

THE COMPANION
GUIDE TO

SICILY

Raleigh Trevelyan

THE COMPANION GUIDE TO SICILY

THE COMPANION GUIDES

It is the aim of these guides to provide a Companion in the person of the author, who knows intimately the places and people of whom he writes, and is able to communicate this knowledge and affection to his readers.

It is hoped that the text and pictures will aid them in their preparations and in their travels, and will help them remember on their return.

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SICILY

RALEIGH TREVELYAN

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Introduction

‘We are old, Chevalley, very old. For over twenty-five centuries we have been bearing the weight of superb and heterogeneous civilizations, none that we can call our own ... for two thousand years we’ve been a colony.’

This famous quotation from Lampedusa’s *The Leopard* is true but in a sense untrue, and used to irritate some Sicilians. The history of Sicily is almost impossible to encapsulate, with its long cavalcade of invaders, conquerors and rulers, starting with Sicans, said to have come from Iberia, followed by Elymnians, who according to Thucydides were refugees from Troy, and then by Sikels from the Italian mainland. Afterwards there came Greeks, Phoenicians, Romans, Vandals, Goths, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans, Hohenstaufens, Angevins, Aragonese, Hapsburg Spanish, Bourbon Spanish. The British occupied Sicily during the Napoleonic wars, but whether they or the Normans were responsible for the number of redheads and blue eyes on the island is a moot point. At least the British were instrumental in the abolition of feudalism.

Lampedusa’s prince was lecturing a Piedmontese officer some months after the capture of Sicily by Garibaldi in 1860. Soon the Sicilians were beginning to suspect that they were nothing more than a colony of Piedmont (which was almost true), and revolts broke out. The last invasion of the island was in 1943 when the Allies landed in ‘Operation Husky’. In 1946, after more civil unrest, Sicily was at last granted regional autonomy, followed by much needed agrarian reform.

To this great mixture of races must be added a once considerable Jewish population. The Romans brought in a huge number of slaves. from all over the known world,

in order to work in the then rich cornfields of what was regarded as the 'granary' of their empire. The Normans and the Emperor Frederick introduced mercenaries, chiefly Lombards, who settled in Sicily (one has only to look in telephone directories to see the great number of people called Lombardo or Lombardi). In the fifteenth century Albanian refugees from the Turkish invasions were given sanctuary in Sicily, but in this case their descendants still keep a distinct identity and have their own form of religious worship.

For all this, a very definite Sicilian psyche has emerged, quite different to any other around the Mediterranean. Goethe was surely wrong – however flattering it may seem to Sicilians – when he said that without seeing Sicily is not to have seen Italy at all. Foreign civilizations may have introduced, for instance, their own forms of art and architecture, but any visitor can see that in these the results have been suffused by a peculiar kind of '*Sicilitudine*'. This could even be said to apply to the Greeks of Selinunte and the metopes on some of their temples. But to attempt in any way to fathom the Sicilians' mentality one has to take into account centuries of fearful poverty, not just because of the conquests and resulting oppression, but because of earthquakes, plagues, or erosion due to deforestation. After the First World War about forty per cent of the population was still illiterate.

Dialect is one obvious manifestation of Sicilian otherness. Even to Italians it is incomprehensible. And not so long ago Italian was incomprehensible to most Sicilians. When Garibaldi landed people shouted 'Viva Talia', not 'Italia', because they thought Talia was the name of a queen. 'Sicily', said the late Leonardo Sciascia, 'is a fantasy world. How can you live there without imagination?' The more one travels around the island, as Vincent Cronin famously did in search of the golden honeycomb of Daedalus, the more one begins to suspect that the archaic and clas-

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sical divinities have never quite lost their hold – in the small towns of the Nèbrodi and the Madonìa for instance, especially when the harvest is celebrated, and, it has to be admitted, during Holy Week. The devil dancers of Prizzi; do they have anything to do with the dancing bird men of the Addàura caves, 8000 BC? At Erice, mysterious and silent, I was not surprised to find two people making love on the site of the temple of Venus – mariners used to come here with gifts and expected to be consoled by the priestesses. Then Enna, on its lofty crag, thought once to be impregnable and where that other great and formidable goddess, Demeter, alias Ceres, was revered, the patron deity of Sicily. Now in July at Enna the Madonna is carried in procession to a church where once was a temple of Bacchus. And Agrigento, with its *Sagra del mandorlo*, celebrating its spectacular show of almond blossom that in turn heralds the blaze of wild flowers in Spring, when Ceres's daughter Proserpina is released from the underworld.

The looming presence of Mount Etna, usually snow-capped, nearly always smoking, sometimes savagely erupting, has inevitably inspired legend and superstition. Sant'Agata is still invoked when lava flows become threatening. Mongibello, as the Sicilians call their mountain, may destroy but is also life-giving; for the volcanic earth below is amazingly fertile. The scent of the *zagara*, lemon blossom, in the Catania plain and along the Ionian coast is something never to be forgotten. And Pantàlica; its crowded rock tombs are almost frightening in their silence. What strange rites were performed here? And who was that Greek who so brilliantly decided to keep the temple of Segesta low, to be in harmony with the mysterious landscape? Those tumbled columns at Selinunte are like the aftermath of a battle of giants. Maybe they were the very giants condemned to act as telamons to the temple of Olympian Zeus at Akragas?

The fantasies and wonders continue. To enjoy them we

need time for quiet and contemplation, difficult on a quick round-the-tour of the principal monuments. Among the great sights of Sicily are the famous mosaics of the Roman villa near Piazza Armerina. But those too are a mystery; no one is quite certain about their origin. Selfishly, one cannot but regret the great crush of visitors that makes it hard to linger over them in solitude ...

The ancient symbol of Sicily is the Trinacria, the island's triangular shape being represented by three legs, oddly like the equivalent symbol for the Isle of Man, except that the Sicilian legs are naked and the Manx ones are booted. Also the Trinacria has a winged Medusa's head on the centre, complete with snakes, as if to say 'keep off, beware'.

In size Sicily is the largest of the Mediterranean islands, over three times that of Crete, and its population is around 5 million – it would be a good deal more but for mass emigration before the First World War and after the Second. Much is often made of a contrast or antagonism between the 'Arab' west of the island and the 'Greek' east, and this cannot be denied. The people of Catania do not much like Palermitans, and vice versa. They will tell you that they take more pride in hard work, and that in the east there is a lighter approach to life – those in the west are more 'introverted'. There are even different tastes in food. To take two frivolous examples, Catanesi like blood oranges, but Palermitani don't; Catanesi like fully grown artichokes, Palermitani like them young and tender. (*Gastronomia* looms large in any discussion of regional differences in the island.) Catania may have been the birthplace of the composer Bellini, but Palermo is Sicily's cultural centre, and in any case it has the largest number of great palaces and churches.

But what is really meant in these discussions is that the Mafia started in the west. When writing about Sicily this dread word cannot be avoided – it is the sole Sicilian dialect word that has worldwide currency. Sicily is divided

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into nine provinces, and until recently only the provinces of Ragusa and Syracuse, and perhaps part of the province of Messina, were spared the scourge of the Mafia. Now no city can be said to have been Mafia-free, especially not Catania. But then in Catania they will say that the Mafia only arrived there when northern Italians came to industrialise the city. The cities of Ragusa and Syracuse, until the building of the new roads, had been in a kind of isolation – communications overland to Palermo had been arduous. Conditions had not greatly changed since 1851, when the Rev. Arthur Tidman, British chaplain at Palermo, was writing home; he complained that there was only one road suitable for carriages in all Sicily, and this ran from Marsala, where the English had their thriving wine establishments, to Palermo via Tràpani and Alcamo, and then on to Catania via Misilmeri and Castrogiovanni (now Enna). He also said that his wife had become ill, after a journey to Syracuse, because ‘being of nervous disposition’ she had travelled in a *lettiga*, a kind of sedan chair carried by ‘obstinate and over-frisky’ mules. ‘She swears’, he said, ‘that she will never journey by land again in Sicily.’ (They returned to Palermo by sea.)

A cliché in more recent times, which also had some truth, was that Sicilians on the coast were less likely to be Mafiosi than those living in inland towns. Now Gela, which is on the coast, has a reputation for being one of the ‘worst’ Mafia towns (and the dreariest) – again because of industrialisation. Corleone is in the centre of Sicily and has had the most notorious Mafia reputation of all. It too is an unattractive place; foreigners only go there for a dare or a spurious thrill, whereas Gela cannot be missed by anyone interested in Sicily’s Greek past.

All these Mafia stories are somehow mixed up in certain people’s mind with Verga-like tales of passion and vendetta, and with old newspaper accounts of dishonoured girls being revenged by brothers or fathers, as indeed in

Robert Hichens' best-seller of 1906, *The Call of the Blood*, which was turned into a gripping silent movie in 1919. In more modern times a Sicilian is more likely to go straight to his lawyer if he catches his wife being unfaithful.

And here I must hasten to demolish another fallacy, that Mafia means brigands. It seems almost absurd to have to say that it is perfectly safe for a foreigner to travel round Sicily. In the large cities, especially in the poorer quarters and at night, well dressed people carrying handbags can be targets for muggers, but this could apply anywhere in Europe. All the same, faint-hearted travellers may still find reassurance in an anonymous book published in the mid nineteenth century, *Unprotected Females in Sicily, Calabria and on the Top of Mount Etna*.

Sicilians might justifiably object if I were now to launch out into a long resumé of the origins of the Mafia and *omertà* – the conspiracy of silence – and the growing sense of public outrage following the murders of Dalla Chiesa and the courageous judges Falcone and Borsellino. So I shall simply refer the reader to books on the subject listed in my bibliography.

The Mafia – *Cosa Nostra* – has caused so much agony and now at last, after great sacrifices, the shackles look like being broken, with the arrest of top bosses, the confessions of *pentiti* and the refusal of businessmen to pay the *pizzo*, protection money. It is therefore part of Sicilian history, and that is inescapable. It has also been responsible for a great deal of the ugliness in post-war Sicilian architecture and urban development.

The most obvious candidates for a beginning to a guide to Sicily are Palermo, Syracuse or Messina. But it could also be Pantàlica, which would be more appropriate chronologically, or Taormina where many people visiting Sicily for the first time often prefer to stay. Messina is of course where one arrives if travelling by train or car, but to me Messina

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is more enjoyable after having got to know other parts of the island. Pantàlica is in too remote a spot. And historically it would be rather absurd to begin with Taormina, even though Naxos on the coast below was the first of the Greek settlements.

These days most people arrive by air, either at Palermo or Catania. A few with time to spare might brave the possibility of rough seas and come to Palermo by night ferry from Naples. Catania has plenty of monuments of importance, but like Messina it is a city to be appreciated later, not as a first impression. Syracuse is within easy range of Catania airport, whereas driving on to Palermo from there might take up to three hours. So why not start with Syracuse? For centuries before the Christian era, Syracuse's history was in effect the history of Sicily. It is also an excellent base for inland excursions, to Noto for instance, or Caltagirone, or Piazza Armerina, or for that matter Pantàlica.

I have chosen Palermo for at least two obvious reasons: it is the capital, and it is by far the largest city on the island. Then the modern history of Sicily really began with Palermo's conquest by the Normans, and under Roger II it was the most brilliant city in Europe, skilfully incorporating its Arab inheritance. Even today its back streets are almost oriental in atmosphere. The influence of Spanish rule, which lasted for four centuries, has left behind numerous and wonderful Baroque churches and oratories. Then there are relics of Palermo's fashionable heyday in the *belle époque*, roughly equivalent to the Edwardian period in Britain. It also is a base for visits to major sites: to Monreale naturally, Cefalù, Erice and Motya, also Segesta and Selinunte, which could compete with Syracuse as introductions to the age of the Greeks in Sicily.

The temptation to race round the island and cram in all the most famous temples, churches, within a week should be strenuously resisted. It is impossible to get any inkling of the 'real' Sicily in this way, let alone explore the beautiful

countryside in the interior. Far better to concentrate on one area or province, and to decide to come back again for a second or third visit. Even three days are not enough to see all that Palermo has to offer.

A great obstacle in sightseeing anywhere in Sicily is the haphazard opening times of churches, archaeological sites and museums. In small towns it is usually easy to plead with the priest or *guardiana* (as against *guardiano*) to be allowed access to a church. In Palermo for instance, it may be a case of arriving at 8 a.m. and then being turned out an hour later. Museum officials will be absolutely adamant at getting home to lunch before the appointed time (which could be midday, 1 p.m. or 2 p.m.). Some archaeological sites and parks are open until 'an hour before sunset', and this also can be a problem. By and large it is best before setting out to see some special church or building, maybe an hour's journey away, to pay a visit first to the provincial tourist office (APT) and hope that a magic telephone call from there will pave the way.

Because of these difficulties about opening times, I have had – when dealing with cities – to suggest 'walks' within a smallish compass. In fact I have divided the book up into a great number of sections, so that if for example a reader is staying at Sciacca, having already been to the important sites of Selinunte and Agrigento (which are not far away from Sciacca), he or she might like to be directed to Santa Margherita di Bèlice, identified with Lampedusa's Donnafugata, or to the 'devil' town of Prizzi, or to the dramatic heights of Caltabellotta. It will also be seen that, apart from excursions to Bagheria and Cefalù, I have worked my way anti-clockwise from Palermo, west to east. I have not attempted to describe every work of art in every church or note, or even to describe every church in every town or village. I have tried to include everything of major importance – or everything that seems important to me – adding some favourites.

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In July and August Sicily can be very hot indeed. Not surprisingly the resorts by the sea are crowded then. Sicily is famous for its Easter festivals, and every town at different times in the year, but often in August, has a *fiesta* for its particular saint, e.g. one in honour of Santa Lucia at Syracuse on December 13 and of San Corrado at Noto on February 19. Carnival is particularly spectacular at Acireale and Sciacca. Music and theatre festivals in open-air theatres generally take place in August. On the south and east coasts there are beautiful beaches, some unspoilt, especially near Eraclea Minoa. But in recent decades mediocre apartment blocks and holiday homes have sprung up, sometimes illegally built. Out of season they are like ghost towns, all shuttered up.

In March the weather begins to change, but is fickle, though the south-east corner of Sicily can have delightful balmy periods from January onwards. February is the time for almond blossom, not only at Agrigento but also at Taormina; April and May are for wild flowers. The most spectacular wild flowers are in the Iblei mountains, in the south-east. I love the journey from Palermo to Catania in June, and seeing the long blue shadows of mountains on the newly yellowed fields. June is also the month when the genista is in flower, and in private gardens there one sees glorious displays of bougainvilleas of many colours, amazingly rampant pelargoniums, oleanders and perhaps jacarandas.

The *autostrade*, striding across the centre of the island, have made communications immensely easier. Now, if staying at Palermo, it is possible to drive to Agrigento and back in a day, after having seen all the temples and the archaeological museum. Many of these roads have been built on stilts, providing tremendous views as one speeds along by car, but from a distance ruining the landscape – how they would have horrified travellers such as Saint-Non, Brydone and Augustus Hare! At long last, however,

conservation groups are battling to preserve and restore their unique Sicilian heritage, and to halt the jerry-builders. National Parks have been created, and stretches of superb scenery, such as the Zingaro on the north coast and the Vendicari in the south, have been saved from developers. There is also a growing consciousness of the need to preserve bird life, especially in the all-important migration seasons, though this has not, unfortunately, permeated to the Calabrians on the other side of the Straits of Messina, where the massacres continue.

As on the Italian mainland *Agriturismo* – country homes and farms taking in guests – has become a flourishing business, with considerable success. In towns there are also now Bed and Breakfast signs, advertised as such in English.

Palermo and Environs

Palermo: Introduction

For centuries the beauty of Palermo and its setting, the Conca d'Oro or Golden Shell, has been praised by travellers. In Arab times the magnificence of the city was compared to Córdoba or Damascus. 'This incomparable bay, this blessed land,' exclaimed Goethe in 1787. 'A perfect garden of delights,' wrote George Dennis, British consul in the 1870s and author of Murray's *Handbook*. Augustus Hare quoted J.A. Symonds: 'Few spots on the surface of the globe are more beautiful than Palermo.' In the *belle époque* royal and grand ducal yachts called here, balls and entertainments such as *tableaux vivants* and 'battles of flowers' were provided by princely houses and the fabulously rich Florio family, and by the wealthy English residents.

Well, nothing can spoil that theatrical backdrop to the city, with Monte Pellegrino slumbering to the north, Monte Zafferano to the south, and the occasional glimpse of Etna over Hare's 'rugged outline' of more distant ridges. But the poor Conca d'Oro is hardly golden any more. Uncontrolled buildings have swamped that fertile plain around Palermo, and the historic centre suffered badly in the Second World War. Unemployment is high. Mafia 'wars' and assassinations gave the city a bad reputation. Streets can be choked with traffic, almost as bad as at Naples. Modern Palermo is brash, lively and noisy, at any rate by day – for at night a strange silence descends on it. Not many travellers arrive these days by sea, as Goethe did, but scenically this still gives the best first impression – better than the approach from the Punta Raisi airport, along the *autostrada* and through an industrial area. Palermo continues to grow. At the end of the 19th century the population was about 250,000. Now it is about 750,000.

Since the 1990s and into the twenty-first century much has changed. There are still a few bombsites, but restoration has gathered momentum, by the *Regione* or Regional Government, and thanks to that excellent public-spirited institution *Salvare Palermo*, 'Save Palermo', and to private munificence as in the case of the Palatine Chapel. The Norman palace of the Zisa has been a spectacular success; the lovely church of the Immaculate Conception and Serpotta and Gagini statues elsewhere have been beautifully restored by *Salvare Palermo*. The transformation of the Spàsimo into a cultural centre has been an amazing and popular achievement. And following the example of Miss Delia Whitaker, who in 1971 left her Villa Malfitano and its contents to a Foundation in memory of her father, the sister of the late Prince Filangeri has more recently presented Palazzo Mirto, again with much of its contents, to the *Regione*. Both are open to the public.

The *centro storico* is close to the Cala or old port, which is why it suffered so much in the 1943 bombings. The souk-like alleys of the Kalsa district were almost totally obliterated. So it is not surprising that families moved out into the suburbs. Now that we see what postwar Sicilian builders have done to the Conca d'Oro, it is just as well they left the centre alone. Owners of ruined *palazzi* have also made repairs. One reason for the decay of these *palazzi* (which also applies to the once grand villas at Bagheria and the Colli district) is that according to law an inheritance may have to be divided up among many heirs, some of whom could be disinclined to pay for the upkeep or for rebuilding. This in fact also applies to any property in Sicily, not only to the aristocratic houses.

The closing of traffic at the western end of Via Principe Belmonte has been a brilliant success, with outdoor cafés and bars, flower-sellers and an occasional book stall. It has proved a much needed focal point, and a popular meeting-place.

Palermo: Introduction

In prehistoric times – and long after – the city was centred near what is now the Royal Palace. It was an ideally defensive situation, sloping gently to the harbour, once very much larger and extending to where now is Via Roma, and covering Piazza Marina. In effect it was a peninsula, with small rivers on either side: the Papireto on the north-west and the Kemonia on the south-east – this last was also known as the Fiume del Maltempo (River of the Bad Weather) because it only filled up during the rains. Both these rivers have disappeared underground, though Papireto has survived as the name of a square and street.

There was never a Greek colony, but Greek settlers in the eighth century BC called the place Panormos, meaning ‘all harbour’. Around 700 BC the Phoenicians from Carthage established a large trading post, and walls were built. Dionysius I of Syracuse tried in vain to seize the town. In the First Punic War, after a long struggle, it fell in 254 BC to the Romans.

Palermo under the Romans had a certain strategic importance but did not expand. Virtually the only survivals of their occupation are some sparse and dusty remains of a couple of houses in Piazza Vittoria, below the Royal Palace. In the fifth century AD Palermo was seized and pillaged first by the Vandals and then by the Ostrogoths under Theodoric the Great. In 535 Belisarius captured the city for the Byzantine empire. In this period of relative peace many convents were founded by Pope Gregory the Great. The upper part of the city was known as Paleopolis, the lower Neopolis.

In 831 the city fell to the Saracens, the conglomerate term used for the Arab Muslim conquerors, after a year’s siege with ‘unexampled horrors’, in George Dennis’s words. Nevertheless a new era of opulence began. Sicily was made into an emirate, with Palermo (Balharm) instead of Syracuse the capital. The population increased to above 300,000 including Arabs, Greeks, Jews and Blacks. A castle,

al Qasr, corrupted afterwards to Càssaro, was built where the Phoenicians had had their fortress, and a long street was built, running down to the harbour, with on each side schools, shops and palaces of the nobles. The emir's citadel, the arsenal and the prisons were by the sea and known as al Halinah (the Elite) or the Kalsa, which name is still used for that quarter of Palermo, just as the street from the Royal Palace is still often called the Càssaro. Baths or hammams were built. It was said that there were 800 minarets rising above the roofs of the city. The south-eastern quarter, now known as the Albergheria, was unfortified and had buildings for trade and industry. The northern quarter, now known as Capo, was at one stage called Schiavoni, because in Muslim times it was chiefly inhabited by slaves, supposed to be adept at piracy, an important source of income for their owners. Merchants from north Italy and Amalfi also settled here.

By the eleventh century the Normans had established themselves in southern Italy. In 1061, taking advantage of internal squabbles among the Muslims and encouraged by the Pope, they crossed the straits and captured Messina. Ten years later Roger de Hauteville entered Palermo, after a siege of five months. He was created Count, but in history is generally known as Roger I. The new Norman rulers showed great magnanimity towards the indigenous races, relying especially on Muslim councillors, artisans and merchants. Territories were divided among Norman barons – the beginning of feudalism in Sicily. After Roger II was crowned king, Palermo entered a golden age of prosperity. Roger and his descendants loved oriental luxury and splendour, and even kept harems. Trade flourished, and illustrious scholars and artists were attracted to the great new palace on the site of the Arab castle or watertowers. The Muslim population now left the Càssaro district and moved into the Schiavoni.

Sixty-four years later the Norman dynasty in Sicily

ended, leaving as its legacy such dazzling monuments as the Palatine Chapel and the cathedrals of Cefalù and Monreale, built using Arab craftsmen and decorated by Greek mosaicists. After seeing the red domes of the Eremiti church and of San Cataldo and the pleasure palaces of the Zisa and the Cuba, one might well be excused for believing that they are the product of the Arab period. But they are not. Those buildings, and many others in Palermo, such as the Martorana, and elsewhere in Sicily, are a unique and marvellous combination of architectural styles – the cathedral of Monreale being the climax and the crown.

In 1194 the Hohenstaufens of Swabia under the Holy Roman Emperor Henry VI, son of Frederick Barbarossa and husband of the Norman heiress Constance, gained control of Sicily. Henry died three years later, having eliminated his rivals with extreme cruelty and leaving as his heir his son Frederick II, still a child and educated under the supervision of the Pope. When Frederick came of age he inherited an enormous empire, which brought him into frequent conflict with the Papacy, and he was twice excommunicated. Remembered as ‘Stupor Mundi’, the Wonder of the World, he was an extraordinarily gifted ruler though contradictory in character: the most powerful sovereign of the day, a linguist and man of letters, a hedonist, both generous and cruel. Much of his later life had to be spent in his northern domains, but Palermo always had his affection and here he is buried. He said that he wanted to make Sicily the ‘envy of princes’, and in this he succeeded. He had to return to Sicily in 1221 when there was a revolt of the Muslim emirates in the mountains. After this had been crushed, Muslim survivors were either forcibly expelled to Lucera on the mainland or made to convert to Christianity. New walls were created round Palermo, and many castles and forts were built throughout Sicily, most notably at Catania, Syracuse, Augusta and Enna. The Normans had also built castles, and the ruins of these and of the ‘*castelli*

federiciani', castles of Frederick, sometimes in the wildest settings, are a romantic feature of the Sicilian landscape.

Bitter fighting for the succession after Frederick's death led to the unpopular reign of Charles of Anjou, brother of the king of France. Land was confiscated and given to French nobles, exhausting the island's economy. This resulted in the notorious 'Sicilian Vespers' revolt, which began at Palermo on Christmas Eve 1282 and spread all over Sicily, when nearly every Frenchman in sight was butchered. The Sicilian barons next invited Peter of Aragon to be their king. From then onwards over four centuries, apart from a brief period, Sicily effectively was under Spanish rule. And, as has often been said, both Sicily and southern Italy in the early Renaissance period lapsed into a backwater. Sicily had lost much of its strategic and trading importance.

Two powerful families dominated Palermo in the fourteenth century, the Sclàfani and, especially, the Chiaramonte, who built vast fortified mansions still to be seen. The palace of the Chiaramonte, known as the Steri, overlooking Piazza Marina and next to the Kalsa, became all the more awesome for being converted into the seat of the 'Holy Office' or Inquisition, particularly severe in Palermo. The power of Palermo slowly diminished in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the city lost importance to Messina and Catania. By 1492, the year of the expulsion of the Jews, its population had sunk to 65,000.

The first Spanish viceroy arrived in Palermo in 1415. Two other great mansions, both built by the architect Matteo Carnelivari, who came from Noto, date from the end of the fifteenth century, Palazzo Aiutamicristo and Palazzo Abatellis. These have a peculiarly Sicilian combination of Gothic and Catalan features – also to be seen in many other parts of the island. This style can best be seen in Palermo in the loggia and sacristy of the Cathedral. Carnelivari was also probably the architect of the beautiful

little church of Santa Maria della Catena near the Cala. Palazzo Abatellis has been restored and is now Palermo's national art gallery, and among its many masterpieces is an extraordinary and mysterious fresco of great size, *The Triumph of Death*, painted in the mid fifteenth century and which used to be in Palazzo Sclàfani. Again in Palazzo Abatellis are works by two major sculptors, both born around 1460 and from the mainland, Francesco Laurana and Domenico Gagini. The latter was also an architect and the founder of a dynasty active in Sicily until the beginning of the seventeenth century. Indeed, after travelling extensively over Sicily, one is left with the impression that there is hardly a town or village without at least one Madonna sculpted by a Gagini.

As the religious orders became more powerful, and new churches and convents, often lavishly decorated, were built by them, so several more artists were invited from the mainland. One exception is Antonello da Messina, who was born in about 1430, and is the greatest of all the Sicilian painters. But his most outstanding works in Sicily, such as the *Virgin of the Annunciation* in Palazzo Abatellis, date from the 1470s, near the end of his life. Two artists of a later date, both born in Palermo and working in the seventeenth century, were Giuseppe Salerno, also known as Zoppo (the Lame One) di Gangi, and Pietro Novelli, created important works to be seen in Palermo and all over Sicily. Also in the seventeenth century Caravaggio and Van Dyck were among those working in Palermo.

The viceregal government responded to the challenge of the religious institutions by erecting public monuments such as the fountain in Piazza Pretoria. A new port with a mole was created, and new fortifications were put in hand, as the menace from North African pirates increased. In 1582 the Via Càssaro was extended to the sea, and in 1600 Via Maqueda was opened up. In 1608 that splendid though rather cramped Baroque fantasy, the Quattro Canti, was

created where the Maqueda crosses the Càssaro, now officially known as Corso Vittorio Emanuele. This for a long while became a popular social meeting place. So the face of Palermo began to be radically changed.

Near the Quattro Canti is the church of San Giuseppe dei Teatini, begun in 1612. It may not be one of Palermo's greatest churches, but it is nevertheless imposing and its interior is an excellent introduction to early Palermitan Baroque. Like the church of the Gesù, built by the Jesuits in the Albergheria, it was bombed in 1943 and has been well and carefully restored to its original glory.

If the most exciting Baroque architecture in Sicily, ecclesiastical and secular, is in fact in the south-eastern corner of the island (the result of the rebuilding after the earthquake of 1693), Palermo Baroque is especially remarkable for its use of *marmi mischi*, polished inlaid coloured stones. This is to be seen in San Giuseppe dei Teatini, but the best and most lavish examples are in Santa Caterina, a church not to be missed, even though opening times are difficult. The decorations of Santa Caterina were directed by Giacomo Amato, who was born in Palermo and the leading architect in the city at the end of the seventeenth century. Other important architects working at that time were Paolo Amato (no relation), Giovanni Biagio Amico and Tommaso Maria Napoli.

Nor should the three oratories of Santa Cita, San Lorenzo and San Domenico be missed. These are all decorated by the incomparable stucco-worker Giacomo Serpotta (1656–1732). He was born in Palermo, as was his son Procopio Serpotta whose best work is in the oratory of Santa Caterina di Alessandria (near the Archaeological Museum).

The aristocracy of Palermo, absurdly extravagant and selfish, set out to compete with one another in building palaces. Palazzo Filangeri di Cutò on Via Maqueda, now somewhat spoilt, and Palazzo Cattolica in Via San

Francesco, impressive still, were built by Giacomo Amato. The best preserved state rooms are in Palazzo Gangi, and its Salone dei Specchi has become famous since Visconti's film of *The Leopard*; this faces Piazza dei Vespri. But behind the façade of Quattro Canti was the reality of the wretched poor, many from the country, living in shacks and ruins. There were plagues, and in 1592 no less than 13,000 people died of famine in Palermo. There was an attempt at a revolt in 1647.

The Spanish government made money out of selling titles, and this continued well into the eighteenth century. A German traveller, as late as the 1830s, noted that out of a population of two million in Sicily there were 127 princes, 78 dukes, 130 marquesses, not to mention innumerable barons and counts. Some of those might have possessed half a dozen titles, which were freely bestowed as gifts on lovers or mistresses. Indeed after the Napoleonic war, Stefania Branciforte e Branciforte, the grandest lady in Sicily, held a whole string of titles. She was Princess of Butera, Scordia, Pieltaperzia, Leonforte, Campofiorito di Catena, Radali, as well as Countess of Mazzarino and much else. When she fell for a German mercenary, Georg Wilding, she bestowed on him the title of Prince of Radali. As Lady Blessington remarked later in her memoirs, by the 1830s, this Prince had become the 'most fashionable of fashionables'.

The Church continued to dominate, and at its highest level was mainly non-Sicilian, that same German traveller of the 1830s. Frederick von Raumer, maintained that there were 28,000 monks and 18,000 nuns, presumably mostly Sicilian born. Not surprisingly perhaps clandestine anti-establishment and anti-clerical associations appeared, the most notorious being the Beati Paoli. Brigandage was also rife in the mountains above Palermo.

By the Treaty of Utrecht Sicily was assigned to Victor Amadeus of Savoy who however was forced to exchange

it for Sardinia. The island went to the Austrians and soon after to the Spanish Bourbons of Naples. Charles III made Sicily an autonomous state within the kingdom and was generally regarded as a benevolent and constructive ruler, although he only visited Sicily once. The nobility, as economic condition improved, built more fine palaces, as well as villas for hot weather outside Palermo, in the Colli district near Monte Pellegrino and at Bagheria. The outstanding architect when Neoclassicism was coming into vogue was the Palermitan Venanzio Marvuglia. This keeping up of appearance among the nobility put many of them into debt, much to the detriment of their estates elsewhere in the island where the *gabellotti* or managers were left to their own devices. Attempts at reform were made by the Viceroy Carracciolo, who abolished the Inquisition (and who, incidentally, created the famous Botanic Gardens).

Travellers from the north had in the eighteenth century begun to discover the wonders of Palermo and Sicily, and some were notable artists. Their accounts brought the island a certain fame, though Sicily was still not considered a part of the fashionable Grand Tour. An Englishman named John Breval arrived in 1725. Among those who followed him were the Abbé Saint-Non, Jean Houel, Richard Payne Knight, Henry Swinburne, and above all Goethe. The letters of the gossipy (and sometimes inaccurate) Patrick Brydone were widely translated and enjoyed.

When Charles III left Naples to become King of Spain he was succeeded by his son Ferdinand IV. New hopes (which proved to be very temporary) arose when Ferdinand and his queen, Maria Carolina, sister of Marie-Antoinette, fled from the advancing French in 1799 and were brought to Palermo with Nelson's help. It was then that Nelson was rewarded with the dukedom of Bronte, an estate near the western slopes of Mount Etna. The royal pair were close friends of Sir William and Lady Hamilton and often entertained them at their very pretty 'Chinese' pavilion designed

by Marvuglia in the Colli (until recently in a shockingly dilapidated state). Their Prime Minister, who had accompanied them, was also as it happened an Englishman, Sir John Acton. They were able to return to Naples, but four years later had to flee again to Palermo. From 1806 to 1815 Sicily was under British protection. Partly thanks to the British Envoy, Bentinck, the king was forced to adopt a new constitution and Parliament, involving at least the abolition of feudalism. However as soon as he was able to return to Naples, and the British were out of the way, the constitution was conveniently dropped. The king now styled himself Ferdinand I 'of the Two Sicilies' and repealed most of the previous reforms.

John Galt visited Palermo in 1809, and wrote of the city 'crowned with numerous domes'. But, he said, despite the palaces and churches, 'there is an air of tawdry want ... Poverty seems really to be the ordinary condition of the people from top to bottom.' He added: 'The present state of Sicily, I am inclined to think resembles very much what I conceive to have been that of England in the reign of Henry VIII. The church is falling, the nobility are losing their feudal influence, and the pretensions of the Crown are visibly extending.'

So it is not surprising that the long simmering desire for independence was preparing to burst. 'Sicily,' wrote L. Simond after a tour in 1817–18, 'seems completely a *tabula rasa* of despotism as Naples itself ... It would feed five times its population, if that population were but left alone, and the industry not shackled by absurd regulations.' 'Not a day has passed,' he added 'since our landing without our hearing someone lament the fall of Buonaparte and the retreat of the English – not for the sake of either of them, but because the existence of the one and the presence of the others maintained the Constitution, and above all effectively separated Naples and Sicily.' He reckoned the population of Sicily to be about 1,800,000 and said that

there were 1,700 prisoners in Palermo's Vicaria prison. (But he did also note 'an unusual number of fine women' at the opera in Palermo, and very much enjoyed the local ice-cream and lemonade.)

There was a brief but bloody revolution in Palermo in 1820. The Prince of Aci, whom Galt had described as a 'thorough going supporter of whatever the Court wishes', was murdered and his head displayed at the Quattro Canti. The Prince of Cattolica was also killed and his palace and its *casina*, where Nelson and the Hamiltons had stayed, were burnt.

Many British traders and merchants had come to Sicily during the Napoleonic wars, and several had stayed behind, mostly based at Palermo, but also at Marsala, Mazara del Vallo and Messina. Notable among them were the Woodhouses, Gardners (partly American), Hoppses, Pains, Morrisons, Sandersons, and in particular Benjamin Ingham. This last had come from Leeds, trading in woollens but almost immediately he saw the potentialities of Marsala's wine, already being sold to Nelson's fleet by John Woodhouse. Ingham later branched out into other commodities, such as citrus fruit and sulphur, but even more lucratively into banking and shipping. He married a Sicilian duchess and by 1830 this 'English Croesus' was easily the richest man in Sicily, with a *palazzo* near Palermo. He also exported wine to the United States, where he invested his profits in coal, railways and real estate (he owned three per cent of the New York Central and part of what is now Fifth Avenue). Thus money earned in Sicily helped to develop the American economy, while Sicily itself sank into worse poverty, creating a breeding ground for the Mafia that in future generations was to permeate North America.

Ingham died in 1861, in his large new house which is now the Grand Hotel delle Palme. His heirs were his sister's family, the Whitakers, who built themselves more palaces

in Palermo and were leaders of social life, as well as considerable philanthropists.

There were further riots during the severe cholera epidemic of 1837, when nearly 41,000 people died in the Palermo area. The Neapolitans (rather unjustly) were blamed, and *The Times* of London reported 'unheard of excesses' in the city. Among other things royal statues were destroyed and the Viceroy was murdered. 1848 was the great year of revolutions throughout Europe, but the first was at Palermo. Full-scale revolt lasted into 1849 throughout Sicily, and associated with it are some great names in the Italian Risorgimento: Ruggero Settimo, Giuseppe La Farina, Francesco Crispi and Michele Amari. Palermo was bombarded by the Bourbon navy, as was much more notoriously Messina, which earned Ferdinand II the nickname of King Bomba. There was another cholera epidemic in 1854 – worse this time at Messina, with several British fatalities.

In the famous year of 1860 Garibaldi and his Thousand landed at Marsala, defeated the Neapolitans at Calatafimi and entered Palermo in triumph on May 28. Sicily now became part of the nascent kingdom of Italy. But discontent and disillusion soon followed, and in 1866 there was yet another short-lived rebellion in Palermo.

By now the Florio family was in the ascendant, dominating Palermo with their wealth and amazing entrepreneurial genius. Like Benjamin Ingham, Vincenzo Florio's riches, which became far greater than his, were originally based on wine, but ultimately on banking, industry and shipping. His son Ignazio married into the aristocracy, and the scale of their entertainments encouraged the leading families of Palermo, and the Whitakers, to compete. In 1873 the huge Politeama Garibaldi theatre was begun; while the Teatro Massimo, designed by Giovanni Battista Basile and continued by his son Ernesto, was on an even vaster scale, in size only equalled by the Paris Opera, and

mostly funded by the Florios. When it was completed in 1895 Palermo was at its socially smartest zenith.

In 1891–2 there had been the great International Exhibition at Palermo, on the site of which there are now the Piazza Ruggero Settimo, Piazza Castelnuovo and Piazza Croci. Many of the pavilions were designed by Ernesto Basile. Soon afterwards elegant Art Nouveau or ‘Liberty’ style houses were built along the Via della Libertà, which had been laid out by the revolutionary government in 1848, and some of these were also designed by Basile. It was he who transformed the Florios’ luxurious Villa Igiea into a hotel in 1900.

One of the chief fashionable events initiated by the Florios was the Targa Florio, the first of Europe’s motor races, which began at Cerda near Termini Imerese, not far from Palermo. The ‘divinely lovely’ Franca Florio and Princess Giulia Trabìa, who had been born a Florio, were the two leading hostesses. The Trabias gave a memorable reception in 1905 for the German Kaiser and his sons. Afterwards the ambitious Mrs Joseph (Tina) Whitaker gave a ball in their honour at Villa Malfitano. She also managed to forestall her two sisters-in-law by being the only British resident who entertained Edward VII and Queen Alexandra in 1907. Another notable hostess at this period was Princess Maria Niscemi, on whom Lampedusa is supposed to have based ‘Angelica’ in *The Leopard*.

The main monument of the Fascist era in Palermo is the unmissable Post Office in Via Roma, to make way for which many old *palazzi* were cleared away. It was Tina Whitaker who entertained George V and Queen Mary at Villa Malfitano in 1925. But by then many of the old British ‘colony’ had long since disappeared. The Florios had overspent themselves, and in 1928 the Marsala wine establishments of Ingham Whitaker, Woodhouse and Florio were sold to Cinzano.

The American 7th Army entered Palermo on July 22

1943, and General Keyes formally accepted the surrender at 7 p.m. on the steps of the Royal Palace. Palermo had been one of the worst bombed cities in Sicily. In Via Alloro we can peer through the gates for a glimpse of the magnificent staircase that is virtually the only remnant of the eighteenth century Palazzo Bonagia. Palazzo Lampedusa is not even a shell but an empty space. Only half Palazzo Geraci in the Corso has survived; this was considered Venanzio Marvuglia's masterpiece. There is a huge desolate area by the port, overlooked by hideous cheaply built buildings. The population that had to move out of the *centro storico* into the new apartment blocks found themselves in the hands of speculators, many of whom were in the hands of the Mafia. Several splendid Art Nouveau villas standing in gardens in Via della Libertà and unique in their way were mysteriously burnt down or surreptitiously demolished, and in their places shoddy apartment blocks were raised, with the discreet help of corrupt officials.

It has been a long and sad story, but at last there is progress. A key figure has been Leoluca Orlando, twice mayor of Palermo and founder of the anti-Mafia party *La Rete*. New buildings of some architectural distinction have appeared in the district known as Tommaso Natale, on the way to Sferracavallo. Organizations such as *Salvare Palermo* and the *Fondazione Chiazzese* are symptomatic of a continuing surge of interest in Palermo's historic past, fostered by Orlando's successor as mayor, Diego Cammarata. The Fondazione Federico II was formed by the Regional Assembly at the Royal Palace, specifically for the care of the city's Norman heritage. In 1995 a new initiative was begun by Leoluca Orlando and Alessandra Siragusa, the educational commissioner, whereby schools were given the task of 'adopting' areas of famous, usually tumbling down monuments. This proved a great success. It was deliberately launched in memory of the murders by the Mafia of Judges Falcone and Borsellino, and of Falcone's

wife Francesca Morvillo, who was killed with him, and their security men. During a week in May 1996 children took conducted tours round the city, and there were concerts and exhibitions, culminating in a great meeting to 'reaffirm and pledge Palermo's will to regain its liberty'.

It has been realized that in past decades the Mafia had forced the people of Palermo to turn in on themselves, 'forfeiting' their civic rights and making them neglect their cultural heritage. The aim now is to promote a sense of responsibility for *una città per troppo violata*, a city for too long violated. As Giulio Meli, the director of the cultural office at the *Regione*, has also said, it is not just a question of restoring or rebuilding individual monuments in the *centro storico*. 'What has been missing is the tranquillity of life. It is the fabric, the context, of central Palermo that has been degraded.'

I have recommended seven 'walks' in Palermo, I hope on a convenient geographical basis, though 'sections' would be more appropriate as sometimes transport is necessary, and certainly in some cases a great deal of stamina. I have already given a warning about opening times, which vary wildly. Some of the more interesting churches are only open very early or on Sunday when Mass could be in progress, making it impossible – not to say sacrilegious – to wander round. It is therefore advisable, at the earliest opportunity, to seek out the Tourist Office, the APT, at 35 Piazza Castelnuovo (on the opposite side of the square to the Politeama, and as it happens nearly on the site of Benjamin Ingham's original house) for the most up to date information.

I apologise if on occasions, especially in museums, I have had to resort to mere lists of important things to see. If I were to try to include all the main items in every museum and every church it would double the length of this already long book.

Palermo: Introduction

My first section includes some of the chief sights which almost any traveller, even on a brief visit, would presumably be eager to visit. A final word of advice. When walking through markets or back streets, put your camera in a plain white crumpled plastic bag, not marked Duty Free, and in the markets try to look as if you are merely there to buy a *mezzo kilo* of squid and a few black olives. Wear a money belt and don't wear jewellery or an expensive watch.

*San Giovanni degli Eremiti – Royal Palace
 Piazza della Vittoria – Cathedral – Papireto
 Flea Market – Piazza Bologni – Quattro
 Canti – San Giuseppe dei Teatini
 Piazza Pretoria – Santa Caterina
 La Martorana – San Cataldo*

The romantic little church of **San Giovanni degli Eremiti**, St John of the Hermits, is an ideal starting off point for a first tour of Palermo. With its five weathered domes it is often depicted as the emblem of the city. Now deconsecrated, it is a strangely moving building, forlorn even, an oasis of peace as traffic rushes by in Via dei Benedettini. Here we feel very strongly the welding together of diverse cultures under the Normans. The original Benedictine monastery on this site was founded in the sixth century at the time of Gregory the Great. The Arabs destroyed it and created a mosque in its place. Their building was in turn demolished when the Normans conquered Palermo. Roger II gave the monastery feudal rights with large territories, and the abbot had a high place at court. Over the centuries its importance faded away, and it was almost forgotten until the end of the nineteenth century.

San Giovanni is open every morning from 9 a.m., and sometimes in the afternoons. It is important to get there early before the rush in order to appreciate its special atmosphere. Paths lead through a garden of palms, with roses, jasmine, acanthus and pomegranates, according to season, maybe also scented with orange blossom, to

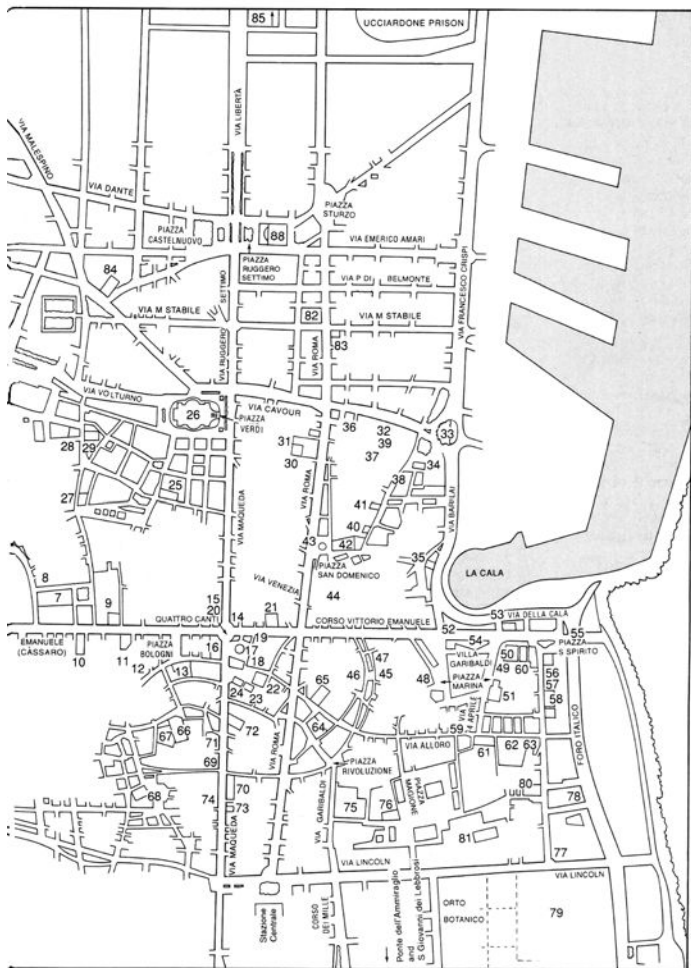
The Companion Guide to Sicily

PALERMO: CENTRO STORICO

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| 3 Palatine Chapel | 46 Palazzo Cattolica |
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| 5 Palazzo Scialfani | 48 Palazzo Mirto |
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| 7 Cathedral | 50 Palazzo Zecca (Old Mint) |
| 8 Loggia e Cappella
dell'Incoronazione | 51 Palazzo Chiaramonte (Steri) |
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Santa Ninfa | 53 Sta Maria della Catena |
| 11 S Salvatore | 54 S Giovanni dei Napolitani |
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| 17 Piazza Pretoria | 60 Puppet Museum |
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| 31 Archaeological Museum | 74 Chiesa dei SS Pietro e Paolo |
| 32 Palazzo Whitaker | 75 Palazzo Ajutamicristo |
| 33 Piazza XIII Vittime | 76 La Magione |
| 34 S Giorgio dei Genovesi | 77 Porta Reale |
| 35 S Sebastiano | 78 Porta dei Greci |
| 36 Palazzo Branciforte | 79 Villa Giulia (La Flora) |
| 37 Oratorio del Rosario
di Sta Cita | 80 S Teresa |
| 38 Conservatorio di Musica | 81 Sta Maria dello Spàsimo |
| 39 Palazzo Lampedusa (site) | 82 Hotel des Palmes |
| 40 Oratorio del Rosario
di San Domenico | 83 English Church |
| 41 Sta Maria di Valverde | 84 S Francesco di Paola |
| 42 San Domenico | 85 Villa Bordonaro |
| 43 Statue of the Immacolata | 86 Villino Florio |
| | 87 Villa Malfitano |
| | 88 Politeama |



Palermo I



the bare interior of this once ornate and holy spot. The church was built in the 1140s. Its nave has two bays, each surmounted by a dome. The presbytery has three apses, again with domes above, the one on the left supporting the campanile. On the right a door leads into a rectangular room which was part of the original mosque, one of the few purely Islamic fragments left in Sicily. This room originally had two naves divided by pillars. On the left is a thirteenth century fresco of the Madonna with saints. Outside the mosque there would have been a portico, and in fact its wall is now part of the church. The large courtyard was used as a burial place for members of the Norman court. Beyond a screen of five pointed arches, one blocked up, are the attractive cloisters with slender double columns, all that remain of the original Benedictine monastery. In the centre is an Arab well.

We move on to a quite different atmosphere, the busy and touristy Piazza Indipendenza, where there is the visitors' entrance to the Palazzo dei Normanni or Royal Palace, and where the coaches stop. It is a short walk, through the small Piazza della Pinta, which is on the site of part of the river Kemonia. Here the dilapidated sixteenth century church of the Pinta is open for Mass at midday on Sundays, when there is a chance to see the stuccoes of Giuseppe Serpotta, brother of the more famous Giacomo. Next to the Piazza Indipendenza, on the south side, is the Parco d'Orléans, once the property of the future King Louis-Philippe of France, who was married to Princess Maria Amelia, daughter of Ferdinand and Maria Carolina. Now it is occupied by the Presidency of the *Regione* and not visitable, rather a pity.

The Normans enlarged the original fortress, where now is the **Royal Palace**, with four towers at each end of the more or less rectangular building. But only one tower remains, the Torre Pisana at the northern end, best seen from the Piazza del Parlamento on the other side. Roger II

embellished it, calling in Arab and Byzantine craftsmen, and it was he who founded the Palatine Chapel in 1130, one of the glories not only of Palermo but of all Sicily. During the reign of Frederick II the palace was famous for its splendour and as a centre for artists, scientists and writers from many nationalities. Contemporary accounts speak of gorgeous gardens, fountains and loggias. After the Hohenstaufens the building began to decay, but in the late sixteenth century it was restored by the Spaniards and became the seat of the Viceroys. Much reconstruction and many changes took place, and the façade overlooking the city was completely altered. More major repairs took place in 1921, and in the process various bits of the Islamic and Norman structures were uncovered. So now it is quite a hotchpotch, somewhat austere outside. Visitors should also be warned that only the Palatine Chapel is likely to be on view, and this is closed if there is a religious service and on feast-days.

The main internal courtyard with its three-storied loggia was built around 1600 by the Viceroy Maqueda. From here rises the grand staircase built for Charles III's visit in 1736. This brings us almost directly to the Palatine Chapel, a vision at last of the tremendous richness of Sicily at that period. Maupassant's comment is often quoted: '*Le plus surprenant bijou religieux rêvé par la pensée humaine*', 'the most surprising religious jewel to be dreamed by the human mind'. One has to use hyperbole. The fusion of styles – Latin, Byzantine, Arab – is unique to Sicily, and here it reaches perfection. The richness is never strident. There is a wonderful feeling of intimacy about the place.

Above all the chapel is famous for its mosaics. Those in the portico are, however, modern, dating from 1800. Six of the seven columns are of Egyptian granite. The entrance is through the narthex, now the baptistery. Two carved mosaic doorways with bronze doors lead into the little basilica, shimmering and golden, only 32 metres long,

divided into three naves with ten antique columns with gilded Corinthian capitals. Ahead are the raised choir and the cupola. The floor is richly inlaid with tessera, the lower part of the walls lined with polychrome marbles. At the west end steps ascend to the royal throne. The ambo or pulpit, encrusted with gold, malachite and porphyry, was presented by the Archbishop of Palermo for the coronation of William I, 'the Bad'. By its side is the tall Paschal candlestick in white marble, carved with acanthus leaves, animals and saints. Recently the entire Chapel has been restored thanks to the generosity of a German industrialist, Reinhold Würz. This has included the superb wooden ceiling, of exceptional interest for its Islamic craftsmanship with its *muqarnas* or stalactites in shades of muted greens, rose and grey-blues. What makes it unique is its depiction of human figures, the only possible comparison being the Hall of Justice at the Alhambra. Here in the Palatine Chapel, in addition to birds, animals and heraldic monsters, we have scenes of chess players, huntsmen with falcons, musicians, wrestlers, all amazingly well preserved, and filling every niche. An inscription shows that there were repairs in 1553, obviously by Christians, which accounts for the occasional religious lunette. Unfortunately these fascinating details – score upon score of them – are difficult to see from below without binoculars, and not many travellers are likely to be carrying them. Indeed it could be said that the Chapel celebrates the restoration of Christianity to Sicily.

The mosaics at the east end would have been the work of Byzantine craftsmen. An inscription on the cupola gives the date as 1143. Christ Pantocrator, with his large all-seeing eyes, is surrounded by angels and images of David, Solomon, Zachariah and St John the Baptist. On the arch of the presbytery are the Annunciation and the Presentation in the Temple: in the right apse are scenes from the life of Christ; in the left are the Virgin and saints

of the Greek Church. The mosaics in the central nave show stories from the Old Testament. There are three images of the Pantocrator. Above the altar Christ has an open book and holds his hand in blessing. Above the throne the laws of Christ are being delivered to the king, with Saints Peter and Paul on either side.

The glories of the place are enhanced by the slanting ever-changing shafts of light from above. In 1900 Oscar Wilde wrote to his friend Robbie Ross about this 'marvel of marvels': 'Nowhere, not even in Ravenna, have I seen such mosaics. One really feels as if one was sitting at the heart of a great honeycomb *looking* at angels singing.' In the treasury, usually kept locked, there is a superb Fatimid-style casket, with ivory inlays and Cufic inscriptions, also two Byzantine caskets and various gold and silver objects.

It was here that in 1177 Joanna, daughter of Henry II of England, aged eleven, was crowned queen of Sicily by Archbishop Walter Offamilio, also English. And in 1882 Wagner used to come daily for inspiration for the chapel of the Grail while finishing *Parsifal*. It has also been suggested that W.B. Yeats had some kind of mystical experience here which gave the impulse for his poem 'Sailing to Byzantium'.

If we are lucky enough to visit the palace at the right time, we may also have a chance of seeing the Sala di Ruggero on the second floor. This is another gem of the twelfth century, probably dating from about 1146, ablaze with gold and green mosaics of centaurs, lions, peacocks and stylised vegetation. Originally it was a bedroom. The rather disapproving-looking leopards are often reproduced as symbolising Norman Sicily. It is more difficult to see the Sala d'Ercole, which was decorated in 1799 by Giuseppe Velasquez, as this is where the Regional Parliament sits. The rest of the royal apartments are usually closed to visitors and mostly have nineteenth century decorations. The armoury below has a vaulted ceiling. The extensive

dungeons have been opened to the public. Created by the Normans they were used by the Inquisition and certainly have a chilly atmosphere. In one cell the skeletons of two walled-up females were found.

Emerging once more into the Piazza Indipendenza we turn right and are faced with the fantastic structure of the Porta Nuova, commemorating the triumphal return of the Emperor Charles V after defeating the Tunisians in 1535, but only completed in 1583. On the site of an earlier archway, it was struck by lightning in 1667, which set off an explosion of gunpowder that had been stored there. Four understandably morose-looking Arab or Turkish captives, acting as telamons, two with severed arms, are surmounted by a graceful loggia with a pyramidal majolica roof, displaying the Spanish eagle. In this eyrie Garibaldi and his aides lived for a while in May 1860. From here to the south-west the Corso Calatafimi runs towards Monreale. To the east is the Corso Vittorio Emanuele, often known by its original name of Càssaro (p. 6), that leads down to the sea, and where the traffic thunders past Piazza del Parlamento and Villa Bonanno on its right. The whole area is sometimes known as Piazza della Vittoria, so called in memory of the uprising against the Bourbons in 1820. It has always been a favourite place for public demonstrations.

We are now on the site of the ancient fortified town, and the medieval buildings that were once here were cleared away in the sixteenth century when the Càssaro was straightened. The full expanse of the Royal Palace can be clearly seen, much of it sixteenth century, though the tower on the right, Torre Pisana, is early Norman. On top of the tower is an observatory, where Giuseppe Piazzi on January 1 1801 discovered the first asteroid, Ceres, named after the ancient protectress of Sicily. Garibaldi allowed Dumas *père* and others in his entourage, including his mistress (whom he pretended was his nephew), to occupy

a suite of 18 rooms overlooking the square on the top floor of the palace.

In the centre of Villa Bonanno, laid out with tufted palm trees in 1905, is a marble statue of Philip V of Spain surrounded by allegorical figures, two of which have been stolen. The statue has been perhaps too excessively admired: 'the full flower of Sicilian Baroque', so we are told by an enthusiast. Nearby is the refurbished Oratorio di SS Elena e Costantino, housing the official library of the Sicilian Parliament.

Roman villas have been excavated in **Piazza della Vittoria**, visually unexciting, mainly because the mosaics from the larger building have been removed to the Archaeological Museum. Some remains of the mosaic floor from the smaller villa are still there and are of considerable interest, attributed to Philoxenos and depicting Alexander the Great at a hunt, and in style very like that great and superb mosaic of the Battle of Issus from the House of the Faun at Pompeii, now in the Naples museum. At the south-eastern corner of the square is Palazzo Scàfani (1330), much altered and today a *comando militare*. This was one of the great fortified palaces of the period, the other being Palazzo Chiaramonte in Piazza Marina. It used to contain the extraordinary painting known as *The Triumph of Death*, since removed to Palazzo Abatellis, the city's art gallery. Some original features of the building, including interlacing arches and a portal, can be seen on the south side on the piazzetta San Giovanni Decollato.

The **Cathedral**, dedicated to Santa Maria dell'Assunta, comes into view on the left, after the long walls of the Carabinieri barracks and the Archbishop's Palace. Throughout the centuries this building has played an important part in the history of the city. The area in front was cleared in the sixteenth century. Sometimes the Holy Office of the Inquisition had its elaborate and horrific 'Spectacles of Faith' or *Autos da Fé* here, described in

Leonardo Sciascia's chilling story *Death of an Inquisitor*. The Cathedral, a rich golden ochre, with a crenellated roof, was originally erected by that unattractive-sounding but powerful individual, Walter Offamilio archbishop of Palermo from 1169 to 1190, on the site of a Byzantine basilica that had been turned into a mosque. (The long-held belief that 'Offamilio' is derived from 'of the mill' has now been finally quashed. It had been due to a misreading of the Greco-Latin text on a parchment of 1191: *ophamilios* for *aphamilios*, the latter meaning 'of the family', i.e. of the king.) The Cathedral has been altered many times, not always for the better, but we can still admire the bold, glorious proportions of the Norman original. The east apsidal end is the best view, preserving much of the original architecture, with its magnificent decoration of intertwining blind arches in light relief and bichrome stone inlays. The west end, on the narrow Via Matteo Bonello and facing the Archbishop's Palace, is however, Gothic, with two mullion-windowed towers that match those at the east end. There is a fifteenth century Madonna over the doorway.

Two Gothic arches join the Cathedral to the Palace, above which rises the great campanile, partly medieval but mostly built by Emanuele Palazzetto in the 1840s. The huge dome, quite out of character with the rest of the building, by Fernando Fuga in the late eighteenth century, at first sight almost ruins the aspect of this magnificent building, but the compensation is the Catalan-Gothic portico on the south side, which is a masterpiece by Antonio Gambara and dating from 1429–30. The marble column on the left of the portico must have belonged to the mosque, as it is carved with a passage from the Koran. The beautiful doorway is by Antonio Gambara (1426) and the wooden doors are by Francesco Miranda (1432), surmounted by a small Madonna in mosaic of the twelfth century, perhaps from the original Norman basilica. During a recent resto-

ration, a carving of the tree of life has been revealed above the portico, with allegorical representations of the Saviour with human and animal figures.

It must be admitted that the cold sparseness of the interior of the Cathedral is a shock, and this again is the fault of Fernando Fuga. The previous splendour has been swept away and replaced by a dull late Baroque style veering towards Neoclassic. Between 1781 and 1801 the walls were whitened and a number of small chapels created. However the group of royal tombs are of the greatest interest and importance, crammed though they are by Fuga into a small chapel on the left of the south entrance, and difficult to examine properly. The four main tombs, are of porphyry, the royal stone, and each has six columns supporting a canopy. On the left lies the great Emperor Frederick II, who died in 1250. Four lions, their paws on human victims, support the sarcophagus with its carved lid. For an unknown reason – economy? hero-worship? – it also contains the remains of Peter II of Aragon (died 1342). On the right is Frederick II's father, the unpopular Henry VI (died 1197). Originally he was in the tomb directly behind, which Frederick had removed from Cefalù Cathedral, and into which he transferred the remains of his mother Constance (died 1198). The other tomb, behind Frederick's, is that of his grandfather Roger II (died 1154) also from Cefalù. Both the Cefalù tombs have marble pillars and canopies inlaid with mosaics. In fact Frederick's tomb had originally been prepared for Roger II and dates from 1145.

Against the wall to the left of Frederick is the tomb of Duke William (died 1338), son of Frederick II of Aragon and brother of Peter II. By the wall on the right is a Roman sarcophagus, carved with lion-hunting scenes. In this lies Constance of Aragon (died 1222), wife of the Emperor Frederick. When the tombs were opened the body of Henry VI was found to be well preserved, in Arab clothes,

with blond locks of hair laid across him and a crown on his head. Frederick also had his crown, an orb on his pillow and a sword by his side. Oscar Wilde went to see his tomb: 'A sublime bare monstrous thing, blood-coloured, and held up by lions, who have caught some of the rage in the great Emperor's soul.' Augustus Hare mused on this 'resting place of princes born in the purple and from distant lands ... They sleep and the centuries pass them by. Rude hands break open the granite lids to find tresses of yellow hair and fragments of imperial mantles. ...' Rude hands reopened Emperor Frederick's tomb in 1998 and found that his sword had gone.

If only Fuga had left well alone, and the royal tombs had remained in their original and appropriate place of honour, in their 'haughty silence' in the north transept ... Even the statues by the Gaginis that Fuga placed along the nave look dull in that dull nave. At least we still have the beautiful holy water stoup that faces the south entrance. This is by Giuseppe Spatafora and Antonio Ferraro (1553). On the other side of the nave there is another, even finer, stoup attributed to Domenico Gagini, late fifteenth century. Continuing along the south aisle we pass a chapel with many urns containing relics of Palermitan saints. The seventh chapel has an altar of *marmi mischi*. To the right of the presbytery is the chapel of Santa Rosalia, patron saint of Palermo, with a glittering silver altar. Her relics are kept in a silver casket, not on view except during her five-day *festino* in July (p. 63). Santa Rosalia was perhaps of royal descent and died in a cave on Monte Pellegrino in about 1183. Her bones were discovered in 1624 and miraculously rid Palermo of plague. Every year since then her casket has been carried through the city in triumphal procession.

On the right of the altar are the entrances to the sacristy and treasury, also the crypt. The first has a Catalan-Gothic vault, and beyond it, through a Gagini doorway, is a chapel with a Madonna by Antonello Gagini (1503). The treasury

should not be missed. Here are the objects found in the royal tombs, including the crown of Constance of Aragon, decorated with emeralds, seed pearls and turquoises – exactly like the royal crowns one sees in the mosaics at Santa Sofia in Istanbul (some think that the crown was Frederick's own and that he placed it himself in her tomb). There are also some superb vestments and chalices.

The crypt has recently been restored and is part of the original Norman building. Here are to be found twenty-two sarcophagi, mainly archbishops' tombs. The first on the right is that of Archbishop Cesare Marullo (died 1588), an antique urn showing a hunting scene, with a sixteenth century lid. In the first apse, facing the entrance, we have Frederick of Antioch, an illegitimate son of Frederick II, with a recumbent figure taken from another sixteenth century tomb. In the third apse there is another antique sarcophagus, with a husband and wife and Muses. Next comes Archbishops Giovanni Paternò, the patron of Antonello Gagini, who probably sculpted the figure; the urn with *putti* and soldiers is a fine example of Roman art. There is another fine Roman sarcophagus opposite. Facing the fifth apse, where lies Archbishop Pietro Travaglia (died 1558), is the sarcophagus of the great Walter Offamilio (died 1190), founder of the cathedral.

The inlaid choir stalls are Catalan-Gothic work. The bishop's throne is made from pieces of mosaic. On the left is the Capella del Sacramento where there is a tremendous lapis lazuli and marble tabernacle in the form of a temple, the work of Cosimo Fonzago of Bergamo (1663). The north transept has the fourteenth century Chiaramonte crucifix, its harrowing realism contrasting with the softer figures by Gaspare Guercio and Gaspare Serpotta (late seventeenth century). In the adjoining chapel is a Madonna by Francesco Laurana and helpers, and in the penultimate chapel, opposite the royal tombs, there are pieces by the Gagini from the original *tribuna*.

As the Diocesan Museum has at last been opened, it is very much worth taking the risk of dodging through the traffic across Via Matteo Bonello in order to visit it. The entrance, decorated with acanthus leaves, and a window near the east corner of the palace are relics of its fifteenth century façade. The museum contains many marbles, fragments of tombs, statues, reliquaries, altar frontals and paintings rescued from the Cathedral, also from churches which are either redundant or were badly damaged in the Second World War bombing raids. There are paintings by Simone da Bologna, Pietro Novelli, Zoppo di Gangi, Mario de Laurito, Giorgio Vasari and Giuseppe Velasquez, as well as medieval triptychs and an iconography of Santa Rosalia. In the Sala dei Gagini there is a wonderful tomb cover of a young knight by Francesco Laurana. There is also a sixteenth century Spanish statue of the Madonna del Monserrato.

To the rear of the palace is the Oratorio dei SS Pietro e Paolo, usually closed, with stuccoes by Giacomo Serpotta and Domenico Castelli (1698), and a vault painted by Filippo Tancredi (1704–6). Across Via Bonello is the Loggia dell’Incoronazione where the newly crowned Norman kings are supposed to have shown themselves to the populace. The present construction dates from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, using old capitals and columns. Next to it is the Cappella dell’Incoronazione, like the loggia partly destroyed by Bourbon artillery in 1860 and recently restored; this was originally built in 1184. The humble church of Santa Cristina la Vetere nearby is twelfth century. And round the corner is the **Papireto flea market**, in Piazza Peranni, bordering on the Quartiere del Capo, a slummy area to be entered by well-dressed tourists at their peril – in any case, not a patch on London’s Portobello Road or the *Marché aux Puces* in Paris. The name of the river Papireto (now underground) is derived from the fact that there was once a swamp here where the papyrus plant

grew. This last fact is of particular interest, as the only place in Europe where papyrus now grows wild is in Sicily, in the Ciane nature reserve near Syracuse (p. 290) – it has usually been assumed that papyrus was brought from Egypt in the Greek period.

Proceeding along the Corso we pass through an area that was badly damaged by bombs during the Second World War. On the left is the heavily restored building of the Biblioteca Regionale, in the sixteenth century a Jesuit College. It has some four hundred thousand volumes, including important codexes and incunabula. On the right is the Palazzo Castrone-Santa Ninfa, also sixteenth century. The church of San Salvatore (1682–1704), with a stately façade by Paolo Amato, has been turned into a concert hall for sacred music; it contains frescoes by Vito d’Anna, though damaged in the war. The dilapidated state of the bombed out palazzi, some still left as shells, is inevitably depressing, but one compensation in this part of the Corso is the number of bookshops.

Piazza Bologna on the right, once fashionable and still with a certain charm, has in its centre a strangely emaciated statue of Charles V erected in 1631. The seventeenth-century Palazzo Villafranca on the west side is still impressive with a fine doorway. But it has a sad history. Once owned by the powerful Alliata family and one of the greatest houses in Palermo, with stucco work by Serpotta, Baroque furnishings and tapestries, it was bequeathed by a previous princess to the Archbishopric and has been neglected ever since. Palazzo Ugo on the south side was damaged by a bomb in 1943 and has statues of the Gagini period. Facing the Piazza is another pathetic sight: the Palazzo Belmonte-Riso (1784), once considered among the best works of Venanzio Marvuglia; the sculptured work is by Ignazio Marabitti. Here in the 1850s patriots held their clandestine meetings. No. 383, the again pathetic Palazzo

Geraci, was also designed by Marvuglia and at one time regarded as his masterpiece.

Further down, also on the left, is the restored Albergo Centrale with many *fin de siècle* features. Nearby, down the Vicolo Ragusi, is one of Palermo's famous puppet theatres. A friend who went there enthusiastically wrote, 'The pandemonium was *stupendo*. The high jinks left me speechless and dazed.' So, recommended!

Many of the smartest houses of the old aristocracy were grouped round the **Quattro Canti**, where the Corso meets Via Maqueda. Designed by Giulio Lasso and finished in 1620, the Quattro Canti's obvious inspiration is the Quattro Fontane in Rome. Known also as Piazza Vigliena or the Teatro del Sole, 'Theatre of the Sun' (because the sun always shines there from whatever angle), it was a great meeting place for news and gossip. But these days the last thing one would want to do there is to stand in the middle and gossip, with traffic tearing past from all directions.

The surrounding screens of the Quattro Canti do have a theatrical splendour, typically Spanish. Above the fountains there are three orders of architecture – Doric, Ionic, Composite – with representations of the seasons and statues of kings of Spain (Charles V, Philip II, III, IV), and above them are the four protectoresses of Palermo. On top of all are imperial and royal coats of arms. Maybe it is all a bit overpowering.

When built the Quattro Canti neatly divided Palermo into four quarters, and these names still survive: Albergheria, Capo, Castellamare (or Loggia), and Kalsa – but in that period and indeed long after most of the inhabitants of these quarters were miserably poor. Out of sight, out of mind.

The grand houses at the north end of Via Maqueda now look forbidding, more remarkable for strength than beauty, as the old Murray's *Handbook* informs us. The first on the right is Palazzo Merendino, No. 217, by Marvuglia,

with a large courtyard beyond a massive portal. If somehow permission can be obtained to see the *piano nobile* there are saloons well worth looking at. Opposite is Palazzo Rudinì, also late eighteenth century, adjoining the ex Casa dei Crociferi (with a fine red marble staircase) and Santa Ninfa dei Crociferi. In this latter church, by Paolo Amato, with stucco figures by Giacomo Serpotta, there is a memorial bust of Sir John Acton (1736–1811), Prime Minister under Ferdinand IV when at Naples, and who at the age of sixty-three was given Papal dispensation to marry his niece aged fourteen (when told she was to marry her uncle, so the story goes, she had to be coaxed from under the piano by a box of chocolates). No. 323, Palazzo Branciforte, has a fine courtyard and frescoed *saloni*.

On the corner of the Corso by the Quattro Canti is the façade of **San Giuseppe dei Teatini**, relatively staid by Palermo standards apart from its multicoloured majolica dome. Designed by Giacomo Besio of Genoa in 1612, it hardly prepares one for the exuberant richness of its interior, recently and splendidly restored after war damage. On each side of the entrance to the church are two surprising and beautiful holy water stoups, angels descending, designed with a typically Palermitan panache, the one on the right being by Ignazio Marabitti and on the left by Federico Siragusa. The side chapels are gorgeously decorated, the altar in the fourth chapel on the right having a Gagesque Madonna and Child. The interior of the cupola was painted by Guglielmo Borremans in 1724, and the decorations of the vault of the right transept are by Giuseppe Serpotta. In the chapel of this transept there is a canvas of San Andrea Avellino by Sebastiano Conca, and below the altar are some delightful *putti* by Siragusa. On the right of the choir there is the sobering sight of a crucifix by Fra' Umile da Petralia, whose agonising realism is to be seen in so many churches in Sicily; to its left are two marble reliefs by Procopio Serpotta, son of Giacomo.

An altar in the left transept is a fine example of *marmi mischi*. In the sacristy there is a collection of eight magnificent altar frontals embroidered in gold and coral. The crypt is a separate church dedicated to the Madonna della Provvidenza, with its door to the left on the main entrance. This has a silver altar.

The large building next to San Giuseppe on Via Maqueda was once a convent of the Teatini and is now part of the University, founded in 1805 – thus very much later than those at Catania and Messina. The oratory of San Giuseppe dei Falegnami (St Joseph of the Carpenters) in Via Alessi may be difficult to get into; but there are stuccoes by Giuseppe Serpotta (1701) to be seen inside, and some good wooden carvings by the Calandra brothers.

Across the street is **Piazza Pretoria**, in the centre of which is a dramatic and most surprising fountain, a contrast to all that we have seen so far: nude tritons and sirens eyeing one another, with water gushing from animal heads and other aquatic fantasies. It is in fact the only example of the Tuscan Mannerist style in Palermo. Designed by the Florentine Francesco Camilliani (1554–5) and added to by Michelangelo Naccherino, the fountain was originally intended for the Spanish viceroy in Naples. But the viceroy died and his son sold it to the Senate of Palermo, all 640 pieces. The level of the piazza had to be lowered to accommodate it. Some Palermitans were shocked by such nude abandon and called it the Fountain of Shame. All the noses of the male figures have had to be replaced, it is said because nuns from a neighbouring convent crept out at night and knocked off the originals, not having the courage to do the same to the private parts. Garibaldi, on the day of his entry into Palermo, May 26 1860, sat on the steps of this fountain, unconcernedly giving orders and receiving congratulations as Bourbon shells crashed all round.

The square is dominated by the majestic domes of San

Giuseppe and **Santa Caterina**. To its north are two grand palaces, one seventeenth century, the other Neoclassic, Palazzo Bordonaro and Palazzo Buonocore. Garibaldi made his headquarters in the Palazzo del Municipio, originally built in 1463, rebuilt in the sixteenth century, rather heavily restored in 1875. The internal courtyard is worth a glance and there is a handsome staircase with a Baroque portal at the top by Paolo Amato. Santa Caterina is usually open for two hours only on Sunday mornings or for weddings, funerals and feast-days, but it is also worth making a special effort to visit its fantastic interior: the apogee of Palermo Baroque, planned mostly by Giacomo Amato, the most important of Palermo's late seventeenth century architects. The façade has with reason been described as uncompromising. Obviously it was inspired by Roman models – but inside it is a blaze of *marmi mischi*, polychrome marbles, one of the special features of Palermo Baroque, with sculptures and stuccoes of allegorical figures, fruit and flowers, frescoes, all illuminated by massive chandeliers. Immediately to the right on entering there is an amusing relief of Jonah and the whale, followed by another of the sacrifice of Isaac. In the right transept there is a statue of Santa Caterina by Antonello Gagini, one of his last works (1534) and among his best; here also is a sumptuous altar by Andrea Palma.

Behind the church, inaccessible except by special permission from the nuns, which males are unlikely to get, is a huge Dominican convent, little damaged by the Allied bombs that fell nearby. This has fifteenth century cloisters and a fountain by Ignazio Marabitti. It is thought that the convent might be on the site of a Phoenician watch-tower.

Facing the northern side of the convent, on Corso Vittorio Emanuele, is the Baroque church of San Matteo, grey marble, in three orders, and completed in 1662. The richly decorated interior has statues of 1728 by Giacomo

Serpotta and frescoes by Vito D'Anna (1756). The main altar is a mixture of ormolu, lapis lazuli, agate and other stones. On the fourth altar on the left there is a painting of the Madonna and St Anthony by Pietro Novelli.

The lower part of the Corso or Càssaro was laid out by the viceroy Toledo and thus came to be called Via Toledo, or more rudely Càssaro Morto. After Garibaldi's arrival the name of the whole of the Corso, upper and lower, was changed to Corso Vittorio Emanuele, but to Palermitans it is still the Càssaro.

If in a single morning it has been possible to cover all these sights, rest and sustenance may be badly needed. The south entrance of Santa Caterina faces on to a little square, Piazza Bellini, where there are two more important Norman monuments, the **Martorana** and **San Cataldo**, which can be visited in the afternoon. At the east end of the square is the old Teatro Bellini, once the Teatro Carlino, built in 1808 when the royal family of Naples was in exile in Palermo. Still in use, part of it has been turned into a modest restaurant, and thus a possible place for a halt.

The two churches of the Martorana and San Cataldo are raised on part of the Roman walls. The Martorana's other (and rightful) name is Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio, so called because in 1143 it was founded by George of Antioch, admiral and 'Emir of the Emirs' under Roger II. In 1443 King Alfonso of Aragon gave it to the then neighbouring Benedictine convent, founded by Eloisa Martorana – hence its present name. The nuns of this convent made marzipan fruits whose prototypes – *frutti di Martorana* (useful as presents) – are still sold in shops today. It was in the Martorana that Parliament met in 1282, after the massacre of the French at the 'Vespers', in order to decide on offering the crown to Peter of Aragon.

San Cataldo has three identical red domes, close together, like giant pomegranates on a crenellated platter. The Martorana lost its dome in the earthquake of 1726,

but the Norman campanile is fortunately well preserved. The Arab traveller Ibn Jubair saw the Martorana in 1184 and described the façade as the most beautiful work in the world – gone alas. Major alterations were made to both the exterior and interior in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, so that now only the truncated Baroque north entrance overlooks the square.

The actual entrance to the church is under the original twelfth century campanile. When the chancel of this wonderful building was prolonged, some of the original Byzantine mosaics were destroyed. The frescoes at the west end are by Borremans (1717). On the right is a portal of the ninth century with a carved wooden door made by Arab craftsmen. Next to it is one of the great treasures of the city: a mosaic of Roger II being symbolically crowned by Christ, the only likeness of the king in existence. Opposite is another mosaic, showing the Virgin with George of Antioch, looking curiously like a tortoise, at her feet. It is still possible to make out the original Greek cross.

As one approaches the cupola the sombre dimness turns into a flood of light illuminating the mosaics: once more Christ Pantocrator, enthroned and surrounded by angels, strangely distorted, and the words of a Byzantine hymn written in Arabic – a fascinating combination. As we sit on a bench contemplating this superb display, we can indeed appreciate the words of Otto Demus, the great authority on Byzantine mosaics, that we have before us the ‘quintessence of all that is gentle and lovely’ in the art. There is an intimacy in the Martorana that is quite different to the Cappella Palatina, and indeed to the Cathedral at Cefalù: perhaps because it was not a royal creation.

Other mosaics are of prophets, evangelists and saints, and in the side vaults are the death of the Virgin and the Nativity, it would seem with George of Antioch determined to be part of both scenes, insinuating himself as a supplicant. The original apse was destroyed between 1683

and 1686, and its successor is a contrast to all this Norman splendour: a Baroque chapel almost as ornate as Santa Caterina with polychrome marbles, stuccoes and a beautiful lapis and ormolu tabernacle under a painting of the Ascension by Vincenzo da Pavia (1533). In 1937 the church was given to the diocese of Piana degli Albanesi, one of the small towns in the interior of Sicily where descendants of Albanian immigrants of the fifteenth century still live; offices are therefore held here according to the Greek rite.

The keys of San Cataldo are kept in the Martorana. Both churches were well restored by Giuseppe Patricolo in the nineteenth century. San Cataldo was founded by another admiral, Majone of Bari, chancellor of William I in 1160. It was never decorated with mosaics because of Majone's early death, or rather murder. The exterior, with its quaint domes, honeycombed windows and blind arcading has great charm, and the bare interior has a benign, even cosy, atmosphere, with its original floor in Muslim patterns. The three domes are supported by squinches and six antique columns, all with different capitals. The church now belongs to the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre. For a while it was used as a post office.

Sant'Agostino – Teatro Massimo
Sant'Ignazio all'Olivella – Archaeological
Museum – Palazzo Whitaker – Palazzo
Lampedusa – Oratorio di Santa Cita
Santa Cita – Santa Maria di Valverde
Oratorio di San Domenico
San Domenico – Vuccirìa

The Archaeological Museum of Palermo, the Museo Regionale Archeologico, has some of the finest Greek collections outside Greece, and many important Phoenician objects. A visit there is essential before going on to Selinunte. The Museum is off Via Roma, and close to that unprepossessing lump of Fascist architecture, the Post Office, which deserved the attention of Allied bombs far more than some of its neighbours (but the interior is fairly impressive). A morning's excursion, including the museum, could begin at the Teatro Massimo in Piazza Verdi or, better, at the church of Sant'Agostino nearby.

Sant'Agostino is usually open in the morning and for part of the afternoon. Via Sant'Agostino is mostly a clothes market, and cars are banned. The main portal of the church is Gothic, inlaid with lava, and there is a beautiful rose window above. The side portal is fifteenth century and attributed to Domenico Gagini. The interior is a great contrast, having been renovated in 1671, and is rich with stuccoes by Giacomo Serpotta, executed between 1711 and 1729. There is an eighteenth century organ. The cloisters

are sixteenth century, with graceful columns dating from two centuries earlier.

In the Capo district behind Sant'Agostino there are a number of architecturally interesting small churches, mostly open on Sundays only. The seventeenth century Santa Maria di Gesù, otherwise known as Santa Maria dei Cancelli (1660), in Piazza Beati Paoli, is particularly attractive with a portal of twisted 'barley sugar' columns. The Chiesa della Immacolata Concezione (1612) in Via Porta Carini is magnificently decorated with stuccoes, frescoes and polychrome marbles, a little Baroque masterpiece; restored thanks to *Salvare Palermo*. This is opposite Sant'Ippolito, with a 1728 façade and containing an ancient wooden crucifix and a fresco of the Madonna, Byzantine in style. San Gregorio nearby is late seventeenth century. There is a bustling fruit, vegetable and fish market in Via Porta Carini, almost as colourful as the Vuccirìa (p. 57), and perhaps with fewer bag-snatchers. Ask to be directed to the Panificio Morello, where Art Nouveau mosaics are now in pristine glory.

The huge **Teatro Massimo** was begun by Giovanni Battista Filippo Basile in 1875, at the start of Palermo's great fashionable period, and was finished by his son Ernesto, in time for its opening on May 16 1897 with a performance of Verdi's *Falstaff*. One is not surprised to learn that this Germanic-looking 'Corinthian' edifice was based on designs for the National Theatre in Berlin. The figure of the lion on the left below symbolises Lyric Poetry, that on the right Tragedy. Many Baroque palaces, churches and a monastery were destroyed to make way for this honey-coloured leviathan. For over twenty-five years it was closed, casting a certain gloom over the square, regarded then and still as the centre of the old city. Now all is changed; at last, in 1998, and thanks to the agitation of public-spirited citizens, it was reopened and the gorgeous three-tiered interior revealed – all the good work nearly

undone by the applause of the 1500 strong audience for José Cura's glorious rendering of *Celeste Aida*.

In the summer months there is no opera, but the interior can be visited. Two rather skittish Art Nouveau or 'Liberty' kiosks in the square are by Ernesto Basile. Some horse-drawn *carrozze* may be loitering nearby, and there are sometimes taxis – a rarity in Palermo. Crossing to Via Bara all'Olivella, we pass another famous puppet theatre, Mimmo Cuticchio, and then come to the grand façade, adorned with columns, of **Sant'Ignazio all'Olivella**, close to the Archaeological Museum. Designed by Antonino Muttone, it was begun in 1595 and consecrated in 1622, but work continued until the eighteenth century – the cupola completed in 1732. This is a church well worth visiting. The interior is a Latin cross, divided by columns, and remarkable for *marmi mischi* and the marble pavement. The second chapel on the right is one of the best, though the soapy plaster saint is a pity. The statues of Saints Peter and Paul at the high altar are by Ignazio Marabitti, and the painting of the Trinity is by Sebastiano Conca. In the left transept, the 'Martyrdom of St Ignatius' is by Filippo Paladino. The fifth chapel on the left has a painting of San Filippo Neri by Conca, and the third chapel is richly decorated with *marmi mischi* and jasper columns – the crucifix, surrounded by holy relics, is seventeenth century, and the fresco in the vault is by Pietro Novelli. The elegant little building next to Sant'Ignazio in Via Monteleone is its Oratorio, also dedicated to San Filippo Neri. This was built by Marvuglia in 1769. Further down Via Monteleone is the Oratorio di Santa Caterina, which has stuccoes by Procopio Serpotta, executed in 1719 and 1724, and considered his best.

The seventeenth century building housing the **Archaeological Museum** has been restored after wartime bombing, and was once the convent of the church of Sant'Ignazio all'Olivella. The nucleus of the collection was

begun in the early nineteenth century and belonged to the University. Several private collections were acquired, and major donations given – some from the Italian mainland – by the last Bourbon kings, Francis I and II. The Museum was moved here in 1866 when properties of religious orders were confiscated. One of the great names in the organisation of the collection is Antonio Salinas, who was director from 1873 virtually until his death in 1914.

It is open daily but closes early on Sundays and Mondays. European nationals are allowed into the Museum free on production of passports.

There are two cloisters. In the centre of the first there is a fountain with a seventeenth century triton, originally in the Royal Palace. The portal is sixteenth century, and the window above, tufa and lava, is fifteenth century. The room on the right has underwater discoveries, notable for the largest collection of ancient anchors in existence. Beyond are two Phoenician sarcophagi, with lids carved in the shape of female figures, that were found near Palermo, and a statue of a Phoenician goddess enthroned. The room to the left of the entrance into the larger cloisters contains the renowned and important Pietra di Palermo, with Egyptian hieroglyphs, c. 2700 BC, giving a list of Pharaohs up to the Fifth Dynasty. The lion attacking a bull is sixth century BC, of Eastern provenance. The white stone with a Punic inscription, found at Marsala, refers to the sun god Baal Hammon. The torso of a statue was found by fishermen in the *Stagnone* or Lagoon of Marsala in 1933, perhaps it was being brought from Motya after the sacking by Dionysius in 397 BC (p. 173). There is a little squat statue of the Egyptian god Bes, fifth century BC.

The larger cloisters have in the centre banana trees, a bust of Salinas and a fountain with papyrus plants. In the arcades are objects from Soluntum and Tyndaris, including on the left (north side) two colossal Roman statues, both restored, the first being Zeus copied from a Greek orig-

inal, the second an emperor, probably Claudius, in part composed of fragments found at Tyndaris in 1809 by that enigmatic Irishman Robert Fagan, art dealer and smuggler, and Consul for Sicily and Malta during the British occupation. The female statue on the south side used to be at the Baths of Caracalla in Rome and later in the Farnese collection. Ferdinand IV brought it with him in 1798 when he fled from Naples and had it placed then in the Favorita park. The entrance to the Inscriptions Room is on the east side. Many of these inscriptions are from Selinunte. The large sixth century BC inscription from Temple G seems to be a thanksgiving to the gods for a victory. From here we enter a small room with votive *stelae* from Selinunte. Most are with two heads, male and female, archaic in style and probably fifth century BC. They come from the sanctuary of Zeus Melichios from Gaggera, near Selinunte, and were originally brightly coloured: a cult which evidently survived the destruction of Selinunte by the Carthaginians. The room known as the Ettore Gabrici Room has an enormous and impressive reconstruction, using original fragments, of the garishly coloured east pediment of Temple C at Selinunte, including a Gorgon's mask. On each side are cases with sculptural fragments. The room is also used for audio-visual films.

Next we have the Pirro Marconi Room with its thrilling display of 19 lion-head water-spouts from the Temple of Victory at Himera, built to celebrate the defeat of the Carthaginians in 480 BC. These water-spouts were discovered by Marconi in 1929–30. He has described his amazement at seeing their bright colours fade so quickly. This is the best collection of its type to be seen anywhere.

There follows the Salone di Selinunte with its famous collection of *metopes*, one of the great sights of Palermo. On each side of the entrance are three beautiful marble heads of women and fragments from Temple E. Beneath the window are six *metopes*, dating from the sixth century

bc: two divinities, perhaps Demeter and Kore, in a chariot; the three gods of Delphi; a winged sphinx; the rape of Europa (note the dolphins underneath); Herakles battling with the bull; Demeter and Hecate meeting Kore emerging from Avernus. Opposite are three archaic *metopes* from Temple C, sixth century bc, discovered by the young English architects William Harris and Walter Angell in 1823: the quadriga of Helios, god of the sun: Perseus killing the gorgon with an approving Athene by his side, and with blood of the Gorgon giving birth to the winged horse Pegasus; Herakles carrying the robber brothers Cercopes, held upside down on a pole. Grotesque and haunting, they are important in the evolution of Greek art, and still show vestiges of colour. The *metope* below, fifth century bc, shows Eos, the goddess of dawn about to kidnap the young hunter Kephalos. Next come two *metopes* from Temple F, with scenes from the Gigantomachia, the battle of the giants. Facing the entrance to the room are four *metopes* from Temple E, perhaps about 460–450 bc, and these by contrast are lively and full of character: Herakles fighting the Amazon, grabbing her by the hair, his toes treading firmly on her feet – a wrestler’s hold; Hera and the seated Zeus, who removes in wonder the veil from her beautiful face; Actaeon attacked by dogs, cruelly urged on by Diana; Athene fighting a Titan. In the centre of the room is the strange, slim, bronze statue with staring eyes and arms outstretched, known as the Ephebus of Selinunte, fifth century bc: Greek but essentially Selinuntian in style, and unusual in Greek sculpture for being less than life-size. This was stolen from Castelvetro in 1962 but recovered six years later when it was removed to Palermo.

Leading from here are four rooms containing the Etruscan collection, also known as the Casuccini collection: sepulchral monuments, statues, sarcophagi, urns from the sixth century bc to the first. The *cippi* in the first room have scenes of games, dances, banquets, horsemen, some-

times with traces of colour. The second room has a female statue made to contain the ashes of the deceased and representing a goddess with a pomegranate in her hand. The lids of the alabaster cinerary urns usually show a banqueting scene, while the sides depict battles. In the third room an alabaster sarcophagus has a scene showing the dead woman saying farewell to her family. Another urn depicts a married couple, their expressions beautifully conveyed. The fourth room has a male cinerary statue, sixth century BC, with some traces of polychrome colouring, bearded but without a moustache and gently smiling. There is a large collection of vases of *bucchero*, black Etruscan terracotta. Standing on its own is the great *oinochoe* vase, again sixth century BC, known as the Vaso di Anubis or della Gorgone, one of the finest of its kind.

The way up to the first floor is in the small cloisters. Here is displayed a great variety of terracottas, bronzes, vases, and *stelae* from various parts of Sicily. Immediately to the right of the long northern gallery at the top of the stairs is the restored eighteenth century chapel of the old convent. Along this gallery are arranged a series of funeral shrines from Lilybaeum (Marsala) and a number of exhibits from Motya, Soluntum, Segesta, Randazzo and Himera, also some examples of ancient plumbing from Termini Imerese. The eighth century BC Egyptian vase in glass paste came from Lilybaeum, as did the astragals, sheep's knuckle bones used in a popular game. The three rooms leading off here contain material from the necropolis at Selinunte but normally will only be opened by special permission. The east gallery has several terracottas, some from the mainland, and recently discovered objects from Selinunte, also a collection of lamps and a comic fifth century BC bath with two feet from Agrigento. Continuing along the south gallery we find a well arranged selection from the 12,000 odd votive figures unearthed at Selinunte. Note the male mask with pierced eyes, a sixth century BC Medusa,

a polychrome group of Eos and Kephalos, and two bronze busts of Persephone. (All the statuettes of Ceres, one notes, are smiling.) The west gallery has a selection of objects from the old necropolis at Palermo, in the area of Corso Calatafimi, Corso Pisani and Via Cappuccini and in use from the seventh to second centuries BC. These include unglazed Punic pottery and imported Greek ware, also silver and vitreous paste jewellery, and scarab amulets, believed to have had magic properties and derived from Egypt.

At the end of the south gallery, up some steps, is the main collection of bronzes. The best of the smaller group include a Hercules, a shock-headed nude youth, a winged sphinx from Selinunte, and a head of an athlete. In the larger group there are two exhibits of great importance: the famous 'Ram of Syracuse', and an athlete, maybe Hercules, subduing a stag. The Ram is a survivor from a pair dating from the beginning of the third century BC by a sculptor of the school of Lysippus. Both used to adorn the entrance to the castle of Maniace at Syracuse, but were taken to Castelbuono to decorate the castle of Giovanni Ventimiglia. Eventually they were removed to the royal palace at Palermo, where one was destroyed in the fighting of 1848. The athlete came from Torre del Greco, near Pompeii, a gift of Francis I, and was once part of a fountain in a private house.

The Greek sculpture in the adjoining room contains the Robert Fagan collection, even if not all are given attributions (e.g. the boy with a dog); most are probably from Tyndaris, though there is a fragment from the Parthenon at Athens. Also in this room there is marble satyr filling a cup, a Roman copy of the Praxitelean original, from Torre del Greco and presented by Ferdinand II. Two other important pieces are a head of Aristotle, again a Roman copy, and a herm of a bearded Dionysus.

We next enter the Roman sculpture room, which has a

priestess of Isis found at Taormina, a marble relief of Vestal Virgins, Mithras killing a bull, an *omphalos* and tripod with a serpent from Centùripe (a copy is in the British Museum), and a third century AD mosaic pavement from Lilybaeum. There is an outstanding bearded head, second century AD, from a villa at Partinico.

The second floor is in part devoted to prehistoric finds, especially from the island of Lèvanzo and the Addàura caves on Monte Pellegrino, including casts of the late Paleolithic groups of graffiti – Matisse-like ‘bird dancers’ and animals. There is also a splendid collection of Greek vases. The east gallery contains proto-Corinthian and Corinthian ceramics from Selinunte. The south gallery has a collection of Attic black-figures, notably a large krater depicting a dance of satyrs and maenads, and a lekythos of Herakles with the Cercopes. In the Salone della Ceramica Greca there are red-figure vases, some from Chiusi, and many of great beauty, including the departure of Triptolemus in a winged chariot, from Agrigento, Iphigenia taken to the sacrifice, from Selinunte, Herakles at Olympus, from Gela, a cup with Eros on a dolphin, a krater showing Phaon and Aphrodite, from Agrigento, and a hydra with the judgement of Paris. The Salone dei Mosaici has pavements mostly found in Piazza Vittoria, and including Orpheus with animals and birds (third century BC). In the north gallery there is a remarkably brightly coloured vase with a lid from Falcone (fourth century BC), and also a number of vases from Centùripe, interesting for the use of relief work and gilding (third–second centuries BC).

After leaving the Museum and crossing Via Roma we could walk down Via Cavour, which leads down to Palazzo Whitaker, now the Prefettura or police headquarters, in Venetian Gothic style and set back among palms. This was built in 1882 by an Englishman, Henry Christian, for Joshua Whitaker and his wife Effie, one of the three rival Mrs Whitakers who ruled British expatriates at that period.

Joshua or Joss and his brothers Joseph (Pip) and Robert (Bob) were the heirs to the Marsala wine business founded by their great-uncle Benjamin Ingham. The exotic-looking Effie was half Maltese and known in Palermo as Signora Whitaker Pappagallo, because she went about with a parrot on her shoulder. The palazzo was damaged by bombs but restored with additions in 1971.

At the end of Via Cavour is Piazza XIII Vittime, called thus to commemorate thirteen men shot here by the Bourbons on April 4 1860. In this same square there is a great jagged monument dedicated to victims of the Mafia. It is a rather desolate area, partly because of some excavations of Norman fortifications nearby, partly because of inferior rebuilding after the Second World War bombings. Ahead are the docks and to the right is the harbour, the Cala, visually improved by a confetti of small boats and yachts. Next to Piazza XIII Vittime is the deconsecrated San Giorgio dei Genovesi, usually kept locked, originally built in 1576–81 for the Genovese colony; its beautiful Renaissance interior is sometimes used for exhibitions, but its own pictures have been removed elsewhere. San Sebastiano, facing the docks, also usually locked, has a striking portal in the manner of Gagini, and contains stuccoes thought to be by Giacomo Serpotta.

Garibaldi enthusiasts will be interested to know that at No. 20 Via San Sebastiano a red marble staircase leads up to the *piano nobile*, where there is a delightful series of painted scenes of places associated with his victories, all in elaborate gilded frames. There is also a large allegorical picture of 'Victory'. Just before Palazzo Whitaker is an unmarked lane that leads into Via Bara. This is another area that was badly bombed. The fifteenth century Palazzo Branciforte, Via Bara No. 2, has been well restored and is the seat of the Lauro Chiazzese cultural foundation, which has done so much to encourage the restoration of the *centro storico* of Palermo and revive interest in the

city's history. Facing it in Vicolo Lampedusa is a bomb site which was once the **Palazzo Lampedusa**, nostalgically described by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, author of *The Leopard*, 'I loved it with utter abandon,' he wrote in his *Places of My Infancy*, and it was on April 5 1943 that 'bombs brought from beyond the Atlantic searched her out and destroyed her'. People say that Lampedusa was so dazed by the catastrophe that he walked eight miles to the house of a friend in Bagheria, arriving covered in dust and unrecognisable, only able to utter, 'My house has been bombed, it has been completely destroyed.' After that he was silent for three days.

Lampedusa also tells how he remembers looking from his mother's dressing-room towards the **Oratorio del Rosario di Santa Cita**, or Zita, renowned for its superb stuccoes by Giacomo Serpotta. This is a place strongly to be recommended. The loggia dates from the late 1550s, Serpotta's stuccoes – some of his earliest – from 1685–88. The miraculous translucency of his work is due to his applying ground marble dust to the stucco when wet. The walls swarm with *putti* in every conceivable attitude of fun and gaiety, hardly conducive one might think to meditation, though little reliefs of New Testament scenes are set into the walls to remind us of more serious matters. Allegorical figures represent Peace, Constancy and other virtues, two of the most striking being that of an elderly gently smiling woman representing Hebrew Law and another of a girl representing Fortitude, reminiscent of Joan of Arc. On the wall as you enter is a huge relief of the battle of Lepanto, depicted here because its victory was attributed to the Madonna of the Rosary; *putti* frolic above, and below are two of the best known of Serpotta's figures, boys seated on a mantelpiece next to trophies of war (but see the two naughty *putti* above with the eagle and the lion). The altarpiece is of the Madonna of the Rosary by Carlo Maratta (1702); lovely gilded balconies are on either side. The seats

along the walls are of ebony inlaid with mother-of-pearl flowers and birds. In his standard book on Sicilian Baroque Anthony Blunt has said that the stucco workers of Bavaria never produced anything so elegant as the work in this little oratory.

The church of **Santa Cita**, gravely damaged by bombs, has many sculptures by Antonello Gagini, dating from 1517–27. The church was founded in 1369 but rebuilt between 1586 and 1603. In a chapel to the left of the presbytery is the sarcophagus of Antonio Scirota (1527) by Antonello Gagini. The great triumphal arch in the apse is also by Gagini (1517). On the right of the presbytery the chapel of the Rosary has splendid polychrome marble work, with statues by Gioacchino Vitaliano. The ‘Beata Agnese’ is by Paladino. And opposite the church is Teatro Carlo Magno where there are evening puppet shows.

Across Via Squarcialupo is the Conservatorio di Musica, once the church of the Annunciation; the fine thirteenth century doorway remains. The enormous Palazzi Requesens di Pantelleria and Requesens-Niscemi, both begun in the sixteenth century, overlook Largo dei Cavalieri di Malta. One of Palermo’s smartest restaurants, I Grilli, is in part of the former (another restaurant off the tourist beat, Nabucco, is near San Domenico). In this otherwise slightly sombre setting is the church of **Santa Maria di Valverde**, built by Mariano Smiriglio (1633), with a magnificent portal of 1691 and a campanile of 1730. The interior, partly designed by Paolo Amato, is very grand indeed and has chapels with spiral columns. The main altar used to have one of Pietro Novelli’s most important paintings, ‘The Virgin of the Carmelo’, but this has been moved to the Diocesan Museum – just as well, as a fifteenth century picture of the same subject was stolen from here a few years back.

We next continue down Via Bambinai, the street of the doll-makers. The **Oratorio del Rosario di San Domenico**

is another marvellous building decorated by Giacomo Serpotta, but also famous for its painting of the Madonna of the Rosary by Van Dyck. The Oratory was built in the grand manner in 1578 by wealthy tradesmen and artisans. There are *putti* once more but the design of the stucco work is carefully worked in with the paintings of the Mysteries by Pietro Novelli, Matthias Stomer, Luca Giordano and others, and with the Van Dyck over the altar. The Oratory is also remarkable for Serpotta's beautiful allegorical statues of women, all magnificently attired and elegantly posed. 'Fortitude' reappears here with ostrich feather headgear and a breastplate.

The lizard, Serpotta's trademark, appears on the columns by this statue – Serpotta's name being similar to the Sicilian word for little serpent, *sirpuzza*. 'Liberality' has a delightfully enigmatic smile, in contrast to the seriousness of 'Wisdom'. According to Donald Garstang, in his monograph on Serpotta, the more opulent the adornments the greater the prestige of the figure. But it is Van Dyck's picture that dominates the room. He came to Palermo in 1624, but had to leave because of plague, finishing the painting at Genoa three years later.

The church of **San Domenico** faces on to a square cut short by Via Roma, which was opened up in 1906–9. In the centre of this square is the column of the Immacolata, surmounted by a Madonna by Giovanni Battista Ragusa. The original church of 1300 was rebuilt in 1640, onto which was added an exceedingly grand façade by Napoli in 1726, with columns, statues and campaniles. Tommaso Maria Napoli laid out the square, its dimensions spoilt now by Via Roma. It is said that he had to go to Vienna to seek permission from the Emperor Charles VI, who at the time was ruler of Sicily, in order to obtain special permission. It has also been assumed that whilst there he met and consulted the imperial architect Von Erlach, who gave him advice. The church is now a pantheon of famous

Sicilians. The interior is a Latin cross, and with its muted colours at first sight rather disappointing. But here is the tomb of the great Ruggero Settimo, who convened the Sicilian Parliament in this very building in 1848, and the sepulchres of the artist Pietro Novelli, the patriot Emerico Amari, the historian Michele Amari, and Giovanni Meli the poet. There are also monuments to Francesco Crispi and the Garibaldinian heroes Carini and Tüköry. The first chapel on the right has a remarkable funerary monument of Francesco di Villabianca by Leonardo Pennino (1892), including the emblem of the Trinacria. The second chapel has a painting of the Crucifixion by Paolo Fondulli (1573). The third has rich marble decorations with spiral columns, designed by Gaspare Guercio and Gaspare Serpotta (1665); there is also a Gagesque statue of St Joseph. The seventh has a painting of St Vincent Ferrer by Giuseppe Velasquez, and in the right transept there are paintings by Filippo Paladino. Also to the right of the choir there are a bas-relief by Antonello Gagini, a pretty Gagesque holy water stoup and a wooden crucifix by Giovanni Matinati (1509). The two Rococo organs date from 1781, and the choir stalls are also eighteenth century. Ruggero Settimo's tomb is on the left of the presbytery. The elaborately decorated left transept has a painting of the Madonna of the Rosary by Vincenzo da Pavia (1540). In the third chapel on the left is a statue of St Catherine by Antonello Gagini (1528).

Three sides of the fourteenth century cloisters remain. These have charm, and originally were part of the Dominican monastery. On the capitals is the coat of arms of the Chiaramonte, who financed the construction of the church. Here, too, there is a memorial to Ugo Foscolo, patriot and major poet, who died in 1827 and was buried at the church of St Nicholas at Chiswick in London; the tombstone remains but the bones are now at Santa Croce in Florence. Adjoining the cloisters is the Museum of the Risorgimento (open in the mornings on Mondays,

Wednesdays and Fridays), with a number of interesting portraits, statues, medals and mementoes of Garibaldi, Ruggero Settimo and others, and collections of memorabilia of Francesco Crispi and Giovanni Meli.

Smaller churches round here are still awaiting renovation from wartime damage. Via Meli, by the side of San Domenico, leads to Piazza Meli and thence to Piazza San Giacomo. Here we find the forlorn Santa Maria La Nuova (1554–82), in the late Catalan-Gothic style with a portal rather similar to that of Santa Maria della Catena (p. 62). The interior was decorated with Rococo stuccoes. Nearby is San Sebastiano with a portal in the Gagesque style. This too has stucco work, by Giacomo Serpotta, and much polychrome marble. The names of the streets in this area – such as Via Argenteria (silver makers) Via Materassai (mattress makers), Via Maccheronai (macaroni makers), Vicolo Tintori (dyers) – recall craftsmen and artisans of centuries past. In the medieval heart of it all, next to Piazza del Garrafello (from the Arab *gluiraf*, little spring of water) is the **Vuccirìa**, a colourful, noisy, thronged, casbah-like market with pile upon pile of the freshest vegetables and glossy fruit, succulent meat and iridescent fish, sliced tuna and piles of *calamari*, cheese, shoes, handbags – anything: the oldest market in Palermo and popular with first time visitors. Going there is indeed a most enjoyable experience, though it is a notorious place for muggings and pick-pockets. There is also scant respect here, unfortunately, for monuments of the past. The little fountain of the Genio (Spirit) of Palermo has been irretrievably vandalised.

In Via Argenteria, Santa Eulalia dei Catalani, fifteenth century in origin and once full of stuccoes and busts of Aragonese kings, has been stripped by thieves.

*San Francesco d'Assisi – Oratorio di San
Lorenzo – Palazzo Mirto – Piazza Marina
Santa Maria della Catena – Porta Felice
Puppet Museum – Palazzo Chiaramonte
Palazzo Abatellis – Palazzo Gangi*

San Francesco d'Assisi, east of Via Roma and south of Corso Vittorio Emanuele, is one of the great and most interesting churches of Palermo. Originally thirteenth century, it has a magnificent Gothic portal of 1302 with zigzag ornamentation and a rose window above. The interior was altered and decorated over the centuries, but in 1823 the church was shaken by an earthquake and in 1943 damaged by bombs. A radical reconstruction has involved the stripping away of Baroque stucco from the nave. On either side of the main entrance and along the nave, against the pillars, are ten allegorical statues, dating from 1723, by Giacomo Serpotta. Once more the statue of 'Fortitude' is among the most striking. 'Theology' has swirling draperies and a dove perched comically on her head. 'Modesty' (like 'Liberality' in San Domenico) has an expression just a bit priggish.

On each side of the nave are magnificent chapels. On the right as you enter the church there is a fine Renaissance doorway of 1465. The second chapel on the right has St George on horseback by Antonello Gagini (1526) with

medallions of six saints. The fourth chapel is Gothic (1396) with sarcophagi of the Omodei family, also a Madonna and Child from the Gagini workshop. The fifth has a beautiful Gothic arch and a Gaginesque lunette. In the apse on the right again is the gorgeous chapel of the Immacolata, all decorated with polychrome marble and with eight statues by Giovan Battista Ragusa. The sacristy has a huge Baroque wardrobe and a Gaginesque lavabo; leading from here are the cloisters, where there is the tomb of Domenico Basadone by Antonello Gagini.

Continuing on the left hand side of the church we reach the original entrance to the cloisters with a graceful marble portal. Near here is the tomb of Antonio Speciale, regarded as one of the masterpieces of Domenico Gagini (1463), restored by *Salvare Palermo*. The Mastrantonio chapel, fifth on the left from the main entrance, has a doorway in the Chiamonte style and frescoes by Novelli. The fourth, of the Vanni family, has a superb portal by Francesco Laurana and Pietro di Bonitate (1468), the earliest important Renaissance work in Sicily. The second chapel is dated at 1384, and contains the silver statue of the Immacolata (1647). The first chapel has a Madonna del Soccorso by Domenico Gagini and a portal of the Gagini school.

Opposite the church is the enormous Palazzo Cattolica attributed to Giacomo Amato with a double courtyard. The princely owner of this palazzo was a friend of Nelson and the Hamiltons, but unpopular in the city; like the Prince of Aci he was lynched and beheaded by a mob in the riots of 1820. Aci's head was put on display in the Quattro Canti.

On the left of San Francesco is the **Oratorio di San Lorenzo**, Giacomo Serpotta's masterpiece (1698–1710). We are presented as always with a joyous, riotous extravaganza of naked *putti*, but also with a series of beautiful full-length figures, male and female. 'Charity' is the best known, a smiling young woman giving her breast while

another child reaches up to her, his trousers falling down. Episodes in the lives of Saints Francis and Laurence are depicted in *teatrini*, literally little theatres, around the walls. The extraordinary versatility of expression and the movement of the bodies in Serpotta's work has often been remarked on and here it is unsurpassed. The scene of St Laurence's martyrdom on the grill is sobering, horrific, but again superb. Once this room was dominated by a great work of art, Caravaggio's *Nativity* (1609), perhaps his last work, but it was stolen in 1969 and has never been recovered. The benches are inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and have stucco legs designed by Serpotta and painted to simulate bronze.

Except on Sundays, the Oratory is open in the morning – or should be. If it is closed, the custodian might be traced in the nearly piazza.

Animals are blessed at San Francesco on October 4. Near the church is the Ristorante di Padre Scordato, to be recommended. It is run by the Padre and maladjusted persons. Via Merlo is to the right of the church. At No. 2 in this street is **Palazzo Mirto**, seventeenth century with eighteenth century additions, on an earlier structure. This was given, with its contents, by the sister of Prince Stefano Filangeri, the last of the line in this illustrious family, to the Sicilian *Regione*, and is open to the public, providing a splendid glimpse of aristocratic décor, some of it unchanged since the nineteenth century. The staircase is of red marble. The Salottino Cinese, with its scenes of Chinese life, lacquered furniture and porcelain are typical of the craze for chinoiserie in the eighteenth century; it also has a floor of leather. A *sala di ricevimento* or throne room has two large and beautiful tortoiseshell boxes. Some of the furniture in the palazzo is Empire. There are paintings by Breughel, Salvator Rosa and others, also tapestries, Murano and ancient glass, a collection of fans, Capodimonte and Meissen porcelain – reputedly five hundred pieces of the

latter. In the old days when there was a *fiesta* wine flowed from a fountain encrusted with shells in one of the court-yards.

