



SEESICILY

The island's gifts, in gift cards.



SICILIA

your happy island

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On the cover:
Taormina (Messina), Greek Theatre.

*"Italy without Sicily does not leave
any image in the spirit.
It is in Sicily that the key
to everything is found.[...] The purity
of contours, the softness of every thing,
the yielding exchangeability of colours,
the harmonic unity of the sky
with the sea and of the sea with the land...
Who has seen them only once
will possess them for life".*

Wolfgang von Goethe

Ceramics from Caltagirone (Catania), famous in the world, with the traditional owl motif.

Following page: Trapani, workers in the salt pans.





INTRODUCTION

The largest island in the Mediterranean, and one of the most beautiful in the world, Sicily has inspired numerous myths of classical antiquity and attracted many peoples, as well as illustrious men and travellers from every era.

It is, in fact, thousands of years old, as wrinkled as its rocks, as old as its vestiges... and yet it exudes an air of eternal youth, of continuous movement, of incessant ferment.

Is it the volcano that never stops shaping the landscape with its creative activity? Is it the favourable climate that always provides lifegiving contact with nature and

beauty? Is it the insular character, which, while proud of itself, looks curiously at the world?

As it should be, Sicily is a living land that enchants and entertains, charms and conquers, attracts and calls, binds to itself...

In order to introduce Sicily, we have not been able to list all its many attractions, so we have chosen some of them, certainly without presuming to present a complete picture of the island, but with the desire and intention of showing its many faces and promoting its beauty and typicality.

It was a difficult and painful choice, inevitably subjective, but necessary.





Before turning the pages of this book, we would like the readers to make themselves comfortable, relax, prepare for a little journey that will fill their eyes and heart, a little like a visitor who takes a seat on an open-air tourist bus and prepares, quietly but excitedly, for an encounter with beauty...

This publication is in fact a small discovery tour of Sicily and its countless treasures, which follow one another between the pages, one after the other, just as it happens during the travel of the bus.

Bronte (Catania), ripening fruits of the "Pistacchio verde di Bronte" plant, known as "green gold" for its extraordinary organoleptic characteristics and high commercial value.

An unrivalled PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) product in the world, it is grown in the province of Catania, including in the Adrano and Biancavilla areas, and only on land of volcanic origin.

Actually, this is perhaps the most salient characteristic of Sicily, which makes it unique in the world: the fact that there is hardly enough time to finish admiring one beauty before another comes into our view.

Therefore, we wanted to accompany the reader-visitor along this journey through Sicily's nine provinces without adding much to the voice of the guide who usually, microphone in hand, comments on the bus about the route, providing passengers with some information, just enough to place the objects of their impressions and emotions in time and space.

Because we did not want to deprive the journey of its fundamental character of discovery through the senses, of an emotional trip evoked and guided by colours, shapes and architecture created by man or nature, by the sea, vegetation, mountains and hills, by the typical features of the anthropisation of the landscape, by monuments...

We have enriched the book with a number of thematic areas – Sicilian puppet theatre, food and wine, literary Sicily, and the artistic craftsmanship of the island's typical ancient carts – which can represent short bus stops with brief forays into worlds full of colours, flavours, knowledge, culture, curiosity and typicality.

So, dear visitors, welcome.

Come on, turn the page: let's go!

Mount Etna (Catania), spectacular night view of an eruption. For around two and a half million years, the volcano has been modifying and shaping the landscape with the most "creative" of natural events.

The column of lava, smoke and gas emitted by the volcano can be more than 5 km high, offering a unique spectacle that is as exciting as it is disturbing.

Next page: Palermo, the Cathedral.

Symbol of the City, it effectively summarises the historical and cultural changes it has undergone over the centuries, taking the visitor on an exciting journey through its thousand-year history, characterised by continuous additions and changes. Arab, Norman, Catalan Gothic and neoclassical elements...

appear mixed and overlapping.



PALERMO AND ITS PROVINCE





Palermo

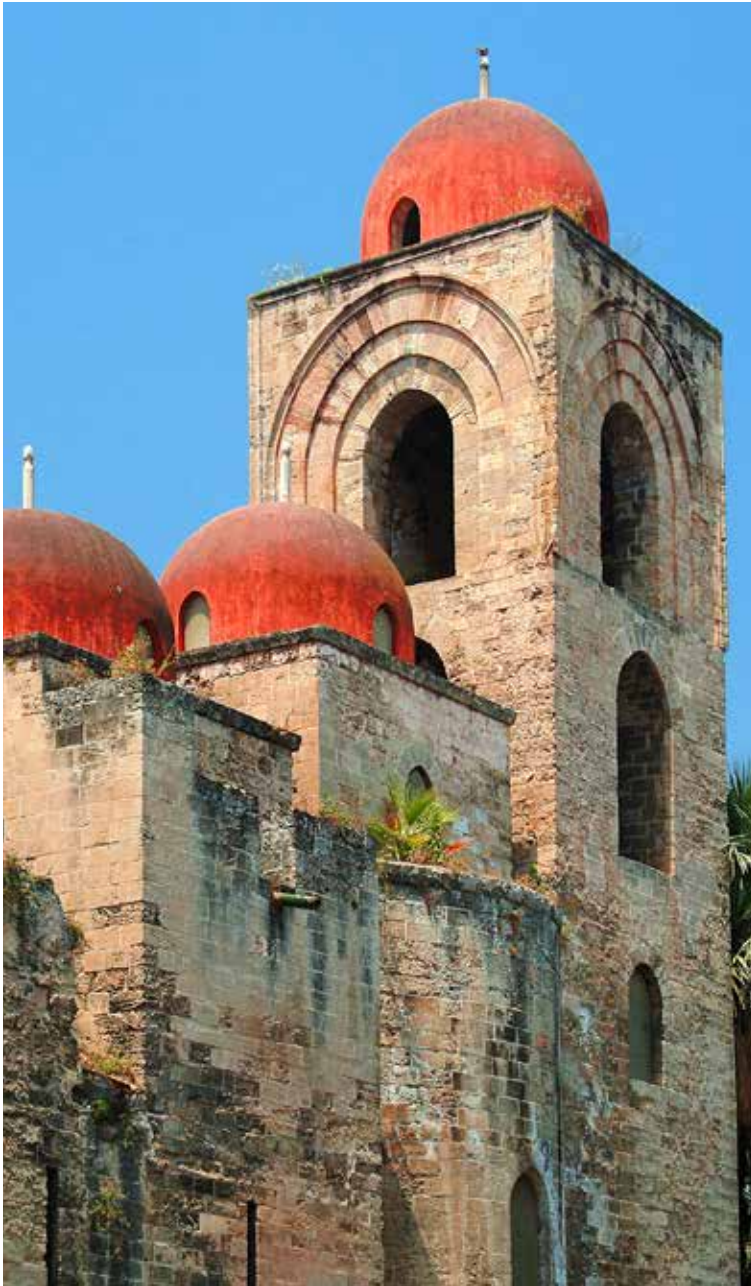
Palermo welcomes you, literally stunning you, with the close succession of its astonishing images of beauty and grandeur.

Today it is the capital of Sicily and the fifth largest city in the nation in terms of population, but no visitor could fail to notice the role of the city as a capital for centuries, due to its broad scope, the sumptuous magnificence of its architecture and its artistic jewels. Scenically surrounded by rugged, sloping hills, it is set in the Conca d'Oro plain, at

the foot of Mount Pellegrino and close to a magnificent port, the largest in Sicily.

Its ancient name, Panormos, a Greek word that came about even though the city was never a Siceliot colony, means "All port".

Palermo, whose area was originally home to the Sicans, Cretans and Elymians, was founded by the Phoenicians between the 5th and 6th centuries BC and was later inhabited by Carthaginians and Romans, whose presence can be seen in its archaeological sites.



Palermo, Church of San Giovanni degli Eremiti. Built by Roger II in 1136, it is one of the most significant monuments of Norman Palermo. It has domed cubic elements at the top which are clearly Islamic in design.



Palermo, recreational boats.

The city has several marinas offering modern facilities.

The most striking feature of the ancient city is the overlapping of architectural styles and historical periods. The streets clearly bear the traces and atmospheres of the peoples who dominated the island, with a heritage that makes it unique in the world as a mixture of very different elements that nevertheless coexist in magical harmony.

The Arab-Norman Palermo and the Cathedrals of Cefalù and Monreale were declared UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2015 and include several monumental assets of the City.

Palermo was the seat of the historic Sicilian Parliament for nearly seven hundred years, which finds continuity today in the Sicilian Regional Assembly, whose members are referred to as “deputies”, the only ones in Italy.

The Sicilian Parliament is the oldest legislative body in the world, having

held its first assembly in 1130, at the Royal Palace, on the occasion of the proclamation of the first king of Sicily, Roger II of Altavilla.

A city of great artistic and cultural vibrancy, Palermo has been named “Youth Capital 2017” and “Italian Capital of Culture” for 2018.

It features an exhibition space, the “Cantieri Culturali della Zisa”, which is an interesting example of industrial archaeology and hosts important musical, theatrical and other events. It is home to the Palermo branch of the National School of Cinema, which is part of Rome’s “Centro sperimentale di cinematografia”, and the International Centre of Photography.

It is impossible not to be enchanted by this capital city with its Norman heart and Byzantine soul, where bare and unadorned stones alternate with glittering narrative walls covered in gold tiles and mosaics in the colours of the rainbow.





Palermo, Praetorian Fountain, or Fountain of Shame. The monument has a very adventurous history, having been commissioned in 1554 by a future Spanish viceroy to Francesco Camilliani to be built in his own garden in Florence. Composed of forty-eight statues, in 1573 the fountain was sold by its indebted owner to the city of Palermo, where it arrived the following year disassembled into more than six hundred pieces and without a number of parts, some of which were probably destroyed during transport and others located elsewhere. The work of recomposing the fountain, which even required the requisition and demolition of some houses in the square in front of the Praetorian Palace, was entrusted to Camilliani's son, Camillo, and took about seven years.





Palermo, Zisa Castle.
Completed in 1167, it was built at the behest of the Norman King William I of Altavilla, who entrusted its design and execution to Islamic architects and workers.

Next page: Palermo, Palazzo dei Normanni, or Royal Palace. One of the city's main monuments, it was transformed from an Arab fortress into a sumptuous palace in 1130 by Roger II, the first Norman king of Sicily.









Palermo, Interior of the Church of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio, known as "della Martorana". It belongs to the Italo-Albanian Catholic Church and officiates the liturgy according to the Byzantine rite. It contains one of the most important mosaics in the world, whose golds and colours literally leave visitors breathless. It was built in the Sicilian-Norman style by an admiral of Roger II, of Byzantine worship, who dedicated it to the Virgin Mary to thank her for her protection during his long military life. The church is called "Martorana" because of the presence, near the site where it was built, of a Benedictine women's monastery founded by the noblewoman Eloisa Martorana. This is where the tradition of the famous Martorana fruit, made of almond paste and painted to resemble the real thing, began.

Previous page: Palermo, Palazzo dei Normanni, Palatine Chapel. The basilica, built within the architectural complex of the Palace and contemporary to it, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It contains one hundred and seventy-two mosaic scenes and was described by Guy de Maupassant as "the most beautiful church in the world, the most astonishing religious jewel dreamt of by human thought".

Following page: Palermo, Cuba Palace or Castle. The building, erected in 1180 in the Arab-Norman style, was originally a pavilion of delights, a place where the Norman king and his court spent periods of leisure and rest. Impressed by the splendour of the building and the whole city, Boccaccio set a novel of the ecameron here.





Here and above: Palermo, exterior and interior of the Teatro Massimo Vittorio Emanuele. A magnificent work by architect Giovan Battista Filippo Basile, and later by his son Ernesto, it is the largest opera house in Italy. It was inaugurated in 1897.

On the side: Palermo, exterior and interior of the Politeama Garibaldi Theatre. It was built between

1867 and 1874, based on a design by Giuseppe Damiani Almeyda, inspired by the shape of a circus theatre. According to the original idea, it was supposed to be outdoors, but then an ingenious metal cover was made.

The entrance consists of a triumphal arch surmounted by a bronze quadriga flanked by two bronze horses. The Sicilian Symphony Orchestra has been based here since 2001.



The Cathedral of Monreale (Palermo), a human masterpiece, inseparable from the magnificence and perfection of its setting. It is impossible not to think that such a miracle of beauty was guided by the divine hand

Monreale

A small town about eight kilometres from Palermo and, like it, lying on the Conca d'Oro, Monreale is known for the beauty of its views and its **Cathedral**, one of the finest religious architectural jewels in the world.



