

PETILIA POLICASTRO

HISTORY, CULTURE, TRADITIONS AND ANCIENT JOBS



Progetto 10.2.2FSEPON-CL- 2017-2025
ALLA SCOPERTA DELLE NOSTRE RADICI: FULL IMMERSION DAY:
ARTE E MESTIERI ANTICHI NEL CENTRO STORICO

Our origins, the history of the town, of the ancestors, of the family, are fundamental, and like the roots of a tree: they support us and give us our identity.

This is the reason why it is important to know our history and pass them on with great pride of owning them. As always, the non-knowledge does not erase things, but it makes everything more difficult by giving importance to gaps, that in the absence of objective elements are always filled with imagination, with the risk of projecting fantasies, anxieties and fears.

The cultural aspects of identity pass through numerous communication channels like: tales, the language, the cuisine, the customs, the crafts, the music, and often even by family stories, by school projects, personal interest or simply for the love of keeping alive our roots.



A brief history of Petilia Policastro

Going through the many narrow streets of the historical center of Petilia Policastro, you can immediately notice the typical imprint of the town of Hellenic origin, which brings up to mind a town rich in history and legends.

Policastro was an ancient center of Bizantine origin, its real name proves it; POLIKASTRON (Bigcastle) which is a Greek term.

The most probable period of its foundation goes from 800 to 830 A.D.

Starting from the IXth century, Policastro was a possession of the Normans.

In the late Middle Ages there was a Jewish ghetto in the eastern part of the town, where there was the existence of a synagogue in "Largo Santa Caterina" where today "Porta da Judeca" still persists.

Between the XVth and XVIth centuries, Policastro was the Seignory of the Carafa of Santa Severina. During this period of time the arts and letters flourished.

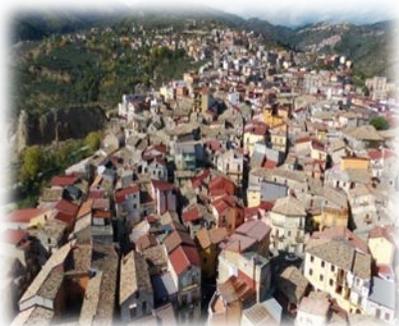
In the XVII century Policastro was the Seignory of the Medici of Florence. It was then held for about two centuries by the Philomarino Princes known as Della Torre.

In 1863, Vittorio Emanuele II, added Petilia, since then its name is Petilia Policastro.

Between the XIX th and XXth centuries, Petilia Policastro has been the biggest center of the Crotone interland, with singular economic activities: mills, spinning mills, sawmills, all driven by the force of the water.

Petilia Policastro today

Petilia Policastro is a town that has about ten thousand inhabitants, located on a cliff at 400 meters above the sea level. It is near the mountains of the "Sila", between the two rivers Soleo and Cropa. It is in the Province of Crotone. From here there is an enchanting view which dominates the whole "NETO" valley up to the blue Ionian Sea. In 2011, the President of the Republic, Giorgio Napolitano confers on the municipality the title «city».



A brief look at the districts of Petilia Policastro

Petilia Policastro has a density of 92 km² counting its other small districts. The vastness of the territory, the agricultural and the mountaineer's resources, the demographic increase and immigration from other parts of Calabria, have determined the creation of the three fractions: Foresta, Camellino and Pagliarelle.

Foresta is the youngest fraction, born in 1928 on the occasion of working on the silan wood by the Southern Forestry Company: SO.FO. ME. which has implanted an important sawmill and the station of the great cable car that conveyed all the timber produced in Sila. Many wood-processing industries still persist in Foresta and as a result it has become a considerable urban district. (1218 inhabitants)



Camellino: The oldest district of Petilia Policastro is immersed in the hilly Mediterranean vegetation. Its population is devoted to agricultural work and forestry.

(430 inhabitants)

Pagliarelle was born in the first decades of the nineteenth century during the Napoleonic domination. After a long first period of economic agropastoral and forestry, the population was mainly devoted to mining activities. (1277 inhabitants)



Our Mountains

Just above Pagliarelle, you can find the “Principe “ village, which together with “Giardino” is one of the most suggestive places of the “Sila Piccola”. Enchanting territories rich in mountain essences together with a rich undergrowth is where you can admire and taste wild berries such as; blackberries, raspberries and wild strawberries. You can admire the colours and greenery of bramblerose, fern, violets, red lilies, and orchids. Everything is immersed in an uncountaminated, not polluted and pure nature, just like the big Canadian and American parks. Here you can also find and pass an unforgettable day at the adventure park where you can walk safely on branches through wooden tunnels, on rope lines and bridges.

A little further down from the Principe village, you can find another place rich in chestnut trees. Petilia Policastro is among the most important chestnut producers. This fruit is harvested but it is also transformed in flour, jams, roasted and dried chestnuts.



