

WHEN GEOLOGY BECOMES CULTURAL WEALTH: PRAIA A MARE, TOWN OF CAVES

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Abstract: The geological conformation of an anthropized place decides the fate of the women and men who live in that portion of territory. Praia a mare, called the city of the island due to the presence of the imposing island of Dino, is actually characterized by the presence of many caves both on the mainland and on the island. The life of men has taken place in these caves since the Paleolithic age: in its largest cave there are the geological signs of the sea that reached it but also the drawings of the Paleolithic men who settled this cave. And in this same cave, designated the largest in Europe, there is the Sanctuary of the Madonna della Grotta, patron saint of Praia a Mare. And Greek monks settled in the nearby caves since the early Middle Ages, founding monasteries and places of spirituality. But Greek monasticism has also left signs of its passage on the island, as is also clear from the name of one of the caves, called the Monk's cave. And again in a cave on the island, the body of Vitigno was found, the hero of Praia who defended the city from an assault by the Turks led by Amurat Rayt who, in 1639, attacked the island of Dino with six vessels. It is probable that the first settlement of Praia took place between the 15th and 16th centuries by Schiavoni, probably coming from Ragusa, today in Croatia, who occupied the caves on the mainland, forming the first residential nucleus of the town and giving the name of Plaja Scavorum.

In this contribution, a precise census was carried out of the caves present in the Praia area so that they could become part of a redevelopment project through the cleaning of some earth caves covered by vegetation that had grown over time and by debris and by the protection of the sea caves so that all can become a tourist route with the creation, first of all, of signs to be fixed in front of each cave to know its name, geological characteristics and any historical episodes that have occurred there.

Keywords: History, Tourism and Landscape of the coastal areas, Enhancement, safeguarding and dynamics of the territory

Text

The stretch of Tyrrhenian coast between the mouth of the Noce River and Torre San Nicola is located along the Tyrrhenian margin of the southern Apennines and represents the north-eastern edge of the structural depression of the Gulf of Policastro subject, during the Quaternary, to extensional tectonics linked to the opening of the Tyrrhenian basin which caused extensive uplifts of this portion of the coast of which the widespread marine terraces represent a witness.

This stretch of coast includes a small strip of Lucanian territory and extends into the territories of Tortora and Praia a Mare.

The area in question is delimited to the north-west by the Noce river valley and is characterized by the presence of reliefs that show a certain degree of morphological maturity; there are numerous marine terraces that interrupt the profile of the coastal slopes starting from rather high altitudes (180 m above sea level).

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Recent studies, on the basis of existing and detected marine morphologies¹, have analyzed in detail the evolution of this coastal sector characterized by a generalized uplift lasting for the entire Pleistocene period, with limited episodes of subsidence in localized areas, and also active during the Holocene.

A first marine entry into the sector under examination is witnessed starting from the beginning of the Lower Pleistocene. with the entry of the sea into the paleovalley of the Noce River on an area previously occupied by glaciais and by the fluvial conglomerates of the Tortora paleofiumarella.

The summit shelf of the Island of Dino appears correlated with that of the Foresta district and shows, overall, a transversal profile characterized by stretches of surface with different inclinations (Fig.1) which, also including the shelf of the Island of Dino, surpasses the 2 km. This leads us to believe that the entire terrace was shaped during various changes in sea level and that it is, like the high terraces in the area of the mouth of the Noce river. a polycyclic terrace.

¹ Filocamo F. (2006) - *Evoluzione quaternaria del margine tirrenico dell'Appennino Meridionale tra il golfo di Sapri e la foce del fiume Lao: Studio stratigrafico e geomorfologico*. Tesi di dottorato Coord. Prof. Aldo Cinque. Università degli Studi di Napoli "Federico II" Facoltà di Scienza MM.FF.NN. Dip. di Sc. D. Terra.

In the area of the mouth of the Noce river, at the time of the formation of the marine terraces currently at an altitude of 140 m, a gulf must have existed.

The subsequent stabilization of the sea level at around 90 m, referable to the Middle Pleistocene, appears well represented in the area near the mouth of the Noce river and can be correlated with the surface present on the top of Dino Island: this testifies to the continuation of the phase of uplift even after the Early Pleistocene.

