Sicilian Visitors Volume 2

Culture

Francesco Rocco Ruggeri

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To My Parents

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Introduction

Today, the history of Italy is often thought of in terms of (1) the Roman empire, (2) Dante, Petrarch, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Thomas Aquinas of the 1200s (3) the Vatican in Rome, (4) the

Renaissance and its giants such Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Michelangelo and Titian among others and Galileo and Niccolo Machiavelli, (4) the era of opera in the 1800s with Rossini, Donizetti, Verdi and Puccini among others and finally (5) the unification of the country in 1860 and Garibaldi. Under such a scheme, Sicily hardly features in the history of Italy with only the appearance of the painter Antonello da Messina in the 1400s and the opera composer Bellini the 1800s. (There were of course many other famous and world class Sicilians who are the subject of this book.) Such a scheme, however, is misleading. Specifically, it neglects the Phoenician and Greek era of Sicily, the Norman kingdom of the island when the city of Palermo was richer than all of England, the era of Frederick II when the sonnet, used by Dante and Petrarch, was invented in Sicily together with the first vernacular language of Italy and the Baroque era with the Sicilian master Serapotta and architect Juvarra influencing all of Europe. It also neglects the history of literature on the island from the time of the ancient Greeks, with Greek comedy said to have been invented in Sicily, through the 1800s and one of Italy's most famous writers Giovanni Verga and the 1900s with two Sicilian Nobel laureates in literature Luigi Pirandello and the poet Quasimodo, not to mention the Sicilian language masters Veneziano from the 1500s, Giovanni Meli and Domenico Tempio from the 1700s, the world class folklorist Giuseppe Pitre from the 1800s and Nino Martoglio, the poet, playwright and neorealist filmmaker from the very early 1900s.

In the 1700s, Goethe, Germany's most famous author, visited Sicily and stated that the country of Italy could not be understood without understanding the island. In the 1800s, Ulysses Grant, the American Civil War general and U.S. President visited and spoke of the glories of its ancient Greek past. Today, it may appear that Sicily was a provincial Greek colony during the Greek era which was not the case. (Under the Romans, the island perhaps played a more provincial role.) Under the Greeks, the city of Syracuse was the most famous city in all of Europe (with the exception perhaps of Athens and Sparta) until it was "demoted" by the Romans about 200 B.C. Plato came to Siracusa to tutor the son of the tyrant Dionysius and Pythagoras ,Aeschylus and Euripedes two of Greece's most famous playwrights, also visited. Sicily itself was known in the Greek world for its food, especially its cheeses and in 400 B.C. the Syracusan army defeated the Athenians under their best soldiers. Athens is seen today

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54. Sydney Morning Herald Kathy Evans Apr 5 2014
http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/music/is-crazy-sicilian-giovanni-sollima-the-worlds-coolest-musician-20140402-35zh4.html

Chapter 7: Architecture in Sicily

Sicily has a rich history of architecture. Besides neolithic structures, it is believed that people from the island built temples on Malta about 4000 B.C. These are the second oldest examples of architecture in the world, the first being temples in Turkey. In addition, Sicily has some of the best preserved ancient Greek ruins (especially temples and amphitheatres) in the world.

The island also contains other ancient styles (Phoenician, Roman and Byzantine). In particular, the ruin of a Roman villa at Piazza Armerina is world class and is a UNESCO site, the catacombs of Siracusa are second only to those of Rome and there are ruins of at least two Roman gladiatorial amphitheatres and an aqueduct. Surprisingly perhaps, there are not many purely Byzantine or Arabic buildings, although the influence of these two groups was significant especially on the Normans. The Normans, who came in 1061, made a major impact on architecture in the roughly two centuries they were present. First, they built numerous castles, second they built very unique Norman-Arab-Byzantine churches with round domes which look like they come from an oriental world and finally they created impressive Romanesque cathedrals with huge Byzantine mosaics inside. These latter have been declared UNESCO world heritage sites. Later, Baroque, Rococo ,Neo-Classical and finally Art Nouveau styles were developed. The Baroque towns of the very late 1600s are world class UNESCO heritage sites.

Sicily also had an aristocracy which were responsible for much of the island's architecture.

Seven of the best ¨secret¨ palaces in Sicily (according to Catharine Sabino 2017 of Italy magazine) are Palazzo Aliata of

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Modern Representation of the Neo-classical style

In 1935, a large cathedral, the second largest in the province of Messina was built in Barcelona Pozzo di Gotto in the neo-classical style. It is reminiscent of work by Juvara, but contains many interior paintings from the 1900s. (88)

Modern Architectural Style (89)

We present a few brief snippets of some modern architects and their work in Sicily.

In 1953, the Venetian architectural master Carlo Scarpa renovated the palace of a one time port master of Palermo. Today, it is a museum and Walter Gropius calls it "A masterpiece. In Palermo I have seen the best museum design ever."

(90)
"Danilo Dolci, educated as an architect, became a leading figure in the struggle to use nonviolent means to achieve social justice. He moved to Sicily in 1952 and died in 1999. While in Sicily, he helped to establish a "people's college", an educational center for primary school children; a variety of centers for conflict resolution".

In 1955, Carlo Broggi in 1955 built a 17 story skyscraper. Gae Aulenti has transformed a 17th century townhouse into a stunning, modern venue.

Palazzo Amoroso, was built in 1974 by four Italian masters of rationalism, Gian Luigi Banfi, Ludovico Barbiano di Belioioso, Enrico Peressuti, Ernesto Nathan Rogers. Is a blend of ancient and modern styles.

Antonino Cardillo is a modern Sicilian architect. He studied in Rome and from 2007 until 2011 and designed seven imaginary houses to international acclaim. In 2009, he was selected to be among the best thirty architects of the year by a British magazine. (91)

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Chapter 8: Medicine, Psychology, Physics, Math, Biology, Chemistry and Technology

Sicily is perhaps not the first place that comes to mind when math, science, medicine or technology are mentioned. Nevertheless, the island has produced its share of scientists and medical experts over a long period of time. Names that appear often are Archimedes from about 300 B.C., Maurolico from the 1500s and Ettore Majorana from the 1930s, whose predicted the neutron and postulated particles which are their own antiparticle. These were finally confirmed conclusively in 2017. In the 1500s, Foscarini a Carmelite monk in Messina supported the ideas of Copernicus and Galileo, but was silenced. Galileo wrote about him in a letter. In addition, Cannizzaro, a Sicilian chemist is responsible for justifying the ideas of Avogadro in 1858. Rene Favaloro, a Sicilian from Argentina, performed the first