Piazza Marina was once part of the harbour but silted up in Arab times. In the medieval period there were entertainments and joustings here, but later it was used for public executions by the Inquisition. (Other executions were at Piazza Sant'Erasmus in the Kalsa district.) By the end of the eighteenth century it had become a popular place for hotels, initially for the British. One of the earliest was run by a 'noisy troublesome' Frenchwoman, Madame de Montagne, wickedly so described by Patrick Brydone in 1773 in a book that became a best seller throughout Europe. '*Ah mon Dieu,*' he heard her mutter when she realized that he did not find her attractive, '*comme ces anglais sont sauvages.*' Cornelia Knight, companion of the Hamiltons, stayed at that hotel and complained of the 'groans and lamentations' all night from inmates in the old Vicaria prison across the way, where now the Neoclassic Palazzo delle Finanze stands on Corso Vittorio Emanuele; just opposite her room another prisoner stood at his grated window and played mournful tunes on his guitar.

In the piazza near here is the dilapidated and war-damaged Garraffo fountain (1698). This originally was in Via Argenteria Nuova by the Vuccivìa market but removed here in 1862. It was designed by Paolo Amato and built by Gioacchino Vitaliano.

There was an English Club in Piazza Marina in Nelson's time, and the Hotel d'Angleterre was popular with officers during the British occupation of Sicily. The future Cardinal Newman in 1833 stayed at Page's Hotel on the south side; this later became the Hotel de France, and as Palazzo San Onofrio the building still stands between the old Mint (Palazzo Zecca), and Palazzo Chiamonte (of which more later). Gladstone stayed at the Albion Hotel in 1838, on the east side of the piazza.

In 1863 the centre part of Piazza Marina was laid out as the Giardino Garibaldi by Giovanni Battista Basile, and planted with *figus magnoloides* trees, now enormous with branches like tentacles.

The part of Corso Vittorio Emanuele which runs between Piazza Marina and the Cala or harbour was and is sometimes still known either as the Càssaro Nuovo or the Càssaro Morto. When the street was laid out, part of the church of **Santa Maria di Porto Salvo** had to be rebuilt; it had been begun by Antonello Gagini in 1526 and finished by Antonio Scaglione. The façade is still very interesting in that typically Sicilian intermediary style of late Gothic and Renaissance. The name of Porto Salvo ('safe port') refers to the fact that it was built as a thanksgiving when a ship, carrying rich booty after a marauding expedition along the north coast of Africa, had reached Palermo safely following a storm. The interior of the church is also attractive, with three arched naves and some noteworthy pictures and sculptures, including a seventeenth century triptych, and a fifteenth century wooden crucifix.

The much photographed **Santa Marina della Catena**, a favourite place for weddings, was spared any such mutilation. Unfortunately it is only open for services, at 8 a.m., and on Sundays at midday, which makes it difficult for wandering around. The name of the church derives from the fact that a chain (*catena*) was put across the harbour at nights to protect it from pirates or other marauders. The building is attributed to Matteo Carnelivari, and has been dated around 1502, though built on a Norman site. Again there is that curious combination of styles. The graceful porch has three arches under which are three portals with bas-reliefs by Vincenzo Gagini. Augustus Hare, always disdaining Baroque 'excesses', was relieved to find the interior 'as pleasing as any in Palermo'; and that tribute certainly cannot be denied. The naves are divided by slender columns, fifteenth century capitals on

Gothic pedestals. The rib vaulting is Gothic. On the right is a fifteenth century fresco of the Madonna with four Gagini saints. In the left-hand nave there is an antique sarcophagus, and another of the sixteenth century.

Almost opposite, on the corner of Piazza Marina, is the church of San Giovanni dei Napolitani, begun in 1526, once the church of emigrants from Naples. It is more interesting inside than outside. If by some extraordinary chance entrance can be gained, there are stuccoes to be seen by Procopio Serpotta (1738) and frescoes by Giuseppe Salerno. In contrast, at the southern corner of the Piazza, there is the elegant façade of Santa Maria dei Miracoli, begun in 1547 and attributed to Fazio Gagini.

Porta Felice marks the end of the Càssaro, just as Porta Nuova by the Royal Palace marks its beginning. Bombs fell all round here, and Porta Felice suffered. Now it has been faithfully restored to its original majesty. It was begun in 1582 by the Viceroy Marcantonio Colonna, who named it after his wife Felice. No arch was built; this was so that the tall triumphal car or *vara*, eleven metres high, could pass through it at the *festino* of Santa Rosalia, who is affectionately known to Palermitans as their Santuzza. Each year there is a new and elaborately built *vara*, accompanied by musicians and fireworks and sometimes in the shape of a galleon or castle. The excitement is tremendous. There are processions, concerts and acrobats. Stalls sell sweets, pumpkin seeds, *fincioni* (water melons), chickpeas and *babbaluci* (snails). The five-day *festino* begins on July 15, the religious procession being on the last day. However September 4 is the Santuzza's birthday, when there is a procession to her shrine on Monte Pellegrino.

Beyond Porta Felice, on its most ornate side, decorated with royal eagles and basket-carrying ladies, traffic tears past along what was known as the Marina but is now called the Foro Italico. On the other side of the road an open space or park has recently been created, the Terrazza a

Mare: a great success, and indeed a relief, as before it was one of the visual sadnesses of Palermo. The Marina was once famous for its promenades, but after the war rubble was dumped here and the very necessary bypass created. Brydone in his usual way told scandalous stories about the 'curious pastime' of concerts being held in a sort of temple on the Marina, lasting until 2 a.m.: 'The better to favour pleasure and intrigue, there is an order that no person, of whatever quality, shall presume to carry a light with him.' Thus one circulated in utter darkness (unless there was a moon), and ladies to avoid being compromised usually wore masks.

Goethe stayed in Palazzo Benso, the first of a series of palaces and houses overlooking the Marina, at the beginning of Via Butera; nearly all these buildings were badly affected by bombing. The once hugely rich Princes of Trabia owned the next palace, Palazzo Butera, which has now been restored. It is worth trying to have a look at its saloons with their painted ceilings, let out for wedding receptions and the like. Lavish parties were given here during the *belle époque*; the German Kaiser was famously entertained on the terrace in 1905.

The Hotel Trinacria, opened in 1844, was at No. 24 Via Butera. Previously it was a theatre. With its superb view across the bay towards Monte Pellegrino, it soon became – in the words of Murray's *Handbook* – 'one of the most comfortable and best regulated hotels south of the Alps'. In *The Leopard* the old prince is made to die in the hotel during the heat of July, above the 'metallic sea'. And in 1860 Consul Goodwin, when Garibaldi was nearing Palermo, flashed signals from the hotel's windows to Admiral Mundy's squadron.

It must have been an extraordinary sight out there in 1860, in the shimmering heat and with such a great concourse of warships and merchant vessels on which many British and American civilians and other foreigners

had taken refuge. Wounded Garibaldini soldiers were later carried to the hotel, some to die. Colonel John Dunne, of the volunteer 'English Regiment' (he was Irish) and 'Garibaldi's Englishman', Colonel Peard (he was Cornish), lived in it during the exciting times that followed. The hotel closed in 1911.

The next building in Via Butera had been owned by the Lampedusas, and the author of *The Leopard* returned to live in part of it at the end of his life. This too was bombed, but has been superbly restored to perhaps more than its former glory by Lampedusa's heir, Gioacchino Lanza Tomasi. The author of this book paid a visit to Lampedusa's widow when the *palazzo* was in a much sorrier state than it is now. On a very hot afternoon he was ushered into her presence by an aged retainer. The room was shuttered, and the princess was all in black with a black bandeau low on her forehead. Candles added to the heat of the room. Speaking in her guttural voice (she was half Latvian-German in origin) she offered him much vodka and several melting chocolates, all of which she had made herself. ...

At the southernmost end of Via Butera was another Palazzo Cattolica (p. 80), in the garden of which was the Casina Vega where Nelson and the Hamiltons stayed briefly on their arrival in 1799.

Recently a walk below this range of buildings, along the wall above the Foro Italico, has been reopened. This is the Mura delle Cattive, so called because 'captive' widows in mourning walked there, enviously watching or imagining the goings on below.

At Via Butera No. 1 there is the **Museo delle Marionette**, with the largest collection of puppets in the world, some from the Far East, and also including a Punch and Judy. *Pupi*, puppets, are so much a part of Sicilian folklore, that it would be a shame, as I have already suggested, to leave Sicily without having seen a performance either here (on Sundays and on certain special occasions) or in one of the

numerous puppet theatres in Palermo. Though developed in the nineteenth century, the origins go back to the days of chivalry, derived from Spain, and we are treated to episodes in the fantastic world of Orlando and Rinaldo battling against cruel Saracens, Charlemagne and his paladins, the beautiful Angelica, and the traitor Garo. These stylised scenes, in their gaudy colours are usually adapted so as to be relevant to the world today, its hopes and fears, successes and failures, but whether that was meant to be the case in April 1908 when G. M. Trevelyan saw a puppet show is a debatable one. 'The Pope is put in prison,' he wrote in a description to his parents, 'but gets himself released by the Devil, who continually stands on his head for you. Next scene Orlando is found a captive to the Saracens and is about to be put to death when the Pope with the Devil's aid turns up in fumes of sulphur and the Saracens flee. The released Orlando so far from being grateful is angry with the Pope, who bursts into tears ...' Heroic scenes based on the exploits of Orlando are also painted on *carrozzini*, carts drawn by fantastically beplumed horses, but these carts are now mostly seen on festive occasions or have been broken up for antique shops and museums. (Could the violence of the painted scenes and the imagery of the puppets somehow be symbolic of that age-long Sicilian attitude towards oppression? It seems very likely.)

The dominating building in Piazza Marina is **Palazzo Chiaramonte**, also known as the Steri, from the Latin *hosterium*, a massive example of medieval fortified architecture, still showing some Islamic influence. The Chiaramonte were the most powerful family in the economic and political life of their time. Manfredi Chiaramonte I laid the foundation stone of the Steri in 1307, but work continued until 1380. The end of the family's influence came in 1392, when King Martino I of Aragon had Andrea Chiaramonte beheaded in front of the palazzo. The king then himself moved in. There is a romantic story, reminiscent of

Washington Irving's *Tales of the Alhambra*, concerning Martino's widow Queen Bianca, who was so terrified by the passion of her admirer Bernardo Cabrera that she had to flee in her nightgown to Sòlanto.

Later the palazzo became the seat of the Spanish vice-roys. After a rebellion of 1523 cages were hung outside the Steri with the skulls of rebels. Then from 1605 to 1782 the Inquisition took over, confirming the place's reputation as one of dread and horror. Sciascia's *Death of an Inquisitor* includes transcripts of some of the pathetic graffiti still to be seen on the walls of some cells. From 1799 until 1972 it was occupied by the Tribunali or Law Courts. Now, in spite of the place 'breathing diabolical cruelty', it is the headquarters of the University Rector. The decorations of the arcaded courtyard gave rise to what is known as the *chiaramontane* style. An external staircase leads to the great *salone* with a most interesting painted wooden ceiling of 1377–80, depicting scenes from Tristan and Iseult, the Trojan War, and the Bible. The loggia has beautiful spiral columns and chevron-moulded windows. To the right of the courtyard is the plain façade, but with a good marble portal, of San Antonio Abate, also built by the Chiaramonte, and with frescoes inside. An attempt can be made to see the *salone*, the torture room and the prisons by applying at the *portone* or porter's lodge, but permission is unlikely to be given without some previous professorial authority. In the *portone* there are three Arab columns.

On the south side of Piazza Marina at No. 46 is the very grand Palazzo Galletti, nineteenth century but with traces of the fifteenth century original in the courtyard. No. 51 is Palazzo Notarbartolo, eighteenth century, with telamons and a massive carved wooden door.

Via Quattro Aprile near here brings us to Palazzo Palagonia, on the corner of the lengthy Via Alloro, once lined with grand palaces but many still in ruins from the war. Nelson and the Hamiltons, according to some

biographers, lived at Palazzo Palagonia but tradition in Palermo insists that they moved to Palazzo De Gregorio near the old Mole.

Almost opposite is the church of La Gancia, otherwise known as Santa Maria degli Angeli, especially revered because in the neighbouring convent the heroic Francesco Riso rang the bells on April 4 1860 (hence Via Quattro Aprile) to call the city to rebel against the Bourbons. The Bourbons attacked, and Riso was mortally wounded. Thirteen of his companions were captured and executed in the square now called Piazza XIII Vittime. Two others remained hidden for five days in the crypt of the church; eventually, climbing on a pile of desiccated corpses, they managed to escape through a hole into the street, still to be seen on the left of the church – *la buca della salvezza*, the escape hole.

Originally there was a hospital for sick Franciscan monks on this site, nicknamed La Gancia, and this name has stuck. The present church is seventeenth century; but some fifteenth century features remain, including the Gothic portal. The interior was transformed in the seventeenth century. The elaborate organ case with Baroque cartouches above the west door is dated 1620 and considered to have been the oldest in Palermo. In the second chapel on the right is the 'Madonna di Monserrato' with Saints Caterina and Agata, by Antonello da Palermo (1528) and a painting of the Holy Family by Novelli. The fourth chapel has a Madonna of the Gagini school. The pulpit is made of Gagini workshop fragments. To the right of the presbytery there are stuccoes by Giacomo Serpotta (in a poor state) and medallions by Antonello Gagini. On the pillars of the presbytery there are tondos of the Annunciation by Gagini. In the chapel to the left of the choir are more Serpotta stuccoes framing a picture of the 'Marriage of Virgin' by Vincenzo da Pavia. In the succeeding chapels on the left there are reliefs by Antonello Gagini and paint-

ings by Novelli and Vincenzo da Pavia, and also some very grand family tombs.

Adjoining La Gancia is **Palazzo Abatellis**, also known as Palazzo Patella, the Galleria Regionale della Sicilia, with paintings and sculptures, mainly fourteenth to seventeenth centuries, that used to be housed with the archaeological collection in the Regional Museum. It is open daily, but not in the afternoons on Mondays and Saturdays. The building, much damaged during the war and now restored, is by Matteo Carnelivari, that interesting architect who merged late Gothic and Renaissance forms in his work. It dates from 1490–95. Passing through the unusual doorway, rather heavy and carved as if woven with ropes, and into the elegant courtyard, turn left into the first room where there are some Arab relics and fifteenth century works of art, including a Madonna enthroned with the Baptist and St Benedict, from the workshop of Tommaso de Vigilia.

The second room, once the chapel, is dominated by the famous fresco, grim and unforgettable, and known as *The Triumph of Death*, mid-fifteenth century and originally in Palazzo Sclafani, (p. 29). The painter of this great masterpiece (recently restored) is unknown but thought to be of the school of Pisanello. Death the omnipotent on a ghostly horse – compared sometimes to the horse in Picasso's *Guernica* – rides across the picture shooting arrows at a group of happy young people; the successful and affluent have already been struck down. Meanwhile the old and ill, including two Popes, perhaps one an anti-Pope, and among whom are the painter and his assistant, beg for release from their suffering. By contrast, in the same room, there is an alabaster bas-relief of the crowning of the Virgin, Franco-Flemish, and a sarcophagus attributed to Laurana.

The third room has Hispano-Moresque lustre-ware plates from Manises and a huge two-handled vase with a wonderfully iridescent sheen, from Màlaga (the equivalent

at the Alhambra in Spain has only one handle). There is also a piece of Siculo-Arabic ceiling from the royal palace in Palermo. In the fourth room there is the second masterpiece of the Gallery: the bust of the swan-necked Eleonora of Aragon, with her famously unfathomable expression, by Francesco Laurana, his greatest work (c. 1471). This used to be in the abbey of Santa Maria del Bosco, north of Sciacca. There is also a beautiful head of a boy with gilded hair attributed to Domenico Gagini. In the next two rooms there are more works by Antonello and Domenico Gagini. Room 7 has a number of fourteenth and fifteenth century paintings, some from the mainland, and a Byzantine mosaic of the early fourteenth century.

On reaching the first floor, we turn left. The first room has a triptych of a Madonna enthroned with Saints Clara and Basile. The next, a large *salone*, has a number of works by Tommaso de Vigilia, one of the outstanding Palermitan painters of the late fifteenth century (1435–94). Then at last we come to Antonello da Messina's marvellous picture, *The Virgin of the Annunciation*, unexpectedly small perhaps but of supreme and grave gentleness; the hand is raised in surprise and gratitude, accepting the will of God. There is also another painting by Antonello, of Saints Gregory, Augustine and Jerome, and a Madonna by Marco Basaiti (c. 1500). The next room is the upper part of the old chapel and here one can look down on *The Triumph of Death*. This contains paintings by Riccardo Quartararo, late fifteenth century.

The next part of the collection contains Flemish paintings including the fourth major work of art in the Gallery: the 'Malvagna triptych', the Virgin and Child with Saints Catherine and Barbara by Mabuse (Jan Gossaert), dated 1510: Adam and Eve are depicted on the back. There are also two other triptychs of the Antwerp school. In the succeeding rooms there is, at the time of writing, a provisional selection from the many works of art of the

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which will be put on display with some Serpotta stuccoes when the Gallery is enlarged.

The church on the other side of Palazzo Abatellis, on Via Torremuzza is La Pietà, built 1678–84 and designed on a Roman model by Giacomo Amato. It has frescoes by Borremans and stuccoes by Giuseppe and Procopio Serpotta, a Pietà by Vincenzo da Pavia and some good ironwork. Via Torremuzza leads on to Santa Teresa and the gardens of Villa Giulia, but these will be described in the next section.

In recent years the Archivio Storico, the historic archives of Sicily, have been moved nearby, its entrance at Cortile della Gancia 2. If access is allowed, the sight of the storage racks is awe-inspiring. There are documents dating back to the eleventh century, some written in Arabic. Nearly opposite, in the Vicolo della Novo is the modest Parco Letterario for Lampedusa enthusiasts, and a bookshop.

The remainder of the Via Alloro, which leads towards Via Roma, was once fashionable but is now a little sad. At No. 58 there once stood the splendid eighteenth century Palazzo Bonagia, almost totally destroyed by bombing except for the magnificent Baroque staircase repaired thanks to *Salvare Palermo* and built on a Neapolitan model by Antonio Giganti. Open air concerts are held in the area below.

After Piazza Aragona we reach Piazza Croce dei Vespri, where graves of French people killed in the Vespers of 1282 used to be commemorated.

The large palace overlooking this last is **Palazzo Gangi** (sometimes called Ganci or Valguarnera-Gangi), c. 1780, to be seen only by special permission, which is difficult to obtain. A grand double staircase leads up to princely rooms *par excellence*, in particular the *Sala dei Specchi* with its double ceiling, Rococo mirrors and majolica floor, and the ballroom, with yellow damask walls and ormolu and

crystal chandeliers hanging from a painted ceiling, that Visconti used for the Ponteleone ball in his film of *The Leopard*. Here we must close our eyes and visualise Angelica in her crinoline waltzing under the painted gods with Don Fabrizio ... pyramids of iced cakes, lobsters, champagne, ices ... the ball ending at six in the morning.

Piazza Sant'Anna is a clothes market. The church of that name, next to a convent, is by Giovanni Biagio Amico, begun in 1726. The façade is dramatic with external statues. None of the paintings inside are of particular note, except some remnants of frescoes by Vito D'Anna. The church was very damaged during 'restorations' in 1823.

The adjoining convent building now houses the new Gallery of Modern Art transferred here from its original home behind the Politeama theatre (p. 84). It is closed on Mondays but on other days is open morning and afternoon. Most of the paintings are by Sicilians and Southern Italians, including Giuseppe Patania, Stefano Faja, Francesco Lo Jacono, Gino Severini, Giovanni Boldoni and Renato Guttuso. A famous bronze, *Gli Iracondi*, by Mario Rutelli is here, among other sculptures of the Art Nouveau period, and there is a realistic and horrifying painting of naked boy sulphur workers, *I Carusi*, by Onofrio Tomaselli.

*Gesù – Piazza Ballarò – Piazza del la
Rivoluzione – Palazzo Ajutamicristo
La Magione – Botanic Gardens
Villa Giulia – Santa Teresa*

This section takes in some fairly rough areas – parts of the Albergheria and Kalsa districts – but includes a number of important monuments. It ends with the Botanic Gardens and Villa Giulia (also known as the Flora), which could be the objects of a separate expedition, or combined with a visit to Palazzo Abatellis and Piazza Marina.

We start therefore at the church of **Gesù**, otherwise known as the Chiesa Casa Professa, south of Piazza Bologni. This was the first church built by the Jesuits after their arrival in Sicily in 1549. Begun in 1564, but consecrated in 1636, its interior is still regarded as one of the outstanding examples of Palermo Baroque, badly damaged though it was by wartime bombing. As so often in Palermo one admires a sober façade of a church and then is stunned by the richness inside and the elaboration of polychrome marbles and stuccoes. In this case however restorations soon become apparent, especially the indifferent modern frescoes on the ceiling and the stained glass. Note the amusing *putto* playing with a lion by Gioacchino Vitaliano near the entrance, and the *trompe l'oeil* altar panel to the right of the presbytery; also paintings by Novelli and a Madonna di Tràpani of the Gagini school. The apse and the presbytery contain much of the exceedingly rich original decoration, especially sculpture by Gioacchino Vitaliano (late seventeenth century). See also the fantastic doorway

of inlaid marbles and stucco at the entrance to the chapel of the 'Japanese martyrs', and in the Sacristy the five eighteenth century inlaid wardrobes.

The elegant cloisters at the back (access problematical) lead to what was the Jesuits' Casa Professa and is now the Biblioteca Comunale, founded in 1760 and transferred here after the expulsion of the Jesuits. The principal entrance to the library is however in Piazzetta Brunaccini. There are about 300,000 volumes in the library, as well as thousands of priceless manuscripts and incunabula, including the original score of Bellini's *I Puritani*.

A little further on, to the west, is **Piazza Ballarò**, another market, noisy and thriving, of medieval origin – though there is said to have been a market here in Muslim times (the name Ballarò comes from the Arab *Segeballaraht*). *Panelli*, oil-cakes, are a speciality here. This is an area popular with African and Indian immigrants, and where spicy foods are on sale. We must turn right down Via della Mosche (Street of the Flies) for the site (only) of the house in which Cagliostro (Giuseppe Balsamo) was born in 1743. Goethe was fascinated by this place and wrote at length in his *Italian Journey* about that romantic scamp who was then still alive and had not yet been arrested. Famed for his love philtres and elixirs, Cagliostro had a great success in London where he founded a new sort of Freemasonry according to the 'Egyptian rite'. His career of double crossing caught him up over the renowned diamond necklace trick played upon Marie-Antoinette in 1785. He was put to death by the Inquisition on August 27 1795. A plaque tells us: 'As an heretic, excommunicated, impenitent sinner, he was denied burial according to the ecclesiastical rite.'

The church of the Carmine, at the end of Via Ballarò is by Vincenzo La Barbera and Mariano Smiriglio, and has an unusual dome of coloured majolica adorned with telamons and pillars dated 1681, restored in 1814. In the

first chapel on the right there is a painting of San Andrea Corsini by Pietro Novelli, and in the fourth there is a statue of Santa Caterina by Antonello Gagini (1521). Two altars have huge spiral columns, elaborately carved with miniature Biblical scenes and creepers, and stuccoes by Giuseppe and Giacomo Serpotta (1683–4). And in the sacristy there is a fourteenth century wooden crucifix.

Via Albergheria, with little courtyards and alleys running off it, is to the west. The word Albergheria has nothing to do with hotels and is again an Arab derivation, from Albargeriat. The continuation to the south is Via del Bosco, where there are remains of many grand palaces, including the sixteenth century Palazzo Bosco at No. 25 and the Mannerist Palazzo Gravina at No. 2.

Palazzo Comitini, now the seat of the Provincial Administration, is on the corner at Via Maqueda. Dated 1766–71, it is by Nicolò Palma, but with some inferior 1930s alterations. It contains some well preserved state rooms with, especially, frescoes by Gioacchino Martorana, also marble floors and Murano chandeliers. Opposite is Palazzo Santa Croce (1751), once one of the most majestic of the Baroque palaces in Palermo, and again with frescoes and a majolica floor. Fulco Verdura in his *The Happy Summer Days* remembers its twin staircases and ‘lugubrious, very high-ceilinged rooms’. Worth trying to get in.

To the north along Via Maqueda are the churches of Sant’Orsola, with a Mannerist façade, stuccoes by Giacomo Serpotta and paintings by Novelli and Salerno, and San Nicolò da Tolentino, begun in 1603 but altered later after earthquakes. This last is on the site of a synagogue – commemorated by the name of Piazza Mesquita to its rear. It has a fifteenth century font and paintings by Novelli.

To the south, we have the somewhat plain façade of the Assunta (1625), with some rich Baroque decoration inside. The little SS Pietro e Paolo opposite has Giacomo Serpotta stuccoes. Via Maqueda leads on past Palazzo

Filangeri, perhaps by Giacomo Amato, to Porta di Vicari, Neoclassic in design but marking the old entrance through the city walls.

From Palazzo Comitini we cross over Via Maqueda into Via Divisi, which is cut in half by Via Roma. We then proceed to **Piazza della Rivoluzione**, anciently – at least as far back as 1291 – known as the Fieravecchia (old fair) and a crucial spot in the history of nineteenth century Palermo. In this centre of medieval arteries there began the revolution not only of 1820 but of 1848, ‘the spark that lit the European conflagration of that year’ in the words of G. M. Trevelyan. It was also the scene of Garibaldi’s first triumphant halt in Palermo on May 27 1860.

Again to quote Trevelyan: ‘Here, then, in the Fieravecchia, at about four in the morning, Garibaldi first drew rein, and began at once to organize the occupation of the city. Around him, as he sat giving his orders, swayed a crowd of unarmed Palermitans, so dense that there was no room to move, all in the wildest excitement, struggling to get near and kiss the hand or knee of the massive horseman, and yelling [in dialect] like maniacs “*Viva la Talia [Italia] e Garibaldi amicu [friend]*.” In the midst of all this Garibaldi embraced Bixio [his general], pointing him out to the ecstatic gratitude of the populace, as the hero of the day. Bixio was at the moment near fainting with pain and loss of blood, for he had just cut out with his own Spartan hands the bullet he had received in his breast at the Porta Termini.’ Nino Bixio will briefly reappear in this guide, when dealing with the Nelson estates at Bronte (p. 395).

Garibaldi and his men had advanced along what is now known as Via Garibaldi, whose continuation to the south is Corso dei Mille. Many plaques, some occasionally obscured by washing hung out to dry, commemorate their deeds of valour. In the middle of the piazza is a fountain with at its centre a familiar emblem, the Genio di Palermo,

an old man with a crown holding a serpent, representing the city feeding its foreign conquerors – removed in 1849 by the Bourbons as being seditious, but afterwards replaced. Originally there was another fountain in this spot representing Ceres, in classical times the patron goddess of Sicily.

The large palace on the square is Palazzo Scavuzzo-Trigona, where lived the unfortunate contessa Giulia Trigona, aunt of the author Lampedusa and victim in 1911 of an atrocious *crime passionelle* – merely because, according to Mrs Tina Whitaker in her acerbic diary, she happened to be ‘one of these eminently frivolous and inconsequential beings who are bound to bring their men ruin and despair’: a *belle époque* scandal very different to the heroic days of Garibaldi and the Thousand.

On the left of Via Garibaldi is the massive **Palazzo Ajutamicristo** (1490–5), like Palazzo Abatellis designed by Matteo Carnelivari. Among the famous people who stayed here were the Emperor Charles V on his way back from Tunisia and Queen Giovanna of Naples. There is something endearing about this old place, with its late Catalan-Gothic façade. For a better idea of its past glories enter a ramshackle courtyard at No. 23, and turn left; we are then confronted by a fine portico, with a beautiful loggia supported on delicate arches, and with crenellation above.

Via Magione leads to the church of **La Magione**, in a garden of palms. Now we are in the Kalsa. The whole area was devastated by bombs, and the Magione was badly damaged. The church was originally built in 1191 by the aged Matteo d’Ajello, who had been Chancellor of William the Good, for the Cistercians, but soon after it was given by Henry VI to the Teutonic Knights as their *mansio*. Admirably repaired, in some places reconstructed, it has kept an air of dignity. The front has three arches with rusticated recesses, surmounted by five more and then three on

the tower above. The interior is bare with marble columns, but has some of its original painted ceiling. On the floor are memorial slabs of knights of the Order. Ask the sacristan for the key to the picturesque cloisters, which are earlier than those at Monreale and have some attractively carved capitals. In an adjoining chapel there is a fifteenth century fresco of the Crucifixion.

Matteo d'Ajello had also been Chancellor for Tancred, who had become king in the stormy period following the death of William II. No doubt the Magione, which he dedicated to the Trinity, was in part a thanks offering for his survival. For the old man suffered from gout, and his enemies claimed that to alleviate the pain for this and other ailments, he washed his feet in the blood of decapitated Muslim children (which does in fact seem to have been a possibility).

Piazza Magione, behind the church, is a desolate place, next to the equally dreary Piazza dello Spàsimo. Before the Second World War the Kalsa was densely populated, and its inhabitants felt themselves a tribe apart. In Muslim times the area was the seat of the Emir, hence *El Khalisa* meaning the select, or excellent.

At this stage some sightseers might prefer to return to Via Roma in search of sustenance or to find a taxi. Those who are more energetic could turn right along the long dusty thoroughfare of Via Lincoln, connecting the Central Station with the sea-front. Continuing eastwards, we reach after a while the Botanic Gardens, indeed well worth the effort, containing as they do one of the best collections of tropical and subtropical trees and plants in Europe. The gardens are only open in the mornings usually until midday, and this for some of us may well be a decisive factor in planning a day's itinerary.

The **Botanic Gardens** (Orto Botanico) were founded in 1785, and have an amazing variety of palms and exotics such as lotus, dracaenas, papyrus, strelitzias, yuccas, giant

bamboos, euphorbias, aloes, orchids, insect-eating and sensitive plants. There are also many aquatic plants. The first sector is based on the Linnaean system, the next is bio-ecological and geographical. After the Regina Carolina greenhouse on the right there is an experimental sector, followed by 'useful' plants, including cinnamon, coffee, sugar cane, cardamon, cotton and sisal. At the end there is a sector based on the Engler system.

The Gardens on their foundation were regarded as an outstanding symbol of the new science of agronomy. The original entrance, the so-called Gymnasium, is a somewhat severe building, a mélange of Doric and Egyptian that includes the Herbarium and the Library, but had a great influence on subsequent Palermitan architecture. It was designed by a Frenchman, Léon Dufourny, who had made a special preliminary visit to Agrigento (then known as Girgenti) in order to study the temples. The building includes a central domed hall with frescoes by Giuseppe Velasquez. The Calidarium and the Tepidarium on either side were designed by Venanzio Marvuglia. The statues on the roof, representing the four seasons, are by Gaspare Ferriolo. The two sphinxes were the gift of Ferdinand IV in 1795.

Villa Giulia comes next. This formal garden was laid out in 1777–78 by Nicolò Palma at the instigation of the Viceroy Marcantonio Colonna. Goethe on his visit to Palermo in 1787 loved it for its tranquillity; to him it was the 'most wonderful place on earth' and he would come here to read and write. According to Murray's *Handbook* of 1864 it was also the 'favourite lounge for idle Palermitans'. The palm trees are enormous. In the spring there is a delicious whiff of citrus blossom. Right in the centre of the gardens there is a fountain with an eighteenth century sundial. Grouped around it are four semi-Pompeian pavilions, designed in 1866 by Giuseppe Damiani Almeyda. Towards the sea is yet another fountain

of the Genio di Palermo, by Marabitti. Busts of illustrious Palermitans decorate the walks.

The once grand but now dilapidated Porta Reale (1784) opposite Villa Giulia leads into Via Cervello, on the right of which is another crumbled gateway, the Mannerist Porta dei Greci. This last has been incorporated in the odd-looking Palazzo Forcella, neo-Gothic (1832) and which for a while in recent years was a disco. The 'Casina' where Nelson and the Hamiltons stayed was near here.

In this part of the Kalsa one is usually advised to watch one's bags and valuables. The church of **Santa Teresa**, built by Giacomo Amato between 1686 and 1706, stands up grandly in such a mean area. The exterior was modelled on Santa Maria in Campitelli in Rome, completed a little while before. The interior is also very fine, Roman in style, with stuccoes by Giuseppe and Procopio Serpotta. Via Spàsimo leads to the shell of Santa Maria di Spàsimo, its reconstruction the symbol of the cultural regeneration of Palermo begun by Leoluca Orlando. The three naves open to the air are used for theatrical spectacles, concerts (classical and contemporary), art shows, films, with a pleasant garden at the back. Built originally in 1506 for the Olivetan order, it once contained Raphael's masterpiece, 'Christ bearing the Cross', also known as *Lo Spàsimo* [Agony] *di Sicilia*. It was given by a Spanish viceroy to Philip V of Spain and is now in the Prado of Madrid. In its long years of decay the church was variously used as a lazaretto, a storehouse for the Senate, a beggars' hospice, and a hospital for prostitutes.

If arriving at Villa Giulia and the Botanic Gardens by car, then a visit to outlying monuments east of Palermo including some important Arab-Norman buildings, might be contemplated – San Giovanni dei Lebbrosi, for instance, the Ponte dell'Ammiraglio, and Santo Spirito. These however will be described in a later section.

For many years a pair of lions lived in a cage at Villa

Palermo IV

Giulia. The female died, and the male called Ciccio grew very fat from eating rats. A common saying in Palermo used to be, 'Who do you think you are? The lion of Villa Giulia?'

Albergo delle Palme – Piazza Ruggero Settimo
Politeama – Viale della Libertà –
Fondazione Mormino
Villa Malfitano

Having explored much of the *centro storico* we turn to late nineteenth century and *belle époque* Palermo, when the city was being expanded northwards and Ernesto Basile made it a capital of the Art Nouveau or ‘Liberty’ style. This was the period dominated by the spectacularly rich and extravagant Florio family.

A starting point could be the **Albergo delle Palme** in Via Roma, which was enlarged into its present and almost unchanged *belle époque* magnificence by Basile in 1907. The original house, full square and plain, had been completed in about 1858 for the English tycoon Benjamin Ingham, and in those days had a garden around it. When Garibaldi was advancing on Palermo, Ingham and his Sicilian wife, the Duchess of Santa Rosalìa, had refused to be evacuated for safety to one of the British warships outside the harbour. It is said that after the fighting had begun the aged duchess, on spotting a Bourbon soldier cutting down one of her precious new palm trees for a barricade, had run out and banged him on the head with a bottle of marsala. After Ingham’s death the hotel was bought by the Ragusa family, the owners of the old Trinacria hotel overlooking the Marina.

Wagner completed *Parsifal* in the Hotel des Palmes, as it then was, on January 14 1882, and his rooms (nos. 24–6) can still be visited – maybe they still have that whiff of his

rose perfume that Maupassant noticed. Tina Whitaker used to sing for him, but was irritated by the way Cosima would throw different coloured veils over the Master according to his supposed moods. In one of these very rooms, in October 1957, there was a notorious meeting of top Mafia bosses, including Joe 'Bananas' and 'Lucky' Luciano. It was then that the Mafia decided to switch to drugs.

Opposite the Palmes is the English church, in yellow sandstone, rather incongruous architecturally, and designed by William Barber and Henry Christian – harking back to the days when there was a large British colony in Palermo. It was opened for worship in 1875, thanks to the energy of Colonel Henry Yule, best known as the author of *Hobson-Jobson*, the famous dictionary of Anglo-Indian slang. Inside the church are many memorials to the Whitaker, Ingham and Woodhouse families. (Note the 1930s frieze on the house next door.)

Between the Palmes and the port there are several inexpensive and pleasant trattorie, but the area otherwise is of little interest and certainly not improved by post-war rebuilding. The western end of Via Principe Belmonte, next to the Palermo, is closed to traffic and has several lively outdoor cafés – a nice place for a rest and watching passers-by. This leads to Via Ruggero Settimo, the main street for fashionable shops and known as *Il Salotto* (drawing-room) *di Palermo*, and which in turn opens into a vast square, swirling with traffic and with many palm trees in the centre, part of which (on the right) is Piazza Castelnuovo where the tourist office (APT) is to be found. Immediately on the left at the end of Via Ruggero Settimo is Basile's kiosk, the Chiosco Ribaudò (1916), a fantasy in his *floresale* mood, with recognisable Gothic and Oriental motifs.

This great area was the site of most of the Palermo exhibition of 1891–92, which had many pavilions designed by Basile. It is dominated by the Teatro Politeama Garibaldi

built between 1867 and 1874 by Giuseppe Damiani Almeyda in Neoclassic-Pompeian style, and surmounted by a bronze quadriga by Mario Rutelli. Until the reopening of the Teatro Massimo the Politeama was the main opera house and concert hall of Palermo. (A performance of *Cavalleria Rusticana* here was unforgettable for intense audience participation.)

The moment has perhaps come to comment on the fact that Palermo is the birthplace of the Scarlatti family – the singers Anna Maria and Tommaso, the violinist and composer Francesco, and their famous composer brother Alessandro Scarlatti (1660–1725).

In front of the Politeama is a statue of Ruggero Settimo, who was the head of the provisional government of Sicily in 1848. The pretty little bandstand in the square was the gift of William Whitaker, main heir of Benjamin Ingham, in the late 1860s. Whitaker lived in a villa, now replaced by a tall modern building, on the west side of Piazza Castelnuovo and had this bandstand built by Salvatore Yalenti in order to protect his view. Via Sant’Oliva leads into Piazza Sant’Oliva where at No. 50 (a *pensione*) elegant *floreale* ceilings can be seen. Beyond is the church of San Francesco di Paola (1594) with a portal containing three statues by Giacomo Gagini. Inside the richly decorated church are works by Vincenzo and Antonello Gagini, frescoes by Guiseppe Salerno and Vito d’Anna, and an organ by Francesco La Grassa (1859). In Piazza S. Francesco di Paola we have the sad sight of the once grand Villa Filippina (1775), which has a loggia on three sides and some scraps of frescoes by Vito D’Anna and Antonio Manno – it is now a cinema and playground.

Viale della Libertà, lined with plane trees, runs north from Piazza Ruggiero Settimo, begun in 1848. This is Palermo’s smart residential area and still has a few ‘Liberty’ buildings.

Presumably the word ‘Liberty’ for Art Nouveau in part

derives from the famous shop in London, but maybe it is also connected with Viale della Libertà. Ernesto Basile was very aware of Sicily's architectural traditions – hence his adaptation of fifteenth century motifs and his interest in Matteo Carnelivari's Palazzo Ajutamicristo etc. – and this makes his brand of Art Nouveau and that of his followers somewhat different to the rest of Europe's.

(There is a story that an eminent American historian was invited to Palermo to talk on Liberty. He arrived ready to expand on the glories of the Risorgimento, only to find that he was expected to speak about Art Nouveau ...)

Casa Lemos, Via Quintino Sella 77, on the right, is well worth pulling strings to see for its designs and furnishings by Basile and a painted ceiling by Salvatore Gregoriotti. Via XX Settembre runs parallel to Viale della Libertà, to its left; two 'Liberty' houses are Nos. 36 (by Vincenzo Dato, 1904) and 62 (Basile, 1901). Basile designed his own house, Villino Ida, in 1904 at Via Siracusa 15, which is visitable, being the Soprintendenza ai Monumenti per la Sicilia Occidentale. Further along we reach the Giardino Inglese, with grottoes and bridges over little lakes, not really very English: a 'romantic interpretation'. On the other side of the garden is Via Generale Dalla Chiesa, named after the general who was assassinated here with his wife by the Mafia in 1982. In this street there is an early example of Basile's style, Villa Chiaramonte-Bordonaro (1896). The house also contains a tremendous collection of pictures, majolica and furniture, which can only be seen with prior permission from the family, understandably not easy to get. Close by and near the port are the grim bastions of the Ucciardone prison, begun by Carlo Giachery in 1840 and where many notorious Mafiosi have been incarcerated (and still are). This place was also known as the New Vicaria. The name Ucciardone derives from the French *au champ d'echardons*, at the field of the thistles. There is in

fact a linear descent from the work of Giachery (died 1865) to G.B.F. Basile and Ernesto Basile.

South of the Ucciardone towards Piazza Ximenes and Via Domenico Scina is an area of small streets known as the Borgo Vecchio, where there is another market. Under the Bourbons it was given a degree of autonomy, being outside the walls. Shops and the market can stay open all day and all night, all week, and up to a point delinquents are exempt from police harassment – the people having their own laws.

Still further along Viale della Libertà, after Via Notarbartolo, at No. 52, is the eighteenth century Villa Zito, where is now the head office of the Banco di Sicilia with its own museum, the Fondazione Mormino, including important ancient Greek objects, many excavated on sites subsidized by the Bank, especially at Selinunte, but also at Himera and Soluntum; also coins from Greek to Bourbon times, ceramics from Sciacca, Caltagirone and San Stefano di Camastra, rare prints, a philatelic collection and a library of books about Sicily.

It is admittedly a long walk from Piazza Ruggero Settimo to the Fondazione Mormino. Via Dante, north of Piazza Castelnuovo is also long, and narrower. At No. 167 is Villa Malfitano, far more of a *palazzo* than a villa, built in 1889 by Ignazio Greco for Joseph (Pip) and Tina Whitaker, with a large garden and park: a fascinating period piece, quite different to most other *palazzi* in Palermo. A taxi would be advisable; but again check opening times. On the way up, at Piazza Virgilio, note on the right Villa Favalaro, built by G.B.F. Basile in 1889 and enlarged by his son Ernesto in 1914. No. 159 Via Dante is also Art Nouveau.

Large wrought iron gates and a lodge mark the entrance to Villa Malfitano. Tina (Caterina) Whitaker, half Sicilian, half Tuscan but born as she used to say ‘in exile’ in London, being the daughter of Risorgimento patriot refugees, was a diarist and writer, very socially ambitious and trained

as an opera singer. Her great moment in opera was when she sang with the tenor Tamagno at the Politeama. Pip Whitaker was an amateur archaeologist, ornithologist and botanist; it was he who discovered the Phoenician site at Motya (Mozia) and bought up the entire island. There were two daughters: Norina who, after being courted by practically every eligible bachelor in Sicily, in middle age married General Antonino di Giorgio, for a while Mussolini's war minister; and Delia, who was never married.

The park at Malfitano is of exceptional interest for its great variety of palms, many of them now over a hundred years old. It was laid out by Emil Kunzmann, from Alsace, who had already been responsible for creating the garden at another Whitaker house, Villa Sofia (now a hospital) near Monte Pellegrino. An aerial rooting *Ficus magnolioides* at Malfitano is so huge that reputedly it can shelter a thousand people. There are trees and palms brought from Tunisia, Sumatra, Chile and Australia, as well as a *Sequoia* and a *Thuja gigantea*. The many-headed *Yucca australis* came from Mexico, and the *Araucaria rulei* from New Caledonia. Papyrus grows in the fountain pool.

An enormous wistaria and climbing roses cover the garden side of the house, which as Tina put it was planned in 'Belgrave Square style', though in reality copied from the recently built Villa Favard on the Lungarno at Florence; it was completed in 1888. The interior is very much of the *belle époque* period, with early Art Nouveau elements, notably in the floral wall paintings by Rocco Lentini. The great ballroom is now used for concerts and conferences. Three superb sixteenth century Gobelin tapestries, depicting scenes from *The Aeneid*, came from the Palazzo Colonna at Rome. There are two drawing-rooms, one Louis XV in style, another Louis XVI, and a large conservatory, once full of canaries; also a billiard-room, an 'English baronial' dining-room, and a pretty garden room with frescoes by Ettore de Maria Bergler. Two prize objects in the

corridor with its Pompeian ceiling are cloisonné elephants from the summer palace at Peking, and upstairs there is a fine collection of seventeenth and eighteenth century Tràpani coral-work. Silver framed portraits of crowned heads who visited Malfitano are on display, and there is a rare eighteenth century harpsichord.

Tina died in 1957 aged nearly 99. Delia died in 1971 aged 86. She offered the house to the British government, but it was turned down. She therefore created the non-profit-making Fondazione Giuseppe Whitaker in memory of her father, 'to promote the study of Punic-Phoenician culture in the Mediterranean'. A sweet-natured woman, her presence is strongly felt at Malfitano by those who knew her, especially in the garden room where she loved to sit, stroking her ancient cat Pellegrina.

If on a visit to Malfitano a taxi has been kept waiting, the driver could be asked to pass the turreted Villino Florio at 38 Viale Regina Margherita, one of Ernesto Basile's masterpieces. More will be said about the Florios in the section that includes Villa Igiea (p. 104). Villino Caruso, privately owned, at 159 Via Dante is a fascinating example of later Palermitan Art Nouveau, especially the interior with painted leather walls. The architect was Filippo La Porta.

*Zisa – Cappuccini Catacombs – Cuba
Cubula*

The Zisa and the Cuba are two of the many country palaces built by the Norman Kings around Palermo in the immense park known as the Genoard to its west and south, and which according to the Arab traveller Ibn Giubayr ‘was like a necklace of pearls around the neck of a full-breasted maiden’. The Zisa should be visited first. Transport is needed for this excursion, although the Zisa is within walking distance of Villa Malfitano; indeed Via Whitaker runs part of the way between them. Brilliantly restored, it is a must for anyone interested in Norman-Arab architecture.

The **Zisa**, derived from *El Aziz* the magnificent, dates from about 1165–80. It was begun by William I who in his mid-forties had decided to concentrate less on his political interests, and more on his main passions, hunting and women. But he died in 1166, and his son completed the work. Arab architects were instructed to build a *solatium*, or place of pleasure, in the Islamic style, with accommodation for a harem. We are told that the result surpassed all other palaces in Italy for splendour. There were lakes, fishponds and gardens full of sweet-smelling plants and fruit trees. One must imagine a large lake in front, connected by a bridge, and with an island. For many centuries the Zisa went through years of neglect. In the eighteenth centuries it was occupied by the Sandoval family and drastically altered. Some repairs were made after the Second World War, but in 1971 part of the building fell down. Now at last, after arguments and criticisms, a full-scale reconstruction

has been made, surrounding buildings have been cleared away, and terraces and fountains created. Originally there was a large lake in front with an island and a bridge, but in its place there is a *peschiera* or fishpond. Now we really do have a glimpse of Xanadu.

The crenellation and the little towers are later than twelfth century, but the fine rhythmical design on the main front is typically Arab-Norman. There are two floors above the three arched doorways, the main one having a self-congratulatory inscription in Cufic extolling the beauty of the place and glory of the king. The greatest delight is the central hall with mosaics of peacocks and archers, vaults decorated with stalactites or *muqarnas*, and a central fountain. Water flowed beneath the imperial eagle and along the channel, out into a fishpond. The capitals of the columns have birds pecking at grapes. The frescoes are seventeenth century and used to be known as *I diavoli della Zisa*, the devils of the Zisa. Upstairs there are two floors with displays of Islamic relics, not all Sicilian, though there are fragments which do give an idea of past luxury. There are also photographs, some of the stalactite ceiling at the Palatine Chapel (p. 26). A useful model by the entrance shows the original structure. We are told that a series of ten rooms once ran northwards towards the chapel, which still exists beyond a wall as the sacristy of the church of Gesù Maria e Santo Stefano (usually closed). The Zisa is open daily, but not in the afternoon or on Sundays and holidays.

The building nearly opposite, on the east side, is what was once the Educatorio Norina Whitaker for orphans, now restored.

With a certain reluctance a visit can be suggested to the catacombs of the convent of the **Cappuccini**, as these are on the way to the Cuba. Take the Vicolo Zisa and turn right into Via Cipressi. The monks make a lot of money out of this macabre place, open mornings and afternoons,

though not on Sundays. Most visitors, having given in to morbid curiosity, leave vowing never to return. Nearly nine thousand corpses are exhibited here, mostly skeletal but some mummified – looking like dried stock-fish, Brydone said – and all dressed in the remnants of their best clothes and with labels for identification. They stand in rows, or sit, or are lying down, or placed in niches, arranged according to rank, sex and occupation. The catacombs were begun in 1599, but the exhibits date from the seventeenth century until 1881, when the system of drying out corpses was forbidden. Limbs that have dropped off have been made good with wire. Dry air was responsible for some mummification, but other bodies were embalmed. A glass coffin contains a more recent and horrid exhibit, a little girl named Rosalia Lombardo, who died in 1920 and lies there almost perfectly preserved.

‘C’est le carnaval de la mort,’ wrote Maupassant. *‘Quelle horreur!’* Perhaps if you had opted to end up here, the prospect of death might seem more comforting. After all, you could even choose your neighbours for the next world. Or, as Brydone suggested, you might like to try standing for a few hours in a chosen niche, to get used to the idea, and to teach yourself humility.

The convent itself dates from 1621. Its church has a medieval crucifix, and many funerary monuments, including an elaborately Baroque one of the Prince of Palagonia, grandfather of the creator of the famed monsters at Bagheria.

Via Pindemonte leads to Via Cuba but the entrance to the **Cuba** is at Corso Calatafimi No. 100, through the Tuköry barracks. It is best to check at the tourist office about opening times, in case of a hostile reception from soldiers on guard. Built in about 1180 by William the Good, more as a summer resort or for official occasions, it was the last of the Norman palaces. The main work on the cathedral at Monreale (p. 109) was by then coming to

a close, so William would have found Arab architects and builders becoming available.

The Cuba (from *Kubbeh*, meaning dome) was surrounded on three sides by the water of a lake, in the centre of which was a fountain. This explains why the main entrance now appears to be several feet above ground level – its arch may even have reached the top of the outside wall. Architecturally the exterior has grander and more interesting outer features than the much larger Zisa, with more arcading and blind ogival arches. Some of the epigraphs in Cufic script can still be seen around the top. One of them invites us to pause and admire this ‘illustrious dwelling of the most illustrious king on Earth, William the Second’. There would have been a dome (probably red) and no doubt with many *muqarnas* or stalactites inside – now only scraps remain. Dreary apartment blocks on the far side to the barracks create a certain gloom, not helped by knowing that the Emperor Henry VI used the Cuba as a torture house. Nevertheless in the fourteenth century it was still famous. Boccaccio in his sixth story of Book Five of the *Decameron* describes it as ‘sumptuous’. It was used as a hospital during plagues. In the eighteenth century Palermo expanded westwards, swamping what little remained of the surrounding park. The lake disappeared. The Bourbons used the building as a cavalry barracks. Some controversial restorations were done by Francesco Valenti in 1936, and at last more renovations began in 1989. The whole place cries out for more space, and some bold and unpopular decisions will have to be taken in order to achieve this.

Further along Corso Calatafimi, at No. 575, Via Arcoleo leads to Villa di Napoli where there is an orchard in which stands the **Cubula**, or little Cuba, a domed pavilion or kiosk, open on four sides, still charming in spite of yet more apartment blocks glowering down at it. Romantic artists such as H. Gally Knight, a contemporary of David Roberts, painted idyllic scenes of these Norman pleasure

palaces, and one of the best known shows ladies in traditional dress strumming guitars by a bubbling fountain in the centre of the Cubula. Alas ...

Villa Di Napoli is in fact part of another Norman building, the Cuba Soprana, though one would hardly think so in its crumbling state. It was much altered in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the conventional double staircase of the Baroque period leading up to the first floor. But some of the old Norman arches are still visible.

Villa Tasca is at the crossing point of the Corso Calatafimi and the Viale by-pass. It is one of the few princely villas outside Palermo in that area which have been in continuous occupation. Over the centuries each generation seems to have wanted to expunge the memory of the last, so that now Villa Tasca is mainly the equivalent of Victorian in style. The ashlar gateway on the Corso is a remnant of the seventeenth century, and there is a seventeenth century majolica pavement. The gardens, with araucarias and palms, a lake and a temple, are among the best in Palermo, but can only be seen by previous appointment. Wagner stayed at Villa Tasca, after finding the Hotel des Palmes too cold.

On the return journey down the Corso, nearing Piazza Indipendenza, we pass some large eighteenth century buildings. On the right at No. 86 is the Educandato Maria Adelaide (1738), once built to house discarded unmarried women of noble birth. Next to it is the church of San Francesco di Sales by Giuseppe Marvuglia, not open to the public. The fountain with its two dragons, the Fontana dei Draghi, by Mariano Smiriglio, dates from 1630. Opposite is the Albergo delle Povere, built in 1746–72 by Orazio Furetti at the behest of Charles III, once the site of the Gallery of Modern Art. The two courtyards are handsome and formal, with a church at the far end, typical of the last stages of Baroque architecture.

San Giovanni dei Lebbrosi
Ponte dell'Ammiraglio – Santo Spirito
Santa Maria di Gesù

Some or all of the places in this section could, as already mentioned, be combined with a visit to Villa Giulia and the Botanic Gardens, or with a day's excursion to Solunto and Bagheria. The church of **San Giovanni dei Lebbrosi** is the nearest to Villa Giulia and lies between the continuation of the Foro Italico and Corso dei Mille. This picturesque little building in a garden of palm trees is one of the oldest of the Norman churches, having been begun by Roger I in 1071. In 1150 it became a leper hospital, hence Lebbrosi (sometimes Lepprosi). Usually it is open both in the mornings and in the afternoons, except Sundays when it opens only in the mornings, though it may also be necessary to hunt for a custodian. The façade is simple with a red dome, and the campanile is modern. Inside, the unadorned basilica has three aisles, and at the east end there are three apses and a cupola. The site was once a Saracenic tower, and became a Norman stronghold before being turned into a church. There are some Saracenic remains in the garden.

Just off Corso dei Mille is the historic and well preserved (and restored) bridge known as **Ponte dell'Ammiraglio**, built in 1113 with seven arches by George of Antioch, Emir of Emirs and Admiral in Chief. The river Oreto which used to run under it has been diverted. At this place the first clash between Garibaldini and Bourbon troops took place on May 17 1860.

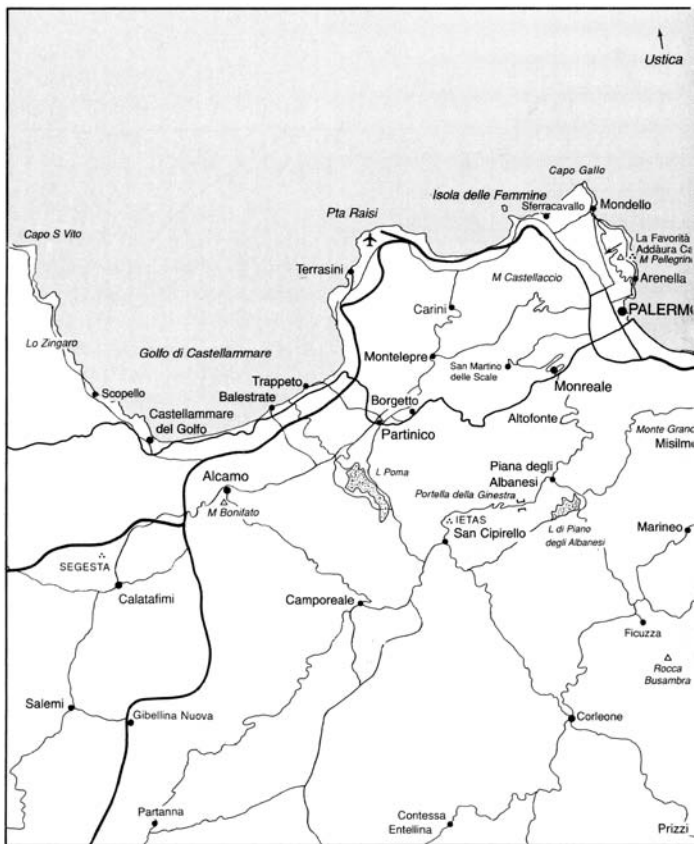
If we continue westwards, we come to Via Oreto. Driving back in the direction of Palermo, we must watch for Via Mendola on the left, which ends at Via del Vespro near the large cemetery of Sant'Orsola, founded in 1782 and with a wealth of funerary monuments and chapels up to the period of Art Nouveau. Among the flower stalls and marble masons' yards is the church of Santo Spirito or del Vespro. (These directions are as complicated to follow as they sound.) An easier route is from Corso Tuköry. Via del Vespro starts half way along the Corso at the double-arched Porta Santa Agata, possibly Norman; follow the signs for Policlinico Ospedale.

Santo Spirito was consecrated in 1179 and founded by Archbishop Walter Offamilio for the Cistercians. Now it is a bit of a mongrel, rather lacking in charm. The volcanic stones used for the arcading are however most attractive, as are the lattice windows. The Cistercians abhorred ornament, so the interior is suitably austere and grand. A basilica, it has three naves separated by pillars without capitals, and the large high presbytery has three apses. Some of the original ceiling decoration has been discovered. Behind the high altar is a painted wood crucifix of the sixteenth century, and there are sarcophagi of the same period on each side of the presbytery. If the church is closed, seek out the guardian of the cemetery for its key.

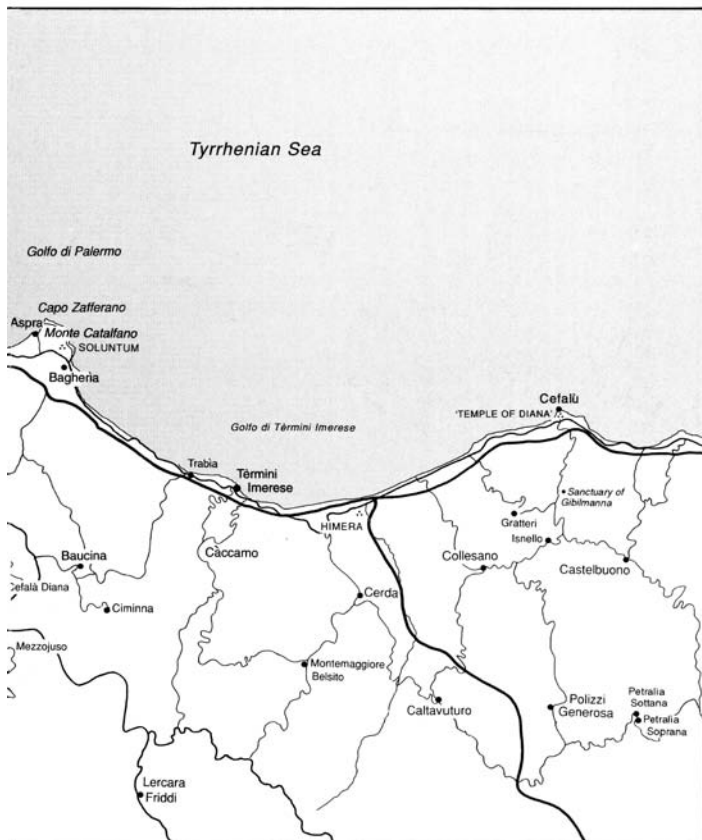
It was here that on Easter Tuesday March 3 1282 at the hour of the Vespers the famous revolt broke out against the hated Angevins. A Frenchman searched a pregnant Sicilian woman too intimately for weapons, and was stabbed to death by her husband. This brought about an explosion of popular fury and quickly led to a ferocious massacre of French throughout the island; Peter of Aragon was summoned to be the new king. But the war was to continue for twenty years.

By rights the Castello della Favara, or Maredolce, should be one of Palermo's most interesting sights, but instead

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Palermo VII



it is one of the most disappointing – tumbledown and surrounded by slums. It is reached by Via Brancaccio that runs into Via Giafar. Then we must find Via Conte Federico. The entrance to the Favara is in Vicolo Castellaccio on the left.

This once magnificent summer palace, extolled by poets and travellers, was constructed by Roger II soon after his coronation, it would seem on the site of another palace built by the Emir Giafar between 997 and 1019. It was used by all the Norman kings, and the Emperor Frederick II spent his childhood here with his hawks and thoroughbred horses, amazing his contemporaries at that early age with his wide knowledge and his air of majesty. The north-west façade, with typically Norman blind arches, is fairly well preserved. Unlike the cube shapes of the Zisa and the Cuba, the Favara consisted of low buildings around a courtyard. Roger II's chapel is in a surviving wing: two vaults, a little sanctuary and a cupola.

The Favara was Roger II's favourite resort in winter and during Lent, when he would eat the fish from the great lake of sweet water, the Maredolce – now all gone, as are the famous fountains, which a traveller described as 'liquid pearls'. In this area, near the ruins of the church of San Ciro, some fossil bones of animals have been found in the Grotta dei Giganti.

Further south, by the ring road and near the end of Via Loreto, is **Santa Maria di Gesù** beautifully situated at the foot of Monte Grifone. The view of the Conca d'Oro, and across to Monte Pellegrino, so often praised by travellers of the past, is now sadly spoiled by high rise buildings. This little church has associations with St Anthony of Padua who took refuge near here after a shipwreck. It was founded by the Franciscans in 1426, with an adjacent convent. The façade has a marble Renaissance portal with figures of the Apostles holding the Credo. Inside there is a single nave, with a richly carved sculpted arch. The tomb

of Antonio Alliata in the presbytery is by Domenico Gagini (1524) and there are some Gagesque reliefs. On the left of the nave are other sarcophagi; on the right there is a sixteenth century wooden Madonna.

The very attractive La Grua-Talamanca chapel outside has a Catalan-Gothic doorway, and some Spanish frescoes of the fifteenth century within. The cloisters of the convent are worth seeing. Capitals on the columns are interestingly varied. What is fascinating in these cloisters is the little wall fountain with majolica tiles and maiden-hair ferns. The terracotta figures in the centre represent monks carrying the body of Blessed Matteo Gallo, bishop of Agrigento, over Ponte dell'Ammiraglio on the night of January 8 1448. When the holy man died his body lay in San Francesco in Palermo. The monks of Santa Maria claimed that the bishop had always wanted to be buried at their church, so they secretly stole the body. However the monks of San Francesco soon found this out and went in hot pursuit. But they were driven back by a violent storm at Ponte dell'Ammiraglio. This was taken to be a sign of divine intervention, and the monks of Santa Maria were allowed to keep the body after all.

There has been some vandalising at Santa Maria in recent years, notably the theft of four lions that were on the rim of the seventeenth century fountain in the courtyard (note the impudent little *putti*). After the suppression of religious orders and the confiscation of property in 1866, the convent was taken over for a while by the military. Later, from 1881, Santa Maria became a fashionable burial place for the nobility. Some tombs in the old cemetery are designed by Ernesto Basile. The very grand sepulchre of the Florios is by Damiani Almeyda. Unfortunately the new cemetery, with its concrete paths, is no improvement to the view.

An easier way to reach Santa Maria is from Via Oreto. Turn right at the end on reaching the ring road, then left

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in Via S. Maria di Gesù. At Via S. Maria di Gesù 142 is Villa Trabìa Campofiorito, which has a crazy Rococo fountain, crumbling away, with sea-horses and barley sugar columns entwined with vines.

*La Favorita – Palazzina Cinese – Villas of the
Colli – Villa Igiea – Monte Pellegrino
Mondello*

The wealthy families of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had villas for the *villeggiatura* – holidays in the country, especially during the heat of summer – as well as their palaces in the city. Some of these villas were at Bagheria, but many were in the district known as the Piana dei Colli to the north, in the direction of Mondello. A few were grand and stately, but most were fairly modest, and all had attractive if not beautiful features, usually with gardens or parks around them. Now the majority are either in ruins or submerged in newly built up areas. Yet it is well worth seeking out the best or most famous.

When the royal family arrived from Naples in 1799 the king, Ferdinand IV, created a large park for hunting and agricultural experiments known as **La Favorita**, between the Colli and Monte Pellegrino. This mercifully has survived and is a beautiful bosky place, through which one can drive to Mondello. In the centre there is the Fountain of Hercules, modelled on the Farnese Hercules in the Naples museum, and on the way to Mondello we pass the recently restored Scuderie Regie, the royal stables, now an ecological station. At the main entrance to the Favorita, off what is now the Via Duca degli Abruzzi, Ferdinand and his neurotic queen, Maria Carolina, sister of Marie-Antoinette, built the little yellow and terracotta **Palazzina Cinese**, designed by Venanzio Marvuglia in the Chinese style. Over the last decades this has been shame-

fully neglected and the interior suffered from damp and thefts. Now at last it is being restored. Sometimes a permit to enter can be obtained from the Soprintendenza della Belle Arti, but an effort to see the exterior of this curious pagoda-like caprice, perfect in its way (and very different in conception to Brighton Pavilion), should be made even on a short visit to Palermo. Nelson and the Hamiltons were often here, and Nelson gave a collection of English prints, still in existence, though in bad condition. In October 1799 the king and queen gave a gorgeous Chinese fête in the Favorita, described by Lady Elgin who was one of the guests as 'really outdoing the Arabian Nights'.

Not all the interior of the Palazzina is chinoiserie. Several wall decorations are of scenes of Chinese life, but others are Pompeian or in the Louis XVI style, with furniture to match. There are wonderful *trompe l'oeil* effects too, and any amount of creatures such as peacocks, dragons and swans, painted by Vincenzo Riolo and Giuseppe Patania. The dining-room is (or was) a delight, the table having a special wooden contraption for bringing up dishes from the room below. The ballroom, the audience room and the bathroom are in the basement. The queen had her apartment on the top floor, with frescoes by herself and from which during the second royal exile she plotted and schemed against the British and their exasperated Envoy, Lord William Bentinck. The royal chapel, in Neoclassic style, is to the left of the Palazzina. To the right is the Ethnological Museum, founded by Giuseppe Pitrè, the renowned folklorist, in 1909. This has an important collection illustrating Sicilian customs, popular arts, puppets, painted carts, textiles and domestic artefacts, also a good library. There is also a model of a *vara* used during the *festino* of Santa Rosalia. The coach of the Lampedusas should not be missed, nor should relics of 'La Vecchia dell'Acete', the old woman who poisoned eighteen people with a mixture of vinegar and herbs.

Several aristocratic **villas** were grouped round the Palazzina Cinese. Villa Niscemi has been recently acquired by the *Comune* with some of its contents and its park. Not one of the best architecturally, but pre-eminently a family house, with – as Fulco Verdura wrote – a ‘warm, sympathetic charm of its own’, it also has a particular interest for readers of *The Leopard*, as being the inspiration for the house of ‘Tancredi’ (whose prototype was in fact Corrado Valguarnera, Verdura’s grandfather). The park is very well kept, full of exotic palms and shrubs. Villa Lampedusa in Via dei Quartieri, at the end of a long drive, once seemed in a state of irretrievable decay, but has been miraculously restored and is used for concerts. It dates from 1780 but the Lampedusas bought it in 1845. More modest than Villa Niscemi, it has the double stairway typical of many of the villas. The charming Villa Spina, opposite the Palazzina, is lived in and well preserved. It is early eighteenth century, and has contemporary frescoes, worth seeing.

Heading back towards Palermo on Viale del Fante we pass Villa Bordonaro, also lived in, a mixture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with Neoclassic features. Villa Castelnuovo has a pavilion designed in 1819 as an agricultural institute, formal but with good motifs in the Louis-Philippe style. Opposite the Stadio delle Palme is Villa Sofia, once a Whitaker house and now a hospital. Some trees and shrubs remain from its once magnificent park, laid out by Emil Kunzmann of Alsace (p. 87). A centre for society entertainments such as *tableaux vivants* and lively parties in the *belle époque*, Villa Sofia was redesigned for Robert and Maude Whitaker partly by an American relative, Beaumont Gardner, and partly by Ernesto Basile.

If we want to continue on this nostalgic journey, we could head for a group of villas in the area around Via Tommaso Natale, in the direction of the airport road: Villas Amari (1720) and Boncuore (1730), both interesting

but decayed; also Villa De Cordova (1750), on a larger scale with a fine double staircase, balustrades and bulbous wrought-iron balconies; the unfinished Villa Boscogrande, again with a double staircase, and frescoes inside.

Returning once more towards Palermo, Villa Resuttano is off Via Resuttana. This is on a sumptuous scale, early eighteenth century, still occupied and well worth attempting to get an invitation to see the interior. It has a marble stairway and a ballroom decorated with frescoes by Vito D'Anna and Gaspare Fumagalli (1762). The great park, which had pavilions, fountains etc., is however gone. Villa Airoidi, with a Neoclassic façade, is now on the edge of Palermo, on Via dei Leoni and used for offices. There are eighteenth century frescoes inside. Villa Ranchibile is off Via Libertà and dated 1830. It was built by Alessandro Emanuele Marvuglia, son of Venanzo Marvuglia, and interesting for its Louis-Philippe style adornments.

Villa Belmonte (1800) is in the Acquasanta region and by Venanzio Marvuglia. It is Palermo's most outstanding Neoclassical building and would be a pity to miss. This and Villa Ranchibile mark the end of the building of 'feudal' villas. Gutted of its furnishings and used for government offices, it is still magnificent, with its motifs reminiscent of Robert Adam and its colonnade and lions watching over the sea.

Below Villa Belmonte is **Villa Igiea**, one of the two grandest hotels in Sicily (the other being the San Domenico at Taormina) and high monument of Art Nouveau, although much altered in the 1930s and since the last world war. Ignazio Florio the younger, grandson of the founder of the family fortune, intended it as a T.B. sanatorium, and it was to be under the supervision of the eminent doctor Professor Cervello. But Cervello became alarmed by its grandeur. As he said, 'Not all T.B. patients are millionaires, and not all millionaires have T.B.' So in 1900 Florio got Ernesto Basile to convert it into a hotel,

and it soon became Palermo's most fashionable meeting place in the *belle époque*, attracting numerous crowned heads, grand dukes and operatic divas ('apache dances', performed here in the 1920s, were very much disapproved of by the set of Tina Whitaker).

The view is still superb, in spite of the annoyance of intervening cranes, derricks and piers. There is a ruined temple in the garden, perhaps put there by Admiral Sir Cecil Domville who previously owned the land. The terrace was used for the film *Death in Venice*, as was the original dining-room, with its sinuous 'Liberty' furniture and woodwork, designed by Ducrot and Basile, and with frescoes by Ettore de Maria Bergler of dreamy girls in diaphanous dresses, among irises, waterlilies and swans.

The Florios were in effect responsible for the nineteenth century industrialisation of Sicily. The elder Ignazio, Calabrian in origin, was an agent for Rothschilds. He and his son Vincenzo, befriended and encouraged by Benjamin Ingham, rapidly amassed phenomenal wealth in a multitude of activities, including banking, shipbuilding, transatlantic liners, tunny fisheries, armaments, iron foundries, ceramics, wine and much else. The later generation was wildly extravagant, a byword for elegance, partly thanks to the 'divine' Franca Florio, considered to be one of the loveliest women in Europe, and overspent themselves. With the coming of the motor car they instituted the Targa Florio, a cross country race over the Madonìa mountains. D'Annunzio, Boldini, Leoncavallo, Enrico Caruso, Robert de Montesquiou were in their circle. And Giulia Florio married Prince Trabìa, owner of the socially most important palazzo in Palermo, Palazzo Butera. The Trabìas at least managed to retain their wealth.

A Florio *tonnara*, tunny fish storehouse, is further along the coast at Arenella. In this last, next to the lighthouse is a small Neo-Gothic house where the last of the Florios, Vincenzo Florio junior and his wife Lucie Henry, another

outstanding beauty, lived in reduced circumstances. It was built by Carlo Giachery and is now partly a yacht club. Below on the beach there is a popular fish restaurant.

Behind Arenella is the Lungomare Cristoforo Colombo which runs round Monte Pellegrino to Mondello. On Sundays one must be prepared for tremendous traffic jams, caused by visits to the Ròtoli cemetery where a section is also allocated to the *cimitero degli inglesi*. Here are the graves of many of the once thriving foreign community, including Benjamin Ingham's. (The older Protestant cemetery within Palermo was disgracefully bulldozed to make way for Mafiosi tower blocks. I saw this happen and was assured that the 'bones had been saved'.)

At the end of the Lungomare, past the furthest point of Monte Pellegrino, is the way up to the Addaura caves with their Paleolithic graffiti of weird bird men, which can only be visited with prior permission from the Soprintendenza Archeologica, situated next to the Archaeological Museum in Palermo. Some of these drawings were found by accident; Americans during the war had stored bombs here, and one went off by mistake, its blast peeling off incrustations. In 1960 bones of a lion were discovered 700 metres inside one of the caves.

There has been much discussion about those bird men, all naked, who appear to be dancing round two recumbent victims, possibly about to be strangled, though they seem to have erections. The phallus of the chief dancer, his arms raised as if in exultation, is also visible. Is this some horrific magico-erotic ritual, a sacrifice, a punishment: the heart of darkness? Or are the 'victims' merely performing acrobatics, as some have suggested? There are other figures below, only one of whom is a woman – she is pregnant and carrying a large load. There are also animals, evidently unconnected with the main scene.

Everyone quotes Goethe on **Monte Pellegrino**: 'The most beautiful promontory in the world.' The pity is that

in 1932 a large hotel, the Castello Utveggiò, was built half way up it: a monstrous white elephant of a place, now an international business school. One of the roads to the top runs behind Villa Belmonte, and the best way to reach it from Palermo is past the Fiera del Mediterraneo site, and along Via Pietro Bonanno. There are many viewpoints, and the rock has a wonderful golden colour, with little vegetation except cacti and clumps of pines. A pleasant walk up the mountain starts at the Scuderie Regie, the royal stables in the Favorita park.

The ancient name of Monte Pellegrino was Heirkte. To the Arabs it was Gebel Grin. Here from 247–245 BC Hamilcar the Carthaginian held out during the Roman siege of Panormus. To modern Palermitans Monte Pellegrino is almost synonymous with their patron saint, Santa Rosalia, whose shrine 428 metres up the mountain was built in 1625, in front of the cavern where her bones were found (we draw a discreet veil over the verdict on their authenticity by the Victorian naturalist William Buckland). Goethe found the marble statue of the saint, by Gregorio Tedeseo, in its silver gilt mantle, so lifelike and lovely that he could hardly bear to tear himself away. There is a remarkable collection of votive offerings, and the water oozing down is thought to have miraculous properties.

Each year on September 4 there is a barefoot procession to the shrine. The road continues nearly to the summit of Monte Pellegrino where there is a colossal bronze statue of Santa Rosalia. Non-barefoot walkers can take the Scala Vecchia near Castello Utveggiò, and then continue from the convent by the shrine to the Semaforo at the top. Far away, over the swelling mass of mountains, is Etna.

The lido of **Mondello**, with its sandy beach and beautiful situation on a bay between Monte Pellegrino and Monte Gallo, is one of the smartest and best bathing resorts of Sicily. It was discovered by the élite of the *belle époque*, hence certain characteristic villas of the period and, above

all, the Kursaal in late *floreale* style (built by a Belgian tramways society). In spite of the crowds and new buildings Mondello still has great period charm. The grand folk live in the Valdesi area nearer Monte Pellegrino. The other end of the bay is packed with animated crowds at weekends and feast-days, and there are many good fish restaurants: an enjoyable evening's excursion from Palermo. Nearby is a prominent medieval watchtower. Travellers with their own transport might prefer to stay at Mondello rather than in Palermo.

A winding road climbs up Monte Pellegrino from Viale Regina Margherita. On the way to the shrine you get a good view of the Piana dei Colli and along the coast to Isola delle Femmine.

Monreale – San Martino delle Scale

The Cathedral of **Monreale**, on the slopes of Monte Caputo, some eight miles south-west of Palermo, was a wonder of the Middle Ages, and still is one of the great sights of Italy. The drive up, however, has not quite the enchantment of yesteryear. Once more we can quote Oscar Wilde after his visit in 1900: ‘The lemon-groves and orange-groves were so perfect that I became again a Pre-Raphaelite.’ There are indeed lemon-groves and orange-groves, and the occasional whiff of *zagara*, lemon blossom, but so much of the famous Conca d’Oro has been built over, and a motorway on stilts runs across it. Nevertheless the view from Monreale, 280 metres high, remains marvellous – across numerous smallholdings to stark blue-tinged mountains, and then to Palermo, and the always beautiful sea.

The legend is that in 1174 the young William II was guided by the Madonna in a dream to a hoard of treasure buried by his father, to be used for religious purposes, and that Monreale was the result. The reality is that the Cathedral, on a Benedictine foundation, was conceived as a curb to the ambitions of the Archbishop of Palermo, Walter Offamilio. The Abbot of Monreale (Mons Regalis) was in due course raised to the rank of Archbishop. Certainly the cost of the whole complex must have been enormous, and shows how wealthy was the ‘Kingdom in the Sun’, as John Julius Norwich so aptly called it. The result is the apotheosis of Norman architecture in Sicily, the *summa* of its fusion of Saracenic, Classical, Byzantine and Romanesque styles. The Benedictine convent’s foundation was laid in the year

of the King's dream, and by the time of his death fifteen years later, in 1189, nearly all was complete, including most of the Cathedral's 6340 square metres of mosaics, as well as the cloisters, the archbishop's palace and it would seem the royal palace, which also adjoined the Cathedral. The speed with which all this was done is amazing. Offamilio began his rival Cathedral in Palermo in 1184 vying in size with Monreale but, even taking into account the drastic alterations over the centuries, not comparable in splendour internally.

On arrival at Monreale we are immediately conscious of its cathedral city atmosphere. The front of the great building is massive and relatively plain, and as usual has been many times altered. One tower is still incomplete. Some interlacing arches, decorated with black lava, can still be seen at the west entrance above the eighteenth century portico designed by Ignazio Marabitti (who also designed the two fountains on the road from Palermo to Monreale). The northern side has another portico, by Giandomenico and Fazio Gagini, sons of the great Antonello. As in the case of Palermo Cathedral, the only more or less unspoilt piece of original architecture is the apsidal east end, with its wonderful interlacing blind arches, and including touches of red brick and lava from Etna, also some typically Arab motifs. Walking round the east end, we could take a glance at the few remains of the royal palace, at the north end of the Municipio.

The splendid bronze door at the west end is by Bonanno of Pisa (who built the Leaning Tower) and is signed and dated 1186. It has forty-two panels in relief of Biblical scenes and heraldic animals. The surrounding portal, alternate strips of carving and mosaic, must again have been made by Arab craftsmen. The door on the north side, by Barisanus of Trani, is smaller with a simpler frame in mosaic. This has twenty-eight panels, mainly of saints and evangelists. Norwich has pointed out that while the designs

of Barisanus are still those of Byzantium, Bonnanus was a 'westerner through and through', a forerunner of the typically Italian style that was to 'reach its apogee with Ghiberti two centuries later'.

The interior is incandescent with the gold of the mosaics; a vast illuminated missal it has been called. In fact the basic design of the Cathedral is simple, and it must also be admitted – compared with the Palatine Chapel and the Cathedral of Cefalù – that the impression is more of majesty and splendour than of mystery. Originally the light would have been more subdued, for in 1811 there was a terrible fire, involving the subsequent restoration of windows and some mosaics. The nave has eighteen columns, one of cipollino and the rest Roman granite – capitals showing Ceres and Persephone with cornucopias can even be seen. These columns support pointed arches in the Arab style. The roof of the nave is nineteenth century, paid for by Ludwig I of Bavaria after the fire.

Dominating all, beyond the triumphal arch, is the gigantic Christ Pantocrator, all-seeing and all-ruling, one hand in blessing, the other holding a book with the words 'I am the light of the world' in Latin and Greek. He is more awesome than the Christ of Cefalù, which is a masterpiece, but superb all the same. Below is the enthroned Virgin with the Child, and all are encircled by archangels, seraphim and apostles. Below again are saints. Next comes a surprise. Between Saints Sylvester and Lawrence is 'SCS THOMAS CANTUR', St Thomas à Becket no less, and completed only ten years after his murder – but then William II's father-in-law was Henry II of England.

It has often been pointed out that these figures have more freedom and ease in their design, and more imagination, than their predecessors in Sicily. Possibly Italian craftsmen were in some cases working from Byzantine designs, for there are noticeable variations in style. The best mosaics are at the east end, which was not so much

damaged by the fire. On each side of the apse are figures of Saints Peter and Paul with episodes from their lives. The sequence of Old Testament scenes begins on the lower south side of the nave, and some of these scenes are undeniably comic. Note Noah's family peering out of the windows of the overcrowded Ark, Noah helping a lion out onto Ararat, and Lot's wife turning into salt as skulls swirl in the Flames of Sodom. New Testament stories follow, some again amusing. Lazarus's body is already putrefying so that onlookers hold their noses. The man possessed has his feet in chains and is in a straightjacket. St Paul escapes from Damascus in a tiny basket. Then in the choir we have as a contrast the Passion of Christ. (There are coin-operated lights, which are essential for seeing these mosaics properly.)

The chapel to the right of the transept has the porphyry tomb of William I. Its canopy was destroyed in 1811. Next to it is the inappropriately small marble tomb of this magnificent building's founder, William II. It dates from 1575, and was also damaged. The original tomb was of brick. The story goes that the fatal fire of 1811 was started in a cupboard by a chorister. When he found he could not put it out, he simply shut the door and went home.

Near here is the chapel of St Benedict, dating from 1569, but decorated with eighteenth century marble and stucco work by Giovanni Marino. The white marble relief of the 'Glory of St Benedict' is by Marabitti. To the left of the choir are the tombs of Queen Margaret of Navarre, mother of William II, and her two other sons, Roger and Henry. All these were restored in 1846. Here too are buried the heart and intestines of Saint Louis of France, who died of plague in Tunis in 1270. A richly decorated entrance with bronze doors leads into the Chapel of the Crucifix, a Baroque fantasia of elaborate marble inlays, *putti*, etc. and with two fine twisted columns of red marble. Under the fifteenth century crucifix lies a statue of the archbishop

founder of the Chapel gazing into the eyes of Christ. The altar has an interesting frontal of pictorial marble inlay work. From this chapel we enter the treasury, which has many important and costly objects, encrusted with jewels, including a reliquary containing a Holy Thorn, the gift of Philip III of Spain.

The ascent to the roof is well worth while, not just for the panorama, but for getting an idea of the extent of the royal and archbishop's palaces (the latter being to the right), and of the original convent and cloisters, and the eighteenth century New Convent, now the Institute of Mosaic Art. The stairs to the roof are to the south of the main entrance. The entrance to the cloisters is in the square outside; visitors must be warned though, the cloisters will probably be closed in the afternoons and on Mondays.

The tranquil atmosphere of these famous cloisters, richly embellished though they are, is a contrast indeed to the blaze of the cathedral. The 228 slender columns supporting the arches of the arcades are in pairs; some are carved, some are gorgeously decorated with mosaics in geometrical patterns, some are plain. Once again the Arab influence is felt. Each of the capitals is different and beautifully carved. A few are of plants and flowers, but others depict narrative scenes such as the Flight into Egypt, knights in battle, monsters, or peasants collecting grapes. Particularly interesting is the double capital showing William II offering his church to the Virgin. In the south-west corner a fountain, with a shaft carved like the trunk of a palm, trickles away in a small pillared enclosure. For any visitor this is a favourite spot; almost one might be in the Alhambra. The south side of the cloisters is surmounted by the remains of the dormitory of the Benedictine convent.

There are other things to be seen in Monreale. The eighteenth century Municipio contains a terracotta Madonna with saints by Antonello Gagini and a seventeenth century painting of the Adoration of the Shepherds

by Matthias Stomer. The New Convent has paintings by Giuseppe Velasquez and Pietro Novelli, who was born at Monreale. Beyond, through a doorway, is the *belvedere*, with a sweeping view of the valley of the Oreto. There are also some Baroque churches, notably the Collegiata, which has an eighteenth century crucifix in majolica, stuccoes by Giacomo Serpotta (1723), large canvases by Marco Benefial and Matthias Stomer, and a much venerated wooden crucifix of the fifteenth century. The Chiesa del Monte and San Custrense have stuccoes of the school of Serpotta.

Far above Monreale, on the summit of Monte Caputo (766 metres), is Castellaccio, where William II built a hospice for sick monks, serving also as a fortified lookout point. The place fell into ruins and was restored in 1898. It then passed to the Club Alpino Siciliano. The view of course is magnificent. In Augustus Hare's day in order to get to Castellaccio you hired a donkey for three *lire*. Now a road branches off to it from the aptly named *strada panoramica* that winds from Monreale to the huge Benedictine abbey of **San Martino delle Scale**, buried among pine woods.

San Martino by tradition was founded by Gregory the Great. Destroyed by the Arabs in 820, it was rebuilt in 1346. Further changes were made over the centuries, culminating in a vast addition completed in 1770 by Venanzio Marvuglia. There are now some thirty monks and a few nuns. The main part of the abbey is a college for poor boys. The church – bare, cool and silent – was built between 1561 and 1595. It is remarkable for its great gold and white mid-seventeenth century organ, restored by Francesco La Grassa in the 1850s and for its choir stalls, mostly of the 1590s by the Neapolitans Nunzio Ferraro and Giovanbattista Vigilante; also for the font of 1497, depicting St Martin giving his cloak to a poor man, and a marble portal of the same period with panels representing the Mystery of Easter. There are paintings by Zoppo di

Gangi and Filippo Paladino (notably of St Martin), and a large picture of St Benedict in the presbytery by Novelli. The cloisters (1612) are in the monastic area and may be inaccessible. The fountain representing the river Oreto beneath the campanile is by Marabitti.

The most spectacular aspect of San Martino is Marvuglia's double staircase at the main entrance of the college. This whole complex – as at the Benedictine monastery at Catania – is a display of building on the grand scale, when an abbot could wield absolute feudal powers. At the foot of the staircase is a marble group of St Martin and the beggar by Marabitti, and the walls above are decorated in the Pompeian style. The fresco of Daniel in the lions' den on the ceiling of the refectory is by Novelli: an odd choice for a dining-room, one might think.

On Easter Monday there is a colourful *Festa di primavera* at San Martino, and there is another *fiesta* the third week in July.

Continuing towards Palermo we reach Baida, like San Martino delle Scale popular for the *villeggiatura*, country holidays. Here there was another Benedictine convent. The church still has its original Gothic archway with a Renaissance portal of 1507. The apse is fourteenth century, and there is a minor work by Antonello Gagini, a statue of John the Baptist. But over-restoration has spoiled the place.

Anyone searching for the once famed Palazzo dell'Uscibene, supposed to have been either a Norman royal hunting-lodge or a summer residence of the archbishops of Palermo, will be disappointed by what remains. The scanty ruins are in the modern hamlet of Altarello, near Baida. The area is still known as 'Parco', because Roger II used to hunt here. There are plans (badly needed) to tidy it up.

Bagheria – Soluntum

Any discerning traveller, when staying at Palermo, will want to visit **Bagheria**, chiefly to see Villa Palagonia, the ‘villa of the monsters’, described by Goethe, Brydone and many others since. The grandest country villas of the eighteenth century Palermitan nobility are, or were, to be seen around Bagheria. But the traveller must be prepared to be dismayed not only at their neglect but at the ugly post-war buildings that surround them, the product of rapacity and intimidation. For Bagheria, which Augustus Hare once called the Richmond of Palermo, has had a notorious Mafioso reputation.

It must be said at once that gallant efforts are at last being made to save some of the villas, and let us hope that this will include repairing Villa Palagonia, which although open to the public is privately owned. And the Mafia may, with luck, have decided by now that there is no more land left to ruin.

The way out of Palermo to Bagheria – and onwards to Cefalù – is just as depressing. It also tends to be confusing, as we wind through slums, and past a gypsy shanty town, after starting at the Foro Italico on the sea front. At the ‘village’ of Romagnolo watch out on the left for a quaint pseudo-Arab pavilion (‘Lo Stand’) built for the Florios by Ernesto Basile in 1906, recently restored but collapsing again. In due course we may also catch sight of the occasional crumbling gateway or an eighteenth century façade. At last, at the entrance to Bagheria, there appears the imposing vision of Villa Cattolica. with its double exterior staircase and concave front. Built in 1736, this has been

well restored and is now a gallery of modern art, most notably including a collection of early paintings by Renato Guttuso (1912–87), who was a native of Bagheria. Guttuso is buried below the villa; the grave is designed by Giacomo Manzù, in blue marble that picks up the colour of the sea beyond.

As we approach Bagheria along Corso Butera we pass the elaborately decorated Palazzo Inguaggiato, built out of the local gold-coloured stone and probably designed by Andrea Giganti in 1770. This road brings us to Piazza Vittorio Emanuele. The first princely villa to be built in Bagheria was by Giuseppe Branciforte, Villa Butera, as early as 1658. He had aspired to the throne of Sicily, but on being slapped down by the Spanish viceroy, retired to Bagheria, boldly inscribing on the villa the words '*O corte addio*', 'O court goodbye'. Other wealthy families followed suit, building villas in the neighbourhood. Villa Butera, rather austere, refaced in 1769, is at the end of Corso Butera. In what was once its park is the ruined so-called Certosa (Charterhouse), which contained waxworks of famous figures, including Nelson, in the garb of Carthusian monks. To the west of this villa in Via degli Oleandri is the Neo-classic Villa Villarosa, with a colonnaded front.

It must be said that since the Second World War Bagheria has suffered from the Mafia permeating the town council and involving shoddy and uncontrolled building. The entrance to Villa Palagonia is now from Piazza Garibaldi, a part of Bagheria which still retains some remnants of its eighteenth century atmosphere. Grotesque statues are on each side of the gateway, which in fact leads to the back of the house, through a dusty garden of palms, oleanders and pines. The famous monsters, of which some sixty survive, are on the surrounding walls – the creation of Prince Ferdinando of Palagonia, who died in 1789 and whose surreal Rococo imagination so horrified Goethe ('bad taste and folly of an eccentric mind') but amused

Brydone ('whimsical and fantastical'). Actually some of the figures are of musicians and warriors, or from mythology. When the prince was asked by Henry Swinburne what had been the inspiration for the monsters, he replied that it came from Diodorus's descriptions of creatures emerging from the slime of the River Nile's mud. If Goethe thought the figures hideous, what one wonders would he have thought of the cement blocks of flats that have risen all round Villa Palagonia? These monsters were designed to be seen against the open sky.

Architecturally the villa, built for the prince's grandfather in 1715 by Tommaso Maria Napoli, is interesting and attractive. Its main front has a dramatic double stairway that ascends to the *piano nobile*, splendidly ornamented and which curves out like welcoming arms. The entrance hall has frescoes depicting the labours of Hercules. Prince Ferdinando had a passion for coloured glass and marbles, alabaster and *trompe l'oeil*, and all this is to be seen in its glory in the magical ballroom. Around the room are portrait medallions, said to be of his family, bewigged and elaborately costumed. The ceiling is composed of bits of faceted mirrors, so as to multiply the reflections of people walking below, and swans, coral and shells are painted over some of the corners. According to writers such as Jean Houel, the prince had peculiar ideas for furniture. Columns and pyramids were made from Chinese teapots and bowls, chandeliers from drinking glasses stuck together. Chairs had uneven legs, and spikes for the unsuspecting were concealed under cushions. (One begins to sympathise with Goethe.) The prince also had a mania for collecting horns and antlers. Brydone joked that whereas pregnant women were afraid of visiting the villa for fear of giving birth to a monster, husbands were 'little satisfied with the great variety of horns'. Though spending huge sums on such fantasies, Prince Ferdinando – 'a miserable lean figure, shivering at a breeze' – could be

seen in Palermo begging for money to help prisoners taken by Barbary pirates.

Across Piazza Garibaldi is the handsome iron gateway to the huge and stately Villa Trabìa, white pilasters on a grey background, restored in 1890 and perhaps needing another face-lift. This is privately owned and not accessible, though much burgled. The statue in front, just visible among greenery, is by Marabitti. Next comes Villa Valguarnera, one of the largest and most beautiful of all the princely villas outside Palermo, white and saffron yellow, with fine furniture and interior decoration. It is also privately owned, by the Alliatas (descended in the fifteenth century from a Pisa banking family and now with literary connections), and unfortunately not visible from the street. Dating from 1721, on a hill with a panorama of the whole bay, it was designed like Villa Palagonia by Tommaso Maria Napoli, with a concave front and outside staircase, and has statues along its parapet by Ignazio Marabitti. The family has been restoring the building and may allow visitors by prior arrangement.

Villa Ramacca, 1740, with a single storey, and also with a panoramic view, is on the north side of Monte Catalfano and not far from Villa Cattolica. Villa Filangeri, originally seventeenth century, is now the Municipio of the village of Santa Flavia, a popular holiday resort, and with charm. Near the railway station is an early building by Ernesto Basile (1874). The ancient castle of Sòlanto, where Queen Bianca took refuge (p. 67), was refurbished at the end of the eighteenth century; Ferdinand IV and Maria Carolina were entertained there.

The remains of **Soluntum** (Solunto) are on the summit of Monte Catalfano (374 metres). Originally called Solus and founded c. 450 BC, it was according to Thucydides one of the three most important Punic cities, with Motya and Panormus, in western Sicily. An outpost against Himera, very likely the original site was seven kilometres to the

south-west at Cannito, and then moved to the mountain top after its destruction by Dionysius in 397 BC. Around 250 BC it was captured by the Romans and renamed Soluntum. By the third century AD it was abandoned, possibly voluntarily though it must have been a prosperous town. Excavations began in 1826, but there is still much to be uncovered. There is a small museum by the steep path. It is a place full of atmosphere, and there are lovely views. In certain seasons the ruins are almost buried in aromatic plants.

The excavations reveal a city laid out on a grid plan. The main street, Via dell'Agora, partially paved with bricks, has 'islands' of houses on each side, and narrow passages running down from the hillside to catch the rain-water. The six Doric columns that have been raised on Via Cavallaro, above on the left, mark the 'Ginnasio', in reality a Hellenistic-Roman house. On the street named Ipodamo di Mileto there is another large house known as the Casa di Leda, because of a wall-painting of Leda and the swan. Some shops are also to be seen on Via dell'Agora, and there are other houses with mosaic fragments and wall-paintings. The road leads into the Agora, beyond which is the theatre, which has 23 rows of seats and over eight hundred places, and a semi-circular building, possibly an Odeon or Bouleuterion, with a hundred places, for public meetings. Near here is a large public cistern. The collection of rainwater was all-important, there being no springs, and all the houses had their cisterns. A Roman villa with mosaics and wall-paintings has a superb view of Capo Zafferano jutting out below. On clear days you can see the Aeolian Islands and Etna.

There is good underwater swimming on this coastline, which has also seen many wrecks. Below Soluntum is the fishing village of Porticello, an excellent place for trying out the Palermitan speciality, *pasta alle sarde*, pasta with sardines. A spectacular road runs past orange groves

From Bagheria to Soluntum

and scenery of considerable geological interest to Capo Zafferano and Capo Mongerbino, where a great view of the Gulf of Palermo opens up. The village of Aspra is a little holiday resort and fishing village.

Tèrmini Imerese – Himera – Cefalù

A journey to Cefalù could be combined with a visit to Villa Palagonia at Bagheria. But Cefalù is far more important and rewarding than Bagheria, and should be a priority even on a brief visit to Sicily.

Tèrmini Imerese, anciently *Thermae Himerenses*, and the ruins of Himera could alternatively be combined with Cefalù. There are two picturesque castles on the coast road from Bagheria to Tèrmini, at San Nicola l’Arena where there is also a *tonnara*, and at Trabìa. The latter has a tower that was part of the original fortification and a bridge built in 1624. Tèrmini is in fact divided into two distinct parts, the upper town being on a promontory 70 metres above Tèrmini *bassa*, where there are thermal springs and the port. Inhabited in prehistoric times, it was populated in 408 bc with refugees from Himera after its sack by Hannibal. In 252 bc it was captured by the Romans, who built the Roman aqueduct, which can be seen on the right before entering the town. The small museum, near Piazza Vittorio Emanuele and opened in 1992, is well laid out with a variety of interesting objects found locally and at Himera, including Roman glass and lions’ head water-spouts. The art gallery is on the first floor, and has a beautiful Byzantine triptych; there is also a St Sebastian attributed to Solimena but possibly by Guido Reni. And there is a gruesome seventeenth century painting of the martyrdom of St Agatha by Vincenzo La Barbera.

The cathedral, reconstructed in the seventeenth century, has a modern front that incorporates four statues of saints dating from 1504–6. The inside has a definite air of pros-

perity. In the second chapel on the right there is a marble Madonna by Giorgio da Milano (1487) and in the fourth on the right there is the oval 'Vergine del Ponte' by Ignazio Marabitti, eighteenth century. The chapels on each side of the presbytery are richly decorated, that on the left having five reliefs by Marabitti and Federico Siragusa. The important wooden cross painted in 1484 by Pietro Ruzzolone has recently been moved to the high altar.

In Via Mazzini, near Piazza Umberto I, the Baroque Santa Maria della Misericordia has a fine triptych of the Madonna with Saints John the Baptist and Michael attributed to Gaspare da Pèsarò (1453). Nearby is the eighteenth century Chiesa Del Monte, now used for art displays and concerts. Near Piazza Liborio Arrigo the church of Santa Maria della Consolazione has stuccoes of the Serpotta school. Santa Maria di Gesù, built in 1472, the most interesting of the churches at Tèrmini, is in Piazza San Francesco d'Assisi and has two fifteenth century statues, by Giorgio da Milano and Antonello Gagini, also a contemporary fragment of a fresco. Local help will be needed for locating keys to any of these churches. The rather scanty and disappointing remains of the Roman amphitheatre, which had seats for 4,000 spectators, are to the north of the cathedral and near the public gardens.

A road winds down to the lower town. The Roman baths, their waters sometimes still in use, but usually not, are beneath the Grand Hotel delle Terme, which was built in the *belle époque* on a design by Giuseppe Damiani Almeyda. These same waters have mineral properties and are good for all sorts of unmentionable ailments, and were praised by Pindar. The fashionable motor race, Targa Florio, used to start at Cerda near here and continued into the Madonìe mountains; another reason for the hotel's popularity. This part of the town has a vibrant, very Sicilian atmosphere, and has *trattorie* where the famous macaroni (*maccheroni*) of Tèrmini can be sampled.

Càccamo and its enormous twelfth century castle (p. 500) are a few miles inland from Tèrmini. Along the coast from Termini *bassa* are acres of a derelict industrial area. Striking inland and passing under the *autostrada* at Buonfornello we reach Fiume Grande, otherwise known as Imera Settentrionale. The famous Doric Temple of Victory is on the left. A small road winds up on the right (easy to miss) to the **Himera** excavations and the museum. The original colony of Himera was founded in 648 BC by Zancle (Messina). By the next century there was considerable traffic with Spain, as testified by the discovery of coins. The lyric poet Stesichorus was born here. In 480 BC the invading Carthaginians under Hamilcar were defeated at Himera by the forces of Gelon of Syracuse and Theron of Akragas (Agrigento). The slaughter was tremendous, and Hamilcar either was killed or committed suicide. But at the end of the century the Carthaginians under Hannibal, Hamilcar's grandson, had their revenge, after first sacking Selinus (Selinunte). Thousands of the inhabitants were massacred, and their houses and the temple were razed.

The best view of the Temple of Victory, believed to have been built to celebrate the victory over the Carthaginians, is from the heights opposite. Only the lower parts of the columns survive, fourteen at the sides and six in front; the *pronaos* and the *opisthodomos* are also visible. The museum, in the 'brutal' style of 1970s architecture, is appropriate to the atmosphere of this place of terrible memories, and contains useful maps and plans. The many objects found in the excavations are well displayed. Particularly interesting are the pieces of sculpture from Temple B in the sacred area of the city. There are also votive statues and ceramics, and pieces recently found at Cefalù and Caltavuturo. A guide is needed for exploring the site of the devastated city and its three necropolises.

The view of **Cefalù** has not been too spoilt by 'Club Med' and other tourist complexes. The two towers of

Himera and Cefalù

the wonderful old cathedral stand high over the roofs of the town, and above is the great rock, the Rocca, which Lawrence Durrell has compared to a 'whale basking in the blueness'. Traces of Sikel occupation from the ninth century BC have been found in caves near here. To the Greeks Cefalù was known as Cephaloidion, from *cephale*, meaning headland. There was a cult dedicated to Hercules here, as coins have shown. The shepherd Daphnis, son of Hermes, and who was taught to play the pipes by Pan, was blinded by Juno for spurning her daughter and spent the rest of his life on the beach at Cefalù. The Romans took Cefalù in 254 BC. The Arabs besieged it twice in 838 and 858, and lost it to the Normans in 1063. This was the beginning of a period of splendour for the city. The legend is that the Cathedral was founded by Roger II in 1131 in gratitude for having landed in Sicily safely after a violent storm. But more probably he was creating it for a new bishopric, partly as a buffer between Palermo and its rival Messina, and partly as a gesture of defiance against Pope Innocent II.

Arriving at Piazza Garibaldi we see on the right the Church of Santa Maria della Catena, built in 1780 with a tufa façade and a pretty portico. This is on the site of one of the old gates into Cefalù, and some remains of the megalithic walls can be seen in the campanile. In this church bishops robed themselves before processing through the town. Further down the main street, Corso Ruggero, and on the left at the corner of Via Amendola is the Osterio Magno, traditionally the site of Roger's residence but actually built by the Ventimiglia family in the fourteenth century. There is a fine double-mullioned window. Beyond on the right is the church of the Purgatorio, once next to the oratory of the Brotherhood of the Dead whose task was to help the condemned to the scaffold and then embalm the bodies for display. Images of souls in torment adorn the pillars of the rich Baroque portal. Inside the church,

which has three naves, is the tomb of Barone Mandralisca, the great patron of Cefalù, by Salvatore Valenti. In the rectangular crypt there are some desiccated corpses.

The Cathedral, begun in 1131 but not completed until about 1240, is reached by a pyramidal flight of steps. Grand, benign, it contrasts with the awesome rockface immediately above. The original façade, as at Monreale, has been much altered, and the magnificent portico with its three elegant arches is the work of Ambrogio da Como, begun in 1471. The two towers are subtly different, fraternal rather than identical as John Julius Norwich has remarked. Recently polychrome mosaics have been discovered behind the portico. To appreciate the original structure of the Norman building it is really best to view it from the south-east, where a path leads up to a narrow terrace. Also, of course, it can be seen from the Rock above. It is interesting to note how the eastern end is much higher than the nave. The dome over the nave is curious, a bit ungainly, but the wall beneath is very characteristic of the period and relatively untouched. The interior is a basilica with sixteen columns, all granite except the first on the left which is cipolin, their capitals Roman or Byzantine supporting stilted pointed arches. A tremendous Gothic arch with twelfth century capitals marks the entrance to the transept. Dominating all in the apse is the great mosaic of the Christ Pantocrator which has often been described as unsurpassed by any other representation of Christ, and is in the tradition of early likenesses in post-Apostolic times. The face is ascetic, even haggard (unlike say at St Mark's in Venice), with an extraordinary compassion. One hand is in benediction, the other holds the Gospel with the words 'I am the light of the world. Those who follow me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life', in Latin and Greek. Below is his mother in prayer, looking very young, with four archangels, and underneath them are the twelve apostles. Above the Christ are angels and

Himera and Cefalù

seraphim. Most of the mosaics date from 1148 according to an inscription. It would seem that a diverse group of artists was used. Even so the whole conforms to the canons of the best Byzantine figurative tradition.

Some traces of painting can be seen in what remains of the original thirteenth century roof in the nave. The twelfth century font, of grey marble is decorated with four lions, and the huge double-sided fifteenth-century cross is attributed to Tommaso de Vigilia. On the right and left of the choir are the episcopal and royal thrones, marble inlaid with mosaic; a mosaic floor (covered over) is between them. In the north transept there is a Madonna by Antonello Gagini (1533). The organ lofts are supported by Romanesque columns. Originally the cathedral was regarded by Roger II as a pantheon for his family, and for this purpose he prepared two large porphyry sarcophagi. In fact his body was eventually to lie in Palermo Cathedral (p. 31). The sarcophagi were removed by his grandson Frederick II, during the absence abroad of the Bishop of Cefalù – who on his return furiously excommunicated Frederick.

A door on the left nave leads into the cloisters, which are in poor condition but due to be restored: all that is left of the original Augustinian convent. As at Monreale there are double columns, with curved capitals, the best known of which shows acrobats. Only the foundations remain of the fountain in the north-west corner.

On leaving the Cathedral, we have on the right the Archbishop's palace, 1793, with the Seminario next to it. The palazzo on the south side with a Mannerist portico is Palazzo Piraino, sixteenth century, where Barone Mandralisca lived. This has a courtyard with an outside staircase. A further group of buildings in the Piazza include the medieval Palazzo Maria, with a Gothic window and an ogival portal, the Santissimo Sacramento oratory, 1610, and the unfinished Neoclassic Palazzo Legambi.

The medieval town is full of charm, with narrow sometimes cobbled alleys, over which there are arches, and modest palazzi, covered in autumn with scarlet Virginia creeper. Sometimes ancient capitals and pillars are incorporated into the buildings. The most typically medieval part of Cefalù is between Corso Ruggero and the Rock, south of the Piazza del Duomo. Streets to the north of the piazza lead to the town's old fortifications. The Mandralisca museum, open every morning and every afternoon after 16.00 hours, in Via Mandralisca opposite the Cathedral, contains a famous masterpiece, Antonello da Messina's *Portrait of an Unknown Man*, painted in about 1470, with a marvellously quizzical expression – unworthily displayed however. The museum consists of objects gathered in the nineteenth century, a vast 'cabinet of curiosities', with about 20,000 shells, an outstanding collection of coins, Greek terracottas, paintings of the Flemish and Cretan-Venetian schools, and a much illustrated vase of the fourth century BC showing a comic scene of a man cutting up a tunny fish for a customer. There are also five large fifth century BC kraters and a very fine cupboard in ebony, rosewood and ivory, dated at 1630.

Corso Ruggero ends at Via Carlo Ortolano di Bordonaro, a lively street in the summer months with several good and *accoglienti* restaurants. At the *località* known as La Fontana there are some most interesting polygonal blocks from the ancient walls. The gateway here is the entrance to the old Jewish ghetto. A small street from Piazza Crispi passing two adjacent churches leads to a seventeenth century bastion known as the Marchiafava. A fourteenth century fountain has been placed here. Again on a summer evening it is a delightful spot, with waves slapping on the rocks below and the *lampari* of the fishermen out to sea, and with the Rock floodlit above.

Other streets west of the Corso run down to the harbour at regular intervals, like the teeth of a comb, it

has been said. Rather too many of the old houses have been cemented over. The Marina or Pescara gate is the only one remaining of the four medieval gates, and the view from here is a favourite one for photographers. Not far from Piazza Marina in Via Vittorio Emanuele, next to No. 59 and down some steps, there is the smelly medieval bath-house, the Lavatoio Pubblico, cut into the rock, still with plenty of water pouring out. Women used to do their washing here. Boccaccio once described the water as more salubrious than any other! Piazza Marina has another picturesque view of fishermen's houses and boats. The continuation southwards is the Lungomare overlooking the long sandy beach, and leading to several hotels.

The path up to the Rock, with steps, is off Vicolo dei Saraceni near Piazza Garibaldi. It takes about an hour to reach the top, which has of course a splendid view. There are lots of acanthus and euphorbia on the way. On the Rock there are many traces of habitation, presumably mostly of Cephaloïdion. There are also remains of the castle where Charles 'the lame', son of Charles of Anjou, was imprisoned in 1284, after the Vespers. A strange building with megalithic blocks and known as the Temple of Diana, dated at the ninth century BC – evidently a prehistoric sanctuary of sorts, and once used as a Byzantine church – is next to a large cistern of the sixth century BC or perhaps earlier.

There are hydrofoil services from Cefalù to Palermo and Lipari and vice versa. Some fifteen kilometres away is the Santuario di Gibilmanna in a lovely position among oaks, cork-trees, and especially arbutus. This has a small museum with objects from Franciscan churches in the Val Demone, the original Arab name for this part of Sicily. There are vestments, portraits of priests and statues, also some artefacts. Cefalù is a good centre for excursions into the Madonìa mountains, whether by car, on foot or on horseback. The towns of Collesano and Castelbuono

(pp. 484, 498) are within quite easy reach, also the tiny unspoilt village of Gratteri.

Mention must now be made of Aleister Crowley, 'the great beast', who has become something of a cult-figure at Cefalù, in spite of such practices as coprophilia and the sacrifices of animals, and rumours of cannibalism. Between 1921 and 1923, when he was expelled from Italy, he exercised his black magic in what he called the Abbey of Thelema, an ordinary-looking house still standing, but semi-derelict with windows barred, among olives near the new Cefalù football stadium – the mystic Rock looming above. Nearby is another smaller house with esoteric symbols in front, probably one of the eighteenth century Freemason lodges. Locals understandably say that the houses are *stregate*, bewitched. A Crowley museum is planned. Rock bands sometimes perform here. Can this be why in villages around there is a saying that there is a madman in every house at Cefalù?

Ustica

The island of **Ustica**, of volcanic origin and shaped like a turtle, lies fifty-eight kilometres north-east of Palermo. It is a pleasant place for a quiet holiday, or for a day's excursion, since there are daily ferries and hydrofoil services, more frequent in the summer months.

