

Agora



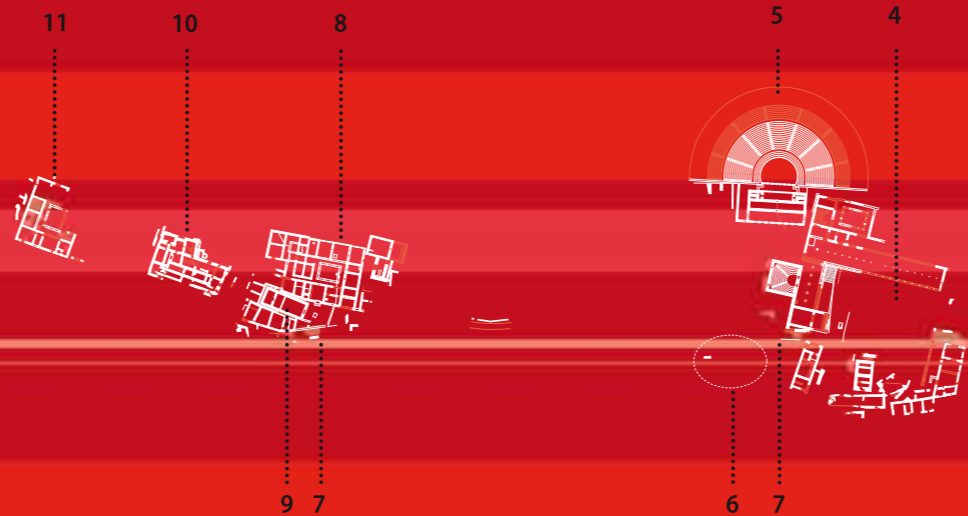
Ancient Bouleuterion (C)



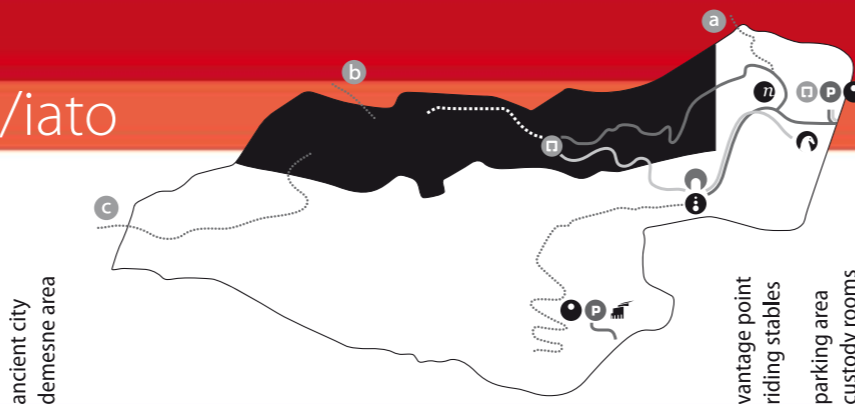
New Bouleuterion (D)



- /1. east gate /2. walls /3. eastern district /4. agora /5. theatre /6. cistern /7. east-west street
- /8. peristyle house 1 /9. temple of aphrodite /10. late archaic house /11. peristyle house 2



/iato



ancient city
demesne area

vantage point
riding stables
parking area
custody rooms
toilets

convent
ss. cosma e damiano
case d'alia / antiquarium
necropolis

itineraries

pedestrian and service
pedestrian equipped
pedestrian naturalistic:
scala di ferro
san giuseppe iato
(via amitero vecchio)
san cipirello (via roma)
horseback



Regione Siciliana / Assessorato Beni Culturali Ambientali e Pubblica Istruzione
/ Soprintendenza Beni Culturali ed Ambientali di Palermo

/ Servizio per i Beni Archeologici



ambulatories and divided into seven wedges by eight radial flights of steps. The three lower tiers of seats, the third one of which had backs, was reserved for the authorities (*proedria*). Thus set out the pit contained 4400 places.

The area for the choir (*orchestra*) simply had a dirt floor. The stage building is well preserved and shows the various building phases. In the third and last construction phase dating from the first years of the 1st century BC, the stage building was enlarged with a porticoed room behind and with an access corridor on the western side. Over and above its chronology – it is among the most ancient Hellenistic theatrical buildings so far known – the theatre occupies a major place in Sicilian theatrical architecture on account of its important and original decoration.

