

PALEO
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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

MEDIEVAL CASTLES

by **Ferdinando Maurici**

REGIONE SICILIANA
Assessorato dei Beni culturali
e dell'Identità siciliana



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AN OVERVIEW OF THE CASTLES IN THE PROVINCE OF PALERMO

The Norman Age

Sicily must be numbered amongst the countries that can be considered as 'a Land of Castles'. It is sufficient to open a detailed roadmap of the Province of Palermo, published by the local Automobile Association (Touring Club Italiano), for confirmation.

Castelbuono, San Mauro Castelverde, Castellaccio di Monreale, Castronovo di Sicilia, Campofelice di Roccella. All of these names correspond to places where there is still a medieval castle, mentioned in historical sources, most of which are still in existence and more or less well preserved, the exception being San Mauro. Other places immediately call to mind the existence of a famous castle either historically or architecturally of interest. One such is Caccamo, already mentioned in the oldest guidebooks on Sicily for the beauty and magnificence of its castle. Another is Carini, inevitably linked to the bloody and tragic history of its unhappy Baroness. And then there is Vicari, indissolubly connected with the history of the Sicilian Vespers.

The history of the Sicilian medieval castles must start with the Norman conquest, the arrival in Sicily of a strong sovereign power, originally Comital and then Monarchical, the imposition of a feudal system that elsewhere gave signs of breaking down, and the return to Christianity of a territory that for 250 years had been a part of the Arab world, known as the *dār al-islām*.

Before the arrival of the Normans, in the three centuries that Sicily had been a province of the Byzantine Empire, there are frequent references to cities and places fortified against the great Muslim threat. One

of these is Mount Kassar of Castronovo di Sicilia (**fig. 1**).

The site has been an archaeological reality for over a century but only recently systematically excavated and has uncovered a monumental Byzantine fortification. It is not a castle in the accepted sense of the word, denoting a building or a complex of fortified buildings, seat or expression of some type of power, but rather what would have been known as a 'castle' or better a 'kastron' during the Byzantine era. At that time this normally signified a fortified city or town, characterised by the existence of a massive curtain wall. And this is what still exists on the only side of Mount Kassar that is accessible, the north side, defended by an incredible wall, 1,800 metres long, almost 3.50 metres wide with two gates, two posterns and eleven towers. Inside the enormous enclosure (the bailey) surrounded by the outer curtain wall and

1
Castronovo. Kassar

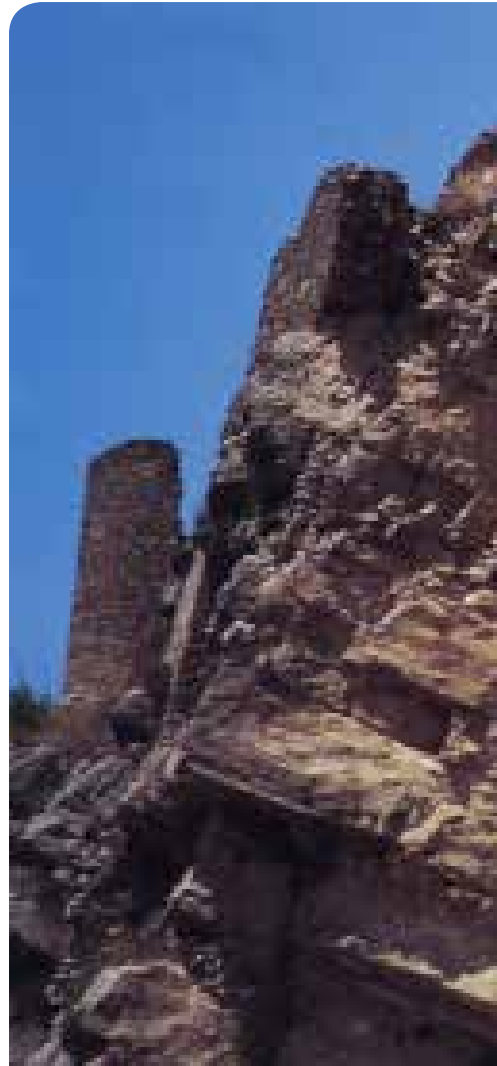


MEDIEVAL CASTLES

protected on two other sides by precipitous slopes—Mount Kassar has a triangular ground plan with the apex to the south—only the part nearest to the outer wall appears to have been occupied by other constructions in Byzantine times. One of these buildings was certainly a small church. It is most likely that the fortification on Mount Kassar can be identified as the *qaṣr al-ğadid*, the “new castle”, so called in an Arab source, and which then gave this name to the city under the fortification, Castronovo (new castle). The Kassar settlement was a *kastron* in the Byzantine sense of the word. Perhaps the beginnings of a newly founded fortified city; more likely a large military settlement that could harbour and protect in time of need, a numerous population and hundreds of head of livestock, over and above the garrison itself.

