

The greatest truffle in the world ***(The hills of San Miniato in the Guinness Book of Records)***



Presentation

The leaning tower of Pisa and its “Piazza dei Miracoli” are internationally recognized as a symbol of Pisa and one of the most important monuments of Italy. In some countries people even go as far as considering this tower the most important Italian monument. Such an impression on its own does not convey the total value of a territory like the Pisan territory which is built on the harmonic relationship between its history, its arts, its environment, its country sides together with its nature in general. The San Miniato hills, immersed in the spectacular country side of the heart of Tuscany are good example of the above mentioned harmony. These hills, because of their mysterious combination of forestall vegetation and geological substratum are one of the few producing zones of the much cherished white truffle which is an underground mushroom usually referred to as “The King’s food”. The San Miniato truffle as their name suggest are specific regional variety which represents an old tradition born within the medieval age and passed down from generation to generation. Each of these generations has had its own secret and its ow unique hunting dogs. Thanks to the work of the various generations the white truffle today enriches tables in the world’s best restaurants and adds a lot to the already very rich local gastronomy. Truffle collector’s research shown that the San Miniato hills hold the Guinness record for the world’s biggest white truffle (more than 2,5 Kg) found in 1954 and given as a present to the then U.S.A. President. Meticulous research on this episode have led to the publication of a collections of anecdotes, photographs and documentation as well as historic quotation. The story of this episode narrates events in a very simple way, thus bringing to light the details of truffle hunters of that era. The publication of this story which is a continuity of “I tartufi della Provincia di Pisa” in our opinion represents an important operation for both historical and cultural reasons – that is in addition to marketing reasons. The availability of interacting emotively with a vast population of tourists and sympathisers from within and without Italy helps to spread the first hand knowledge of this marvellous products as its importance to gastronomy as well as products. In addition this is a good way of letting everyone know about the people, the lands and all the other typical products of the San Miniato hills. The International White Truffle Week of the San Miniato hills was instituted in 2003 with the aim of coordinating the trade Fairs of Volterra, Palaia and San Miniato. This is certainly a good moment to present the publication and thank the authors who have put in everything possible to have the work done.

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*Chairman of the Production Committee
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The greatest truffle in the world

(The hills of San Miniato in the Guinness Book of Records)

It is here, in the hills of San Miniato¹ that you can find the most scented and most exquisite white truffle (its scientific name is *Tuber Magnatum Pico*) of Italy. Not only of Italy but of the whole world, since in our country we boast about our exclusive research of this precious truffle. The white truffle is the unquestionable King of all truffles, as we can deduct from the high price at which it is sold and its penetrating and unmistakable smell. In the valleys and hills of this area, in the heart of Tuscany, from September to December you can find in abundance the “food of the gods”. Every year, several hundreds kilos are collected. That is about one third of the whole national production, and therefore the world production. The environment is ideal: vegetation and trees growing together, the right soil, the perfect climate, an ecologically uncontaminated *habitat*. The truffle men of the province of Pisa are about 1700 (half of those of the whole Tuscany), and every day with their loyal dogs they go in search of truffles in the ditches, valleys, forests, fields, along the streams and the canals. San Miniato is the centre of this area with its truffle producing zones of Valdegola, south of Pisa; with its sellers, who sell the “precious fruit” to the whole world; with the important National Trade Fair of the White Truffle of the San Miniato hills, which started in 1969 and every year attracts several thousands of visitors. Nowadays, we can also have other Festivals in this area: Balconevisi (since 1980), Corazzano (since 1987), Cigoli (since 1999). Moreover other events are organized from quite a number of years in Volterra, Palaia, Forcoli, Montaione. The three most important areas for the truffle, together with San Miniato, are the area of Alba and that of Acqualegna. There is often competition between these two to exalt the best truffle. Without doubt, San Miniato is perfect area of production, while often the market is more developed in the other two areas where the truffles of San Miniato are sold as truffles of Alba. That is why the competition and provocations on TV are quite frequent. Anyway, our truffle is not afraid of competitions as far as its scent and its taste are concerned, and it is appreciated by the most refined cooks, all over Italy. There is also some debate on the record: which is the most important truffle festival? And which is the biggest white truffle of the year and of all times? Well, regarding this last question, we think we have the answer; because we are convinced that the most precious white truffle to be registered in the Guinness Book of Records should be that of San

¹ In the hills of San Miniato the following Municipalities are added after a regional decision: Municipality of Bientina, Calcinaiia, Capannoli, Casciana Terme, Castelfranco di Sotto, Chianni, Crespina, Laiatico, Lari, Lorenzana, Montecatini Val di Cecina, Montopoli Valdarno, Palaia, Peccioli, Ponsacco, Pontedera, San Miniato, Santa Croce sull'Arno, Santa Maria a Monte, Terricciola and Volterra in the Province of Pisa; Barberino Val d'Elsa, Castelfiorentino, Cerreto Guidi, Certaldo, Empoli, Fucecchio, Gambassi, Montaione, Montelupo Fiorentino, Montespertoli e Tavarnelle Val di Pesa in the province of Florence.

