

PALERMO
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TREASURE MAPS

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



Soprintendenza per i Beni culturali
e ambientali di Palermo

ARCHAEOLOGY

THE COASTAL SITES

edited by **Stefano Vassallo** and **Rosa Maria Cucco**

REGIONE SICILIANA
Assessorato dei Beni culturali
e dell'Identità siciliana



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“Investiamo nel vostro futuro”

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

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ARCHAEOLOGY

The coastal sites

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This volume of the *Treasure Maps*, dedicated to the archaeological sites along the coast of Palermo, offers an itinerary through some of the best-known archaeological settlements along the stretch of the Tyrrhenian coast that is within the province of Palermo. Only sites that are nowadays well known and consolidated archaeological realities are described, and many of these have areas open to the public as well as small museums. It should, however, be specified that along this 140kms of coastline, with its magnificent landscape interspersed with rocky reliefs sloping down to the sea, the sites of archaeological interest are far more numerous, some are yet to be discovered, others have been located, but field surveys and research are still in the initial phases. The human population has always been very active in this part of the coast due, most probably, to its position on the sea-route that connects the Strait of Messina and the Italian continent with the eastern Mediterranean, Sardinia and the northern Mediterranean. Of equal importance are the river valleys that create a wedge between the chains of mountains, thereby permitting rapid connections with the economic resources of a fertile inland, and consequently furthering the establishment of geographically well-positioned, permanent settlements. These advantageous conditions have, since Prehistoric times, favoured a human presence along the coast. Proof is provided by the quantity of grottoes inhabited since the Palaeolithic Age, which are often in inaccessible

locations and along the shoreline. Among these, the Addaura Grotto is of great artistic significance because of the extraordinary wall graffiti, depicting scenes of probable ritualistic significance in a “mature” linguistic style, and which are somehow universally understandable. The prehistoric village of Ustica is an important model of an agglomeration of huts defended by an imposing outer wall, and provides a unique example of the social and cultural context of a fortified settlement situated along the sea routes of the southern Tyrrhenian Sea at the end of the 2nd millennium BC. The large towns of Palermo, Soluntum, Himera, Termini Imerese and Cefalù testify to the presence of cities born at different moments, and which have strongly marked the landscape of these territories between the 8th and the 4th century BC. Some of them still exist today, having survived without interruption through Medieval and Modern times, but have played a key role in the history of Sicily. The Greek colony of Himera has been a physical and historical presence of extraordinary importance in Sicily; despite its short life, “only” 240 years, and its abandonment after the destruction in 409 BC, it was an important metropolis and played a major role in providing the population of northern and central Sicily with a set of cultural elements, influencing not only its language but also its urban, artistic, religious and economic spheres. These elements became the basis for the development of all the large and small communities in this area, even after the destruction of the metropolis.

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We hope that this booklet will help you explore the coastal roads of the province of Palermo. These marine landscapes, often extremely beautiful, have for thousands of years been the site of many human

settlements, that have, over time, created a wide variety of relationships between population and territory due to the many cultures that generated them.

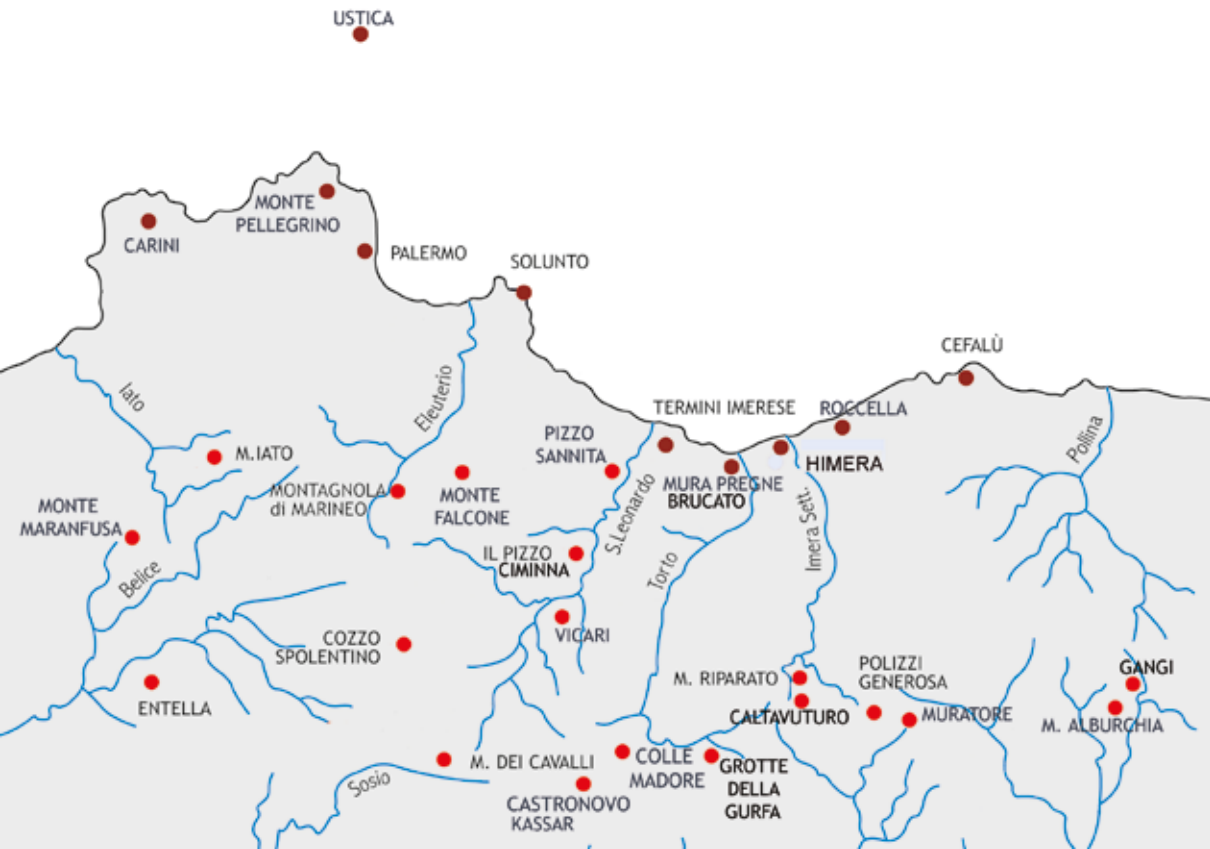
Stefano Vassallo

THE COASTAL SITES

The main archaeological sites along the northern coast of Sicily were facilitated by their location close to the ports used by ships sailing the sea lanes in the vicinity,

as well as by their proximity to the roads running parallel to the coast, consisting of tracks consolidated over the centuries.

1
*Province of Palermo.
The principal
archeological sites*



FROM CEPHALOEDIUM TO THERMAE HIMERAEAE

2

Cefalù. The Hellenic-Roman inhabited area (Amedeo Tullio)

CEFALÙ

Diodorus Siculo, who lived in the 1st century BC, is the source of the earliest evidence of the *phrourion* (a military outpost) in *Kephaloidion* (396 BC). Following the first Punic War (264-241 BC),

the centre became Roman and was reduced to the status of *civitas decumana* and took the name *Cephaloedium*. Its Greek place-name probably derives from KEPHA (stone) and is connected to the Rocca, intended as a promontory overlooking the city. The centre developed greatly between the Hellenistic





and Imperial Roman era, as it expanded around the harbour. The Hellenistic-Roman settlement, coinciding with the current historical centre, expanded along the lines of a regular urban layout, with orthogonal road axes. At the end of the 5th century BC the “megalithic wall” – a massive wall made with polygonal blocks – (**fig. 5**), was built, with four gates and a postern (i.e. a small entrance suitable only for people). The surrounding walls, reinforced with small towers and bastions, underwent several renovations in the following centuries. The best-preserved stretch is the one on the cliffs that runs parallel to the current Via Pierri. Portions of the urban road system, which have remained the same from the Hellenistic

period and the subsequent Roman Age, are preserved in the central courtyard of the former Convent of St. Catherine (the current Town Hall), in the gardens of the Mandralisca Museum, in the Corte delle Stelle neighbourhood and in the small northern apse of the Cathedral. The latter is the only road that is not paved but is made of cobblestones and is the oldest (4th century BC), while the remaining roads are from the Augustan Age. The most important remains of the settlement, relating to at least three houses inhabited from the 3rd to the 1st century BC, are visible under the Osterio Magno. The explored part of the Greek-Roman necropolis is located to the southwest, around Via Roma. There is a

3
*Cefalù. Aerial view of
the Rocca*

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*Cefalù. Hellenic-Roman
necropolis in the area
around ex-Villa Miceli.
Tomb markers (Amedeo
Tullio photo)*





lot of factual evidence on incineration rites and the *epitymbia*—indicators of sepulchres located underneath—made of stone steps, are extraordinary (**fig. 4**). Some of the funeral clothes found in the tombs are on show in the Himera Antiquarium. The practice of interment is also documented in the Hellenistic and Imperial Age.

By the second half of the 5th century AD, the town around the port had become less important but the continuity of life in the Byzantine Age—6th century AD—is documented by the mosaic floor discovered in the Cathedral, probably belonging to a small Christian Basilica, reproducing motifs of plants, and animals (with allegorical

5
*Cefalù, Corso Ruggero.
 Stretch of megalithic
 wall*

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significance) as well as geometric motifs. The Rocca was inhabited even in Pre-historic times, as attested by two caves on the eastern side known as that of the doves (“delle colombe”) and that of the mares (“delle giumente”), and they probably served as a shelter and as a place for prayer. The system of cisterns that constitutes the fulcrum of the so-called “Temple of Diana” can be dated around the 9th century BC. This construction,

of polygonal blocks, similar to that of the surrounding walls, was probably built at the end of the 5th century BC. It is a kind of large enclosure and its connection with the cistern suggests that it could have been some kind of Sanctuary of Holy Water that was used up until Roman times. The Temple of Diana is the best-known architectural structure in the Rocca—as attested by Jean Houel towards the end of the 18th century—and building

6

Cefalù. Panorama of the historical centre





it on the site of a medieval church (11th-12th century), perhaps dedicated to St. Venera, would appear to testify to the continuity of its cultural destination.

In Medieval times the Rocca assumed a preeminent role, and was surrounded by crenellated walls and occupied by the settlement. This included a castle, protected by two or three quadrangular towers, which, in relation to the current

layout can be dated to Frederick II—13th century—while the structure dates back to the Byzantine era. Rocca kept its fortress role at least until the 16th century.

The coastal zone would once more be inhabited during the reign of Roger II and the famous Cathedral would become its fulcrum.

7
Cefalù, Rocca. Temple of Diana (water painting by Jean Houel end 18th century)

R.M.C.

THE MANDRALISCA MUSEUM

.....