As cited by Arab sources, the various places that fell into Arab hands were also fortified Byzantine cities and towns. Palermo itself, obviously, as well as Cefalù, Corleone, Caltavuturo, Geraci and another fortified city of Byzantine origin could well have been Polizzi (perhaps from the word *polis?*), which Michele Amari, important [Italian] historian and Arabist, identified as one of ‘the King’s cities’, founded by the Byzantines in the area known as the Madonie, at the end of the 9th century. The example of Caltavuturo (**fig. 2**), mentioned above, is a clear indication of how toponomastics, used by itself without reference, can lead the historian astray. It clearly refers to a toponymy constructed out of the Arab word *‘qal‘a*, which generally signifies a fortified site that is already well protected naturally and by the terrain. But the Arab etymology as applied to Caltavuturo and other similar cases

(Caltagirone, Caltanissetta, Calatafimi), does not necessarily confirm its origin from the Islamic era, but it is far more likely, at least in most cases, that the Arab conquerors simply renamed with the prefix *‘qal‘a*, pre-existing fortifications garrisoned by the Byzantines,



which they intended either to take by storm '*manu militari*' or force to come to terms. During the Islamic era there are only a few mentions in sources of the '*qsur*' and the '*rbut*', Islamic fortifications along the coast, garrisoned by warrior-monks.

The Arab 'Ibn Hawqal' cites one in the vicinity of Palermo, and a cosmological study, dating from around 1020, notes the existence of two 'castles from the defensive chain' at the entrance of the port of Palermo. In the second half of 19th century

2
*Caltavuturo. The
Castle of the 'terra
vecchia'*



the chroniclers of the Norman conquest, (Amatus of Montecassino and Gaufredo Malaterra) are amongst the most important, once again describe an Arab-Islamic Sicily that is defended and protected more by walled cities and towns, than by castles in the sense that has been described above. Other than Palermo, the largest fortified city (*madina*) of the Arab *Siqilliyya*, the sources already mentioned record the fall, either violent or more often negotiated, of Petralia, Castronovo, Cinisi and Jato. This last locality is now a well-known archaeological site, even though it does not fail to provide frequent surprises. Thus this provides evidence of cities and towns fortified under Islamic rule. At that time, to the word ‘*castelli*’ (castles), in the definition most generally used of the word, the same sources only make a passing mention, without providing any particulars. Close to Palermo, most likely on the site of what would then become the Church of San Giovanni dei Lebbrosi, was the *chastel Jehan*, recorded by Amatus of Montecassino. What it really was is unknown: perhaps a *ribat*, a military building similar to that which still exists today at Sousse, Monastir and other places in Tunisia. Or perhaps a suburban villa of pleasure (*sollazzo*), of the type that would become well-known under the Normans, as evidenced by the spectacular examples of ‘castles’ which were in fact non-fortified Palazzi or *sollacia*, of Maredolce, Scibene, Zisa and Cuba.

Thus the Normans arrive; the powerful Grand Count of Sicily, then subsequently from 1130, the power of the *rex Sicilie*, [the King of Sicily], together with his *barones* [Barons] and his *militēs* [soldiers]. And a new type of fortified residence arrives, together with a new – for Sicily – architectural

tradition originating in France – from Normandy and from England, which had just been conquered by another Norman army and another Conqueror. And the concept of a castle arrives in Sicily, in the sense that Europe and the various emerging European languages give to the word, be it *château fort*, *castillo*, *castle*, *castelo*, or *Burg*. The conquerors in Palermo construct or significantly modify two castles: one will form the nucleus of the future **Royal Palace**; the other, built almost certainly on the site of one of the two ‘*castles of the Sicilian defensive chain*’, which existed around 1020, would become the *castrum maris*, the **Castello a Mare** (**fig. 3**). The chronicler Gaufredo Malaterra, refers to the construction or the rebuilding of a fortified complex in the city, in relation to the conquest of Palermo by Robert the Guiscard, and then subsequently by Roger I (1072). The first initiative, together with the reconsecration of the Cathedral, which had previously been transformed into a Mosque, was in fact that of *castellum firmare*; an action that was of necessity propaedeutical to the need to subjugate the city to the will of the new Norman masters and keep it firmly in their power.

The residual ambiguity of Malaterra’s expression ‘*castellum firmare*’ (which could be taken to mean either the construction more or less from scratch or the reinforcement of the pre-existing structure) would seem to be resolved by another testimony relative to the origins of the first nucleus of the future Royal Palace, that of Amatus of Montecassino, yet another chronicler of the conquest (of Sicily). According to Amatus, after the conquest of Palermo, the Duke Robert “*eslut un lieu molt haut là où il fist*

une forte roche, et la fist molt bien garder, et la fornì de choses de vivre, pour lonctemps et à grant abondance". The substantial innovation of the operation seems to have consisted in the choice of the location, high up, and the importance attached to the actual building process—["Robert made a fortified Rock"]—that strengthens the concept of an almost original intervention, necessitated by the situation, by the need to assure the control and the defence of the great Islamic city that had just been conquered. There was an ever-present possibility of an uprising of the Muslim population with the consequential blockade of the Norman garrison, and the d'Hautevilles had recently been besieged in their Castle of Troina. Thus every effort was made to avoid possible consequences by laying-in abundant stores

