

# Thoughts on the Ticino in winter

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Le 5 février, le beau village enneigé de Scuol, dans la Basse-Engadine, livre aux flammes le « Hom Strom », gigantesque bonhomme de paille, au moment où l'hiver commence à décliner. – Le 1<sup>er</sup> mars, tout l'Engadine, en particulier Saint-Moritz, Samedan, Scuol et d'autres stations de sports d'hiver retentiront des cris joyeux de la « Chalanda Mars », la fête de la jeunesse. – Au Tessin, au cours de la première semaine de février, d'immenses marmites de risotto fumant et odorant seront offertes en plein air à l'appétit des badauds à Lugano, Castagnola, Paradiso, Massagno, Locarno et Ascona.

## AUSSTELLUNGEN ANGEWANDTER KUNST

Seit dem Jahre 1918 veranstaltet das Eidgenössische Departement des Innern alljährlich einen Stipendienwettbewerb für angewandte Kunst, der die Förderung und Hebung des schweizerischen Formschaffens auf den vielfältigen Gebieten des künstlerischen Gewerbes bezweckt. Im wesentlichen betrifft dies die Werbe- und Illustrationsgraphik, die Photographie, Gebrauchsgeräte und Möbel, Textilien, Keramik, Schmuck, Buchbinderei, Bühnenbilder. Die von der Eidgenössischen Kommission für angewandte Kunst mit Stipendien und Aufmunterungspreisen bedachten Arbeiten werden jeweils im Kantonalen Gewerbemuseum in Bern ausgestellt. Dieses Jahr dauert diese Ausstellung vom 24. Februar bis 12. März. Ebenfalls in Bern, und zwar in der Zeit vom 4. bis 12. März, wird in der Berner Schulwarte im Rahmen der « Foto-Ausstellung FIAP » eine Kollektion von gegen 200 Photos gezeigt. FIAP ist die « Fédération internationale de l'art photographique », der über 50 Landesverbände angehören. Die Photoamateure der angeschlossenen Länder reichen jeweils auf den Zeitpunkt der alle zwei Jahre wiederkehrenden Schwarzweiss-Kongresse der FIAP ihre besten Bilder zur Bewertung ein. Was am Kongress 1966 in Moss (Norwegen) die Bewertung bestanden und auch eine neuerliche Prüfung in Bern glücklich passiert hat, wird nun samt einer Anzahl aus einer erstmals durchgeführten Jugend-Biennale erfolgreich hervorgegangener Aufnahmen dem Besucher der Ausstellung dargeboten. – Einer Art angewandter Kunst dürfen auch die Zürcher Poststempel zugezählt werden, die, der Sammlung von Alfred Müller (Zürich) entstammend, als Sonderausstellung des Schweizerischen PTT-Museums in Bern vom 1. März bis 30. April gezeigt werden.

STANLEY MASON

## THOUGHTS ON THE TICINO IN WINTER

Perhaps it is only natural that, rising on cold northern mornings when windows open on the blank walls of the mist, one should think of the Ticino. Autumn is longer there, and it is October before they gather the purple-black grapes. And even when winter comes, when the cold beleaguers the high valleys, the lakes still mitigate its onset. Temperatures are never killing, as they are in the North. The palms survive them, the rosemary grows from year to year into great bushes that are hardly ever cut back by frost, and by February the first camellias are in bloom. Above all, damp and chilling mists rarely descend, frosts can only leave their mark where mountains cast lasting shade, and throughout the winter there are days of crisp, bright sun that would seem to many a Northerner a delicious foretaste of spring.

Snow falls, of course, even here, first powdering the peaks, then descending lower. Finally it drapes the plain, but seldom stays long. Snowfields await the skier on the heights. Excellent skiing facilities are offered by the higher reaches of the Leventina; and even in Locarno the enthusiast can be up on the white slopes within half an hour. Yet skiing has not yet become the huge organized sport it is north of the Alps or in the high mountains of Austria, France or Italy. For one thing it is difficult here to believe, really believe, in the winter; buds waiting to burst and the ever returning brilliance of a winter sun keep spring too conspicuously on the brink of one's expectations.

The interstitial seasons of late autumn and early spring here have their particular and inimitable charm. When the wooded slopes are stained with reds and ochres, or again when the first green begins to kindle across them, the snow-tipped mountains make a setting of delicate and moving beauty. Both autumn and spring bring many translucent days when, seen

## ZU FRÜHE BOTSCHAFT

*Schneemänner beginnen zu schmelzen.  
Die Bäche steigen an.  
Heraus aus den Kellern die Stelzen  
und Dreirad und Rollschubgespann!*

*Fussspuren zerfliessen im Eise.  
Dann über Nacht fiel Schnee.  
Eine Möwe zieht schreiend Kreise.  
Kein Spiegelbild gleitet im See.*

*Der Honig in bauchigen Gläsern  
ist zuckrig kristallisiert  
und ein Fenster mit Blumen und Gräsern  
aus dem Wintermärchen verziert.*

*Die Bäche gefrieren wieder.  
Der Schneemann steht starr und schwer.  
Die Möwe trägt Schnee im Gefieder,  
und der Brunnen ist still und leer.*

*Tief in den Kellern der Erde  
wachsen Februar, März und April  
und ein Wagen und hölzerne Pferde,  
weil der Frühling bald herfahren will.*

ALBERT EHRLSMANN

from the lakes especially, the morning over water and hills has all the indescribable charm of a landscape on some Japanese plate, and Pizzo Vogorno seems almost to steal the thunder of Fujiyama.