The Museum, desired by the Baron Henry Pirajno of Mandralisca and located within his Palazzo, is mainly composed of objects from the various collections of the nobleman himself. The art gallery boasts, besides the famous *Portrait of an Unknown Man* by Antonello da Messina, a beautiful painting of St. John the Baptist attributed to Giovanni Antonio Sogliani. Together with the rich malacological collection, the archaeological collection is also of great

importance consisting mainly of items from the Baron's estates in Lipari, as he had personally led excavations in the district known as contrada Diana. Among the Italiot and Sikelot figured vases there is a proto-Sikeliot "bell-shaped krater" depicting "*The Tunafish Seller*" (380-370 BC). Amongst the pottery from Attica there is a "volute krater", attributed to the "Painter of the Centauromachia of Florence" (480-470 BC) depicting a popular traditional scene of the "Elopement of Paris and Helen", that differs from the better known



8
*Cefalù, Mandralisca
Museum. Bell krater
from Lipari with the
Tunafish Seller*



“Helen’s Abduction by Paris”. Together with some terracotta figures, including two theatre masks of the 1st half of the 3rd century BC, *Katakomos ochrà* – (feminine character, pale with flowing hair)—and *Oúle*—(feminine character, curly haired), there is a rich numismatic collection with

coins from various mints. The Museum is also home to a library that together with the Mandralisca books, also houses recent acquisitions.

9
Cefalù, Mandralisca Museum. Late Hellenistic mosaic with Eros riding a swan, from Via Veterani

R.M.C.

THE ROCCELLA CASTLE

On a rocky ridge running north-south, culminating sheer above the sea, in the plain of Roccella, between Buonfornello and Capo Plaia are the ruins of the medieval Roccella Castle, bound to the east by the mouth of the omonimous river. To the extreme south of the ridge stands a tower that is a beautiful example of 14th century architecture, while all around it, to the south and west, the ruins of the Baglio (the keep) are also of medieval origin. An aqueduct, of uncertain date, that carried

water from the river to the mill, joins the Castle complex from the south (fig. 11). The Castle, of Norman origin, was a point of reference for the hinterland: it is, in fact, visible from Gratteri and Monte d'Oro in Collesano. The parallelepiped tower is the heart of the complex (fig. 12) consisting of three floors and a terrace; bordered on the the south and east by a ramp, whose current state is attributable to the restoration undertaken by the Ventimiglia family shortly after 1385 when the Castle passed to the Counts of Geraci and Lords of Castelbuono. From an



architectural point of view there are ribbed groin vaults, wooden corbels and a room with a fireplace on the third floor. Various rooms were annexed to the tower, built on the rocky cliff top, but all fell into rack and ruin during the 20th century (**fig. 13**). In the Middle Ages, the complex was part of the Diocese of Cefalù. In Norman times, in the hamlet, cited by al-Idrisi around 1154, stood the Church of San Giovanni, already attested by Diploma in 1098. In 1218 Bishop Arduino of Cefalù allowed another church to be established and dedicated it to the Virgin Mary. It is difficult to be certain

about the dates of this other church. Since the Middle Ages the economic activity of the Castle has been bolstered by the presence of mills that date back to Norman times – around 1169. It seems that milling was particularly important during the busiest period of the port of Roccella, known as “Caricatore” (a dock), that is, from 1385, the year in which the Castle passed into the hands of the Ventimiglia family.

From the Middle Ages, at least until the 15th century, the “Caricatori” close to Termini Imerese, including that of



11
Roccella. The arches of the Aqueduct (right)

12

*Rocella, The Tower.
Southern perspective*





13
Roccella. Rocky promontory with rooms from the Castle of Roccella

Roccella, exported barley, salted meat, skins and cheese in addition to large amounts of grain. The operations of the “Caricatore” complex of Roccella lasted through to the beginning of the 20th century. The site of Roccella was also home to a press for the processing of sugar cane, which lasted from the 15th to the 17th

century. The tower, now owned by the city, was recently restored and is open to the public.

R.M.C.

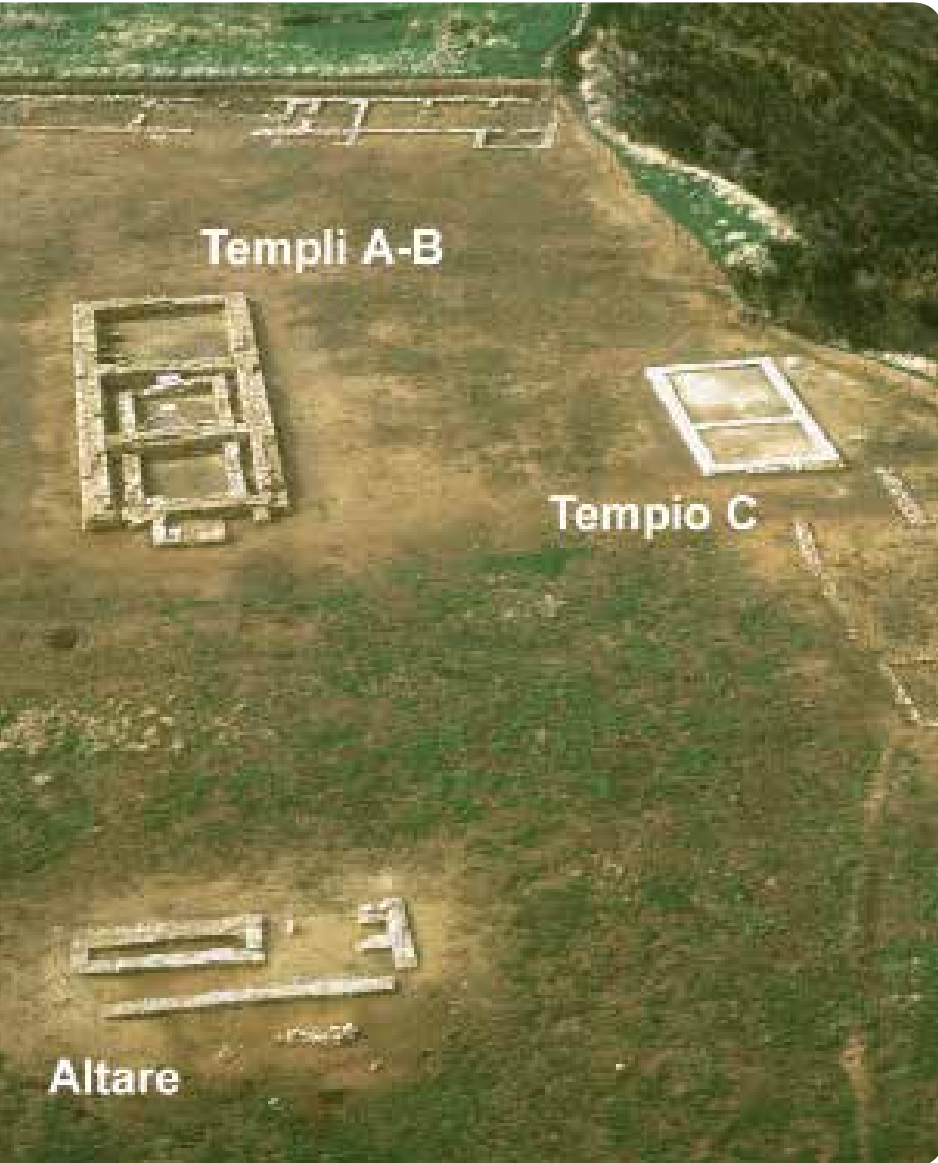
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HIMERA

Himera is located in an important strategic position, in the centre of a wide gulf crowned by a series of quite high peaks, including the Madonie to the east and Mount San Calogero to the west. According to the testimony of Diodorus in 648 BC, the colony was founded by three “Oikistai” (founders) from “Zankle” (Messina), who built it with the aid of the so-called Myletidai, exiles from Syracuse. The “*polis*” (Greek city-state) has always been famous for the well-known battle of 480 BC, in which a coalition of Syracusians, Agrigentians and Himeraians defeated the Punic army, according to Herodotus, on the same day the Hellenic fleet defeated the Persians in the waters off the Island of Salamina. In 409 BC, however, the Carthaginians, during military operations that overran most of Sicily, in turn defeated the colony and razed it to the ground; the site of the *polis* was abandoned and the city was rebuilt shortly after in what is now Termini Imerese. The settlement covered the plain of the same name and its eastern slopes—explored by the Institute of Archaeology of the University of Palermo in agreement with the “Soprintendenza” (local Italian Supervising Authority for Archeological Heritage)—as well as the vast area west of the Fiume Grande, where studies carried out by the Soprintendenza have clarified the basic elements of the road system; east of the Himera river a large suburban area also has been partly explored, built according to plan. The Himeraiian city plan for the Plain of Himera proposed houses oriented initially





14
*Himera, Upper City.
Sanctuary of Athena*

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like the temples of the sacred area—along lines running northeast to southwest— (fig. 14); later, the city plan was renewed, with blocks built along the east-west axis, perpendicular to a single north-south road that ran through the plain. On the eastern slope, on a stepped road, there are two blocks of dwellings identical in shape to the one on the Plain of Himera. The houses were built on terraces supported by containment walls made from river pebbles. However, in the Lower town, on the plain below the plateau where the Upper town was located, the orientation of the blocks of dwellings runs north-south with 3 or 4 roads running east-west, though these have not yet been uncovered. In the Upper town there is a sacred area dedicated to Athena; the sanctuary occupied the northeast corner of the Plain of Himera, dominating the Lower town (fig. 14). Within the sacred enclosure there were three temples, of which the oldest had a rich votive deposit.

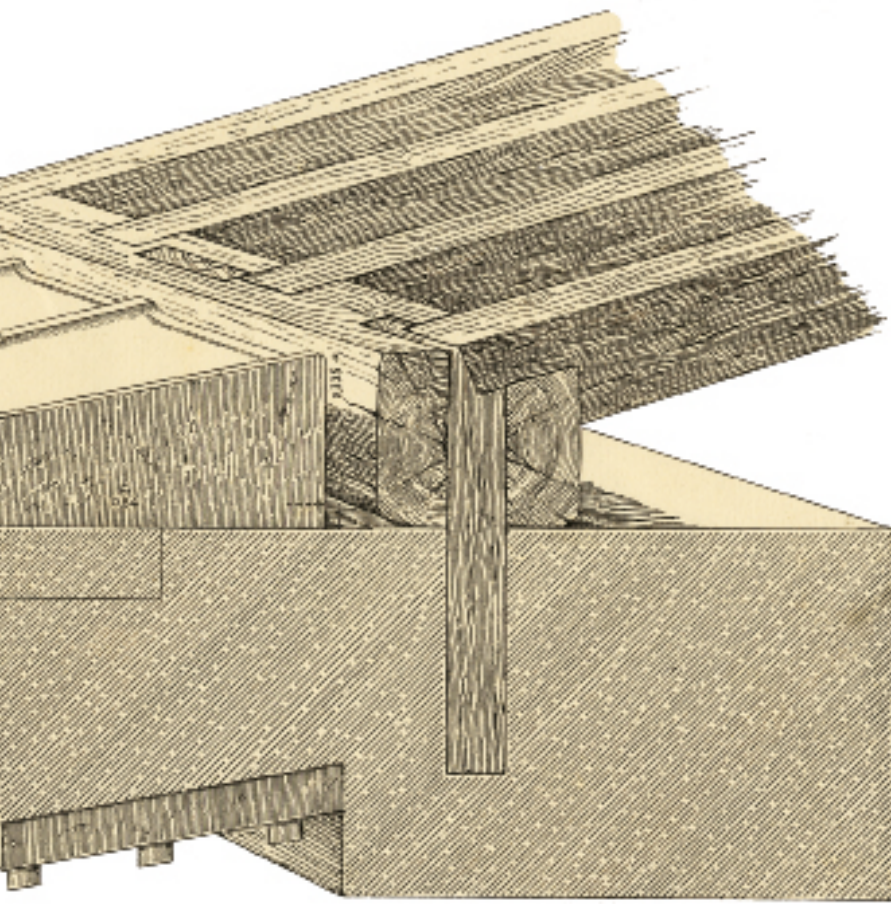
The so-called “Tempio della Vittoria” (Temple of Victory or Nike), the most important Himerian monument, is also located in the Lower town, which was almost certainly surrounded by a large sanctuary, whose precise boundaries are still unknown. Built around 480 BC to celebrate the victory over the Carthaginians, it was decorated, amongst other things, with impressive marble lion protomes on the guttering.

