



Sicilian World Heritage

SicilianWorldHeritage

The Sicilian patrimony made UNESCO World Heritage





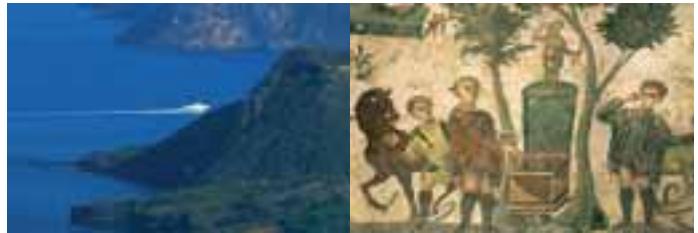
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The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization - UNESCO founded in London on 16 November 1945 arose from the intention to contribute to the maintenance of peace, respect for Human Rights and the equality of peoples through the channels of Education, Science, Culture and Communication.

The World Heritage Convention to which there is correlated the World Heritage List -WHL was adopted during the General Conference of UNESCO in 1972. Currently 182 countries (as on 28 April 2006) adhere to the Convention, transforming it into one of the biggest international legal instruments for the protection of the cultural and natural heritage.

According to the Convention, cultural heritage means a monument, a group of buildings or a site of historical, aesthetic, archaeological, scientific, ethnological or anthropological value. The natural heritage refers to important physical, biological and geological characteristics, as well as the habitats of endangered animal and plant species and areas of particular scientific and aesthetic value.

Sicily, with The Valley of the Temples in Agrigento (1997), The Roman Villa of Casale in Piazza Armerina (1997), The Aeolian Islands (2000), The Baroque Towns of the Val di Noto (2002), Syracuse and the Pantalica Rock Necropolis (2005), is among the Italian regions with the biggest number of sites on the WHL.

Since 2003, the year of approval of the "Convention for the safeguarding of the immaterial cultural heritage", UNESCO has also set going projects to protect five spheres of human activity: traditions and oral expressions, including language, seen as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; entertainment arts; social practices, rites and feasts; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; traditional craftsmanship.

In Sicily recognition and inclusion in the WHL has gone to the tradition linked to the Sicilian Puppet Theatre.

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A grayscale map of Sicily showing its coastline and internal regions. The city of Agrigento is highlighted with a teal dot and labeled in teal text. Other labels visible on the map include "Regno" in the north-central region and "TANIA" in the northwest.

Agrigento

sicilian







Tempio dei Dioscuri

Temple of Vulcan

Temple of Zeus

Temple of Theron

Museum

Oratory of Phalaris

Hellenistic-Roman district

Temple of Juno

Temple of Concordia

Temple of Aesculapius

Temple of Hercules

cultural patrimony

The **VALLEY** **Agrigento** of **TEMPLES**

The rediscovery of Akragas was set going towards the end of the eighteenth century, when the first European travellers came here. They ventured into Sicily discovering unexpected and immense artistic and archaeological riches, despite those who, like the compilers of the Encyclopaedia, thought that on the island there was nothing interesting, apart from the villainous activity of the inquisition. What the travellers observed more than two centuries ago is still offered today to the eyes of visitors, and their descriptions are in many respects still topical: the temples, today as then, are lined up on the crest of a hill, and are the most evident symbol of a city, once among the most powerful in the world, whose richness and beauty were sung of by the greatest poets of the 5th century. Indeed, that was the period of greatest splendour for Akragas, which was founded in 528 BC by settlers from Gela and in the space of a century became one of the richest and most powerful cities in the Mediterranean, a cradle of arts and sciences, a city whose citizens, according to the philosopher Empedocles' happy definition, lived as if they were going to die the next day and built as if they were going to live for ever.

Of this constructive fervour, the temples, built in the 6th and 5th centuries BC, are the most evident monumental expression, little remaining, unfortunately, of the Greek city, destroyed by the Carthaginians in 406 BC. Agrigento, though enjoying other moments of ephemeral splendour, never again returned to the ancient splendours and gradually became a provincial town like so many others - if it were not, precisely, for the temples. They afford an extraordinary sight, enchanting every visitor, especially at sunset, when the sinking sun seems to set them on fire and really very little is required to return with the imagination to the splendid city sung of by Pindar.



Proclaimed World Heritage by UNESCO in 1997, they are in the valley below the modern city, which maintains the medieval layout, constituting a remarkable archaeological walk.

To the right of the Golden Gate, toward the south and the sea, a path leads to the imposing ruins of the **Temple of Olympic Zeus**, which (together with temple G at Selinunte), was the most imposing one in the west (the surface area is almost 7000 square metres, bigger than that of the Roman basilica of St. Peter's). Its construction was undertaken in 480 BC and was characterized by the presence of **Telamons**, huge statues about eight metres high, which symbolized the force of nature subjugated by Zeus. Among the columns supporting the entablature, they were all destroyed except one, kept at the Agrigento Archaeological Museum (among the ruins there lies a cast). Ruined because of abandonment, bad weather and

earthquakes, in the eighteenth century it became a sort of stone quarry: Agrigento workmen used the gigantic tufa blocks for the construction of a dock at Porto Empedocle. Near the temple there was a gigantic altar for sacrifices, on which up to one hundred oxen could be sacrificed at one time, and there was room for two thousand believers to watch.

Around the temple of Zeus there is a big sacred area, constructed in the 6th century BC and filled with buildings for worship but also private residences and shops. Here the temples proper are four but the only one immediately distinguishable from the non-religious buildings is the one referred to as that of **Castor and Pollux**, four corner columns of which are extant, raised in 1836; it is a very picturesque complex, so much that this temple is used as a symbol of Agrigento (480-460 BC). In a depression to the north of this temple there has been identified

the **Kolymbetra**, a swimming pool that with its waters made it possible to irrigate the most fertile garden in the valley. The area, entrusted to the Italian Environmental Fund in 2001, has been restored from by the point of view of vegetation and fitted out with explanatory panels.

In the opposite direction, on the ridge of a low hill, three temples stand in a line. The **Temple of Hercules** is believed to be the oldest (6th century BC); it has nine columns standing, on some of which the purple plaster with which the temple was painted is just visible.

Further on in all its beauty there stands the **Temple of Concordia**, one of the most perfect from the stylistic point of view in the whole Greek world, "inexpressibly beautiful and picturesque" (F. Münter). The temple, which is the best

preserved in the Greek world together with the Theseion in Athens and the Posidonion at Paestum, owes its integrity to a fortunate circumstance: unlike the other pagan temples more or less demolished by the Christians, this was converted into a church in the 6th century. So the structure remained intact and in 1748 the temple, which was exquisitely built in the 5th century in the Doric manner, was restored in its original forms (apart from some arches in the walls of the cell). The road of temples - flanked by Christian-Byzantine hypogea - goes to the **Temple of Hera Lacinia or Juno**, at the extremity of the ridge, in a charming position. Its look is like that of the temple of Concordia: it was built more or less at the same time as the latter; and is a little smaller. On the walls of the cell you can still remarkably see traces of the

fire that was started in the building by the Carthaginians in 406, during the sack of Akragas. East of the temple, the remains of the usual altar for sacrifices are found and a stretch of street deeply furrowed by carts.

If these are the essential stages of the visit, there are also a great many other remains of the ancient city to be seen: from the **Temple of Aesculapius** to the tomb of Theron and the Hellenistic-Roman district with the oratory of Phalaris, the **ekklesiasterion** and the **bouleuterion**, and finally the interesting **Archaeological Museum** at which precious items from Akragas are kept, like the lion's head gutters that adorned some of the temples to the splendidly painted vases, but also panels and models that give a more precise idea of the city and its monuments.

