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Twenty Itineraries
Designed to Help
You Explore the
Cultural Heritage
of Palermo and
its Province

Soprintendenza per i Beni culturali
e ambientali di Palermo

THE “CONCA D’ORO” IMAGES, HISTORY, MEMORIES

by **Gaetano Bongiovanni**

REGIONE SICILIANA
Assessorato dei Beni culturali
e dell’Identità siciliana



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Project TREASURE MAPS

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The “Conca d’oro”: Images, History, Memories

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Modern tourism was born in the 18th century. Even its definition comes from that era: the ‘*Grand Tour*’ signified a trip through Europe, lasting several months, enjoyed by well-to-do young gentlemen (aristocrats and wealthy bourgeoisie) for the completion of their knowledge of the world, before returning home to take up the profession or career for which they were destined. Italy was one of the most sought-after destinations, even though the travellers preferred initially to visit Venice and Rome, and Naples was added only mid-18th century. Sicily, at this time, was totally ignored by the ‘*touristes*’, and was substantially unknown to all of them. The first person to recommend Sicily as an attractive and singular destination was a Scotsman, Patrick Brydone (1741-1818), who travelled to Italy as a tutor to William Fullarton and visited Sicily between May 14th and August 1st 1770. It was the Ambassador to Naples, William Hamilton and Lord Fortrose, who had visited Sicily before them and had suggested the tour. The book, ‘*A Tour through Sicily and Malta*’, a collection of letters from Brydone to William Beckford, published in London in 1773, was a great success and was immediately translated into German and French, drawing to Sicily the attention of all of educated Europe. Two trips from celebrities followed that of Brydone, two Frenchmen who accompanied their annotations with an extensive collection of images. Jean Houël (1735-1813), who visited Sicily once in 1770 and again in 1776, published 4 volumes, between 1782 and 1787, of his “*Voyage pittoresque des isles de Sicile, de Malte et de Lipari, où l’on traite des antiquités qui s’y trouvent encore, des principaux phénomènes que la nature y*

offre, du costume des habitants et de quelques usages”; The second *Voyage pittoresque ou Description des Royaumes de Naples et de Sicile* [A Picturesque Trip or a description of the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily], edited in Paris in 5 volumes between 1781 and 1786 was written by the group led by Dominique Vivant Denon (1747-1825), which included the architects Jean-Louis Desprez and Jean Augustin Renard as well as the landscape artist Claude Louis Châtelet, and was guided from Paris by the abbot Jean-Claude-Richard de Saint-Non (1727-1791), who was also the final curator of the publication. It was not by chance that the two works were both entitled ‘*Voyage pittoresque*’—even though they were theoretically competitors. They had in common the fact that the idea of a trip to Sicily was a memorable experience, especially (if not above all) for the eyes. Unlike for the other areas of Italy, the *picturesque* aspects of Sicily—as the critic Sergio Troisi noted in his ‘*Vedute di Palermo*’ [Views of Palermo], (Palermo, Sellerio, 1991)—are not, at least for the early Tourists, formed by the views of the city but by the archaeological remains of the Greek civilisation, by the marvels of nature (with Etna, the largest volcano in Europe, first amongst equals) and by the beauty and clarity of the landscapes, which had never before been seen by strangers (it would seem).

This mainly pictorial interest for these places is also born out by perhaps the most famous visitor to Sicily in the 18th century, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, who spent twenty days in Palermo in the spring of 1787. He was also the first person to reach some of abandoned areas of the interior. Goethe travelled with a painter, Kniep and he was

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himself something more than an amateur painter. Both the educated Germans, from the moment of their arrival, were fascinated by the landscapes: "At three o'clock in the afternoon, with an effort, we finally entered the port, where there appeared before us a most sunny landscape. I felt completely recovered, and my enjoyment was heartfelt. The city, sited at the foot of the high mountains, faces north; depending on the time of day, the sun shone over it, lighting up all the façades of the houses in the shadows. To the right Mount Pellegrino, with its elegant lines, under the full glare of the sun, to the left the long coastline stretches out, interspersed by bays, peninsulas and promontories. A certain fascination was added by some slender trees, a delicate shade of green, whose tops, lit by reflected light, seemed to sway like a swarm of fire-flies in front of the darkened houses. A bright gauziness tinged the shadows blue". As soon as they had settled in to their hotel Goethe and Kniep went immediately to their window "From there it was possible to glimpse an infinite number of vistas, which we studied and depicted one by one either as a drawing or as a painting; it was really unlimited the quantity that was on offer to the artist".

The most singular aspect of this kind of fever for the panoramas and '*vedute*' [Italian for 'views'] that met the eye of the Tourist, was that before these Sicilian beauty spots were fixed as images, and in this particular instance, those of Palermo, there was no local tradition of landscape painting, as Troisi likes to remind one.

Thus it is that the discovery of the beauties of Palermo and its surroundings goes hand in hand with its depiction on canvas and

paper. This happens, initially, as a result of the fascination for a natural environment, contested by both the mountains and the sea, in which the walled city tends to shrink and dissolve. Even more important, starting from the 1930's, was the desire to follow in the footsteps of the mediaeval traces of Sicilian architecture with its fascinating Arab imprint which turns Palermo into a kind of jumping off place for the Orient. The '*Vedute*' of Palermo, which start to be painted in the late 1800's and become more numerous and more commonplace over time, create a suggestive visual legacy of the myth of the Conca d'Oro, at least until the end of the First World War, which signals the end of the *Belle Époque*.

From the end of the 18th century, in fact, the intensive cultivation of citrus fruit is extended to almost all the land around the city. And this area, historically an area of intense woodland cultivation, ends up by seeing that its moniker, the Conca d'Oro (which is considerably older), matches the aspect conferred on it by the evergreen lemons and mandarins.

This epoch, perhaps the most memorable in the history of Palermo, lasts some one hundred and fifty years. The city prospers economically, enters finally into the age of modernity, it is enriched with some excellent public architecture and becomes, for the peaceful Europe of the 19th century, an imaginary place of delights, over whose fascinating beauty the most unexpected witnesses have written laudatory words (to name just a few: Guy de Maupassant, Edmondo De Amicis, Oscar Wilde, Sigmund Freud, Ernst Jünger). From the start of the 1920's the enchantment begins to fade.

The citrus-growing is in crisis, the Florio family (the entrepreneurial and social heart of 19th century Palermo), go bankrupt, the large companies, often in English hands (the Whitaker family especially), lose money, the cosmopolitan socialites of Europe are attracted to other destinations and with the end of the Second World War and the resulting uncontrolled and violent urban expansion, the Palermitans themselves destroy the green spaces that surround the city, almost entirely erasing the ancient Conca d'Oro.

None of this cancels out what remains of the visible traces of this world, that for so long had managed to maintain a precarious equilibrium from the point of view of urban city and private lifestyle, between the growing needs of modernity and the usefulness of agriculture and the beauty of

the countryside. This is partly entrusted to the memory preserved in the paintings and which are nowadays on show in museums; and in part it continues to live on in the many corners that have managed to keep, even if slightly soiled, their fascination. It is left to another of these Treasure Maps—number 15, *Botanical Wonders: Palermo's Gardens and Parks* by Giuseppe Barbera and Manlio Speciale—, the task of guiding the visitor through whatever is still visible of the immense 19th century grove of citrus fruits. It is instead, the intention of this Itinerary to guide the visitor through the transposition, over a period of 150 years, into images of these places, with the intention of recreating, with the aid of what is known as '*the memory of art*' its quite extraordinary sense of seduction.

1
*Francesco Lojacono,
 Detail of 'View of
 Acquasanta'. Palermo,
 Fondazione Sicilia*



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Villa Giulia: “The sea does not break on nearby shores, the sea is further afield, beyond the noisy streets, full of traffic, the sea breaks on the rocks. But all the villa is filled with the sound of the sea, far and near; and all the palms that line the first avenue, that rise gently and virgin like up to a point then sink with the same slow pace, like waves, they are marine like”.

Bonaventura Tecchi, *L’isola appassionata*, Turin, Einaudi, 1945

In the 12th century the Arab traveller al-Idrisi, describes the city of Palermo at the time of King Roger II, immersed in its natural environment between the Conca d’Oro and the sea: “Balarm [Palermo] the Beautiful is an immense city, ... the greatest and most splendid of its day; the one of which [were one to do so] it would be difficult to stop singing its praises; [the city

adorned] with great elegance; the seat of kings, both in modern and in ancient times. From her, fleets and armies move out to war, return to her in the same guise as she is today. She sits on the sea bord, on the west side [of the Island]: she is encircled by large and tall mountains; [not withstanding all this] her beaches are happy, sunny, pleasant. Palermo has edifices of such beauty that

2

Errico Guglielmo Smyth “Map of the surroundings and the Gulf of Palermo ...”, 1825,





visitors come [attracted by] the fame of [the marvels offered here] by the architecture ... From all sides of the capital of Sicily [the ground] is cut through by water and perennial springs erupt out of [the ground]. Palermo abounds in fruit; its edifices... confound those who try to describe them and enthralls the intellect. To say it in a few words, this city turns the head of those that look at her... In the highest part of this 'Kassar', king Roger has a brand new citadel, built of hard stone mosaics and large cut stone slabs, shaped with all the rules of art, with tall towers, reinforced with look outs and bulwarks, [comfortable] small pavilions and well constructed rooms; notable for its architectural decoration, for the strange and unusual calligraphical embellishments and for the elegant images of every kind that are collected here... there are many gardens; beautiful 'villini' and canals of fresh, running water, brought down to the city from the mountains that encircle her plain.