The only known remains of the fortifications of the Upper town are south of the “*polis*” together with the remains of a crude brick wall positioned on the northern boundary of the Plain of Himera,



with the blocks that probably were part of the foundations of a tower in the northeast corner of the city.

Remains of the walls of the Lower town were recently found in several places in the Buonfornello plain: in particular, excavations uncovered some parts of the northern wall, a small part of the western area and the northwest corner of the fortification, which included an important corner tower.



15
*Himera, Temple of
 Victory. Hypothetical
 reconstruction of the
 roof (R. Carta)*

The necropolii were located outside, along the access roads to the city; the eastern ones—where more than 2000 tombs have been explored—extend along the coast, beyond the river Imera. The southern one is located in the Scacciapidocchi area along the road that branches off from the city and is connected to the hinterland; the few graves explored had already been violated. Finally in the west, a necropolis was found located on the slopes of the Piano del Tamburino;

furthermore, during work on the railways, a vast burial-ground was discovered, which extends along the beach and in which nearly 10,000 sepulchres were found (fig. 17). In the three necropolii the internment rite of burial was predominantly used, while cremation was less common; also numerous, were infant burials in terracotta containers (*enchytrismoï*).

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Antiquarium of Himera. Gold foil depicting the Gorgon kneeling, from the votive offerings of the Temple A. Last quarter of the 7th–beginning of the 6th century BC

THE ANTIQUARIUM OF HIMERA

The Antiquarium hosts a selection of the most important finds from the archeological sites in the city; from the “sacred areas”, one of the lion protomes of the gutter that decorated the Temple of Victory is on show, together with part of the votive offerings in the cell of Temple A, including a gold foil depicting the Gorgon in repoussage. In the section devoted to the “inhabited area” there are some small domestic altars, numerous fragments of large earthenware basins with a high base and terracotta decorated with figures. Among the figured ceramics, there is a bell krater attributed to the circle of the



Niobid painter and vessels attributable to the production of the so-called Painter of Himera. From the “necropolis area” there is a rich selection of transport amphorae of varied origin, numerous *pithoi* (large container-like jars), some of local production, and a choice of objects accompanying the dead.

17

Himera. Western necropolis under excavation

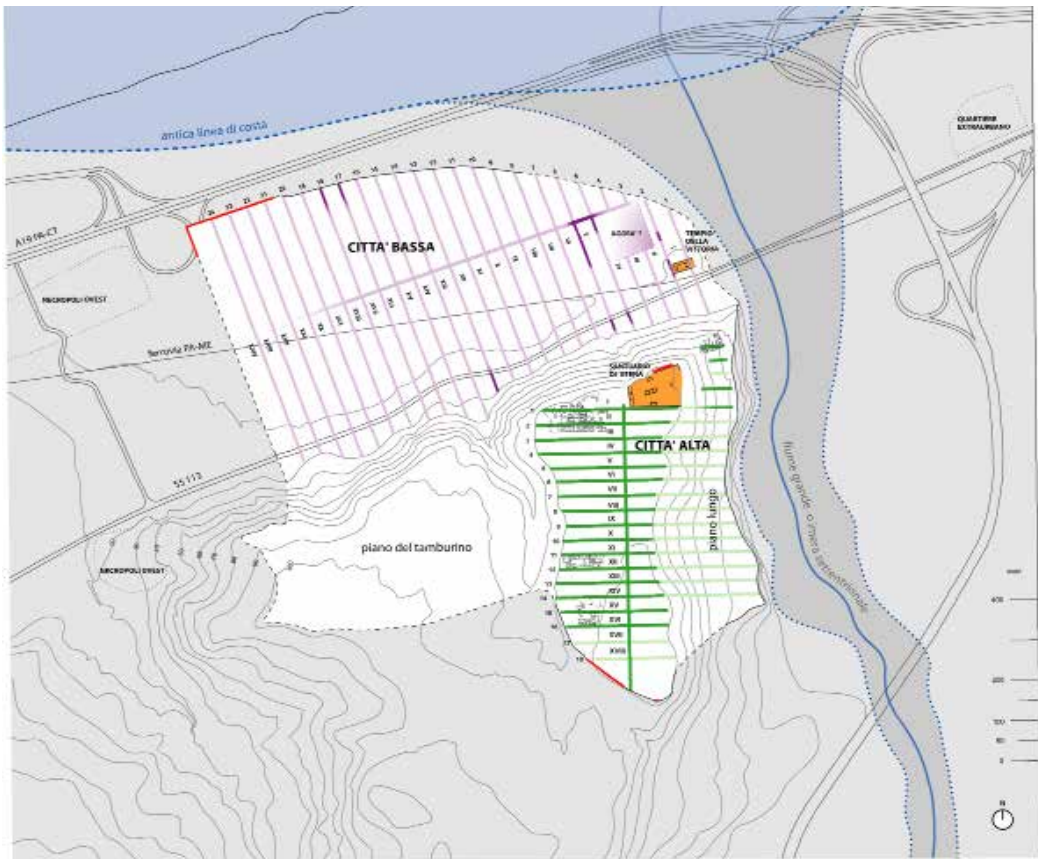


The exhibition also includes some showcases dedicated to the sites bordering the *polis*, such as Terravecchia di Cuti, an indigenous settlement in which clay fragments pertaining to large sized cult statues were found; a fine gold cup and some grave goods probably come from Mount Riparato in Caltavuturo. The exhibition also hosts some finds from

Mura Pregne; moreover, some displays are dedicated to the Hellenistic-Roman necropolis in Cefalù. The exhibition ends with a polychrome Roman mosaic from the Settefrati area, where there was a *villa maritima* (Mansion) datable between the 3rd and 4th century AD.

18
Himera. Outline of the Upper City and a hypothesis of the possible lay-out of the Lower City

M.C.



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19

*Termini Imerese,
Gallery of the Baths,
(water painting by
Jean Houel end 18th
century)*

20

*Termini Imerese,
Cornelian aqueduct.
Starting tank of the
Barratina siphon,
(water painting by
Jean Houel end 18th
century)*

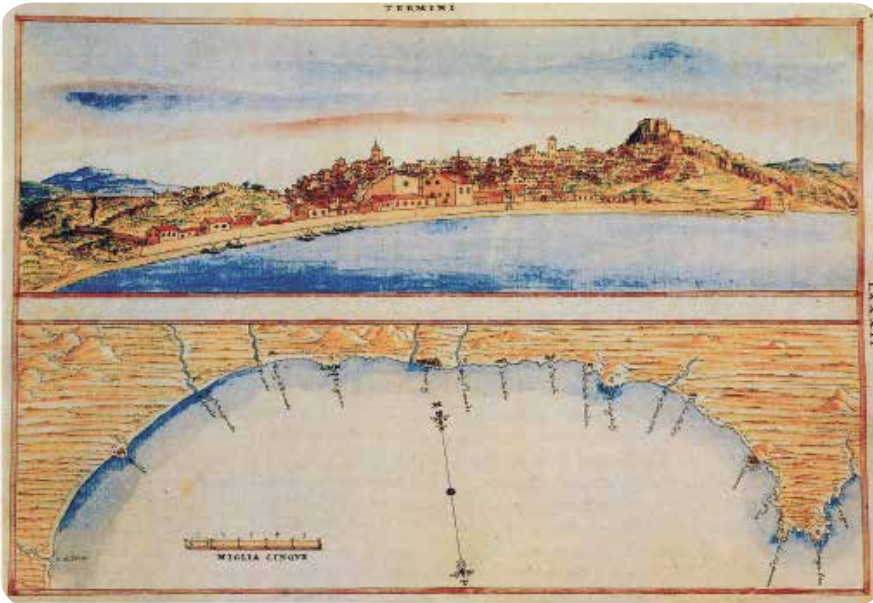
TERMINI IMERESE

Termini Imerese (formerly *Thermai Himerai* and *Thermae Himeraeae*) stands on a low promontory west of the settlement of ancient Himera; the area, inhabited since ancient times (fig. 22), is home to a source of warm water that flows near the coast and that still feeds the city Baths. These places were the *thermà loutrà*, cited in all the writings of the time, linked to the cult of the Nymphs and the myth of Heracles. According to tradition, the Greek hero was refreshed from his labours by the Nymphs, who caused the hot springs to gush forth. Legend creates a close relationship between the source of the warm waters and the Chalcis city of Himera, founded in 648 BC near where the myth is supposed to have taken place; in fact, the story of the warm waters as well as the mythological



episode survives in various iconographic forms, such as the Himera Tetra dramas, coins minted in the mid 5th century BC, in which it is possible to discern the figure of the nymph Himera near a monumental fountain. The image was considered, according to a variety of studies, the representation of the spring of thermal water that was found near the city. More recently, the link between Heracles and nymphs can be identified from the bronze coins of the city of *Thermai*, in which three nymphs are depicted.

The city was rebuilt in 406 BC after its violent end and the abandonment of Himera, that had resulted in a gap in the chain of settlements along the Tyrrhenian



21
Termini Imerese.
View from the sea
(drawing of Tiburzio
Spannocchi, 1578)

coast of Sicily. According to Diodorus the foundation of Terme occurred with the support of Libyan settlers, but Cicero argues that it was Himeraian survivors of the siege that repopulated it. The two sources can probably be linked; initially the *Thermai* residents were perhaps Carthaginian citizens and small groups arriving from Africa, joined later by Himeraian survivors. In fact, when Dionysius of Syracuse attacked the Punic territories during the early 4th century BC, he enlisted the aid of the pro-Hellenic inhabitants of Termini. The city was also the birthplace of Agathocles – son of an exile from Reggio and future tyrant of Syracuse – who, by the end of the 4th

century BC will have made *Thermai* one of the key points of his fight against Carthage. The exact date of the foundation of the city has recently been given an archaeological confirmation thanks to the discovery of some residual fragments that prove that the present day urban area was already inhabited at the end of the 5th century BC. In 260 BC, during the first Punic war, the Roman army suffered a defeat near Terme, but shortly after the civil wars, conquered; later, during the civil wars the city supported first Marius, then—when Pompey in 81 BC was preparing a harsh punishment—Stenius, an important pro-Marius citizen averted the violent action against Terme and cooperated with

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*Termini Imerese.
The Castle shelter, in
use since the Upper
Paleolithic Age*



23

*Termini Imerese.
Remains of the Roman
Amphitheatre*



Pompey. Cicero described the city as a rich centre with large public buildings and beautiful monuments, that attracted Verres' greed. Under the reign of Augustus the population was increased by the number of soldiers in a legion and the city was elevated to colonial status. The study of *Thermae* antiquities have a long tradition, but research has become more intense in recent decades, thanks to the work of the Institute of Archaeology of the University of Palermo, which operates under an agreement with the "Soprintendenza dei Beni Culturali".