Monreale, interior of the cathedral. The central apse is occupied by the beautiful depiction of Christ Pantocrator (i.e. "almighty"), an iconographic model typical of the Byzantine and Orthodox tradition. The figure is rich in symbols, starting with the posture of the blessing hand, in which the three joined fingers represent the Trinity and the index and middle fingers represent Christ's dual nature, human and divine. Inside the Saviour's halo there is the cross, to distinguish it from that of the saints.





Monreale, exterior decoration on the triple apse of the cathedral, dedicated to Santa Maria Nuova. The building was constructed at the behest of William II of Altavilla from 1174 and is renowned for the richness of the mosaics that adorn its interior.

Previous page: left, Monreale, the Cloister of the Cathedral, belonging to the ancient Benedictine Monastery (12th century). A Romanesque

construction with a square plan and an arched portico supported by twin columns. So Jean Houël in 1787: "The columns are all fluted, some are twisted, others straight. They are all encrusted with coloured and gilded mosaics, granite, porphyry, and all kinds of marble [...] The capitals are a mixture of flowers, fruit, and animal figures of all kinds [...] This cloister is the most complete, the most refined monument of its kind."

Bagheria

By the sea, but surrounded by citrus, olive and loquat trees, Bagheria was chosen in the 18th century as a holiday resort by numerous families of ancient lineage from Palermo, as can be seen from the **fine Baroque buildings** in the town.

It is the birthplace of several famous people, including the poet Ignazio Buttitta, the painter Renato Guttuso and the film director Giuseppe Tornatore.



Above: Bagheria, Villa Gravina di Palagonia, Hall of Mirrors. The beautiful building, built in 1721 by the Prince of Palagonia, also the praetor of Palermo, is the most famous of Bagheria's buildings because of the many oddities and curiosities that characterise it and of which Goethe, both repulsed and fascinated, gave a detailed description.

Left: Some of the grotesque ornamental figures of Villa Palagonia, also known as the "Villa of the Monsters". Originally there must have been about two hundred figures, but today only sixty-two remain.





Mondello

An ancient fishing village, just a few kilometres from Palermo, Mondello is nowadays the favourite seaside resort of the City's inhabitants and a popular tourist and residential centre.

Its suggestive bay is scenically bordered by Mount Gallo and Mount Pellegrino, on the side of which are the **Addaura Caves**, home to interesting archaeological finds and engravings of human figures dating back some ten thousand years.

The area is also renowned for the presence **of fine Liberty-style buildings**, appreciated as the best expression of that style in Italy, and as a venue for important cultural, musical and sporting events.

Mondello, panoramic view.



Cefalù

This enchanting and very popular seaside town most probably owes its name to the shape of the fortress that towers above it and seems to draw a head (it was formerly called Kephaloídon, from Kephalis, meaning “head”). The Rocca slopes down almost to the coast and is the natural element that most characterises the panorama of Cefalù, together with its famous **Cathedral**.

Cefalù is home to the remarkable **Mandalisca Museum**.

On the side, above: Cefalù, the Cathedral. It was built in 1131 by Roger II in Romanesque style enriched with Arab elements. One of the first and foremost jewels of Norman architecture in Sicily, it stands out with its mighty Norman towers against the blue sky, austere but gentle, imposing but slender.

On the side, below: Cefalù, Mandalisca Museum, Portrait of an Unknown Sailor by Antonello da Messina.

Previous page: Cefalù, panoramic view dominated by the Cathedral Basilica in the background.



Palazzo Adriano

In the heart of Sicania is Palazzo Adriano, at 695 m above sea level. It appears to have earlier origins, but the reliable data point to the 12th century, when it was completely depopulated, only to be repopulated by an Albanian colony in the 15th century. Acknowledged by the Sicilian Region as a “town with a tourist vocation”, Palazzo

Adriano features prestigious sacred and secular buildings. It is characterised by the presence of **thirty-three fountains**: the most characteristic is the octagonal fountain in Piazza Umberto I, made famous by Giuseppe Tornatore's film Cinema Paradiso, shot almost entirely here.

Palazzo Adriano (Palermo), the town's main square, named after Umberto I.



Isola di Ustica

Situated in the Tyrrhenian Sea thirty-six miles N-NW from Palermo, Ustica is one of the miraculous array of islands and islets that dot Sicily, enriching it with countless precious pearls.

Ustica is known as the "Black Pearl of the Mediterranean", a destination for sea lovers and divers from all over the world,

attracted by the amazing colour spectrum of its waters and seabed.

No less valuable in Ustica are the land scenarios and the atmospheres that accompany them.

Ustica, the island's extraordinary crystalline waters.



PUPU ON STAGE

There are few things children enjoy more than watching a performance of the Opera dei Pupi Siciliani (Sicilian Puppet Opera), during which their shrieks of joy, laughter and expressions of amazement are mixed with the already deafening metallic clangour of shields, armour and



swords in constant battle, accompanied by tremendous warnings, threats and challenges uttered in a stentorian voice... On the puppet stage, such moises are created by Charlemagne and his heroic champions – Roland, Renaud, Roger, Ganelon and the beautiful Angelica. Towards the end of the 18th century, some island puppeteer decided to host them in their theatre, styling them in the local manner and making them speak in Sicilian. A very interesting transposition of the narrative material of the Chanson de Roland or Orlando Furioso into the oral form of puppet theatre, the tradition of the Opera dei Pupi has been declared a masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity by UNESCO, the first to obtain such recognition in Italy. Today, some families of puppeteers try to keep the tradition alive, with shows for tourists or theatrical exhibitions.



*Typical scenes
from the Puppet Opera.*

*Next page:
Roland and Angelica*

AGRIGENTO AND ITS PROVINCE





Agrigento

Agrigento is world-famous for its Valley of the Temples, one of the greatest expressions of Greek genius, which seems to stand over it maternally, watching over it from the top of the two hills on which it lies.

The modern city has not retained the glory, ancient splendour and prosperity of the past, to which even the philosopher Empedocles from Agrigento bears witness, but it retains a certain vibrancy and poignant charm.

The old town, dating back to the Middle

Ages, of which it preserves the typical layout and some of the buildings, is located on top of the Girgenti hill. It also features interesting examples of Arab-Norman art.

The numerous **archaeological sites** in the province of Agrigento bear witness to the human presence on the territory in prehistoric times.

Pagine precedenti: Santo Stefano di Quisquina (Agrigento), Teatro Andromeda.



Above: Agrigento and the Valley of the Temples.



On the side: A colourful image of the Sagra del Mandorlo in Fiore (Festival of the flowering almond tree), the 18th international folklore festival featuring performances by folk groups, music and typical Sicilian food and wine.





Valley of the Temples

A yearning mixed with childish amazement seizes the spirit in the contemplation of the enchanting and enchanted Valley of the Temples – whose numerous golden buildings

are immersed in a regal silence – which has survived, on this Earth where almost everything is ephemeral, the action of the centuries and even the millennia...

Being here at the transition between day and night, when the ancient temple stones turn to a warm amber hue at sunset and the cleverly placed artificial lights begin to illuminate the valley, you can witness a spectacle of unparalleled beauty.

Indeed, the Valley of the Temples in Agrigento has nothing to envy to any other archaeological site of Greek antiquity: the exclusive view of the Doric buildings, not 'polluted' by images of modernity, and indeed enriched by magnificent olive and almond trees, makes it unique and incomparable.

The Agrigento temples, some of which are in an excellent state of preservation, were built with yellow ochre sandstone tuff in the 6th-2nd centuries BC.

The Valley of the Temples, with its 1,300 hectares, is the largest archaeological park in the world.

In addition to temples, there are sanctuaries, necropoleis, fortifications, part of a Hellenistic Roman quarter built on a Greek floorplan and much more.

UNESCO has not failed to include this authentic jewel of classical antiquity in its list of World Heritage Sites.

*Agrigento, Valley of the Temples,
remains of an ancient temple.*







Agrigento, Valley of the Temples, tuff reproduction of one of the great telamones of the Temple of Jupiter Olympianus, lying among its ruins. The telamon is the male equivalent of the caryatid, typically used as a structural or even just decorative support, replacing columns or lesenes. An original telamon from the Temple of Jupiter, 7.65 metres high, reassembled in the Regional Archaeological Museum in Agrigento, together with the remains of three other telamones found during excavations in 1928.

Previous page: the Temple of Concord with a detail of the Statue of Fallen Icarus. Built in 430 BC, it is one of the best-preserved in the world and also one of the most remarkable in the Greek world. The statue of Fallen Icarus, whose sad figure appears broken and missing both arms and legs, is a gift from Polish sculptor Igor Mitoraj.







Sciacca

Spread over hills sloping down to the coast, Sciacca picturesquely overlooks the sea of its port.

It is a popular thermal bathing destination, but it can satisfy every wish of the most demanding tourists, offering, in addition to the ancient and renowned thermal baths, a beautiful beach, monuments, valuable sacred and civil buildings, works of art, traditions and folklore.

The city hosts a famous historic carnival.

Heraclea Minoa

Founded as a colony of nearby Selinunte, it lies on the Capo Bianco promontory, at the foot of which is a beautiful pine forest bordered by a long, soft sandy beach.

It preserves the remains of a splendid 4th-century-BC **Theatre**. The archaeological park also includes a small **Antiquarium**, parts of the city walls, two towers and a Sanctuary.

Today the site is included in the territory of the municipality of Cattolica Eraclea,





within which the **Foce del Fiume Platani** (Platani 53 River Mouth) nature reserve was established in 1984.

On the side: Eraclea Minoa (Agrigento), the remains of the Roman Theatre.

Below: Eraclea Minoa (Agrigento), Foce del Fiume Platani nature reserve.

Next page: Sciacca (Agrigento), view of the harbour.

Previous pages: Realmonte (Agrigento), the famous Scala dei Turchi.



Pelagie Islands

Closer to Africa than to Europe (about 200 km from Sicily), they are further away to reach than the other Sicilian islands.

Apart from *Lampione*, which is just a large rock, they have been inhabited since prehistoric times and have been a stopping place for Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans and Arabs, all of whom left clear traces.



Linosa (Agrigento), il porticciolo di Scalo Vecchio.

Lampedusa (Agrigento), la spiaggia della Baia di Cala Creta.



The three islands are equally wild and have very different orographic characteristics.

Linosa, of volcanic origin, is mountainous and characterised by low vegetation consisting of typical crops such as capers, vines, figs and prickly pears.

Famous for its beautiful seabed, it is the closest of the three islands, covering an area of 5.4 km² and characterised by its colourful houses and a relaxed pace of life far removed from modernity.

Lampedusa is part of the African continental plate and is almost flat, barren, arid and, in short, semi-desert.

Beautiful and with a breathtaking sea, it has an airport, is the largest of the three islands and is literally invaded by tourists, to whom it offers various attractions, such as a **necropolis** dating back to the 6th-7th century BC, a **Roman fish processing plant** and the **Sanctuary** of the Madonna di Porto Salvo.

