is less damp than in the valley and it comprises species adapted to dry conditions (xerophiles = organisms that like the sun and dry soils). In this habitat you can find tree species like bay oak, downy oak, turkey oak, and cherry. Shrub species present are the dog rose, hawthorn, bloodtwig dogwood and elderberry. In some parts, the natural wood was replaced by an acacia wood: a wood made up prevalently of *Robinia pseudoacacia*, a plant of North American origin introduced in Piedmont as a cultivated tree in 1750. The indigenous species present in the wood at the bottom of the valley are English oak and, in more humid areas, alder. The English oak normally appears to be a dominant state, because it reaches the highest elevations. Lime, elm, hedge maple and hornbeam. The underbrush is rich in mosses and ferns. We continue along the path until we reach Montedelmare where the Casotto di Ulisse (Ulysses' Shed) is located; this is a transitional place for the writer, because it was here that, in June 1944, Davide Lajolo gathered his first partisan Group. It was a fundamental time in his life, when he decided to "turn coat", i.e. to switch places and go from the ranks of the Fascists to those of the partisans, subsequently becoming comandante Ulisse. The partisan choice prevailed.

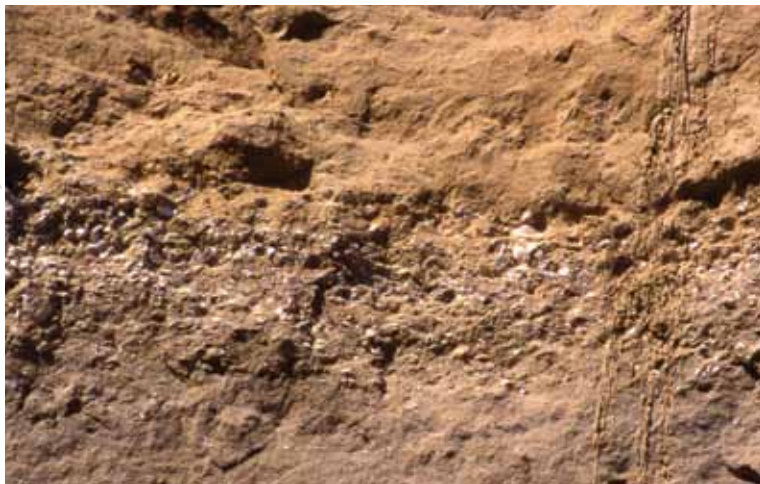
*“At last, he was able to understand the meaning of those two words, life and death; for many years, one had been as good as the other. To get himself out of a harsh life, he had been willing to stake it out even with death.*

*Only later, at his own expense, had he understood that abject poverty is not only material. Everything was more complicated, everything had to be questioned; no question had an easy answer. He had taken the plunge. It had happened at a certain time in his life. The most dramatic time, because to the general tragedy he added his inner crisis, when he had escaped to his hometown, with the absurd hope of crawling into the ground, like a worm, and disappear. And it was there, before his father’s face and the hills, that he found himself again and life started anew”. (How and why)*

From here to return to the parking lot we can take the paved road and turn left. Those who wish to enter the Reservation can follow the itineraries devised by the Asti Park Agency, marked by different colors. Another fascinating stop is sure to be the Bricco dei Tre Vescovi (Three Bishops’ Rock), where a milestone marks the junction of three dioceses (Alba, Acqui and Asti). The place is splendidly scenic, and two paths start from here. To reach it in a short time, you can take the paved road, turn right, then turn right again after a few hundred meters. In the lower part of the Protected Area, the Lago Blu (Blue Lake) is visible. In spite of its name, the Blue Lake should actually be classified as a “pond” because of its small size. Thanks to the total absence of pollutants, remarkable amphibian colonization has been possible. The observed species are the Toad, the Agile Frog and the Smooth Newt. Among the observable insects, numerous are the dragonflies, with their long



**18** streamlined body, who spend the initial part of their existence in the water, preferring still, stagnating water holes. With a bit of luck, in the pond you can view the water scorpion, recognizable by the presence of a long tail, which is the breathing pipe or siphon.