Akragas



Girgenti [...] affords the most stupendous set of temples that one could ever admire. On the crest of a long ridge, stony, entirely bare and red, a burning red, without a blade of grass, without a bush and with the sea, the beach and the harbour dominant, three superb temples are delineated that, seen from below, stand out with their enormous outlines of stone against the blue sky of warm countries. They seem to be built in the air, amid a magnificent and desolate landscape.

Guy de Maupassant Sicily





Beyond the hill of Minerva, you reach that line of temples that are at the southern edge of the walls of the city. The sight of them against the background of the Libyan sea, when the ardent sun illuminates their yellow stones and makes the powerful columns shine, still today is enchanting; and it makes you think how stupendous it must have been in antiquity.





**The telamon is here, two steps
away from Hades (sultry, immobile murmur)
lying in the garden of Zeus and crumbles
its stone with the patience of a worm
of the air: here there is joint upon joint
amid eternal trees for a single seed.**

Salvatore Quasimodo Temple of Zeus at Agrigento





cultural patrimony

SYRACUSE and the Syracuse Pantalica rock necropolis

Syracuse and the Pantafica rock



Certainly there are monuments, from different epochs and in different styles, bearing witness to a glorious past, attempts being made to recover the memory of it and respect for it. But also sea, clear and rich in flora and fauna, luxuriant papyri, more and more intense cultural life, craft activities and artists' studios, and gastronomy. There are so many things that are interesting about Syracuse, the last place, chronologically, to be declared World Heritage by UNESCO. This is undoubtedly a recognition of the historical prestige of this city that for a long time was one of the capitals of the Mediterranean. But it is also a recognition of its determination to once again play a major role in the Mediterranean today, also, indeed above all, through the recovery and valorisation of the signs of the past. Which means not only Magna Graecia, but also Swabian and Baroque, art nouveau and modern architectures.

A ferment of rebirth is running through **Ortygia**, the oldest part of the city, where prehistoric peoples settled well before the Greeks. On this islet that, at the centre of the water on which the city looks out, was once the stronghold of the tyrant Dionysius I, one of the most important characters in ancient Sicilian history, roads, piazzas, houses, churches and buildings are being restructured, transformed and opened to the public, and hotels, pubs, eating and drinking places of every kind are multiplying.

All this is for a night life that is a worthy conclusion to a day spent visiting monuments: the **Neapolis**, with the imposing Greek theatre where every year classical performances are done, the altar of Hiero, the latomias with the famous "Dionysius' Ear." Then there is the area of the **Epipolis**, with the little San Giovanni Evangelista church, over an immense network of palaeo-Christian catacombs, and the modern sanctuary devoted to the miraculous Madonna of Tears. There are the **museums**, including the archaeological one, the biggest in Sicily and one of the most important in Italy, and the Regional Gallery, at which there are authentic treasures like the *Annunciation* by Antonello da Messina and the *Burial of Saint Lucy* by Caravaggio.

necropolis

And last but not least there is Ortigia, with irregular little medieval streets gathered around the elegant cathedral square, one of the most beautiful in Italy, all surrounded by splendid buildings and dominated by the cathedral, whose Baroque façade hides the structure of an ancient Greek temple.

Here the cult of the virgin martyr St. Lucy, the highly venerated patron saint, replaced that of the goddess Athena, and the traces of the ancient architecture are placed side by side with the more modern architecture in splendid syncretism. On the islet one walks very slowly, looking up to admire the stone volutes and the wrought iron balconies of the Baroque buildings, but also allowing the gaze to wander on the sea, which appears every now and then, sparkling like a mirror. One visits **Maniace Castle** and the **Jewish miqwe** (tubs for purification baths), the oldest in Europe, and one halts at the **spring of Arethusa**, which according to legend is a nymph who was turned into a spring to escape too ardent a suitor. One goes shopping and one stops for lunch, an ice cream or a snack. One can also go swimming, taking advantage of the little flights of steps that go down to the surface of the sea from the bastions, the sea now being clean thanks to the sewerage having been redone, and one sunbathes comfortably stretched out on the solariums reaching out over the sea. From Ortigia one can set out in a wooden fishing boat to go to visit the caves on the **Maddalena peninsula**, whose extremity for some time now has been protected through the Plemmirio marine reserve; here you can go scuba diving or snorkelling to discover splendid seabeds. Not far away there are the boats that go up the **river Ciane**, a pleasant and relaxing trip, but also one of great botanical interest, allowing you to observe the only wild colony of papyrus in Europe, as these grow along the banks of this river.

From Syracuse you can also get to another important place which was declared World Heritage in 2005: the **Pantalica necropolis**. This is a place of wild beauty, at the confluence of the **rivers Anapo** and the **Calcinara**, which in addition to the archaeological interest is also interesting in terms of nature and landscape thanks to the richness and variety of the plant and animal species that live on the banks of the watercourse. Here the rocky bastion of Pantalica rises high over the deep valley hewn out by the water, in the shade of plane trees and oleanders, in its millennial flow. Here in the stone, the Siculi, the prehistoric people that lived in Sicily before the advent of Greek colonization, dug out almost five thousand graves. It is not known for certain how they succeeded in doing so, since in the Bronze Age, from which the necropolis dates, the Siculi did not know iron, and therefore they had to use axes or ancient systems that combined water and fire. The workers were suspended in the air, tied to ropes by the waist, or astride a beam, on tottering scaffolding. The corpses, in turn, were pulled up or lowered with ropes, "a grisly spectacle seen from afar and from the opposite slopes" (Paolo Orsi).

With the passing of the centuries, the graves became a refuge for persecuted Christians, a hermitage and then a residence for Arabs and Norman. Then, gradually, the site was abandoned.

A mysterious people remained, that of the Siculi, swallowed up by the history of other much more daring and therefore more famous people. But the Pantalica graves, though mute, hand down the memory of them, together with the scattered ruins of the mysterious Anaktoron, the prince's palace, a perfect geometry of walls of stone whose splendours the imagination can only guess at. This is all that is left of a city that must have existed, and who knows what it was like.



And so on the sea there appears the white castle and its opposite cape of the island. It was the Greek, Arabic, Norman and Spanish Syracuse. There opens up the incomparable gulf on which the city rests easy and glorious, and around it there are the harmonious hills that seem to remember when in the theatres the hymns and odes of the good poets of the motherland were delivered to the opulent settlers.

Riccardo Bacchelli The tuna knows

O beautiful daughter of haughty cities

powerful Syracuse

temple to the lord of bellicose hosts.

O divine nurse of generous minds...