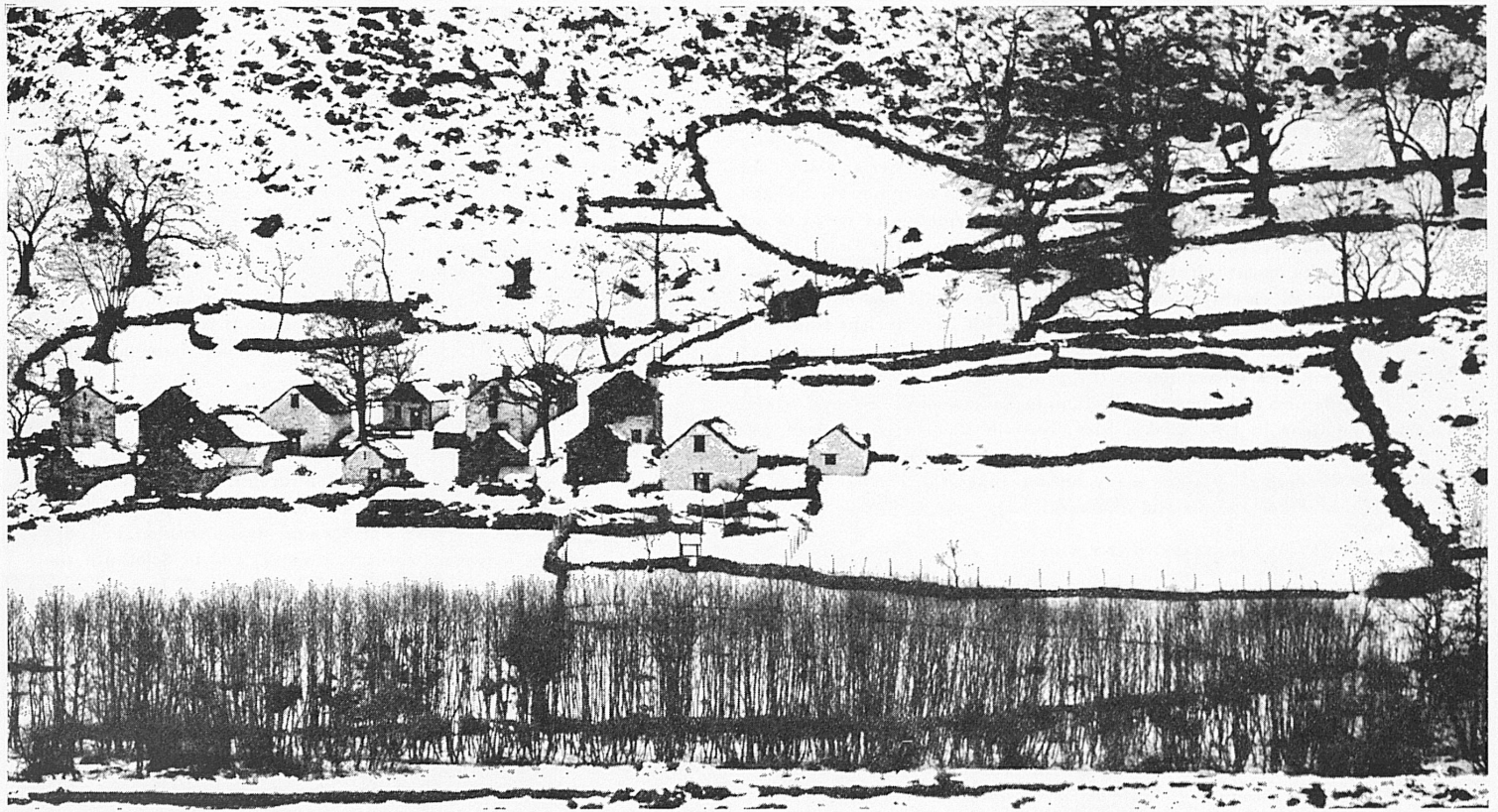
Even mid-winter has aspects of its own that are worth treasuring, traditions and customs of rich individuality. Now life draws closer around the fire, and the hearth becomes the centre of an age-old local culture. This winter life about the hearth was once common to all Europe, and memories of it still live on in prose and verse, perhaps nowhere more evocative than in Shakespeare's lines:

When icicles hang by the wall,  
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,  
And Tom bears logs into the hall,  
And milk comes frozen home in pail...

