

THE HISTORY

Apice is a town of about 6,000 inhabitants located 7km from Benevento towards the east. The town was completely rebuilt after several seismic events, in particular after earthquakes in 1962 and 1980 giving rise to "Apice Nuova". From that moment, the original nucleus of the town will be called "Apice Vecchio". The country covers an area of 4,883 hectares from the valleys of the rivers Calore, Ufita and Miscano to the surrounding hills, at an altitude ranging from 147 to 632 meters. The Apice's herald dates back to 1504, when King Ferdinando d'Aragona, as a form of gratitude for the grain provisions offered by the Apice people during the period of famine in Naples, granted Apice this coat of arms. Over time, the bundles of wheat were replaced by flames and at the foot of the hills the representation of a water course was added, identifiable with the Calore river.

The origin of the name Apice is uncertain and has remote origins. The historians, basing themselves on some etymologic assonances, hypothesize that the first inhabitants of the place could have been the Japigi, population of Asia minor and of the Peloponnese that, in the first centuries before Christ, inhabited the Apulia territory. Findings such as the sculpture of the Bue Apis, set in the walls of the Church of San Nicola, in any way, certify the ancient historical origins of the town. Other historians, on the other hand, maintain that it derives its origin from influences from the Etruscans and the Pelasgians, which see a meaning linked to the birds used for divinations (Apis for the Samnites meant Bird); other hypotheses claim that it derives from the presence, in loco, of Marco Apicio who was commissioned by the Roman Senate to reward some legionaries on public funds and to share some lands of the Sannio to the colonists. The literary tradition collects under this name some characters who have dealt with gastronomy in different eras; on the contrary, the classical tradition does not mention the figure of Apicius as consul or official of the Senatus Romanus charged with collecting taxes in the Campania hinterland (publicanus). The first reference to Apicius of which we have news concerns a fierce opponent of the Lex Fannia that limited the waste and the superfluous during the banquets, including the excessive number of guests. The second was the rich patrician Marco Gavio Apicio, who lived in the 1st century AD and considered the author of many recipes then later collected in *De re coquinaria*, the first treatise on cooking. Apice has been inhabited both in pre-Roman and Roman times, crossed over the centuries by colonies of the Goths, Lombards, Normans, Swabians, Angevins and Aragonese. There are several finds that testify to these historical passages, including castles, churches and Roman remains.

CASTLES

The castles nearby the area were built during the Middle Ages, especially in the Norman period, and often stood in strategic positions, such as the top of the hills

or the pass of the valleys. The castles were surrounded by large walls and provided with towers; often around the castle there was a deep moat full of water and drawbridges. In addition to the mansion, there was a chapel, large dormitories for men of arms, warehouses and stables, while in the basement there were the terrible prisons.

The Ettore castle is certainly the best preserved one. It is located north of the entrance to the old town and is a large building that has undergone transformations over the centuries. It dominates the whole town and in fact all the main alleys lead to its square: this strategic position was a feature of the castles, because the feudal lord from above watched over the town. Over the years, the Ettore castle has been transformed into the Municipal House, the Carabinieri Barracks, the Elementary School, the Fascio headquarters, the Historical Museum with Library. Today it can be admired, at least in part, in its entire splendour thanks to a restructuring project implemented by the Municipality. It is believed that the fortress dates back to the 9th century and that it has Norman origins. Despite this title, inside it is possible to find a votive chapel of Lombard origins. Originally, the castle had four towers (today only two are left), providing the Apicesi with an enviable military defensive outpost. Built with river stones found near the neighbouring watercourses, it is said that the Castle has hosted important historical figures such as Manfredi di Svevia, Federico II and Antonio di Padova. Historic lords of the castle were the Maletta, the Balbano, Gustavo di Shabron and Innico di Guevara.

In the Cubante Recupo district, in a very advantageous position to defend Apice from the Saracens, stood a castle called "Castiglione". It was razed to the ground by Landolfo la Greca, contestabile of Benevento, which in retaliation against the Normans, who exercised oppression and bullying against the Beneventani, assaulted Apice (then belonging to the County of Ariano) razing the castle site in the place " Castiglione ", for which today no vestiges remain.