Outside the southern side the river abbàs (the Oreto) flows, an everlasting river on which so many mills are placed as to be more than sufficient for the needs [of the city]". In this description emerges all the extraordinary and singularly rich architecture of the Norman era as well as the relationship with an extremely rich and variegated environment in which the sea, the mountains, the plain, the rivers and the spring waters define a verdant context in which nature is correlated in an extraordinary fashion with the dimensions of history.

Little more than six hundred years later, in the second half of the 18th century—to be precise 1776-1779—some of the more salient aspects of al-Idrisi's Mediaeval description will be recalled by the French traveller Jean Houel, with a wide cultural baggage of knowledge as a painter, architect and an expert engraver and therefore able to reproduce by himself, the elements of his trip, without the need for the intervention

3
Luigi Lojaco, *The Sicilian Vespers*, 1860 circa, Oil on canvas. Palermo, Private collection



4

Francesco Lojacono,
detail of 'View
of Acquisanta'.
Palermo, Private
collection

of outside landscape painters or artists. In fact Houel in his *Voyage pittoresque des isles di Sicile, de Malte et de Lipari, où l'on traite des antiquités qui s'y trouvent encore ...*, Paris 1782-1787, describes the nature around Palermo in this way: "Having left Monreale, I made my way north and soon a most suggestive spectacle offered itself to my eyes. From the high ground on which the city is built I looked out over a vast zone gently sloping down from the mountains to the seashore covered in copses, studded with homesteads, verdant with cultivations, with countless shades of colour that contrasted the somber azure of the immense sea that bounds the horizon, almost a dark background to enhance the visibility of the buildings of Palermo. The city appears in the distance and towers like a Colossus over all its surroundings; a semicircle of high mountains encloses the plain forming around the township an immense and magnificent amphitheatre. Palermo is reached by a road, three miles long, flanked by country palazzi and villas.. which alternate with superb fountains, partly clad in

marble and decorated with statues and animal figures... Monseigneur Testa, Archbishop of Monreale has greatly improved this road since 1760; he has had new fountains built... he has made it more accessible, reducing the gradient of this artery cut out of the mountains... the high mountains by which Palermo is encircled ensure a constant supply of water [to the city]."

The presence of numerous beautiful fountains indicates the permeation between artistry and utility with regard to water, of which, as Houel maintains "in such a warm climate there is a continuous need".

The birth of the demand amongst travellers for the so-called '*vedute*', spread also to Palermo and Sicily, unavoidable stops on the 18th century '*Grand Tour*'. "From this passionate desire to know and make known the world and above all the places where civilisation was born, an extremely particular genre of the '*veduta*' [landscape painting] was born: that of the travelling painter who went through Europe and above all Italy, but also the nearby Orient [Middle East], sometimes

along the most frequented routes of the *Grand Tour*, at other times stopping in a region, a city or near a group of monuments” as Giuliano Briganti so succinctly puts it in (*La Sicilia di Jean Houel all’Ermitage, Palermo, Sicilcassa, 1989*). [Sicily according to Jean Houel at the Hermitage]

“With their inseparable notebook in their pocket or their artist’s portfolio, paints and folding chair slung over their shoulder like a ‘rucksack’, sometimes alone, sometimes accompanied by rich ‘*grand tourists*’ and their scholarly bear-leaders and tutors, or directly in the company of architects, antiquarians or scholars... these artists travelled around, looked, drew, faithful to the task they had set themselves, a task often more similar to that of a modern photoreporter than to that of a traditional painter”.

From these two testimonies of travellers (al-Idrisi and Houel), culturally and chronologically very different, as well as with different traditions, an image is delineated of a city not closed in on itself but open to the expanse of nature that surrounds it, due mainly to its extraordinary position, which characterises it in a very special manner. This explains how the image of the Conca d’Oro is continually depicted in the ‘*vedute*’ and in the landscape paintings that have influenced other artistic techniques such as drawing, engraving and photography. Therefore this voyage by means of the *vedute* of the Conca d’Oro, involving figurative material between mid 18th century and the start of the 19th century, not only reveals the extraordinary potential of a Nature environment but above all the special relationship between Nature and History, which has been of significant importance for Palermo.

The starting point for the portrayal of the Conca d’Oro is linked to the descriptions of the landscapes present in the travel

annotations in which the concept of brilliance and chromatic variations are often mentioned. Emanuele Kance writes about Goethe, travelling in Sicily, in his book *L’immagine della Sicilia nei resoconti di viaggio del Settecento tra classicità ed emozione romantica*: [Images of Sicily between classicism and romantic emotion in the travel observations of the 18th century]

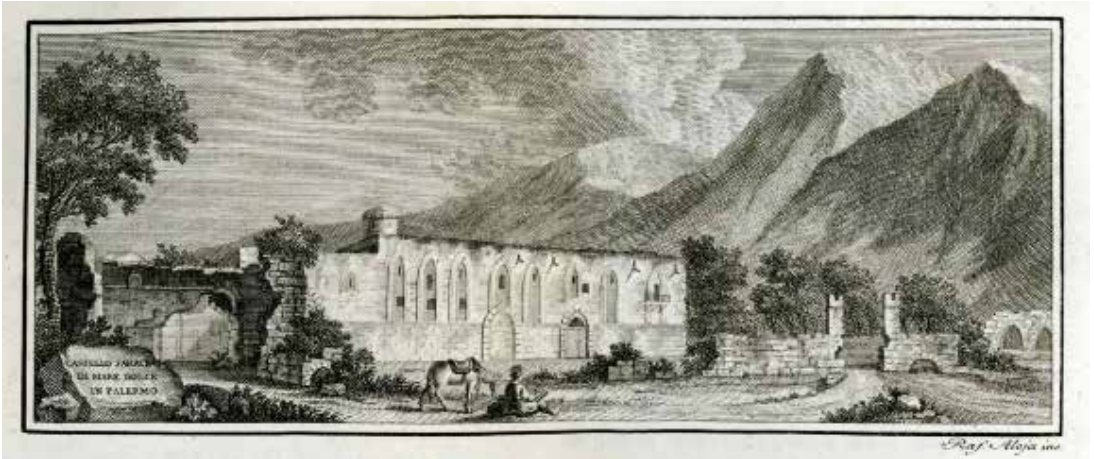
“The effect of light, the play of chiaroscuro, the tones of the shadows and the vast force of the Mediterranean daylight find a deep and vibrant echo in his ability to portray them. His writings, extremely sensitive to the light, seem to swell up with this triumph of light, sought for and analysed in all its contrasts and subtle colours [connotations]”.

The interconnection between the plain, the Tyrrhenian Sea and the encircling mountains create a particular type of Nature, that thanks to the fertility of the ground and the beauty of the landscape, will be mentioned for the first time in a poem written in the 15th century by Angelus Callimachus Siculus, the *aurea concha*. By virtue of the mild climate and the numerous and varied sources of water—writes Giuseppe Barbera in the Conca d’Oro (2012)—“the territory around Palermo has been an immense garden, very attractive to look at and extremely productive. In the history of the Conca d’Oro it is the trees that dominate the landscape and constitute the principal crops that over the centuries have substituted for the natural vegetative covering. The productive order of the market gardens and orchards, the centuries- old trees, survivors of the original plantations, the biodiversity incremented century after century, as well as the refreshing presence of water have earned the landscape the epithet of ‘*fruitful and charming*’”.

Leandro Alberti, a priest who visited Sicily in 1526, noted in his ‘*Descrittione di tutta l’Italia*

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5
Mareadolce, View of the Castle. Engraving by Raffaele Aloja taken from the “Libro del consiglio di Egitto tradotto da Giuseppe Vella...” (In Palermo: in the Reale stamperia, 1793)

et Isole pertinenti ad essa, (1567, riedited in 1596) [Description of Italy and its Islands], the countryside around the city displays “a fertile and charming land... bountiful with beauty and charm and gardens, filled with serried ranks of citrons, lemons, mandarins and other noble fruits”. The landscape of the Conca d’Oro is studded with numerous agricultural buildings but above all the old buildings from Norman times such as the Mareadolce, the Zisa, the Cuba, the little Cuba. Only from the beginning of the 18th century is the countryside invaded by new forms of recreation, including agricultural experimentation; some 200 new villas are built, often forming the nucleus of new towns, neighbouring the older villages revitalised during the 18th century. Thus the city in the eighteenth century begins to move out from behind the walls that have largely enclosed it since Mediaeval times. Thus, under the rule of the Bourbons the city opens out into the surrounding countryside. Antonietta Iolanda Lima in

Palermo: *strutture e dinamiche* [Palermo: buildings and dynamics] makes notes: “1778-88 the public garden of Villa Giulia between the avenue of Sant’Antonio and the road Colonna sul mare”; on the extension of the ‘Strada Maquedda’ an addition by the Prince of Regalmici (the first expansion outside the city walls); a road, between the plain of Sant’Oliva and the hamlet of Santa Lucia; public cemetery of Sant’Orsola in the mediaeval Church of the Santo Spirito; the construction of the complex of San Francesco di Sales on the highway of Mezzomonreale; the urbanisation bordering the road of San Francesco di Paola and so the list goes on: “1789-99 the Botanical Gardens next to Villa Giulia; the nautical College Gioeni all’Arenella; the southern extension of Via Maqueda (Via Oreto); the experimental agricultural centre in the Park d’Orleans; the parishes in the boroughs of Altarello di Baida, Falsomiele and Partanna”. Thus the ‘*vedute*’ and the landscape paintings depict a bucolic scene animated

by individual buildings and small villages. The aim of this short introduction, mainly through paintings and prints, is to retrace the pictorial representation of the Conca d'Oro through the diverse interpretations of the artists, all of them conscious of finding themselves before a place, a city and a landscape of surprising beauty. During the course of the 18th century there is a notable increase in the interest of 'vedutisti' [painters of 'vedute'] for the 'veduta' of topographical nature, which

assumes a different role from that of the simple painted 'veduta': "the painters cannot compete with the increasingly sophisticated and specialised technical instrumentation, and therefore they create their own space, the landscape portrait *on parts* of the urban space in which the architectural and environmental values are key aspects". (Cesare De Seta, in *L'immagine delle città italiane dal XV al XIX secolo*, 1998). [Images of Italian cities from the 15th to the 19th century].