The centre in ancient times must have been fortified and the walls probably followed the layout that was later replicated by the medieval curtain, demolished by the Angevins in 1338.

At the end of the 19th century the remains of a porch, facing, probably, the main body of the built up area, were discovered in the *Agorà* (today's Piazza Duomo). Evidence of the fact that this same area was transformed into a forum in the age of Augustus, is to be found in the remains of monumental

buildings near the Cathedral and which, improperly, were considered at the time, to be Stenius' house. In the Imperial Age, in the city, major public works were realised: the amphitheatre (**fig. 23**), one of three in Sicily (besides those of Syracuse and Catania); the public baths—fed by a hot



24
Termini Imerese.
Aerial view

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25

*Termini Imerese,
Contrada Figurella.
Span of the aqueduct*

water spring—partly uncovered at the end of the 19th century, when architectural remains, fragments of mosaic flooring and walls encrusted with marble were brought to light and the findings confirmed by a recent archaeological assay carried out inside the building. And last but not least the aqueduct, that still has some pillars and arches standing; whilst in the Barratina area, there are the monumental remains of a castle with a hexagonal structure over 15mts tall and technically very advanced and lastly the double arched bridge in the district called Contrada Figurella (**fig. 25**). In the Civic Museum there are numerous finds unearthed in the city and surrounding territory; among these, some leonine

protomes from the gutter of the “Temple of Victory” in Himera and figurative Attic vases found in the necropolis of the *polis*; the Museum also houses many Latin inscriptions, some Roman imperial portraits, togated statues found in the city and some show-cases with examples from the Hellenistic-Roman age from the necropolis of Terme.

M.C.



FROM SOLUNTUM TO CARINI

SOLUNTUM

Soluntum can be found to the east of Palermo, near Santa Flavia. It is one of the centres—together with Palermo and Mozia—to which the Phoenicians retired on the arrival of the Greeks.

The oldest settlement has been found on the promontory of Solanto, on the San Cristoforo plain, easily identifiable at the far end by the soaring castle built in Norman times. The area occupied is modelled on the Phoenician settlement, which, as described by Thucydides, had a preference for the promontories and the islands facing the coast. The presence,

moreover, of small streams in the plain, permitted access to the inland and facilitated contact with the indigenous centres of the Eleuterio Valley, thereby fulfilling the commercial vocation of the Phoenician centres. Both the Greek and Punic names of the settlement are known: Soluntum – “*kfr*” (village). The necropolis extended to the northwest of the inhabited area. A section, located on the border of what is today the town of Santa Flavia, can be visited upon request: the graves are mostly subterranean hypogean chambers accessed via a stepped *dromos* (corridor) excavated in banks of calcanerite. The archeological site open to the public is that



26
Antiquarium of Soluntum. "Arula Thymaterion". Portable altar from the late Hellenic era

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The coastal sites

of the Hellenistic-Roman settlement on Mount Catalfano, where Soluntum was rebuilt after the destruction of the primitive coastal centre operated by Dionisius of Syracuse in early 4th century BC.

The city lies on the suitably terraced southeast slope. The road system consists of three main axes (*plateiai*) running north-south, intersected perpendicularly by eight streets (*stenopoi*) running east-west; the intersection of roads determines rectangular settlements (*insulae*), divided lengthwise by channels for the collection of rainwater (*ambitus*) that supplied public and private cisterns. The access path up to the plateau is crossed by the so-called “Via dell’Agorà” that leads nowhere but was the main *plateia*, for the last part built of bricks, at the expenses of a private citizen named *Antallos Ornichas*, as recorded on an epigraph inserted in the roadbed. However the *stenopoi* (streets), are indicated by ramps of stairs made of large slabs of sandstone, which were used to overcome the considerable changes in the levels of the hillside. Along the “Via dell’Agorà”, there are the houses belonging to the upper classes built with several stories: along the way there are shops (*tabernae*), consisting of a single room with a mezzanine (*pergula*), desumed by the presence of a masonry staircase, while above there is the living area of the house with a separate entrance from the side streets.

These houses are built around a courtyard, often a peristyle, with colonnades on two levels divided into different styles. The rooms are characterised by their architectural elements and by the decoration of the floors and walls. The artisans and working class



homes are more modest and are located on the outskirts of the city; the rooms are arranged asymmetrically around a courtyard without colonnades and are simultaneously both dwellings and workshops. At the end of the “Via dell’Agorà”, the municipal buildings are to be found further out, preceded by a sacred building with three bethel altars with vertical steles which in the



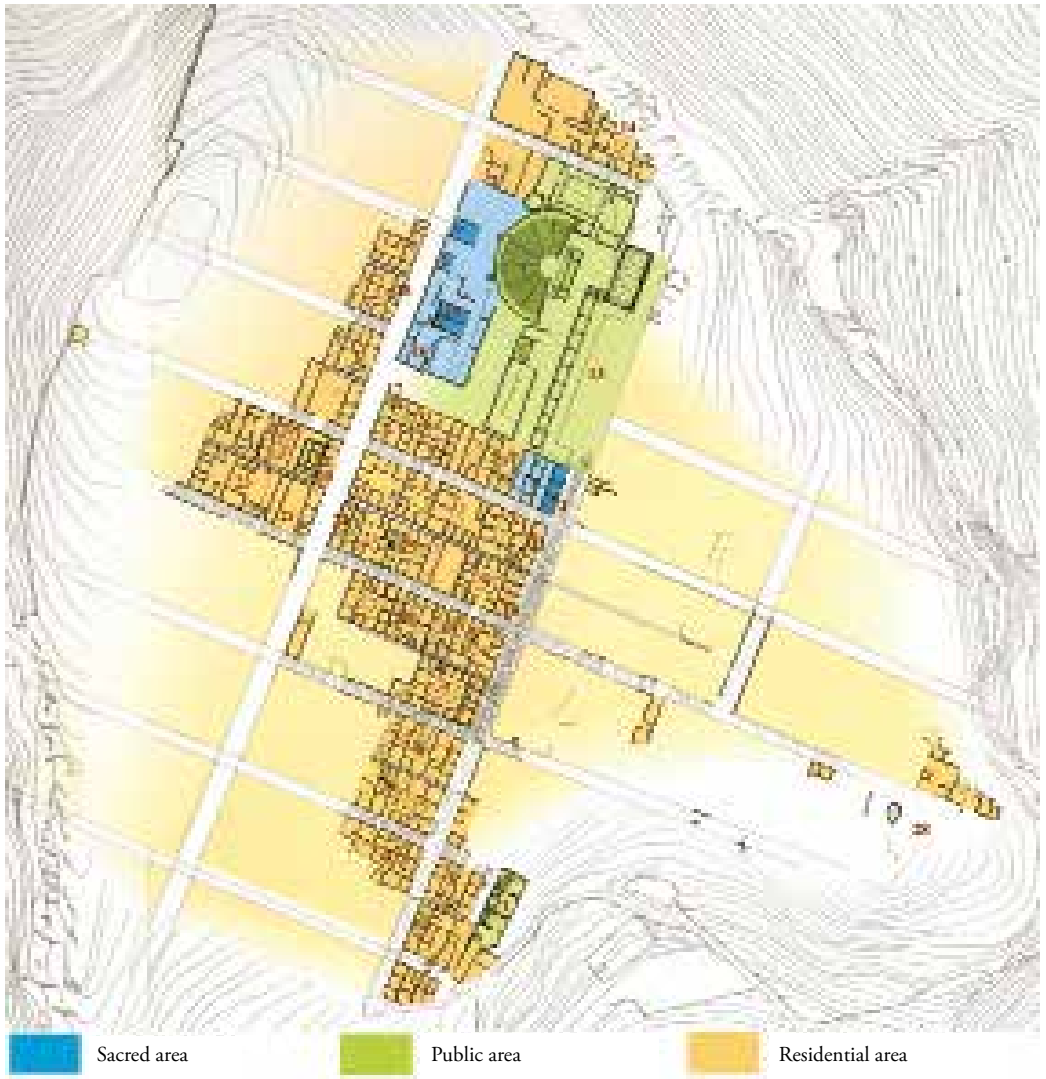
27
*Antiquarium of
 Soluntum-Casa Leda.
 Mosaic depicting the
 Armillary Sphere*

Punic religion aniconically represents the Deity.

The monumental Piazza dell' *Agorà* is closed in on three sides by a portico; to the northeast there is a large public cistern, while further up are the municipal buildings: the theatre, the *bouleuterion* (public meeting place) and the gymnasium, and, on a terrace above, a large sacred area

comprising several sanctuaries.

The dedication of the *Res Publica Soluntinorum* to *Fulvia Plautilla*, the wife of Caracallus, dated between 202 and 205 AD, marks the traditional chronological death of the city, abandoned by its inhabitants and never rebuilt.