Famous now above all for its underwater scenery, for its gorgonians, sponges and coral, and for its astonishing varieties of fish, it was designated Italy's first marine reserve in 1987. And not before time. The giant groupers had all but disappeared. Currents from the Atlantic not only bring plankton on which sea creatures feed but ensure that the sea itself is kept pure and unpolluted. Prehistoric remains, possibly dating back to 1500 BC, have been uncovered. In ancient times the island was called *Osteodes*, the Island of Bones, after the skeletons of six thousand rebel Carthaginian soldiers who were left there to starve. Some say it was Circe's island, others Aeolus's. The Romans changed the name to *Ustum*, meaning burnt, a reference to its volcanic rocks – hence the sobriquet 'the black pearl of the Mediterranean'. On a hot clear day these strange black shapes against the limpid blue sea are a wonderful sight. Barbary pirates harried the island in the Middle Ages, slaughtering the inhabitants or carrying them off as slaves, and also used it as a base. In 1763 it was fortified by the Bourbons and repopulated from the Aeolian islands. From the early nineteenth century and including the Fascist period it was used as a penal colony, one famous detainee in 1926–7 being Antonio Gramsci, the Communist theorist.

There are about 1200 inhabitants. The port is unpretentious, typical of many small Italian islands, and the central square is made jolly with bars and restaurants. The fish in most of these restaurants (book in advance) is needless to say excellent. The church is plain, cared for (1993) by the remarkable Padre Carmelo, who was Ustica's pioneer archaeologist; his private collection contains objects from the Palaeolithic age onwards, including some strange phallic stones. Note the memorial in the church to Ignazio Di Bartolo, British Vice-Consul, died 1831, with its lion and unicorn above. He was the father of Vincenzo Di Bartolo, employed by the English tycoon Benjamin Ingham and famous as the master of the *Elisa* which in 1837 brought a cargo of pepper from Sumatra, a great sensation at the time; Vincenzo also took the *Elisa* to Boston the following year. The Santa Maria tower (possibly closed) holds the collection of the underwater archaeological museum, with objects found in ancient wrecks around the rugged coast. A climb among the caper plants to the Castello Saraceno, only twenty minutes, is worthwhile and provides a good view of the island, only four and a half kilometres long. Or we can hire a donkey. A minibus circles the island at regular intervals, dropping us off at our chosen bathing place, or at the prehistoric village site on the northernmost point, Punto Gorgo Salato, or at the necropolis near Punto Omo Morto.

The waters around the perimeter of Ustica are divided into three zones. Would-be scuba divers, snorkellers and anglers should obtain a map from the tourist office. The small Zone A, to the furthest west, from Caletta to Cala Sidoti, is a 'total reserve', even boats being prohibited. Zone B, from Punto Gavazzi to Punto Omo Morto, has restrictions up to three miles from the coast; underwater photographs, angling and specially authorized fishing are permitted. Zone C, covering the rest, allows underwater fishing and 'professional fishing', only if authorised by the

Ustica

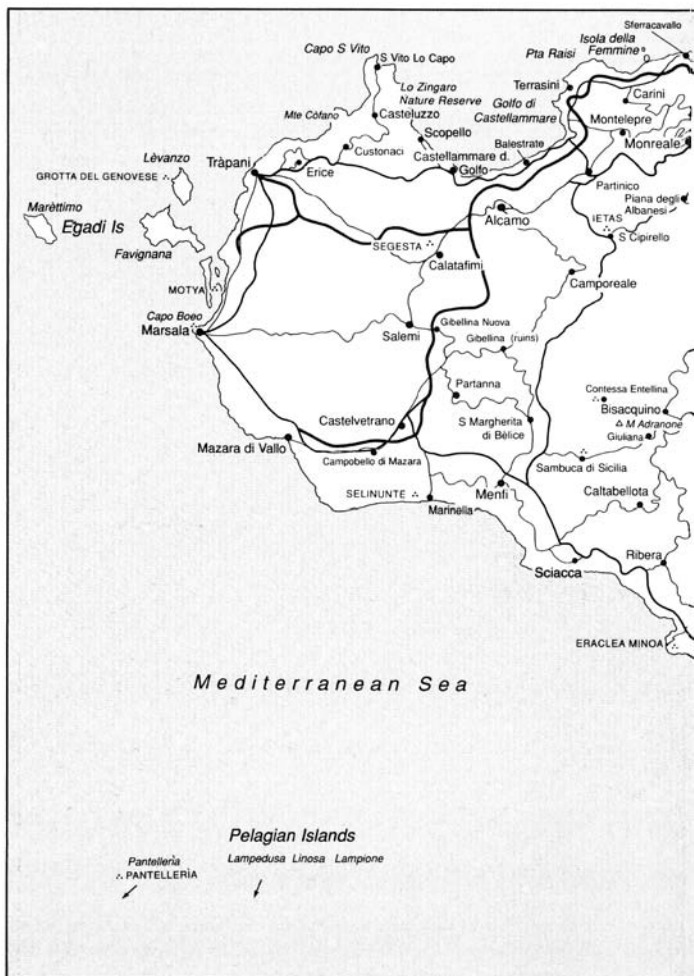
municipality. There are no sandy beaches. The best bathing is to the south-west, at Punto Gavazzi, where there is a *piscina naturale*, and at Punto delle Spalmatori; hence the nearby Villaggio Turistico. The best snorkelling is at Punto di Megna and the outlying Scoglio del Medico, just north of Zone A – this swarms with fish large and small among anemones and brightly coloured gorgonians (there are also occasional turtles). A round trip of the island, skirting Zone A, is quite an experience, with so many grottoes and cliffs, fantastically eroded. The Grotta Azzurra or dell'Acqua is one of the best in the afternoons, a brilliant turquoise. Another is the large Grotta della Pastizza, with stalactites. When the wind blows a noise like thunder is produced in some of these grottoes.

Ustica can also be reached from Naples, Civitavecchia and Leghorn.

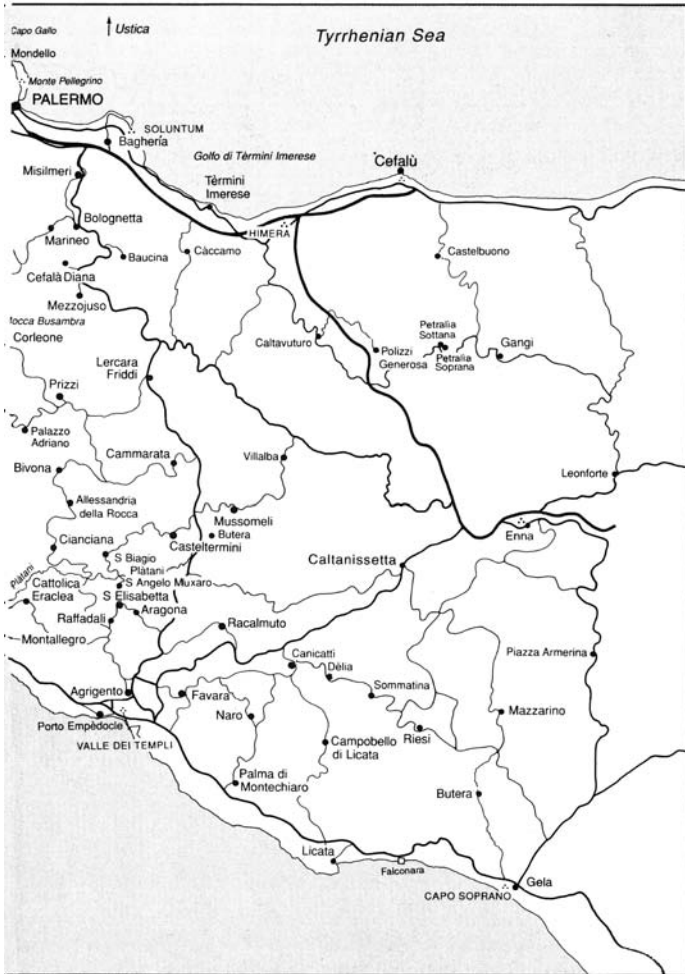
In the early hours of September 7 1943, off the island's coast, two American generals in a British PT boat secretly met an Italian corvette and were escorted to the mainland to negotiate the Armistice.

Western Sicily

The Companion Guide to Sicily



Western Sicily



*Altofonte – Piana degli Albanesi – Ficuzza
Gibilrossa – Misilmeri – Bagni di Cefalà
Diana – Mezzojuso Baucina – Ciminna*

Piana degli Albanesi, some fifteen miles south-east of Palermo, is famous for its Easter and Epiphany processions, when it is packed with visitors. A particular attraction of this small town is that it is the largest of the Albanian colonies in Sicily, founded in the fifteenth century for refugees from the Turkish invasion of Albania. The inhabitants still retain their original language and customs, and are Catholic of the Italo-Greek rite. On feast-days and at weddings they wear traditional dress. In other respects Piana is not of great interest, compared to other small inland towns in the province of Palermo, but a round trip, including Altofonte, Ficuzza and Misilmeri is to be recommended for some unspoilt and wild mountain scenery. This excursion also takes us in the steps of Garibaldi before his capture of Palermo in 1860.

We leave Palermo by Corso Re Ruggero, off Piazza Indipendenza, behind the Royal Palace. Eventually, after a steep climb, we reach the village of **Altofonte**, until 1930 known as Parco, in a magnificent position overlooking the valley of the Oreto towards Monreale. Roger II had a hunting lodge here. This was turned into a royal palace, and it was the birthplace of Peter II of Aragon. In 1307 the building was transformed into a Cistercian monastery. Cardinal Scipione Borghese, nephew of Pope Paul V, was its abbot, and in 1618 he rebuilt the church, now the Chiesa Madre. Inside there is a sumptuous altar incorporating a

bas-relief of 1328. Nearby is a seventeenth century wooden statue of Santa Anna. Behind the church is the old Norman chapel, not very well restored. The name Altofonte – *alto* high, *fonte* spring – refers to the many springs of water locally.

Garibaldi and his Thousand arrived at Altofonte, exhausted and soaked by unseasonable rain, on May 22 1860, and dug their trenches on the summit above. On learning that the Bourbons were advancing from Monreale, Garibaldi was forced to retreat to Piana degli Albanesi, then known as Piana dei Greci, where he halted briefly. It was a disheartening moment in the campaign.

Piana degli Albanesi is surrounded by rocky mountains rising up to 1300 metres. Its main church is San Demetrio, restored recently. This contains some damaged frescoes by Pietro Novelli. The church of San Giorgio is the oldest but much restored, and has modern mosaics and icons, not of interest. Opposite Santa Maria Odigitria, near the Municipio, is the sixteenth century fountain into which at Epiphany the bishop dips the Cross, while boys offer oranges to the faithful, all dressed in their picturesque and typical attire. At Easter there is a procession of the Holy Veil, and red-painted eggs are distributed.

In the 1920s one of the most notorious Mafiosi was the Mayor of Piana, Don Ciccio Cuccia. Victor Emmanuel III visited Piana in 1922. On entering San Demetrio the tiny king found himself suddenly lost in the crowd and hustled to a font. A baby was thrust into his arms and in a trice Victor Emmanuel was named godfather. The baby was Don Ciccio's.

Beyond Piana is a large artificial lake with a dam. A walk from here leads to the mountain pass of Portella della Ginestra (p. 147). **Ficuzza** has an elegant hunting lodge in neoclassical style, built in 1803 by Venanzio Marvuglia for Ferdinand IV, who loved this place. Nearby is the Bosco di Ficuzza, a forest of oaks and chestnuts, unique in western

Sicily though now much reduced in size. It is one of the few inland places in Sicily frequented by bird-watchers. It is also a great place for edible fungi. Birds of prey, including eagles, are to be seen on Monte Busambra, 1613 metres high, which however has had grim Mafia associations. Another lake, the Lago di Scanzano, is near the road to **Marineo**, which has an Aragonese castle and a sanctuary of the fourteenth century, once a Franciscan convent, dedicated to the Madonna della Dajna (i.e. Dama). The Chiesa Madre, eighteenth century, is dedicated to San Ciro, whose skull is kept in a seventeenth century urn. A great rock, in shape not unlike Gibraltar, looms above. There are also water-mills.

Garibaldi came here, after bivouacking in the woods. In G.M. Trevelyan's description the Thousand had followed along 'one of the most lovely footpaths in Sicily, across rocky ravines filled with olives and fruit-trees, and with poplars in the stream-bottoms'. Spirits were rising. Their next halt was at Misilmeri, where Garibaldi was greeted with the 'wildest delight'. Here he was joined by Giuseppe La Masa, who had been anxiously waiting for him. While his men 'flung themselves down to rest', he and la Masa had a council of war, preparing to attack Palermo. So on the next day they were at Gibilrossa on the slopes of Monte Grande, where an obelisk now marks the spot on which Garibaldi uttered the famous words to Bixio: '*Nino, domani a Palermo.*' That night the Thousand with some Sicilian volunteer *squadre* reached the Ponte dell'Ammiraglio, the scene of their first skirmish with Bourbon troops before advancing to the Fieravecchia.

Misilmeri is named after the Emir Manzi al Amir. In this place in 1068 Count Roger decisively defeated the Saracens. There are ruins of a fortified castle of Arab origin added to by the Chiaramonte and Ajutamicristo families.

A more extensive drive on this trip, unconnected with Garibaldi, could include the **Bagni di Cefalà Diana**, the

remains of Arab baths, recently rather over-restored but important as being one of the very few surviving monuments in Sicily from the Arab period. They are moreover in beautiful country. To reach them, after passing through Marineo from Piana take the road to Bolognetta, and then continue south on the road to Cefalà Diana. Usually the baths are open in the mornings. Thermal springs still bubble up at intervals, though these intervals can last years. It has been suggested that there may have been baths here in Roman times. Some Cufic inscriptions, now barely visible, are on the outside tufa frieze. The room inside is barrel-vaulted and has three deep basins. The back part of the room is separated by two pillars which support three ogival arches.

From here there is a good view of the castle of Cefalà Diana on its splendidly strategic position – and which itself has a magnificent panorama around. Further south again is **Mezzojuso**, its name derived from the Arabic, *Manzil Yusuf*, village of Joseph. Like Piana degli Albanesi it was settled with Albanian refugees in the fifteenth century, and similar traditions survive. There are some relics of Byzantine origin in the churches.

East of the *statale* further north in the Palermo direction is **Baucina**, founded in 1626. In the Chiesa del Collegio there is an urn which holds some relics of Santa Fortunata and which is carried in procession on her feast-day, second Sunday in September. **Ciminna** has a surprising number of interesting churches for such a remote spot and with a population of less than five thousand. Punic and Roman remains have been found here, and the site was occupied in Arab times. A castle, most of which has disappeared, was built by the Normans. In the church of San Domenico there are two works by Antonello Gagini, a *ciborium* and a Madonna. The Chiesa del Purgatorio has a fifteenth century polyptych of the Madonna and Saints. The Chiesa Madre, in Via Kennedy, is sixteenth century on an older structure,

Piana degli Albanesi to Ciminna

has been much altered. It still, however, has its original rose window and a campanile of 1519. The Baroque interior has three naves and a sixteenth century wooden ceiling. The inlaid wooden choir stalls are by Giuseppe Datolino (1619). There is also a copy of Raphael's *Spàsimo* (p. 80) by Simone di Wobreck. But, most important perhaps, are the stuccoes and statues of the 1620s by the Li Volsi brothers, Scipione and Francesco, of Tusa, in the central apse. These are early examples of the Sicilian stucco work that flowered so gloriously under the Sepottas in Palermo. (Not that Scipione's peculiar statue of Charles V in Piazza Bologni, Palermo, is much of a tribute to his work!) The architect of the seventeenth century church of San Giovanni Battista was the celebrated Paolo Amato (1634–1714), who was born at Ciminna. The church has a prized sixteenth century crucifix and a triptych, likewise sixteenth century, of the Madonna dell'Udienza.

*Isola delle Femmine – Terrasini – Trappeto
Castellammare del Golfo – Carini
Portella della Ginestra – Alcamo*

Most places in this section, eastwards from Palermo, have had sombre associations in recent Sicilian history. One has only to read books by Gavin Maxwell, Norman Lewis, Carlo Levi and Danilo Dolci to be aware that we are entering what was once a Mafia heartland and an area that used to be notorious for its poverty. Things are more cheerful now. Living conditions have been greatly improved, especially along the coast, where the small towns have been developed for seaside holidays.

First comes Sferracavallo, which has a 'tourist village'. **Isola delle Femmine**, uncomfortably close to a cement factory, takes its name from an uninhabited island opposite, where there is some good scuba-diving, and where coral has been recently found. Along this coast important archaeological discoveries have been made. Many of the anchors and amphoras in the Palermo museum were found near the island, on which it seems the celebrated ancient Roman fish sauce *garum* was also fabricated. The word Femmine, incidentally, has nothing to do with exotic sirens or Amazonian warriors, but is probably derived from a more prosaic Arabic word.

Palermo airport at Punta Raisi is near the next town, **Terrasini**, which has become popular because of its sandy beach and the spectacular sea-bed off the Cala Rossa. The charming Palazzo d'Aumâle has been restored and converted into a museum, concentrating on natural

history, underwater finds and traditional painted carts. The Duke d'Aumâle was a son of Louis-Philippe of France and had a large and flourishing wine business. On Easter Sunday there is a *festa* of *Schetti*, young unmarried men who evidently have to prove their strength by balancing a beribboned orange tree on the palm of the hand.

At **Trappeto** Danilo Dolci, the 'Sicilian Gandhi', began his great work in his struggle against the Mafia and it is here that he founded his *Borgo di Dio*, teaching self-help and agricultural improvement.

Later he created a *Centro Studio* at Partinico nearby – still a poor and somewhat uninspiring town. Balestrate is a livelier place, an agricultural centre and full of holiday homes; the wine firms of Ingham, Woodhouse and Florio had establishments here. This town dates from the nineteenth century and was created to house people who caught *seppie*, cuttle-fish, particularly abundant roundabouts.

The scenery now becomes more dramatic, with jagged mountains on one side and the marvellous deep blue (depending on the weather) sea on the other. From the *autostrada* there is a glimpse of the romantic crumbling castle of Calatubo, built on Byzantine foundations. Finally we reach the now prosperous **Castellammare del Golfo**, which has had a particularly bloody and violent past, born needless to say out of poverty and corruption. Gavin Maxwell was told by a local man in the early 1950s that eighty per cent of the male population had been in prison – one hopes an exaggeration. Long streets run down to the harbour which has the typical charm of most Sicilian fishing ports, and where there is an Aragonese castle. The Chiesa Madre has a façade of 1726 and a seventeenth century majolica statue of the Virgin.

The hinterland was once the kingdom of the glamorous bandit Salvatore Giuliano, who was mysteriously killed in 1950 aged twenty-seven. He is buried in the cemetery outside his home village of **Montelepre**, a sullen little

place in wild countryside. Wreaths are still placed on his sarcophagus, with flowery inscriptions about 'dreams of love' and 'proud phantoms' (the cemetery is only open in the mornings). Giuliano started with Robin Hood ideas and became allied to the Sicilian separatist movement which planned to break away from Italy, possibly to be tacked on to the United States of America or even to become a British colony. Ultimately and inevitably, he found himself manipulated by the Mafia. To some, as in the famous local ballad, he is still the 'king asleep in the mountains'. Giuliano's sister even built a kitsch 'Castello di Giuliano' as a restaurant. Some of the scenery round here is indeed beautiful, at the Piano dell'Occio especially – where there is a trattoria to be recommended. Likenesses of the Giuliano saga have been seen on painted carts.

One way to Montelepre from Palermo passes through the hill town of **Carini**, after which the Gulf below is named. Anciently Hyccara, it has another dilapidated medieval castle. The Chiesa Matrice possesses an 'Adoration of the Shepherds' by Alessandro Allori (1578), and in the Oratorio del S.S. Sacramento there are stuccoes of the school of Serpotta. The fifth century BC courtesan Lais was born at Carini, later operating with much success at Corinth. And a celebrated poem in the Sicilian vernacular, *La Baronessa di Carini*, tells the story of a murder in 1563 when a father killed his daughter for having an affair with a cousin.

Borgetto is almost a suburb of Partinico. Here in May 1860 Nino Bixio's battalion bivouacked 'amid the clamour of nightingales', while Garibaldi continued to the pass of Renda above Monreale. A road south from Partinico goes by the Lago di Porna, formed by the Iato dam, built at the instigation of Dolci. The barren slopes of Monte della Fiera rise above espalier vines among olive groves. The village of **San Cipirello** has a small but interesting museum with objects found in recent excavation at Ietas

on Monte Iato nearby. Ietas was Elymnian in origin. A temple to Aphrodite, a theatre that seated over 4000 spectators and a *bouleuterion*, or council place, have been found. Frederick II destroyed it after a long siege in 1246.

Towards Piana degli Albanesi is the mountain pass of **Portella della Ginestra**. Here on May Day 1947 peasants from Piana and the village of San Giuseppe Iato, among them children, were mown down by Giuliano's henchmen, destroying for most admirers his image as saviour of the poor – for the procession had been organised by Communists, who were Giuliano's arch enemies. This was the first post-war political massacre in Sicily.

The main road from Partinico continues to **Alcamo**, a prosperous industrial and agricultural town, on the slopes of Monte Bonifato and where Goethe stayed on his way to Segesta, admiring the panorama – 'impressive in its majesty' he called it, and so it still is. This important town of Alcamo comes as a contrast to all we have just been seeing, with its factories, marble works, *palazzi*, Baroque churches, and wealth of Gagini sculpture. From here the sinister *Capomafia* Vincenzo Rimi operated in the 1950s and 1960s, and here he quietly lies in an ornate marble sepulchre.

Alcamo – Manzil al Alqamah in the time of the Arabs – was a key outpost in the Arab defences. The thirteenth century poet Ciullo or Cielo d'Alcamo was born here: his *cantilena*, written in the language of the troubadours, is one of the earliest documents in Italian literature. For centuries the town was dominated by a succession of noble families and religious orders. Indeed, in spite of Alcamo's *Mafioso* past, it seems to possess a strong church-going community – and, for a change (compared to Palermo), not many of its numerous churches have been made redundant. One tries hard to like Alcamo.

The wide Corso 6 Aprile, the old *Strada Imperiale*, cuts across the town. Emerging from the Porta San Francesco,

rebuilt in 1801, we pass immediately on the left the church of San Francesco d'Assisi, early seventeenth century, which has fine works by Antonello and Giacomo Gagini. San Tommaso is fifteenth century and has a beautiful Gothic doorway. SS Cosma e Damiano, early eighteenth century, attached to the convent of Santa Chiara, has stucco statues by Giacomo Serpotta and a painting of a Madonna with Saints by Borremans. The fifteenth century church of the Madonna del Soccorso is in a dilapidated state; its doorway is attributed to Bartolomeo Berretaro. The Chiesa Madre, originally fifteenth century, rebuilt in the seventeenth by Angelo Italia and Giuseppe Diamante, is in Piazza 4 Novembre. It still has elements of its original campanile, and there is a fine marble portal by Bartolomeo Berrettaro (1499). The interior, richly decorated, is a Latin cross with pillars of local red marble. The frescoes are by Borremans (1736–7). In the second chapel on the right is a crucifix by Antonello Gagini (1523) and in the fourth there are two tombs of the De Ballis family with portraits by Filippo Paladino. In the chapel to the right of the high altar is a 'Last Supper' by Giuseppe Carrera (1613), and on its right are two beautiful ogival arches and a fragment of a fresco, the remains of a late Gothic chapel. Among other items of note is a 'Transit of the Virgin' in high relief by Antonello Gagini (1527) in the third chapel on the left. The sacristy door (1505) and the statue and lunette of the Madonna del Soccorso (the Madonna of Help, her stick symbolising the victory of good over evil) are attributed to Bartolomeo Berretaro.

The Baroque Sant'Oliva in Piazza Ciullo was built by Giovanni Biagio Amico in 1723. In the first chapel on the left of its fantastically ornate interior there is a wonderful marble group of the Annunciation by Antonino and Giacomo Gagini (1545), and in the fourth on the right there is an even more outstanding statue of Sant'Oliva by Antonello Gagini (1511), one of his best. Over the

high altar is a painting of the Purgatory by Pietro Novelli (1639). This is undoubtedly the most interesting church in Alcamo.

The Jesuits' Chiesa del Collegio, seventeenth–nineteenth century, with a very pretty façade, is in the same piazza. Nearby is the Church of SS Paolo e Bartolomeo, which has a painting of the Madonna del Miele (the Madonna of the Honey) of the fifteenth century and stucco decorations by Vincenzo Messina.

To continue. The Benedictine Church Francesco di Paola in Via Navarra also has its attractions. Built in the eighteenth century, it is known as the Badia Nuova. Inside there are statues by Giacomo Serpotta (1724) and a St Benedict by Novelli. Near here is the great and grim castle of the Counts of Mòdica, fourteenth century – in reasonably good repair. This forms one side of the Piazza della Repubblica, off which is Santa Maria di Gesù, with its original (1507) marble portal composed of four columns and attributed to Bartolomeo Berretaro. The church was reconstructed in 1762. Inside are a statue of the Baptist by Giuliano Mancino, some Gagesque reliefs, and a statue of the Virgin either by Berretaro or Mancino. The church of San Salvatore, known also as the Badia Grande, fifteenth–sixteenth century, has paintings by Novelli and a statue of St Benedict by Antonino Gagini (1546).

There is a shrine to the Madonna dell'Alto on Monte Bonifato, a nature reserve. The country inland towards Camporeale and Grisi is unspoilt, with vineyards and a vast geometry of the once feudal *latifondi*. In the spring there is a blaze of wild flowers. In the summer all becomes yellow and silent, strangely melancholy and untroubled.

There is also an 'Alcamo Marina' on the coast: melancholy in a different way, a mishmash of cheap buildings, shuttered up for most of the year.

*Segesta – Calatafimi – Scopello – Lo Zingaro
San Vito Lo Capo – Erice – Tràpani*

Majestic and solitary, in a vast and lonely landscape, among cliffs and valleys, the great Doric temple of **Segesta**, originally Egesta, has inspired generations of travellers and artists. To the future Cardinal Newman it was the ‘most perfect building remaining anywhere’. ‘Oh wonderful sight!’ he wrote, ‘full of the most strange pleasure ... It has been the day of my life to have seen Egesta!’ ‘Behold,’ wrote Ferdinand Gregorovius, the eminent German historian of Rome, ‘the temple of Segesta! The utter desertion that reigns everywhere is impregnated with myth and strange legendary forms.’ Lawrence Durrell saw it from afar, ‘standing there so quietly in the vale, wise as an elephant with the world on its back’.

Mass tourism has removed some of the romance of visiting Segesta. Now it can be reached from Palermo in an hour or so along the *autostrada*. No need to worry about lurking bandits, or as in the case of Newman to stoke up beforehand with an ‘egg or two’ at neighbouring Calatafimi. There is a café near the car park – admittedly a decent distance from the sites. Even in the late 1950s a friend and I found ourselves to be the only visitors, and we hired ponies to take us to the theatre.

Segesta was once one of the two main towns of the Elymnians, the other being Eryx, or Erice, and seems to have been founded in the twelfth century BC. The legend is that the first inhabitants were refugees from Troy, under Acestes, the son of a river god. Another tradition, according to Thucydides, is that they came from Italy

before the Sikels. In any case they soon became Hellenised. From 580 BC they were in almost constant conflict with Selinus, or Selinunte, allying themselves with Greeks or Carthaginians, whichever was most opportune. In 307 BC Agathocles of Syracuse is said to have massacred 10,000 of them, using the most horrible tortures, and enslaved the rest, repeopling Segesta with Greeks under the name of Dikaiopolis. Later they came under the influence of the Carthaginians, but in the first Punic War they murdered the Carthaginian garrison and attached themselves to Rome. Under the Romans the city greatly prospered. It was sacked by the Vandals and finally destroyed by the Saracens.

The temple is outside the original fortified area. Its dedication is unknown. We do know that a much revered statue of Demeter was carried away from here by Verres, the rapacious Roman praetor of Sicily. One of the most important examples of the Doric style, it is in fact unfinished. The roof was never built, and there was no *cella* or inner sanctuary. The thirty-six columns are not fluted, and the bosses or projections used for hauling the steps from the quarry have not been cut away. All this seems to add to the grandeur and the mystery. Sparrows nest in the pitted holes, lizards dart across the *stylobate*. There is no doubt that the original architect must have been a Greek of outstanding ability, deliberately making the building somewhat squat to suit the rugged scenery. It has been suggested that it was begun in 426 BC at the time of the alliance with Athens but abandoned two years later when war broke out with Selinus. Certain small repairs have been made, especially at the end of the eighteenth century, but it is extraordinary that it should have survived the centuries, including earthquakes. Even the Vandals must have been awed by this holy spot.

The road which ascends to Monte Barbaro, where the town stood, follows the ancient route. In the right season there are masses of rock roses, wild marigolds, and fennel

among the agaves. Excavations are in progress and have revealed some fortifications. Goethe found the climb too fatiguing, but in these days a mini-bus is available for the less energetic. He certainly would have been kinder about the theatre now that so much of it has been revealed. Dating from around the third century BC, it must be one of the most superbly situated open-air theatres anywhere in the world. Twenty rows of seats, divided into seven sections, have been cut out of the rock. Foundations of the *frons scenae* or scene buildings, mostly Roman, can be seen in front of the semicircular auditorium. These buildings seem to have been in two storeys and decorated with columns and pavilions on each side. Telamons of the god Pan were found here, probably connected with a sacred cave below. Every other summer, alternating with Syracuse, performances of Greek plays are held in the theatre: odd dates Segesta, even dates Syracuse.

At the foot of Monte Barbaro, to the south, in the *contrada* or district of Mango, a small sanctuary has been discovered, with the remains of a Doric temple. A custodian has to be found for admission.

To Italians the name **Calatafimi** will forever be associated with the first victory of Garibaldi's Thousand over the Bourbons on May 15 1860. In fact the actual battle took place on the heights opposite this otherwise rather insignificant little town, at Pianto Romano. A monument, built by Ernesto Basile in 1892, is inscribed with Garibaldi's stirring words '*Qui si fa l'Italia o si muore*' 'Here we make Italy or die'. The Garibaldinians were outnumbered three to one, and it is easy to see how much they were at a disadvantage, with the Bourbons on the higher ground. Calatafimi itself was badly damaged in the terrible earthquake of 1968, as was the Aragonese castle above it. The narrow streets hark back to the town's Arab origin.

The hilly country around, studded with farms and vineyards is dramatic and beautiful, especially in the spring and

autumn. It must have been this view that decided Samuel Butler to live at Calatafimi. But the author of *Erewhon* and *The Way of all Flesh* also had an obsession about the *Odyssey*, which he was convinced had been written by a woman, living at Tràpani. He also believed that Marèttimo in the Egadi Islands (p. 167) was the real Ithaca – and indeed that the entire locale of the poem was drawn from Sicily. Polyphemus was not on Mount Etna but on Mount Eryx (Monte Giuliano), and the island of Favignana was where Ulysses hunted goats. Pantelleria was the island of Calypso, etc. etc. He also propounded that the *Odyssey* was composed in about 1050 BC, two hundred years after the *Iliad*.

At Buseto Palizzolo near here there is a procession of ‘living statues’ on Palm Sunday, quite impressive.

Returning to the coast, skirting Castellammare, and just before Capo La Puntazza, there is a mysterious place by the sea, of unknown origin, called ‘*Il Bagno del Re*’ the Bath of the King. In rainy weather, or when waves are high, water fills interconnected basins scooped out of the rocks, and runs into an artificial ‘throne’, where one can sit and enjoy a tepid bath. A necropolis is nearby.

This is an area of *bagli*, from the Latin *ballium*, farms fortified originally against North African pirates. The most impressive is the Baglio Lisciandrini, on the way to Balata di Baida, where there are remains of a Norman castle. There is another *baglio*, eighteenth century, in the small and picturesque village of **Scopello**, which has mercifully so far escaped the ravages of urbanisation creeping up from Castellammare. Below Scopello is the *tonnara* or tunny fishery where Gavin Maxwell stayed and which he described in *Ten Pains of Death*. Two watchtowers look down on the old buildings, one the barracks of the *tonn-aroti* or tunny fishers. Rusted anchors lie abandoned on the beach. The jagged Faraglioni rise dramatically, like those

at Capri, out of the deep and limpid water. It is all very *suggestivo*.

Now the tunny fishing is concentrated at Favignana (p. 167), taking place at the end of April but usually in May, depending on when the fish come into spawn. It is not a spectacle for the squeamish. A series of net corridors is prepared, leading into a 'death chamber', into which the giant fish become crowded. Gradually this last net is hoisted up, and the fish rise to the surface. All is performed according to an age-long ritual, going back at least to Arab times. The head fisherman is known as the Raisi, from the Arabic *rais*, leader. He will invoke the help of St Peter beforehand. Various chants, some religious, known as *cialome*, accompany each stage of the operation, including the rhythmic hauling in of the nets, and the transporting of the catch to land. The most famous and beautiful has the chorus *Aja mola, aja mola*, which some say meant originally 'Allah, let it die', and others 'Pull hard, black one', black one referring to the tunny. The fish struggle and thrash about in a frenzy, wounding one another, and sometimes their tormentors, while yelling men lash at them with long-handled harpoons. This is the *mattanza*, a Spanish word meaning slaughter. The foaming water turns red, and bloody spray leaps up fifteen feet or more. Sometimes one fish alone can weigh as much as 1,000 lbs.

Scopello is at the entrance to **Lo Zingaro**, a nature reserve – founded in 1982, after a fierce battle against developers, and the first nature reserve in Sicily – that runs for five miles in the direction of Capo San Vito, the north-western corner of Sicily. A small museum and information centre have been lovingly created. There are two footpaths, one along the coast, the other up the mountain, the first greatly recommended for walkers, particularly in the spring and autumn. After about June 15 the landscape becomes yellow, but even in great heat it is still a marvellous experience looking down on the ever changing pattern

of the sea. I was there once in late April, and the profusion of flowers in some parts was unbelievable. In drier places there are dwarf palms (used once for making brooms), lentisks, prickly pears and aromatic plants. A few sheltered areas are cultivated, and there are olives and pistachio trees, also canes for making baskets. The almond blossom is said to be spectacular in February. Cliffs are sheer, but there are places to bathe. You might see a porcupine or a vulture. At the far end, at Uzzo, Neolithic remains and skeletons of dwarf elephants have been found. Unless you intend to return on foot to Scopello, you should arrange in advance for a car to be waiting at Torre dell'Impriso.

The village of **San Vito lo Capo** has developed enormously as a holiday resort, and with good reason. In a spectacular position in the north-west promontory of the island, it has glinting white sand and crystalline water; the houses are Arab-style, festooned with jasmine and bougainvillea, and with inner courtyards. In the summer months it is animated and crowded, a high spot being the '*struscio*' or evening passeggiata. In the winter San Vito is practically deserted. The Santuario, a church cum fortress, on the main street was sacked by the Turks in the 1500s and then enlarged and fortified. In September there is a couscous festival with participants from all round the Mediterranean. Nearby are caves with numerous Palaeolithic incisions: Grotta Racchio and Grotta di Cala Mancina. There is a feeling of being cut off, of primeval desolation in this odd uncompromising plain, surrounded by mountains. Off Màcari there were some of the coral beds that supplied the master craftsmen of Tràpani – gone, alas, apparently for ever. The road climbs along Monte Sparagio. One branch leads to Castelluzzo and Balata di Baida, and thence to Scopello: an exacting drive. The other passes through a village alarmingly named Purgatorio. Custonaci lies under Monte Còfano, a nature reserve since 1997; here there are important marble works and a

fortified sanctuary, still attracting pilgrims and 'folklore' processions. The Grotta Miceli near Scurati, has palaeolithic incisions newly discovered. The very large Grotta di Scurati, a kilometre further on, is fascinating: inside is a small village of one-storied houses, recently abandoned, with a medieval paved road, no doubt in the old days well hidden from Barbarossa and his pirates.

The road that winds up Monte San Giuliano to Erice, 751 metres high, is still an adventure. Often Erice is swathed in cloud, but on clear days the view is magnificent, especially towards Monte Còfano. Below, to the west, is Tràpani on its headland, always and with reason described as sickle-shaped, and then come the salt-pans towards Marsala. Beyond are the Egadi islands, and on occasion one can also see Pantelleria and Cape Bon in Tunisia – though I have never had that luck.

In the centre of Sicily there are hill towns still strongly medieval in character, in spite of modern blocks on their perimeters. **Erice**, anciently Erix, is unique, not only for its size and situation, but for its importance in pagan times, and for being largely unspoilt, apart from an unsightly pylon or two. To appreciate its atmosphere one needs to spend some nights there. During daytime, especially in summer, coachloads of visitors debouch. We cannot complain about that, but since Erice is an excellent centre – with reasonable hotels – for exploring other parts of western Sicily, such as Segesta, Motya and Selinunte, it is easy to leave local sightseeing to less crowded moments.

Under the Carthaginians the goddess Astarte was venerated here. She became identified by the Greeks with Aphrodite, goddess of love, beauty and fertility, and a great temple was built to her. The mountain seemed to the ancients to stand like a sentinel, watching over sea and weather, and so Aphrodite also became the patron saint of sailors and navigators. At some stage sacred prostitution was practised. Sailors would bring gifts of money, jewels

and wine to the Ierodule, as the 'thousands' of priestesses were called. Every year the goddess and her doves would fly to Sicca Veneria in North Africa, and here too there was prostitution. Another legend tells of Daedalus, fleeing from King Minos in Crete, and how he presented a golden honeycomb, or maybe a golden ram, to the goddess. Virgil recounts how Aeneas came here after deserting poor Dido on her funeral pyre, and sacrificed three bull-calves in memory of Anchises and – to be on the safe side – a lamb to the storm-gods before continuing his journey.

Mount Eryx had a reputation for being impregnable, but Pyrrhus seized it in dramatic fashion in 78 BC, and only eighteen years later Hamilcar Barca managed to take it back again, removing the population to Drepanon, Tràpani, on the coast below.

Aphrodite became Venus to the Romans. After the battle of Trasimene the Sibyl instructed the Romans to seek Venus's help, since she was the mother of Aeneas who had gone on from Sicily to found Rome. A temple to Venus Erecina was consequently also built on the Roman Capitol, and other temples to her sprang up elsewhere in the Mediterranean.

There were a surprising number of slaves at Eryx (offspring of priestesses perhaps?), known as Venerii, used as guardians or protectors of the temple. The Roman Senate apparently took over its administration. M.I. Finley quotes Diodorus as saying that when Roman officials visited Eryx 'they put aside the gravity of office and enter into play and intercourse with women amidst great gaiety'. After this period of glory there was a decline, and a petition was sent to Rome to repair the temple, which was done under Claudius. The Arabs called the town Gebel-Hamed, mountain of Mohammed. The Normans repopulated it and encouraged cultivation of the land, and eliminated pagan traces. Count Roger changed the name to Monte San Giuliano, after having had a dream about Saint Julian

while he was besieging the Saracens. In 1934 Mussolini renamed it Erice.

The main entrance is by Porta Tràpani, built by the Normans on top of Phoenician blocks repaired with Roman masonry. The walls continue in good condition along the north-western side of Erice, to the two other gates, Porta Carmine and Porta Spada, also Norman and near the 'Quartiere Spagnolo' on an outcrop with a view of Monte Còfano, one of the most sublimely beautiful in all Sicily. The town is almost perfectly triangular. There are approximately 29,000 inhabitants, yet it often seems deserted, with – on misty days – an eerie silence in the narrow cobbled streets and alleys. One might be in some town in Umbria, suddenly abandoned, all inhabitants gone; indeed Carlo Levi called Erice the 'Assisi of the South'. The façades of the houses are austere, with occasional Gothic or Norman windows and door frames. Sometimes there are glimpses of patios, filled with flowers. The Chiesa Matrice, dedicated to the Assunta, is near Porta Tràpani, and dates from 1314. Stones from temples have been used for the façade. The battlemented campanile with mullioned windows stands obliquely apart, evidently in origin a watch-tower. A porch of 1426 is built over a beautiful Gothic portal and four ogival arches. Above is a rose window. The interior of the church is rather gloomy, but grand nevertheless. Apart from the side chapels it was rebuilt in the nineteenth century. In the third chapel on the right there is a Madonna and Child (1469) attributed to Francesco Laurana but probably by Domenico Gagini. The great altarpiece in the apse is by Giuliano Mancino (1513). The second chapel on the left has another Madonna and Child perhaps by Laurana, from the church of Sant' Orsola; the Child's head has been stolen.

Via San Francesco wends its way, past quiet *caratteristiche* streets to Villa Balio, the public gardens, where human beings at last might become visible. Beyond is the site of

the ancient acropolis and the famous temple of Venus Ericina, on its precipitous rock. First, however, comes the Castello Pepoli, originally Norman but restored by Count Pepoli around 1880, with a fifteenth century tower restored in 1973 (no admission). This was the seat of the Governor or Baiulo. The massive Castello di Venere, so-called, is also Norman, built in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries out of stones from the temple. The Hapsburg eagle of Charles V is above the entrance. Relics of the temple are visible inside, including the Pozzo di Venere (Venus's well), which may really have been a grain store. Many fragments of amphorae have been discovered during excavations. The view from the castle's terrace is again tremendous. On a bosky slope to the south-west and full of nightingales in spring, is the romantic-looking Torretta Pepoli, built originally as a *rifugio di meditazione*, literally refuge for meditation, by Count Pepoli, very photogenic.

There are many churches in Erice, some redundant, most Norman in origin. It is sad to see them neglected. San Giuliano for instance, in a square of that name, used to be the focal point of the town, and here notables met to discuss whether to join in the 'Vespers' of 1282. San Martino, off Via Salerno, has a fine majolica floor and an equestrian statue of St Martin by Giammatteo Curatolo (1605), also a Gaginesque Madonna and Child. San Domenico, fifteenth century, is now the Centro Majorana, a well-known international centre of scientific culture, founded in 1964. San Giovanni Battista on the northern slopes was originally twelfth century and reconstructed first in 1436 and then in 1631. It has a thirteenth century portal. It is deconsecrated, but worth trying to get in. Inside are a statue of the Baptist by Antonello Gagini (1531), statues of the Madonna and St Elizabeth by Gabriele di Battista (c. 1497), and a relief of the baptism of Jesus (1528). Nearby is the church of San Cataldo, with a Gaginesque (by Domenico Gagini?) holy water stoup, dated 1474. Sant'Orsola is near Porta Spada;

it is here that the 'Mysteries' are kept, paraded round the town on Good Friday.

The Municipio building houses the Biblioteca Comunale and the Museum. The Biblioteca has valuable manuscripts and incunabula, including books from suppressed convents. In the entrance there is a splendid 'Annunciation' by Antonello Gagini (1525), regarded as one of his finest works. Among various prehistoric, Punic, Greek, Roman and ecclesiastical relics there is a Praxiteles-type head of Aphrodite of the fourth century BC.

Music festivals and art shows are held at Erice in the summer. Sometimes at the end of August there is a procession of *Personaggi*, animated characters in oriental costume. Erice is noted for its almond cakes and its *dolce* known as 'Easter lamb', and for its ceramics.

Tràpani has for centuries been a busy commercial port and agricultural centre, important for tuna, wine and salt, and more recently marble. Capital of a province, it was bombed during the Second World War, but the *centro storico* has miraculously survived or has been well restored. Usually the town is not on the itinerary for the hurried traveller, put off no doubt by the dreary modern suburbs. That is a pity, because it does mean missing not only an outstanding museum, the Museo Pepoli, and its coral-work, but the famous Madonna in the sanctuary of the Annunziata.

For a thorough exploration of the city, it is recommended that the museum should be left to the last, as it is open in the afternoons (except Mondays) and that visitors should drive straight on to Piazza Garibaldi or to Piazza Scio, or thereabouts, in search of a parking space – though some do claim that the light in the museum is better in the mornings and should therefore be seen first. We could, however, begin the day wandering round the narrow medieval streets, so obviously based on the old Arab souk, and looking at the port and fish market. The liveliness of the

town is quite a contrast to sleepy Erice. There are also some good fish restaurants, where lobster is not too exorbitant, and *cuscusu*, a fish soup, is a speciality.

Tràpani to the Elymnians was Drapano, and to the Greeks Drepanon. Virgil tells how Aeneas brought his father Anchises, son of Aphrodite, to die at Drepanon. Originally the site consisted of an archipelago of rocks and islets. Its status as a town really began in 260 BC when Hamilcar Barca forcibly removed Eryx's population here and put up fortifications. In 241 BC the Romans under Lutatius Catulus took it after destroying the Carthaginian fleet in a great battle off the Egadi islands.

Tràpani benefited greatly from the cult of Venus Ericina, though the worship of Saturn seems to have been a local alternative. The fish sauce *garum* was a lucrative export. Sacked by Vandals, Byzantines and Saracens, it rose to prosperity under the domination of the last, and this continued with the Normans. The town began to be renowned at this stage for its coral-work and jewellery making, which reached perfection in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Its strategic situation increased its importance, as the crossroads between Anjou, Aragon and Tunis. Charles V conferred many favours on it, and strengthened its walls, putting up bastions, which proved very necessary as the menace of the pirates increased. The walls were demolished in the late nineteenth century, when the town began to expand.

The Viale Regina Elena by the port, with its blue and white fishing boats, *aliscafi* and cargo vessels, is a favourite place for the evening *passeggiata*. Out to sea loom the silhouettes of the islands of Favignana, Marèttimo and Lèvanzo, with the elegant little Villa Nasi perched improbably on rocks in the foreground. To the left are Isola Colombia, with a fifteenth century fort, now a prison, and, nearer the harbour the Lazzaretto or fever hospital. The Torre di Ligny, built by a Spanish Viceroy, is at the

far right end of the peninsula; it is now the Museum of Prehistory.

Eastwards from Piazza Scio we reach Corso Vittorio Emanuele, originally Rúa Grande, created in the thirteenth century and the main street in the old town. On the left is the Cathedral, dedicated to San Lorenzo, built in 1635 on an earlier building, its façade elaborate Baroque with a more restrained portico; inside there are three paintings of interest: a seventeenth century Crucifixion by a Trapanese artist Giacomo Lo Verde, a 'St George' by Andrea Carreca who was also from Trapani. and a 'Deposition' showing Flemish influence. A little further down the street, also on the left, is the Jesuits' Chiesa del Collegio, begun in the early seventeenth century by Natale Masuccio, with a Mannerist-Baroque façade – the classical pilasters and columns contrasting with a galaxy of masks, shells, festoons and statues. The marble bas-relief at the end of the grand interior is by Ignazio Marabitti (1766), with a colossal group of the Trinity above. There are beautiful cupboards with intaglio woodwork in the sacristy. Next to this church and facing the length of the Corso is Palazzo Cavaretta, otherwise La Loggia, rich and imposing, in three orders, dating from 1696.

There are many interesting if dilapidated palazzi in this area. Palazzo Riccio di San Gioacchino in Via Turretta is one of the oldest of the Baroque palaces. It has an elaborate balcony in late Renaissance style, reminiscent of balconies at Noto (p. 284), and an equally elaborate window above. There is a splendid internal courtyard. The Chiesa del Purgatorio, built in 1688, in the Piazzetta del Purgatorio, was badly damaged in the war. It is claimed to be open at certain times on Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays but that has proved problematical. There is a tiled dome, and the façade is adorned with statues. This little church is where the 'Mysteries' are kept, twenty life-size groups, carved in the seventeenth century, representing scenes from the

Passion, that are paraded round the town during the afternoon of Good Friday. Easter week is celebrated with processions in most towns and villages in Sicily, but the occasion at Tràpani is regarded as one of the most spectacular. The influence of Spain is obvious – hooded figures in surplices of different colours representing different guilds parade through the town, beating drums. Each ‘Mystery’, placed on a bier heaped with flowers, is carried by members of a particular guild: the ‘Washing of the Feet’ by fishermen, the ‘Betrayal’ by barbers and hairdressers, ‘Ecce Homo’ by cobblers, and so on. This is a great and moving experience to watch, but beware of *scippi*, pickpockets, and camera snatchers.

Near here are the ex-prison, with caryatids on the façade, and the Chiesa della Immacolata Concezione, with an apse decorated with stuccoes of the mid eighteenth century by Nicolò Carrecca. San Agostino, the church of the Templars, is in Piazza Saturno, close to a late seventeenth century fountain surmounted by the god Saturn, marking the end of the aqueduct built by the Chiaramonte. The entrance portal and the lovely rose window of the church (much damaged in the war) are of the fourteenth century. Santa Maria del Gesù, early seventeenth century, is in Via Santa Elisabetta, with a mixed Gothic and Renaissance façade, including an Annunciation in the Catalan-Gothic style. The interior is simple but contains a masterpiece: a full-length glazed terracotta ‘Madonna of the Angels’ by Andrea della Robbia, in a marble baldacchino by Antonello Gagini (1521) with garlands of winged cherubs, flowers and fruit.

The Pescheria or fish market is near here, on the north side of the peninsula and greatly entertaining in the early mornings. San Nicolò Mirenze has Mannerist frescoes of the sixteenth century. A stone commemorates the burial of Manfredi, son of Frederick II of Aragon and who died in 1318 after falling off a horse.

There is a fresco of the Madonna and Child of the sixteenth century, and a realistically macabre *gotico-*

doloroso crucifix of the fifteenth century. Casa Pilato in Via Sette Dolori is thought to have been the original Palazzo Chiaramonte. Continuing in that direction we enter what was the Jewish ghetto. Palazzo Giudecca, otherwise Ciambra or 'Lo Spedaletto', although in a bad state is an important example of the sixteenth century Catalan Plateresque style, with a diamond-pointed wall (of a type which will also be seen at the Palazzo Steripinto at Sciacca (p. 202)), and an ogival doorway. The church of San Pietro in Via Sergio contains a monumental organ by Francesco La Grassa, considered to be his masterpiece and completed in 1842.

It is now a matter of returning to the car and driving down Via Fardella and Via Conte Pepoli to the Sanctuary of the Annunziata and the Museo Pepoli. The Annunziata, completed in 1332 and rebuilt in 1760, is the chief monument of the town and contains the revered Madonna of Tràpani. Only the façade, the rose window and the Gothic portal remain from the original building. The outside of the chapel of the Marinai (sailors), on the left is late Gothic, with curious narrow columns, but with Renaissance windows. The campanile is typically Baroque. The spacious interior of the church, redesigned by Giovanni Biagio Amico, is especially remarkable for its shrines. The chapel of the Pescatori (fishermen), on the right, which dates from 1481, has many ex-voto offerings from people miraculously saved from shipwrecks. This has elaborately decorated arcading, also an octagonal cupola with sixteenth century frescoes of scenes from Genesis. The chapel of the Marinai is later, created in the sixteenth century with decorations of the eighteenth; its lovely shell-shaped windows are by Giovanni Biagio Amico. The famous, smiling Madonna di Tràpani, holding the Child gazing up at her, is in a chapel behind the high altar. She is indeed very beautiful and believed to have been carved by Nino Pisano in the fifteenth century. The great marble

archway at the entrance to her always crowded chapel was designed by Antonello Gagini and executed by his sons, and the bronze gates are by Guiliano Musarra (1591). The legend about this Madonna is that she was landed at Tràpani during a storm, on her way to Pisa; immediately miraculous cures were made. The Pisans wanted her back, but the Madonna decided that she was much happier at Tràpani, where ever since she has continued to perform miracles. The chapel is decorated with polychrome marble and there is a magnificent *baldacchino*. Beneath the statue is a representation of Tràpani in silver. Leading off this chapel is another containing the silver statue of Sant'Alberto, the city's patron saint. Watch out for the extraordinary shrine to the Beato Luigi Rabata of Erice (died 1443), who has an arrow piercing his head.

The Pepoli Museum is in the former Carmelite convent behind the Sanctuary to the right. The scale and richness of this building is amazing. Its entrance is through the cloisters, Tuscan in style, dating from about 1650. The nucleus of the museum was begun in 1908, thanks to the enthusiasm and generosity of Count Agostino Sieri Pepoli, who had been collecting artefacts and treasures in the province for many years. To this was added other collections, in particular that of General Giovan Battista Fardella, Minister under Ferdinand I and Francis I. The whole collection, vast and diverse, was moved to this building when it was taken over by the State in 1925. The Count's bewhiskered bust stands at the entrance. The ground floor has various architectural and Arab fragments and leads into a large display of Gagini sculpture, in particular St James the Great by Antonello Gagini and a holy water stoup of 1486. A sumptuous staircase in polychrome marble, probably dating from 1639, leads up to the next floor: an early and important example of this very Sicilian style. Rooms I and II are devoted to paintings mainly of local provenance collected by Fardella. In Room III there are three major works: a Virgin and

Saints by the Master of the Tràpani Polyptych, fifteenth century; a Pietà by Roberto di Oderisio (1380); a Madonna and Child by an unknown Palermitan artist (c. 1450). In Room IV there is a triptych (fifteenth century) by Antonio Massano, known as *Il Pastura*. Room VI has a masterpiece by Titian, 'St Francis receiving the Stigma'. Leading on from Room XII there are local artefacts, particularly models of Christmas cribs, church silver and examples of the famous coral-work, which are in Rooms XIV–XV. (Collectors in the past, particularly in the Whitaker family, bought up many of the best pieces of Tràpani coral-work, now very rare and dispersed, and a few are to be seen at Villa Malfitano in Palermo. Connoisseurs might like to know that one of the best examples of Tràpani coral-work is a seventeenth century casket kept locked in the main Tràpani branch of the Banco di Sicilia.)

In Room XV there are three important pieces by the master-craftsman Matteo Bavera around the 1630s: a chalice, a large hanging lamp and an armless crucifix made from a single piece of coral. On the walls there are pieces of majolica pavement. Room XVIII has a beautiful altar frontal woven with silver. There follows more examples of silver and majolica, then an archaeological section with pieces from Erice, Camarina, Motya, Segesta and Selinunte. Finally we have the prized flag of Garibaldi's steamship of 1860, the *Lombardo*; this had originally been presented by Garibaldi to Richard Brown Cossins, the stalwart manager of the *baglio* Ingham (p. 182).

A visit to the Tourist Office, the Azienda Provinciale Turismo, at Villa Aula, Via Saba 15, is well worth while. Villa Aula was built by Gaspare Ingagnone, the Florios' administrator, and then bought by the Aula family. It has a gorgeous fantasia of decorative detail, especially stained glass, and furniture – Classical, Baroque, Empire, and 'Liberty'.

The Egadi Islands and Pantelleria

The principal **Egadi**, or Aegadean, **Islands** – Favignana, Lèvanzo and Marèttimo – can be reached from Tràpani by ferry or hydrofoil (*aliscafo*). Favignana is the nearest, about 13 kilometres away, besides being the largest and most populated (over 4,000 inhabitants) and famous for the *mattanza* of tunny fish (p. 154). It has sundry small hotels and developing tourist villages. For enthusiasts of the *belle époque* it certainly deserves a pilgrimage. Lèvanzo is the smallest island (c. 200 inhabitants), rocky, unspoilt, with one hotel, ideal for a quiet holiday. It also has important prehistoric cave drawings. Marèttimo is the furthest, wild and dramatically beautiful, with a superstitious and independently minded population (about 700) and no hotels. There has been much emigration from this island; 1400 Marèttimani are said to be living at Monterey in California.

There are also two islets near Tràpani. These are Formica, which has an old lighthouse and some *tonnara* sheds converted into a rehabilitation centre for drug addicts, and Maraone, uninhabited.

Favignana was anciently Aegusa. Settlers came here from Liguria to fish for coral (the famous coral banks were exhausted about 1750). In mid-May when the sea is frothing red with tunny blood, at the time of the *mattanza*, some of us may uneasily be reminded of the slaughter of the Carthaginians in 241 BC. But the terrific excitement of the *tonnaroti*, and of the spectators, and the ancient rituals involved, have something of the drama and tension of Spanish bull-fights, without of course the glamour. A

thousand fish might be caught in a good season, though nowadays fishing has been reduced because of the sinking of oil wells. Since September 1993, the area has also been declared a marine reserve, divided into zones, as at Ustica, and shipping has been restricted.

The great arched cathedral-like *tonnara* sheds are now a museum. They were built in 1874 for Ignazio Florio by Almeyda, who created the Politeama at Palermo. Florio's statue, dated 1896, stands in the little square, in front of the Chiesa Matrice (1704) with its majolica cupola. Florio bought the islands with the fishing rights from the Pallavicini family of Genoa in 1874. His Palazzina Florio, castellated like the Zisa and now the Municipio, is a little gem, also built by Almeyda, in 1876. This was the centre of much fashionable entertainment in the *belle époque*, presided over by the 'glorious' Franca Florio. In *Places of My Infancy* Lampedusa unforgettably describes being awakened here as a child at 7 a.m. in order to be kissed by the aged Empress Eugénie in her widow's weeds, 'flapping wildly in the wind'.

Grotesque heads by a local sculptor 'Sarinu', alias Rosario Santamaria, have become a feature of the town. Over the otherwise flat (and parched) landscape towers a mountain of 314 metres, capped by the fort of Santa Caterina. The rebuilt and enlarged fort at San Giacomo is now a prison. In fact Favignana has long been associated with convicts. Murderers used to be kept in cavern cells like cages, to be stared or jeered at. Other convicts worked in chain gangs. During the Fascist regime political prisoners were also sent here.

At the north-east corner of the island there is the Cala Rossa or Red Beach, so named after the gory Roman-Carthaginian battle. The tufa quarries to the south are strange, but of only passing interest. The Lido Burrone is the most popular beach. Grottoes abound, the Bue Marino being the best known. The sunset over Marèttimo as seen

The Egadi Islands and Pantellèria

from Punto Sottile is spectacular. It is possible to bring cars to Favignana, and bicycles and motor-cycles can be hired (useful!).

Lèvanzo, originally Phorantia, with its tiny group of mostly white-roofed houses and a summer sea of turquoise blue, billed as the 'Island of Solitude', is a welcome contrast. Fresh water has however, to be imported. The Palaeolithic black-figure drawings, about eighty, of animals and anthropomorphic dancers, in the Grotta del Genovese, were only discovered in 1949. Day visitors to Lèvanzo wishing to see them are advised to call first at the Tràpani tourist office, so that a *custode* can be alerted. The cave can be reached by boat, or else by mule, but better on foot along goat-paths among the *macchia mediterranea*, euphorbias, thyme and agaves. There are many other grottoes around the island.

After Palmarola near Ponza, and Alicudi in the Aeolian Islands, Marèttimo is my favourite unspoilt small island in Italy. Hierà to the ancients, 'Ithaca' to Samuel Butler (p. 153), it is mountainous and undeveloped, with many fresh water springs. The highest point of its Monte Falcone is 686 metres. Rooms can be hired from fishermen's families, and social life centres round the Bar Torrente. Some Roman remains have been discovered above the village, where there is also a ruined Byzantine church, now a stable. A path leads to the Castello di Punta Troia, romantically situated but with grim associations, having once been a Bourbon prison. The boat trip round the island, beneath the sheer cliffs, is extraordinarily beautiful. There are coves for bathing from a number of grottoes, that of the Presepe or Crib, with figures reminiscent of the Nativity, being the best. The Cala dello Spalmatore is even larger, with very deep water, rather alarming. Fish are abundant.

The island of **Pantelleria**, not one of the Egadi, is the largest of the offshore Sicilian islands, and nearest to Tunisia – 70 kilometres away. This strange black outcrop, towering to

a cone of 836 metres, has had many names and many conquerors, being so strategically placed in the Mediterranean. It can be reached from Trapani by ferry or by air, and there are air services from Palermo and Rome. To the Phoenicians it was Hiranin, evidently meaning 'Island of Birds' – and indeed the annual migrations, including storks and falcons streaming overhead, are marvellous and moving to watch. The Carthaginians used it as a staging post. Conquered by the Romans, it was renamed Cossyra, i.e. 'smaller in comparison to Malta'. Then came the Vandals, the Byzantines, and finally the Arabs, who wiped out everybody and called the island Bent el Rion, 'Daughter of the Winds'. The Normans later annexed the island to Sicily. Spaniards, Bourbons and Fascists kept prisoners there. In the Second World War Pantelleria was notorious as a base for attacking Allied convoys. After a terrific bombardment in May 1943 it was captured with 11,000 prisoners taken, the only Allied casualty being 'one soldier bitten by a mule'. There are now about 8,000 inhabitants, and there are some reasonable hotels. Cars can be hired.

What with its buildings made of lava, including the castle, the Castello Barbacane, and the *fumarole*, hot springs (said to increase potency) and the salt water lake, obviously a crater and known as the Specchio di Venere, Mirror of Venus, one is not surprised to learn that Pantelleria is in reality a volcano. The last eruption was in 1891. Obsidian and quartz are found here. There are some six hundred species of plants, many being aromatic and including myrtle and a low pine called the Zappino. The land is rugged, divided up by black walls, but very fertile. The grapes of the Zabbino variety are famous, as are the capers (a main export) and figs. The wines are strong, especially the muscatel and 'Tanit', named after the Carthaginian goddess. Ravioli made with ricotta and mint is a speciality; also *tuma*, a cheese, and stuffed wild rabbit.

There are some interesting prehistoric remains, including

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a fortified Neolithic village at Cuddie Rosse and mysterious tumuli of lava, the best examples being in the Mursia locality. The cubic houses, usually white, scattered around the island, are called *dammusi* and are of obvious Arab descent. The ultra-modern villas and those in 'traditional' style are mostly owned by rich Milanese. A drive round the island is well worth the effort, a boat trip even more so, for there are many fantastic *faraglioni*, grottoes and coves, including the Cala dei Cinque Denti and the Salto La Vecchia, where on warm nights ghostly laments might be heard. On July evenings Northern Lights have been seen from Pantelleria: a sight never to be forgotten.

Motya – Marsala – Gibellina

It is a strange landscape south of Tràpani. On the right are the salt-pans, marshes and windmills. The mainland is very fertile, almost African, with little white houses, palm trees, vineyards, and vegetable and tomato plots, enclosed by reeds or prickly pears. The windmills, for crushing salt, have mostly been restored and some are illuminated at night. Watch out for a sign to the Museo del Sale, the salt museum, which although modest is worth a visit. Near the museum are tanks for breeding fish. Sometimes flamingoes are distantly seen. There are also terns and herons. The sunset over Favignana is a gorgeous sight.

A large lagoon, Lo Stagnone, comes into view, enclosed by a long island, Isola Grande, privately owned. The small northern island within the lagoon, is Santa Maria, also private. Both can be visited with permits. The other small island on the lagoon is San Pantaleo, now generally known as Motya, in Italian Mozia, high on the list of the most interesting sights in Sicily, also something of an adventure to reach. There are no great ruins on Motya, but it is a place of magic and contains one great masterpiece. The island is also a good place for a picnic, though refreshments are available. The sea around is shallow and somewhat weedy, full of fish but no good for bathing.

A motor boat takes visitors to the island, a journey of about ten minutes. Canoes can also be hired. Near the landing stage are huge mounds of salt, and there are more windmills. There is also a pleasant café.

Motya belongs to the Fondazione Giuseppe Whitaker whose headquarters are at Villa Malfitano in Palermo. It

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is the site of one of the three major Phoenician trading centres in western Sicily – the others being Panormus and Solus – and was founded in the eighth century BC. Indeed it would have been a natural transit point for ships sailing to Spain, Sardinia and central Italy.

By the sixth century BC Motya was probably the most flourishing Phoenician city in the western Mediterranean. The entire perimeter of this curious flat island, only two and a half kilometres in circumference, was protected by high walls. As rivalry between Carthaginians and Greeks increased, so Motya became a major Punic stronghold. In 397 BC it was attacked and destroyed by Dionysius I of Syracuse, who had brought an army of 80,000 men with 3,000 boats. The *ballista* or catapult is said to have been used for the first time in this siege. Motya was noted for its tower-like buildings, several storeys high. Dionysius built his own siege towers of six storeys, with protruding bridges on which hand-to-hand battles were fought, while battering rams breached the walls below. The whole place must have been set on fire, and certainly afterwards there was frightful slaughter; any Greek residents or mercenaries found there were crucified. According to Diodorus, the Motyans had ‘fought like men, desperate and prodigal with their lives, knowing too well the cruelty of the Greeks’.

Dionysius withdrew from the ruins, and in the next year Motya was regained by the Phoenicians, who removed any survivors to Lilybaeum, now Marsala, on the Capo Boeo promontory. The island became virtually uninhabited, except for some peasants and farmers, and over the centuries the whereabouts of this once mighty town was forgotten. Although some slight excavating was made in the nineteenth century at San Pantaleone, even by the famous Professor Hermann Schliemann, the discoverer of Troy, it was an Englishman, Joseph (Giuseppe, or Pip to his family) Whitaker, who established the site as Motya. He gradually bought up the entire island, and initiated

serious excavations in 1906 under the supervision of Professor Antonino Salinas of the Palermo museum and the direction of Cavaliere Giuseppe Lipari – whose photograph shows him to have been a splendid robust character with white dundreary whiskers, and whose name is also commemorated on the island.

The wealth of the Whitakers, as already mentioned, was derived originally from Marsala wine, exploited by Pip Whitaker's great-uncle, Benjamin Ingham, the 'English Croesus of these parts' as a contemporary traveller described him. Pip may have seemed a charming, gentle dilettante, but he developed into an archaeologist of some reputation. Almost immediately, in 1906, discoveries of extraordinary interest were unearthed at Motya, so he made a small museum, which is still the nucleus of the collection in the present building. It was realised – the site having lain undisturbed for twenty-three centuries – that more could probably be learnt here about those shadowy Phoenicians than anywhere else in the Mediterranean, even at Tyre and Sidon.

Pip's book on Motya was published in 1921. His other passion, ornithology, regrettably resulted in the shooting of interesting birds of passage on this migration route. He also went on shooting expeditions in Africa, and in 1905 his two-volume *The Birds of Tunisia* was published. A museum of stuffed birds was created at Malfitano. Pip also had the idea of growing agaves commercially at Motya: 'Oh, those horrible giant goats' horns, such a waste,' groaned his wife Tina. She was aghast at his extravagance. 'The girls' future *must* be considered!' Boxes at the Teatro Massimo, dresses by Worth for *tableaux vivants*, race meetings, things like these should be the priority. She had to agree to a house being built on Motya, and the Whitakers' castellated villa is still to be seen there. It was some consolation for Tina when 'pigeons', the fashionable young men of Palermo, flocked to Motya to flirt with her daughters Norina and

Delia. Delia was to be the last of the Whitakers in Sicily. Her father died in 1936, so it was she who left Motya and Malfitano to the Foundation in memory of her father. As the Sicilians were not interested in Pip's museum of stuffed birds Delia's cousin, the then Sir Terence O'Neill, Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, arranged for them to be sent to Belfast Museum.

Motya has a ghostly stillness, except at the height of summer when there are cicadas. The atmosphere is all the more strange when one thinks of its once dense population, possibly even 15,000. Terrible things happened here, and there were cults that involved human sacrifices. But this does not at all detract from the island's beauty. The little castellated house of the Whitakers still stands, like a benign sentinel.

The new museum has a room devoted to Pip's discoveries. Particularly fascinating are the objects from the *tophet*, a sacrificial enclosure dedicated to the gods Baal, Hammon and Astarte. These include not only offerings such as grinning terracotta masks and *stelae*, but little globular urns with flat lids that contained ashes and bones of sacrificed human babies and small animals. There are some beautiful unguent bottles of vitreous paste, typically Phoenician, coins, lucky charms, jewellery – including necklaces threaded by Delia – weapons and domestic objects (note the delightful dishes for fish). Attic vases, an Egyptian alabastron painted with an antelope, and representations of Horus and Anubis, are indicative of commercial ties abroad. Winged sphinxes seem to denote Assyrian contacts, whereas a *metope* showing two lions attacking a bull is obviously Mycenaean in style. This last came from the main or north gate. In order to accommodate new finds, there has been some controversial modernising.

The museum also contains one of the greatest pieces of Greek sculpture found in southern Italy, as important as the Riace bronzes in the museum at Reggio Calabria.

Usually referred to as the Giovane or Fanciullo di Mozia, it is a superb marble statue of a young man, over life-size, Greek, of the mid fifth century BC, the arms and feet missing. It was discovered in 1979 near the area known as the Cappiddazzu, the head cut away clean, a little way from the body. At once one is struck by the long pleated tunic, so diaphanous that it clings like wet muslin to his sinuous shape, showing every muscle. The right arm probably held a spear, and there seem to have been a breast-plate and helmet, no doubt of bronze. The face has a certain arrogance. There has been much speculation about whom or what this masterpiece represented. It has been pointed out that the long tunic was typically Carthaginian. Was it booty of war? Or could he have been a charioteer, a deity or a priest? Maybe the statue was simply commissioned from a Greek artist by a wealthy Motyan. After all, Pip in his book *Motya* has commented on how Greek art had already penetrated into the colony and firmly established itself there; and according to Diodorus, as Margaret Guido has pointed out, there were temples dedicated to the Greek cult in Motya.

A little to the south of the museum there are also remains of a Greek villa, though it has even been suggested that this might have been built *after* the removal of survivors to Lilybaeum. This villa was also discovered by Pip Whitaker and has pebble mosaics of a panther attacking a bull and a griffin pursuing a deer. Remains of the perimeter walls, towers and bastions, can be seen all round the island, especially on the north and east. There is a small barracks south of the Greek villa. Near the south gate, with its two towers, is the *cothon*, a small artificial port with a paved canal running to the sea. The Motyans had a large fleet, and in the silence of this place one has to imagine the bustle of loading and unloading merchandise, and the noise of caulking and hammering. But an exciting new discovery has revealed the foundations of a great open-

air temple nearby. Fresh water flows into the *cothon*, and there is a sacred well within the temple. Evidently a new building was constructed on the site after the Greeks had been driven out; many mysteries have yet to be solved. Comparisons have been made with Maabed in northern Syria.

The most thoroughly excavated area is at the other end of the island. From the museum a path through vineyards leads past the 'house of the amphoras' to the *tophet*, the site of a sanctuary to Baal Hamon. For those lucky to have been present during the excavation an extraordinary spectacle was revealed: hundreds of little cinerary urns, terracotta masks and *stelae*, haphazardly in layers. The bones in the urns were thought to be of sacrificed babies. It was here that the famous grinning mask with its half moon eyes, used as the emblem of Motya, was discovered. Next to the *tophet*, eastwards, is the necropolis. When this became full, a new and larger necropolis had to be created on the mainland at Birgi. Most of the excavations behind the old necropolis are in an area known as the Cappiddazzu, a Sicilian word meaning big hat, which was supposed to have been worn by a hermit – the name of the site was invented by Delia Whitaker. The main sanctuary, certainly larger, seems to have been at Cappiddazzu, where there are sixth century BC walls and a mosaic pavement. It was in the so-called industrial area between Cappiddazzu and the necropolis that the Fanciullo di Mozia was found. From the north gate, which has two massive towers, there is a causeway, still intact though now under water, to Birgi. Occasionally a horse and cart may still be seen splashing along it.

The necropolis at Birgi has been much excavated, and items found there are in the museums at Motya and Marsala. It is not worth a special detour. Birgi has also given its name to the Tràpani's military airport.

After the Second World War excavations at Motya were

mostly done by Professor Benedikt Isserlin and members of Leeds University. Then Italians took over, and the British were relegated to underwater archaeology. In 1971 a sensational discovery was made by Miss Honor Frost off Isola Lunga: part of a Punic warship of the third century BC, originally thirty-five metres long and manned by sixty-eight oarsmen – the only Punic ship of its type ever to be found. Possibly it had been sunk during the First Punic War. The stern had been deeply driven into the bottom, obviously with great force, accounting for its preservation. The pieces were meticulously put together, and it was found that many were marked with alphabetic signs, showing that the ship had been prefabricated. Now the reconstruction is to be seen in the archaeological museum at Marsala, the Baglio Anselmi, a must after visiting Motya.

For many years this ship was kept in a plastic tent, to keep the temperature constant. Displayed near it are objects that show what the crew had been eating, as well as bits of rope and baskets, and – surprisingly – uncorroded iron nails. The stones for ballast are identified as coming from Pantellena. Photographs tell us how the ship was recovered from the sea. Other rooms in the museum contain relics illustrating the history of Lilybaeum from earliest times to the Normans. There is also a section devoted to Motya.

The museum is near Capo Boeo, the site of Lilybaeum, where there are remains of a Roman villa with good mosaics (hunting scenes, a chained dog, Medusa, the Trinacria) and baths. The custodian of this place has to be contacted through the museum. A little south of the museum is the small church of San Giovanni Battista, which has a statue attributed to Antonello Gagini. Below the church is the so-called Grotto of the Sibyl, where one of these prophetic ladies, the Sibyls – this one known as the Lilibetana – is said to have lived and been buried. There are Roman mosaics and traces of frescoes. The water is still regarded as having magical properties.

Motya and Marsala

Lilybaeum surrendered to the Romans in 241 BC after two long sieges, and became an important military and naval base. Cicero described it as a *splendidissima civitas*. The Arabs captured it in 830 and changed the name to Marsa Ali or Mars-al-allah, the harbour of God. The Normans rebuilt the castle. The decline came after Don Juan of Austria decided virtually to seal off the port because of the threat from Barbary pirates. Most of the original Punic city is buried under the present town, though traces of the walls are visible.

Marsala today is an important and busy agricultural centre, famous of course for its wine, but also – for every Italian – because it was here that Garibaldi landed on May 11 1860. Visitors are strongly advised to park outside the town, as some streets are narrow and the centre is often closed to traffic. Marsala was devastated by Allied bombing in 1943, and was in danger of losing its original character. Now it has been splendidly restored, and the boulevards outside the walls, lined with palms and oleanders, have a certain elegance. In the *centro storico* the most interesting buildings are around the central square, the Piazza della Repubblica. The Palazzo della Loggia or Pretorio is eighteenth century. The monastery of San Pietro, with a rose window, is seventeenth century, the college of the Jesuits sixteenth century, both in Via XI Maggio, known also as the Càssaro, the principal street. The Cathedral, built in 1628 on a Norman structure, is dedicated to St Thomas of Canterbury. Its Baroque façade was only completed in 1957. The interior is disappointing, but has sculpture by the Gagini, including a good Madonna by Domenico Gagini and a statue of St Thomas the Apostle by Antonello, also a sarcophagus by Giuliano Mancino (1512). Behind the Cathedral in Via Garaffa is the Museo degli Arazzi, open daily, which contains eight beautifully preserved and important Flemish tapestries of the sixteenth century, depicting scenes of the war of the Romans under Vespasian

and Titus against the Jews. They were donated to the Cathedral in 1589 by Antonio Lombardo Archbishop of Messina, who had been given them by Philip II of Spain. A theory is that the designs were by Peter de Klemperer, who died in 1586.

On Maundy Thursday there is a procession of the *Misteri*, statues connected with the passion of Christ, through the streets to the accompaniment of a brass band. All over Sicily there are processions during Holy week, but this one – like those at Tràpani, Enna and Piana degli Albanesi – is among the most famous and strangest: for the people participate in the procession, alternately applauding, wailing and groaning. The statues are kept in the Cathedral.

Porta Garibaldi, or Porta di Mare, rebuilt in 1685, is in the form of a Roman triumphal arch, and has the royal Spanish eagle above. The low building containing the municipal offices was put up by the Spaniards in 1577 as a *quartiere militare*. Behind it is the market square. Near the gateway is the circular church of the Addolorata, with a cupola, completed in 1790. Inside there is a revered Madonna dressed in black.

From here the Viale dei Mille leads to the port and the Piazza Piemonte-Lombardo, so named after the two paddle-wheel steamers that bore the immortal Thousand from Genoa. On that great day British warships, the *Intrepid* and the *Argus*, were already anchored out to sea, having been sent to protect the English wine merchants – Benjamin Ingham having demanded help, estimating the contents of his *baglio* to be worth half a million pounds. It was near the gateway that a group of British officers, who were eating ices in a cafe, were suddenly surprised by armed men in red shirts, rushing in and shaking them enthusiastically by the hands. It was the first the officers knew that Garibaldi had landed. Soon afterwards the situation became less happy, when a Neapolitan sloop moved closer

to land and began firing at the Mole some yards away. All this is vividly described by the then British commander, H.F. Winnington-Ingram, in *Hearts of Oak* (1889).

The Mole had been built in the 1780s by the Woodhouses of Liverpool, who had been the first to discover that the strong local wine was very like madeira, then fashionable in England. John Woodhouse had arrived in Sicily about 1770 in search of *barilla*, a plant that grew in the salt-marshes and was used for making soap. Instead, so a descendant of his has written: 'As a speculation he chartered a sailing ship, loaded it with casks of well-matured natural wine and sent it home. The wine met a ready and profitable sale, with the result that in 1773 he repeated the experiment on a large scale (8,000 gallons) and with equal success.' He thereupon bought a *tonnara* shed and turned it into a *baglio* for storage. His son, also called John, took over in 1787 and set about what was in effect the beginning of a complete agrarian revolution, giving loans to farmers for planting vineyards on what had been wheat fields and olive groves. The real success came in 1798 when Nelson, who had anchored off Marèttimo, a favourite spot of his, took a liking to Woodhouse and put in a large order of wine for his fleet. In 1800 Nelson wrote that 'the wine is so good that any gentleman's table might receive it', and a contract was signed for 500 pipes, about five and a half thousand gallons.

When Sicily was occupied by the British between 1806 and 1815, as a bastion against Napoleon, English merchants saw their chance, and one of those arriving in 1806 was Benjamin Ingham, then aged twenty-two and from Leeds. As already mentioned (p. 14) he visited Marsala and realized at once that he had lighted on a goldmine. He then studied ways of fortifying and preserving wines. But his first shipments seem mostly to have been to Boston, Massachusetts – so as not to appear to be competing too much with Woodhouse. However by 1812

he had impertinently erected his own *baglio*, less than a mile from his rival's. Soon he had also established his own banking firm in Palermo. He died in 1861, vastly rich with huge investments in America, formidable and feared, leaving his Sicilian interests mostly to his nephew Joseph Whitaker (father of that other Joseph, or Pip, who acquired Motya).

Meanwhile a number of other English firms, including those of Wood and Hopps, had been established not only at Marsala but at Mazara and Castelvetro. By the 1840s Vincenzo Florio had also built his *baglio*. He and Ingham were easily the most powerful, for the Woodhouses were not interested in diversifying their interests in Sicily and continued to live humbly at Marsala, while the Ingham-Whitakers and Florios built palaces in Palermo, leaving resident managers in charge.

In Edward Lear's day marsala wine was more widely drunk in England than perhaps it is today. As Lear said of himself:

He sits in a beautiful parlour
With hundreds of books on the wall;
He drinks a great deal of marsala,
But never gets tipsy at all.

Ingham had discovered that in order to get his money back from the United States it had to come through London, which meant losing twenty per cent on the way. So he sensibly left it where it was, investing it first in canals, then in railways and real estate. Hence his large holdings in the New York Central and the Michigan Central Railroad Company, and his purchase of land in Manhattan at 'agricultural prices'.

The *bagli* were like fortresses, with high walls and watchtowers in case of pirates. Ingham's manager was the redoubtable Richard Brown Cossins, who in 1860 was British Vice-Consul at Marsala. A fervent admirer

of Garibaldi, he rode with the Thousand and volunteers swarming in from San Giuliano (Erice) and Castelvetro, to Salemi, where on May 13 Garibaldi proclaimed himself Dictator of Sicily in the name of King Victor Emmanuel.

Under Pip Whitaker and his brothers Joshua and Robert, from the 1880s onwards, the family wine business languished, and suffered still more on the advent of Mussolini. In 1929 the firms of Ingham-Whitaker, Woodhouse and Florio were bought by Cinzano, and merged under the name of Florio. The *bagli* were very badly bombed in 1943, the Woodhouse and Wood establishments, including the Woodhouse mausoleum, being totally destroyed. It is still possible to visit what is now the Florio *baglio* within which the grand Ingham palazzo stands empty, and one can still sample varieties of Marsala such as 'SOM' (Superior Old Marsala), 'Vergine' and 'Garibaldi'. Other wine firms now include Spanò, Pellegrino, Mineo and Rallo. There is a wine museum, the Enomuseo, on the road to Mazara.

In the late nineteenth century much of the country between Marsala and Salemi was still uncultivated, compared by some latter-day emigrants to the Pampas of Argentina. Cossins has recorded that in 1860 it was a hot, rough, and thirsty march for the Thousand (but that the great Garibaldi and his second-in-command Bixio had ridden on horses). He also noted that Salemi on its hilltop had some 'fine houses'. Alas, the town was badly affected by the earthquake of 1968, and many of those houses have now disappeared.

Evidence of the devastation at **Salemi** is still visible, the cathedral and the Capuchins' monastery being totally destroyed. The castle however survives; trapezoidal with three towers, it was reconstructed from an older building by Frederick II. The College of the Jesuits has been restored and is now the Museo Civico, containing sculptures by Domenico Gagini and Francesco Laurana and a painting

by Mariano Smiriglio; it also contains some Risorgimento memorabilia, originally in the castle, and objects from excavations at the necropolis of Mokarta nearby.

Salemi, with a population of over 15,000, may be on the site of the Sican-Elymian town of Halicyae which was allied with Segesta against Syracuse. It had special privileges in the time of the Romans, and the remains of a small Byzantine basilica in the contrada Miceli (with some mosaics and Greek and Latin inscriptions) are evidence of its continued importance. The name derives from an Arab word meaning safety, and it is interesting to discover that some quarters of the town are still called Rabato (after Rabat) and Giudecca (harking back to the old Jewish community). But Salemi is most famous for its 'bread festivals', when bread is made into dolls and other peculiar shapes, their symbolism possibly of pagan origin. These take place on February 3, the *fiesta* of San Biagio (who delivered the country around from a plague of locusts), and on March 19, the *fiesta* of San Giuseppe, that culminates in the *cena* or supper of the saint, when *sfinci*, rich cakes made with honey, are eaten.

Crossing the *autostrada*, lined with eucalyptuses, we reach **Gibellina Nuova**, not far from the railway station. The original village of Gibellina was about twenty kilometres to the east and totally decimated, with many deaths, in 1968, as were other villages such as Salaparuta and Montevago. Mainly on the initiative of the mayor, Ludovico Corrao, who was determined to beat bureaucracy and the Mafia, it was decided to build a new village of Gibellina in a less isolated spot, completely modern in style and using leading Italian architects. The idea was seized upon with enthusiasm and much publicised. If the result already looks somewhat dated, one must respect the inspiration and the effort. We pass through a gigantic steel structure shaped like a star, by Pietro Consagra, who also designed the strange but effective entrance into the

cemetery. The spheroid church is by Ludovico Quaroni, the museum by Francesco Venezia, the 'Labarinto' with its two earlike protrusions by Nino Franchina. Even the furniture in the Municipio is avant-garde. A house is built like a snail. All is a bit stark, and needless to say controversial. Perhaps a few trees are needed.

The road to old Gibellina runs through wild and beautiful country, sparsely inhabited. This is the Alto Belice. Gibellina had about six thousand inhabitants and was just beginning to emerge from centuries of poverty. The earthquake struck when snow was on the ground, and people who decided to stay behind because of the cold were all killed by the second shock. As a memorial it was resolved by Alberto Burri, the artisan designer, to cover the whole area of the original village with white cement, leaving cracks where the streets had been – the idea being that the blocks where there had been houses should look like tombs, while the cracks would symbolise not only the shaking of the earth but the 'labyrinth of memory'. *Il Cretto* is a controversial idea, grim and rather overwhelming, looking like a maze in cement, and visible for many miles but, when one gets used to it, acceptable. On the hill opposite by the church there is generally an unkempt mass of scaffolding, awaiting the summer 'festival' when poetry readings are given and modern plays performed.

Selinunte – Mazara del Vallo – Castelvetro

The *autostrada* from Palermo to Mazara del Vallo passes close to the turning for **Selinunte**, one of the most evocative places in Sicily, also one of the most impressive of all Greek sites, never having been built over in modern times. It can be easily reached from Marsala or Erice. The village of Marinella nearby is hardly a village any more and is still growing. There are some commendable hotels here and good *trattorie* (try the *triglie al finocchio*, red mullet with fennel). Another attraction is the long beach of 'echoless sand, glistening with mica', in Lawrence Durrell's description. This beach has now become popular, especially on the east side towards the *pineta*. Much further on there is a nature reserve at the mouth of the river Bèlici, and here there is a beach that is less frequented, about a hundred metres from where cars can be parked.

To appreciate and understand (if that is possible) Selinunte a two-day visit is best, or two mornings – for as the day wears on it is hot and shadeless, and there is some scrambling about. It opens at 9 a.m. There have been dramatic restorations of the temples, very successful in spite of some experts' grumbles. Yet, as we survey the chaos of broken blocks and fallen capitals, there is an impression of the aftermath of a battle of giants. Terrible things have happened here, but then that has been the case with virtually every Greek site in Sicily. Selinunte is one of the great examples of where the imagination, as Rose Macaulay put it, soars 'into the high empyrean where huge episodes are tangled with myths and dreams'. The situation is beautiful: looking towards Africa across the unpolluted (one hopes)

sea, with wild flowers spreading over the ruins in spring. A vast earthquake, believed to have been in the sixth century AD, must have been the final death-knell. Some small religious foundations or hermits were established here, but Selinunte – Selinous to the Greeks – passed for many centuries into virtual oblivion. Even Goethe, who stayed at Castelvetro, seemed to have thought it not worth the journey. His French contemporaries, D'Orville, Saint-Non and Houel, did however sketch and describe the tumbled mass. An Englishman, Henry Swinburne, went there in the 1780s and was astonished by 'the most extraordinary assemblage of ruins in Europe' lying in 'stupendous heaps with many columns still erect', from a distance looking like steeples of a city. His book probably inspired Robert Fagan, Consul-General in Palermo, to search for buried treasure in 1809–10. The two Englishmen William Harris and Samuel Angell (p. 48) were the first to undertake serious excavations. In 1822–3, and it was they who found the famous archaic *metopes* of Temple C, now in the Archaeological Museum of Palermo. Harris died of malaria, but Angell continued the work with Thomas Evans and Barone Pietro Pisani.

Throughout the nineteenth century excavations continued, with important results – though sometimes not adequately supervised so it would seem. For instance Douglas Sladen around 1900 said that it made him 'quite sick to see beautiful figures and heads being broken by careless picks' in the sanctuary of Malaphoros (whence, it must also be said, over 12,000 figurines have been recovered in subsequent years). The whole area around Selinunte has now been enclosed as an archaeological park, thanks to the efforts of Dr Vincenzo Tusa, to whom so much is owed in recent Selinuntine studies.

The original name Selinous was derived from a wild celery (*Selinon*) that grew there, and which appears on coins. Exceedingly prosperous and determinedly grand,

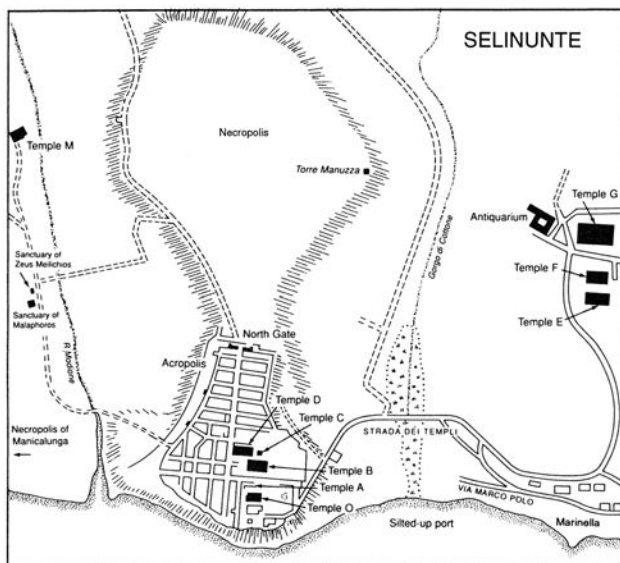
it was the most westerly colony of Magna Graecia and founded, according to Thucydides, from Megara Hyblea in 628 BC – though most authorities now accept Diodorus's earlier date of 650 BC.

As Selinous extended its borders northwards, so inevitably it came into conflict with the Elymnians of Segesta. The people of Selinunte kept close trading relations with Carthage, and indeed were its allies at the battle of Himera. Soon afterwards they decided to switch their allegiance to Syracuse. Their power increased and more splendid public buildings were put up. Carthage was thus ready for vengeance when Segesta appealed for help in yet another border quarrel, and in 409 BC it sent a great invasion force against Selinunte under the command of Hannibal, son of Giscon. The Greeks must have been taken by surprise, and there was no time for help to arrive from Akragas (Agrigento) or Syracuse. After a nine days' siege, at which siege towers were used, Selinous fell in spite of its massive fortifications, and there followed massacres, looting and rape. 'Every place', Diodorus said, 'was full of blood and dead bodies. The sufferings of girls and virgins are too shameful to relate.' It was said that 16,000 people were killed and 5,000 taken as slaves. The mighty temples were sacked and then set on fire.

After this Hannibal set off for Himera, where he avenged the Carthaginian defeat seventy-one years before. For a short interlude thereafter the site was repopulated by Hermocrates of Syracuse, but on his assassination Selinous came again under the domination of Carthage. In 250 BC the Carthaginians decided to remove the entire population to Lilybaeum. Sand and *macchia* covered the ruins and the rivers silted up.

There is no trace of Roman occupation here. The Arabs called the place Rahl al Asnan, village of the idols. In 1503 there is a reference to it as the Terra dei Pulci. Land of the Fleas, but this may be a corruption of Polluce, the name

From Selinunte to Castelvetro



of the watchtower built against the Barbary pirates and still visible.

Since the dedications of most of the temples have long been argued over, each temple has (rather boringly) had to be designated by a letter of the alphabet. The Acropolis is built on a high and very exposed promontory with a river on either side: the Salinon or Modione to the west, and the Hysas or Gorgo di Cotone to the east. There were harbours at the north of each of these rivers. But the water was not enough for such a large population and it became foul, causing disease. So the far-famed philosopher-physician Empedocles was called in for advice – which seems to have been a success. Perhaps it was he who suggested that the answer was to increase the flow of water by diverting inland springs into the rivers. During recent excavations

many rainwater tanks have – needless to say – been discovered, together with an aqueduct.

It is best first to visit the group of temples to the east, placed on a hill away from the Acropolis and near Marinella. A road leads first to Temple F, the earliest of the group, dating from the mid-sixth century and possibly dedicated to Athene. Archaic in style it has 6 columns at each end and 14 at the sides. Here Harris and Angell found the *metopes* of the Gigantomachia, gods fighting the giants, now in the museum in Palermo. An interesting point about this temple is that there were once screens between each of the outer columns, as though to prevent prying eyes from seeing the sacred mysteries within. The temple was greatly pillaged in the past. Selinunte is unique in Sicily as having sculpted *metopes*, and this is important in the history of archaic sculpture.

Temple G, beyond, ranks among the largest of all Greek temples and in Sicily is second in size to the Olympieion of Agrigento. From an inscription it is likely that it was dedicated to Apollo. It was begun in 550 BC and work continued until 480; but more was evidently in hand when the Carthagians sacked Selinunte in 409, judging by the pillars left at the quarries of Cusa (p. 193). Huge drums, 3–4 metres in diameter and weighing nearly 100 tons, lie tumbled in heaps among unfluted columns at Temple G (the fluting would have been done after the columns had been erected). This is one of the most extraordinary and moving sights of Selinunte. Only one column stands out of an intended 50. The original area was 110 by 50 metres, and because of the long drawn out period of building, its east end was archaic in style and the west classical.

Temple E, superbly restored in 1956–8, against the usual opposition from rival experts, has all its columns standing, 6 by 15, with part of the entablature. Dedicated to Hera and in style pure Doric, it is dated at 490–480 BC – therefore after the battle of Himera. Here in 1831

were found the four superb great *metopes*, full of life and movement, displayed in the Palermo museum (Heracles and the Amazon, Actaeon, Zeus and Hera, Athene and the Titans). The *stylobate* (base) measures 25.30 by 67.70 metres. At night it is illuminated. A new antiquarium has been created near Temple G in a converted farmhouse, once belonging to the Florio family.

The Strada dei Templi crosses the Gorgo di Cottone and leads up to the Acropolis. Passing the aforementioned tower of Polluce we reach the remains of Temple O, identical in size with Temple A (6 by 24 columns), just behind. Both were built at the same time as Temple E. The little Temple B on the other hand, on the far side of the east–west road, dates from about 280 BC, not long before Selinous's final demise. It was peristyllic, i.e. with only 4 columns in front of a *pronaos* or porch: a modest edifice, it must have seemed, amid the ruins of past glories, once so proudly and awesomely visible from the sea.

The twelve massive columns of Temple C, complete with capitals, were set up in 1925–7, and are among the most memorable sights of Selinunte, enough to inspire Rose Macaulay's 'myths and dreams'. The three archaic *metopes* (the Quadriga, Perseus and the Gorgon, Heracles and the Cercopes) were in many bits when found here by Harris and Angell, and were painstakingly pieced together by Barone Pisani. This is the oldest and largest of the Acropolis temples (17 by 6) and was dedicated perhaps to Apollo or Heracles. It was built on an earlier structure, and dated mid-century, though various features indicate that it took several years to build – the widths vary between flutes on columns and some of these columns are megalithic and some built up on drums.

The roof would have been of painted terracotta, with lion-head water spouts. The immense and alarming gorgon's head, as seen in the reconstruction of the pediment in Palermo, was at the east end. The visitor would have

mounted eight steps and have passed through a second row of pillars, to be confronted by the *pronaos*, which would have been closed off by great bronze doors. And behind these doors was the *cella*, at the end of which sacred objects were perceived – perhaps the archives, as many seals were found here. The corner columns are thicker than the rest, and fell at the time of an earthquake on some Byzantine habitations within the temple.

A few yards south of Temple C is the *megaron* or hall where offerings would have been kept. At the far end of the sacred area to the east of the temple is a *stoa* or portico. Between the temple and the *stoa* are the remains of a large altar.

Temple D, north of Temple C, is thought to have been dedicated to Aphrodite, and was probably a little later in date, measuring 34 by 56 metres, with 6 by 13 columns. These columns are slightly convex. The ornamentation was of stone, not terracotta. The town was laid out on a grid plan, one of the most ancient, the wide main street leading to the main or north gate, past the main inhabited area. Recent excavations have shown traces of buildings of the times of Hermocrates and the Punic occupation. The whole Acropolis was surrounded by strong defensive walls with several towers, some of which have been restored. A complex system of bastions, covered passages, ditches and posterns has been discovered, especially round the North Gate where there were secondary defences. Another group of houses, still being excavated and known as the Ancient City, the site of the original Selinunte settlers, lies some way to the north near Torre Manuzza, where there is also a necropolis. To reach this, we must return to the Strada dei Templi and take the path northwards before the Gorgo di Cotone. There is another necropolis further north again, in spite of some recent and quite important excavations, they are of less interest to the ordinary traveller.

There were in fact several necropolises, all far off, an

unusual feature in Greek times. The most important seems to have been that known as Manicalunga, west of the sanctuary of Malaphoros (literally 'Bearer of Pomegranates'). The sanctuary, dedicated without much doubt to Demeter, was evidently a halting place for funerals, where the bereaved left votive offerings, statuettes (all female) and similar objects, and where a sacrifice to the goddess was made. It was surrounded by walls. Now one enters through a columned gateway, the *propylaeum*, of the fifth century. Inside there are a small archaic altar and a huge sacrificial one.

The sanctuary was also used in Byzantine times, and several little lamps with Christian symbols have been discovered. Next comes a small temple dedicated to Zeus Melichoros and Pasistratea, alias Persephone. *Stelae* with a male and female head were discovered here. Further on still are the ruins of the so-called Temple M, believed in reality to have been an altar of the sixth century BC. The necropolis extends for about two kilometres. Tombs and piles of bones are still visible. Many fine Attic vases have been found.

The small road to the quarries of Rocche di Cusa runs from Campobello di Mazara and past what was once a *baglio* Ingham. The assumption by some is that work for Temple G had to be interrupted when Hannibal attacked in 409 BC. Here we find huge column drums in various states of construction, some completed, some half-hewn from the rock, all romantically overgrown. One leaves wondering at the effort of transporting such enormously heavy bits of masonry. Surely only Titans could manage it?

Mazara del Vallo, at the mouth of the river Mazaro, is the main fishing port of Sicily, and full of colour and activity along the quays. It used not to be on the main tourist route, with Selinunte and Segesta in competition, not to mention Erice and Mozia. Now it possesses a major attraction, in fact a masterpiece. This is the *Satiro*

Danzante, the Dancing Satyr, a fourth century BC bronze, over life size, possibly by Praxiteles, pulled out of the sea by local fishermen. It is known as Skirtos – he who leaps and dances.

As so often in Sicily, uncontrolled buildings have spoiled the outskirts, but the centre with its tortuous streets, alleys, arches and courtyards recalls the Arab past almost more than anywhere else in Sicily. What was once the Casbah and is still so called has been repopulated with immigrant North Africans who make up about a quarter of the population of Mazara: ironically perhaps when one looks up at the façade of the cathedral and sees the relief of 1534 showing Count Roger on horseback vanquishing a Saracen. In Arab times Sicily was divided into three administrative areas or Valli, also known as Wali: Val di Noto in the south-east, Val Demone in the north north-east, and Val di Mazara in the west. Hence Mazara del Vallo.

Probably Phoenician in origin, the town was an emporium of Selinunte and destroyed by Hannibal in 409 BC. Mazara was the Arabs' foothold in Sicily, and here they remained until 1072 when they were driven out by the Normans. The first Norman parliament was also held here in 1097. British wine firms were established at Mazara in the nineteenth century and the name of the most important is commemorated in the Lungomare Hopps, running east by the sea.

The ruins of Count Roger's castle are a shade disappointing, except at night when they are illuminated. They overlook Piazza Mokarta, a lively meeting place for locals. The Cathedral, dedicated to San Salvatore, was originally Norman (1093) but reconstructed in the 1690s, the ponderous campanile earlier. The façade was only completed in 1906. Inside there is a 'Transfiguration', a huge marble composition with six statues by Antonino Gagini and planned by his father Antonello, amid stuccoes by Antonino Ferraro: while on the left is a pretty *ciborium*

by Antonello Gagini. A chapel leading from the presbytery has a large painted crucifix, perhaps of 1200 AD though Byzantine in style and said to be the earliest in Sicily. There is a number of sixteenth and seventeenth century sarcophagi in the church, also a Roman sarcophagus with a carving of the rape of Proserpina. The Cathedral treasury is well worth seeing, including a silver processional cross of 1386. Behind this building there is the Piazza della Repubblica, the old Piano Maggiore. Here we find the Bishop's palace with a courtyard and loggia; this was built in 1596 and altered in the eighteenth century.

The seminary of the Chierici with its beautiful and elegant façade by Giovanni Biagio Amico is dated at 1710. The church of Santa Caterina, to the east of the square, has a statue of the saint by Domenico Gagini. Westwards we find, near Piazza Plebiscito, the two small churches of Sant'Egidio and the Carmine, both sixteenth century but with domes that hark back to the Arab-Norman tradition. The former College of the Jesuits, next to Sant'Ignazio and late seventeenth century by Giovanni Napoli, has a portal decorated with telamons and another handsome courtyard. It now houses the civic museum – especially intriguing are the two elephants which used to support the columns outside the porch of the Norman Cathedral. Opposite is the fifteenth century church of San Egidio where the *Satiro Danzante* is kept, strangely in a way since the satyr, with his staring white eyes, is supposed to be in a Dionysian ecstasy.

The palace of the Knights of Malta overlooks the port, usually crammed with boats, at the mouth of the river, some of them with painted eyes to ward off evil spirits. The boats arrive to unload their fish in the early morning, a sight worth getting up to see. At the end of August in the Piazzale Quinci there is a fish festival, when sandwiches of cod and prawns are handed out to all comers. Continuing up the Molo we reach the small Norman church of San

Nicolò Regale, a rectangular building of a certain charm with three apses and a dome. Near here is the Tunisian and Moroccan quarter. In this northern area of the town we reach Piazza San Francesco with the church of that name, part of the great Franciscan monastery founded in the thirteenth century. This Baroque church, derelict for many years, is fantastically decorated with frescoes and stuccoes, both sacred and profane, and is at last being restored as a place for 'communal activities'. Plunging south again through the maze of alleys and small streets we eventually reach Santa Veneranda (1714) with an elaborate façade, wrought-iron balcony and twin campaniles. Near here is the commercial street Via Garibaldi, off which at Via Pino 5 is Casa Scuderi, with a fifteenth century cylindrical tower and a Gothic doorway, Plateresque in style.

Via San Michele, north-east from Santa Veneranda, leads to the Church of San Michele, which has a campanile of 1771 and is joined to a Benedictine Convent for enclosed nuns, founded like the Martorana in Palermo by George of Antioch, but rebuilt in 1637. The Rococo interior of the church has a single nave and is richly decorated with marbles, stuccoes of the Serpotta school and paintings by Tommaso Sciacca (c. 1766) There is a majolica pavement, and an elaborate organ loft. The nuns make delectable marzipan sweets and also sell embroidery.

The church of the Madonna dell'Alto is another Norman building of interest. It is about two kilometres to the east of the centre, along Via Toscanini and up to the left. This was founded by Giulietta, daughter of Count Roger, in 1103. It has recently been restored, and some of the old structure has been revealed, including a thirteenth century fresco.

One person who did not like Mazara or Mr Hopps the wine merchant was Benjamin Ingham's wife, the formidable Duchess of Santa Rosalia. She and Ingham were once invited to stay by Hopps. Bandits got to hear of it, and lay in wait for the carriage. But the Duchess was so reluctant

to leave Marsala, and took so long to be persuaded, that the bandits became bored with waiting and went away.

The present-day *autostrada* from Palermo to Mazara passes through the fertile valley of **Castelvetro**, along which Goethe (not afraid of bandits, evidently) rode in April 1787, admiring not so much the crops as the wild flowers: 'beautiful convolvulus, hibiscus, rose-mallows, clovers ... interspersed with allium and goat's rue.' To which could be added asphodel, anemones, grape hyacinths, poppies, acanthus, spurge, according to season. Castelvetro is in a 'lofty situation' (Augustus Hare), a busy agricultural town, dealing in wine and olive oil, and has been such throughout the centuries. Furniture is also made here. There was damage after the 1968 earthquake. The Chiesa Madre, dedicated to the Assunta, mid-sixteenth century, stands in the main square, Piazza Garibaldi. It has an inlaid Mannerist portal. The triumphal arcades inside have stuccoes ascribed to Gaspare Serpotta, and there are other and earlier stuccoes in the presbytery by Antonio Ferraro 'junior' (1660). The font has a wooden cover carved by Pietro di Giaito (1610), and in the same chapel there is a canvas of Santa Chiara by Orazio Ferraro, who also may have painted 'The Assumption' over the high altar. On the left there is a Gagesque Madonna del Giglio. The great chapel of the Maddalena in the left nave is decorated with frescoes and stuccoes by Tommaso Ferraro (completed 1589).

Near here, on the left, is Piazza Umberto I with a strange fountain of a nymph by Orazio Nigrone (1615). The church of the Purgatorio, seventeenth century with an eighteenth century façade decorated with statues, is now an auditorium. The oldest and potentially the most interesting church within Castelvetro is San Domenico, also quintessentially Sicilian, begun in 1470 and decorated with elaborate stuccoes, including a tree of Jesse, in 1574–80 by Antonino Ferraro (senior). There are fragments of a

sixteenth century majolica pavement in the choir, and, under the altar, a sarcophagus, also sixteenth century, of the Aragona-Tragliavia family, accorded royal status and which sponsored the original building and decoration of the church. Alas, San Domenico was damaged in 1968 and is still in a bad way. Many of its contents, such as a fifteenth century Madonna di Loreto, have been moved to San Giovanni Battista, eighteenth century adapted from the sixteenth century original. In this latter church there is an outstanding statue of the Baptist by Antonello Gagini (1522).

The museum, off Piazza Garibaldi, contains finds from Selinunte – coins, bronzes and ceramics – as well as pictures and sculptures, including an alabaster Virgin and Child of 1467, from redundant churches. The famous ‘Ephebus of Selinunte’ used to be kept here and may one day be returned. As previously mentioned, it was stolen in 1962, recovered in 1969 and removed to the Archaeological Museum in Palermo.

The bandit Salvatore Giuliano was shot in a house off Via Mannone near the railway station, on July 5 1950. His body was later taken to the courtyard below, when chicken blood was added to his own for the sake of realism. To this spot came Giuliano’s mother, who in front of press photographers knelt down to kiss the blood, some say to lick it. But it is hardly worth trying to seek out this courtyard, even if old crones are available to be paid to re-enact the scene.

A visit to the Norman church of Santissima Trinità di Dèlia is the best reason for making a detour to Castelvetrano. It is in fact three and half kilometres outside the town, and an excursion much to be recommended. From Piazza Umberto I follow Via Ruggero Settimo. A country lane runs between vineyards. Near some farm buildings, full of barking dogs, and a grove of eucalyptuses, is this little twelfth century building, built between 1140 and 1160

From Selinunte to Castelvetro

and well restored in the 1880s by the Saporito family, whose funerary chapel it now is. With its cupola on four columns and its three apses it has much in common with the Martorana in Palermo. A key can be obtained from the farmhouse. There are three grand tombs inside and more in the crypt which is reached by an outer staircase. Do not miss a monument behind the church where these words – a real *cri-de-coeur* – are written: ‘*Mamma Mamma Mia, Rispondi a Stefano tuo!!*’ From the hill, through the trees, there is a good view of Lago Trinità, formed by the damming of the river Dèlia.

The small and ancient town of Partanna, possibly Greek in origin and some miles inland along a winding road from Castelvetro, was gravely hit by the earthquake in 1968. There is a massive Norman castle, which suffered less than some surrounding buildings.

Sciacca – Santa Margherita di Bèlice
Sambuca di Sicilia – Contessa Entellina
Corleone – Prizzi – Palazzo Adriano
Caltabellotta – Ribera

Sciacca is now more easily reached from Palermo than hitherto. If however we arrive from the west, from the direction of Selinunte, we pass Melfi, another town devastated by the earthquake of 1968; alternatively the old road, *statale* 115, winds past Porto Palo, a fishing village with a beach popular in summer (try the local delicacies, graniti of figs or of *fichodindia*); an American force landed here in July 1943.

Sciacca, which is in the province of Agrigento, could be a good base for exploring places inland, and for excursions to Selinunte and Eraclea Minoa. There are also sandy beaches nearby. The centre is unspoilt and full of important buildings. Sciacca is also a famous thermal establishment, and the volcanic vapours on the mountain above were venerated in prehistoric times. To the Romans it was known as *Thermae Selinuntianae*, and to the Arabs *ash-Shaggah*, hence the modern name of Sciacca. The carnival here is famous; this lasts for six days and is an extraordinary sight, with fantastic allegorical floats and grotesque masks. 'Kilometres of sausages and rivers of wine', according to the handouts, are then on sale. A special kind of ceramic work, obviously derived from Arab influences, is produced locally, including tiles and figures like the characters seen in carnival parades.

The town is built as if on a terrace high above the

harbour, which is in a separate and detached quarter. In Arab times it was developed as an agricultural centre. The Normans fortified it, as did Frederick II of Aragon. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries a famous and bloody feud raged between the rival families of Luna (Catalans) and Perollo (of Norman origin). This was known as *il caso Sciacca*, the Sciacca Affair, and caused the deaths of hundreds of citizens. Prosperity only began to return in the eighteenth century.

On July 18 1831 a volcanic island, about three and a half kilometres in diameter, rose suddenly from the sea in front of Sciacca. and an English captain by the name of Graham was the first to land on it, cheekily raising the Union Jack. Variousy known as Julia (to the British) or Ferdinanda (to the outraged Neapolitan government), it just as suddenly subsided, on January 12 1832, thereby avoiding an international squabble. In 1875 there was another excitement when a coral bank was discovered in the vicinity – excitement well justified, for, up to 1912, 4662 tons of coral were gathered here.

Much new building has spread out to the west of the town. The main road from Castelvetro brings us to Piazza Belvedere, where it is usually easier to park. Traffic from the coastal road enters the two at the elaborately carved sixteenth century Porta San Salvatore. Directly ahead of this gateway, in Piazza Carmine, on the right, is the church of Santa Margherita built for Eleonora of Aragon in 1342. It still has its Gothic portal, and there is another outstanding side portal by Francesco Laurana and Pietro de Bonitate. One has to take on trust that there are interesting polychrome stuccoes and frescoes inside, for the church has been deconsecrated and is thus permanently closed. On the left is the church of the Carmine with a majolica dome, a partially completed Baroque façade and a fine Gothic rose window. Inside there is a painting of the ‘Transit of the Madonna’ by Vincenzo da Pavia (1552),

his last work. From here Via Pietro Gerardi leads up to an architectural curiosity, a building known as the Steripinto, dated 1501 and built by Antonio Noceto, as an inscription on the portal tells us, in Sicilianised Catalan style. It has a rusticated diamond-pointed exterior under a crenellated parapet, with three matching mullioned windows. There is a barrel-vaulted ceiling inside. Via Gerardi runs up to Porta Palermo, reconstructed in 1753 with the Bourbon eagle on top, leading into Piazza Belvedere. The area to the right is the Cadda, once the Jewish quarter.