Our Hills

Leaving the land of chestnut trees and going down to Petilia Policastro, you can pass through the village of San Demetrio, the hill area “par excellence”.

In ancient times it was precisely on these hills rich in vineyards that a fine wine was produced. In fact, an ancient wine mill, excavated in a single month, has been found in this area. The time of its use seems to date back to the Byzantines. From the 18th century onwards, San Demetrio, was renowned for the production of fine wines. The remains of wine mills and large barrels still remain even if today the production of wine is almost absent.



Important historical reference in San Demetrio is the rocky settlement of the “Colle della Chiesa”. Its thirty beautiful caves, some certainly prehistoric, other related to the Byzantine era, were created along a transhumant path, used by nomadic shepherds. But they were also used for residential purpose by some hermit people thanks for the presence of numerous crosses and niches for icons.

The Sanctuary “Santa Spina”



The sanctuary of the Sacred Thorn «Santa Spina», preserves a Holy Thorn, which is supposed of being part of the crown of Jesus Christ on the cross, venerated by the people because it is reputed to have saved them from a terrible earth quake on March 8th, 1832. The Church has a vast central nave, while the altar is made up of Baroque decorations. Above the altar there is the chapel where the Sacred Thorn is kept. On the ceiling of the church there is a beautiful painting of the four women of the Bible by the artist Cristoforo Sant’Anna.





In honor of the “Spina”, every second Friday of March people go on a pilgrimage from town to the Sanctuary following the procession to the Calvary. It is considered one of the main manifestations of custom which is organized by the association NATESS since 1978. It is a religious festivity which gained a historical and cultural importance in time involving people from Petilia and near by towns, but also immigrants that return to their home town in this occasion.



The Naca Procession

The Naca (“A Neca” in dialect) is a religious procession that takes place on Good Friday in Petilia Policastro and in other Calabrian centers. The main subject of the procession is the Naca (a dialectal term that derives from Greek νάκη (nake), which means woolly fleece, most likely used for the construction of cradles or hammocks), in which the body of Jesus is laid.

The "Naca" was carried on the shoulders with a slightly "annacante," rocking gait. The "Culla" or Christ coffin, is followed by the grieving Madonna, dressed in a black dress and represented with a heart pierced by seven swords. These are the seven sorrows of the Virgin and Mother of Christ. The Naca is preserved in the Church of S.S. Annunziata, precisely in the “ Congregation”, located next to the church.



THE «TOCCA TOCCA»

The Procession is preceded by some children playing two ancient wooden instruments, the “*tocca-tocca*”.

The deafening and grieving sound of these instruments announce the passage of the Procession with The dead Jesus. These ancient instruments recall the earthquake, which according to christian tradition, occurred with the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

There are two different “tocca tocca” instruments. The first one is more laborious than the second one to build. It is made of wood, it has a rectangular shape, and it can be of different sizes. Its sound is produced by a handle which commands a stick placed in the widest part of the instrument. It is crossed by a series of wooden plugs (from two to four), placed at regular intervals with different inclinations. Moving the crank, the stick turns on itself, allowing the pins to rise small wooden gavels (clappers), fixed in the narrowest part of the instrument. When they are released they hit the bottom of the box, producing the noisy sound.



(These two instruments were built by the students in 2013-2014 from the High School of Wood Arts in Petilia Policastro)

Instead the smaller instrument, is made up by a piece of wood, hallowed at the ends with a small crotch. On this crotch is inserted, through a little hole, a thin stick that tends with a toothed wheel with a wooden pin that serves to block it. One of the two sides of the groove is left longer. Turning it, the *tocca-tocca*, produces its original sound.

FLORAL FESTIVAL DECORATIONS

The floral festival decoration is a festival organized by the cultural association Nattes together with other associations and students of Petilia Policastro to enhance the feast of Saint Francis on the third Sunday of May. Flowers are picked and/or donated from people and arranged as a large floral carpet. They decorate Saint Francis Square with different designs near the church where the relics of Saint Francis lay.

This tradition has been going on for about 20 years. Many people from different associations and students help to set up and decorate the wonderful and colourful designs.

The procession walks across the floral path and at the end there is a big beautiful drawing of Saint Francis.





U " Mmitu " of San Giuseppe

The " Mmitu " of San Giuseppe" is a tradition of the past that has been re-evaluated thanks to the Natess Association that a few decades ago thought of re-evaluating an appointment that was in danger of being lost.

Until the 1960s, it was customary for the more affluent families of Petilia to invite in their homes some poor people to share and have lunch together on St. Joseph's day, March 19th. Among the different dishes on the menu, pasta with chickpeas was the fundamental main dish served. With the evolution of society, unlike in the past, "U Mmitu" no longer takes place in individual homes, but outside in neighborhoods where associations or groups of families cook and eat together "pasta con ceci". Around the tables there are dozens of people and the appointment is a real gathering that has lost some of its charm, but the sake of sharing and staying together have remained essential elements of this special day of celebration.