Miniato. That is why we report a passage of a book written by Umberto Marini, author of many publications on the truffle and credible judge in this dispute because he is from the area of Acqualagna: “The precious white truffle (*Magnatum Pico*) which holds the record for its weight was given in 1954 to the President of the United States by the merchant of Alba Giacomo Morra; its weight was 2520 grams and it was picked in San Miniato”. Therefore, the stamen is clear and undoubted, as other sources have confirmed: the largest truffle was picked in San Miniato. This fact pushed us, years ago to investigate and go back to when this truffle was picked in our area. Therefore, we have worked in order to unveil this mystery which has existed for half a century. The exceptionality of its weight attracted our curiosity. In fact, the weight of the white truffle varies from a few grams to some hundreds of grams, rising in a few exceptional cases to about a kilo, as we saw in 1999 during the trade fair of San Miniato. If the truffle is white, called after its colour, it is “the diamond of the table”. We have been looking for the biggest diamond of all times, and we can say that after about 50 years we have found it. In order to arrive to this conclusion, we started from more general considerations which we think are worth mentioning. For more than a century the truffle has been a very important resource for San Miniato and the areas around it. Our grandparents used to tell us that many truffles, quite big at times, used to be found by pigs which were bred outdoors in the field. The pigs used to dig out the precious fruit and ate them. Sometimes the truffles were found by the farmers who filled up their baskets and gave them to the pigs. The discovery of the great commercial importance of the truffle in our area, took place only towards the end of 1800s. We have various theories for this. The first is that at the end of the 1800s and the beginning of 1900s, experts arrived on ditches, from Romagna and settled in the area of Valdegola and Valdera. It was them with their dogs who taught us the art of truffle hunting. The pioneers were Stagnazza, Giacchetta, Paolo, Tego, (remembered by their names and nicknames), who settled in Balconevisi, Corazzano, Palaia. We have only a vague memory of these first adventurous trips from Romagna. It is said that they arrived after various days’ walks, crossing the train. Every autumn, the people from Romagna returned and stayed, in the best occasion, with the local families. Often they left their dogs with families in other parts of Valdegola and returned to take them the following season. Friendships were born in this way and people even found their spouses in this manner. The most emblematic example is that of Stanislao Costa, called Stagnazza, born in Casola Valsenio in 1875, on the Apennines, in the province of Ravenna. He probably was a baker. He arrived in Balconevisi between the end and the beginning of the last two centuries with three other truffle men. He got engaged and then married Amelia Pieragnoli in 1902, and settled there for ever. Therefore, it seems that the search of truffles was encouraged by the presence of Stagnazza and the other people from Romagna. Probably their dogs were Lagotti with curly hair, patched fur, of medium size and a robust chest, like some photos of the period confirm: we should not forget that this type of dog, at the beginning of the century was common of the valley of Santerno, Lamone and Senio, that is Stanislao Costa’s area of origin. This kind of dog has often been crossbred with the local dogs and in our areas we have never opted for a particular kind of truffle dog. In fact, our best truffle dogs are bastards and of various types. Every family of Balconevisi and the near areas, had two or three dogs which they kept indoors. The second theory sustains that the seeds of the truffle hunt were sown here. Actually Eugenio Gazzarrini (1885), who lived down the slope of Balconevisi, started looking for truffles at the age of 15. Not only that, but after some time he started selling truffle dogs and maybe from there we have the origins of the collection and the commercialisation of truffles. The Gazzarrini family, used to manage the ovens for various factories since the middle of the 800s, something that was continuously done for another 100 years. Nevertheless, Eugenio was very enterprising, so he also started dealing with hunting and trading truffles. The business of the ovens was not a steady job and often the workers and Gazzarrini himself, had to go to work in Piemonte.