Corso Vittorio Emanuele, on the corner by the Steripinto, passes the monastery and church of the Spàsimo and leads to Piazza Scandaliato, the main square, spaciously laid out with palm trees and with a fine view out to sea and looking down on the port. Alternatively we could return to Piazza Carmine and walk along the rather more interesting Via Incisa, where at No. 48 is Palazzo Arone, late Gothic with three slender mullioned windows. The former Jesuit College, early seventeenth century, facing Piazza Scandaliato, is now the Municipio and has an attractive courtyard. Nearby is the Chiesa del Collegio (1613), also with a courtyard. Continuing along the Corso we come to the Cathedral, dedicated to Santa Maria Maddalena, begun in 1108 and enlarged in the seventeenth century. The exterior has three apses and lacks one campanile. The statues on the front are by Antonino and Gian Domenico Gagini. The interior has three naves. Especially remarkable are the sixteenth century sarcophagus of Bartolomeo Tagliavia (first chapel on right) and the Madonna della Catena by Giuliano Mancini (fourth on right), who also sculpted the Madonna del Soccorso (1503, with Bartolomeo Berretaro) by the high altar. This last Madonna is the patroness of the fishermen and is carried by them through the streets on February 2, the date on which she liberated Sciacca from plague, and on August 15. The font in the Cathedral is dated 1491 and has a carving of the beheading of the

Baptist – somewhat sobering to those assembled at a christening, one might think.

Corso Vittorio Emanuele continues past two fifteenth century *palazzi*, Bertolino and San Giacomo, and ends at Piazza Friscia and the public gardens, again with a view. On the left Via Licata leads to Piazza Lazzarino. The upper part of Via Licata separated the Cadda from the mercantile quarter. From here Via Santa Caterina takes us to the church of that name, originally sixteenth century, with a Baroque façade. Opposite is the fascinating little church of San Nicolò La Latina, founded in the twelfth century by Giulietta, daughter of Count Roger, and claimed as the oldest Norman church in Sicily. This has the familiar blind arcading of the Normans and three apses. Inside there are traces of Byzantine-type frescoes. All is rather dilapidated.

The harbour area below has several quite good *trattorie*, but the area is rough and one has to be circumspect at night.

On our daylight tour we can ascend to the ruins of the castle of the Luna that dominates the town. Near here off to the right, off Via Valverde, is a pleasant garden-park in front of Santa Maria delle Giummare, Norman in origin, with a battlemented façade and two towers. There is a rich Rococo interior, with early tapestries, stuccoes by Ferraiolo (1760s) and a high altar decorated by Ignazio Marabitti: all worth seeing if the nuns permit access – which is not always likely. Via Amato, to the left of the castle, takes us to the church of San Michele, sixteenth century with an isolated tower, possibly built into the original walls. At the northern end of Piazza Noceto are the Badia Grande and the church of Santa Maria dell'Itria, both late eighteenth century on fourteenth century structures, traces of which are visible within the former.

Travellers approaching Sciacca from the direction of Agrigento could take the Lungomare delle Terme which

leads to the big hotel next to the neo-‘Liberty’ buildings housing the mud and steam baths, the discovery of whose therapeutic properties was attributed by the Greeks to Daedalus. The Albergo delle Terme is certainly the most comfortable in Sciacca, but one has to be prepared to be surrounded, in the words of the local brochure, by people with ‘bothersome and serious ailments’. About two kilometres outside Sciacca on the Agrigento road is the Giardino Incantato (Enchanted Garden), a dotty collection of some 3,000 naive heads carved out of stones and on trees by the reclusive Filippo Bentivegna, who died in 1967. Actually some heads are not unlike the twin *stelae* from the Malaphoros sanctuary, now in the Palermo Museum.

Much more interesting and curious is a drive up to Monte San Calogero, known as Kronos to the ancients, where we can visit the seventeenth century sanctuary of San Calogero and another very popular and less expensive thermal establishment. The view is tremendous, Pantelleria being sometimes visible. The sanctuary is built with *pietra lavica* and travertine, and has been restored recently, quite tastefully. It contains a statue by Giacomo Gagini (1538) of San Calogero, the learned ‘black saint’ who came to this sacred mountain from Constantinople in the fifth century and practised exorcisms, and who died aged ninety-five. In previous centuries there had been rites in honour of Saturn on this spot.

Christian hermits who came to live here were called the Calogeri. The most famous of the vapour caves are known as the Stufe (ovens) di San Calogero, part of a gallery 55 metres long leading to other grottoes, used – so it has recently been discovered – even in the Neolithic period. There is a small antiquarium nearby which has interesting geological specimens, also some tiny bones of infants, presumably sacrificed to placate the demons of the underworld. Other archaeological relics show that later the mighty goddess Demeter was venerated in this place.

Also on display are some alarming photographs of daring explorations by speleologists.

The modern thermal centre is built over the caves. Arrivals are divided according to sex and then strip off, but fully clothed visitors can ask for a quick viewing of a cave, where seats are carved in the rock, before the patients have finished divesting themselves. These seats (and the caves) are said to have been made by Daedalus.

Few admirers of *The Leopard* would want to miss making a pilgrimage to **Santa Margherita di Bèlice**, north of Sciacca. For here are the ruins of the country palace that inspired 'Donnafugata' in the novel, and which Lampedusa described in *Places of My Infancy*. Ninety per cent of the village was destroyed in the earthquake, but the façade of the palace facing the square is still there, the once elegant iron balustrades twisted, the clock tower tumbled. The Chiesa Madre next to it has two walls standing, its Baroque stuccoes open to the weather. You can still see where the family sat at Mass.

The house is smaller than one might have expected. In Lampedusa's day it belonged to the Filangeri di Cutò. That garden of 'parched scents', where the lovers wandered, is overgrown, but some attempt has been made to cultivate it. Across the square is the long range of the Palazzata, deserted shells now, some used as stables for cattle and horses. It would have broken Lampedusa's heart to see all this, twenty-six years after the bombing of his beloved house in Palermo. Originally the palace belonged to the Corbera family, who built it in the 1680s – Leonardo Sciascia has written a wonderful Stendhalian story, called *Euphrosyne*, about these Corberas. The new buildings in the village are more conventional than those at Gibellina Nuova, and follow the outlines of the original. It is indeed an effort of the imagination to visualise local people breaking into *Noi siamo zingarelle* from *La Traviata*, as described by

Lampedusa, when the carriages of the Salinas approached the bridge under the pale baked sky of summer.

To the west of Santa Margherita are the ruins of Montevago, destroyed by the earthquake. A statue of Simon Bolivar in the new town may come as a surprise, but this has been placed here by emigrants in South America. Close by, in a pretty spot, are warm springs known as Aquaria and organized as a thermal spa. A road east leads to **Sambuca di Sicilia** and passes the new reservoir of Lago Arancio. Here in July international water-skiing competitions are held. In spite of Sambuca being twinned with Winter Haven, Florida, few buildings of particular interest are to be seen. The two main churches have fourteenth century portals, and there are nineteenth century waxworks in the Palazzo Panitteri. The Municipio is known as the Palazzo dell'Arpa the palace of the harp. Archaeologists will head for Monte Adranone nearby, where excavations began in 1968. This is the site of a city founded by Selinuntians. It was destroyed by the Carthaginians, who rebuilt it. The Romans destroyed it again. Behind the small antiquarium there is an Iron Age necropolis, including the so-called Tomba della Regina.

A minor road, passing the remains of the Castello di Calatamano, perhaps Byzantine in origin, leads northwards to the village of **Contessa Entellina**, settled by Albanians in 1450. We are now temporarily back in the province of Palermo. There is a wide panorama, but because of crass rebuilding after the earthquake there can only be disappointment. As at Piana degli Albanesi there are elaborate processions according to Greek rites during Holy Week. The original village was simply called Contessa, but in 1875 Entellina was added in deference to the town of Entella, founded by the Elymnians in prehistoric times and which existed until 1246 when it was finally destroyed by Frederick II. Where exactly Entella was situated has been debated. Some have suggested Castelvetrano, others Monte

Castelluzzo near Poggioreale. But the obvious choice is Rocca d'Entella, a bare outcrop in open country. Recent excavations at Rocca d'Entella have revealed both Elymian and Greek remains, as well as an Arab necropolis. Entella was the last stand of the Muslim revolt against Frederick II. When the Emir Ibn Abbad was killed the story goes that his beautiful daughter continued the fight, and that Frederick sent her *una proposta amorosa*, which was angrily refused. Her garrison was overwhelmed, she was killed and the survivors were deported.

The ex-abbey of Santa Maria del Bosco on the way to Bisacquino was built by Olivetan monks, and begun in 1593. This is in a superb position, on the edge of a forest, with huge views. The decaying buildings are used by farmers, but the church, attributed to Vanvitelli, has terracottas of the Della Robbia school. It was from here that the famous bust of Eleanora of Aragon by Laurana was removed for safety to Palazzo Abatellis in Palermo. There are two cloisters, each with a well in the middle. The building is an important example of early seventeenth century architecture in Sicily and crying out for restoration.

Driving north from Bisacquino we eventually reach **Corleone**. Can there be any other reason for making this expedition, apart from the thrill of knowing that it is the most notorious Mafioso town in Sicily, once the heroin capital of the world? Unlikely, it must be admitted. The Chiesa Madre, begun in 1382, altered in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is certainly impressive and has a number of worthwhile statues and paintings, in particular the colourful 'Four Doctors of the Church' by Fra' Felice di Sambuca. There are medieval features in many houses. Above the town looms the Castello Sottano, until recently a gaol. Otherwise a grey glumness hangs over Corleone.

There is one word which it would be unwise to utter, however naively, to a chance acquaintance in a Corleonese

bar. It is not surprising that Mario Puzo chose the name Don Corleone for his Godfather. During the reign of Luciano Liggio in the 1950s Corleone had the highest murder rate in the world: 153 in four years out of a population of 18,000. Many of Liggio's victims were thrown into a narrow ravine at Monte Busambra, near the bird-watcher's paradise of the forest of Ficuzza. First arrested in 1969, he continued to run his multi-billion empire from the Ucciardone prison in Palermo. Transferred at last to the top security prison in Sardinia, his place as Boss of Bosses, i.e. Godfather, was taken over by his number two, Totò Riina, arrested in January 1993 and convicted by the end of the year of ninety murders. Liggio's favourite reading in prison was said to be the novels of Dickens. He died in November 1993, aged sixty-eight. Ask a child, perhaps not a grown-up, to show you his pink marble tomb in the cemetery. Sicilians take pleasure in pointing out that Corleone was originally founded by Piemontesi from Casale Monferrato.

One sight worth seeing near here is the alarmingly named Gorgo del Dragone, Gorge of the Dragon. This is on the way to Ficuzza, a green oasis in parched countryside.

The way to **Prizzi**, along *statale* 118, is wild and desolate, with strange rock formations. The best time to visit the hilltop town of Prizzi is on Easter Sunday, when there is a 'Dance of the Devils', obviously pagan in origin and with a distinct undertone of violence, representing the triumph of good over evil. Visitors should beware, for these Devils are 'looking for victims to take to Hell'. Near here is another little hill town, **Palazzo Adriano**, chosen because of its unspoilt character for Giuseppe Tornatore's classic film *Cinema Paradiso*. An Albanian colony settled on this site in 1482. The eighteenth century traveller Jean Houel drew the local costumes here for his *Voyage pittoresque*. Palazzo Adriano is proud of its several distinguished

citizens in the past, including the forebears of Francesco Crispi, patriot and Prime Minister.

We pass quickly through ugly Chiusa Sclàfani. Not much of its fourteenth century castle remains. The castle of Giuliana, Norman in origin, in the far distance to the right, is however a marvellously romantic sight; apart from the view, it is not worth struggling up there. And so we come to **Caltabellotta**, perched even higher, mostly unspoilt and in a truly spectacular position. Many signs of ancient dwellings, caves and fortifications are visible hereabouts. In medieval times the two were clustered round the two peaks where now are the ruins of the Castello and the Castelvecchio; later it spread south-east to the rock known as Gogàla. Caltabellotta has been claimed as 'Kamikos', founded according to legend by Daedalus for Kokalos, first king of the Sicans. Certainly it and the village of Sant'Anna below were Trickale, which withstood a long siege by the Romans in the Second Slave War. In Arab times it was called Kalath al Balbuth, Rock of the Oaks – Caltabellotta being a corruption of this. The castle was rebuilt by the Normans, and it was here that in 1332 the peace treaty after the war of the Vespers was signed between Frederick II of Aragon and Charles of Valois.

The best and most dramatic view is from the Chiesa Madre, now outside the modern town, to the north-east, and below the Castelvecchio. On a clear day one can see the whole coast from Agrigento to Mazara. The church, in dire need of repair, is only visitable at religious festivals, one being that of Santa Maria dei Miracoli, on the last Sunday in July. It was founded by Count Roger after his defeat of the Muslims and retains many of its fourteenth century features. There are some good statues by the Gagini family inside, and some deteriorating stuccoes and frescoes by Antonino Ferraro. Sant'Agostino, below the rock Gogàla, is also fourteenth century in origin and has a Gothic campanile, and is especially interesting for

its life-size terracotta group of the 'Deposition' by Ferraro (1552). The dull-looking church with a modern façade in the main square near the Municipio is the Carmine, which does however possess a Madonna by Antonello Gagini. The Strada Panoramica west from the Chiesa Madre passes the little church of San Salvatore, with zigzag motifs on its portal, and the 'Pizzo', 950 metres high. A tower is virtually all that remains of the Norman castle. Here Queen Sibylla and her son William III attempted to take refuge from Henry of Hohenstaufen, and were never seen again.

Eventually we reach the hermitage of San Pellegrino, with its monastery attached. This odd little building, with a Baroque frontage, once again crumbling away, leads into two grottoes with traces of frescoes and curious niches, evidently connected with some obscure ancient cult. A procession takes place here every August 18. A possible detour from the Panoramica is to another quaint little building, the Chiesa della Pietà, built into the rockface and with an artificial cave with six recesses. There are several caves nearby, some with stairs cut out of the rock. The olive oil from the valley below Caltabellotta is especially known for its quality and aroma. Try some.

The village of Burgio, on a hill above the river Verdura, has a castle, in ruins now, built by the Normans probably on an Arab foundation, and for centuries the seat of feudal nobility, the Peralta among others. The tortuous streets are very medieval. The Chiesa Madre was originally thirteenth century but reconstructed in the seventeenth. It has a Madonna and Child by Vincenzo Gagini (1568) and a wooden crucifix from the Sanctuary of Rifesi in the mountains above to which it is taken in the summer. In the church of San Vito there is a fine statue of the saint by Antonello Gagini (1522). Burgio has a little ceramics industry, making household objects with a distinctive design in yellow, green and blue. It takes about an hour and a half to reach the sanctuary of Santa Maria di Rifesi

on foot. Built in 1170, it has a most interesting portal, with blind arches and grotesques on the corbels. A monastery is attached, with two courtyards. This is a recommended excursion, especially in the time of spring flowers.

Finally **Ribera**, near the *autostrada* to Agrigento and again through pleasant country. A large, now mostly modern, agricultural town, noted for its production of strawberries and peaches, it was founded in 1627 by the Prince of Paternò and so named in honour of his Spanish wife, Maria de Ribera. Francesco Crispi was born here in 1818.

A late Bronze Age necropolis has been discovered two kilometres to the south of the town, in which some chamber tombs have long corridors approaching them.

Eraclea Minoa – Porto Empèdoce
The Pelagic Islands – Agrigento

Eraclea Minoa is roughly halfway between Sciacca and Agrigento, on a promontory high above a glorious stretch of sandy beach that has managed to escape the developers. It is true that a ‘village’ has appeared in a newly planted wooded area immediately below, but this is not offensive. The excavations, compared to other greater archaeological sites in Sicily, are a little disappointing, partly because at some unknown date there have been severe landslides on the cliffs. The small theatre, built in sandstone, has seats protected by perspex. Some foundations of dwellings, parts of the wall and defensive towers are visible, and there is an antiquarium, open for most of the day.

According to Herodotus the town of Minoa was founded in the sixth century BC as a colony of Selinunte. To the west is the river Plàtani, originally the Halykos, that served as a port. Diodorus says that the Cretan king Minos, in his pursuit of Daedalus, landed at the Halykos, and that he was eventually buried here. It is thought that the word Eraclea (after Herakles) was added by Spartan immigrants. For a long period the place was fought over by Selinuntines and Agrigentines, Greeks and Carthaginians, and sometimes destroyed. It was taken by the Romans in 210 BC and suffered during the two Slave Wars. It seems to have become uninhabited by the end of the first century BC, perhaps because of the landslides. As we continue eastwards towards Agrigento we pass the village of Montallegro, which despite its name, is not worth a diversion. Further along a small beach has been developed for holidaymakers at Siculiana

Marina. Between Realmonte and Porto Empèdocte at Punta Piccola excavations of a Roman villa are progressing slowly. Near here are the bizarre cliffs called the Scala dei Turchi, chalk striated by the wind, dazzling in the summer sun and compared by locals to the cliffs of Dover. Muslim corsairs climbed up here, hence the name 'Turchi'. **Porto Empèdocte**, birthplace of the best-selling crime writer Andrea Camilleri, who writes of it in his novels as Vigàta, is to me I am sorry to say one of the dullest towns in Sicily: a busy, smoking industrial port developed in the nineteenth century during the days of the sulphur boom. It has a mole built in the mid-eighteenth century partly from the stones of the temples of Agrigento. A small road from the hamlet of Villasetta leads to Caos, birthplace of Luigi Pirandello (1867–1936) and where his ashes lie.

The origin of the word Caos is obscure. Pirandello, whose father owned sulphur mines, liked the idea of being born in chaos. The modest house was damaged in 1943, and has been rebuilt and turned into a museum of some charm. On the blue-tiled upper floor, there are enough displays of photographs, first editions, letters and theatre bills to satisfy the most ardent pilgrim. Porto Empèdocte is mercifully out of sight, and the horrors of modern Agrigento's high rise buildings are only distantly seen. The sea, the vines in neat rows, the olives, the two-coloured fields are like the backdrop for a play. Pirandello, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1934, wanted his ashes either to be cast to the elements or embedded in a piece of rough local stone cut from where he was born. This last was chosen, so they were put in a Greek vase that he had kept in his study in Rome, and then taken down to Caos, to a windy spot near the cliff. The stone was shaped by the sculptor Mazzacurati, and placed under an old umbrella pine that Pirandello had loved, among vines and olives 'scented by wild thyme and sage' and hedges of prickly pears.

Pirandello's family had a special wooden box made in Rome for the vase, and gave it to a friend to take by train to Agrigento. The friend put it in the luggage rack above him, but while he slept others in the compartment, not knowing what was in it, took it down and used it as a table for playing cards. Pirandello would have enjoyed that.

Sometimes in August open-air plays by Pirandello are performed, depending on how rich the Municipio of Agrigento is feeling.

From Porto Empèdocle it is possible to take the ferry to the **Pelagic Islands** – Lampedusa, Linosa and the uninhabited Lampione. The journey to the nearest, Linosa, takes about eight hours, and to Lampedusa an hour more. It is thus more comfortable to fly from Palermo (45 minutes) or Tràpani. These barren, flat, sun-scorched islands are to be recommended for those who like solitude, great heat and underwater swimming. Lampedusa is about 200 kilometres from the nearest point in Sicily, and just over 100 from Tunisia. It feels much more African than European. Ariosto made it the scene of a bloody duel between Orlando and the Saracens. The Tomasi family owned it, and although they probably never visited it were made Princes of Lampedusa by the King of Spain in 1630. In 1839 the widowed Princess Carolina of Lampedusa tried to sell it to Queen Victoria. This so alarmed Ferdinand II of Naples that he bought it for 12,000 ducats and despatched 120 men and women to colonise it. These people and their descendants were ultimately responsible for the total and drastic deforestation. In 1943 the inhabitants of Lampedusa capitulated to a British airman who ran out of fuel and had to make a forced landing. In 1986 Colonel Gaddafi fired a couple of rockets at it; he missed. In recent years it has become known as the landing-place for migrants from Africa, with many desperate stories.

There are remnants of Phoenician, Greek and Roman

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settlements on the islands. The old cube-like houses on Lampedusa are called *dammusi*. The sanctuary of the Madonna owes its foundation to the time of the Crusades. Sometimes as many as 250 fishing boats gather in the harbour, and the population is approaching 6,000. Many interesting birds are to be seen at migration times. On the Isola dei Conigli (Island of the Rabbits) turtles lay their eggs.

The rocks of Lampedusa are calcareous, whereas Linosa, 42 kilometres to the north, is volcanic, with three cones and black sand, similar to Pantelleria. Linosa has about 500 inhabitants and was for a while the favoured place for imprisoning top Mafiosi, notably the dashing Angelo La Barbera, the butcher of Palermo, and Salvatore Zizzo of Tràpani. The island has more scrubby vegetation than Lampedusa, more *macchia mediterranea*. Both islands are ecologically protected. Linosa has lizards, Lampedusa none as they were all eaten by snakes; the latter are now dead from hunger. There are many grottoes at Linosa. Cory's Shearwater breeds here. The lava area, Scogli di Tramontana, has a strange beauty.

Lampione is 17 kilometres north-west of Lampedusa, and has no vegetation. There is a lighthouse. You can dive for sponges if you are not afraid of sharks.

In spite of the desecration of the surrounding countryside, and this desecration appears to be continuing, **Agrigento** will always remain a major goal for travellers in Sicily. To the Greeks it was Akragas, to the Romans Agrigentum. It became Girgenti when the Arabs left and remained as such until 1927.

Praised by Pindar for its beauty – built it was said as though it would never die – Akragas was for a while one of the richest and strongest Greek cities in Sicily. The Temple of Concord is among the most perfectly preserved Doric temples anywhere, and has been an inspiration for architects

since the early eighteenth century. The view of the three temples along the famous ridge is still marvellous, and at night when floodlit they look – in the words of Lawrence Durrell – like golden moths. The almond blossom in early February is stunning and rightly celebrated with a *fiesta*, the *Sagra del mandorlo in fiore*. Wild flowers follow in profusion until summer turns the ridge into burnt apricot (Durrell again), contrasting with the deep blue of the sky and the glittering sea. ‘Never in my life,’ Goethe wrote, ‘have I enjoyed such a vision of Spring.’ That was in April.

Reading the old descriptions of a ‘vast and desolate countryside’ and the ‘loneliness of billowing woods’ almost makes you weep. The gnarled olives in the Valley of the Temples are still there, but the hill above, where there was the Acropolis, bristles with rows of shoddy high-rise buildings. A motorway on stilts strides across the view to the west. The Villaggio Mosè, mercifully hidden, comes as a shock when driving east towards Gela: supermarkets and filling stations. The seaside resort of San Leone, near the original Greek port, is no beauty either, geared up to the world of discos. It must be conceded that modern Agrigento was badly damaged in July 1943 when the Allies landed in Sicily (and there were many Sicilian casualties). All the same, the present-day Agrigentines, with the honourable exception of the archaeologists, have behaved with a shameful disregard for their inheritance.

The site was ideal for a great city, the fertile and inhabited low-ground protected by the ridge on which the main temples stood, and to the north by the Rupe Atenea, on the site of the Acropolis and now part of the modern city. All was surrounded by walls, with nine gates. To the east was the river Akragas (now the San Biagio), to the west the Hypsas (Sant’Anna), converging near the sea and the port. The original city was founded by Gela in 580 BC, and there were colonists from Crete and Rhodes. According to Thucydides the growth was rapid. The tyrant Phalaris

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(570–555 BC) probably built the walls and most of the original roads, though the first settlement must have been on the Rupe Atenea. Phalaris had a reputation for cruelty and is said to have possessed a brazen bull in which he roasted his enemies alive. The period of great prosperity began under Theron (489–472 BC), especially after the victory at Himera in 480, when slave labour became plentiful. After his death there was a long period of democratic government. The Temple of Concord was built and the city's wealth became proverbial. We read of ivory furniture, much use of gold and silver, and luxurious tombs for pets. Akragas was also noted for its breeding of horses and its swift chariots. The principal citizen was the philosopher-poet-physician Empedocles, who was revered for his divine powers and considered himself a god. Then in 406 Akragas was attacked by the Carthaginians, and after an eight months' siege captured, sacked and put to the flames. In 340 BC, Timoleon defeated the Carthaginians and set about rebuilding the city. The Romans took it and looted it in 261, and captured it again in 210. Strabo, Ptolemy and Cicero all testified to its importance thereafter. A decline began to settle in during the Byzantine era. The Saracens took it in AD 827, the Normans in AD 1087.

Augustus Hare claimed that the inhabitants of Girgenti were among the most prolific in Sicily. Typically, he quoted an authority who had mentioned that one woman had brought forth seventy-three children at thirty births. He added: 'There is a grain of Attic salt here!'

In spite of those pseudo-skyscrapers along its perimeter, modern Agrigento (as distinct from the ancient sites) has its attractions and some important buildings. Some guide-books recommend starting a tour in the modern town, but this would depend partly on the length of a visit and partly on the tyranny of opening times. Most travellers are likely to be impatient to see the temples and the excellent archaeological museum nearby. Moreover modern

Agrigento has to be seen on foot, because of the problems of parking, and there are flights of steps and steep streets to negotiate, which take up time and energy.

The main temples are in two groups. The car park at the Posto di Ristoro is partly on the site of the *agora* or forum. To its west are the Temple of Olympian Zeus, the Sanctuary of the Chthonic Deities and the renowned Temple of Castor and Pollux, whose image is often used as the symbol of Sicily. These are open from 9 a.m. till dusk. To the east are the Temples of Herakles, Concord and Hera, which are not enclosed and approached by the Via Sacra (cars not allowed).

The Temple of Herakles or Hercules was the earliest of the great temples, built in about 520 BC, and dominating the cross roads. Once it had 38 columns (6 x 15), but now eight only on the south side are standing, re-erected in 1923–4 by an Englishman, Captain Alexander Hardcastle, at his own expense. Some traces of fire, dating no doubt from the Carthaginian sacking of Akragas in 406 BC, are still visible on the tawny stone, pitted with fossilised sea-shells. Hexastyle, with six columns at each end, it had a *cella* or sanctuary with a *pronaos* and *opisthodomos*. Cicero mentions that it contained a beautiful and much revered bronze statue of Hercules, which the iniquitous Roman praetor Verres tried to steal.

Captain Hardcastle's ivy-covered house, Villa Aurea, is very close, in a garden full of plumbago, bougainvillaea and palms, and containing several ancient tombs. He died in 1933, and there is a bust of this bespectacled 'English Maecenas' in the garden. He had spent nearly all his money on local projects, including an aqueduct to the Valley of the Temples and rearranging the Archaeological Museum. In the house there is an antiquarium, but permission to see it has first to be obtained from the Museum. Close by is a honeycomb of Christian-Byzantine tombs and catacombs known as the Grotta dei Frangipani, with an underground

passage, which may well be locked. The city walls ran along the ridge, and some remains can be seen.

We now come to the Temple of Concord, miraculously preserved over the centuries – due to the fact that in the sixth century AD it was converted into a church, dedicated to San Gregorio delle Rape (St Gregory of the Turnips). All its 34 (6 x 13) fluted Doric columns are standing, complete with entablature and *metopes*. Smaller than the Temple of Herakles, it ranks next to the Theseion of Athens in the completeness of its preservation. Goethe said that compared to the temples of Paestum the Temple of Concord was like a ‘god as opposed to giants’. The original dedication is not known. The name Concord derives from the discovery there of a Latin inscription on a marble tablet.

The temple, built around 430 BC, stands on a *stylobate* with four steps. Understandably, because of its supreme importance, we are not permitted to go inside. The columns narrow towards the corners, in order to support the *metopes*: an early example of this technique. The cella, as perfect as at Palmyra, has its *pronaos* and *opisthodomos*. Two spiral staircases, still usable, lead up to the roof. Originally the temple would have been covered with stucco, possibly with paintings on it.

Part of the *Sagra del mandorlo* is celebrated here, sometimes with dancing (international folk groups) on a stage in front of the temple.

At the far end of the ridge is the temple of Hera or Juno Lacinia. In its design it is very like the Temple of Concord, but is smaller and earlier, about 450 BC. It also had 34 columns, 25 of which are standing. Part of the *cella* is intact. Here again you can see traces of fire. It was restored by the Romans, but damaged later in an earthquake. Near the east end a large altar has been recently restored. Augustus Hare suggests a picnic here, ‘among the asphodels and violets’, a recommendation that can

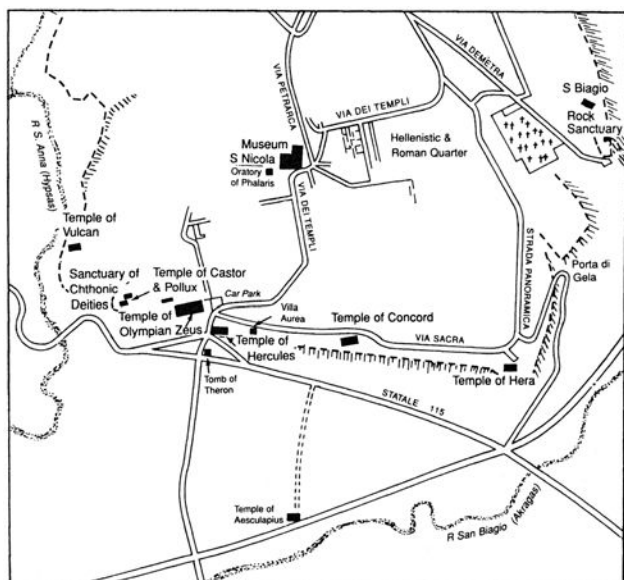
certainly be endorsed – provided eyes are averted from the *autostrada* in the distance.

The cliff immediately below has been much eroded, and is a curious and dramatic sight from underneath, with the temple perched above it. Near this place is one of the gateways, known as Gate Three. The deep ruts of the road leading from the gate are still visible. Many desperate and bloody battles were fought round here in Greek times, and again in 1943.

Returning to the car park, we enter the enclosure of the western temples. The outline of the Temple of Olympian Zeus is enough to show why this enormous structure amazed the ancients. Begun by Theron in 480 BC, after the battle of Himera, it was the largest of all Doric temples, a little larger than Temple G at Selinunte, and measuring 56.30 x 112.60 metres. It was still unfinished at the time of the Carthaginian siege. Earthquakes and spoliation by builders completed its destruction; much of its stone was taken to build the harbour of Porto Empèdocle in the eighteenth century. It was heptostyle, i.e. with seven columns at the end, and had fourteen on each side, 16.7 metres high. The columns were rounded externally, square-faced outwards. The spaces in between the columns were filled in. Another unusual feature was the use of small stones instead of large blocks; the joins would have been disguised by the stucco which covered the building. Most remarkable of all were the 38 giant figures, acting as telamons at the upper level, supporting the architraves with their elbows above their heads. A reconstruction, skeletal and somewhat awesome, lies as though sleeping among the ruins – there is another in the museum. According to Diodorus one pediment showed the Gigantomachia, the other the capture of Troy. Hundreds of slaves must have laboured to build the place. You can still see the U-shaped grooves in the pillars, made by the pulleys.

We thread our way through more excavations, perhaps

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once houses inhabited by priests, and past Gate Five, which must have been heavily fortified. The walls of the city continue, perfectly visible, to the west. Then comes the Sanctuary of Chthonic Divinities (gods who lived under the earth), believed to be on a Sican, pre-Greek site. This was excavated at the expense of Captain Hardcastle. At the northern end is the so-called Temple of Castor and Pollux, or Dioscuri, reconstructed from various sources in 1836, a pastiche, but as Margaret Guido has said a 'delightful piece of nineteenth century landscape gardening' – not that there is any garden hereabouts, apart from wild flowers. Broken columns and drums of stone lie in picturesque abandon. More excavations are in progress around and beyond. The temple of Vulcan, with two columns standing, is across the railway line and not really worth the effort.

The main road south leads through what was Gate Four, Porta Aurea, the way to the sea. Just beyond is the Tomb of Theron, so-called, a mixture of Doric and Ionic, 'chaste and simple' in the old Murray's *Handbook*, in fact first century BC Roman. There is a Roman necropolis near here. Further still, amid a whirl of traffic, is the little Temple of Aesculapius, the god of healing, and where once was a statue of Apollo. This may not be open to the public, because of excavations in progress.

Returning along the main road to Agrigento, the Via dei Templi, we reach on the right the area known as the Hellenistic and Roman quarter, where much excavating has been done – although it is only a very small section of what was the old city. Here four *cardines* or side streets have been exposed, and some columns have been raised. The city was laid out on a grid system. Several mosaic floors can be seen, with geometric designs including swastikas, and animals. There are traces of peristyles, drains and stairways which indicate that the houses had upper storeys.

More excavations are to be seen near the Regional Archaeological Museum opposite. Here a *bouleuterion* or

council chamber had been found, the largest in Sicily and converted into an Odeon by the Romans, obviously quite grand. A hoard of gold coins has also been discovered. A good view of work in progress can be had from Room XI in the museum.

The splendid modern museum, one of the most important on the island, is on two floors, airy and well-lit. It differs from most other Sicilian museums, being a museum 'of the territory', without heterogeneous pieces from elsewhere in Italy or Sicily. In effect its beginnings date from the time when a trench for the new railway was dug in what turned out to be a necropolis. The entrance is through the fifteenth century cloisters, where there is a stone seat inscribed to Hermes and Herakles, found in the *agora*.

The museum is divided into nineteen rooms. In Room II there is a spherical bowl, sixth century BC and of the greatest interest since it is the first to have been discovered with the *Triscele* or Trinacria, the three-legged symbol of Sicily. This was found at a sanctuary excavated at Palma di Montechiaro. Room III has a superb display of black- and red-figured vases, arranged in chronological order and beautifully displayed. Among the best known fifth century BC red-figure vases are those depicting Dionysus at a banquet with Silenus, the burial of a warrior, possibly Patroclus c. 490 BC, and a goat (obviously unaware of its unpleasant fate) being brought as a sacrifice to Apollo, c. 430 BC. A krater, also c. 430, shows Perseus and Andromeda on a white ground. In this room there is the marble 'Warrior of Agrigento', in the act of falling, his arm assumed to have been holding a shield to protect his back.

In Room IV there are capitals and lions' head water-spouts from various temples. Room V has a fascinating collection of votive offerings, also the mask of a Negro of the sixth century BC, an archaic head of a *kouros*, also of the sixth century, and a fine helmeted head of Athene from

the fifth century BC. Room VI is dedicated to the Temple of Zeus, and is in fact a hall large enough to accommodate the colossal figure of a telamon fastened to the end wall. There are also three heads of telamons on display, and plans suggesting the possible positioning of the celebrated marble statue of the 'Ephebus of Agrigento', dated about 470 BC, and perhaps representing Apollo; the back view has been especially admired. There is also a pretty little *Aphrodite al bagno*.

In Room XI there are six sarcophagi including a beautiful alabaster sarcophagus with carvings of scenes in the life of a child and of his death, surrounded by grieving relations, second century BC. The room also contains recent finds within the province of Agrigento, including a large bronze vase, in perfect condition, with swan's head handles, found at the necropolis at Contrada Mosè, from the last quarter of the fifth century BC. In Room XV there is another well-known object, a red-figure krater from Gela, showing Amazons in battle, c. 470 BC. There are photographs of other famous vases in the Gela Museum – Gela having been the founder of Akragas. Room XVIII is reserved for loan or temporary displays, such as various objects from the Cathedral's Diocesan Museum, including Limoges reliquaries and a painting attributed to Guido Reni; permission to see them is complicated and has to be obtained from the *Diocesi*.

The small church of San Nicola, thirteenth century, has charm and stands on a spot which has been a place of worship from time immemorial, standing on a rise in the centre of the old city. It was built by the Cistercians, and has a strange Gothic doorway with a Doric cornice. The interior was altered in 1426. At present it contains an object of importance, in the second chapel on the right (which has to be unlocked). This is the sarcophagus portraying episodes from the story of Hippolytus and Phaedra, second century BC, and inspired by earlier Greek marbles.

Goethe's enthusiasm is often quoted. The figure of the nurse bringing the love letter to Hippolytus is thought to be deliberately small in order to offset the heroic figures around her. This sarcophagus, used once as an altar, was brought here from the cathedral after the landslide and earthquake of 1966 (p. 227). In the third chapel there is a wooden crucifix known as the Signore della Nave, which inspired one of Pirandello's plays.

The church can be entered through the auditorium leading off the cloisters. To the left of the main entrance is a curious semi-circular structure now known as the *ekklesiasterion*, presumed to be for prayers and public meetings. The 'seats' are narrow and carved out of the rock, so participants may have stood. Beyond is the so-called Oratory of Phalaris, dating from the second century BC. This little funerary temple or shrine was turned into a chapel in medieval times.

An excursion to San Biagio, a Norman church built on the site of a temple to Demeter – the goddess of fertility and mother of Persephone, queen of the underworld – can be disappointing for it is usually closed. This also can apply to the Rock Sanctuary of Demeter. Both are near the town cemetery, which can be best reached by the road just north of the Hellenistic and Roman Quarter (beautiful at almond blossom time). We are now in one of the less spoilt parts of the area with fewer tourists. However it must be added that the Rupe Atenea above, which has a fine view of the Greek walls, has a mass of unsightly aeriels, and partly belongs to the military. The temple seems to have been built around 480 BC, after the battle of Himera. There are two large altars nearby, and you can see the deep ruts on the old Greek road. The Ephebus in the Archaeological Museum was found near here.

A steep flight brings us to the Rock Sanctuary, which could date from the seventh century BC, i.e. before the Greeks' arrival. It has a rather haunted atmosphere,

especially as the shadows draw in. Behind a narrow chamber in the rock are two caves where many votive offerings were found, and where water – from the Underworld – flows into a courtyard.

Another path from the cemetery leads to Gate I in the old walls. Near here is an interesting bastion that guarded this strategic spot. Between Gate I and Gate II (Porta di Gela) there was a sacred area. Excavations have also revealed that near here there was a workers' area in Punic times.

To visit the modern city it is best, if arriving by car, first to look for a parking place in the region of Piazza Vittorio Emanuele. There is little to admire around the Rupe Atenea, although the terrace along the Viale della Vittoria is agreeably cool in the evening. All the important sights are in 'Vecchia Girgenti', to the west and whose hub is the tortuous Via Atenea, leading off Piazzale Aldo Moro, a lively enough place. Almost immediately on the right, as one enters the street, steps lead to the church of Santo Spirito (which could even be reserved for the end of an exploration of the city). Santo Spirito was founded by Cistercian nuns in 1290 – Captain Hardcastle paid for it to be restored around 1930. It might be locked, in which case try knocking at No. 2 in the piazza. There is a Gothic portal with a rose window above. The interior comes as a surprise. One might almost be back in Palermo, with such a riot of Serpottian (Giacomo perhaps) stuccoes, including Saints Basil and Benedict in all their glory over the high altar. Elsewhere there are more stuccoes of the 'Flight into Egypt' and the 'Presentation in the Temple'; also a Madonna and Child of the Gagini School. The painted ceiling includes the arms of the Chiaramonte. To the right of the church are the remains of the cloisters. There is an imposing gateway, followed by a second portal, with mullioned windows on each side, which leads into the old refectory. The dormitory is on the floor above and used

for concerts. Nuns sell delicious sweets made with almonds and pistachios. Apply at No. 8 for these.

Via Atenea passes various churches of minor interest, as well as courtyards and alleys with 'characteristic' *trattorie*. In Piazza Purgatorio the most imposing of the two churches is San Lorenzo, also known as the Purgatorio, built over a *hypogeum* or burial place. It has a Baroque façade and stuccoes by Giuseppe and Giacomo Serpotta. In the neighbourhood of the Piazza discoveries have been made of complicated subterranean systems of water supplies, dating as far back as the fifth century BC. Via Atenea ascends to the church of San Giuseppe, then drops to the former Piazza Municipio, now Piazza Pirandello. On the north side of the piazza is the church of San Domenico, again with a Baroque façade. Adjoining it is the old convent, built in the late seventeenth century on the site of a palace of the Princes of Lampedusa. This now houses the Municipio and the Teatro Pirandello, restored at last, original decorations inside by G.B.F. Basile. On the other side of the square is the Museo Civico, with a collection of paintings from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, including Pietro Novelli, Francesco Lojacono and Ettore de Maria Bergler.

Via Matteotti leads north from the Piazza to Via Duomo, and thence to the Cathedral. A series of flights of steps, starting from behind San Domenico, is a more direct route to the Cathedral which is on the highest point of the city, and where once it was believed stood a temple of Zeus. The Cathedral is dedicated to San Gerlando, first bishop of Agrigento, and was founded in the eleventh century, but rebuilt and altered in the fourteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: a medley of styles therefore. It was damaged in the earthquake of 1966, involving a landslide, but has been well restored. The campanile, begun in the fifteenth century, has never been completed. The interior has three aisles. The magnificent painted roof, with its saints and coats of arms, dates from the 1680s. The choir

has gorgeous stucco work. At the end of the south aisle, in the chapel of San Gerlando, with its finely moulded Gothic portal, there is a silver reliquary made by Michele Ricca in 1639 (twice vandalised). To the right of the chair is a marble statue of the Madonna and Child by Stefano di Martino (1495). In this building there is a curious acoustic phenomenon. Anyone speaking in a low voice by the main entrance can be heard in the apse 85 metres away – but not so in reverse. Typically again, Augustus Hare tells how because of this *porta-voce* a jealous husband learnt of his wife's infidelities, as she poured out her secrets into the ear of her confessor.

Opposite the Cathedral is the Museo Diocesano, whose contents have been temporarily moved to the Archaeological Museum. To the east of the Cathedral along Via Duomo is the Biblioteca Lucchesiana, with a valuable collection of incunabula and manuscripts. Steps and narrow alleys lead down to the charming but simple Norman church of Santa Maria dei Greci. With luck the custodian might be found at Via Alfonso 8. It was built on a Doric temple, possibly built by Theron, and dedicated to Athene. We enter through a courtyard. A lovely thirteenth century Gothic doorway takes us into this little church with three aisles. There are traces of fourteenth century frescoes in the nave, as well as a painted ceiling and a sixteenth century Madonna and Child. An entrance in the courtyard leads down to a narrow passage under the church where there are the fluted remains of the temple's six columns on a *stylobate*.

It is somewhat complicated returning by way of Via Santo Spirito from here. It is best to ask for Via San Girolamo, and after that for the church of the Purgatorio. Via Fodera leads directly from the Purgatorio to Santo Spirito.

Aragona – Raffadali – San Biagio Plàtani
Sant’Angela Muxaro – San Stefano
Quisquina – Cammarata – Lercara Friddi
Mussomeli – Racalmuto – Favara

The *statale* 189 from Agrigento to Palermo passes through dramatic, sometimes beautiful, sometimes forlorn, country. It also reaches a part of Sicily that was notorious for poverty and brigandage. The sulphur mines have been long closed, but once they had a worldwide monopoly. Their closure brought about an economic crisis, resulting in much emigration.

Aragona and Raffadali are both fairly large, with over 12,000 inhabitants. Both have panoramic views and seventeenth and eighteenth century buildings. **Aragona** was a sulphur town. Though founded in 1606, the centre is a network of small casbah-like alleys. There is also a massive Palazzo Feudale, its austerity relieved by elegant loggias. A short walk outside the town (guide needed) leads to the Vulcanelle di Macalube, tiny volcanoes full of bubbling mud, dried white and cracked in summer. **Raffadali**, on the other hand, was originally an Arab settlement (*Rahlfadil*), and is in an area that produces cereals, pistachios, almonds and wine. In the Chiesa Madre there is a Roman sarcophagus featuring the rape of Proserpina.

The village of Santa Elisabetta lies between Aragona and Raffadali and is a centre for sheep farmers. Shepherds perform comic plays at a *fiesta* called Nardu at Epiphany, when there is also a *sagra della ricotta*, festival of ricotta. The church of Sant’Antonio contains a peculiar painting

on a large block of stone, the *Madonna di li putrieddi* (of the little shops), perhaps an ex-voto.

Cattolica Eraclea, some way to the west of Raffadali and near the river Plàtani, is in more arid country with chalky hills around. Rock-salt is produced here. Nearby is the Largetto Gorge, a staging-point for migratory birds. Cianciana, across the valley of the Plàtani, has a number of eighteenth century palaces, also some marble works. Continuing the journey, we come to Alessandria della Rocca, which was founded in 1570 and has a sanctuary to the Virgin nearby. Bivona, earlier in origin (twelfth century) and more remote, is notable for having been the base of the Luna family, deadly enemies of the Perollos of Sciacca (p. 201) who eventually massacred them. The Chiesa Madre dates from the fourteenth century and has a very fine *chiaramontane* portal. The fourteenth century castle is in ruins. Bivona's population has been much depleted by emigration.

A winding road south-east of Alessandria della Rocca brings us to **San Biagio Plàtani**, best visited in Holy Week, when two rival groups form processions under fantastic arches decorated with wild flowers, orange blossom, palm fronds and loaves in odd shapes coated in sugar. Next comes **Sant'Angelo Muxaro** above the river Plàtani. It has been suggested that this also could be the site of Kamikos (p. 209), the citadel built according to legend by Daedalus for King Kokalos's daughters, who poured boiling pitch or water over him while he was bathing. There is a number of Sicilian rock-tombs peppering the hillside, comparable to those at Pantàlica (p. 323). One of them, the *Grotta del Principe*, is 9 metres in diameter and 3.5 high. Gold objects found here are in the Syracuse museum, and some gold cups, one decorated with bulls, are in the British Museum. In this very *grotta* Sant'Angelo, after whom the village is named, is said to have slain a mighty dragon.

If driving north from Bivona, along *statale* 118, the

next town is **Santo Stefano Quisquina**, a more attractive little place, surrounded by high mountains and in fertile country. It is believed to have been founded in the fourteenth century by Frederick II of Aragon. There are several churches, and the Chiesa Madre was founded in the seventeenth century by Federico Chiaramonte. This last has three naves, and contains frescoes, a carved wooden cross and a 'Raising of Lazarus' of the school of Caracci. The fountain in Piazza Castello is eighteenth century, and the Palazzo Baroniale was built by the Ventimiglia family in 1745. There is a small local museum. Outside the town, in an oak wood and along a mule path, is the Sanctuary of Santa Rosalìa, daughter of Count Sinibaldo – seigneur of the region in the thirteenth century – and who later became the patron saint of Palermo (p. 32). Gruesome battles were fought near here in the *Valle di Sangre* (Valley of Blood) between the Luna and Perollo families for the control of Sciacca. Beyond the Sanctuary is a vast pine forest and Belvedere.

A road north leads to Prizzi (p. 208). **Cammarata** lies to the east, a popular place for *villeggiature* or holidays in the country, being just off the Agrigento–Palermo road and dominated by Monte Cammarata, 1578 metres high, as jagged as the Dolomites. Probably Arab in origin, it was developed in Norman times. The Chiesa Madre, originally thirteenth century, was rebuilt in 1640 after a fire. It has a painting of the Madonna della Catena by Pietro d'Asaro and a marble *ciborium* by Andrea Mancino. There is a vast Dominican convent, and there are remains of a castle. Agates are mined hereabouts. For an adventurous drive take the mountain road to **Casteltèrmini** (more easily reached from the *autostrada*) which has about 12,000 inhabitants. Efforts have been made to industrialise it after the closure of the sulphur mines. Again the town is probably of Norman origin. The Chiesa Madre was refurbished in the nineteenth century and has paintings by Giuseppe

Velasquez and a statue of St Francis di Paola by Salvatore Bagnasco. Casteltèrmini is famous for its festival on the last Sunday in May, the Tataratà, when vividly costumed cavalcades march to the rumble of drums, and mock battles are realistically fought between Arabs and Normans.

Lercara Friddi, founded in 1595, has few buildings of interest. The notorious Lucky Luciano (Salvatore Lucania), pre-World War II Mafia chief in the USA, was born here. Sentenced to thirty years' imprisonment in America, he was released in order to assist the secret services in the invasion of Sicily in 1943, with dire consequences for the island thereafter. Lercara was also one of the main sulphur mining areas, signs of which are still evident in the vicinity. This is part of the country described by Carlo Levi in *The Words Are Stones*. The squalid conditions under which miners worked, sometimes naked because of the heat, and for a time including boys and girls under fourteen, were a scandal and the subject of many books and articles from the 1870s onwards, notably by Jessie White Mario in 1894 and Franchetti and Sonnino in 1876. The Anglo-American firm of Rose, Gardner & Co. was the chief mine-owner, and the high style of living of the family is still remembered at Lercara. In November 1876 there was a sensation reported at length in *The Times* of London, when John Forester Rose was kidnapped by the bandit Leone, regarded locally as a kind of hero. Rose was released when a large ransom had been promised, but Leone was caught and shot. Ruin came for the Rose-Gardners in 1906, after a lawsuit with a local dignitary, and they were forced to leave at dead of night.

In the same cracked and craggy zone, across the hills, is **Villalba**, described by Norman Lewis in *The Honoured Society* as a 'small bleached town, carved from the bone of its own landscape'. This was the headquarters of Don Calò (Calogero) Vizzini, Capomafia of Sicily and old friend of Lucky Luciano. It was Vizzini who arranged for the American 7th Army in 1943 to speed along the main road

to Palermo without the expected opposition at Cammarata. As a reward the old brute was allowed to become Mayor of Villalba, and to make recommendations for his friends to be mayors elsewhere on the island, one of whom was his number two, Genco Russo of Mussomeli.

Mussomeli is to the east of *statale* 187 and worth a detour. It is in the province of Caltanissetta. Perched high on a cliff, two kilometres from the town, is the romantic castle of Manfred III Chiaramonte, built in the 1370s, added to and restored over the centuries. The view is tremendous, over fertile country, and towards another outcrop, Monte Paolino above Sutera. Vaulted rooms include the great baronial hall and a chapel, with fine *chiaramontani* portals, columns and mullioned windows. Legends abound – three sisters walled in and starved to death, now haunting the battlements, and so on. In the town of Mussomeli the northern part of the *centro storico* is known as the ‘Terravecchia’. The fourteenth century Chiesa Madre was founded by Manfred III Chiaramonte and enlarged in the eighteenth century. Among the other churches and *palazzi* the most important is the church of the Padri Domenicani in Piazza Chiaramonte, where there is a wooden crucifix by Fra’ Umile da Petralia, one of his best works.

The road to Sutera twists through sulphurous hills. This village of about 2,000 inhabitants has been a place of strategic importance from probably prehistoric times. The chalky Monte San Paolino is surmounted by a sanctuary, built in the fourteenth century. The land around here also belonged to the Chiaramonte. The Chiesa del Carmine has a marble Madonna del Soccorso of 1503, a holy water stoup of 1516 and a wooden statue of the Immacolata of 1696.

Racalmuto, 27 kilometres from Agrigento, is a place of pilgrimage for admirers of the books of Leonardo Sciascia (1921–89), who was born and is buried here. The name of the town derives from the Arabic *rahalmut* meaning

'destroyed village'. Once there were many sulphur mines in the neighbourhood, which now is chiefly agricultural producing remarkably strong wines. The seventeenth century Chiesa Madre has a charming façade, with a rose window and two small campaniles. Inside, in addition to gold and white stuccoes by Francesco Lebrotti, are five paintings by Pietro d'Asaro (1579–1647), another of Racalmuto's famous sons – further examples of his work are to be seen elsewhere in Sicily, for instance at the Palazzo Abatellis in Palermo and at the Museo Civico of Termini Imerese. D'Asaro was a pupil of Zoppo di Gangi and known as *Il Monocolo*, because he had one eye.

Beyond are some remains of the fourteenth century Chiamonte castle. In the Palazzo Municipale there is a Roman sarcophagus carved with that familiar Sicilian subject: the rape of Proserpina. Near here is the Teatro Regina Margherita, designed in 1879 by Dionisio Sciascia (no relation apparently of Leonardo), a pupil of G.B.F. Basile. The church of Santa Maria del Monte is dated 1738, and has a Virgin of the Gagini school (1503) and on the left a carved stone altar. Its *fiesta* on 11–14 July, when horses are goaded up the steep steps in front of the church, is not a sight for sensitive souls.

Leonardo Sciascia was the son of a sulphur miner, and born at No. 5 on that same hill below Santa Maria del Monte. His brilliant novella *The Day of the Owl* (1961) was a brave indictment of the double-speak world of the Mafia, which also permeated the sulphur trade. And as he made clear in other works before the Mafia there was the Inquisition, just as evil. To the west of Racalmuto, near the contrada Sacchitello, a rock perforated by caves was once part of a prehistoric necropolis; and in one of these there lived for a while Diego La Mattina, the Augustinian friar burnt by the Inquisition in 1658, the subject of Sciascia's *Death of an Inquisitor*.

Sciascia's home town, which he transmuted into

'Regalpetra', was the inspiration for many of his writings, causing him sometimes to be compared with Borges and Voltaire. His tomb at Racalmuto is beautiful in its simplicity. The house where he spent the summers, in the contrada Noce, is also simple, but ugly, which does come as a shock to visiting admirers from abroad. The view across vineyards and olive groves is monotonous too. Evidently he did not want to be distracted by material things.

Racalmuto's neighbouring town of Grotte is so called because in its centre are a number of prehistoric caves or grottoes, a few of which are still inhabited. **Favara**, fifteen kilometres from Agrigento, has 32,000 inhabitants and takes its name from the Arabic *Fawwara*, meaning spring of water. The churches are swamped by modern developments and are in any case not of great interest. That of the Madonna dell'Itria, originally fifteenth century, was probably built on an outpost of the neighbouring Chiaramonte castle, which still has some good *chiaramontani* features, though shockingly restored.

*Palma di Montechiaro – Naro – Licata
Gela – Butera – Mazzarino*

Driving east along *statale* 115 we pass close to **Palma di Montechiaro**. This small town is another that had a reputation for crime and extreme poverty, and today the scruffy buildings on its outskirts, several left unfinished, are not inviting – in the 1780s Henry Swinburne wrote, ‘A native of Palma might be found in every jail in Sicily.’ Nevertheless there are two good reasons for visiting Palma. The first is its connection with the author of *The Leopard*. The second is its delightful Chiesa Madre.

The town was founded in 1637 by the Tomasi family, who in the following year were created Dukes of Palma and in 1667 Princes of Lampedusa. Local Palmesi enthusiasts insist that the derelict Palazzo Ducale was the inspiration for ‘Donnafugata’ of the novel. There may be some elements in this, but the Palazzo Cutò at Santa Margherita di Bèlice does seem the more likely. In fact the author-prince only visited Palma twice. The Palazzo Ducale is a somewhat plain building, white with the typical honey-coloured stone ornamentation, and a balcony around the upper storey that must have wonderful views towards the sea. Nearby a wide and long flight of steps leads dramatically to the Chiesa Madre, with its twin partly globular campanili and regarded as one of the prototypes of Sicilian Baroque. It was designed by the Jesuit architect Angelo Italia at the behest of Giulio Tomasi the ‘saint-duke’, and built between 1666 and 1703. The church, dedicated to Santa Rosalìa, is a Latin cross with three naves. There is some splendid stucco work, and the fine organ has been

regilded. In the first chapel is the sarcophagus of Giovanni Battista Odierna, astronomer. Some Lampedusa portraits are in the sacristy.

The first Tomasi palace is in fact in Piazza Domenico Provenziani and was turned into a Benedictine convent by the saint-duke. The way the steps lead up to the entrance is especially attractive. The remains of the old *palazzo* can be seen on the left, with a partly Neo-Classic façade, 1843. Next to it is the church of the Rosario where the saint-duke is buried, as is his daughter who became a nun when aged ten, Suor Maria Crocifissa ('La Beata Corbera' in *The Leopard*), venerated by Pope Pius VI. The author of *The Leopard*, so his biographer David Gilmour relates, was proud to be descended from 'ascetics and mystics'. The saint-duke flagellated himself daily. A son became a cardinal, and was made a saint as late as 1986. The altar of the church is silver, and there is an interesting ceiling. A donation to the convent is gratefully accepted, and in return sweets made by the nuns may be proffered.

The ruins to the west of the town were part church, part fortress, built by the Tomasi and used as a place of refuge in case of attacks from the sea. The Castellazzo di Montechiaro, to the south-east and originally built by the Chiaramonte, is in better shape, with a chapel and a Gagini (Antonello?) Madonna. Along the coast are two sixteenth century watchtowers, the Torre di San Carlo and the Torre di Gaffe.

Time permitting, a detour to **Naro** is certainly to be recommended. This picturesque battlemented town, surrounded by almond trees and vineyards (producing the 'Italia' grape) and in a fertile valley, is dominated by another Chiaramonte castle, fourteenth century, quite well preserved. It is full of Baroque churches and palaces, mostly in need of repair, and is rather difficult to find one's way around. San Calogero in Viale Umberto I has an elegant and revered seventeenth century wooden statue

of St Nero and a fifteenth century tabernacle. The Chiesa Madre, founded in 1619, has a late Gothic font decorated with reliefs, also sculpture by Antonello and Giacomo Gagini, fine choir stalls and more beautiful woodwork in the sacristy (1725). San Francesco is early Baroque with an elaborate façade, including two pairs of caryatids by the portal. It has a splendid interior, with a richly decorated sacristy. San Agostino, begun in 1707 by the Tuscan Francesco Querni, was not finished until 1815, but keeping to the original design. It contains a wooden image of San Francesco di Paola and many paintings. The Municipio building and the Biblioteca Felicianiana were once a convent, originally built in the fourteenth century, but altered over the centuries; there is a little Museum here, with a terracotta group of the Crucifixion by Antonino Ferraro, worth seeing. San Salvatore's façade is left unfinished. The church contains a most interesting porphyry sarcophagus of Giuseppe Lucchese, copying the famous sarcophagus of Frederick II in Palermo cathedral. The Chiesa Madre, once part of the Jesuit college, was founded in 1619. This has a sacristy with some superb woodwork (1725) originally in the old cathedral. Some prehistoric remains have been found outside the town, also an ancient Christian necropolis in the Grotta delle Meraviglie in the contrada Canale.

Excursions to the inland towns of Canicatti, Dèlia, Sammartino, Riesi, Campobello di Licata and Tavenusa are, frankly, not worth a special effort. The country is pretty in the spring, parched under the pitiless sky of the summer. Some of the towns were founded in the seventeenth century, and all have an interesting church or two. **Canicatti** is one of the oldest, evidently on an Arab foundation. To Italians its name (i.e. *cani e gatti*, dogs and cats) can raise a smile, as symbolising the back of beyond, a kind of Timbuktu – in fact it is fairly prosperous, with high

production of grapes. Remains of a Greek city are being excavated at Ravanusa, possibly the site of Kakyron.

Licata's outskirts are offputting, but there are quite a few buildings of interest in the centre. It was badly battered when the American 7th Army, in Operation Husky, landed in the vicinity on July 10 1943. The invaders were shocked by the poverty, which still to some extent persists. The town is on the site of Phinitias, founded in 280 BC by the tyrant of that name, with refugees from Gela. It flourished as a port in Roman and medieval times, and was sacked by the Turks in 1553. The cathedral, reconstructed in the eighteenth century, has frescoes and a chapel decorated with intaglio work and containing a crucifix that was saved from being burnt by the Turks. Leading from here, up the Corso Vittorio Emanuele, we pass the church and convent of San Francesco, with a marble façade of 1750 by Giovanni Biagio Amico, and Palazzo Canarelli which has grotesque heads supporting a balcony in the manner of Noto (p. 284). Also in the Corso is the Palazzo del Municipio, designed by Ernesto Basile in 'Liberty' style, and which has some antique reliefs, medieval statuary and a painting by Pietro d'Asaro. In Corso Roma the church of San Domenico has two paintings by Filippo Paladino. The church of Sant'Angelo, with its striking cupola, is supposed to have been designed by Angelo Italia. A silver urn of 1621 in here holds the relics of Sant'Angelo himself, patron saint of Licata and martyred in 1225. The Civic Museum has archaeological finds from the neighbourhood.

There are some quite good fish restaurants near the artificial harbour, at the mouth of the river Salso. Once the harbour was a main port for the sulphur industry. The hill above has the vestiges of a castle of the seventeenth century, and is noted for its view. Remains of a prehistoric settlement have been found here.

Skirting Monte Gallidoro we see on a headland the romantic and photogenic image of Falconara, one of the

few privately owned and occupied castles, complete with towers and battlements, fifteenth century in origin. Below are a palm grove, many prickly pears and cotton fields, and there are two good beaches. A pleasant stopping off place. Now we are in the province of Caltanissetta, which bills itself as *La Provincia dei Castelli*. On the coast beyond there is another watchtower, the Manfria, again with a beach.

Next comes **Gela**, famous in ancient times and for a while the most powerful of the Greek cities. It is regarded these days as being among the dreariest towns in Sicily, having had one of the worst reputations for Mafia murders, once several in a year, sometimes in a day. The long beaches on either side and the flat plain behind made it an ideal target for the American 7th Army in July 1943. 80,000 men landed around Gela and Licata in this so-called soft underbelly of Europe. Much of the town was destroyed, and has been rebuilt in an uninspired fashion (usually illegally anyhow). The petro-chemical works have also caused pollution. All this said, Gela should not be missed by anyone with the slightest interest in archaeology.

Gela was founded in 688 BC with settlers from Rhodes and Crete. It soon rose to prosperity, and in 582 BC itself founded the colony of Akragas. But its time of greatest power was under Hippocrates, 498–491 BC. He was succeeded by his commander of cavalry, Gelon, who in 485 BC transferred the seat of power to Syracuse, and with it half the population. However, many of its citizens returned in 466 BC. The great Aeschylus, father of Greek tragic drama, wrote his *Oresteia* trilogy at Gela. The story goes that he died in 456 BC when a passing eagle dropped a tortoise's shell on his head. The poet Apollodorus was also born here.

The Carthaginians destroyed the city in 405 BC, and decline thereupon set in. Timoleon of Syracuse repopulated it in 339 BC with colonists from Chios. The city

was considerably enlarged and redesigned. New walls were built. The Gelans now allied themselves with the Carthaginians, which was to prove a disaster; they were defeated by Agathocles in 311 BC and 4,000 of their leading citizens were tortured to death. In 282 BC, Mamertines from Messina sacked the city. An appeal for help was sent to Phintias of Akragas, with the result that he removed the entire population to his new settlement at the mouth of the river Salso and razed as much as he could of the old town. After that Gela in effect disappeared from history, until 1230 AD, when a new town called Terranova was built on the site by Frederick II. In 1927 the name Gela was revived and replaced Terranova.

For well over a century in modern times Gela was plundered by collectors, with the result that its vases and terracottas are to be found in most of the main museums in the world – including Palermo, Agrigento and, especially, Syracuse after systematic excavations began in 1901. Gela's own splendid museum was opened in 1958 and reorganized in 1985. It is situated in the area known as Molino a Vento, on the eastern side of the town, near the site of the acropolis and the quarter built up in the time of Timoleon. The richness of the exhibits, arranged topographically and chronologically, is quite amazing. The ground floor, for instance, contains decorative elements from temples, including a famous sixth century BC horse's head which has become the emblem of Gela. There are also numerous terracotta statuettes and red-figure vases. Among the objects of particular interest are a mask of Demeter, *antefixes* with the head of Silenus, a vase with a white ground depicting Aeneas and Anchises, and a number of ceramic inscriptions and graffiti. On the upper floor are sarcophagi, vases and a hoard of nearly a thousand silver coins, found in 1950 (stolen in 1973 but since recovered).

Houses, shops and two Doric temples have been excavated near the museum. A single column stands in the

Parco di Rimembranza, which overlooks the Allied landing beach – and its ghosts. The Corso runs through the dirty depressing town, past the eighteenth century Chiesa Madre, originally built in part from stone taken from the temples and hardly worth entering. In the area beyond the piazza was the Greek necropolis, where so many famous vases were discovered early in the twentieth century. At the west end of the town is the Capo Soprano district, and here are to be found the marvellous Greek fortifications, incredibly well preserved, having for centuries been covered by sand. It is a relief to find oneself, at last, in such an attractive and *suggestivo* area, the waves lapping the beach below. The walls are eight metres high in places, the lower part made of stone blocks, belonging to the Timoleon period, the upper in unburnt bricks, added by Agathocles when the sand had become a problem – now protected by glass. It would seem that they could have been even higher, and that a third section might have been destroyed by Phintias. There are three watchtowers, reached by steps, and a massive gate. The barracks and a well have been found nearby.

Also at Capo Soprano, reached by Via Europa, are the Greek public baths, again well preserved. These hip baths with terracotta seats are in two sections. In one section twenty baths are arranged in a circle around a terracotta pavement – the wonder is how slaves could have emptied them satisfactorily. It has been assumed that the whole of this area was once surrounded by a wall, which again could have been destroyed by Phintias. No trace of a theatre has been found: this is surprising, considering the association of Aeschylus with Gela.

Gourmets should at least know that Gela is well known for its *stigghiulata 'mpanata* – *focaccia* bread stuffed with vegetables and meat or fish.

The medieval village of **Butera**, north-west of Gela, reached by a secondary road, has a superb view as far as Etna and the Madonie mountains. It was once a *feudo* of

the Branciforte family. The castle is eleventh century, with mullioned windows and a large central courtyard, and the Palazzo Municipale has a splendid fifteenth century portal. The Chiesa Madre, dedicated to St Thomas, is a Latin cross with a cupola, and has elaborate stucco work. It contains a 'Madonna of the Angels' by Filippo Paladino. There are also some Siculo-Greek tombs in the neighbourhood.

Many of the grandest families of Palermo have or had Branciforte blood, as a result of a great heiress, Stefania Branciforte e Branciforte, marrying Pietro Lanza, Prince of Trabìa, in the early part of the nineteenth century. This was the intriguing lady who married secondly a German mercenary, Georg Wilding, and whom she made a prince by giving him one of her numerous titles (p. 11). She was also Countess of **Mazzarino**, which town is reached by a winding road from Butera in mountainous country, once the haunt of bandits. The Branciforte palace, originally seventeenth century, still exists at Mazzarino, though not in a good state, and is next to the Chiesa Madre. Branciforte tombs are to be found in Santa Maria di Gesù and in the church of the old Carmelite convent; the convent itself, now the Municipio, where a fifteenth century Gagesque Branciforte sarcophagus – very attractive – is in the cloisters. There are paintings by Filippo Paladino in the churches of the Immacolata and San Domenico.

South-eastern Sicily

Niscemi – Piazza Armerina – Morgantina

The mosaics of the great Roman villa at Casale, La Villa Romana del Casale, sometimes also known as the Villa Imperiale, near Piazza Armerina, are among the half dozen essential sights of Sicily for those on the circuit coach tour. The road from Gela passes near Niscemi, from which in 1943 the Hermann Goering division launched a massive and almost fatal attack on the Americans. **Niscemi**, founded in 1626, was ruined in the cataclysmic earthquake of 1693 that destroyed so many of the towns in south-eastern Sicily. The churches therefore are eighteenth century, post earthquake.

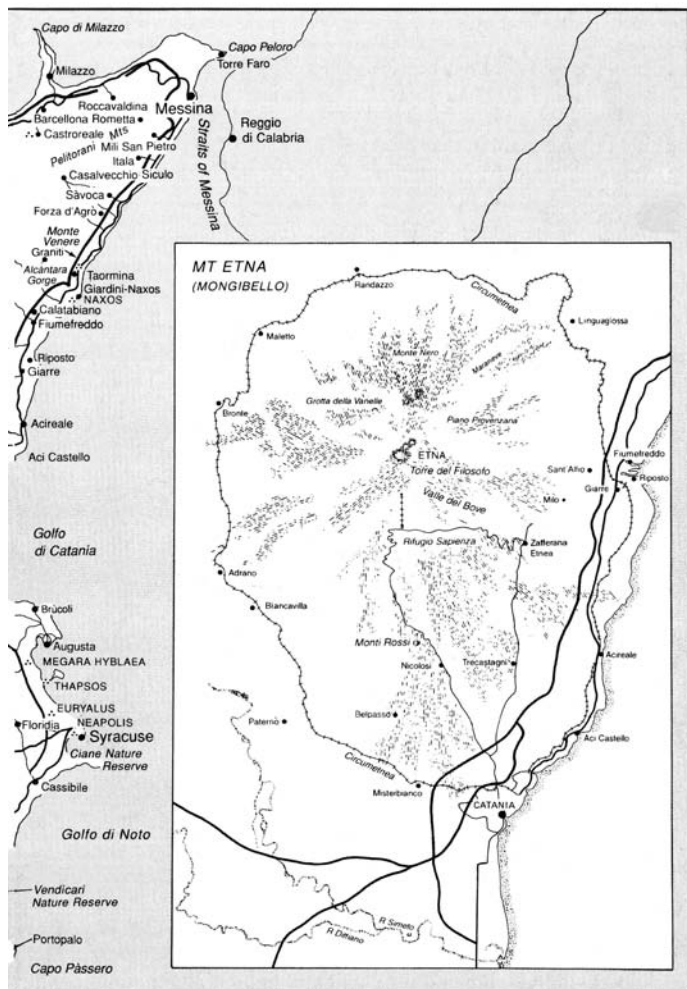
The independent traveller would do well to spend the night at **Piazza Armerina**, so as to be able to visit the Roman villa early before the crowds. High up in bosky surroundings and in an agricultural area, the old town of Piazza Armerina has considerable charm and is well worth exploring with its many interesting palaces and churches. Between August 14 and 15 the great procession of the ‘Palio dei Normanni’, with flags and horse races, and much flowing of wine, takes place, commemorating the liberation from the Arabs. However mid-August is not the time to combine a visit to the Roman villa, which even in spring can be stifling hot under its perspex protective coverings.

Piazza Armerina is dominated by the Aragonese castle and the hulk of the cathedral. Frederick III of Aragon summoned the Sicilian Parliament here in 1296, when his brother plotted to put Charles II of Anjou on the throne. In 1299 the town withstood a siege by the Angevins. Its time of expansion and prosperity began in the fourteenth

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Piazza Armerina and Morgantina



century. Lombards were settled here and it is said that these origins are still noticeable in the local dialect.

Proceeding from the modern area along Viale Generale Ciancio we find on the left the early seventeenth century church of San Pietro, which has a coffered ceiling, Gaginesque sculpture and a fifteenth century fresco of the Madonna and Child. Near here, off Piazza Generale Cascino and the Discesa Santo Stefano is the church of San Giovanni, originally fifteenth century and almost entirely decorated with frescoes by Borremans and his pupils. Via Umberto leads to the *centro storico*. The church of San Rocco, early seventeenth century, off Piazza Garibaldi has a splendid portal in carved tufa. The adjacent Palazzo della Città was built by the Benedictines as their convent in 1773 and has a room on the first floor with a ceiling painted by Gioacchino Martorana. From here Via Cavour winds up to the Piazza del Duomo, past Palazzo Demani. The original Cathedral, dedicated to the Santissima Assunta, was begun in 1624 by Orazio Torriani, a Roman, following twenty years of argument and discussion. It was on the site of an earlier building, the campanile of which (c. 1420) in the Catalan-Gothic style still remains, with an addition in 1526. The reconstruction after the earthquake of 1693 was begun in 1705 by Giuseppe La Rosa and finished in 1719, and the dome was added in 1768. Barley sugar columns twisted with foliage adorn the portal. The interior once all blue and white, pleasantly cool, has had a welcome change of colour. There is an arch in the Gaginesque style with candelabra on the right of the baptistery. On the high altar, respondent with *pietra dura* and marbles, there is a silver tabernacle containing a Byzantine painting of the Madonna delle Vittorie, which according to tradition was given by Pope Nicholas II to Count Roger and was carried by him into battle. The elaborately carved choir stalls by Vincenzo Greco date from 1627, and there are remarkably fine gilded organ cases. Paintings by Giuseppe

Piazza Armerina and Morgantina

Salerno (Lo Zoppo di Gangi) are in the presbytery, but the greatest treasure is to the left of the presbytery – a wooden crucifix, painted on both sides of 1485, by an unknown Provençal artist, a marvellous work. A huge sixteenth century painting of the Trinity with quantities of figures is at the entrance of the sacristy, and over the altar there is an Assumption by Filippo Paladino (1612). A small museum contains various reliquaries, one containing a hair of the Virgin, and another in silver by Simone di Aversa (c. 1400). A Tràpani coral and silver monstrance is nineteenth century, and a Venetian chasuble was made in 1604. There are also vestments, and an especially valuable seventeenth century cape embroidered with gold and coral. A prized silver equestrian statue of Roger I may or may not be on view, being so valuable.

Next to the cathedral is Palazzo Trigona, with a Baroque façade and a long range of balconies; it contains an art gallery. The very steep Via Monti, once the main street of the town, passes through a medieval quarter and eventually leads, by way of Via Crocifisso, to the church of San Martino, which in the fifteenth century was the Chiesa Madre. Via Floresta, leading to Piazza del Duomo, passes Palazzo Sant'Elia, with a beautiful Renaissance loggia, and continues to the Aragonese castle built by Martin I who used it as his main residence. Via Vittorio Emanuele passes the seventeenth century churches of Sant'Anna and Sant'Ignazio, decorated inside with stuccoes. In the ex-convent next to Sant'Ignazio there is a museum containing some finds from Casale. To the north of the town, beyond Via Torquato Tasso, but only a short walk, is the lovely little Norman priory of Sant'Andrea, built in 1096 by Count Simone of Butera, nephew of Roger I. The proportions are simple, and there are frescoes of the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries. It is certainly a place to be visited, though finding the key may be a problem. Further on still are the

little church and convent of Santa Maria di Gesù, sixteenth century, pleasantly situated in hilly country.

The Roman villa at Casale is some three miles southwest of Piazza Armerina. A first reaction is of amazement – why should such a luxurious pleasure-dome, or palace, certainly not for year-round occupation, have been built in so remote a spot? For this was an establishment of fifty-one rooms, covering almost an acre, complete with baths, basilica and huge peristyle, and with the most extensive and spectacular mosaics of the late Roman era anywhere in the world. One answer would be that it was near Sofiana, a staging-point on the road from Catane (Catania) and Agrigentum. The pity is that so little remains of the structure of the building, and that there are so few wall frescoes left. For this we must partly blame the Vandals and Visigoths. The site was certainly occupied in Byzantine and Saracen times. It was William the Bad who ordered its destruction. Mud floods, as a result of deforestation and erosion, completed the obliteration. The existence of Roman ruins was not noticed until 1761, and in 1881 some digging began. From 1929 there were more systematic excavations; all the mosaics were uncovered by 1954. The slaves' quarters and the outbuildings have yet to be excavated.

It seems that a more modest building existed here in the second century AD. While scholars generally agree that the great villa dates from the end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth, they disagree violently about the name of the owner, obviously a person of much wealth and prestige. The most popular attribution is Maximian, or Maximianus Herculus, who in 286 was made co-Emperor with authority over the West by Diocletian. A possible clue to his identity is that the labours of Hercules feature among the mosaics, which could have been a tribute to the name of Herculus bestowed on him after his victories. Maximian certainly was a great builder. It was he who in

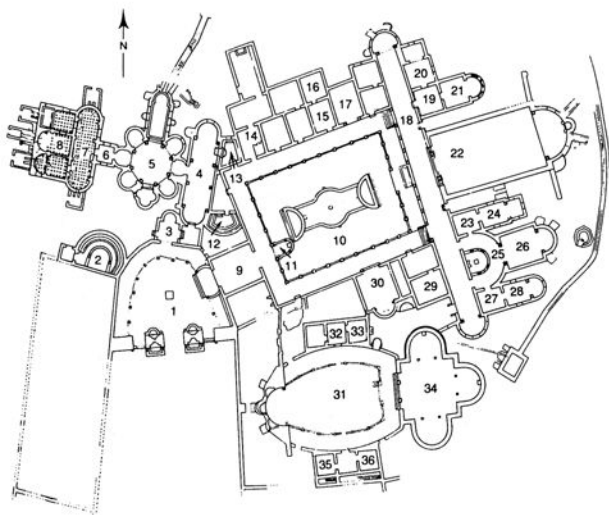
298, after his return from Africa, began the vast Baths of Diocletian in Rome. According to medieval tradition 40,000 Christian slaves were employed in this latter building. Both Diocletian and Maximian abdicated in 305, so it is speculated that Maximian's son Maxentius could have continued work at the villa. Then, again, perhaps Constantine took over the villa after he had defeated Maxentius in 312. It is known that Constantine had considerable properties in Sicily.

The mosaics stylistically resemble others found in North Africa, and so must have been made by African craftsmen. Clothes and hair styles also give clues as to dates. It is the tremendous variety of themes that make the mosaics so intriguing: such vitality and humour, imagination as well as realism – and yet, oddly, there is a kind of unity. We have mythological scenes, animals and birds, and insights into the pleasures of a gilded world, such as hunting and music. A walkway has been built above the mosaics under the perspex roof. Some advice: those who suffer in great heat can buy paper fans beforehand at the shop.

The villa's grand entrance (1) flanked by columns, leads into a great pillared *atrium*, in the centre of which was a fountain. In its left-hand corner there is a large latrine (2), its marble seats missing. Ahead is a small vestibule (3) decorated with a geometric pattern and evidently once containing a statue of Venus. It is through this vestibule that, for the time being, the present-day visitor enters the building. This leads into a long room (4), the *Salone del Circo*, with mosaics depicting chariot races, complete with spectators, in the Circus Maximus in Rome. These mosaics however have to be viewed from the walkway round the peristyle. To the left is the complex of the baths. We enter the octagonal *frigidarium* (5), once vaulted, with plunge baths and vestibules, and decorated with marine creatures such as naiads and tritons, also a scene of a fluffy-haired lady being disrobed by servants. Four of the small apses

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IMPERIAL VILLA, CASALE



- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1 Grand Entrance or <i>Atrium</i> | 19 Ulysses and Polyphemus |
| 2 Large Latrine | 20 <i>Scena erotica</i> |
| 3 Vestibule | 21 Master Bedroom |
| 4 Hall of the Circus | 22 Basilica |
| 5 <i>Frigidarium</i> | 23 Pan and Eros |
| 6 Massage Room | 24 Children Hunting |
| 7 <i>Tepidarium</i> | 25 Cupids Fishing |
| 8 <i>Calidaria</i> | 26 Arion |
| 9 Vestibule | 27 Child Charioteers |
| 10 Peristyle | 28 Tragic and Comic Actors |
| 11 <i>Aediculum</i> | 29 'Bikini Girls' |
| 12 Small Latrine | 30 Orpheus |
| 13 Vestibule: mother and children | 31 <i>Xystus</i> |
| 14 Medieval Oven | 32 and 33 Vintage Scenes |
| 15 Bedroom: Four Seasons | 34 <i>Triclinium</i> : Labours of Hercules |
| 16 Bedroom: Cupids Fishing | 35 and 36 Cupid Fishermen and
Gathering Grapes |
| 17 Room of the Small Hunt | |
| 18 Corridor of the Great Hunt | |

Piazza Armerina and Morgantina

were used as vestibules, the others for cold baths. Next (6) we have a massage room, showing a man being massaged and anointed by his naked servant, this being succeeded by the remains of the *tepidarium* (7) and the *calidaria* (8) where the missing pavements have exposed the hypocaust which heated the rooms.

Arriving at the *atrium* (1) visitors of the third or fourth century would turn right. Ascending some steps and passing through a vestibule (9) they would emerge into the villa's magnificent centrepiece, the peristyle (10), rectangular in shape, surrounded by marble columns with Corinthian capitals and a fountain in the centre. The mosaics around it depict heads of animals, both wild and domestic. Immediately opposite the vestibule is a small *aediculum* (11), the shrine of the patron deity of the villa. Continuing to the left, we pass a small latrine (12), probably for women, with a marble hand basin, all very luxurious. From here we can look down on the Hall of the Circus. On the corner of the peristyle there is another vestibule (13) with mosaics showing a mother – presumed by some to represent the Empress – with two boys, attended by servants, on their way to the baths. A series of small rooms (14–16), probably bedrooms, now follow. In the first, a medieval oven has destroyed part of the mosaics. In the succeeding rooms, the four seasons are represented. followed by cupids fishing from boats, with a porticoed villa amid trees in the background.

The *Piccola Caccia*, or Small Hunt (17), is among the best of the mosaics. We see the hunters making preliminary sacrifices to the goddess Diana, a wild boar being carried in, stags being chased into a net, a banquet with servants, one black, pouring wine and stoking the fire. An important-looking personage holds a dead hare. But the Corridor of the Great Hunt (18) is a masterpiece, nearly 70 metres long. The theme here is big game. At each end are apsidal recesses symbolising the two Roman provinces:

Armenia, on the left, and Arabia (or Africa) represented by an exotic bare-breasted lady, with a tiger and an elephant, and a phoenix rising from the flames. The Mediterranean, full of fish, and Italy lie in between. The whole abounds in three-dimensional excitement, savagery and energy.

Room 19 is a contrast, and shows Ulysses, with a glint in his eye, offering the drugged chalice to Polyphemus prior to the blinding. Room 20 has a rather banal *scena erotica*, symbolising possibly a pubescent initiation to sex. Room 21 – thought to be the master bedroom – has representations of fruits. The spacious basilica (22) would have been used for official receptions. The next room (23) shows the battle between cloven-hoofed Pan and winged Eros, with an umpire standing by; it has been suggested that the spectators are members of the Imperial family. Room 24 has humorous scenes of children hunting, including a child being pecked on his behind by an angry rooster. There is more humour in room 25, which is a semi-circular *atrium* and *nymphaeum* or pleasure room: frolicking cupids fishing and playing with ducks. This leads into a private living room (26), decorated with scenes from the life of Anon, the Greek poet who invented the dithyramb in praise of Bacchus, with lively scenes of tritons, fishes, naiads and sea monsters; Arion is shown playing the cithera and singing to the sailors who have threatened him with death, and then throwing himself into the sea, where he is saved by dolphins. Rooms 21 and 28 have child charioteers, and a bedroom decorated with actors tragic and comic.

The most famous mosaics and probably the latest are in the *Sala delle Dieci Ragazze* (29), known popularly as the 'Bikini Girls'. These have been found to overlay geometric mosaics from the second century AD villa. The ten girls do have a strange appeal, even if one misses the background details shown in most other figuristic mosaics. They are performing not very arduous exercises: dumbbells, discus throwing, volley-ball. The rather coy and prettiest one has

been awarded the victor's crown and palm. The next room (30) is another living room, which had a fountain and was probably used in hot weather; the mosaics here are much damaged, which is a shame, and depict Orpheus playing on his lyre to animals and birds.

The last section of the villa, which is slightly detached, has the *xystus* or exercise court (31), a large elliptical courtyard surrounded by colonnades and with a fountain. To its north are two small rooms (32 and 33) with vintage scenes being performed by cupids. At the end of the *xystus* is the great banqueting hall or *triclinium* (34), containing superb mosaics (the best of all) of the labours of Hercules – the vanquished Titans almost Michelangeloesque as they writhe with pain from his arrows, from which they try to free themselves. Finally, there are two more bedrooms (35, 36) with cupids gathering grapes.

Security and protection, one hopes, are better now. For vandals broke in by night in 1995, and in 1991 there was a mud flood.

The extensive and fascinating ruins of the Sikel-Greek city of Morgantina are not often visited by the hurried traveller. Very different in atmosphere to the villa at Casale, they are being excavated by Princeton University and are about 16 miles north-east of Piazza Armerina, in beautiful unspoilt country, near the medieval town of Aidone. The mosaics and private wealth of the Roman villa seem almost brash compared to what must have been the thriving busy community living at Morgantina.

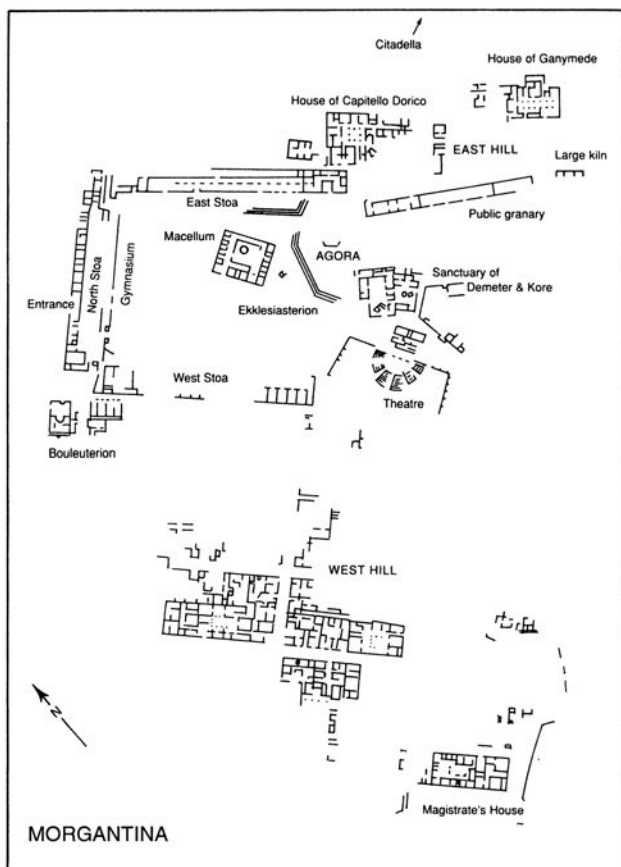
Aidone was damaged in the earthquake of 1693. The church of Santa Maria la Cava was founded in 1134 by Adelasia, niece of Roger II. Some fourteenth century remains are visible inside. Before going on to the excavations it is important to visit the well-organised museum, which was opened in 1984 and is in a former Capuchin convent. The excavations are open from 9 a.m. to an hour

before sunset, but it would be well to check at the museum beforehand.

We enter the museum through the church, where there is some good inlaid woodwork, also statues and paintings. The exhibits are arranged chronologically, beginning with Bronze and Iron Age objects found at Citadella, above the main site of Morgantina and which began to be inhabited by Sikels in 1000 BC. The most important pieces from the period of the Greek occupation of Citadella are a red-figure *krater* by Euthymides (c. 500 BC) depicting Herakles battling with the Amazons and a black-figure *oinochoe* with a satyr dancing. The collection from the *agora* has a great number of terracotta votive offerings to Persephone and some fine terracotta busts of this sometimes benign goddess, who when placated promised good harvests and a happy after-life. A plate decorated with fish is a delight (fourth century BC). There are splendid displays of domestic utensils, toys, weights, beads, coins, lamps and vases: note a black glazed vase with three spouts.

Morgantina is 5 kilometres from Aidone along a sometimes bumpy road, dusty in high summer. No wonder the late King Gustav VI of Sweden, a great lover of Morgantina, preferred to visit the ruins on horseback. Citadella is on the conical-shaped hill above. Greeks settled up there in the sixth century BC and seemed to have co-existed peacefully with the indigenous Sikels until they were driven off in 459 BC by the Sikel chieftain Ducetius, attempting to free central Sicily from Greek influence. The town was rebuilt in the late fourth century on what is now the Serra Orlando ridge and remained under Syracusan influence. Its greatest moment of prosperity and culture was in the third century BC at the time of Hieron II of Syracuse. It was also conveniently on the main route from east to south Sicily. But Morgantina suffered for being on the wrong side in the second Punic War. The Romans, after sacking it in

Piazza Armerina and Morgantina



211, gave it to Spanish mercenaries. By the end of the first century BC, according to Strabo, it no longer existed.

We enter by the north *stoa* near a small cypress grove. The remains of the gymnasium are opposite. Some lava millstones have been placed here. To the right is the

bouleuterion or council chamber where the senate would have met. Much of the eastern *stoa* on the left has been uncovered. In the centre of the *agora* is the *macellum* or covered market; we can see the remains of a circular pavilion around which were stalls and butcher shops. This is a late addition, about 125 BC. Just beyond is a highly interesting and important set of three rows of steps, set at angles, and dividing the upper *agora* from the lower. This is unique in Hellenic architecture, and was probably used for public debates. A speaker's podium has been unearthed in front. Nearby is a sanctuary to the gods of the Underworld. Hundreds of votive offerings were found here. There are two altars, one covered in glass. Next comes the theatre, dating from the fourth century. This is divided by five passages and could seat a thousand spectators. Evidently it was dedicated to Dionysus, judging from an inscription on one of the seats. To the east we find a large building, believe to be the public granary. This is succeeded by a large kiln for making bricks and tiles. Near here we get a panoramic view across the valley and far into the blue distance. On the hill above there is a residential quarter, including the *Casa del Capitello Dorico* – note the inscription on a floor, EUEXEI, 'Welcome' – and the *Casa di Ganimede*, which has a mosaic floor depicting the rape of Ganymede; this last is of the period of Hieron II and among the earliest known mosaics in the western Mediterranean. Another residential area is on the west hill, including the *Casa del Magistrato*, which has 24 rooms, those on the left of the entrance (from the east) being the public area, those on the right private. Other houses have mosaics, some very attractive. The way up to the Citadella can be tiring. Some remains of temples and fortifications are to be seen there, and several chamber tombs. There have been some notorious cases of thefts from Morgantina.

Instead of returning to the coast, some travellers may prefer to continue to Enna, described on pages 413–23.

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The road to Enna, via Valguarnera, passes Floristella, the site of one of the most important sulphur mines – the horrors of working there can easily be imagined.

*Camarina – Vittoria – Acate – Còmiso
Chiaromonte Gulfi – Ragusa – Donnafugata*

A branch road east of Gela leads in due course to the fishing village of Scoglitti, almost overwhelmed by holiday homes. Soon we reach the mouth of the river Ippari (Hipparis to the Greeks), above which are the remains of **Camarina**, founded as a sub-colony by Syracuse in 598 BC. Over the next three hundred years Camarina was destroyed four times, by the Syracusans after a rebellion, by Gela, by the Carthaginians, and finally and conclusively by the Romans in 258 BC. ‘Camarina, which fate said must never be reclaimed’, wrote Virgil in Book III of the *Aeneid*, referring to the tradition that the people of Camarina drained a marsh and were defeated by an enemy which marched over it. Excavations are in progress, and permission to see them has to be obtained from the Museo Archeologico, which as usual in Sicily is excellently arranged. The old walls especially have been well preserved.

The museum is near the site of the temple of Athena, dating from the fifth century BC, the period of Camarina’s greatest splendour. Most of the finds from the necropolis, starting from the time of the great archaeologist Paolo Orsi, are in museums at Ragusa or Syracuse. Recent discoveries have however been sensational, in particular an almost entire set of bronze bowls and other utensils from a *triclinium* or dining room such as would have been used in a typical Roman grandee’s house. And these include not only the lion-shaped legs of couches, which would have surrounded three sides of the table, but a bronze statue of a nude Venus, minus only one foot, that would have

presided over the room. All were found underwater at the mouth of the river Ippari.

Other objects fished from the sea include helmets and what had been a bagful of lamps, now congealed together. There is also a pot with the head of Silenus. Finds from town sites are well displayed, and good maps show the strategic importance of Camarina.

The beach below is beautiful. Most of it is the preserve of the lucky Club Méditerranée.

Back on the main road we enter **Vittoria**, 15 kilometres north of Camarina, a thriving town of about 55,000 inhabitants, a centre for wine and oil. It was founded in 1607 and named after Vittoria Colonna, a Countess of Mòdica. There is some dreadful 'illegal building'. The centre is laid out on the grid plan. The main square, Piazza del Popolo, is a happy gossipy place overlooked by a grand Neoclassic theatre, surmounted by statues of Diana and Apollo and built between 1869 and 1877, praised by Bernard Berenson with good reason. The church of Santa Maria delle Grazie nearby was begun in 1612 but partly destroyed in the 1693 earthquake. Rebuilt in 1754, it has some attractive altars in polychrome marble. The Chiesa Madre in Piazza Ricca was rebuilt in 1706. Its interior, a basilica, is impressive, with a huge chandelier, a gilded pulpit and an organ case, gilded likewise. Indeed nearly everything is gilded in this church. The cupola was added in 1854. In the choir there is a curious ex-voto pavement donated by wine-growers after an outbreak of phylloxera in 1798–1801. Next to the Chiesa Madre is the Oratorio del SS Crocifisso with sculpture of the school of Giacomo Serpotta.

The little town of **Acate**, 10 kilometres to the north of Vittoria is built on an ancient site and flourished in Byzantine times. Once called Biscari, its name was changed to Acate in 1938 on account of its river, now the Dirillo, having been known as Achates under the Romans. The Latin for agates is *achates*, and agates were found there. It

is hardly worth the detour to see the churches, or to hunt for agates, unless you wish to see the body of San Vincenzo donated to the town by Pope Clement XI in 1722 – in honour of which there is a *Palio* or horse race through the streets every third Sunday after Easter. The castle has interest, having been restored in Baroque times.

Còmiso, on the western spur of the Iblei mountains, is smaller than Vittoria. From afar it stands proudly, with its cupolas and campaniles. Its people are proud too. For a few days in 1944 they declared themselves independent, and later, after an American missile base had been established nearby, an open city. The centre, away from the dreary suburbs, is attractive, with some medieval remnants and Art Nouveau buildings. But it is mostly a Baroque town, a foretaste of the wonderful and ebullient south-eastern Sicilian brand of Baroque for which the town of Noto is especially famous. Còmiso is also known for its marble and calcareous stone, which was appreciated by Sikels, Syracusans and especially Romans. In the Middle Ages the town was dominated by a succession of feudal families, eventually by the Naselli, after whom the castle is named. It suffered badly in the 1693 earthquake.

The modern fountain of Diana, long-necked and recumbent with her hounds, in the Piazza del Municipio, is the hub of the town. Its waters supplied the Roman *thermae*, and some comically naive second century AD mosaics – a shaggy Neptune, nereids, and marine creatures – have been discovered off Via Calogero. If a husband wants to prove that his wife has been unfaithful, wine poured by her will not mix with the fountain's water. But this ruse does not apply to a husband who has been unfaithful.

Remains of some Bronze Age *capanne* or huts have also been found in the vicinity, so we are told – they are not visible. The Palazzo Comunale overlooking the piazza is eighteenth century, as is the Palazzo Iacono-Ciarcia, with a façade attributed to Rosario Gagliardi.

Beyond Via Calogoro is Piazza Erbe, on one side of which is the former fish market (1867), and on the other the Chiesa Madre, otherwise Santa Maria delle Stelle, originally fifteenth century. The mighty façade of this church is attributed to designs by Gagliardi, but its bell-tower was added in 1936. There are three aisles in its richly decorated interior. Remarkably, in view of the damage caused by the earthquake of 1693, the seventeenth century frescoes on the ceiling have survived; they are by Antonio Barbalonga of Messina. The monument to Baldassare Naselli by Marabitti and the alabaster sculpture by L.V. Cerulla (1706) are also of interest. Via San Biagio leads from Piazza del Municipio to the Castello Naselli, much altered (not however very well) over the centuries and reduced in size by the earthquake. It has a sixteenth century loggia and two Gothic doorways. The octagonal tower, known as *La Fossa*, is believed to have been Byzantine. The church of San Biagio, which was certainly Byzantine, was rebuilt in the eighteenth century, but still has a seventeenth century portal. Inside are two paintings by Novelli. It has a polychrome majolica campanile.

Via Morso, off Piazza San Biagio, passes the little church of the Misericordia (*U Timminu*) with a rose window of the sixteenth century, in San Francesco (also known as the Immacolata). It was founded in the thirteenth century, and in the fifteenth the convent was attached; this latter possesses a delightful little quadrangular courtyard. If the church is closed, ring the bell of the convent and insist on being given the key, for the chapel of the Naselli inside is one of the chief sights of Còmiso. Richly decorated, this elegant little place, built between 1517 and 1555, has a triumphal arch and a superb marble effigy of Gaspare II Naselli, *Il Rosso*, attributed to Antonello Gagini, resting on a sarcophagus held up by two winged sphinxes; the vaulted ceiling, in eight segments, is a real architectural curiosity,

an Arab-Norman pastiche. In the church there is also a notable statue of San Rocco and his dog.

The Annunziata church, on the highest point of the city, is near here, above a long diagonally placed flight of steps. The façade, by G.B. Cascione-Vaccarini, is in the Palermo Baroque style, in two tiers. The pillared dome, based on San Giorgio at Ragusa Ibla, was built between 1877 and 1885. The interior, richly decorated in stucco, is now in a state of some abandon. There are several fine *palazzi* in Via Vittorio Emanuele, notably Palazzo Occhipinti, with a façade once more attributed to Gagliardi. Flights of steps lead to the San Leonardo district, the oldest part of the town but disfigured by modern constructions. Further down Via Vittorio Emanuele are a number of houses with Art Nouveau motifs.

Còmiso was the home of the prize-winning writer Gesualdo Bufalino (died 1996); the son of a blacksmith, he was a close friend of Sciascia and in the great Sicilian literary tradition since Verga.

A short distance outside the town, and after continuing along this street, a road leads to the battlemented Torre di Canicarao, an eighteenth century farmhouse with a pretty courtyard, complete with fountain, mulberry tree and outside staircase. There are exotic plants in the garden outside. Still further, along a rough road, is Monte Tabuto, where there are Bronze Age flint mines, dating perhaps from the sixteenth century BC and afterwards used as tombs. Because of the great number of necropolises the area around the valley is now 'archaeologically protected'.

Chiaromonte Gulfi, surrounded by almond and olive trees, lies in a once strategic spot 27 kilometres north of Còmiso in the Iblei mountains. There was a Saracen town here, and it was destroyed by the Angevins in 1299 after the 'Vespers'. The town was rebuilt by Manfredi Chiaromonte, Count of Mòdica, at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The *centro storico*, encased in cheaply built apartment

blocks, is well preserved, with narrow alleys and steep stairways. Some remnants of the old walls remain. The Chiesa Madre, Santa Maria la Nuova, with three naves, was begun in 1536 but not finished until the eighteenth century. The various changes in architectural styles are visible in the tall façade with its bell tower above. Inside are some fine eighteenth century embroidered altar cloths, fading a little. San Giovanni Battista is on the highest point, next to the ruined castle of the Chiaramonte. Brightly redecorated within, in yellow, white and gold, and with stucco cherubs, it has a painting attributed to Vito D'Anna. Four antique columns have been placed outside. The convent of the Capuchins with its church was rebuilt after the earthquake. Near here are the Villa Comunale (view) and houses of eighteenth century gentry. Up in the pine woods is the sanctuary of the Madonna delle Grazie, with a spring of water that used to supply the town. Chiaramonte Gulfi is especially known for its pork dishes.

And so to **Ragusa**, which in fact once was two towns, for many years operating as separate and rival communities. In 1926 they were happily united, in recognition of which Ragusa was promoted to be the capital of a province. The original site of the town, now known as Ragusa Ibla, stands on an outcrop with ravines on each side – a spectacular view when driving from the direction of Mòdica. After the earthquake of 1693 it was decided to rebuild the town on the hill above, but this was vehemently opposed by the noble families, who insisted that it must remain where it always used to be. As a result the new or upper Ragusa was laid out on a rather dull plan, in accordance with the precepts of Baroque city-planners, while the old or lower Ragusa retained its medieval pattern.

The Sikel settlement here was Hellenised as Hybla Heraia. Conceivably in Byzantine times settlers from Dalmatia could have called it Ragusa after their native city of that name, now known as Dubrovnik. In 1091 Count

Roger gave it to his son Godfrey. In the thirteenth century Manfredi Chiaramonte included it as part of his county of Mòdica. In recent years the discovery of oil, and before that of asphalt, has added to the prosperity of the region.

Upper Ragusa (Ragusa Superiore) is a well organised bustling town and with a reputation of being more or less Mafia-free. Apart from the museum and cathedral, it has relatively few attractions for the average sightseer. The best approach is from Piazza del Popolo, near the railway station. This continues to Piazza della Libertà, with sundry buildings of the Fascist era, and thence to Ponte Nuovo. one of the three bridges over a gorge. From here Via Roma continues up to the intersection with Corso Italia, where stands the mighty and richly decorated Cathedral or Duomo, dedicated to San Giovanni. The Piazza del Duomo is alive with activity. All around are bars, shops and clubs, not to mention pigeons. The Cathedral itself, set on a broad terrace with a balustrade, was designed in 1694 by Mario Spada of Ragusa and Rosario Boscarini of Mòdica, but not finished until 1760. The interior has three naves and is decorated with stuccoes. A number of Baroque *palazzi* are to be found along Corso Italia, notably Palazzo Zacco off Via San Vito, with grotesque heads holding up the balconies.

The Archaeological Museum is near Ponte Nuovo. The exhibits, mostly excavated since the 1960s, are well laid out chronologically and topographically, from prehistory to early Christian times, with photographs and plans. There are some interesting reconstructions, particularly of tombs and potters' ovens. In vitrine no. 20 in the third section there is an important *kylix* with animals outside and a running warrior inside, sixth century BC. Note too the terracotta figurines from Scornavacche in vitrines 22–24 in the fourth section, fourth century BC. In the fifth (Roman) section there are mosaics from Santa Croce Camerina and some beautiful glass.

At night Ragusa Ibla below is a lovely glowing sight. By day it is grey and white on its great spur, with swifts swooping and screaming above. The best view is from Santa Maria delle Scale, reached by Via XXIV Maggio at the end of Corso Italia. This little church has remnants of its fourteenth century origin, including part of the campanile, a pulpit and, inside, a Gothic archway. There are 242 steps from here down to Ragusa Ibla; arduous indeed, especially on the return journey. On arriving at its foot we find ourselves in a quite different world, quiet, secretive, in places crumbling, in places carefully preserved, with some magnificent buildings. Parking is also easier than up above.

The Chiesa del Purgatorio with its graceful stairway dominates Piazza della Repubblica. Near here are Palazzo Cosentini and Palazzo Bertini, with grotesque heads and figures supporting balconies, a familiar Sicilian conceit. Palazzo della Cancelleria, built in 1760, is a little masterpiece, with pilasters and an elaborate doorway. The church of Santa Maria dell'Itria has a campanile decorated with coloured tiles from Caltagirone: it was built in 1626 on a Byzantine site. To reach the Piazza del Duomo and the famous cathedral church of San Giorgio take Via del Mercato, then Via XI Febbraio and Via Stefano.

The word 'wedding-cake' is sometimes unfairly flung at this admittedly theatrical but very striking building, on a flight of steps set artfully at an angle to the square with its line of palm trees. Begun in 1744 and completed in 1775, San Giorgio is the only church outside Noto definitely known to have been designed by Rosario Gagliardi, about whom personally so little is known it is said that he never even left Sicily. Described on the plans kept in the sacristy as 'engineer of the city of Noto and its valley', he must surely have been responsible for very many other buildings throughout this corner of Sicily. Anthony Blunt has said, for instance, that it is impossible to disassociate

him from that other San Giorgio at Mòdica and with this one cannot but agree.

The elaborate three-tiered gold-coloured façade, with triple columns on the lower two, rises to a balconied bell and clock tower. The wrought-iron railings in front of the steps are, however, late nineteenth century, and the cupola, with its blue glass, by Carmelo Cutrano, was added in 1826. The interior of the church, as with so many churches linked to Gagliardi, has not the richness of the outside. A Latin cross, it has three naves, divided by stone pillars with black marble bases. There are three paintings by Vito D'Anna. In the sacristy there is a stone relief of St George and the dragon, with Saints Ippolito and Mercurio on either side.

A contrast to this crescendo of Baroque splendour, further down the Piazza del Duomo, is the severely Neoclassic Circolo di Conversazione, with Roman Doric pillars and friezes of sphinxes; within are an allegorical *trompe l'oeil* ceiling and red plush sofas. Palazzo Arezzi has a good balcony and hedgehogs sculpted on the façade (hedgehogs being the Arezzi family crest). Palazzo Donnafugata is very grand inside, with a marble staircase and a picture gallery, only to be seen by special permission. It also has a theatre, used for concerts. The wooden screen on the balcony was for watching passers by unseen. Continuing east we reach Piazza Pola and the church of San Giuseppe, attributed to Gagliardi, smaller than San Giorgio and not so dramatically situated. Elliptically shaped, domed and stuccoed, it has altars of painted glass and balconies once used by nuns. The pavement is black asphalt. Corso XXV Aprile continues past dilapidated *palazzi* and the church of San Tommaso to the Giardino Ibleo, with statues, palms and in spring plenty of flowers. At its entrance is an outstanding fifteenth century Gothic portal from San Giorgio Vecchio, most of which was destroyed by the great earthquake; in the lunette there is a crumbling relief of St George and the

dragon. The modest church of the Capuchins has paintings by Novelli. San Giacomo, originally fifteenth century, has a nineteenth century painted ceiling and a large organ of 1881.

Via Orfanotrofio from Piazza Pola passes Sant'Antonio, which also has remnants of a Gothic portal. Near here is Palazzo Di Quattro, with a pretty courtyard. The church of the Immacolata has a splendid campanile, and Palazzo Battaglia, westwards along the narrow Via Chiaramonte, is attributed to Gagliardi.

Wandering through this part of Ragusa Ibla, medieval in atmosphere, we find many other interesting *palazzi*, mostly in bad repair. In the sides of the cliffs below, ancient rock dwellings and tombs are used as storerooms, cattle-sheds or workshops.

The Castello of **Donnafugata** is some twenty kilometres south of Ragusa. Despite its romantic name, it has nothing to do with Lampedusa's book. Presumably it was called this because the ever elusive Queen Bianca of Navarre was here. This curious building, now part Neoclassic, part Venetian Gothic, was reconstructed by Baron Arezzi in the nineteenth century with 122 rooms, and stands in a large park with many palm trees and carobs. Only the *piano nobile* is officially open to the public, but other rooms include a picture gallery, a frescoed music room, a hall of mirrors, a 'Bishop's room', and some suits of armour. In the luxuriant park there are *figus* trees, statues, sphinxes and architectural fantasies.

The road continues to the village of Santa Croce Camerina, which need not necessarily detain us. A Roman harbour is being excavated at Punta Secca, where there is also a good sandy beach. The Marina di Ragusa is for most of the year a shuttered ghost town of apartment blocks and holiday villas.

Mòdica – Scicli – Pozzallo
Cava d’Ispica – Ispica

Mòdica, fifteen kilometres from Ragusa, is a delightful, lively, largely Baroque town, smaller than Ragusa, but like Ragusa built on two levels. Mòdica Bassa, the lower town, has the *centro storico*. In the Middle Ages Mòdica was the fief of the Chiaramonte and then of the Cabrera, a state within a state, sometimes a challenge to central authority. All that now remains of the mighty castle, destroyed by the earthquake of 1693, is a tower on a rust-coloured crag at Mòdica Alta.

There was a Sikel settlement here. In the fourth century BC the place was known as Motyka. The rebuilding of the town after 1693 mostly followed the original layout of the streets, and the wealthy families built their palaces along what is the Corso Umberto I, which after a disastrous flood in 1902 now covers the confluence of two currents. Salvatore Quasimodo, the Nobel Prize winning poet, was born at Mòdica, and Sir John Acton, Prime Minister of Naples, was created Duke of Mòdica.

Arriving from the direction of Ragusa, along Corso Umberto, we have on the left a terrific view of the famous church of San Giorgio, the Chiesa Madre. Away to its right is the castle tower, crowned by a large clock. Next, a flight of steps decorated with statues of the twelve apostles leads up to San Pietro (c. 1720), probably by the same architects of the Cathedral in the upper town of Ragusa (Mario Spada and Rosario Boscarino). Recently decorated inside in blue, white and gold, it has a sixteenth century Madonna di Tràpani in the Gagini style. Near here, off Via Clemente

Grimaldi, is a cave, kept locked, with frescoes which may date from the eleventh century. The Municipio was once a Dominican convent. Continuing still further along the Corso we pass Palazzo De Leva, with a late Gothic doorway with zigzag ornamentation. The Chiesa del Carmine also has a fine portal, with a rose window above, which survived the 1693 earthquake. Inside there is an Annunciation by Antonello Gagini. Further still, after Piazza Buozzi, there is the Civic Museum, especially notable for its ethnographic section; this is in the former convent of the Padri Mercedari. There are also archaeological finds here from Cava d'Ispica.

We return to the Piazza del Municipio, and up Via Marchesa Tedeschi. The church of Santa Maria di Betlem, originally fifteenth century on an earlier site, contains the important Cabrera chapel, to the right of the high altar, a curious mixture of late Gothic and Renaissance, with an octagonal dome. Above the richly decorated multi-ringed archway are some classical fragments. Notice also the little grotesque heads amid scrolls and flowers. This mixture of styles in the chapel, known as the Cappella del Sacramento, can be compared with the Naselli chapel at Còmiso. In the north aisle there is a crib with sixty painted terracotta figures, made in 1882.

