



Sicilia Parra



Bi-annual Newsletter of Arba Sicula:
An International Organization that Promotes the Language and Culture of Sicily

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The Annual Tour of Sicily for 2021: Again in Jeopardy

As you know, our 27th tour of Sicily had to be cancelled because of the Corona virus pandemic. It was very disappointing to all the forty-five people who were looking forward to it, and to me as well. But I think we made the only decision we could make under the circumstances.

The situation is still somewhat uncertain in this county and in Italy. While the new administration has completely changed the outlook, doing an amazing job by speeding vaccinations and reducing the number of deaths, the situation still appears to be uncertain. While the number of vaccinations has increased dramatically in the past few weeks, reaching a level of over four million shots administered daily, there are some areas in the country where the infection is rising at an alarming rate. There are

still many people who do not abide by the recommendation to wear masks and keep the minimum distance between themselves and others. While I am confident that the vaccinations will be able to reduce the number of infections and hospitalizations in this country in the next few months, I am not so confident that Europe and Italy especially will be able to reach the level everyone needs to travel safely. I just

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Dr. Jill Biden, the First Lady of the United States

The New American First Lady Is of Sicilian Descent

In the last issue of *Sicilia Parra* we published an article on Dr. Anthony Fauci and we expressed our pleasure at seeing a man of Sicilian origins climb to the top of his profession and become the doctor that most Americans trust during the difficult times of the COVID 19 pandemic that has caused so much destruction and more deaths than all the wars Americans have fought. In this issue we are delighted to see another person of Sicilian descent become the First Lady of the United States: Jill Biden, who had already served as the Second Lady of the nation as the wife of Vice President Biden during the Obama's presidency, has now become First Lady.

Dr. Biden's grandfather, Gaetano Giacoppo, was born in a little Village of Gesso in the province of Messina. He was two years old when the family emigrated to the United States.

The village is located on a hill on the north side of the island from where you can see the Eolian islands in a clear day. Its name was derived from the Italian word for gypsum (gesso), which in Sicilian is *jibbisu* or *jippisu*. The townspeople are known as *jibbisoti*.

The family arrived in the US in 1900, going through Ellis Island and they settled in Hammonton, N.J.,

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President's Message

This past year has not been good. The world and especially the United States has suffered a tremendous loss of lives. In fact, the casualties in the U.S. have more than doubled since the last issue of *Sicilia Parra*, reaching the staggering number of five hundred eighty thousand people. The economy has suffered great losses; millions of people are unemployed and thousands are desperately struggling to breathe in ICUs. But things are beginning to turn around. Vaccinations have reached an amazing four million shots a day. Two hundred million shots have already been administered and it looks like the population of the United States will be inoculated by July. Unfortunately, there are still many places in the country where the infections are rising, posing great danger to the rest of the country. While we can see the light at the end of the tunnel, we cannot say that the COVID19 virus has been defeated. News strains are emerging and we may have to wear masks longer than we want. In addition, the rest of the world is struggling with it.

The impact on Arba Sicula's operations has been awful. We have not been able to hold any events. The University where we hold our events (St. John's University) has been locked down to large gatherings. Their courses are primarily taught online. They may resume in person teaching in the fall, but things are still uncertain.

I have continued to do my work. In fact, as you may have seen, I have published several articles in various magazines. But more recently I have devoted most of my time to a project that I hope will be a great contribution to the study of the Sicilian language. My first book *Learn Sicilian / Mparamu lu sicilianu* has done extremely well. I have had to reprint it three times, which is a confirmation that Sicilian-Americans, more than the Sicilians in Sicily, are not ready to give up the language of their forefathers! The success of the first book encouraged me to create a more advanced textbook for those who have already studied the first volume. The new text is meant for those who already possess a good grounding in the language and who want to continue studying it. It is the equivalent of a second year college course. Primarily written in Sicilian, but for English speaking students, the book focuses on the variations that exist in the spoken language that people can hear on the island. The idea is not to teach the different *parrati* of Palermo, Catania, Agrigento or Enna, but to familiarize students with the most important variations so they can recognize them and realize that the language is still one. Once they learn a few rules that govern the way Sicilian is spoken in different places, the varieties become less difficult to understand. It is my hope to publish this major work by the fall. The book will have some readings written in standard Sicilian and others that will reflect the languages spoken in the various different locations. In addition, the book will include features that were well received in the first volume, such as short texts under the rubric, *Umorismu Sicilianu*, profiles of Sicilian personalities, Sicilian myths, proverbs and other features. I am focusing also on prefixes and suffixes that English and Sicilian share because of their connection to Latin. These similarities will help students to increase their knowledge of vocabulary considerably. The book will also include an anthology of readings, so students can put to use what they learn, enjoying authentic literature written in Sicilian.

I published two new articles in *Italics Magazine* about the Sicilian language that you may want to read: here are the two links: These were part of the same article but I had to split it in two because of its length:

<https://italicsmag.com/2021/01/15/the-stigma-of-speaking-a-dialect-the-case-of-sicilian/>

<https://italicsmag.com/2021/02/03/is-sicilian-a-language-or-a-dialect/>



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where the father changed his name to Jacobs to try to blend better in American society which in those days and for a long time after that, was not very welcoming to immigrants and especially to Sicilians. Her grandfather worked as a furniture delivery man.

The little village was overjoyed when people heard the news that Joe Biden had been elected President in the 2020 election and especially when it became known that Jill Biden's relatives were from Gesso. The village, which is nestled on high ground to escape the pirates' incursions, which were a constant threat to the coastal towns of Sicily for centuries, has only 549 inhabitants. It has no banks, no hotels, but because of its connection to the First Lady it has attracted a lot of attention lately. Relatives of the Giacoppo family have come forward to invite the First Lady to visit the village. One of her distant cousins has extended an invitation to the First Lady promising to cook pasta with sauce and meatballs from a local recipe that may have been what the Giacoppo family ate at those Sunday dinners that the First Lady remembered eating at her grandparents' home in New Jersey. They are, of course, delighted that a *jibbisota* has become First Lady.

Doctor Biden is an accomplished educator. She has a bachelor's degree and a doctoral degree from the University of Delaware, as well as master's degrees from West Chester University and Villanova University. She taught English and reading in high schools for thirteen years and instructed adolescents with emotional disabilities at a psychiatric hospital. From 1993 to 2008, Biden was an English and writing instructor at Delaware Technical & Community College. Since 2009, she has been a professor of English at Northern Virginia Community College.

The First Lady is very active and supports many humanitarian causes. Her doctoral degree is in Education. Her chosen profession speaks for her commitment to make a difference in society. Teachers are always interested in their students and do



The mother church of Gesso (built around 1600) where the parents of Gaetano Giacoppo were married.

their best to see that they develop their skills and reach the maximum of their potential. Teachers are role models and I know that Dr. Biden will fulfill her new role as First Lady with distinction. Arba

Sicula, an organization that promotes the best that Sicily offers the world, takes pride in Dr. Biden's accomplishments and wishes her success in her new role.

Help our children Learn Sicilian and bring the DOE Sicilian Dual Language program to District 22- A note from Charlie Forti

Dear Parents,

Many of us feel our Sicilian heritage, culture, traditions and language are something that should be promoted and shared with future generations. We also work effortlessly to ensure our children receive the best opportunities and set them up for a successful future. Now is our chance to bring a new DOE Sicilian Dual Language program to District 22 in Brooklyn New York.

Language immersion is a technique used in bilingual education which two languages are used for instruction. The research shows that language immersion at the preschool level has many positive effects for a child's overall development and future success in school. Children who learn a second language from an early age consistently show superior mathematical conceptualization, problem solving skills, verbal acumen, and creativity.

To make this happen we need 15-20 families with children whom have started the September 2020 school year and are committed to sending our child/children to an Sicilian Dual Language program. The hope is that the program can start this year, or for the next school year.

We require a commitment letter for each child, stating that your child is committed to attending a pre-K and Kindergarten Sicilian Dual language program for the this School year or next years Kindergarten classes.

Please reach out to me via e-mail at vinciri@mail.com with any questions you might have. I am trying to collect the commitment letters as soon as possible.

Arturo Di Modica: a Sculptor and His Art.

by Annalisa Saccà

(We are publishing this article about Arturo Di Modica, published in *Arba Sicula* in 1990 to commemorate his passing, the Editor)

Arturo Di Modica was born in Vittoria (Ragusa), and emigrated to the United States eighteen years ago. He belongs to the category of artists who have shaped their life according to their art, without accepting compromises of any sort.

His career started quite early. At twelve, Di Modica was working in a carpenter shop, learning patiently how to carve the elaborate Sicilian carts. This first job inspired in the artist the temptation of creating the sculptural forms of his imagination.

Thus, two years later, Di Modica put aside the wood of which Sicilian chariots were made, and started experimenting with the lava stone, shaping his first figurines. At this point in his life Di Modica knew he wanted to be an artist, and not just any artist, but a good one. In order to his, he felt compelled to leave his Sicily and move to Florence to study sculpture.

In the fourteen years Di Modica spent in Florence he gave himself completely to art. For his sculptures, he worked on marble and bronze. He loved particularly marble, and as Michelangelo used to do centuries before him, he himself would go to Carrara to choose the blocks he would work on. In the white transparency of marble, the sculptor found the *Fimmina nuda*/Naked Woman primordial forces of nature that he manifested through the shaping of timeless figures, resembling mythological heroes that never lived, and yet that always are. During the Florentine period, Di Modica experimented also with painting. The figures in the canvas corresponded to his sculptures in a manner that he was simply giving color to his carved forms.