CESARE DE SETA: A PAGE ON PALERMO

The historical centre is a labyrinth where nude and dumb phantoms of its glorious past drift around: Muslim emirs, Norman and Swabian kings, Spanish Viceroy; Nobles such as the Chiramonte and the Sclafani, Pietro Speciale, Simone da Bologna or the Marquis di Regalmici are the invitees of stone on the deck of this raft that is adrift. I arrived in Palermo for the first time knowing that my relatives had lived here for centuries—putting down roots—, knowing of past splendours only by word of mouth and familiar usage. I visited the Palace that bore my family name: it is a ghost amongst ghosts... I felt in that first meeting that I had rediscovered a milieu that I had always known: streets and squares, palazzi and churches and those rare gardens with their intense aroma of towering palm-trees, were all part of my genetic memory.
[...]

The gardens of Palermo, with their scent of jasmine, orange and bergamot, are an integral part of this city: even in the 19th century

the travellers were still able to distinguish the perfumes... In the countryside south of Palermo, circa two miles from the oldest nucleus of this very ancient city it is where the Royal Norman park stretched along. This park was almost certainly an Arab inheritance that the sovereigns arriving from the north had known how to make prosper: in fact the most ancient of Arab names '*Jannat al-arq*' means exactly "Paradise on earth". The Muslim civilisation practiced the cult of gardening and Muslims were absolute masters of the use of water; in this they were the direct heirs of the Romans' knowledge of hydraulics and engineering. But the Muslims harboured a different kind of love for Nature and created in Sicily, *et pour cause*, in the Conca d'Oro, a hydraulic system which had never been seen before, nor since. The Norman sovereigns scattered the immense garden of the Conca with castles, mansions, *solatia* that were immersed amongst lakes and fountains, riverbanks and canals, palm groves, reed beds and citrus groves.

Taken from: *Viaggi controcorrente*, [Travelling against the flow] Torino, Nino Arago, 2007

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6
*Francesco Lojacono,
‘View of Acquasanta’.
Palermo, Private
collection*

Even in the Enquiry into Sicily written by Leopoldo Franchetti and Sidney Sonnino, (*Inchiesta in Sicilia*), in 1876, which exposes many critical aspects of the social and political life in Sicily, the Conca d’Oro appears ‘sprinkled with light from the citrus fruit...a fascination of men and things...the colours change, the aspect of each and every thing is transformed’ (cited by Giuseppe Barbera in the ‘*Conca d’Oro*’).

To open our itinerary, extrapolating it from the chronological sequence, it is necessary to present a painting from a private collection in Palermo entitled ‘*Vespri siciliani*’ [the Sicilian Vespers] dated some time around 1860. It is a work—recently published by Ivana Bruno, by the painter Luigi Lojacono, father of the

better known landscape artist Francesco, who often painted episodes and themes from the Risorgimento, from personal experience as he had participated in the Expedition of the Thousand [an event of the Italian Risorgimento]. Thus his paintings depict scenes of fights he had experienced during the battles. The Sicilian Vespers, as often happens for historical paintings of the 19th century, constitute ideal transpositions of the contemporary culture of the Risorgimento. We are interested, however, in the depiction of the Conca d’Oro animated by battles, figures, soldiers and horsemen, characterised by an excitement counteracted by the context of the wide open spaces of the Plain of Palermo, with the imposing outline of Mount Pellegrino on the right of the foreground. The landscape portraiture is probably caught from the slopes of the mountains that encircle Palermo and mainly from Mount Billiemi. It is also possible to make out some buildings, probably depicting the Royal Palace and the Cathedral of Palermo, even though the painted shapes do not exactly conform to the above-mentioned buildings. However, the painting demonstrates the extraordinary depth of the plain surrounding the city, which, in this case, has been turned into a battlefield where the Angevins fight the Aragonese. It should be remembered that the theme of the Sicilian Vespers assumed a certain importance during the 18th century, underscored by the quantity of works of art by important Italian artists such as Francesco Hayez (Rome, National Gallery of Modern Art).

Both the Vedutisti and the landscape artists prefer to depict Palermo from certain points of view that can be grouped in four different nuclei: 1. Palermo seen from the sea; 2. Palermo seen from the south, above

all from the slopes of Mount Grifone and in particular the area of the Franciscan Monastery of Santa Maria di Gesù and from the beach of Romagnolo/Acqua dei Corsari; 3. Palermo seen from Mount Pellegrino or from its slopes; 4. Palermo seen from the mountains behind the city near Monreale, Boccadifalco and Mount Billiemi. But the *Topos* that characterises both the *vedute* and the landscape paintings consists of Mount Pellegrino, characterised by the inclusion of its entire outline and above all taken from the point of view of the beach of Romagnolo and *Acqua dei Corsari* but also from the countryside to the south of the city

along the River Oreto or from Santa Maria di Gesù. The image of Mount Pellegrino somehow symbolically becomes the image of the city itself. The great promontory of which Goethe was so enamoured is also clothed in religious significance as it was the seat of the grotto-sanctuary of Santa Rosalia where the bones of the Saint, connected to the salvation of the city from the plague in 1624, were found. For this latter reason as well, Palermo and Mount Pellegrino are closely interwoven into the history of the city and its collective memory. Cesare De Seta wrote “ The supremacy of the model of the city seen from the east,

7
Francesco Hayez,
detail of 'The Sicilian
Vespers', Rome,
Galleria Nazionale
d'Arte Moderna



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8
Emanuele Lajosa,
*'Palermo seen from
Santa Maria di
Gesù', lithograph,
1839 circa*

near the sea, with Mount Pellegrino in the background, spreads by means of the canvases and the panels painted by the 19th century artists intent on copying the monuments from the Norman era, the Cathedral, the Zisa etc. and will certainly contribute to the creation of the Tourist

myth of a city which is simultaneously European and exotic" (Cesare De Seta, in the introduction to the *Vedute di Palermo* [Views of Palermo] by Sergio Troisi in 1991). Moreover, and above all in the 19th century – the mediaeval monuments present in the Conca d'Oro, were recuperated through images that conjure up the sense of time passing, a romantic type of Italian 'rovinismo' [depiction of ruins real and imaginary] which in Palermo becomes nostalgia for the Norman era.

The paintings and views incorporating the Zisa, the Cuba and the Maredolce as well as the cloisters of Monreale and San Giovanni degli Eremiti, the pavilion of the little Cuba and the Bridge of the Ammiraglio should all be included in this ambit.

As an example of the above the lithograph of the *Veduta dell'antico Ponte dell'Ammiraglio*

9
Emanuele Lajosa,
*'The Marina of
Palermo', lithograph,
1839 circa*





sul fiume Oreto [View of the old Bridge of the Admiral on the river Oreto] , painted in 1827, from the drawing by Giovan Battista Carini and nowadays in storage in the Regional Gallery of Palazzo Abatellis, as well as that which depicts the lateral view of the *Palazzo della Zisa affrontato alla Chiesa dell'Annunziata*, [The Zisa Palace facing the Church of the Annunciate] lithograph of 1835 by G. Minneci and G. Filippone, based on the drawing by Saverio Cavallari, also in storage in the same Museum. (cp. Salvo Di Matteo, *Iconografia storica della provincia di Palermo*, 1992). [Historical iconography of the Province of Palermo]. Worth seeing is also the lithograph picturing the Palazzo of the Favara by C. Hullmandel based on the drawing by George Moore, part of the collection of the Fondazione Sicilia (the profile by Maria Chiara Scarpaci can be seen in the catalogue curated by Troisi in 2012). It is exactly the ruins of mediaeval architecture that are often recalled to mind by literary descriptions where the landscape enshrouds and defines the ancient constructions. It is therefore possible to evoke the words of Francesco Orlando (from his *Gli oggetti*

desueti nelle immagini della letteratura) [Obsolete objects in literary images]: “The relationship of monuments with the landscape is that which relegates the south of Italy amongst those regions that have been overtaken by progress, on the road from east to west and from south to north: a relationship that is scattered, essential,

10
 Francesco Zerilli,
 ‘View of Palermo from
 Mount Pellegrino’

11
 Rouargue, ‘Vue de
 Palerme’, lithograph,
 1840



THE “CONCA D’ORO”

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Giovan Battista Carini, *The cross of Santa Maria di Gesù*. Palermo, Galleria d'Arte Moderna Empedocle Restivo

deteriorated, permanent and unappreciated [misunderstood]...too many diverse civilisations are layered over each other”. From a purely historical-artistic point of view, between the *vedutisti* of the 18-19th century—the works of Francesco Zerilli, Giovan Battista Carini, Tommaso Riolo, Carl Werner and Jacob Frey are the most available—and the landscape paintings of the second half of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, it is possible to identify a certain continuity in the choice of the points of view of the natural

environment whilst the stylistic-formal aspect changes almost completely. In fact the image extremely defined and open over a wide visual sector is realised with the use of a technique that endeavours minutely to detail the values of the landscape and the architecture of the past that has been immersed in it; whilst landscape painters search for moods, chromatic variations that change across the various hours of the day, in fact a less objective interpretation of the surrounding world and transposed into very personal interpretive suggestions (Francesco



Lojacono, Antonino Leto, Michele Catti, Mario Mirabella, Ettore De Maria Bergler and Michele Cortegiani).