Via Castelli brings us to the great and chief monument of Mòdica, indeed one of the most remarkable Baroque churches in Italy, San Giorgio, triumphant above its 250 steps. This splendid building, conceived on the grand scale and brilliantly exploiting its position on the hillside, is by general consent the work of Rosario Gagliardi. The richly decorated façade with its Corinthian columns has five doorways. The convex bell tower rises sheer above a balustrade, emphasising the elevation. As in the case of San Giorgio at Ragusa Ibla, the interior comes as a slight anticlimax at first sight. Painted white, blue and gold, it has four aisles. Over the main altar – silver – is a polyptych of ten panels,

attributed variously to Girolamo Alibrandi (1513) and Bernardino Niger (1573); evidently this was created for an earlier building destroyed by the earthquake. The choir stalls are 1630, and the organ is 1886–88. In the second chapel on the right there is a painting of the Assumption by Filippo Paladino, signed and dated 1610. At the end of the south side is a fourteenth century silver urn made in Venice containing relics of St George himself. In a chapel to the left of the presbytery is a beautiful Madonna della Neve by Giuliano Mancino and Bartolomeo Berrettaro (c. 1510). A large nineteenth century meridian has been drawn on the pavement in front of the high altar.

The eighteenth century building on the left of San Giorgio is Palazzo Polara. Behind the church we have Corso Crispi; this leads into Corso Regina Margherita which brings us to the elegant San Giovanni Evangelista, again above a theatrical flight of steps. The façade in the Baroque style is nineteenth century by Salvatore Rizza.

Scicli, south of Mòdica, lies in a valley among rocky hills. ‘What is this?’ cried the young shepherd in Elio Vittorini’s *Le città del mondo*. ‘Is it Jerusalem? It must be the most beautiful city in the world.’ Well, not quite, but Scicli is another attractive and interesting Baroque town, full of churches and palaces. Fruit trees – apricots, figs, pomegranates, oranges – abound in the area, and there are strange prehistoric caves, many used as storerooms. The town, as one might suppose, takes its name from Siculo. Important in Saracen and Norman times, it was fortified in the fourteenth century and later spread into the plain. According to Quasimodo the girls of Scicli smell of the syrup of tamarinds.

Scicli is also known for its peculiar, indeed unique Madonna, the Madonna dei Milici, which is kept in the Chiesa Madre, Sant’Ignazio. This Madonna, made of papier-mâché and brightly coloured, sits on a white horse in the act of trampling two Saracens. She wears a cuirass

and carries a sword. Her *fiesta* is on the last Sunday in May, when she is carried out into Piazza Italia, where the defeat of the Saracens in 1091 at Donnalucata is reenacted. In these racially conscious times, during the *fiesta* the trampled Saracens are now discreetly covered with flowers. Sant' Ignazio was originally the Jesuit church, founded in 1629. A three-aisled basilica, its grand façade was added in the eighteenth century.

Piazza Italia is the town's centre and reached by Via Nazionale from Modica. From here we can climb to the imposing church of San Bartolomeo in rugged country. Originally sixteenth century, this survived the earthquake and contains a large 'Neapolitan' crib with angels hanging from wires by Pietro Padula (c. 1775), based on a version of 1535, and in the sacristy there is a 'Deposition' attributed to Mattia Preti.

Off Piazza Italia is the dilapidated Palazzo Beneventano, one of the most bizarre palaces of the many bizarre palaces in this part of Sicily, with screaming moronic heads as corbels and with other fanciful shapes. Near the Municipio is San Giovanni Evangelista, originally fourteenth century, reconstructed in the eighteenth, now much adorned with stucco work. In this church there is a seventeenth century Spanish painting of the crucified Christ wearing a long embroidered skirt. Santa Maria La Nova is in one of the oldest quarters of the town, surrounded by cliffs. The Neoclassic façade is dated 1816. Again the interior is full of stucco work. Venanzio Marvuglia designed the presbytery. There are a number of statues to be seen, in particular a silver statue of the Immacolata (1844), a beautifully serene Madonna della Neve (1496) and a wooden Madonna della Pietà, possibly Byzantine.

There are fifteenth century frescoes in the ruined Santa Maria della Croce, seventeenth century, reached by Via San Giuseppe: a romantic, if precarious, spot. Another church in photogenic abandon is San Matteo, the original

Chiesa Madre. This can be reached on foot along the ex Via Matrice. Originally twelfth century, its Baroque façade was added after the 1693 earthquake.

The town of Donnalucata on the coast has little to offer scenically, but has less pretensions than Ragusa Marina. **Pozzallo** close by is a small port swamped in an industrial complex, but with a nice beach. Its sturdy tower, the Torre Cabrera, was built in 1429 against pirates. During the Risorgimento exiles sailed from here to Malta. It was captured by the Canadians on July 9 1943. The best time to visit Pozzallo is on the second Sunday in August, when there is a 'fish festival'.

About ten kilometres east of Mòdica is the entrance to **Cava d'Ispica**, a limestone gorge, in part a rosy-yellow colour, in part cindery-grey, full of lush vegetation, running for some thirteen kilometres and as far as the town of Ispica. Along its whole length are hundreds of caves, large and small, which have been used as tombs, hermitages and dwelling-places from the Bronze Age until the early years of the twentieth century. It is a strange place, much to be recommended for a long silent walk (except perhaps for the braying of donkeys), or for a picnic, its caves being comparable in some ways to those at Palazzolo Acrèide or Pantàlica, but more akin to sites in Anatolia. There are problems about gaining access, and enquiries should if possible be made in advance at Ragusa, Mòdica or Camarina tourist offices. The Soprintendenza in the hut near the entrance at Molino Cavallo d'Ispica might well be shut, and locals appear only to speak torrents of Sicilian dialect, as indeed I discovered when making enquiries at the stores nearby. (I deduced that the dialect word for caves is 'urutti'.) A guide would be helpful and a torch useful.

The so-called Larderìa, Christian catacombs, is to the right of the Molino bridge. This and some half dozen caves beyond suffice for a brief visit, though it means missing some interesting spots, including the Grotta di

Santa Maria (once an oratory) and the 'Castello' on four floors, which was really once a village. The Larderia dates from the fourth–fifth centuries AD, and has three galleries, with a quantity of tombs, in part under water; *baldacchini* and pillars have been carved from the rock. A little way to the left of the bridge is the Grotta di San Nicola, transformed into a chapel in Byzantine times. The Grotta dei Santi (Urutt'e Santi) near Mulino Cerruto, north of San Nicola, has some much damaged Byzantine frescoes. Beyond here is a tomb known as Baravitalla, dated at 1800 BC, with curious mock pillars. In this area are the ruins of a Byzantine church called San Pancrati.

We get a good view of these raddled caves and grottoes with rather less exertion from the Parco della Forza in the town of Ispica. In October 1847 Edward Lear visited Cava d'Ispica, where he encountered an 'authentic troglodyte' family. He wanted to carry off a 'little trog' but his companion Proby would not allow it.

Ispica, anciently Ispra, or Ispicae Fundus (i.e. the End of the Valley of Ispica) was known less euphoniously as Spaccaforno until 1935. The churches are not of exceptional interest. The Chiesa Madre, above a flight of steps, is mid-eighteenth century. Santa Maria Maggiore, its façade designed by Vincenzo Sinatra, has elaborate nineteenth century stucco work and frescoes by Olivio Sozzo, painted between 1763 and 1765; it also has a canvas by Vito D'Anna and a prized vestment supposed to be embroidered with the hair of camels.

Santa Maria dell'Annunziata has even more stuccoes, mid-eighteenth century, grey on blue and attributed to Giuseppe Gianforma. The Palazzo Bruno di Belmonte, now the Municipio, was built by Ernesto Basile in 1906 and is an interesting mixture of 'Liberty' and local styles. The Parco della Forza is on the site of the ancient citadel, and above where the Cava d'Ispica divides into two. Here there are traces of Bronze Age, Byzantine, medieval and

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Renaissance occupation, including fortifications, cisterns, a 'palazzo' and a church. A grotto known as the Scuderia (stable) has mangers and a drainage system: a favourite spot for young lovers. There is also a large tunnel called the Centoscale which was probably constructed for fetching water in case of siege. The park closes before nightfall and at lunchtime.

Pachino – Portopalo – Vendicari – Eloro
Noto – Avola

Rather than taking the direct route on *statale* 115 from **R**ispica to Noto, we may prefer to turn south-east towards Capo Pàssero, the horn-like tip of mainland Sicily nearest to Africa.

This more circuitous route passes through undulating agricultural country, with many vineyards and, alas, many plastic greenhouses. Eventually we reach **Pachino**, noted for its strong red wine. Families from Malta were settled in this place in the sixteenth century. The Bourbons laid the town out on a geometrical plan with a central square, but the little courtyards have a distinctly Arab flavour. Some years back a storm revealed a series of basins near here, evidently of the fourth–fifth centuries AD and presumably for trapping fish. The village of **Portopalo** on Capo Pàssero is a rather desolate little spot, with not much of a beach, and with a not surprising reputation for smugglers from North Africa. Fish auctions are held most afternoons. The islet opposite has a tower, many times rebuilt. This promontory was a prime objective for the Allied landings in Sicily in July 1943. More attractive, especially out of season, is another small fishing village, Marzamemi, again Arab in character. The dominant building here is an old *tonnara*.

The neighbouring *oasi* of **Vendicari** is the most exciting of all Sicilian nature reserves. As it also has a fine beach, there was a fierce struggle by conservationists to save the area from developers. There are five lagoons. Not only is it a staging point for thousands of migratory birds, but it is the home of many waders and marsh-birds, including

flamingoes, spoonbills, purple herons, gallinules and Audouin's gulls. The habitat is very varied, with dunes, rocks and salt marshes, so there is also an interesting flora: the legend is that the Vendicari is haunted by a virgin who cries out at nightfall for an impossible love: the cry of the curlew perhaps? There are remains of a *tonnara* here, and a so-called *torre sveva* or Swabian tower.

Not far to the north, in the hamlet of Cadeddi, the remains of a large villa of the late Roman period have been found, known as the Villa del Tellaro. There are problems here about owners of land, so only photographs of its extraordinarily interesting mosaics may be on view. Apart from geometrical patterns, these mosaics depict hunting scenes of considerable elegance and fluidity of movement, at least equalling in technique those of similar subjects at Piazza Armerina. Note the leaping female tiger, the panther in a cage, and ox-carts carrying other cages. It is thought that the villa must have been sacked by Byzantines.

At the mouth of the river Tellaro in blessedly unspoilt country are the remains of the Syracusan town of Helorus (Eloro), founded in the seventh century BC. This is particularly known for the 'Pizzuta' column, ten and a half metres high, thought once to have been a monument commemorating a sea battle fought in the fifth century BC, but now established as part of some grand person's tomb. The area is still being excavated. A small theatre, sanctuaries to Demeter and Kore, and a sanctuary to Aesculapius, have been found, as well as a large *stoa* or portico which was incorporated into a Byzantine church. There are some lovely beaches round here, leading up to the Lido di Noto. Since accommodation is scarce at Noto itself, and since a thorough visit to the town deserves at least two days, it is best to look for a hotel either at the Lido di Noto or the Lido di Avola – both very crowded in the holiday season.

From the time of the Sitwells until well after the Second World War, **Noto** for Anglo-Saxons was regarded as a kind

of preserve for the cultured élite. Books by Anthony Blunt and Stephen Tobriner made it better known. Now that it has been designated a World Heritage site tourist interest has been unleashed, and it can be thronged with visitors in the middle of the day – which pleases the locals but does take away some of the theatricality of the place. In any case the ‘Golden City’ is shown at its best in the light of the later afternoon.

In March 1996 the dome of the famous cathedral crumbled into the nave, due to a failure to repair cracks after a slight earthquake. This caused dismay and scandal throughout Italy, following so soon after another jewel of the Baroque, the Fenice at Venice, went up in flames. After long delays the building was reopened in June 2007. But by then a new peril threatened: the Sicilian regional authority had given permission to a Texan firm to prospect for oil in the area. Needless to say, there was a tremendous outcry, eighty thousand people signing a protest launched by the writer Andrea Camilleri to the *Repubblica* newspaper, and the Texans appeared to back down. Scepticism remained, when it became clear that they had plans for the Val di Noto, the ancient administrative area covering a third of Sicily (see p. 194). Vineyards, olive and citrus groves, archaeological sites, the Vendicari nature reserve would all be under threat – not helped by the backing of persons at Ragusa, near which there is already a small oil well. At present (2008) all is on hold.

Noto Antica, the original Noto, on a large outcrop about sixteen miles inland, would also be endangered. The rebuilding of the new Forum after the great earthquake of 1693 was undertaken by Giuseppe Lanza, Duke of Camastra. Unlike Ragusa, the nobility and clergy were in favour of the move, whereas the poorer people opposed it. Nine years passed before the arguments were finally settled. The division in the new Noto between the richer and poorer quarters is still very evident.

Apart from the wonderful pale golden-yellow stone used for the buildings, Noto is remarkable for its careful planning and its theatrical views and perspectives. Many of the finest churches are placed in strategic spots, aided by the fact that the lower town is on a slope. There is a homogeneity, a coherence, of style in both civil and ecclesiastical architecture, though after a while one becomes aware of subtle differences. This local stone is ideal for carving, but has suffered not only from weather but from pollution. As a result there is usually some scaffolding to be seen. Nevertheless entering Noto is like coming into a stage set, created by and for people with a strong sense of *joie-de-vivre*, which is not always apparent in some Sicilian towns, especially in the west. ‘*Che fantasia, che movimento*,’ as they said in Michelangelo Antonioni’s film *L’Avventura*.

It is advisable to leave a car at the eastern entrance to Noto. Near the car park is the Giardino Pubblico, with huge *figus* trees that form a green shady panoply, a favourite place for the evening *passeggiata*. The Porta Reale was built in 1843, in honour of the Bourbon King Ferdinand II’s visit. It is surmounted by models of a tower, a pelican and a dog, signifying strength, faith and loyalty. Proceeding along the Corso Vittorio Emanuele we reach the first and smallest of Noto’s three main squares, the Piano di San Francesco, above which stands the church of San Francesco, its façade relatively sober compared to some of its Baroque neighbours. The church was built by Vincenzo Sinatra, possibly with the help of his uncle Rosario Gagliardi, and completed in 1745. The interior is also fairly subdued. Tobriner has pointed out that many alterations took place to this square, as a result of the lowering of the Corso. The convent of SS Salvatore must in part have been redesigned, evidently losing an upper floor, and the charming little campanile would seem to be late eighteenth century. The Civic Museum is in part of the monastery, but often closed. It contains objects salvaged from Noto

Antica, also the reconstructed tomb of the Viceroy Nicolò Speciale (1544), attributed to Gian Domenico Gagini. A Christ's head is seventeenth century. A bronze panther may be Norman. The museum's archaeological section has material from Eloro, including a reconstructed sanctuary to Demeter and Kore. Further down the Corso on the left is the former convent of Santa Chiara, designed by Rosario Gagliardi (1748), its effect rather spoiled by the lowering of the Corso and the insertion of a nineteenth century basement. The church's interior is oval and rich in stucco and marble.

We come now to the greatest setpiece, the Piazza del Municipio, dominated by the reopened cathedral, the Chiesa Madre, San Nicolò, with its new dome, twin campaniles and majestic stairway the whole width of the building. Opposite is a much admired building, the Palazzo Ducezio, the town hall, the lower floor of which with its undulating portico all along its front is the work of Vincenzo Sinatra (1746) and based on a French design. The upper floor was added as recently as 1951, not too unsuccessfully but a pity all the same. On the left upstairs is a grand reception room, in Louis XV style. According to Diodorus, Ducezio or Ducetius after whom the palazzo is named, was the king of the Sikels and founder of Noto Antica.

The collapse of the dome obliterated much of the interior, though the sixteenth-century silver ark, borne by winged griffins and containing the remains of San Corrado, was evidently undamaged. Unfortunately the interior is now a disappointment, due – it is true – to its blank emptiness but also because of the lighting system.

On the right of San Nicolò is the bishop's palace, nineteenth century. The basilica of the Salvatore, scenographic as ever and adjacent to the monastery already mentioned, was built at the end of the eighteenth century by Antonio Mazza on Andrea Giganti's design. The colourful interior has a frescoed vault by Mazza; there are paintings by

Giuseppe Velasquez and an organ of 1778. On the left of San Nicolò is Palazzo Landolina, a stately building classical in style – Giovanni Battista Landolina was one of the planners of the new Noto; the family is now extinct and the palazzo belongs to the Church. Next comes the marvellously eccentric Palazzo Nicolaci Villadorata with an entrance at Via Nicolaci No. 18. The best known of Noto's buildings, it has six balconies with billowing wrought iron railings, supported by a host of monstrous heads, leaping horses, sirens, snarling lions and cherubs. The central courtyard is sloping, and there is a ramp that enabled the Princes of Villadorata to be carried in their coaches up to the *piano nobile*.

The public library is now in this building. Across the Piazza del Municipio and still on the Corso, not far from Palazzo Ducezio, is the tawny-coloured Chiesa del Collegio, dedicated to San Carlo Borromeo and built for the Jesuits probably by Gagliardi between 1736 and 1746. It was badly damaged by an earthquake in 1990. Behind Palazzo Ducezio in Via Speciale is the small Santa Maria dell'Arco, Gagliardi's first commission. It has an elegant portico with twisted columns.

The Corso leads into the third important square, Piazza XVI Maggio, so named to commemorate the day in 1860 when the Notinesi, or Netini as the inhabitants of Noto are sometimes called, rose against the Bourbons. In its centre is a garden, known as the Villa d'Ercole, with palms, ornamental trees and a fountain surmounted by a statue of Hercules sitting on a lion that was rescued from Noto Antica. This square has the most beautiful of Noto's churches, San Domenico, its façade completed by Gagliardi in 1736 and obviously much influenced by Roman High Baroque, with a curved front. The interior has three aisles with a central dome. In the left aisle there is a painting of the Madonna and the Fifteen Mysteries by Vito d'Anna. One can clamber down into the crypt and see where

monks' bodies were kept in a seated position. Opposite San Domenico is the theatre, inaugurated in 1870 and designed by Salvatore La Rosa, with a profusion of statues and bas-reliefs of musical instruments and theatrical masks.

There are not many buildings worth seeking out in the southern part of Noto. It is best therefore to walk up Via Galilei, which leads up to Via Cavour that runs parallel to the Corso and where there are many aristocratic palaces. Palazzo Castelluccio, Via Cavour No. 10, belongs to the Knights of Malta. The former convent of the Crociferi is in Via Bovio nearby, now the judicial offices; it has rooms frescoed in the 1830s. The church of Montevergine, greatly admired by Anthony Blunt, looks down Via Nicolaci to the Corso, and has an unusual concave front whose curves take in the two towers. The date is 1748 and it is attributed to Sinatra. The handsome and much praised Palazzo Astuto with Baroque balconies is at No. 48; it once contained a renowned private museum (part now being in Palermo's Archaeological Museum) – this building is either by Vincenzo Sinatra or Paolo Labisi. Palazzo Trigona, No. 93, regarded as the most interesting example of Noto's domestic architecture, is probably by Labisi.

Noto Alta, upper Noto, was the most damaged by the 1990 earthquake. Unlike Noto Bassa, lower Noto, which is on a slope, it is on an even level, and thus the streets are more regular. The massive former convent of San Tommaso (1739) in Via Garibaldi, reached by Via Mansi is again attributed to Gagliardi; it is now a prison. A little further up Via Garibaldi is another imposing building, Palazzo Impellizzeri, said to have over sixty windows. The most interesting building in Noto Alta is the Chiesa del Crocifisso, which ranks second in importance to the Chiesa Madre. To reach this church from Via Cavour we should return to Palazzo Astuto, climb the stairs on its right and proceed along Via Sallicano. The Crocifisso (1728) once more is attributed to Gagliardi, but its façade

is unfinished. On each side of its great portal are rather comic weather-beaten lions from Noto Antica. Inside is one of the most outstanding works by Francesco Laurana, the Madonna della Neve (1471), its serenity a contrast to the richness around. The Capella Landolina has a reliquary containing a holy thorn brought from Palestine in 1225. The gilded cross in the apse of the church was designed by Gagliardi.

A warning. Noto suffers from a dearth of restaurants as well as places to stay, though it does have the renowned Caffè Sicilia, in Corso Vittorio Emanuele, selling cakes and confectionery from traditional recipes, not to mention delicious *cassate*, made with almonds and honey.

The way to Noto Antica passes through many lemon groves. Groups of prehistoric caves and necropolises testify to the town's ancient settlement on this superbly defensive hill crest. Neetum or Neai became important under the Arabs, hence their choice of Val di Noto as a subdivision of the island.

An engraving of the early seventeenth century shows a forest of towers and campaniles in this crammed medieval town. Tobriner quotes an eye-witness account of the earthquake of January 11 1693, an event of 'Biblical proportions': 'It was so horrible and ghastly that the soil undulated like the waves of a stormy sea, and the mountains danced as if drunk, and the city collapsed in one miserable moment killing more than a thousand people.' Thus a new site had to be chosen where streets could be wider and there could be squares, less vulnerable to earthquakes. Also by that time defence was no longer a priority.

Before arriving at Noto Antica we pass a series of tabernacles leading up to the sanctuary of Santa Maria della Scala, with a façade of 1707. This is a silent and romantic spot, and there is little to be seen of the old town except the walls, though the Porta della Montagna, through which we enter, has been repaired. On the left was the guard

room. A rock staircase has been excavated on the right and leads to the ruins of the main tower, erected in 1431 by Pietro d'Aragona. Much clearance has yet to be done. A path to the far end leads to an abandoned and vandalised hermitage, with a great view.

A circuitous route, in wild country, past Testa dell'Acqua, leading on to the road to Palazzolo Acreide, brings us to Castelluccio. Near here are the ruins of a fifteenth century castle, perched as if standing guard over the landscape. The remains of a prehistoric village (eighteenth–fourteenth centuries BC) have given a name to a 'culture' known as the *Civiltà di Castelluccio*. About two hundred tombs of the 'oven' type have been discovered. Their entrances were closed by stone slabs carved with spiral motifs, now to be seen in the Archaeological Museum at Syracuse. About three kilometres from Castelluccio a sign directs us to a cave called the Grotta dei Santi, with a fresco of a Byzantine Madonna suckling a fairly mature Christ child: *La Vergine Galaktotrophousa*.

Avola is the next town on the coast before Syracuse. It too was rebuilt on a new site, but compared to Noto is dull architecturally. Fra Angelo Italia planned it hexagonally around a main square, and such a strict geometric design is certainly charmless. Nevertheless it is a lively and busy place, being a centre for almonds and wine, and the fountains, palms and flowers such as cannas in the squares do provide a certain exotic atmosphere. The Chiesa Madre, San Nicola, is indeed handsome. It has a fine eighteenth century organ by Donato del Piano. The Museo Civico is near here. The church of San Antonio Abate in Piazza Regina Elena has rich Rococo stucco work. The Annunziata in Via Manin has a convex façade and is by Giuseppe Alessi, a pupil of Gagliardi. There are also several buildings to be seen with Art Nouveau details.

The Lido di Avola is justly noted for its fish restaurants (I have had some of my most memorable meals here),

but is no great beauty. A Roman seaside villa has been excavated at the east end of the promenade, though badly damaged. There is not much to be seen either at Avola Antica, but the countryside around is beautiful, especially at almond blossom time. It too was built on a defensive site, being above the Cava Grande di Cassibile, a deep canyon ten kilometres long where over 80,000 tombs of the eleventh to ninth centuries BC have been discovered. Along the river are some huge and rare plane trees. The area is now a nature reserve.

Cassibile – Syracuse (Ortygia)

In a lush olive grove near the mouth of the river Cassibile (Kakyparis to the Greeks) an armistice was signed between the Allied powers and Italy on September 3 1943 by Generals Bedell Smith and Giuseppe Castellano. On the same day the Allies crossed the Straits of Messina unopposed. There had been some tough fighting around Cassibile and Avola in July, and today various wartime pill boxes can still be seen thereabouts. The announcement of the armistice was not broadcast until September 8, and by that time the Allies were already sailing for Salerno.

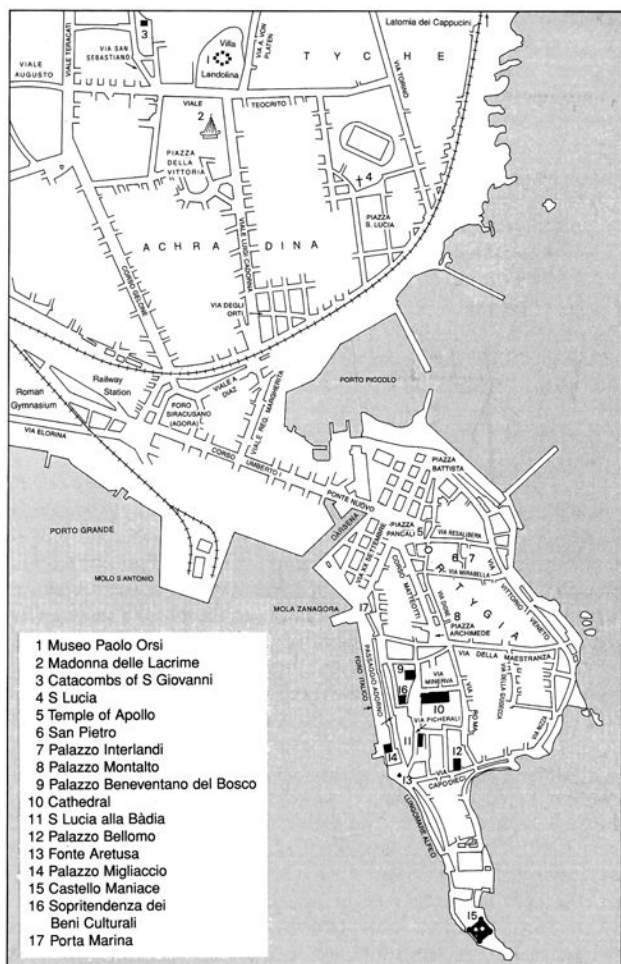
The church in the hamlet of **Cassibile** contains three paintings of interest, all originally from the church of the Anime del Purgatorio in Messina. They are by Angelo Trevisani (c. 1690), Paolo de Matteis (1728) and Pompeo Batoni (1752). Permission to see them can only be obtained from the owner, the local *marchese*. This same *marchese's* nostalgia for the era of the Two Sicilies is demonstrated by medallions of the last two Bourbon kings that he has placed by the main road. On the coast near here are the fashionable and overbuilt resorts of Fontane Bianche and Arenella, extremely crowded in summer.

The *statale* cuts through the nature reserve of the Ciane, now a canal leading from the *fonte* or source, much venerated in ancient times. Before reaching the bridge we glimpse on the left the remaining two monolithic columns of the Olympieion or Temple of Zeus, sixth century BC, peripteral in style. This once splendid Doric building had forty-two columns and is on a site where many enemies of Syracuse (Siracusa) encamped over the centuries, with a view over

the Great Harbour towards the island of Ortygia. Standing here, we can imagine before us the vast fleet, including 134 triremes, that was sent by the Athenians in 415 BC, and the frightful slaughter that followed later when the Syracusans barricaded the entrance to the harbour with their own ships. In 397 BC, the Carthaginians pitched their camp here, destroying the majestic tomb of Gelon nearby. The Carthaginians were back in this spot in 279 BC. Then came the Romans, the Byzantines and the Saracens. The name Ciane derives from the Greek meaning blue, but is also connected with the myth of the nymph Cyane who was turned into a spring of water by Hades (Pluto) because she had opposed his abduction of Persephone. The water is still blue and clear. A boat trip to this area from the marina at Syracuse is a pleasant experience. Occasionally a kingfisher can be seen among the papyrus, which Maupassant thought looked like human beings turned into plants. This is the only place in Europe where papyrus still grows wild – perhaps it was introduced from Egypt by Hieron II, or perhaps the Arabs brought it with them. The river Anapo joins the Ciane near the sea. At this point the salt marshes begin, stretching south to Punta Galderini. Once they were more extensive and thus an important part of Syracuse's defences, bringing pestilence to invading troops who camped there. This is a great place for birds, especially in winter, when we may find many species of duck, and occasionally flamingoes, also falcons, night herons, penduline tits, and red-legged stilts, known as *cavalieri d'Italia*.

Augustus Hare said that without seeing Syracuse it is impossible to understand its history. To some extent this is true. In such a superb situation, easily defensible, with harbours on each side, a supply of fresh water, and a fertile hinterland, it is not surprising that it was once the greatest city in the Greek world, perhaps in Europe. For centuries it was the key to the control of the Mediterranean. The climate moreover is extraordinarily mild. Over the last

Syracuse I



SYRACUSE

decades, in an all too familiar Sicilian fashion, a sprawl of uncontrolled building has grown up. This makes it the more surprising to learn that at the height of Syracuse's power its population was over three times what it is today. The appearance of what looks like a concrete icecream cone turned upside down, 73 metres high – actually supposed to represent a giant teardrop – will also come as a shock. This edifice is in fact the sanctuary of the Madonna della Lacrime, 'Madonna of the Tears', of which more later. So many ideologies, so many civilisations, so many conquerors have left their mark on Syracuse, for better or worse.

The Greeks divided the city into five districts, and their names are still used: Ortygia, Achradina, Tyche, Neapolis and Epipolae. If we are to think of the Madonna della Lacrime as a teardrop, then from a distance Ortygia can be compared with a majestic battleship, or a trireme, ready to put out to sea. It is connected to the mainland by two bridges, and mostly now has a medieval and Baroque aspect. The district of Achradina is nearest to Ortygia, and then as in the present was the commercial centre. This rather dreary part of Syracuse was badly bombed by the Allies and later by the Germans. Tyche, to the north-east, is the old residential quarter, where there are many catacombs and the great new archaeological museum. Neapolis, the 'new town', is to the north-west and contains the archaeological park, including the theatre, the amphitheatre and many of the *latomie* quarries, and the so-called Ear of Dionysius. Epipolae, the 'upper district', is spread inland over the north and west and includes the walls and fences on the high ground, with the castle of Euryalus.

Sikel and perhaps Phoenician remains have been discovered beneath and around the Cathedral at Ortygia. Thucydides gives 733 BC as the founding of the first Greek colony from Corinth. The city evidently expanded into the mainland very quickly, and sub-colonies such as Akrai and Camarina were created within the first hundred years.

Syracuse I

The first of its famous tyrants was Gelon (485–478 BC) who removed most of the population from his native Gela to Syracuse. It was he who made Syracuse a major naval power. In alliance with Akragas (Agrigento) in 480 BC, he crushed the Carthaginians at Himera on the north coast of Sicily, and to celebrate his victory built the temple of Athena, now incorporated into the modern Cathedral. He was succeeded by his brother Hieron I (478–466 BC), a man who Diodorus said was an ‘utter stranger to sincerity’, cruel and avaricious. But Hieron did attract intellectuals and poets to Syracuse, and these included Pindar, Simonides and Bacchylides. It is thought that Aeschylus in his last years may have produced his plays *Prometheus Bound* and *Prometheus Released* at Syracuse. Hieron also won a great naval victory over the Etruscans at Cumae.

Syracuse’s increasing prosperity and importance alarmed Athens, and the war of 415 BC was the result. The city at this time was a republic and enjoying a period of democracy. It is a long and at times grim story, and nearly resulted in an Athenian victory, had not their brilliant general Alcibiades been put under political arrest; he was sent back to Athens but escaped to Sparta en route. All this is vividly described by Thucydides. The Athenians occupied part of Epipolae and advanced right up to the wall that the Syracusans had built to defend Neapolis. Meanwhile the Syracusans were joined by a force from Corinth and Sparta. An eclipse of the moon, regarded as an ill-omen by the Athenians, was in part responsible for their utter defeat in 413 BC. The Athenian generals Demosthenes and Nikias were executed. At least 7,000 prisoners were taken and crowded into the *latomie*, cruelly treated and starved. A few were sold into slavery, with the image of a horse branded on their foreheads. According to Plutarch some were set free if they could recite from Euripides, for the Syracusans ‘had a passion for his poetry greater than that of any Hellenes outside Greece’.

Across the sea Carthage had noted that the Syracusans had been weakened by the war, and they took advantage of it. Selinunte, Akragas, Gela and Camarina fell in turn to this new enemy. But a young man called Dionysius had risen to become the Syracusan commander and ultimately its tyrant (405–367 BC). Shrewdly he arranged a treaty with the Carthaginians, biding his time so that he could build up strength. Dionysius was not only ambitious but like his predecessor Hieron cruel and ruthless. In due course he fought four wars against the Carthaginians and in so doing became the most powerful ruler in Europe. In 397 BC he sacked Motya with horrific brutality, having used catapults, unknown hitherto – it was said that his brilliant tactics were copied by Alexander the Great when he besieged Tyre. It was in retaliation the following year that the Carthaginians landed near the Olympieion. They had to withdraw when the disease-infested marshes decimated their troops.

Dionysius fancied himself as a poet, and attracted intellectuals to his court, though they seem quickly to have bored him. One was Plato, who had to leave in case he was sold as a slave. He sent Philoxenus to prison in the *latomie* because he had criticised his poems. In the last years of his life, at a festival of theatre, the Athenians begrudgingly had to give him a prize for his play.

His son Dionysius II (367–343 BC) was by contrast a weakling and a drunkard, preferring to 'loiter in the fish markets and squabble in the streets with common women'. Plato on two occasions returned to Syracuse. An uncle, Dion, who had been Dionysius II's guardian, attempted a coup and was assassinated. All this features in Mary Renault's compulsive novel *The Mask of Apollo*. Then the Syracusans, fearing another attack from the Carthaginians, appealed to Corinth for help, which came under the command of Timoleon. Dionysius II was

expelled and Timoleon (344–336 BC) instituted reforms and re-established democracy.

The next tyrant was Agathocles (317–289 BC), another ruthless and ambitious leader. Indeed none of his predecessors, according to Diodorus, had displayed such cruelty to his subjects. A potter in origin, he came to power through a coup, murdering 4,000 people, 'their only offence being that they were of better birth than the others'. He took the war against Carthage into Africa, and in effect brought the whole of Sicily under his dominion. Once secure, and having eliminated any conceivable rivals, he proclaimed himself king.

Agathocles died by poison, apparently in a family feud over the succession. Anarchy followed in Sicily, and the Carthaginians returned to the attack. Help appeared from Pyrrhus, King of Epirus, Agathocles's son-in-law, who had already fought the Romans in Italy. For two years (278–276 BC) he was regarded as king, whether of Syracuse only or of all Sicily it is not clear. He tired of the long siege of Lilybaeum (Marsala) and finally withdrew from Sicily altogether – a 'Pyrrhic' victory – and the Syracusans elected one of his officers, Hieron II (275–216 BC) as their leader and eventual king. This was the period of Syracuse's greatest wealth and glory. Hieron II wisely sided with Rome during the Punic Wars, and improved the laws of Syracuse. His most famous surviving monument is the huge altar dedicated to Zeus Eleftherios which was designed for mass sacrifices. He also improved the theatre. Once again intellectuals were attracted to Syracuse, the most famous by far being Theocritus and especially Archimedes, who had been commissioned to devise new contrivances for the city's defence.

Hieron's successors made the mistake of switching allegiance to Carthage. The Romans attacked and, although Archimedes's inventions such as grappling irons and dropping lead weights on scaling engines were successful,

Syracuse fell to the Consul Marcellus after a long siege in 212 BC. Archimedes himself was killed, though accidentally it was said; Marcellus had ordered that he should be spared. Shiploads of statues and treasures were carried off to Rome, and Syracuse now found itself relegated to being a mere provincial town in the Roman empire, though capital of Sicily. The notorious praetor Verres further despoiled it between 73 and 71 BC. Cicero succeeded him, describing Syracuse as the 'greatest of Greek cities, and the most beautiful of all cities'. Even so it never recaptured its former splendour.

In AD 61 St Paul spent three days at Syracuse under arrest, as related in Acts 28 verse 12. Christianity must have spread quickly in the city, judging from the extent of the catacombs. In 395 Syracuse became part of the western Roman Empire. In 440 it was sacked by the Vandals. Sicily was recaptured for the Empire of the East by Belisarius in 535. There was a brief period of renewed splendour when the Byzantine emperor Constans II had his court here from 662 until his murder in 668, banged on the head by a pot containing Gallic soap. Then came the Arabs, who captured Syracuse in 878 AD after a long siege amid frightful atrocities. They are said to have carried off booty worth a million pieces of gold. Palermo was chosen as their new capital, and south-eastern Sicily sank into poverty and neglect. As a result there are hardly any significant traces of Arab architecture in Syracuse.

Frederick II of Hohenstaufen built or improved many castles in the south of the island, one of his greatest being the Castello Maniace at Ortygia, so named after the Byzantine general George Maniakes who was thought originally to have founded it. Crusaders called at Syracuse. It grew in importance as a trading centre under the Spaniards, and until 1536 was the administrative seat of the Camera Reginale and part of the Spanish queen's dowry. For the next two centuries, with threats from the Ottomans and

Barbary pirates, it was continually refortified. In spite of the 1693 earthquake there are still numerous buildings in Ortygia from the Catalan-Gothic period, often concealed by Baroque façades. In that earthquake, according to the English traveller Henry Swinburne, a quarter of the population died in the ruins. In 1815, after the Napoleonic wars, Syracuse became a provincial capital or *capovalle*, but this privilege was transferred to Noto in 1837, following an unsuccessful rebellion against the Bourbons. Syracuse's economy greatly improved in the early twentieth century when it was found to be the ideal port for Italy's new North African empire.

The distinguished writer Elio Vittorini (1908–66) was born in Syracuse.

In recent years there has been much restoration on the island of Ortygia, which has once more become fashionable. Hotels have been built or refurbished, cafés and bars are popular with young people, and there are several good restaurants and *trattorie*. Houses with views of the sea are in great demand. Crossing Ponte Nuovo over the Dàrsena, the channel between the mainland and Ortygia, we reach the rather uninspiring Piazza Pancali, where there are the sunken ruins of the Temple of Apollo, only discovered in 1862. The importance of this somewhat forlorn and dusty place is that it is the site of the earliest peripteral Doric temple in Sicily. It has had a chequered history: converted into a Byzantine church, then a mosque, then a Norman church and finally a Spanish barracks. Traces of these various periods are still just visible. The temple probably dates from 575 BC, and may have resembled the slightly later and larger Olympieion. There were seventeen monolithic side columns, closely spaced, and six at each end. Part of the terracotta cornice is in the Archaeological Museum. On a piece of *stylobate* is a reference to Apollo; even so some believe that the temple was in reality dedicated to Artemis. Since Apollo and Artemis were twins, they may

have been worshipped together, as was the custom elsewhere in Greece.

Via Dione, running south from here, followed the ancient Via Sacra connecting the temple of Apollo with the temple of Athene, where now is the cathedral. Some remnants of Greek walls are to be seen in Via XX Settembre west of the square (at the end of which street is a place for parking).

The most usual route recommended for visitors with not much time to spare is along Corso Matteotti to Piazza Archimede, and then to Piazza del Duomo and the fountain of Arethusa, the two main sights of Ortygia. Corso Matteotti was created in 1934–6, sweeping away old buildings (it was then known as Via del Littorio) and is as a result rather dull, with many buildings of the Fascist era – an exception being No. 29, Palazzo Greco, which was originally fourteenth century. Piazza Archimede was laid out in the 1870s as the hub of Ortygia. The contemporary fountain representing Artemis in the centre is by Giulio Moschetti; water gushes over sea-creatures, and Artemis is shown turning Arethusa into a spring. It is worth having a look at the courtyard of the Banca d'Italia, where there is a Catalan style staircase. This building is also known as the Casa dell'Orologio because of the clock put there in 1882. Palazzo Lanza on the south-west side of the piazza is sixteenth century, with a series of fine Gothic windows and a Renaissance portal; again in the courtyard there is a Catalan stairway. On the north-east side there is the once magnificent Palazzo Mergulese-Montalto (1397), with three elegant Chiaramonte style windows, one with zigzag ornamentation. This building has had to be buttressed.

Continuing along Via Roma, we pass on the left Santa Maria della Concezione, built in 1651. We then turn left along Via Minerva, past the north side of the Cathedral. Embedded in the medieval wall are twelve weatherworn

columns from the Temple of Athene, with Norman battlements above the entablature.

The Piazza del Duomo is free of traffic and among the most attractive of all Italian Baroque squares. On Saturday evenings it is packed with young people. The tremendous façade of the Cathedral, Santa Maria del Piliero, or delle Colonne, comes as a surprise. The original Norman front fell down in the 1693 earthquake and was rebuilt in 1728–54 to the designs of Andrea Palma. The statues of St Peter and St Paul are by Ignazio Marabitti (1746), as are the statues of Santa Lucia, the patron saint of the city, and San Marziano, its first bishop, and the Virgin above. It is now realized that this was a sacred site from the earliest times, and that there was an Ionic temple near here before Gelon erected his great temple to Athene in the fifth century BC. After its conversion to a Christian church, it was raised to Cathedral status by Bishop Zosimus in AD 640. There was a disaster in 1100 when the roof fell in and buried the congregation, and there was a severe earthquake with much damage in 1542.

Cicero, in his prosecution of Verres, gives a list of some of the temple's fantastic riches. The doors were of ivory and gold, and decorated with pictures of the battles of Agathocles, while inside were portraits of all the previous rulers of Syracuse. On the top of the temple there was a great statue of Athene (Minerva) with a burnished shield which was used as a guide for mariners.

The simplicity of the interior of the cathedral, its muted colours and the extraordinary sensation of stepping back over two and a half millennia, are a contrast indeed to the flamboyant inventiveness of Andrea Palma's façade. This is all the more strange when one realises that for a great deal of its history the building in its various guises must have shone like gaudy jewels. The Baroque decorations were only stripped away early last century. Immediately on entering, the structure of the temple becomes clear.

The *cella* is now the nave, and the walls have been opened up to form eight arches on each. But most wonderful – and moving – are the aisles embedded with many of the original fluted columns, battered and worn, still with their Doric capitals. On the east side are two columns from the *opisthodomos* or enclosed rear part of the temple. In the baptistery, immediately to the right, is a huge marble bowl with a Greek inscription, used as the font and supported by seven quaint bronze lions of the thirteenth century. (Could the bowl once have been used for sacrificial remains?) Pieces of mosaic panels from the old church are let into the walls.

In the second chapel, kept closed by seventeenth century bronze gates, is the silver statue (1599) by Pietro Rizzo of Santa Lucia, the virgin martyr who sacrificed her own eyes and who saved the city from plague; this statue, said to weigh 1200 kilograms, is carried in procession twice a year, on December 13 and May 13 – the December procession being the most spectacular, including the *Carrozza del Senato*, a gilded Rococo coach with liveried grooms in ‘imperial Vienna style’. The altarpiece in the chapel is also silver, by Desio Furno (1781) and is supported on a coffer attributed to Nibilio and Giuseppe Gagini (1610). By coincidence the earthquake in 1990 occurred on December 13, Santa Lucia’s feast day. But faith in her miraculous powers was by no means affected. On the contrary, it was decided that she had intervened to save the city from more destruction.

The next chapel, the Cappella del Sacramento, designed by Giovanni Vermexio, is even more lavishly decorated, with columns, frescoes and marbles. The marble altarpiece of the Last Supper and the *ciborium*, a pretty little tempietto, is by Luigi Vanvitelli (1752), the architect of the palace of Caserta outside Naples. The two griffin consoles are splendid but do seem a bit out of place here.

We then come to the chapel of the Crocifisso, which was

once famous for its paintings, including one of St Zosimus by Antonello da Messina, now removed to Palazzo Bellomo after an attempted theft. The bronze candlestick in the presbytery is dated at 1533. In the apse of the north aisle there is a beautiful Madonna della Neve by Antonello Gagini (1512). Further down the north aisle there is another statue of Saint Lucy, somewhat disappointing, also by Antonello Gagini (1527), and there are two other Gagesque statues. Ten columns are set into the north wall, and we can clearly see movement caused by the earthquake of 1542.

On the north side of the cathedral is the archbishop's palace, built by Andrea Vermexio in 1618 on an earlier site but with an upper storey added by Louis Alexandre Dumontier in 1751. It contains an important library of ancient books, the Biblioteca Alagoniana, inaugurated in 1780. The Vermexio family was Spanish. Giovanni Vermexio built the building known as Palazzo Vermexio or del Senato, now the Municipio, on the corner of Via Minerva, in 1629–33. This was spared damage in 1693. A wrought iron balcony separates the more restrained ground floor from the early Baroque first floor, where empty niches were to have contained statues of Spanish kings. Here excavations have revealed the foundations of the Ionic temple. Palazzo Interlandi, still with its fifteenth century features, is next to the Municipio and is followed by Palazzo Chiaramonte of the same period (in fact 1397), with mullioned windows, in a precarious state. Across Via Landolina is Palazzo Francisca-Nava, fifteenth century with early nineteenth century additions on the *piano nobile* by Luciano Alì. The magnificent palace opposite the cathedral is Palazzo Beneventano del Bosco, also reconstructed by Luciano Alì, in 1779–88. The original structure was fourteenth–fifteenth centuries. Once it was the seat of the Knights of Malta. The large and harmonious courtyard has a decorative pavement of lava and white stones and a staircase flanked by pairs of columns. If permission can be

obtained, it is worth seeing the stucco work by Lombardo and Ermenegildo Martorana (1797), and the Venetian mirrors and lights on the first floor. An inscription on the central balcony records a visit by Nelson in 1798.

On the corner of Via Carceri Vecchie is the building that once housed the Archaeological Museum which is now at Villa Landolina (p. 309). This was once the convent of the Fatebenefratelli and was rebuilt in the 1880s by Luigi Mauceri. Now the seat of the Soprintendenza dei Beni Culturali it also contains a superb and priceless collection of some 3000 Greek coins, many of them silver. Application to see it has to be made the day before from the Soprintendenza. It is excellently laid out, the earliest coins showing the head of Apollo, sixth century BC. Coins from Messina depict a dolphin, from Syracuse Arethusa, from Agrigento (Akragas) a crab, from Gela an anthropomorphic bull, from Selinunte (Selinus) the celery plant. There are also coins from later periods, including Roman, Byzantine, Spanish and Bourbon.

The church on the south side of the piazza is Santa Lucia alla Badia, entirely and attractively rebuilt in 1693, with a wrought iron balustrade on the façade, typical of Syracusan Baroque. Two large Spanish coats of arms are on each side of the fine doorway. The church belongs to *suore di clausura* (enclosed nuns), and is therefore not to be entered. It does have some good stuccoes and a painting of the 'Martyrdom of Santa Lucia' by Deodato Guinaccia (1579). Next to the church is the eighteenth century Palazzo Impelizzeri, originally Borgia, with Rococo decorations. At night the cathedral and buildings around the square are illuminated and look even more splendid. The evenings are a good time to explore the lively side streets such as Via Reginale off Via Landolina.

Via Picherali leads to the little Piazza San Rocco, where there is the fifteenth century Palazzo Migliaccio, decorated with lava chevrons, and then on to the far-famed foun-

tain of Arethusa. Once this spring poured out much more strongly from a grotto and had to be dammed. It is not surprising that such a phenomenon should have inspired a myth. 'Arethusa arose, from her couch of snows,' Shelley tells us. Pindar, Virgil, Strabo, Ovid all celebrated the story, which ends in effect with a rape, a theme so popular with the Greeks. The nymph Arethusa was bathing in the river Alpheus in the Peloponnese when she was spotted by its god. 'Oh save me! Oh save me! And bid the deep hide me, for he grasps me by the hair!' Artemis took pity on her and turned her into a spring of water, which dived under the Ionian Sea and came up at Syracuse. Even then she could not escape Alpheus, who pursued her and mingled his waters with hers for eternity. It was also said that if a cup was thrown into the river at Olympia it would reappear in her fountain. Nelson wrote to Lady Hamilton that his fleet had been 'watering at the Fountain of Arethusa' but this must have been metaphorical because the water had already become slightly saline after an earthquake some centuries before. Dumas said that he saw thirty washerwomen at work in the pool, skirts rolled up and wringing out shirts. Now one gazes down from on high at the still waters, with its papyrus, white ducks and bream, the whole embellished with bougainvillea. As old Gregovius the German historian rightly said, if you stand here in moonlight you can feel the shiver of the past.

From the adjoining terrace there is a grand view of the bay, sometimes marred by giant cruise ships. Below on the Foro Vittorio Emanuele there is a tropical aquarium, surprisingly good.

Lungomare Alfeo leads to the castle of Maniace at the tip of the island. Until recently it was a barracks but now it is open to the public. Repairs and reconstructions are still in progress (2008), but many fascinating thirteenth-century features have been revealed. One certainly gets a feeling of impregnability as one gazes over the bastions

to the Ionian Sea, imagining the threatening approach of Athenian warships. Niches in the great Gothic gateway once contained two bronze rams, said to have been brought from Constantinople by Maniakes. These marvellous beasts were eventually taken to Palermo, where one is in the Archaeological Museum, always known as the Ram of Syracuse (p. 50). The impressive vaulted chambers are sometimes used for lectures. Stairs lead to the so-called *Bagno della Regina*, the Queen's Bath, always full of water, now brackish but once fresh.

From the Arethusa fountain the Passaggio Adorno leads back towards the mainland, passing two once favourite now refurbished hotels, the Etrangers and the Grand, and later the church of the Collegio, built between 1635 and 1687, very grand in the Jesuit style. Along the waterfront below is the Foro Vittorio Emanuele II, planted with *ficus* trees, sometimes known as the Foro Italico (parking spaces here), a favourite place for watching the sun set in winter. There used to be a promenade on this site at the time of Cicero, and which he described as a 'den of iniquity'. In the Second World War trees here were cut down to make way for landing craft.

Via Ruggero Settimo brings us to Santa Maria dei Miracoli, originally fifteenth century but badly damaged in the last war; it has a pretty marble doorway (1501), with a lunette of the Madonna with Saints Sebastiano and Rocco. Now we have before us the Porta Marina, the last remnant of the medieval wall. It has an elaborately carved Catalan window frame, missing its top. This has been the site of Syracuse's main port since time immemorial. Here Nelson's ships dropped anchor before sailing on to the Battle of the Nile.

Via Capodici leads east from the Arethusa fountain to Palazzo Bellomo, the Galleria Regionale, with its important collection of medieval and modern art up to the eighteenth century, mainly from deconsecrated churches. As such it is

an ideal setting. The building dates from the Hohenstaufen period and was altered in the fifteenth century. Palazzo Parisio, fourteenth century, also houses part of the gallery. Palazzo Bellomo has a Catalan stairway in its courtyard, climbing up to a fifteenth century loggia and a beautiful niche in the flamboyant style. On the ground floor Room I has early Christian and Byzantine sculpture. Room II has twelfth–fourteenth centuries sculpture, including part of a twelfth century doorway. Room III has sculptures of the Renaissance, including Domenico Gagini's *Madonna of the Bullfinch*, a monument to Eleonora Branciforte by Giovan Battista Mazzolo and the tomb of Giovanni Savastida in the manner of Francesco Laurana. In Room IV there are two sumptuous eighteenth century 'Berlin' coaches.

The Pinacoteca is on the first floor. Room V has an outstanding collection of Venetian, Cretan and Byzantine icons, the best in Sicily, and a triptych of the 'Stroganov' period (c. 1590), designed to be portable. In Room VI we have the gallery's most famous exhibit, the 'Annunciation' by Antonello da Messina (1474). Originally in the church of the Annunziata at Palazzolo Acreide, it was painted on wood and greatly damaged by damp – its transfer to canvas and restoration have caused much controversy. In the same room there might or might not be (see p. 309) another great work, Caravaggio's 'Burial of Saint Lucy' (1608) from the church of Santa Lucia *extra moenia*, painted after the artist had fled from Malta. Among the fourteenth and fifteenth century works are a Madonna and Child with saints, attributed to the Spanish artist Pedro Serra, and a statue of San Leonardo attributed to Lorenzo Veneziano. Room VII has more paintings of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, some showing the influence of Antonello da Messina; also miniatures from a Flemish Book of Hours. Room VIII has an Annunciation attributed to Andrea da Salerno (c. 1520). Room IX has a notebook of drawings by the Tuscan Mannerist artist Filippo Paladino (1616). The

remaining rooms contain the collection of silver, ceramics and figures from church cribs, and including Mudejar plates from Valencia.

The small church of San Martino Vescovo is near here. This was built in the fourteenth century over a sixth century basilica. It contains two Roman columns and an early fifteenth century polyptych possibly by a local master, name unknown. San Benedetto at the end of Via San Martino, is attributed to Andrea Vermexio (1619). The labyrinthine alleys and streets east of this area are worth exploring, but other palaces and churches of greater note are to be found off Piazza Archimede.

Bombs were dropped by the Germans after the Allied landings behind Palazzo Mergulese-Montalto in Piazza Archimede, unfortunately missing the ugly Fascist Scuola Elementare. Many interesting buildings, mostly Baroque and with attractive courtyards, were however spared from bombs in Via Maestranza east of Piazza Archimede, notably Palazzo Rizza, No. 110, the very opulent Palazzo Bufardeci, No. 72, Palazzo Bonanno, No. 55, Palazzo Zappata-Gargallo, No. 50, still with a staircase in the Catalan style, and Palazzo Impellizzeri, No. 17. The church of San Francesco, also known as the Immacolata, has a convex front, unique in Syracuse. Originally fourteenth century, many times altered, it has eighteenth century stucco work and a ceiling frescoes by Giuseppe Crestadoro. Here is performed the rite known as the *Svelata* the unveiling of the Madonna. Preparatory to this, at 3 a.m. every November 28, a band of musicians sets out from the church and parades through the sleepless streets of Ortygia.

The Giudecca or old Jewish quarter is to the south-east of Via Maestranza. The church of San Filippo Apostolo is on the site of the synagogue – as in Spain, the Jews of Sicily were expelled in 1492. Via Vittorio Veneto, running north and parallel to the coast at the end of Via Maestranza, has

Syracuse I

an array of smaller Baroque *palazzi*, several with pretty wrought iron balconies. San Filippo Neri, originally seventeenth century, was altered in the eighteenth perhaps by Giovanni Vermexio. Palazzo Interlandi, No. 89, fifteenth century, has been recently restored. In Via Mirabella, halfway along Via Vittorio Veneto, we have Palazzo Bongiovanni, originally fourteenth century, with fine corbels supporting the balconies. On the left in Via Gargallo, off Via Mirabella, is Palazzo Gargallo, fifteenth century, with an attractive courtyard, outside stairway and portico, very Catalan. The church of the Carmine, closed, was originally fourteenth century and rebuilt in the seventeenth. In front of it is the former church of the Retiro (1720), attributed to Pompeo Picherali.

Just beyond is Via San Pietro, where there is the church of San Pietro Apostolo, now used for concerts. This is a small aisled basilica of the fourth–fifth century AD, altered in Byzantine times. After the Cathedral it is the most ancient church in Syracuse. We know that Bishop Germanus founded four churches, one to Saint Peter – so this must be it. There are remnants of Byzantine frescoes inside.

Via Vittorio Veneto continues, past the Bourbon prison, to Piazza Battisti. Near here is the small port, the Porto Piccolo, the ancient Lakkios, in use in archaic Greek times, now usually filled with smart yachts. In Via De Benedictis, off the piazza, is the market building, completed in 1900. This street brings us back to Piazza Pancali.

Syracuse II – Euryalus – Thapsos
Megara Hyblaea – Augusta

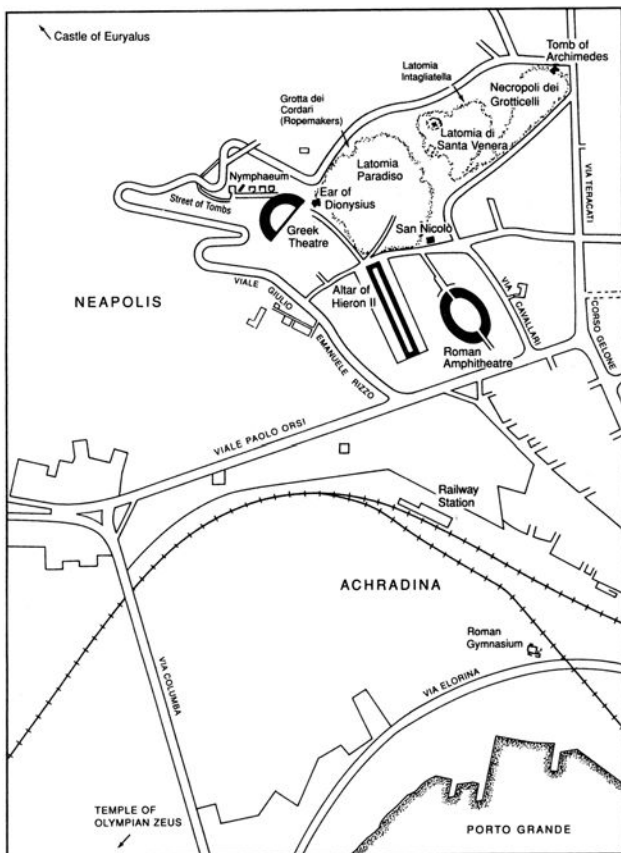
Achradina was the most populous part of Syracuse in Greek times, and recent excavations have brought to light a settlement of the eighth century BC. For the general traveller little of interest is left in the district, thanks in part to the chaotic and ugly rebuilding after the bombing in World War II. The giant silo is a blight on the landscape.

The Foro Siracusano in the centre of Achradina is on the site of the *agora* or market place. A few scraps of ruins remain. The place is not, unfortunately, much enhanced by the Fascist war memorial. Here once were mighty monuments to Dionysius I and Timoleon, and a temple to Jupiter built by Hieron II. Via Elorina leads to the more interesting and so-called Roman Gymnasium. This in reality was a small theatre from the Imperial period, with a temple in front. A portico surrounded the area on four sides. The site is quite attractive, laid out with palms and oleanders. Some statues of Roman dignitaries were found here. The orchestra of the temple is now under water.

Viale Diaz, north-east of the Foro Siracusano, passes on the left some Byzantine baths, believed to have been 'The Baths of Daphne' where the Emperor Constans II was murdered in 668. Near the busy Porto Piccolo is the Arsenale Greco, behind some railings. You can still see where ships were dragged up to the dry docks. Devotees of the Madonna delle Lacrime will want to look at Via degli Orti No. 11, where the plastic Madonna wept for five days in 1953. Past Largo Porto Piccolo Via Fugetta brings us to the church of Santa Lucia *extra moenia*, where Caravaggio's

masterpiece, 'The Burial of St Lucy', is hanging, after much *polemica*. Previously it was in the Palazzo Bellomo (p. 305), but removed here while restorations there were in progress. If it is to remain in the church (for which it was painted) there are fears that it might suffer the same fate as the Caravaggio stolen from the Oratorio di San Lorenzo at Palermo (p. 60). The portal, apses and the lower part of the campanile are Norman. The rose window is fourteenth century, as are the very interesting paintings on the ceiling beams (restored in 1940) – these last include saints, heraldic beasts, rosettes, and ships. The cross on the triumphal arch is of the Pisan school, and to the right of the presbytery is a smooth granite column, supposed to mark the exact spot of the saint's martyrdom in 303 AD. In the sacristy there is a superb inlaid wardrobe of 1600. Probably the original church was Byzantine. Saint Lucy's body was carried off to Constantinople by Maniakes in 1038, but transferred by crusaders in 1204 to Venice, where it still lies in the church of Santa Geremia. A tomb on the site of where she was originally buried is in the octagonal Cappella del Sepolcro nearby, and is the work of Giovanni Vermexio (1629–31); this contains a few relics of the saint left behind, or forgotten, by Maniakes. The silver statue under the altar is by Gregorio Tedeschi. Part of the chapel is underground and connected to extensive Christian catacombs, the largest in Italy after Rome's. They are likely to be kept closed indefinitely, for reasons of safety.

The Archaeological Museum in Tyche, the Museo Archeologico Regionale Paolo Orsi, is in the grounds of Villa Landolina, between Viale Teocrito and Via August von Platen. It is named after the great archaeologist who formed the original collection and was director of the first museum, then in Piazza del Duomo, from 1895 to 1934. This admirably designed modern building is by Franco Minissi and was deliberately kept low to be in keeping with its surroundings – now high blocks have grown up all around.



SYRACUSE: NEAPOLIS

Syracuse II

Since Paolo Orsi's time much more of great value has been discovered, and the enormous collection of some 18,000 exhibits was moved here in 1988. The garden is full of shady trees – cypresses, palms, olives and oranges – and there is a fountain. At the back are the remnants of the Protestant cemetery. Some American graves (c. 1805) are to be seen here, dating from the time when an American squadron was sent to deal with the pirates of Tripoli; also the grave of August von Platen, the German poet (1796–1835), who died when a guest of Count Marco Landolina.

The museum is among the best of its kind in Europe. Triangular in form, elaborately arranged but clearly marked, with glass walls, it surrounds a circular hall. The basement has an auditorium for films and is also used for laboratories and storage.

Section A has geological and prehistoric displays, including bones and models of dwarf elephants, items from the so-called Stentinello culture (agrarian communities of the Neolithic period to the north of Syracuse), and obsidian tools from the island of Lipari. One of the most curious objects in this section is a Bronze Age door slab from a Castelluccio tomb with a presumably phallic design. Finds from the cave duellings of Pantalica (thirteenth–eighteenth centuries BC) include translucent red pottery. Bronze spears, razors, brooches, etc. are from many other sites. Tombs are reconstructed, and there are maps and photographs.

Section B leads on to items from the Greek colonisation of eastern Sicily, in its various stages beginning with the eighth century BC. First, however, we have before us the famous Venus Anadyomene, otherwise known as the Venus Landolina, headless, life size, representing the goddess emerging from the sea with a dolphin at her feet. This is a second century AD Roman version of a Hellenic original, and has been temporarily placed here. It was found in 1804 by Saverio Landolina. Few statues have aroused

such fierce and contradictory reactions, especially from males. Robert Fagan, British consul from 1809 to 1816, wrote: 'Not of first class, thighs misshapen.' Maupassant almost fell in love with her: '*Elle défine toute l'attitude de la femme sur la terre ... le symbole de la chair.*' Augustus Hare: 'exquisitely beautiful'. Peter Quennell in *Spring in Sicily*: 'atrocious'; it was he who coined the much quoted phrase 'immodest modesty' about the way she holds her falling robes. Lawrence Durrell: 'Vulgar ... ought to have been sent back to stock.' Vincent Cronin: 'A figure of pure passion' – 'the marble has a melting quality.' And, lastly, a viewpoint from the opposite sex – Cettina Yoza in her *Guida di Siracusa* (1994): 'The opulence of a healthy nude, not a goddess but a woman.' Which is true if one compares it to the Capitoline Venus or the Campo Iemini Venus in the British Museum, excavated by Fagan near Rome in about 1794. The Venus Landolina is meant to be voluptuous, and this she certainly is. Most visitors agree that the two *kouroi*, naked youths, in this section, again headless and both sixth century BC, are greater works of art. One is from Lentini (its head is in the Catania museum), and the other from Megara Hyblaea, with an inscription carved on a leg, 'Sambrotidas ["Saviour of Mortals", i.e. a doctor] son of Mandrokles'. presumably some kind of votive offering. Also from Megara Hyblaea is the wonderful though far from anatomically perfect limestone figure of a goddess, headless once more and suckling twin babies, almost Picasso-like (c. 550 BC).

Another haunting object is a painted terracotta bust of a divinity, much cracked on the face, found at the sanctuary to Demeter and Kore, revealed in Piazza Vittoria after it had been cleared to make way for the Madonna delle Lacrime building. Many votive offerings found in Piazza Vittoria are also on display. A great number of the finds from necropolises outside Syracuse were imported from Greece. The rich collection of vases and other objects from

the Syracuse necropolises are excellently displayed. Also in this section are models of the temples of Athena and Apollo, and of the Ionic temple near the cathedral.

Section C is devoted to sub-colonies of Syracuse and Hellenised centres, beginning with Eloro. There are numerous items from Camarina, including vases and a horseman in terracotta from the apex of a temple. From Grammichele there is another beautiful *kouros* in marble, also a terracotta Demeter on a throne. The terracotta reliefs from Francavilla are of exceptional interest, mostly related to the cult of Persephone. The bronze statuette of an athlete from near Adrano is known as the 'Ephebus of Mendolito', c. 460 BC. The vases from Gela are quite outstanding, as are the terracotta votive busts from Akragas. The three wooden archaic-statuettes, very rare, are seventh century BC and were found by a sacred spring at Palma di Montechiaro.

The inharmoniously placed concrete sanctuary of the Madonna delle Lacrime is in the park opposite the museum. It was completed in 1994. The plastic Madonna's tears are preserved in a specially made reliquary. Thousands of pilgrims have flocked to see her, and miraculous cures have been attested. If this building were in some modern town, one might be prepared to admire it more. At least it is a good landmark, and the interior, like a vast auditorium, is a spectacle.

We must also be grateful for the excavations in Piazza Vittoria, prior to its construction and that of the complex around. These have been of major archaeological importance, some of the most exciting in Sicily in recent years.

The Vigna Cassia catacombs off Via von Platen are closed except for students. These were among the earliest and probably contained graves of martyrs. Continuing westwards along Via Bassa Acradina, we reach the *latomia* of the Cappuccini. This also is closed, because of landslides, but it can be seen from the road and from the Hotel Politi. Augustus Hare raved about its beauty and the exotic

vegetation, much of which has been lost. The peacocks have also gone; now there are magpies. Most early twentieth century writers believed that it was in this *latomia* that the Athenian captives were kept in 415 BC. 'Here,' Gertrude Bell wrote in her diary, 'the Athenians sighed their lives away out of sight and earshot of the blue waters they had ruled and lost.' (Sighing was an understatement – the conditions were atrocious, the stench and disease fearful, and they died in misery and shame.) Nowadays that episode is usually associated with the *latomia* of the Paradiso and the Ear of Dionysius – but all the *latomie* were probably used as prisons.

Winston Churchill spent the winter of 1955 at the Hotel Politi. Alas, his view of Syracuse has been spoiled by modern buildings. He used to paint, so we are told, from the bow window in the music room. The hotel was built in 1862 by a rich German lady, Maria Teresa Laudien, who married her interpreter, and her seated statue is in the garden; after dinner she would play Chopin and Schubert for guests on the piano. The *latomia*, known once as the Silva, used to be in the care of the Capuchin monks, whose sixteenth century convent and church beyond the hotel – unpretentious and with palm trees outside – looks almost like some South American mission building. The church is appropriately dedicated to Santa Maria dei Pericoli, of the Dangers. In their exposed position the buildings were very vulnerable to raids by Barbary pirates, and the monks were even allowed to have a drawbridge and a small cannon on the loggia.

Just west of the Villa Landolina in Via Teocrito is a papyrus museum. We soon reach the church and catacombs of San Giovanni Evangelista. The original church, a basilica, after being destroyed by the Saracens was rebuilt by the Normans. It was destroyed again in 1693 and the ruins remain, apart from a rose window, portal and other details mostly reconstructed from ancient fragments. It

was here that St Paul is supposed to have preached, and where San Marziano, Syracuse's first bishop, was possibly martyred. One tradition is that San Marziano was sent to Syracuse by St Peter – which would have to be in about AD 61 – but another and more credible version is that he died in 264. In any case this spot is profoundly linked with the bringing of Christianity to Syracuse, and to Sicily.

The crypt has survived and is in the form of a Greek cross. The columns have fascinating capitals, carved with symbols of the Evangelists. It is possible that the place may once have been a Roman *hypogeum*, a place of internment. One column is supposed to be where San Marziano was flogged to death. There are also traces of fourth and fifth century frescoes.

The catacombs of San Giovanni, the only catacombs in Syracuse open to the public, are a vast network and among the latest in Syracuse, early to mid fourth century. There are thousands of *loculi*, niches for burial, large and small. The main gallery, the *decumanus maximus*, was probably a Greek aqueduct. This leads off into small round chapels for prayer. Robbers have despoiled the tombs, but in 1872 the ornately carved sarcophagus of a certain Adelfia was discovered – now removed to the Archaeological Museum.

The Casale *latomia*, just north of San Giovanni and very overgrown, is at present closed. Via Teocrito leads west towards Neapolis. The entrance to the Archaeological Park is by the little Norman church of San Nicolò dei Cordari (of the Rope-Makers) where in 1093 the funeral service was held for Jourdain, son of Count Roger. This was built on the site of a Roman water tank. Proceeding along Viale Paradiso we pass on the left the base of the great altar of Hieron II, nearly 200 metres long and carved out of the rock. The blocks of stones on its upper structure were removed by the Spaniards in the sixteenth century for the fortifications of Ortygia. Thucydides tells how no less than

450 oxen were sacrificed here in one day. The ramps along which the animals would have been driven are visible at each end.

The theatre is not only one of the most impressive and evocative monuments of south-eastern Sicily, but one of the largest of all surviving Greek theatres. The seats, for 15,000 spectators, were mostly cut from the rock. Here many plays were produced by Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles and the comic writer Epicharmos, some for the first time. There is no doubt that this theatre was highly important in the civil and religious life of the city. Cicero mentions a temple to Demeter and Kore close by. There are also many anecdotes. Plutarch, for instance tells how in 355 BC an infuriated bull charged into an assembly taking place in the theatre. Again, when Mamereus, tyrant of Catania, was arraigned here, he attempted to kill himself by bashing his head against the rocks of the *cavea*. It does seem probable that a small wooden theatre was here first, and converted into something more substantial by Hieron I. Timoleon enlarged it, but its present form dates from 230 BC. A valuable clue to this last is the fact that a frieze on the gangway gives names identifying each section of the *cavea* or auditorium. On the left is Hieron (II) and next comes Philistis (his wife). In the centre is Zeus Olympios. Then comes Nereis (wife of Hieron's son, Gelon II, and daughter of Pyrrhus). The name following is missing, but must have been Gelon's. The Romans made alterations to the theatre, adapting the arena for gladiatorial combats and enlarging the front seats, which they covered in marble for important guests. In the fourth century there were more changes, so that the arena could be flooded for nautical displays or mock sea battles. Concerts and Greek dramas are performed here, usually in May or June, every other year. The view of the great harbour and of Ortygia crowned with houses and churches must once have been even more stupendous than it is now.

Syracuse II

The little modern building on a rock above the theatre is the remnant of many mills that were here from Spanish times onwards. Nearby is a *nymphaeum* cut from the rock, out of which some water still emerges. This was sacred to the Muses, and statues were found here. There are several niches for votive offerings dedicated to dead heroes. To the west is the entrance (usually inaccessible) to the Street of Tombs, with more votive niches and Byzantine rock tombs. The street has ruts made by carts coming to the mills. It crosses the rock hewn Galermi aqueduct, which in Greek times brought water all the way from the Bottiglieria spring near Pantàlica, some twenty kilometres away. This water-course, entirely cut from rock, was resurrected for the mills by the Spaniards. At the end of the street are small reliefs of the Dioscuri (Castor and Pollux) on horseback and Triptolemus in a chariot drawn by snakes.

Also to the west of the theatre are the recently unearthed remains of a sanctuary to Apollo Temenites. Here once stood the great bronze statue of the god mentioned by Cicero and which was taken to Rome by Tiberius. Close by are vestiges of a small early theatre, known now as the Linear Theatre. This would have been for a thousand spectators.

The Latomia del Paradiso is a strange and beautiful place, full of luxuriant vegetation, citrus trees, pomegranates, plumbago and wild geraniums. The huge extent of the *latomie* stretching east under the cliffs is an indication of the great amount of stone used for the building of Greek Syracuse. From here we enter one of the most celebrated of all the sights of Syracuse, the Ear of Dionysius, a name bestowed on it by Caravaggio in 1586. This twilight cavern, 65 metres long and 25 metres high, spirals into the form of an S, since the original quarry followed the course of an aqueduct. It has extraordinary and rather alarming acoustic properties, a whisper at one end being perfectly audible at the other. The legend is that Dionysius had the opening

made at the top so that he could listen to the conversations of prisoners below – and deal with these unfortunates accordingly. The picturesque Grotta dei Cordari, the Cave of the Ropemakers, which has appeared in so many nineteenth century engravings, is closed because of landslides. Its dampness was ideal for the trade. That St Paul preached here seems hardly likely.

There is a separate entrance to the Roman amphitheatre. The path runs past sarcophagi brought here from various necropolises in Syracuse and Megara Hyblaea. The amphitheatre dates from the third or fourth century AD and was created because the Greek theatre was found to be too small for gladiatorial blood sports. Elliptical in form, partly built out of the rock, it is only slightly smaller than the amphitheatre at Verona, though now not nearly as impressive. The entrance for spectators was the south end. Beneath the parapet, where marble blocks have the names of owners of seats, is the corridor along which gladiators, victims and wild animals passed. The central cavity may have been filled with water (for washing away the blood?) or used for stage effects.

North of the church of San Nicolò is the *Latomia di Santa Venera*, another beautiful *latomia*, turned into a garden but not open to visitors, again because of landslides. This has niches dedicated to the cult of heroes. Further along are the *Necropoli dei Grotticelli*, with Greek and Byzantine tombs, one of which is called, without any foundation whatsoever, the tomb of Archimedes.

The castle of **Euryalus** on the Epipolae ridge is about eight kilometres from the archaeological zone. Once, no doubt, this area was partly wooded. Now it is bare and barren, redeemed in the spring by masses of anemones, spurge, asphodels, marigolds and dwarf irises. The road is signposted to Belvedere. We pass on the right the *Latomia del Filosofo*, so called because Philoxenus is said to have been imprisoned here by Dionysius I. This would have

been the quarry for stone used in building the castle and its walls.

Euryalus is one of the finest and most complete Greek military buildings anywhere. Its name means 'broad-topped nail', referring to its strategic and dominant position above the city. After the Athenian siege of 414 BC and the subsequent threat from the Carthaginians, it was realized by Dionysius I that fortifications were urgent. The citizens of Syracuse are said to have spent five years, from 402 to 397 BC, building the castle and the walls that encircles Epipolae from Neapolis along the ridge to Tyche, over thirty kilometres. Actually it is now realized that Euryalus was many times altered, probably by Agathocles and Hieron II, also by the Byzantines. Archimedes no doubt gave advice on improvements at the time of the Roman siege. He is supposed to have erected large mirrors here for reflecting the sun that would burn the Athenian ships in the harbour.

Three deep trenches were dug at the west entrance. The first is near the present custodian's house. Between the second and third were some outer defences, now collapsed. Three piers for the drawbridge can be seen to the right of the third trench. A network of underground passages, cut from the rock, leads out from the trench, not just for easy communication but so that soldiers could creep out at night and remove the earth that the attackers might have thrown into it. The network of passages is one of the most intriguing aspects of the castle, the longest passage, on the north side, being 480 metres, and connecting with the main entrance from the city, the Epipolae Gate. There are also underground chambers for storage and stables. The keep, roughly rectangular, has five towers which originally would have been some fifteen metres high and probably had platforms for catapults. The adjoining enclosure has three large water cisterns and a tower at the eastern point, where there is a commanding view of Syracusan territory

– and of the oil refinery between Cape Panagia and the Magnisi peninsula. It is possible to walk along the old walls eastwards to Scala Greca.

The Magnisi peninsula is the site of **Thapsos**, a Bronze Age settlement that has given its name ('Thapsos culture') to similar sites in this part of Sicily. Here the Athenian fleet first anchored in readiness for the siege of Syracuse. About two kilometres long, it is reached by a sandy isthmus. Paolo Orsi began excavations in the 1890s, but recently the foundations of a number of circular huts of the Mycenaean type have been discovered. The tombs – about 400 – are particularly interesting. Those along the rocky shore west of the lighthouse are domed, and seem to have been crammed with bodies. Obviously Thapsos was a considerable emporium. Besides its distinctive pottery, there were importations of Mycenaean, Cypriot and Maltese wares, including bronzes, beads, and weapons, the earliest being about 1400 BC. After some two hundred years coastal villages such as this had to be abandoned for reasons of safety, and were reestablished at Pantalica and other places inland.

The site of the Neolithic village of Stentinello, which was ditch enclosed, is a little south of Priolo Gallo, but privately owned and not accessible. Like Castelluccio (p. 287) it too has given its name to a type of 'culture', the earliest in Sicily in fact. Pieces of the primitive pottery found here, marked with shells, fingernails and sharp instruments, are now in the Archaeological Museum of Syracuse.

Megara Hyblaea, further up the coast, was one of the earliest of the Greek settlements, founded by Megarians in about 728 BC. Now, partly because of the monstrous forest of petrochemical works nearby, it is rather a forlorn spot – and the remains themselves can by no means be called spectacular. The site for many years has been excavated by members of the French School at Rome, and many highly important objects found here are to be seen in the

museum at Syracuse. The town prospered quickly after its foundation and sent out new colonists to found Selinus. It was totally destroyed by Gelon in 483 BC, but rebuilt by Timoleon in 340 BC. Walls were built against the Romans, but to no avail, and Megara was once more destroyed in 214 BC. There are two sets of walls, the archaic walls and the Hellenistic walls. It is best to head straight for the small antiquarium which has some good maps and plans. A temple of Hera was near here. Red posts indicate the archaic sites, green posts the Hellenic ones. Epicharmos (c. 540–450 BC) was born here.

Augusta, about ten kilometres north, is one of the major oil ports of Italy. At night the flames and lights do have a certain beauty, if sinister, but the sight by day is enough to deter most visitors from crossing the bridge into the town, which is a pity. For Augusta, like Ortygia, is an island, with harbours on each side. In spite of its grand Roman name, it was founded only in 1232 by Frederick II and peopled with survivors from Centùripe and Montalbano, which he had destroyed. A great castle was built. Brutal revenges on the hated Angevins took place at the 'Vespers'. There was an earthquake in 1407, and for the next two hundred years there were perpetual raids and sackings by Turks and Barbary pirates. Not surprisingly the population dwindled. The castle was also enlarged and strengthened. In 1676 the town was badly damaged during a Franco-Spanish War, and in 1693 it was partially flattened by the great earthquake. A notorious incident is also held against the unfortunate Augusta: after Nelson's victory at Aboukir Bay wounded French soldiers, mostly blind, were landed and promptly slaughtered in an exceedingly barbaric way. The subsequent conversion of the castle into a prison only increased the town's sombre reputation. In July 1943 it was heavily bombarded by air and from the sea. The earthquake of 1990 left many people homeless.

After such a history of destruction it comes as a surprise

to find the Porta Spagnola – the Spanish gate – intact, with its peculiar grotesque heads and coats of arms. It was built in 1681 by the Viceroy Benavides. This leads into a shady public garden. On the left is the castle, in part restored. This was larger than the castles at Syracuse and Catania and originally four square, with a tower at each corner. The bastions were added in the Spanish period; moats were dug and casements made for cannons. Recently an ambitious and well-designed military museum (of all periods) has been created in the castle; it is the only one of its type in Sicily. The Chiesa Madre, originally 1644, rebuilt in 1769 and again after 1943. has a painting of the Madonna and Child, Byzantine in style.

Augusta features in Lampedusa's story *The Professor and the Siren*. Maybe if we too were to take a boat and row into the summer sea at dawn, we should meet that luscious creature Lighea with her forked tail covered in 'minute scales of blue and mother-of-pearl'.

Further up the coast is **Brùcoli**, a fishing village and popular holiday resort, at the mouth of a canal. It has a castle that has been recently restored. This was built between 1462 and 1467 by Giovanni Cabastida, governor of the Camera Reginale, and was subsequently reinforced against pirate attacks.

*Florìdia – Sortino – Pantàlica – Ferla
Buccheri – Buscemi – Monterosso Almo
Giarratana – Palazzolo Acrèide – Akrai
Canicattini Bagni*

Readers of Harold Acton's *The Bourbons of Naples* might associate Florìdia with the duchess of that name who was Ferdinand I and IV's morganatic wife after the death of Maria Carolina. There is nothing however at the town of **Florìdia**, north of Syracuse, remotely to compare with her magnificent Villa Floridiana in Naples. This agricultural town was founded in 1626, and has a few eighteenth century churches with nineteenth century additions. The church of the Madonna delle Grazie (1720) has an interest in that it was built to celebrate the defeat of the Austrians by the Spaniards. About three kilometres out of Florìdia there is a large and deep natural grotto, the Cava di Spampinato.

Solarino is smaller and founded in 1759. From here we climb through ever more dramatic scenery and eventually reach **Sortino** on its hill top. The medieval town was moved to its new position in 1693, still with some alleys in the Arab fashion. It too has eighteenth century churches, nearly all with frescoes by Giuseppe Cristadoro. The church of the monastery of Montevergine has a fine majolica pavement and frescoes by Sebastiano Lo Monaco. A mule path from here leads down to the gorge of the Anapo and to **Pantàlica**, one of the most haunting places in the entire Sicilian countryside, and with the largest prehistoric necropolis in Europe. Visiting Pantàlica on

horseback, as Vincent Cronin did in the 1950s, is still the most romantic way – that is, if you can find a horse. These days intending visitors will most likely prefer to drive to Ferla, where there is a car park with mini buses that go along part of the gorge on a defunct railway track (there is no parking in the gorge). Alternatively a side road, which eventually leads to a dead end, climbs up from Ferla past pine woods and wild scenery, including a few rock tombs, to the strange bleak plateau which was the main defensive area of Pantàlica. Here on each side are the deep valleys of the Calcinara and the Anapo, and here it is possible to park.

For Cronin the sight of the sheer cliffs in the valley below, riddled – honeycombed – with caves (there are over 5,000), was the end of his quest for the Golden Honeycomb of Daedalus. One feels a strange mixture of emotions in that beautiful place, full of almond and orange trees, and wild flowers; Cronin mentions campions, bugles, asphodels – I noted poppies, verbascum and wild sweet peas. It is also possible to bathe in the river. Cronin heard nightingales and saw goldfinches. Yet there is also something sinister about those blank eyes of tombs, haphazardly arranged and mostly inaccessible in the greyish rock above. We suddenly realise that we are in a chasm of death, even fear.

The first colonists came to this natural fortress in the thirteenth century BC, taking refuge from exposed places on the coast such as Thapsos: a date that happens to coincide with the period in which Diodorus said the Siculi arrived from the Italian mainland. Their king or ruler had his palace on the plateau, which is easy to visit from the road. This site, known as the Anactoron, has been excavated, and the blocks of its foundations show similarities with other palaces of Mycenaean Greece. His subjects presumably lived in huts of wood, as at that time there were plenty of forests around. Pantàlica has been identified with the legendary Hybla, and it would have been

the capital of a state which extended towards Augusta and Syracuse. The king of Hybla allowed Megarans to settle at what became Megara Hyblaea.

The oldest and largest necropolis is at the north-west corner of the valley, below Sortino. Each cave seems to have been the tomb of a family. It was here that the best of the ceramics were found, also bronze implements. Next comes the necropolis of the Cavetta, approximately ninth century BC. The necropolis of Filiporto, near the entrance from Ferla, has about a thousand tombs, and is slightly later.

There was a long period of recession from the eleventh to ninth centuries. This ended with the arrival of the Greeks. The ditch and fortifications near the Anactoron would date from the period of the growing Greek menace. Just below is the Porta di Pantàlica, which guarded the path down to the Anapo. Pantàlica became deserted after the founding of the fortress of Akrai, in 664 BC, only a few kilometres away. When the Arabs arrived in Sicily Byzantine families fled to Pantàlica and lived in some of the caves. There are also traces of Byzantine pavements in the Anactoron. Just below the Porta di Pantàlica is a cave used as a church, San Nicolicchio.

There were three Byzantine villages in the gorge of the Anapo. Another cave converted into a church, San Micidiario, which has traces of frescoes, is near the Filiporto necropolis. The church of the Crocifisso is near the Cavetta necropolis.

Ferla is worth visiting, for it possesses two notable Baroque churches. San Sebastiano has a fantastic portal, designed by Michelangelo Di Giacomo in 1734–41. The figure of the saint in its central niche is flanked by two pious ladies. On each side of them are Roman soldiers, while kneeling Turkish slaves carry the burden of the upper structure on their shoulders. A two-headed eagle is above the door. The interior has been closed for many

years, but should contain a 1530 statue of St Sebastian in orange wood and a seventeenth century statue of the Immacolata. San Antonio Abate, at the point where Corso Vittorio Emanuele meets Via Baida, is believed to be of the school of Rosario Gagliardi. Its façade, which is incomplete, has three concave recesses, divided by pillars. The interior, richly decorated, is unusual, a Greek cross, octagonal under the cupola, with four small chapels radiating at each corner. The stuccoes and frescoes are by Giuseppe Cristadoro.

Càssaro, Ferla's near neighbour, is of ancient origin but contains little of interest. A road west through the Iblean mountains reaches a fork under Monte Contessa. On the left we reach Buscemi, on the right Buccheri. Buscemi perhaps had an Arab foundation, but it was totally destroyed in 1693 and rebuilt on a grid pattern. The Chiesa Madre has a remarkably vivacious façade, and contains a statue of the Addolorata by Filippo Quattrocchi (1732).

Buccheri, due north, on the road to Vizzini, is known for the purity of its air and water, and sometimes has snow. The church of San Antonio Abate rises majestically above the tiled roofs of houses and over a *scalinata*, protected by railings donated by *emigranti* Buccheresi in Argentina. It has two paintings signed and dated by Borremans (1728) and stuccoes by Giuseppe Gianforma (1760). The formality of its design is a contrast to the Baroque church of the Santa Maria Maddalena, designed in 1708 by Michelangelo Di Giacomo. This contains a most beautiful statue of the Maddalena by Antonello Gagini (1508) and a seventeenth century painting of the Nativity by an unknown artist. With its wealth of coloured marbles, Murano-type chandeliers, elegant pulpit and organ case, the church is altogether a gem and not surprisingly has been used in films.

A corkscrew road passes under Monte Lauro, the highest point in the Iblean mountains (986 metres) and brings us to **Monterosso Almo**. This little town existed in Norman

times. The Chiesa Madre has a reconstructed Neo-Gothic façade; it contains two crucifixes, one of wood, one of silver, for carrying in processions, and two twelfth-century holy water stoups. San Lorenzo, on the other hand, has four fifteenth century holy water stoups and a sixteenth century 'Martyrdom of San Lorenzo'. The church of San Giovanni Battista is attributed to Vincenzo Sinatra.

Giarratana, some twenty kilometres south of Montebasso, has two Baroque churches of note. Driving east, towards Palazzolo Acrèide, near Monte Erbeso we reach the sparse remains of Casmene, the second colony to be founded by Syracuse, in 643 BC.

And now to **Palazzolo Acrèide**, a charming town which could be recommended for a halt of a few days as a sample of Sicilian provincial life. It is within easy range of Pantàlica, Syracuse, Noto and Caltagirone, besides being the successor to Akrai, first of Syracusan colonies. The original site of Akrai was well chosen, as it controlled the road to the south. Destroyed by the Arabs, it was a place of refuge for early Christians. The Normans rebuilt it around a castle (now gone), and it was thus that the name Palazzolo was eventually added. The earthquake of 1693 devastated it once more, and a sprightly new Baroque town was born. It was badly bombed in 1943, with many casualties.

'Prudenza' we are admonished by signs on the winding roads before reaching Palazzolo Acrèide, and with good reason. First we pass the *cimitero monumentale*, a surprising and rather beautiful sight. The central square, Piazza del Popolo, generally full of activity, is dominated by the seventeenth century church of San Sebastiano, reconstructed in the eighteenth century by Paolo Labisi, magnificent outside but disappointing inside (redone in 1909), though it has a painting of Santa Margherita di Cortona by Vito D'Anna. An unusual feature of the façade is the large clock. Two

snarling medieval lions have been placed by the main door. The Municipio was built in 1808.

Palazzolo Acrèide is known for its palaces with balconies supported by grotesque heads, in the style of Noto. One of the most extraordinary is the eighteenth century Palazzo Iudica at Corso Vittorio Emanuele No. 10, with scowling and leering faces. Palazzo Pizzo, now used as a stable, is at No. 38. Palazzo Zocco, in Piazza Umberto I, near the Chiesa Madre, has according to Anthony Blunt the largest Baroque balcony in Sicily. The very large Chiesa Madre was rebuilt on the site of a church of 1215. It has a seventeenth century crucifix and a painting of the school of Pietro Novelli. Via Annunziata leads to the eighteenth century church of the Annunziata, with a beautiful façade with four barley sugar columns twisted about with vines. The interior has stuccoes and an eighteenth century high altar made of coloured inlaid marbles. It was for this church that the 'Annunciation' of Antonello da Messina, now in the Museo Bellomo in Syracuse, was commissioned in 1474. Near here is another eighteenth century church, San Paolo, with a very pretty façade, perhaps by Vincenzo Sinatra. Its projecting pillars and portico opening into arches are reminiscent of Palazzo Ducezio at Noto. Above and around the bell-tower are carved figures of the Epiphany and the twelve Apostles. There is a richly decorated interior – with a ceiling fit for a ballroom. The organ is impressive, as is the pulpit supported by a pelican wounding itself, a familiar motif in this part of Sicily. There are more elegant palazzi in Via Garibaldi. Near here, in Via Gaetano Italia, is the archaeological museum, with some of the finds from Akrai. In Via Machiavelli, off Via Carlo Alberto, running parallel to Corso Vittorio Emanuele, there is the little ethnographical museum, created by the late Antonello Uccello and now run by the *Regione* of Sicily. This has all sorts of agricultural and household objects, also puppets, from the provinces of Syracuse and Ragusa. At the end

of Corso Vittorio Emanuele, in Via Acre, on the way to Akrai, is the church of the Santa Maria della Moneta with a convex façade. In order to see its Madonna and Child by Francesco Laurana apply for a key from the custodian at the school behind the church.

A *strada panoramica* follows the line of the acropolis of **Akrai** above the old fortifications, and gives splendid views over undulating and once wooded country. The theatre, perhaps dating from the time of Hieron II, has a modest charm and is well preserved: a perfect semi-circle, designed for 600 spectators. Performances of modern plays are sometimes given here. Behind the theatre is a minute *bouleuterion* or council chamber, with rows of seats, and beyond that is the long *decumanus* paved perhaps by the Romans with lava rock. There are remains of a temple near the theatre. This is believed to have been dedicated to Persephone, and once had a cupola. Still within the modern enclosure are two *latomie* or quarries, known as the Intagliata and the Intagliatella, from which stone was cut to build the city. These have niches where *pinakes* or tablets were placed in memory of dead heroes, and were also used in Christian times. The Intagliatella has a large sculptured relief with banqueting and sacrificial scenes. Not far away are extensive Byzantine catacombs, but kept locked. The few remains of a temple of Aphrodite date from the sixth century BC. Some of the finds are in the Syracuse museum, some in the Palazzolo museum.

A guide is needed to visit the Templi Ferali, another quarry with niches, chambers and Greek inscriptions. This may have been used as a temple for the dead. For a visit to the 'Santoni' in the valley of Santicello a guide is also required. Here are a dozen roughly carved sculptures of the oriental goddess of fertility, Cybele, the Magna Mater, somewhat disfigured by weather. She is either seated or standing, and is shown attended by priests in Phrygian caps, lions, the Dioscuri, Hermes and Marsyas. This

obviously was a very holy spot, and there is a strong aura of mystery, slightly spoilt by the modern protective coverings. As 'Santoni' means 'great saints' or 'apostles', obviously these figures were revered by local people long after pagan times. The repetitiveness of the figures is also odd, but this is sometimes seen in the East with representations of the Buddha.

Canicattini Bagni, on the road to Syracuse, was founded in 1678. Some of the survivors from Noto were brought here after 1693. There are a few 'Liberty' style *palazzi*.

North-eastern Sicily

*Carlentini – Lentini – Francofonte – Vizzini
Scordìa – Militello – Mineo – Palagonìa*

The first three towns in this section, east of Augusta, are in the province of Syracuse, the rest in Catania. All are roughly equidistant from both Syracuse and Catania. **Carlentini** has little to recommend it, apart from a view of Etna and the plain of Catania, and seems to have a problem with the disposal of its garbage. It is conveniently near Leontinoi, but even so before going to the remains of this once great Greek city it is best to visit the archaeological museum at Lentini.

Carlentini was founded in 1551 by the Viceroy Giovanni Vega and so named in honour of the Emperor Charles V. The intention was to resettle the inhabitants of Lentini there after an earthquake nine years before, but the Lentinesi would not have it. **Lentini** was ruined again in 1693, but still its people refused to move, preferring to rebuild on their original site. There followed a long period of relative impoverishment, as a result of which no doubt the only building of real interest in the town, apart from the museum, is the eighteenth century Chiesa Madre, dedicated to San Alfio. In a chapel to the left of the presbytery there is a Byzantine icon known as the Madonna Odigitria. The *fercolo*, or bier for carrying the effigy of San Alfio, is made of silver. Near here is a fourth-century Christian *hypogeum* traditionally regarded as the tomb of the saint. There is a fine intaglio cupboard in the sacristy.

Some of the best objects from Leontinoi are in the Syracuse and Catania museums. The Lentini museum contains a quantity of recent finds, including vases, a few

with comic scenes. Also on display are some excellent plans and reconstructions of the ancient city. Leontinoi was founded in 729 BC by the Calcidians of Naxos, and life there for the next two centuries seems to have been relatively prosperous, and in harmony with the local Sikels. In the early fifth century BC however it was seized and looted by Hippocrates of Gela, soon after which it passed under the domination of Syracuse. From then onwards the history of Leontinoi is mostly an unhappy one. An appeal for help was the excuse for the Athenian expedition against Syracuse in 427 BC. The Carthaginians devastated it. Refugees from Agrigento, Gela and Camarina were sent there, and the population swelled to 20,000. The Romans under Marcellus sacked it in 214 BC, and 2,000 people were beheaded. Cicero described it as 'miserable and empty'. The Arabs sacked it again in 848 BC. It arose again under the Normans and flourished especially under the Hohenstaufens. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries religious communities settled there, founding churches and convents. It suffered from earthquakes in 1140, 1169, 1542, and of course devastatingly in 1693; also in 1990.

The site of **Leontinoi** is delightful, planted with cypresses and pines. We enter through the south gate. The *agora* lies between two hills, the San Mauro, where there was the oldest settlement, and the Metapiccola. On each of these hills are remains of temples, where many of the ceramics and coins now in the Lentini museum were found. A vast necropolis and a prehistoric village are being excavated outside the walls, but these are not open to the public.

North of Lentini there is a fertile swampy area, some of it reclaimed, known as Lago Lentini, once indeed a lake. The legend goes that the lake was originally Lacus Erculeus, the lake of Hercules, because it was here that Hercules presented the skin of the Nemean lion (i.e. *leone*) to Ceres. Thus the city nearby became Leontio, or Leontinoi. A beautiful and exotic garden, Il Biviere, has

been created by Princess Borghese, open to the public and for receptions by appointment, full of rare plants, especially succulents, and scented with orange blossom and jasmine. It is best seen between April and November. The lake used to be full of fish and the *morti* into which they were driven and trapped can still be seen.

Francofonte, about 15 kilometres from Lentini, along *statale* 194, was built around a Chiaramonte castle, of which two towers remain. Perhaps it is on the site of the Greek Hydra. After the great earthquake the Gravina family built a palace (1705) on which had been a wing of the castle. This has a fancy Baroque façade with a balustrade and anthropomorphic heads. Many orange groves are around here.

Vizzini, which comes next, is on the edge of the Iblei mountains and is famous for being the setting of Giovanni Verga's *Mastro Don Gesualdo* and *Cavalleria Rusticana*. The Verga family came from here, but the great man was later to live in Catania. Locals are eager to show sites associated with 'Cav', such as the inn and Lola's house, though Francofonte lays claim to possessing the real originals. The town is probably on the site of the Roman Bidis, but cliff caves indicate that the area was occupied in prehistoric times. There is also a strong Arab character to the town, with numerous alleys and courtyards.

The Chiesa Madre (San Gregorio) has a striking Catalan-Gothic portico, raised above the level of the street and believed to have come from a palazzo destroyed in 1693. The interior is decorated with stuccoes and has a wooden ceiling, both by Natale Bonaiuto. There are two paintings by Filippo Paladino. The church of San Giovanni Battista is a basilica with three naves, divided by pillars. It has stuccoes by Bonaiuto. The tall three-storeyed façade is adorned with columns and has two small domed towers on each side.

Near here is the picturesquely situated village of Licodia

Eubèa. If time can be spared, and the dialect understood, visitors will be regaled with many a colourful tale of baronial vendettas perpetrated in this ancient place.

Scordia, north of Francofonte, was founded in 1628 by the powerful Branciforte clan, again on a prehistoric site; it is in a pretty area full of olive and orange groves. The Chiesa Madre is dedicated to San Rocco, who has a statue (1813) in the piazza – San Rocco is usually shown with his dog, who cured him by licking his wound. Next to the church of Sant'Antonio di Pàdova is the convent of the Padri Riformati, built in 1644. The convent's cloisters are worth a look, and inside the church there is a very fine pavement made of Caltagirone majolica. Santa Maria Maggiore, built in 1780 and incorporating a more ancient church, has a painting of 1589 by Vincenzo Valdassi and a polychrome wooden statue of the Madonna which is carried through the streets during *feste*.

Militello, more properly Militello in Val di Catania, to distinguish it from other towns of a similar name, is full of interest and beautifully positioned, facing Etna. Said to have been founded by the soldiers of Marcellus during the siege of Syracuse in 214 BC (*militum tellus*, land of soldiers), it is more likely Byzantine in origin. The Arabs developed it and it was rebuilt after 1693. There are many grand *palazzi*.

At one stage the town (now with about 11,000 inhabitants) had twenty-four churches and nine convents. San Benedetto, built between 1615 and 1619, and with a 1725 façade, is a Latin cross. The altar is of *marmi mischi*, and the wooden choir stalls (1735) are carved with forty episodes from the life of St Benedict. The eighteenth century Chiesa Madre, dedicated to San Nicolò and San Salvatore, also a Latin cross, has good stucco work and a wooden crucifix, but is otherwise slightly disappointing. In 1981, when the high altar was being restored, a series of crypts was discovered and these have been turned into

a fascinating museum of twenty rooms, lovingly arranged and containing not only the treasures of the Chiesa Madre but precious objects from other churches in Militello.

Across Piazza Vittorio Emanuele is the oratory of Santa Maria della Catena (key at the museum), built at the end of the sixteenth century, and decorated with stucco figures – scenes from the life of Christ above, and figures of saints below: all quite a surprise. The stuccoes were originally painted white in time of plague. Sant'Antonio di Padova, at the end of Via Pietro Carrera, was originally sixteenth century and has an interesting chapel of that period with a semispherical cupola. Santa Maria della Stella, south of Piazza Vittorio Emanuele, stands high above a square. Dating from the early eighteenth century, it has noteworthy intaglio work and magnificent altars, and a wealth of works of art from other churches which were damaged in 1693, foremost being a glazed terracotta group attributed to Andrea Della Robbia, originally in Santa Maria la Vetere. A bas-relief with a portrait of Pietro Speciale is perhaps by Francesco Laurana. The much venerated statue of the Madonna della Stella has a sixteenth century head, the original body having been destroyed by fire. The sarcophagus of Blasco Barresi is fifteenth century, as is a painting of episodes in the life of St Peter, possibly by Pietro Ruzzolone. The little fifteenth century church of Santa Maria la Vetere is outside the town, among orange groves, and has a portal with columns resting on lions and a lunette of the Madonna and Child with angels. It has some beautiful sixteenth century altars.

The smaller town of **Mineo**, reached by twisty roads, was probably founded by Ducetius, king of the Sikels. It was an important fortress both in Arab and medieval times, and under the Spaniards part of the Camera Reginale, property of the queen of Spain. For such a remote place there is a surprising number of good eighteenth century buildings. The church of Sant'Agrippina, built after 1693, still has

some of its original fourteenth century features. The statue of Sant'Agrippina is sixteenth century, and she has an elaborate *fercolo*, shaped like a temple. San Pietro (eighteenth century) has a seventeenth century polychrome wooden statue of the flagellation of Christ, and a grand pulpit and organ. Santa Maria Maggiore is supposed to have been built on the site of a temple to the sun. It has an alabaster statue of the 'Queen of the Angels', said (optimistically) to have been donated by Roger I. Near the ruins of the castle is the Tomba Gallica where French people killed in the Vespers were buried.

The agricultural town of **Palagonia**, also reached by winding roads from Mineo and Militello, is on *statale* 385 from Catania to Caltagirone. Here, it would seem, was Palike, founded in 453 BC by Ducetius as his capital and a bastion against the Greeks. Nearby was the sacred lake of the twin deities Palici, whose bubbling and poisonous exhalations were used for punishing liars and perjurers. Zeus had seduced the nymph Thalia (also called Aetna) and had made her pregnant. For fear of the wrath of Hera, Thalia prayed that she would be swallowed by the earth. Her prayer was granted, and in due course twin boys, the Palici, issued from it. A great sanctuary was thus built here, and inevitably this was linked in legend with the lake of Pergusa near Enna (pp. 415–16) and the story of the rape of Persephone. We are told that the 'pious flocked from all quarters' and that it was a place of asylum for slaves.

It is now difficult to find this once holy – infernal? – spot which has become known instead as Naftia. One in fact has to ask for the 'Stabilimento Mofeta dei Palici'. Duncan Fallowell described his pilgrimage and his disillusion, on discovering the lake to be only a dozen feet across, hideous and slimy. In 1900 it was 490 feet across. Amazingly its sulphurous gas, which ancients said would even kill birds flying overhead, is actually so pure that the Stabilimento

From Carlentini to Palagonia

extracts it by a metal tube and bottles it up for makers of fizzy drinks. Still, it is a good adventure getting there.

Palagonia itself is Norman in origin. In the Chiesa Madre is a prized statue to its patroness, Santa Febronia. In April she is reverently carried by farm labourers along a mule track to a little Byzantine hermitage, with walls carved out of the rock and sixth century frescoes in the apse. Here there *is* a feeling of sanctity. The hermitage is about five kilometres from Palagonia, in the Contrada delle Coste. At Palagonia, on Santa Febronia's day, a monument is erected in the street. This has holes in it, into which you must spit, to 'damn the Devil'.

Ramacca, north of Palagonia and founded by the princely family of Gravina, is not worth a deviation, even though it has been said to have given Wagner inspiration when he stayed there in 1881. Cosima's daughter Blandine von Bülow married Count Biagio Gravina, supposed – according to Tina Whitaker (p. 86) – to have been in 'financial extremes' and with debts to pay. 'Was it right', she wrote, 'that this young, blonde creature of the north, ignorant of the practical world, should be tied to a man she knew so little, without a tiny home?' But she conceded: 'At any rate she became a perfect wife, supporting her position with dignity, and twiddling her thumbs at Ramacca.'

*Grammichele – Caltagirone – Mirabella
Imbàccari – San Michele di Ganzarìa*

Grammichele, laid out on a geometrical pattern after 1693, is regarded as an interesting example of eighteenth century town planning. In other respects there is little to attract the average traveller. Six broad streets lead out from a central square, and the result is not unlike the town of Santa Fé which Ferdinand and Isabella created during the siege of Granada. The only concession to any sort of elegance is the Chiesa Madre, begun by Andrea Amato in 1723, and this certainly is attractive. Nowadays we also have, in the square and next to the church, the handsome Palazzo Comunale, built in 1896 by Carlo Sada.

This giant housing estate, which in effect it is, was designed by Michele da Ferla at the behest of the then Prince of Butera, who was mathematically minded. Rather less rigid equivalents are to be found at Avola, Pachino and the upper part of Noto. It is a little touching to realise that such a dull featureless place was built on a piece of land with the faery-like name of Piano degli Asfodeli, the Plain of the Asphodels. Some of the ruins of the pre-1693 town, Occhiolà, can be seen in the *contrada* Terravecchia; possibly this was the site of 'Echtela', mentioned by Diodorus.

How different is **Caltagirone**, the 'Regina dei Monti', situated on three hills with tortuous streets and dramatic vistas, and above all famous for its production of ceramics. There are ceramics decorating the most unexpected places, on churches, balconies, parapets, giving an extra touch of frivolity to this large (nearly 40,000 inhabitants) and prosperous town. The name comes from the Arabic, *Qalat*

Caltagirone

meaning castle and *Alghira* caves (though *djinn* has been fancifully suggested, because of the *girone* in Caltagirone), but there is evidence that such a strategic spot was inhabited in Neolithic and Bronze Age times. It was captured in 1030 by Genoese troops under the Byzantine George Maniakes, and again by Count Roger in 1080. It is claimed that even now the local dialect has a trace of Genoese accent. Caltagirone under the leadership of its hero Gualtiero was one of the first towns to rise up in the Vespers revolt of 1282. Over the next centuries its wealth increased, mainly based on the ceramics industry. Devastated in 1693, the city rose again with magnificent Baroque façades. Henry Swinburne commented on the long rows of carriages, and Houel in 1776 said that Caltagirone was '*la plus riche de toute la Sicile*'. In winter there is often a mist, which does give the place a touch of djinn-like melancholy.

Approaching from the south and before entering the less interesting new residential area, we pass Santa Maria di Gesù, which was founded in 1422 and still has its original ogival portal. Inside there is a particularly beautiful Virgin and Child by Antonello Gagini. Round this area are some two dozen villas built by the local nobility, ranging from the late eighteenth century to Art Nouveau, many decorated with ceramics and some rather dilapidated. The grandest is Villa Crescimanno. During the anti-Jacobin riots of 1799 we are told that many noblemen, being accused of Jacobinism, took refuge in their villas. Villa Chiaranda-Jacona is one of the best preserved and with its outside staircase very like the villas near Palermo. Villas Patti and Giusino are also in good condition. Villa Gravina and the Villino Favita are Art Nouveau. The Art Nouveau tombs in the cemetery are worth searching out.

Via Roma passes the public gardens and the eighteenth century scenographic Teatrino or Little Theatre, built by Natale Bonaiuto and which is now the entrance to the excellent Museo della Ceramica, on a par with the museum

at Faenza. There is a particularly fine view from the top of the steps here. The collection of ceramics ranges from prehistoric times until the twentieth century. The most famous objects are a red-figure *krater* of the fifth century BC depicting naked figures making a large vase watched approvingly by Athene, and a black figure *krater* of about 530 BC showing a chariot in a battle scene. The production of vases greatly increased in medieval times when Caltagirone was known for producing honey. Tiles also became an important export. The combination of shades of blue, green and yellow have always been especially admired. In the museum there are also pharmacy jars, religious and popular figurines and ornaments, in particular by Giacomo Bongiovanni (1772–1859) and his nephew Sebastiano Vaccaro. Bongiovanni was in fact illiterate.

Also in Via Roma we have the house of Benedetto Ventimiglia, the leading worker in majolica in the eighteenth century, with its original terrace composed of polychrome ceramics. The entrance to the public gardens, laid out by G.B.F. Basile with palms, firs and pines, is from the north and here we have any amount of ceramic fantasies. At the end there is a quaint Moresque bandstand, again decorated with ceramics. Nearly opposite, Via San Pietro brings us to the church of San Pietro, mid-nineteenth century Neo-Gothic with twin campaniles and almost half covered with majolica. Continuing on Via Roma, we pass the church of San Francesco di Paola which has a portal of 1625. The convent attached is now a hospital. Further along there is against the wall on the right the 'Tondo Vecchio', that commemorates the opening of the road in 1766. Rising high above an open area is San Francesco d'Assisi, originally 1226 and rebuilt after 1693, with a vaulted Gothic chapel and paintings by the brothers Francesco and Giuseppe Vaccaro. There are four huge medallions on the façade with crowns held up by *putti*. The fountain in front was undamaged by the earthquake. The modern statue of

Gualtiero from a distance resembles Don Quixote, but the horse is evidently inspired by the one in the painting *The Triumph of Death* in Palazzo Abatellis in Palermo.

The bridge of San Francesco is decorated with majolica tiles. We now come to the awesome ex-Bourbon prison, built in 1782, which has partly been turned into the Museo Civico. This has sundry archaeological objects, vases, coins, sculptures and so on, not of tremendous interest. There are various paintings by the Vaccaro family. It does however contain a gorgeous eighteenth century *fercola* or processional bier and a bishop's very grand sedan chair.

The large Neoclassic building, now the Banco di Sicilia, is by Natale Bonaiuto (1783). The Cathedral, San Giuliano, lies before us, originally of the Angevin period but restructured in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and again in the very early twentieth, so that now it has an Art Nouveau *floreale* façade. Inside there are paintings by the Vaccaro brothers, a wooden crucifix of the sixteenth century, and a Madonna and Child of the Gagini school (1594). The wooden choir stalls came from another church, San Bonaventura. The long low building beyond is the Corte Capitaniale, a pre-1693 survivor, with decorations by Antonuzzo and his son Giandomenico Gagini; it is now the 'Sporting Club'. In the Piazza del Municipio we have the sixteenth century Palazzo Senatorio which was transformed into a theatre and is now the Galleria Sturzo, used for exhibitions. The Chiesa del Gesù was built first in 1576. It has a single nave and contains a Nativity by Polidoro da Caravaggio, also a Pietà by Filippo Paladino (1605). Behind the church a lane turns into Via dei Cappuccini which eventually leads to the Cappuccini church, noted for its trussed wooden roof – it also has a triptych of 1604 by Paladino, an inlaid wooden tabernacle of 1608, and paintings by Fra Semplice da Verona (1647).