Di Modica showed his works in several galleries in Italy and in Europe since 1958, and finally in 1970 he arrived in



the United States with a personal show at the Wickersham Gallery in Manhattan. In the last ten years, Di Modica has put aside painting, to concentrate entirely on sculpture. He doesn't use marble as much, but he is happy with the results of bronze and stainless steel which sometimes, he combines through a special technique "ad incastro" where one element (the steel) is encased into the other one (the bronze) creating quite a remarkable effect.

In the most recent works, the sculptor, renouncing a period of more abstract forms, has gone back to the shapes of his land: his beloved Sicily. It is Sicily at his best, in the times of Magna Graecia when the classical forms shaped the destiny of people.

The balancing of the bodies, the plasticity of the movements of each

figure, the exact distribution of weight and the serene pose, suggest the intent to recapture and crystallize in its power the mysterious world of mythological events (as his sculpture of the birth of woman from a fish). The cyclical time is reflected in the cyclical movement of his sculptures trapped in the traditions of an island destined to recycle his past in the present of his people whether they are physically there or not.

"All the works of Arturo Di Modica-wrote the art critic Renata Karlin, during the artist retrospective at the Queens Museum-are permeated of a choral and pleasurable pantheism. The same forms of his sculptures transmit exuberance and generosity, materializing the vitality of nature."

This "vitality", is applicable to Di Modica's sculptures as well as Di





Arturo Di Modica posing with his famous bull originally meant as a gift to Wall Street. The second is a model for the enormous horses he was working on before passing away.

Modica, the sculptor. The artist has been known to bring his art to the people in a very singular manner. He actually surprises the public by inviting him to share his art when he least expects it, and in the process he ends up in the first page of the newspapers. Unforgettable is the case of the bull. One night of three years ago, Di Modica, as Christmas gift to the city of New York, delivered, right in the middle of Wall Street, a tree and a half bull, in bronze and stainless steel. "It is a monumental work that testifies the vitality and energy of the American people in the adversities," said Di Modica, forced by the police to remove "the gift" that, since then, has been placed permanently in the Bowling Green Park. Years before, in the same manner, Di Modica had placed some marble sculptures at Rockefeller Center.

The latest project the artist is working on, is a colossal bear that he intends to bring himself to Russia as a gesture of friendship from one country to another. "I want this to be their Statue of Liberty"

commented Di Modica, upon unveiling the project.

Finally, it has been nine years that the artist has been working on his masterpiece. It is not a single sculpture, it is his home. In an empty space between two Soho buildings, working frantically every night for the first two years,

Di Modica has created a monument that symbolizes his life as an artist. Each corner of this house is a work of art. It is a blend of styles created with stain glass, steel beams, marble, bronze, wood, and cascading water from a forty feet wall fountain (not yet completed). In the middle of all, two monumental wooden caryatids two centuries old seem to stare, echoing, in silence, the unspoken words of their master: the artform of Arturo Di Modica.

Postscript: Arturo di Modica had returned to his hometown in Sicily and passed away in March 2021. He was 80 years old. He had been battling intestinal cancer but he continued to work on two colossal projects: two 40-foot high statues of rearing horses that were intended to straddle the river near Vittoria. He passed away as he was finalized the prototype. He had predicted that he would die working. His works, however, will live on as monuments to his creativity and generosity.



Di Modica's interpretation of the symbol of Sicily, the Trinacria.

The Last Summer of Figs

By Rosaria Caporrimo

She stopped eating figs, long ago. The summer had been hot. Brutally hot but the beach, with its clear turquoise water, brought respite and calm. She spent mornings on the warm sand and swam until she was exhausted, watching the sea life just beneath the surface and exploring the niches about which foreigners knew nothing. She left no later than one o'clock, in time for lunch at two, at home with the family. Lunch was a welcome break from the tourists who flooded Castellammare in summer.

It was late August and figs were bountiful. Figs had always been her favorite fruit; mamma had to stop her from eating too many, especially after the summer she ate so many her stomach ached for days. There was a bowl of them in the kitchen and on a table in the garden. Her mamma, proud of her fig trees and the harvest, served them for breakfast along with some biscotti and strong caffè, to which much cream was added for the bambini. Other fragrant fruits and melons waited to be consumed later in the day. But ahhh, the glorious fig, indigenous to northern Asia Minor then migrating with the Greeks and Romans throughout the Mediterranean, these were her favorites. The hue, the texture, the fragrance.... she would tear the fig in half and marvel at the

Attenzioni:

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syconium, turning the fig carefully and lovingly between her fingers—fleshy and colorful, inviting her to feast.

Giulio was outside in late afternoon. He was only four and she enjoyed spending time with her little cousin when he visited. Her aunt and uncle had left him in Mamma's care for these two weeks so they could travel to Rome for Zio to have a procedure that required a rare specialist. After lunch and the daily rest, she tossed a ball with him in the garden until he tired. The dog lay motionless in the heat under a lemon tree, napping in the same spot every late afternoon. Giulio joined the dog under the tree, patting his head and singing the lullaby his Mamma gently sang to him as he drifted into sleep each night.

Their beloved home was high on a hill in Castellammare del Golfo, giving a 180° view of the legendary and beautiful gulf. The air stilled and, suddenly, the dog sprang to his feet and looked out toward the sea as Giulio slept peacefully in the shade of the tree. She had heard a scirocco might be coming. The scirocco, those winds beginning as hot, dry, desert air in northern Africa that picked up speed and humidity as they moved northward into the southern Mediterranean, arrived that late afternoon. She always enjoyed spinning in the strong breezes, until they intensified. Then she would run indoors to listen to the shrieking winds in safety, taking Mamma's hands and laughing as they whirled together to the strains of the storm.

The dog ran into the house first. She called to Giulio and saw him abruptly jump up in response. The wind and sand swirled in a red dance, knocking over the bowl of figs on a nearby table. She searched for Giulio and saw him directly behind her as she entered the house, slamming the door behind her. Outside, the scirocco attacked in hurricane frenzy. The howling of the wind made it impossible to hear beyond a meter or two as the ruby sands did a tarantella in circles beyond the window. She was glad to be here, in the safety of her home.

Mamma asked for Giulio. Giulio,

who loved the scruffy dog, likely was cuddling with him on the bed in her room, where he always hid during these storms.

The dog lay on her bed, a bit shaky, but he had grown accustomed to these occasional fits of nature. But Giulio was not with the dog. Then, in an instant, the cacophony—the discovery and the screams. Outside, in the ferocity of the scirocco she heard her papà, returning from work. He was screaming. Papà never screamed. “Caterina,” he called to his wife. She opened the door to see papà struggling to walk, holding Giulio in his arms, limp, with blood rushing from his head.

Before Giulio could enter the house, the fury had tossed him meters across the garden head first into the post papà had hammered into the ground to tether the dog in the cooler weather, when he wanted to go out and she would rather read in her room. She didn't know why she hadn't grabbed Giulio's hand. He was right behind her as she entered the door. Right behind her. Why hadn't she taken little Giulio's hand? She collapsed into Mamma's arms, unwilling to believe her eyes.

When the winds subsided and the ambulance departed, the scene before them revealed the details. The sight that after 30 years still haunted her dreams, its memory as vivid as that August evening. In the garden the blood-stained post with light brown hairs imbedded in the vermilion stickiness. The figs, ejected from mamma's shattered ceramic bowl, the one she had purchased in Caltagirone the summer before, scattered about the garden and around the post, some of them smashed open, revealing the tender interior that now sickened her.

She stopped eating figs. They tasted like sand and guilt.



The Santa Rosalia Caper

by *Vincent J. Emilio*

It was August 1957. Every year for the preceding three or four years, the Festa di Santa Rosalia had been held on Henry Street in our Brooklyn neighborhood of South Brooklyn. Santa Rosalia is the patron saint of Palermo and the annual feast had been sponsored by Society of the Former Citizens of Palermo.

We were all around seventeen years old and we felt as full of ourselves as seventeen-year-olds do. We met every day in The Mommie Schiera Shop. It was Tommy Schiera's parent's business where they sold religious articles, statues, medals, Catholic school uniforms and the like. With religious statues and hundreds of pictures of saints in varying degrees of rapture looking down on us it was an unlikely place to hatch schemes, but it was the place where The 'Santa Rosalia Caper' was conceived. We were talking about the feast and saw it as an intrusion on our turf. We had probably just seen the movie *West Side Story*. For ten days each year the Feast ran from De Graw to Summit Streets along Henry Street. People came and did what you now see people doing when the TV cameras go to Manhattan's San Gennaro street festival every year. That is, people literally being swept along in a river of humanity. Occasionally you can break off into a side whirlpool, which gives you enough time to order a hero with sausage and peppers, which you wash down with a Manhattan Special coffee soda. Then you can push off back into the mainstream current until you reach your favorite *zeppole* stand. Henry Street was not that crowded, but we were still annoyed that our neighborhood was being overrun by strangers. What were we going to do about this damned feast?

