



MYTHS AND LEGENDS ON ETNA CAVES

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Abstract

The Author selected and reports hereby some most significant legends and tales related to Etna caves, in order to sketch an ideal underground itinerary through fantasy and wonder around Mt. Etna. The particular subject of the lecture prevented the Author from any kind of manipulation of the original texts or translation of it into a language other than Italian.

Two classic tales start this selection: both of them refer to caves presently existing only in people's memory, as they've unfortunately been destroyed or became inaccessible. The first tale concerns the Grotta delle Palombe (Doves' Cave) at Santa Maria La Scala, destroyed by a sea storm: popular belief placed here the scenic background of Aci's and Galatea's love story. The second one refers to St. Sophia's Cave on the hill of Cibali (northwest borough of Catania), buried by the expanding town: poets praised this cave as Hades Gate, wherefrom Pluto sorted out for Persephone's rape. Three legends are reported, among numberless tales very similar to one another, concerning enchanted hidden treasures, popularly said *truvature* (findings), often watched by demoniac beings. Also caves sanctified by hermits' presence are hereby reminded.

Though, the main part of the lecture reports the fascinating underground legends with a religious background, whose heroine is the Holy Virgin Mary, as they still feed Etna people's devotion. Four legends are reminded, concerning Our Lady of the *Pileri* at Randazzo, Our Lady of Valverde, Our Lady of the *Sciara* (lava flow) of Mompilieri, and Our Lady in the crypt of the church of St. Gaetano alla Grotta in Catania. A fifth tale, the *missed legend* of the Holy Virgin of Vadalato, concerns an unusual event that can be considered as a commentary of the subject dealt with.

Last but not least, an atypical polyedric tale brings the lecture to its end, a tale pregnant with epic and chivalrous atmosphere whose legendary world breaks into the sharp and rustic Etna caves, by hosting here a great northern king. This improbable legend, rides such different cultures and natural sceneries as Mt. Etna and the Round Table, that both topics get excited each other in turn: the legend of King Arthur on Mt. Etna.