Pindaro 1st Pythic Ode



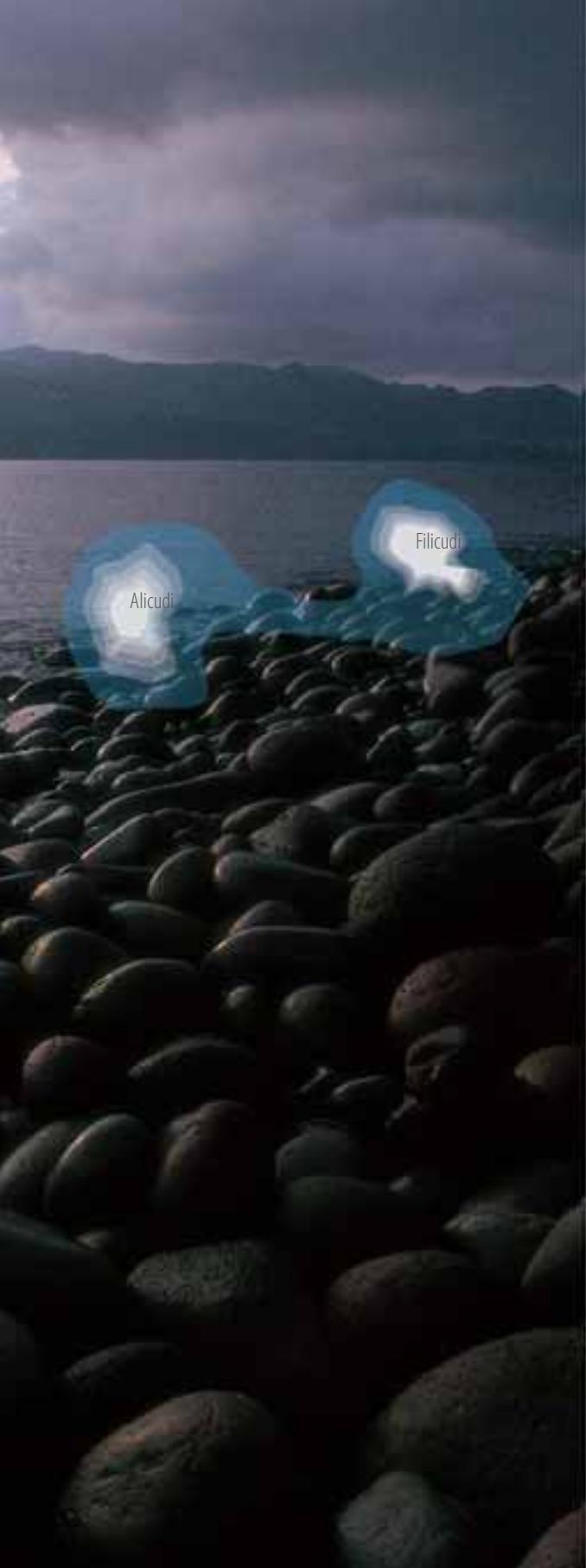


Along these roads Venus seeking her son Cupid roamed / and calling said everywhere / To anyone who can tell me of Cupid who fled from me / I will give a kiss as a reward / and to anyone so bold as to bring him back to me I promise / and swear that much more will I give than a pure kiss. / He has such signs of a child, and such tools / that on his first appearance they will be evident.

Moschus of Syracuse Love the Runaway







naturalistic patrimony

AEOLIAN Messina ISLANDS





In winter, to the traveller going along the sinuous coast road that flanks the Tyrrhenian Sea, the Aeolian Islands (which became World Heritage in 2000) appear in the motionless and clear air like certain drawings by children, with the outlines of the islands floating between sea and turquoise sky. On warm days, instead, when haze settles on the horizon, the uncertain blue outlines of the islands look like those of an ancient fleet that has run aground, hopefully awaiting rescue. But in either season, they accompany the traveller for long stretches, and it is difficult to resist their call, as if new sirens intoned their bewitching songs from the coasts that seem so near.

The Aeolians are almost magic islands, and fabulous ones: the ancient Greeks, fascinated by their changing appearance - indeed, they appear and disappear according to the whim of the clouds and the winds, changing their colour and, it would seem, even their positions - set more than one of their myths here. It is not difficult to understand this even today, though our souls are now accustomed to every form of technology, from the moment when you reach **Vulcano**, the first landing place of the sailor coming from the Sicilian coasts. With its dark look and the smell of sulphur floating around, it might seem indeed like the antechamber of hell... and in some respects it was hell, for the hosts of damned that, up to the end of the nineteenth century, were forced in a state of inhuman imprisonment to extract sulphur and alum from the bowels of the earth. Today of those poor wretches only the memory remains, and the island is instead a destination of tourists and vulcanologists. The former come in search of the emotion of a bath in the heated by the volcano (which has therapeutic validity for the treatment of some skin diseases) and of an ascent to the volcano cloaked in dust and sulphur crystals; the latter are attracted by the possibility of observing and studying volcanic phenomena close up, the only trace, at least for the time being, of eruptive activity that provoked huge cataclysms in the past, described by historians from the epoch of Pliny the Elder on with abundance of dreadful details.

It was really an eruption that detached Vulcano from its neighbour **Lipari**, the pulsating heart of the archipelago, its capital since the most remote epochs, when the islands were at the centre of the flourishing trade in obsidian, the volcanic glass sought even in the most distant lands in the Mediterranean for its properties: it was not only a very sharp stone, but it also had a reputation for being thaumaturgic, magic.

The village is all around two landing places and in it there is the Aeolian Archaeological Museum, one of the most important in Italy, set in the area of the castle, the fortified zone where the successive inhabitants of the island settled. In addition to finds testifying to the ancient history of the archipelago, the museum also has a vulcanological section in which the particular geology of the islands is illustrated. After a visit to the museum you can visit the church dedicated to the patron saint, St. Bartholomew, which has a beautiful ceiling; you can also see the excavations that have brought to light residences from different epochs, some prehistoric, and look out from the belvedere near the theatre, to enjoy the magnificent panorama of Marina Corta, the picturesque harbour that is one of the hearts of social life on Lipari.

After you get back onto the sea a must is to sail round the island, which will allow sailors to admire caves, little bays and cliffs, before setting off for Salina, the next stage. Dominated by the massive shape of two mountains, this island is known as "the green one" because of the quantity of vegetation that covers it,

and in effect its two main products are linked to nature: capers and Malvasia, a sweet liqueur known since antiquity. On Salina you can visit the village of Pollara, with a beach at the foot of a Cyclopic sheer part, and you can look for traces of Massimo Troisi, who here made *Il Postino*, his last film. The archipelago, besides, can boast of a long cinema history: on Stromboli, for instance, Roberto Rossellini made his film Stromboli with Ingrid Bergman, giving the public black and bare images of the island. It is nothing but the peak of a huge submarine volcano, whose activity, documented since the remotest times, never ceases, so much so that eruptions, at almost regular intervals of 15-20 minutes, even acted as a lighthouse for people who crossed the low Tyrrhenian. Today nighttime excursions are organized to see the eruptions reddening against the black velvet of the sky.

Now we must speak of Panarea, a picturesque mix of sea, archaeology and social life. This island for some years has been distinguished by exclusive tourism, being preferred by the best-known members of the international jet set. Near Punta Milazzese there is one

of the prehistoric villages that are most important for the history of the archipelago, but also the splendid Cala Junco, one of the most beautiful in the Aeolian Islands. And we must also speak of the two most secluded and solitary sisters, Alicudi and Filicudi.

The former, more to the west, is not an island for everybody: you need only know that there is not even one road but only paths up which you climb on foot or on a mule's back.

The houses are few and tiny, concentrated in the western part, and it is only for a few years that they have had electric energy. Filicudi is also very distant from mass tourism, although less wild than its neighbour. A must is a bathe in the gigantic Sea Ox cave, as well as excursions to the Perciato and the Canna spit, a basaltic rock-stack that rises over seventy metres from the surface of the sea.

And as we are talking about islands and sea, your luggage must include a mask and nozzle: in this way even less expert people can explore the magnificent seabeds, observing on the water's surface Gorgonia grasslands and the rapid flashes of every sort of fish.