Therefore, the coastal trend between the Lower Pleistocene (Santerian) and the Upper Pleistocene - as a function of the overall uplift of the area, albeit characterized by local subsidence episodes of some limited sectors - would have seen a progressive substantial advancement towards the west of the coastline in the S. Domenica area of Talao/S. Nicola Arcella up to the current position and a phase of marine intrusion, which probably occurred in two phases during the Lower Pleistocene, in the paleo-Noce valley until the establishment of a real gulf located between Praia and the Serra di Castrocuoco and, subsequently filled by the alluvial deposits of the Noce during the subsequent uplift phase of the area.

It is clear that the geomorphological evolution of the territory is strictly conditioned by the widespread presence of carbonate rocks affected by karst phenomena that developed over time in close correlation

with variations in the base level.

There are numerous karst cavities known and registered in this area which are currently in direct contact with the sea or which have been in direct contact with the sea in the past: such cavities abound along the perimeter of the Island of Dino and along the coast of Praia a Mare.

Some caves are in direct contact with the sea such as, for example, the Blue Grotto and the Lion's Grotto; others are found at a level slightly higher than the current sea level such as, for example, the Grotta del Frontone which has numerous lithodome holes on the walls as evidence of the period in which it was invaded by the sea.

Other caves are found below the current sea level such as, for example, the Gargiulo Cave which is located 15 meters deep and extends for over 124 meters and, probably, is connected upwards to the Grotta del Frontone. Even the large Grotta della Madonna, located close to the town of Praia, shows on its walls the signs of marine organisms (litodomes), witnesses of the era in which this cave was connected to the sea.

The island of Dino located in front of Contrada Fiuzzi in Praia a Mare is the largest island in Calabria. It is about 500 m from the coast and can be said to be almost joined to the mainland by a chain of rocks very close to each other which are the last remnants of that stretch of land which once united it and to which it will once again become connected, in the not too distant future.

Whichever way you look at it, it looks like a small but massive plateau emerging from the sea, with mostly very steep sheer walls. Where the coasts are overhanging, they are completely bare, sometimes for their entire height, up to a level of about 10 m higher than the line of the reef; where the slope is not excessive, however, you can often see thick bushes clinging to the rock.

The summit terrace of the island of Dino, as already mentioned, which can be connected to the coast with the same morphology present in Contrada Foresta,

hosts conglomerates and sands of the coastal terrace, generally brown and reddish and whose clasts are predominantly calcareous-dolomitic.

Among the numerous caves on the Island of Dino, interesting for their position or characteristics, are that of "dei Colombi", "di Punta Frontone", "del Monaco", "delle Sarde", "del Tondo", "Azzurra", "Grazia", "Del Leone", "Gargiulo". The Colombi cave is more of a hollow dug by the sea than a real cave and has traces of lithodome holes which allow us to measure a previous sea level. The Punta Frontone cave is accessed from a rocky platform located approximately 3.00 meters above sea level. and extends for about 12 meters in a north-east direction.

Of interest is the presence of earthy sediments inside the cavity which has, right up to the innermost parts, lithodome holes on the walls, evidence of the intrusion of the sea into it. It is interesting to note how, at a depth of about 15 meters on the vertical of the Punta Frontone tunnel, the vestibule of the Gargiulo cave opens up. Both caves, both the Frontone and the Gargiulo, testify to a phase relating to a different basic level: the first with the marked shoreline at an altitude of 12 m above sea level starting from the lithodome holes found on the rocky coast of Praia and the second with the terraced morphological surfaces detectable around the Dino island, between 9/12 meters deep².

The Grotta Grazia opens at about 15 meters above sea level and extends for about thirty meters in a southerly direction: the presence of numerous small stalactites and small stalagmites in the final stretch up to 30 centimeters long, suggest the presence of dripping for at least a thousand years.

The numerous caves present in the coastal sector of Praia a Mare represent an interesting testimony to the post-Miocene evolution of this sector of the Southern Apennines: it was affected by an evolution connected to neotectonics and to the variations in the base level connected to the glacial phases and interglacials and which followed one another from the Lower Pleistocene to the Upper Pleistocene.

It is interesting to note how some of these, such as Mulino (20 m above sea level), Saraceni (20 m above sea level), Vallone Papalio (300 m above sea level), della Mina (17 m above sea level), still constitute delivery points for underground water circulation.

The Grotta della Madonna (40 m above sea level), although about 500 meters from the sea, has traces of lithodome holes on its internal walls, unmistakable signs that it has been lapped and affected by the sea.