The images of the Conca d'Oro and more generically of Palermo in its rural context can be found in the historical photographs that sometimes snap the same painted images in ways that are very similar. Amongst the photographers that have best interpreted the *vedute* images of the city with their technical instruments one should cite Giuseppe Incorpora (Palermo, 1834-1914), author of the picture *Foro Italico e*

Monte Pellegrino [Italic Forum and Mount Pellegrino] in circa 1890 and some ten years earlier *Palermo Piazza della Vittoria*. In both of these photos the monuments have been inserted into the context of the city and the surrounding rural landscape. Piazza della Vittoria, not yet a green space, allows an excellent view of the 18th century façade of the Royal Palace next to one of the mediaeval towers, other low buildings and the pinnacled outline of Porta Nuova. The partnership of Sommer & Behles gave us the *Marina di Palermo* around 1860 in which

13

Michele Catti,
'The Tonnarazza'.
Palermo, Galleria
d'Arte Moderna
Empedocle Restivo



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Giuseppe Incorpora,
*‘Foro Italico and
Porta Felice’, 1890*
circa



the Strada Colonna with its Bandstand and the baroque Palazzi are still close to the sea (see: *Sicilia Ottocento: fotografie Grand Tour*, produced by Vincenzo Mirisola e Michele Di Dio). [Sicily in the 19th century: photographs of the Grand Tour] . Unfortunately after the Second World War, the remains of the rubble caused by the bombing and deposited along the seashore along Strada Colonna, distanced the sea from the road. In the *Veduta di Palermo da Santa Maria di Gesù* [View of Palermo from Santa Maria di Gesù] around 1890, Giorgio Sommer copies almost slavishly the view of the *vedutisti* painters of the 19th century, a tangible sign that photography

assumes between the 19th and 20th century the iconography and compositive modality which is typical to paintings. Also in the first half of the 20th century the photographs in *veduta* style are very disseminated, attested to by some photographs by Dante Cappellani from the 1920's: for the sake of brevity only the *Veduta dei Colli da Monte Pellegrino* [View of the hills from Mount Pellegrino] in which this part of the Conca d'Oro appears studded by ancient villages but is relatively lightly urbanised. Another photo, from the 1920's captures the city from the Teatro Massimo, right up to the axis with Via Libertà, and while it shows the massive urban expansion of the city, it still allows the



mountains surrounding it to show through. Other images by Cappellani depict the *Rione Castello San Pietro* after the bombing of the Second World War and the *Vecchia Cala* [the Old Cove], overflowing with boats of all kinds. It is this last photo that resembles the *Veduta della Cala* painted by the painter and engraver Antonio Guarino (Palermo, Collection del Circolo Artistico “Città di Palermo”), a picture characterised by the ample chromatic layering aimed at returning a modern look to the old Palermitan port through the use of a paint that tends to hold the light.

15
Commercial Poster,
second decade of the
20th century

16
Giuseppe Incorpora,
‘View from the
Cala with Mount
Pellegrino’, 1890 circa



INFORMATION SHEETS

GROTTE DE S^{TE} ROSALIE SUR LE MONT PELLEGRINO PRÈS DE PALERME, 1785

Claude-Louis Châtelet

Engraved by: Marie-Alexandre Duparc
Acquaforte, 24.8 x 16.8 cm
Palermo, Fondazione Sicilia

The engraving made for the book by Jean-Claude-Richard de Saint-Non, *Voyage pittoresque ou description des Royaumes de Naples et de Sicile* Paris 1781-1786, [Picturesque voyage or description of the Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily – Abbot of Saint-Non] depicts the 17th century façade of the Sanctuary of Santa Rosalia on the Mount Pellegrino, the façade up against the grotto where the remains of the Saint were found. The words he wrote about the Saint Rosalia del Denon are of extreme anthropological interest: “Her remains have been transferred to Palermo, where no day

or year passes that she does not work numerous miracles; and without doubt, the greatest miracle is the one where for five days of the year, she manages to get the most indolent people in Europe to move”, referring therefore to the Feast of Santa Rosalia, showing an ironic prejudice about the Palermitans and their way of being religious. The drawing, made by Châtelet and turned into an etching by Duparc, depicts in the centre the 17th century façade of the Sanctuary alongside the Convent, placed inside a framework of a landscape of rocks and froned trees, that transforms the image in almost romantic terms. The presence of a number of pilgrims in eloquent poses is utilised to give movement and veracity to the figuration; the same applies to the two friars praying near a roadside shrine, who seem to stand out for the very emphatic mode of their praying. In this etching the Sanctuary building and the surrounding nature are of almost equal importance.



(ph D'Aguanno/Civita Sicilia)

(ph D'Aguanno/Civita Sicilia)



**VUE GÉNÉRALE DE PALERME PRISE
DES HAUTEURS DE SANTA MARIA DI
GESÙ, 1822**

Huber, based on an sketch by Louis Nicholas
Philippe Auguste de Forbin

Aquatint, 29.8 x 13 cm

Palermo, Fondazione Sicilia

The engraving realised by Jan Frédéric d'Ostervald, *Voyage pittoresque en Sicile*, Paris 1822-1826, as a testimonial of his trip is connected to a *veduta* of Palermo frequently captured by painters and engravers between the 18th and the 19th century. The drawings elaborated by Count Forbin are the basis of the images used to depict the aforementioned *voyage*. Luis Nicolas Philippe de Forbin was a French draughtsman, a scholar of antiquity and curator of the Louvre; in Sicily, during the year of 1820, he executed a copious number of *vedute* with great stylistic rigour and characterised by a close adherence to

the realities of Nature. In fact his cultural background is perfectly in line with the art of the *veduta* that most closely adhered to the concrete and analytical style preferred by the traveller taking the Grand Tour. This view of Palermo from the slopes of Mount Grifone near the Franciscan Monastery of Santa Maria di Gesù is connected to a *veduta* theme frequently utilised, which includes a wide tract of the Conca d'Oro and above all the unmistakable outline of Mount Pellegrino. The picture is beholden to the 18th *vedute* with Mount Pellegrino that is elevated to the status of emblem of the city of Palermo, through an association of ideas, which connects the image of the Mount to the idea of the city itself.

This *Veduta* also reveals a particular attention to the vegetation, which here is depicted with olives, and those “cacti and aloe”, which according to Hélène Tuzet (*Viaggiatori stranieri in Sicilia nel XVIII secolo*, 1995) are typical examples of a flora that is exotic and almost subtropical.”

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CROSS OF SANTA MARIA DI GESU',

1835 circa

Giovanni Battista Carini

Oil on canvas, 15 x 22 cm

Palermo, Galleria d'Arte Moderna

Empedocle Restivo

Even if it is not signed nor dated this small picture is attributed to Giovanni Battista Carini, Palermitan painter active in the first half of the 19th century, in the formal style of the *vedutisti* of the *Grand Tour*. The Cross is depicted sited on a series of steps in the 'piazetta della Guadagna' in the area surrounding the city. The city can be seen in the background, immersed in verdant gardens and overlooked by the imposing mass of Mount Pellegrino. The brush strokes, full of colour and rapidly placed offer a final effect similar to that of the sketch itself. It cannot be ruled out, given the size, that the small painting could have been the preparatory sketch for a much larger painting. The Guadagna Cross was erected around the mid 15th century in memory of a tempest that ended the contest between the Franciscan Order of Friars Minor of Santa Maria di Gesu and the Franciscan Order of Friars Conventual of San Francesco over the translation of the body of the Blessed Matteo Gallo.





THE "CONCA D'ORO"

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THE FAVARA, 1840

George Moore

Engraved by G. Hullmandel

.....
Lithograph; 15 x 27.2 cm

Palermo, Fondazione Sicilia

.....
The Palace of Maredolce or the Favara was an ancient suburban building of the Emir Jafar, rebuilt at the time of Roger II as a *solatium* [a place for rest and pleasure]. The

building held a particular fascination for the 19th century artists who were strongly attracted to the Sicilian mediaeval Islamic period, which can in part be connected to the Gothic Revival style prevailing in the years around the mid 19th century. The lithograph was included in the book by Henry Gally Knight (1786-1846), *Saracenic and Norman remains to illustrate the Normans in Sicily*, London 1840 and the author of the drawing, George Moore, lingers in particular

(ph D'Aguanno/Civita Sicilia)



over the external walls of the building, highlighting with a delicate chiaroscuro, the characteristic ogival architectural details. The lithographical technique is mainly used to define the images of the monuments via chromatic effects enhanced by the use of white contours round the etched lines. It is necessary to note that the image of the mediaeval monument is not treated in an archeological fashion but its insertion into a landscape, with the mountains that surround

the city placed in the upper right hand area, does not cancel out the misery depicted with a horse anchored to a tent outside the Palace. This last view, connected to the overall sense of abandonment and decay, probably led Gally Knight to title the illustration 'Ruins of Favara'.

THE "CONCA D'ORO"

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VIEW OF PALERMO FROM MOUNT PELEGRINO, 1820-1825

Francesco Zerilli

.....
Tempera on paper; 58.7 x 92.8 cm
Palermo, Fondazione Sicilia
.....