ANTIQUARIUM OF SOLUNTUM

The Antiquarium is attached to the archeological state property area and is divided into two complexes. The entrance pavilion contains architectural and decorative elements of houses of Soluntum from the Hellenistic-Roman period. Of note are the examples of the capitals documenting the variety of designs that decorated the peristyles of the houses, as well as the mosaic *emblem*, which came from the House of Leda, with illustrations of the armillary sphere (astronomical instrument representing the orbits of the planets and the Sun around the Earth by armilla or rings), which is a unique example and of great artistic value (fig. 27). The second pavilion displays a selection of the ceramic material that documents life in Soluntum from the Archaean period to the Hellenistic-Roman period. The showcases display pieces from the oldest repertoire of Phoenician pottery, dating between the late 7th and the early 6th century BC, to indigenous fragments and imported ceramic pottery from Greece, from the colonies and from Etruria. This documents the commercial relations of the *emporion* (merchant-settlement) of archaic Soluntum as early as the late 7th century BC, right up to the black-glazed pottery with overpainted polychrome decorations, and the “Terra Sigillata Italica” and “Terra Sigillata Africana” of the Hellenistic-Roman city. Two show-cases display some of the most significant grave goods, which include traditional Greek vases, ceramic items and objects typically Phoenician-



29
Antiquarium of Soluntum. Votive Stele with horseman from the 2nd-1st century BC



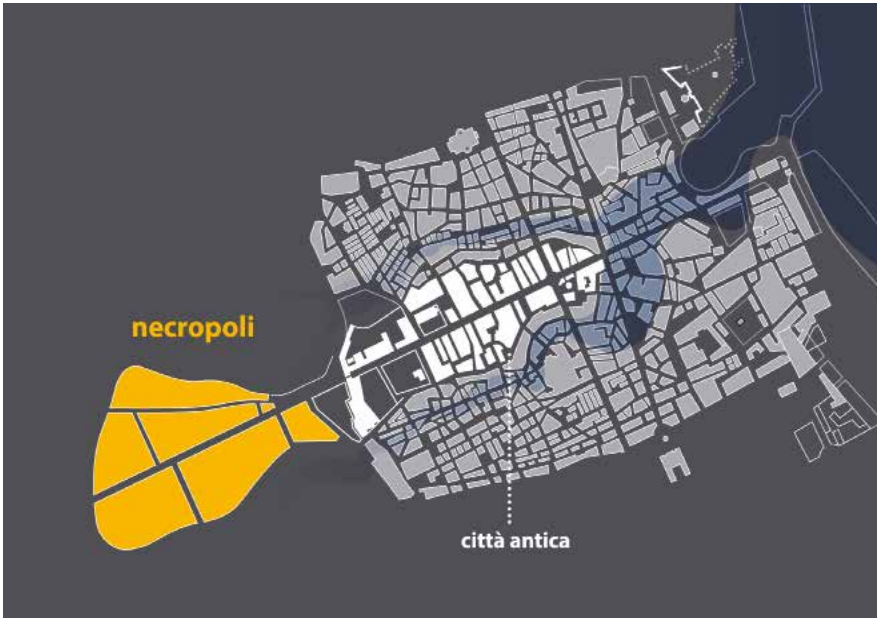
30
Soluntum. Aerial view

Punic, such as the *askos* in the shape of a donkey, small amulets and pieces of necklaces (*vagues*) in *faïence* (coloured glass paste).

Here, in addition to substantial documentation about daily life in the city of Soluntum, there are also fragments of plaster from the “Casa delle Maschere” or House of Masks, whose original bright colours are still intact, two portable altars of terracotta from the “Casa delle Ghirlande” or House of Wreaths (*arule*

thymiateria) with applied Punic motifs and a group of votive stele (**fig. 26 and 29**). A small room is reserved for objects found underwater, such as anchors and commercial amphorae. These testify to the uninterrupted occupation of the coastal area on which Soluntum was built, from the archaic period up until Roman times. Probably the characteristic portable stove (*foculus*) with a lead border is from this period.

L.D.L.



31

*Palermo, plan.
Evidenced the areas of
the ancient city and
the necropolis*

PALERMO

** The asterisk indicates places which can be visited*

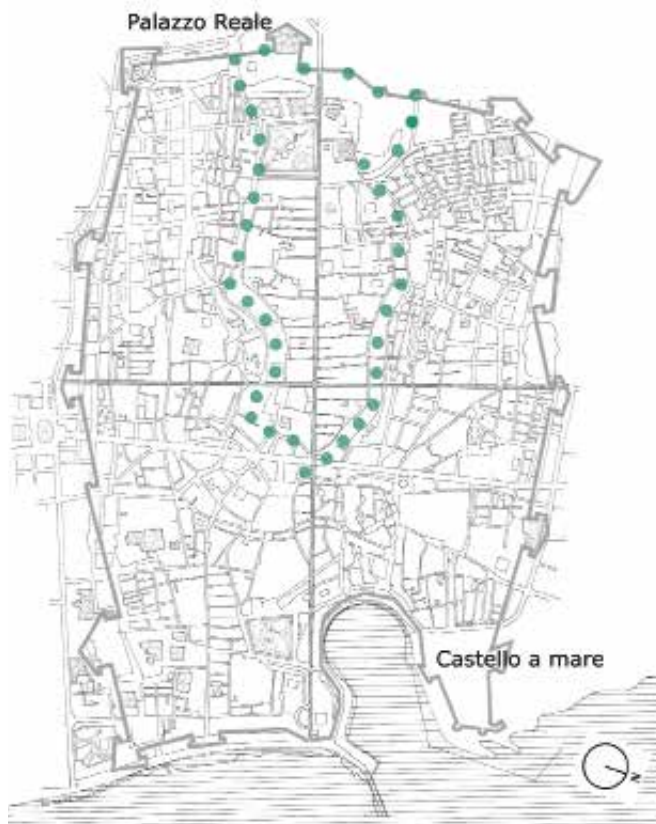
Panormos

Founded by the Phoenicians in the 7th century BC, the city occupied an elongated promontory, easily defensible and in a good position on the Tyrrhenian coast, bordered to the north and south by the Papireto and Kemonia rivers.

The Necropolis

The oldest traces of the settlement were found in the **Punic necropolis***, which was in use from the 7th to the 3rd century BC and it developed west of the city, in an area between the current Piazza Indipendenza and the current Corso Pisani, Via Danisinni

and Via Cuba, along the axis of Corso Calatafimi (**fig. 31**). Today, this area is intensely urbanised and in Norman times it was part of the vast and lush regal park called the “Genoard”, a large hunting reserve that stretched from the Royal Palace up to Altofonte and Monreale. It is possible to visit a representative strip of the necropolis in the Tuköry barracks (caserma) in Corso Calatafimi (**speak to the caretakers of “The Cuba” in Corso Calatafimi no. 100**). The necropolis area was rationally organised: the graves were all distributed along an east-northeast axis and a service road was also found. The oldest burials were by cremation, within pits dug in the ground, or by burial in chambers excavated in the rock. Later, as the rite of inhumation prevailed,



32
Palermo. Plan of the ancient city (area circled in green) with the layout of the medieval and modern walls

the use of underground tombs became widespread, but there are also burials in simple earthen graves or wooden sarcophagi. The practice of placing children within large transport amphorae (*enchytrismoï*) is also documented. In the Hellenistic period, the ritualistic collection of ashes in an urn was frequently practiced. With regard to the burial vaults, definitely the favoured method of burial in the Punic necropolis of Palermo, they consisted of a hypogean (underground) cell usually

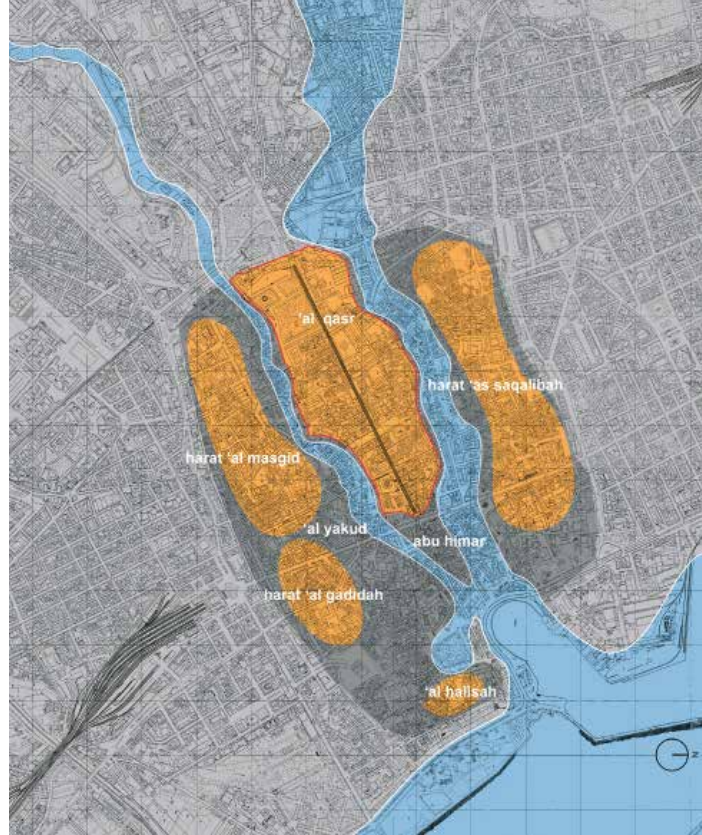
rectangular in shape, carved out of the rock, providing a northeast entrance, which is accessed through a steep corridor with staggered steps. The entrance is usually sealed by one or more slabs of calcarenite. The rich grave goods – ceramics, jewelry, amulets – which accompanied the burials testifies to a relatively elevated level of economic wealth, and above all an interesting phenomena of cultural interaction between the people of Punic and Greek origin. One finds, in addition to the traditional Phoenician-Punic typical products, imports directly from Greece or from western colonies, concentrated especially from the middle of the 6th and 5th century BC; for the 4th and 3rd centuries BC the most numerous finds relate to the vases from factories in western Sicily.

The settlements in the Punic and Roman era

The ancient city, according to sources divided into *paleapolis* and *neapolis*, was surrounded by mighty fortified walls, nowadays incorporated in the medieval palazzi in the historical center and still partially visible: in the **Sale Duca di Montalto in the Palazzo Reale***, in the Monastery of St. Chiara on the Via Rua Formaggi, in **Via degli Schioppettieri*** in the Convent of Santa Caterina, in **Via Candelai***. The walls, operative up until the Arab era, began to lose their defensive function only in the Norman age, when the city, which by then extended well beyond the original nucleus from the Punic and Roman era, was enclosed by a new and larger city wall, of which some parts have been preserved: (**Via Mura di Montalto all'Albergheria***).

Later, the 16th century walls were mounted on top of the defensive Norman base, making it more solid and monumental (fig. 32). There are few surviving traces relating to this archaic phase of the city; the adoption of an orthogonal urban layout, existing from the 4th century BC, is documented by the remains of some roads and buildings found in **Piazza della Vittoria***, in the courtyard of the **Palazzo Arcivescovile***, in **Piazza Sett'Angeli***, in Via Montevergini, in **Via Candelai***. This regular urban scheme was in use for a long time and is still recognisable in the current development of secondary roads that branch off from the Cassaro axis (Corso Vittorio Emanuele).

Particularly significant is the evidence relating to the Roman period and the mosaic floors in the luxurious residences found in **Piazza della Vittoria (Roman houses of Villa Bonanno)*** and in **Piazza Sett'Angeli***, bear witness to this. Some of these pieces



are now on display at the Archaeological Regional Museum "A. Salinas". Remains of earthenware floors have also been identified in **Palazzo Sclafani*** (today the Military Barracks Rosolino Pilo). It is likely that

33
Palermo. Plan of the city. Evidenced the arab quarters



34
Palermo. View of the city from the southeast (watercolour)

35

Palermo, Tuköry barracks. Punic necropolis, inside a burial vault



the Roman Forum was located in the Cathedral area; there are many clues that provide evidence of the functions of the civil and religious buildings. These were the most important places in the city and were positioned at the top of the Cassaro. Little is known about the Late Antiquity and the Byzantine Ages: it seems that the luxury homes in Piazza Vittoria were abandoned to the extent that in the 5th century AD a burial ground was established there, while the **Catacombs in Via Ossuna*** (guided tours organised by the **Pontificia Commissione di Archeologia sacra**) provide one of the few surviving examples of the Paleo-Christian necropolis; the complex was probably in use from the 3rd to the 5th century AD. Another group of catacombs is located in the **Church of San Michele Arcangelo*** close to Casa Professa. Old finds suggest that there was once a Byzantine necropolis in Via Cavour.

