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Prehistoric origins for the place name *Cetaria*? A new hypothesis arising from the meeting of archaeological science and toponymy

Marcello A. Mannino

Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Department of Human Evolution (Leipzig)
Excellence Cluster TOPOI, Freie Universität (Berlin)



Cetaria was a small town on the northern shores of Sicily and, according to Ptolemy, it was located between *Drepanum* (Trapani) and *Panormus* (Palermo). The origin of this place name is unclear, although it may be associated to the practice of tuna fishing at the present-day locality of Scopello, on the western side of the Gulf of Castellammare. This paper explores the possibility that the origin of the toponym reflects a more literal association with cetaceans rather than tuna. The opportunity for doing so arises from the find of a large cetacean bone assemblage at Grotta dell'Uzzo, a cave around 5 km north of Scopello. For a few decades, Mesolithic hunter-gatherers took portions of whales and dolphins to this site and, according to isotope analyses and dating, consumed them there regularly sometime before 8,000 years ago. These groups lacked whaling technologies and in all likelihood exploited stranded cetaceans. Analogies between the Gulf of Castellammare and stranding hotspots worldwide suggest that the area around Scopello may have been the location of the strandings. The implications of these findings for the origin of the toponym *Cetaria* and for other similar names around the Mediterranean Sea will be discussed.