## THE DAVIDE LAJOLO MUSEUM

Via Capitan Lajolo, the street below Piazza San Marco, where the Town Hall is located, at number 12, we find the Davide Lajolo Culture Center, which includes the Museum dedicated to Davide Lajolo and the Town Library.

As we step inside the Museum, whose title is *Vinchio è il mio nido* (Vinchio is my nest), one of the writer's phrases, filled with love of his hometown, the impression we get is that the writer himself tells visitors the story of his life and his works. This was the intention of Laurana Lajolo, Davide's daughter, who reconstructed, clearly and precisely, her father's life through photographs, writings and autobiographic quotes from his books. The Museum is a journey through the writer's life, starting from his family, his partisan brothers in arms, the journalists of L'Unità, the Members of Parliament and lastly his writer and painter friends.

*“Vinchio was my nest. My roots must have been planted quite deep in this hilly land by my father and mother, for not a day has gone by in my life without my mind going back to the peach tree on St. Michael's Rock, to the Settefiglie meadows, to the shell-like rows of the Montedelmare vine. Even when I was at war, eleven breathless years among firefights and ambushes, not a day went by without my thoughts wandering back to the Saracen Rock, to the little valley of death.*

*I had learned in my childhood that war and death had visited those places, and that memory would flash back in the midst of the artillery bursts and under aerial strafing. At night, once my eyes got adjusted to the darkness, I would see once again the primroses and shivering lilies of the valley laying their carpets in the spring, on the slopes of the chestnut wood. The roots are deep, ancestral, bewitching, even morbid. Leaving always pained me, as if it marked a farewell with no return, be it when I left for my boarding school or the war fronts. I left my heart and feelings in the town. It was as if I could breathe free only in the midst of that dust, amongst the friendly plants, in the straight line following the vine rows, exactly as if only in those places could I let my imagination wander from one hill to the other, and take flight.*

*In no other place in the world have I ever felt this way again: not the sky over Paris, or over Athens, or in Beijing or Samarqand, or Marrakech or Beirut; no, never again.”*

Vinchio is my nest (*The country blackbird and the city blackbird*)

For Davide Lajolo, Vinchio is a microcosm that he, through his pen, allowed to dialog with the world through which he traveled for his political, journalistic, literary work. Within the hall, we can view the five sections where Davide Lajolo's life is summarized from left to right.

The sections are: *"I Mè"*, *"Il partigiano"*, *"Il giornalista"*, *"Il deputato"* and *"Lo scrittore"* (*"My People"*, *"The Partisan"*, *"The Journalist"*, *"The Member of Parliament"*, and *"The Writer"*). Closing it all, a stylized tree shape holds his book among its branches, to signify his great love for nature.

Davide "Ulisse" Lajolo lived his life in a rush and then reflected upon it in his writing, almost as if recovering its meaning through autobiographic reflection and literary transposition. A biographic journey emerges that is also the story of his generation, called upon to make historic decisions; the journey tracks some fundamental historic events that were personally experienced by Lajolo.

The Memorial House of the Resistance and political and civil deportation of the Province of Asti will soon be built in the spaces underneath the Museum and the Civic Library.



## DAVIDE LAJOLO, PARTISAN, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, WRITER

Davide Lajolo was born in Vinchio on July 29, 1912, “in the season of golden wheat”, from a farming family. He completed his humanistic studies in Salesian boarding schools.

Upon his return as a veteran from the Spanish Civil War, gripped by the illusory mystique of the Fascist revolution, he met some cadres of the regime and started his journalistic work at *Corriere Adriatico* in Ancona. He launched a poetry review, *Glauco*. As an officer in the Army, he took part in the wars in Greece and Albania. Even on the battlefields he kept on writing, mostly poems expressing his refusal of death and war and his loyalty to young fallen comrades. Returning to Vinchio, after September 8, 1943, he made the wrenching decision of “turning coat” and organizing the partisan guerrilla on his hills, taking up the fighting name of Ulisse. A recount of his conversion is found in “*Classe 1912*” (1945), reprinted in 1975 and in 1995 with the title “*A conquistare la rossa primavera*” (“To Conquer the Red Spring”) and in “*Il voltagabbana*” (“*The Turncoat*”) (1963).