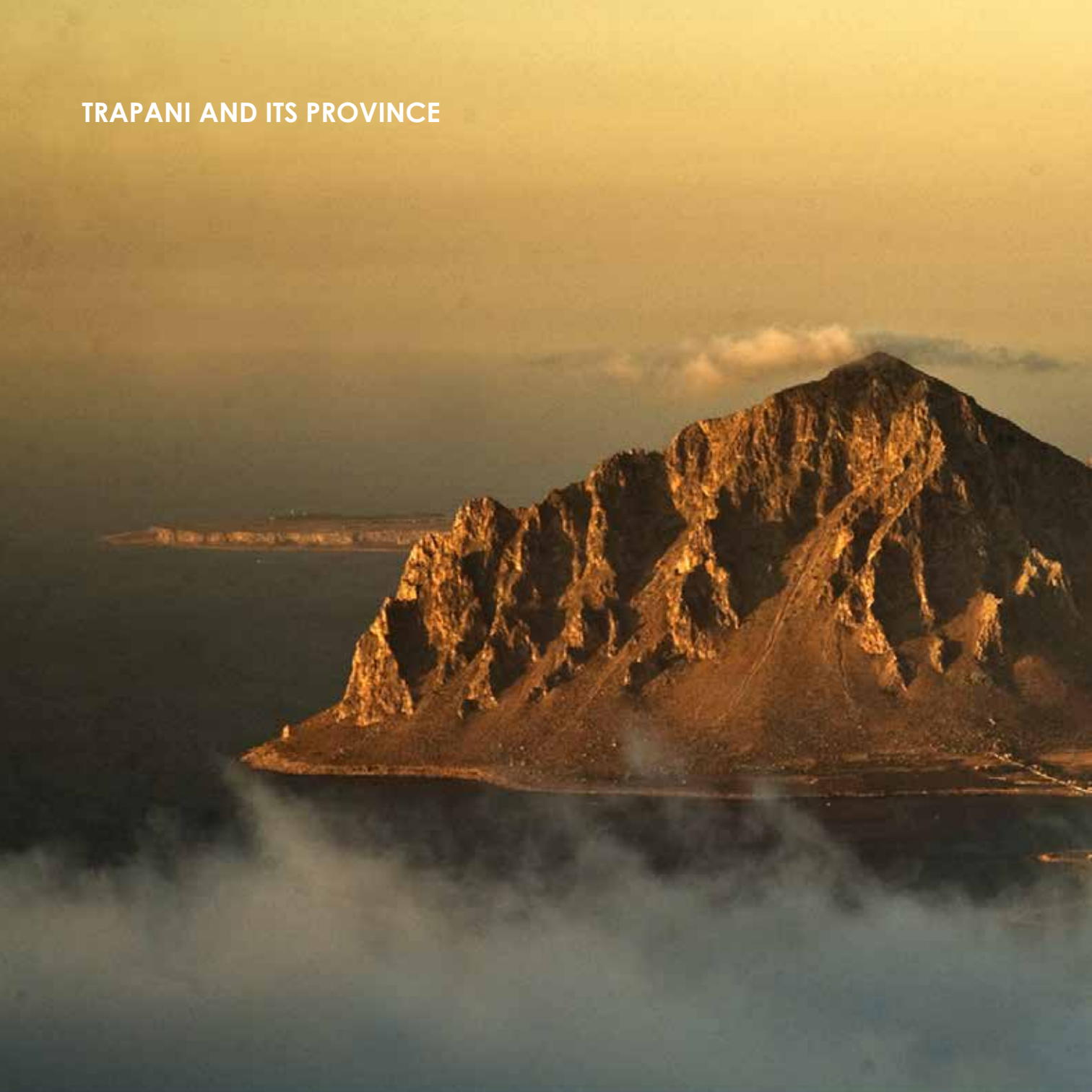


Linosa, a painted stone indicates the destination of the paths on the island. This one in the photo announces the arrival at "Piscina".

It is a pool of water fed from the sea through a tunnel. It is possible to bathe in its calm waters even when the sea is very rough. The other small pools in the vicinity are fed by the waves of the sea.



TRAPANI AND ITS PROVINCE





Trapani

Located in the western part of the island, including the entire coastal strip, Trapani juts out like a wedge into the sea, at the confluence of the Tyrrhenian and the Mediterranean seas.

The Greeks called it Drepanon, reflecting in its name its shape reminiscent of a sickle, as recounted in a legend involving Ceres and her daughter Proserpine.

Trapani is historically the city of salt pans, which give its whitewashed coastline a distinctive feature and its territory an evocative atmosphere:

regular pools are dotted with pyramidal piles of salt covered with tiles and a few windmills, the legacy of an old industrial activity.

The ancient heart of the city, where you can admire **fine churches, palaces** and **museums**, bears the mixed and confused traces of the passage of Sicilians, Arabs, Normans, Jews and Spaniards.

Previous pages: Erice (Trapani), view of the Tyrrhenian Sea from the Castello di Venere.

Next page: Trapani, salt pans with windmill.





Erice

Perched on top of the mountain of the same name, at about 750 m above sea level, the ancient medieval town of Erice offers an extraordinary panorama, which includes not only Trapani, the Egadi Islands and Mount Cofano, but even, in favourable weather conditions, Ustica, Pantelleria and Africa's Capo Bon.

Marsala

Like Erice, Marsala also meets the needs of tourists who are passionate about historical sites, monuments and art, as well as natural beauty. It features ten kilometres of white sandy beach and a vivid turquoise sea. Here, too, the coastal landscape is characterised by salt pans and mills.

San Vito Lo Capo

An ancient fishing village at the foot of a promontory and blessed with a beautiful sea and beach, San Vito Lo Capo is internationally renowned for its many



Above: Erice (Trapani), Mother Church. The Real Chiesa Madre Insigne Collegiata, known as the Real Duomo, is dedicated to Maria Assunta. It was built at the behest of Frederick III of Aragon, as a sign of gratitude for the hospitality received by the city, in the first decades of the 14th century. Over the following centuries, the building underwent a series of alterations until, in the second half of the 19th century, it was finally renovated.

Next page: Erice, Castello di Venere. Built by the Normans in the 12th century on the ruins of an Elymian-Phoenician-Roman temple, it stands on a cliff, following its contours.

cultural events. Particularly crowded among them is the Cous Cous Fest, an international festival of cultural integration, which attracts chefs from all over the world.

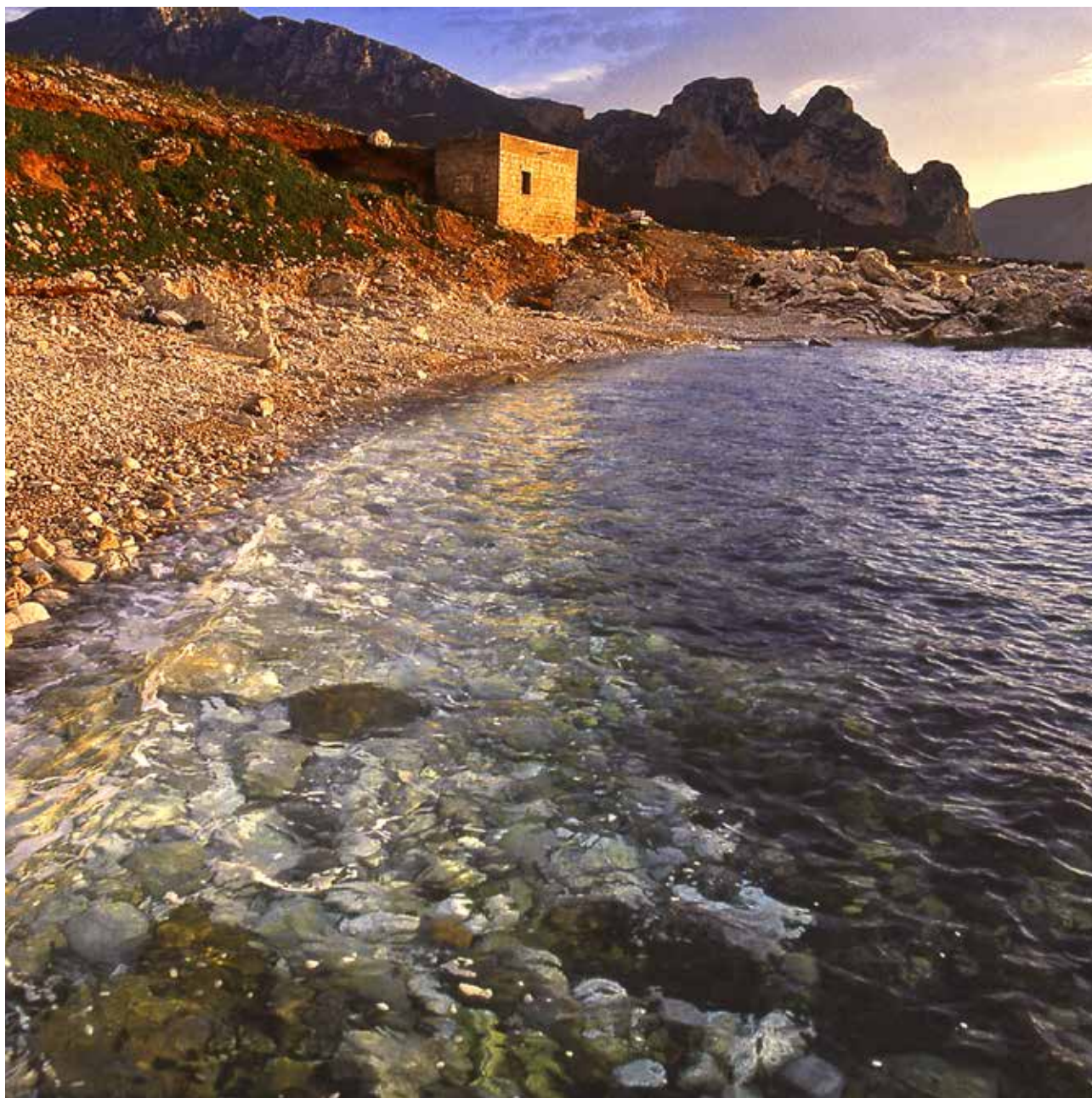
Riserva dello Zingaro

It is located between San Vito Lo Capo and Scopello. It has seven kilometres of protected coastline, which can also be explored on foot, with bays, sea stacks, inlets, Mediterranean maquis and expanses of sea and sky.

San Vito lo Capo (Trapani), Zingaro Nature Reserve.

Next page: San Vito Lo Capo.





Mozia

Mozia was one of the most important and prosperous cities of the Phoenician West. Destroyed by the Greeks in 397 BC and never rebuilt, its museums house **very ancient finds** (8th-7th centuries BC).

It is located on the island of San Pantaleo,



in the **Stagnone**, a sort of lagoon just north of Marsala.

Covering just 0.4 km², with its lagoon landscape, salt pans and windmills, it is a magical and timeless place.

Selinunte

Europe's largest archaeological park, containing the ruins and remains of numerous grandiose buildings, including splendid temples, sacred monuments, public and private buildings, as well as treasures, Selinunte has a history full of charm and mystery. It was a prosperous, powerful and feared Greek colony, whose decline was caused by a nine-day

Mozia (Trapani), Giovane o Giovinetto di Mozia. Statua in marmo risalente al 450 a.C. circa, pare sia stata portata nella attuale sede dai Cartaginesi dopo l'assedio e il saccheggio di Selinunte.

Pagina accanto: Selinunte (Trapani), il Tempio E.



siege by the Carthaginian Hannibal, who sacked, destroyed and burned it in 409 BC, consigning it to oblivion.

The 270 hectares of the Selinunte Park contain an archaeological heritage that is still largely undiscovered. "Trampling on its ancient stones, gazing at its ruins immersed in the silence of the past, admiring the austere height of its columns is an unforgettable experience, a journey through time that flows and overwhelms, a longedfor rest at the foot of the mirage of eternity".

Belice River Mouth Nature Reserve

Perhaps it was this splendid site, just a few hundred metres away from the Selinuntine treasures, which attracted the settlers and made them decide to found a city there. It is a quiet, unspoilt place of ineffable beauty, inhabited by various bird species, the Sicilian lizard and sea turtles, which come here to lay their eggs.

Cave di Cusa

Located in Campobello di Mazara (about 13 km from Selinunte), the Cave di Cusa are the quarries from which stone was extracted to build the Selinunte temples and are ideally the first stop on a visit to the Siceliot city.



In fact, it was from this very spot that Tommaso Fazello came to discover Selinunte, then buried under stones and sand due to a cataclysm that probably occurred thousands of years earlier. The scholar came across several huge stone cylinders, perforated in the middle, lying on the ground in a random position and deduced that these blocks should have been transported to Selinunte but were abandoned suddenly, perhaps due to a tragic event.

So it was that he, following "the way of the stones", brought to light the vestiges of one of the most prestigious cities of the past.

The archaeological interest of the Cave di Cusa, whose park has been dedicated to Vincenzo Tusa, is enormous: it is in fact an open building site, from which it is possible to reconstruct the fascinating system of extraction, cutting and processing of stone destined for buildings in Selinunte.



Campobello di Mazara (Trapani), Cave di Cusa. The photo shows a lithic cylinder around which a trench has been made to allow the passage of workers and the subsequent stages of processing.

Next page: Belice River Mouth Nature Reserve (Trapani and Agrigento). The ineffable beauty of the site.

Mazara del Vallo

Mazara is a seaside town and has one of Italy's most important fishing ports. The old urban layout has the characteristic features of the medinas, Islamic neighbourhoods made up of courtyards, flower gardens, widenings, streets, alleys and lanes. But this is not the only reason for Mazara's arabesque character, as it is home to a large Maghrebi community, which fills its streets with its scents, sounds and typical garments.