The architectural colonnade of the stage building, and more precisely of the *paraskenia*, comprised four big sculptures depicting two maenads and two satyrs and two lions in limestone, which originally must have been situated on plinths set at the sides of the seats of honour closing off the frontal supporting walls (*analemmata*).

/ roman and medieval city

In the early imperial age the apogee of the city was concluded, though its life continued throughout the Roman and Byzantine period down to the height of the Middle Ages. Building activity was very limited during of the imperial Roman period. In the theatre, the last enlargement was not completed. It is above all the ceramics that allow us to trace out the history of *letas* in the imperial epoch. From the last years of the flourishing of the city there date beautiful Roman shiny red table ceramics (so-called "*terra sigillata*"). Beginning from late in the 1st century AD Italic *terra sigillata* was replaced by African, which was produced until the late epoch; the last examples bear the sign of the cross, indicating the adoption of the new Christian faith. In the late ancient age dwellings were superimposed on public buildings in disuse, destroyed once and for all with the raid by Vandals in 440. From the ensuing Byzantine epoch (6th-10th centuries) no architectural testimony is known, though a series of objects coming from diggings, like necklaces and belt buckles, also confirm the occupation of the site in those centuries. In 827 the Arab conquest of Sicily put an end to the Byzantine dominion. Sicily came under the Fatimid caliphate based in Cairo. Despite the total lack of monumental remains relating to this period, it is likely that the dwelling area was to the west, in a part of the plateau not yet investigated. When in 1061 the Normans conquered Sicily, Monte Iato was inhabited above all by Arab populations that, beginning from 1079, refused to pay the tribute and to serve Count Roger, who had difficulty in subduing them. From the Norman period some remains of houses and numerous ceramics are known. In the 13th century religious clashes provoked a last insurrection of the Arabs on the island against Frederick II of Swabia, the Christian emperor and King of Sicily. Giato became the theatre of the last Muslim revolt in Sicily, initially led by Muhammed Ibn 'Abbād. The importance of the site in the rebellion is stressed by the presence of Frederick II there during the siege of the city, in the years 1222-1224. Having rebelled again in 1243, the people in the city were at last starved out in 1246 and the city was razed to the ground.

/ Case D'Alia antiquarium

Some of the most significant finds from the Monte Iato diggings are on display at the *Antiquarium* set up in the Case D'Alia. The itinerary is divided into various sections: after a historical and urbanistic introduction, on the ground floor there are illustrated the most important examples of public, sacred and civil architecture (agora, Temple of Aphrodite and theatre), with the display of a series of remarkable finds (sculptures, ceramics and architectural pieces). The first floor is devoted to house building in the archaic, classical and Hellenistic ages and the material culture relating to the various periods of life of the city, from the Iron Age to the Middle Ages. The itinerary ends with a selection of ancient, Byzantine and medieval coins.

Eastern entrance: tower



Peristyle House 2



Peristyle House 1



Theatre



/ territory

The ample and ramified territory in which Monte Iato stands has peculiar environmental, morphological and hydro-geological characteristics; it is a hill system behind the city of Palermo crossed by two principal rivers, the Iato and the right Belice, and surrounded by rugged and sometimes inaccessible mountains, with heights varying between the 640 metres of the Billiemi mountains and the 1333 metres of Monte La Pizzuta.

Both the upper valley of the Iato and the upper valley of the right Belice correspond to big natural connection routes between the Tyrrhenian, the inland area of western Sicily and the southern coast of the Island, along which, starting from the prehistoric age, the passage and settlement of various peoples occurred. The valley of the Iato, a hinge between the Conca d'Oro plain and the upper valley of the Right Belice, has constituted an important axis of communication between "native" places in the hinterland, the Greek colonial world and the Punic cities on the north coast, while the Belice, the most important river in western Sicily, which flows to the southern coast of the island near Selinunte, has had a decisive role in the process of human settlement in the area.

The whole valley was intensely inhabited from the most remote prehistoric epochs, but it was above all from the First Iron Age that there was an organization of the territory of a hierarchical type, based on the existence of big settlements in prominent and naturally defensible positions, around which there were distributed a series of smaller settlements on low hills or in the valley bottom, which ensured control and agricultural exploitation of the grounds.