and putting the garrison in a position to resist '*pour lonctemps*' [for a long time]. Even though both Malaterra and Amatus write about the fortification being built on what would almost certainly become the site of the future Royal Palace, two other sources, William of Apulia and the Vatican Anonymous (of a slightly later date), also extend the paternity of the Guiscard and of Roger I to the future 'Castello a Mare'. For the Anonymous, the two d'Hauteville brothers "built in a very short space of time, two strong castles, one near the sea, the other in what is known as Galca", in order to frustrate every effort at rebellion by the Muslim population of Palermo. Sixty years after the original Norman intervention, Roger II started and finished a first version of the *palatium* or *castrum*

3 *Castello a Mare. The Castle*



4

*Castello a Mare.
The Castle*

superius, the Royal Palace, incorporating and enlarging the structures built by his predecessors, though unfortunately it is not possible to know by what measure. The rough and ready castle of the Conquest became a magnificent Palace, worthy of the power of Roger II and his heirs. A late 12th century miniature, by Pietro da Eboli, in the book '*Liber del regno Sicilie*', shows it made out of hewn stone-work, turreted and with battlements, similar to the one on the other side of the city, the Castello a Mare. There is an excellent description of the Palazzo by the Arab geographer Al-Idrisi, in the

following translation: "In the most elevated part of this Qasr, the dreaded king Roger has a new citadel, made with hard mosaic stones and large pieces of dressed stone, artfully designed, supplied with high towers, well protected with look-outs, [comfortable] with well built rooms and apartments; notable for the architectural decoration, for the wonderful and rare calligraphy and for the elegant images in all styles that are collected there."

The Arab poet Ibn Basrun could well be a perfect counterpoint to Al Idrisi. His verses celebrate the triumphant royal Palace



“which shines with enchanting beauty, with its Castle splendidly built, elegant forms and high loggias”.

Towards the end of the 12th century a text, generally attributed to Ugo Falcando, a letter to a certain Peter, treasurer of the Palermitan Church, offers the most complete description of the Royal Palace in the Norman era. Surrounded by a wide defensive wall, constructed with the squared stones (ashlar) characteristic of the Palermitan Norman architecture, it appeared “magnificent inside for the intense splendour of jewels and gold”.

At one end, the Tower known as the *Pisana*, still in existence today, was reserved for the safekeeping of the treasure; at the other the Tower ‘*Greca*’ overlooked the river Kemonia and that part of the city that was crowded along its banks. A middle section, the *Joharia*, was reserved for the pleasure of the sovereigns. Thus there were rooms for servants, matrons, young girls and eunuchs in the service of the King and Queen, rooms reserved for the King to meet with the so-called ‘*familiares regis*’ (inner royal council or *Consilium familiare*) and the nobles, to discuss the problems relating to the kingdom, and lastly the workrooms, especially for the spinning of silk.

Thus the Royal Palace in Palermo was a union of luxury and defensive characteristics. An intricate shell of walls and merlons conceals the splendour of the royal apartments, of the Palatine Chapel, the workshops or *nobiles or cinae*, where the works of art and the workmanship necessary for the luxurious lifestyle at court, were produced. However, not far from the royal rooms, in the squalid dungeons, the King’s enemies rot, forgotten or else plot

desperate schemes with the help of some of their gaolers, as actually happened in 1161, during the reign of William I. A second rebellion, born in the dungeons of the Palace and thwarted thanks to the fidelity of the castellan (a certain *Ansaldus*), convinced the King that it would be better to transfer the prisoners from the Palace dungeons to those in Castello a Mare.

Far more obviously *castral* [military], it became, from Norman times right up to the revolt of the Seven and a Half (1866), the guard dog of the Sovereign Power, protecting it from both potential enemies arriving from the sea and, even more so, invigilate over the city, with its walls further strengthened with numerous towers, to which the author refers in his letter to Peter the Treasurer and clearly visible in the famous miniature by Peter of Eboli in the *Liber*. Contrary to the Royal Palace, the Castello al Mare (**fig. 4**) was almost totally destroyed at the beginning of the 20th century. There were not many who made an effort to save the Castello al Mare as it had always been feared and ill-famed because of its repressive functions, its use as a jail and the death sentences carried out there. During its destruction, after it had been divested of all the later structural additions, what can only be described as Arab-Norman donjon came to light. The reclamation of the area, the extensive excavations, the rehabilitation and the opening to the public of whatever had escaped from the destruction was one of the most applaudable acts implemented in Palermo during the course of the last century.

The sources written at the time of the Normans list more than twenty castles just in the area of what is now the Province of Palermo.