The four of us, Joey Caracciolo, Vito Incorvaia, Tommy Schiera, and me set out to devise a plan. After much debate we decided the entertainment stage was

the embodiment of our problem. Joey said, "My father always says, 'Cut off the head of the snake and the tail will stop moving.' Why he says it I don't know, but if my father says it, it must be true." The next time I heard this aphorism was during the congressional investigation into President Kennedy's assassination. New Orleans Mafioso capo Carlos Marcello said it, referring to killing the President in order to get Bobby off the Mafia's back. Did he hear it from Joey's father, I wondered? So there it was. The PLACE had been decided. The stage.

The festa's stage was set up on the sidewalk in front of Romano's Pork Store at 512 Henry Street. Every night, a band would ascend the bandstand and different singers would come and sing the golden oldies of Neapolitan and Sicilian folk songs. The performers were a collection of older men and women who went from feast to feast. There was always 'local talent' too. These were local kids aspiring to be the next Julius LaRosa and Connie Frances who saw this as their big shot at stardom. I was amazed when my cousin Giulio appeared on stage and did his rendition of Johnny Ray's "The Little White Cloud That Cried." He even threw in some Elvis hip movements. Elvis made it look sexy; my cousin looked like he was being given electro-shock therapy. His appearance that night did nothing for his show business career so he gave up his dream and eventually became a longshoreman. This "entertainment" would go on every night of the feast until midnight. On the last night of the Festa, the singers from all of the previous nights would all gather for the Gala Grand Finale. We decided this was the time to strike our blow. It would be the perfect time to execute our evolving plan.

The TIME of the action had been decided. The grand finale.

But what to do? We put our nefarious brains to work. Ideas of varying degrees of violence were suggested until Tommy suggested water balloons. Perfect! What a genius! There was instant unanimity. We make our statement and no one

gets hurt!

The ACTION had been decided. Water balloons.

Now the suggestions were coming fast and furious...

Joey suggested his house was the ideal site from which the bombardment would be launched. He lived directly across the street from Romano's Pork Store where the stage was located. Someone suggested we should buy the balloons outside of the neighborhood. "Tommy, you buy the balloons on Smith Street," Vito said. In our minds, Smith Street, which was two blocks away, was for us like going to Wisconsin.

Vito said, "Joey, your parents will be looking out the front window watching and listening to the singers. You fill the balloons in your kitchen sink and bring them up to your roof using the fire escape."

Tommy said, "Yeah, we'll line the filled balloons up along the cornice of your building and when they hit the final note, we'll let go with a bombardment of water balloons."

Now for the getaway. I said "Joey, you and Vito go down your fire escape and appear on the sidewalk after we do the dirty deed."

"Tommy, you'll go down your fire escape and then go downstairs and act amazed at what has just happened."

"Me, I'll go down my fire escape, go into my apartment, and then go downstairs into the store to man the soda bin again." "All agreed?" "OK, let's do it!"

Check and final check.

We awaited the last day of the feast anxiously. When the time came would we have the *coglioni* to do it? How could we not? We had become more than friends, now we were four conspirators. A band of brothers bound together by a secret oath. As the days passed inexorably one into another, we looked into each other's eyes, knowing that only we knew what the future would bring. It was a dizzying sense of power and control.

Every time I see the street festival scene in *Godfather II* when the young Vito Corleone gets the money from Clemenza and Tessio to pay off the

white-suited Black Hand's Fanucci, I mouth the words along with DeNiro as he says to his partners, "I'll reason with him. Leave everything in my hands. I'll settle this problem to your satisfaction. I make him an offer he don't refuse." That scene and the street festival's background music never fail to carry me back to that hot day in August of '57.

Well that night finally arrived. We met in Tommy's store. "OK guys, let's do it." One by one we went out to fulfill our assigned part of the mission. I went to our store and excused myself from the soda bin in front of my parents Sicilian *focacceria* selling cold soda to the passing throng. I told my parents I had to go upstairs to the bathroom. "Why don't you use the one in the back of the store?" my mother asked. "No Mom, I'd rather go upstairs." I went upstairs, out the window and up the fire escape to the roof. I then went roof to roof until I got to Joey's roof. Wow, this was easy!

One by one we all assembled on Joey's roof cornice at 525 Henry Street. Joey had lined up twenty water balloons along the roof ledge. We knew the Grand Finale was coming up any minute. We spread out along the roof's cornice. We stood back out of view of the people looking at the feast from their windows across the street. "Let's see 20 balloons and there are four of us. That means 5 each, right?" We did the math in our heads. What geniuses!

Finally, as the moment of truth arrived, we each picked up two balloons and waited. Allowing for speed of the missiles, trajectory, and time to hit the target, and seconds before the singers hit the final sustained note, we started throwing! And we went back for more until the barrage was over.

We didn't dare look over the ledge



to do bomb assessment lest we be recognized. Tommy and I ran across 4 or 5 roof parapets to get to our respective brownstones. Remember how the young Vito Corleone walked calmly from air vent to air vent alternately breaking up the gun he had just used to kill Fanucci and dropping the pieces down the vents in *Godfather II*? The *Godfather* script notes describe his movement as follows: "Vito moves like a cat along the rooftops; Vito is a dark figure, moving with agility across the rooftops."

Trust me it was nothing like that. Tommy and I ran like we were being chased by a pack of starved wolves. I went down our fire escape and went into my parent's apartment, flushed the toilet (Alas, the perfect crime) and then went down into our luncheonette where we sold Palermitan specialties, panelli, arancini, "cazzilli" and vasteddi. The store was empty! Where are all the customers? My mother was outside with her hands over her mouth with a look of shock on her face. "Mom! What happened?" I asked.

"Someone threw water balloons at the bandstand just as they were singing the final notes of the last song? Everyone got soaked. Even the statue of the Madonna got soaked! What animals would do something like that!?"

The Madonna! Oh my God, we had forgotten that on the last night the Madonna was paraded one last time and her statue would stop by the bandstand for the blessing of the populace by our Pastor.

Word spread quickly that the police had been called! Oh my God! Someone had called the FRIGGIN' POLICE! 'Hey guys this was just a prank, no need for the police,' ran through my head. But NO, someone had called the POLICE!

I'm thinking, "Man, are we in trouble! Gotta stay calm, gotta stay detached". My mother will know in an instant if I give her the slightest hint that I might be one of THOSE HORRIBLE BOYS THAT DID THIS HORRIBLE THING!

Well, we weren't found out and the next day we met at headquarters as the crews came and started disassembling the street light arches and the bandstand. We swore to carry the secret with us to our graves. Hell, we're Sicilians; we're the people who invented *Omertà*. But what is it they say about secrets, "To keep a secret is wisdom, but to expect others to keep it is folly."

Rita

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finished talking to a friend in Catania who told me that there are travel restrictions in place. They cannot go from one city to the other yet. I presume the situation will change in the next few months. Also it is not clear at this time what international travel will be like during the summer and the fall. Presumably, everyone in the United States will have been vaccinated by June/July. President Biden said that by July Fourth the country can resume gathering for barbecues. Let's hope that is the case and let's hope that Italy can also reach the same level of safety.

For this reason I am publishing a tentative itinerary for the fall of 2021, departing on October 4 and returning on October 16. I have not made any plans in terms of airline reservations or hotels. But I am confident that in the next two months, if the conditions improve, I can make the arrangements for the flights and the hotels in time for the October departure.

I can foresee, however, that all people who will join the tour will have to show proof of vaccinations and that they pose no danger to others in the group.

One reason for publishing this issue of *Sicilia Parra* with the tentative itinerary rather than wait longer until we have a better picture of the situation is that we are already late with it and I could not delay its publication any longer.

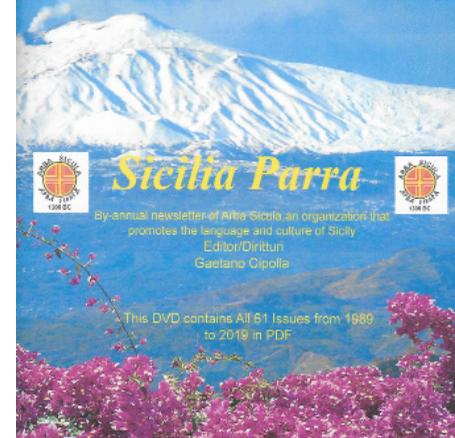
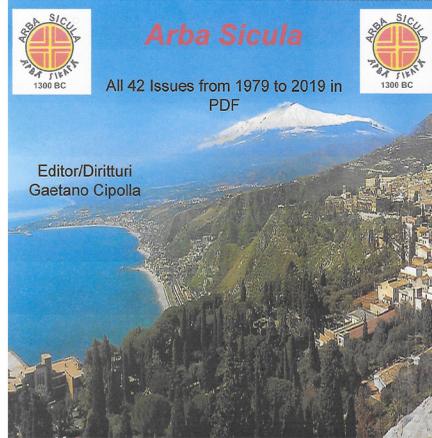
There is no need to send your \$200 deposits for the tours at this time. If you are interested in going on the tour, please let me know by sending me an e-mail. I am thinking also that given the situation it would not be advisable to have 45 people going as were scheduled for the last tour. A smaller number would be more advisable.

October in Sicily is still a very good time to travel. The weather is still warm. We might be just in time for the grapes harvesting.



Attention Members

Issue 40 marked the fortieth year of uninterrupted publication of *Arba Sicula*. As you may know, we produced a CD that contained the first 31 issues of the journal published from 1979 to 2010. We have now updated that CD by adding the remaining issues produced from 2011 to 2019. The CD has a linked General Index for all issues, organized by recurring sections (poetry, narrative, art, etc.), tha makes it easy to navigate from one issue to another with a click of the mouse.