Maybe that is the reason why he became conscious of the fact that not only Alba and the area around it but also San Miniato could be fruitful from the truffle point of view. He took up the trade of this product and was the pioneer of the whole area. He sent not only fresh truffles but also preserved to northern Italy. He wrapped the boxes on his own and he sent them via mail or train in the first years of the century.

In 1924 Eugenio Gazzarrini was awarded a prize in the Mostra Circondariale for the “preservation of white truffles in boxes”. We can of course deduce that the two theories are compatible: both the experience of the people from Romagna as well as the enterprising spirit of Eugenio Gazzarrini have undoubtedly played a decisive role in starting off this difficult art in San Miniato. Gazzarrini was able to manage his affairs as a seller: he also had a reference point in San Miniato, in a little shop, near Via della Cisterna, which no longer exists. That shop was run probably by Emilio Ercolani, “il trillo. Nearby there were also other truffle sellers, Giorgio and Giacomo from San Miniato and others from Balconevisi: Tonelli, Pancanti, Cecconi, (but after some time only Gazzarrini remained) who traded truffles all over Italy: Milan, Turin, Rome. Traders from Alba such as Morra would contact Gazzarrini for supplies of even 2 or 3 hundred kilos per time. Moreover, Gazzarrini often used to host Morra who only returned to Alba after he had got the required supply of truffles. Many buyers all over Italy used to come to San Miniato; we remember Agostino Bonora from Bologna who used to come twice a week; Galli and Riva from Milan, Ugo Merciai, Leonarda Prococci from Florence, Antonio Fava, Ferdinando Grazioli and other local traders such as “Balilla” from Certaldo, Milani from Castelfiorentino.

In the 1920s Primo Novembre known as “Giorgio” who ran the restaurant – “la Tazza d’Oro” in Bonaparte Square, gave a magnificent truffle to king Vittorio Emanuele. He only got back a formal work of thanks and since he was not accepted amongst the official suppliers of the Royal House, he did not offer other truffles. Among the typical figures of the truffle hunters, we remember “il monchino”, Italo Boschi or Vasco Cerri, seller of precious perfumed “balls” at low price in Seminario Square. As time went by, more and more people took up this seasonal activity. Almost all of them were farmers or woodcutters whom with this extra activity earned some extra money and managed to feed their big families. We can say that the truffle collection helped Gazzarrini were involved (Cecconi and Gemignani themselves), as well as those who collaborated for the sending, bringing the truffles to the train station by bike. Towards the 30s Leonardo Gemignani who supplied a little shop in Balconevisi and therefore had less difficulty in the search of the truffle started a business on his own, following the example of Costagli de La Serra. In that period, truffles were common and each searcher picked even more than a kilo per day. Only Gazzarrini himself collected up to 70-80 kilos daily. 10-12 of these were collected in Bucciano, 25-30 in Corazzano and the rest in Balconevisi. Gemignani traded in 1940, 741 kilos of white truffle, the following year 537 and in 1942, 946 kilos. We should consider that since Gazzarrini had many more truffle men he could as well double these numbers.

After these details, our researches have been concentrated in Valdegola and focused on Balconevisi, a place 6 km from San Miniato, hometown of Stagnazza, where the vendors Gazzarrini and Gemignani operated. These two, remembering what Marini had written about the biggest truffle, conferred the truffles to the trader from Alba called Morra. The truffles were many more than in respect to nowadays; we cannot even make a comparison. We could say that every family of Balconevisi used to go and collect truffles. They started off when it was still dark in order to anticipate the other searchers and in order to be in time for work in the morning. They walked in dark paths and roads together with their loyal dogs. The truffle for these areas was manna from heaven; in a period of extreme poverty, it helped quite a number of families to survive and to have an extra income rather than just that low one, which came from the work of the land or of the woods. The dog was a precious