5

Caccamo. The Castle

These include the mysterious Al-Khazan, which was probably situated on a ridge not far from the modern day Scansano reservoir, together with those of **Battalaro** or **Patellaro**, of **Brucato**, **Caccamo**, **Calatamauro**, **Calatrasi**, **Caltavuturo**, **Carini**, **Castronovo**, **Cefalà**, **Cefalù**, probably **Collesano**, **Geraci**, **Gratteri**, **Iato**, **Misilmeri**, **Partinico**, **Petralia**, **Petterana**, **Polizzi**, **Pollina**, **Prizzi**, **Roccella**, **Termini** and **Vicari**.

With the ambiguity of the definition used by archivists and by Al-Idrisi, it is not always easy or indeed possible to distinguish proper castles from larger fortified towns. However, these two realities, fortified town and garrison often went hand in hand. In

some cases the Castles belong to the allodial title - belonging to the monarchy, like the one in Iato, in which the prisons were almost certainly located, and which is still waiting to be excavated. More often fortified towns and garrisons were held in fiefdom by the early Sicilian nobility; Caccamo (**fig. 5-7**), falls into this category and it was from here that Matteo Bonello plotted against William I; Calatrasi (**fig. 8**) fiefdom of the Malcovenant family from around 1162; of the *castellum cognomento Chephalas* [the Castle known as Cefalà] in Gratteri; of Petterana fiefdom of the Lucy family; of Prizzi, also a fiefdom of Matteo Bonello, and of which only a few ruins remain of





6
*Caccamo, the Castle.
The courtyard*

7
*Caccamo, the Castle.
Detail*

the Castle. Destruction, reconstruction, readaptation have cancelled or hidden almost everywhere the Norman facies (appearance) of these castles.

At Roccella all that is visibile nowadays is a splendid 14th century tower and other ruins that are extremely difficult to date. At Cefalà, the Norman *castellum*, cited in 1121, is almost certainly to be found on Mount Chiarastella, reduced to a few buried remains, whilst the Castle in the present day town probably also dates from the 14th century. Here and there a tower or its batter, a length of curtain wall or a window (loop hole) are attributed to the 11th and 12th century. Vestiges of Norman architecture can be found in the Tower of the Castle of Carini.





8
*Calatrasi. The Castle
on Mount Maranfusa*

The courtyard or ward in the southern part of the large military complex of Vicari (**fig. 9**) could also be dated back to the original Norman structure. The Sicilian word ‘*baglio*’, both as a name and as a structure, probably originates from the Norman *bailey*, the lower courtyard or ward of a Castle [enclosed by a protective curtain wall]. Almost nothing of the impressive ruins of the Castle of Caltavuturo can be dated with certainty as Norman. It was built on the summit of a rocky promontory, high above the valley of the River Imera, in the first inhabited nucleus of a Medieval town, ‘*the terra vecchia*’ [literally meaning old land]. There is a similar situation in Castronovo, where the remains of the Castle dominate the actual town centre dating from the early Middle Ages, but where the ‘*terra vecchia*’ is totally in ruins. They appear as fragments or

relicts from a great shipwreck. Archaeological excavations, however, rather like the excavations of Calatameth in the province of Trapani, have also uncovered—in the province of Palermo, more specifically in Campo Fiorito, in the site known as ‘The Castle of Batticani’ or the ‘Castle of Count Rayneri’ or even more colloquially ‘*Castellaccio*’—the ruins of a fortalice, which from various valid pieces of evidence, allow it to be dated from the Norman era, and establishing it as a *donjon*, surrounded by a curtain wall. On the summit plateau at 610 mts, a curtain wall with an irregular ovoid shape, and a bulwark, covers an area of around 2,000 sqmts. There are two gates let into the wall, respectively to the east and west, guarded by two flanking square towers, some 1.60 mts thick, not much different

from that of the outer curtain wall.

The curtain wall appears to have been built in a single phase, and have been dated to early Norman times by the diggers. Almost at the summit of the ridge is a tower, not quite square as it is 10 x 11 mts, divided on the groundfloor into two rooms by a central wall, as is characteristic of many Norman and Anglo-norman donjons, as well as those of Paternò and Adrano at the foot of Etna. There is certainly a first floor and the diggers do not exclude that there were further floors. A short distance from the north side of the donjon (around 1.50 mts at the maximum point), at the highest elevation of the ridge, a church with a rectangular floor plan was

built (5.42 x 9.20 mts), with a semi-circular protruding apse and perimeter walls that are 0.90 mts thick. As for the rest of the complex, the diggers suggest that the church was built in Norman times, which can be considered highly likely, if not a certainty given the typology of the Castle (*donjon*, church and irregular curtain wall encircling a '*base cour*' or inner bailey), as well as the already mentioned analogies with Calatameth, in Bagni Segestani, province of Trapani. Until a short time ago this Castle was known only for the lack of documentation, what there was relating only to the early Middle Ages, and for the risible amount of visible remains. The knowledge of its

9
*Vicari. Panorama of
the Castle*



historical significance is due almost entirely to an important archaeological intervention, and there is another fortified complex, almost certainly Norman, which awaits exhaustive study.

