



ACTIVITY: Swimming

CASE: [GSAF 1721.06.06](#)

DATE: June 6, 1721

LOCATION: The incident took place in the Tyrrhenian Sea, off Naples (at the beach of Ponte della Maddalena), Italy.

40°51'N, 14°17'E

NAME: Unknown

DESCRIPTION: He was a fisherman.

NARRATIVE: The man was collecting seafood when he was devoured by the shark. Fishermen, in retaliation for the man's death and to prevent the shark from damaging their catches, fished together and caught the shark.

INJURY: Fatal.

SPECIES: The shark was captured by placing a looped rope around its head. Its stomach contained many fish and human remains including "half of a human skull still covered on the outside with hair, the tibias, and part of the spine with its ribs." The incident involved a 1600-pound female white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias*. Dr. De Maddalena, in writing his book, *The Great White Shark in the Mediterranean Sea*, found a clarification of the measurements used by Ricciardi who stated the shark was 20 palmo long. The "palmo" (hand-width) that was used in the Naples province before 1840 corresponded to 0,263670 m. Therefore the white shark was 5,2734 m long.

SOURCES: Monograph by Francesco Ricciardi; Dr. Alessandro de Maddalena. (Note: See pages 4 & 4 for the original text, and page 6 for the translation.)

CASE INVESTIGATOR: Dott. Dr. Alessandro De Maddalena, *President of the Italian Ichthyological Society, Curator of the Italian Great White Shark Data Bank, Member of the Mediterranean Shark Research Group*

Italian Great White Shark Data Bank: utenti.lycos.it/Carcharodon/index.html

Italian Ichthyological Society: it.geocities.com/societaittologicaitaliana

Mediterranean Shark Research Group: www.elasmoworld.org/mediterraneangroup/index.shtml



*A view of the Bay of Naples with Mt. Vesuvius in the background and fishermen in the foreground
by Antonino Leto*

Relazione del mostro
DISTINTA
RELAZIONE
DEL MOSTROSO
PESCE

Preso da' Pescatori Napolitani nella Spiaggia
detta il Ponte della Maddalena
il di 6. Giugno 1721.



IN NAPOLI MDCCXXI. Per Francesco Ricciardi.

Con Licenza de' Superiori, e Privilegio.

*Distinguished Relation of the Monstrous Fish
Taken by a Naples fisherman on the beach called Ponte della Maddalena
on 6 June 1721
Published in Naples in 1721 by Francesco Ricciardi*



Canis carchariae species alia, 20 hand-widths long

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ESSENDO stato ne' giorni scorsi un Nottone, che pescava frutti di Mare nella Spiaggia del Ponte della Maddalena, divorato da un gran Pesce Cane, del quale accortisi in tempo altri Pescatori, ch'erano intorno, ebbero fortuna di salvarsi. Considerando poi coltoso il grave danno, ch'avrebbe apportato alla loro pesca il predetto Mostroso Pesce, non meno che la vendetta del morto loro Compagno, s'unirono, ed avendo fatto a spese della loc Cappella varj ordigni di ferro, e grossi Ami d'acciario, sopra più Barche in buon numero, si posero in traccia del Pesce, che s'era fatto vedere più volte nella medesima Spiaggia, ed avendolo osservato Venerdì scorso 6. del corrente li buttarono all'incontro in acqua grossi Ami nascosti in una Coscia di Cavallo, ma la Bestia, come se accorta si fosse degli aguati, avendo fiutata la Coscia la ributtò; allora i coraggiosi Pescatori pensando, che la Bestia con simile inganno altra volta tentandosi, molto meno si farebbe fatta adescare, posero in opera un'altra astuzia da loro preparata; e fu, che buttando in acqua un Cappio Scorrivoce con esca in mezzo, dalle due parti tenevano i capi della corda: sicchè andato il Pesce a divorire l'esca, ed avanzandosi coll'empito suo medesimo dentro al Cappio, strinsero dalle due parti i Pescatori della corda i capi, onde il Pesce restò legato verso la Nave: la Bestia sentendo stringersi per scappare diede un capirombolo colla testa verso la terra, e così rottasi la Nave colla fuga medesima diede nel secco, e restò presa. Fu incredibile l'allegrezza de' Pescatori, e l'applauso di tutto il Popolo, ed il concorso di tutti gl'Ordini a vedere una Bestia di così smisurata grandezza. Ella era lunga palmi 20. con una bocca d'eccessiva larghezza, con tre ordini di denti fatti a terra nella mascella superiore, ed uno nel inferiore. Aveva due Ali lunghe tre palmi, e sopra la schiena aveva una terza Ala assai più lunga dell'altre, l'arco della Coda s'innalzava palmi sette, la Pancia non aveva proporzione col resto del
Coc-

Corpo, per essere di circonferenza non meno di palmi quattordici; e si conteeua esser Femina, quale essendosi pelata, si trovo di canna sedici.