Above: Mazara del Vallo (Trapani), detail of the Dancing Satyr, a mythological figure caught in the moment of orgiastic ecstasy linked to the ritual of wine-making and drunkenness. It is a bronze statue of Greek workmanship and dates from the end of the 4th century BC. Standing upright, the statue would reach a height of about 2.5 metres. It was found by a fishing boat from Mazara, which recovered one leg in 1997 and later, in 1998, the body without the other leg and the arms. Since then, the statue has travelled extensively: Rome, Japan, Paris... Since 2005, it has been housed in the Museum of the Dancing Satyr, set up for the purpose, of which it is the most prestigious exhibit.

On the side: Mazara del Vallo, Church of San Nicolò. Of Arab-Norman style, it was built in 1124.



Above: Mazara del Vallo (Trapani), Jesuit College, detail of the Baroque façade.

The important building complex, which includes the adjacent Church of Sant'Ignazio, was built in 1672-75 by the Jesuits, who turned it into a study centre with faculties of philosophy and theology.



On the side: Mazara del Vallo, a building in the Casbah.

The old Arab quarter, with the tolling of the bells of the nearby church mingling with the chanting of the muezzin inviting people to pray, offers a very happy example of integration between different peoples, cultures and religions.

Castellammare del Golfo

Castellammare rises in front of the magnificent gulf to which it gives its name, on the slopes of the Monte Irci mountain range.

It possesses every possible beauty, from naturalistic to historical-architectural, and therefore lives primarily on tourism.

Founded as a port of the nearby Segesta, it was consequently fortified on several occasions.

Segesta

An important Elymian city of ancient origin (9th century BC), it lies behind the Gulf of Castellammare and was the historical enemy of the Greek Selinunte, which it finally defeated by forming an alliance with Carthage.

There is an impressive **Doric temple** on a hillock at the foot of Mount Barbaro and a scenic **Hellenistic theatre**.







Aegadian Islands

The archipelago consists of Favignana, Levanzo and Marettimo and the islets of Maraone and Formica, together with a handful of rocks and sea stacks.

Easily accessible, being very close to the mainland, they are a true paradise for lovers of relaxation and bathing.

Island of Pantelleria

Closer to Africa than to Sicily, the third largest island among Italy's minor islands, it enjoys one of the finest seas in the Mediterranean and is so beautiful and rich in attractions that it even has a natural lake, fed by rainfall and thermal currents in its interior: the blue, wonderful, enchanting

Lago di Venere.



*Above, Segesta (Trapani), the Temple.
It is one of the best preserved in Sicily*

Below, Segesta, the panoramic theatre



Favignana, Aegadian Islands, the Tonnara (Tuna fishing facility), or former Florio factory, a true jewel of industrial archaeology. The magnificent construction was the brainchild of Ignazio Florio, who in 1878 commissioned the architect Damiani Almeyda to renovate the buildings of the Tonnara. Thus began the fortunes of Favignana, which became the Florio island par excellence.





Pantelleria, the famous lake Specchio di Venere (Venus' Mirror), so called because, according to legend, the goddess used to reflect in it before meeting Bacchus.

It is a natural lake occupying the crater of a volcano, located more or less in the centre of the island.

In addition to its fantastic flora and fauna, the lake is famous for its thermal mud baths and is also a popular destination for birdwatchers.

Facing page: above, Levanzo; below, Marettimo.



FROM THE GOOD EARTH GOOD FOOD

A beautiful and generous land, where fruits and food plants with excellent organoleptic characteristics grow in the soil, could not fail to express an extraordinarily rich, varied and appetising cuisine, which also captivates with intense and vivid colours and attractive and refined shapes.

The island's history has also contributed to this richness, with different cultures and peoples bringing with them their own culinary traditions and mixing them with local ones.

Today, Sicilian cuisine is considered the richest and most scenic in Italy. But already in classical antiquity, Siceliot cooks, i.e. Sicilian Greek cooks, were in demand in the motherland. One of them, Mithaecus, was the author of the first cookery book in history.

With the Arabs, the production of pasta made great progress: consider that the wheat and the workers of the first Ligurian pasta factories, to whom the introduction

of spaghetti in Italy is erroneously attributed, came from Sicily.

But Sicily also has an important record when it comes to wine: some ceramic finds suggest that Sicilian wine-growing, which is six thousand years old, is the oldest in the world. For certain, Sicilian wines were already famous in classical times.

A significant contribution to the island's cuisine was made by the monsù (local adaptation of monsieur), refined French chefs summoned by Sicilian nobles to their homes who mixed the rich tradition of the nobles with the poor local tradition, a trait that still distinguishes the island's cuisine today.

Sicily has dozens of famous dishes, street foods and desserts, including Pasta alla Norma, Pasta with Anchovies, Sarde a Beccafico, Caponata, Bread and Pannelle, Arancino, Cassata, Granita and Brioche with the "Tuppo", Almond Pastry, Cannoli... Numerous indigenous Sicilian grape varieties are used to produce excellent wines, which are increasingly recognised at the international level.









CATANIA AND ITS PROVINCE







Catania, Piazza Duomo seen from the back of the Amenano Fountain, locally known as Acqua ô Linzolu.

Beyond the "sheet-like" fall of its waters, it is possible to see the Elephant Fountain, a fine work by Giovan Battista Vaccarini dating from 1737. The animal, Liotru in Sicilian, is the symbol of the City. The statue and the obelisk on its back are pre-existing elements of uncertain date.

Next page: Catania, St. Agatha's devotees wearing the traditional white "sack", black velvet headdress, handkerchief and white gloves. During the St. Agatha's festivities, devotees carry majestic candles on their shoulders, subjecting themselves to heavy labour and the risk of burns.

Previous pages: Catania, Porto Ulisse or Ognina, dominated by the view of snow-capped Etna.

Catania

A popular European tourist destination, Catania is the beautiful Sicilian city of black and white architecture, the result of a combination of lava stone and Syracuse limestone, used in its main monumental buildings.

Daughter of the fire spewed over the millennia by Europe's highest volcano, the majestic Etna, Catania is also dominated by the water of its vivid sea.

As volcanic as their city, born and raised in an extraordinarily multifaceted territory, which lacks nothing and makes nothing

lack, the citizens of Catania are ironic, fearless and enterprising, they love the outdoors, night life, good food, sport and beauty.

But they also love St. Agatha, the patron saint who was martyred and killed by the





Catania, St. Agatha's Cathedral. Originally built around 1094 on the ruins of the Achillian Baths – dating back to the 4th century and now open to visitors – it has a long and troubled history, characterised by continuous additions and revisions over the centuries and marked above all by the earthquake of 1693, which destroyed it almost entirely, leaving only the apse and the façade standing. During reconstruction, it was modified by

transferring the original portal, now located in the Church of Sant'Agata al Carcere, and enriching it with the placement of some statues. The current building is the work of architects Girolamo Palazzotto and Giovan Battista Vaccarini, who designed the interior and the façade respectively. The Duomo overlooks the scenic piazza of the same name, a veritable “living room” of the city surrounded by magnificent black and white buildings.



Catania, Benedictine Monastery of San Nicolò La Rena. With the adjoining 18th-century monumental church, it represents a building complex of gigantic proportions and incredible architectural and artistic value.

The building, of 16th-century origin, was rebuilt following the earthquake of 1693. Europe's second largest Benedictine monastery, it was listed by UNESCO as a "jewel of late Sicilian Baroque" in 2002.

It is now home to the Department of Humanities of the University of Catania.

The Monastery houses, among other things, the five extraordinary rooms of the Biblioteche Riunite Civica and Ursino Recupero, in which about 270,000 volumes are kept, as well as manuscripts, parchments and, above all, rare and extremely valuable books.



Romans while still a teenager, whom the city celebrates with one of the most impressive and famous religious festivals in the world. Several miracles are attributed to the "Santuzza" (Dear Saint), including having saved her city several times from the destructive fury of the volcano and earthquakes.

The patron saint has a very onerous task indeed, since Catania has been destroyed and rebuilt nine times over the centuries. After the catastrophic earthquake of 1693, it was rebuilt in the style of Baroque architecture, of which Catania offers one of the finest examples.

But the city of Etna, which is home to the first university established on the island and one of the oldest in Italy and the world, is also rich in precious vestiges from the Greek, Roman, Arab, Norman and Neoclassical periods. Moreover, its territory is embellished by an extraordinary coastline and numerous natural sites of great interest.



Catania, Benedictine Monastery, East Cloister, detail of the spiral columns and ceramics adorning the café by engineer Angelo Musumeci.

Previous page: above, Palazzo Biscari, upper part of the side elevation, overlooking Via cardinale Dusmet.

This is the most important private building in Catania, one of the most significant examples of Sicilian Baroque, which the princes of Biscari began to build after the earthquake of 1693, on the ancient city walls, erected by Charles V in the 16th century. The palace is spread over a single floor and has six hundred rooms, including sumptuous halls, furnished and decorated in an extraordinarily rich and precious way; below, Castello Ursino. A building from the Norman era, it was built by Frederick II of Swabia starting in 1239. Over the centuries, it changed its role from military facility to royal residence and prison. Following the eruption of 1669, the moat of the castle was filled with lava and the coastline was shifted by a few hundred metres, weakening the defensive value of the castle, which was finally compromised by the damage to the building caused by the earthquake of 1693. Since 1934 the Castle has been home to the rich Museo Civico di Catania.



Catania, Teatro Massimo Vincenzo Bellini, dedicated to the great musician born in Catania. A Neo-Baroque building, it was designed by Carlo Sada from Milan and opened in 1890 with Bellini's *Norma*. Since then, many of the best musicians and singers of the 20th century and the new millennium have performed on its stage, including Riccardo Muti, Luciano Pavarotti and Maria Callas, to name but a few. Callas performed in *Norma* in 1950 and 1951, when she also performed in the *Puritani*; in 1952 and 1955 she starred in *La Traviata* and *Lucia di Lammermoor* respectively. The Bellini has an orchestra of one hundred and five musicians, an 84-piece choir and a prestigious technical and

artistic staff. It collaborates with internationally renowned directors and hosts an opera season and a symphonic and chamber music season. The theatre's acoustics have a well-deserved reputation for being perfect.

Next page: the interior of the Teatro Massimo Bellini. The hall consists of four tiers of boxes plus the galler and, with its rich decorations, is one of the most beautiful in Italy during the 19th century. The ceiling is frescoed with allegories of Vincenzo Bellini's major works: *Norma*, *La sonnambula*, *I puritani* and *Il pirata*.





The Coast

The Catanese coastline offers an unparalleled array of wonders and surprises:

golden sands, small and large ports, delightful villages, tiny pastel-coloured houses, black cliffs, islands and sea stacks, castles by the sea, cliffs, ancient overhanging walkways, enchanting belvederes, sumptuous residences...

Catania has a golden sandy beach, the *Playa*, which is about 18 km long and very popular during the bathing season.

A territory that has inspired many ancient and celebrated myths, including that of Polyphemus and Ulysses, the *Riviera dei Ciclopi* is a collection of small, picturesque and charming villages.

Aci Castello features an extraordinary 11th century **Norman Castle**, built of lava stone on a cliff overlooking the sea. The square through which you enter the castle,

The sea of Acireale.



very large and overlooked by a green hill, is a vast, extraordinary panoramic terrace. Nearby [Aci Trezza](#) is famous for the picturesque **Cyclopean Isles** – tall black sea stacks that stand out like mighty sculptures against a blue sea – and for providing the setting for Giovanni Verga's famous novel *I Malavoglia* (The House by the Medlar Tree) and Luchino Visconti's masterpiece *La terra trema* (The Earth Trembles).

Riposto hosts an important tourist port, the Porto dell'Etna, in a strategic position.

Acicastello (Catania), stretch of coastline with Aci Castle in the background. It is a medieval work of Norman manufacture, but the original building dates from much earlier times.

From wherever you look, the Castle enchants, amazes and tells an ancient story full of charm and mystery.

Following page: Acitrezza (Catania), the microarchipelago of the Cyclopean Isles. Whether they are immersed in the timeless calm of the sky and water or in the tumult of stormy seas, at dawn or at dusk, in the dazzling light of the sun or in the darkness, the sea stacks of Acitrezza offer unforgettable images of beauty.



Acireale

Acireale is known for its carnival, the most significant in Sicily and the third in Italy, and for its Baroque architecture, which testifies to its capacity for rebirth.

It is home to several prestigious religious and civil monuments, including the **Duomo**, the **Palazzo Comunale**, the **Basilica dei Santi Pietro e Paolo** and the **Basilica Collegiata di San Sebastiano**.

Acireale (Catania), a carnival float with the top of the Cathedral in the background.

