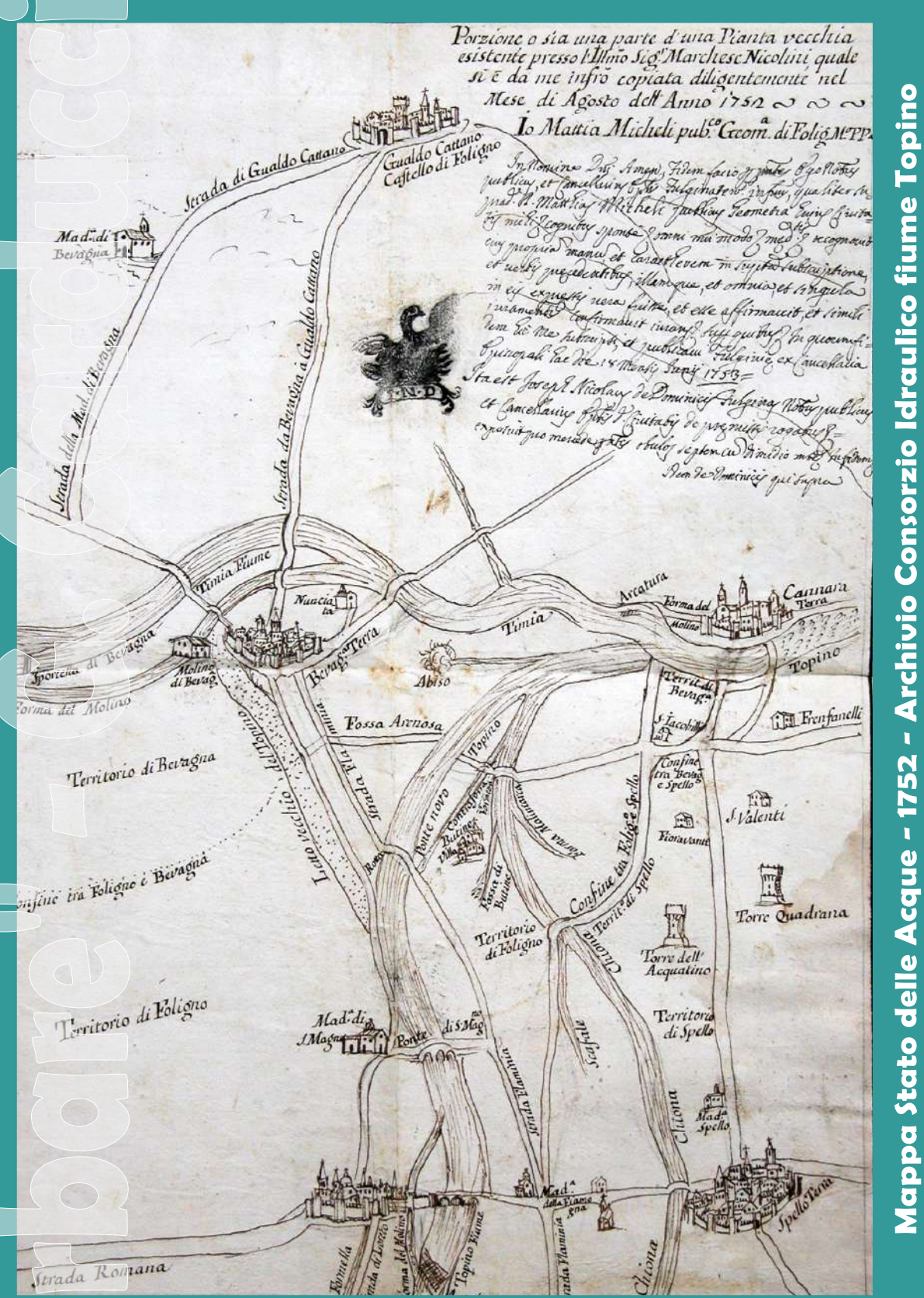


AISO THE NATURAL RESURGENCE

Naturalistic area in the Bevagna resurgence system
(W.D.)