The morphological elements present in the area - from the terraces along the lower valley of the Noce river to the flat depositional and erosional surfaces present numerous along the coast of Praia and in correspondence with the Island of Dino and together with the karst morphologies - allow us to reconstruct with good clarity the geomorphological events that have sculpted the territory and the environmental variations that have occurred.

² Ferrini G., Mendicino P., Toccaceli R.M. (1994) - *Caratteristiche morfostrutturali ed evoluzione recente dei fondali dell'Isola di Dino (Calabria nordoccidentale, Italia)*. Mem. Descr. Carta geol. D'It. LII (1994) pp.135-148.

Table 1 crosses the recognizable morphological elements mentioned in figure 1 with the paleoenvironmental conditions and the eras, allowing us to obtain an interesting picture of the Pleistocene-Holocene evolution of the territory.

Such a precise geological description makes it very clear to us why, on the back of a postcard sent in 1937, we read these words: "On the Napoli Battip line. Reggio visit the wonders of the Praia Caves, the magnificent caves rich in superb stalactites, the "Blue Grotto" of the Island of DINO where there are also the ruins of a temple of Venus. Come, admire again the stupendous Grotto of the Madonna with the gigantic openings, and with the symmetry, and the surprising light where nature has prepared enchantments and surprises... Station: "Praia d'Aieta-Tortora". Therefore, ever since then it was very clear that tourism could become a significant source of economic progress even if the tourism that they were trying to convince, with those words, was not a distracted mass tourism but one made up of cultured travelers who felt an interest in visit both the sea caves and the land caves. And the earth caves were described with gigantic openings which are the main characteristic of these very large cavities. And therefore, ever since then, it was very clear that geology was the most important asset of Praia a Mare and one to focus on for the future. It should also be specified immediately that, in 1937, Praia a Mare had been an independent municipality for 9 years: with Royal Decree no. 813 of 29 March 1928, Vittorio Emanuele III brought together the municipalities of Aieta and Tortora into a single municipality called Praia a Sea, with capital in Praia. The three municipalities became autonomous again in 1937.

Praia a Mare, even if its official history began only in 1928, in reality, was an inhabited area that existed since the Upper Paleolithic as shown by some graffiti - but evidence of the Metal Age is also evident - found inside the immense cave of the Madonna within which the primitive Praia settlement began to form³. Praia a Mare was a district of Aieta and was a city without a name for a long time: for the inhabitants of Aieta who, as we read from the sources, lived in Praia from November to June due to the clemency and mildness of the climate⁴, the name was beach of Aieta. The same beach had been called Plaga Scalorum, Schiavoni beach, in reference to the arrival of Schiavone populations around the mid-15th century after the fall of Constantinople to the Turks and the great migrations of Albanians, Greeks and Schiavoni to the Italian coasts⁵. The peculiarity is that a beach that has the name of beach (Praia derives from the Latin term *plaga*) only became Praia a Mare in 1937, an unfortunate clarification because it is difficult to find beaches in the mountains or in the plains. At most a beach can be near a lake or a river! But

³ Guida G. (1991) - *Aieta. Pagine della sua storia civile e religiosa*, Cosenza, p.11.

⁴ *Monografia sul Santuario di nostra Donna della Grotta nella Praja degli Schiavi e sul Comune di Ajeta in Provincia di Cosenza per VINCENZO LOMONACO giudice della Gran Corte Civile di Napoli e socio dell'Accademia Ercolanense, Cosentina, Pontaniana ed altre*, Terza Edizione, Tipografia della Sirena, Strada Nuova de' Pellegrini n.20, Napoli 1858, p.10.

⁵ Pellettieri A. (2022) - *...in finibus Lucaniae. Historical cartography of the Tyrrhenian coast and demographic fluctuations*, in Bonora L., Carboni D., De Vincenzi M. Matteucci G. (eds) *Monitoring of Mediterranean coastal areas: problems and measurement techniques* Ninth International Symposium (Livorno, 14-16 June 2022) Firenze University Press, pp.855-864.

that there was not much generosity in giving the name to settled places is also clear from the toponym Foresta, today the district of Praia, a location located on the upper part of Praia and which implies there was a forest not to be confused with a beach!