The Acireale Carnival is considered the most beautiful in Sicily and the third most beautiful in Italy. The allegorical, papier-mâché or flowered floats that parade there are the only ones in the world to use extraordinary lighting systems and mechanical and hydraulic movements.

The construction of the current Cathedral, dedicated to Maria Santissima Annunziata, began in 1598 and has since undergone numerous changes until 1889. It is a building of great value. The beautiful sculptural group of the niche was made in the Messina workshop of Paolo Blandamonte, then transported by sea to the small port of Santa Maria La Scala and from there towed to Acireale.





Caltagirone

Caltagirone is one of the few Sicilian towns where at least part of the medieval architecture survived the earthquake of 1693. Its historic centre has some welcome surprises in store for visitors.

Militello in Val di Catania

A city extraordinarily rich in valuable buildings, churches, museums, former monasteries and palaces, mainly in the

Caltagirone (Catania), the staircase of Santa Maria del Monte (1606), connecting the old part of the city with the new districts. With a length of 130 metres and 142 steps, it is one of the symbols of Caltagirone.

The polychrome ceramics that decorate the risers of the steps, in a variety of themes and styles, are a spectacular sight.

The art of ceramics has a very old tradition here (5th century BC).

Next page: Militello (Catania), Sanctuary of Santa Maria della Stella, the town's main patron saint, with its scenic staircase and magnificent bell tower.

Following page: Militello V.C., entrance to the Istituto di Incremento Ippico, housed from 2019 onwards in the Tenuta Ambelia.

Baroque style. This lovely town has been on the UNESCO World Heritage list since 2002. The Mustard and Prickly Pear Festival is held here.

Tenuta Ambelia

Once belonging to the Branciforti princes, the Tenuta Ambelia is located about 40 km from Catania, in the municipality of Militello Val di Catania. Originally, it must have been a wine-growing estate, as



evidenced by the name “Ambelia”, which derives from Ampelos “vine”.

The main task of the Tenuta Ambelia is to breed and maintain the pure-bred Oriental horse, an endangered breed with unique characteristics and qualities compared to the world's horse population. The facility is now managed by the Istituto di Incremento Ippico, which is controlled by the Region and is responsible for the protection of four native Sicilian breeds: the oriental horse, the Sanfratellano horse, the Ragusan donkey and the Pantelleria donkey.

From 2019, the Tenuta Ambelia will host the Mediterranean Horse Fair.

On the estate, which covers about 45 hectares, currently planted with fodder crops and olive trees, there are numerous buildings of considerable historical and artistic value, now restored and returned to their former glory.



Gole dell'Alcantara (Alcantara Gorges)

Located within the territory of the two provinces of Catania and Messina, they are made up of suggestive deep cracks produced in the basalt rock, crossed by the icy waters of the Alcantara River. The most famous and largest gorge is over 6 km long and about half of it can be easily followed on foot.

Etna

A destination for tourists, visitors and scholars from all over the world, Etna can be considered the lighthouse of Sicily, if you consider that, in conditions of excellent visibility, it can even be admired from some points in Palermo, some 150 km away. But Etna is above all the mother of Catania and its main cultural, architectural,

Alcantara Gorges.









landscape and even psychological feature.

In spite of the roars, seismic tremors and the threats to structures or inhabited areas that particularly violent eruptions can represent, the people of Etna love, respect and admire their Muntagna (Mountain). Perhaps because the Volcano is the source of fertility – Etna's natural products have unique organoleptic characteristics – and of the great beauty of its territory.

With its different seasonal liveries, Etna never ceases to enchant:

it is hard to forget, for example, the image of the purple, orange and pink reflections that brush its snowy summit at sunset, or that of its austere and imperious mass that stands out black and massive against the blue sky of Catania.

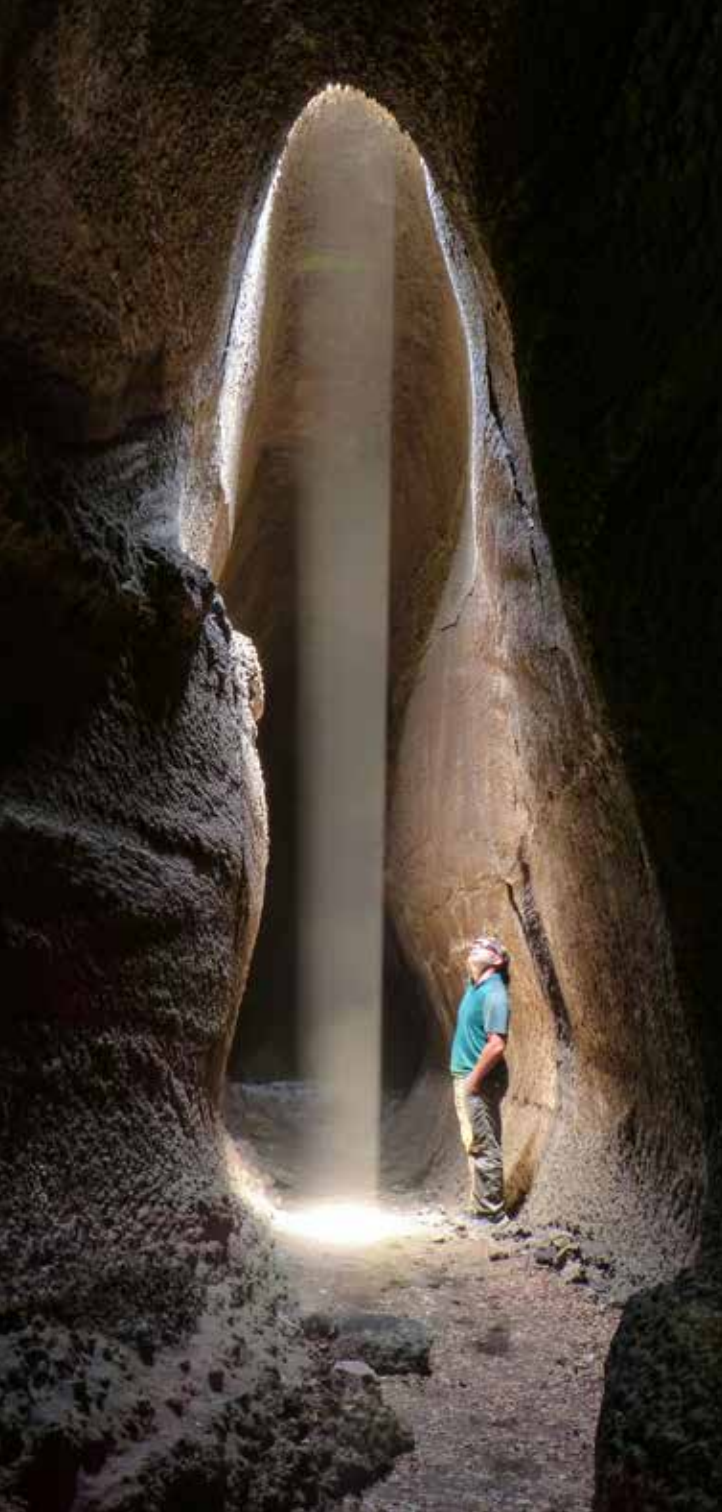
But Etna, whose southern and northern slopes – equipped for winter sports – are the destination of tourists and visitors, is above all a fantastic area, characterised by evocative lunar landscapes alternating with

dense and vast forests of pine, beech, birch and chestnut trees. Beneath, amidst the lava flows of the past, there are numerous and fascinating caves...

Ineffably beautiful from up there is the view of the surface of the sea, streaked with red at sunset or animated by flickering golden reflections during the day.

Next page: Etna Park, Lake Gurrida (Randazzo), a natural basin created by a barrage caused by a lava flow in 1536. The lake offers a view of what can perhaps be considered the best mirror in which Etna is reflected in all its majesty.

Previous pages: Fiumefreddo di Sicilia (Catania), winter view of Etna at sunset, with the characteristic "lenticular clouds", the most classic and spectacular cloud formation that thickens on the volcano's summit craters as a result of a complex physical phenomenon linked to temperature. Locally, Etna's "hat" is called Contesa, or Contessa.



Etna, Serracozzo Cave. It is a much-visited site, thanks to the fascinating visual effects that the light coming from above produces inside the cavern when the sun is perpendicular, generating various colour shades.

Next page: Etna, Grotta del Gelo (Cave of Frost, 2030 m). Its temperature never exceeds -6 °C and is therefore considered the southernmost perennial glacier in Europe. It was formed during a lava flow that started in 1614: in contact with the atmosphere, the walls and surface of the flow cooled faster than the interior, creating a magma flow channel covered by solidified lava. When the flow runs out, it leaves a hollow structure.

Next pages: Marzamemi (Syracuse), charming and renowned seaside village. Night view of the Balata Marina.



SYRACUSE AND ITS PROVINCE





Syracuse

White Syracuse, clad in white limestone, like most of its marvellous cliffs, harmoniously incorporates the austere features of a very ancient past, forms of medieval essentiality and flashes of Baroque exuberance.

Two safe harbours, a strategic position, abundant water resources, extremely fertile soil and enchanting natural beauty must certainly have convinced the Greeks—who already knew the area well, having engaged in profitable trade with the indigenous peoples – to found Syracuse, preparing it for a future of great

power and magnificence.

The birthplace of the genius of Archimedes and the greatest Siceliot city, many illustrious ancient writers have written about it, from Livy to Cicero – who described it as “the most beautiful of Greek cities, and the most beautiful in the world” – Virgil and Thucydides. Like many other Sicilian sites, its territory is also a land of ancient myths and legends.

It is home to important archaeological and architectural treasures, which have earned it inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage list.



On the side: Island of Ortygia.

*Below: Syracuse, the Cathedral.
It houses statues, relics and remains of saints, martyrs
and noblemen from Syracuse.*





Syracuse, Piazza Duomo. It is considered among the most beautiful Baroque squares in Sicily. Elegant, spacious and airy, it is overlooked by a number of fine buildings, including the Duomo. To better enjoy the magical atmosphere of the square, you can sit at the tables of the coffee shops overlooking it. According to a fairly widespread choice, also in Syracuse the symbolic place of ecclesiastical power was associated with the building that was the seat of temporal power: the Palazzo Senatorio, which houses the Town Hall, is also located here, along with the Cathedral.

Next page: Syracuse, a stall in the fish market. Sicilian markets are renowned for their liveliness, as the sellers' voices call out to customers, shouting, with colourful fixed formulas, often comical or amusing.

In the fish markets, the voices of the auctioneers become particularly vibrant and fast, perhaps to evoke the rapid darting of the fish or, who knows, to mark the need to conclude the sale of particularly perishable goods quickly.







The enchanting island of [Ortygia](#), connected to Syracuse by two bridges, is the oldest part of the city, the original settlement of Greek colonists, who landed here around 734 BC and later expanded into four other urban centres.

Ortygia contains the remains of the **Temple of Apollo**, the oldest Doric Siceliot temple in Sicily, as well as numerous valuable buildings and art objects, including the first Sicilian work by **Caravaggio**.

The **Arethusa Spring** is very famous in Ortygia, fascinating and richly embellished by papyrus, with fresh water that flows underground to the island and then into the sea.

Syracuse, Greek Theatre.



Syracuse, Latomia del Paradiso, Ear of Dionysius. It represents an artificial cave of great proportions (it is about 23 m high and as much as 65 m long). It is still unclear why it was dug out: legend has it that the tyrant placed prisoners there to eavesdrop on their conversations. Indeed, thanks to its S-shape, the cave amplifies sounds.

The [Neapolis Archaeological Park](#), in the portion of Syracuse's territory beyond Ortygia, contains the fascinating remains of numerous buildings from the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

Timelessly beautiful, the **Roman Amphitheatre** of Syracuse is the largest building of its kind in Sicily; the **Greek Theatre** is also magical, having enjoyed great international prestige in Antiquity as a popular and renowned venue for Greek tragedies. It even seems that Aeschylus himself staged two of his plays there. Since 1914, the theatre has once again hosted the great tragedies of the past, a renewed tradition that is still of great artistic and cultural prestige today.

Not to be missed is a visit to the **Latomie**, the quarries that in ancient times provided the material for the buildings and still represent a suggestive place.



Pantalica (Syracuse). This evocative image was taken from inside the tombs of the necropolis. A very important natural and archaeological site, it has often been identified with the ancient

Siceliot kingdom of Hybla. Since 2005, it has enjoyed UNESCO protection for its high historical, archaeological, speleological and landscape profile.

Palazzolo Acreide

An ancient colony of Syracuse, it houses a small **Greek theatre** dating from the 3rd century BC and surrounded by imposing carob trees, the **Bouleuterion** and the **Latomie**.