**And we reached the Aeolian Islands; here there was
Aeolus... dear to the immortal gods / ... /
and a whole month he kept me with him, he asked me every thing
But when I asked to return home and implored
to be allowed to leave, he did not say no, he prepared my departure.**

Homer Odyssey





Immersed in the enchanting sea of Sicily, these small islands captured my soul in an unusual way, whether they appeared to me during tempestuous gusts or whether I contemplated them dotted with vineyards in the summer, resembling emeralds in a sea of sapphires.

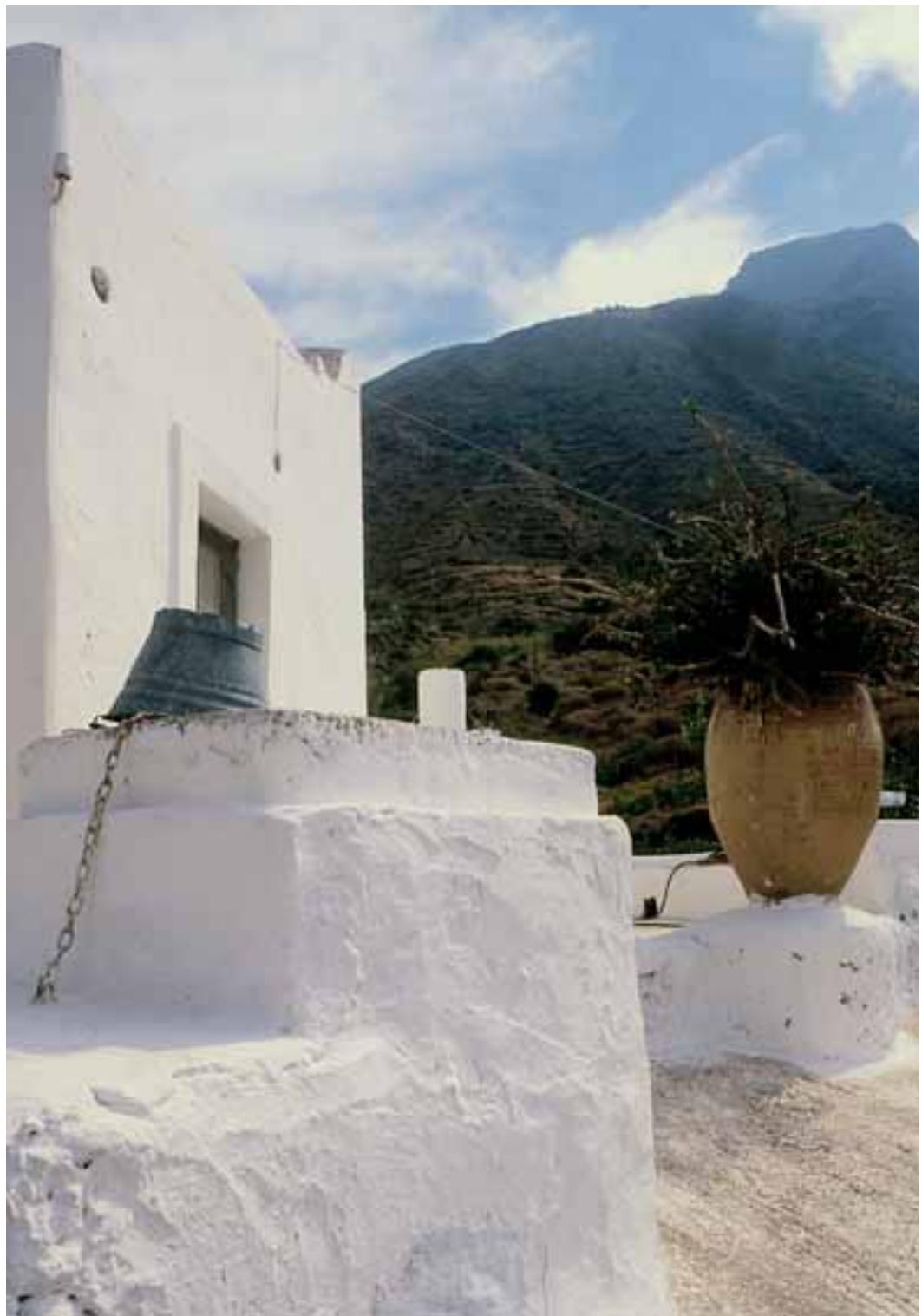
Luigi Salvatore d'Austria The Lipari Islands



“...I confess that this night is one of the most curious that I have spent in my life... I could not break away from that terrible and magnificent spectacle.”

Alexandre Dumas Stromboli, from Trip to Sicily







This Sicily bathed by the laughing and singing waves of the Tyrrhenian Sea, from whose breast in a semicircle, like a protecting shelter, the garland of the Aeolian Islands, starting from the great cone of Stromboli, rises in the eastern part, as far as the thin contours of Salina and Alicudi, which fade into the distant fog.

Augusto Schneegans **Sicily in nature, history and life**





monumental patrimony

The **VAL** **di NOTO**

Catania
Caltagirone
Millettò Val di Catania
Palazzolo Acreide
Noto
Ragusa Ibla
Modica
Scicli



The earthquake of 11 January 1693 was one of the most catastrophic events in Italy in historic times. The earthquake - to which experts today assign an intensity equal to the eleventh degree of the Mercalli scale - destroyed an area of hundreds and hundreds of square kilometres: practically all south-eastern Sicily.

Yet, despite death and desolation, never has it been truer than in this case that "it's an ill wind that blows nobody good": the reconstruction, undertaken with heroic fervour, gave rise to what is now defined as the "Val di Noto Baroque", an inestimable patrimony of art and architecture that in 2001 UNESCO proclaimed World Heritage.

The towns and villages chosen to make up this treasure are eight in number: Catania and, in its province, Caltagirone and Militello Val di Catania; Ragusa with Modica and Scicli; Palazzolo Acreide and Noto, in Syracuse province.

Catania may not be the most beautiful Sicilian city, but certainly it has a splendour of its own, in addition to an environment of great vivacity, joyfully rediscov-

ered by young people, artists and cultural personalities. Here you can admire the line of churches and monastic buildings in Via dei Crociferi, the gigantic San Nicola church and the refined backdrops of Piazza Duomo, with the building of the town hall, the seminary and the Elephant and Amenano fountains framing the Cathedral, dedicated to the beloved patron saint, St. Agatha, and the sumptuous Benedictine monastery, which has nothing to envy a royal castle. The Benedictines were also among the protagonists of the reconstruction, as can be seen at **Militello Val di Catania**, a town that, in spite of its limited size, can boast of a quantity of Baroque buildings of merit: from the monastery, precisely, that reprises the structure of the one in Catania, with the attached San Benedetto church, to the buildings of the nobility - including Palazzo Baldanza-Denaro and Palazzo Liggieri - and a large number of sacred buildings like the cathedral church, the Madonna della Catena church and the Sanctuary of Santa Maria La Stella.

In Catania province we also find

Caltagirone, well known for ceramics production since remote times. The quality of the production can be observed more or less everywhere, in the municipal park as on the risers of the monumental flight of steps of Santa Maria del Monte, which since 1608 has connected the lower and upper parts of the town. This is one of the best-known attractions in Caltagirone, and also the protagonist of numerous events like the flower procession in May, and the night-time illumination with coloured oil lamps in July. Below it there is the Baroque San Giuseppe church, but also worth seeing is the beautiful San Giacomo church, with an original bell tower on top of which there sit the four evangelists, St. Claire and the Most Holy Saviour.

