

## The “Al Terzo” (Lug) Sails

It was seven in the evening at the end of a beautiful summer’s day, the sky was clear blue. I had just finished work and was hurrying to get to the dock as I couldn't wait to go to sea.

On the canal I met Italo Bartolini, known as La Sgringa, Francesco Baldini known as Chino and Federico Cortesi known as Toscanino, who, every day, around five in the afternoon, sat down to chat in the shade of Casa Moretti.

“Where are you off to?” They asked me, “To sea” I would reply.  
“No, no” they responded “you’re not going anywhere, you’re staying here” said Italo, without giving me the chance to reply.

However, I insisted on replying because I didn't want to waste such a beautiful day. Again, it was repeated! “You will stay here”

Just like that, twenty minutes later a very strong storm arrived hiding the sunlight in its wake, and bringing hail, wind and floods.

The experience that those men had acquired by going to sea with their Luggers was such that they understood, by reading the wind, what was about to happen. If they hadn't stopped me, maybe, I wouldn't be here today!

I was lucky enough to meet those elderly fishermen, La Sgringa, Chino and Toscanino. Amongst the last in Cesenatico that went to sea with their Luggers, before the advent of motor boats.

It took me some time to get to know them. You have to approach people like them, who give you their heart and soul, with an educated respect, and let them tell their world in their own way. They are the masters of ancient knowledge.

The sails of the Lugger Boats tell the story of sailing in our region, in an era when there were no engines and those who went out to sea relied on their sails.

Between the First and Second World Wars, fishermen coming from the upper and lower Adriatic, in particular from Chioggia and San Benedetto del Tronto, arrived in Cesenatico and passed on their fishing and navigation techniques. Quite often, not only did they work on the boats, but they lived on them too with their whole family.

Taking the luggers to sea required profound knowledge, it is not a job that can be improvised. Their trapezoidal-shaped sails were called "al-terzo" (translated as "the third") due to the size of the portion of the sail placed at the bow of the mast, a third compared to that at the stern.

Here on the canal, there are now many small, restored boats, lancets, dinghies and small fishing boats. They were not used for fishing but to shuttle between the quay and the boats that fished in the open sea, bringing the fish to land. Each boat had its own sail, bearing the symbol of the family to which it belonged. The sails, made of cotton, were painted with natural blue, yellow ochre, red and black clays, not only to distinguish the lineage, but also to protect the fabric which, without dyeing, would have been irreparably affected by mould. It was also important that the boat was recognisable by the fishermen's wives, who would wait for their husbands on the bank of the pier. They could distinguish the symbol on the sails from afar, be ready with empty boxes waiting to fill them with the fish destined for sale.

I am from the generation that experienced the transition from traditional sailing to motor engines. When this happened, these boats fell into disuse and the fishing boats changed their physiology and habits.

However, there is always a time to return back to your origins. Towards the end of the nineties, the Maritime Museum began working with private individuals who made their traditional boats available, creating the floating section of the museum.

When this tradition was retrieved, La Sgringa, Chino and Toscanino experienced a second youth and started sailing again, as they once did with their Lug sails. When the weather permitted, they competed with each other, whoever outrun the others would blow a whistle, whoever lost would pay for the coffee. Even though I took a boat, I could never keep up with them, they were way above my class.

In May 2023, sailing with these traditional boats, along the coasts of Romagna, was recognised as an intangible collective part of our heritage.

For those who, like me, love the region and these traditions, the Maritime Museum is not to be missed. Today there are 33 private individuals who work with the Museum to preserve and protect the historic boats. There are strict rules which surround maintaining the boats that enrich our floating exhibition.

Only certified materials and tools that were used back in the day are permitted to be used, and they are regularly checked to ensure conformity.

It is important these boats and their stories continue to live today, that children can go aboard, raise the sails and get their hands dirty with the natural clays used to dye them, thus carrying on the tradition and "the knowledge of sea".

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