On the side: Palazzolo Acreide (Syracuse), Greek Theatre.

Below: Palazzolo Acreide, St. Paul's Basilica. Featuring a striking Baroque façade, it is the most important church in the city.



Noto

A city of ancient origins, Noto is today the emblem of Baroque architecture in Sicily, thanks to which it has been listed as a UNESCO site. Like many other Baroque centres on the island, it was also rebuilt in the architectural style typical of the period immediately following the earthquake of 1693.

Its reconstruction involved three generations of architects and craftsmen, who have left us priceless Baroque jewels.

Noto (Syracuse), Palazzo Nicolaci di Villadorata, detail of the corbels adorning the balconies. The building has as many as ninety rooms, some of which are richly decorated.

Below: Noto (Syracuse), suggestive image of the Cathedral of San Nicolò and its monumental steps, seen from a building opposite.







The coastline

The Syracuse coastline, characterised by white rock dotted with wild plants and shrubs, is dotted with delightful seaside towns: from **Portopalo di Capo Passero**, to nearby **Marzamemi**, **Fontane Bianche**, **Augusta** and its small hamlet, **Brucoli**.

The coastline is also home to the precious **Vendicari Nature Reserve**, established in 1984 to protect one of the few stretches of Sicilian coastline still free of buildings.



Above: Noto, "Oasi Faunistica di Vendicari" Nature Reserve, a resting place for migratory birds.

Below and next page: Portopalo di Capopassero.

Previous pages: Noto, Palazzo Ducezio (1830), seat of the Town Hall. Ducetius, king of the Sicels from 460 to 450 BC, was the founder of the City







THE NARRATING ISLAND

Sicily has a very intense, ancient and profound relationship with words, not only as a means of social communication, but also as an expression and “form” in which to substantiate the creative and imaginative universe of its inhabitants, their pleasure and their need to talk, to open up, to narrate their stories, but also their marked inclination towards philosophical speculation and investigation into the nature of the human soul.

It is no coincidence that the art of rhetoric – the longest-lived discipline, together with grammar, dealing with language – was born on the island some two thousand five hundred years ago.

Further evidence of the close link between Sicily, words and narrative is provided by the large number of ancient theatres scattered throughout the island, extraordinary and scenic architectural works in which the echoes



Acitrezza (Catania), il Museo intitolato alla “Casa del Nespolo” – raffigurata qui in un acquerello di Nino Lanza –, la piccola abitazione che Giovanni Verga immaginò quale dimora dei protagonisti del suo famoso romanzo, I Malavoglia. La struttura del Museo riproduce un tipico ambiente siciliano di fine Ottocento ed è composta di due sale, dedicate rispettivamente al film La terra trema di Visconti, tratto appunto dal romanzo verghiano, e ai Malavoglia, con gli antichi strumenti da pesca e arredi tipici delle case dei pescatori. Il Museo ospita inoltre alcuni importanti documenti autografi del Verga e un album fotografico con scatti originali dell'Autore, che fu come è noto appassionato fotografo.

Pagina accanto: immagine di una scena del film Il Gattopardo, tratto dall'omonimo, celebre romanzo di Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa. La scena fu girata in un salone del pregevolissimo Palazzo settecentesco Valguarnera Gangi, a Palermo.

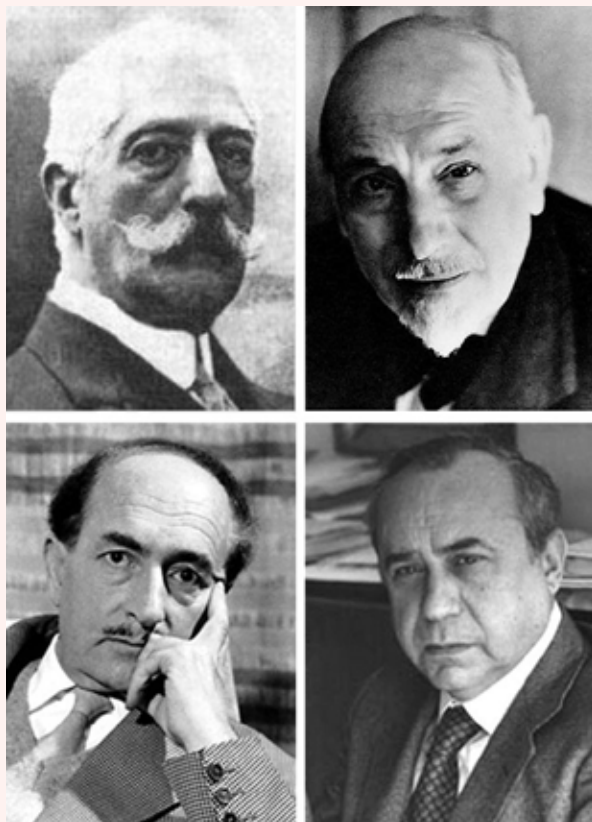
full of suggestions of imperishable works of human intellect and imagination still resound. The highly celebrated Aeschylus, one of the greatest tragedians of Antiquity, was called upon to perform his works in Sicily, where he later wrote *The Women of Aetna*, and where he chose to end his days.

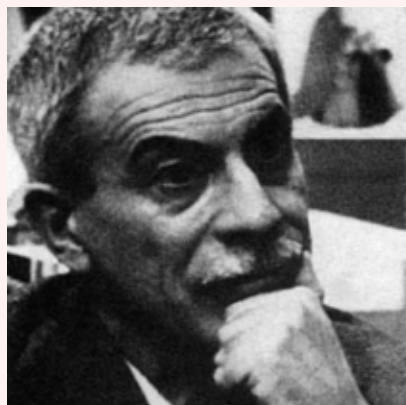
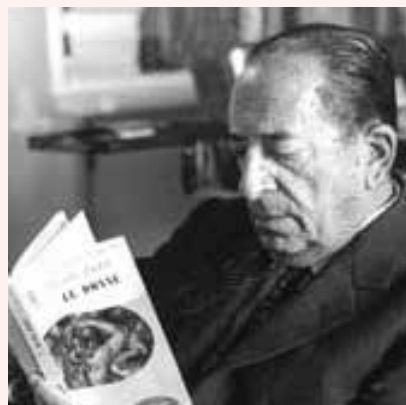
Finally, and even more significantly, under the court of Frederick II, in Palermo, in the second decade of the 13th century or so, the Sicilian School was born, to which we owe the first lyrical production in the Italian vernacular.

In other words, the Italian language was born in Sicily!

Countless writers, poets and playwrights have been born on the island: Giuseppina Turrisi Colonna, Luigi Capuana, Giovanni Verga, Mariannina Coffa Caruso, Luigi Natoli, Federico De Roberto, Luigi Pirandello, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, Salvatore Quasimodo, Ercole Patti, Vitaliano Brancati, Elio Vittorini,

Livia De Stefani, Gesualdo Bufalino, Leonardo Sciascia, Goliarda Sapienza, Andrea Camilleri and Vincenzo Consolo are among the main names that have contributed to determining the greatness of Italian literature and giving it prestige in the world





RAGUSA AND ITS PROVINCE





Ragusa

Ragusa, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, lies in the Val di Noto area, on the rocky plateau of the Hyblaean Mountains, bordered by two deep valleys.

It has a strong agricultural vocation, making its province the richest area in Sicily, and holds the national record for gross saleable agricultural production.

It is a city with a dual soul, divided, as it has been since the reconstruction that followed the earthquake of 1693, into the two different portions of Ragusa Alta (Upper Ragusa) and Ragusa Ibla (Lower Ragusa), joined together by a monumental

staircase. Ragusa Ibla was in fact rebuilt by the citizens on the original layout of the medieval town, while Ragusa Alta was created by the nobility and clergy. Both are in the Baroque style, typical of the time, and are full of beautiful secular and religious buildings. However, the charm of the bewitching Ibla, built of white tuff, with its intricate alleyways, curls, putti, festoons and masks, is surely unparalleled and rivals the beauty of Ragusa Alta. Pietro Germi fell in love with the beautiful Ibla, making it the set for the famous film *Divorzio all'italiana* (Divorce Italian Style), starring Marcello Mastroianni and Stefania Sandrelli.



*Ragusa Ibla, Insigne
Collegiata di San Giorgio,
commonly known as Duomo
di San Giorgio.*

*The grandeur of this fine
Baroque building and
its plastic effects are
accentuated by its location
at the end of a high flight of
steps and its slanted position
in relation to the square it
overlooks.*





Modica

A town of Neolithic origin, Modica has a prestigious past, having been until the 19th century the capital of a county that had significant political, economic and cultural influence.

The city's one hundred extraordinary buildings, including churches, convents and Baroque palaces, bear witness to this past and have earned it UNESCO World Heritage status.

Like Ragusa, Modica is divided into two parts, connected by a colossal monumental staircase.

Gesualdo Bufalino, a native of nearby Comiso, dedicated beautiful pages to Modica in *Argo*, the blind man.

Modica (Ragusa), the Duomo, dedicated to St. George.

*Previous pages:
Ragusa, St. John the Baptist's Cathedral.*





Scicli

Also in Baroque style after an earthquake in 1693 reduced it to ruins, it was rebuilt with a skilful arrangement of buildings according to Baroque rules of space and illusionistic



effects, creating a true architectural jewel.

Scicli is a UNESCO World Heritage Site as well.

On the side: Scicli, St. Bartholomew's Church.

Below: Comiso, former fish market, called Vucceria. It has been home to the Gesualdo Bufalino Foundation since 1999. The famous writer often walked along the loggia of the elegant neoclassical building.





The coastline

From **Scoglitti** to **Pozzallo**, passing through **Punta Secca**, **Marina di Ragusa** and **Donnalucata**, the Ragusa coastline, about sixty kilometres long, has enchanting beaches and landscapes and is therefore an increasingly popular destination for tourists and holidaymakers.

The spontaneous vegetation includes numerous species of freshwater reeds and acacias, reminiscent of African scenarios: after all, several seaside resorts in the Ragusa region lie below the Tunisian parallel.

Donnafugata (Ragusa), the Castle.



Above: Puntasecca (Santacroce Camerina, Ragusa), the famous, celebrated beach that laps the home of Inspector Moltalbano (Italian TV series based on Andrea Camilleri's novel).

On the side: Punta Braccetto (Santa Croce Camerina, Ragusa) is a seaside village overlooking the Strait of Sicily, with a long history of human settlement. The famous archaeologist Paolo Orsi unearthed a small village consisting of circular huts.

*On the side: Donnalucata, the Micenci Beach.
With the delicacy of a naïve painting, this delightful
image conveys the joy and simplicity of a day at the
seaside that is drawing to a close.*

*Below: extraordinary aerial view of the Donnalucata
area, whose pearly sands plunge into the
breathtaking blue sea.*



CALTANISSETTA AND ITS PROVINCE





Caltanissetta

Caltanissetta is located right in the heart of Sicily, where the visitor arrives after a long journey through an area that seems to be a succession of marvellous, timeless naturalistic paintings, with warm, embracing hues, solitary and motionless on fine weather days and animated only by grazing herds and the occasional bird in flight.

This is the other side of Sicily, or, if you like, its other chromatic palette – less rich than the first, but certainly no less beautiful – which replaces the black of the lava, the white, beige, ochre of the stones or the intense

blue of the sea with the gold of the wheat, the pastel shades of wild or cultivated plants, the red and yellow of the fair hills in bloom, the browns of the soil.

A land of sulphur mines, also rich in rock salt and potassium salt mines, Caltanissetta was also a land of estates and fiefdoms, the home of powerful Sicilian lords, against whom farmers and miners revolted in the 19th century, demanding better living conditions.

Although Caltanissetta has remote origins 141 and it is believed, for example, that the present site was chosen by the Byzantines and that its name has Arab origins (Qal'at

al-nisa, meaning “castle of the women”), the first reliable historical evidence about the city dates from the Norman period. Caltanissetta offers an interesting visit to the **remains of ancient monuments, Norman works, valuable 16th-century and later buildings.**

Caltanissetta. The scenic Piazza Garibaldi, overlooked by the city's major monuments and with the Fondana del Tritone (Triton Fountain) in the centre. The square is animated by a large crowd and the presence of “vare” (literally “coffins”), with sculptural groups, linked to the Easter celebrations taking place.