The Medieval Ages

With the Arab conquest (831) and with the large influx of immigrants from North Africa, Palermo developed rapidly outside the limits of the old city and become a Mediterranean metropolis of great importance. The Arab traveler Ibn Hawqal in the 10th century describes a prosperous and populous polynuclear city, structured in districts based on the model of the Islamic cities of North Africa; the ancient Punic-Roman nucleus of the district of *Balarm* or *Kassar*, as it was called, was important both for its role and for its function, and in this period experienced a lively phase of renewed building. In 937 the Fatimid dynasty—the successor of the Aghlabids—founded, close to the sea, the small city known as “*al-Halisab*”, decentralised and easily defensible. It probably stretched out to include the current Piazza Marina even though

it is very difficult to calculate its exact extension and location. The recent finding of some necropolii dating from Islamic times has helped to configure the perimeter of “*al-Halisah*” (fig. 33). Sources underline the presence of lush gardens both inside and outside the city and without a doubt the network of aqueducts that irrigated the plain of Palermo, known as “*qanat*”, are fruit of the traditions and knowledge introduced into Sicily during the period of Islamic domination.

The artisanal work, peculiar to this period and to the Islamic culture of the time, mostly the work of immigrant artisans from North Africa, flourished during this period, especially in the production of glazed ceramics, which was to continue throughout the Norman era.

It is difficult to delineate the extension of

the port in ancient and medieval times, because through the centuries the port area became progressively silted over due to the alluvium transported by the rivers. Probably, the area of Piazza Marina was a wide and indented cove that during the Islamic period was already almost completely buried and used as a service area (arsenal) for artisanal activities related to the port.

The Norman Conquest marks a halt in the development of the city; the new walls will mark a clear distinction between city and countryside and underlines, in fact, the resizing or even the abandonment of the populous suburbs of the Arab era. Excavations of the Convent of Sant’Antonino, the railway station, and the former penitentiary of Via dei Benedettini by the river Kemonia have recently confirmed this.

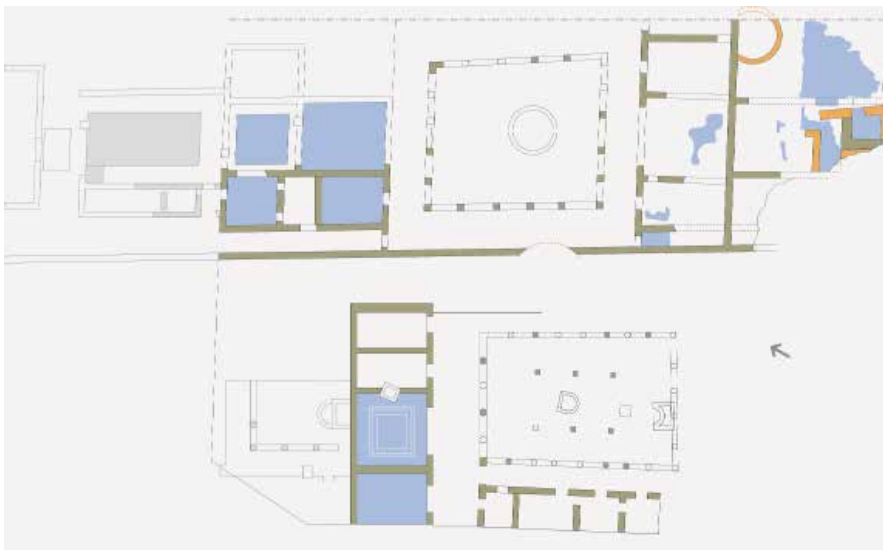


36

Palermo, Piazza della Vittoria, Villa Bonanno. Polychrome mosaic of Alexander hunting wild boar, detail of the decorative frame

37

Palermo, Piazza
della Vittoria, Villa
Bonanno. Building A
(above) and B (below)



The second half of the 19th century saw a continuation “in fieri” of the passionate restoration of religious monuments considered to be symbols of the Italian National Heritage. Thus numerous religious monuments from the Norman era are still standing today. The initial stages of the restoration of the Church of **San Giovanni dei Lebbrosi***, of the **Martorana***, of the **Church of San Cataldo***, of the **Church of San Giovanni degli Eremiti*** were carried out at this time.

The oldest information on the **Castello a Mare*** dates back to the Norman age in which sources indicate its position as *castrum inferior*, in counter-position to a *castrum superior* which would most likely be in the Upper city, probably the original nucleus of today’s Parliament building. As regards the Castello a Mare, an Arab phase seems to exist, to which the annexed necropolis is connected and of which a small section still exists.

Both civil and religious buildings are built in the late Norman age on the fortifications

of the Punic city: the walls, devoid of their defensive function, were used as solid foundations for private homes or convents. This construction phase of city was to intensify in the 14th century, linked as it was to the economic and political development of the most powerful families of the time (Sclafani and Ventimiglia); the best examples of buildings built on the city walls are: along the north side, Palazzo Marra Tassorelli and Palazzo Gualbes, with their mullioned windows that overlook the Via Candelai, Palazzo Santamarina and the first nucleus of Palazzo Vatticani on the Salita Sant’Antonio; along the south side, there are Palazzo Federico, the Church and Convent of Santa Chiara, Palazzo Speciale, Palazzo Ugo delle Favare, the Convent of the Padri Teatini (Theatine Fathers) which now houses the Faculty of Law. Palazzo Sclafani, which overlooks Piazza della Vittoria and Lo Steri on Piazza Marina is also part of this exuberant 14th century construction phase.

THE QANAT IN THE PLAIN OF PALERMO

The Qanat is one of the most interesting water transport systems for agricultural purposes and for the supply of water to the city. Its millenary roots lie in an Eastern tradition: in fact starting with the open channels that were developed in Mesopotamia in the 5th millennium BC, in the 7th/6th century BC, covered underground channels became widespread in Persia. Called the “*qanat*”, they are mentioned by Herodotus, who remembers them in Arabia. As regards Sicily, it seems that this system was introduced during the Muslim domination, or more likely, during the Norman period. According to tradition it was the geographer and traveler Al-Idrisi, of Berber origins—who lived in the court of Roger II—and had learnt their construction techniques in North Africa, prior to importing them to the Island. This chronology appears to be confirmed by the few ceramic fragments, dating from the 12th or 13th century, found in two *qanat* (*ngruttatu in Sicilian*) on the plateau of the Piana dei Colli. In Palermo, where there is a dense network of canals—some located at 20mts under ground level both in the historical centre and in the countryside—the use of the *qanat* lasted until recently (end 19th century).

From a structural point of view the Palermo *qanat* are tunnels measuring around 70-80cms and of variable height. The latter seems the only useful data when trying to date these artifacts, in fact the higher they are they older they should be. They are carved into the layers of limestone





with a constant slope (about 0.2%), often with a pitched roof made of counterposed blocks and this characteristic is similar to the Majorcan *qanat*. Regarding their function, in Palermo, the *qanat* perform the task of transporting and draining the water and thus have an orthogonal flow in relation to the downflow of water, which occurs naturally, under gravity.

Downstream, the water collects in a storage tank (in Sicilian *gebbia*, from the Arabic *ġabiyah*) and is then distributed via surface channels (*saje*, from the Arabic *sāqiyā*, and *catusi*, from the Arabic *qadūs*) for irrigation or as drinking water. The *puzzari*, workers skilled in the excavation of wells, inherited their knowledge from their family, like their Persian counterparts, the *muqanni*. The walls of the well are lined with the *pedarole* (footholds), small notches for descent down into the channels, as well as small cavities blackened by the smoke of lanterns necessary, not only to illuminate the excavations, but also to determine the alignment of the channel.

Nowadays, some of the *qanat* can be visited by contacting the C.A.I. of Palermo.

G.B.

MOUNT PELLEGRINO

The nature reserve of Mount Pellegrino includes the promontory that closes off, to the north, the Gulf of Palermo, and to the south the Gulf of Mondello. The mountain, at 609 mts high – called *Ercte* (albeit with some reservations over this name) by the Greeks, *Mons Peregrinus* by the Latins, *Gebel Grin* (the nearby mountain) and then *Bulkrin* (a modification of *Pulgrin*) by the Arabs – is a real limestone mountain which presents evidence of human inhabitation from the Upper Paleolithic era. A guided tour can start from the Scuderie Reali (Royal Mews) within the Favorita area and follows a clockwise walk from west to east. The initial archeological evidence is situated along the **Valle del Porco**, one of the three ways of reaching the top of the mountain, where on the right-hand wall, half way up the hill, there is a Byzantine inscription—dating back to the early decades of the 7th century—which reads: “*Be glorified wherever and ever, O God*”, whilst to the left of this there is a cross on a triangle between the letters *I* and *S*. On the walls of the ‘**Niscemi**’ **Grotto**, open behind the Scuderie Reali, excavations have found engraved zoomorphic figures (bulls, deer and small equids). The animals are drawn full of vigour and agility, in a naturalistic style. The species are similar to those depicted on the fragments commonly found in the excavations from the Sicilian Paleolithic era, namely the primitive ox, the deer and a small wild equids. Continuing towards Mondello, in the foothills, at the beginning of the last century,

the remains of a village and a necropolis from the Copper Age were brought to light, whose artifacts are now preserved at the Regional Archaeological Museum “A. Salinas”. Continuing towards Valdesi, behind the state middle school “Borgese”, the rock cliff presents, midway up, a series of shelters and natural caves used as a **rock necropolis** from the late Copper Age to the Bronze Age. Continuing eastwards, one reaches the **Addaura** (from the Greek *Λαύρα* **Lavra** or **Laura** meaning “passage” or “allied”). The name probably derives from a cluster of cells or caves of Basilian hermits, with a church and sometimes also a dining hall in the middle; the Basilian hermit monasteries seem to have been built in a variety of places on Mount Pellegrino. This form of monasticism was born in the Eastern world and was present in Sicily until the arrival of the Normans. The famous **Grotto of the Graffiti** is also to be found here. There are thirty graffiti divided between human and animal figures (**fig. 40**). Some animals—bulls, deer and small equids—are drawn with a style that expresses a realistic vivacity; others have an uncertain and schematic style. The human figures are composed around three scenes, depicting moments of life. In the main scene there are seven male figures in the nude, five with their heads covered with a bird’s beak mask and a thick head of hair, arranged in a circle inside which there are two individuals, slenderer, bald, facing each other, wearing long phallic holders, in acrobatic positions; according to some it is a rite of initiation, others believe it is a human sacrifice and for others a gymnastics competition. An additional figure, maybe an adolescent

ARCHAEOLOGY

The coastal sites

40

*Palermo, Addaura.
Grotto of the Graffiti,
ritualistic scene*

(or a woman), is depicted inside the circle of the main picture, in the act of bending down to pick up something. It is wearing neither the phallic holder, as there is no waist belt, nor the bird-like beak mask.