Francesco Zerilli (Palermo 1793-1837) was a pupil of Francesco Ognibene and Giuseppe Patania. He probably started his artistic career as a landscape painter around 1818, influenced by certain '*vedute*' by Jacob Hackert. Later he specialised in the kind of *vedute* that had previously been executed by foreign artists who had arrived in Sicily together with the travellers on the *Grand Tour*. His method of painting, combining a clear and analytical hand with extremely modulated pictorial effects, is the key to the success of his *vedute*, realised as tempera on paper. Moreover Zerilli did not just enjoy local fame but could count amongst his buyers the Count Hemming, plenipotentiary of the Prussian king and Marie Louise of Habsburg, Duchess of Parma. His landscapes were beloved above all for their exact correspondence to reality and for the graceful delicacy of the brushstrokes that can sometimes result almost transparent. The compositional cut of the *veduta* shows an image of Palermo from the slopes of Mount Pellegrino with the village of Acquasanta in the foreground and the city to the right, enshrouded in the mountains, in turn surmounted by a terse and clear sky. The wide-open frame of the *veduta* is introduced by a tall tree to the left and by various prickly pears in the foreground, alongside small figures of farmers.



(ph D'Aguzzo/Civita Sicilia)



THE “CONCA D’ORO”

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SANTA MARIA DELLA CATENA, 1836

Carl Werner

Oil on canvas; 50 x 70 cm

Palermo, Fondazione Sicilia

The painting by Carl Friedrich Heinrich Werner (Weimar 1808 – Lipsia 1894) was probably executed during his first sojourn in Italy, begun some time around 1830, after he had won a scholarship. Werner, in fact, signs and dates it 1836, adding the place as Rome, where he was living at the time. His stay in Italy actually lasted until 1850 and contributed to increase his fame as a landscape painter and above all as a watercolourist. He also visited Spain, Egypt, Palestine and Greece. He became a lecturer at the Leipzig Academy, where he died.

The late 15th century painting of Santa Maria della Catena in the Cala di Palermo depicts the Church before the destruction of the double main stairway and the removal of the drinking fountain. There is also a small portico looking out over the *Cassaro*, which was built after the road had been extended and then demolished soon after in 1850. The painter does not omit to include the *veduta topos* of Palermo, Mount Pellegrino but it does not depict the Doganella gate, which would have impeded the view, but inserts a visible equestrian statue—with no historical existence—with an architectural pediment in the neogothic style. On the extreme left it is possible to make out the bulky outline of the Castello al Mare whilst the figures of some local people and some aristocrats are painted in the space between the Church and the gulf of the Cala. The extraordinary brilliance



of the painting together with the short brush strokes, analytically descriptive, connect the work to the tradition of the *vedutisti*, who were active between the 18th and the 19th century.



(ph D'Aguzzano/Civita Sicilia)

THE "CONCA D'ORO"

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THE SICILIAN VESPERS, 1844-1846

Francesco Hayez

Oil on canvas; 225 x 300 cm

Roma, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna
inv. 2373

The large painting donated to the Roman Gallery by Francesco Ruffo, Prince of Sant'Antimo, depicts one of the best known themes of Sicilian history and in particular, according to the painting's full title: "The wife of Ruggier Mastrangelo da Palermo is insulted by the Frenchman Droetto and is then avenged by his death." The event, in 1282, caused the so-called War of the [Sicilian] Vespers between the Angevins and the Aragonese. The historical theme fitted well in the contemporary era of the painter, with the war of Independence and the strong yearning for the Risorgimento. Francesco Hayez (Venice, 1791 - Milan, 1882), had painted a first version of the theme in 1822, a young man's painting in which the historical event was depicted in front of the Cathedral of Palermo, followed by a second version. Instead, in November 1844 the painter goes to Palermo in order to see for himself the places and the lay out of the city, as he wanted to give his work a more realistic imprint, unlike the picture of 1822, set in a completely 'imaginary' atmosphere. The patron, Ruffo, was so completely satisfied by the quality of the painting that he paid 2,250 ducats for it.

Hayez was favourably received into the Neapolitan society of his patron, and in 1853 the Parthenopean art critic Tito Dalbono invited people to "admire in all the group such a variety and beauty of faces that only the painters like Hayez can give



them". The picture was probably begun in 1844 and finished two years later. The emphatic and magniloquent character of the 19th century historical painting shows a Hayez very attentive to the scenography and to the very studied poses that often produce special theatrical results. Aspects defined by Giulio Carlo Argan, relating to the Vespers,



of “false theatrics... background, wings, costumes: the lighting is well regulated between the background and the front of the stage; the well balanced distribution of the figures, each with his own part to play” The description of the wide Palermitan plain closed off by the imposing outline of Mount Pellegrino, appears to have been

drawn from real life, with romantic and Italian Risorgimento elements. For an indepth analysis see *Francesco Hayez: catalogo ragionato* [catalogue raisonné] by Fernando Mazzocca (Milan, F. Motta, 1994) pages 289-291.

THE “CONCA D’ORO”

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VIEW OF PALERMO FROM THE VALLEY OF THE RIVER ORETO, 1841

Johann Jacob Frey

Oil on canvas; 42 x 56 cm

Palermo, Fondazione Sicilia

The little painting executed by the Swiss painter in 1841, dated next to the signature at the bottom right, shows Frey (Basil 1813 – Rome 1865) well versed in landscape painting thanks to his apprenticeship in Paris, where he copied the Flemish painters of the 16th and 17th centuries in the Louvre. In fact the painter was very young when he moved to Paris, where he worked as a lithographer and restorer of paintings. In 1836 he transferred to Rome, where he devoted himself almost exclusively to painting. From Rome he moved south through Italy to Naples and Sicily and between 1842 and 1843 he went to Egypt and Ethiopia in the train of the Prussian archaeologist Lepsius. He then went on to Spain. The painting belonging to the Fondazione Banco di Sicilia depicts Palermo from an unusual point of view, the Valley of the river Oreto. Moreover the city appears surmounted—as if it were a hat—by the ephemeral outline of Mount Pellegrino. In the work it is possible to make out an ascensional movement not often found in other Palermitan *vedute*. The clear brush strokes next to the bright colours and an extremely terse light associates him with certain choices of the painters of the contemporary ‘Posillipo School’. A certain peculiarity is given to the painting by the rocks and the ancient ruins in the foreground that introduce the view of Palermo with a vaguely old-fashioned taste.



The city in the distance is defined by the domes and the bell-towers, whilst humble constructions surrounded by figures and animals are painted in by the banks of the river Oreto.

“Life at the foot of history, a clear and



affectionate reference to the grandiose landscape paintings of the 17th century”. (Silvia Regonelli, in *Le collezioni della Fondazione Banco di Sicilia. 6. I dipinti, 2015*). [The collections of the Fondazione Sicilia. 6. The Paintings]

(ph D'Aguanno/Civita Sicilia)

THE "CONCA D'ORO"

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VIEW OF PALERMO FROM SANTA MARIA DI GESÙ, 1850 circa

Unknown Sicilian Painter

Oil on panel; 80 x 165.5 cm

Palermo, Fondazione Sicilia

The large painting was left to the *Fondazione* in 2008 by a donation from Alesi-Cuccio Cartaino having previously belonged to Baron Giuseppe Sgadari di Lo Monaco, a

musicologist and Sicilian art scholar. In the very extensive view of the Conca d'Oro, the city is only visible in the distance, surmounted by the mountains and by the sky tinged with rose coloured clouds. The composition of the painting once again resembles that of the *vedutisti* of the *Grand Tour*, with the point of view taken from the 15th century Monastery of Santa Maria di Gesù, built on the slopes of Mount Grifone. The tranquil landscape has, however, an

(ph D'Aguanno/Civita Sicilia)



occasional emphasised outline that defines trees, rocks and buildings, showing clear signs of how the influence of the '*vedutismo*' of Hackert and Zerilli can be treated in a more flowing mode, more suitable to a greater adherence to reality. In fact the painting can be compared to the language of chronologically more advanced landscape painters such as Andrea Sottile, Giuseppe Tripi, Giovan Battista Carini and Tommaso Riolo. It is Sottile who appears as the

painter closest to this picture belonging to the *Fondazione*, which could perhaps be attributed to him and not remain anonymous; in this case this painting should be attributed to his work as a young man because figurative tastes typical of a period of apprenticeship, in which a strong narrative intonation comes to the fore, are present.

THE "CONCA D'ORO"

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VIA STABILE DAL SAMMUZZO and VIEW OF SANTA LUCIA AL BORGO, 1863

Tommaso Riolo

Oil on canvas; 25.5 x 36 cm
Palermo, Galleria d'Arte Moderna
Empedocle Restivo

The two twin paintings depict two suburban
environments of Palermo: Borgo Santa
Lucia seen from the beach with the boats

in the foreground and the neighbourhood
Church. The popular intonation is also
given by the children playing on the beach
and by the clothings hanging out to dry.
In the background is the township of Aspra.
The Via Stabile from Sammuzzo depicts a
recently urbanised area later incorporated
into the actual port. The view point of the
Via Stabile is from the sea with the humble
houses and the boats in the foreground. On
the right there is a votive shrine.
The viewpoint of the two small paintings



with its close up of the houses and the boats is reminiscent of the traditional *veduta* style of the late 18th century even though the figurative naturalism of the depiction allows one to glimpse an observance of reality. The colour palette relatively lightened by the emergence of the greens, the azure and the ochre is still in tune with the paintings of the *vedutisti* but the adherence to and the interpretation of a non idealised urban landscape are forerunners of the most glorious season of the Palermitan landscape