This refers to the Castellaccio of Mount Caputo or the **Castellaccio of Monreale (fig. 10)**, a monument that although very well known, has only partially been investigated. Sited on the internal summit of Mount Caputo, dominating Monreale, it is visible from many places in the city of Palermo. The panorama from the summit stretches from the ex Palermitan Conca d'Oro to the mountains that enclose the valley of the river Iato, in the direction of the municipalities that between the end of the 12th century and 1246 were at the centre of an important uprising of the Islamic population. The Castellaccio has a groundplan that is a long, almost rectangular parallelogram, some 80 x 30 mts in size. The high walls have rectangular towers at irregular intervals, four to the southwest, two to the northeast, one of which is the main entrance gate. A triapsidal church building projects from the same wall. Along the walls and in the towers are occasional lancet windows and what are most likely loopholes that recall those in the tower of the façade of the Cathedral Monreale nearby, founded in 1174.

Inside the Castellaccio are two very distinct areas: one residential, with rooms grouped around a courtyard; the other more monastic with a courtyard delimited by stilobates, originally a cloister, and also a triapsidal church, partly built over a cistern, as is the case at Calatameth and in the Castle of Caronia, built in the 12th century.

There is no documentation of the origins of

the Castellaccio, nor is there any mention of it until mid 14th century, when, in those bellicose times, it was purely a garrison. Its Norman origins, more or less contemporary with those of the Cathedral of Monreale, are however, mentioned on various occasions. From the architectural particulars already mentioned, together with the bent entrance into the tower, which is similar to one in a large fortified building, late 12th/early 13th century, excavated at Entella, it would seem logical to presume that the complex, which could almost constitute an acropolis of the monastic citadel of Monreale, with its extremely high guard post facing the



municipalities inhabited by the Muslims was built more or less at the same time as that of Entella as a guard house and secure refuge. In the panorama of Norman castles known in Sicily, the Castellaccio of Monreale is, however, unique.

Its massive and compact architectural design and the geometrical ground plan of the complex are at opposite ends of the spectrum – for example – of the *lache* curtain wall of the Castellaccio of Camporeale. There is also a complete absence of a donjon but the presence of an ample cloister, which can be explained by the building's monastic origins. A

large space, clearly religious (cloisters and church), together with the dwellings are enclosed within a geometric and impenetrable walled curtain, with towers that more closely resemble the northafrican Islam fortifications with their *rbut* (plural of *ribat*) or perhaps even more so the older Byzantine models, rather than *the cinte laches* [ring-works] of Castellaccio di Camporeale, of Caronia, of the Castle in Segesta or even the bailey of the Castle of Erice. It would seem that the builders of what can still, in many ways, be considered the mysterious Castellaccio, were heavily influenced by Islamic military architecture.

10
*Monreale. The
'Castellaccio'*



11

Calatamauro. The Rock and the Castle ruins

The Swabian and Angevin Age

The grandiose construction of castles under Frederick II, dictated by precise political and strategical reasons, was concentrated mainly in eastern Sicily, from Milazzo to Messina, Catania and Syracuse and probably even Gela. The great urban rebellion of 1231-1232, brutally repressed; the crusade of the excommunicated Emperor; the conquest of the kingdom of Jerusalem with the necessity of provisioning the Imperial garrisons with men, arms,

victuals and basic means of subsistence, from secure bases in the most eastern part of the *regnum* [kingdom]. Last but not least, it would appear that Castel Maniace in Syracuse was built purely to represent and symbolise the Imperial power.

Western Sicily was, with the exception of some fortified residences (*Bellumvidere*, *Bellumreparum*, *Burgimilluso*), less involved.

These were probably only partly built and moreover were more *sollacia* [see





Treasure Map 6] than strong military garrisons. The Emperor even ordered a sort of temporary demilitarisation of the castles of the important maritime cities of Trapani, Marsala and Mazara, consigning them into the care of loyal citizens with the requirement that they not be allowed to fall into ruins.

The story of fortified architecture in what is now the province of Palermo, would, during the Swabian era, appear to be an almost blank page were it not for some

recent and less recent archaeological discoveries. The name of Calatamauro (**fig. 11**) figures in the list of '*castra exempta*', of 1239, castles belonging to the crown, not under the control of the '*provisor castrorum*' and of which the nomination of the castellan remained within the sphere of the sovereign. From the surrounding hills of an extensive estate in the vicinity of Contessa Entellina a rocky spur, difficult to access and protected by a sheer rock face, stands