Right after the Liberation of Italy, he went to be a journalist at *L'Unità* in Turin, quickly rising to bureau chief. In 1947 he moved, as Deputy Editor in Chief, to *L'Unità* in Milan and from 1949 to 1958 he was its editor in chief. He always remained close to the world of journalism, launching the sports paper *Il campione* (*The Champion*), editing *Giorni-Vie Nuove* in the Seventies, and regularly contributing to daily and weekly publications. For many years he was co-editor in chief of the review *Europa letteraria* (*Literary Europe*) with *Giancarlo Vigorelli*. In 1958 he was elected to the Chamber of Deputies with the Communist Party and he remained a Deputy for three terms, serving as whip and member of the RAI-TV Oversight Committee. In 1960, he published the well received biography of Cesare Pavese, "*Il vizio assurdo*" (*"An Absurd Vice"*, translated in many languages, and then all his best known books: "*I mè*" (*"My People"*), "*Il voltagabbana*" (*"The Turncoat"*), "*Veder l'erba dalla parte delle radici*" (*"Seeing the Grass from the Side of the Roots"*) (Winner of the 1977 Viareggio Award), the biographies of Fenoglio and Di Vittorio, "*Il diario 24 anni*" (*"Diary of 24 Years"*) (1945-1969), "*Il merlo di campagna e il merlo di città*" (*"The Country Blackbird and the City Blackbird"*), "*Gli uomini dell'arcobaleno*" (*"Men of the Rainbow"*), dedicated to his painter friends. He also carried out an intense activity as a consultant for the publishers Rizzoli, Sperling and Kupfer, Frassinelli. He ended his life, lived like an epic poem, the first day of summer, June 21, 1984. He is buried at the Vinchio cemetery, in the family tomb that bears the inscription he wanted: "*Dignità nella vita serenità nella morte*" (*"Dignity in life serenity in death"*).



## LAJOLO AND HIS HOMETOWN

Vinchio is a small town positioned on the barbera-producing hills between Monferrato and Langhe, which Davide Lajolo, in his books, transformed into a literary site.

Starting from Piazza San Marco, where two of the panels positioned along “The Paths of Freedom” that illustrate the time of the Resistance in this area are placed, we find the Confraternita della Santissima Trinità (Eighteenth Century façade), the baroque parish church of Saint Mark’s and the Town Hall. Behind the Town Hall, through a short path, we can climb on the rock to reach the place where the Castle of the Marquis Scarampi del Carretto once stood. Upon reaching the top, the view is spectacular all around. In the distance, we can see: Castelnuovo Calcea, Mombercelli, Vaglio Serra, San Marzano, Moasca, Calosso, Montegrosso, Agliano and other towns, farther away on the horizon. On the lay-by is situated the fourth area of the open-air Farming Museum, with the virtual reconstruction of the Castle, according to the description of the Nineteenth Century historian De Canis, with the reproduction of Gonin’s etching and of the building’s structure with the inner rooms and some preserved relics (pieces of walls, rocks, a millstone). On the side, there is one of the panels positioned along “The Paths of Freedom”, where the first muster of the partisan group is remembered.

The town’s name comes from the Roman name *Viginti* (*Twenty*), i.e. a site located twenty miles from Alba Pompeia, where the road that passed through the town led. Through the Noche hamlet also passed a pilgrimage route to Santiago di Compostela.

The age of the City States (Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries), was a very prosperous age and between the Fifteenth and the Seventeenth Century Vinchio became imperial fiefdom of Langa under the Duchy of Milan, together with other towns known as “imperial lands”. From 1731 onwards, the territory came under the House of Savoy.

The territory is highly protected, and in fact the Town has obtained the ISO 14001 environmental certification and the EMAS registration. Vinchio’s typical products are its wines: barbera, freisa, cortese, just to mention the most renowned; and also truffles, mushrooms,



asparagus, cultivated cardoon and now olive trees too.

