

The story of Adria – the town that gave its name to the Adriatic sea

The town of Adria rose on the stretch of the coast, where the Po river discharged its water into the Adriatic sea. Indeed, the town was linked to the sea through the presence of a port-canal. In this way, the town had the honour of giving its name to the Adriatic sea. In these places, the presence of human beings had been witnessed from the bronze age. However, only since the 6th century B.c. a massive presence of human beings and especially a developed port and commercial centre had been established.

Witnesses, not only from the Ancient Veneti, but also from the Etruscans and the Ancient Greek, as well as from the Celts, had been found: a multiethnic society characterized therefore the port town. After a short gothic domination, Adria joined the sphere of influence of the Exarchate of Ravenna until the end of the 7th century, when the lands of Adria were deeded to the Pope and when the bishop of Adria was also appointed “count-bishop”.

When the districts began to rise, Adria gained a certain independence, that was still maintained later, when the district was ceded to the ducal Este family, until the definitive passage to the Venetian Republic in 1516. With the fall of the Most Serene Republic of Venice, Adria had been alternately occupied by the French and the Austrians until 1867, which was the year of the annexation of Adria to the kingdom of Italy. Between the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, the town had an agricultural and commercial development thanks to the reclamation of the lands, to the construction of new roads and also to the river traffic, which influenced the town planning.

There are many different theories about the origin of the name “Adria”, most of them are linked to the myth. Indeed, it is told that Dyomedes, the Ulysses' companion during the Trojan war, shipwrecked and found salvation in a peaceful beach. There he founded a town and called it “Aetria”, which means “peaceful”. Another legend tells that Adria originated from Atri or Adriano, who was the king of the Pelasgians and founded the town. The same legend also says that the king's gold carriage was buried into the ground of Adria.

More accredited theories maintain a Latin origin from the term “ater”, which means “sombre, dark”, or from “atrium”, which means “the porch of the house”. The second was an Etruscan word which was later reclaimed through the Latin. But “day, light” is the another meaning of “atrium”, that includes the concept of the East, the Orient. This is the reason why Adria could represent the nearest town to the sea which gave its name to the Adriatic sea.

The economic and the commercial importance of the town gained a foothold with the arrival of the Greek during the first half of the 6th century. Then the Etruscans supplanted the Greek. The Roman invasion dates back to the 3th century B.c. During that period the gradual decline of Adria began, especially because of the progressive landfill of the Po delta, which widened a gap between the town and the sea. The latter had been a vital source for the commercial trades and the reason of its prosperity for centuries.

“The power of the Etruscans extended widely both to the ground and to the sea before the Roman invasion. Indeed, the names of the “Superior sea” and the “Inferior sea” (the Tyrrhenian and the Adriatic sea, which enclose Italy as an isle) are the proof of their power: the Italic populations called one of these seas “Tusco”, a term that designated all the population, and the other “Adriatico”, a term that comes from Adria, an Etruscan colony.”

Livius V, 33, 7

“... and all these arms (are linked) thanks to the Fossa Flavia and they helped first the Etruscans to open up through the Segis arm, and then to divert horizontally the river currents within the Adriatic lagoons - called “Seven Seas” - and in this way to connect it with the famous part of Adria, town of the Etruscans. The sea was first called “Atriatium” from the name of this town and now “Hadraticum.”

Pliny, Naturalis Historia III, 120-121

“Oderzo, Concordia, Adria, Vicenza and other similar small towns are less hindered by swamps and they are connected to the sea through some small canals. It is also told that Adria was a famous city from which the name of the Adriatic gulf comes.”

Strabo V, 1, 8

“The town of Adria and there is the Adriatic gulf and the homonym river nearby. The land is so suitable to farming that animals breed twice a year, also with multiple births, delivering three or four kids, sometimes five or even more. Besides, moorhens lay eggs twice a day, even though they have a smaller size than the other hens.”

Hecateus of Miletus, by Stephan of Byzantium