In the lower register, in the second scene there is a rampant fallow deer and a naked hunter with abundant hair, the bird-like beak mask and a long pole. The third scene includes three human figures: a pregnant woman with a voluminous object on her shoulders and two men walking in opposite directions. The man who is walking in the same direction as the woman carries a large object tied to his forehead and resting on his shoulders. These graffiti date back to about 12,000 years ago, and show a naturalistic style that testifies to a very refined level of execution. Continuing west, one reaches the **Grotto 'del Bagno della Regina'** (The Queen's Bath), which with that of the Acquisanta, is part of an ancient complex of thermal caves that included the so-called "fish pond" and architectural elements incorporated into the 18th century Villa Lanterna.

The **Grotto of Saint Rosalia** shows evidence of having been frequented since prehistoric times; also, the so-called "Rosary of Santa Rosalia" would appear to be part of a prehistoric burial; it consists of pendants from a calcite necklace from the Age of Copper, now enclosed in an ostensorium and on show in the Treasury of the Cathedral of Palermo. The so-called outdoor vestibule of the grotto sanctuary of Santa Rosalia, according to some scholars, was a place of Punic worship; in the Byzantine era there could have been a church dedicated to Our Lady.

Another settlement of a probable religious nature, was founded next to the **Grotto of Saint Rosalia** (eastern zone), where a rich treasure of Punic coins (Dekadrachms and lower denominations), together



with jewelry from the Hellenic age was accidentally discovered in 1958. In the **Piano of the Grotto**, a flat area in front of the Sanctuary, in the early 90s of the last century, a permanent settlement was

uncovered which was been inhabited off and on from the 3rd century DC to the late Imperial Age (4th-5th century AD).

G.B.



MOUNT GALLO

The nature reserve of Mount Gallo includes the promontory which separates the Gulf of Mondello from that of Sferracavallo, and is located northwest of Palermo. It is a carbonate massif that the sea has eroded, due to the karstic nature of the rocks, and has created along the slopes a series of grottos and caves, several of which are very interesting from a palaeontological and archaeological point of view, especially on the eastern coast called the Marinella: the Grotto 'dei Vitelli', the Grotto 'Perciata', the Grotto 'del Capraio' and the Grotto Regina. During the 2nd World War, the grottos were used as bomb shelters which caused irreparable damage to the deposits. The **Grotto 'dei Vitelli'**, the first cave

of the Marinella group, is a corridor of twenty metres that presents a group of linear carvings, almost at ground level on the right hand side. No trace remains of the ancient deposit. The **Grotto 'Perciata'**, a large cave, has two openings: one facing North which looks out over the open sea and one to the east overlooks the Gulf of Mondello. The first excavations date back to 1859, when several stone tools from the Upper Palaeolithic era were found. Other excavations followed, up to those of 1970, which were made in collaboration between the Soprintendenza alle Antichità della Sicilia Occidentale and the Istituto Italiano di Preistoria e Protostoria of Florence. The deposit yielded stone and ceramic items, bones from a hippopotamus, a deer and a fragment of a molar from an *Elephas mnaidriensis*. In the right-hand tunnel, about twenty metres long, five "in positive" handprints in red ochre were found. Handprints are a recurring theme in prehistoric rock art of all continents, perhaps the first sign of "individuality" in human history. They can be created using the following either one of two techniques: in positive, as in this case, dipping a hand in the colour obtained by mixing pigments (ochre, etc.) with binders (egg, etc.); in negative, placing a hand on the rock and passing the colour over it. The **Grotto 'del Capraio'** is a large cave in the bottom of which two smaller cavities open. On the walls of one of them a group of linear carvings were found, dating to the Mesolithic era, together with some Punic letters, some crosses and century. The ancient human presence is attested by faint traces of paleosoils encrusted in the





42
Palermo, Addaura.
Grotto 'Perciata'

walls, with stone tools and food remains dating back to the Upper Paleolithic age (in Sicily from 30,000 to 10,000 years ago). Recently discovered on the ceiling, more than five meters from the current floor-level, the engraved figure of a four-legged animal (a fawn?). The **Grotto Regina**, the largest of the Marinella caves, was formed by marine erosion and faces the Fossa del Gallo at 130mts above sea level. The excavations in the 1970's have identified traces of residual deposit sites documenting its use from the Upper Paleolithic to the Medieval Ages. The walls retain hundreds of drawings and inscriptions ranging from recent Prehistory (Age of Metal: stylised human figures painted in red) to the 2nd century AD. Human figures and animals such as a Punic warrior, a bear, a horse, a snake wound round an arm, three ships and even prayers, petitions and signatures. It is a Punic sanctuary. The inscriptions in the Punic, neo-Punic and Libyan language have allowed us to understand the Phoenician-Punic world which founded the Palermo emporium; inscriptions from the 7th century confirm the presence of Phoenician-Punic traders; thanks to the only drawing found so far, which is on

the left wall, it is possible to know how a Carthaginian warship, presented in detail, was made. The sanctuary is dedicated to the Phoenician gods of Melqart – tutelary Deity of Tyre and the Punic lands of Sicily, God Shadrappa – the genius of healing represented with snakes and scorpions, known from the 6th-5th century BC; and the Egyptian Goddess Isis, the patron of magic, of sailors and fertility, and her brother-husband Osiris, king of the afterlife. The grotto was also used during the late-Roman, Byzantine and Arab eras, as evidenced by the ceramic potsherds found inside. In the **'Impisu' Grotto**, on the western slope above Sferracavallo in the locality known as Schillaci, traces of human presence from the Age of Copper (3rd millennium BC) were found. Remains of large animals also emerged, such as hippos, which lived (and then became extinct) in the Pleistocene era.

G.B.

43

*Carini, Grotto 'dei
Puntali'. Bovid*

CARINI - THE GROTTA 'DEI PUNTALI'

.....
In the territory of the town of Carini, on the eastern slopes of the Montagna Longa, the name 'Armetta' Grottoes indicates a group of hollows carved out of the old shore-line, some 90mts above sea level. Among these, the best known is the Grotto 'dei Puntali' which opens at the extreme left of the cliff. The other hollows are shelters or small fissures that have no archaeological remains but are of great

interest for the presence of linear incisions. The Grotto 'dei Puntali' is one of the largest caves in Sicily with a depth of a little more than a hundred meters. It has been known about since the time of Tommaso Fazello (1558) for the "bones of the giants", the Palaeontological deposit, dug in 1869 by Gaetano Giorgio Gemmellaro, that brought to light several tons of bones, especially elephant bones. In 1970, the Sicilian Soprintendenza carried out two excavations, which showed lithic and





44
Carini, the Grotto 'dei Puntali'. Entrance

45
Carini, view of the Grotto 'dei Puntali'

ceramic materials dating from the Upper Palaeolithic Age to the Bronze Age. The parietal zoomorphic carvings are on the rocky spur on the left of the entrance. There are two quadrupeds: a small deer and one equidae drawn grazing. During the excavation, on one of the blocks, which were scattered on the floor of the Grotto, a third partial bovid figure was found. These carvings are similar to those discovered in the Grotto 'del Genovese' in Levanzo and therefore are traditionally dated from the Upper Paleolithic Age. In addition to zoomorphic engravings, geometric motifs and "cupellae" – cup and ring marks (round shaped engraved decorations) were also found, which form trefoils or fillets, attributable to the Medieval period.

G.B.





THE CATACOMBS OF VILLAGRAZIA DI CARINI

.....
It is the largest complex of catacombs in Western Sicily, which attest to the presence of densely populated early Christian communities in the territory of Carini between the 4th and 7th centuries AD; they were so numerous as to justify the establishment of a rural diocese to provide for *cura animarum* (care of the souls).

It was Antonino Salinas who discovered the complex in 1899, which was probably connected to the *vicus* (village) or large settlement of San Nicola in the South (fig. 46). The cemetery, cut in half by a modern quarry, was north and south of the current Highway 113, which was the ancient consular road Valeria. A long period of neglect and abandonment followed the discovery, and the catacombs were used as stables, bomb shelters, mushroom farm and finally as a dumping ground, to the extent that the entrance

track to the underground passage was lost. In the year 2000 investigative activities were once again undertaken due to the interest of the Pontificia Commissione di Archeologia Sacra in collaboration with the University of Palermo. The most recent were concentrated in the area to the south of Provincial Road 113 that from the end of the 14th to the beginning of the 17th century was partially transformed into an area of sugarcane production.

The catacomb complex is organised in large galleries, and on the walls there are polysome arcosolia (multiple adult graves inside of an arched niche), loculi, and a small arcosolia for child burials.

There are also numerous table-top tombs (a mensa), in what are normally elongated niches, intended for adults and children. Along the galleries in the catacombs there are also cubicola (burial chambers designed for family groups), which have both arcosolia and niches on the walls. The grave goods found are terracotta and glass

lamps, objects of personal adornment, such as earrings and pieces of necklaces (vague), and tableware used in burial rites.

The Villagrazia catacomb can be considered architecturally similar to those in Rome, Lazio, Campania, Apulia, Syracuse and Lilibeo. The most important pictorial works – concentrated mainly in the areas destined for children – are to be found in the arcosolium X.2. These include a child pulling the reins of his horse in a rural environment, clearly meant to represent the Garden of Paradise, and the two arcosolia from the cubicolum X.10 with the Adoration of the Magi in the lunette together with, in the extrados, the images of a mother accompanying her deceased child and the small bust of a child in rich clothing among garlands. Some intact floor tombs have preserved inscriptions that are interesting both for the formulation and for the use of the Greek language.

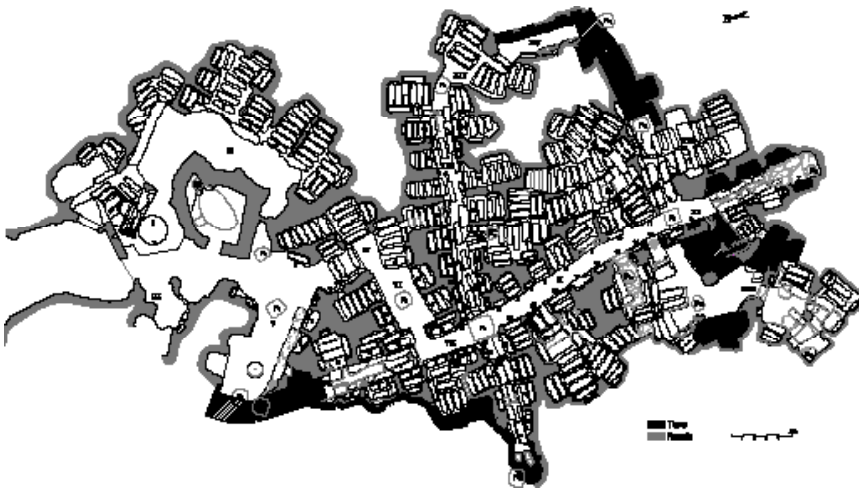


47
Villagrazia di Carini, Catacombs. Arcosolia Tomb X.2 with boy and horse



48
Villagrazia di Carini, Catacombs. Arcosolia tombs X.10.9 with the Adoration of the Magi.

R.M.C



49
Villagrazia di Carini, Catacombs. Overall plan

USTICA

Ustica is located in the southern Tyrrhenian Sea about 36 miles to the north of the Sicilian coast, facing Capo Gallo (Palermo). The Island, of volcanic origin, is about 8sqkms with a perimeter of 16kms. There is a small ridge in the centre, formed by three reliefs that slope down to the coast on natural wide terraces of marine origin. To the northeast is the promontory of the Falconiera, (157mts above sea-level), dominating the Cala di Santa Maria, one of the Island's natural harbours. North is the Tramontana plain, the largest in the island, southwest the Spalmatore and south are the highlands of Ogliastrello and San Paolo. There are numerous grottoes all along the extremely jagged and rugged coastline. Inhabited since Prehistoric times, though interspersed with long periods of neglect, the Island has an important archaeological heritage.