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Mappa stato delle Acque - 1752 - Archivio Consorzio Idraulico fiume Topino

The plain of Bevagna is located in Umbria at the intersection of several rivers (Clitunno, Teverone, Timia, Topino) in an alluvial valley rich in springs. Many small lakes, springs and resurgences, now not extant or filled in, are also depicted in ancient topographic maps of the area.

Not far from the town, is a small nearly circular lake, known as Lake Aiso (SIC | Site of Community Importance - European Union).

The reservoir, with a diameter of 25 m and a depth of approx. 13 m, is fed by two underground springs and was certainly formed in pre-Roman times. Legends dating back to the 14th century relate its origin to a catastrophic sinking. In the vicinity of Lake Aiso - historically known in literature as Abyso, Abisso or Inferno - there are other almost circular springs of smaller diameter, also known since antiquity under the name of Aisilli (Aisillo Mattoli, Aisillo Fanelli, Aisillo Argentati, after the owners of the land), some still active, others filled in and existing only in archival cartography.

BETWEEN MYTHS AND POPULAR LEGENDS

According to a tale already widespread in the Middle Ages - and codified in a prayer text by Fra Valerio Veneziano in the 17th century - there once lived a rich peasant named Chiarò on the spot where the lake now stands and who was little inclined towards Christian charity and religious obligations.

Chiarò only cared about working and earning as much money as possible and did not even care about religious holidays; in contrast, his wife was a pious and charitable woman.

On the feastday of St Anne, which was traditionally dedicated exclusively to rest and to the feast of the mother of the Virgin Mary, Chiarò intended to thresh wheat on the threshing floor, forcing his labourers to work as well.

At one point, the voice of an angel warned his wife to flee with all her belongings, because soon the house would sink. Frightened, the woman took her two small children with her and fled, as the house sank into the ground with her husband and everything else inside. When she turned around, however, she saw that she was running from the stream that had caused the farmhouse to sink. At that moment, the angel spoke to her again, inviting her to abandon the youngest child, because he would grow up to be more evil than his father. The woman obeyed and thus was finally able to save herself. At the very spot where the child was left, a smaller lake called Aisillo was formed.

According to the folktale, every year on St Anne's Day, those who go to the shores of the lake can see the beams of the submerged house with the kitchen furnishings under the water surface and can also hear the voice of Chiarò leading his mares.

Vista del lago Aiso da N-E verso il Fuo emissario - 2022 - Foto M. Berzetta



Vista aerea della "forma" circolare della risorgiva - 2016 - Foto G. Picuti

According to popular tales, documented as far back as the 17th century, the lake was formed by the sinking of a cottage of a blasphemous farmer, who dared to thresh on the feast day of St Anne (26 July); themes of chasms and sinkings are common in folklore after the Roman period.

Oral and written traditions from the 16th century onwards are rich in legends describing chasms and sunken farmyards, as well as the miraculous origins of lakes and pools of water.

Chasms are usually the result of direct divine intervention or, more frequently, the action of a saint, who punishes the violator of a prohibition.

There are various narrative motifs, the most frequent being the sinking and the sudden, miraculous origin of a water spring as a consequence of punishment for threshing on a feast day.

Another peculiarity of such narrative themes is that the lakes thus formed are often considered bottomless or are seen as a path to hell, suggesting an ideal continuity between pagan (chthonic deities, generally of feminine nature, also regarding the worship of underground gods and personification of seismic or volcanic forces) and Christian belief systems.



Vista area naturalistica dell'Aiso alla luci del tramonto incorniciata dai profili dei Monti Martani - 2022 - Foto M. Berzetta
La risorgiva dell'Aiso è sito di interesse Comunitario, tutelato dalla Comunità Europea per varietà floristico-vegetazionale

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