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Miniature Masterpieces: The Art of Greek-Sicilian Coins

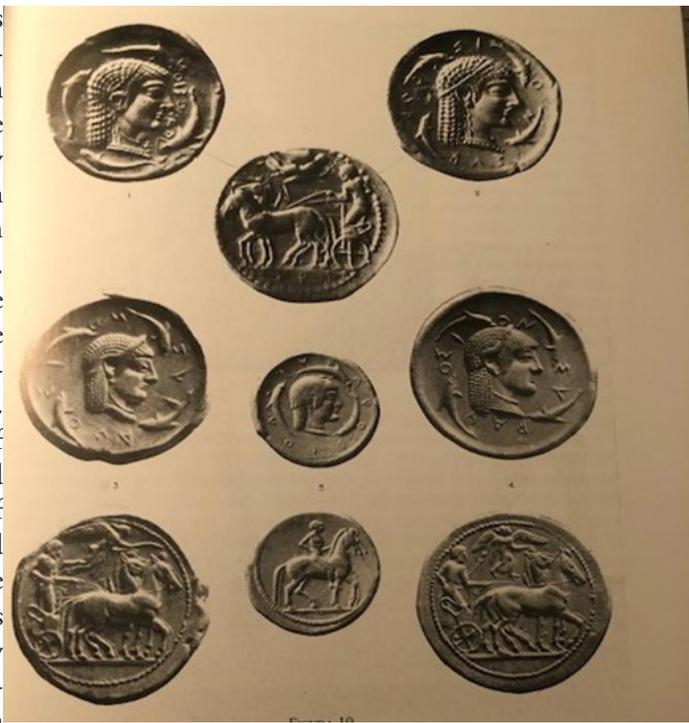
By Bernard Bertone

Why are some of the world's greatest works of art locked up and mainly hidden in museums, largely unseen and barely known by the general public? Others are in private collections even more hidden away from public view, and many are auctioned off by dealers for very high prices but still to only a select few. Ancient Greek coins in general have taken a backseat to other visual arts, namely, architecture, sculpture, vase painting, mosaics, and several other genres. Perhaps their use as money has confined them to artistic obscurity, relegating their esthetic merit to commercial value.

It seems that only experts in numismatics are aware of their relation to sculpture and their artistic beauty in general. Today few people would look at an American or foreign coin and value the quality of its design. It was not much different in the sixth or fifth century BCE in the civilized world. At that time, before the advent of coins the main means of exchange for commercial purposes was barter, later replaced by bars of gold or silver. So, the early coins were not in the least regarded as art. There seems to be no ancient commentator writing about the artistic quality of the use of coinage began in Asia Minor (what is now Turkey) in the seventh century BCE, probably in the kingdom of Croesus of Lydia, a king renowned for his wealth. The earliest coins were not smooth, flat pieces of metal as we know them today, but bean-shaped lumps of silver or gold, and sometimes made of electrum, which is a naturally occurring alloy of both. They were stamped on one side only with facing heads of a lion or bull. "Facing heads" are faces that look outward, or in a three-quarter view, rather than in profile which includes the

vast majority of coins even today. Croesus's relations with Greece were close and coins quickly gained currency in mainland Greece in the sixth century. The first city-state to adopt coinage was Aigina, an island south of Athens. From there the use of coins quickly spread to the other parts of Greece and outward to the west, to the colonies of Dorians and Ionians in Sicily and South Italy, usually known as Magna Graecia.

Greek art in general is divided up into periods, the Archaic, comprising the sixth and part of the fifth centuries, down to about 480 BCE.; the Classical era, including most of the fifth century and the fourth; and the Hellenistic period, from about 323 (the death of Alexander the Great) to the Roman conquest of Greece in 146 BCE. The early coins in Sicily that display an "archaic" style are closely modeled after the style of mainland Greece. The beginning of the great coinages of Sicily is closely tied to historical events which happened soon after the beginning of the fifth century before Christ. The battle of Himera, which pitted the Greeks of Syracuse and Akragas against the Carthaginians in about 480 BCE, was the inspiration for the fine coinages that followed. According to Herodotus, the battle took place on the same day as the Battle of Salamis in which the Greeks in one of the most famous encounters of ancient times defeated the Persians in the bay of Salamis, just to the west of Athens. Herodotus suggests that there was coordinated action by the Persians in the East and the Carthaginians in the West to overwhelm the Greeks and destroy their civilization. Fortunately for Western civilization, the Greeks were able to prevail on both



Source: G.E. Rizzo *L'Arte della Moneta nella Sicilia Greca*

fronts. The Sicilian Greeks, led by Gelon of Syracuse and Theron of Akragas, made their way north to meet Hamilcar and annihilated the Carthaginian army and fleet at Himera, east of Panormos (Palermo). The story goes that the indemnity that the Carthaginians paid was 100 talents, an enormous sum. (According to Wikiwand/Wikipedia a talent would be roughly the equivalent of \$1.4 million today.) There's a question whether it was paid in silver or gold, but the outcome was the silver coins dubbed the "Demareteion." As far as is known, this was the first Decadrachm, with a value of ten drachmas. In Diodorus Siculus' account, he writes the following: "The Carthaginians being delivered contrary to all expectation not only agreed to all of Gelon's terms, but also promised to give a gold crown to Gelon's wife, Demarete, for at their request she had played a great part in the conclusion of the peace. Honored by them with 100 talents of gold, she minted a coin which was called the Demareteion after her; this coin weighed ten Attic drachmae, and was called by the Sicilian Greeks a 50-litra piece because of its weight." (Diod. XI, 26, 3). Some have questioned this whole account, for Diodorus wrote nearly 500 years after the event. An alternate story is that the coin was minted

about 10 years later, and perhaps refers to Hieron, Gelon's brother and successor, having won in the Pythian Games in 480 or the Olympics of 468.

It seems to me that there are elements of both versions of the story. While the chariot seems to point to a victory in the games with Nike above crowning the victor, the running lion in the exergue, perhaps a symbol of Africa, may indicate the Carthaginians in flight. But the near horse shows how skillful this artist was: the proportions, the muscles of the neck, the arrangement of the legs, and other details attests to the knowledge of horses this man had.² On the obverse, Arethusa, the nymph/goddess of Syracuse faces right with four dolphins swimming around her head in a pleasing arrangement to fill the edges of the coin. The word SYRAKOSION (meaning "of the Syracusans") also encircles her head. The most important aspect of this silver coin, however, is not the story behind it, but the art of the coin, which has been praised by art historians throughout the ages, with all the great Sicilian coinage to follow for the rest of the century and beyond. To quote one of the foremost authorities on coinage, G.K. Jenkins, in a large volume titled *Ancient Greek Coins*,

"But whether minted in 480 B.C. or later, the intrinsic beauty of the coin itself is unaffected.

We cannot make any plausible guesses about the artist responsible for it, who seems to be distinct from those who worked on the Syracusan coinage; but it seems likely that we have another work from his hand, in the shape of a fine tetradrachm, no doubt minted at the same time, of Leontinoi a city which during the tyranny was closely connected to Syracuse. Here we have the head of Apollo showing much of the same quality even down to the details of treatment—for instance the loose lock of hair behind the ear and the delicate suggestion of the hair on the far side of the brow. The Apollo is framed by a group of bay leaves, corresponding to the dolphins of Arethusa, and below is a lion which also recalls that of the Syracusan

chariot." (146)

The Demareteion also represents a transitional position in Sicilian coinage. Previously, coins of this type had a decidedly "archaic" style with the characteristic "archaic smile" in the face of Arethusa, her hair was bound tighter, perhaps more stylized, and there was slightly more stiffness to the horses' gait, whereas there is more refinement in the horses of The Demareteion. These earlier coins were probably at the end of the Archaic era, possibly 500-485 BCE. In the later coin, (the Demareteion) of which there are many dies, Arethusa's face has more freshness to it, but the archaic touches are still present in the smile, the bound hair, and the eye which looks outward, not forward, but now she wears an olive wreath, probably

Source: Roma Numismatics; Google Images



indicating victory.