Description of a particular beauty and historical interest on the landscape and its caves is found in the first texts published on local history⁶ but I report the words of a printed supplement found on a Facebook page dedicated to Praia (and which is unknown the year of printing): “...*Una spiaggia vastissima, quasi sterminata, si stende fra l’abitato ed il mare. Di fronte s’erge dall’acqua, come colossale balena, l’isola di Dino. Essa segna il termine del golfo di Policastro, ed apre variamente i suoi fianchi per mostrare diverse magnifiche caverne, nelle quali penetra il mare; e, tra queste, non sai quale ammirare di più. Superba ne è una, detta azzurra, dai riflessi cerulei dell’acqua; migliore, ma meno fortunata di quella di Capri. Magnificamente nel vero senso della parola è l’altra appellata del Frontone, dentro cui si resta estatici dinanzi alle bizzarrie della natura, che ha formato delle strane Catacombe con laberinti, colonne pensili, archi, cupole, piani cristallini ecc. Oscure grotte s’interrano nelle rupi a tergo dell’abitato; ma sono un incanto per le stalattiti e le stalagmiti, che s’incontrano, s’incrociano e formano ancora qui colonne, archi, cupole, fughe di porticati, meraviglie di prospettive, incantati edifici sotterranei, illuminati fantasticamente dalla scarsa luce esterna o dalle torce a vento portate dai visitatori*”⁷

But it is emblematic that one of the first documents handed down to us about Praia so far contains the following words: "ecclesiam sancti Zacharie, que est iuxta mare suptus Aitam, et totam vineam, que est circa eam, una cum cripta, que est iuxta eam and the whole land, which comes from Falconara to the Mali canale"⁸. A recent study has identified the church of Santa Zaccaria on the small hill in front of the Fiuzzi tower: determining in the fairly precise description is the indication of the place located on the sea "sotto Aieta" near a vineyard and a cave, beyond the identification of the Falconara district and the Male Canale. This is a cave located under this small ridge right on the beach, on the seashore, on the ridge, today, there is a well-known nightclub surrounded by olive groves. This cave was hidden by vegetation for a long period and it was possible to identify it with the help of period photographs.

The toponymy linked to the caves is also decisive: the Monaco cave identified on the island of Dino confirms that the church of San Nicola was located on the island, as demonstrated in the same study cited previously.

⁶ Poliorama Pittoresco, t. II n.5, p.3g., 1837; *Aieta in Dizionario Geografico-storico-civile del Regno delle due Sicilie del Sig. Raffaele Mastriani*, Napoli 1838, t.2, pp.117-120.

⁷ Facebook page *Praia com'era*

⁸ Mattei-Cerasoli L. (1938) - *La badia di Cava e i monasteri greci della Calabria superore*, in "Archivio Storico per la Calabria e la Lucania", VIII, pp. 177-178.

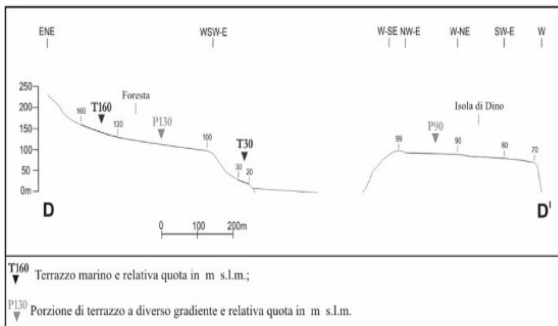
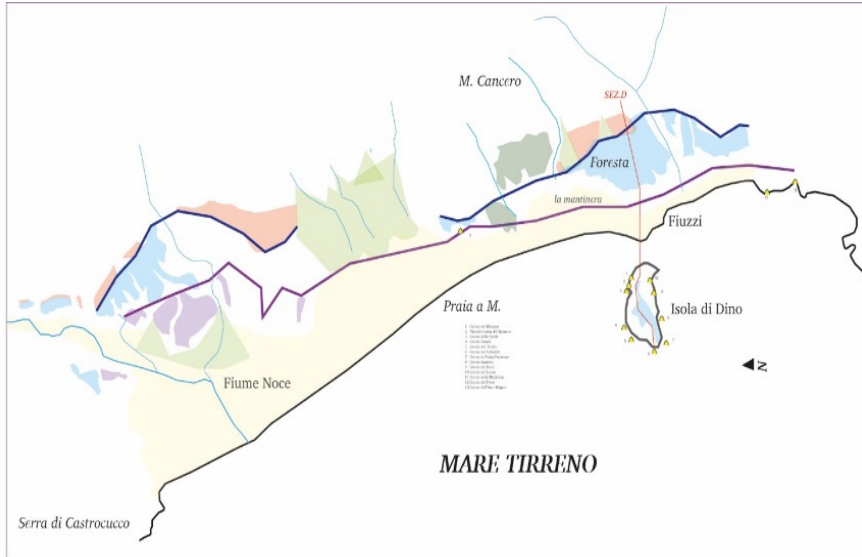