12
Cefalù. The Rock



13
*Cefalù. Panorama
from the Rock*

out. On its summit stands the Castle of Calatamauro, or rather what is left of it. An external curtain wall closed off the north side of the upland, whilst an internal curtain wall enclosed the summit of the ridge and the heart of the whole 'castrum'. A long, rectangular building (11.40 x 5.00 mts), close to the entrance gate was perhaps the castle stables. Some parts of the inner wall are still extremely high, reaching 9 mts. Under the bailey (courtyard) there is a magnificent underground cistern (6.80 x 11.30 mts), with ogival vaults reinforced by an arcade that brings to mind those of the Castles of Calatafimi and Agira. Excavations of the **Rocca of Cefalù** (fig. 12) have confirmed the probable origin of the summital Castle from Norman times, with a subsequent profound adaptation under Frederick II, when the Emperor managed to get his hands on this important fortified position in 1223, which until then had been under

episcopal jurisdiction. The political coup that permitted Frederick to capture the Castle of Cefalù (fig. 13), was justified by the fact that it was situated on the edge of the '*marchia sarracenorum*', the territory under the control of the Muslims who were openly hostile to the Royal and Imperial jurisdiction and who were engaged in a fierce fight to defend and free the territory occupied by them. During the minority of the Sovereign, the Church of Cefalù had managed to obtain the concession of the '*castellum Polline*', the Castle of Polline (fig. 14), sited on an elevated ridge overlooking the Tyrrhenian coast. Nowadays only stretches of the curtain wall and a tower on three floors, sited on the highest point, remain of the fortalice. Some of the important monuments brought to light by archaeological surveys can be connected to the wars against the Saracens that overran a large part of western Sicily between the death of

William II and 1246. A fortified Palazzo was built on the **Rock of Entella (fig. 15)**, already mentioned above as one of the strongholds of the Muslim rebels.

It was erected on the site of a previous residence dating from the Islamic era, between the end of 12th and early 13th century, with a rectangular ground plan (18 x 27 mts), with a bent entrance in the tower. There is also a *hamman*, a small thermal bath with a raised floor and heating. Not far away, still on the Rock of Entella (**fig. 16**), on the summit known as the '**Pizzo della Regina**', the remains of another fortified building have been unearthed.

The excavations currently under way in the other principal bastion of the Muslim resistance against Frederick II, known as Mount Iato, are also extremely interesting. Here, at the foot of the last mountain elevation, a few hundred metres from the spectacular gate entrance into the Islamic citadel, on the hill known locally as **Castellazzo (fig. 17)**, the remains of the *castra*, the fortified camps erected by Frederick II for the long and complicated siege of Iato between 1222 and 1224, have been partially brought to light. These encampments were almost certainly refutilised for the second and definitive siege in 1246, at the end of which Iato was totally abandoned.

The site both covered visually and blocked access to the east gate of Iato, which was probably the most important one. The east gate of the Muslim city is only 400 metres as the crow flies, far enough away to place the fortified camp at a safe distance from



arrows shot from a longbow or a crossbow, or from a trebuchet or onager but at the same time close enough to constitute a real nightmare for the besieged. The expression, 'the enemy is at the gate' adapts itself perfectly to the situation. The opening of the '*Bāb Sharqi*' [Gate of the Sun, was one of the eight ancient city gates of Damascus, Syria] or entrance gate of Iato, still frames the menacing heights of the Castellazzo (**fig. 18**). The abundant availability of water (there is still a plentiful source in the vicinity) made the position even more suitable for the location of a large siege camp. The presence of Frederick II, the numerous troops and at least a campaign section of his Chancery, suggest the existence of an important settlement, even if only for the short duration of the siege.

14
Pollina. Panorama with the Castle tower

15
On the following page: Panorama of the Rock of Entella







16
*Rock of Entella.
 Pizzo della Regina*

They must have been structures able to house the Emperor and part of his court, as well as an army, certainly numerous and well equipped and able to preside over the siege for several years, even though they could count on being resupplied from Palermo itself, only a day's march away. The first findings from the excavations fully confirm the original hypothesis. The Castellazzo (fig.19), is a ridge than reaches 702 mts above sea level, at its summit and has an irregular polygonal perimeter which slopes down to the southeast and is almost imperceptibly higher to the west. From both the aerial survey photos from the 1950's and '60's and from more recent satellite imagery, it has been possible to verify that the perimeter of the summital ridge plateau is entirely fortified, and the fortifications follow the natural features of the upland. A second curtain wall, here defined as the 'outer' wall, that encloses a much larger area of land, rises up from most of the area and encloses Castellazzo to the east and the south. The entire plateau of Castellazzo, 120 mts by 46 mts at its widest point, must have surrounded by

a wall of local rough-hewn stone, about 2 mts thick and in some places more so, certainly extremely high, or at least more than sufficient for a good defense, with numerous turrets projecting outwards, of which two have been brought to light. The enceinte must have been about 300 mts. We therefore believe that the *Frederician castra*, frequently cited in sources, actually contained a smaller but more heavily fortified area (ward), probably reserved for the high command or even for the Emperor himself and a larger one (ward or bailey) for the main body of troops, the animals and all their baggage and equipment (*impedimenta*). A possible entrance could have been from the southeast. Immediately to the east there is a plain, most likely the main campsite of the siege troops. The entire area is scattered with remains of a necropolis connected to the Hellenic phase of the city of *Ietas-Jatum*. Once the site had been discovered and surveyed, three different digs were open between 2011 and 2015, all three in the same northern zone of the upland. Early excavations show that the structure