It was first occupied during the Neolithic Age (6th-4th millennium BC); the successive Copper Age (4th-3rd millennium BC) is documented by finds from a variety of sites and by the fact that the grottoes were inhabited. It is interesting to note that, most probably, water was obtained from the natural process of continuous water dripping (vertical falling drops). A first permanent settlement occurs during the Bronze Age in *Culunnella*, where a necropolis with graves was found. In the mid Bronze Age (14th-13th century BC.), Ustica experienced a period of great development, documented by traces of settlements in several sites, but especially from the Village of the Faraglioni. After the Island had been an abruptly

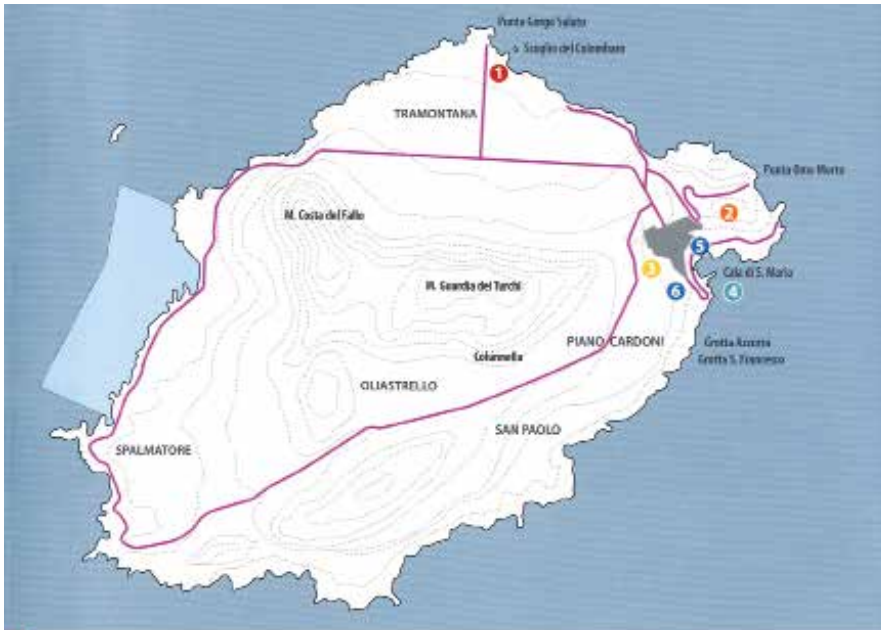
abandoned in 1200 BC, probably due to some catastrophic event, it remained deserted for centuries. However some underwater finds attest to the fact that in the Archaic and Classical Ages the Island was a part of the trading routes through the Tyrrhenian Sea.

There is a very rich archaeological evidence from the late 4th to the early 3rd century BC, when some minor agricultural settlements moved to the plains, while a substantial settlement was founded on Rocca Falconiera. Numbers fell during the 2nd and 3rd AD but the population of Ustica expanded once again in the late Antiquity era, between the 4th and 6th centuries.

A network of villages and farms, located principally in the plains, provides evidence of an agricultural exploitation of the soil, while the diverse types of jars used for transportation found in the port's seabed indicates that the Island was a part of the trade route connecting Africa to the port of Ostia. From the 8th century, the Island once again experienced a rural exodus, however in the mid-12th century a new Cistercian monastery was built there. After the 14th century the Island was almost totally abandoned and became a pirates' nest and in the mid-18th century, just before the new repopulation by order of Charles III and Ferdinand IV of Bourbon, it was recorded as being a deserted island. In 1970 the Soprintendenza initiated an archaeological investigation of the Island and a survey of the surface was carried out, together with excavations at the Rocca della Falconiera and the prehistoric village of the Faraglioni. In the latter site the excavations were

restarted in the 1990's, and from 2003 the Soprintendenza of Palermo has also taken up the surveys once again.

A.M.G.C.



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Ustica. Plan

- 1 The prehistoric village of the Faraglioni and the Middle Bronze Age
- 2 The Rocca della Falconiera and the Hellenistic-Roman Age
- 3 The early Christian necropolis of the Falconiera
- 4 Underwater archeology
- 5/6 Archaeological Museum: “Case Carabozzello” and Tower of Santa Maria

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*Ustica. View of the
village of Faraglioni*

**THE PREHISTORIC VILLAGE
OF FARAGLIONI**

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The village is built in the area known as Tramontana, bordered to the east by a steep cliff about 20mts high, overlooking the Faraglione or Scoglio del Colombaio. Morphologically the place today appears heavily modified, due to sea erosion and catastrophic events that have resulted in the

sinking of the coastline and the detachment of the Faraglione. In the middle Bronze Age (14th-13th century BC) the village covered an area of over 7000sqmts, including the Faraglione, where remains of some huts are still visible. It was naturally defended from the east by high cliffs, on the other three sides it was protected by a mighty curvilinear fortification interspersed by semi-circular buttresses of various sizes,



placed at irregular distances. The town is built following a “proto-urban” articulated plan, similar to those found in the Aegean, which makes it one of the most important prehistoric complexes of the entire Mediterranean basin. It spreads over two terraces connected by a ramp; on both levels, by the roadside, there are circular, elliptical or square spaces, distributed evenly, some of which were almost certainly

courtyards. If one excludes the single room where seven holes for poles were found, the absence of holes for piling differentiates the huts in village of the Faraglioni from the canonical Sicilian hut of the Middle Bronze Age. This hypothesises a roof structure that must have distributed its weight directly onto load bearing walls, consisting of a wooden frame connected by boughs, reeds or other plant matter, and a coating of raw clay. Inside the larger circular huts there is a bench on which, in one case, household vases were found.

All the housing units show evident signs of destruction and/or hasty abandonment probably due to some natural catastrophe that caused the inhabitants to leave the village, and perhaps the entire Island, permanently. The huge amount of material found in the inhabited levels, in addition to documenting the different daily activities, attests to the high standard of living achieved by the villagers as well as their multiple contacts with the contemporary cultures of the Mediterranean area.

A.M.G.C.



THE ROCCA DELLA FALCONIERA

The Rocca della Falconiera dominates the Bay of Santa Maria. Rocca is a remnant of a volcanic cone with a characteristic humpback and a plummeting slope on the eastern side. The ancient **inhabited** zone was built on the summit as it offered both an excellent defensive position and visual control over the Island's main landing place. Making the most of the limited space available, the houses—consisting of quadrangular rooms, partly carved out of the natural rock face and partly built—were constructed on several levels, connected by stairs carved into the rock (fig. 54). Today the only visible traces of the rooms are those carved in the rocks and some bits of flooring in earthenware on the summit. The water supply was guaranteed by numerous cisterns dug out of the rock and covered with earthenware; the emptying of some of the tanks has allowed abundant material to be recovered, some of which is of excellent quality. Among the most significant finds, mostly dating from the 3rd century BC and the 1st century AD, are numerous fragments of stucco frames, polychromatic wall plaster, earthenware or tessellated white flooring, abundant crockery both for the household and for transport (urns, *kylikes*, *skyphoi*, ointment flasks, *lékythoi*, etc.), bronze jewellery and coins. On the northern side of Falconiera there is a third access road to the village. This access is rather bumpy and characterised by small wall niches, probably of a sacred nature, which perhaps should be connected to the *bothros* (well) dug in 1980, in which numerous votive materials

were found (ointment flasks, miniature vases, *gutti*, etc.). The **necropolis** located on the western side of the Falconiera is connected to the settlement from the Hellenistic-Roman Age. These multiple burials are atypical and a rare type of burial: single graves were carved into the rock face, presenting a sort of step leading to another and deeper pit, where the body was laid, parallel to and deeper than the first pit and which was the closed with a slab. The presence of amphorae with bone remains, lying at the head of some of the bodies, would appear to document the reuse of the tombs over the centuries which has led to grave goods, dating between the 3rd century BC and the 1st and 2nd century AD, being found.

On the southwest side of the Falconiera there is a large late **Roman necropolis** (5th -6th century AD). Besides simple pits dug into the rock, there are also some underground tombs (*hypogea*), concentrated on the southern side; these are square-shaped or elliptical chambers which were reached through long *dromoi* (corridors). The bodies were placed within pits dug out of the floor or in niches dug in the walls or sarcophagi placed inside the *arcosolia* (tombs inside an arched niche). In some cases the chambers were made from ancient cisterns, which had fallen into disuse and were then occasionally reutilised during the Bourbon period for their original function.



**THE CIVIC ARCHAEOLOGICAL
MUSEUM “PADRE CARMELO
SEMINARA DA GANCI”**

.....

The new Civic Archaeological Museum opened in 2010 and was named after the parish priest of Ustica who had been the first to discover and then support the archeological sites on the island. The museum is housed in a complex known as the “Fosso” (Ditch), in one of the dormitories, used since the Bourbon era as a kind of prison for inmates who failed to

obey the rules. The exhibition is divided between two pavilions and has a wide selection of artifacts relating to the two main phases of the Island’s history: the Middle Bronze Age and the Hellenistic-Roman Age.

In **Hall A** the introductory section is dedicated to the general nature of the Island’s territory and its geomorphological and archaeological peculiarities, which are all illustrated through a rich educational programme. The successive halls provide a wide selection of materials found in

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*Ustica, Prehistoric
Village of the
Faraglioni. Hut*





the village of the Faraglioni and are exhibited by type, grouped by class and accompanied by illustrated panels. Among the artifacts, the most characteristic is the bowl with its high foot and elegant ribbed decoration, which was probably used for eating sitting on the ground. Other items are the clay plates of considerable size,

which were probably used as a work surface in the preparation and baking of focacce (flat bread) or in the preparation of dishes that required slow cooking (**fig. 55**). In this case, between the plate and the container there were supports, the so-called “*andirons*”, morphologically unusual and functionally enigmatic.

54
Ustica, Rock of the Falconiera. Steps in the rockface

ARCHAEOLOGY

The coastal sites

55

*Ustica, Prehistoric
Village of the
Faraglioni. Terracotta
cooking plate*

Hall B is dedicated to the later periods of documented life on the Falconiera promontory. The more significant findings are dated between 4th century BC and 1st century AD and were mostly found inside the various cisterns from the settlements dating from Hellenistic-Roman times: fragments of mosaic flooring, stucco frames, plaster walls and funereal artifacts

from the most important tombs, dating back to the 3rd century BC and the 1st-3rd century AD. These consist of ointment flasks, oil lamps, kitchen pottery (pans), and both achromic (jugs, bottles) and black glazed tableware (plates, libation bowls and cups).

A.M.G.C



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