Figure 1 – Geomorphological scheme of the area: 1) Debris strata; 2) Erosion and depositional terraces on limestone substrate (140 - 139 m above sea level). Early Pleistocene; 3) Erosion and depositional terraces on limestone and conglomerate substrate (75 - 70 m above sea level). Middle Pleistocene. 4) Fluzio-torrential fans (Holocene). 5) Recent alluvial and coastal deposits (Holocene). 6) Main karst cavities; 7) Trace morphological profile. 8) Upper limit of terrace 140-139 m. Lower Pleistocene 9) Upper limit of terrace 75 - 70 m. Middle Pleistocene.

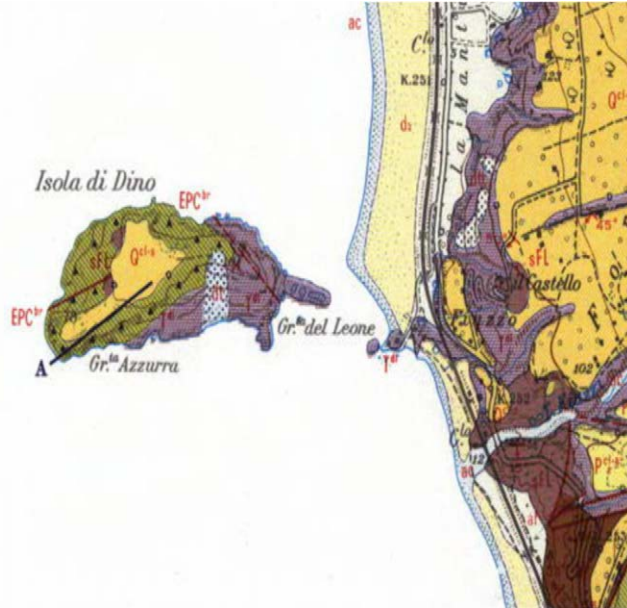


Figure 2 – Geological scheme of the Island of Dino: Qcl-s (conglomerates and sands of the coastal terrace, generally brown and reddish whose clasts are predominantly calcareous-dolomitic – Pleistocene); EPCbr (calcareous breccias passing laterally to calcareous conglomerates and calcarenites, containing fragments of Upper Cretaceous limestones and some rare elements of a siliceous nature - Eocene – Paleocene); Tdl (fine-grained dolomites and recrystallised limestones, generally dark grey, locally well stratified - Trias).

Table 1 – Recognizable morphological elements and paleoenvironments of the Praia a Mare area.

	Sector between the Castrucucco peak and the mouth of the Noce river	Sector Praia – Dino’s Island
low pleistocene	PaleoNoce outline, coastline at the edge of Castrucucco peak	Submerged Dino s Island, Emerged coast at north of Serra della Rosa, Serra della Rosa promontorio a mare
low pleistocene inferiore	Emiliano-Siciliano, transgression of the sea in the paleoNoce valley, Coastline-120-140 m s.l.m	Dino s Island subsidence, Terrace at the top in Foresta area and on the top of Dino s island at 90 m on sea level
medium pleistocene	coastline at 70 and at 40 m s.l.m.	coastline 75, 30, 20 meter
high pleistocene	coastline at 3 - 5 metri	coastline 3 - 5 meter
Olocene	shoreline groove +2 – 0	shoreline groove +2 – 0
	Depth	età B.P.
submerged terraces of the Dino’s Island	25 meters	28-36 000
	12-9 meters	6-7000
	3-4 meters	5-6000

Table 2 – Summary of the Quaternary chronology with indication of the chronological windows accredited for the main recognized hominid types.