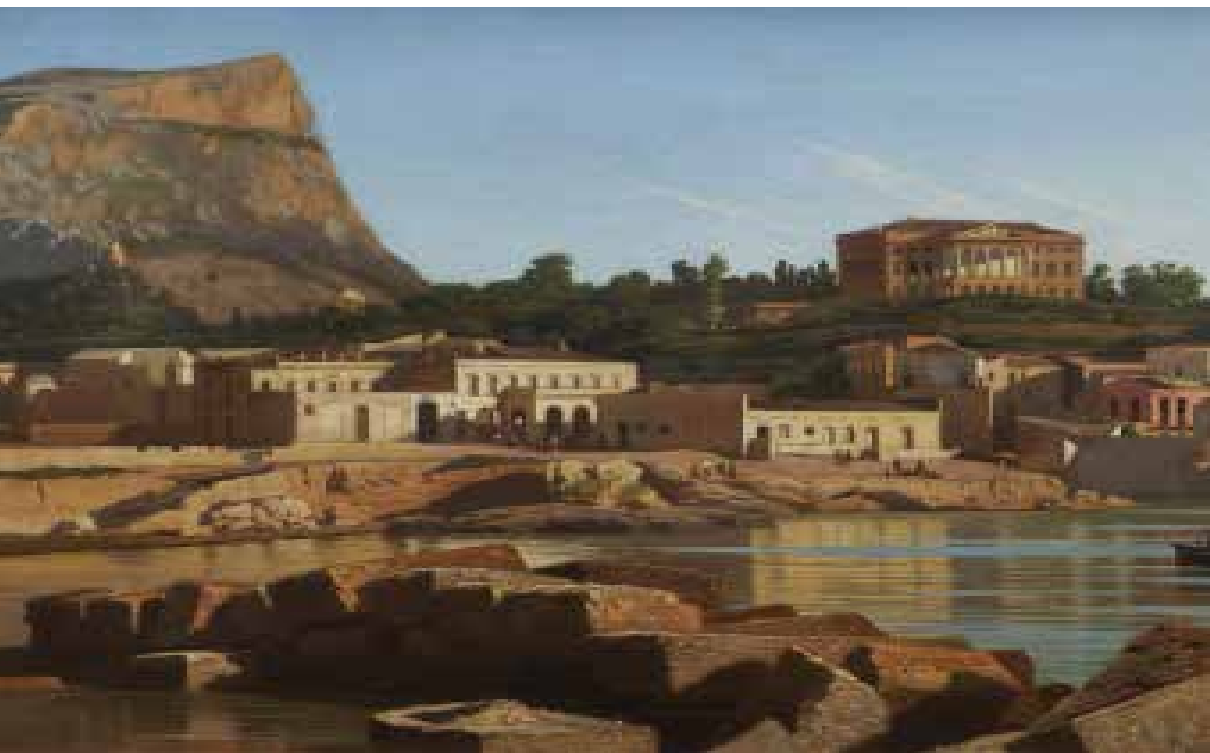
artist between late 19th and early 20th century.

Tommaso Riolo (Palermo, 1815-1906) was the nephew and pupil of Vincenzo Riolo but later on, together with Giuseppe Tripi and Andrea Sottile, he was attracted by the teachings of the Parthenopean painter Giacinto Gigante.



THE “CONCA D’ORO”

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A VIEW OF THE ACQUASANTA

1864-1866

Francesco Lojacono

Oil on canvas; 48 x 117 cm

Palermo, Fondazione Sicilia

This early work by the well-known Palermitan landscape painter (Palermo, 1838-1915), is painted in the horizontal format (in Italy known as ‘a maddalena’), which allows for the framing of an extremely extensive view. Amongst the paintings selected for inclusion in this booklet, the view of Acquisanta is a part of the *veduta* style in which the city is seen from the point of view of the sea, which in this particular

instance, is preceded by the breakwater in the foreground. The hillock of Acquisanta on the slopes of Mount Pellegrino, with the village houses, the *tonnara* [tuna factory] and the middleclass villas rises above the calm, clear blue sea on which several boats are depicted. The whole is surmounted by the villa of the Prince Ventimiglia di Belmonte, built in a neoclassical style, designed by Giuseppe Venanzio Marvuglia, and surrounded by a park, in which there is also a small temple. The work is probably that shown by Lojacono in 1864 in the XX Esposizione di Belle Arti mounted by the Società Promotrice di Firenze where General Luigi Federico Menabrea bought it. In 1909 Colnago describes this lost painting

(ph D'Aguzzo/Civita Sicilia)



“as an evocative patch of our sea at Acqua Santa”, which could well be the painting acquired by the Fondazione Sicilia in 1985. It should be pointed out that Lojacono depicted the seaside village of Acqua Santa in other paintings. In this particular work the Palermitan painter demonstrates a clear rapport with the 18th-19th century models and above all with the tempera of Francesco Zerilli dedicated to the same subject matter. However compared to this tradition the paintings of Lojacono show analytical and photographic mannerisms which tend to highlight the lighting-related aspect of the landscape with almost crystal clear definition, making the shapes of the houses and even the colours in which the

humblest houses are painted stand out, in adherence to reality, in a way that up until then had probably not been tried by any Palermitan painter. His wider attachment to the naturalistic environment is also evidenced by a part of the outline of Mount Pellegrino, painted in the upper left corner. With reference to the classification of Lojacono, this painting would appear to show significant similarities with two works depicting Parthenopean themes: *Posillipo* and *Palazzo Donn'Anna in Naples*, both of which have been sold on the antiques market.

THE “CONCA D’ORO”

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CUBULA, 1870-1875

Francesco Lojacono

.....

Oil on canvas; 44 x 66 cm

Agrigento, Civic Museum

.....

The painting, part of Lojacono’s early works, is part of the Sinatra collection from Agrigento. Belonging to the early 19th century tradition of the *veduta*—and in particular to those painted by Giuseppe Tripi—the work is probably meant as a pictorial documentation of the little square building built in the Islamic style, known as the little Cuba. Built sometime during the second half of the 12th century, the pavilion was situated in the immense park of the Genoard, commissioned by Roger II as a place of relaxation and pleasure (*solatium*). In this painting Lojacono clearly depicts the monument from a photographic point of view. The architecture is lit by an afternoon light which also qualifies the environment. Thus the objective approach “following the style of Palizzi” fits in well with the cultural theme of Giuseppe Sinatra’s collection, who was interested in connecting the late 18th century style of the *vedutisti* with the new forms of approach to reality created by photography. Moreover, Giuseppe Sinatra was an excellent photographer himself and furnished the artists that he supported with photographs of the Valley of the Temples with the intention that they should be an inspiration for new paintings.







**VIEW OF THE GULF OF PALERMO FROM
THE BANDITA, 1870 circa**

Francesco Lojacono

Oil on canvas; 29.3 x 66.5 cm

Palermo, Fondazione Sicilia

The painting, donated to the *Fondazione* by Alesi Cuccio Cartaino in 2008 depicts a view of the Gulf of Palermo with Mount Pellegrino at the centre; the view point is from the shore-line of the Bandita, in the southern

part of the city, between the ancient villages of Acqua dei Corsari and Sant’Erasmus. The image of Mount Pellegrino as seen from this point of the coast is typical both of the late 18th century *vedute* as well as that of the landscape painters between late 19th and early 20th centuries. Other painters that have also depicted the entire outline of the Mount from this very viewpoint include: Michele Catti, Mario Mirabella and the Swiss Erminio Kremp, who spent a great deal of time in Palermo. It is the southeast corner of the



(ph D'Aguanno/Civita Sicilia)

Gulf of Palermo which, “notwithstanding the profound transformations that have occurred since the end of the Second World War, which have partly altered the coast line and have reduced it to a state of complete abandon, it [the Gulf] can still conjure up that incredible harmonious equilibrium that for many years existed between the city and its sea” (Sandra Proto, *Vedute e luoghi della costa sud-orientale*, 1997).[Views and places of the southeast coast].

The painting evinces a certain rigorous

composition, given by the line of the horizon above which Mount Pellegrino rises, and in the distance is the city, whilst in the foreground are the rocks with fisherman. The slope of the perspective can be seen in conjunction with a painting that has strong realistic connotations and in which the light animates the colour, creating a very particular atmosphere. There are clear chiaroscuro effects playing over Mount Pellegrino, producing formal results of conspicuous plasticity.

THE “CONCA D’ORO”

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VIEW OF PALERMO FROM SANTA MARIA DI GESÙ, 1875

Francesco Lojacono

Oil on canvas; 78 x 156 cm

Palermo, Galleria d’Arte Moderna

Empedocle Restivo

The painting, signed bottom right “F. Lojacono 75” is one of the noted Palermitan landscape painter’s (1838-1915) more mature works. According to Accascina (in his book on the *Ottocento siciliano* of

1939), the painting was presented, three years after its completion, at the Universal Exhibition in Paris. The canvas can perhaps be identified as that cited as “ a general view of Palermo” in the catalogue of the Exhibition of the Belle Arti organised in 1875 in the Church of Montevergini in Palermo. As has already been stated, this is one of the most famous of Lojacono’s landscape paintings. The view of Palermo from the countryside around the slopes of Mount Grifone, next to the Franciscan Monastery of Santa Maria di Gesù, presents



some peculiar characteristics such as Mount Pellegrino depicted in its entirety with the city lying at its feet projected towards the Gulf. The viewpoint shows in the foreground the road bisecting the tree-lined countryside, with the focal point being Mount Pellegrino. There are also small groups of farmers on the road. In this work, Lojacono shows how he is in a phase of moving away from the more traditional aspects of the *veduta* to a version of landscape painting animated by a densely coloured light and atmosphere, which produces effects that soften the contours,

leaving the landscape in a more vaporous dimension. It is also interesting to note how the presence of Mount Pellegrino in a view of Palermo is inevitable: Lojacono paints the Mount in a miniaturised view of Palermo on a small fan, which he signs in 1886 (private collection). Evidently even in the second half of the 19th century the bulk of Mount Pellegrino is still synonymous with Palermo.