The territory seems not to have undergone any break in settlement between the ancient Age and the Middle Ages.

Substantial continuity of occupation between late antiquity, the Byzantine age and the Islamic age is recorded along the river valleys and only the Norman conquest involved the concentration of the rural population in big villages on high ground. At the end of the 12th century, the valley of the Iato was part of the *Magna Divisa Iati*, which with the *Magna Divisa Corilionis* and the smaller *Divisa Batallarii* and *Magna Divisa Kalatatrasi* constituted the vast territory donated by the Norman King William II to the abbey of Santa Maria la Nuova in Monreale.

/ site and name

Uninterrupted occupation, lasting over two thousand years and documented through complex stratification, characterizes the settlement on Monte Iato, a majestic mountain rising to 852 metres above sea level in the upper valley of the Iato, the river that starts on Pizzo Mirabella and flows for about 35 km, going through a deep gorge and finally flowing into the sea on the northern Tyrrhenian coast.

The mountain constitutes the extreme southern offshoot of the Palermo mountains: it also dominates the upper valley of the Right Belice and is situated in the hinterland immediate behind Palermo, about 30 km southwest of the chief Sicilian town. The urban area, partially surrounded by walls, occupied about 40 hectares, with an internal difference in altitude of more than 100 metres: observation of the ground allows one to suppose that in the ancient epoch about two thirds of the area were occupied; only the western part was free, and here, in the medieval age, the inhabited area probably lay.

Greek written sources mention the people of the city on Monte Iato with the names IAITINOI, IETINI and IETENSES according to the Latin authors. The name of the city appears both on some tiles and on a series of coins: in these cases the name IAITOY is used in the genitive (of Iaitas). Hence the city was called IETAS in Latin and IAITAS in Greek. The medieval form of the name, GIATO, is handed down by the latest sources.

/ history

The first settlement on Monte Iato dates back to the first centuries of the 1st millennium: of these first phases of life unfortunately we know very little, also because no literary documentation exists relating to the history of the settlement until the 5th century BC. The archaeological documentation too for this period is rather sparse; there are extant a few remains of huts and numerous ceramic fragments modelled by hand or done on the slow wheel.

The indigenous component, though maintaining a specific identity, was profoundly transformed in contact with the Greek element: to the end of the 7th century BC there are dated the first importations of Greek material, proto-Corinthian and Corinthian ceramics, which perhaps came via Selinunte, while from the middle of the 6th century BC relationships with the western colonies became more intense, so much so as to allow us to guess at the presence of a real nucleus of Greek population that settled inside the city.

We know, thanks to ancient literary sources, that beginning from the 4th century BC Iaitas, like the whole of western Sicily, was under the Carthaginian dominion. Furthermore, the historian Diodorus Siculus tells us that between 278 and 275 BC the city was attacked by Pyrrhus King of Epirus, and that during the First Punic War (264-241 BC) the Ietini, having driven out the Carthaginians, gave themselves up to the Romans. From a passage in the *Naturalis Historia* of Pliny the Elder and through other works by ancient historians we know that in 79 AD *Ietas* was listed among the 45 tributary cities of Rome and that, in the first imperial age, it was one of the fifty most important urban settlements on the island. In this connection, transport amphoras from the Roman epoch, in the most varied shapes, attest to commercial contacts with Africa, Spain, Italy and the eastern part of the empire.

In the middle imperial age, nevertheless, the apogee of the city

appeared to be over and many monumental complexes were in a state of ruin. The building activity of those centuries was very limited and homes, sometimes built on disused public buildings, collapsed in about the middle of the 5th century AD, perhaps because of the Vandal raid in 440 AD. The Byzantine period is the one least well documented in the history of the city till now; it was brought to an end by the Islamic conquest of Sicily, which began in 827. Sources and documents from the Norman age attest that the Muslim presence at Giato (the name of the city in the Arab-Norman age) was very strong; Idrisi in the middle of the 12th century speaks of the castle of Giato and its underground prisons and the *divisa* of Giato, in the Norman age, following the donation by William II, certainly constituted one of the biggest and most important administrative districts among those belonging to the Diocese of Santa Maria la Nuova in Monreale. Then when, in the first decades of the 13th century, the revolts by the Muslim populations broke out against the reigning Swabian dynasty, Giato became one of the strongholds of the rebellion, until the time of the total annihilation and destruction of the city by the troops of Frederick II in 1246. The people that survived the war were deported to Lucera in Puglia and from that moment on the site was abandoned for good.