QUATERNARY PERIOD							Homo		
PERIOD	EPOCH	Age/Stage		Age/Stage	GLACIATIONS Name / Phase				
Quaternary	Holocene	Meghalayan		0	4200				
		Northgrippian		4200	8200				
		Greenlandian		8200	11700				
	Pleistocene	Tarantian		11700	129000	Wurm	glacial		
		Ionian		129000	774000	Riss-Wurm	interglacial		
			Neotyrrenian			Riss	glaciale		
			Eutyrrhenian			Mindel-Riss	interglacial		
			Crotonian			Mindel	glacial		
		Calabrian	Sicilian	774000	1800000	Gunz-Mindel	interglacial		
		Gelasian	Emilian	1800000	2580000	Gunz	glacial		
Santernian	Donau-Gunz		interglacial			interglacial			
Neogene	Pliocene	Piacenzian							
Erectus									
Neanderthal									
Sapiens									

The document reports: “*que Mercurii nuncupatur abbatiam Sancti Petri que dicitur Marcanito, et ecclesiam Sancti Helye et Sancti Zacharie cum omnibus relevanceis earum, et ecclesiam Sancti Nicholai de Digna cum vineis et terris et silvis et marino portu, et abbatiam Sancti Nicholai de abbate Clemente cum vineis et terri et silvis et ecclesiam Sancte Venere cum casale*”⁹.

This description speaks of three churches located in the territory of Praia and, in addition to the aforementioned church of Santa Zaccaria, the presence of a church of San Nicola de Digna is specified; with Digna we mean the island of Dino and on it there were vineyards, lands and a port. The port was well described in 1837 by Vincenzo Lomonaco: “...vi è un’isoletta di circa due miglia di circuito, appellata isola di Dino, con un porto capace di potervi comodamente stare circa venti bastimenti da carico. Ella è molto amena, e nelle scogliere, che sonovi nel suo giro, vi si trovano degli eccellenti frutti di mare, come patelle, dattili...”¹⁰. The port reported since 1065, date of the document reported above, is important to narrate another episode of the history of Praia in which another cave is the protagonist. We must report, again, the words of another volume by Vincenzo Monaco from 1858: “... .. *In questo luogo [isola di Dino denominata Dina nel XIX*

⁹ Pratesi A. (1958) - *Carte latine di abbadi calabresi dell’archivio Albobrandini*, Città del Vaticano, p.254.

¹⁰ *Aieta in Dizionario Geografico-storico-civile op. cit.*, p.118.

secolo], ebbe morte onorata un tal Vitigno condottiero degli Ajetani che in agosto 1639 combattè valorosamente contro i Turchi che capitaneggiati d'Amurat Rayt con sei vascelli prima assalsero Dina; di poi Scalea, onde furono respinti dal Principe Francesco Spinelli che vi lasciò miseramente la vita come narra Giannone Stor. lib. 35. cap. 1. Ciò avvenne essendo Viceré di Napoli il Conte di Lemos. La morte di Vitigno é decantata con mediocri versi dall' Abate, Molitemo (Poesie Liriche Nap. 1760 p. 166). La tradizione di questo avvenimento si conserva tuttora dai terrazzani, e si ripetono di frequente i versi che descrivono il coraggio e la pietà di quell' eroe e martire cristiano, il quale ferito letalmente, sopraffatto dall'oste che discendeva folla dai legni barbareschi, ebbe rifugio in unantro, ove si trovò poi spento intriso nel sangue col rosario in mano, ineffabile conforto dei veri credenti nell'ora solenne del supremo tragitto"¹¹.

It is not possible to identify in which cave Vitigno died but it was certainly one of those located near the Monaco cave (if not the Monaco cave itself).

Yet another event in the history of Praia has a cave as its setting and in some earth caves it is possible to identify the church of Sant'Elia. The literature on the subject identifies this church in the cave named below. Grotto of the Madonna. Around this cavity there are many others at different levels of height on the face of the mountain onto which they open.

Other documents from the 1160s describe the situation of the Byzantine theme of Calabria which was divided into two turms: one of these is mentioned since the 10th century in a hagiographic text "*con il suo centro ad Aieta; essa sicuramente a Nord si estendeva sino al Noce che costituiva la frontiera del tema di Calabria; e ad Ovest sino alla turma del Merkurion, che apparteneva al tema lucano*"¹².