belonging and often lived in Balconevisi, at home with the rest of the family. Only from the notebooks of Gemignani we see that in the beginning of the 50s, the truffle men of Balconevisi were 100 out of 900 inhabitants. Many of them lived in the farms around the village, in Buecchio, Fornacino, Montoderi, Collegalli. Gazzarrini and Gemignani traded hundreds of kilos of local truffles. The truffles arriving from Montaione, Volterra, Chiecina, Palaia are not included. Considering only those picked in Balconevisi by Gemignani, we can see that they are several hundreds in 1951 and 1952, and the number even tripled in 1954. From Gemignani's notebooks where he registered the deliveries, we can have a list of the leadership in 1954, an exceptional year in which various truffle men gathered several kilos of product. Amongst these we can name Secondo Faticcioni, his brother Primo, (called Maso), Romeo Nannetti, from Buecchio and his whole family (called Rabai) and others who gathered more than 20 kilos. In that period the truffles were bought at L. 3000 to L. 6000 per kilo, according to the period of the season which went from the middle of August to the middle of January. The peak time of the harvest was in November with 210 kilos. Therefore, 1954 was an exceptional year and it was then that Balconevisi had the record of all records of the white truffle. But why haven't we ever found the searcher of the marvellous truffle? Some say that there has been a secret agreement between the trader, the local seller and the truffle man to keep the name secret. The fact that the truffle given to the President by someone from Alba was actually a truffle from San Miniato had to remain a secret, that is why it may have remained so with the help of a great amount of money. Nobody had ever revealed this secret and we have not succeeded in finding out anything from the sellers of Valdegola. Everybody has always known that the record truffle was from Valdegola but the name of the hunter has never been revealed. Maybe the truffle man kept the secret within his family because nobody remembers that incredible truffle. On the other hand, the truffle man's nature is the opposite of that of the traditional hunter. The traditional hunter boasts about his prey, whereas the truffle man keeps his findings and other achievements secret for himself. After many researches we have managed to discover an incredible document thanks to Francesca Gallerini of Balconevisi: an old notebook of her father's which she treasures. From there we have discovered various secrets. Her father was Arturo Gallerini, called "Bego", a very well-known man in Balconevisi and in the whole Valdegola. He was born on the 23 July 1913 and lived in Saccuccio in a farmhouse near the old church of San Jacopo di Scopeto. That church dates back to the 100s and most probably was the first church in Balconevisi. Its ruins are found in a little forest next to Saccuccio.

Although Arturo Gallerini had attended several times the first classes of Elementary School and could hardly write his signature, he had a little notebook in which his wife Dina wrote down everything. From that notebook we can see that he wrote the truffles found each week from October to November and he underlined the bigger ones writing next to them the date in which he had found them. Many old truffle men actually took a note of the place and the date in which they found the biggest truffles, convinced that the following year they would find another similar one. From that notebook we can see that in the 50s he found 40 kilos of truffles, while during the exceptional year of 1954 he found more than 100, amongst which not only the record truffle but other ones worth mentioning: in November one of 1.80kg, in Rogacciaia, one of 900gr in Noceto. Coming back to our research on the biggest truffle we have a special note in Gallerini's notebook, who writes that on the 26 October 1954 he found a truffle weighing 2 kg and 18 pieces, that means 2360gr. Really, truffles were usually weighed using metallic scale balances with weightpieces of about 20 gm each. This is the evidence which makes us believe that this is the biggest truffle ever found in the world. Regarding the difference of weight between 2520 and 2360gr we can suppose that it is possible to increase the weight of a big truffle with many little tricks. Or simply we have an estimation of the weight on the scale, since the truffle we are talking about was so big. We feel free to say that "Bego"