In G.E. Rizzo's words the horses in all these early coins are "non ancora agonistica," (meaning that they are not yet in competition), another sign that these are still in a transitional state, but notice the horses in The Demareteion. There's more dynamism in the legs, as if they were daintily stepping forward with pointy hooves. There are an incredible number of different dies for this coin, (as there are for almost any of these works) and in both the obverses and in the reverses of these coins, there are changes gradually in the arrangement of hair in Arethusa, for example, different hair nets being introduced, and the attitude of the horses becoming more motional. After about 460 the period of

point to some special victory because several smaller towns in Sicily, including Sikel towns, also issued coins of the agonistic type, for they certainly would

Source: G. K. Jenkins *Ancient Greek Coinage*



not have been invited to the Olympic or Pythian games at Delphi. Instead, “they are a general expression of pride in the beauty of the horses and chariots...” (116) One thing is certain: once Syracuse initiated these types of coins with god or goddess reverse (perhaps Apollo/Artemis or Arethusa) and the quadriga (four horse chariot) obverse, the style became very popular all over Sicily (including the Carthaginian west), and beyond in many parts of the Greek world. Head further adds, “The manner in which the quadriga is treated may be taken as a very accurate indication of date. Down to about B.C. 440 the horses are seen advancing at a slow and stately pace; after that date they are always in high and often violent action, prancing and galloping; not until quite a late period (on the coins of Philistis) are they again represented as walking. The only exception to this rule is the mule-car on the coins of Messana where the animals are never in rapid movement.” (116)

If the Demareteion was the first real masterpiece of Sicilian coinage, it was closely followed by another great series of coins emanating, not from Syracuse, but from Naxos and Katane (mod. Catania) and Aetna, which may have been a near foundation or a renaming of Katane itself. Hieron had conquered the area north of Syracuse and it is not known if he commissioned these next pieces, but there is no loss of artistic brilliance in the so-called Aetna-Master. Again, Jenkins comments with superlatives:

“Two other masterpieces stand out from the early classical period in Sicily, the tetradrachms of Aetna and Naxos in Sicily. One coin produced during that time is among the most splendid of all achievements of Greek coinage. A single specimen survives. The obverse is an astonishing vigorous and strong head of Silenus full of animal ruggedness yet expressed with precision and restraint, the snub nose and horse ears, an immense bushy beard and smooth bald cranium, on which a wreath of ivy leaves is lightly etched as if to contrast with the powerful structural forms of the head. Below, a scarabaeus beetle stands for the

typical local fauna of Mount Aetna. On the reverse we see Zeus enthroned on a carved seat covered with leopard skin, his robe neatly stacked in semi-archaic folds, holding a winged thunderbolt in his left hand and a jagged staff in the right. One leg is withdrawn below the seat and the solid forms of the body are well revealed through the robe. In front the picture is completed by a lofty fir tree in which perches the sacred eagle. It seems likely that this outstanding coin was minted toward the end of the period of Hieron’s Aitna. Its overwhelming quality may

these artists. Just a few years later another tour-de-force was created by this same artist. Possibly after the fall of Hieron’s regime in Syracuse, the people of Naxos who had been transferred to Leontinoi were able to return to their city.

The Naxos coin (next coin below) has been deemed the equal of the Aetna coin, and stylistically, very likely by the same artist. There aren’t enough words to describe this famous coin. While experts have pointed out the how the coin still retains some elements of Archaisms, it is clearly pointing to its later fifth-century



Source: Wildwinds.com; Google images

be due to a sculptor from Greece, as its affinities are with Attic art rather than anything in Sicily.” (147)

It’s amazing how much detail can be crammed into such a small space, for this coin, a tetradrachm, is 26mm actual size! It only attests to the sculptural skill of

followers that summoned all the qualities of the high Classical period. Now it is Dionysos that perfectly fills the space and even transcends it. Charles Seltman sees Athenian influence in these two coins as “rich and strong” (*Masterpieces* 55) and compares it to Attic painting of

Source: Hogshead.com – A Wine Blog – WordPress.com



the fifth century, at least what we know of that, for only Roman copies exist and not the originals. But the reverse of this coin, to my mind, is very near the greatest of Sicilian coins as it shows complete architectural mastery of the human body. The musculature is so well defined it seems modern in its depiction. A squatting Silenus (a follower of the lord of wine and drunkenness) drinks from a cup. The foreshortening of his left leg and foot giving the coin its three-dimensional quality, almost seems to break out of its space. This has many times been cited as reminiscent of Renaissance paintings two thousand years later. Seltman again exclaims, "... when the figure of this superb seilenos is called – as called it must be – magnificent in its animal vitality, this is to be understood as most high praise – never as a petulant pejorative." (57) Notice, too, the ithyphallic selinus which was normal in the "animal" nature of this creature with his bushy tail trailing behind. Around the silenus the city is represented: NAXION.

Around the middle of the fifth cen-



Online Source: NGC Ancients: Ancient Die Engravers (posted 9/13/2016)

tury BCE, a most unusual innovation in coinage occurred in Sicily in which coins began to be signed by artists. Never before in the Greek world had this happened. Vases in Greece proper were being painted and signed by great artists around this time, but not on the coins of Greece. "Black Figure" and "Red Figure" vases had large areas for the artist's signature but comparatively

few were actually signed, but signatures on coins demanded more skill on such a small space. It is obvious that these artists felt themselves the equals of mainland Greek artists who signed some of their works. There is only some stylistic evidence, not testimony, that perhaps some of the Sicilian engravers had emigrated from Greece or Asia Minor. But we know absolutely nothing of their origin, their lives, only which cities they worked for, and, on stylistic evidence, some worked for multiple cities. "The following names of engravers, among others, occur on coins of this period: at Syracuse, Euainetos, Kimon, Eukleidas, Parmenidas; at Agrigentum, Myr...; at Camarina, Exakestidas; at Himera, Mai...; at Messana, Kimon, Anan(?)...; at Naxos, Prokles; at Catana, Herakleidas, Chorion, and Procles." (Head, 116). Charles Seltman adds other names: Euthymos and Phrygillos. (16) In all, there are approximately 20 artists who signed their coins. Again, this is an astonishing number, considering that there were fewer Athenian artists who signed their vases.³

The period between 440 and 380 BCE was the most productive and artistic era in Sicily, corresponding with the great artistic flowering of art and literature in Athens. Even after that period some great works continued, somewhat becoming repetitive and imitative. While Sicily did not have the literary masterpieces that the Athenians had, she made up for it by the resplen-

dent period of coinage that came after the middle of the century. That is not to demean what came before the middle of the century, but the number of great masterworks increased manyfold. Not only were many of the coins signed by artists, but sometimes two artists would join in on a coin as this next one shows:

This is a Syracusean Tetradrachm (four drachmas) in which the obverse (in this case the chariot) was signed by Eumenes, and the reverse, Arethusa, was signed by Eucleidas, although one needs a magnifying glass to see the signatures. The date of this coin is in question but it is obvious from the style of the horses that it fits into the second half of the fifth century. The horses' legs are very orderly, except perhaps the far horse's head. However, the forelegs have now left the ground, which will be an almost exclusive feature from here on in. On the reverse of the coin the ever-present dolphins around the head of Arethusa signify Syracuse's attachment to the sea, and her face is much more elegant and beautiful than previous faces. Her story is a famous tale of its own. Sometimes she is depicted as Artemis. To quote Jenkins, "For she is not only Artemis but, by assimilation, also Arethusa, who in the mythology was pursued by the river-god Alpheios in the Peloponnese but passing under the sea re-emerged as the nymph of the fresh-water spring on the island of Ortygia, the original site of Syracuse. The subsequent variations of this theme which appear on the Syracusean coins are almost infinite." (145)

This article will be continued in the next issue of *Sicilia Parra*.



Puisia Siciliana

Autunnu

Di Nino Bellia

'Nta 'ddi misi d'ottobri e di novembri
quannu chiòvunu 'i fogghi 'i supra è pianti
ddu' cori 'ntò me' cori fànu scerra:
unu si svina di malincunia
unu si arma 'i pacienza e di valìa.
Mentri ca rugnu 'ddenza a 'stu cuntrastu
vaju taliannu e viru a tutti 'i gnuni
macchi di viridi e nùvuli di-rrussu
giallu c'arràma prima di cascàri.
L'àrvuli si canciunu 'i culùri
ci crisciunu capiddi d'oru anticu
ma n'oru-ddilicatu, ca sospira
comu 'n amanti 'bbannunatu e stancu.
Picchè tanta biddizza - m'addumannu-
picchè st' incantu, ora ca si mori?
nun capisciu su è sira o s'è matinu
su sta 'rriannu 'u jornu o 'n nunca 'a notti:
'nsanguniati su' 'i pampini dà vigna
ma 'u vinu spanni e 'bbunna intra li vutti
alivi su' pistati intra ô frantoiu
ma l'ogghiu sgriccia a ciumi ntê cafisi.
Chistu è l'autunnu, l'ultima stazzioni
'u viru attornu attornu e 'u sentu r'intra.
E' 'u tempu ca m'acalu e m'agginocchiu
ca mi fazzu cchiù nicu e vasciu vasciu.
E prima di cuccàrimi ppi-nnotti
comu all'indiani a sentiri 'i cavaddi
posu aricchi supra 'a terra fridda
ascutu 'u so' rispiru, 'u so' battagghiu.
Appo' mi susu e tornu a grapu l'occhi:
com'ora, 'u peri 'i lotu è tuttu spogghiu
ma ci avi luni-rrussi appisi ê rami
lappùsi sì, ma, appressu, veru mèli
su 'i cogghiu e 'n pocu 'i lassu maturari.
Fussi accusi macàri la me' sorti
fussiru gialli 'i me' capiddi bianchi
'n occhju 'i chiara prima di scuràri.
Quannu sarà, vogghiu èssiri 'na fogghia
cascàri alleggiu, senza fari sgrusciu.
'N fogghiu 'i quadernu ca giria ccò ventu.