THE "CONCA D'ORO"

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SUNRISE, 1910

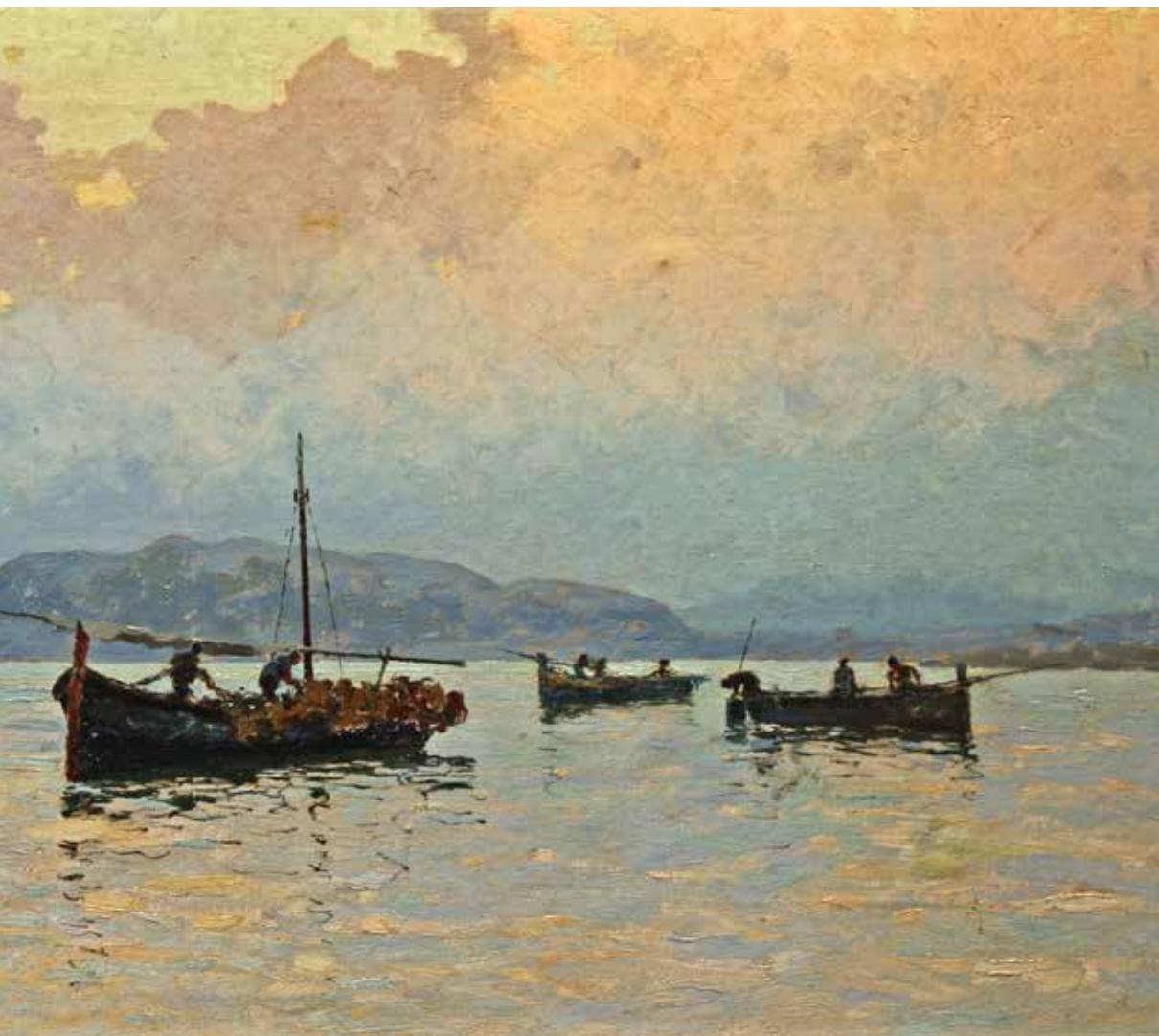
Michele Catti

Oil on panel; 27 x 47 cm
Palermo, Galleria d'Arte Moderna
Empedocle Restivo

.....

This small painting signed and dated bottom left 'M. Catti 1910' depicts the well-known Palermitan landscape painter (Palermo, 1855-1914), in a personal portrayal of the Palermitan marine landscape from the view point of Bagheria and Aspra. The luminous reflections of the sea, created by a combination of azure and yellow strokes, which can also be seen in the chromatic articulation and light-related effect of the sky, pick out in the foreground three fishing boats with the small fishermen figures backlit. The perspective is created by the different chromatic intensities of the figurative parts, creating not just a first and second plane but also a background developed with four or five different colour ways. The work, which can be placed amongst Catti's later works, reveals not only a positive compositional cut but also absolute mastery over the execution. This picture can be confronted with *Monte Pellegrino con barca e pescatori* [Mount Pellegrino with a boat and fishermen] in a private collection (Catalogue of the Catti exhibition by Maria Antonietta Spadaro in 2013).





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FOUNTAIN OF HERCULES, 1910 circa
Ettore De Maria Bergler

Oil on panel; 75 x 60 cm
Palermo, Galleria d’Arte Moderna
Empedocle Restivo

The painting signed bottom right ‘E. De Maria’ (Ettore De Maria Bergler, born in Naples in 1850, died in Palermo in 1938) appears to be characterised by a naturalism created by the light of the evening hour in which the column with the statue of Hercules is depicted, sited in the park of the Favorita near the Lake with the swans. The statue is also known as the ‘*Ercole Farnese*’, inspired by the 3rd century AD Hellenistic sculpture at present in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples. The fluidity of the brushstrokes demonstrates a simplified figurative attitude, almost as if it were a mural; in fact the painting shows both characteristics evocative of 18th century traditional landscapes as well as more modern aspects, endeavouring to capture impressions from a given natural environment rather than portraying analytical descriptions.

In 1910 the painting was shown—together with the *Giovane donna siracusana e Pescatori siciliani* [A young girl from Syracuse with Sicilian fishermen] – at the IX Venice Biennale. In 1918 the *Fontana d’Ercole* [Fountain of Hercules] is bought by the Galleria d’Arte Moderna di Palermo [Palermo Gallery of Modern Art GAM] during the III Mostra “Pro Patria Ars”, where it was being shown.





THE "CONCA D'ORO"

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**VIEW OF PALERMO FROM
MEZZOMONREALE**, 1890 circa
Michele Cortegiani

.....
Oil on canvas; 51 x 85.5 cm
Palermo, Fondazione Sicilia
.....

Mezzomonreale, the upper part of the city, built either side of the avenue that leads to the Norman centre of Monreale, is chosen in this picture by Michele Cortegiani (Naples 1857 – Tunis 1909) to represent Palermo, seen in the background next to the sea. In the foreground are the slopes of Monreale and the houses, either isolated or grouped in villages, scattered over the extensive Conca d'Oro. From a chromatic point of view, the green of the plain in the foreground, the white of the houses and the urban nucleus of Palermo give way to the intense azure of the sea and the clear sky. A pupil of Francesco Lojacono, Cortegiani in this painting shows that he has assimilated his lessons: a landscape seen through a vivid luminescence that reveals a luxuriant vegetation. Cortegiani further develops the concept of light in his paintings in the early years of the 20th century when he worked abroad, mainly in the city of Tunis.



(ph D'Aguanno/Civita Sicilia)



THE “CONCA D’ORO”

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OLIVES ON THE SLOPES OF MOUNT PELEGRINO, 1925 circa

Ettore De Maria Bergler

Oil on canvas; 35 x 25.5 cm

Palermo, Fondazione Sicilia

.....

In this small painting Ettore de Maria Bergler (Naples 1850 – Palermo 1938) depicts in the foreground the twisted trunk of an olive tree, one of those rare trees that manages to grow on the arid terrain of the slopes of Mount Pellegrino. The work is characterised by the intense luminance, which affects the brightness of the colours, as for example the very dark green of the leaves. There is, on the other hand, a certain contrast with the clear sky next to the reddish rock. De Maria Bergler uses a rapid, thick, brushstroke, almost as if he were drawing a preliminary sketch, showing by his use of colour a certain emotivity in front of the spectacle offered by nature. Although the work was painted in his later years, by the strength of the composition and the technique—the paint is often put on with a spatula and tends to be lumpy— De Maria manages to depict the real features of the surrounding nature though they appear bathed by a fine lyricism.





(ph D'Aguanno/Civita Sicilia)

**VIEW OF THE PORT OF PALERMO
(LA CALA), 1926**

Antonio Guarino

Oil on canvas; 89 x 98 cm.

Palermo, Collection of the Circolo artistico
‘Città di Palermo’

One of the most challenging paintings of Antonio Guarino (Sambuca di Sicilia 1882 - Rome 1969), painted late in life, the *Veduta* [View] was shown for the first time in 1927-28 in the II Mostra d’arte marinara” [II Exhibition of Marine Art] in Rome at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni and organised by the Lega navale italiana (catalogue, Rome, E. Pinci, 1927). In the catalogue of the painter’s works, reconstructed in the monograph of the year 2000 (Gaetano Bongiovanni, Rosario Amodeo, *Antonio Guarino pittore e incisore del primo Novecento*) [Antonio Guarino painter and engraver of the early 20th century], the landscape paintings and the *vedute* are rare, as Guarino prefers to paint figures—often dramatic—portraits and female nudes. Up until at least the end of the 1930’s, then from 1941—year in which *Stagno azzurro* [The blue pond] is dated, now in the collection of the Fondazione Sicilia in Palermo—he paints landscapes and urban environments heavily influenced by a personal code and therefore not necessarily very realistic. Instead the *veduta* can be compared to some of his works painted shortly after, all painted with large and concise brushstrokes, sometime around 1930, such as *Porticello no. 2*, *Porticello no. 3* and *Portonaccio*, all shown in the “Mostra del sindacato belle arti”, held in 1931 in Palermo, (cp. *Arte e stato. Le esposizioni sindacali in Sicilia 1928-1942*, [Art and the State, the Trade Union exhibitions in



Sicily 1928-1942] rist. anast. dei cataloghi, edited by Gioacchino Barbera, Messina, Di Nicolò, 2002-2003). The old port of Palermo is depicted from the point of view of



Castello a Mare, with two large barges in the foreground. Slightly above are the buildings of Castello San Pietro, before its destruction during the Second World War, and to the

left is Mount Cuccio. Here the *vedutista* abandons analytical description in favour of an extremely personal interpretation of the environment.