Yet while the open fireplace lasted long in Britain, it began to lose its cultural identity over a century ago, and only in old feudal manors and rare cottages can the fine old hearths still be found upon whose blazing logs the roasted crabs once hissed in the bowl.

In the Ticino the old hearth is dying only in our own days and is still an attribute of the stone Ticinesan house, just as much as the wooden loggia, the portico or the soil-floored cellar accessible from outside. In the remoter villages cooking may still be done even today on the open fire, although the ugly blessings of the *cucina economica*, the cast-iron stove, have long been spreading at alarming speed.

The Ticinesan fireplace is meant for burning wood, since the coal that came into use a century ago in northern countries is nowhere to be found



*Winter im Hinterland von Locarno. Photo Flammer*  
*L'hiver dans l'arrière-pays de Locarno*  
*Inverno nel retroterra di Locarno*  
*Winter in hinterland of Locarno, Ticino*

in these valleys. The hearth is a stone construction and may have an ingle-nook with a stone seat. The fuel burnt is often chestnut, the Ticinesan tree which previously met so many of the needs of a simple and frugal people: its dried leaves replaced straw in the stables, its wood provided furniture and fuel, its nuts were one of the staples of a rural diet. All the family cooking used to be done on this open fire, and a whole arsenal of cauldrons, pots and fire utensils in copper and iron served this purpose. Today many of these handmade vessels have wandered north, where they decorate walls or hold flowers; others lie collecting dust in murky Ticinesan cellars; and a few are still in use, and still reflect the red glow of the leaping flames.

Foremost among them is the *paiuolo*, the cauldron used for making the best-known of all Ticinesan dishes, *polenta*. It is a copper vessel that widens upwards and is hung by its iron handle from a hook above the fire. Polenta in its simple form consists only of maize flour, water and salt. It is cooked and stirred with a long wooden mixer till it finally becomes a consistent mass that can be turned out on to a flat wickerwork plate. On this it is cut into portions with a cord or a wooden knife. In the old days polenta was often eaten with milk alone; in our own more affluent times it is frequently served with meat and gravy. But however it happens to be served, polenta has a healthy rustic aroma that blends to perfection with the setting of a stone fireplace and crackling logs in a low-beamed Ticinesan kitchen.

While polenta is still widely eaten, the chestnut already belongs largely to the past. In the village life of yesteryear each family would sally forth in autumn to collect the fallen chestnuts in its own piece of woodland. The task was as painful to the hands as it was rewarding to the eye. The sharp spikes of the burrs hidden in the dry foliage pricked the fingers; but the new chestnuts, freed from their green prison, glowed in opulent reds and browns like jewels. Like Thomas Love Peacock's sheep, the mountain chestnuts are sweeter, but the valley chestnuts are fatter; and the simple Ticinesan peasant folk deemed it meeter to carry off both.

Chestnuts are either roasted or boiled while they are fresh or are dried for later use. A special iron pan with an open, barred bottom is used for roasting them; it is suspended from a hook, while a long handle enables

it to be moved over the red-hot embers. Naturally, the chestnuts must be nicked with a knife before they are roasted; otherwise they may explode with some violence, and the searingly hot contents can cause quite serious burns.

The evening meals at which whole families sit around the fire eating roast chestnuts and drinking wine from the typical Ticinesan wine-cup, the *boccalino*, have today become a rarity. Chestnuts are still eaten, of course, and boiled chestnuts in milk can still be a tasty and satisfying countryman's meal; but it gives the housewife far more trouble to prepare than the ready-made food available from the local shop, and in any case the chestnut trees of the Ticino have in recent years become the prey of an insidious disease for which there is no cure but large-scale replacement by more resistant strains. Thus old customs die, as even the remote valleys gradually get geared to the motor-car and the television set, to the self-service shop and the pattern of the life of tomorrow.

One ought not really to mourn unduly the passing of such customs. Life in the Ticinesan valleys, and on the romantic shores of the lakes, is less hard today than it used to be. The beauties of the landscape, the blessings of a mild climate and the relics of centuries of culture have been made accessible to the tourist, who in his turn has helped to bring a measure of prosperity to the local populace. These too are real benefits which we should not leave out of account.

The complete tourist will therefore keep a weather eye open for the vestiges of a dying culture, and will relish them without sorrowing too much over their loss. They still leave their traces everywhere, and a few words with the older inhabitants, especially in the more remote villages, will soon bring a wealth of old-time lore to light. Wherever one comes across yellow corn cobs hanging in the shelter of umber wooden loggias, there is sure to be somebody who can still tell the story of how, in the old days, the villagers would gather in the barns of an evening to strip the cobs and prepare them for hanging by their husks. And those who are lucky may still come across some artisan who sits in a low doorway plaiting the wicker of the Ticinesan basket, the *gerla*, his brown fingers skilfully interweaving supple strips of white wood that shine in the winter sun.