During the year, several fixed cultural and wine and food related events take place; among them: in May, the Feast of the Saracen Asparagus and *La Notte dei Saraceni (The Night of the Saraceni)* - a historical reconstruction to remember the victory won at Aleramo in 935 in Vinchio's territory; three events from June to August related to the theater, music, poetry, on *Davide Lajolo's Literary Itineraries: On the Fifty-year Rock, With the Moon in the Saracen Woods, Ulisse on the hills - nature, music, art, poetry*; in July, *Pagan Cinema*, a movie festival; in August, the Feast of the Associated Winegrowers' Cellar and of the Special Natural Reservation of the Sarmassa Valley.

This is how Lajolo describes Vinchio in winter and in summer:

*In the winter, under the snow and frost, the hills of Monferrato take on the appearance of mountains. The snow-covered rumps, the trees white with frost, replacing the leaves, the vine rows muffled with snow, roads and paths all covered, everything looks like a land to be explored. And yet at night, in the light of the moon, that astral landscape has always captured me in its magic and since I was a child I have always wanted to brave the cold at all costs, leaning out of the window to contemplate it. In the light of the moon, white became an infinite color. Can infinite colors even exist? Well, for me that's the way it was. That single color did not make me melancholy or evoke any desolation in me. I would think of heaven then; it seemed as if white angels flew over it and as is a music filled with unrepeatable harmonies emanated from the snow-decked steeple, instead of the ringing of each passing hour.” (The country blackbird and the city blackbird)*

*“The countryside bursts with its green and flowers. It is the season when everything germinates, branches get longer, leaves multiply. I take a tour of the Monferrato hills. A short way from my rocks, I see the tall and dark rumps of the Langhe. The sky is clear, the sun is high, the paved roads, in the middle of the luscious vegetation, down below, look like silver streamers.*





*The silence of the countryside is broken only by the blackbirds, the greenfinches, the nightingales calling each other, while the newborn chicks' tremulous chirps can barely be heard. I walk up a path carpeted with grass.*

*All around stand acacia trees, the branches hanging down, loaded by the weight of the sweet-scented, clustered white flowers. I walk as in a dream, as if the world of men and the voices and noises and the worries and anxieties and stresses were non-existent things.*

*I discover new flowers. The wild lilies in their stubborn blue and the clover with round, red and sky-blue flowers, and thousands of daisies grown like hedges between which rise the red poppies that tower over them in their conceit. But so many other flowers, whose name escapes me, mingle with the tiny forget-me-nots. Their properties and scent are known only to the bees". (The country blackbird and the city blackbird)*

Descending along the panoramic stairs that connect Piazza San Marco and Piazza Vercelli, we find Davide Lajolo's bust, dedicated to him by the sculptor Floriano Bodini (1933-2005). The bronze monument was unveiled in 1990 and it depicts the writer with a proud, stern bearing. It should be noted that the bust is adorned in its lower front part by a laurel branch, signifying fame, and on the rear base by a vine shoot, signifying the roots that inspired his literature.







Educational proposals and tourist packages

### GETTING TO KNOW THE TERRITORY BETWEEN LANGA AND MONFERRATO THROUGH LITERATURE

*Literary itineraries of Cesare Pavese, Davide Lajolo and Beppe Fenoglio*

### FROM THE PLIOCENE TO THE SARACENS

*The land tells its tale*

### FROM THE VINEYARD TO THE CELLAR

*The cycle of the vine and wine-making processes*

Activities will be carried out at a single meeting or several meetings of variable duration, depending on each participant's requirements. Full or half-days can be arranged.



## WEEK END SOLUTIONS

### GETTING TO KNOW THE TERRITORY BETWEEN LANGA AND MONFERRATO THROUGH LITERATURE (Pavese, Lajolo, Fenoglio)

**1<sup>st</sup> day:** tour of the Davide Lajolo Museum (Vinchio) and of the literary sites within the Special Natural Reservation of the Sarmassa Valley, managed by the Asti Park Agency; lunch with local specialties; tour of Cesare Pavese's birth place and the Cesare Pavese study Center (Santo Stefano Belbo) with the opportunity to see the sites of *The Moon and the Bonfires*; lunch with local specialties; overnight stay at the hostel or bed & breakfast in Vinchio.