Il giorno seguente temendo i Marinari, che non puzzasse gli aperiero il Ventre, e dentro vi trovarono, oltre ad una gran quantità di pesci, un mezzo cranio umano coperto ancora de' suoi Capelli, le Tibbie, e parte della Spina colle sue Coste, le quali ossa probabilmente supponendosi essere del detto ineshimo Pelcatore da pochi giorni divorato.

Mà ben subito questa Eccellentissima Depurazione della Salute prevenendo anche ogni picciolissimo sospetto di cosa, che potesse nuocere alla comune salute, diede ordine, che fosse in mezzo all'arene brugiato, affinchè corrompendosi non incomodasse quella Contrada con la puzza.

Di questo Pesce parla lungamente *Aldovrandi* nel lib. 3. dicendo d'essere stato conosciuto dagli Antichi, sotto il nome di *Canis Carcharias*, e prova coll'autorità di *Plinio*, ed altri più Antichi esser questo Pesce ghiotto della carne umana, e perciò nemico de' Nuotatori, e forse per questo motivo non è in uso la sua carne, la quale per altro è bianchissima, e di buon sapore, come attesta *Rondelezio*.

Li denti di questo Pesce sogliono legarsi in argento, e sospenderli al collo de' Fanciulli per Amoletti, per preservarli dalla paura, e per ajutare la loro dentizione: anzi dicono i Naturalisti lo sfregolare le gengive con un dente di questo Pesce, giovare assai per il dolore de' denti, giovando ancora per questo il Cervello dello stesso Pesce cotto nell'oglio, ed unto poi sopra al dente, che duole.

Essendosi appresso veduto un simil Pesce, se li vò dando la caccia per prenderlo, giudicandosi esser il Maschio, che si fallie con la detta presa Femina venuto in questi Mari.

I L F I N E.

TRANSLATION OF TEXT

In days past a swimmer, who fished seafood along the beach of il Ponte della Maddalena, was devoured by a great "Dogfish" [this is how Italians of old refer to large sharks], which was noticed in time by other fishermen who were around, and had the fortune to have saved themselves. Then, considering the serious damage that the aforesaid monstrous fish would have brought to their catch, not to mention the vendetta for their dead companion, they joined together, and having made at the expense of their chapel various iron tools and large steel [sword/blade-like] fish-hooks, even more boats in good number were set on the trail of the fish, which had been seen more times off the same beach, and having been observed last Friday the 6th. The fishermen threw into the water large hooks hidden in a horse's thigh, but the beast, as if it was aware of the needles, having smelled the thigh, rejected it. Then, the courageous fishermen, thinking that with a similar deceit, much less would lure the beast, they placed into work another trick that they had prepared, throwing into the water a slip knot with bait in the middle, and from two parts they held the heads of the rope: so that the fish went to devour the bait, and advancing with a fury, caught itself within the loop; then, the fishermen tightened from two parts the heads of the rope, by which the fish remained tied near the neck: the beast, feeling the rope tighten, tried to escape by diving down, with head towards the bottom, and in this way, its neck was tightened [broken?] in that same flight, and it gave in and remained captured. It was incredible, the joy of the fishermen, and the applause of all the people, and the competition of all the orders to see a beast of such immense size. It was 20 hand-widths long with an excessively wide mouth with three rows of robust teeth in the upper jaw and one in the lower. It had two long fins three hand-widths long, and over the back a third fin much longer than the others. The arc of the tail curved, seven hand-widths; the stomach was not in proportion with the rest of the body, being in circumference not less than 14 palm-widths; and it was known to be female, and being weighed, it was sixteen [Neapolitan weight measure, 1 cantaro = ~100 lbs; so shark was ~1600 lbs].

The sailors dreaded the following day [because of the smell?]; they opened the stomach and found within, besides a large amount of fish, half of a human skull still covered on the outside with hair, the tibias, and part of the spine with its ribs, these bones supposedly belonging to the poor aforesaid fisherman eaten a few days prior.

But very quickly the most excellent delegation of health, preventing every least suspicion of what could endanger the common health, gave order that it was to be burned in the middle of the arenas [amphitheater?; town square?], so as, while deteriorating, not to inconvenience that district of town with the smell.

About this fish Aldovrandi speaks at length in vol. 2, saying that it was known to the ancients under the name of Canis Carcharias, and proved with the authority of Plinio [Pliny] and other older/more ancient ones to be voracious for human flesh, and therefore an enemy of swimmers, and perhaps for this reason its meat is not in use, which nevertheless is very white and of a good flavor, as Rondelezio attests.

They tie the teeth of these fish in silver and suspend them from the neck of children as amulets to protect them from fear and to help their teething: indeed, naturalists say that one can loosen the gums with a tooth from this fish and be of much use with toothaches, and also of use is the brain of the same fish cooked in oil and then greased over the tooth that hurts.

A similar fish was seen nearby, they themselves giving chase to take it, judging it to be the male that might have come into these waters