Typicalhomemade products

- The town's economy mainly depends on agriculture such as the production of olive oil, wine, chestnuts, animal farms, craftsmen.

PRESERVATION OF FOOD

- The process of preservation of the local products has always played a primary role in the local gastronomy of Petilia Policastro. Everything that is organically produced is preserved by a different process and method of conservation and in different periods, for a long maintenance of the food. Everything is preserved from tomato sauce, to the inimitable sun-dried tomatoes and the tasty aubergines cut into fillets and conserved in jars in extra virgin olive oil, to the sweet green and black olives and even peppers, mushrooms as well as the spicy red chilly to conserve the the sausages.



THE SLAUGHTER OF THE PIG

- For centuries the slaughter of the pig has been a real ritual, a custom and a great opportunity for the whole family to socialize with relatives and friends who were invited to eat together and to help with the preparation of the typical irresistible, delicious sausages, prosciutto, coppa, soppressata, jelly meat and lard.
- From the combination of tradition and art nothing is wasted, in fact, there are still women who make artisanal soap from the pig's grease.

EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL

- The traditional olive harvest has always been a great importance for the population and economy of Petilia Policastro. The olive harvest begins when the olives have just started ripening (October-November). Traditionally the olive harvest is done by hand to avoid damaging the drupes or however by adequate modern machinery and then transported to the local mills to obtain an extraordinary extra virgin olive oil.

WINE and vincotto

- Viticulture was introduced many years ago during the Greek colonization and today the wine production of the area around Marchesato is characterized by the typical geographical indication of the «Val di Neto» which includes the municipality of Petilia Policastro among the various territories. However, today it is mainly produced for personal home use.
- «Vincotto» is a syrup made of fresh grape must or fresh figs, boiled for hours until it reaches a dense consistency with a sweet taste suitable to prepare typical sweets such as «crustoli» and «turdilli» and fresh drinks. It is also suitable for children and the elderly due to its large properties.

ANCIENT JOBS and HANDCRAFTS

Petilia Policastro has always been the center of craft activities that served the whole neighborhood. There were so many artisanal enthusiasts, some managed to create even real works of art. Textile art has always been important for Petilia and one of the main tools is the old handloom weaver ("il telaio"). Many women made beautiful clothes and tapestry for their bride's linen kit. Today there are still a few women that make wonderful blankets and sell them.





Another exemplary of craft activities is the chair maker “u seggiaru”, manufacturer of straw chairs. Even today they still use beech lumber and for mending, “la vuda” a typical marsh fiber.

The shoemaker still uses the tools of the past, the real leather, nails, strings and the artifacts are beautiful and indestructible.



The blacksmith, “ ufurgiaru”, or master of wrought iron. Its production is innumerable and still appreciated today. Through out the history of mankind the work of the blacksmith has always been given a practical value to build and invent everyday items such as weapons, agricultural tools and instruments.



The dried figs transformation and preservation is linked to the regional food traditions especially in typical fig-based sweets such as «crocette».



Wood maker: In Petilia there are many people who still work with wood from carving to inlaying, from the restoration to the manufacture of real furnitures or of musical instruments such as the flying guitar.

The importance of wood working is demonstrated by the fact that in Petilia Policastro there is a Professional High school of Wood, "Industria e Artigianato", Made in Italy. In the pictures below there are some examples of different objects built by the students during their laboratory lessons in the last few years.



Si ringraziano:

- per alcune foto: Mascaro Franco, Riccio Antonia, Rizzuti Mimmo;
- per la collaborazione e disponibilità, il giornalista Rizza Francesco;
- per l'ospitalità nei luoghi del Convento della Santa Spina il parroco Marra Giuseppe;
- Ed il Comune di Petilia Policastro.



I corsisti:

Alunni del diurno: Fassari Maria Teresa, Ferrazzo Maria Pia, Ierardi Carmine, Ierardi Maria Teresa, Lucà Silvia, Mascaro Melany;

Alunni del corso serale per adulti: Carcea Fabio, Carcea Maria Francesca, Carvelli Francesco, Cosco Marisa, Lepera Mario, Parente Luigi, Segreto Paola, Vona Agata, Vona Domenico.

Gli alunni della scuola secondaria di primo grado "G.Marconi":
Cavarretta Anita, Ceraudo Karole, Rizza Morena, Seminara Livia

Tutor: Prof.ssa Cesira Carvelli
Esperta lingua inglese: Prof.ssa Rosa Maria Cortese
Esperto Informatico: Prof. Salvatore Mesoraca.