The other provincial capital, **Ragusa**, in addition to a profusion of churches - including the beautiful San Giorgio Cathedral, at the extremity of the oblong plaza in the heart of the Ibla district - also has quite a big quantity of noble mansions. With curious harmony, the new Baroque buildings done at the behest of the local aristocracy were grafted onto a





street texture that was still markedly medieval, creating that authentic jewel that is Ibla. Walking around looking up, the visitor will discover decorations with overflowing pomp, for instance on Palazzo Cosentini and Palazzo La Rocca.

Not far from Ragusa we meet the enchanting **Modica**, a town with ancient history and prestige, the chief place in a county that once was considered a kingdom in the kingdom, because of the wealth and influence of its seignior. Here the most famous monument is certainly the big San Giorgio church, with a long flight of two hundred and fifty steps preceding a high façade, as if it wanted to challenge the sky. San Giorgio is one of the most beautiful Baroque works in southern Italy, but there are other splendid churches in the town, like the beautiful San Pietro, Santa Maria di Betlem (inside which there is a the magnificent sixteenth-century Sacrament Chapel), and San Nicolò inferiore. There is also the birthplace of Salvatore Quasimodo, to whom a literary park is dedicated.

A narrow little road goes down from here

toward Scicli, allowing itself, at the end of a straight road along which there are the dry-stone walls typical of the Iblei countryside, big bends as far as the village. If you arrive in the evening, the houses, the church and the buildings appear to be illuminated by warm gilded light, a charming spectacle preluding so many decorations in stone on the buildings. There are flowers, carvings and geometries, but also grotesque representations like the two Moors' heads supporting the coat of arms of the owners on a cornerstone of Palazzo Beneventano, one of the most beautiful. Not to mention Palazzo Fava, the long succession of churches and palazzos in Via Mormino Penna, and the Carmelite church and monastery. Churches and monastic buildings are extremely well represented at **Noto**, which has always been considered the "capital" of the Baroque. They go from the Salvatore monastery to the Cathedral, an imposing and elegant building that at last, after laborious restoration, will reopen to believers and visitors in the spring of 2006. Then there is the San Domenico

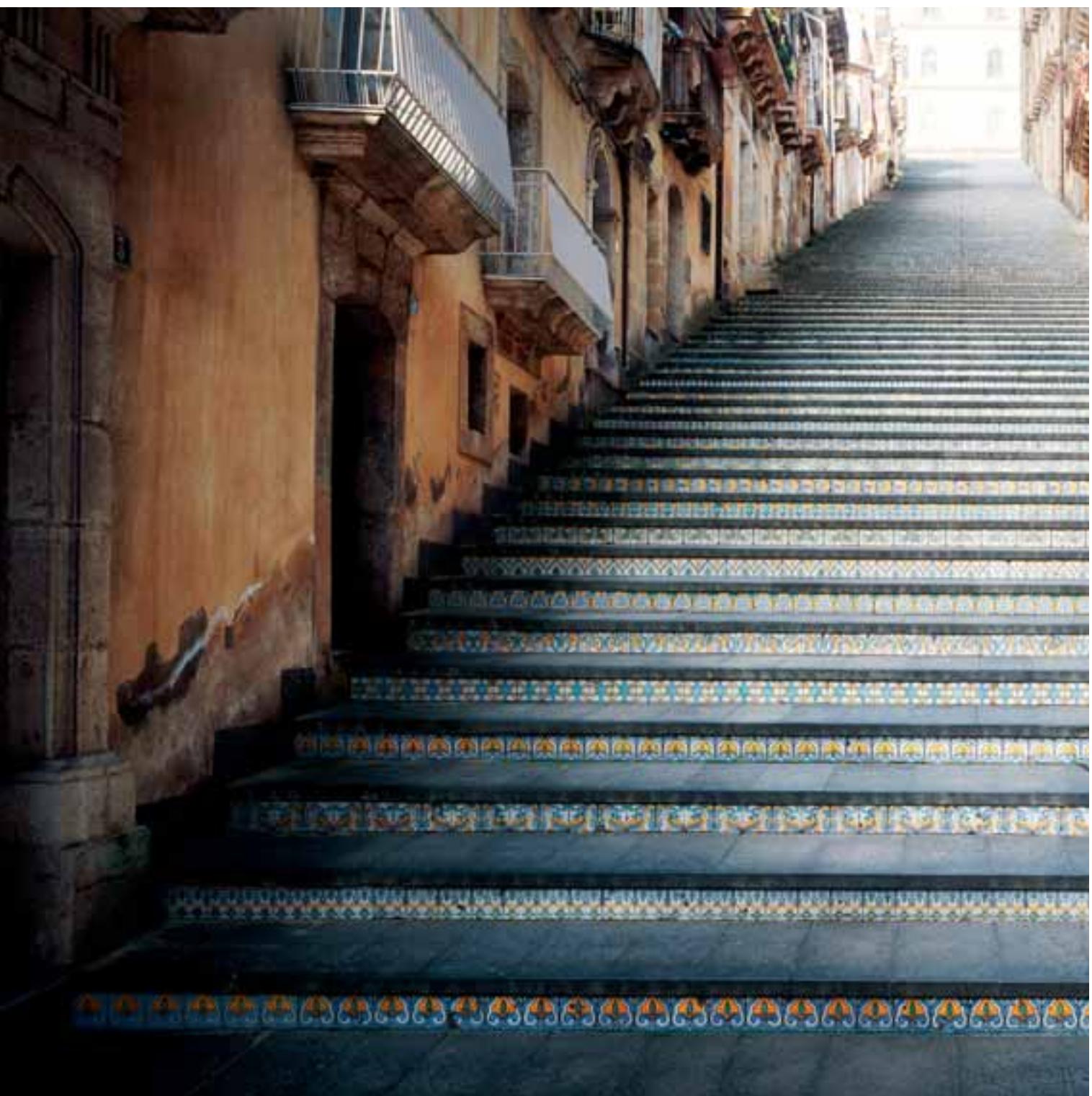
church, one of the most important, its façade framed by the palm trees in a neat little garden, and San Carlo. Then we have Palazzo Dueezio, which is the town hall, and Palazzo Villadorata, an old and very beautiful abode with a long façade adorned with balconies supported by decorated stone brackets, which dominates a whole street and in May acts as a backdrop to the preparation of a flowery scenario. **Palazzolo Acreide** is the last stage - but certainly not the least important - of our itinerary. Here there are a lot of richly adorned palazzos: they include the abode of Baron Gabriele Judica, who made himself poor in his efforts to bring to light the remains of ancient Akrai, as well as Palazzo Zacco and Palazzo Ferla. And the churches are very beautiful: San Sebastiano, in the piazza of the town hall, and that of the rival saint Paul, both enchanting Baroque buildings, and the Annunziata, with a stately portal of twisted columns around which turgid augural vine-branches wind.





Ibla is a town that in a word recites with two voices. Sometimes from an eloquent podium, more often whispering, slyly, as befits a land that wears its baroque with the reserve of an ancient lady...

Gesualdo Bufalino Lost Waxes





Noto is unique, among Sicilian Baroque towns, because of two characteristics: the regularity of the planimetry and the beauty of the stone, soft enough to allow elaborate cuts; you can also leave it bare so as to give free scope to the manifold language of the matter.