And so, back in the Piazza del Municipio, we come to the most spectacular and famous sight of Caltagirone, a flight

of 142 steps known as the Scalazza, at the top of which is poised the church of Santa Maria del Monte. This stairway was created in 1608 by the architect Giuseppe Giacalone, originally to unite the upper and lower parts of the town. In 1954 each row of steps was lined with modern majolica tiles of varying designs, some copying those of the eleventh century; a brilliant success, organised by Antonino Ragona. In May and on July 24 and 25, at the feast of San Giacomo, the stairway is illuminated with up to four thousand oil lamps in different colours, creating a huge and elaborate design. On Easter Sunday a three metres high effigy of St Peter is carried to the foot of the Scalazza, his head turning to the right and left. Here he meets the Madonna and bows before her, telling her that Christ is risen.

It is hard work climbing the steps. An easier approach to the upper town is along Via Luigi Sturzo. The church of San Salvatore on the way up to the right has yet another Madonna (del Monserrato) by Antonello Gagini (1532), as well as some good stucco work. Here we also have the chapel containing the tomb of Don Luigi Sturzo (1871–1959), priest, benefactor, founder of the Christian Democrat based Partito Popolare Italiano, an anti-Fascist who was eventually exiled in London. On the other side of the street is the Chiesa del Rosario with a splendid majolica pavement. At the end of Via Sturzo we find the church of San Giorgio, originally built by the Genoese in 1030, rebuilt in 1699. This has an important painting of the Trinity reputedly by Rogier van der Weyden and certainly the oldest Flemish picture in Sicily, also a sixteenth century holy water stoup and a wooden crucifix of the same period. There is a good view of the countryside from the church's terrace.

The Via del Rosario brings us to the Istituto dell'Arte della Ceramica, founded in 1918 by Sturzo. The Church of San Nicola in Via San Agostino is now an ethnographical museum. The late seventeenth century church of Santa

Caltagirone

Maria del Monte, at the top of the Scalazza, was once the cathedral of Caltagirone. It may be hard to gain entrance. The façade is by Francesco Battaglia and the campanile is by Natale Bonaiuto after designs by Venanzio Marvuglia. The church was founded in the thirteenth century and has a Gaginesque Madonna with Child and a treasury with many prized objects, including a late sixteenth century silver and gilded monstrance. At the foot of the Scalazza on the right, Via Trigona passes the church and monastery of Santa Bonaventura. The plain front of the church belies the fact that its interior is one of the most richly decorated in Caltagirone. Next we come to the church of San Giacomo, patron of the town. This was originally built in 1090 by Count Roger to celebrate his victory over the Saracens, and was rebuilt after the great earthquake. The façade, by Simeone Mancuso of Agrigento, is elaborately decorated with floral motifs, pomegranates and vases. The interior is very fine, with *pietra intagliata* work by Antonuzzo Gagini. The large coat of arms of the city is by Giandomenico Gagini, and the beautiful archway in the Cappella del Sacramento and the Portale delle Reliquie are by Antonuzzo Gagini. On the left of the presbytery is a chapel with a silver urn behind glass by Nibilio and Guiseppe Gagini (1604) and a statue of San Giacomo by Vincenzo Archifel (1518). In the sanctuary are paintings by Filippo Paladino. Around this area are several fine *palazzi*.

To the north of Caltagirone in the *contrade* Sant'Ippolito and delle Montagne are a number of cave tombs, similar to Pantàlica, in lovely country. There are frescoes in the remains of the chapel of Santa Maria della Rocca. Near here are the eroded cliffs, *vaddanche*, of the white clay from which the majolica is made.

An excursion could be made to **Mirabella Imbàccari**, where the women are noted for their embroidery and lace-making. The village was founded in 1610 by Barone Giuseppe Paternò and named after his wife Mirabella.

Because of malaria, in 1635 it had to be moved up to the hill called Imbàccari: hence the name. The village is dominated by Palazzo Biscari, and its Chiesa Madre is perched above a long flight of steps. Another village, **San Michele di Ganzaria**, is the furthest point (90 kilometres) of the province from Catania. It was founded in 1534 on land given by Barone Antonio Gravina for Albanian exiles. The Chiesa Madre was originally thirteenth century and is known as the Tempio dei Francesi, recalling Vespers days. In the first half of December there is the Cuccia fair, when a chick pea soup is dispensed with 'mystic' properties.

Catania

Catania is the second largest city in Sicily, a thriving, busy place with a population of about 400,000, important both commercially and industrially, and traditionally a rival of Palermo. In the old centre it has many grand and important Baroque buildings, principally by Giovan Battista Vaccarini and his son-in-law Stefano Ittar, both of whom had an influence on other architects throughout the area stricken by the 1693 earthquake. Compared to Syracuse and even Messina, Catania has an air of confidence and prosperity, as if by right. In fact not only has it been atrociously governed in recent years but it has become notorious for crime. As already mentioned in the introduction, eastern Sicilians like to think of themselves as being essentially of Greek origin, as opposed to the west, which is supposedly Arab, and that they therefore are not under the influence of the Mafia. This may once have been true of Syracuse and towns like Noto and Ragusa, but big-time Mafiosi well and truly established themselves in Catania, leaving as their hallmark dispiritingly cheap blocks of buildings.

The brooding presence of Etna, both beautiful and sinister, must have some fatalistic effect on the character of its inhabitants, though it seems to be taken cheerfully for granted. Gertrude Bell on her visit in 1902 apparently saw no particular menace in it, but wrote how it floated 'like a white ghost above the clouds'. And so it does at times. Most of the buildings have been made out of its dark grey sombre lava. Recent and not so recent flows of the solidified stuff are to be seen on the outskirts of Catania, and

we are soon made aware that there have been times when the city was almost entirely obliterated by eruptions. It suffered as much as anywhere from the 1693 earthquake, when a third of its population was killed. So its majestic phoenix-like revival has been all the more remarkable.

Volcanic debris, as distinct from lava, makes for great fertility and this is well exploited in the plain of Catania, which is also blessed by abundant water. British veterans of the war in 1943 will not, however, have fond memories of the country between Floridia and Catania; nor, for that matter, will survivors of the Hermann Goering Panzers. The fiercest fighting in the glaring heat and dust of that July was at 'Lemon Bridge', over the river Simeto on the way to Caltagirone.

The airport of Fontanarossa, seven kilometres south of Catania, was a crucial objective in 1943. Present day arrivals by air will usually want to drive on to Syracuse, or to Taormina which remains the best and most famous introduction to the beauties of Sicily. All the same, a visit to Catania should not be missed. It is integral to the understanding of this part of the island. Indeed, in order to see all the city's main sites at least two visits are necessary, however daunting the traffic and the problem of parking.

Catania, as Katane, was founded on a Sikel settlement by the Calcidian Greeks of Naxos in 729 BC, about the same time as Leontinoi. The acropolis was on the higher ground, where now is the church of San Nicolò and the former Benedictine convent. It soon began to flourish on account of the richness of the land around it and the position of its harbour so near to the Streets of Messina. We also know from Homer and many other writers that the country round Etna attracted the imagination of Greeks from earliest times. The great lawmaker Charondas died here in 552 BC. From then onwards the history of the city tends to read like a succession of disasters – though in fact there were long periods of prosperity.

Catania

In 476 BC Hieron of Syracuse conquered Catania and deported all its inhabitants to Leontinoi, replacing them with some 10,000 settlers of Doric origin. In celebration of this Aeschylus wrote his *Women of Aetna*. But in 461, after the death of Hieron, the original inhabitants were back and threw out the interlopers. The city was devastated by a lava flow in 425. The Athenians used Catania as the base against Syracuse in 415, for which a heavy price was paid. Dionysius I attacked it in 403 and sold off its citizens as slaves, replacing them with mercenaries – who in turn were expelled in 396. In 278 King Pyrrhus entered Catania, and in 263 it was taken by the Romans, one of the first towns to fall in Sicily in the Second Punic War. It suffered during the Slave War in 135 and was virtually destroyed by an eruption in 123. Nevertheless in late Republican and Imperial times Catania reached one of its great periods of glory, and was reckoned as among the twenty most important cities of the Mediterranean. This is testified by the size of its forum and amphitheatre, and the fact that there were four thermal establishments.

St Peter is said to have despatched St Berillus to Catania in 44 AD. The most famous of Catania's Christian martyrs was St Agatha, who is the city's patron saint. She died in 251 AD. The first bishop was St Fortunatus, in 515. Inevitably decline set in during the Ostrogoth and Vandal invasions. The Arabs introduced new agricultural methods, especially irrigation. A new period of splendour began after Catania's conquest by the Normans in 1071, when the Cathedral was built, but in 1169 there was a violent earthquake with 15,000 people killed. The city was rebuilt, but in vain, because in 1194 it was sacked and destroyed on the order of Henry VI for daring to support Tancred and William III. In 1232 Frederick II ordered a further destruction and then seven years later built the Castello Ursino, a massive demonstration of his imperial power.

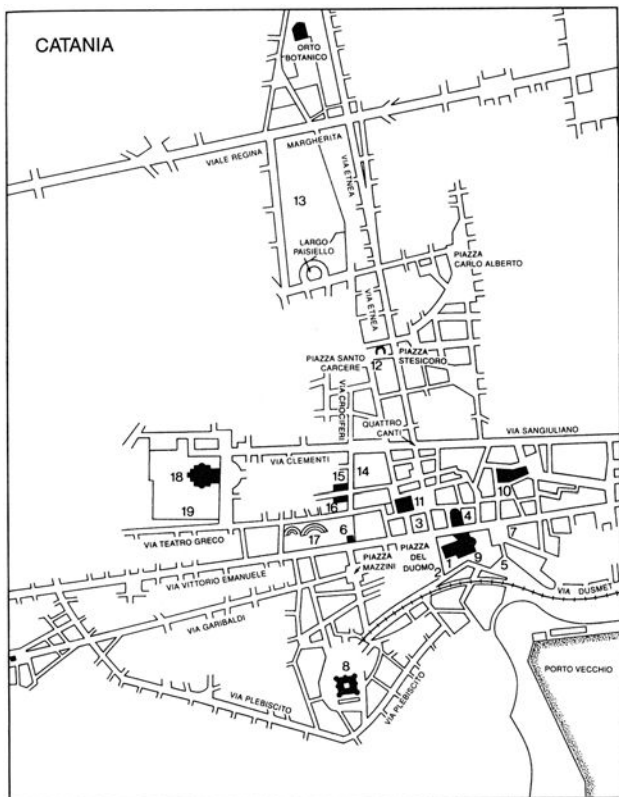
Happier times returned with the Aragonese, who made

Catania their capital. A university for 'divine studies' was founded in 1434, by Alfonso the Magnanimous, the first in Sicily. The Spanish viceroy Giovanni Vega built the city walls, some of which can still be seen in the area of Via del Plebiscito. Plague struck Catania in 1576, wiping out a large proportion of the population. In 1669 much of the western part of what had been Roman Catania was submerged by a lava flow. Then came the terrible earthquake of 1693, which virtually wiped out the rest of the city.

Immediate plans were made for reconstruction on a splendid scale, and the main layout of wide streets and large rectangular squares were essentially the same as they are today. Catania's determination to rise above disasters is symbolised by the inscription on Porta Ferdinandea, now known as Porta Garibaldi, built in 1768: '*Melior de Cinere Surgo*', literally 'I arise better from the ashes'. What is regarded as the eighth great catastrophe was in 1818, another earthquake, but this was not so serious as previously. A revolt against the Bourbons, sparked off by a cholera epidemic, was crushed in 1837, and Catania was in the heart of the fighting in the revolution of 1848–9. In 1860 after Garibaldi had entered Palermo, the Bourbon troops took revenge by sacking Catania over a period of 36 hours. Cholera struck again in 1866. The population grew steadily in the nineteenth century, especially after the arrival of the railway, and by 1900 had reached 150,000. The ninth catastrophe was the bombardment of 1943, when 28 churches were gravely damaged and 752 people killed, with many others wounded.

The composers Vincenzo Bellini (1801–35) and Giovanni Pacini (1796–1867) were from Catania, as were the writers Luigi Capuana (1839–1915), Mario Rapisardi (1844–1912), Giovanni Verga (1840–1922), and Federico De Roberto (1866–1917), whose novel *I Vicerè*, *The Viceroy*s, is comparable in scope with Lampedusa's *The Leopard* and recommended reading when travelling round eastern Sicily.

Catania



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|-------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 Cathedral | 8 Castello Ursino
& Museo Comunale | 14 S Giuliano |
| 2 Porta Uzeda | 9 Archbishop's Palace | 15 S Francesco Borgia |
| 3 Municipio | 10 Teatro Massimo Bellini | 16 S Benedetto |
| 4 Sant'Agata | 11 University | 17 Roman Theatre |
| 5 Palazzo Biscari | 12 Roman Amphitheatre | 18 San Nicolò l'Arena |
| 6 Bellini's House | 13 Villa Bellini | 19 Former Benedictine Convent |
| 7 San Plácido | | |

Piazza del Duomo is the traditional centre of Catania. The main street, Via Etnea, runs in a straight line north, and Via Vittorio Emanuele east and west. Almost parallel to the latter is the third most important street, Via Garibaldi. In the centre of the piazza is the much loved fountain with its black lava elephant, the symbol of the city – ‘charming, operatic’, Durrell called it, and familiarly known to the Catanesi as ‘o Liutru’, referring back to a popular necromancer in Byzantine times – with an Egyptian obelisk on its back. The elephant is Roman and the obelisk has hieroglyphs relating to the cult of Isis. The fountain was designed by Giovan Battista Vaccarini in 1736 and inspired by Bernini’s elephant and obelisk in Piazza Minerva in Rome. Written on the fountain are the cryptic words ‘Agatina Msshdepl’, which we are told mean ‘The mind of Sant’Agata is healthy and spontaneous, honouring God and liberating the city’. The façade of the Cathedral, the Municipio and the convent church of Sant’Agata, opposite the Cathedral in Via Vittorio Emanuele, were all designed by Vaccarini.

The Cathedral is also dedicated to Sant’Agata. It was originally built between 1086 and 1090 by Count Roger on the site of the baths of Achilles, but rebuilt many times after earthquakes. Part of the Norman structure can be seen from the courtyard of the archbishop’s palace at Via Vittorio Emanuele 154; the lava blocks were taken from Roman buildings. Vaccarini was trained in Rome and arrived under the influence of the great masters Borromini and Bernini. His theatrical façade, which includes columns from the Roman theatre, was begun in 1733 and finished in 1761. The cupola is by Antonio Battaglia (1804). On the north side is a marble portal of 1577 by Giandomenico Mazzolo da Carrara. The huge and spacious interior has three naves, divided by antique columns. By the second column on the right is the tomb of Vincenzo Bellini, with an inscription from his opera *La Sonnambula*; he had been

buried at the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris but his body was brought here with every honour in 1876. The second and third altars on the right have paintings by Borremans. By the seventh column is the tomb of Cardinal Giuseppe Benedetto Dusmet (1816–94), benefactor of the poor and recently canonised – his shrivelled blackened hands exposed. In the right transept is a marble portal by Giovanni Battista Mazzolo (1545) with fourteen bas-reliefs. From here we enter the Capella della Madonna, much restored, with a sixteenth century statue of the Madonna and Child. Facing us is a large Roman sarcophagus, originally from Asia Minor and in which are gathered together the remains of many royal figures of the Aragonese line, including three kings – Frederick II of Aragon (died 1337), Ludovico (died 1355), Frederick III (died 1377) – and a queen, Maria (died 1402). Next to the doorway is the sarcophagus of Queen Constance (died 1363), wife of Frederick III, and with contemporary carvings.

The glittering chapel of Sant'Agata is protected by wrought iron gates. On the right hand wall is a memorial to the Viceroy Ferdinando de Acuña (died 1494), shown kneeling with a page behind him. Concealed in the treasury on the left and only on view on days of *fiesta* is a bejewelled gilt and enamel bust of the saint, made at Limoges in the 1370s and containing her head and thorax. On the bust's head is a crown said to have been presented by Richard Coeur de Lion of England. Other pieces of the saint's body are preserved in a large silver reliquary, Flemish in style, and with a Renaissance lid. The main treasury of the Cathedral has several other reliquaries, including the arm of St George. The carvings of the choir stalls in walnut wood by Scipione di Guido (1588) represent scenes from the life and death of Sant'Agata, while the frescoes in the presbytery by Giovan Battista Corradini (1628) represent her 'Triumph', and include likenesses of other Catanesi

martyrs and sanctified bishops. There is a resplendent altar in red Verona marble inlaid with *pietre dure*.

Another sixteenth century marble portal, by Giandomenico Mazzolo is at the entrance of the Cappella del Crocifisso in the left transept. Restorations here have revealed elements of the Norman building. In the sacristy there is a most interesting fresco of the eruption of 1669. The wardrobes as so often in these establishments are tremendous pieces, made in about 1675.

To the right of the Cathedral's façade is the entrance to the Terme Achilliane, closed pending restoration. The Municipio on the north side of the Piazza del Duomo is jokingly known as the *Palazzo degli Elefanti*, the palace of the Elephants. It was begun in 1695 but work continued over the next century. The principal façade is by G.B. Vaccarini and was finished in 1750; Carmelo Battaglia completed the façade overlooking Piazza degli Studi in 1780.

On the west side of Piazza del Duomo we have the Palazzo dei Chierici (Clerics), built by Alonso di Benedetto early in the eighteenth century, and very typical of Catanese Baroque. From the balcony Mussolini harangued the crowds in 1937. The fountain next to it is the Fontana dell'Amenano, by Tito Angelini (1867), the water, coming from an underground river, called by the locals *Linzolu* (sheet) because of the smoothness of the flow. Beyond is the marvellous fish market, usually open only in the mornings, with stalls heaped with *calamari*, lobsters, *cernie* and all the Mediterranean fish one misses in northern Europe. Vendors shout their wares, and further along are fruit and vegetable stalls, and shops selling spices.

Vaccarini's masterpiece is the domed church of the convent of Sant'Agata, known as the Chiesa della Badia di Sant'Agata to distinguish it from five other churches dedicated to the saint in Catania. Good use is made of

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contrasting white limestone and the dark grey of lava. Entwined on the slightly Borrominian façade we have all the decorative details associated with Sant'Agata: lilies for virginity, palms for martyrdom, a crown for celestial glory. The interior is Rococo, on a white background, completed after Vaccarini's death and unusual for Catania. There are some beautiful yellow marble altars, and the pavement has an intricate design of white marble and lava.

So who was this Agatha? There are many versions of the story. One is that she was a Christian virgin who in the mid third century BC resisted the advances of the Roman praetor Quintinianus. She was scourged and horribly tortured, but St Peter came to her in a vision and cured her of her wounds. Next she was condemned to be burnt at the stake, but an earthquake saved her. Her breasts were cut off and she was put in a dungeon, where she either died or was taken out and flung into a furnace. Her body remained incorrupt and was eventually carried off to Constantinople by Maniakes in 1038. After great adventures two soldiers named Gislibert and Goselin in 1127 managed to bring her back to Catania.

Paintings of Sant'Agata usually show her carrying her breasts on a platter. You can buy little cakes known in dialect as 'Minni di Virgini' and shaped like breasts at the time of her *fešta*, February 3–5. She is said to have inherited her veil from the goddess Isis, and this used to be brought out when eruptions threatened Catania. Brydone tells how he saw a man on the slopes of Etna making a passionate appeal to Sant'Agata when his property was about to be overwhelmed by lava. All of which must go to show that however much Catanesi appear to ignore the presence of Mount Etna, except as a piece of scenery, possible danger from the old devil is forever at the back of their minds.

For good measure St Agatha in other countries and elsewhere in Sicily is the patron saint of bellringers, since her

breasts looked like bells. She is also the patron of women who breast-feed.

Porta Uzeda (1696), the archway on the east side of Piazza del Duomo, takes us past the Pescheria or fish market, a rumbustious, noisy and fascinating place, noted for bag-snatchers. There are some good small restaurants here, but a local escort is advisable to and from them after dark. Passing the church of Santa Maria dell'Indirizzo we reach the remains of Roman baths (closed). Behind the church and its convent is an early eighteenth century *palazzo* with beautiful balconies, Palazzo Zappalà-Gemelli. In this rough area shops specialising in coffins are ominously to be seen in Via Ursino, the street which takes us to the vast Castello Ursino, with a fat cylindrical tower at each end of the quadrilateral and smaller towers in between. This great fortress was built by Riccardo di Lentini for Frederick II between 1239 and 1250. The Aragonese kings used it as their royal residence. Alterations were made in 1837 when the Bourbons turned it into a prison, and there were further restorations in 1934. Once the castle overlooked the sea, but the lava flow of 1669 spread all round it, so that now it stands within a residential quarter. It houses the Museo Comunale, which includes the major collections from the Benedictine convent, and the Princes of Biscari. At long last this museum has been opened, but much has still to be put on display.

The eighteenth century museum of Ignazio Paternò Castello, Prince of Biscari, the Maecenas of his age, with its vases and statues was famous throughout Europe, and visited by Sir William Hamilton among others. The most admired object was a large marble torso, thought to be either of Jupiter, Bacchus or a Roman emperor. Goethe tells how he had already seen a cast by Tischbein, and in Palermo's archaeological museum there is another cast to which has been added bits of a statue discovered by Robert Fagan at Tyndaris. The museum has nearly thirty rooms.

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In addition to many Roman pieces, there is an outstanding head of an ephebus from Lentini, fifth or sixth century BC, and a number of paintings, including a St Christopher by Pietro Novelli, pictures attributed to Ribera and Van Dyck, three pictures by Matthias Stomer and an Adoration of the Magi by Simone de Worbrecht. There are also ceramics and examples of ancient clothing, including shoes.

Via Dusmet runs under the high walls of the archbishop's palace and then to Palazzo Biscari opposite the old port. A great blank wall, once part of the city's bastions put up at the time of Charles V, has above it a single storey with windows exuberantly decorated with festoons, *putti*, cornucopias etc. These are by Antonino Amato, but it was Francesco Battaglia who expanded the palace in 1763, partly to accommodate the museum. The entrance to the courtyard of the palace is on the other side in Via Museo Biscari, off Via Vittorio Emanuele. The oldest part of the building is on the southern side, by Alonzo di Benedetto, and the east side is by Giuseppe Palazzotto. Usually it is not possible to see the many wonderful apartments and state-rooms such as the gallery of the birds without a personal introduction, as members of the family live there. However the Salone delle Feste or ballroom is sometimes opened for concerts. Oblong in shape, it has Rococo decorations unsurpassed in Sicily and perhaps made by Venetians or Bavarians. There are two ceilings, the upper one decorated with an allegorical fresco. The little spiral staircase up to the musicians' gallery is nearly always described with good reason as exquisite.

In Via Vittorio Emanuele there is the elegant San Plàcido with a concave front, by Stefano Ittar (1769), very typical of Catania Baroque. Going eastwards on the left is Via Landolina. This leads to Piazza Bellini where stands the Teatro Massimo Bellini, begun in 1873 and inaugurated in 1890 with a performance of *Norma*. The interior is a wonderful period piece. At the corner of Via Teatro

Massimo and Via Vittorio Emanuele is the Collegio Cutelli built in about 1650 by Francesco Battaglia, with a round courtyard attributed to Vaccarini. Palazzo Guttadauro di Rebardone, also by Battaglia, is one of the best of the late Baroque palaces, and has a courtyard worth seeing with an outside staircase. At the end of the street is Piazza dei Martiri, where a statue of Sant'Agata has been placed on top of a column taken from the Roman theatre.

Back in Piazza del Duomo we can take Via Etnea, the city's main artery, which leads almost directly into Piazza Università, with the great University building on the left, designed by Antonio Battaglia, c. 1750. This has a splendid courtyard, paved with white stones and lava. Palazzo Sangiuliano, opposite, is by Vaccarino (1745). The church of the Collegiata was built on a royal chapel by Antonino Amato on a design by Angelo Italia, but with a façade by Ittar (1768), regarded as his outstanding achievement both for its originality and decorative features. There is an inkling of Borromini here, but the bell-tower is typically Sicilian.

Via Etnea seems to lead straight to the volcano. Archibald Colquhoun, translator of *The Viceroy's*, described it as Catania's open-air club, especially at *l'ora del gelato*, the hour of the ice-cream, when the evening sun lights up the domes of churches and their 'exasperated' Baroque façades. (Try sampling *granite di mandorle*, made with almonds.) The point where the street crosses Via Di Sangiuliano is known as the Quattro Canti (copying Palermo? Surely not?). The next church, San Michele Archangelo is by Francesco Battaglia (1771). Piazza Stesicoro is the modern centre of Catania, named in honour of the Dorian lyric poet Stesichorus. In the centre of the square is a monument to the city's presiding genius, Vincenzo Bellini, by Giulio Monteverde (1882).

The railed off remains of the Roman amphitheatre are inevitably disappointing since so much of the stone was

removed for buildings at the times of Theodoric and the Normans, and even later. It was also submerged by lava. When built it was about the same size as that at Syracuse, and could hold nearly 16,000 spectators. Near here, to the west, are three of the churches dedicated to Sant'Agata. Sant'Agata alla Fornace, otherwise San Biagio, is Neoclassic and on the site of where the poor woman was pushed into a furnace, part of which is inside the church. Sant'Agata al Carcere, in Piazza Santo Carcere, is on the site of her prison cell. The façade is Baroque by Francesco Battaglia, 1762, but incorporating a Romanesque portal with alarmingly grotesque heads which used to be part of the Cathedral before 1693. You can see inside the church the imprint of the saint's tiny feet, also the cover of the box in which her body, by then dismembered, was brought back from Constantinople. Sant'Agata la Vetere, on the site of an ancient Christian basilica, is in Via Santa Maddalena opposite the severe-looking Conservatorio della Purità, founded in 1775, and its church by Antonino Battaglia. Here we have the wooden 'ark' in which the saint's remains were once kept, also a sarcophagus, late Roman with a Byzantine top. Also in the church are *candelore*, magnificent Paschal candlesticks sacred to Sant'Agata and representing various guilds such as pasta-makers, fishermen and vine-growers; these are carried through the streets on Sant'Agata's feast day, adorned with ribbons and flags – the great moment being when the *candelore* are made to 'dance'.

San Domenico, the northern end of Via Santa Maddalena has a remarkable Madonna and Child by Antonello Gagini (1526). On the other side of Piazza Stesicoro Via San Gaetano leads to Piazza Carlo Alberto, a *quartiere popolare* where there is a market known as 'Fera 'o Luni', literally 'Monday market' even though it operates every day except Sunday. Continuing along Via Etnea we reach the public gardens, Villa Bellini. From here there is a dramatic view of Etna. There are araucarias and a giant *ficus*, also a

pretty little 'Chinese' bandstand of 1878. Still further north is the Orto Botanico, botanic gardens, interesting but not competing with Palermo's. Westwards is Santa Maria di Gesù, rebuilt in the early eighteenth century by Girolamo Palazzotto, with a marble lunette of the Gagini school, a Virgin and Child by Antonello Gagini and a crucifix by Fra Umile da Petralia.

Via Crociferi is the most beautiful street in Catania, lined with Baroque churches, convents and palaces. It takes its name from the order of the Crociferi or Camilliani, who cared for the sick. Starting from the northern end, we pass the convent of the Padri Crociferi, by Francesco Battaglia and added to in modern times. On the left is the church of San Giuliano (1738–60) by Vaccarini, architecturally considered one of the most important in Catania – since – as Anthony Blunt has pointed out – it influences the more elaborate façades by Ittar at the Collegiata and San Plàcido. It has a concave façade, and the covered belvedere surrounding the cupola was to enable the nuns to take the air without being seen. Inside it is octagonal. There is a fifteenth century painted crucifix, Byzantine in style, and there is a very grand high altar. Next to the church is a *palazzo* with a garden of banana trees. On the opposite side is the Collegio Gesuitico, now the Institute of Art, with four courtyards, in part probably designed by Vaccarini. San Francesco Borgia, by Angelo Italia, is somewhat more severe outside but richly decorated inside, with a beautiful pulpit. San Benedetto, attached to a convent, is the grandest in the street (1704–13), by Alonzo Di Benedetto, with a portal by Vaccarini. There is an elegant vestibule followed by steps into a single aisle. The stucco work is extremely fine, and there are some sumptuous altars inlaid with marble and *pietra dura*. The barrel vault is decorated with frescoes by Giovanni Tuccari (1726), and there is an elaborate, almost regal, nuns' gallery. Just before the arch

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there is the entrance to the Badia Grande, by Francesco Battaglia (1777).

We have now reached Via Teatro Greco. In fact the theatre is Roman, though it probably was built on the original Greek site – and, if so, would have been where Alcibiades harangued the people of Catania in 415 BC, urging them to join the Athenians against Syracuse. The *cavea* is 87 metres in diameter and would have seated 12,000 spectators. The steps were of lava, but the seats were covered with marble. Evidently in Imperial times *naumachiae* or aquatic entertainments were held here. Next to the theatre is the Odeon, used for competitions, music rehearsals and smaller spectacles, seating 1,300. Under the *cavea* were seventeen small rooms, presumably dressing rooms, of which eleven remain. The little domed church of Santa Maria della Rotonda, to the north in Via Rotonda, is built on Roman baths which were converted into a church in early Christian times. For a key apply to the custodian of the theatre. This survived the 1693 earthquake. A colonnade from the Forum is in the *cortile* San Pantaleo, near the convent of San Agostino on Via Vittorio Emanuele. It is not open to the public.

Proceeding east along Via Vittorio Emanuele we pass Palazzo Gravina-Cruyllas, which has a magnificent portal. We then come to Piazza San Francesco d'Assisi in the centre of which is a statue of Cardinal Dusmet. The Bellini museum is at No. 3 in the square: not a very inspiring entrance, through an archway. Nevertheless the little museum has great charm and is full of memorabilia of the composer, including original scores of his operas, posters and portraits of Malibran and Grisi. Vincenzo Bellini was born here. His upright English piano is here, and there is also a spinet which belonged to his grandfather and on which he practised as a child. The sight of the coffin in which his body was brought from Paris comes as a shock.

There is also a piece of his finger. Attached to the museum is a library of *cultura musicale* and *studi belliniani*.

The church of San Francisco d'Assisi is somewhat ponderous. It contains a copy of Raphael's *Spàsimo* by Jacopo Vignero (1541). A plaque records that the tomb of Queen Eleonora of Anjou, wife of Frederick II of Aragon, used to be on this site.

Crossing into Via Garibaldi we find ourselves in Piazza Mazzini, designed by Vaccarini and Ittar in the style of a Spanish *plaza major*, with arcades all round. The marble columns come from a Roman basilica excavated under the content of San Agostino. Proceeding westwards down Via Garibaldi, we find at the corner of Via Santa Anna a palazzo where Giovanni Verga lived from his earliest childhood (he was born in Vizzini, p. 335). His apartment is left almost exactly as it was when he died in 1922, with original furnishings, books, autographed works including *Cavalleria Rusticana*, clothes and hats. There is a number of handsome palaces in Via Garibaldi, including Palazzo Trehella at No. 92. The Bourbon barracks are now a tobacco factory. The amazing Porta Garibaldi, originally called Ferdinanda, has ideally to be viewed from the far side, since it was designed as a triumphal arch before entering the city. It was erected in 1768 to celebrate the marriage of Ferdinand IV to Maria Carolina. Designed by Francesco Battaglia and Stefano Ittar, it has alternate banks of limestone and lava. An eagle sits on the huge clock above, and on each side are winged figures and military trophies.

The former Benedictine Convent of San Nicolò l'Arena is one of the great sights of Catania, and almost worth a special visit just to see it. Readers of De Roberto's *The Viceroys* will remember it as the seat of power in the city, with two members of the great Uzeda family among its members. The buildings cover 100,000 square metres, which makes it the second largest convent in Europe

after Mafra in Portugal. The scale and richness of decoration are staggering. Brydone thought it 'almost equal to Versailles', especially when he entered and saw the white marble staircase and 'everything that announced a royal magnificence'. But later he heard that it was simply the home of 'fat Benedictine monks, who were determined to make sure of a paradise in this world, if not in the other'. In the mid seventeenth century it is recorded that there were only fifty-two monks, plus numerous brothers and servants, and judging from the amount of cells (more like apartments) this must have been the average number thereafter. Originally there had been three Benedictine convents on the slopes of Etna, but on account of dangers from eruptions and earthquakes permission was given for a single convent on this site in 1558. The early building with its church attached was almost entirely destroyed by the earthquake of 1693. The rebuilding began in 1703, under the auspices of Antonio Amato, but later it was continued by his son Andrea. In due course all the leading architects of Catania became involved – including Francesco Battaglia, Vaccarini, Ittar and Palazzotto.

The gateway into the outer courtyard is by Battaglia. Amato senior designed the east and south walls with their rusticated pilasters and window surrounds fantastically decorated with *putti*, caryatids, festoons etc. similar to those which he created for Palazzo Biscari overlooking Via Dusmet. The staircase which so impressed Brydone had been designed by Palazzotto, but later it was reconstructed along Neoclassic lines by Battaglia, with stuccoes by Gioacchino Gianforma. There are two cloisters. The first has a strange and rather inappropriate Neo-Gothic folly. The second is the more attractive, mostly designed by Amato but including a marble portico of 1606 and with a fountain in the middle.

The spacious cells of the monks lead off long corridors overlooking the cloisters. The 'ante-refectory' is circular

with a cupola and frescoes. This leads into the enormous refectory proper next to the original kitchens.

A room is dedicated to memorabilia of the poet Mario Rapiscardi. The library is magnificent, the main room designed by Vaccarini. There are about 130,000 books, some of them extremely valuable and at least 50,000 from the original convent, including parchments, Bibles, and incunabula. About 40,000 came from the library of Barone Ursino Recupero, and are mostly concerned with local history and Sicilian matters. In 1977 the convent was acquired by the University, and an ambitious and excellent work of reconstruction was put in hand. It is at present used by the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy. Excavation has been carried out at the southern end, to find the remnants of the original Greek settlement on this elevated spot. Part of the building was also used for a long while as a famous astronomic observatory.

Next to the convent is the church of San Nicolò, the largest in Sicily, with Piazza Dante opposite, a semi-circular group of modest but elegant *palazzi*. The façade of San Nicolò is peculiar, as it was left unfinished in 1798, we are told for technical reasons but presumably also because of the threat of war with the French. Huge stumps of columns have been compared to the teeth of mastodons. The scale and ambition of this building reminds one of the Temple of Jupiter at Agrigento. The church was begun in 1687, but after the earthquake the work was taken up by Amato, then by Battaglia, next by Ittar, who created the cupola. Then Carmelo Battaglia Santangelo took over. The vast interior is rather dull. It also includes the 'Sacratio dei Caduti', the memorial to war dead. The organ is on a massive scale with 2916 pipes, and was created by Donato Del Piano (c. 1755). Goethe described how a 'melancholy monk' played for him on this instrument, 'filling the remotest corners with sounds that ranged from the gentlest whisper to the most powerful trumpet blasts'. There is a meridian

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of 1841 with signs of the zodiac by Bertil Thorvaldsen. The view from the cupola is tremendous, even as far as the coast of Calabria.

Paternò – Etna – Trecastragni – Nicolosi

The best beaches are south of Catania. The ones to its north are rocky but more interesting historically and architecturally. La Playa (the Spanish word is still used) has white sand and runs south for thirteen kilometres, though parts are private or for the military only. In the spring amber is sometimes washed up at high tide. A nature reserve, mainly to protect migrant birds, has been established at the far end, in a marsh near the Simeto river, and here with luck flamingoes, spoonbills and even Bewick's swans are to be seen.

Misterbianco, a main suburb of Catania, has had one of the worst Mafia reputations in Sicily. Its odd name derives from Monastero Bianco, a Benedictine convent which was destroyed in the earthquake of 1693. Nearby is the castle of Motta Sant'Anastasia, still with its original battlements, and where Bernardo Cabrera (p. 67) was imprisoned. Artichokes are a main crop in this district. There is another castle, well preserved, on the rock above **Paternò**. This has a chapel with remnants of frescoes and other original features, including mullioned windows. It was used as a German lookout in 1943, and as a result the town was heavily bombed – with 4,000 dead. It has been assumed that the site of Hybla Gaelatis was in this area, but no trace of the famous temple of Venus has been found. Near the castle, and up a flight of steps, is the Chiesa Madre, Santa Maria all'Alto, rebuilt in 1342 on Norman foundations. In Via Gancia there is the church of Santa Maria della Valle di Giosafat (Jehoshaphat), founded by Countess Adelasia (Adelaide) in 1072, with a splendid Gothic portal and a

sixteenth century ceiling. Paternò is especially noted for its great juicy oranges. In this area are some *salinelle*, miniature volcanoes with cones of bubbling mud.

The speciality of Belpasso is its grapes. It also produces *torrone*, nougat with nuts. Originally the town was called Malpasso (bad passage), but after being destroyed by a lava flow in 1669 it was rebuilt under its present and happier name.

So to **Etna**, the largest volcano in Europe and one of the most famous in the world, nearly 3400 metres high. The Sicilians know it either as 'Mongibello', a combination of *monte* and the Arabic *gebel* or simply 'a'Muntagna' the Mountain. Etna, originally Aetna, was to the Greeks where Hephaestus (Vulcan) had his forge and was assisted by the Cyclops. The giant Enceladus was shut in here, as was Typhon, father of the Harpies. The famous one-eyed monster Polyphemus lived in a cave on the mountain. He desired the sea-nymph Galatea, 'white as milk', but when she rejected him for the handsome shepherd Acis, he became crazed with jealousy and crushed the youth under a huge rock. Luckily the gods took pity on the distraught Galatea, and turned the boy's blood into an ever-flowing stream, the Aci, which to this day gushes out from a cliff near Acireale into the sea, thus uniting the two lovers for eternity. Hence the number of towns below Etna which begin with 'Aci'. As some of us know from school, Ulysses was lucky not to have suffered the same fate as Acis. In more historic times the philosopher Empedocles (p. 189) in 433 BC jumped into the crater of Etna to prove that he was a god; the mystery of his disappearance was revealed when one of his golden sandals was thrown back by the volcano.

Brydone relates how in 1772 he was told by a peasant that an English queen had been condemned to burn for ever in Etna as 'she was the wife to a king that had been a Christian, and that she had made him a heretic'. That

queen turned out to be none other than poor Anne Boleyn. And there are associations with other English monarchs. Gervase of Tilbury, c. 1211, tells us that King Arthur had a palace on Etna of 'marvellous workmanship', and that a bishop of Catania, who had lost his way in the darkness, had found him reclining there on a royal couch. The king was recovering from wounds after the battle with Mordred, and gave the bishop a present of 'fabulous novelty'.

Etna is in fact a cluster of volcanoes, some of them extinct, around a main cone. Every now and then new ones burst out. Evidently there was a major eruption in Sikel times, and settlements were abandoned. An eruption in 475 BC was described by Pindar and Aeschylus. Catania was destroyed by a lava flow in 122 BC. After AD 40 there was a period of relative quiet, but in 1169, 1329 and 1381 the lava reached the sea, the last one engulfing Catania. It is said that there were 'horrendous shudders' before the 1669 eruption, the worst recorded, and which again destroyed Catania. A deep crack was formed from the village of Nicolosi to the top of the mountain. Then came 'furious and deafening explosions' with huge columns of ash and red hot stones. The lava flows were 'red as gore'. In 1886 Nicolosi was threatened again, but the lava flow was stopped within 100 yards of it, thanks perhaps to the intervention of Cardinal Dusmet who had produced the sacred veil of Sant'Agata. In 1910 lava burst out near the present *rifugio* at Sapienza and continued for 26 days for 12 kilometres, burying a village near Belpasso. The 1928 eruption was brief but disastrous, destroying woodland, citrus groves and 550 houses at Mascali on the coast. The 1971 eruptions lasted for 69 days, sweeping away the observatory and the cableway. In 1988 Etna was again bad-tempered, some thought ominously – but only minor ones since (2008).

To vulcanologists the 1971 eruption was one of the most interesting, since it displayed three distinct phases.

The first was minor and known as Strombolian, spasmodic and shooting out fragments high into the air; the second was Hawaiian-type, a long fissure opening without an explosion and with rivers of lava quickly flowing; the third was Vulcanian, a pit-like opening near the main crater, without lava but sending out cauliflower-like explosions of clouds and ash. In 1981 there was another lava flow on the north slopes near Randazzo, cutting the road – still very visible. The cableway above the *Sapienza rifugio* was again destroyed in 1983 and Nicolosi threatened. The lava of 1986 luckily flowed into the great chasm called the Valle del Bove, so did no damage. In 1991–2 lava advanced towards Zafferana Etnea, with 7,000 inhabitants. American helicopters dropped concrete blocks in a forlorn attempt to divert the flow, while the thirty foot black wall moved relentlessly through the olive groves. A farmer was photographed leaving a bottle of wine and a loaf of bread outside his house before it was engulfed – even the gods of destruction had to be propitiated. Then, suddenly, and miraculously, the lava stopped only a kilometre from the town. Prayers to Sant’Agata had been answered.

There are many travellers’ accounts of Etna describing it as ‘a pit in Dante’s hell’, ‘the ghastly scenery of the moon’, and such like, but this applies only to the summit and crater. Eruptions, when seen from a safe distance, either spurting up like firework displays or coiling down the slopes like wriggling scarlet snakes, are marvellous to watch, and the distant view of this old rogue is perennially beautiful, ever changing in colour. But the richly fertile soil on the lower slopes has produced another sort of beauty. A single-track railway, the Circumetnea, runs from Catania to Riposto, round the mountain, 114 kilometres, through citrus groves, vineyards, olive and almond groves, past banks of *fichi d’India* (prickly pears), crossing old lava flows, past castles and grey volcanic villages. It is all a delightful experience, provided we have five and a half

hours to spare – if need be, of course, the journey could be broken at, say, Adrano or Randazzo.

In 1981 the whole area of Etna was declared a national park. Above the cultivated slopes the woods begin: chestnut, ilex, pine, walnut, with low bushes of juniper and in sparser spots the so-called *spinosancto*, the holy thorn, often mingled with the attractive Etna violet. There are also clumps of saxifrage and senecio. The famous yellow broom, *genista aetnensis*, is dramatic against the black lava. Then comes the desolation, ‘Dante’s hell’, sheer clinkers, hard underfoot. In the woods below there are many birds of interest such as hoopoes, woodpeckers, red kites and, occasionally, golden eagles. There are also pine martens, porcupines, foxes and, with luck, edible dormice. A hundred years ago there would also have been wolves and wild boars. These lower reaches are good walking country, but a guide is advisable, and it is certainly best to check with a tourist office, maybe at Nicolosi, about the mood of the volcano, also about the weather – bad weather can be misery. There is not really much danger, provided no risks are taken.

The view at sunrise from the top is also famous, and excursions can be arranged – the emperor Hadrian climbed the mountain to see it. Those who have undergone the chilly experience speak of the unearthly glow from the main crater, the sun catching the summit when all else is dark, and when daylight comes the long shadow of the volcano gradually dwindling. If visibility is good, the view can be fantastic, right along the coast of Calabria and perhaps to Malta.

Skiing is possible on Etna for about four months in the year. There is a number of *rifugi*, and there are ski-lifts at Sapienza and near Linguaglossa on the north slope (p. 393). The great excitement for some is to be able to ski on Etna in the morning and bathe in the Ionian Sea in the afternoon.

Considering Etna's past behaviour, it may come as a surprise to find the slopes below on the Catania side so thickly populated with farmsteads, commuters' homes and *casali* (p. 378). **Trecastagni** is worth a halt on the way up to Sapienza, if only to admire the exterior of its Chiesa Madre, often described as one of the best examples of Sicilian Renaissance architecture (its disappointing campanile apart). The original church is thought to have been designed by Antonello Ciagini. There is an extraordinary collection of votive offerings inside, worth a look. Wealthy Catanesi had villas here in the Belle Epoque period, so there are some good examples of 'Liberty'. The name Trecastagni is derived from '*Tre Casti Agni*', three chaste lambs, referring to the local saints Alfio, Filadelfo and Cirino, who were taken to be martyred at Militello. On the night of May 9 there is a pilgrimage of '*nudi*' in their honour; barefoot and shirtless men with red sashes run down the main street carrying huge candles. About the same time there is the *Sagra dei Carretti*, the festival of painted carts, a rare chance to see them outside museums. This again coincides with the great garlic sale; cars returning to Catania, sounding their horns, are festooned with long tresses of garlic.

Nicolosi calls itself the 'gateway' to Etna and is full of hotels and holiday villas. It has also been developed as a skiing resort. This too is a good starting off place for walks; about an hour away on foot are the two craters called Monti Rossi, formed by the 1669 eruption. W.E. Gladstone stayed at Nicolosi in 1828 and complained that he could not sleep 'for the distant booming of the mountain'. Zafferana Etnea has facilities similar to Nicolosi, and is slightly less smart; it is also considered to have a more bracing climate. One can reach Sapienza by car from Zafferana, but the most sensible road is from Nicolosi.

Sapienza is 1400 metres up and fully geared for tourism: very busy in summer. From here there is a *funivia* or cableway which has fifty little cabins for six people each. You can

also hire clothing and strong footwear, both essential. At the top end of the *funivia* we are allotted guides and there are minibuses which take us to the Torre del Filosofo, the Tower of the Philosopher (i.e. Empedocles), the site of a monument believed more likely to have been Roman and probably built to commemorate Hadrian's visit.

We have now reached the land of clinkers, sometimes hot underfoot, sometimes even in summer with patches of snow. There are whiffs of sulphur, and a piece of paper pushed down certain *fumaroli* will catch fire. The immense view is weirdly exhilarating, and we are escorted to the brink of the vertiginous hole of the much described Val del Bove, twenty kilometres in circumference and with sheer cliffs nine hundred metres high. Some of the old lava flows have left bizarre and jagged formations known as *hornitos*, the Spanish word for 'little ovens'.

A climb to the main crater of old Mongibello is forbidden without special permission. In 1979 nine tourists were killed at its edge, and in 1987 two more. But in July 1960, on a baking hot day at the coast, the writer of this book did make the ascent to the crater, and afterwards agreed with a remark by Edward Lear: 'A task, but now it is done I am glad I did it.' Indeed this writer swore never to go up there again; but circumstances later decided otherwise. That adverse resolution of 1960 was partly due to his being wrongly dressed, in light summer clothes and soft shoes. Also the steep climb turned out to be an international competition, since a Frenchwoman and a German youth happened to have ridden in the same *funivia* cabin, and each was determined to get there first. The writer won, in spite of being very short of breath on account of the altitude. (The German had a nose bleed.) The wind at the crater was bitter and so strong that it was only safe to crawl up to the edge and peer over at a bubbling, smoking brown and sulphur-coloured platform, not a deep cavern as at Vesuvius. It was just a little disappointing, no incarnate

Etna

molten rock or sprays of fire. Nor any 'lugubrious noises from the entrails of the earth,' as heard by Dumas père.

Gladstone on his visit was luckier. He watched a great mass of lava detaching itself by degrees. 'It opened like an orange' he wrote, 'and we saw red hot fibres stretch in a broader and still broader vein, until at last it found a mass to support it.' A 'sharp and loud clap' coincided with a shaking of the ground beneath him, so he wisely decided it was time to retire.

*Aci Castello – Acireale – Sant’Alfio – Giarre
Fiumefreddo – Calatabiano*

Visitors leaving Catania by car and seeking the motorway north will find themselves having to keep a sharp eye for the appropriate signs. The old road, along the Ionian coast, with its tumbled black lava, passes through some thickly populated areas. Ognina is claimed as the port of Ulysses mentioned in the *Aeneid*. **Aci Castello** is one of the quieter holiday resorts, especially out of season. Its fairytale Norman castle on a sheer basaltic crag was rebuilt by Roger of Lauria, the rebel admiral of Frederick III, who drove him out in 1297 by means of building a wooden tower of equal height by the castle’s side. This crag has also been known as the Rocco Saturnia. The body of Sant’Agata was brought first to the castle from Constantinople in 1126, before being carried to Catania. A geological museum has now been established here. Flowers decorate the streets of the town, and at night the reflections from the *lampare*, the fisherman’s lights for catching squid, bob up and down out to sea.

Aci Trezza, a less attractive place, has nevertheless been immortalised in the classic novel by Giovanni Verga, *I Malavoglia* (1881), translated as *The House by the Medlar Tree*. Luchino Visconti’s film *La terra trema* was also made here. But the town’s greatest fame is the group of jagged rocks out to sea, the Scogli dei Ciclopi, or Faraglioni. For these are the very rocks supposed to have been hurled at Ulysses when he escaped from Polyphemus. The largest, Lachea, is the site of a marine research station run by Catania University. On July 29 there is the festa *Lu pisci a*

mare at Aci Trezza, when a fisherman pretends to be a fish and is pursued by colleagues. Inland we have Aci Catena, which has a church, San Giuseppe, architected by Francesco Battaglia, and a grand 1747 palazzo, Palazzo Riggio. Then there is Aci Sant'Antonio, where *carretti siciliani*, Sicilian carts, are made and where every Easter Thursday an ambitious religious drama, 'The Redemption of Adam', is performed, with 42 characters. Aci San Filippo has a Chiesa Madre with a façade also by Francesco Battaglia, regarded as one of his major works. The campanile of this church is dated 1588, and there are some pretty lava decorations. Otherwise these and other Aci towns are not of very great interest to the traveller, apart of course from **Acireale** which has been important since Roman times and has a number of outstanding Baroque buildings. Acireale is also well known for its sulphur baths, puppet shows, and its Carnival, reckoned to be the best in Italy after Viareggio's. The Romans called the town Aquilia. The eruption of 1169 virtually wiped it out; later there was a great fire which again destroyed it. The name was changed to Acireale by decree of Philip IV of Spain, who made the town directly subject to the crown. A painting of the period shows how prosperous it was then, bristling with domes and campaniles. It did not suffer as badly as Catania from the 1693 earthquake, but the Duke of Camastra nevertheless undertook a total reconstruction of the town. In recent years the population has increased greatly (now about 48,000) and it is a considerable tourist centre, though mainly for Italians.

The most famous building in Acireale is the church of San Sebastiano, which has a façade that is basically pre 1693, and thus a good example of the Spanish style architecture of the period. But a great deal of ornamentation has been added, which some find 'too fussy'. The ten statues and the balustrade were added by Giovanni Battista Marino in 1754. Otherwise we have a galaxy of *putti* holding garlands,

grotesque heads and many pilasters. The interior has frescoes by a local artist, Pietro Paolo Vasta, and others. Bits of St Sebastian's body are preserved in silver cases which are carried in processions. As with so many Sicilian churches, the belfry is incorporated in the façade, which Anthony Blunt considered to be Byzantine in origin, since many Greek churches have a similar feature. Near San Sebastiano is Palazzo Pennisi di Floristella which houses a large collection of Greek coins.

The Cathedral, built originally between 1597 and 1618, has a Neo-Gothic façade by G.B.F. Basile around a Baroque portal. The interior has three naves, again with frescoes by Vasta. There is a silver statue of Santa Venera, patron saint of the town, by Mario D'Angelo (1651). Her *fercolo* or bier, again silver, is also on view. A meridian has been traced on the floor, the work of a German, Christian Peters (1843).

The Palazzo Comunale is a seventeenth century survivor, dating from 1659, with embossed pillars. The church of SS Pietro e Paolo, close to the Cathedral, has an elaborate early eighteenth century façade with a triple belfry. Via Cavour leads west to Via Marchese di San Giuliano, where we find the Biblioteca and Pinacoteca Zalantea. The library was founded in 1671 and is one of the most important in Sicily, with an estimated 150,000 books and incunabula. The art gallery has several drawings by Guido Reni, Luca Giordano. Salvator Rosa, Vito D'Anna, none exceptional, and a 'Holy Family' attributed to Rubens. Its most outstanding exhibit is a marble bust of Julius Caesar found in 1676. In the same building are archaeological and Risorgimento collections.

Various Baroque buildings of note are to be found in this area. To the south of the town, at the end of Corso Vittorio Emanuele we have the renowned Terme di Santa Venera, whose sulphurous and radioactive waters were appreciated by the Romans and as usual are cures for all

sorts of 'disturbances', physical and mental. The Neoclassic establishment was built in 1873, and there is a large modern hotel nearby. At the north end of Acireale is the Villa Belvedere, the public gardens, laid out in 1848. From here there is a great panorama of the sea and Etna. Nearby is the church of Santa Maria dell'Indirizzo, Neoclassic, by Stefano Ittar. A walk can be recommended to the fishing village of Santa Maria la Scala, built around a seventeenth century church, and where there is a much frequented stony beach. We are now in the heart of the 'Riviera dei Limoni', and for some kilometres there are quantities of lemon groves. The whole shore at times seems to 'breathe' lemon-blossom.

One of the villages inland from here is **Sant'Alfio**, which for generations has attracted visitors because of the remains of its ancient and huge 'Castagno dei 100 Cavalli', or Chestnut Tree of the 100 Horses. The tree is called this because Queen Giovanna of Anjou with a hundred cavaliers and their horses is said to have sheltered under it during a storm. It in fact now looks like four trees, but the stems are joined underground. There are other imposing trees near here. In 399 BC the then forest supplied material for the fleet of Dionysius of Syracuse. The place may not be quite so 'fragrant with mythology', as it was in Augustus Hare's time, though we might still see – as he suggests – a modern version of the god Pan gambolling with nymphs among the trees.

The towns of **Giarre** and Riposto virtually run into one another but insist on separate identities. Both have handsome Neoclassic cathedrals. Giarre specialises in ceramics, and its name derives from the terracotta containers that were used for conserving wine, oil and grain in Arab times. The lava flow of 1979 just missed Riposto. This town is known for its wine, and is where the Circumetnea railway ends.

The eastern slopes of Etna, so amazingly fertile and

with such a delightful climate, have been heavily cultivated since at least the sixteenth century. The production of silk used to be important here. In late spring wistaria billows over garden walls and on the fronts of *casali*, small country houses, while the scent of citrus is at its strongest. This part of Sicily was less attached to feudal structures and the nobility and ecclesiastical administration found it convenient to hand over their lands in 'emphyteusis', whereby they received yearly sums in cash or kind. In the building of the middle class houses (the *casali*), much use has been made of wood and lava. The older farm houses are usually constructed over a series of arches, with the living quarters above. Some of these buildings are decorated with terracotta pine cones. The most interesting of the larger country houses are in what were the domains of the Cruyllas-Gravina family, Princes of Palagonià, behind and beyond Giarre and Riposto. Several of them are fortified with towers at each end. One such is the Palazzetto Diana, its walls inlaid with lava, just north of Fiumefreddo, and another is the so-called Castle of San Marco, otherwise called the 'Casina dell'Acquicella', near Calatabiano. The most curious is the Castello degli Schiavi, Castle of the Slaves, also known as the Palazzetto Palmieri. The name derives partly from the fact that busts of two captive Algerian corsairs are incorporated in the loggia above the building, and partly because ears and eyes are carved in the towers so that workers in the fields would know that they were being watched whilst the master was absent.

Fiumefreddo is in an important agricultural area. It also has a popular beach known as Boscomarino. A winding road through citrus groves leads up to Piedimonte Etneo, once aptly called Belvedere. **Calatabiano**, further along the coast road, is on the river Alcàntara, which marks the boundary between Catania and Messina provinces. It is dominated by its strategically placed castle that has been rebuilt possibly on an Arab foundation. This castle

From Aci Castello to Calatabiano

has several medieval features worth noting, such as the slender fifteenth century archway in the great hall, bearing the arms of the ancient family of Cruyllas. These same arms reappear on the portal of the church of San Filippo, rebuilt in 1484.

Naxos – Giardini – Taormina

Naxos, built on what was originally an ancient lava platform, now known as Capo Schisò, was the first Greek colony in Sicily. Thucydides gives the date of its foundation as 734 BC, though it could have been slightly earlier. The colonists were Chalcideans from Euboea, and their first task was to build an altar to Apollo Archagetes, protector of colonial enterprises. Excavations have shown that Sikels had previously been there, and they must therefore have been driven inland. Within a few years other Greek settlements were established at Leontinoi and Catane.

Naxos fell to Hippocrates of Gela in 495, and again to Hieron I of Syracuse in 476. As it had backed the Athenians in their fatal attack on Syracuse in 415, Dionysius I in 403 made sure it paid the full penalty. The town was plundered and then burnt, and many of the inhabitants were enslaved, while the land was given to neighbouring Sikel towns. However in 358 Andromachus, father of the historian Timaeus, collected together the survivors of Naxos and planted them in the new and more defensible town of Tauromenion, now Taormina. In 36 BC a great sea battle was fought in the waters of Naxos when Pompeius Sextus defeated Octavian.

Naxos never was of great importance, except for its religious associations. The excavations are indeed basic, consisting mostly of foundations, but the site is moving and *suggestivo*, since it was on this spot that the history of Sicily began. The approach, among eucalyptuses and oleanders, next to a lemon and medlar grove, is pleasant, and the silence, apart from an occasional croaking frog,

most welcome. A stream, the Santa Venera, runs along the path while beyond is the River Alcàntara, which would have been the main water supply for the town. The remains of megalithic walls are also visible.

Two *sacelli* or small temples have been found, but there has been no sign of the altar to Apollo. In the south-west corner there is a base of a *temenos* or sacred area, probably devoted to Aphrodite, and close by are two kilns, one large, one small. The polygonal walls near the sea gate are impressive.

As so often in these cases it is really best for the non-specialist first to visit the museum, which although modest is good. Its situation, slightly inconveniently, is at the extreme end of Capo Schisò next to a small fort. The ground floor has pre-Greek finds and some plans of the excavations. On the floor above there are votive offerings, sphinxes and a Silenus in relief, terracotta weights for looms, unguent vases, a glass bowl, a helmet, surgeon's utensils etc. Objects found underwater, such as amphoras and anchors, are displayed separately in the fort.

It was from the bay of Naxos that on August 19 1860 Garibaldi set out with two steamships and 4200 men for Melito in Calabria, to do battle with the Bourbons on the Italian mainland.

The town of **Giardini-Naxos** which straggles above a beach is often recommended as more satisfactory for staying in than overcrowded and often expensive Taormina. It depends on whether one enjoys the excitement of discos, night spots and revving motor-bikes, and in summer, crowded beaches. The large group package hotels are at the southern end of Giardini. Ovid praised the red mullet and moray eels caught off this shore. Mullet (*triglie*) are still much to be recommended, but moray eels (*murene*) are not likely to be found on menus of the many *trattorie* or for that matter the grander (and good) restaurants. A more peaceful alternative for accommodation, if rooms

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can be found, could be further along the coast at Mazzarò, where there is a small beach, and a funicular or *funivia* up to Taormina.

The building at Giardini that evokes something of Taormina's fashionable heyday before the First World War is the little railway station, designed by Ernesto Basile – a 'pygmy', D.H. Lawrence called it. Sleeping cars still come clanking down from the far north. All that is missing are the barouches drawn by horses with head-dresses of coloured ostrich plumes and their handsome cheeky drivers. There is an extremely steep footpath leading from here to Taormina, which is 200 metres above sea-level. The old road for cars is very scenic, but one must beware of hairpin bends and oncoming coaches. Parking in Taormina is frustrating and exasperating, though some hotels, especially five-star, have space for customers. The hideous Lumbi car park always seems to be full up. Best to park at the foot of the *funivia* at Mazzarò, if driving from Messina.

In 1885 Maupassant wrote: 'If someone had to spend just one day in Sicily and asked "What ought I to see?", I would answer without hesitation, "Taormina".' For the view from **Taormina** is among the loveliest in Italy, if not in Europe, especially when the almond blossom hangs like a mist over the hills. The panorama is of course dominated by Etna, often topped with snow and nearly always smoking, and by the marvellous blue curve of the bay below. Away to the right are more mountains. The vegetation is lush with sub-tropical plants, the climate is delightful, nightingales sing. Goethe a hundred years before Maupassant remarked that Art had assisted Nature at Taormina, and that also is true. He was mainly speaking of the most famous view of all, framed by the Greco-Roman theatre. He would have been shocked though by the excrescence of some new buildings, especially at Giardini below, and by the main road on stilts, but there are still many ancient *palazzi* and churches preserved within the town, and some of the twentieth

century villas are in harmony with the old architecture, and have luxuriant gardens.

The town is in effect built on a long natural terrace – ‘anchored in heaven’, said Durrell – below a rocky pinnacle, on which is a castle and where once was the acropolis. Rising above is the hill of Monte Tauro, and beyond that is Monte Venere, 900 metres. When Andromachus in 358 BC brought refugees from Naxos here, there was already a settlement of Dionysius’s mercenaries. It was its tyrant Tyndarion who invited King Pyrrhus to Sicily in 278, and Taormina was one of the slaves’ strongholds in the First Slave War. Octavian deprived the town of its ‘allied’ status because of its support for Sextus Pompeius and colonised it anew. After Syracuse had fallen to the Saracens in 878, Taormina became the capital and held out until 962, when gory revenge was meted out. Count Roger took it in 1078, and in 1410 the Sicilian parliament met here to choose a successor to King Martin of Aragon. Thereafter it became an important base against pirates. Between 1676 and 1677 it was held by the French in a war with Spain. The fame of its setting increased with descriptions by eighteenth and nineteenth century travellers, and to John Henry Newman it was the ‘nearest thing to approaching Eden’. By the end of the nineteenth century it had developed in the words of Augustus Hare into a ‘fashionable loafing place’.

Taormina also achieved a kind of notoriety thanks to two German ‘baroni’, Otto Geleng, who arrived in 1863, and Wilhelm von Gloeden, who came in 1880 and whose photographs of naked shepherd boys in Grecian poses are now sold as postcards. Douglas Sladen’s joke about Taormina was that ‘nobody goes about naked, as might be expected from the photographs’. These pictures became so famous that Edward VII visited von Gloeden’s studio in 1906. In 1909 two energetic American ladies, Elizabeth Bisland and Anne Hoyt, had as a frontispiece for their travel book *Seekers in Sicily* a reproduction of a pair of

von Gloeden's more mature nudes, back view, with the title 'Demeter's well-beloved children'. Less exotic but nevertheless eccentric foreigners settled in Taormina such as Florence Trevelyan, who owned what is now the public gardens, and Mabel Hill, who revived the lace industry. Robert Kitson was among the best known of the many British residents. An artist himself, he got his friend Frank Brangwyn to decorate his villa and design furniture. Pictures of those days show herds of goats still being driven through the main street, and women carrying pitchers on their heads or spinning in doorways. The Albergo Timeo, next to the theatre, was once the grandest hotel, attracting royalties, who Hare complained had 'done so much to spoil Taormina'. (Later in the 1930s the Timeo became famous for its 'tea-dances'.) Robert Hichens, author of *The Call of the Blood* and *The Garden of Allah*, was the first to arrive at Taormina by automobile, in 1910.

D.H. Lawrence and his wife Frieda stayed here between 1921 and 1923, in spite of his adverse first impressions. A recent British benefactor, deserving more recognition, was Robert Pratt-Barlow. Greta Garbo was a yearly guest at the house of the wealthy American dietician Gayelord Hauser. Gloria Vanderbilt, Marlene Dietrich, Joan Crawford, Tennessee Williams and Roger Peyrefitte were among his other guests. In spite of the mass tourism that has now overtaken Taormina, especially between April and October, and in spite of the souvenir shops, there is somehow still a lazy mountain village charm about it even if there are no longer any herds of goats. 'Work at Taormina? But it's absurd!' said André Gide.

Taormina's popularity has meant drastic changes in access. Coming from the direction of Catania the first signposted road on the left takes us to the enormous and unprepossessing concrete car park (admittedly necessary) and then to Porta Catania and Piazza Sant' Antonio. From here there is a tunnel which goes the length of Taormina to

the Lumbi car park and the way down to the coast towards Messina. The old road is more of an adventure and useful for reaching those hotels which have parking facilities. This is Via Luigi Pirandello, which winds snakelike past banks of bougainvillea and the little fifteenth-century church of SS Pietro e Paolo, usually closed, and the belvedere that overlooks Isola Bella. Then after a short while we reach the Anglo-American church of St George, which was built in 1922. The terminal of the *funivia* from Mazzarò is near here too, as is Villa San Giorgio, built in 1908 for Colonel Shaw-Hillier by C.R. Ashbee, founder in England of the Guild of Handicrafts – some examples of its work being incorporated into the building's fabric.

Porta Messina, rebuilt in 1808, is at the end of Via Pirandello. Beyond is Piazza Vittorio Emanuele, on the site of the *agora* and for local people the hub of the town. On the right is Palazzo Corvaja, where the parliament met in 1410 in the time of that romantic figure Queen Bianca of Navarre. Begun in the twelfth century but mostly built in the fifteenth century, it has been restored recently. The crenellated front has a triple window with slender columns, and the bichrome decorations are characteristic of Taormina. Through a Gothic doorway we enter a courtyard, from which a stairway ascends to a landing decorated with bas-reliefs of scenes of the Creation and to the great hall, very restored. The church of Santa Caterina, seventeenth century, nearby is built partly on the Roman Odeon and partly on a Greek temple, traces of which can be seen inside. It has a marble statue of Santa Caterina, dated 1493. The painting of the Madonna and Saints is seventeenth century, by Antonio Alberti, called *Il Barbalonga*, of Messina. Other remains of the Odeon have been uncovered at the rear of the church. Behind the Carabinieri barracks an enormous Roman thermal establishment has been excavated.

Via Teatro Greco leads from this piazza, past the old

Albergo Timeo, now restored, to the famous theatre, Greek only in name, for it was entirely reconstructed in Roman times in the second century BC. It is the second largest classical theatre in Sicily after that of Syracuse, and one of the most perfectly preserved anywhere. The great and famous view is from the top of the *cavea* or auditorium. Goethe, sitting here and watching the 'huge, fuming, fiery mountains' surging up in the distance, decided that Etna was at that distance not forbidding but friendly. D.H. Lawrence on the other hand saw it as a 'wicked witch', her winds 'prowling like Circe's panthers'. From these heights one can also see the coast of Calabria, to Lawrence like a 'fire-opal' in the distance. The semi-circular *cavea* is carved out of the rock, 109 metres across. It is surprising that the Romans wanted to block out the stupendous landscape with such a monumental *scena* (stage), but now that part of the structure has crumbled away the view of Etna through the ruins has given inspiration to millions of artists and photographers. The foundations of the stage remain and one can see some of the bases of the row of columns of the portico that was in front of the *scena*. The five columns on the right were put there arbitrarily in a restoration in 1880. The acoustics have always been famous. Every summer a festival of music, theatre and cinema takes place in the theatre.

The main street, Corso Umberto I, is permanently closed to traffic (has to be, because of the crowds). Small stepped alleys run off it on both sides. On the left after a few yards Vicolo Naumachia leads down to the so-called Naumachia, really some sort of cistern, 122 metres long, but impressive all the same. The brick wall has niches which would have contained statues. Piazza Nove Aprile, lined with pink and white oleander trees and with smart cafés, is the favourite tourist spot, and with good reason, for the view of the sea and Etna is superb. (One warm night I could hardly bear to tear myself away from the sight of Etna erupting,

every few minutes sending up great geranium-coloured sprays into the blue – the hyperboles are catching – illuminating the snow cap.) The little church of Sant'Agostino (1486) is now the public library. San Giuseppe, also in the square and up some steps, is seventeenth century, with a richly decorated eighteenth century stuccoed interior. An archway called the Porta di Mezzo through the clock tower, reconstructed in 1679, on Greek foundations, leads into the medieval town. Continuing along the Corso we pass many small *palazzi* with Catalan-Gothic features, one of which (No. 154) has Roman columns incorporated. Flowers are everywhere. Nos. 147, 172 and 176 have elaborate portals. The church of San Giovanni di Malta (1533) is now used as a club for war veterans. Up some steps on the right is Palazzo Ciampoli with a portal of 1412. In this quiet area are some attractive private houses. On reaching the Piazza del Duomo we come to the Palazzo Municipale, in part seventeenth century.

The little battlemented cathedral is dedicated to San Nicolò. Like Palazzo Corvaja the stonework is left bare. Built in the thirteenth century it was altered in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and has side portals of those dates. The main portal is 1633, and there is a small rose window. The interior – a basilica – has three naves divided by columns of pink Taormina marble. Among the important paintings are a 'Visitation' by Antonino Giuffrè (1463) and a polyptych by Antonello de Saliba (1504). In the chapel to the right of the main altar there is a tabernacle of 1648 in the Mannerist style, and also a Gagini-style Madonna and Child.

The fountain in front of the cathedral dates from 1638 and is topped by a funny two-legged female centaur, the symbol of Taormina, surrounded by sea-horses. Steps next to the cathedral lead down to the Piazzale San Domenico, behind which is the former Dominican convent of San Domenico, now a luxury hotel on a par with Villa Igia.

in Palermo. During the war it was Kesselring's headquarters and badly bombed, but a number of original features from the fifteenth century convent survive, as well as the seventeenth–eighteenth century campanile. Via Roma below has magnificent panoramic views.

I cannot resist inserting here a piece of family history. Around 1900, R.C. Trevelyan, brother of G.M. Trevelyan and a poet, visited the then ruins of San Domenico by moonlight and found a Dutch girl there playing the violin. This so charmed him that he proposed marriage on the spot, and indeed later married her.

The Corso ends at Porta Catania. Near here is the Palazzo of the Dukes of Santo Stefano, a well restored thirteenth century building, used for concerts and exhibitions. There are Gothic mullioned windows in varying shapes and a particularly remarkable black lava and white stone frieze, Arab in concept. This area had much bomb damage in the war. Slightly to the north, on Via Dionisio I and near the road known as the Circonvallazione, is the crenellated tower of the Badia Vecchia, Norman in origin. The Circonvallazione, also at this point known as Via Leonardo da Vinci, brings us to what was the village of Cuseni. On the right near some cypresses is the villa built by Robert Kitson in 1907 (p. 385), with a lovely terraced garden, fountains and pools, very English. For nearly fifty years it was run as a guest-house by Kitson's niece, Daphne Phelps, who died in 2005; many famous writers and artists stayed here, one of the first being Bertrand Russell. This was where Kesselring himself was living in 1943. The road from here zigzags to the castle (398 metres). It would be best to check opening times before ascending on foot – though the view is the real attraction.

Via Roma below the Hotel San Domenico continues to Via Bagnoli Croce and the Villa Comunale or public gardens, which again have a 'paradisal' view. These gardens are also (unfairly) named after the Duca di Cesarò. He

was the Fascist minister who put up the money for their upkeep when they were expropriated, with the bait that his name would be thus commemorated. For they, as already mentioned, had once been the garden of Florence Trevelyan (more family history), who had married a local surgeon Salvatore Cacciola. She came first to Taormina in 1881 and died there in 1907. This wealthy and tough Northumbrian lady's bust was placed in the gardens in 1977 by the Taormina Rotary Club, and is a copy of the one on her tomb on Monte Venere high above the town. The word 'Hallington' under the bust relates to her house in Northumberland, which she left to G.M. Trevelyan when he was writing his Garibaldi books – she also called her house in Taormina 'Hallington Siculo', which must have been a tongue-twister for Sicilians.

Many ridiculous fantasies have been invented about Florence by local guides (also for that matter about Frieda Lawrence). The reality is that she was a typical English countrywoman, bookish and interested in natural history, far from the *mondaine* world attributed to her. She had married Dr Cacciola after he had cured one of her many dogs, Sole, a mastiff, whose grave ('True Family Friend and Protector') is in the dogs' cemetery in the gardens. Another grave is of 'Dear Fanny, poisoned 27 July 1899'. Most remarkable of all are her follies or 'beehives', as she called them, a jumble of architectural styles, used for watching birds and tea-parties. The guides of Taormina are a good example of Sciascia's remark that you can't live in Sicily without imagination.

Returning to Porta Messina we can continue north-east to the church of San Pancrazio, a seventeenth century building on the site of a temple to Serapis – the *cella* can be traced. The area beyond here known as Fontana Vecchia is of little interest, with so much new building. The rather dull house where the D.H. Lawrences lived has been rebuilt and is now at No. 15 Via Giuseppe di Vittorio; the

street leading up to it has been named Via David Herbert Lawrence and is the continuation of Via Fontana Vecchia. Durrell found its modesty 'quite fitting to the poems he [Lawrence] wrote here in the pure high tower of silence which is Taormina by night'.

The beach at Mazzarò is fairly exclusive, with recommendable hotels, as is the village. There is a stony beach in front of Isola Bella which also used to belong to Florence Trevelyan – she bequeathed it to her heirs on condition that it should never be built on or have trees planted on it (ignored, needless to say). She also owned part of the summit of Monte Venere and her crumbled tomb is still here, at Mendicino, looking out across the valley of the Alcàntara and the grey-green hills to Etna. A journey to Monte Venere is very much to be recommended for those with 'an abundance of time', as Baedeker used to say, and especially in spring. The road there from the Circonvallazione passes the sanctuary of the Madonna della Rocca and the dramatically situated village of Castelmola, which has a ruined castle with a better view than the one at Monte Tauro.

A return to Taormina from Mendicino, along rough roads, ex-mule tracks, could be via Monte Ziretto. Florence Trevelyan used to write about the 'carpets of wild cyclamen' on these mountains and the 'many petalled purple anemones'. Among the *scabiosa* and prickly pears on her island of Isola Bella she claimed that an unique type of lizard was to be found.

*Alcàntara gorge – Francavilla – Linguaglossa
Randazzo – Bronte – Adrano*

The drive from Taormina round the north and west slopes of Etna passes through sometimes beautiful scenery, less inhabited than on the east. Some shorter excursions can also be recommended, for instance to the woods near Graniti, to the **Alcàntara gorge**, or to Linguaglossa. Graniti has charm and is on an Arab foundation, with exceedingly narrow streets, alarming for motorists – though they can be bypassed. The Gola di Alcàntara has been compared to Fingal's Cave, with its bizarre formation of rocks, created by the Alcàntara river cutting through a prehistoric lava spill, so deep that instead of clambering down the steps one can even take a lift to it. Waterproof boots may be hired for wading through the greenish waters below. The cliffs are ribbed in extraordinary shapes, emphasised by shadows and the slanting sun, and in some places the gorge is dramatically narrow.

Francavilla di Sicilia is the first town of consequence, with a good view of Etna, especially from the fourteenth century convent of the Cappuccini, near the cemetery. The town grew up round its Norman castle, now in ruins. Its Chiesa Matrice has a portal of 1493.

The name Francavilla is said to derive from '*Franca veglia*', 'Franca wake up', words spoken by a lover to Franca, a nobleman's daughter, before they eloped. As we drive on the countryside changes. Lemon groves give way to almonds, olives, vines and wheat, and there are fields of asphodels. In April there can be a wonderful clarity and freshness in the air, with pine trees above contrasting with

the snows of Etna, puffing away. Then there is the genista. A medieval bridge crosses the Alcàntara. Near here, by a factory, are the pathetically neglected ruins of a Byzantine church. A winding road leads up to **Castiglione di Sicilia**, medieval in atmosphere and situated round another castle, commanding the valley of the Alcàntara. Castiglione was a *città regia*, royal city, under the Normans and Hohenstaufens but became *feudale* when given to Roger of Lauria (p. 374). In fact the village dates back to 496 BC when exiles came here from Naxos.

The road east from Castiglione (we are now in the province of Catania) brings us to **Linguaglossa**, developed as a skiers' resort but relatively quiet in warmer months, and with several ancient churches. The mountain road 'Mareneve' starts from here and passes through the Bosco di Linguaglossa and eventually reaches the Piano Provenzana, where the ski slopes begin.

West from Castiglione, there is a turning to the right at Passopisciaro for Moio Alcàntara and Malvagna where there is a ruined Byzantine chapel of the seventh or eighth century known as La Cuba.

The main road and the Circumetnea railway run close together. Approaching **Randazzo** we cross the lava flow of 1981, awesomely close to the town which however has always managed to escape destruction by Etna. Almost more amazing is the fact that the medieval appearance of Randazzo has survived so well after the furious bombardments by the Allies in 1943. 'Virtually destroyed' say the war historians, and approximately 1200 air sorties were made against it. Captured on August 13, it was one of the Germans' last main strongholds during their retreat. A fascinating point about the town is that its population (now about 12,000) is descended from three separate and rival strains – Greek, Latin and Lombard – and up to the sixteenth century different dialects were in use. Until 1916 the three main churches of Santa Maria, San Nicolò and San

Martino took it in turns to act as the Matrice, for periods of three years. Now Santa Maria, a somewhat severe-looking and fortress-like building, though handsome, built out of grey lava, has that honour in perpetuity.

Randazzo was founded in Byzantine times, and was the military base of Peter I of Aragon at the time of the 'Vespers'. In 1305 it was the summer residence of Frederick II of Aragon. Here also the river Alcàntara divides into two.

Entering by Via Regina Margherita we reach Piazza Loreto. On the right is Via Umberto I, which has several medieval *palazzi* and which brings us to Santa Maria, originally 1217–39 but altered in the sixteenth century and again (rather badly) in the nineteenth. A terrace overlooks the deep and wide cleft of the upper Alcàntara. There are three massive apses, and on the south side little Catalan-Gothic windows, also a sixteenth century portal above which in a lunette is a tiny marble Madonna of the Pisan school. There are three naves inside, separated by monolithic lava columns. The baptismal font is sixteenth century, of the Messina school. There are paintings by Giuseppe Velasquez, and a seventeenth century Crucifixion by Jean de Houbraken, some fragments of Byzantine-type frescoes, and, most interesting of all, in the right nave, a fifteenth century painting by Girolamo Alibrandi of Messina, entitled 'The city of Randazzo saved from the lava by the intercession of the Virgin'. The treasury is usually closed, unfortunately.

Via Duca degli Abruzzi leads to San Nicolò, fourteenth–fifteenth centuries but reconstructed in the sixteenth, badly damaged in 1943. The black lava decorations on the front are set against a white background. The truncated campanile dates from 1789. This is the largest of the churches at Randazzo and was the cathedral of the Lombards. The apse is original thirteenth century. A statue of San Nicolò is signed and dated 1532 by Antonello Gagini. There are other works by Antonello and Giacomo Gagini, and a font

by Angelo Riccio of Messina (1447). The treasury contains a magnificent processional cross of 1498 by Michele Gambino.

In front of this church is a peculiar statue known as Randazzo Vecchia (1737), damaged in 1943: a male figure with a serpent, an eagle and a lion, symbolising the union of the three ethnic groups of the town. The early sixteenth century building at Via Duca degli Abruzzi 57 is Palazzo Finocchiaro, an interesting combination of Gothic and Renaissance styles. Continuing along Via Duca degli Abruzzi we pass the former Royal Palace, now Palazzo Scala, where Queen Joanna of England wife of William II stayed, as did the Emperor Charles V. In the square at the end we have San Martino, thirteenth–fourteenth centuries, the most attractive of the churches at Randazzo but very badly damaged by the bombing – now restored. It has a fourteenth century crenellated campanile. Inside there is a marble font of 1447 in red marble by Angelo Riccio of Messina, also a Gagini-style Madonna della Misericordia. A polyptych is attributed to Antonello de Saliba (c. 1500).

Not far from the market and near Piazza Loreto, in Piazza Rabatà, is the Museo Vagliasindi, curiously situated in an old people's home. This has a number of archaeological objects, mostly discovered recently, in particular from a Greek necropolis. A warning: there might be problems about getting access.

Maletto, at 960 metres, is the highest town on Etna, and one of the highest in Sicily. It is noted for its wine, strawberries and *zumpognari*, players of pipes – also for its oaks and beech trees.

The name **Bronte** has romantic associations for the British because of the gift of the Duchy of Bronte to Nelson by King Ferdinand IV in 1799. Although the town was part of the *feudo*, the Duchy in fact was centred round the Abbazia di Maniace, which is twelve kilometres from the town (signposted 'Castello dei Nelson') and can just

as easily be reached on *statale* 120 from Randazzo. Bronte itself, important now for its pistachio growing industry, is not a particularly prepossessing place, though certainly more salubrious than travellers found it in the early nineteenth century. Lord Ossory who struggled here in 1832 by mule ('most provoking animals', and to Gladstone 'the Frankensteins of the animal creation') found it a 'pile of rude houses surrounded by lava beds'. The town was to be devastated by an eruption that year, as it had been in 1651 and was to be again in 1843. For all that some interesting buildings have survived.

Bronte, meaning Cyclops or Thunder (Lady Hamilton called Nelson the 'Duke of Thunder') was founded in 1520 by a decree of Charles V, retarding for a while the growth of neighbouring Randazzo. The Collegio Capizzi in Via Umberto I was built in 1774 and has a Rococo façade, and the Chiesa del Sacro Cuore next to it is of about the same date. In Piazza Cacini the Church of the Annunziata, built in 1535, has a richly decorated portal in yellow sandstone with a window of 1631 above and a lava cornice.

The people of Bronte have had a bloodthirsty reputation in the past, though arising from their desperate poverty. Until 1870 Nelson's family never lived at Maniace and the estate was run by bailiffs. Nelson himself was unable to visit it. Some historians have tried to put all the blame for the upheavals on this absentee landlordism – but it is not altogether justified. Hatred in Bronte was directed against anyone who had power, particularly the government. In 1820 there was an uprising involving beheadings and disembowellings. In 1848 amid more mayhem the bailiffs of Charlotte Lady Bridport (Nelson's niece, who had inherited the property) had to flee for their lives. Brigandage began to grow. The most notorious episode was in August 1860, when bloodlust took over and particularly disgusting atrocities were reported. At the request of the British consul at Palermo, Garibaldi sent Nino Bixio to suppress

the revolt. which was done with great severity, including summary executions: a lasting slur on his name.

The Duchy, of about 40,000 acres, had originally belonged to the Great Hospital of Palermo. The gift was a back-handed one, involving a history of unsolved litigation and debts, in addition to being a 'sour wilderness' which produced little income. Then there was a dispute within the Nelson family about legal ownership, and this was not resolved until 1847. Lady Bridport had already travelled out in 1835 by *lettiga*, a form of litter borne by those notoriously cantankerous Sicilian mules, and had not been impressed, vowing 'never to return to the island unless there was a revolution in England and even then would probably go elsewhere'. In 1861 she agreed to cede half the lands. An attempt was made later to market Bronte wine as a rival to marsala. Flour mills were built, orange, nut and pear groves planted. Apart from the period of the Second World War the family was virtually in continual residence at Maniace until 1981, when the 'castello' and the remains of the estate were sold to the *Comune* of Bronte. Previously to this there had been a number of enforced sales and expropriations.

A variation on Brydone's story of Anne Boleyn burning for ever inside Etna (p. 368) grew up at Bronte. Now it was Queen Elizabeth. She was supposed to have made a pact with the Devil, who collected her body on her death and carried it into the crater. On the way there he let slip one of her jewelled slippers, which was found by a peasant. At a royal *festa* at Palermo a mysterious lady appeared briefly before Nelson and gave him a casket in which was this slipper. Nelson carried the slipper in every battle as a talisman. But at Trafalgar the same lady reappeared and asked him where it was. He told her that he had given it to Lady Hamilton. 'Disaster,' said the woman. 'You will die in this battle.' And with that she disappeared.

The former Benedictine abbey of Maniace was built on

the site where George Maniakes's Byzantine army, with the help of Normans, defeated the Saracens in 1040. It was founded in 1174 by Queen Margaret, mother of William II, and William of Blois, the first abbot. Its church, dedicated to Santa Maria, was also built then. The Bridports in 1981 left behind English furniture (some of it quite good) and paintings of sea battles, also a decanter and drinking glasses which had been in Nelson's cabin at Trafalgar – not to mention portraits of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. The house has been successfully redecorated by the *Comune* – even with new bedspreads and chintz-like curtains, but there have been thefts involving some reorganization. The garden may not compare with, say, Ninfa outside Rome, but it is full of nostalgic atmosphere, and includes standard white and blue wistarias, fountains, box hedges, urns, lilac, and a pink chestnut, also palms. The garden front of the house is covered with Virginia creeper. In the courtyard there is a Celtic cross made with lava, dedicated to Nelson with the words 'Herói Immortali Nili'. The *Comune* has also restored the church, which has an ogival arch with quaintly carved figurative capitals. An icon within is said to have been brought from Greece by Maniakes.

The social heyday of Maniace was in the time of the diminutive Sir Alexander Nelson Hood, known to friends as 'The Bandbox'; he was equerry to Queen Mary in the 1920s, and succeeded as 5th Duke of Bronte in 1904. Among his guests were writers such as Robert Hichens, Mrs Lynn Linton, Marion Crawford, the sprightly Frances Elliot who wrote *An Idle Woman in Sicily*, William Sharp who wrote rhapsodic prose-poems under the name of Fiona MacLeod, and Edith Somerville of 'Somerville and Ross' fame, who came with Edith Smythe the composer; other famous visitors included D.H. Lawrence and Lady Ottoline Morell. William Sharp died at Maniace in 1905 and is buried under an Iona cross in the private graveyard,

kept locked. Both Kesselring and Alexander signed the visitors' book during the war – but it was later stolen.

The town of **Adrano**, with a past reputation as a haunt of bandits, was known from Norman times until 1929 as Aderno. Its present name derives from the Greek Adranon, founded by Dionysius I in about 400 BC. There was a temple near here dedicated to Adrano, the Sikel god of fire. The town supported Timoleon against Leontinoi, and was duly rewarded. The Normans built the great castle on this very strategic spot. Bombers blasted the town in August 1943, as the Allies battled to break through the Germans' Etna Line along the Dittaino river, down in the Catania plain.

The castle with its rectangular tower was built between 1070 and 1080, and reconstructed in the 1300s. The bastions at each corner are probably fifteenth century. Two lions guard the entrance. The Archaeological Museum is inside (opening times should be checked) and has many Palaeolithic and Neolithic objects recently found, especially in the Mendolito area. Via Roma has on one side the Giardino Vittoria with some fine trees and on the other the long stretch of the former monastery of Santa Lucia, founded in 1158 by Countess Adelaide. This last is now a school. In the centre of the building is the late Baroque church of Santa Lucia with an elegant elliptical interior in pale blue and gold. Of particular importance are the rich hangings in velvet and silk worked with silver thread by the nuns. The Chiesa Madre is Norman, but has in contrast a crude half-finished modern façade, by Carlo Sada. The interior is a Latin cross and has three naves divided by sixteen basalt columns traditionally held to be from the temple of Adranon. There are paintings by 'Zoppo di Gangi' (Gaspare Vazano), and a canvas of the Messina school in a great frame above the main entrance (Madonna and Saints), as well as a painted wooden cross of the fifteenth century. On Easter Sunday an elaborate '*Diavolata*' takes place, when the archangel Michael frees a

chained up angel representing Humanity, while the Devil acknowledges defeat. Then on August 3 we have the 'Flight of the Angel'. A child, dressed as an angel and tied to a rope between the Municipio and the castle, swings across to pay homage to the statue of San Nicolò Politi, Adrano's patron saint.

Some remains of the Greek walls can be seen on the east side of the town. About six kilometres to the north-west near the river Simeto are the few ruins of the Sikel town at Mendolito. A little further on, set in a wild landscape among lava crags, is the Bridge of the Saracens, so-called though possibly Norman – but more likely fourteenth century. It has arches of varying sizes, two of them ogival and each decorated with lava. South-west of Adrano on the other side of the Ponte del Maccarone and on the way to Carcaci is the aqueduct of the Princes of Biscari, with 31 arches, constructed first in 1761–66. To the north of this is an attractive foot-bridge with five arches and of much earlier construction. The river runs through a gorge and beyond is a pool where young people come to bathe in the chilly water.

*Centùripe – Troina – Nicosia – Sperlinga
Leonforte – Agira – Regalbuto*

A tour round the hill towns and *latifondi* of the province of Enna can be a most enjoyable experience – at the right time of year, that is (spring or autumn) and provided the weather is good. Several of these towns, on the edge of the Nèbrodi-Caroni mountain range, are between 800 and 1000 metres up, and the winds can be chilly. Nicosia is the best architecturally and one of the largest, but others like Troina also have an historical importance. A number of permutations can of course be made on this round but admittedly lengthy trip, taking in Troina, Nicosia, Leonforte and Centùripe, but they depend on whether the starting off point is Enna, Randazzo or Adrano, or even Catania (by way of the motorway A19, getting off at Catenanuova).

The *Comune* furthest south in the Nèbrodi ‘national park’ is sometimes considered to be **Centùripe**, across the valley of the Simeto from Adrano and with good reason known as the ‘balcony of Sicily’ – a phrase attributed to Garibaldi. It is in an extraordinary position, on a ridge 763 metres high, and on a clear day has one of the best views of Etna and the sea beyond. A tortuous road leads up to it from *statale* 121, which runs between Adrano and Regalbuto.

Being in such a strategic position, it is not surprising that Centùripe has suffered from invading armies. It was battered by the Allies in 1943, and its capture by the British was a turning point in the campaign. The rebuilding has not been inspired, but there are other reasons for visiting this town. There is the view, and it has long for instance

been famous for its lively Greek terracottas – even if the best examples are to be seen in the archaeological museums of Syracuse and Catania. To the Greeks it was known as Kentoripa, but there was a considerable Sikel settlement here before. In more modern times and until 1863 it was called Centorbi. Cicero wrote of its high standard of living, due to agriculture. It sided with Octavian during the war with Sextus Pompeius but suffered much damage then. In 1232 it rebelled against Frederick II, who destroyed both it and the castle, and deported the population to Augusta.

A curious incident followed Frederick's death, when a local mendicant called Giovanni Caltara claimed that he was the Emperor, who had never died but had gone to live in a cave on Etna for a penance. In due course Caltara established himself in the town, boldly calling himself Caesar and sending out edicts with a false seal. This was a period of interregnum and rival claims between Hohenstaufens and Angevins, so it was the Governor Riccardo Filangeri who marched into Centùripe and dealt with Caltara and his minions. Legend has it that Conradin of Hohenstaufen built the castle, hence the name of its site 'Il Castello di Corradino'. In fact this is probably a confusion over his supporter Corrado Capece having been besieged there in 1268 by Charles of Anjou, and who totally destroyed both the town and the castle. Centùripe afterwards was left in total ruin until it was rebuilt by Francesco Moncada in 1548.

The central piazza is fairly intact, and has a Chiesa Madre completed in the seventeenth century. An avenue of pines leads to the 'Castello', built on part of a Roman mausoleum which presumably was within the original castle, otherwise obliterated. Here the view is the most magnificent of all. Via Duca degli Abruzzi descends to the church of the Crocifisso, opposite which is the new museum which may or may not be open. This little museum contains recently excavated examples of Centùripe's individual

style of terracotta statuettes, usually and aptly described as *deliziose*. The ceramics of Kentoripa are also noted for their bright colours and for the relief work on vases, and there are specimens of these too. There is a marble head of Antoninus Pius, and a cast of the superb head of Augustus that was found here and is now in the Syracuse museum. A torso has a breast-plate with the head of Medusa on it. A word of warning though: it is well known that forgers of vases have been at work at Centùripe.

The remains of a large building of the Augustan period, believed to be connected with Imperial worship, have been found partly under the Crocifisso. The few ruins of the Forum are near here, but should be visited on foot, emphatically not by car. Off Viale Giuseppe Fiorenza in the *contrada* Panneria there is a Hellenistic house with traces of frescoes and a mosaic. In the Vallone dei Bagni there are remains of a Roman thermal establishment.

Beyond Centùripe is the 'naked interior of Sicily', in the words of Carlo Levi. The road from Ponte del Maccarone near Adrano to Troina, some 27 kilometres long, does indeed run through often desolate country, along a valley with a steep climb at the end, Troina being 1120 metres above sea-level. An alternative route, on *statale* 120 from Randazzo, which passes the turn to Maniace, is even more adventurous. Cesarò could be visited on the way. This has a stupendous panorama, and the ruins of a fourteenth century castle. A small lake, the Biviere di Cesarò, is a staging point for migrant birds.

Troina was another key point in 1943 and described at the time as 'the bloodiest battle since Gela'. It was captured by Americans on August 5, and there were 1600 German casualties. Streets on the Americans' arrival were blocked by rubble, and a 500 pound unexploded bomb was found in the Chiesa Matrice. The new arrivals were shocked by the plight of the civilians, many both wounded and starving. *Time* Magazine of August 23 quoted a Colonel

Horner: 'I never wanted to capture a town more than this in my life.' He then made a helpless gesture, adding 'But now ...' and was unable to finish the sentence.

Troina, on a Sikel site, has been variously identified with Enghyan, Herbita or Tyrakinai. It was taken in 1062 by Count Roger, who made it his headquarters and founded a bishopric there. But the Byzantine Christians who had supported him were soon enraged by the crude ways of the Normans and joined up with the Saracens. For four months in icy winter weather Roger himself and his wife Judith, first cousin of William the Conqueror, with 300 Norman soldiers were besieged in the town. John Julius Norwich describes how the royal pair had one blanket between them. The unfortunate Judith, a contemporary has said, had 'only her tears to quench her thirst'. In 1088 Roger met Pope Urban II here, and mass was celebrated in the Cathedral that Roger had founded in 1062, now the Chiesa Madre, where not much of the original Norman work is visible, except in the campanile and the castle – the campanile was in fact part of the Norman castle. The church, dedicated to the Virgin, was built between 1078 and 1080; it is divided into three naves by columns which include some of the old marble. The baptismal font is supported by *putti*, and on the first column on the left there is a wooden crucifix of 1512. In the transept there is a fifteenth century Madonna and Child in the Byzantine style, and the Archangel Michael dated 1512. There is a very grand Baroque bier or *vara* for carrying the effigy of San Silvestro in procession (1736). But the real treasures are in the vestry: a crozier and the bishop's ring, presented by Roger and with his crest on it. The crypt is impressive and actually represents the transept of the original Cathedral, which in effect could be the first Norman building in Sicily.

In spite of the destruction in 1943 the town still has a strongly medieval atmosphere. Narrow alleys and steps

straggle off the main street, Via Conte Ruggero. In Via Vittorio Emanuele the sixteenth century church of the Annunziata has a majolica dome, and San Silvestro contains the fifteenth century tomb of the saint with a recumbent effigy believed to be by Domenico Gagini.

From Troina excursions can be made on foot or horse-back into the high Nèbrodi, where wild peonies are among the botanical surprises. Seven kilometres to the north-east among woods and pastures is the Lago di Ancipa, a reservoir formed in the valley of the Troina river. On a clear day a climb up Monte Pelato (1567 metres) is certainly recommended for its glorious panoramic view towards Etna. With luck you may spot herds of black pigs indigenous to the Nèbrodi (delicious *prosciutto!*). A map of the area is advisable in case of mists and rain.

Cutting westwards along *statale* 120 a side road branches off, under the ominously named Monte Femmina Morta, to **Gagliano Castelferrato**. Gagliano, because of its remoteness, and its attractive situation spread out under a jagged crest, is worth a visit, but it was badly knocked about in 1943 after a 'hell of a scrap' in the battle for Troina. The castle was considered to be almost impregnable – hence *ferrato* which means 'well protected' or 'proof against' – but not much of it is left. The church of San Cataldo, with its multi-coloured campanile, was begun in the fifteenth century. Especially important is its wooden ceiling of 1666. It has a sixteenth century painting of the Last Supper by an unknown artist and a tabernacle of the Gagini school. There is also an old wooden *vara* with more recent silver replacement. The silver chalices and monstrances are very fine.

The small windswept village of **Cerami** on *statale* 120 has a dwindling population. It is on a Bronze Age site and was the scene of a fierce battle between Normans and Saracens in 1063. The Chiesa Madre, dedicated to San Ambrogio, is rather disappointing. Begun in the sixteenth

century, it has recently been restored. The church of Sant'Antonio has a magnificent portal, though damaged in the 1967 earthquake – as one soon observes. The portal of San Sebastiano, begun in 1612, has a less grand but nevertheless fine portal, also damaged. Inside there is a rather coy statue of St Sebastian with gold-painted hair.

A little way after Cerami a zigzag road on the right brings us to Capizzi, 1100 metres up, with a *belvedere*. The church of San Giacomo has a Madonna attributed to Antonello Gagini, and the Chiesa Madre has a Gothic portal of 1234.

Statale 120 continues through mainly treeless country to **Nicosia**. Spoilt on the outskirts by inferior modern building, it is topped by the remains of its castle rebuilt by Count Roger when he captured the town in 1062. This is another strategic and obviously very defensible spot, also important for having been on the main mountain route from Palermo to Messina (known as *Via Messina Montagna*, the other being *Via Messina Marina*). There was a succession of immigrants from Lombardy and Piedmont, which even now has left its mark on the local dialect. Charles V came here on a triumphant visit after his victory in Tunisia. The town was captured by Americans early in the 1943 campaign, and was the scene of General Patton's notorious 'slapping incident', when he hit a G.I. in hospital for supposed cowardice.

Nicosia suffered from a landslide in 1757 and the earthquake of 1967, this last accounting for the many cracked and crumbling *palazzi* in the crowded medieval streets. The Cathedral of San Nicola in Piazza Garibaldi has a beautiful fourteenth century ogival portal, with floral motifs and sandstone lions, sadly decapitated, and a loggia of six arches. Its campanile with its double, triple and rose windows was originally fourteenth century. There are many objects of interest inside the Cathedral, also some polychrome decoration. Near the entrance is the funerary

monument of Alessandro Testa (died 1753) by Ignazio Marabitti. The splendid marble pulpit of 1566 in the central nave is attributed to Gian Domenico Gagini: here is represented the Risen Christ, the Baptist, St Paul on the left and St Peter and St Nicholas on the right. The font and the Madonna in the south transept are both Gagesque. Over the altars on the south side are paintings by Pietro Novelli and an outstanding 'Martyrdom of St Placidius' by Giacinto Platania. To the right of the high altar is yet another gruesome crucifix by Fra' Umile de Petralia. The carved wooden stalls in the presbytery are by Giovanni Battista and Stefano Li Volsi (c. 1622), as is the organ case (note King David playing the zither). The painting of St Bartholomew is attributed to Ribera (known to Sicilians as Lo Spagnoletto), and the St Sebastian is attributed to Salvator Rosa. There is also a fascinating display of photographs of the fifteenth century paintings on the nave ceiling. If perchance the sacristy is open, have a look at the sixteenth century silver censer, pricked with spires, pinnacles and cusps.

Opposite the Cathedral is the eighteenth century bishop's palace. Via Francesco Salamone leads past various eighteenth century palaces, No. 37 (Palazzo Salinella) being fantastically decorated with grotesques, to the convent of San Vincenzo Ferreri, where the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries church attached has frescoes by Guglielmo Borremans (1717). From Largo San Vincenzo we continue to the handsome Baroque church of Santa Maria Maggiore, begun in 1767 by Giuseppe Serafini and moored like a huge ship to the castle rock. At the east end there is a great marble ancona by Antonella Gagini (1512), worth climbing up to see (and it is a climb). On the left, in a pretty chapel, there is a Gagesque Madonna. And in the sacristy we have the original 'throne' of Charles V. The bells of the campanile fell down in 1967 and are now displayed next to the façade. Near the west door are some houses

built into the rock face. There is a good view of the mountains from here, including the castle and the church of San Salvatore, with modern buildings in the foreground.

Among other churches at Nicosia are the Carmine in Via Li Volsi, which has a group of the Annunciation attributed to Antonello Gagini (1525), and in the same street San Benedetto, fourteenth century, which has a wooden statue of its saint by Stefano Li Volsi. San Biagio nearby in the Via Randazzo has eighteenth century stucco work, five paintings by Giuseppe Velasquez, a triptych by Antonello Gagini and wooden sculpture by the two Li Volsi.

Edith Wharton came to Nicosia, and walked along 'unknown roads' by the river Salso: a 'stupendous journey, dotted with all sorts of marvels', some of these marvels no doubt being the troglodytic caves and farmsteads built to look like monasteries, not to mention the wild flowers, ablaze in spring.

A few miles west of Nicosia is **Sperlinga**, a truly romantic sight. A cone of grey rock with a turret on top rises improbably from the rolling countryside. Around it are clustered a few mean houses, also some caves which until a few years ago were inhabited. In Sicily Sperlinga is well known as the only place which supported the French in the 'Vespers' rising. A Latin inscription inside the castle commemorates this: '*Quod Siculis placuit sola Sperlinga negavit*' i.e. 'only' Sperlinga would not agree to what the rest of Sicily wanted. Indeed it is (questionably) claimed that the present inhabitants still have a dialect with a French accent.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Sperlinga belonged to the mighty Ventimiglia family, who sold it to the Natoli and who in turn converted it into a baronial residence. Part was demolished as unsafe in 1914, and the rest was left to the elements. However, in the 1970s it was acquired by the *Regione* of Sicily, and restorations were put in hand. Some caves have been turned into a modest ethnographic museum. Steep steps are carved out of the

rock leading to a bridge where once there was a draw-bridge. There was also a series of booby traps, including trap doors for the unwary, who would be sent hurtling into the pits below. A labyrinthine complex of dungeons carved out of the rock was later turned into stables. From the battlements there is a huge view of untamed mountain country and farmland.

Striking south from Nicosia on another winding road we reach **Leonforte**, perched on a hilltop with shimmering cornfields below in early summer. It was here that in May 1833 John Henry Newman lay delirious with fever in a 'miserable inn' – the best inn having been commandeered by a Sicilian duke and his retinue. He had arrived by mule from Catania via Adrano and Regalbuto. It was a pity that he had no introduction to the Branciforte family, who founded Leonforte in 1610 and built the great battlemented palace, where he could have stayed, and which still stands like a run-down barracks, with the old stables – an ex-riding school – next to it. The piazza in front of the palace is not unlike a private courtyard. To the south is the church of San Giovanni Battista, built by the Branciforte in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, grand but relatively plain by Sicilian standards: a cool resting place after a long hot drive. The columns are of brown marble, and there are a number of wooden statues. From here a very steep path leads to Leonforte's most famous monument, the Granfonte, built in 1651 by Nicolò Placidio Branciforte and which can be reached also along Via Garibaldi. This jolly Baroque fountain in honey-coloured stone has twenty-four jets of water flowing into a trough, serving a double purpose, a *pointe de vue* or folly, and a place where washerwomen could work and their husbands bring mules and donkeys to drink. Behind stretches a glorious view in the direction of Enna. On the north side of the town in Via Cavallotti is the church of the Cappuccini, built in 1630. The tomb of the founder, Nicolò Branciforte, lies

before the high altar. In the chapel on the right is the massive black sarcophagus, supported by lions, of his wife Caterina. There are Gagesque statues and above the high altar is a large altar painting by Pietro Novelli, 'The Calling of St Matthew', including the artist's self-portrait on the left. The crypt is cold and rather grim, with more Branciforte tombs. In the sacristy there is a pine wardrobe with inlays. Unfortunately there have been some thefts from this church.

The pleasant little town of **Assoro** is of ancient origin, and parts of megalithic walls have been uncovered. It was a Greek colony, then a Roman one. A temple is known to have been raised to its tutelary river-god Crisa. The town was captured by the Arabs in 939, and by the Normans in 1061. Its Chiesa Madre, dedicated to San Leone (hence the name of Leonforte close by), was probably fourteenth century in origin. The inner doorway is Catalan in style, and the columns inside are twisted, which is unusual. There is a very fine marble ancona of 1515 supposedly by Antonello Gagini, and a font of 1514. A painted crucifix of the late fifteenth century hangs from the ceiling of the nave. The six wooden statues are sixteenth century. In the sacristy there is a sixteenth century enamelled silver and gold processional cross by Vincenzo Archifel. Near the church is Palazzo Valguarnera with a balcony supported by grotesque heads.

The village of Nissoria on *statale* 121 has no monuments that need detain us, but the country around is attractive with olive groves and vineyards. Pasta and olive oil are made here.

Next comes **Agira** on another lofty cone above the river Salso, and on the site of the important Sikel town of Agrion. According to Diodorus, who was born here, it was flourishing in the twelfth century BC. In Greek times under Timoleon of Syracuse the population is supposed to have numbered 20,000. A shrine to Herakles was famous, and

games were held in his honour. Now San Filippo il Siriaco (St Philip the Syrian) is revered instead. The tradition is that he was sent to Agira by St Peter to drive out devils from pagan sites, though another theory is that he was living in the fifth century AD and may be confused with the San Filippo who was a Father of the Desert. In any case Agira is important in the history of Christianity in Sicily, and many miracles were claimed. It was also prosperous in Arab times, as one might guess from the structure of the old town with its maze of alleys and courtyards. The Normans built the castle, of which little remains, though from a distance its silhouette adds to the general panorama. In 1187 several monks from Jerusalem took refuge here.

Agira has many churches, mostly sixteenth century and rebuilt after the earthquake of 1693, and mostly now in poor repair. San Filippo in Largo Mercato has paintings by Giuseppe Velasquez and a crucifix by Fra' Umile da Petralia, contrasting with a painting of St Agatha by Olivio Sozzi. There is a fifteenth century triptych in the left nave. In the crypt there is a sixteenth century recumbent statue of San Filippo. The church of San Antonio di Padova in Piazza Garibaldi was originally built in 1549 and has a fine wooden statue of San Silvestro, fifteenth century, and a painting on marble attributed to Borremans in a silver frame. A steep climb brings us to Santa Margherita, with a rather plain façade; the choir stalls are late eighteenth century, and there is a nicely painted door (1793) leading into the chapel of the Immacolata. On leaving the church, we pass under an archway, then up and up until we finally reach the sixteenth century San Salvatore, with its mainly Gothic campanile. In a side chapel there is a fifteenth century marble reredos. An Aragonese portal was from the Oratory of Santa Croce, previously a synagogue. Driving from here through the exceedingly narrow streets can be alarming, but at the top there are tremendous views of the Monti Erei. Then at last we reach Santa Maria Maggiore,

which is a real delight. The keys can be obtained from a house opposite. Many of the Norman features remain. The two naves are divided by arches on columns with decorated capitals. There is an outstanding sixteenth century crucifix, double-sided. In an attractive little side chapel stands a seventeenth century polychrome statue of the Madonna.

Agira was captured by the Canadians in 1943. Their cemetery, with 490 graves, is near Lake Pozzillo and beautifully kept.

Lake Pozzillo, six kilometres long, is in fact a reservoir, formed by the Salso and popular for water sports. The next town, Regalbuto, was also captured by Canadians. Its name derives from the Arab *rahl* meaning village or hamlet. In 1261 it was razed to the ground by the inhabitants of Centùripe for supporting the Hohenstaufen dynasty, but rebuilt by Manfred. Mostly an industrial town, it is not a great interest for the traveller, except for its succulent trout from Lake Pozzillo. Santa Maria della Croce, partially destroyed in 1943, has been faithfully rebuilt, with its many columned façade. It stands in Piazza Vittorio Emanuele, where there are several palm trees. In Piazza Re the Chiesa Madre, completed in 1764, is notable for its curved façade. From Regalbuto there is a good road which ends at Catenanuova, where we can join the A19 motorway to Catania or Enna.

On what is now *statale* 121 Newman, already weak and ill as he approached **Regalbuto** from the east, was still able to appreciate the beauty of the May scenery, noting in his diary: 'Hills thrown about on all sides, and covered with green corn, in all variety of shades, relieved by the light raw sienna of the hills. Deep valleys, many trees, high with towns on the top. Etna behind us.' All this is still true. And what a superb surprise the sudden view of Etna can be.

Enna – Calascibetta – Caltanissetta

The rape of Persephone (otherwise Kore or Proserpina) by Hades (Dis or Pluto), King of the Underworld, is one of the best known of the ancient myths, and it was by the lake of Pergusa near Enna that this is believed to have happened. Milton wrote in *Paradise Lost*:

That faire field
of Enna, where Prosperin gathring flours
Her self a fairer Floure by gloomy Dis
Was gathered, which cost Ceres all that pain
To seek her through the world.

Persephone's mother was Demeter (Ceres), goddess of fertility, the earth mother, sister of both Zeus (Jupiter) and Hades. After wandering in search of her daughter she learnt the terrible truth and in her fury refused to allow the Sicilian land to bear fruit. Zeus intervened – the matter was complicated by Persephone eating a pomegranate seed – and Persephone was allowed to spend eight months of the year with her mother, her arrival symbolising spring, the germination of plants and blossoming of trees. In the winter she returned to being Queen of the Shades, where she reigned formidable and majestic.

It would seem that even before the Greeks an earth goddess was worshipped in this fertile country. **Enna** or Henna, built on such a fantastic isolated crag, visible for miles around, was a natural stronghold – *inexpugnabilis*, Livy was to call it – and thus it had a double significance, military and sacred. A temple to Demeter was erected here

in 480 BC by Gelon, a counterpart to the shrine of that other great goddess in the west of the island, Aphrodite at Eryx (Erice).