from Balconevisi, *alias* Arturo Gallerini should be recorded in the *Guinness book of Records* for the biggest white truffle ever found in the world. As he wrote in the notebook, Arturo Gallerini found this incredible treasure in Vallina and was really astonished by the exceptionality of the weight. This valley is south of Balconevisi, there is also the homonymous farm and farmhouse, between Rondinaia and Chiecina, under Rogacciaia near the woods of Cerchiaie. In fact, the vally of Egola and of Chiecina, around Balconevisi, south of San Miniato, should be considered very fertile places, in which the Etruscans live since ancient times. Indeed, even nowadays, we can find the tombs and ruins of millenniums ago and we can also find many fossils of antique times. The forests around Balconevisi have always been the ideal places for the search of the white truffle due to their vegetation: oaks, poplars, Holm oaks, and other kinds of vegetation as well as for their sandy and clayey soil. In Valdegola we have also a very old proverb which says: “Between Doderi, Montoderi and Poggioderi, there is a beautiful daisy which costs more than Florence and Pisa”. Many would actually swear that in this triangle between Balconevisi and Corazzano a golden idol or a treasure is hidden. We think that the “beautiful daisy”, as the old truffle man revealed, could be the white truffle. In this area indicated by that triangle in Valdegola we have the most requested truffles all over Italy and therefore of a great value. Moreover, the daisy is a fruit of the land, just like the truffle. And this confirms that our theory is correct. Another confirmation can be found in the name of the three places. On a document in 1260 we have the name of church *sita in loco Monteodori Extra*, which was the old name of Montoderi. So Doderi and Poggioderi are nothing other than Colle degli Odori and Poggio degli Odori. And what has a stronger smell (*odore*) than the truffle? The fact that the proverb encloses the unknown in old times value of the truffle depends on the scarce knowledge of the quality of this product that people had then. As we have already said, until the 800s the truffles were given to the pigs and very few were aware of their qualities, even though they had always been served at the noble tables. Coming back to Arturo Gallerini we can say that he was one of the best searchers, not only because he found that great truffle, but also because of the quantity of the truffles that he found. He was a shy person and dedicated his tome to the search of truffles from October to December. He was a woodcutter and he lent out a piece of the forest in which he looked for truffles. When he did not do that, he cut the trees and cleaned the forest. He also had a small piece of land in Valley della Chiesa Vecchia which he ran together with his wife. There he cultivated grain, vegetables and vines. He used to start off when it was still dark with his loyal dog from Saccuccio, went down the Valley, passed through the lands owned by Angiolo and Ezio Falaschi, important truffle men as well, proceeded to the valley of Chiecina until San michele and Toano, waling averagely 25 km per day. Almost always he used to return home in the evening, with the truffles which he gave to Dina. She put them wrapped up with yellow paper in a pan of pottery together with some sand and she kept them under the staircase to protect them from light. Finally Arturo gave the truffles to Gemignani who was his trader, although at times he sold the truffles himself. He had always been very reserved as far as the search of truffles was concerned and he wanted his trader to be as reserves as himself and never mention his name in any way. Gemignani respected his will, as we can see from his notebooks and he rarely mentioned Arturo’s name among those of the providers. In the first years of the truffle Festival in San Miniato, Arturo found another beautiful truffle which he sold to Gemignani, but he wanted him to keep secret the fact that it was him who had found it. In that way, he did not receive the award. Last but not least we would like to mention Arturo’s dog who dug out the famous record truffle. His name was Parigi and he was Arturo’s faithful companion. He was a bastard dog, just like all the good truffle dogs. He was big, had a smooth and wavy fur and a long tail. He was really loyal to “Bego”. After the death of Parigi, Bego kept giving the same name to other dogs he had. Arturo Gallerini knew all the secrets of this difficult art. He controlled the other

truffle men to see what time they started off to look for truffles. Then he tried to anticipate them. He knew the whole territory and all the place where the white truffle could be found; the art of breeding a truffle dog; amongst many other tricks of this art. After his death in 1984, and after the death of many other truffle men of Valdegola who lived in that period, we have lost the mythical figure of the truffle man of this area. With them we have also lost many secrets, unique experiences and a great tradition which cannot be repeated anymore. This research of the record about the world's biggest truffle is dedicated to them: to the truffle men of the past times. We dedicate it to them, conscious of the fact that in order to honour and remember them in a worthy way, we should preserve the *habitat* of the white truffle intact. And we should be aware that this is a godly gift, which allows us to the lovers of taste a divine smell and taste.

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October 1954 – Balconevisi a resort in Saccuccio

Arturo Gallerini, called Bego, as a truffle searcher was not very fond of looking for truffles far from places known to him. There were people who, during the hunting period, extended their walks until Granaiole or who walked until the area of Volterra and stayed in the house of some farmer from Monday to Saturday. Gallerini, was convinced that the earth where he lived was the most “generous” and if they kept neglecting it, it would go bad and would stop producing. This land produces and it produces a lot! In his notebook with the black cover and red edge, we still find the names of places still known by some truffle men of the area: Pinocchieto, Piaggine, Doccia, Cambiati, Broto a Rosa, Rogacciaia, Macchiafonte, Vallina, Noceto, Vermana. He kept insisting to his friends and the people who knew him, hoping that they would believe him, that he went to look for truffle mostly during the day, “a barluzzo”. But he was a night bird! That’s what everybody said! He added to his stories that he found many truffles, maybe hoping to give the impression of a liar, just like every real a look at his notebook where he kept a record of the weight of the truffles he found, we will discover that during the high season he picked up 14 or 15 kg per month. Almost half a kilo per day!

