

## 15. THE FONTANELLE CEMETRY

The Fontanelle cemetery is an old **tuff quarry** in the Sanità area of Naples, which dates back to the **Aragonese period**. The quarry provided building materials for local housing.

The name “**Fontanelle**”, or small fountains, comes from the numerous underground springs in the area.

During XVII century, the quarry was used as a cemetery to bury the victims of the **plague**, especially the 1656 outbreak which was so serious that the resultant poverty and epidemics affected the city for the whole of XVIII century and well into XIX as well.

Naples is home to mystery and the esoteric, and the cult of the dead has always been very strong and something the people are very interested in. The deceased is seen as being somewhere between this life and the **afterlife**, a kind of middle-man between us and God.

The various cemeteries and hypogeums dotted around the city have an important feature in common. They all house **lost souls** and their human remains. All the nameless dead, the victims of plague or earthquakes, those who committed suicide or were hanged, anyone who had their life taken away from them with no spiritual comfort, and with no family there to offer their love: all of these people belong to the lost souls category, abandoned to their fate.

Devotees choose a **capuzzella** or skull and “**adopt**” it, offering help and prayer and, in return, ask for themselves and their loved ones to be given grace and favour. The nameless skulls were buried and their graves looked after as if they belonged to the devotees, and this was why they felt it was their duty and their right to put the bodies inside wooden or glass **cases**. The skulls were cleaned frequently in the hope that they might sweat, because it was a widely-accepted belief that sweating was a sign of benevolence. Obviously it wasn't really sweat but simply **moisture** which came to the surface because of the external temperature and conditions.

In the Fontanelle Cemetery, the “**Carabiniere**” and the “**Captain**” have become symbols of the mystery and magic that surround the place, and legends, dream references and customs have grown up around them.

Monday was the day for the Souls in Purgatory, and this was the day when people collected money for the poor because they were supposed to be the living representatives of the lost souls. According to popular belief, any dreams you had on a Monday night were bound to come true.

Tradition had it that if you did not show enough respect for the dead, they would punish you.

Whether it is true or not, whether you believe it or not, the fact remains that one of the things that makes Naples unique is the mystery and tradition linked to its cult of the **anime pezzentelle** or sad souls.