I Morti

Di Anthony Di Pietro

Curcatu sugnu cca nna santa paci
U Signuruzzu beddu e' la me luci
Cu li brazzi conserti e l'occhi chiusi
A la Madunnuzza betra cuntutu così
Ora ca sugnu ncelu nsemi a vui
A vui vi raccumannu i figghi mei
Assistimatili commu nun potti fari iu
la vita fu crudeli e nun ni potti cchiu
La granni misericordia di lu Salvaturi
A mia tantu pararisu vosi rari
Nna stu giardinu viridi chinu i ciuri

Nna la paci cu l'angiuli pozzu durmiri
Oggi ca lu cancellu ha na raputu
E tuttu lu paisi ci ha visitatu
Cu ha purtatu ciuri e iautri cannili
Chiddi cchiu poviri nenti e sunu sulì
Ma unni semu nui nun prittinnemu nenti
Na visita e na preghiera abbasta re parenti
Purtati i picciriddi vostri, purtatili tutti
E' bellu ca s'amparunu di nuiatri morti
Caminunu cu li vivi pi li strati
Sunu esseri umani pi nui nati
Quandu ni lassati e a casa vi ni turnati
Pinsati a cosi belli di tutti nui passati.

Comu semu

Di Diego Maggio

A vita - amicu meu, senti 'ccà a mmia -
po' essiri 'ntrippitata comu na' puisia.
Basta taliàlla cu' ll'occhi di lu cori
pi' ssentila accusi, prima chi mori.
Si 'n Sicilia è un Paraddisu, nun è pi' scienza
ma picchè è tuttu meritu di la Pruvirezza.
E si di chiddru ch'avemu nun semu latrì,
è sulu picchè nu' cunsignaru patri e matri.
E 'ntavula nne' festi, li figghi e li niputi
ti fannu pàriri boni puru li cuti.
Agghiorna e scura, fora di la to' finestra
viri sempri lu mari, arbaria o timpesta.
E quannu t'alluntani tanticchia di li casi,
t'attrovi 'nmezzu a li vigni chi nesci e trasi.
Dipenni, certu, d'unni nasci e dunni campi
ma puru cu' ccui ti unci e cu' ccui rumpi.
A mala carni va tinuta sempri arràssu
e puru i soiddi chiddri iunti senza stentu.
A lu 'ngegnu va datu u pisu cchiù grossu,
ma senza però sparagnari u sintimentu.
Picchè quannu arriva u mumentu
di la virità, a la to' famigghia
ci po' lassari sulu a dignità.

Urtimu cantu a la puisia

Di Senzio Mazza

La notti è 'na ùgghia di sita ca raccamma
li peni e li trapungi supra la petra rutta
di lu cori: pari e spirisci 'stu lamentu anticu
ccu vuci ca spirdia e s'assuttigghia
'ntra la rebbecca staca di luntanu.
Si sdruderu 'n caminu li vintanni
ppi bàsuli 'ntagghiati e tu ristasti
commu la cicatrici di la fronti ca s'allarga
cascannu li capiddi: tu ristasti la primma
vuci d'oru ca squagghiava palori di sdilliri
a la conca lucenti di la luna. E vàiu
ppi li strati ccu lanterni all'antica,
lu fazzulettu niuru di luttu e sonu la brogna
paisi-paisi. Mi svinnu l'urtima sbrizza
di sangu ppi circàriti, amuri. E non ti vidu
e non ti trovu. A cu dumannu di tia

'nnaca la testa, rùnchia li spaddi e cància
caminu. Iò sugnu unu vistutu di sàliciu.
Persi l'amici, lu ventu mi tàgghia.
Iò sugnu unu vistutu di nenti. Persi l'amuri,
mi pisa la morti. Sburricàtimi 'st'ossa
di la carni, nisciti 'ncantu supra li barcuni
finu a quannu lu gìgghiu si squarina,
finu a quannu la rosa si sbuttuna.
Iò non sugnu puièta. Sugnu 'n zuccu
di ficudìnia supra 'n pricipìziu ccu li toppi
'mmasciati di l'arsura e li crafocchi fràcidi
di muccu, si svinu la me' peddi nesci iacqua,
si iàpru la me bucca nesci feli e senza ciatu
è la me fantasia. Ora iò sugnu comu sugnu.
Niciulu e sulu a la to' strata vàiu
ccu 'na trùscia di sònnira; partu a rubari
l'arba ghiara a la marina e la mettu
nall'occhi di cu' soffri; acchiappu li stiddi
di lu celu e ci li dugnu 'n manu a li carusi
e 'n caminu mi mettu ppi lu munnu
manu manedda ccu tutti li genti ppi
cuntàricci a tutti la me pena.

"A la signura cu la valanza 'nmanu"

Di Nino Provenzano

"Lady Justice"

Ti dumannai di li contraddizioni,
di li poli opposti, e tu mi dicisti:

"È parti di natura chi usa liggi di certa misura.
Ti dumannai quantu vali l'amuri,

e tu mi dicisti "Ni stu casu
duna 'na ucchiata all'odiu e ti fai pirsuasu".

Ti dumannai socch'è la speranza:
e tu: "Talia la negghia
quannu scura crisci,
di la dispirazioni, e poi capisci".

Ti dumannai
socch'è onestà e curaggiu
e tu "Osserva la viltà
e l'orrendu dammaggiu".

Ma quannu ti dumannai
picchè lu munnu è fattu accusi,
tu arrispunnisti:
"Ti dicu picchè.

Li marvagi sentimenti umani
su antichi quantu Cainu
ch'è ancora vivu
ed è in caminu

pi li strati di lu munnu
cu li petri 'manu ed ogni arma nova.
Cerca a so' frati
e ogni iornu lu trova!"

Sicilian Poetry

Autumn

By Nino Bellia

In the months of October and November,
when the leaves fall off the trees
two hearts inside of me wage war:
One is beset with melancholy,
the other stiffens with patience.
While I attend to these contrasting moods,
I look around and see in every corner,
patches of green and clouds of red,
yellow that turned to gold before it fell.
Trees change color, they grow old gold hair,
that is so delicate it seems to sigh
like a lover who's been forsaken, tired.
I ask myself: why so much beauty?
Why such enchantment at the point of death?
I do not understand if it is daytime or night,
if dawn is breaking or night advancing.
The vine leaves are stained blood red,
but the wine is flowing into the barrels.
The olives have been pressed inside the mill,
and olive oil is filling up the containers.
This is autumn, the last station.
I see it all around and inside of me.
It's time for me to bow my head and kneel,
making myself small, low to the ground.
Before I retire for the night, I rest my head
upon the cold earth, like the Indians
who listened to the sound of horses' hooves.
I listen to its breathing, its heart's beating.
Then I get up, and open up my eyes again:
The lotus tree is now completely bare,
but it has red moons hanging on its branches.
They're bitter, yes, but later sweet as honey.
I gather them and let them ripen a bit.
If only were my destiny like that!
Would that my white hair turn to yellow,
a glimpse of brightness before the dark.
When that time comes, I want to be a leaf,
falling lightly, and without noise:
a notebook page turning with the wind.

The Dead

By Anthony Di Pietro

I am resting peacefully in bed.
The sweet Lord is my light,
with my arms crossed and with eyes closed,
I relate things to the beautiful Madonna.
Now that I am with you in heaven
I ask you to protect my children.
Take care of them as I could not do.
Life was too cruel and I could do no more.
The wondrous Mercy of the Savior
granted me the joy of Paradise.
This green garden filled with flowers
where I can sleep with the angels.
Today that they have opened the gate

the whole town came to visit us. Some
people brought us flowers, others candles;
Those who are poor brought nothing, just
themselves.

But where we are, we don't expect a thing.
A visit, a prayer by our relatives suffices.
Bring your children, bring them all!
It's good for them to know that we, the dead
Walk along the streets with living people.
They are human beings born from us.
When you leave us and return home,
think good things about all who are dead.

The Way We Are

By Diego Maggio

Listen to me, my dear friend, -- Life can be
Interpreted just like a poem. All you need
To do is look at it with the heart's eyes
To feel its sense, before it fades away.
If Sicily is a paradise, it's not for science.
The credit all belongs to Providence.
And if we did not steal what we possess,
it's just because our parents taught us well.
And on Feast days, the faces of the kids
make even rocks taste good enough to eat.
When dawn comes and night falls, out of
your window

you see the sea, through storms or clear skies,
and when you walk outside your house,
you find yourself surrounded by grapevines.
It depends, of course, on where you're born
and where you live, whom you befriend and whom
you shun. Keep scoundrels always at bay.
and stay away from money made easily.
Wit must be given greater weight,
but not at the expense of sentiments,
for when the moment of truth arrives,
all you can leave your family is dignity.

Last Song to Poetry

By Senzio Mazza

Night is a silken needle that embroiders
woes, pinning them to the crushed stones
of the heart;

this ancient dirge appears and disappears
with a loud voice that quickly fades away
into the weary echo in the distance.
My twenty years were spent on streets paved
with cut lava stones and you remained
like a scar on the forehead that grew wider
as your hair vanished; you were the first
gold voice that melted delirious words
to the moon's gleaming bowl. I walk through
the streets with lanterns, as in old times,
wearing a black kerchief as sign of mourning
and I blow the conch from town to town.
I pawn the last drop of my blood to look
for you, my love. And I cannot see you,
and I can't find you. The folks I ask
about you shake their heads, they shrug

their shoulders,
and just change course. I wear mourning
clothes.

I lost my friends, the wind now slashes at
my face: a man dressed up with nothingness.
I lost my love, and death now weighs on me.
Part bones from flesh, sing from the balcony
until the lily blooms, till roses blossom.
I'm not a poet. I am just a stump
of prickly pears, above a precipice,
with my leaves burning from thirst, its
crannies

rotting with mucus. If I break my skin
water spurts out, when opening my mouth
gall flows out, and my wit has no breath.
Now I am what I am: weak and frail
and I walk on your road alone, a bag
of dreams upon my back. I aim to steal
the gleaming dawn at the shore of the sea
and I will place it in the eyes of those
who suffer. I will catch the stars out of
the sky and put them in the children's hands
and I'll begin my journey through the world,
holding the hands of all the people,
so I can share my sorrows with them all.