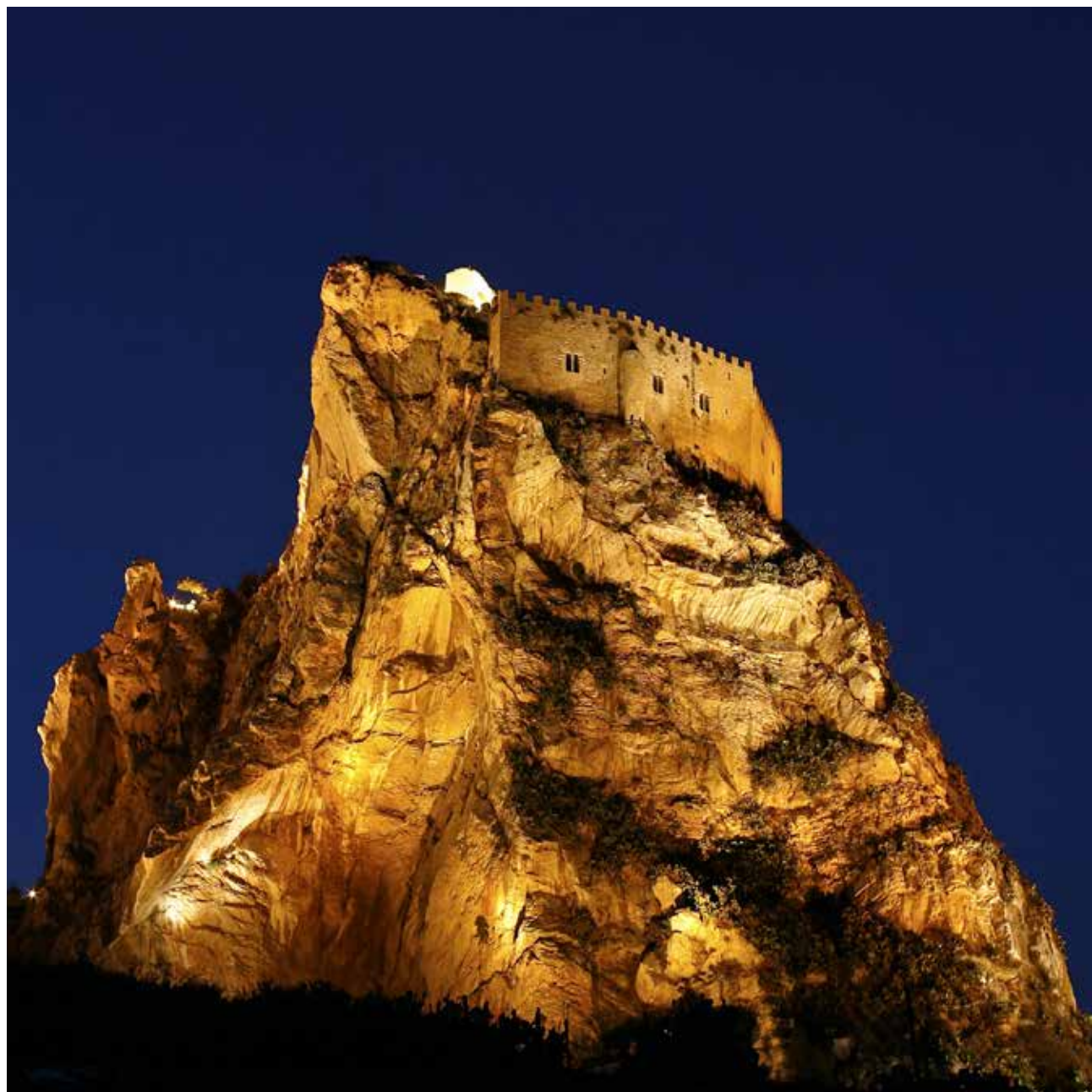






*Caltanissetta, the interior of the Cathedral.
Divine light seems to penetrate the dome of this
magnificent sacred building.*

Next page: Caltanissetta, religious celebrations.





Falconara, Butera (Caltanissetta): the Castle, dating from the 15th century. A historic residence, a place of extraordinary beauty and charm, it still shows the Aragonese structure and its three construction phases intact. On the elevation where the entrance is located, in the tower, there is a gunning terrace. The park surrounding the castle is also noteworthy, rich in palm trees and historical essences. In this twilight shot, the clear reflections of the moon on the sea seem to remind us of the sacredness of beauty and life.

Next page: Mussomeli, the Castle. Situated on a high cliff (at almost 800 m), it dates back to the 14th century. It became famous, even outside Sicily, for the legends and stories that shroud its walls in mysterious charm.

According to these narratives, various wretched souls wander the castle grounds in search of peace. Among them, the ghost of the famous Baroness of Carini, murdered by her father because she was caught with her alleged lover.

Needless to say, the Castle is a place of absolute tranquillity and safety, despite the legends...

Gela

Gela lies on the southern coast of Sicily, where its golden sand and dunes meet the blue waters of the sea. Its territory is enriched by the presence of a fertile plain. Needless to say, for these reasons Gela was among the first protagonists of the Greeks' adventure in Sicily, who founded it in 689 BC.

The city soon became an expression of power and culture and hosted illustrious men, including the famous tragedian Aeschylus, who ended his days there. Its main attractions are now a nature park, the **Biviere di Gela**, and an important **archaeological site**.

Caltanissetta, the wonderful colour palette of the Sicilian hinterland.

Next page: Gela (Caltanissetta), the Biviere. Delightful specimen of egret (Egretta garzetta), one of the many bird species that inhabit the Nature Park.

Following pages: Falconara (Butera, Caltanissetta), the panoramic view of the castle.









ENNA AND ITS PROVINCE







Enna

Called the “navel” of Sicily by Cicero, Enna is located at the geographical centre of the island and is the only one of its provinces that is landlocked.

It is perched on a high mountain and at 931 metres above sea level is the highest provincial capital in Italy.

But Enna is also the belvedere of Sicily, extending with its very old streets on a terrace overlooking the high valley of the Dittaino river and looking out over the beautiful landscapes of the Sicilian hinterland.

Enna's climate is also different from that of the rest of the island, as the altitude makes the city cold and foggy, with heavy snowfall in particularly cold years.

The climate is milder in Lower Enna, as the original nucleus of the town of Sant'Anna is now called, located downstream from the historic centre at an altitude of 250 metres.

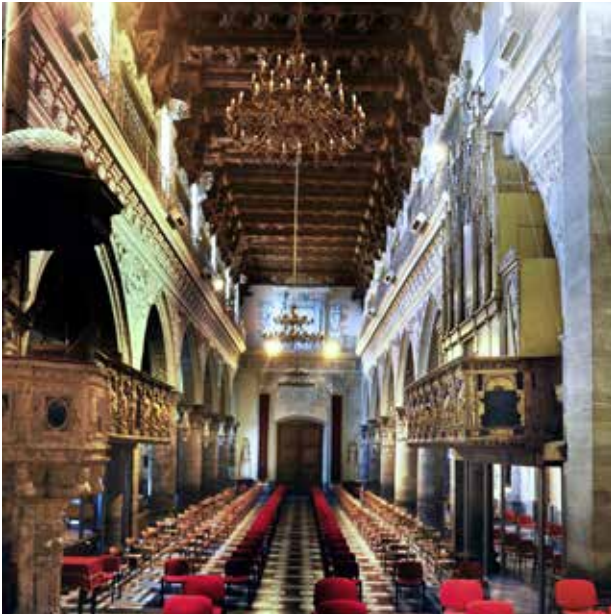
Enna, The Lombardia Castle. The imposing building, simbol of the town and erected on its highest point, is one of the three largest medieval castles in Italy. It was built on a fortress of Sican origin like the city that hosts it, the ancient Henna.

Next page: Enna, the splendid Belvedere, overlooking a vast panorama at the foot of the mountain on which the city stands.









A natural stronghold, *urbs inexpugnabilis* as the Romans called it, Enna obviously attracted the most ancient populations that settled in Sicily and was the home of all the island's successive rulers.

Pergusa

A few kilometres from Enna, in the eponymous hamlet, is the **Special Nature Reserve of Lake Pergusa**, celebrated by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* and the scene of Pluto's famous Abduction of Proserpine. The interesting natural site is populated by a very rich birdlife; the lake is surrounded by sinuous hills, over which the *Selva Pergusina* has developed.



Enna, two details of the Cathedral's precious interior.

Previous page: the Duomo. A national monument and UNESCO World Heritage Site, it houses valuable works, including altarpieces by Guglielmo Borremans.

Previous page: Enna, the bell tower of the Church of San Francesco dei Conventuali.



Pergusa is home to a historic **racetrack** with a glorious past, which surrounds the lake in a highly evocative setting.

Morgantina

Morgantina is an ancient Siceliot and Greek city, now an archaeological site in the territory of the municipality of Aidone, from which come precious archaeological finds, such as the **Treasure of Morgantina**, consisting of fifteen silver pieces, and the wonderful statue of the **Goddess of Morgantina**, whose history is full of mysteries, vicissitudes and twists. The impressive work of art is now kept in the Archaeological Museum of Aidone.

Piazza Armerina

Piazza, as it was called until the beginning of the 19th century, is a town of Norman origin, although its territory was also inhabited in much earlier times.

It was certainly very prosperous in Roman times, as the presence of the extraordinary



Morgantina (Aidone, Enna), the Goddess of Morgantina.

Next page: Pergusa (Enna), an enchanting image of the lake. Along its circumference, all the way to the left, you can see the stands of the racetrack.

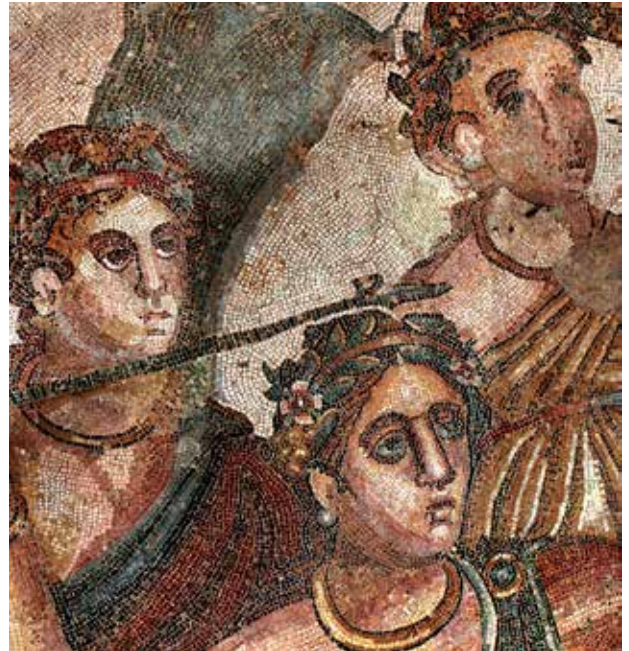


Villa del Casale on its territory undoubtedly suggests.

Built on three hills, the town is located in a very fertile area of Sicily and appears to be surrounded by pine and eucalyptus forests, almond and olive trees.

Its centre is in the charming Piazza Garibaldi and offers a visit to **fine palaces, castles, churches** and **convents** bearing the architectural traces of the peoples who have lived there.

The Villa Romana del Casale, considered one of the most significant Roman monuments in existence, is world-famous for its magnificence and its floors, which



represent the largest and most complex collection of Roman mosaics in the world (3,500 m²) The Villa, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has undergone complex restoration work.

On the side: Morgantina, Amphitheatre.

Above: Piazza Armerina, the famous mosaics of Villa del Casale. Detail of a triclinium scene.



Piazza Armerina, details of the famous mosaics of Villa del Casale.

Above: Girls in bikinis.

On the side: Cubicle of the Erotic Scene.



RIDDLE... CARTS

When Guy de Maupassant landed in Palermo in 1885, he was first struck by a Sicilian cart, which he wittily described as “a moving riddle”, i.e. something that “attracts the eye and the mind like a riddle that you always want to solve”.

“These carts”, continues the French writer, “small square boxes, perched very high on yellow wheels, are decorated with simple and curious paintings, representing historical facts, adventures of all kinds...”. The variety of themes depicted on the bodies of the carts is incredible: from religious, historical, legendary or fairy-tale themes to musical, realistic or descriptive subjects.

An expression of a popular art involving a variety of craftsmen and whose construction culminated in the work of skilled masters, Sicilian carts transported goods and people along the roads of

the island from the 19th century until the middle of the 20th.

Today they have become an admired object of handicraft art.

Sicilian cart.

Previous page: detail of a cart wheel.





Above: painting of a Sicilian cart depicting a duel between paladins.

On the side: detail of an epic scene.