At that time, someone called Marabotti had just arrived in Balconevisi. He was a priest who could combine the doctrine and common sense, and make everybody listen to him. One day he asked: “How is it possible Father Proposto that one can go and pick truffles from someone else’s land?” Father Proposto replied: “Res abscondita primi intervenientis” that is pure latin which means: “Something hidden belongs to he who finds it first. That is the same reason for which a hidden treasure belongs to he who finds it”. Then he added something so deep that made him shiver. “you see Bego...truffles are not something cultivated, they are not the fruit of the earth. They are something that the earth bears!” This comparison convinced him because a truffle man’s job is a bit similar to that of a midwife. You see, digging a truffle out of the ground requires delicacy and skill. That night, it was the night of the 26th October 1954, Arturo Gallerini called Bego, returned home which was in the resort of Saccuccio in Balconevisi looking forward to weighing that thing which was really as big as a baby’s head. After shutting the main door, he put his hemp sack on the table. He lit one of those candles that Proposto gave him as leftovers from the mass; they did not fill the room with smoke, they were bought from the shop. In freckle light, the brass scale took a golden colour. As he removed it from the wall the rings gave him their usual happy music. Parigi, his little dog, started going around the table as usual: that was his way of participating at the weighing process. He put the truffle in the plate of the scale and pulled the ring up. He had not calculated well the number of the pieces because the indicator of the scale flew on the pole and returned to zero, the pole jumped into the air and the weighing plate on which the truffle was, fell towards the table. Slowly, Bego, slowly! This is really a champion truffle! Holding his excitement, he regained all the calm he needed to put the indicator back in the correct position. The truffle weighted two kilos and eighteen pieces! Bego wrote it his black notebook with the red edge which is still found in his daughter’s house. He made a note: “Found in Vallina”.

The brass scale which weighed with grams and pieces and the pole still exists. Hereby we have

reported what was written in this sort of diary of this truffle man of Balconevisi. The rest has had to remain secret because in those days as well, the truffle man's image also played a big role on his commerce. The Morra family from Alba knows something about that. By bringing the truffles of San Miniato to this well-known city, they brought prestige to their place, but, being honest and true merchandisers, they were also willing to pay, apart from the price of the truffle, the reservation of the secret. The fact that the truffle weighing over two kilos, given by the city of Alba to the President of the United States, here in San Miniato has never been a mystery; only a secret. Now, after the discovery of Arturo Gallerini's notebook it is not even a secret: it is a little story unburied from the humid sands of this magic land, just like the truffle.

Luciano Marrucci

September 1944 – in Ranci, the ridge of a hill in San Miniato.

Johnny, a soldier of an American department lodging in San Miniato, suddenly found himself in front of that man whose order was part of no identification code provided by his Command. He was truffle man who was wearing a hunter's coat, trousers which reached down his ankles; lace-ups and sustentation where his laces crossed. Over the man's shoulder slung a rifle which finished in a shiny crescent. When Johnny saw this, he instinctively stopped and tightened the belt of his little Winchester which also slung over his shoulder. I replied with a simple smile when I felt Johnny's eyes consulting me as if to say: who is the man in front of me? It seemed to me that both men grasped the grotesque aspect of a situation represented by a carbine and rifle opposed one against the other and they wanted to get out of it as soon as possible, so that they wouldn't seem both ridiculous. Then I went ahead and showed the American the Italian's hemp sack which was sticking out. Finally, the Italian took out the whole sack. He opened it. The smell of underground cavern invaded us. Consenting to my invitation, he took a truffle, holding it with the tip of his fingers, just like all truffle men do, and took it towards the soldier's face to smell it: now, even the dog seemed to follow the scene with some interest. The question which I managed to interpret from the words, but mostly from Johnny's gestures, was simply this: "Can you eat this? Although hesitant, I replied yes. From quite a number of days I was a sort of guide for the American soldiers who gave me those beautiful waxed boxes from the military mess as reward for my service. They used Am-liras to pay the housewives and then filled their laundry bags with their stuff: *poteitos* (potatoes), *pomeitos* (tomatoes), *cichen* (chicken) and *uaituain* which stands for white wine. At this point the soldier took out of his pocket a handful of banknotes and took off one or two Am-liras: the was the price of a rabbit or a flask of wine! The truffle man expressed his disclaim by oscillating the forefinger of his left hand; this gesture was accompanied with a kind smile. Looking again at this truffle which did not weigh more than a hundred grams, I nodded my head to confirm that the truffle man was absolutely right to ask for more.

Then guess what happened: the American put forward a piece of fifty. He had my OK together with the truffle from the truffle man. The diversity of the language did not allow the purchaser to satisfy his legitimate curiosity. One thing was sure: that truffle could not be grated in the kitchen of a simple patrol and it was sent, by the jeep which carried the mail and the waxed rations, to the highest Command. Something like a lot of war, a gift from the troops to their General.

Luciano Marrucci