/ urban development

The inhabited area, situated on a big plateau strongly sloping to the south and southeast, develops in the east-west direction and has an overall extension of about one kilometre.

At the end of the 4th century BC the city was affected by imposing restructuring work which, the canons of Greek urbanism and architecture being applied, gave rise to a new urban layout and the construction of important public buildings, as well as of districts with luxurious private residences to the east, west and south of the monumental area, where the theatre and the agora were.

Unlike what happened in other coeval examples with orthogonal streets (for example Solunto and Morgantina), the new urban layout was not perfectly regular. The dwelling area is organized around a main street, running in the east-west direction, not straight but adapting to the conformation of the terrain, perhaps following a previously existing line. The road is carefully paved with sandstone, the same sandstone that was used for paving the agora; subsequently in some stretches it underwent repairs with local light-coloured limestone.

Naturally defended to the north and northwest by a steep rock slope, the city had walls with towers along it to protect the south and east sides and bastions to the southeast and southwest.

The present-day access corresponds more or less to the original one, going in through the east gate, flanked by two robust towers, in which more ancient architectural elements were reutilized.

The fortification system was probably enriched and structured better in coincidence with the organization of the new urban layout of the city, in about 300 BC, although it is possible that it was all done earlier.

The Hellenistic fortification was used, with various restructuring operations, until the Middle Ages.

/ hellenistic settlement

The high standard of living attained by the city in the Hellenistic age is remarkably documented by luxurious private residence. The quarters of the city, created in the framework of the urban reorganisation at the end of the 4th century BC, are to the east, west and south of the monumental area. In all the districts the peristyle house is found, being a type of private residence that was very popular and showed a high standard also regarding the inside arrangement and the architectural decoration. It is characterized by being organized around a central courtyard, mostly rectangular, with a colonnade (peristyle).

All the houses so far known at Monte Iato have common characteristics: they are very big and often have two floors. The richest houses have a representation wing that includes a central exedra, opening towards the peristyle, among banquet rooms (*andrones*) where there were couches for the *convivium*.

Moreover, the construction technique with dry walls showing accurate facture, the architectural elements, sculpted in local soft limestone, the floors in *opus signinum* and mosaics, the wall coverings with coloured stuccoes and sumptuous cornices, make the Monte Iato peristyle houses very similar to one another.

/ agora

The *agora* was the main square of the ancient city, where civic life took place as well as all affairs relating to its government. The construction dates from 300 BC, but it was only later that it was endowed with complementary architectural structures. With a surface area of about 2000 square metres, the square is the result of the levelling of the rock in the northern part and of fillings supported by an earthwork in the southern area.

The *agora* was closed off on three sides by porticos (A-B-L) with doric columns on stylobates with three steps; the southern side, instead, did not have a monumental arrangement, but, at least partly, left the view free towards the valley. The north portico (A) had two aisles (56.3 metres) and formed a unitary complex with the public building behind made up of a peristyle with attached rooms to the east and south and by a hall of the city council (*bouleuterion*) flanked by a rectangular room. The west side too, built in the late 2nd century BC, about two centuries after the rest of the square, appears as an architectural whole with unitary layout and is formed by a portico with two aisles with Doric columns (B), which looks out on a paved square, by a new room of the council (*bouleuterion*) (D) and by a temple on a platform (E) with an altar in front of it. The temple on a platform, typically Roman, is further confirmation of a Roman having commissioned the three buildings. The monumental complex of the agora fell slowly into disuse between the early or middle Roman imperial age and the 5th century AD.

/ theatre

The building of the theatre was part of the monumental restructuring of the city; it was built at the centre of the plateau in a dominant position, in the area immediately northwest of the agora. From a dedicatory inscription we know the name of the private citizen, one *Antallos*, who dedicated the monument. The pit (*koilon*), with a front of 68 metres, lay partly on the natural slope and partly on thick artificial filling and comprised 35 tiers of seats, today largely lost, subdivided by two



Maenad