Anthony Blunt Sicilian baroque

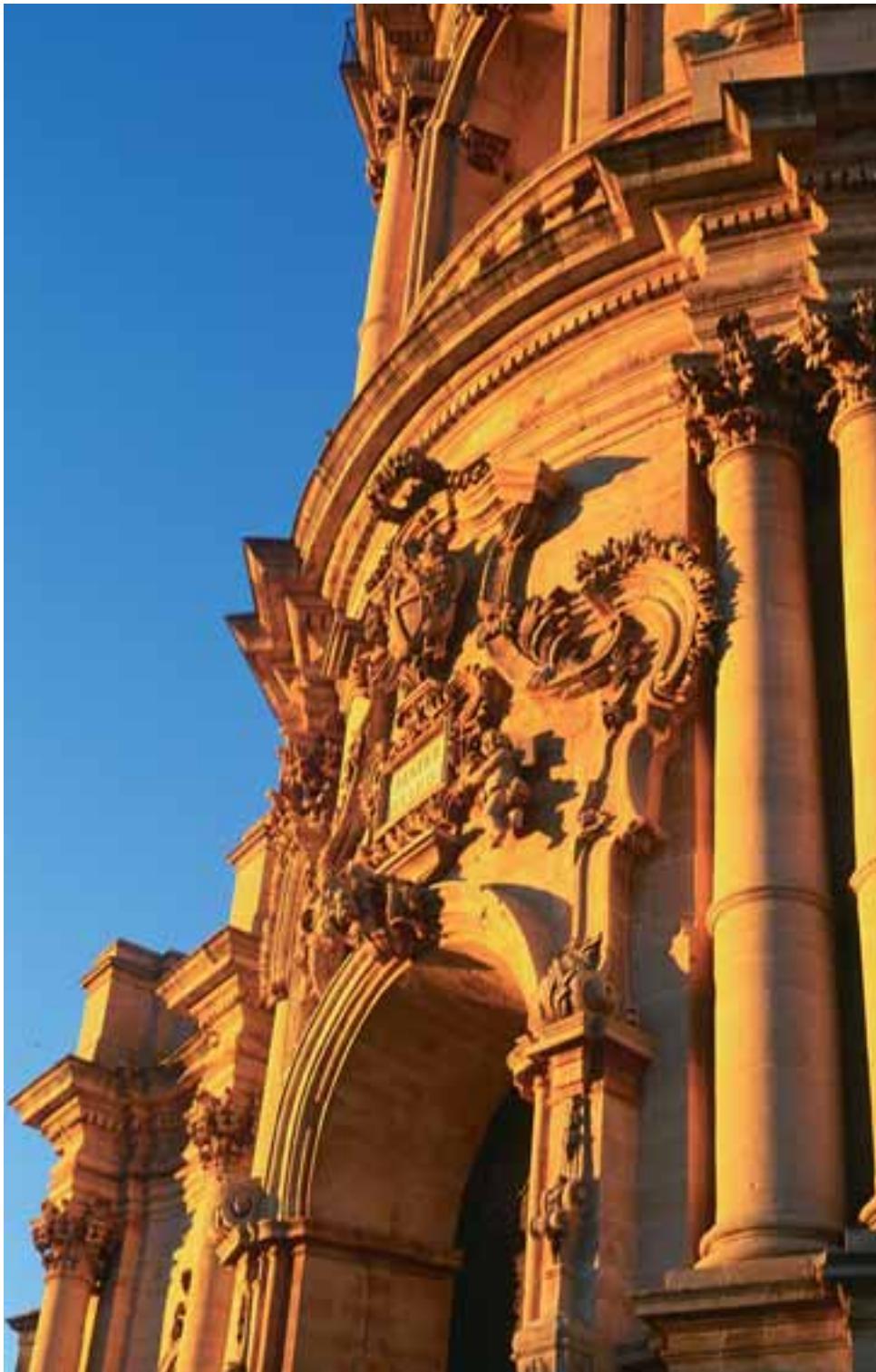




And anyone coming there from inland places suddenly finds it at his or her feet, festive with heaped-up roofs, thieving magpies and ringing of bells; while anyone coming there from the not very distant shore perceives it nesting with ten thousand black windows in line with the whole height of the mountain, among serpentine wisps of smoke and here and there the shine of an open or closed pane, of a sudden, against the sun.

Elio Vittorini Scicli, from Towns of the world







I was young and happy one summer, in fifty-one.. And perhaps it was by grace of the place where I lived, a village shaped like a broken pomegranate; near the sea but countrified; half clinging to a spur of rock, half scattered at its feet; with so many flights of steps between the two halves, to serve as peacemakers, and clouds in the sky from one bell tower to the other, breathless as in relay races of the Troopers of the King.

