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**SOCIETÀ
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3RD
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Napoli
Castel dell'Ovo
10-14 July 1991



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A T T I

a cura di R. Paone e C. Piciocchi

Napoli - Castel dell'Ovo - 10/14 July 1991

UNDER-SEA TUNNELS IN THE VICINITY OF CASTEL DELL'OVO IN NAPLES

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Riassunto

Il gruppo di speleologi cecoslovacchi ha esplorato, durante il Simposio Internazionale sulle cavità artificiali, la scogliera sommersa del Pleistocene, lunga circa 50 metri, che si trova a 40-50 metri a Sud-Ovest della punta meridionale del Castello. Quattro tunnel artificiali sottomarini, lunghi dai 2 agli 8 metri, di profilo rozzamente trapezoidale, sono stati trovati. Noi supponiamo che rappresentino i resti di un antico porto greco della città di Partenope, fondata durante il 7° secolo a. C. fra la scogliera del Castello e la collina di Pizzofalcone.

The group of Czech cavers searched during the 3rd International Symposium on Underground Quarries held in Naples the submerged approximately 50m long, young Pleistocene volcanic reef lying some 40-50m SW from southern point of the Castle and running almost parallelly to via Eldorado. Four submerged artificial tunnels were found in the reef ranging in length from 2-8m. Their common feature is roughly trapezoedric profile typical for ancient Greek underground ediths.

Tunnel I is localised in the southern part of the reef. It is formed like other tunnels by single gently sloping corridor 6,5 m long and 1,6 m high. The depth of its roof is 1,4-2,6 m under the sea level.

Tunnel II is localised some 20 m north from tunnel I only 1 m under the sea level. It consist of single 4,5 m high and 1,9 m long rock bridge.

Tunnel III is localised only several metres north from tunnel II. It is the longest one reaching almost 8 m of total length. It has trapezoedric profile.

Tunnel IV can be found in the separate rock of the reef almost 5 m under the sea level. It is several metres long with small profile 60x80 cm. The research was carried without diving equipment so all the data have only informative value.

Concerning the origin of the tunnels we evaluated the possibility of the sea abrasion origin which could evolve due to the backwash currents returning from the Castle rock. However the semi-regular profile of the tunnels indicates the artificial origin. It is hardly to believe the tunnels were dug through under the sea level. Therefore we suppose

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they represent former sea level hollows later submerged due to the seismic activity of the region. We believe the tunnels may represent the remains of the ancient Greek harbour of the Parthenope village which laid protected between the Castle rock and the submerged reef. This solution is of course questionable and further research is needed to clear the relationship of the former settlement between Pizzofalcone and Castle rock.

The Czech cavers would like to stress they were not the first Czech visitors of Napolitan underground. The pious Czech traveller, Bedrich from Donín, during his pilgrimage to Santa Casa in Loreto visited Napoli in 1594. He describes several underground objects in the vicinity of Napoli. He notices water cisterna and relicts of blue and gold frescoes in the Cave of Sibyll of Cumae. Besides the description of Campania Felix, the miracle of St. Januarius he pays attention to Possilipo tunnel, Grotta del Cane, Grotta Dragonara, the underground passages of Flavian amphitheatre of Pozzuoli and in the Bath of Tritoli. His short but beautifully written description of Grotta del Cane is the first description of a cave ever written in Czech language since the former descriptions were recorded in Latin. The unpractical but pious noble man Bedrich from Donín died as beggar in 1634. Before his death he donated to the church of St. Salvator in Prague the large oil painting of the saint he adored and resembled as well — St. Franciscus Xaverius. His manuscript was for the first time published in 1940 in Prague under the title “Cestopis Bedricha z Donína” (The travels of Bedrich from Donín).

The other Czech traveller in Napoli Milota Zdirad Polák (1788-1856) represents a very special case of promising poet who later became the general of Austrian army and ceased any cultural activity. Polák spent as the officer of Austrian army three years in Napoli. His Italian life was for the officer of occupation army rather untypical. He had close personal connections to the local political opposition and he probably met another suspectful to regime writer — Stendhal who lived in Napoli at the same time and visited the same literate and muzician salloons.

Polák published in 1820-22 the first Czech modern traveler's book and maybe the most brilliant czech travel records of the 19th century under the title “The voyage to Italy” reflecting Goethe's “Italian voyage” (the last edition in Odeon publishing house, Praha, 1979). Unlike Goethe who in search of himself is writing diary of his soul, Polák in poetical language describes the history of Napolitan kingdom, the monuments and churches of the city, the cult of dead. With charm and joke he pays attention to the nature of the inhabitants, to the spirit of the city.

One short chapter is dedicated to the description of St. Gennaro catacombs. Another part deals with detailed history of Posillipo tunnel. Besides he mention the cave close to Averno lake, the corridors of Flavian amphitheatre and Grotta del Cane. We hope the book will be once translated to Italian.

Although the historical contacts between Czechs and Napolitans were not really common we feel obliged the both important Czech travelers were interested in local artificial caverns and they described them to Czech reader as early as almost 400 years ago.

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