Enna was captured by Dionysius I in 397 BC and again by Agathocles in 307 BC. The Carthaginians took it by a subterfuge in 259, but in 258 the Romans recovered it. The first of the two great slave revolts in Sicily, in 139, started at Enna under the leadership of Eunus, a Syrian possibly of noble extraction, certainly regarded as a magician and prophet. The revolt quickly spread throughout Sicily, even beyond, and Eunus proclaimed himself king with the name of Antiochus. He won control of Morgantina and Tauromenium (Taormina), and is said to have commanded 200,000 men. He even minted coins. An eruption of Etna in 135 seemed to confirm his promise of divine support. The Romans besieged Enna for two years, and finally Eunus was caught in humiliating circumstances hiding in a cave with his servants. Thousands of his followers were killed. Enna was not so involved in the second slave revolt of 104, and this time the gods of Palici (p. 338) were invoked for help. Morgantina became the main centre of the fighting, and some of the captured slaves were sent to Rome to fight wild beasts in the arenas. Spartacus's famous slave revolt of 73–71 BC was on the mainland, and planned to spread to Sicily – Plutarch quoted Spartacus as having said that 'only a little fuel is needed to rekindle the Sicilian fire'.

The Byzantines fortified *Castrum Hennae*, as the Romans called it. In AD 859 after another long siege it was captured by the Saracens, by means of soldiers climbing one by one up a sewer. Again huge slaughter followed. The old buildings were destroyed, and women were sent as slaves as far away as to Baghdad. Now the town was known as *Kasr Janna*, *kasr* being the equivalent of *castrum*, and this was later Christianized as *Castrogiovanni*, a name which was retained until 1927 when it reverted to Enna, becoming the capital of a province. It was one of the main

places of Arab resistance against the Normans, but surrendered eventually in 1087. New importance was assumed at the time of Frederick II of Aragon, who convened his first parliament here, calling himself king of Trinacria. He also rebuilt the Castello di Lombardia (originally dating, it would seem, from the time of Emperor Frederick of Hohenstaufen) and the so-called Torre di Federico. Enna suffered bomb damage in 1943. Because of its commanding position the British decided it was more sensible to bypass Enna, but this annoyed the Americans, who were the ones who captured it.

The catch-phrase about Enna is that it is the navel of Sicily. Often the town seems to be cloaked in mist or caught up in swirling winds, but this somehow helps to foster the aura of ancient mystery. It hardly comes as a surprise to learn that the processions in Holy Week are so famous. The town is divided into brotherhoods, *la confraternita*, each with their different colours, and representatives parade through the streets hooded in the Spanish manner, with symbols of the Passion – a live cockerel, a crown made of thorns. On Good Friday they carry the Madonna dell'Addolorata and an effigy of the dead Christ lying in a glass coffin, and the two are made to meet on Easter Sunday outside the cathedral. A form of harvest festival also takes place on July 2, when another Madonna, the Madonna della Visitazione, is carried in a procession of white-robed barefoot *confrati* (also known as *i nudi*) to the former hermitage of Montesalvo – the very spot, it is claimed where festivals in Roman times were held in honour of Ceres, Proserpina and Bacchus. Just as lamps were lit for Ceres in remembrance of her search for Proserpina, so candles are now presented to the Madonna.

There are various other ceremonies at Enna which would seem to hark back to pagan times and the cult of Demeter-Kore/Ceres-Proserpina. But the lake of Pergusa is

a dreadful disappointment for those seeking a link with the ancient myth. The water is brackish and a motor-racing track runs round the perimeter (there is a 'Rally Proserpina' – oh dear). Once there were meadows where hounds were supposed to have lost the scent of game because of the fragrance of flowers, and where fields 'yielded a hundred-fold'. Nothing much of this remains, though wild narcissi do sprout up in the spring. On the south side there is a cave from which the god Hades-Pluto is supposed to have emerged in his chariot drawn by black horses, but it is not worth looking for. Some excavating, it is true, of prehistoric remains has been done in the area of the hill called Cozzo Matrice. The many modern holiday houses and hotels that surround the lake are meanly built. It just has to be acknowledged that the inhabitants of a large inland town like Enna need to find somewhere for their recreation, and that the undoubtedly popular race-track has a certain international reputation, attracting badly needed visitors. All the same, it is enough to make sensitive folk despair.

Via Roma is the main street running right through the town, branching off to the west at Piazza Matteotti. The part that goes to the east from Piazza Vittorio Emanuele and on to the Castello di Lombardia is much the most interesting as well as being the most prosperous. The Catania–Palermo *autostrada* runs close to the north of Enna. The branch road off it can eventually bring us to Piazza Matteotti, but on a visit of one day it is best to take the turning on the left along the Panoramica Casina Bianca and then left again up Viale Caterina Sàvoia. This ends outside the Castello di Lombardia, where there might be a possibility of parking, and which is not far from the cathedral and the Alessi museum, the most important sights. But there are a great number of good churches to be seen in the city, and with Piazza Armerina, Morgantina and the hill towns of the province reasonably close, Enna is much

to be recommended as a centre for a few days' exploring. What is more, in the evenings Via Roma in the upper town is closed to traffic and the scene of an animated *passeggiata*, worth experiencing.

The Castello di Lombardia, the citadel of Enna, is one of the largest and best preserved castles in Sicily. Its name derives from the fact that in Norman times there was a Lombard colony settled nearby. Originally it had twenty towers. Now there are only six, some of them stumps but the most spectacular being Torre Pisana. A memorial to the dead of the First World War in the piazza outside is by Ernesto Basile. Beneath the battlements there is a modern statue of the slave Eunus. The first courtyard of the castle has a permanent open-air theatre. There was a small church here, possibly on the site of a temple of Juno. The second courtyard is laid out with trees and grass and also had a church, of which traces can be seen. There are a few rock tombs. The third courtyard has more atmosphere. Again there are remains of a church. To the left next to Torre Pisana are what were the royal quarters, occupied by Frederick II of Aragon. The Torre Pisana has a staggering view, immense and wild, in every direction, to Etna and to Calascibetta and Lake Pergusa.

North-east of the castle is the Rock of Ceres where once on these rugged incised stones stood the temple of the mighty goddess but of which virtually nothing remains. Here stood two colossal statues, of Ceres and Triptolemus, the inventor of the plough and indeed of agriculture. According to Cicero the statue of the former was so awe-inspiring that people believed that they were seeing the goddess herself.

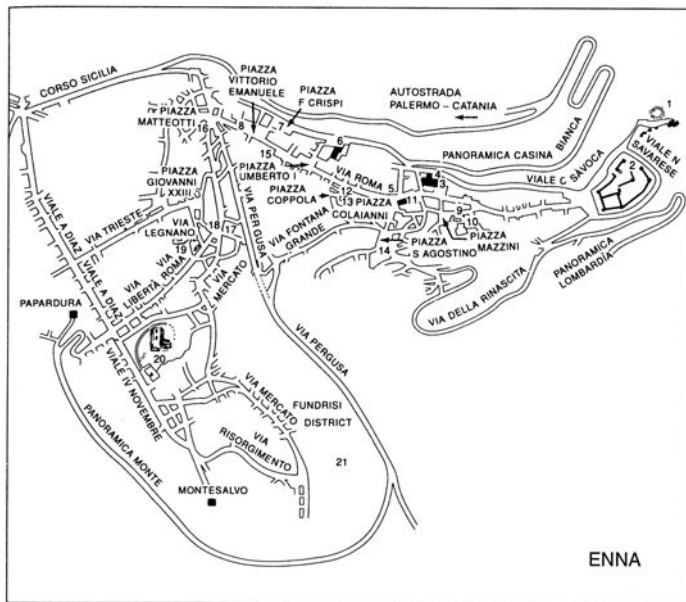
The Cathedral was founded in 1307 by Queen Eleonora, wife of Frederick II of Aragon, but was partly destroyed by a fire in 1446. Reconstruction proceeded at a slow pace and continued throughout the sixteenth century. The transepts, including the Porta Santa, and the polygonal apses

are virtually all that remain of the original building. The main entrance, through a narthex and beneath the bell-tower built later, is somewhat ponderous. On the south side of the Cathedral, built in pale yellow tufa, are two doorways, one designed in 1574 by Jacopino Salemi of Messina with a bas-relief of St Martin and the beggar, and the other the Porta Santa. This last, Gothic with a zigzag frieze, was blocked up in 1447, to commemorate a jubilee in that year, to launch the rebuilding of the Cathedral, under the auspices of Pope Eugenio IV.

The interior is a Latin cross, with three naves divided by black basalt columns, with carved bases and capitals, the first two at the west end being by Gian Domenico Gagini, completed in 1560. The two beautiful holy water stoups are mid sixteenth century. The organ loft, with its series of figures of the Apostles, is by Scipione di Guido, who also carved the magnificent choir stalls between 1588 and 1590 (though panels were added in 1592 by Giuseppe di Martini). The three apses still have their original ribbed vaulting. The main apse has late sixteenth century stucco work representing the 'Crowning of the Virgin' by Pietro Russo. The one on the right is gorgeously decorated with polychrome marble; its altar has twisted columns and a painting of the 'Visitation' attributed to Filippo Paladino. Here in a niche is the revered statue of the Madonna della Visitazione which is carried in its glittering golden bier in the procession of July 2 – this statue according to tradition was bought in Venice in 1412. The apse on the left by contrast has been recently restored to reveal the simplicity of its original structure.

The main altar is silver, depicting the Last Supper. The great painted wooden cross that hangs before it is by an unknown artist and dated at 1500; it is referred to in Enna as the 'Christ with three faces' because the expression changes according to where one stands. In the presbytery are four large canvases by Filippo Paladino painted

From Enna to Caltanissetta



- | | |
|---|-------------------------|
| 1 Rock of Ceres | 11 Santa Chiara |
| 2 Castello di Lombardia | 12 S Guiseppe |
| 3 Cathedral | 13 S Giovanni Battista |
| 4 Museo Alessi | 14 S Agostino |
| 5 Palazzo Pollicarini | 15 San Marco |
| 6 S Giovanni | 16 S Cataldo |
| 7 Proserpina Fountain | 17 Anime Sante |
| 8 S Francesco d'Assisi | 18 S Tommaso |
| 9 Palazzo Varisano
(Archaeological Museum) | 19 Chiesa del Carmine |
| 10 S Salvatore | 20 Torre de Federico II |
| | 21 Porta di Jannuscuro |

between 1612 and 1613: the 'Visitation', the 'Presentation of Jesus', the 'Presentation of Maria', and the Immacolata'. The paintings in the first four chapels on the south side of the nave are by Guglielmo Borremans, who also painted the 'Madonna del Pilar' in the transept and the 'Dream of Constantine' over the fourth north altar. The extraordinary pulpit in white marble inlaid with coloured stones is by Francesco Frasoni of Carrara (1605). It stands on a Roman pedestal, possibly from the temple of Ceres. The baptistery has a marble font of 1596, added to in 1689. The wrought iron screen is supposed to have come from the harem in the castle. In fact it was made in 1544 and embellished in succeeding centuries. In the sacristy there are wardrobes magnificently carved in walnut with Biblical scenes, completed in 1704 and known as the *casciarizzo*.

The exterior of the three apses can be seen from the Alessi museum which is housed in a building at the east end of the Duomo. The museum is named after *Canonico* Giuseppe Alessi (1774–1837), naturalist, archaeologist, geologist, historian, who left his enormous and varied collection, including paintings, to his brother to be passed on to the Church. As it happened, the Church was forced to buy it in 1860, and the collection was first put on display in 1862. The museum has now been rearranged – very well – and includes the cathedral's treasury, one of the best in Sicily if not in Italy and of awesome richness. The basement has a collection of Sicilian vestments, embroidered with silver and gold thread and decorated with coral. The picture gallery is on the ground floor. Outstanding are two panels from a polyptych, of St John the Baptist and St John the Evangelist, by Antonello Crescenzo (1504) known as *Il Panormito*, a Madonna and Child by an unknown artist from Bruges, a late sixteenth century *Pietà* by an unknown Spanish artist, and the 'Mystic Marriage of St Catherine' by Antonio Spatafora (1585). There are also icons and paintings of harbour scenes similar in style to Canaletto.

The Cathedral treasury is on the first floor. It is hard to decide which is the most remarkable: the six foot silver monstrance by Paolo Gili (1536) or the jewel encrusted silver-gilt and enamelled crown of the Madonna della Visitazione, created by Leonardo and Giuseppe Montalbano with Michele Castellani (1653). There is also a most beautiful jewel of a pelican wounding itself. The silver *raggiato* (literally 'emitting rays') silver-gilt monstrance by Salvatore and Antonio Mercurio (1768–72) is decorated with 270 rubies and 663 diamonds. Six silver candlesticks are by Nibilio Gagini and Pietro Rizzo (1595–99).

The gallery of the museum has *Canonico Alessi's* important collection of over 4000 Greek, Punic, Roman and Byzantine coins, all arranged topographically. There is a large collection of Greek vases and of Greek and Roman oil-lamps. Alessi also collected some lead missiles used in the First Slave War. Finally there are 31 Egyptian *ushabtiu*, funerary figurines, found in Sicily and an important evidence of an Egyptian presence in Sicily.

On the opposite side of Piazza Mazzini in Palazzo Varisano is the Archaeological Museum, opened in 1985. This is a fairly sober collection compared to the Alessi but well arranged. There are five rooms. The first has finds from Calascibetta and Capodarso, a Hellenised native settlement where excavations began in 1974. The second concerns Enna itself, with Greek, Roman and medieval ceramics, the third is dedicated to Pergusa, the fourth to Rossomano. This last room has in particular an unusual chain-like bronze necklace of the seventh century BC, an Attic *krater* of the sixth century BC decorated with swans and an owl, and some scarab beetles in vitreous paste indicating Phoenician-Punic ties in the sixth century BC. The fifth room is used for temporary exhibitions.

The church of San Salvatore behind the museum is on the site of a private chapel founded in 1261 but rebuilt in 1500. Rich in stucco and recently restored in yellow and

white, it contains the effigy of the dead Christ carried in procession on Good Friday. The key to the church can be obtained from the *barbiere* opposite. The coffered wood ceiling is magnificent, and there is a fine majolica floor. There is a crucifix of 1262, and a statue of Santa Barbara of 1613. Continuing down Via Roma we come to Piazza Colaianni with its statue by Ettore Ximenes of Napoleone Colaianni, famous as the campaigner for better conditions for sulphur workers. Palazzo Pollicarini on the right has Catalan-Gothic features and an outside staircase. The church of Santa Chiara, seventeenth century, is now a war sacrum and has an interesting majolica pavement of 1852, one scene depicting a steamship and another the defeat of the Muslims. The church of San Giuseppe, with its tall Baroque façade, has a silver altar designed by Vincenzo Natoli in 1718 and an early nineteenth century group of the Holy Family. Above the sacristy door is a painting of the Deposition by Antonio Mercurio; this church, so we are there informed, is a 'true laboratory for spiritual revival'. Leading off Piazza Coppola at the beginning of Via Candrilli is the fifteenth century tower of San Giovanni Battista with a Gothic window inserted. At the end of Via Candrilli is the Piazza San Agostino with the plain eighteenth century church of that name, containing a Madonna of the Gagini school and an 'Adoration of the Magi' by Pietro D'Asaro of Racalmuto.

Via Roma passes through Piazza Umberto I. To enter San Marco one must ring the bell of the convent on the left for the key (the nuns are enclosed Carmelites). This early seventeenth century church was built on the site of a synagogue. The interior has stucco decorations and a pretty gallery.

Piazza Vittorio Emanuele is the social apex of Enna. On its north side is the massive bulk of San Francesco d'Assisi, adapted in the early fifteenth century from a palazzo of the Chiaramonte and with a late Gothic campanile based

on one of the town's defensive towers. The wooden cross within, painted on both sides, may be by Pietro Ruzzolone, and a painting of the Epiphany, early sixteenth century, could be by Simone Wolbreck. The frescoes are by G.B. Bruno (seventeenth century). The crypt has been carved out of the rock. Also off Piazza Vittorio Emanuele and just before the church of San Francesco is Piazza Francesco Crispi, which has a dramatic view across the valley to Calascibetta and beyond. In the centre of this square is a fountain surmounted by a copy of Bernini's 'Rape of Proserpina', struggling and terrified.

San Cataldo near Piazza Matteotti, where Via Roma turns sharp left, has a great stairway and an imposing front. Inside is an alabaster font by Domenico Gagini (seventeenth century), also a large polyptych in marble of 1562. Some way down this branch of Via Roma we reach the church of the Anime Sante (1616), in a neglected state but with a very fine portal. The key may have to be obtained in advance from the church of San Giuseppe (see above) – check at the tourist office. The ceiling has a fresco by Borremans. There is a Rococo pulpit and a vitreous altar. San Tommaso opposite is a popular church, much frequented. Its campanile was originally a defensive tower, still with a loop-hole, and it has a loggia. Inside, at the high altar, there is a tremendous marble ancona by Giuliano Mancino (1515). Next to San Tommaso Via Legnano leads to Piazza Giovanni XXIII. On the left we soon reach the Chiesa del Carmine, which has a campanile based on a fourteenth century tower of the castle of Santa Maria. The original tower was ninth century but destroyed by the Arabs, because of its association with the friar Elia, who had continued to fulminate against them after being rescued from captivity in North Africa. Note the cylindrical feature at the back of the campanile. The church was built in 1618, but its handsome façade is in a bad state.

At the furthest end of Via Roma, in a public park, stands

the octagonal Torre di Federico II, normally closed to the public. This was originally thirteenth century and has a spiral staircase rising up three floors. The district to the south-west is known as the Fundrisi, its houses huddled together with narrow streets, arches and steps. Its inhabitants have their own sing-song dialect. The only remaining medieval gate, the Janniscuru, is also here. Nearby is a grotto called the Spezieria (difficult to reach) where there are niches for votive offerings dating from pagan times. The sanctuary of Montesalvo, where the Madonna della Visitazione is carried in July, is due south of the Torre di Federico, in a splendid and dominating position. The former Franciscan convent next to it has cloisters, and there is also a cave with a cross carved in the rock. Another sanctuary, the Papardura, is west of the Torre and reached by a winding road. This little church is built against the rock face and has stuccoes and a coffered ceiling. There are more caves in this area.

The small agricultural town of **Calascibetta**, which looks so delightful from Enna, is mercifully spared high rise buildings. Its tightly packed houses denote its Arab origins, but there were settlements here in remotest times. Count Roger fortified it in 1062 during his siege of Castrogiovanni (i.e. Enna). The narrow main street leads to the Chiesa Madre, originally fourteenth century but totally rebuilt and restored. The columns of the nave have bases carved with monsters as in Enna cathedral. The font is 1571 and the choir stalls are seventeenth century. There is a rich collection of reliquaries in the sacristy. Via Giudea from Piazza Umberto I brings us to the convent of the Cappuccini, founded in 1589. Inside the church there is a large altar piece of the Epiphany by Filippo Paladino (1613). On the road to Petralia, about a kilometre from Calascibetta, a path leads to the Realmese necropolis where a large number of oven-shaped tombs have been found, dating from the ninth and eighth centuries BC. In

the *contrada* Malpasso, east of Realmese, five tombs have been found, thought to be 2000 BC. Indeed the whole area is riddled with tombs.

The motorway to Palermo branches off to **Caltanissetta**, an important industrial and agricultural town. From Enna, the best road scenically is *statale* 117 *bis* which joins *statale* 122. Goethe reached Caltanissetta on April 28 1787, approaching it from Agrigento, or Girgenti as it then was, and became bored. At last, he wrote, ‘we can see why Sicily earned the title of “the Granary of the Empire”’. He saw wheat and barley growing in ‘one great unbroken mass’; ‘We soon longed for the winged chariot of Triptolemus [drawn by dragons] to bear us away out of this monotony.’

Caltanissetta was thought to have been on the site of Nissa – hence its name, with the Arabic *kalat* meaning castle as a prefix – but that ancient settlement is now identified with a hill nearby, Gibil-Habil. The place was captured by the Normans in 1086, and in the fourteenth century it was the scene of fierce struggles between the Chiaramonte and the Ventimiglia. In the fifteenth century it passed to the family of Moncada di Paternò. After the unification of Italy in the nineteenth century Caltanissetta was regarded as the capital of the sulphur mining industry. It is also well known, like Enna and Tràpani, for its elaborate processions in Holy Week. These start on Ash Wednesday with a procession of tradesmen, the *Real Maestranza* – *real* (royal) because of a visit to Caltanissetta by Ferdinand IV in 1806. The *Maestranza* consists of representatives of various guilds, from marble-workers and butchers, to lorry drivers and bakers. A number of set-piece groups or *vare* depicting scenes of the Passion are paraded through the streets on the Thursday, each carried by members of different guilds. Sixteen bands play in the Piazza Garibaldi that evening. Good Friday is the day of the ‘*Cristo Nero*’, the Black Christ. On Saturday a drama called the *Scinnenza* is enacted. On

Sunday the Resurrection is celebrated by the *Maestranza* and the Cathedral chapter.

Caltanissetta was badly bombed in 1943, and there are fewer monuments of interest than at Enna. The outskirts are off-putting, but Piazza Garibaldi in the centre has charm and might seem to belong to a much smaller town. In the middle of the square is a modern bronze fountain of a triton and a sea-horse by Michele Tripisciano. Dominating all is the Cathedral, built between 1570 and 1022 and restored after wartime damage. It has three naves, the centre one adorned with stuccoes. The vault above has stuccoes with frescoes by Guglielmo Borremans (1720), restored but without doubt his masterpiece. In the second chapel on the right there is a wooden statue of the Immacolata with silver drapery. On the right of the sanctuary there is another wooden statue of the archangel Michael by Stefano Li Volsi (1625), and there are two marble statues of the archangels Gabriel and Raphael by Gioacchino Vitaliano (early eighteenth century). The main altarpiece is again by Borremans, and the splendid organ case in gilded wood with painted panels is dated 1653. In the left hand transept the painting of the Madonna del Carmelo is by Filippo Paladino (1604), and the crucifix in the second chapel in the north nave is attributed to Fra' Umile da Petralia.

On the opposite side of the square is the church of San Sebastiano, seventeenth century, refaced in the late nineteenth. It has a fine eighteenth century wooden statue of St Sebastian. Corso Umberto I leads north to Sant'Agata, built by the Jesuits in 1605, austere outside but very pretty inside, rich in marble intarsia decorations. The marble altarpiece of Sant'Ignazio in glory on the left on the high altar is by Ignazio Marabitti, and the altar below has a lively and delightful frontal of birds among exotic foliage. The high altar is by Agostino Scilla (1654) and the statues on either side are by Salvatore Marino (1753). The first

chapel on the north side has frescoes by Luigi Borremans. Via Matteotti, on the east side of Umberto I, brings us to the majestic Palazzo Moncada, built in the Mannerist style between 1635 and 1638 and with monstrous heads supporting the balcony of the *piano nobile*. Here and there in the town one comes across smaller *palazzi* with similarly bizarre balconies.

Compressed oddly behind the Cathedral is San Domenico, fifteenth century with an attractive Baroque façade. Inside we have paintings worth seeing, including a Madonna of the Rosary by Paladino (1614) and St Vincent Ferrer by Guglielmo Borremans (1722). A dull walk down Via Angeli brings us to the decayed Norman church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, with a Gothic doorway. Still further, on a curious rock formation, are the remains of the castle of Pietrarossa, in an even worse state. This existed in Arab times and was rebuilt by the Normans. Frederick II of Aragon also occupied it.

To visit the Museo Civico we must take Via Vittorio Emanuele in a westerly direction from Piazza Garibaldi, and then at Piazza Marconi turn left down Via Crispi. This has some modern art, including sculpture by Michele Tripisciano, but is primarily interesting for its displays from local excavations at Gibil-Habil, Sabucina and Capodarso, with appropriate plans and explanations. The *vare* for Good Friday are kept in the Folklore Museum nearby in Via Colajanni. In the Palazzo Vescoville in Viale Regina Margherita, near the public gardens, there is the museum of sacred art, which includes vestments, paintings by Borremans and Corradini, and a sixteenth century copy of Raphael's *Spàsimo*.

The museum of mineralogy is at 71 Viale della Regione. This not only has a large collection of minerals, but models and illustrations of sulphur mines. The plight of the sulphur workers, and especially that of the *carusi*, small boys as young as ten, was a great scandal in the late nine-

teenth century and after, and attacked by many writers and sociologists (p. 232). There were some 500 mines in the provinces of Caltanissetta and Agrigento, and such was the heat underground that many workers had to be completely naked. Sulphur was Sicily's biggest export in the 1850s, but production ceased soon after the Second World War when better and less costly methods for the extraction of sulphur were used in the United States. The main *Zona delle Solfare* is to the south of Caltanissetta, at Dèlia, Riesi and Sommatino.

About three kilometres east along *statale* 122 is the Abbey or Badia of Santo Spirito, built by Count Roger and his wife Adelaide between 1092 and 1098, and consecrated in 1153. This is an expedition to be recommended. The three little apses of the church, with their series of blind arches, are original and well restored. The interior is decorated with frescoes of the sixteenth century, though the Christ Pantocrator is eighteenth century. The painted crucifix is attributed to Salvo D'Antonio, nephew of Antonello da Messina. Below it is a huge baptismal font. The paintings of Saints Liborio and Trofino are attributed to Paladino, and that of the 'Japanese martyrs' is thought to be by Giuseppe Salerno. The dedication stone of 1153 is on the arch of the apse. A small Roman cinerary urn of the first century AD is nearby.

The excavations at Monte Sabucina are further along the road to Enna. This Sikel site was taken over by the Greeks, and there is no doubt that in the sixth century BC Sabucina was one of the more important Greek colonies in central Sicily. Its decline follows the revolt of Ducetius in 450 BC. The line of the walls and its towers can be traced. There is less to be seen at Gibil-Habil, south of Caltanissetta, where Sikel and Greek tombs have been uncovered, some of them carved out of the rock. As at Monte Sabucina there is a grand view.

The neighbouring towns of San Cataldo, Pietraperzia

and Barrafranca are of little interest, except during Easter week. At San Cataldo on Good Friday there is the 'Descent from the Cross', with a procession of historical characters, chariots, horses and *Santoni* (effigies of the Apostles), while at Barrafranca on Easter Sunday there is a meeting of Christ with his Mother, with the bizarre addition of eleven giants.

A tour round other small towns, all agricultural, is by and large only interesting for scenic reasons (*pace* Goethe), especially at the time of Proserpina's spring flowers. There is a well-arranged little archaeological museum at Marianopoli, on *statale* 121, opened in 1984, with finds from Castellazzo. Resuttano has a castle; an 'island' in the province of Palermo, it is nevertheless administered by Caltanissetta at the insistence of its inhabitants. Valguarnera was another centre of sulphur mining. There have been excavations uncovering habitations of the twelfth–fourteenth centuries BC on the hill of Rossomano nearby.

*Forza d'Agrò – Casalvecchio Siculo – Sàvoca
Itàla – Messina*

The motorway from Catania to Messina is a spectacular piece of engineering, passing through tunnel after tunnel and with intervening glimpses of the Ionian sea and the Calabrian coast. The old *statale* 114 below the motorway passes villages developed into holiday resorts, from which narrow roads lead to foothills of the Peloritani mountains, where there are other villages tucked away, unspoilt, timeless, overlooking ravines banked with prickly pears, and with mules and donkeys as the essential alternative transport – the Sicily of old. The brash resort town of Letojanni, a short distance from Taormina, could be the beginning of a round trip inland through Mongiuffi and Limina and as far as Antillo at the head of the Agrò valley and surrounded by mountain peaks. None of these places have monuments of particular interest – which is quite the opposite if we return to the coast by way of Casalvecchio Siculo and Sàvoca. What is more, near these two last is one of the most fascinating of the smaller buildings in Sicily, the Basilian monastery church of SS Pietro e Paolo.

Another and easier way of reaching Casalvecchio and Sàvoca is from the coastal towns of San Alèssio Siculo or Santa Teresa di Riva. But first there is **Forza d'Agrò**, perched on its ridge facing Capo San Alèssio with its picturesque fortress on the top of a crag. The road to Forza d'Agrò winds serpent-like to this medieval village, where there is yet another marvellous view. The streets are narrow, the houses often decorated with flowers or entwined with vines. In 1117 Count Roger gave the settle-

ment of Vicum Agrillae, as it then was, to the Basilian monks of SS Pietro e Paolo. The piazza in front of the church of San Francesco has a large belvedere. Inside this church there is a sixteenth century statue of Santa Caterina d'Alessandria. Nearby, above a flight of steps, is the church of Sant'Agostino, or 'della Triade', referring to the representation of the three angels with Abraham. This has an altarpiece by Antonio Giuffrè (c. 1500) and an unusual wooden *gonfalone* or processional banner. The Chiesa Madre, dedicated to the Annunziata, is sixteenth century with a Baroque façade added. It has a number of seventeenth and eighteenth century paintings and some attractive side chapels. Of special note are the eighteenth century choir stalls and a fourteenth century painted crucifix. A seventeenth century marble statue of Santa Caterina has bas-reliefs below. A castle of Norman origin, but rebuilt in 1595, broods overhead. A key can be obtained at the Municipio; it is worth getting, for within the castle area is a closely packed cemetery, giving the place a strange and mysterious atmosphere.

From San Alessio the valley of the Agrò runs among lemon groves and vineyards on terraces. Near the shingly river-bed, in a lovely isolated position and next to a farm where the key can be obtained, is the Basilian monastery church of SS Pietro e Paolo, founded in 1117 but reconstructed – so an inscription in Greek tells us – on behalf of Gerardo il Franco in 1172. The building is a superb synthesis of Norman, Arab and Byzantine styles, tall and fortresslike, and with a polychrome exterior using alternate black lava and white limestone, blended with red brick and blueish mortar. There are two small cupolas over the central nave and transept. Norman austerity is mixed with Moorish decorative details, including a stalactite effect in the vaulting. Recently the plasterwork has been removed from the interior to reveal the brickwork – a great success.

Across the valley, over the river-bed (not always dry) is the well-preserved village of **Casalvecchio Siculo**, Palachorion in Byzantine times. In the centre is the Chiesa Madre, dedicated to Sant'Onofrio. The church is Baroque in origin, but has been much altered and was redecorated in the war years by refugees from Messina with frescoes and new windows. A holy water stoup is dated at 1686 and is on a capital possibly from Pietro e Paolo. There is an 'Adoration of the Magi' by Gaspare Camarda (1626). In the *canonica*, off Piazza Crisafulli, there is a quaint little museum, with local artefacts well preserved, including an old gramophone, an altarpiece of 1497, many silver objects and above all a lifesize silver statue of the gaunt and bearded Sant'Onofrio by Giuseppe Arico, commissioned in gratitude for the village having been spared the plague of 1743.

There are more dramatic views on the way from Casalvecchio to **Sàvoca**, another delightful and peaceful place built on two hills and with remnants of a castle, the Castello di Pentifurri, its name derived from *penteforio*, meaning five hamlets. Sàvoca, once Sàboca, is so called from the *sambuco* or elder tree that grows plentifully in the area. The houses in the upper town are mostly crumbling away, but the newer ones, which seem to be owned by commuters, are quite tastefully built.

We enter through the twelfth century gateway. Via San Michele leads up to the churches of San Michele and San Nicolò di Bari. The former is fifteenth century in origin, San Nicolò a little earlier. In San Michele there is an eighteenth century pulpit and a fifteenth century painting of St Michael the Archangel. The Chiesa Madre is in the depression between the hills and has a great panorama, especially beautiful under the peace of the sky at sunset. This church was originally sixteenth century, but rebuilt in the seventeenth. It has a fine gilded pulpit and a seventeenth century holy water stoup. In a parlous state, the interior once must

have been very grand. The castle mostly dates from the Aragonese time in the fifteenth century.

Savòca now has a new kind of fame on account of the bar Vitelli, partly because here one can get delicious *granita di limone*, much sought after in the heat of summer, but chiefly because the wedding feast scene in Coppola's film *The Godfather* was shot here. Indeed there is a picture of Marlon Brando on the wall. A little outside Savòca, on the way to Casalvecchio Siculo is another popular destination: the Cappuccini convent, where desiccated mummies of eighteenth century gentry are to be seen, dressed in the remnants of their original finery, some with their chins held together by wire. Lesser fry lie naked in coffins, while scores of skulls are stacked on shelves. On November 2, the Day of the Dead, local Savòcesi come with bunches of flowers to pay homage to their grisly ancestors.

Continuing along the coast road towards Messina at Roccalumera there is a road inland to Pagiara, where the Chiesa Madre has an altarpiece of 1580, and the hamlet of Mandanici on an Arab site with tortuous narrow streets. All round are peaks of over 1200 metres. **Fiumedinisi**, on a river of the same name, has a Chiesa Madre that was probably on a Norman foundation. This has a wooden statue of Santa Lucia by Rinaldo Bonanno (1589), a marble statue of the Madonna delle Grazie (1560), a painting of SS Cosma e Damiano by Giovanni Battista Quagliata (1647), and a fresco in the Byzantine style.

Ali is now known for its sulphur baths. The site was given in 1093 by Count Roger to the Basilian monks of SS Pietro e Paolo. Its Chiesa Madre, dedicated to Sant' Agata, was built in 1582 and is worth visiting. There are three naves separated by massive stone columns. The choir stalls of inlaid wood, with panels representing the life of St Agatha, are eighteenth century like the marble altar. There is a sixteenth century statue of St Sebastian.

But a church of greater importance is near **Itàla**,

slightly inland a few kilometres on. This is San Pietro in the *contrada* Badia, once attached to a Basilian monastery – another of the many of that order founded around 1092 by Count Roger. Indeed the tradition goes that this church is on the site of where he defeated the Saracens. The blind interlacing arches on the side are in the familiar Sicilian Norman tradition, and the chromatic effect of the brickwork is most effective. The interior has three naves and the presbytery three apses. The cupola however is a reconstruction. The Chiesa Madre within Itàla is sixteenth century. It has two crucifixes painted in the fourteenth century and a wooden cross of the eighteenth century. The church of the Madonna della Catena, also sixteenth century, has a spire-shaped campanile.

Scaletta Superiore has a castle of the fourteenth century, used since restoration for exhibitions of modern art. A bye-road from Mili Marina leads up through vineyards and orange groves to the church of Santa Maria di Mili, now abandoned and used as a stable for farm animals. This humble building is another that was founded by Count Roger, and once again it was attached to a Basilian monastery. Various changes over the centuries have diminished its original construction, but there is a pretty little apse with typical blind arches. An inscription records that Count Roger's illegitimate son Jourdain was buried here. Within the village of Mili San Pietro a church also dedicated to SS Pietro e Paolo has a painting of the Madonna of the Rosary by Francesco Laganà (1668) and an eighteenth century statue of the Madonna.

Messina is the third largest city in Sicily after Palermo and Catania. Its position on the famous Straits, which at their narrowest point are only three kilometres wide, and the fact that it has a superb natural deepwater harbour, has insured its strategic and commercial importance over the millennia. It has also notoriously suffered many calamities – from earthquakes, bombardments and plague

– and is now in effect a modern town, with widely spaced streets and only a few of its great monuments remaining. Perhaps not all of us these days would agree with Lawrence Durrell that Messina, with such a tremendous increase in traffic, is the town in Sicily where life could be the ‘most delightful’. He was taken then by the fact that buildings were low-built, ‘in scale with human beings’, reminding him of the ‘spacious charm’ of the Plaka at Athens and of Santa Barbara in California. The setting is without any possible argument magnificent, and it is no wonder that the place has inspired so much myth and legend. On a hot summer’s day, when the sea is lapis blue, Messina from Calabria gleams white against the dark greens of the woods of the Peloritani. And from Messina in certain lights the Calabrian coast is distorted by a strange mirage called the Fata Morgana, named – surprisingly – after the sister of King Arthur, Morgan-Le-Fay, who was supposed to have her palace at the bottom of the Straits.

Homer, in the twelfth book of the *Odyssey*, writes of the terrors of Scylla and Charybdis who preyed on mariners. Scylla on the Calabrian shore had twelve feet, six heads on long necks and three rows of teeth. Charybdis, opposite, caused whirlpools by sucking in the sea three times a day and then spewing it out. There is still a town called Scylla in Calabria, and the swirling cross-currents from the Ionian and Tyrrhenian Seas are still a danger to small craft. But for local people the best known figure in legend is Colapesce, the fisherman whom Frederick II sent diving in search of mermaids and tritons.

Shakespeare of course made Messina the setting of *Much Ado*. Some Messinesi also like to think that the splendour of their harbour gave inspiration to Claude Lorraine. Cervantes was in hospital here after being wounded at Lepanto in 1571. Messina’s most famous son is the great Antonello da Messina (1430–79), the contemporary of Giovanni Bellini and Piero della Francesca, and credited

with introducing into Italy the technique of painting in oil instead of tempera, after having studied in Flanders. The architect Filippo Juvarra (1676–1736), best known for his work at Turin and Madrid, was another native. The Risorgimento hero Giuseppe La Farina (1815–63) was also born at Messina; Cavour entrusted him with the organisation of the expedition to Sicily in 1860.

Messina's Siculo-Greek name was Zancle, meaning sickle, on account of the shape of the promontory that protects the harbour. Cumaean pirates and Chalcidians are said to have been its founders in 730 BC. Anaxilas, tyrant of Rheggium (Règgio), captured it and renamed it Messana, after Messene in the Peloponnese. It was taken by the Athenians in 426, and in 396 was utterly destroyed by Hamilco of Carthage. The Syracusans rebuilt it, but in 289 the city was occupied by the Mamertines, 'sons of Mars', mercenaries of Agathocles. When the Mamertines appealed to Rome for help against the Carthaginians it was the beginning of the First Punic War. St Paul is said to have visited Messina several times, as a result of which, in AD 42, the Virgin Mary is supposed to have sent a letter to the converted in her own handwriting and tied with a single hair from her head. The 'Madonna della Lettera' is thus patroness of the city, and her statue, known as the Madonnina, stands on a tall pillar on the harbour promontory, with words from her letter underneath, '*Vos et ipsam civitatem benedicimus*' 'We bless you and your city'.

Messina flourished under the Normans. An Englishman, Richard Palmer, was its Archbishop from 1183 to 1195. It was he who arranged the marriage between William the Good and Joanna Plantagenet. The city became an important assembly point for crusaders. Philip Augustus, king of France, and Richard Coeur de Lion of England arrived here in 1189. But Richard behaved atrociously; on the pretext of demanding a very expensive dowry overdue from his sister Joanna's marriage he sacked the city. However he did

present Excalibur, King Arthur's sword, to King Tancred, illegitimate son of William II (not that it was of much help to Tancred or to his own unfortunate son, William III).

In 1282 a siege by Charles of Aragon was successfully beaten off, thanks in part to warnings given by two local heroines, Dina and Clarenza. In the succeeding period of confused and violent conflicts Messina attempted repeatedly to assert itself as capital of Sicily in place of Palermo. Charles V gave it many favours, and a statue was erected to his son Don John of Austria on his return here as the victorious hero of Lepanto. But after 1678 Messina lost many of its privileges in a rebellion against the Spaniards, and the population was drastically reduced. From then onwards its history becomes a catalogue of catastrophes. It suffered in the 1693 earthquake. In 1745 there was plague, which wiped out half the population and this was followed by a severe earthquake in 1783, with 1200 dead. Earlier Brydone, like many other visitors, had admired the long row of palaces built on the quay and known as the Palazzata. But Goethe in 1787 found it still in ruins after the earthquake, 'gap-toothed' and crumbling. There was a flood in 1823, and in 1837 a cholera epidemic. Then in the revolution of 1848, Messina was bombarded by Neapolitan warships, thus earning Ferdinand II the nickname of 'King Bomba'. In 1854 there was a terrible cholera epidemic, with 9000 dead, including the entire family of the elderly British consul, W.W. Barker.

Several of the British merchants who stayed on in Sicily after the Napoleonic wars were attracted by the 'halcyon' climate and atmosphere of Messina and made their homes there. Notable among these were the Sandersons and Smithsons, dealing mainly in citrus fruit, bergamot and silk. But the ministrations of King Bomba had caused £300,000 worth of damage to British property, a large sum on those days. The great cholera epidemic almost seemed the final straw.

More disasters were to follow though. There was an earthquake in 1898, and in the early hours of December 28 1908 Messina was hit by what is still considered to have been among the ten worst earthquakes in history. 83,000, perhaps 100,000, people were killed in and around the city. The epicentre was in the bedrock under the water of the Straits, and a seismic wave caused even more damage. Canon Skeggs, British chaplain in Palermo, wrote in a letter: 'A huge wall of sea rushed up into the town with a roar. It was pitch dark. Just before people on the ships could hear hundreds of voices on the quay calling for boats. But now there was a dead silence, the most awful moment in that terrible half hour. Not a scream for help, the wave had sucked them all in and covered them with debris. Then fire broke out, the gas mains caught light.' Looting and pillage followed. Tremors continued for another thirty years. Ninety per cent of the buildings had been destroyed. In the Cathedral the twenty-six granite columns, originally from the Temple of Neptune, were irretrievably smashed to bits. Among the casualties was Nicoletta Cianciafara, aunt of Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, author of *The Leopard*. Trapped under the rubble, she was found to have gnawed her fingers out of hunger.

The first assistance came from Russian ships. Reconstruction was still in progress in 1943 when Messina was again devastated by Allied air-raids – there were 2805 sorties, resulting in some 5000 civilians killed or missing. In the race to capture Messina the Americans got there first on August 17. But it was a backhanded victory for the Allies. The Axis had put up a brilliant delaying action, and without any naval support had managed to evacuate about 110,000 men across the Straits, not to mention over 10,000 vehicles, as well as tanks, ammunition and fuel.

Such a catalogue of disasters might well deter travellers from visiting Messina, but this would be a shame. Quite apart from the view and its historical associations, Messina

has a magnificent museum, full of major works of art beautifully laid out. It is also easy to take the *aliscafo* to Règgio di Calabria to see the Riace bronzes, and this can be managed in half a morning.

From whatever direction we enter Messina we are confronted with the all too familiar Sicilian spectacle of chaotic and uncontrolled buildings on the outskirts. The centre of the city is now Piazza Cairolì, no beauty in spite of huge *figus* trees, but the historic centre is the Piazza del Duomo and it is from here that a tour should logically start. The Cathedral was meticulously rebuilt after the 1908 earthquake, but destroyed again in 1943 by an incendiary bomb which caused a fire that lasted three days. Again it has been reconstructed, and some of the original features have been incorporated, especially in the lower façade. Essentially it is therefore a new building, but impressive all the same by any standards. Originally founded by Roger II, it was consecrated in 1197 in the presence of Henry VI. The splendid and elaborately carved main portal is fifteenth century, with a tympanum by Pietro de Bonitate (1468), incorporating a 'Coronation of the Virgin' dated at 1470. The Virgin and Child below is by Giovanni Battista Mazzolo (1534). The side portals are both early sixteenth century, and on the south side there are some fine Catalan-Gothic windows. As with other Norman cathedrals the interior is a basilica with three naves separated by columns – evoking all the majesty of the original, though naturally lacking much of the splendour of the ancient decorations. On the right is a sixteenth century holy water stoup on a modern base. The marble pulpit is an exact copy of the 1539 original which was probably designed by Polidoro da Caravaggio. Statues of saints (the *Apostolato*) lining the sides are all copies apart from John the Baptist, first on the right, which is attributed to Antonello Gagini (1525). At the end of the south aisle is the Gothic tomb of five bishops. In the transept nearby on a pillar is the tomb

slab of Archbishop Palmer (Palmieri to Sicilians), who died in 1195, just before the consecration of the Cathedral. The organ (1948) is the largest in Italy with five manuals and 16,000 pipes. In the sumptuous chapel in the right apse is the tomb of Archbishop Guidotto De Tabiatis, with his recumbent effigy by Goro di Gregorio (1333). The high altar, also richly decorated with *pietre dure*, has a copy of the statue of the Madonna della Lettera, originally Byzantine and destroyed in 1943. The baldacchino, dating originally from 1628, is a faithful reconstruction and the mosaics are also copies, apart from the Virgin enthroned in the left apse, the Chapel of the Sacrament, architecturally the best preserved in the building and designed by Jacopo del Duca between 1589 and 1599. The treasury, usually closed, contains a famous object, *La Manta d'Oro*, the Golden Mantle, made by the Florentine goldsmith Innocenzo Mangani in 1668 and encrusted with rubies, sapphires, diamonds etc. There are also several costly reliquaries, chalices and candlesticks, mostly in silver for which Messina was once renowned.

The campanile is another and most enjoyable reason for visiting Messina, especially at midday. Designed by Francesco Valenti, it contains the largest mechanical clock in the world, made by Ungerer of Strasbourg in 1933 and including a veritable extravaganza of entertainment. At every quarter of an hour bronze figures of the folk heroines Dina and Clarenza strike the bells. In the lower 'window' the day of the week is marked by a *carosello* or chariot in which sits the appropriate god or goddess – Venus for Friday (*venerdi*), Mars for Tuesday (*martedi*). Meanwhile above them more *caroselli* gyrate, signifying the ages of man. At midday the great bronze lion, wearing a crown, shakes his head and tail and roars three times. Then the cock flaps his wings and crows three times. This is followed by a dove in another 'window', and the emergence of a representation of the church of Montalto, connected with

an episode in the 'Vespers' war. Next we have Biblical scenes and events concerning the Madonna della Lettera, who finally blesses the spectators. Other entertainments include a planetarium and a rotating moon which follows the actual lunar cycle.

To the left of the Cathedral is a Baroque statue of the Immacolata (1758–9), repaired after 1908, by Giuseppe Buceti. In front of the campanile is the handsome fountain of Orion, which survived the 1943 ordeal on account of being sandbagged; this is by Giovanni Angelo Montorsoli (1547) but was conceived by Francesco Maurolico, author of the verses inscribed on the rim. Orion was one of the mythical founders of Messina. The four recumbent statues represent the Nile, the Tiber, the Ebro and Messina's own river the Camaro.

In Piazzetta Catalani behind the Cathedral, off Via Lepanto, is the bronze statue of Don John of Austria by Andreas Calamech (1572–3); his foot is on the head of the vanquished Turk. Here too is the church of the Annunziata dei Catalani, twelfth century Norman with thirteenth century additions, one of the best preserved of the surviving monuments of old Messina. It has been many times restored but to a large extent – and amazingly – managed to survive both 1908 and 1943. The east side is particularly remarkable with false arcades on slender columns. The three portals with lava decorations on the west side are thirteenth century. The interior has three small naves, a brick apse, a yellow and white dome, and dark grey stone columns. The font is made from two capitals, one thirteenth century, one eighteenth century. Opening times are however variable.

Between Via I Settembre and Corso Garibaldi is the church of Santa Maria degli Alemanni, early thirteenth century, in a bad state of repair but remarkable as being one of the few surviving Gothic churches in Sicily. It was built by the Teutonic Knights, and during the Napoleonic wars

the British used it as an ammunition and powder store. The Dogana or Customs house, also on Via I Settembre, is post 1908 and in 'Liberty' style. Indeed one comes across several survivors of the 'Liberty' period in the city; the Cassa di Risparmio, for instance, was designed by Basile.

Corso Garibaldi runs parallel to Corso Vittorio Emanuele along the seafront, looking across to the San Salvatore fort, originally sixteenth century, and the Madonnina. The *alis-cafi* for Riggio leave almost exactly opposite the Teatro Vittorio Emanuele, originally built by Pietro Valenti in 1852. This great opportunity of seeing the Riace bronzes in the Riggio museum should not be missed. Fished out of the sea in 1972, they are, with the 'Fanciullo di Mozia' (p. 176) among the most exciting archaeological finds in Italy since the Second World War.

Continuing still further north we reach Piazza Unità, where there is the fountain of Neptune by Montorsoli (1557), another of Messina's landmarks, depicting the naked Neptune subduing Scylla and Charybdis. In fact the figures of Neptune and Scylla are copies, the originals being now in the Museo Regionale. The church of San Giovanni di Malta nearby is a reconstruction of the sixteenth century original.

An excursion to the leafy Cimitero Monumentale, at the south side of the city (open only in the mornings) is to be recommended, particularly for its stupendous view. Designed by Leone Savoia in 1872, it is in fact regarded as one of the most beautiful cemeteries in Italy. The Protestant cemetery (far left corner) has tombstones dating from Napoleonic times, but is all now rather pathetic, compared to the rest. (When I visited the cemetery there was a notice outside from *Gli Inquilini*, the Inhabitants, warning visitors that if they went on smoking they would 'join us here'.)

There are other good views from a sequence of buildings above the city: the Santuario di Montalto (1930)

near the Botanic Gardens, the church of Monte di Pietà (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), well restored, but with its original eighteenth century double stairway unimpaired and the church and monastery of Montevergine (seventeenth century, rebuilt). Much of the so-called Strada Panoramica is hemmed in by high-rise buildings, so it is scarcely 'panoramic' any more. This route follows Viale Principe Umberto, starting near the Botanic Gardens, and continues north along Viale Regina Margherita, past Monte di Pietà and the Observatory.

From the Neptune fountain Via della Libertà passes the buildings for the Messina Fair, which is held in August, an annual event officially started in 1934 though first instituted in 1296 by Frederick II of Aragon. Opposite this site is Via Fata Morgana, and some way along this street is Porta Grazia, worth a visit if you want to see one of the few extant examples of pre 1693 seventeenth century eastern Sicilian architecture (another being San Sebastiano at Acireale). Dating from about 1680, it was removed here in 1961, and is the only remnant of the original Spanish citadel. Continuing north along Via della Libertà we reach the Museo Regionale, temporarily housed in its present building and due to be moved to another nearby. This was formed in 1914 and contains older collections and in particular objects rescued from ecclesiastical and secular buildings after the 1908 earthquake. During the Second World War the most important works of art were stored in the church in the mountain village of Mandanici above Roccalumera on the Ionian coast and thus escaped damage.

The first room has the Byzantine-Norman collection, mainly thirteenth century. Most important is the mosaic niche of the Madonna and Child called 'La Ciambretta', by an unknown Byzantine artist. There is also a painting of the Madonna *allattante*, giving her breast, and a marble slab of the Madonna with her hands raised in prayer. The

sarcophagus is that of the archimandrite Luca, died 1175. The second room has the Gothic collection. Outstanding are a marble Madonna and Child by Goro di Gregorio (1333) from Siena, a triptych attributed to the Master of the Sterbini diptych, a painted crucifix of the fourteenth century, and a polyptych of the Madonna, Child and Saints. Room three, mostly fifteenth century, has a polychrome crucifix by an unknown artist, a bas-relief of the Madonna attributed to Desiderio da Settignano, and a tondo of the Della Robbia school. In room four we have the famous polyptych by Antonello da Messina, painted in 1473 for the monastery of San Gregorio. There is also a marble Madonna attributed to Francesco Laurana. Other stylistically related paintings include a 'Madonna of the Rosary' (1489) of the school of Antonello, a 'Madonna with Saints Peter and John the Evangelist' attributed to Giovanni Salvo d'Antonio, 'Santa Chiara and St Thomas of Canterbury' by Giovannello da Itàla, 'St John the Baptist' with incidents in his life attributed to Hendrik Met de Bies (sixteenth century), two paintings, of the 'Deposition' and of the 'Madonna and Saints', by Colin de Coter (sixteenth century). Room five: Girolamo Alibrandi and the early sixteenth century. Here we have a 'Presentation at the Temple', a 'Circumcision' and a 'Last Judgement' by Alibrandi, the 'Parable of the Good Samaritan' by an unknown North Italian artist, a 'Holy Family' attributed to Vincenzo Catena, and a marble Madonna (1500) by Antonello Gagini. Room six has Montorsoli's original Scylla from the Neptune fountain and a painting of the 'Adoration of the Shepherds' by Polidoro da Caravaggio (1533). Room seven has a fine marble relief of the 'Adoration of the Shepherds' by Rinaldo Bonanno (1569) and another 'Adoration' by Diodato Guinaccia. The marble battle scenes are from a funerary monument (1564). In a case are majolica vases, Casteldurante and Venetian. Room eight has the 'Madonna dell'Itria' by Alessandro Allori

(1590), the funerary monument of Francesca Lanza Cibo (1618), the 'Wedding of St Catherine' by Antonio Biondi. In room nine are 'St Francis' by Filippo Paladino, the funerary monument by Rinaldo Bonanno (1572), 'Madonna della Lettera' by Antonio Catalano il Giovane (1629). Room ten has two masterpieces by Caravaggio, painted during his visit to Messina in 1609: the 'Raising of Lazarus' and the 'Adoration of the Shepherds'. Other Caravaggesque paintings in this room are 'Saints Peter and Paul on their way to Martyrdom' and the 'Massacre of the Innocents' by Alonzo Rodriguez, 'Nairn's Widow' by Mario Pinniti, 'Mucius Scaevola' by Matthias Stomer. Room eleven has more seventeenth century paintings by Domenico Maroli, Giovan Battista Quagliata, Mattia Preti, Agostino Scilla as well as some intarsia panels. Room twelve has eighteenth century paintings by Giovanni Tuccari, Filippo Tancredi, Sebastiano Conca. In the same room there is a magnificent Berlin coach used by the Messinese Senate in the eighteenth century and designed by Domenico Riudo. Stairs lead up to a room where ecclesiastical treasures are exhibited, many from the monastery of San Gregorio, including a superb collection of altar frontals and vestments, and majolica from Caltagirone.

Proceeding north along the coast road we pass a series of villages, some with delightful if deceptive names: Paradiso, Contemplazione and Pace. Ganzirri is a charming and lively little place, with some good fish restaurants (such lobsters, such mussels!): it is next to the Pantano Grande where the shell-fish are farmed. Torre del Faro is another fishing village, where the main catch (in June and July) is swordfish, off Capo Peloro, the extreme north-east corner of Sicily. The Pantano Piccolo lies behind, and nearby is the popular resort of Lido di Mortelle.

We are now on a main migration route for hundreds of thousands of birds flying from Africa, and the indiscriminate slaughter, especially of birds of prey and storks, is a

major international scandal, much worse on the Calabrian side. The honey buzzard is the most frequent victim, and as a result is becoming extinct. The tradition in Calabria is that any man unable to shoot a honey buzzard will be cuckolded within the year.

There are some pleasant excursions to the nearer slopes of the Peloritani, starting from *statale* 113, the old Palermo road. One is to the secluded ruins of La Badiazza, otherwise known as Santa Maria della Valle, in a deep gully surrounded by pines. This interesting little church, recently restored, was originally twelfth century and attached to a Benedictine convent. All was abandoned in the seventeenth century, and at the end of the nineteenth century the church was half buried in mud after a flood. The castellation makes it look rather like a fortress, but the façade is reminiscent of that of the cathedral at Taormina. The marble architrave above the main doorway is possibly sixth century. To get there, one must pass under the viaduct of the *autostrada*, and after about three kilometres turn right at the signpost.

Continuing along *statale* 113 we reach the San Rizzo crossroads (460 metres). From here a spectacular, sometimes dangerous, road is signposted Santuario di Maria Santissima di Dinnamare. This leads through a forest of pines and eucalyptus along the crest of the Peloritani, with terrific views west and east as far as the Aeolian Islands and all across Calabria. There are some lovely picnic spots and at least one excellent restaurant, with delicious *funghi* in season (but refuse to eat 'game' birds in the migration periods).

Another route from San Rizzo, again through forest, is to Castanea delle Furie, where there are two churches worth a look. On the way we pass Monte Ciccìa, part of the migration route for birds – which, because of the *cacciatori*, can be an upsetting experience, especially in May.

On August 14 at Messina there is the procession of

From Forza d'Agrò to Messina

Mata and Grifone, two giants on horseback, like Orion mythical founders of the city (Mata is female, Grifone a dark-skinned Moor). On the following day, *Ferragosto*, in contrast there is the procession of the *vara*, celebrating the Assumption of the Virgin.

Rometta – Roccavaldina – Milazzo
The Aeolian Islands

The Tyrhennian coast between Messina and Milazzo is heavily populated with an almost uninterrupted succession of buildings of recent date. Until 1830, when the French captured Algiers, there had for centuries been constant peril from the Barbary pirates, and populations had tended to cluster round inland castles mostly built in medieval times. On the coast there were of course watch-towers and an occasional fort, such as that at Spadafora, and strongholds like Milazzo. **Rometta**, ten kilometres from the coast and up in the Peloritani, is one such castle, but Byzantine in origin and in fact was the last Christian stronghold to fall to the Arabs, in 965 after a long siege. Its little church of the Salvatore, also known as the Gesù e Maria, is an important Byzantine relic, built of rough stone and with a dome. The Chiesa Madre has late Renaissance portals and a Gaginique Madonna in a niche above. At the highest point of the town are the remains of the *palatium* of the Hohenstaufen period, with a sweeping view of the Aeolian Islands and Milazzo.

Venetico also has a castle, fifteenth century. It is presumed that in the waters directly opposite here Agrippa defeated Sextus Pompey in the great battle of Naulochus in 36 BC. **Roccavaldina**, with less than 1500 inhabitants, has a seventeenth century pharmacist's shop of unusual interest, containing 238 jars, vases, jugs and flasks, made in Urbino in about 1580. All are decorated with the familiar arabesques and grotesques of the period, usually incorporating mythical or historical scenes, and with orange

and turquoise blue as the predominant colours. Bought originally by a Messinese merchant, they were given to the *Confraternita* of the SS Salvatore in 1628, when the shop was created for them. The dilapidated but imposing Palazzo Valdina in Piazza Umberto is based on a fort acquired in 1509 by the Valdina family, Spanish in origin. It has a graceful loggia and is partly battlemented. In the Chiesa Madre there is a Valdina funerary monument by the Florentine Camillo Camilliani (1603, the last year of his short life).

The fourteenth century castle at Spadafora was also turned into a *palazzo baronale* by Camilliani. There are several reasonable, much frequented, beaches along this coast.

Santa Lucia del Mela, further west, certainly existed in Norman times, and in the fourteenth century its inhabitants were mostly Jews and Lombards. Garibaldi came here in July 1860, preparing for his attack on Milazzo, his last battle in Sicily. The Cathedral was originally Norman but rebuilt between 1590 and 1642. It has paintings by Pietro Novelli and a marble statue of Santa Lucia (1512). The font is fifteenth century. The castle, thought to have been on an Arab site, was enlarged by Frederick II of Aragon and is now a seminary.

Milazzo on the isthmus of a narrow peninsula jutting far into the sea, has been especially vulnerable to invaders, and as a result its castle is of formidable size. Built by Frederick II of Aragon, again probably on an Arab site, it was extended by the Spanish in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It withstood a long siege by the Spaniards themselves after the Treaty of Utrecht, and was fortified again by the British in Napoleonic times. Recent excavations below the castle, in the Via Roma area, have shown that there was a Bronze Age settlement. The first Greek colony, Mylae, was founded from Zancle (Messina) in 716 BC. It changed hands often in successive centuries, and near here in 260

bc the Romans under Duilius won their first sea battle against the Carthaginians. In February 1061 Count Roger made it his foothold before advancing on Messina. But Milazzo is most famous in Italian history for Garibaldi's victory against the Bourbons on July 20 1860. The great man himself fought hand to hand in the battle. Colonel Dunne's English Regiment took part, as did his squadron of *picciotti*, Palermo street-boys, some as young as twelve. Also present was John Peard, the Cornishman popularly known as 'Garibaldi's Englishman', who was promoted to colonel on the field. The indefatigable and rather tiresome Jessie White Mario tended the wounded, and Garibaldi's admirer, the Contessa della Torre, was to be seen on horseback in her hussar's tunic and plumed hat. Reinforcements hurried from England, including Edward Bowra, aged nineteen, and Raleigh Trevelyan, aged eighteen, namesake and great-grandfather of the author of this book, who arrived too late.

A large *zona industrial*, including an oil refinery, now divides the peninsula from the mainland. Notwithstanding this, and it is off putting, the town itself has charm, with fishing boats, yachts, and the *traghetti* and *aliscafi* arriving from or leaving for the Aeolian Islands. Via Rizzo by the port continues as Via Crispi, where there is the Municipio, late nineteenth century and containing mementoes of 1860. On the other side of the Municipio is the main square, Piazza Duilio, full of activity and in the centre of which is the fountain of the Mela, rebuilt in 1990 after the 1762 original by Giuseppe Buceti was destroyed in the Second World War. Also in this square we have the façade, dark red, of the Carmelite convent, and next to it the Chiesa del Carmine, sixteenth century, rebuilt in the eighteenth but incorporating some original elements, including the portal, with a Madonna by Baldassare Valenti (1632) in the niche above. Opposite is Palazzo Proto where Garibaldi had his headquarters for five days and where

there was a historic meeting with the representative of King Victor Emmanuel II. The church of San Giacomo, fifteenth century but altered since, is also in Via Crispi. This contains an inlaid marble altar removed from the old cathedral. The new cathedral, completed in 1952, is to the left. This has important sixteenth century paintings by Antonello de Saliba and Antonio Giuffrè. Near the south-west corner of the castle is San Papino, built in 1617. Here we have a remarkable tabernacle in wood and mother-of-pearl, and a crucifix by Fra' Umile da Petralia. Continuing on the east side of the town along the Lungomare we come to San Francesco di Paola, the most handsome of Milazzo's churches, with an eighteenth century façade and a double staircase in front. Inside there are paintings of the miracles of San Francesco by Letterio Paladino and a marble Madonna of the workshop of Domenico Gagini. The church is built on the site of a sanctuary founded by the saint himself in 1465. Next come the churches of the Immacolata (1640) and on the right San Salvatore (1616), in an abandoned state.

The entrance to the castle passes between massive Aragonese towers. Within the enclosure, once full of houses, is the sadly forlorn Duomo Vecchio or old cathedral, thought to have been built, or at least planned, by Camillo Camilliani and now gutted. Above its portal is a pleasing Madonna and Child. The castle keep is indeed imposing, and rather grim, and until recently was used as a prison. The Gothic doorway is fourteenth century, and there is a large *sala di parlamento*, dating from about 1280. (It may be hard to find the *guardiano* of the castle.)

It is possible to drive round the northern end of the peninsula, known as the Baronia and relatively unspoilt, among palms and olives, with some quite attractive villas. The Baia del Tono is a popular excursion by boat. Beneath the western walls of the castle is a cave called the Grotta di Polifemo.

There are seven inhabited islands in the **Aeolian Islands**, in Italy known either as the Isole Eolie or the Isole Lìpari; all are of volcanic origin. The island of Lipari itself is the largest and most popular, Salina the next largest but less sophisticated, Panarèa the most fashionable, Vulcano and Stròmboli with active volcanoes, Filicudi and Alicudi the most remote and with few inhabitants. Lìpari and Salina are the only ones where a car might be of use for visitors, and these can be brought by *traghetto* from Milazzo, a journey of about forty kilometres and taking over two hours (to Lìpari), including a stop at Vulcano.

It is not surprising that this spectacularly beautiful archipelago should have become such a favourite place for holidays. Each island has distinct characteristics. The sea can be wonderfully limpid, the bathing (mostly off rocks) almost unsurpassed in the Mediterranean; the scenery is varied in form and colour, with many smaller islands and *faraglioni*; the local architecture is unobtrusive. Then there is the drama of the two perpetually smouldering volcanoes. Famous in legend, the islands are important archaeologically with a sequence of prehistoric cultures that makes them unique. In summer it is essential to book accommodation in advance.

There can be strong winds, and Aeolus, after whom the islands are named, was keeper of the winds. He was married to the daughter of Liparus, king of the Ausonians. In the *Odyssey* we are told that he lived on a 'floating' island – Alicudi perhaps, which does from a distance seem to float in the shimmering heat of high summer, though claims have been put in for Salina. Odysseus stayed with Aeolus for a month and then was given a leather bag with the winds safely packed inside so that he could have a calm journey back to Ithaca. But while Odysseus was asleep, his crew, knowing that there was something valuable in the bag, opened it and unleashed a tempest.

The first traces of inhabitants on the islands go back

The Eastern Tyrrhennian Coast and the Aeolian Islands

to the Neolithic period, in about 4000 BC. The people had been attracted by obsidian, a hard glass-like volcanic substance which could be chipped into sharp instruments. This developed into a lucrative trade that lasted for nearly 2,000 years, until the discovery of metal. Obsidian from Lìpari has been found in Spain, southern France and the Dalmatian coast. The most primitive type of pottery discovered is regarded as belonging to the 'Stentinello' culture (p. 320).

New settlers arrived during the Bronze Age. Their 'Milazzese' culture is so named after traces of a settlement found at Punta Milazzese on Panarèa, where Mycenaean pottery of about 1430 BC has also been discovered. Then came the Ausonian invasions, resulting in another round of prosperity, the islands being on a main trade route between the east and west Mediterranean. Lìpari was one of the last Greek colonies, founded during the 50th Olympiad (580–576 BC) by a group of Cnidians and Rhodians. It was also a time when Etruscan pirates were a perpetual menace. The colonists interestingly created a form of self-government, dividing their community into two and sharing the proceeds from their work; one group worked on the land, and the rest were assigned to the fleet. So rich was the booty from fighting the Etruscans – and from piracy on their own account – that they were able to send regular tributes to the oracle at Delphi.

In the Punic Wars the Lìparese sided with the Carthaginians, and in 251 BC the Romans made them pay the price, with the customary slaughter. We learn from Cicero that the town now became poor and insignificant, though the hot springs on the island and at Vulcano were much frequented. Sextus Pompeius occupied the islands in the war against Octavian, and this involved further punishment. Eventually the islands became a useful place of exile – the Emperor Caracalla sent his wife and brother-in-law here after executing their father.

From this point on the history of the Aeolian Islands is more or less linked with that of Sicily. On February 13 AD 254, according to tradition, the body of St Bartholomew arrived from Armenia in a marble coffin. He was thereupon nominated patron saint of Lìpari. But his remains were dispersed when the Saracens ransacked the place in 839. The Normans built the Cathedral in his honour and created a bishopric. In 1544 the Algerian pirate chief Kair-el-Din, otherwise known as Barbarossa, devastated and looted the town, and deported the inhabitants. The Emperor Charles V later set about repopulating the now desolate islands and strengthening their fortifications. But all through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the uncertainty and terror from pirate attacks remained.

In the nineteenth century Lìpari was used as a prison for common criminals. In Fascist times many eminent dissidents were sent here, including Riccardo Bauer, Curzio Malaparte, Emilio Lussu, Carlo Rosselli and Riccardo Gualini. Ironically, at the end of the Second World War one of the last to be kept *in confino* at Lìpari was Mussolini's daughter Edda Ciano.

Life became hard for the inhabitants, subsisting on their fishing, wine and the mining of pumice. There were huge emigrations, particularly to Australia, and Panarèa was left virtually uninhabited. But a great change in prosperity came with tourism.

The island of **Lìpari** now has over 10,000 inhabitants, half of them living in the town of the same name. Originally it was called Meligunis. The last volcano to erupt was Monte Pelato to the north, and it is this that produced the pumice now being mined at La Cava, a strange and rather exciting place – used in the last scene of the Taviani brothers' brilliant film *Kaos*. The sea below, with its sediment of pumice, has turned into an amazing aquamarine. Also near here is one of the few white sand beaches – most are black in the Aeolian Islands – 'La Spiaggia Bianca'. Here as elsewhere

on Lìpari there are *fumarole*, volcanic gas vents. One of the most photogenic views in Sicily, especially when the broom is in flower, is at Quattrocchi, looking across to Vulcano and Le Formiche, and where the striated rocks are coloured russet and yellow.

The ferries arrive at the deep water harbour, the Marina Lunga, north of the Acropolis, known as the Castello: in fact a natural fortress, though it still also has its Spanish walls. The *aliscafi* dock on the other side, at the Marina Corta, near the picturesque small church of the Anime del Purgatorio (where there is a painting of 1708 by Filippo Tancredi of *Anime* or Souls being 'cleansed').

One way to approach the Castello is from Piazza Mazzini above the Marina Lunga, but it is probably best to climb the flight of steps from Via Garibaldi. This cuts right through not only the old walls but – disgracefully – the superimposed strata of ancient settlements. At the top of these steps and directly in front is the Cathedral of St Bartholomew, originally 1084 but almost totally rebuilt after its destruction by Barbarossa. Part of the Norman cloisters do however still exist and are worth trying to see before any more restoration goes ahead. The crude carvings on the capitals are rather endearing, and ancient columns, some of them fluted, have been utilised.

Part of the original Norman structure of the Cathedral can also be seen on the south side; again antique blocks were used, mostly from the Greek walls. The façade is 1861, the pleasant interior mostly Baroque. The ceiling has eighteenth century frescoes of Old Testament scenes, and a silver statue of St Bartholomew in his elaborate gold frame is 1728. There is a fifteenth or sixteenth century painting of the Madonna del Rosario by Gerolamo Alibrandi and a Byzantine-type Mater Dei. In the sacristy there is a 'Descent from the Cross' again by Gerolamo Alibrandi.

It is easier to appreciate the excavations after visiting the excellently arranged Archaeological Museum, which is in

two buildings on either side of the Cathedral. There have been spectacular finds in recent years, thanks to the work of two distinguished archaeologists, Drs Luigi Bernabò Brea and Madeleine Cavalier. The visit begins at the former bishop's palace (seventeenth century), on the right of the Cathedral. The first room has ceramics from the Neolithic period, in particular from the 'Stentinello' culture, up to the fourth millennium. The second and third rooms have material from the 'Diana' and 'Serra d'Alto' styles. Room six (2000–1270 BC) has finds from the Milazzese headland at Panarèa and imported ceramics, showing a change in design, including high stemmed cups. Room seven covers the beginning of the Ausonian period, late Bronze Age. Rooms eight and nine contain later Ausonian objects up to 850 BC. Some cooking pots have unusual handles. A large pot contains a hoard of bronze objects congealed together. There are also some unusual terracotta lamps. Room ten has Greek and Roman finds from excavations at the Castello and the urban areas. These include material from a *bothros*, a votive deposit dedicated to Aeolus, the lid, in lava, has a carved lion (550 BC). Of particular interest is the depiction of Greek warships by the 'Antimenes painter'. Tablets relate to votive offerings sent to Delphi. There is a statuette possibly of Asklepios, and a statue of a girl of the Imperial period. In the epigraphic pavilion in the garden outside are various funerary inscriptions. Another pavilion is in a separate building, a vulcanological section with sarcophagi and reconstructed tombs, near a small open-air theatre built in 1976.

The museum's main classical section is in the large building to the left of the cathedral, comprising display rooms number 18 onwards. Here we have the vases of the renowned 'Lipari painter', excelling in female forms and dating from the first half of the third century BC. Among the many vases of superb quality is an amusing Paestan *calyx krater* of 360 BC that is often illustrated. This shows

Dionysus pondering a girl acrobat with bearded actors watching. The collection of 44 comic masks is particularly fascinating, mostly the work of Menander (342–290 BC) and the subjects easily recognisable – the ‘false maiden’, the ‘chief slave’, the ‘keeper of the brothel’ etc. There are also tragic masks, a mask of Menander himself, and statuettes of dancers and actors, and of Homer and Socrates. The Hellenistic jewellery includes an outstanding filigree gold ring with a nude female dancer. The Roman glass includes some beautiful funerary vases. In Rooms 26 and 27 finds from underwater archaeology are displayed, with great stacks of unbroken amphorae, also black pottery from a wreck off Capistello, third century BC.

There are four churches besides the Cathedral on the Acropolis, an indication of how dense the population must once have been. Now there is a strangely desolate atmosphere, as if the place has never quite recovered from 1544. The Madonna delle Grazie to the right of the Cathedral has an eighteenth century façade and frescoes by Alessio Cotroneo (1708). From here one can look down on the Marina Corta. The church of the Immacolata, next to the excavations, was completed in 1755. The deepest excavations are of the ‘Capo Graziano’ period (1600–1400 BC). Then comes the ‘Milazzese’ period (1400–1270 BC); the first Ausonian period (‘Subapennine’, 1270–1125 BC); the second Ausonian period (1125–850 BC); and finally Greek and Roman. The little church of the Addolorata, originally medieval, has rich Baroque decorations and a painting of the ‘Presentation at the Temple’ of the school of Raphael.

Nearby is the Salita Meligunis, which takes us down to the Marina Lunga. Santa Caterina is now a storeroom for the museum. Outside the walls, still on the Acropolis, is an open area, Piazza Mazzini, popular in summer evenings but otherwise rather dull. The fortifications are however imposing. The Municipio next to the church of Sant’Antonio, is in the former Franciscan convent.

The new town is bright and lively with the usual boutiques, *pizzeria* and *trattorie* of any popular resort. On the west side in the *contrada* Diana a large archaeological park has been laid out. Roman houses have been found here, and traces of Greek walls and some tombs. Off Via Marconi Greek sarcophagi have been displayed, and near here there are also some Roman *hypogea*. A round trip of the island by car or bus covers 27 kilometres. There is good bathing at Canneto, also at Porticello. The hot springs at San Calogero are in an attractive area; here Roman baths have been excavated and Mycenaean pottery has been found.

The island of **Vulcano** is a place of infinite surprises, an adventure to visit, separated by a kilometre from Lipari. Those who remember it in years past will regret the unscrupulous pimping of holiday villas and hotels on the northern side. This weird landscape, with the perpetual skein of smoke from its volcano, and with its hot mud pool and vivid orange and red sulphates oozing from the ground should have been left intact.

The craters of Monti Aria (499 metres) and Saraceno (481 metres) at the southern end have been extinct since prehistoric times. Here the landscape is quite different, green, with fruit trees and vines, also capers, mimosa and mulberries. At the furthest point is a hamlet called Gelso, and *gelso* in Italian means mulberry. The volcano that is still active is the Gran Cratere (481 metres) otherwise known as the Fossa di Vulcano. It erupted in 1888–90, but remains semi-dormant, though the quantity of smoke that emerges varies alarmingly. Its type of activity is appropriately known to geologists (who do consider the volcano dangerous) as Vulcanian (see also p. 369); when erupting it continues several months and ejects solid blocks and fragmented ash. In the last eruption the Gran Cratere sent out '*bombe di crosta pane*', bombs like loaves, still to be seen lying around. This eruption also put to an end a thriving

business begun by a Scotsman called Stevenson who had been extracting alum, sulphur and ammoniac chloride.

At the point of the island nearest Lìpari there is a small cone known as Vulcanello that rose out of the sea in 183 BC, finally becoming extinct in the nineteenth century. It is now linked by an isthmus to the main island, thus conveniently forming two bays, the Porto di Levante where ferries and *aliscafi* arrive, and on the west side the Porto di Ponente where there is a tourist village, near some good beaches of black sand. The mud pool and the curious efflorescence of the sulphates are in this area – sufferers from osteoarthritis and skin diseases come here for a cure. And in the sea near the rocks and beach are underwater *fumarole*, some scalding hot, that gurgle and send up bubbles.

In ancient times the island was TherMESSA or Terasia, or Hiera Hephaiston, the Sanctuary of Hephaistos, the Greek god of fire. To the Romans it was sacred to Vulcan, blacksmith to the gods, hence its present name. A climb to the Gran Cratere takes about an hour. This is about 500 metres across, its sides streaked with various colours, predominantly saffron. A round trip of the island is another exciting experience, among the bubbling pools and jagged *faraglioni*, some of them huge.

The island of **Salina** was once known as Didyme, meaning ‘twin’ (also referring to women’s breasts), because of its distinctive double humps of extinct volcanoes, Monte dei Porri (860 metres) to the west and Monte Fossa delle Felci (962 metres) to the east. Its present name is derived from the salt-pan that was once at Lingua, on the extreme south-eastern corner. With approximately 2200 inhabitants spread among half a dozen villages it is less visited by tourists than some of its neighbours. Extremely fertile, it is famed for its extra large capers, produced commercially, and above all for its strong wines and in particular the golden-bronze Malvasia, the Malmsey of old. There is some interesting *macchia mediterranea*, and on the higher

slopes there are ilex, chestnuts and arbutus. Fish are abundant, the sea near Arenella being thought best for scuba-diving – there are also *fumarole* in these parts.

The main port of call is at Santa Marina Salina on the east coast. Prehistoric remains have been found here, and in the *palazzo comunale* some Hellenistic inscriptions are preserved. Roads suitable for cars run across and round the island, with good views. At Malfa on the north coast, the largest village, boats can be hired to the natural arch at Punto Perciato and to the *faraglioni* below the village of Pollara, situated in a natural amphitheatre below Monte dei Porri. The road from Malfa passes through the Giovi valley where there is the sanctuary of the Madonna del Terzito (1630), and then on to Leni, a market village. That superb film, *Il Postino*, was mostly shot at Salina.

Panarèa is the smallest and prettiest of the islands, and is almost an archipelago of its own, with several islets, some just rocks: Basiluzzo, Lisca Bianca, Lisca Nera, Panarelli, Dattilo, Bottào, Le Formiche. Originally called Euònymos, it has many reminders of its volcanic origin, and is important for its prehistoric settlements. The water is marvellously clear, but the beaches are few and pebbly, some only visitable by boat. The west side has vines and cultivation, but the main post-war emigration was on the east side. An enterprising doctor began developing the island for tourism, repairing abandoned peasant houses. This took off in a remarkable way, so that now Panarèa is a smart resort, with new houses near the coast, built in traditional style with roses and plumbago falling in exuberant abandon over walls, geraniums in pots and hibiscus: rather like pre-war Anacapri as described by Francis Brett Young or Compton Mackenzie. A yachtsman's paradise too.

The inhabited area is divided into three: Ditella, San Pietro and Drauto. A path leads south to the picturesque bay of Calajunco, where on the promontory above is Punta Milazzese with important remains of oval Bronze Age huts,

around 1400–1270 BC. Traces of Greek settlements have also been found at Piano della Calcara at the other end of the island and where there are *fumarole* and hot springs, also a pool of hot mud, similar to Vulcano's. A Greek wreck was found off here in 1980, and objects salvaged from it are in the Lipari museum. Stròmboli looms in the distance, and if it is in a particularly active mood one can see flames at night time spurting up at regular intervals.

Dattilo is the nearest of the offshore islets. There are spectacular underwater *fumarole* at Bottaro. Basiluzzo, the largest, has bizarre striated cliffs. Here among the wild rosemary and aromatic plants are prehistoric and Roman remains, including mosaics. There are more Roman remains underwater, presumably from a landing stage. Lisca Bianca is where yet another famous film was shot: Antonioni's *L'Avventura*.

From time immemorial **Stròmboli** has been a guide to mariners, and thus has become known as the 'lighthouse of the Mediterranean'. As a child I passed it on my way to India in an Italian liner. Seeing those tremendous incandescent flames and the sprays of vermilion and scarlet is among my earliest and most vivid memories. Its name derives from the Greek *strongyle* meaning round, and from the distance Stròmboli does look like a great brooding black-humped octopus. It comes as a surprise on reaching the northern shore to find so much greenery, setting off the white flat-roofed houses and coal-black beaches. The peak is 924 metres high and known as the Serra Vaucina. Although the crater is in constant activity, the frequency and size of its explosions have varied over the centuries. Usually the molten magma and volcanic débris go shooting up every fifteen minutes to a height of a thousand metres. Some of the fragments fall back into the cone, others bounce off and go tumbling down the sheer slope, 700 metres long, known as the Sciarà del Fuoco. This at night from the sea

below is thrilling to watch, and is a popular excursion for those staying on Panarèa.

The town of Stròmboli, with a population of 450, is divided into two, San Bartolo and San Vincenzo, both with churches of the same name. As with the other islands there has been much emigration, so some houses are crumbling away. Other houses have been beautified, probably as second homes, with wistaria and geraniums. But motor-cycles, the common form of transport, can be maddening, and electricity is not general. Nevertheless Stròmboli has become relatively fashionable, particularly for Germans. The memory of the Ingrid Bergman-Rossellini film (this time mediocre) of 1950 lingers on, and her name is commemorated by a bar. There is a hamlet called Ginostra on the far side of the island, but reached by boat: favoured by the Italian right-on radical chic.

There are also several good beaches, all with black volcanic sand. The Malvasia wine is also produced on the island.

The climb from San Bartolo to the crater can take up to three hours, and a guide is necessary. This turns into an arduous experience, after the vineyards, prickly pears, canes and olive groves have been negotiated. The best time to watch the spectacle of the explosions is in darkness, so it is advisable to bring windproof clothes, boots and a sleeping bag – items hardly likely to be in one's luggage on a Mediterranean summer holiday. Shelters have been built near the vent hole. The roar of the explosions has with reason been compared to a jet engine, and this is followed by a rattle like gravel being unloaded on a giant corrugated roof. I found it a more exciting experience than climbing up Etna or Vesuvius, but not one to be repeated.

A boat trip however can be recommended to Strombolicchio, the rock 43 metres high that sticks out of the sea like the turret of a castle. A stairway of over 200

steps has been cut out of the rock to a terrace where there is a lighthouse.

The remote, wild and beautiful islands of Filicudi and Alicudi are less visited by tourists. The sea around them is rich in fish, and the rhythm of life is refreshingly slow. **Filicudi**, oval-shaped with about 250 inhabitants, was anciently Phoenicussa, so named some think because of a Greek word for the dwarf palms that were once abundant – though the alternative suggestion that there was once a Phoenician settlement here does seem the most probable. There are three extinct volcanoes. A small plain near the port connects with Capo Graziano (174 metres) on which two prehistoric villages have been excavated.

The lower village is eighteenth–seventeenth centuries BC. Evidently it was moved up hill for safety, but abandoned in the thirteenth century. The excavated site is now somewhat overgrown. There are several caves, the best known being Grotta del Bue Marino (Grotto of the Monk Seal), 37 metres long with reddish lava walls and refracted light. There are also *faraglioni*, one called La Canna being 173 metres high.

Alicudi has only 100 inhabitants, and has a shape like Stromboli's. Its name used to be Ericusa, because of the many clumps of heather (*erica*). Almost circular, it is only two square miles and rises to a cone 675 metres high. The western slopes are bare. On the east side there are vines and citrus and olive trees, and houses have strings of flaming tomatoes, out to dry. Some fourth century BC tombs with vases and artefacts were found in the Piano del Fucile. In 1693 the Spanish fleet won a memorable victory here over the Barbary pirates who had established themselves in the Aeolian Islands. For lovers of solitude Alicudi is a place out of a dream.

*Castroreale – Novara di Sicilia – Tindari
Patti – Brolo – Capo d'Orlando – Naso*

The industrial town of Barcellona at the eastern end of the gulf of Patti has little to tempt us by way of historical monuments. It was merged with its neighbour Pozzo di Gotto in 1835. A winding road brings us to **Castroreale**, with several important churches and a small museum, not to mention views. There was an Arab fortress here, rebuilt and enlarged by Frederick II of Aragon in 1324 as part of the outlying defences of Messina. The Chiesa Madre, on Piazza Marconi, is dedicated to Maria Assunta. Reconstructed in the eighteenth century, it has a campanile of 1518 and an elegant portal of 1633. Throughout this part of Sicily there are small towns possessing sculpture by the Gagini, and in this church (a Latin cross) we have two examples by Antonello Gagini: statues of Santa Maria di Gesù (1501, an early one) and Santa Caterina di Alessandria (1534). The holy water stoup is 1530, and the organ loft, marble pulpit and font are all early seventeenth century.

A series of steps brings us to the old Capuchin convent (1618) annexed to the Chiesa di Santa Maria delle Grazie and with a sixteenth century painting of the Madonna with saints. Down Via Cappuccini we find the only remaining gate of the walled city, rebuilt in 1800. A medieval tower is incorporated into the church of Santa Marina, sixteenth century, now disused, in Via Siracusa, the main street of the *centro storico*. Close by is Sant'Agata, fifteenth century in origin, modest outside but containing an Annunciation by Antonello Gagini (1519), a statue of St Agatha by Giovanni Angelo Montorsoli (1554), and a papier-mâché

crucifix. The museum is in what was the Oratorio di San Filippo Neri, with a sixteenth century portal over which there is a balcony supported by sea-horses. On display are sculpture, crucifixes and paintings, all removed from various churches. Of particular interest are paintings of the Madonna delle Grazie by Antonello de Saliba (sixteenth century) and an 'Adoration of the Magi' of the Flemish school (sixteenth century) and a silver altar frontal by Filippo Juvarra (1700). The great crucifix, 18 metres high, is carried on its *vara* through the streets during Holy Week. Also in Via Siracusa we have Palazzo Peculio, now the Municipio, and the sixteenth century campanile and church of San Salvatore – the walls of which were probably from a mosque. A stairway leading from behind Palazzo Peculio brings us to the church of the Candelora, with a very fine seventeenth century carved wood altar attributed to Giovanni Siracusa. The church of Santa Maria di Gesù by the cemetery is fifteenth century and has a funerary monument of Geronimo Rosso (1506) by Antonello Gagini and another of the Calamoneri family (1629).

Returning through a terraced landscape to the coast road we reach the thriving thermal establishment of **Castoreale Terme**. In the *frazione* of San Biagio there are remains of what must have been a luxurious Roman villa, first century AD, almost square in design, though now dusty and neglected. The mosaics are black and white, some geometrical, but in the *frigidarium* there is a lively scene of fishermen with swordfish and dolphins, part of a large thermal complex. A little museum has various fragments. Another inland road, *statale* 153, passes through orange groves to the small agricultural town of Mazzara Sant'Andrea. In due course we get a good view of the promontory of Tindari and its sanctuary church.

This tortuous road, quite an adventure at times, eventually brings us to *statale* 185 near Francavilla di Sicilia (p. 392). On the map it may seem a short cut to Taormina,

but the *autostrada* by way of Messina can be quicker in spite of many more kilometres.

Novara di Sicilia is in a lofty situation, 650 metres up. Here the oratory of San Filippo Neri is 1610, and the fountain in front is 1668. San Giorgio, seventeenth century, and the cathedral, enlarged in the late sixteenth century, both have sandstone columns. The cathedral is worth seeing for its fine marble altars, carved choir stalls of the eighteenth century, paintings, and a wooden statue of the *Assunta* by Filippo Colicci (1769). The bronze statue of David in Largo Bertolami is by Giuseppe Buemi (1882). In the church of the Annunziata (sixteenth century) there is a marble Annunciation by Giovan Battista Mazzolo (1531), and in the Badia of the former Cistercian convent there is a French lavabo of the thirteenth century, and a large Hispano-Moresque vase.

The wild mountainous country to the east of Novara, beneath the high ridge of the Peloritani, is known as Fondachelli Fantina. The air currents make this another flight path for migrating birds, and Egyptian vultures and red kites have been seen here. From the fantastically shaped Rocca Novara, 1340 metres, we get a huge view of the coast, the Aeolian Islands, Etna and Calabria. There is another great view of Etna from the rocky shoulders of the Portella Mandrazzo pass, the highest point of the road, 1125 metres up.

At San Basilio, five kilometres west of Novara, there is a cave, the Riparo della Sperlinga, where there was a Mesolithic settlement. Nearer the coast at Rodi Bronze Age Tombs have been found. At Milici there are the ruins of Longane, where Hieron II of Syracuse defeated the Mamertines in 269 BC.

Yet another inland road twists up to Tripi, Basicò and Montalbano Elicona, all very scenic and remote. Montalbano, 920 metres, is in a particularly striking position, above a valley, and has an early fourteenth century

castle that was used as a residence by Frederick II of Aragon. The Chiesa Madre (San Nicolò) has a fine Baroque portal and contains a large seated marble statue of San Nicola di Bari (1587) attributed to Giacomo Gagini.

Continuing along the coast we see on the right the headland of Capo **Tindari** and the prominent modern sanctuary of the Black Madonna. This building stands on the site of the acropolis of the ancient Tyndaris, whose beautiful and evocative ruins lie on the northern slopes and are not normally on package tour routes. The road passes silvery olive groves and the remains of Greek walls to the car park which was once the sacred precinct of the acropolis.

The wooden statue of the Black Madonna is Byzantine in style and said to have come from the East. The legend of her origin is somewhat familiar in that she was washed up in a shipwreck, perhaps in the eighth century, and miracles were at once performed. A chapel was built in her honour but destroyed by Barbarossa and then rebuilt. The present church, pink and white, was completed in 1979. It does indeed have richness and dignity, but some decorative features may not be to everyone's taste. The *fešta* is on September 8, and huge crowds make the pilgrimage from all over Sicily and Calabria. The little Madonna sits in a tabernacle with the proud words from *The Song of Songs*, 'Niger sum sed formosa' – 'I am black but beautiful'. There are many pictures and representations of her miracles. The best known story is that a pilgrim made a disparaging remark about her colour, and shortly afterwards his child fell off the cliff. The Madonna in her mercy caused the sea to recede and the soft pillow-like sand saved the child. It was then that her famous words were uttered.

In the front of the church there is the Belvedere, with its massive panorama, and where we look down on the bizarre formations of the lagoons, formed by the white sand and gravel, known as the Laghetti di Marinello. Another (and

this time profane) legend is connected with a cave near these lagoons. A lady named Donna Villa inhabited it, luring male travellers inside. After making violent love she would kill and eat them, decorating the cave with their bones.

Tyndaris was founded in 396 BC by Dionysius I of Syracuse on a site inhabited in prehistoric times, as a defence against the Carthaginians. The headland, 280 metres high, would have been almost impregnable, with the additional advantage of its great commanding views. The only access would have been on the west side, where now we see the remains of the walls. The first inhabitants were refugees from Greece, and the city was then named in honour of the Dioscuri or Tyndaridae, Castor and Pollux, protectors of emigrants. Soon, we are told, Tyndaris had 5000 citizens. It supported Octavian in the first Punic War and was later seized by Sextus Pompeius. It flourished during the Imperial period, though a disastrous landslide in the mid first century BC is recorded by the elder Pliny. In 365 there was a severe earthquake, and in 836 the Saracens completely razed it.

The British consul Robert Fagan excavated here in 1808 and wrote a report of his findings, now in the British Museum, in 1812. Evidently he surreptitiously sold some of his finds to English collectors, but a leg and a foot from a colossal statue that he dug out were later to be incorporated in the sculptor Valerio Villareale's reconstruction of an emperor in the Archaeological Museum of Palermo (p. 47). Extensive excavations and reconstructions took place at Tindari between 1949 and 1964, and the whole area has been laid out with pines and flowering plants. As usual the little antiquarium could be visited first. Here we have descriptive plans, also reproductions of eighteenth century watercolours, giving a very good idea of the site at that time. Various fragments of pottery, vases, reliefs, masks

are displayed, including two *nikai* or winged victories and, especially, a large marble head of Augustus.

The city was laid out on a regular plan, with three straight roads, *decumani*, lined with shops and with smaller roads running downhill, on each side identical buildings. Above the upper *decumanus* is the site of what was a large town house with fine mosaics and a peristyle. This leads to the theatre, a quiet romantic spot overlooking the sea, goat-bells perhaps tinkling in the background and the wind whistling in the pines. Originally Greek, third century BC, the theatre was reconstructed by the Romans for gladiatorial combats. The first four rows of seats were removed, leaving twenty-eight. The foundations of the Hellenistic stage are still visible, also the entrances to the *parascenia* or dressing rooms where stage properties were also kept. The walls above the theatre are Byzantine.

Returning to the museum we have on the left an entire *insula* of Roman houses with vestiges of colonnaded courtyards and mosaic floors. The baths nearby have a mosaic floor, depicting Dionysus and a panther. Elsewhere there are representations of the Trinacria, Castor and Pollux, and a bull. The arched entrances to the so-called gymnasium have been quite impressively reconstructed and are now a picturesque feature. Maybe this building was really a basilica or public meeting place. Originally there were three floors, but only the lower one remains. It would have been linked to the *agora* which is now covered by the modern village. The date is late Imperial, but Greek square blocks are visible.

Patti, the next town, has a marina that is popular in the summer but is at other times bleak. Count Roger fortified the highest point around a Benedictine abbey which he founded in 1094. On this site, where the Cathedral now stands, a church was built by Roger II in honour of his mother Adelaide who was also buried in it. He had been only six when his father died, so Adelaide – or Adelasia,

as she is generally known in Sicily – became regent. Being now one of the richest women in Europe she was courted by King Baldwin of Jerusalem, who needed her money. So in due course she set sail for the Holy Land with a splendour such as had not been seen since Cleopatra went to meet Antony, as Steven Runciman has said in his history of the Crusades. Nine ships accompanied her with her Arab servants and fabulous treasures. Alas, four years later in 1117 all had gone sour, and her wealth had as good as disappeared. Baldwin turned out to have another wife in Constantinople. She returned to Sicily where she died the following year.

Patti has suffered many great disasters. It was destroyed by Frederick II of Aragon for having backed the Angevins, and was sacked and burnt again by Barbarossa. It was partially destroyed by the earthquake of 1693 and severely damaged by another in 1978. This last has meant that many of the houses are modern, and only some churches, including the Cathedral, have been restored. All the same, the texture of the medieval town, with its narrow streets, has remained.

It was Roger II who conferred a bishopric on it, linking it with Lipari. The main façade of the Cathedral, with its view towards the sea, has a Romanesque portal decorated with grotesque and winged female figures. The relatively plain interior contrasts with the side chapels, richly decorated with polychrome marbles. Among several paintings there is a sixteenth century Madonna and Child with angels by Antonello de Saliba. In a chapel on the right there are boxes with the bones of eighteen martyrs. High above the main altar is a slightly archaic Virgin and Child in Carrara marble by Antonio Venelli, early sixteenth century. Most interesting of all is the marble sarcophagus of Queen Adelaide, made in 1557 to replace the original destroyed by Barbarossa. In the treasury are various important liturgical objects in silver, including a fourteenth century chalice and

a sixteenth century cross. Here too is the 'Area magna', the great ark, consisting of 40 volumes of ancient documents from the tenth century onwards that were collected together in the seventeenth century.

Near the Cathedral is the Norman tower, the remains of the original castle. The fountain outside was built in 1647 by Bishop Napoli, whose sarcophagus is also in the Cathedral, and for two centuries this provided water for the Bishop's palace; it is thought that the basin held up by lions could have been part of Adelaide's first tomb. The church of Santa Maria dei Greci, known also as San Giuseppe, in Via XX Settembre, was originally medieval but has been greatly altered. This has a marble statue of the Madonna with the Child at her breast. San Michele, next to the Porta San Michele and reconstructed in the seventeenth century, has an elaborate marble *ciborium* by Antonello Gagini (1538) and represents a chalice being adored by angels, with the Magdalen and Sant'Agata on either side.

In 1973 when the *autostrada* was being constructed a very grand Roman villa was unearthed. This exciting discovery, which is still being excavated, is near the railway station and under the *autostrada* viaduct. It is reckoned to be 20,000 square metres, and was built round a large peristyle. The polychrome mosaics, obviously the work of North Africans, are mostly geometrical and floral but have similarities with those at Piazza Armerina. The baths too are being uncovered. There was also a settlement near here in Byzantine times, and some interesting objects found in neighbouring tombs are in the antiquarium.

Continuing west we pass Capo Calava, with more views of the coast. Gioiosa Marea is a thriving resort, popular with scuba divers because of the many shipwrecks off the rocky coast. **Piràino**, the next village, has more buildings of interest and is probably of Saracen origin – though it is claimed that its name derives from Piracmone, a cyclops

who lived in Vulcano. Here the Chiesa del Rosario contains a wooden group of the Madonna with saints (1703) set within a sumptuous altarpiece, surrounded by medallions illustrating the Passion. The Chiesa Madre, sixteenth century but altered, also has ornate altars, one with a painting of Saints Rosalia, Biagio and Caterina by Rosalia Novelli (mid seventeenth century). The sixteenth century Chiesa di Santa Caterina, altered in 1694, in Via Umberto and overlooking the sea, has a Gaginesque statue of St Catherine. Nearby is the 'Torrazza', a fourteenth century watch-tower. Special mention must be made of Piraino's *sagra della frinza* in July, celebrated with toasted bread soaked in oil with anchovies, tomatoes and marjoram.

On the coast at Gliaca there is a *suggestivo* watch tower known as the 'Ciavole'. **Brolo**, set among vineyards and citrus groves, is also a popular resort. Its castle, surrounded by a cluster of medieval streets, belonged to the Lancia family, who built the town walls, in the sixteenth century; privately owned, it has been well restored and can be visited. There are marble quarries here. On December 13, the *festa* of Santa Lucia, the great dish is *cuccia*, made with thirteen ingredients that must be distributed among thirteen people. But Brolo's most important day is on the first Sunday in September, the *luminaria du luccu*. Bonfires are lit, commemorating the miracle of a statue of the Madonna Addolorata having remained intact when a church caught fire.

From Brolo and Patti circuitous roads lead to a network of small towns in the lower slopes of the Nèbrodi mountains, the continuation of the Peloritani. A Nèbrodi national park has recently been declared, but the wilder country and highest peaks are further west in the triangle of Mistretta, San Fratello and Cesarò. Near Patti there are groves of hazelnut trees and olives. The woods on higher ground include ilex, beech, oak and yew, with pastureland above. Not all these towns have monuments of impor-

tance, but nearly each possesses a revered marble statue of the Madonna by a Gagini or a member of that school.

First comes Librizzi, with a great panoramic view, and in the church of the Catena there is a Gagesque Madonna holding a chain (*catena*). Next comes the village of San Piero Patti, which was developed by the Arabs – the country around is still known as ‘Arabita’. Count Roger’s Lombard soldiers settled here, and even now local people have a distinctive dialect. The Chiesa Madre has a fine coffered ceiling, and statues of the Madonna dell’Itria and Santa Caterina d’Alessandria. and a marble Annunciation group. Raccuia, on a spur above the river Sinagra, has a Baroque Chiesa Madre with three Gagesque statues. Ucria has one statue of note, a sixteenth century Annunciation.

Floresta, at the head of the Alcàntara valley, is the highest village in Sicily, founded in the seventeenth century by refugees escaping from the Spaniards. This is a place for winter sports, and in summer for Sicilians who prefer mountain air to swimming in the sea. It is famous for its cheese, especially ricotta.

Tortorici, in a hollow by a river of that name, and near an untamed stretch of country known as Bosco di Mangalaviti, has long been renowned for its bronze foundries, and in particular for the making of bells. The church of San Nicolò here has an interesting painted ceiling, and the Chiesa Madre possesses two statues by Antonio and Giacomo Gagini. The dilapidated sixteenth century *chiesetta* of the Badia has a marble Gagesque Annunciation group. The town was badly damaged by flooding in 1682 and 1754. There is more Gagesque statuary to be found in the Chiesa Madre of Castell’ Umberto, a village prettily placed above two rivers; also at Sinagra and Ficarra.

There are stupendous views west of Tortorici, around Galati Mamertino, especially at the Pizzo di Verina. In the Chiesa Madre at **Galati** we have more Gagini sculpture: an Annunciation (1552) and a Trinity by Antonino (1544).

And here we also have paintings by Giuseppe Tresca (signed and dated 1753) and one of the Immacolata by Gaetano Mercurio (c. 1780). In Santa Caterina there is a statue of the saint by Antonio Gagini (1550). And in the church of the Rosario there is a painted wooden fifteenth century statue of St Sebastian by an unknown Flemish artist, also a Madonna perhaps by Antonello Gagini (1534). In the neighbouring village of San Salvatore di Fitalia the church of San Salvatore has a marble ancona, again by Antonello Gagini, and other sculpture.

The road from Galati descends through barren country, then ascends to Longi. Rising above the town are the gigantic rose-coloured limestone cliffs of the Rocche del Crasto (1315 metres), the nesting place of birds of prey. Until 1965 griffon vultures bred here, but were wiped out when shepherds started laying down poison for foxes. Now LIPU, the bird protection society, is aiming to reintroduce them from Spain. About nine kilometres to the south-west a cave known as the Grotta del Lamo has stalactites and traces of a Bronze Age settlement.

On the way to Frazzanò we pass the church of San Filippo di Fragalà next to a Basilian convent founded by Count Roger in 1090. This has been over restored, but nevertheless maintains some of its original charm, with three apses and traces of Byzantine frescoes. Bricks are mixed with stones in an original manner, especially over the north door. The town of **Frazzanò** was founded by refugees fleeing from the Arabs. The church of the Annunziata has an unexpectedly lively façade, and inside a statue of the Annunziata attributed to Giuseppe Gagini (1515), also a beautiful altar made of inlaid marble.

Back on the coast we come to the headland of **Capo d'Orlando**. The tradition is that Charlemagne, on his way to the Holy Land, was so taken by the beauty of this place that he named it after the paladin Orlando. The ancient town of Agathyrnum was probably here, according

to Diodorus founded by Agathyrsus, the son of Aeolus, mythical king of the Lìpari islands and keeper of the winds – and Capo d’Orlando headland can certainly be an unexpectedly windy spot. There are remains of a medieval castle, and a sanctuary has been built on the site of where a miraculous Madonna was found in a box. A ‘sea procession’ in her honour takes place on August 15, and it is a moving event.

The town of Capo d’Orlando was a small fishing village not so long ago and a centre for growing citrus fruit. In the last decades it has developed vastly as a tourist resort, mainly on account of its beaches, both sandy and rocky. There is a marina for yachts. It was in these waters that Frederick II of Aragon was defeated in 1299 by Roger of Lauria, commanding the combined fleets of Cataluna and Anjou.

Capo d’Orlando was also the home town of the poet Lucio Piccolo, cousin and close friend of Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa. Giorgio Bassani, the ‘discoverer’ of *The Leopard*, has described how Piccolo, whose work had been admired by the great writer Eugenio Montale, was invited to a convention in 1954. Everyone had been expecting a ‘romantic youth in blue jeans’, and it was thus a surprise to be confronted by a stolid middle-aged man, accompanied by a taciturn Sicilian prince, who might have been a retired general – Lampedusa no less. The couple were followed everywhere by a ‘deeply sunburnt Sicilian retainer, a kind of mace-bearer’. In fact it was his visit to this convention that gave Lampedusa the impetus to write.

Naso with its hazelnut and chestnut plantations lies on the mountainous road that eventually leads to Ucria and Floresta, and then to Randazzo (p. 393): a lovely spot. The church of the Salvatore (seventeenth century) has a main portal of 1755, and twin unfinished campaniles. Inside there is a large fifteenth century marble triptych, also a painting of St Jerome by Gaspare Camarda (1626). The Baroque

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Chiesa Madre has a wooden crucifix (1642) by Antonio Tambona of Naples. In the gorgeous Rococo chapel of the Rosary there is a Gaginesque Madonna. On the northern outskirts of Naso we have the late fifteenth century church of Santa Maria del Gesù. This was attached to the convent of the monks of the Minori Osservanti. Its portal of 1475 still exists, and inside there is a fine Renaissance archway carved from the living rock. Notable among various objects of interest is the monument of Artale Cardona, who died in 1477, with four statues of the Virtues holding up the urn. The tabernacle on the high altar is 1694. Naso is much to be recommended, *if* the weather is fine, that is.

San Marco d'Alunzio – Alcara Li Fusi – San Fratello – Caronia – Mistretta – Tusa

High above the main road from Capo d'Orlando to Cefalù is the prosperous little town of **San Marco d'Alunzio** on the site of the ancient Aluntium. The situation has charm, with its backdrop of the sea, but even so it is odd to think that this is where Countess Adelaide kept court during her regency. In spite of the old houses being plastered over, and a concrete water tower disfiguring all that remains of the Norman castle of 1061, this place is worth a detour for a look at the little church of San Marco, now roofless, but also interesting as having been built over the *cella* of a temple of Hercules. The original golden brown blocks are still there. Also, in the church of Santa Maria dell'Aiuto, there are two marble tombs of the Filangeri family by Domenico Gagini (1481). The Filangeri were Princes of Mirto, and it is their palazzo in Palermo which is now open to the public (p. 60). They lost the *contea* of San Marco d'Alunzio when feudalism was abolished in 1812. The present-day inhabitants of the town are known either as Sammarioti or Aluntini.

Next, Sant'Agata di Militello, quite different, a well organized seaside holiday place, complete with 'Luna Park'. The beach is pebbly. A road inland leads to Militello Rosmarino, where the church of San Domenico has a sarcophagus attributed to Domenico Gagini. It winds upwards to the slightly larger town of **Alcara Li Fusi**, near the Torrente Schiavoli and the Rocca Traora. This has an imposing Chiesa Madre with a castellated campanile and some noteworthy paintings, also a silver funerary urn with

the ashes of San Nicolò Politi (1581). There are remains of an eleventh century castle. Alcara Li Fusi is a place to visit on June 24th, the *Festa dei muzzuni*. Handmade blankets and sheets are hung outside houses, and in front are placed tables on which are placed *muzzuni*, bundles or parcels representing a decapitated man, covered with gold trinkets, money, ears of corn etc. A group of men dance round each *muzzune*, continuing far into the night, and singing songs in ancient Sicilian dialect.

Acquedolci was founded in 1922 round a medieval castle, to accommodate those dispossessed by a landslide at San Fratello on the heights above. Near here, on the slopes of Pizzo Castellano, is the cave of San Teodoro, which can be reached by a mule path, a walk of about thirty minutes. Fossil bones of dwarf elephants and hippopotami have been found, also bones of deer and polished stones. *Statale* 289 twists up to **San Fratello**. Here a Lombard colony was founded by Countess Adelaide and the local people still retain their distinctive dialect. Near the cemetery is the charming little Norman church dedicated to three martyrs, San Alfio (whose tongue was cut out), San Filadelfo (buried alive) and San Cirino (thrown into boiling pitch). The Chiesa Madre and castle are in ruins. In the cloisters of the convent of San Francesco there are traces of frescoes by Emanuele da Como, seventeenth century.

San Fratello has the most bizarre Holy Week festivities in Sicily. In most other towns on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday hooded figures and mourners reverently parade the streets, but in San Fratello there is a *Festa dei Giudei*, feast of the Jews, which can only be described as orgiastic. This is supposed to represent Jews who brought Christ to trial and beat him. Shepherds in grotesque red masks and devils' costumes, with black tongues and horses' tails, rush hither and thither around the town and inside houses, lashing out with chains and blowing trumpets, and shouting coarse insults. The ecclesiastical authorities are

by no means keen on such activities, but attendances at church on Easter Sunday are suitably subdued and sober.

San Fratello is also regarded as one of the main starting points for exploring the Nèbrodi mountains' most dramatic scenery, on horseback or on foot. The *statale* goes through rugged countryside and past the peaks of Monte Soro (1847 metres), Pizzo Camolato (1586 metres) and Poggio Tornitore (1571 metres). Here we also find semi-wild horses called Sanfratellani, believed to be of part Norman, part Byzantine descent; they are also said to be good to eat. In ancient times all this area was thick forest. There are still many wooded areas, and the slopes of Monte Soro are covered with Sicilian beech, a marvellous sight in autumn, especially when there is snow on the mountain. Other trees include ilex, oak, some yew, and conifers. In the valleys crops and vines are grown, and there is pasture, with herds of goats, shaggy black pigs, sheep and cattle. The last wolf was killed in 1929, and the deer and wild boar have gone. But there are still porcupines, pine martens and wild cats. The bird life is interesting, and in the early mornings we can look for nuthatches, barn owls, kestrels, ravens, Bonelli's eagles and great spotted woodpeckers. At the Portella Femmina Morta a track runs north of Monte Soro to the Biviere di Cesarò, a beautiful lake, with Etna well in view, and one of the sources of the Simeto, the longest river in Sicily. This has an extraordinary number of quaint little terrapins, as well as various aquatic birds, such as mallard and moorhens.

The Bosco di Mangalivite is nearby, and to the south-east under the Serra di Re (1754 metres) is the Foresta Vecchia, one of the best places for wild life. We may also be lucky enough to stumble across some charcoal-burners working in the woods, among the few left in Europe – memories, for me at any rate, of Grimms' fairy tales. The *statale* continues its way south to the mountain villages of

San Teodoro and Cesarò (p. 403), which are not far from Maniace and Bronte.

The next village along the coast, following the old Roman road, the Valeria, is **Caronìa**, on a hill overlooking the sea with a good panorama. Of Saracenic origin it is regarded by Sicilians as among the last of their 'typical' villages; inhabitants stare even at them as if they were *stranieri*, strangers, i.e. foreigners. The Norman castle has been well restored and is privately owned, and there are remains of fourteenth century walls. The Chiesa Madre is seventeenth century, with a portal of 1716. Below is the site of Calacte, which was founded by the Sikel king Ducetius in the fifth century BC. Once again, here at Caronìa there is a curious festival, in honour of San Biagio, the saint who cures sore throats. His statue is carried around with silver tokens of gratitude hanging round his neck, and marzipan cakes (*cudduri*) decorating his arms and feet, while men and women follow barefoot (surely conducive to sore throats?).

The road into the Nèbrodi, south of the Marina di Caronìa, passes the peak of the Pizzo di Laminaria (1260 metres). We then reach the Bosco di Caronìa, once the largest forest in Sicily and from which the alternative name for the Nèbrodi, the Caronie, is derived.