Another important castle is the one called "del Principe". Located on the Calore, today in the municipality of Calvi (a small town bordering the municipality of Apice), it was built by Frederick II who lived there for a long time so that he could open peace negotiations with the Beneventani.

THE MIRACULOUS SOURCE

Apice has the great privilege of having a miraculous source sprung by virtue of San Francesco d'Assisi. San Francesco d'Assisi, crossing the Sannio, went to Apice and above a pleasant and picturesque hill, from which there is a vast panorama, he built for himself and for his friars the Convent of S. Maria dell'Oliva. In the thick wood, before reaching the top of the hill, near the hermitage of S. Maria

dell'Oliva, Francesco succeeded in obtaining the regular transfer of a piece of land in favour of his friars, who dug in that place crude and narrow cells to dedicate oneself better to contemplation and prayer. At that time, the district was poor in water, so that the inhabitants of the place had to go to the Calore river to supply it: according to legend, the Saint did the miracle of making the water gush from a large rock. Legend has it that the monks, in digging the source, found an obstacle and could not move a large stone, so they named San Francesco, who bent over and with just three fingers, that is to say his thumb, index and middle fingers, raised the big boulder, making fresh, clear and abundant water gush out. The miraculous source is in front of the place where the Saint's cell was located; the source is accessed by entering a cave and on the right wall there is a stone engraved with the following inscription: "Miraculous source flowing after P.S. Francesco - anno salutis nostrae MCCXXII". On the left side, instead, in memory of the prodigy, the large boulder is still preserved with the imprints of the Saint's three fingers. It is said that the abundant water is fed only by three drops that fall at regular intervals; inside the fountain, a friar with his arms crossed can be seen carved on the boulder.

THE OLD TOWN

The Historical Centre of Apice shows a "shell" settlement with churches-to-castle main streets and a system of parallel roads directed to squares. At present, following the reconstruction in a different site that happened after the earthquakes in 1962 and 1980, it is uninhabited and retains a particular charm. The history of the inhabited area of Apice begins in the ancient past. It was probably at the time of the Roma Caput Mundi, that Marco Apicius was commissioned by the Senate of Rome to distribute some lands in Sannio region among legionaries who had returned from the war campaigns. The history of Apice Vecchio is interrupted abruptly at about 7.30 pm on August 21st 1962, when two earthquakes of the VI and VII degrees of the Mercalli Scale made Sannio and Irpinia tremble. Apice was one of the most affected centres, but it was not destroyed. The 6500 inhabitants were evicted, in fact, after the decision of the technicians of the Ministry of Public Works who, fearing further collapses, ordered their evacuation.

The inhabitants, not without controversy and harsh verbal conflicts, thus moved to the new settlement that rose on the opposite hill. Not everyone, in truth: very few daredevils resisted in the empty city and, among them, the mayor Luigi Bocchino, who did not want to leave his town. Since then, nothing has changed in Apice. No restoration, except for an intervention on the 8th century castle, completed a few years ago.

The houses of Apice were generally one, maximum two floors. The internal stone stairs, the bathrooms often obtained inside a room, perhaps protected from the eyes by a cardboard partition. On the ground floors, there is a built-in kitchen with a fireplace and a corner for animals. The typical rural architecture of the time, today almost disappeared from the Italian territory thanks to the contribution of so many daring surveyors who were asked to erase the traces of a past of poverty and privation.

The irony of fate is that an earthquake saved Old Apice. He saved it by stopping time. Inducing the entire population to move downstream. He saved it decades ago by depopulating it. By preventing aluminium, Plexiglas, illuminated signs, bold restorations and evidence of urban modernity, they violated the harmonious appearance of a Southern Italian town, stopped at the beginning of the sixties. For those who come across it for the first time, the impact is amazing. The forty years of the past are immediately felt. Streetlights, windows, grilles, alleys and gates take you back. Silence envelops everything, it surprises you. Empty dwellings, at the same time, induce a certain sense of anxiety. Is it possible that nobody is there?

You immediately feel that you find yourself in the middle of a museum. Fortunately, the ancient town, perched on its castle, has remained untouched, attached to its time standstill. It holds superhuman silences and deep quiet.