Gesualdo Bufalino Modica, from Argo the blind

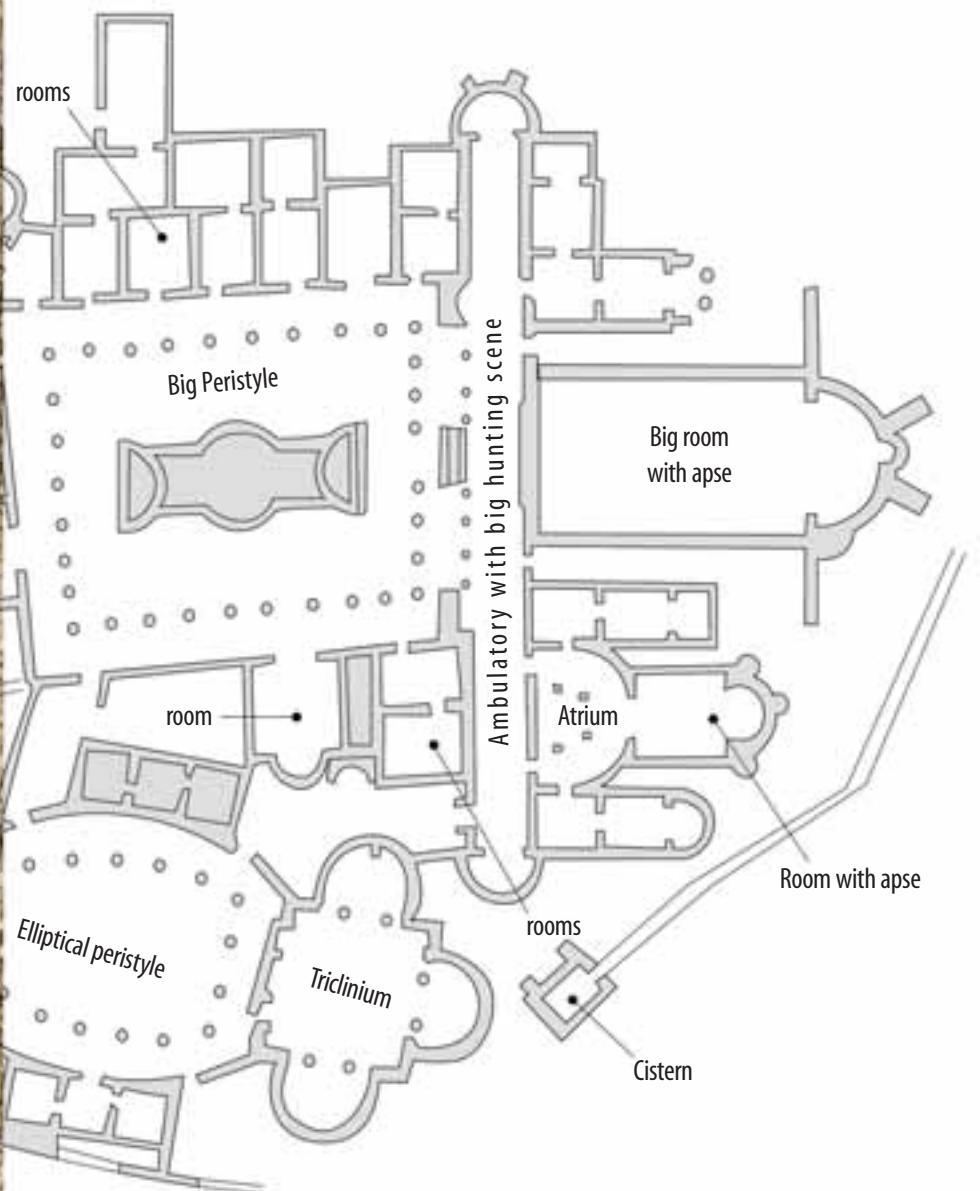
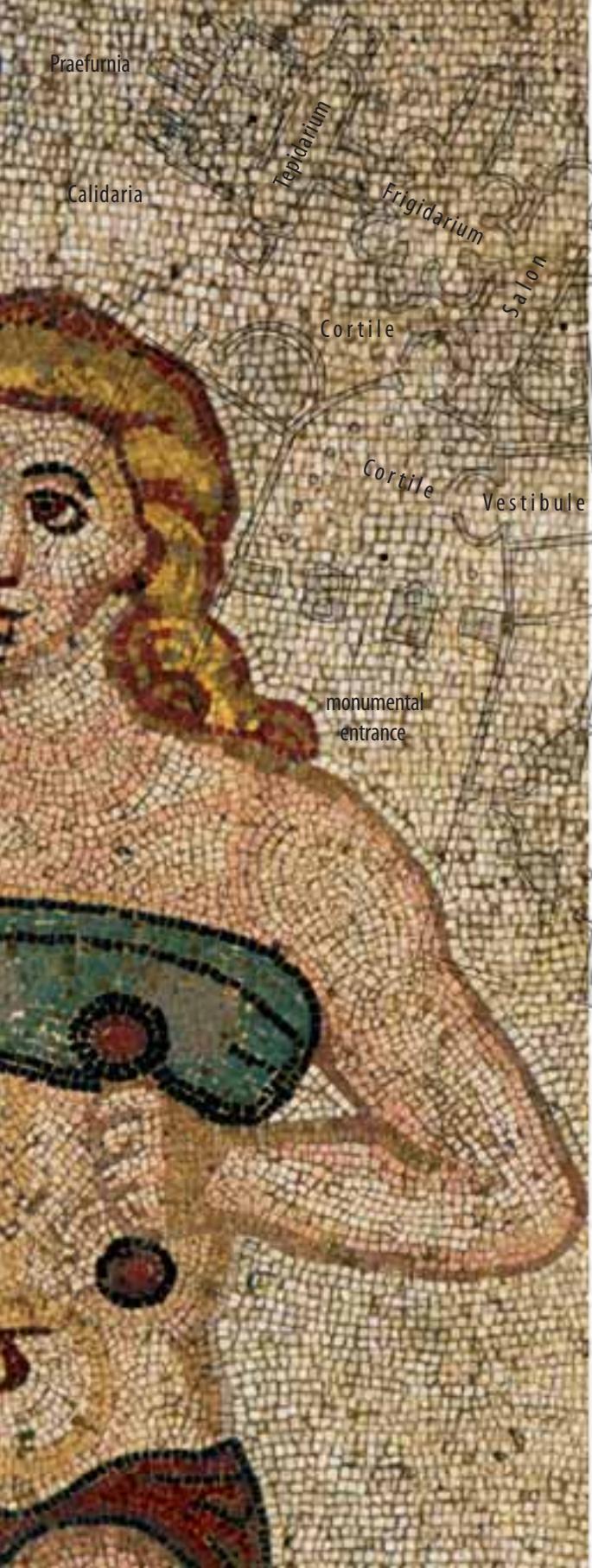




The colour of this town is black [...] black is the lava stone which the houses are made of, so that the old palazzos and the convents look as if they were bunkers. Houses made with the flesh of Mongibello, and so he looks at them from afar like property that is legitimately his, left to the people down there only in life tenancy.

Rodolfo De Mattei Catania, from Secret Island





cultural patrimony

The VILLA of CASALE

Piazza
Armerina



The *Female gymnasts* (which everyone, because of their modern "two-piece" attire, refers to as the "bikini girls") are perhaps the most famous, but the *Great hunt*, with its profusion of wild animals and hunters, is not inferior.

Polyphemus appears vigorous and fierce, while the young woman of the *Erotic scene* that adorns the floor of a cubicle in the private apartments is sensual and mischievous. These are the mosaics of the Roman Villa of Casale at Piazza Armerina, one of the most precious and famous Roman treasures in Sicily, proclaimed World Heritage by UNESCO in 1996.

The first explorations were made in this area towards the end of the 19th century, but it was only in the 1930s that systematic exploration of the area began, while the most important excavations were made between 1950 and 1960. Before the amazed eyes of the archaeologists, three big groups of rooms emerged, connected by galleries and courtyards - a villa of stupefying splendour, with private thermal baths,

complete with all appurtenances. And, what is even more extraordinary, there were hundreds of square metres of mosaics. There was a mosaic cycle of excellent quality, preserved intact by a thick covering of mud that had buried them during a flood. This was a catastrophic natural event that had completed the destruction by man at the villa, but had left the mosaics intact, so that were delivered once again, after seven centuries of oblivion, to our admiring eyes.

The villa was built between the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, in the heart of a vast and fertile agricultural estate near the *statio philosophiana*, a very important station on the road that connected the eastern coast with the southern coast of the island. It belonged to an unknown personage of the Roman aristocracy, who according to some historians might even have been related to the imperial family, a personage of whom all we know for certain is that he was very rich and that he loved to surround himself with luxury. This is testified to,

in the absence of the furnishings and frescoes that indubitably must have covered the walls, now demolished, by the mosaics, an uninterrupted mosaic covering of inestimable artistic and scientific value, with scenes of hunting, private life, mythological characters and geometric decorations. The decorations were done with all probability by African craftsmen, who infused great vitality and vigour in their work, creating one of the most important works of Roman art that has come down to us. An incomparable testimony not only to the magnificence of the empire, but also a graphic representation of the life and customs of a people: from hunting techniques, an activity to which there is devoted the stately mosaic that adorns the ambulatory that gave access to the big room for audiences, to sports, from the activities of every day like a visit to the baths, to those linked to agriculture, for instance the harvest, which then, as today, was among the economic activities of the Sicilian countryside.







(...) In this vast overview of a big game hunt, the most important of the compositions that have come to light through excavations, you see riders hurling themselves in various directions, carts pulled by oxen with cages to contain the beasts captured alive in traps and a big number of tigers, lions, antelopes, gazelles and hippos. The animals are rendered with great spirit (...)

Bernard Berenson Diary pages - Journey in Sicily



OPERA

ONOFRIO

PUPI

SANICOLA





immaterial patrimony

puppet
theatre



The ART of **ANIMATING THINGS**



The Paladins are actual idols, a great deal more than Coppi or Bartali, we are glad of their victories, we cry at their death.

Carlo Levi Words are stones

Once, and it was not so long ago, the Puppet Theatre was a daily show for the Sicilians. One evening after the other, people gathered at the little theatre to follow the stories of Orlando, Rinaldo, Bradamante and Angelica, siding with one or the other and hitting out at the baddies.