Santo Stefano di Camastra, like Sciacca and Caltagirone, is well known for its ceramics, a tradition since the fifteenth century. A school of ceramics is now in the old Capuchin convent near the cemetery. The Chiesa Madre, begun in 1685 and completed in 1752, has a Gagesque Madonna (1610) and two paintings by Giuseppe Patania, and is decorated with stuccoes of the early nineteenth century. **Mistretta** is an attractive place, 950 metres up on *statale* 117, and frequented for the *villeggiature*, country holidays. Anciently Amestratus, it owed its importance to its dominant position on a main route into central Sicily. In the Piazza dei Vespri an elegant double stairway leads

up to the church of San Giovanni, with its portal of 1534 and imposing campanile. The Chiesa Madre, rebuilt in 1630, still has some of its fourteenth and fifteenth century elements, including a side portal of 1494 attributed to Giorgio di Milano. The façade, essentially early fifteenth century, has an elaborate Baroque portal. The interior has three naves divided by columns, with fine choir stalls, a superb organ, and some outstanding inlaid marble. There are statues by Antonello Gagini, and in the sacristy a monstrance by Nibilio Gagini (1604). The Renaissance church of Santa Caterina, in the south-west corner of the town, has an ancona of 1572 with a statue of St Catherine and reliefs of 1493. The church of San Sebastiano has a striking statue of the saint above the portal. Inside is an elaborate *fercolo* or bier. Opposite is the Baroque Palazzo Russo, with pretty balconies and a staircase in the courtyard. Even grander in Via Libertà, is Palazzo Scaduto (1660). Mistretta is another good centre for excursions into the Nèbrodi. On the feast of the birth of the Virgin, September 8, two helmeted giants, one male, one female, precede the procession through the town.

Both Motta d'Affermo and Pettineo have churches with Gagini sculpture. Finally we come to **Tusa**, the last town in the province of Messina on the Tyrrhenian coast and marking the end of the Nèbrodi mountain chain and the beginning of the Madonìa. Slightly beyond the turning for Tusa, near the chapel of Santa Maria de Palatio, there is a small road to the ruins of Halaesa or Alesa, a lovely place full of atmosphere, otherwise known as the Castel di Tusa, overlooking the sea. The tradition is that it was founded by the Carthaginians but almost certainly the founder was Archonides, tyrant of Herbita, around 403 BC. In the first Punic War the town was the first to join the Romans and as a result had special favours. In the Christian period it became the seat of a bishopric, but was totally destroyed by the Arabs.

Walls with towers surrounded the town, which was laid out in a regular fashion, similar to Solunto. Excavations have brought to light the sites of two temples, one possibly dedicated to Apollo, as well as the *agora*, necropolis and part of the walls. They can usually be visited in the mornings, except Mondays.

The town of Tusa has a distinctly medieval appearance, and for centuries was a *feudo* of the Ventimiglia family. The Chiesa Madre has inlaid wooden choir stalls of the seventeenth century, a Madonna and Child of the Gagini school, a seventeenth century painting of 'Jesus giving keys to St Peter' attributed to Alonso Rodriguez, a marble triptych of 1523, and two statues by Scipione Li Volsi, who was a native Tusano. The campanile, surprisingly, is on the other side of the piazza, and was originally a medieval watch tower.

Overlooking the pebbly beach at Castel di Tusa is the extraordinary Atelier sul Mare hotel, a creation of Antonio Presti and a museum of modern art in itself. Presti has also created an open-air sculpture park of huge exhibits, some in concrete, by international artists, '*La Fiumare d'Arte*', causing much fevered controversy. Impressive, after the initial shock.

Castelbuono – Geraci Siculo – Gangi
The Petralias – Polizzi Generosa

The Madonìe Mountains are a favourite part of the island for those who know Sicily well, not just because of the scenery and wild life but for their unspoilt villages and towns, nearly all with at least one outstanding work of art. The area was designated a national park in 1989, and stretches from the river Pòllina on the east to the river Imera on the west, and down to Randazzo. But the Alte (High) Madonìe are the most beautiful, wonderful for walkers. I have chosen to begin this section from the east, but for those staying at Palermo the Madonìe are easily accessible, with the Palermo–Catania motorway running close to Polizzi Generosa, which is among the best departure points for the mountains.

In the folds of the lower hills near the coast there are vineyards and gnarled olives, centuries old. Straw huts known as *pagliarini* are still used by shepherds in the uplands; and in the remoter farms – looking almost like forts – one can buy the strong cheese known as *màncatu*. And beyond are the soaring peaks and deep gorges of the Alte Madonìe, among beech and pine woods. Animal life and flowers here are much the same as in the Nèbrodi, but some plants are unique such as the *cupari* broom and varieties of androsace and colchicum. Rose peonies, euphorbias and royal ferns can be spectacular. There are rather more wild cats, martens and porcupines. The long-eared owl nests in the woods, and might be glimpsed, or at least heard – this strange bird is also the ‘symbol’ of the park.

At the mouth of the Pòllina river a road leads to **San**

Mauro Castelverde, typically medieval with ruins of a castle, probably once Byzantine. The church of Santa Maria dei Franchi has a Madonna by Domenico Gagini (1480) and a baptismal font by Antonello Gagini (1531). Here one is shown the imprint of Gregory the Great's knee. The church of the monastery of the Catena (1550) has a beautiful portal. Part of the Chiesa Madre is twelfth century, and the church of San Mauro existed in the eleventh century, before being restructured in the seventeenth.

The village of Pòllina, on a rocky ledge near the coast, has a Chiesa Madre built it is thought on the site of a temple of Apollo (hence the name Pòllina). The church has a statue and a bas-relief by Antonello Gagini. Manna, used in medicine, is gathered at Pòllina and in July there is a manna festival. An open air theatre in the Greek style, called the Teatro di Pietrarosa after the colour of the stone, was built in 1979 for performances of classic dramas. The drive up to **Castelbuono**, both from Pòllina and from Cefalù, passes through luxuriant country. By Byzantine times the site was known as Ypsigro, and in the early fourteenth century it became the seat of the Ventimiglia. On my last visit I noted that it seemed 'a happy place'.

The central square of Castelbuono, Piazza Margherita, has a sixteenth century fountain and is overlooked by the church known as the Matrice Vecchia (1350), dedicated to the Assunta, with a graceful loggia, 'swallow-tail' battlements and a Romanic campanile. The interior has three naves and an important if uneven polyptych at the high altar variously attributed to Pietro Ruzzolone or Antonello De Saliba, nephew of Antonello da Messina – at any rate dated c. 1520. The late fifteenth century *ciborium* is attributed to Giorgio da Milano. In the presbytery the statue of the Madonna degli Angeli is attributed to Antonello Gagini. There are fifteenth century frescoes in the left-hand nave and sixteenth century frescoes in the crypt. Also in the piazza, in a converted prison, is the rather charming

Museo Palumbo, with fossils, natural history oddments, an herbarium, local glass and a display that illustrates the extraction of manna: mostly collected in the nineteenth century by a local enthusiast, 'Ciccio Mina' Palumbo.

Via Sant'Anna runs north under a Gothic arch to an open square above which rises the imposing bulk of the Ventimiglia castle, begun in 1316. The castle was bought by the *Comune* from a descendant in 1920, and has been well restored – there was still damage from an earthquake back in 1820. It comes as something of a surprise, amid such austere surroundings, to find inside the 'Capella Palatina', fantastically decorated with stuccoes possibly by Giuseppe Serpotta, dating from 1683 and with the usual impish *putti*. In a niche above the high altar is a silver urn containing the relics of Sant'Anna, patron of the town. And from the terrace of the castle there are huge views of the Madonie, including the neighbouring town of Geraci Siculo. Every August a procession in costume takes place in the square, known as the 'Arruccata di li Ventimiglia'.

Back in Piazza Margherita, we take Via Umberto I for the sixteenth century fountain known as the 'Venere Ciprigna', the Cyprian Venus, with bas-reliefs. Near here is the Matrice Nuova church, its completion in 1830 having been delayed because of the earthquake ten years before. This church also has Serpottian stuccoes, and in the presbytery a large painted cross hangs, generally believed to be by Pietro Ruzzolone, though local pundits say it is by Riccardo Quartararo; the very grand Chapel of the Nativity, aswirl with carvings, is by Vincenzo Messina. To the right of the Matrice Nuova down Via degli Angeli is the church of San Francesco, which has a portico with a pretty fresco of 1545 and a balcony above with a Virgin of the sixteenth century. Here we have the ornate tombs of the Ventimiglia in their octagonal chapel preceded by a richly carved portal. There is also a Madonna and Child attributed to Antonello Gagini.

The small town of **Isnello**, west of Castelbuono, is worth a diversion if driving south from Cefalù. Its Chiesa Madre, originally fifteenth century, has a Pietà by Zoppo di Gangi, stuccoes by Giuseppe Li Volsi in the presbytery, and a fine organ case. There is also a *ciborium* attributed to Domenico Gagini and the baptismal font is sixteenth century. The church of San Michele has a painted ceiling and a crucifix by Fra' Umile da Petralia. The church of the Rosario possesses copes and altar cloths worked with Tràpani coral.

Statale 286, south of Castelbuono, climbs to **Geraci Siculo**, near the peak of Pizzo Catarineci, built on a craggy spur, with mineral springs. The name Geraci is said to derive from the Greek *ierax* meaning vulture. It can be very cold up here, even in spring, and men wear warm black capes, lined green or red, with hoods known as *u cuppularu*, and the women black shawls. Snow is common in winter. The Arabs conquered it in 840, and have left the usual legacy of small alleys and courtyards. The medieval walls have long since disappeared, but there are remains of the Ventimiglias' castle, which they abandoned for Castelbuono in the mid-fourteenth century. Theirs was the first marquisate in Sicily.

The Chiesa Madre, in the main square, Piazza del Popolo, is appropriately dedicated to the Madonna of the Snow (della Neve). Originally fourteenth century, it was enlarged in the seventeenth century. There is an attractive portal, and the campanile has a spire of multi-coloured majolica. The interior is fairly plain, having been restored in the 1960s, but the choir stalls of 1680 are good, and in the presbytery we have a 'Last Supper' by Zoppo di Gangi and a statue of the Madonna della Neve attributed to Antonello Gagini. The last chapel on the right has a seventeenth century 'Annunciation' which came from the church of Santa Maria della Casa, now a ruin. In the crypt, kept locked, there is a fantastic collection of treasures, carefully

and well arranged, including a large number of copes, also reliquaries and chalices, many presented by the Ventimiglia family over the centuries.

Among the other churches at Geraci the most notable is Santa Maria della Porta, once next to a gateway through the fortifications. A Byzantine style fresco of a Madonna and Child has recently been discovered there, with a statue above attributed to Francesco Laurana. A marble triptych is attributed to the school of Domenico Gagini, and there is a gruesome but moving crucifix of the seventeenth century.

The people of Geraci are friendly and keep their streets clean. Every seventh year, on the third Sunday in July, there takes place the *cavalcata dei pastori*, calvalcade of the shepherds. On this great day about fifty mules and horses are paraded in sumptuous trappings, and children are offered cheese made into the shapes of birds and animals.

Statale 286 ends at *statale* 120, branching off west to the two Petralias, and to **Gangi** on the east. From a distance the piled up houses of Gangi look like a swarm of bees. With its cobbled streets, blind alleys and stairways it still has a strongly medieval atmosphere. From here we also get a spectacular view of the province of Enna and the interior of the island. Necropolises of the Sikel period have been found, and Roman remains have been excavated at Gangivecchio. Possibly it is on the site of the semi-mythical Engyon, supposed to have been founded by Cretans. The present town developed in the eighteenth century around the old castle of the Ventimiglia.

On January 1 1936, a night of thick snow, there took place the famous 'siege of Gangi' resulting in mass arrests of leading Mafiosi. In those days the Mafia was also associated with brigandage, especially in the Madonìa, and Gangi was a main stronghold. Mussolini had deputed his henchman Cesare Mori to clean up Sicily and this was done with great severity, with over a thousand arrests. Many 'men

of honour' however escaped to the United States – to be invited back, with incredible naivety and disastrous consequences, by the Allied Military Government in 1943.

The *statale* passes beneath a cylindrical tower styled *Saracena*. Nearby is the Capuchin monastery (1695) with a simple but pretty courtyard, and with a well in the centre. Here there is a small museum which has a beautifully carved late Baroque tabernacle by Pietro Bencivinni, a native of Polizzi Generosa. A road south-east leads to the sanctuary of the Santo Spirito, a place of pilgrimage at Pentecost. The rich interior has frescoes by Gaspare Fiumagalli, a Roman artist (who also decorated Villa Pantelleria and Villa Spina in the Colli of Palermo), and paintings on canvas of the twelve Apostles attributed to Gaspare Vazano.

Via Monte Marone passes the Belvedere, where we should pause to admire the spectacular panorama, and then leads to Piazza San Paolo with its church of that name, built in 1530 and with an elaborately decorated portal. The interior of this church, if open, is worth a look, for its unusual twin columns on high bases and with floral and anthropomorphic carvings. The convent opposite was built for Benedictine nuns in the eighteenth century; its pale stone façade on three levels is interesting, but the interior is in a sad state. Corso Umberto passes Palazzo Bongiovanni – Li Destri, now municipal offices; this has many *trompe l'oeil* frescoes of 1758 by Gaspare Fumagalli and some fine doors.

And so we reach Piazza del Popolo, with another great view over the Madonìa. Here stand the Chiesa Madre and the great Torre Ventimiglia (1337), the first dwelling-place of that noble family. This tower is built over a portico, a favourite meeting-place for locals; the two floors above are like loggias and have a succession of very fine mullioned windows, while the third floor is the bell tower for the church, which was built in the early eighteenth century. The interior of the church is a basilica with three naves.

Behind the high altar is an enormous canvas, 5 by 4 metres, depicting the 'Last Judgement' (1629) by Zoppo di Gangi, and considered his masterpiece. There are also polychrome wooden statues by Filippo Quattrocchi, born in Gangi, perhaps the most notable being San Gaetano, with a *putto* and cornucopia. The font and holy water stoup came from Gangivecchio. Special permission, which may only be reluctantly given, has to be sought from the *parroco*, priest in charge, to see the corpses of some fifty of his mummified predecessors, their features remarkably well preserved – at any rate a more dignified place than the horrid touristy catacombs of the Cappuccini at Palermo. The fountain in front of the Ventimiglia tower, representing a rather anxious looking lion in the act of drinking, symbolises the victory of Fascism over the Mafia.

San Salvatore, reached by Via Madrice, has a colourful majolica spire. Inside there is a bleeding Christ by Fra' Umile da Petralia, one side of his face beginning to putrefy, the other calm and serene. There is also a 'Deposition' by Zoppo di Gangi. The remains of the castle, at the highest point of the town, are privately owned; one wing was demolished in 1935 to make way for a municipal water cistern. The Chiesa del Monte nearby was the castle's private chapel and has a handsome portal. Continuing westwards, along Via del Cavalluccio we reach Santa Maria della Catena. This is one of the most important of Gangi's churches and has another richly carved portal. It contains a Gagesque Madonna and Child, and sculpture by Quattrocchi. It is also the burial place of Giuseppe Salerno, Zoppo di Gangi (1570–1632).

Here mention must be made of the confusing fact that the less important but senior (in age) artist Gaspare Vazano (c. 1550–1630) is also sometimes known as Zoppo di Gangi. His most notable work is in the Chiesa Madre at Collesano. In this book, however, 'Zoppo di Gangi' always means Giuseppe Salerno.

In August at Gangi there is the *Sagra della Spiga*, festival of corn, obviously pagan in origin even if the processions are in medieval costume. The floats, known as *stravoli*, have no wheels.

Gangivecchio is about seven kilometres south-west of the town. Here in 1363 the Benedictines built a monastery, which in the late eighteenth century was turned into a farm. It is a lovely tranquil spot, with a garden and peeling terracotta-coloured buildings round a courtyard. There is an exclusive restaurant here, sometimes open, also a riding school, and at times displays of local artefacts and antiques.

Petralia Sottana and **Petralia Soprana** are separate towns but only two kilometres apart. Petralia Sottana (i.e. Lower Petralia) is the more recent, slightly smaller but busier, above a valley running into the Alte Madonie. The name Petralia is said to derive from Petra Heliae, perhaps in honour of the saint Elias. The main street, Corso Agliata, has various small *palazzi* of the nobility and two churches of interest, Santa Maria della Fontana, late sixteenth century, with a Catalan-Gothic portal and Gagesque sculpture, and San Francesco, eighteenth century, which has some vivacious frescoes. The Chiesa della Misericordia has a sturdy campanile of 1597. The Chiesa Madre, dedicated to the Assunta, seventeenth–eighteenth centuries, has a Catalan-Gothic doorway dating from a previous building. The interior is a Latin cross. In a chapel on the right there is a statue of the Christ Child with his mother and St Joseph, attributed to Antonello Gagini, and in the apse there is a great marble ancona, possibly by Giorgio da Milano. Among other works there are a fifteenth century triptych (a Madonna enthroned with Saints Peter and Paul), in its original Gothic frame (1617). In the sacristy there is a magnificent inlaid cupboard, and among its treasures, which include chalices and embroidered copes, there is a highly interesting, very strange, bronze candelabra of

Islamic workmanship. In the church of the Trinità (La Badia) in Via del Duomo there is an important ancona of prodigious size by Giandomenico Gagini (1542), with backdrops representing twenty-three scenes from the life of Jesus. The church also has an eighteenth century organ. The key has to be obtained from the Chiesa Madre.

A curious dance, *La Cordella*, celebrating the harvest and certainly derived from the cult of Ceres, is enacted at Petralia Sottana during August. At the *vendemmia* visitors may also be invited to trample the grapes.

The road to Petralia Soprana (Upper Petralia) passes through pine woods. Cicero mentions staying at 'Petra' during his investigations against Verres. Count Roger fortified it and built a castle. The stonework of the houses has not been plastered over, as so often elsewhere in small towns, adding to the attraction of this well preserved and charming, rather sleepy, old town. As Petralia Soprana is very high, a visit in good – and warm – weather is preferable.

Just outside the town, on the road from Gangi, is the once grand but now romantically dilapidated, if not haunted, villa of the *baroni* Sgadari. The last owner is said to have been a formidable character, guarded by a posse of retainer-protectors in uniform. On entering the town we notice the arch of the Porta Steri, a remnant of the old fortifications. Continuing along Corso Umberto we pass the castellated Palazzo Municipale, Neogothic in style. The church of San Giovanni Evangelista in Via Generale Medici was rebuilt in the eighteenth century on an earlier foundation and has a Crucifixion of 1610 and a eighteenth century Madonna del Carmelo. In Piazza Ruggero Settimo there is a monument to Fra' Umile da Petralia, who was born here and who for fifteen years devoted his life to his painfully realistic sculptures of the dying Christ.

We then come to the Chiesa Madre, dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul, whose marble statues (1767)

adorn the fifteenth century window in the campanile. This ancient building was reconstructed in the fifteenth century and again in the eighteenth century. The portal is Catalan-Gothic. The interior has three naves and has a marble Madonna della Catena by Giorgio da Milano, late fifteenth century, a painted stone Madonna dell'Udienza of the Gaginesque school dated 1520, and a marble group attributed to Fazio Gagini, dated 1649. The over-restored painting of the Deposition is attributed to Novelli. Most famous of all is Fra' Umile's first creation (c. 1624), a crucifix greatly admired by some but certainly not for the squeamish, with much congealed blood, an exposed intestine, flesh putrefying and a thorn through the eyelid. In the treasury there is an extraordinary fifteenth century chalice, silver gilt and enamel, and an embroidered cope commemorating the sack of Rome.

San Salvatore, in Via Cavour, eighteenth century, is said to have been built on the site of a mosque. It has a large cupola and contains a fifteenth century Gaginesque icon. The enormous chandelier was a gift from an emigrant. After passing the sixteenth century San Michele, we reach Santa Maria di Loreto, in the area known as 'Crastu', after the Latin *castrum*, castle. The pleasing façade (1750) is by two brothers named Serpotta and has two small polychrome spires. In front is a wrought iron gate of 1881. The interior is a Greek cross and has a late fifteenth century altar piece, depicting the childhood of Jesus, thought to be by Giandomenico Gagini and incorporating a lovely Madonna attributed to Giacomo Mariani. Various statues in the church include Saints Cosma and Damiano and St Sebastian, late eighteenth century. The sacristy is delicately frescoed and has a fine collection of embroidered cloths and copes. The huge *standardo* (standard) of the Madonna is carried through the streets at festivals, obviously a difficult balancing act – as the present Prince of Wales is said to have discovered to his cost, when he arrived

at Petralia on what he had hoped to be an incognito visit. Near the church is a belvedere, from which Etna and Rocca Bosambra (near Corleone) and the Aeolian Islands can be seen on a clear day. Below Corso Umberto is the church of San Teodoro, founded by Count Roger and rebuilt in 1759, likely to be closed but picturesque and with an interesting interior. Outside the town to the north is the crumbling former convent of Santa Maria di Gesù, built in 1611: its large garden has been turned into a cemetery.

From the Petralias there are mule tracks into the Alte Madonìa, and a road of sorts passes between Pizzo Catarineci (1660 metres). and Monte San Salvatore (1912 metres), eventually climbing to the pass of Portella di Mandarinì. There are woods of ilex and poplars, and with luck an eagle might be seen. South of the Petralias are the small agricultural villages of Blufi, Bompietro and Alimena. Blufi has a sanctuary of the Madonna dell'Oglio. On the far side of the valley opposite Petralia Sottana is the Grotta del Vecchiuzzo, discovered in 1936 but apt to be blocked by landslides. Ceramics, now in the Palermo museum, were found here, possibly relating to sacred rites and initiation ceremonies.

Castellana Sicula was founded in the eighteenth century and in recent years has developed much in size. It is an agricultural centre, a modest town architecturally, but with charm, a good base for excursions into the Madonìa. Divided into three *frazioni*, the northern one, Nociazzi, is easily the most picturesque. The church was reconstructed in 1968. Another, quite different, excursion from here, could be to the south-west, to Count Tasca's vineyards and vast wine establishments at Regaleali near Vallelunga Pratomeno. Here some of the best known wines in Sicily are produced. This is a long drive, so permission should be obtained well in advance either by consulting the telephone directory or through a tourist office, if possible at Palermo. The miles of vineyards are indeed impressive, and the wine

establishments fascinating, models of efficiency. There is also a school of Sicilian cookery – very select – here.

Polizzi Generosa, a most delightful town and full of interest, lies on a spur beneath the western range of the Madonìa and between the two tributaries of the Imera river. The countryside around is heavily cultivated, and noted for its production of hazelnuts. This is a place where one could happily spend a few quiet days, exploring the town and its neighbours, and walking or riding in the mountains.

The name Polizzi is thought by some to have something to do with the cult of the Palici twins (p. 338), but it is far more likely to derive from Polis Isis, town of Isis (a statue of the goddess was notoriously stolen from Polizzi in the eighteenth century). It was the Emperor Frederick who bestowed the additional name of Generosa on it, on account of it having been ‘generous with blood and money’ at the time of the Arab revolts. Count Roger built a castle here. The town has always prided itself on being well governed, and once even had its own senate. It suffered some damage during the Second World War.

As with every town in Sicily Polizzi has gastronomic specialities, but here they are worth sampling: the wild asparagus for example, a dessert called *sfogghiu* which includes cheese, and a salad even less enticingly called *u cunnigghiu* which is made with tunny. The emperor Charles V and other royal visitors seem to have appreciated the strawberry liqueur, another speciality; one needs a sweet tooth. At Easter we can eat *picuruni*, little marzipan lambs sitting on candied fruits and waving miniature red banners.

Polizzi is also known for its rare specimens of the Nèbrodi fir, a tree that is nearly extinct and dates from the glacial period, and for the wild orchids in the mountains above: indeed a ‘real vegetal casket’, as a local brochure informs us. The renowned Sicilian historian and folklorist

Giuseppe Pitrè collected some remarkable Polizzani fables, the best known being the somewhat hair-raising and tongue-twisting *Lu Spunzaliziu di 'na riggina c'un latru*, the marriage of a queen and a bandit.

Once the town is supposed to have had 76 churches, and there are still quite a few left. There are also many convent buildings and some rather grand palaces. The streets are often attractively cobbled, sometimes mixed with bricks. In Piazza Antonio Borgese, originally Piano della Bayota, we have San Salvatore (1554), also the ancient church of the Teutonic knights (with a portico of 1770 and containing a Gagesque triptych), and the former convent of the Dominicans (1469). Along Corso Garibaldi the imposing building on the left is the Palazzo of the Rampolla, a dominant family in Polizzi since the fourteenth century. The rather stern looking ex college of the Jesuits, begun in 1681, is now the Municipio, and conceals a pleasing courtyard with two loggias and an upper balcony (good view). The church attached, a Greek cross and with a quaint doorway, is dedicated to San Gerolamo and was built by the Jesuit architect Fra' Angelo Italia. Further up the Corso on higher ground is the long façade of Palazzo Carpinelli on which are set two sundials. Palazzo Gagliardo is late Mannerist, curiously embossed. At the far end is the belvedere, with another superb view, Via Malatecca, off the Corso, brings us to the church of Sant'Antonio Abbate, which will certainly be closed. However the outside is worth a look, as the original building was a mosque and it still has the typical red dome of the Arab-Norman period; its campanile was once a minaret.

Piazzo Umberto is in effect the town's centre. Near here is the Chiesa Madre, dedicated to the Assunta, dating back to the time of Countess Adelaide but altered in 1690. The original Gothic portal can be seen to the right of the Renaissance doorway. The interior is a basilica with three naves. This church possesses an outstanding work of art,

alone worth a special visit to Polizzi Generosa: an early sixteenth century triptych of the Madonna enthroned with angel musicians and Saints Catherine and Barbara. The artist was Flemish, unknown but simply referred to as the *Maître au feuillage en broderie*. The angel on the left bears a scroll with the words ‘*Ave regina coelorum, mater regis angelorum*’, the once celebrated motet by Walter Frye, a musician active around 1450 at the court of the Dukes of Burgundy.

There is a legend concerning this picture and, as so often with special Madonnas in Sicily, connected with a shipwreck. The owner of a ship which had foundered off Cefalù offered it to the poorest local church in the town. But along came a destitute-looking monk from Polizzi, so he instead was counted the winner. A Duke of Collesano had however shrewdly recognised its worth and bore it away to his home at one of the Petralias, from which after his death it had to be retrieved.

On the south side of the church there is a ‘Madonna of the Rosary’ (1606) by Zoppo di Gangi. In the chapel of San Gandolfo there are bits of sculpture from other churches, including the tombstone of San Gandolfo (died 1260) and pieces of the sarcophagus by Domenico Gagini (1482); also part of a marble ancona of the ‘Last Supper’ by Gagini. There are some elaborate funerary monuments in the Ventimiglia chapel. The triptych of the ‘Massacre of the Innocents’ is by Jannes de Matta, sixteenth century. On the left of the sanctuary is another tryptych, a ‘Visitation’ by an artist of the school of Pietro Russolone, sixteenth century. The paintings of Saints Gandolfo and Benedict are attributed to Zoppo di Gangi. The font (1488) has a base possibly from a temple to Isis. Among the several valuable objects in the treasury are a silver monstrance by Nibilio Gagini and a silver ark of 1549 by Andrea di Leo.

The church of San Francesco, founded in the fourteenth century, has a sixteenth century portal and Gagini

Towns of the Madonìa

sculpture in two chapels. Near the ruined castle, which is supposed to have associations with Queen Bianca, is a small natural history museum, rather charming, with many a stuffed creature, lovingly arranged, in an odd ramshackle house. In a walled garden nearby are two specimens of that famous Nèbrodi fir. Near here also is the church of Santa Margherita, fifteenth century, with stucco work and Goginesque statues, a painting by Zoppo di Gangi, and a copy of Leonardo's 'Last Supper'. In the Chiesa del Carmine there is a revered Christ on the Cross, by a pupil of Fra' Umile, that is carried in processions. Another painting by Zoppo di Gangi is to be found in San Pancrazio, which has a tremendous panoramic view. Next to this latter church is the circular Torre di Leo (1240).

From Polizzi Generosa one can drive to Piano Battaglia, the site of the battle between Normans and Arabs in 1069 and now popular for winter sports. In the summer long-distance back-packers can shelter in 'refuges' in this area, scenically the most spectacular in the Madonìa. Popular places to visit are La Faggeta, the Piano dei Cervi where there is a picturesque little lake surrounded by a beech wood, and the Vallone Madonna degli Angeli. Maps and itineraries can best be obtained in advance from the Palermo tourist office, also details of *Agriturismo* in the Madonìa – farms which take in guests, overnight or longer, the equivalent of 'bed and breakfast' in Britain.

*Collesano – Caltavuturo – Sclàfani Bagni
Cerda – Càccamo*

The small medieval town of **Collesano** lies in a basin below Monte Cucullo and Monte Grotta del Signore. Like Polizzi Generosa it is convenient for driving on to the winter resort of Piano Battaglia, 1619 metres, and for excursions to such beauty spots as Piano Zucchi, the beech wood of Faggetà and oak wood of Querato near Isnello. This part of the Madonìa is especially known for its wild flowers and its strawberries in spring, and particularly for the delicious scent of broom.

Arriving at Collesano from the coast we enter the busy Piazza Mazzini, familiarly known as ‘Carricaturi’. From here Via Cavour brings us to the church of Santa Maria di Gesù, seventeenth century, which has a marble Madonna and Child by Carlo d’Aprile and an inlaid crucifix by Fra’ Umile da Petralìa, only to be seen by request. The ex Dominican convent is now the Municipio. After passing the fountain known as Quattro Cannoli, in Corso Vittorio Emanuele, we reach the Chiesa Madre, dedicated to St Peter, above a steep flight of steps. Built in the fifteenth century, it has been refaced in modern times. The church is full of unusual works of art, amazingly so. For a start, one is immediately struck by the large cross suspended from the trussed ceiling and resting on a grotesquely carved and gilded beam right across the nave. This is painted on both sides and is by a little known artist named Silaro in 1555. A painting of Santa Rosalia is attributed to Pietro Novelli, and the marble *ciborium* in the transept is by Domenico Gagini (1489). The Madonna delle Grazie with Saints Lucia

and Cristina, by an unknown sixteenth century artist, is set under a Renaissance stone arch. The marble reredos in the chapel to the right of the high altar is dated 1552. The presbytery is decorated with frescoes painted in 1624 by Giuseppe Vazano, who like his younger colleague and sometime collaborator Giuseppe Salerno is usually known as Zoppo di Gangi (p. 489). In fact the large canvas of the 'Madonna of the Angels' on the left is by Giuseppe Salerno. The inlaid choir stalls are seventeenth century, and the altar cloth, silver thread on velvet, was made in 1723. A sarcophagus of 1551 has above it a marble Madonna and Child of 1546. The *parroco* has provided useful little descriptive notes in key spots.

The oldest church in Collesano is appropriately known as Santa Maria La Vecchia, thirteenth century in origin and near the ruins of a castle. This has frescoes by a local artist, Giacomo Lo Varco, and a statue of the Virgin by Antonello Gagini (1516). The church will no doubt be closed, but it is worth seeking out the *custode*. Collesano is incidentally reputed to have the best honey in Sicily (but I think Caltagirone's is hard to beat). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was known for a special kind of majolica (like Caltagirone). Some specimens may with luck be found for sale in private houses. And every five years the 'Casazza' takes place here in Holy Week, enacting the Passion of Christ – a moving event, very worthwhile seeing.

Caltavuturo is further inland. Being in such a strategic position it was fortified by both Arabs and Normans. The name seems to be derived from the Arab *kalat* meaning fortress and the Sicilian *luturo* meaning vulture. Santa Maria La Nuova, known as La Badìa, was founded by the Benedictines in 1625, but was gravely damaged in the Second World War. It contains a Gagesque Virgin and a marble tabernacle (1516), believed to be by Giandomenico Gagini. The Chiesa Madre, dedicated to Saints Peter and

Paul, was built in 1582 but altered in the eighteenth century. Here we have a statue of the Virgin attributed to Domenico Gagini and an 'Adoration of the Magi' of the Flemish school. There is a sumptuously carved organ loft by Raffaele La Valle.

The village of **Sclàfani Bagni** (813 metres) is in another strategic position. Its name is said to be a Sicilianisation of Esculapifanum – a temple or *phanum* sacred to Aesculapius may have been here, and if so presumably on the site of where the baths are now. At any rate the castle, Norman in origin, was fortified by Matteo Sclàfani in 1330; it was he who built Palazzo Sclàfani in Palermo (p. 29). The Chiesa Madre in the village has a marble sarcophagus with bas-reliefs of bacchantes and satyrs, also works by Fra' Umile, Zoppo di Gangi, and Pietro Ruzzolone. San Giacomo has stuccoes of the Serpotta school but in a disgraceful state. There is a beautiful panoramic view from the ruins of the castle.

Striking north from here we come to Cerda, once associated with the famous motor race, the Targa Florio, that was initiated in 1906 – its demise was a severe blow to the restaurants. It is also a producer of artichokes and exports vast quantities to the north of Europe (restaurants now compensatorily specialise in a variety of rather good artichoke dishes). But from the point of view of architecture Cerda has little to offer.

A pleasant if slightly circuitous drive could be made through the mountains from Cerda to **Càccamo**, by way of Aliminusa and Montemaggiore Belsito, both attractively situated but with buildings of slight interest. From the direction of Tèrmini Imerese, nine kilometres away, we pass through olive groves and lush cultivation, suddenly to be confronted by the battlements and towers of Càccamo's magnificent castle, perched above the San Leonardo valley. This was a major Norman stronghold. The name of the town may have derived from the Carthaginian word

caccabe, meaning horse's head; for Carthaginians are believed to have fled here after their defeat at Imera in 480 BC. In this castle Matthew Bonnellus plotted with the rebel barons against William the Bad in 1160–1. The many changes of owners (including the Chiaramonte) over the centuries have resulted in alterations and additions, and in 1963 the castle was acquired by the *Regione*. Previously it was owned by the De Spuches family, who had turned it and the town into a cultural centre of some note.

The custodian of the castle lives at Corso Umberto 6, opposite the war memorial. Inside the castle walls we pass the old stables, the theatre and the prisons. Then on reaching the main keep we enter the great *sala della armi* with its fine trussed ceiling. Leading off here are smaller rooms, including the *sala della congiura*, where the plotters met in 1160. The custodian expects a tip.

The cathedral, dedicated to St George, was founded in 1090, enlarged in 1477, and completely reconstructed in 1614. The centre doorway is surmounted by a relief of St George and the dragon by Gaspare Guercio, and the campanile is constructed from a tower of the Chiaramonte period. The interior has three naves and contains many fine works of art, several connected with St George. The font is attributed to Domenico Gagini. Chapels in the right aisle have pictures attributed to Giuseppe Velasquez, Pietro Novelli and Vincenzo La Barbera. A marble portal and reliefs are attributed to Francesco Laurana. The marble statue to the right of the presbytery is by Vito d'Anna, who also did the frescoes in the chapel of the Sacramento, decorated with *marmi mischi*. There are more paintings in the sacristy.

The imposing church of the Annunziata, originally medieval, in a dominating position, was constructed in the seventeenth century. It has a Baroque façade and two towers. Inside there are a seventeenth century carved organ case and some delicate stuccoes by Procopio Serpotta.

Near there is the little church of San Benedetto (1615), or La Badia. This has elaborate stuccoes by Giacomo and Procopio Serpotta and a majolica floor with sea scenes. Santa Maria degli Angeli (1487) has a fine sixteenth century portal with a relief of the Virgin and Child above. If closed, as will be likely, try ringing at the convent of the Padri Agostiniani for the key. The church has a sixteenth century painted ceiling, worth seeing, and a typical statue of the Madonna by Antonello Gagini.

Càccamo is only fifty kilometres from Palermo, and an easy expedition much to be recommended. There is a nice restaurant here too.

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Glossary

ABACUS	Flat slab of stone on top of capital.
ACROPOLIS	Highest point of city, the citadel, with chief temples, etc.
AGORA	Greek market place or public square. Equivalent to Roman forum.
ALABASTRON	Oil flask without base or handles.
AMPHORA	Large vase, usually for oil or wine.
ANCONA	Large altarpiece composed of several compartments.
ANTEFIX	Ornamental block on edge of roof to conceal ends of tiles.
ANTIS	' <i>In antis</i> ': portico of temple when side walls extended, with two columns between the wall endings to support the roof.
ARCHAIC PERIOD	Seventh and early sixth centuries BC.
ARCHITRAVE	Lower part of entablature, horizontal stone resting on columns of a temple.
ARCHIVOLT	Moulded architrave around an arch.
ASHLAR	Blocks of masonry evenly faced and with square edges, laid horizontally.
ATRIUM	Colonnaded open court in centre of Roman house; forecourt of Byzantine basilica.
BADIA	Abbey.
BAGLIO	Warehouse of wine establishment.

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	Derived from Latin <i>ballium</i> , large fortified building.
BALDACCHINO	Large canopy with columns over high altar or throne.
BASILICA	Originally a meeting-hall for public administration. In early Christian times large church divided into three or more aisles, the centre one or nave higher than the others and with own windows.
BOSS	Ornamental knob on ceiling or vault at intersection of ribs.
BOTHROS	Pot for votive offerings.
BOULEUTERION	Council chamber.
BUCCHERO	Etruscan black terracotta.
CALDARIUM	Hot room of Roman bath-house.
CAMPANILE	Bell-tower.
CATALAN-GOTHIC	Late Gothic under Spanish influence in fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (delaying arrival of Italian Renaissance architecture in Sicily).
CARYATID	Female figure used as supporting column.
CAVEA	Auditorium of theatre.
CHIESA MADRE (MATRICE)	Mother church in a town.
CHTHONIC DIVINITIES	Gods of the Underworld.
CIBORIUM	Vessel containing the host.
CIPPUS	Sepulchre in form of altar.
CONTRADA	Outlying district of a town.
CORNICE	Projecting section of an entablature; any projecting ornamental moulding along top of a wall etc.

Glossary

CYCLOPEAN	Applied to walls of unmortared irregular stone blocks. Attributed once to the Cyclops (giants).
DECUMANUS	Main street of Roman town.
DIPTYCH	Double panel of paintings on wood or ivory.
DUOMO	Cathedral.
ENTABLATURE	The superstructure above the capital, consisting of architrave, frieze and cornice.
ENTASIS	Slight convex curve in lower part of column.
EPHEBUS	(Ephebe). Youth aged between 18 and 20.
EXEDRA	Recess, usually semicircular.
EX-VOTO	Offerings of small paintings, tablets, plastic flowers etc. as thanksgiving to saint.
FERCOLO	Dish or bier carried in procession.
FORUM	Roman market or meeting-place, equivalent to Greek <i>agora</i> .
FRESCO	Paintings on freshly laid plaster.
FRIGIDARIUM	Cool room in Roman bath-house.
FUMAROLE	Holes emitting volcanic gas.
GIGANTOMACHIA	War of giants.
GREEK CROSS	Cross with four equal arms.
HELLENISTIC PERIOD	From Alexander the Great to Augustus (c. 330–30 BC).
HERM	Pillar surmounted by a bust.
HEXASTYLE	Portico with six columns.
HYPOGEUM	Underground vault, used especially for burials.
INTARSIA	Inlaid woods of different sorts.
KORE	Maiden, also used for Persephone.
KOUROS	Archaic statue of nude youth.
KRATER	Two-handled conical bowl.

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KYLIX	Shallow drinking-cup.
LATIN CROSS	Cross with one long and three short arms.
LEKYTHOS	Tall jug.
LOGGIA	Covered gallery or balcony.
LUNETTE	Semi-circular space over door or window.
MANNERIST	Late sixteenth century architectural style.
MARMI MISCHI	Inlaid marbles or <i>pietra dura</i> used in churches of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially in Palermo.
METOPE	Panel between triglyphs in frieze of Doric temple, either decorated or plain.
MULLION	Vertical post dividing window into two or more lights.
NARTHEX	Vestibule preceding a basilica.
NAUMACHIA	Mock naval battle, involving flooding of arena.
NYMPHAEUM	Grotto or pleasure-house; originally temple of the nymphs.
ODEON	Concert or lecture hall, usually roofed and in shape of Greek theatre.
OINOCHOE	Wine jug.
OLYMPIEION	Sanctuary of Olympian Zeus.
OMPHALOS	A central boss.
OPISTHODOMOS	Enclosed chamber at rear of temple.
PANTOCRATOR	Christ the Almighty.
PEDIMENT	Gable above portico of temple.
PERIPTERAL	Temple surrounded by colonnade.
PLATERESQUE	Intricate sixteenth century Spanish architectural style.

Glossary

PODIUM	Continuous base or plinth supporting columns; platform enclosing area of an amphitheatre.
POLYGONAL	Masonry composed of stones to fit irregular exposed face.
POLYPTYCH	Multiple panels of paintings on wood or ivory.
PROSCENIUM	Front part of stage.
PUNIC	Carthaginian/Phoenician.
PUTTO	Sculpted or painted small child, usually nude.
QUADRIGA	Four-horsed chariot.
SQUINCH	Small arch at angle of tower.
STATALE	Main road.
STELE	Upright stone slab with monumental inscription.
STEREOBATE	Stepped foundation of temple.
STOA	Portico, roofed colonnade.
STOUP	Receptacle for holy water.
STUCCO	Plasterwork.
STYLOBATE	Upper step of temple platform.
TELAMON	Male figure used as a supporting column.
TEMENOS	Sacred enclosure.
TEPIDARIUM	Tepid pool in Roman baths.
TESSERA	Small piece of marble, glass, etc. used in mosaic work.
THERMAE	Baths in Roman period.
TONNARA	Storage shed for tunny fishing equipment.
TRICLINIUM	Dining-room of Roman house.
TRIGLYPH	Projecting block with vertical grooves on either side of metope on the frieze of a temple.
TRINACRIA	Three-legged symbol of Sicily, usually around Medusa's head.

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TRIPTYCH	Triple panel of paintings on wood or ivory.
TYMPANUM	Area between lintel of doorway and arch above it; triangular space forming centre of pediment.
XYSTUS	Exercise court.

Chronological Outline

BC

- c. 8700 Cave figures, Lèvanzo.
c. 8000 Cave figures, Addàura.
c. 3000 'Stentinello' culture.
c. 1250 Sikel and Ausonian invasions.
c. 1250–730 Pantalica cultures.
c. 734 Naxos founded by Chalcidians.
c. 733 Syracuse founded by Corinthians.
c. 728 Megara Iblea founded by Megarians.
c. 688 Gela founded by Rhodians and Cretans.
c. 650 Selinus (Selinunte) founded by Megara Iblea.

c. 580 Akragas (Agrigento) founded by Gela.
c. 580 First clashes between Segesta and Selinus.
c. 575 Temple of Apollo, Syracuse.
570–555 Phalaris at Akragas.
c. 550 Temple G begun at Selinus.
485–476 Gelon at Syracuse.
480 Battle of Himera.
476–467 Hieron I.
c. 460–440 Sikel revolt under Ducetius.
c. 450 Temple of Concord built at Akragas.
c. 426 Temple at Segesta begun.
415–413 War between Athens and Syracuse.
409–405 Carthaginians sack Selinus, Himera, Akragas, Gela.

405–367 Dionysius I.
397 Sack of Motya. Plato's first visit to Syracuse.
367–343 Dionysius II.
354 Assassination of Dion.
344–336 Timoleon at Syracuse.

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- 317–289 Agathocles at Syracuse.
278–276 Pyrrhus in Sicily.
275–216 Hieron II.
264–241 1st Punic War.
218–201 2nd Punic War.
212 Romans capture Syracuse.
139–132 1st Slave Revolt.
104–99 2nd Slave Revolt.
73–71 Verres praetor of Sicily.
44–36 Sextus Pompeius in Sicily.
- AD**
- 61 St Paul in Syracuse.
286–305 Maximian co-Emperor with Diocletian;
possible builder of Casale villa, Piazza
Armerina.
c. 303 Martyrdom of Saint Lucy.
468–76 Vandals in control of Sicily.
476–535 Ostrogoths in Sicily.
535 Belisarius conquers Sicily for Byzantines.
662–68 Constans II makes Syracuse his capital.
827 Arabs land at Mazara.
831 Fall of Palermo to Arabs.
859 Fall of Enna to Arabs.
902 Fall of Taormina to Arabs.
1038 Maniaces takes Saint Agatha's body to
Constantinople.
1061 Capture of Messina by Roger de Hauteville
(later Count Roger I).
1091 Norman Conquest of Sicily complete.
1101 Death of Count Roger. Regency of Countess
Adelaide (Adelasia) until c. 1112.
1101–54 Roger II.
1140 Palatine Chapel, Palermo, consecrated.
1143 La Martorana, Palermo, built.
1154–66 William I 'the Bad'.

Chronological Outline

- 1166–89 William II ‘the Good’.
1174 Cathedral at Monreale begun.
1184 Rebuilding of Palermo Cathedral begun by Walter Offamilio.
1189–94 Tancred, illegitimate cousin of William II and grandson of Roger II, made king by Sicilian barons. Succeeded by son, William III, assassinated by Henry VI.
1189–94 Third Crusade.
1194–97 Emperor Henry VI Hohenstaufen of Swabia, King of Sicily, married to Constance de Hauteville, daughter of Roger II.
1197–1250 Emperor Frederick II, ‘Stupor Mundi’, king of Sicily.
1243–46 Muslim revolts in Sicily. Deportations to mainland.
1250–54 Conrad of Hohenstaufen, illegitimate son of Frederick II, king of Sicily.
1258–66 Manfred of Hohenstaufen, illegitimate son of Frederick II, king of Sicily.
1268 Conradin, son of Conrad, beheaded.
1268–82 Charles of Anjou, king of Sicily.
1282–1302 ‘Sicilian Vespers’ war.
1282–85 Peter I of Aragon (married to Constance daughter of Manfred). Angevins retain claim to kingdom of Sicily.
1296–1337 Frederick II of Aragon.
1302 Treaty of Caltabellotta. Frederick II ‘king of Trinacria’. Angevins still kings of Sicily.
1307 Palazzo Chiaramonte, ‘Lo Steri’, Palermo, begun.
1337–42 Peter II of Aragon.
1342–55 Ludovic of Aragon.
1347 Black Death.
1355–77 Frederick III of Aragon, ‘the Simple’.

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- 1392–1409 Martin I of Aragon, married to Maria daughter of Frederick III.
- 1409 Queen Bianca of Navarre regent. Civil war follows.
- 1412–16 Ferdinand I of Castile. Viceroy appointed, 1415.
- 1416–58 Alfonso V of Aragon, ‘the Magnanimous’.
- 1442 Alfonso king of Naples; by decree ‘*Re di Sicilia citra et ultra Pharum*’ (‘King of Sicily on this side and beyond the Lighthouse’, i.e. Messina); hence ‘Two Sicilies’.
- 1479 Union of Aragon and Castile under Ferdinand II and Queen Isabella. Kingdom of Spain.
- 1487 Inquisition in Sicily.
- 1492 Expulsion of Jews.
- 1516–56 Charles V (Hapsburg), Emperor 1519.
- 1535 Charles V in Sicily.
- 1571 Battle of Lepanto.
- 1647 Revolt in Palermo.
- 1674–78 Revolt in Messina.
- 1693 The great earthquake, south-east Sicily.
- 1700 Death of Charles II (Hapsburg) of Spain.
- 1701–14 War of Spanish Succession.
- 1713 Treaty of Utrecht. Victor Amadeus II of Savoy, king of Sicily until 1720.
- 1720–34 Emperor Charles VI (Austrian Hapsburg) king of Sicily.
- 1734–59 Charles III of Spain (Bourbon), king of Naples and Sicily.
- 1748 Plague.
- 1759–1825 Ferdinand IV of Naples (Bourbon) and III of Sicily. After 1816 as Ferdinand I of Two Sicilies, reviving decree of 1442; married to Maria Carolina of Austria, sister of Marie Antoinette.

Chronological Outline

- 1763 Expulsion of Jesuits.
1782 Suppression of Inquisition.
1798 French invade Naples. Flight of royal family to Sicily under protection of Nelson.
1799 Nelson created Duke of Bronte.
1806 Second flight of royal family from Naples.
1806–15 British occupation of Sicily. Expansion of Marsala wine production.
1812 Constitution on British model. Feudalism abolished. Constitution suppressed in 1816.
1820 Revolt in Palermo.
1825–30 Francis I of Two Sicilies (Bourbon).
1830–59 Ferdinand II of Two Sicilies, ‘King Bomba’ (Bourbon).
1837 Cholera.
1848–49 Revolution in Sicily.
1854–55 Cholera.
1859–60 Francis II of Two Sicilies (Bourbon).
1860 Garibaldi captures Sicily.
1861–78 Victor Emmanuel II (Savoy).
1866 Revolt in Palermo. Expropriation of monasteries.
1870 Unification of Italy.
1876 Report on poverty in Sicily by Franchetti and Sonnino. ‘The spirit of the Mafia’ denounced.
1878–1900 Umberto I (Savoy).
1891–92 Great Exhibition at Palermo.
1893 Murder of Notarbartolo, Director-General of Bank of Sicily.
1900–46 Victor Emmanuel III (Savoy).
1908 Messina earthquake.
1914–18 First World War.
1922–43 Mussolini Prime Minister.
1925–26 Mass Mafia arrests by Cesare Mori.
1939–45 Second World War.

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- 1943 Allied invasion of Sicily: 'Operation Husky'.
1946 Republic of Italy.
1946 Regional Autonomy of Sicily.
1947 First Regional Assembly.
1950 Death of Salvatore Giuliano.
1950 Beginning of mass emigration.
1950 Agrarian reform in Italy.
1952 Danilo Dolci founds 'Borgo di Dio' at Trappeto.
1957 Top Mafia bosses policy meeting.
1968 Earthquake in western Sicily.
1969 Closure of sulphur mines.
1982 Murder of General Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa.
1987 'La Rete', anti-Mafia movement founded by Leoluca Orlando.
1992 Murders of Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino.
1993 Arrest of Salvatore (Totò) Riina, 'Boss of Bosses'.
1995 Arrest of Leoluca Bagarella, No. 2 of Mafia 'cupola' (summit).
1996 Arrest of Giovanni Brusca, successor to Riina.
2004 Start of anti-Mafia 'Addiopizzo' movement.
2006 Arrest of Mafia boss Bernardo Provenzano.
2007 Arrest of Mafia boss Salvatore Lo Piccolo and his son Sandro.

Ancient Sites in Sicily

These lists under three headings – Prehistoric; Punic, Greek and Roman; Norman – include some of the most important sites on the island. They follow the anti-clockwise arrangement in my descriptive section.

Often sites are superimposed on one another: Greek on Sikel, Punic and Roman on Greek, Norman on Byzantine or Arab. There are in fact very few purely Byzantine or Arab remains left to be seen. Excavations are continuing all over Sicily, particularly at prehistoric sites. There have also been some exciting Greek discoveries in recent years: the *giovine* of Motya for instance, and the sanctuary to Demeter and Kore at Syracuse. Indeed, practically every day at Syracuse, so a friend there has said to me, something new and extraordinary seems to be found.

And at long last most Norman buildings have been restored – although there are still some black spots. At last attempts have been made for the poor Cuba palace in Palermo to be rescued.

Each of the nine provinces of Sicily has its own museum, and every main archaeological site has its own museum. I can testify that these museums are almost without exception beautifully and tastefully arranged.

PREHISTORIC

PALERMO Addàura caves on Monte Pellegrino. Paleolithic drawings only to be visited with a permit.

CEFALÙ Ninth century BC vestiges at ‘Temple of Diana’ on the Rocca. Ancient walls off Via Roma and at Piazza Garibaldi.

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- IETAS Near Cipirello, S.W. of Palermo. Excavations in progress; Elymnian remains, overlaid by Greek and Roman.
- CUSTOMACI Grotta Miceli, with Paleolithic incisions.
- ERICE Megalithic walls.
- LÈVANZO Grotta del Genovese: incised drawings. Paleolithic period. Only visitable with permit.
- PANTELLERÌA Neolithic village at Cuddie Rosse. Tumuli.
- CONTESSA ENTELLINA Elymnian remains at Rocca d'Entella (also Greek).
- SAMBUCA DI SICILIA Iron Age necropolis.
- AGRIGENTO Rock sanctuary of Demeter; some pre-Greek vestiges.
- MORGANTINA Excavations of Sikel site on Cittadella.
- CAVA D'ISPICA Scenic gorge of 13 kilometres with many caves inhabited from Bronze Age until recent times. 1800 BC Baravitalla tomb. Permit usually required. Some caves below town of Ispica.
- CASTELLUCCIO East of Noto. Eighteenth–fourteenth century BC village, designated 'Castelluccio culture'.
- STENTINELLO North of Syracuse. Neolithic ditch-enclosed village not visitable. 'Stentinello culture'.
- THAPSOS On peninsula of Magnisi, south of Augusta. Domed and rock cut tombs. 'Thapsos culture'.
- PANTÀLICA The most exciting of all prehistoric sites in Sicily. Over 5000 rock tombs honeycombed in cliffs above lovely valley. The Anactoron – late Bronze Age palace.
- ENNA Speziera cave.
- CALTANISSETTA Iron Age village excavated at Monte Sabucina. Necropolis, also at Gibil-Habil.
- LÌPARI Neolithic remains on Acropolis; others in Contrada Diana.
- PANARÈA Oval Bronze Age huts at Punta Milazzese.
- FILICUDI Bronze Age villages on Capo Graziano.

PUNIC, GREEK, ROMAN

- PALERMO (Panormos) Foundations of Roman villas with mosaics in Villa Bonanno, Piazza Vittoria.
- SÒLUNTO (Soluntum) Originally a Punic site. Some Hellenistic fragments, but remains mostly Roman. View.
- HIMERA Base of 'Temple of Victory' 480 BC. Part of Greek city excavated, founded 648 BC by Zancle (Messina).
- CEFALÙ (Kephalaion) 'Temple of Diana' on the Rocca, over prehistoric site.
- IETAS Near San Cipirello. Greek and Roman remains on Elymnian original, in course of excavation. Theatre. *Bouleuterion*.
- SEGESTA The famous temple, c. 426 BC. Beautifully situated theatre. Small sanctuary in *contrada* Mango.
- ERICE (Eryx) Elymnian walls added to by Carthaginians and Romans. Some Roman fragments in Castello di Venere.
- MOTYA (Mozia) Extensive excavations of Punic site, destroyed 398 BC. *Cothon* and Whitaker museum. Underwater causeway to Birgi necropolis.
- MARSALA (Lilybaeum) Roman villa, necropolis etc. at Capo Boeo, on site of Lilybaeum.
- SELINUNTE (Selinous) The great complex of temples. Selinous founded c. 650 BC. Sanctuary of Malophoros. Quarries at Rocche di Cusa.
- CONTESSA ENTELLINA Some Greek remains on Rocca d'Entella.
- SAMBUCA DI SICILIA Site of Selinuntine city on Monte Adranone.
- ERACLEA MINOA Remains of Selinuntine colony, including the theatre and walls. Beautifully situated.
- PORTO EMPÈDOCLE Roman villa at Punta Piccola.
- AGRIGENTO (Agrigentum, Akragas, Girgenti) The marvel-

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- lous temples. Founded from Gela 580 BC. Hellenistic-Roman quarter. Rock sanctuary of Demeter. Greek walls.
- GELA Founded 688 BC. Excavations near museum. Greek fortifications of exceptional interest at Capo Soprano district, also baths. (Dreary modern town.)
- PIAZZA ARMERINA (Casale) Superbly preserved third-fourth century AD mosaics in Roman villa, possibly Imperial.
- MORGANTINA Near Aidone. Greek city on Sikel foundation, in course of excavation. Remote and beautiful site.
- CAMARINA Syracusan colony, founded 598 BC. Some excavations in progress.
- CÒMISO Mosaics from Roman *thermae*.
- ELORO (Helorus) South of Noto. Pizzuta column. Excavations in progress, also at Villa del Tellaro inland (mosaics).
- AVOLA Sparse remains of seaside Roman villa.
- SYRACUSE (Siracusa) The indispensable – the *sine qua non* – city for any traveller to Sicily.
- MEGARA HYBLAEA Near Augusta. Founded 750 BC. Large area of this early Greek settlement still being excavated; mostly foundations. Unprepossessing surroundings.
- AKRAI Near Palazzolo Acrèide. Founded c. 644 BC. Roman alterations to Greek city, also Byzantine catacombs. Well preserved theatre. The *Santoni* figures. The *Templi Ferali* (quarries). Necropolis.
- LEONTINOI Near Lentini. Founded 730 BC. Delightful site. Necropolis nearby.
- CATANIA (Catane) Roman theatre and odeon. *Thermae*. Amphitheatre.
- NAXOS Founded c. 734 BC. Walls. Temple sites. Pleasant surroundings.
- TAORMINA (Tauromenium) The ‘Teatro Greco’ (rebuilt by Romans), the most celebrated view in Sicily. Odeon. *Naumachie*.

Ancient Sites in Sicily

- CENTÙRIPE (Kantoripa) Castello on site of Roman mausoleum? Ruins of forum and *thermae*.
- ENNA (Castrogiovanni) Rock of Ceres and site of temple.
- CALTANISSETTA Greek remains overlaying Sikel original at Monte Sabucina and Gibil-Habil.
- LÌPARI Excavations at Acropolis and Contrada Diana. Roman baths at San Calogero.
- PANARÈA Remains of Roman villa on island of Basiluzzo.
- CASTROREALE Roman villa with mosaics.
- TYNDARIS (Tindari) Superbly situated Greco-Roman ruins. Theatre. 'Ginnasio'. Mosaics.
- PATTI Excavations of large Roman villa in progress.
- SAN MARCO D'ALUNZIO Remains of Temple of Hercules.

NORMANS

PALERMO

Royal Palace (Palazzo dei Normanni). A priority on a first visit to Palermo. The Cappella Palatina, created by Roger II c. 1132–40. Superb mosaics by Byzantine craftsmen. Other famous mosaics in *Sala di Ruggero*. The exterior of the palace much altered; only Torre Pisana original.

San Giovanni degli Eremiti. Founded 1136. Deconsecrated, on site of mosque. Great charm, with cloisters. Its five red domes often used as emblem of Palermo.

Cathedral. Founded by Walter Offamilio 1184. Much altered especially in eighteenth century, but apsidal east end intact. Superb royal tombs.

La Martorana (Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio). c. 1140. In spite of unfortunate alterations a gem. Exterior spoiled, but campanile mostly original. Wonderful mosaics, including portrait of Roger II.

San Cataldo. c. 1160. Bare but beautiful interior. Three red domes.

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La Magione (Chiesa della Trinità). Built 1151. Well restored after wartime bombing. Cloisters.

Santo Spirito. Founded by Walter Offamilio 1178. Arcading of volcanic stones. Also known as the church of the 'Vespers'.

San Giovanni dei Lebbrosi. Founded by (Count) Roger I 1071, thus one of earliest of Norman churches.

Ponte dell'Ammiraglio. Seven arches. Built 1113. Recently restored.

Castello della Favara (Maredolce). Remains of pleasure palace of Norman kings and Frederick II, now in slummy area, near Ponte dell'Ammiraglio.

The Zisa. Pleasure palace of William I and II. Beautifully restored. Museum above.

The Cuba. Another pleasure palace, in semi-dereliction and surrounded by army barracks.

The Cubula. Domed pavilion moderately intact, in dreary area.

Cuba Soprana. Near the Cubula. Remains embedded in Villa Di Napoli.

Loggia and Cappella dell'Incoronazione. Near Cathedral. Where kings reputedly showed themselves after coronation. Much altered.

Santa Cristina La Vetere. Small church next to the Loggia dell'Incoronazione, usually closed. Founded by Walter Offamilio.

La Maddalena. Buried within carabinieri barracks near Porta Nuova. Interesting but virtually inaccessible.

Palazzo dell'Uscibene. Scanty ruins of royal hunting lodge of Mimnero (or summer residence of archbishops of Palermo?). In modern hamlet of Altarello, west of Palermo, near Baida.

MONREALE

Cathedral. One of the greatest and most famous build-

Ancient Sites in Sicily

ings in Sicily, especially for its mosaics. Founded in 1174 by William II. Beautiful, also famous, cloisters.

Castellaccio. On summit of Monte Caputo. Not much of original left; fantastic view.

CEFALÙ

Cathedral. Another great and wonderful building. Founded by Roger II in 1131. Stunning mosaic of Christ Pantocrator.

Osterio Magno. Reputed residence of Roger II, but later in date.

ALTOFONTE

Site of hunting lodge of Roger II, originally known as 'Parco'. View.

ERICE

Conquered by Roger I in 1167 and baptised Monte San Giuliano. *San Martino*. Founded by Roger I. Subsequently reconstructed.

Castello di Venere. Twelfth–thirteenth centuries. Site of temple of Ericina Venus.

MAZARA DEL VALLO

The last town in Sicily to be captured by Roger I.

Cathedral. Founded 1093; traces of original in apse. Sixteenth century relief of Roger vanquishing Saracens. Crucifix c. 1200.

Castle. Originally built by Roger.

San Nicolò Regale. 1124. Restored.

Madonna dell'Alto (*Santa Maria delle Giummare*). Outside Mazara. Built by Giulietta, daughter of Roger, in 1103. Restored.

CASTELVETRANO

Santissima Trinità di Dèlia. Outside the town. Delightful twelfth century building, restored 1880.

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SCIACCA

San Nicolò la Latina. Founded by Giulietta, daughter of Roger I. One of earliest churches in Sicily. Unpretentious.

Santa Maria delle Giummare. Some original features, including towers.

Cathedral. Begun 1108. Three apses original.

Castello Vecchio. Founded by Roger I in 1100, in Terravecchia quarter. Some traces remain.

GIULIANA

Castle. Dramatically situated. Believed of Norman origin.

CALTABELLOTTA

Castle. Of ancient origin, rebuilt by Roger I 1090. Here William III and his mother took refuge and were presumably murdered. The scene of the 1302 peace treaty after the 'Vespers' war.

Chiesa Madre. Founded by Roger I, but mostly thirteenth century.

BURGIO

Castle. Ruins only. Arab origin.

Santa Maria di Rifesa. Sanctuary above Burgio. Built 1170.

AIDONE

Santa Maria la Cava. Founded 1134.

Castellaccio. Rebuilt by Normans on Arab foundation.

PIAZZA ARMERINA

Sant'Andrea. Norman priory founded 1096. Thirteenth–fifteenth century frescoes.

SCICLI

Sanctuary of the Madonna dei Milici. Reputedly founded by Roger I c. 1093. Some of the Norman tower remains,

Ancient Sites in Sicily

otherwise in ruins. A picturesque spot, about two kilometres from Scicli.

CATANIA

Cathedral. Originally built between 1078 and 1093 by Roger I. The Norman transept and apses have survived the earthquakes. Norman vaulting in Cappella del Crocifisso.

PATERNÒ

Castle. Built by Roger I 1073, rebuilt fourteenth century. In good repair.

ACI CASTELLO

Castle. Originally built 1076.

CALTANISSETTA

Badia di Santo Spirito. Founded by Roger I 1153. Fifteenth century frescoes.

BRONTE

Santa Maria di Maniace. Founded 1174 by Queen Margaret, mother of William II. Attached to Castello Maniace, part of the Nelson estate, now sold to the *Comune* of Bronte.

ADRANO

Monastery of Santa Lucia. Founded by Adelasia, niece of Roger I. Completely reconstructed in eighteenth century.

TROÌNA

Chiesa Madre. Founded by Roger I. Norman tower.

CASALVECCHIO SICULO

SS Pietro e Paolo. Basilian monastery church founded 1172 in beautiful surroundings.

ITÀLA

San Pietro. Basilian monastery founded c. 1092.

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MILI SAN PIETRO

Santa Maria di Mili. Basilian foundation by Roger I in 1092. Now dilapidated.

MESSINA

La Badiazza (Santa Maria della Valle). Twelfth century foundation, recently restored.

LÌPARI

Cathedral. Norman foundation. Some remains of its construction on southern side, also part of cloisters.

PATTI

Cathedral. On site of church built by Roger II as a burial place for his mother Queen Adelaide. Her tomb is not however contemporary. A Norman tower nearby.

CARONÀ

Castle. Norman origin. Well restored.

CÀCCAMO

Castle. Major Norman stronghold, and where in 1160 rebel barons plotted against William I. Altered over the centuries and recently restored. Dramatically situated.

The Norman period was followed by the Emperor Frederick II's massive castle building, in particular Castello Maniace at Syracuse, at Augusta, and Castello Ursino at Catania, and to a lesser degree Paternò. Santa Maria degli Alemanni at Messina is one of the most interesting churches of the thirteenth century. The era of the great feudal lords of the fourteenth century are epitomised by the fortified houses of the Sclàfani and Chiaramonte at Palermo, still with a Norman influence but giving rise to a style of architecture known as *chiaramontane*. In the early fifteenth century Catalan art, often combined with Gothic elements, began to make its mark all over Sicily.

Artists and Architects

To compile a list of all the painters, architects, sculptors and stuccoers working in Sicily from the fifteenth century onwards would be an enormous task. Here is a selection of the most important, with the places where some of their outstanding works are to be found. It is still a long list, but it would have been even longer if I had attempted to include everything by the Gagini clan, Giuseppe Paladino, Fra' Umile da Petralia and the two artists known to posterity as Lo Zoppo di Gangi. I have however on occasions included places where there are attributions, but have left out 'workshop of'.

ALMEYDA, GIUSEPPE DAMIANI, Architect, Art Nouveau period, 1834–1911, *b.* Capua (Naples). Teatro Politeama, Palermo; Florio tomb, S. Maria di Gesù, Palermo; Grand Hotel, Termini Imerese; Villino Florio, Favignana.

AMATO, GIACOMO, Architect, most important of early Baroque architects in Palermo 1643–1732, *b.* Palermo: in Palermo – S. Caterina. S. Teresa, La Pietà, S. Ninfa dei Crociferi, Palazzo Cattolica, Palazzo Filangeri.

AMATO, PAOLO, Architect, mainly interiors, 1634–1714, *b.* Ciminna (no relation of Giacomo Amato): S. Salvatore, Palermo; S. Maria di Valverde (altars), Palermo; Fontana del Garaffo in Piazza Marina, Palermo; S. Giovanni Battista, Ciminna.

AMICO, GIOVANNI BIAGIO. Architect, 1684–1754, *b.* Tràpani: Immacolata column (with T.M. Napoli), Palermo; Sant'Anna, Palermo; Sant'Oliva, Alcamo; S. Caterina (marble ornamentation), Calatafimi; Crocifisso, Calatafimi; Purgatorio, Tràpani; S. Domenico (chapel), Tràpani; Annunziata (interior) Tràpani; Chierici,

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- Mazara; Carmine (redesigned), Licata; S. Francesco, Licata.
- D'ANNA, VITO, Painter, especially frescoes, *c.* 1720–69, *b.* Palermo: in Palermo – S. Caterina, S. Anna, S. Matteo, S. Francesco di Paola, S. Salvatore, Villa Resuttana, Villa Adriana; S. Giovanni Battista, Chiaramonte Gulfi; S. Maria Maggiore, Ispica; S. Giorgio, Ragusa Ibla; S. Domenico, Noto; S. Sebastiano, Palazzolo Acreide; Chiesa Madre, Militello in Val di Catania.
- ANTONELLO DA MESSINA, Painter, *c.* 1430–79, *b.* Messina, the only major S. Italian painter of the fifteenth century: Palazzo Abatellis, Palermo; Museo Mandralisca, Cefalù; Palazzo Bellomo, Syracuse; Regional Museum, Messina.
- D'ASARO, PIETRO (Il Monocolo), Painter, 1591–1647, *b.* Racalmuto: churches at Racalmuto; Chiesa Madre, Cammarata; Municipio, Naro.
- BASILE, ERNESTO, Architect, foremost exponent of 'Liberty' style (Art Nouveau) 1857–1932, *b.* Palermo, son of G.B.F. Basile: in Palermo – completion of Teatro Massimo, kiosks in Piazza Verdi and Piazza Ruggero Settimo, alterations to Villa Igiea, Villino Florio, Villa Ida, Villa Bordonaro, alterations to Villa Sofia and Hotel des Palmes. 'Lo Stand' at Romagnolo; monument at Calatafimi; theatre, Canicattì; Chiesa Madre, Canicattì; Municipio, Licata; Palazzo Bruno di Belmonte, Ispica; war memorial, Enna; Cassa di Risparmio, Messina.
- BASILE, GIOVANNI BATTISTA FILIPPO. Architect, Precursor of 'Liberty' style (Art Nouveau), 1825–91, *b.* Palermo, father of Ernesto Basile; early stages of Teatro Massimo, Palermo; layouts and plantings of Giardino Inglese Palermo, Giardino Garibaldi (Piazza Marina) Palermo, and Public Gardens Caltagirone; Teatro Pirandello, Agrigento; façade of Cathedral, Acireale.
- BATTAGLIA, FRANCESCO, Architect, 1701(?)–78, *b.* Catania: in Catania – S. Nicolò, Benedictine Monastery, Badia

Artists and Architects

Grande, Cathedral, Sant'Agata, Carmine, S. Michele Archangelo, University, Collegio Cutelli, Palazzo Biscari (completed by his son Antonino), Palazzo Guttadauro; Chiesa Madre, Aci San Filippo; S. Maria del Monte, Caltagirone.

BERGLER, ETTORE DE MARIA, Painter, 1851–1939, *b.* Naples: murals at Villa Igiea, Palermo; Museo Civico, Agrigento.

BERRETARO, BARTOLOMEO, Sculptor, *d.* 1524, *b.* Carrara (?): Madonna in Chiesa Madre, Alcamo; portico S. Maria del Gesù, Alcamo; portal in Museo Pepoli, Tràpani; altarpiece Marsala Cathedral; portal Mazara Cathedral; Madonna in Cathedral, Sciacca; Madonna in S. Giorgio, Mòdica; Chiesa del Salvatore (statue of Redentore), Chiaramonte Gulfi.

BORREMANS, GUGLIELMO (Wilhelm), painter, including frescoes. 1670–1744, *b.* Antwerp: La Martorana and S. Teresa, Palermo; Chiesa Madre and SS Cosma and Damiano, Alcamo; S. Giovanni, Piazza Armerina; Cathedral, Catania; Cathedral, Enna; S. Giuseppe, Enna; Cathedral, Caltanissetta; S. Domenico. Caltanissetta; S. Antonio Abate, Buccheri; S. Silvestro (painting on marble), Agira; S. Vincenzo Ferreri, Nicosia.

BESIO, GIACOMO, Architect, 1612–45, *b.* Genoa (?): S. Giuseppe dei Teatini, Palermo.

CAMILLIANI, FRANCESCO, Sculptor and Architect, *d.* 1586, *b.* Florence: fountain in Piazza Pretoria, Palermo (with Michelangelo Naccherini).

CARNELIVARI, MATTEO, Architect, late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, *b.* Noto: Palermo – S. Maria della Catena, Palazzo Abatellis, Palazzo Ajutamicristo.

DUFOURNY, LEON, Architect, 1754–1818, *b.* Paris: 'Ginnasio' at Botanic Gardens, Palermo.

FERRARO, ANTONINO, Painter, sculptor, stuccoist, *fl.* 1552–98, *b.* Giuliana (Ferraro and his family important precursors in stucco work, perfected by the Serpottas):

stoup in Cathedral, Palermo; stuccoes in Cathedral, Mazara; frescoes, stuccoes, statues in S. Domenico, Castelvetro; stuccoes, frescoes in Chiesa Madre, Caltabellotta; terracottas in S. Agostino, Caltabellotta; terracottas in Biblioteca Feliciano, Naro; frescoes in Chiesa Madre, Isnello.

FUGA, FERDINANDO, architect, 1699–1781, *b.* Florence: Cathedral (dome and general reconstruction), Palermo.

GAGINI, ANTONELLO, Sculptor, architect, 1478–1536, *b.* Palermo, son of Domenico Gagini and prolific if occasionally uneven master-sculptor, mostly Madonnas, the most significant exponent of Florentine Quattrocento, also pioneer in stucco: tribuna in apse of Palermo Cathedral, completed after Gagini's death and dismantled by Fuga, influential on later sculptors and stuccoists: fragments from tribuna rearranged in Cathedral, also more sculpture, and sarcophagus (in crypt); other pieces from tribuna in Museo Diocesano, Palermo; also in Palermo – S. Caterina, S. Maria di Gesù (tomb), Palazzo Abatellis, and original design for S. Maria di Porto Salvo: Cefalù Cathedral; Chiesa Madre and Sant'Oliva, Alcamo; S. Giovanni Battista, Erice; Biblioteca Comunale, Erice; S. Maria del Gesù (baldacchino), Tràpani; Annunziata, Tràpani; Cathedral, Marsala; S. Giovanni Battista, Marsala; *ciborium*, apse composition completed by Antonino Gagini. Cathedral, Mazara; S. Giovanni Battista, Castelvetro: Chiesa Madre, Naro; Naselli tomb, S. Francesco, Còmiso; San Vito, Burgio; Carmine, Caltabellotta; Castellazzo di Montechiaro; Carmine, Mòdica; Cathedral, Syracuse; S. Maria Maddalena, Buccheri; S. Salvatore, Caltagirone; S. Maria di Gesù, Caltagirone; S. Domenico and S. Maria di Gesù (doorway), Catania: Chiesa Madre (design of building), Trecastagni; S. Nicolò, Randazzo; Cathedral, Messina; Museo Regionale, Messina; at Nicosia – SS Maria Maggiore, Carmine, Michele, Biagio; S. Giacomò,

Artists and Architects

Capizzi; Chiesa Madre, Pòllina, S. Michele, Patti; Chiesa Madre, Gieraci Siculo; S. Maria La Vecchia, Collesano; Chiesa Madre. Mistretta; at Castoreale – Chiesa Madre, Sant'Agata, S. Maria dei Franchi, S. Mauro. Museo Civico (sarcophagus).

Sons of Antonello Gagino: Antonino, Gian Domenico, Fazio, Vincenzo.

Grandsons of Antonello Gagini: Antonuzzo, Nibilio.

GAGINI, DOMENICO. Sculptor, *c.* 1420–1492, *b.* Bissone (Lombardy), father of Antonello, arrived Palermo from Naples 1458/9, believed to have studied under Brunelleschi: Cathedral, Palermo; Sant'Agostino (portal), Palermo; Palazzo Abatellis, Palermo; Chiesa Madre, Erice; S. Cataldo (stoup), Erice; Museo Civico, Salemi; Cathedral, Mazara; Palazzo Bellomo, Syracuse; Chiesa Madre, Isnello; Chiesa Madre, Polizzi Generoso; Chiesa Madre, Caltavuturo; Chiesa Madre, Collesano.

GAMBARA, ANTONIO. Sculptor, fifteenth century: Cathedral portico, Palermo.

GAGLIARDI, ROSARIO. Architect, 1682–1762, *b.* Syracuse, perhaps the most important, certainly the most spirited, of Sicilian Baroque architects, especially famous for his work at Noto: S. Maria delle Stelle, Còmisio; Palazzo Iacono, Còmisio; Chiesa dell'Addolorata, Niscemi; S. Giorgio, Ragusa Ibla; S. Giuseppe, Ragusa Ibla; Palazzo Battaglia, Ragusa Ibla; S. Giorgio, Mòdica; at Noto – S. Chiara, Cathedral, S. Domenico, S. Crocifisso, S. Carlo Borromeo, S. Maria dell'Arco, S. Tommaso, Palazzo Gagliardi.

GIGANTI, ANDREA. Architect, 1731–87, *b.* Tràpani: Palazzo Bonagia, Palermo; Palazzo Inguaggiato, Bagherìa; Carmine, Sciacca; S. Salvatore, Noto.

GUTTUSO, RENATO, Painter, 1912–87, *b.* Bagherìa: works in Villa Cattolica, Bagheria; Gallery of Modern Art, Palermo: museum, Gibellina Nuova.

ITALIA, FRA' ANGELO, Architect, 1628–1700, *b.* Licata: Chiesa

- Madre. Alcamo; Chiesa Madre, Palma di Montechiaro; Sant'Angelo, Licata; town plan, Avola; Collegiata, Catania; Jesuit College, Catania; S. Francesco Borgia, Catania; S. Girolamo, Polizzi Generosa.
- ITTAR, STEFANO, Architect, *d.* 1790, Catania or Rome, after his father-in-law Vaccarini's death leading architect in Catania; in Catania – S. Plàcido, Collegiata (façade), Porta Garibaldi, S. Martino, S. Nicolò (cupola).
- LABISI, PAOLO, Architect, *c.* 1731–90, *b.* Noto: Palazzo Nicolaci Villadorata, Noto; Palazzo Astuto (or by Vincenzo Sinatra?), Noto; Convento dei Crociferi, Noto; S. Sebastiano, Palazzolo Acreide.
- LAURANA, FRANCESCO, Sculptor, architect, 1420–1503, *b.* Vrana (Dalmatia), contemporary with Domenico Gagini in Sicily, but the greater artist: Cathedral, Palermo; Palazzo Abatellis, Palermo; S. Francesco d'Assisi (portal), Palermo; Chiesa Madre (or by D. Gagini?), Erice; Museo Civico, Salemi; S. Margherita (portal), Sciacca; S. Crocifisso, Noto; S. Maria della Moneta, Palazzolo Acreide; Museo Regionale, Messina; S. Maria della Porta, Geraci Siculo; Cathedral, Caccamo.
- MANCINO, GIULIANO, Sculptor, sixteenth century, *b.* Carrara: S. Maria del Gesù, Alcamo; Chiesa Matrice, Erice; Cathedral, Marsala; Cathedral, Sciacca; S. Giorgio, Mòdica; S. Tommaso, Enna.
- MARABITTI, IGNAZIO, Sculptor, 1719–97, *b.* Palermo: in Palermo – S. Giuseppe dei Teatini, S. Domenico, Sant'Ignazio all'Olivella and Oratory (angel), S. Francesco d'Assisi (6th chapel right); Cathedral (relief, chapel of St Benedict), Monreale; S. Martino delle Scale; Cathedral, Tèrmini Imerese; Villa Valguarnera (parapet statues), Bagheria; Chiesa dei Gesuiti, Tràpani; Cathedral (statues on façade), Syracuse; Sant'Agata, Caltanissetta; Cathedral, Nicosia.
- MARVUGLIA, VENANZIO, Architect, 1729–1814, *b.* Palermo, preeminent Neoclassic architect: in Palermo – Palazzo

Belmonte-Riso, Oratory of Sant'Ignazio all'Olivella, Botanic Gardens, Villa Belmonte, Palazzina Cinese; S. Martino delle Scale; hunting lodge, Ficuzza; S. Maria La Nova (presbytery), Scicli; S. Maria del Monte (campanile), Caltagirone; S. Maria (dome), Randazzo.

MASUCCIO, NATALE, Architect, *c.* 1561–1630, *b.* Messina: church of Jesuit College, Tràpani; Monte di Pietà, Messina; Jesuit College, Messina; Vecchio Duomo (or by Camillo Camilliani?), Milazzo.

MESSINA, VINCENZO, stuccoist, *fl.* 1692–1692, *b.* Tràpani: SS Paolo e Bartolomeo, Alcamo; Oratorio del Sacramento, Carini.

MONTÒRSOLI, FRA' GIOVANNI ANGELO, Sculptor, *c.* 1507–63, *b.* Florence, worked with Michelangelo: Orion fountain, Messina; Cathedral (original side altars copied), Messina; Neptune fountain, Messina; Regional Museum, Messina.

NAPOLI, TOMMASO MARIA. Architect, *d.* 1723, *b.* Palermo: Villa Palagonia, Bagheria; Villa Valguarnera, Bagheria; Immacolata column (designed), Palermo.

NOVELLI, PIETRO, Painter and architect, 1603–1647, *b.* Marsala, prolific artist, influenced by Van Dyck: in Palermo – Museo Diocesano, Sant'Ignazio all'Olivella, Oratory of S. Domenico, La Gancia, Palazzo Abatellis; S. Martino delle Scale; Badia Nuova, Alcamo; Sant'Oliva, Alcamo; Museo Civico, Agrigento; Capuccini church, Ragusa Ibla; Castello Ursino (*Sala XV*), Catania; Cathedral, Nicosia; Capuccini church, Leonforte; Cathedral, S. Lucia del Mela.

PALADINO (PALADINI), FILIPPO, Painter *c.* 1544–1614 *b.* Casi (Florence): S. Domenico, Palermo; Sant'Ignazio all'Olivella, Palermo; S. Cita, Palermo; S. Domenico, Licata; Chiesa Madre, Butera; S. Domenico, Mazzarino; Immacolata, Mazzarino; Cathedral, Piazza Armerina; S. Giorgio, Mòdica; Palazzo Bellomo, Syracuse; Chiesa Madre, Vizzini; S. Giacomo, Caltagirone; Gesù, Caltagi-

- rone; Cathedral, Enna; Capuccini church, Calascibetta; Cathedral, Caltanissetta; San Domenico, Caltanissetta; Museo Regionale, Messina.
- PALMA, ANDREA, Architect and painter, 1644–1730, *b.* Tràpani: Santa Caterina (side chapels, altar right transept), Palermo: S. Gioacchino, Via Patania, Palermo; Cathedral façade, Syracuse.
- PALMA, NICOLÒ. Architect, eighteenth century, *b.* Palermo: Villa Trabìa, Bagherìa; Villa Giulia (Flora), Palermo.
- RAGUSA, GIOVANNI BATTISTA. Sculptor, *d.* 1727, *b.* Palermo: in Palermo – S. Caterina (right transept), Immacolata column (the Madonna), S. Francesco d'Assisi.
- RITELLI, MARIO, Sculptor, 1859–1941, *b.* Palermo: Politeama Garibaldi (quadriga), Palermo; Lion and 'Lyric' figures, Piazza Verdi, Palermo; fountain in piazza, Monreale; Chiesa dell'Annunziata (font), Còmisò.
- RUZZOLONE, PIETRO, Painter, *fl.* 1484–1526, *b.* Palermo, noted especially for his painted crosses: Museo Diocesano, Palermo; Palazzo Abatellis, Palermo; Cathedral, Tèrmini Imerese; S. Maria della Stella, Militello; S. Francesco d'Assisi, Enna: Chiesa Madre, Sclàfani Bagni; Matrice Vecchia (polyptych), Castelbuono; Matrice Nuova, Castelbuono.
- SALERNO, GIUSEPPE (ZOPPO DI GANGI), Painter, 1570–1632, *b.* Gangi (Gaspare Vazano also known as Zoppo di Gangi, see below), influenced by Paladino: in Palermo – Museo Diocesano, Sant'Agostino (S. Tommaso), S. Francesco di Paola (frescoes), Sant'Ignazio all'Olivella; S. Martino delle Scale; Cathedral, Piazza Armerina; Badia, Caltanissetta; Chiesa Madre, Gangi; Chiesa Madre, Geraci Siculo; Chiesa Madre, Polizzi Generosa; Chiesa Madre, Collesano; Chiesa Madre, Isnello; Chiesa dell'Annunziata, Isnello; Chiesa dei Cappuccini, Carini; Chiesa Madre, Sclàfani Bagni; Chiesa Madre, Castelbuono.
- SALIBA, ANTONELLO DE, Painter, *c.* 1466–1535 *b.* Messina,

his work showing influence of Antonello da Messina: Castello Ursino, Catania; S. Martino, Randazzo; S. Nicolò, Taormina; Museo Regionale, Messina; Cathedral, Patti; Cathedral, Milazzo; Matrice Vecchia, Geraci Siculo; Chiesa Madre, Monforte S. Giorgio; Oratory of S. Filippo Neri, Castoreale.

SERPOTTA, GIACOMO, Stuccoist, sculptor, 1656–1732, *b.* Palermo, brilliant master in the Sicilian tradition, a great sculptor: in Palermo – the Oratories of S. Domenico, S. Lorenzo, SS Pietro e Paolo, and the churches of Sant’Agostino, S. Cita, S. Francesco d’Assisi, Sant’Orsola, S. Matteo, S. Ninfa dei Crociferi, La Gancia, Carmine; Collegiata, Monreale; S.S. Cosma e Damiano, Alcamo; Badia Nuova, Alcamo; Museo Pepoli, Tràpani; Santo Spirito (or by Procopio Serpotta?), Agrigento; S. Lorenzo, Agrigento; S. Benedetto, Càccamo.

SERPOTTA, GIUSEPPE, Stuccoist, sculptor, 1652–1719, *b.* Palermo, brother of Giacomo Serpotta: in Palermo – Chiesa della Pinta, S. Giuseppe dei Falegnami, S. Giuseppe dei Teatini, S. Teresa.

SERPOTTA, PROCOPIO, Stuccoist, sculptor, 1679–1755, *b.* Palermo (Monreale?), son of Giacomo Serpotta: in Palermo – S. Gioacchino (Via Patania), S. Giuseppe dei Teatini (bas-reliefs), Oratorio dell’Immacolatella (next to Oratory of S. Lorenzo), S. Giovanni dei Napolitani, S. Teresa, Oratorio di S. Caterina; Santo Spirito (or Giacomo Serpotta?), Agrigento; Chiesa dell’Annunziata, Càccamo.

SINATRA, VINCENZO, Architect, *fl.* 1742–79, *b.* Noto, second in importance to the great Gagliardi (his uncle): in Noto – Cathedral (with Gagliardi), Palazzo Ducezio, S. Francesco, Chiesa del Montevergine, Palazzo Astuto; S. Lorenzo, Monterosso Almo.

SMIRIGLIO, MARIANO, Architect, painter, *d.* 1636, *b.* Palermo: Quattro Canti (designed by Giulio Lasso), S. Maria di Valverde (reconstruction), Oratorio dell’Immacolata

(painting, next to Oratory of S. Lorenzo), Oratorio di S. Caterina, Chiesa del Carmine (Piazza del Carmine, with Vincenzo La Barbera), Porta Felice (with Pietro Novelli and Vincenzo Tedeschi), Arsenal, Fontana dei Draghi (Corso Calatafimi); Cathedral (mostly destroyed in 1968), Salemi; Museo Civico (painting), Salemi.

STOMER, MATTHIAS. Painter, *c.* 1600 – after 1650, Flemish: works in Oratory of S. Domenico, Palermo; Municipio, Monreale; Collegiata, Monreale; Museo Civico, Tèrmini Imerese; Museo Pepoli, Tràpani; Castello Ursino, Catania; Museo Regionale, Messina.

UMILE DA PETRALÌA, FRA' (Giovanni Francesco Pintorno), Painter and sculptor, *c.* 1580–1639, *b.* Petralìa Soprana, creator of many realistic Crucifixions throughout Sicily: S. Giuseppe dei Teatini, Palermo; Chiesa Madre, Campobello di Mazara (between Mazara and Castelvetro); Annunziata, Còmiso; Cathedral, Caltanissetta; church of Padri Domenicani, Mussomeli; S. Maria di Gesù, Catania; S. Maria delle Grazie, Mòio Alcàntara; S. Maria, Randazzo; S. Maria, Naro; Cathedral, Nicosia; Carmelo, Cerami; Museo Regionale, Messina; S. Papino, Milazzo; S. Salvatore, Gangi; Chiesa Madre, Isnello; S. Michele, Isnello, Chiesa Madre, Sclàfani Bagni; Chiesa Madre, Petralìa Soprana; Chiesa Madre, Collesano.

VACCARINI, GIOVANNI BATTISTA, Architect, 1702–68/9, *b.* Palermo; main architect in post-earthquake Catania, influenced by Borromini: in Catania – Cathedral façade, elephant fountain, Badia di Sant'Agata, Collegio Cutelli, Municipio, University, Palazzo Sangiuliano, Badia Piccola, Collegio Gesuitico (part only), Benedictine Monastery (contribution), design of Piazza Mazzini.

VAN DYCK, ANTONY, Painter, 1599–1641, *b.* Antwerp, in Palermo in 1624, strong influence on painters such as Novelli: Oratory of S. Domenico, Palermo.

Artists and Architects

- VAZANO, GASPARE, Painter, 1555–1630, *b.* Gangi, like the more famous and better artist Giuseppe Salerno known as Zoppo di Gangi: Museo Diocesano, Palermo; Madonna degli Angeli, Calatafimi; S. Nicolò, Randazzo; Chiesa Madre, Adrano; Chiesa Madre, Collesano.
- VELASQUEZ (VELASCO), GIUSEPPE, Painter, 1750–1827, Palermo: Sala del Parlamento, Royal Palace, Palermo; Museo Diocesano, Palermo; S. Giuseppe dei Teatini, Palermo; S. Domenico, Palermo; Ginnasio (frescoes), Botanic Gardens, Palermo; Convent, Monreale; Cathedral, Noto; S. Salvatore, Noto; S. Maria, Randazzo; Chiesa Madre, Casteltèrmini; Cathedral, Nicosià; S. Filippo, Agira; Cathedral, Caccamo.
- VERMEXIO, ANDREA, Architect, *fl.* 1594–43, Spanish: in Syracuse – façade of Montevergine church, original design for Archbishop's palace, S. Benedetto.
- VERMEXIO, GIOVANNI, Architect, *fl.* 1618–48, Spanish, brother of Andrea Vermexio: in Syracuse – original building of Municipio (Palazzo Vermexio), Cappella del Sepolcro of S. Lucia, S. Filippo Neri.
- VIGILIA, TOMMASO DE, Painter, 1435–97, *b.* Palermo: in Palermo – Museo Diocesano, Palazzo Abatellis, Carmine; S. Oliva, Alcamo; Cathedral (double-sided cross), Cefalù.
- VITALIANO (VITAGLIANO), GIOACCHINO, Sculptor and worker in marble, *fl.* 1740–60, *b.* Palermo: S. Cita (marble decorations and *Misteri*), Palermo; Garaffo fountain (from design by P. Amato), Piazza Marina, Palermo; Gesù (apse) Palermo; Cathedral, Caltanissetta.
- ZOPPO DI GANGI, see Giuseppe Salerno and Gaspare Vazano.

Festivals and Holidays

To experience the 'real' Sicily usually means taking part in a *festa*, either on the day of a patron saint or, more particularly, during the processions and rites of Holy Week. This applies not just to the big cities but to the smallest villages where the ceremonies are often just as spectacular or moving – or bizarre. Gavin Maxwell summed it up when he said that most of these festivals are based on the 'indestructible roots of tradition, superstition, fable and ignorance'. Any list has to be selective, at the same time concentrating on the best known events. On public holidays shops and banks are closed, but some museums stay open for restricted periods.

<i>New Year's Eve</i>	<i>Vigilia di Capodanno</i> . Special services in larger churches. Fireworks.
<i>January 1</i>	<i>Capodanno</i> . Public holiday.
<i>January 6</i>	Epiphany, <i>Epifania</i> or <i>Befana</i> . Public holiday. Day for giving presents. Byzantine rites at Piana degli Albanesi; elaborate costumes, distribution of oranges. <i>Nardu</i> (comic plays) at Santa Elisabetta, also <i>Sagra della ricotta</i> (<i>ricotta</i> festival).
<i>February 3–10</i>	<i>Sagra del mandorlo in fiore</i> . Almond blossom festival at Agrigento, with international dance groups and 'folklore'.

Festivals and Holidays

- February 3–5* *Festa* of Sant'Agata at Catania; fireworks, processions with *cannalore*, giant candles.
- February 19* *Festa* of San Corrado at Noto.
- Carnival* Acireale the most famous, with Sciacca, Tèrmini Imerese, Taormina the runners up. Generally lasts five days.
- March 19* *Festa* of St Joseph. Public holiday. At Carini, *tavolata*: special lunches with sardines, *minestra* and snails. *Cavalcata* at Scicli.
- Palm Sunday* Procession of *Confraternita* carrying palms at Gangi. Bishop rides through Piana degli Albanesi on a donkey; giant statues at Aidone.
- Ash Wednesday* Procession of *Real Maestranza*, local guilds, in costume at Caltanissetta; continues on Thursday and Sunday. Footwashing ceremonies etc. in cathedrals. At San Cataldo procession of Roman legionnaires, trial of Jesus.
- Maundy Thursday* Procession of the Mysteries at Marsala enacted by real people instead of setpiece figures; great emotion approaching frenzy.
- Good Friday* *Giovedì Santo*. Most famous procession of the Mysteries (*Misteri*) is at Tràpani, great solemnity and enactment of Passion. *Confraternita* at Enna parade in hoods, Spanish

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style, as at Tràpani. Another procession of the Mysteries at Ragusa. Tableaux carried on shoulders of *Confraternita* at Gangi. Other processions of special note at Acireale, Erice, Isnello and Noto (honouring the *Santa Spina*, Holy Thorn). 'Descent from the Cross' enacted at San Cataldo. Strangest of all, the orgiastic *Festa dei Giudei*, Feast of the Jews, at San Fratello, where hooded masked 'Jews' run riot through the town.

Easter Sunday

Pasqua. Another great Byzantine ceremony at Piana degli Albanesi; traditional costumes, much jewellery and lace; distribution of red painted eggs. Most processions throughout Sicily enact the Meeting of Christ with His Mother (sometimes on Easter Saturday), notably at Aidone, Caltagirone, Enna, Mòdica. At Barrafranca giant 'historical characters assist at the Meeting'. At Prizzi, the wild 'Dance of the Devils', symbolising the struggle between Good and Evil, Life and Death.

Easter

San Biagio Plàtani outstanding for its decorations, floral arches, etc.

Easter Monday

Public holiday.

April 3

The *Diavolata* at Adrano; Archangel Michael subdues the Devil.

Festivals and Holidays

- April 25* Liberation Day (1945). Public holiday.
- May 1* Labour day. Public holiday.
- 1st & 2nd Sundays in May* *Festa* of Santa Lucia (the *Patrocinio*) at Syracuse.
- May 9–10* *Festa* of Sant'Alfio at Trecastagni; pilgrimage of *nudi*, painted carts festival, garlic sale.
- May 15* Establishment of *Regione* in Sicily (1946).
- 3rd Sunday in May* *Infiorata* at Noto, flower festival.
- 4th Sunday in May* *Tataratà* at Casteltèrmini, battle between Normans and Saracens.
- Last Sunday in May* At Scicli effigy of warlike Madonna dei Milici carried through streets, trampling Saracens. *Fiesta* of San Giorgio at Ragusa; costume parade.
- End of May* *Settimana delle Egadi*, Egadi islands week.
- Ascension Day* Public holiday (sixth Thursday after Easter Sunday).
- Corpus Christi* Public holiday (ninth Thursday after Easter Sunday). Floral procession at Petralia Sottana.
- June 2* Proclamation of the Republic; public holiday.
- June 3* *Festa* of Madonna della Lettera, Messina.

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- June 24* Festival of the *muzzuni* at Alcara Li Fusi; cakes distributed; wine flows.
- June 29* *Festa* of Saints Peter and Paul. Public holiday. Celebrations last several days; St Peter especially revered by fishermen, also at Mòdica; St Paul celebrated especially at Palazzo Acrèide.
- July 2* Procession of Madonna della Visitazione at Enna; in effect a harvest festival, going back to the time of Ceres.
- July 10–15* *Festino* of Santa Rosalia at Palermo: the most famous of all the festivals; triumphal car, music, fireworks.
- 3rd Sunday in July* *Cavalcata dei Pastori*, Cavalcade of the shepherds, every seventh year at Geraci Siculo.
- July 24–25* *Festa* of San Giacomo at Caltagirone; *scala* illuminated. Manna festival at Pòllina.

From end of July and throughout August many cultural events, concerts, plays etc., notably at the Taormina international arts and film festival; classical plays alternating at Segesta and Syracuse Greek theatre; open air plays at Caos (Pirandello's house) and old Gibellina; music at Erice, Agrigento and Noto.

- August 3* Flight of the angel at Adrano, in honour of San Nicolò Politi.
- August 6* *Festa* of San Salvatore at Cefalù.

Festivals and Holidays

- August 13–14* *Palio dei Normanni* at Piazza Armerina; horse races, jousting etc.
- August 14* *Sfilata dei Giganti*, Procession of the Giants, Mata and Grifone, at Messina.
- August 15* Assumption of the Virgin. Public holiday (*Ferragosto*). The great day of the summer holidays. Celebrations continue at Messina; fireworks over the Straits. *Sagra della Spiga*, Festival of Corn, at Gangi. *La Cordelia* (a dance) at Petralia Soprana. *Arrucata dei Ventimiglia*, costume parade evoking the Ventimiglia family at Castelbuono.
- August 18* *Festa* of San Sebastiano at Mistretta.
- Last Sunday in August and first in September*
Festa of San Corrado at Noto.
- September 4* Pilgrimage to sanctuary of Santa Rosalia on Monte Pellegrino, Palermo.
- September 8* The Birth of the Virgin. Pilgrimage to the Black Madonna at Tindari, and to the sanctuary at Gibilmanna, Cefalù. At Mistretta two giant warriors 'protect' the Madonna della Luce. *Settembre Nissano*, folklore festival at Caltanissetta. Hazelnut fair at Polizzi Generosa.
- September 27* *Festa* of Saints Cosimo and Damiano, fishermen's festival, especially at Palermo and Mazara.

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- October 4* *Festa* of St Francis of Assisi. General celebrations throughout island.
- November 1* All Saints (*Ognissanti*). Public holiday. Children given presents 'from the dead'.
- November 2* *Il Giorno dei Morti*, the Day of the Dead. Visits to cemeteries, graves decorated, masses sung.
- November 4* Victory Day (1918). Public holiday. Music festival at Monreale cathedral during November.
- December 8* Festival of the *Immacolata*, Conception of the Virgin Mary. Public holiday.
- December 13* Festival of Santa Lucia (the *Santuzza*) at Syracuse. Festival of folk music during December at Erice.
- December 24* *Vigilia di Natale*, Christmas Eve. Midnight masses.
- December 25* *Natale*, Christmas Day. Christmas cribs, especially famous at Acireale, Tràpani and Caltagirone. Child sermons at Taormina.
- December 26* *Festa* of St Stephen, notably at Polizzi Generosa.

Regional Dishes and Wines

Any guide published in Italian about Sicily is almost bound to give a list of regional dishes, usually divided by provinces. Here then is a selection, several of them much enjoyed by this compiler:

Province of Agrigento

Coniglio all'agrodolce

sweet and sour rabbit, with aubergine, capers, olives, celery, sugar and vinegar.

Friscia

cake sold at Easter based on ricotta, eggs and aromatic herbs.

'mpignulata

a dessert made with almonds.

Pasta dishes with tomato and aubergine are also a speciality. The province is noted for its artichokes, broccoli and *cardi* (thistles, of the edible variety!).

Province of Caltanissetta

Torrone

nougat, considered the best in Sicily.

Capretto al canale

young roast goat.

Cavate (Cavatini)

a type of pasta eaten with *ragù*.

Stigghiulata 'mpanata

focaccia bread stuffed with vegetables and meat or fish. A Gela speciality.

Province of Catania

- Simmulu* soup of semolina and cauliflowers.
- Pasta alla Norma* with tomatoes, chopped fried aubergines, ricotta, hardboiled eggs, basil.
- Zuzzu* pork jelly, lemon flavoured.
- Sciacciata* pie with anchovies and sheep's cheese.
- Cutumè* little fried cakes, filled with ricotta and other ingredients such as chocolate, and served with honey.
- Ossi dei morti* 'bones of the dead', sweets given to children on All Saints' Day, also elsewhere in Italy.
- Minni di Sant'Agata* cakes made in the shape of women's breasts.

Dishes with sardines and anchovies are also a speciality. Catania is the 'home' of ice-cream, originally made from the snows of Etna. It also produces delicious nougat. Olives are excellent. Almond cakes are a speciality at Acireale.

Province of Enna

- Frascatola* soup based on milk and flour.
- Maccheroni a tre dita* macaroni 'with three fingers' made with flour, egg, sugar, cheese, sago, cinnamon.
- Semolone* boiled maize with various sauces.

Regional Dishes and Wines

Sfinci cakes made with honey, ricotta, bitter chocolate, lemon peel and crystallised orange. Eaten on St Joseph's day. *Sfinci* derives from the Arabic, meaning sponge.

Sausages with fennel, ravioli with ricotta and honey, tube-shaped *cannoli* filled with ricotta and candied fruit (at Carnival time) are other specialities. Enna is also known for its *pasta reale*, marzipan fruits. (Pasta is a general term for dough or pastry, thus including both cakes and spaghetti.)

Province of Messina

Pasta 'ncaciata with cauliflower.

Pesce spada alia chiatta swordfish with tomato, onion, celery, capers, olives, olive oil. Served with potatoes.

Sciabacheddu small fried fish (like whitebait).

Risotto alle mandorle risotto with almonds.

Cassata made with ricotta, candied fruits, cinnamon, bits of chocolate, also made in other parts of Sicily.

Pignocata little dough balls, baked, flavoured with honey, pine kernels, cinnamon and orange, heaped into a pyramid and covered with icing.

Messina is a great place for tuna, swordfish, lobster and shellfish, especially mussels. Cod in casserole is another speciality, said to have been introduced by the Normans. The *torrone* is also good.

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Province of Palermo

- Pasta con le sarde* with sardines, pine kernels, raisins.
The most famous dish of Palermo.
- Pasta incasciata* with broccoli, sausage, raisins, garlic,
pine kernels.
- Pasta con le seppie* with cuttle-fish, black ink sauce.
- Pasta alia carretera* with garlic, cheese and chillies.
- Braciolone* rolled beef, filled with hardboiled
egg, parsley, cheese, and cooked in
lard.
- Stigghiole* grilled or roast goat's intestines,
filled with onion, cheese and parsley.
Sold on stalls.
- Frutti di Martorana* fruits made out of marzipan.
- Sfoghgiu* dessert with cheese eaten at Polizzi
Generosa.
- U cunnigghiu* salad with tuna eaten at Polizzi
Generosa.
- Picuruni* marzipan lambs eaten in the
Madonìa at Easter.
- Involtini* meat or fish stuffed and rolled.

Province of Ragusa

- 'mpanata* pie of goat's meat, cooked with lard,
sugar, parsley, garlic.
- Trippa in tegame* fried tripe with aubergine, cheese,
nuts, almonds, sugar and cinnamon.

Regional Dishes and Wines

- Pasta 'ncasciata* pasta baked with ricotta, meat, sugar and eggs.
- Maccù* soup made with pasta and dried bean purée, flavoured with fennel.
- 'mpunatiggli* a Mòdica speciality; meat cooked with almonds, chocolate and cinnamon.
- Sospiri di monaca* 'nun's sighs', cakes made with egg yolks, almonds and sugar.

Ragusa province has a reputation for having the best cuisine in Sicily. Sausages are a speciality, also lasagne with ricotta, and cutlets with wild asparagus.

Province of Syracuse

- Pasta alia Siracusana* pasta rissoles fried in lard and covered with hot black honey from the Iblei mountains.
- Maccarruna i casa* macaroni with pork sauce, especially at Palazzolo Acrèide; sometimes served with spicy sausage.
- Tonno alia marinara* tuna with garlic, cloves, onions and tomatoes.
- Zuppa dello Zio Nino* fish soup, including scorpion fish, mussels, prawns and capers.
- Capretto al forno* roast goat with fresh pecorino cheese.
- Anguille alla Casale di Ganci* eels cooked with tomatoes, parsley and bay leaves, in olive oil and white wine.

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Peperoni arrostiti roast peppers, cooked in aromatic olive oil and with tomatoes, also roasted.

Melanzane a barchetta fried aubergines, boat-shaped, with tomatoes, almonds and cinnamon.

Province of Tràpani

Cuscusu couscous made with semolina, fish stock and flavoured with fennel.

Pasta con bottarga pasta with dried and grated tuna roe.

Rianata a type of pizza with oregano, cheese and anchovies.

Mustazzoli almond biscuits or tarts eaten at Erice and flavoured with cinnamon and cloves.

Amaretti almond biscuits.

Mustazzole an Erice speciality, sweet biscuits or tarts, flavoured with cinnamon.

Paste vergini an Alcamo speciality, sweet cakes.

Tonno alla marinara a Favignana speciality, tuna this time with tomatoes, capers and green olives.

Scursunera *granita* (crushed ice) flavoured with jasmine.

Triglie al finocchio red mullet, with fennel, and cooked in white wine, lemon juice and orange peel; excellent at Marinella, near Selinunte.

WINES

Among the best known Sicilian wines are Corvo di Salaparuta, Donnafugata, Settesoli, Terre di Genestra, Ligorio, Liberchio, Rapitala and Regaleali. I have enjoyed Planeta, which appears in UK wine lists. To be recommended are Nero d'Avola (Morgante, Tasca d'Almerita, Donnafugata vineyards) and Cerasuolo di Vittoria (Cos). The wines around Etna are heady and usually excellent; Etna Rosso and Etna Bianco (Benante, Villa Grande) are special. The liqueur Fuoco d'Etna is almost too heady, as a leading British publisher found to his cost. Messina's best known wines are Faro (red) and Mamertino (white); *Grappa* is also a speciality there. Malvasia, known to the English in medieval times as Malmsey wine, comes from the Lìpari islands – Malvasia delle Lìpari (Caravaglio, Haumer). At Pantelleria one drinks a strong *moscato*, Zibibbi, which is sometimes available elsewhere (Buffo, Pellegrino). Then there is Passito di Pantelleria (Donnafugata). Alcamo Bianco (Principe di Corleone) is a good dessert wine. Then of course there are the famous wines of Marsala, which produce the connoisseur's apéritifs and after-dinner wines, from bone-dry to sweet, and some still bearing the names of Woodhouse, Ingham and Florio. (Shame on *marsala all'uovo!*)

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Tyrrhenian Sea

Egadi Islands

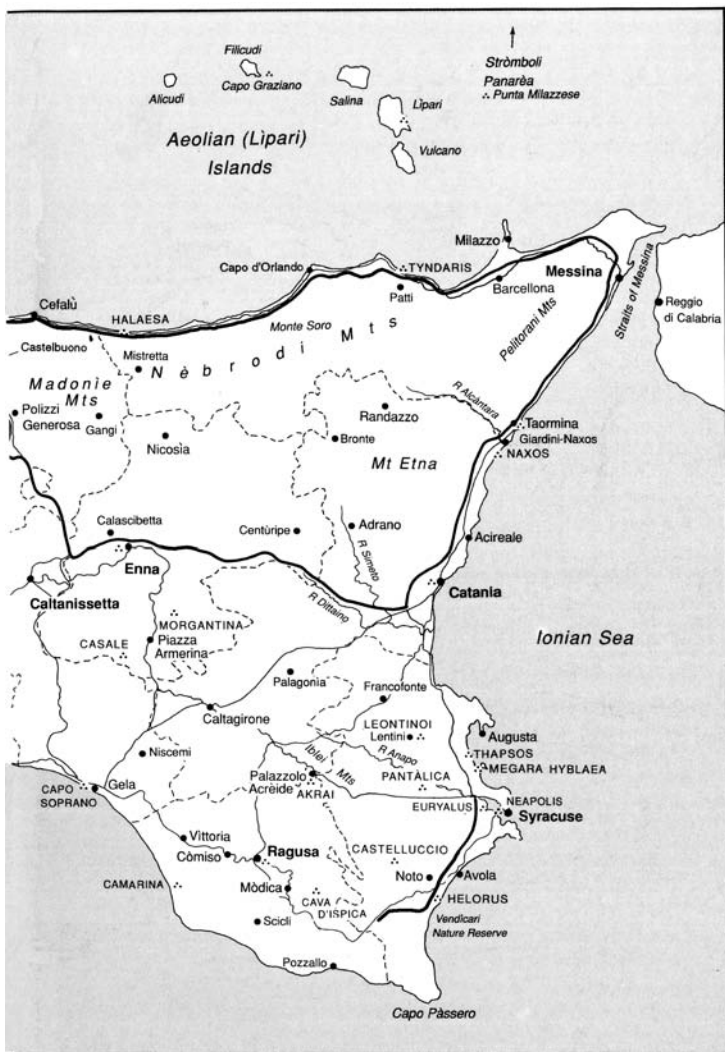


Mediterranean Sea

Pelagian Islands

Pantelleria

Lampedusa
Linosa
Lampione



Informative, entertaining, combining the best of essential knowledge with an agreeable personal touch... A model guide, with all the excitement of discovery and the deeper pleasures of familiarity. THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

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The beautiful island of Sicily, poised between Europe and Africa, has seen many invaders, nearly all of whom have left their mark in art and architecture. It is also a land of myth and enigma, pagan below the Catholic surface, troubled by the shadow of the Mafia – in the words of the great Sicilian writer Leonardo Sciascia, a fantasy world.

Raleigh Trevelyan knows the island intimately, and his knowledge adds immeasurably to the experience of visiting the great sites: Segesta, Agrigento and the mosaics of the Roman villa near Piazza Armerina; Palermo and Monreale; the theatre at Syracuse; and the baroque marvels of Noto. Unforgettable though these are, Sicily's unique character is more fully revealed as the author makes his way from province to province, describing the landscape and monuments, great treasures and remote villages, spicing his discoveries with personal anecdote and references from writers down the centuries.

RALEIGH TREVELYAN writes from long familiarity with Italy and Sicily; his other books on the country include *The Shadow of Vesuvius*, *Princes under the Volcano*, *Rome 1944: The Battle for the Eternal City*, and *The Fortress: A Diary of Anzio and After*.

Cover photograph of Segesta by Melo Minella.

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