must have been a really massive stone fortification, with turrets at more or less regular intervals. According to Tommaso Fazello, the stone structure of the *Frederician castra* were still visible, certainly more so than nowadays, in the 16th century. Coins recovered, some dating from 1221-1225, and some from 1243-1248, suggest that the structures were built for the first siege in 1222-1224 and then reused a second time for the final assault in 1246, led by Robert, Count of Caserta. The first sample dig uncovered what must have been the inner curtain wall, which would have enclosed the entire upland sommital plateau, that is the most internal, highest

and best defended of the complex of the *castra*. Once the stones from a modern vineyard had been removed a further 8 mts of curtain wall was brought to light. The presence of two rectangular projecting edifices up against the wall, indicate, as has already been suggested, that the fortifications included turrets. These structures are made of limestone blocks, some of which are rectangular, joined by claysoil mortar. The internal wall covering consists of shapeless stone slabs of varying sizes. The thickness of the wall varies from 2.0 to 2.5mts. What is left of the turrets is between 1.50 and 1.70 mts. A square room, (2.86 x 3.10 mts), has



17
*Mount Iato. The
 east Gate and the
 Castellazzo*

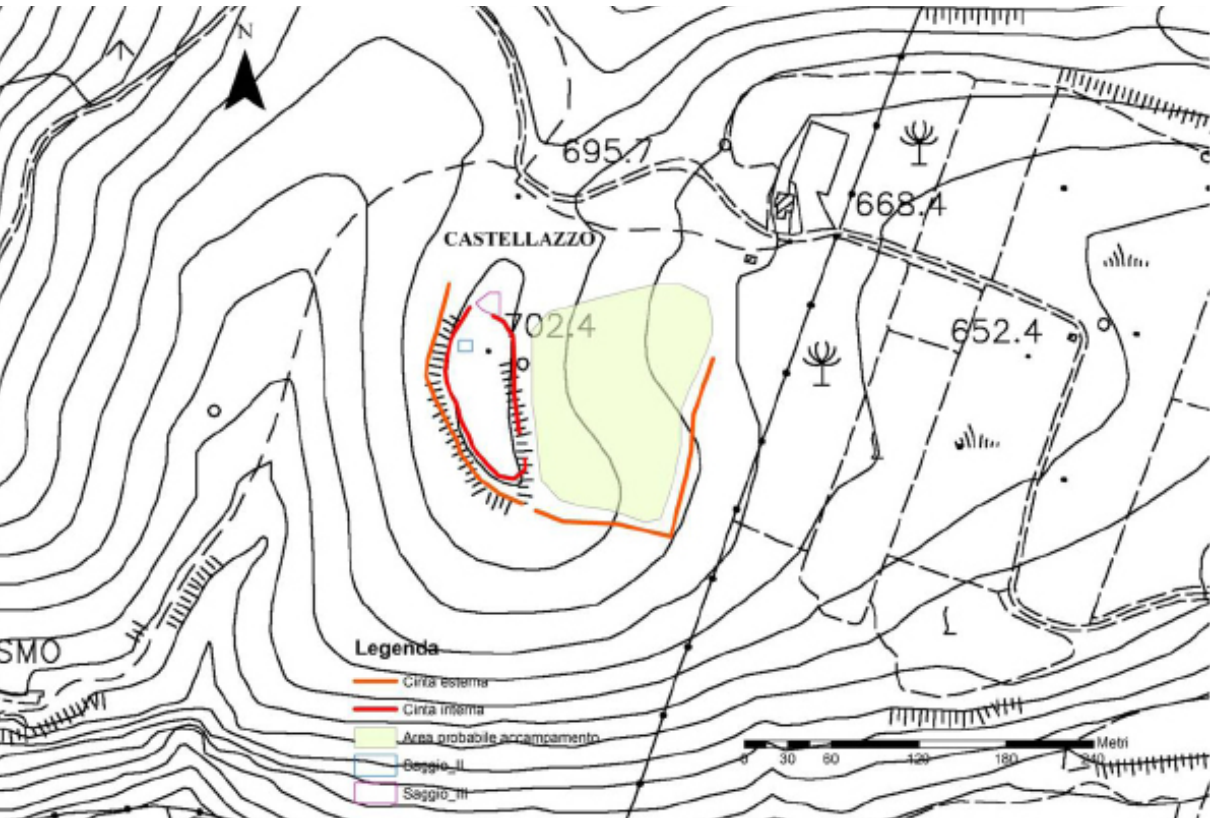
18

Mount Iato. Internal and external perimeter wall

been brought to light, projecting internally from the excavated external wall, with an entrance from the south, and built in the same way as the rest of the structures, with walls that are 0.60 mts thick.