"To the Lady with in Her Hand

by Nino Provenzano

"Lady Justice"

I asked you about the contradictions,
the opposite poles and you replied:

"It's part of nature that uses certain measures."
I asked you how much is love worth?

And you replied: "In this case,
look at hatred and you will have an answer."

I asked you, what is hope
and you replied: "Look at the fog
when out of desperation
it grows dark and you'll understand."

I asked you what is honesty
and courage and you replied:
"Just look at cowardice
and at its horrid harm".

But when I asked you
why the world is made like this,
you said: "I'll tell why:

Evil human feelings are as ancient as Cain
who's still alive and walks
on every street of the world.

He carries rocks and every new weapon
He is looking for his brother
and every day he finds him."

Giacomo da Lentini: a Sicilian Version of Three Poems

I want to share with you a sample of an important project that I have been working on. You may know that the Sicilian School of poetry that flourished in the early part of the 13th century at the court of Emperor Frederick II represents the beginning of Italian literature, that is literature written in an Italian language that was not Latin. The poets of the Scuola Siciliana who were courtiers, bureaucrats, notaries at the court of Frederick wrote in Sicilian and established the literary canon. The language they used became the standard for poetry in all of Italy and was used even by poets who were not Sicilian. In fact, Dante Alighieri acknowledged the importance of the new language by saying that for the first 150 years of Italian literature what poetry was written was written in Sicilian. Sicilian was the first language emerging from Latin to be used for poetry. As I like to say, if Dante was the father of the Italian language, we probably should credit Sicilian as the mother.

When Frederick II died in 1250 and when the Ghibelline forces were defeated in 1266 in the battle of Benevento, his importance in Italian matters came to an end. As a result of the diminished role of the Ghibellines in the political, cultural, and social life on the Italian peninsula, the cultural artifacts that had been produced by the Emperor and his associates faded, either by design of the victors or by neglect. I cannot say whether there was a conscious attempt to eradicate the legacy of Frederick II, as happens usually when the opposition comes to power. But the fact remains that practically all the original poetry produced in the Sicilian School, with few exceptions, disappeared. What remained are copies as transcribed by Tuscan amanuensis who transcribed them not as they were written but in Tuscan. The scribes changed the rhyme words, words were spelled according to

their own language and basically altered the original Sicilian so that it is almost unrecognizable as Sicilian.

My intention is to rewrite the poetry of the Sicilian School to recapture the sounds, the musicality, and the rhythm of the originals. Naturally, the Sicilian of today has evolved and it is different from what it may have been in the 13th century. Nevertheless, I think that by substituting Sicilian endings, changing words to what may have been the original will go a long way to restoring the original sounds. So far, I have rewritten two sonnets and a *canzone* by Giacomo da Lentini who was the acknowledged leader of the group. I have also translated them into English. I will recite the Sicilian version first and then my English translation. Giacomo da Lentini was the poet who invented the sonnet by adding six lines to the eight-line poem that is the traditional composition used by Sicilian poets, like Antonio Veneziano and Giovanni Meli. The first sonnet is well known, in fact, the conclusion of it was used in the first aria of *Cavalleria rusticana* when Turiddu sings to Lola that if he dies because of their transgression and goes to paradise, if she is not there, he would refuse to enter the place.

II

Eu m'aggiu postu in cori a Diu sirviri,
com'eu putissi jiri in paradisu,
ô santu locu, c'aggiu auditu diri,
o' si mantien sollazzu, giocu e risu.

Sanza mia donna non vi vurrìa jiri,
chidda c'à biunda testa e claru visu,
ca senza lei non putirìa gaudiri,
estandu da la mia donna divisu.

Ma no lu dicu a tali intendimentu,
perch'eu piccatu ci vulissi fari;
si non vidiri u so bel portamentu

e lu bel visu e 'l morbidu sguardari:
chi 'l mi tirrìa in gran consolamentu,
vidennu la mia donna in ghiora stari.

II

I have decided to serve God, our Lord,
So I may earn a place in Paradise,
that holy realm that I have often heard
merriment, laughter and great joy supplies.
Without my lady though, I would not go,
the one who has blond hair and a bright face,
because without her I just would not know
what joy is were she in another place.
But I do not say this because I mean

to perpetrate a sinful act with her;
I simply want to see her noble mien
and her sweet face and her soft loving eyes.
Oh what great consolation, oh how keen
to see my lady basking in her praise!
it would be a most welcome consolation
to watch my lady in her glory station.

This is the second sonnet that describes the power of love.

Sonnet 26

A l'airu claru ò vista ploggia dari
Ed a lu scuru rendiri claruri;
e focu arzenti ghiaccia divintari,
e fridda nivi rendiri caluri
e dulzi cosi moltu amariari,
e di l'amari rendiri dulzuri;
e dui guerrerri nfini a paci stari,
e 'nfra dui amici nascirici erruri.

Ed ò vista d'Amor cosa chiù forti,
ch'era firutu e sanòmi firendu,
lu focu dunni ardia stutò cun focu;
la vita chi mi dè fue la mia morti,
lu focu chi mi stinsi ora ne 'ncendu,
d'amor mi trassi e misimi in su' locu

Sonnet 26

I have seen rain fall when the sky was clear
And darkness being rent by glowing light
And burning blazes turn to frozen ice
And ice-cold snow start radiating heat;

And sweet things mightily becoming sour
And bitter things become sweet to the taste
And two harsh warriors abide in peace
And in good friends some enmity arise.

And even stranger things I've seen of love
Who wounded me and healed me
wounding me;
dousing with fire the flame ablaze in me
The life it gave me was in truth my death
The fire he put out now burns within me
He took love out and put me in his place.

The *canzona* that follows is a beautiful composition that describes the effects that a woman has on the poet:

Miravigghiusamenti

Miravigghiusamenti
n'amuri mi distrinci
e mi teni ad ogn'ura.
Com'omu ca poni menti
in àutru exemplu pinci

la simili pintura,
cussi, bedda, facc'eu,
ca 'nfra lu cori meu
portu la to figura.

In cori pari ch'eu vi porti,
pinta comu pariti,
e non pari difora.
O Deu, comu mi pari forti
non so si lu sapiti,
com' v'amu di bon cori;
ch'eu sù sì virgugnu
ca pur vi guardu ascusu
e non vi mustru amuri.

Avennu gran disiu
dipinsi una pintura,
bedda, vui sumigghianti,
e quannu vui non viju
guardu nni dda figura,
pari ch'e v'aggia avanti:
comu chiddu chi cridi
salvarsi pir sua fidi,
ancor non veggia inanti.

Al cor m'ard'una dogghia,
com'om chi teni lu focu
a lo so senu ascusu,
e quannu chiù lu 'nvogghia,
allura ardi chiù ddocu
e non pò star inclusu:
similementi eu ardu
quannu pass'e non guardu
a vui, vis'amurusu.

S'eu guardu, quannu passu,
inver' vui no mi giru,
bedda, pir risguardari;
andannu, ad ogni passu
jettu un gran suspuru
ca facimi ancusciari;
e certu beni ancusciu,
c'a pena mi conusciu,
tantu bedda mi pari.

Assai v'aggiu laudatu,
madonna, in tutti parti,
di biddizzi c'aviti.
Non so si v'è cuntatu
ch'eu lu faccia pir arti,
che vui pur v'ascunditi:
sacciatilu pir singa
zocch'eu no dicu a linga,
quannu vui mi viditi.

Canzunedda nuvella,
va' canta nova cosa;
lèvati di maitinu
davanti a la chiù bedda,
ciuri d'ogn'amurusa,

biunda chiù c'auru finu:
«Lu vostro amuri, ch'è caru,
dunatilu a lu Nutaru
ch'è natu di Lentinu».

Extraordinarily

Extraordinarily
A love constrains me so
it never lets me go.
Like one who puts his mind
to paint a likeness of
a model he can view,
that's all I do, my love,
I carry in my heart
an effigy of you.

I bear you in my heart
painted as you appear
but this outside won't show.
God, it is harsh, severe,
not knowing if you know
that my love is sincere.
However, I'm so shy
I watch you on the sly
and hide the love I bear.

Moved by a strong desire
I drew a lovely portrait
that close resembled you
and when you're not in view
that image I admire
and think I'm seeing you.
Like someone who believes
his faith can save his soul
though he can't see that goal.

There's burning in my heart
like one who has a fire
that's hidden in his breast,
and when incitement soars
the flame grows even higher
so he can't take much more.
That is the way I burn
when I pass by and turn
away from you, my love.

If when I pass, you're there,
I do not turn to stare,
my love, to better see,
but with each step I try
I breathe a heavy sigh
that takes my breath away.
I feel then so unsteady,
who I am I can't say,
so fair you seem, my Lady.

Much praise did I accord,
Lady, to you for all
the beauties you possess.

I know not if you've heard
it's done with craftiness
that's why you hide from view,
but take this as a clue
of what I'll say to you
when you and I will meet.

My little novel song,
go sing of something new.
Rise early in the morn
and seek the fairest one
among the best in love,
whose hair is fine spun gold.
"Your love that is so rare
give to the Notary
who's from Lentini born."