It should also be noted that there is still toponymic memory of a district of Sant'Elia which is located near a very large cave, the sanctuary of the Madonna of the Praia a Mare cave, which has a series of small caves around it which could be the cells in which the monks of the church of Sant'Elia were hospitalized.

We agree with the hypothesis that the church of Sant'Elia was located near the cave of the Sanctuary of the Madonna¹³ if not inside the Marian sanctuary also in consideration of another document which shows that the church and/or the monastery of Sant'Elia was the same one to whom about a century and a half later, precisely in 1198, Giovanni Scullando, lord of Aieta, donated some funds near Petricella, including the 15 farmers employed in their cultivation¹⁴.

The most important cave for the inhabitants of Praia a Mare and the best known is, therefore, that of the Madonna within which stands the church dedicated to Maria Assunta, protector of Praia. Once again the words of Lomonaco help us to

¹¹ *Monografia sul Santuario di nostra Donna della Grotta*, op. cit. p.10 e 19.20.

¹² Guillou A. (1974) - *Geografia amministrativa del Katepanato bizantino d'Italia, in Calabria Bizantina. Vita religiosa e strutture amministrative*, Atti del primo e secondo incontro di Studi Bizantini, Reggio Calabria, pp. 120-121.

¹³ Moliterni B. (2003) - *La chiesa di San Zaccaria e l'origine del Santuario della Madonna della grotta di Praia a mare*, in *Archivio storico per la Calabria e la Lucania* LXIX (2003), pp.19-26; *Idem* Moliterni B. (2013) - *Alfano, Pietro e la diocesi di Policastro*, LXXIX (2013), pp. 7-36.

¹⁴ Trinchera F. (1865) - *Syllabus graecarum membranarum*, Napoli, n. 243, pp. 328-329.

tell the mythological beginning of this event: *“Il Capitano di un bastimento Raguseo il 1326 sospinto da una procella, e dall’avversione de’ marinai parte Saraceni e parte Iconoclasti alle sacre immagini, abbandonava sur un sasso della prefata grotta una immagine di nostra Donna. Dopo due anni, o in quel torno, risolcando gli stessi mari, compiacevasi fortemente che gli abitanti di quelle vicine montagne marine, avendole innalzato una cappella, l’osservavano come speciale protettrice”*¹⁵.

The fabulous story helps us identify at least two aspects: popular legend reports that the sea reached the cave but this happened long before 1326 as geology informs us. The huge cave - formerly home to the church/monastery of Sant’Elia - was transformed into the church of the Madonna and, subsequently, into a sanctuary. Let's not forget that the cave preserves traces of human activity in the Paleolithic. We cannot omit Lomonaco's precise description of the sanctuary, a place of profound devotion of the Praia people but also of all the neighboring towns: *“Quivi dalla parte di occidente vedesi una famosa grotta addimandata la grotta del cardinale Spinelli discosta 250 metri dal mare. Dal basso dell’arena dopo un’erta collina, e dopo aver ascesi molti gradini, si giunge alla prima grotta che forma un atrio con altissima cupola. Quindi dopo aver montati più di 50 gradini perviensi all’ingresso della grotta grande, la cui figura è triangolare, ma alquanto ineguale. Alle due estremità avvi delle aperture naturali donde piove nell’antro copiosa luce, è di un’altezza mirabile, e dal mezzo del lamione cade una stilla perenne di acqua limpidissima che riempie un pozzo in mezzo alla stessa: il suo circuito è più di piedi 800. Camminando a man dritta dopo alquanti scalini si ascende ad un altare dedicato alla Vergine dell’Assunta, e pochi passi lontano se ne scorge un altro. Serpeggiando le massicce pareti della grotta veggondi delle sabbie ammonticchiate, ove giace molto ossame, che ti ricorda i tempi tristissimi dell’oligarchia feudale, e dell’asprissima ostinatezza dei guerrillas calabresi”*¹⁶.

The geological conformation and the thousand-year events in the history of Praia a Mare are closely connected to the sea and land caves and we are not wrong in giving a double surname to this town: Praia a Mare, city of the island and of the caves.

¹⁵ Aieta in *Dizionario Geografico-storico-civile del Regno delle due Sicilie* op. cit., p.120.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.



Figure 3 – Isola di Dino, Grotta del Frontone.



Figure 4 – Isola di Dino, Grotta Azzurra.



Figure 5 – Cave of the Sanctuary of the Madonna and neighboring wall with large caves.

References

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