**2<sup>nd</sup> day:** tour of the Pavaglione Farmhouse and of the sites of "La malora" (San Bovo di Castino).

### VINCHIO AND ASTI- Davide Lajolo and Vittorio Alfieri

**1<sup>st</sup> day:** Sampling the best wines of the Asti area at the Associated Winegrowers' Cellar of Vinchio and Vaglio and tour of the facility; tour of the Davide Lajolo Museum (Vinchio); lunch with local specialties; naturalistic-





paleontological excursion in the Special Natural Reservation of Val Sarmassa along Davide Lajolo's literary sites; dinner with local specialties; overnight stay at the hostel or bed & breakfast in Vinchio.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> day:

Itinerary dedicated to Vittorio Alfieri in Asti; lunch with local specialties; tour of the city center.

## A CULTURE AND NATURE WEEK END

### 1<sup>st</sup> day:

(Vinchio) - Sampling the best wines of the Asti area at the Associated Winegrowers' Cellar of Vinchio and Vaglio and tour of the facility - Tour of the Davide Lajolo Museum; lunch with local specialties. Naturalistic-paleontological excursion in the Special Natural Reservation of Val Sarmassa along Davide Lajolo's literary sites.

Dinner with local specialties. Overnight stay.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> day

(Valleandona) At the headquarters of the Special Natural Reservation of Valle Andona Valle Botto and Val Grande managed by the Asti Park Agency, there will be a brief

multimedia presentation on the Park Agency, on the Reservation and on the activities carried out in the other protected areas in the vicinity of Asti. The geological evolution of the area will then be reconstructed from its origin to its current morphology, moving from the observation to the reconstruction of Northern Italy in the Pliocene, to the land's emergence from the sea in the Villafranchian age. Additionally, an explanation will be provided of the different types of fossilization, also through the finds preserved in the museum hall: mollusks, phyllites and remains of Whales and Dolphins. Lunch with local specialties. Naturalistic walk through the Reservation to admire fossiliferous outcrops.

Green weeks, dedicated to nature and culture, can be planned.

**Information and reservation:**

**WELCOME PIEMONTE**

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Associazione Culturale Davide Lajolo onlus was instituted by express wish of the family and of the Town of Vinchio on July 3, 1998. It is a not-for-profit organization and it pursues the following goals, in accordance with Article 3 of its Bylaws, set out below:

- To promote knowledge of the work and activities carried out by Davide Lajolo, journalist, writer and politician, domestically and internationally. For this purpose it intends to acquire, preserve and catalog materials, manuscripts, letters, books, in addition to those already owned by the family, and to collect the documentation and research pertaining to the writer's life and work, assuring that they are available for viewing particularly for young people and students;

- To promote studies, conferences, publications, research, lectures, lessons on Davide Lajolo;

- To promote the inventorying and cataloging of the writer's library, archive, painting collection for the purpose of their consultation by scholars;

- To promote the study and knowledge of the economical, social and environmental structures of the territory of Monferrato, in order to contribute to its appreciation and to the balanced process of its development;

- To promote historical and ethno-anthropological studies on the traditions of Monferrato, promoting the image of the sites and contributing to their cultural and environmental growth, taking into account the contribution provided by Davide Lajolo's work as a storyteller;

- To promote studies, research and Initiatives in literature, publishing, political culture, journalism and communication, all fields where Davide Lajolo worked;

- To manage the publication of volumes, periodicals, monographs, CD-Rom and new technology products;

- To organize seminars, courses, conferences, lectures, exhibitions and other forms of cultural communication;

- To provide information on the Association's activities through traditional media and the Internet;

- To promote young artists and writers with the aim of building a local and regional network to sensitize the territory and its inhabitants to the management of the cultural resources in their possession.

The seat of the Association is in Vinchio (AT) In the home that once belonged to Rosetta and Davide Lajolo.

The Association has honorary, ordinary (10 Euro) and supporting (50 Euro) members.

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