Next page: above, a nice transposition of the pictorial art typical of Sicilian carts in the colourful livery of a vintage Fiat 500;



below, historical painting on the side of a traditional cart.



MESSINA AND ITS PROVINCE





Messina

Sicilians, who have often been forced by fate to leave their beloved land over the last two centuries, are taken by joy and emotion when, crossing the Strait, they glimpse the coast of Messina...

This is indeed the main gateway to Sicily, which non-Sicilians cross, after a legendary journey – because everyone seems to hear the echoes of the Sirens' bewitching song addressed to Ulysses on the Strait, or seems to sense with a shiver the presence of the terrible monsters of Scylla and Charybdis – with the strong feeling of being at the beginning of a

great, promising adventure.

In the meantime, both receive the blessing greeting of the Madonna della Lettera, whose stele stands significantly at the entrance to the City's port, the first in Italy for the number of passengers in transit.

“When Messina existed, Rome was just countryside”, recites an old popular saying with ill-concealed snobbery and resentful irony, underlining the ancient origins of the city and its magnificent past.

As is well known, over the centuries Messina has been the victim of numerous destructive events, whether man-made or natural, which have devastated it. The last

of these, the terrible earthquake of 1908, gave the city its modern appearance, much of it rebuilt in Liberty style.

Not all the monuments of the past have fortunately been lost, and the city offers visitors a view of **fine religious or civic buildings**.

Messina, the Port.

Previous pages: Tindari (Patti, Messina), the Sanctuary and its wonderful context.

On the left, the Aeolian Islands.





Messina, Piazza del Duomo.
Built on an original building dating back to 530, which was devastated during the Arab domination, it was enriched in the pre-Renaissance period with various precious decorative elements. It was badly damaged by the 1638 earthquake and was then rebuilt, contaminated with Baroque elements: stuccoes, putti, cornices and festoons.

Next page: Madonna and Child with St. Gregory in Adoration, by Antonello da Messina, one of the most famous Sicilian artists in the world.





Messina, Shrine of Christ the King. Originally built on the remains of a fortified structure from the Arab era, the Shrine was designed in 1937.

Baroque in style, it has an irregular octagonal shape and a huge dome, towering over the City, marked

by eight ribs bearing at their base as many bronze statues representing the three theological virtues, the four cardinal virtues and the allegorical virtue of religion.



Messina, Church of SS. Annunziata dei Catalani. It is thought to have been built on the remains of a pagan Greek-Siceliot temple. The Normans remodelled its construction according to Nordic canons.

In the 13th century, it became the seat of the Dominican Order, which had just arrived in Sicily. Damaged by the earthquakes of 1783 and 1908, it is a magnificent blend of Byzantine, Romanesque and Gothic styles.





Milazzo

Inhabited for around four thousand years, Milazzo was a Greek colony. It rises at the beginning of a peninsula about 8 km long, which draws a sort of comma on the Tyrrhenian Sea.

In Capo Milazzo is the **Grotta di Polifemo** (Polyphemus' Cave), the scene of Ulysses' legendary encounter with the Cyclops.

Milazzo offers a visit to the **Castle of Frederick II**, dating from the Norman period, as well as other **fine buildings** and some **archaeological sites**.

Milazzo (Messina), the Castle. With the entire area within the Spanish walls, it is the largest fortified citadel in Sicily. The area, which has been declared a national monument and has undergone extensive restoration, contains the remains of settlements from a wide range of ages, starting with a prehistoric necropolis dating from the Neolithic period, around four thousand years ago.

Tindari

Seen from above or coasted by sea, Tindari gives the impression of a piece of paradise that has miraculously fallen to earth.

Its steep, rocky coastline, overlooked by its imposing but divinely graceful sanctuary, stretches out towards the sea in picturesque evolutions that first outline a lagoon landscape and then an extensive sandy offshoot with a changing shape.

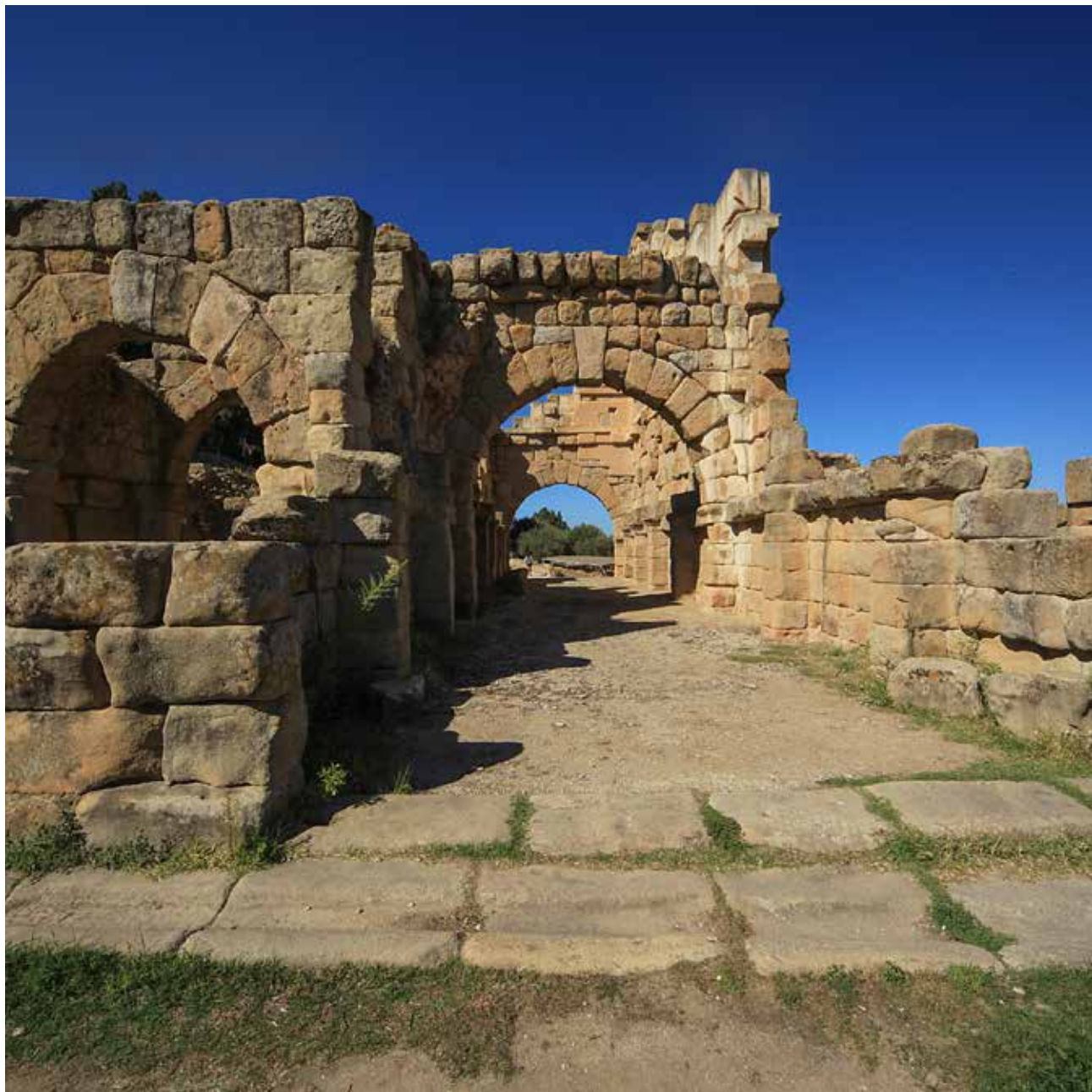
Tindari is also an important archaeological site, including the remains of a beautiful Roman theatre, the ancient city walls and Roman baths.

The Sanctuary houses an ancient Byzantine wooden sculpture depicting the Black Virgin of Tindari, to whom the building is dedicated.

Tindari (Patti, Messina), the Laghetti di Marinello Nature Reserve.

Next page: Tindari, the archaeological area.





Capo d'Orlando

Roland (Orlando in Italian) himself, the hero of the Chanson de Roland, but also of the Opera dei Pupi, apparently stopped here during a crusade to the Holy Land and is therefore the origin of the name of this popular tourist and holiday destination. The town spreads out along the coast, at the foot of a rugged promontory sloping steeply down to the sea, which rises up

again at the Capo and takes on an almost perfectly conical shape.

It preserves the remains of a **castle** and the **Sanctuary of the Virgin**.

*Capo d'Orlando (Messina),
aerial view of its beautiful beach.*



Taormina

Sicily and its image in the world would not be the same without Taormina. First and foremost, for its infinite, exciting beauty, which has nourished the spirit and imagination of Sicilians since time immemorial and attracted artists and men of culture from all over the world.

In addition, for the prestige that the City has always enjoyed, standing not only as a symbol of unparalleled beauty, but also as an example of excellent public administration skills.

As many other Sicilian cities, Taormina was founded by the Greeks. In ancient times it experienced seasons of glory and power, particularly during the Byzantine and Norman periods.

Its beauty disproves the idea that perfection does not exist in the human world: not a single dissonance, disproportion, incongruity or even less ugliness overshadows its magnificent balance of form, light and colour, be



*Taormina, Piazza IX Aprile
with St. Joseph's Church.*



they natural or man-made. A crystal-clear sea, a coastline reminiscent of exuberant lacework and Mount Etna, ever present in the background, contribute to the uniqueness of its views. The city is characterised by its beautiful and elegant buildings erected in different historical periods, from Hellenistic to Norman,

Gothic, Baroque... and by a myriad of alleyways and courtyards, arcades and stairways, which give it an enchanting atmosphere.

To complete the enjoyment of this authentic jewel, there are all kinds of shops and eateries, all with a refined style.

Giardini Naxos

The first of the marvellous sites chosen by the Greeks as the territory on which to establish their colonies in Sicily, Giardini Naxos naturally has all the characteristics that could guarantee the newly settled Siceliot populations prosperity and health.

Giardini Naxos (Messina), extraordinary view of the coast with smoking Etna in the background.

Previous page: Taormina, Greek Theatre.



Castelmola

Not to be missed, after Taormina, is a visit to the nearby Castelmola, an ancient and delightful town which, with its **panoramic square** located 550 metres above sea level, dominates the Ionian coast and the sea and coast of Calabria.

Castelmola (Messina), aerial view of the enchanting and panoramic village, perched on the mountains.





Savoca

Included, like Castelmola, in the circuit of the most beautiful villages in Italy, Savoca is a medieval centre of art, elegantly preserved and maintained.

Of very ancient origins, it is home to many valuable buildings, including many churches and the **Convent of the Capuchin Friars** with its crypt, where seventeen mummified human bodies are kept and can be visited.

In 1972, Savoca hosted the set of the famous film *The Godfather*, by Francis Ford Coppola.

At the entrance to the village, in the aristocratic Palazzo Trimarchi, is **Bar Vitelli**, which was made famous by the film and has remained intact since its shooting.

Savoca (Messina), a suggestive view of St. Lucy's Church.





The coastline near Taormina

“Sea” and “Taormina” are practically inseparable. The beach at the foot of the beautiful village, reachable in a few minutes, is rich and varied: from rocky to sandy or pebble, it is dotted with bays, caves and sea stacks, and lapped by a crystal clear and pleasantly sparkling sea.

Mazzarò, whose sea is home to the verdant **Isola Bella**, is very popular and is connected to Taormina by a scenic **cable car**.

Letojanni is also a notable and renowned tourist centre, gently overlooking a welcoming gulf and with a background of evocative hills, rich in Mediterranean flora and lemon groves.

The long, winding beach of *Sant' Alessio Siculo* is also overlooked by a promontory. On top of it is a remarkable castle, dating from the Byzantine era.

Taormina (Messina), Isola Bella, an unmissable destination for bathers and visitors.



Letojanni (Messina). Seagulls flying.



Aeolian Islands or Lipari

The Aeolian Islands, inhabited by humans since ancient times, are so beautiful that they take your breath away.

Suspended over the Tyrrhenian Sea in crystal clear waters, there are seven of them, they are black, and they are the Sicilian islands best known, loved and frequented by tourists.

To these they offer enchanted and uncontaminated landscapes, colourful seabeds, incredibly transparent waters, atmospheres full of primordial charm but

also of frivolous worldliness, inebriating colours and scents and above all silence, peace and relaxation. The Aeolian Islands are indeed far away from the world...

They emerged from the water in the mists of time and their evolution is still ongoing today, as evidenced by the existence of the **volcanoes** of Stromboli and Vulcano and the presence in some of **them of thermal waters and mud**.

Lipari, view of the island of Vulcano.

Following page: Lipari and its varied coastline.



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