PALERMO AND ITS GREEN SPACES BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

Fabia Ferreri

The expression *Conca d'Oro*, which traditionally denotes the extensive green lands, surrounded by mountains, on which Palermo is built, is documented for the first time as the *aurea concha* in a text by Angelo Callimaco in the 15th century; but the area around the city was already in the 4th century BC known as “being full of gardens” and under the Arab rule was known by the name of *Genoard*, *Giannat al-ard*, paradise on earth or garden paradise. The name *Genoard* stuck and was given to one of the mounts in the province.

Even though they are the work of man, and therefore different from the land on which they are built, cities, and this applies to Palermo, are often founded surrounded by green spaces and these green spaces are then brought into the city itself, in the form of gardens and private courtyards.

In the choice of the siting of the city of Palermo, the physical configuration of a territory that had and still has excellent environmental characteristics played a decisive role, making it a city with an unmistakable aspect.

Sited on a luxuriant plain, traversed by four rivers (Oreto, Kemonia, Papireto, Passo di Rigano), protected by a crown of high mountains, Palermo gets its name—a city that is a port—from having arisen around a natural harbour bay, a safe haven in any type of wind or sea.

The two rivers Kemonia and Papireto, buried by the disastrous floods of the 16th and 17th century, surround the original nucleus of the ancient Phoenician-Punic city, but it cannot be excluded that at the time there were already some small settlements scattered around the territory that from the River Eleuterio (more southerly than the river Oreto, at the southeast boundary of Ficarazzi) reaches the slopes of Mount Pellegrino. The mediaeval city must have

had some very significant, tall buildings and a selection of lower buildings surrounding them, a composition that can still be seen in some minor city centres or those that have a particular orographical position, as in the case of Cefalù with its cathedral still visible in all its splendour even from a distance.

But Palermo, a great city shut up inside its city walls, built up, over time, the orchards and courtyards and also spread upwards, to the extent that it overshadowed the historically tall buildings, which by this time were closely surrounded by constructions, which hid the original, out-of-the-ordinary buildings. Only the tallest bell-towers, domes and towers are nowadays visible.

From the start of the 18th century the city walls, no longer useful as protection, were torn down. Some of the bastions were originally ceded for private use: in the bastion of Porta Carini the first nucleus of the Botanical Garden was created, but was later moved next to Villa Giulia.

Nowadays only the bastions in Piazza Indipendenza, in Corso Alberto Amedeo and the one near the Church dello Spasimo remain. The 18th century also saw the building of villas for the aristocracy outside the walls. Their construction in the countryside around the city leads to the creation of several new towns such

as Resuttana, Sampolo, San Lorenzo and Cardillo, as well as the expansion of centres further afield, outside the surrounding crown of mountains, such as Bagheria and Santa Flavia.

Up until the start of the 20th century, the city of Palermo, although it has continued to grow and occupy some of the neighbouring agricultural land, has maintained a living relationship with its green spaces. The rapport between what man constructed and the regenerative powers of nature has never been lost.

This relationship between a 'civilised' nature and man has its roots in the mists of time. Parks and gardens have expressed, over the ages, the concepts of the era in which they were created. In the Arab gardens, the aim was to reproduce Paradise with its four rivers. In the mediaeval garden '*the hortus*

conclusus' inside the monasteries grew spices and medicinal herbs, uniting in a single location everything that Nature could offer man that was either favourable or useful. In the Renaissance garden the flowerbeds formed geometric shapes with flowers and hedges, the latter pruned to create precise shapes, uniting the concrete vitality of Nature to the clean cut rigour of pure forms. In the private villas of the age of Baroque the tree-lined avenues led with great solemnity, to the main house, the image of wealth and prestige. In the modern city, however, the tree-lined avenue is the public meeting place, delimiting the 'esplanade'.

The 18th-19th century garden is filled with elements from times gone past and from far away places. There are archaeological remains and oriental pagodas, as well as elements full of symbolism such as grottoes and stairways.

Unknown Sicilian painter, detail of the 'View of Palermo from Santa Maria di Gesù'. Palermo, Fondazione Sicilia



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economical to cultivate this crop in America, it was replaced by vineyards, olive groves, almonds, orchards, figs, prickly pears, carobs and also citrus fruits. Palermo has always been famous for its gardens, but they have been attacked and drastically reduced by the city's disorderly (and in many ways also devastating) urban development after the Second World War, which has resulted in a totally uncontrolled building programme on a vast scale in the Conca d'Oro.

Over the last decades a new concept of collective awareness of the importance of green spaces as a public amenity and the idea of the restoration and reconstruction of the gardens in the city has been considered: something has been done already but for the most part much still remains to be done. It is important that what remains of the gardens of the villas of the nobility and the gardens in general that still exist inside the city must be cared for and enlarged. An example in this sense is the excellent restoration work being carried out on the area around Mareddolce, once inside a park, now in the area known as Brancaccio.

The city has developed above all to the north. Here the view of the sea is to some extent covered by Mount Pellegrino, with a particular appeal and beauty of its own, dividing the city of Palermo from the neighbouring seaside borough of Mondello. Up until the end of the 19th century this area was a swamp. Reclaimed, during the period of what is known as the Italianate *Stile Liberty* [art nouveau], it became a very pleasant summer resort. On the slopes of Mount Pellegrino are sited the towns of Acquisanta, Arenella and Vergine Maria. Saved from the disasters of modern urbanisation, Mount Pellegrino has at its

*Michele Cortegiani,
detail of the 'View
of Palermo from
Mezzomonreale'.
Palermo, Fondazione
Sicilia*

Characteristic of all the various eras of the gardens in the territory of Palermo has been the combination of profitable cultivation with an aesthetic role, the combination of business with pleasure, which—already remarked on by visitors such as Goethe—is more than ever applicable in the parks and the urban market gardens.

The countryside around Palermo has become famous, above all in more recent times, for its citrus fruits, to the extent that the name of the Conca d'Oro (considerably older) has been linked with the colour of the lemons. It has not, however, always been cultivated with citrus trees: the cultivation of citrus fruit was intensified in the 19th century, when it was extremely lucrative. Previously the cash crop had been *cannamele*, sugar cane. When, however, it was far more

feet the park of the Favorita, created at the beginning of the 19th century by Ferdinand IV of Bourbon, it is one of the largest urban parks in Europe and should be protected and safeguarded, but on its own, it is not sufficient to provide the city with the green spaces it requires. The park should once again surround the city and enter inside, as it once did.

Amongst the projects known as *Life* of the European Union for the sustainable development of the rural areas, one has been financed for the creation of the Agricultural Park of Palermo, for the protection and the enhancement of the suburban areas of Ciaculli and Croceverde Giardina. The park includes the borough, the villas, the homesteads, the towers, the terraces of drystone walling in the marginal areas around the mounts, which are of extreme interest both from the point of view of the landscape and of the environment, the irrigation systems of Persian origin and introduced into Sicily by the Arabs and present throughout the countryside as well as in the city itself. Inside the Agricultural Park of Palermo the insertion of a field for the confrontation of various species, a museum garden of the Conca d'Oro, a museum of the germplasm in order to preserve the biodiversity of the traditional local species and finally an agro-metereological station. Today, on the ancient Mureno estate, (which then became the Morello estate), on the part that has arrived intact to the present day, the Uditore Park has been created in Piazza Einstein, a civic property. The area belonged to the Regione Siciliana who wanted to create an Administrative Centre, grouping together all its offices spread around the city, but it changed

destination, with a variation of the city planning, as the result of a petition and a popular uprising. The Uditore Park has been given into the care of the Forestry Commission and is run by volunteers. It was opened on October 5th, 2012. Events connected to the various cultivars are held throughout the year as well as civic and cultural ones (there are educational and recreational workshops, a spice market and a handicraft market).

The Cassarà Park, covering some 255,000 sqmts, bordered by the *Università degli Studi* on one side and by Corso Pisani and Via Altofonte, was inaugurated on November 26th, 2011. Bought by the Regione Siciliana between 1954 and 1957 and administered by the Municipal Council, it is a part of the original 66 hectares realised in the 19th century by Louis Philippe d'Orléans. Inside there are, besides the Villa Forni, a lake, a rose arbour, various walkways and cycle tracks, a skating rink with seating, bowling lanes, a children's' playground and an open-air theatre.

The Park, ever since April 2015, is actually in the process of being cleaned up as it was used as an illegal dumpsite and is full of asbestos and other building materials. The recent realisation of a green space in the area, which has been created between the Foro Italico and the sea, as a result of all the rubble dumped there from the ruins of the last war, has enriched the city.

Although not originally included in the urban planning for the historical centre, which had intended to recreate the original 'esplanade', this green space has met with the favour of the Palermitans of all ages and constitutes one of the biggest attractions of the city centre for all the population.

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