Today the place of those little theatres has been taken by TV and other forms of entertainment, but the puppets preserve their charm, and even though there are few puppeteers their shows do not fail to attract attention and curiosity. This is probably because thanks to their absolutely original stylistic and figurative structure the Sicilian puppets succeed in representing in an excellent way the epic and chivalrous spirit, values that, in spite of all technology, still belong to Sicilian culture.

Because of the extraordinary cultural richness of the *Opra*, in 2001 it was placed on UNESCO's list of Immaterial Heritages of Humanity, a recognition that sets this traditional art form alongside other artistic expressions from all over

the world, all characterized by strong specificities.

The *Opra dei Pupi*, as a representation of the clashes between the knights of Charlemagne and the "wicked" Moors, came into being in the second half of the nineteenth century: the chivalrous marionettes, with their typical characters, served to represent the thirst for justice of the less fortunate social classes. At the same time, epic stories were narrated by the *cantasti*, itinerant balladeers that day after day performed in front of a public of fond listeners. The fortune of the genre is also strongly linked to its proximity to certain codes of behaviour rooted in the Sicilians, from the sense of honour to the struggle for justice, values that, though in the simple form of the *Opra*, were transmitted and consolidated in theatrical narration.

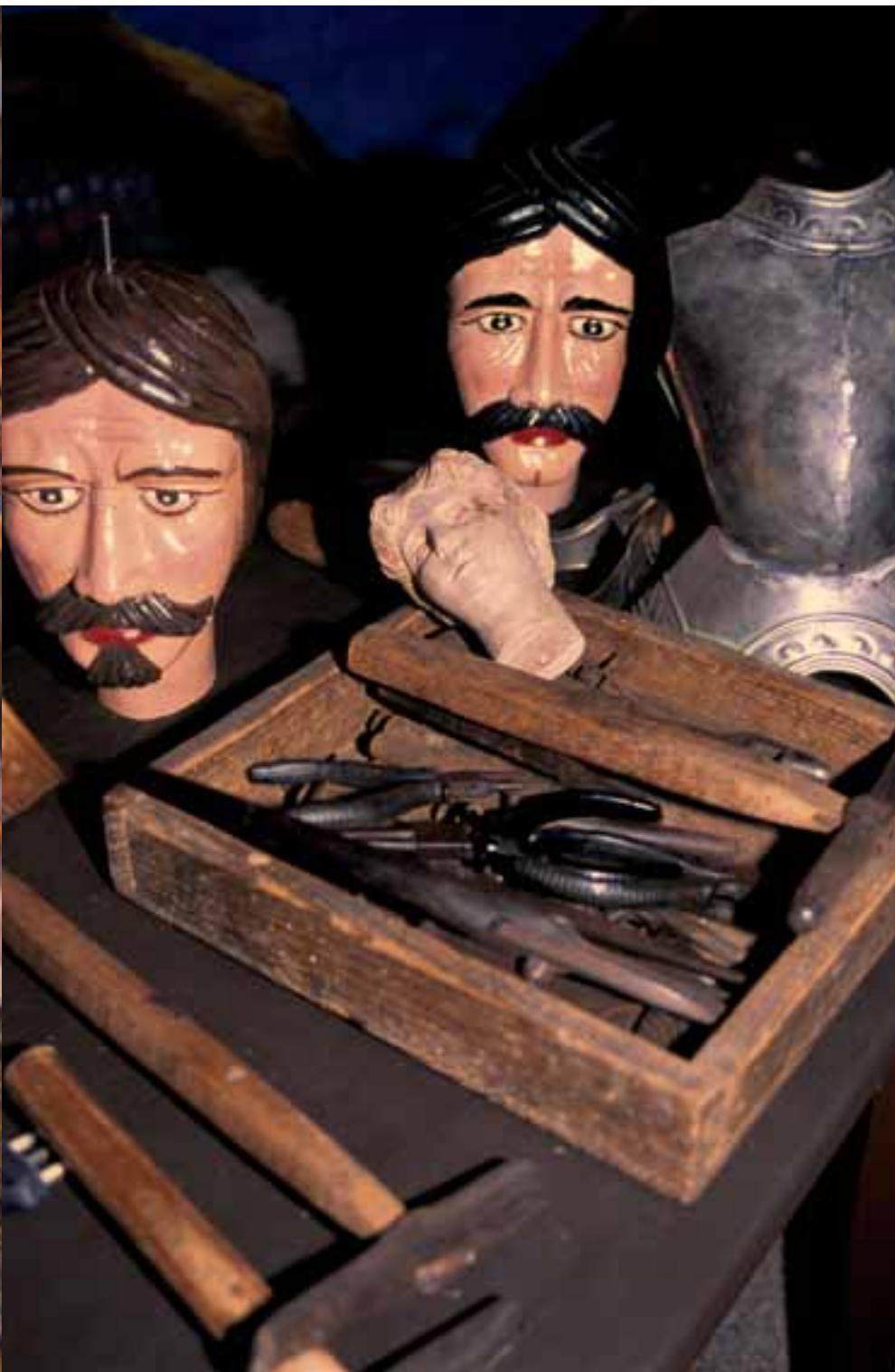
The stories were mainly based on chivalrous subjects, first of all the *Chansons de Geste*, but there were also other themes, from that of bandits to the stories - strongly tied to Catania - of the aristocratic Uzeda family. Today, alongside

these subjects there are also other more fanciful ones, for instance Greek myths, which are represented at a little theatre in Syracuse.

Each family of puppeteers has its own preferences and traditions, its own techniques for manoeuvring the puppets (which vary a great deal in size, depending on the area of Sicily), scenery and backdrops, which are painted by hand, religiously guarded and handed down. The making of the marionettes and the different components of the scenery are also a form of art in themselves, with particular specialization, tricks and skills. Each puppet must be strongly characterized.

Today, besides the puppeteers still active on the island, there are also some museums that preserve the old tradition of the *Opra*: among them there is the big Marionette Museum in Palermo (MiMa), the Museum of Sicilian Puppets in Caltagirone and the Museum of the Puppet Theatre at Sortino. At some of these museums there are also short and simple performances for a first experience of this particular theatrical form.







What this show offers us that is most beautiful is not so much its heroes as its angels (...) these hovering beings that waver at the extremity of a thread, held suspended, one would say, by the hand of God (...)

Marguerite Yourcenar *Pilgrim and foreigner*



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The sites listed below, explored by the present brochures,
have been recovered, restored and re-qualified through
measure 2.01 of POR Sicilia 2000-2006 “Recovery and use of the cultural and
environmental patrimony” coming under the **Regional Ministry for the
Cultural and Environmental Heritage and Education** - Department for
the Cultural and Environmental Heritage.

1. Agrigento – Valley of Temples.

2. Piazza Armerina (Enna province) – Roman Villa of Casale.

3. Val di Noto – Catania (Catania province), Caltagirone (Catania province),
Ragusa Ibla (Ragusa province), Noto (Syracuse province) – various sites;
Militello Val di Catania (Catania province) – former San Domenico church;
Modica (Ragusa province) – Cava d’Ispica Archaeological Park;
Scicli (Ragusa province) – Colle San Matteo Museum Park.

4. Siracusa (Syracuse province) – various sites.

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www.regione.sicilia.it/turismo/trasporti

For urban transport services, visit the websites of the single councils

For museums and archaeological sites, visit the website:
www.regione.sicilia.it/beniculturali

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POR

Syracuse and the Pantalica rock necropolis

The Val di Noto

The Aeolian Islands