Emperor Frederick II wanted to create a lay culture to offer an alternative to the Latin-based culture that was primarily in the hands of the Church. He founded the University of Naples in 1224 to create a class of bureaucrats who could run his empire efficiently. The Sicilian School of poetry was a political statement as well as a literary endeavor. The poets continued the tradition established by the Provençal poets. In continuing that tradition, they made a great contribution not only by inventing a new language but also by devoting their attention to one exclusive theme. While the Provençal poets wrote about all kinds of subjects, war, politics, and many social issues, the Sicilians devoted their poetry to the theme of love, a practice that was continued by the poets who followed them, such as the poets of the Dolce Stil Novo, Dante, Cavalcanti, Petrarch, Boccaccio and continuing through the poets of the Renaissance. They pioneered the cult of love and they explored every aspect of it. This is ironic when you think that the 13th century was constantly at war, struggling with famine and pestilence, but the Sicilian poets wrote only about love! There was another reason for this, however. Frederick II passed a law that no one was allowed to write about him in a disparaging way.



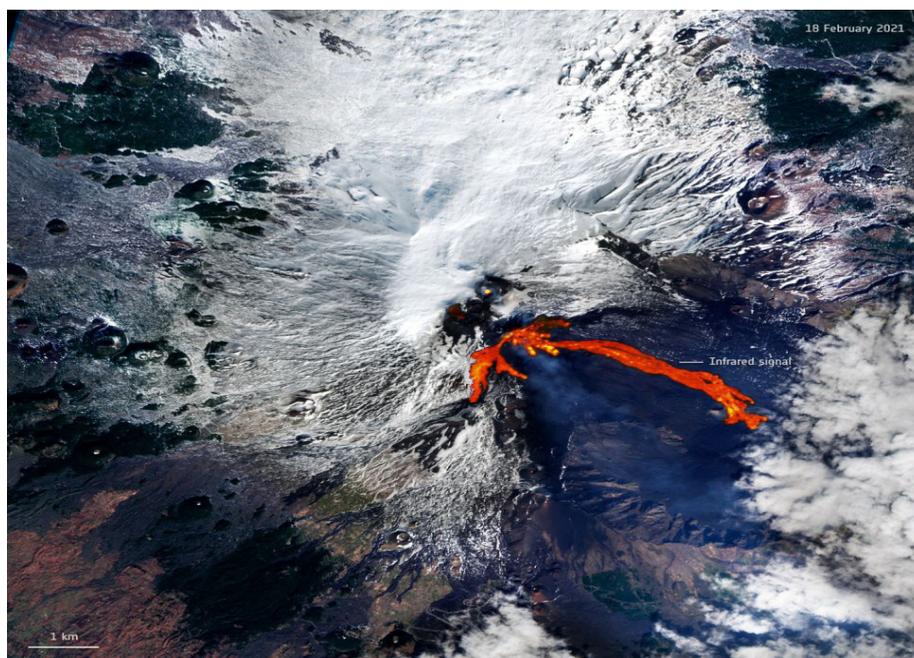
Mt. Etna Is at it Again

In February 1669, Mt. Etna erupted causing tremendous damage to Catania. The city was nearly destroyed and covered with lava that actually reached the port. The great Castello Ursino that was built by Frederick II to protect the city from assault from the sea was spared by the lava but the lava rendered it useless as a coastal defense since it is now quite a distance from the water.

On February 16, Mt. Etna began erupting again and sending ash and lava up in the air, in some case nearly a mile high above the crater. The plume of smoke was actually visible from space as the picture on this page shows. The volcano as of March 24 has erupted sixteen times and according to volcanologists the eruptions have been a lot stronger than usual. To see how big the eruption was look at the image as seen from space on Feb. 18, 2021. (Image credit: Landsat data from the U.S. Geological Survey).

Also on Feb. 18, the European Space Agency's Copernicus Sentinel-2 mission, which is made up of two satellites, observed the eruption. The European satellites captured a moment that, using infrared imaging, showed the lava in bright orange and red.

While Sicilians are accustomed to seeing and hearing the rumbling of the "Muntagna," as the local people call it, and do not live in fear of the enormous volcano, you cannot be nonchalant about what is occurring. Sicily, as we know has experienced many disasters both as eruptions and earthquakes. Twenty four years after after the city of Catania was devastated by the 1669 eruptions, the whole eastern portion of the island, including Messina, Catania, Siracusa and Ragusa, suffered the most destructive earthquake in its history. It destroyed the majore cities just mentined and many smaller towns Many thousands of people died, and those cities had to be rebuilt from scratch, which explains why the buildings in these cities have a distinct baroque style to them.



Landsat 8 satellite snapped a natural color view of the volcano, which was overlaid with infrared data to show the warm areas (or spots where lava had broken through).



Catania has been destroyed nine times in the last three thousand years of history. The symbol of the city should be the phoenix because it has risen out of its ashes every time. Messina too has had its share of disasters caused by earthquakes and tsunamis, the one of 1908 was the most recent and the most deadly. So Sicilians take the activity of their volcano in stride, for while it certainly poses a danger to them, it is also responsible for providing water to all the surrounding town and cities and for making the land extremely fertile.



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Tentative Itinerary for Our 27th Tour: October 4 to October 16, 2021.

I am proposing a tentative itinerary that is almost the same as the tour that was cancelled in 2019. I propose to leave later in October to allow the situation to improve. **Flights and hotels may be different.** We will have the time to make all the arrangements once we know that it is safe for us to travel. A decision to conduct the tour will be made early in June 2021. There is no need to send deposits at this time. The price will remain the same: \$3,500 per person and includes airfare, airport taxes and fuel surcharge, four-star hotels, Deluxe transportation, and all meals, except lunches. The single supplement is \$450.00. You can write to prof. Cipolla at gcipolla@optonline.net to show your interest in joining the tour. Do not send deposits yet. I will send an update in June. Keep your fingers crossed!

October 4 - Monday DAY 1 - Departure from J. F. Kennedy Airport, New York on Alitalia AZ609, 4:25 P.M. Arrive Rome 6:50 AM

October 5- Tuesday DAY 2 - Connect with AZ1777 departing at 8:30 AM which arrives in Palermo at 9:35 A.M. Transfer to our hotel, the Principe di Villafranca in the center. Afternoon free to rest. Welcome dinner at La Casa del Brodo Restaurant.

October 6- Wednesday DAY 3 - Morning guided tour of Palermo that includes the Cathedral, the Norman Palace, and other important sights. In the afternoon, we will visit Monreale. We will travel to Bagheria and have dinner at the Museo delle acciughe with our local members of Arba Sicula.

October 7- Thursday DAY 4 - Before driving to Cefalù in the morning we will visit the Royal Palace a Mareddolce where local students will explain the recent restoration of the museum. We will then visit Cefalù, leisure time for lunch then the beautiful cathedral, the Museo Mandralisca. We will return to Palermo and we will have dinner at our hotel.

October 8- Friday DAY 5 - Palermo to Marsala. We will stop for *casatelle* in Castellammare del Golfo and then proceed to Erice. You will be free to have lunch on your own in this charming medieval city. Then we will visit Naval Archeological Museum before going to our hotel, the Villa Favorita. We will have wine tasting at the hotel and some local guests will join us for dinner.

October 9- Saturday DAY 6 -Marsala to Agrigento via Naro where we will have lunch after visiting the town. We will proceed to Agrigento's Valley of the Temples. Before dinner we will be entertained by the Vald'Akragas group. Hotel Chaos.

October 10- Sunday DAY 7- After breakfast we will drive to Morgantina, one of the most important historical centers in Sicily. After the visit, we will stop for lunch in San Cono and then drive to Siracusa, check in to our Hotel Villa Politi. We will go to the Theater to see a Greek tragedy and will have a late dinner in the hotel.

October 11- Monday DAY 8 - After breakfast we will visit the Archeological sites and then drive down to Ortygia to visit the cathedral and other sights. You will have free time to have lunch in a local restaurant and we will meet again to return to the hotel. After dinner we will be entertained by Salvo Bottaro and his friends.

October 12- Tuesday DAY 9 - Morning drive to Catania. Visit the Cathedral, the Via Etnea, and other sights. Lunch on your own. In the afternoon we will drive along the coast via Acireale where we will stop for their famous gelato and then proceed to our hotel in Giardini Naxos, the Caesar Palace which will be our hotel for the last four nights. Buffet dinner at the hotel.

October 13- Wednesday DAY 10 - A short morning drive to Taormina to visit the Greek-Roman theatre. After a brief reception by the Mayor of Taormina, Mario Bolognari, we will have free time for shopping and lunch. We then return to our hotel for relaxation at the pool or the beach. Dinner in our hotel.

October 14- Thursday Day 11- After breakfast we will go to Mt. Etna. We will return to our hotel early in the afternoon to relax by the pool or do some shopping. Dinner in our hotel.

October 15- Friday DAY 12 - Morning visit to Savoca. In the afternoon we will drive to Francavilla di Sicilia for cocktails and then to the Paradise Restaurant for the farewell dinner.

16- Saturday DAY 13 - Transfer to Catania. The return flight is on Alitalia AZ1724, at 11:15 am, arriving in Rome at 12:40, connecting with Alitalia 610 to New York at 2:50 PM. It will arrive in New York's J. F. Kennedy Airport at 6:35 PM of the same day.