Another piece of the inner curtain wall was unearthed during the third sample dig. Besides the Frederician coins, the site has also brought to light various fragments of what is known as Spiral Ware, characteristic of the last years of the 12th century and the first decades of the 13th century, together with fragments of cooking ceramics made in Messina, commonly found throughout

Sicily between the second half of the 12th century and the first half of the 13th century. Metallic artefacts include lance tips, the hilt of a sword, quarrels from a crossbow, one of which was still stuck in skeleton found in a tomb, partially lined with stone slabs and lain on a rock. Death was probably due to being shot by a crossbow and the cadaver was deposited prone with his face towards the south, but it is not possible to exclude completely that he was laid on his right side, which could indicate a Muslim burial. The Angevin era added a few names to the list of existing Castles, for example Isnello,





nowadays a mass of picturesque ruins. There is really no documentation, either from historical sources or architectural texts, on any new important building programmes. However, the system of Castles belonging to the Sovereign power was further perfected. Created originally under the Normans and improved by Frederick II, the *castra regii demani* belonged to the crown, under allodial title, guarded by garrisons paid by the monarch and commanded by a castellan chosen by the king or by the *'provisor castrorum'*, (castle proveditor) the highest appointment in this administrative field. For the province of Palermo under the Angevins, the following were documented as belonging to the Sovereign: Calatamauro, Carini, Cefalù, the two castra of Corleone, Geraci, the two castles in Palermo (Palazzo Reale and Castello a Mare), Polizzi, San Mauro, Termini and Vicari. The choice is obviously not causal. The crown maintained its hold over the principal cities, keeping them under its direct power. After Palermo came Cefalù, Corleone and Termini. Other castles watched over the central crossroads of the main routes: Vicari, perched on a high plateau, was an essential point for the

control of the Palermo-Agrigento route, as well as over a road that started in Caccamo and Termini, passing through the valley of the river San Leonardo: Polizzi, from its equally important strong position, was a way station on the road between Palermo and Messina through the mountains: Carini was sited along the axis route that led to Trapani. The network of state owned castles also in the present day province of Palermo allowed the Monarch a certain amount of control over the territory. This, however was not sufficient to stop or at least contain the Revolt of the Sicilian Vespers. From Palermo the rebellion spread throughout the territory. The Angevin Chief Justiciar or *magister justitiarius*, the highest authority [of the Royal Household], took refuge in the Castle of Vicari but was overtaken by rebel troops from Palermo and Caccamo, besieged and then killed together with the garrison. Palermo and Corleone signed a Treaty of Alliance and Mutual Aid, which included, amongst other clauses, the destruction of the castle of Calatamauro, a thorn in the side of the territory of the Corleone area. The Angevin domination of Sicily finished in violence as in violence it had begun.

19
*Mount Iato. Remains
of a turret*

The Years of the Vespers and of Frederick III the Great

The Island was given to King Peter III of Aragon, husband of Constance, daughter of King Manfred, as was customary under Swabian rule. Charles of Anjou, Lord of the Mezzogiorno (Southern Italy), did not resign himself to its loss. The resulting war, momentarily interrupted by the Peace of Caltabellotta in 1302, was reopened with violent naval battles, the advance of Sicilian troops in Calabria and the invasion of Sicily by the Angevin troops in retaliation. The battle of Aci-Ognina in 1356 resulted in the end of Angevin pretensions to the throne, even though the peace treaty was not signed until 1372. It has been suggested that this long but discontinuous conflict should be known as the Ninety Years War.

The most difficult years for Sicily will be those during the long reign of Frederick III of Aragon, called 'The Great' by the noted 18th-19th century historian, Rosario Gregorio. This designation is amply justified by a Monarch who, by using all the means at his disposal, successfully opposed the belligerence of the Angevins, supported, obviously by the French, stood up to Pope Boniface VIII, and even to the hostility of the Crown of Aragon itself at one point. The castle architecture in Sicily, including the current province of Palermo, is closely linked to these bellicose events and to the figure of Frederick the Great himself. Frederick reinforced some of the weakest points along the coastline, where there was fear of Angevin-Neapolitan invasion by sea: the Gulf of Castellammare, the seaboard of Termini, and much further east, the plain of Milazzo. At the same time, he had built

a series of strongholds at strategic points inland, obligatory passages along impervious routes inland, were the Angevin armies to land and endeavour to penetrate the Island: centrally located sites, perched on hilltops, from whence a rapid intervention, were it necessary, could be launched. Frederick III's reign is therefore an epic era of war, during which Sicily covers itself with walls, castles and fortifications. Building activity was frenetic, even more so than during the reign of Frederick II of Swabia, who has come under heavy historical scrutiny and continues to do so. Scholarly tradition, furthered by the homonymy of the two Kings and the pedanticism of past and of some present scholars, who insist on calling 'Our', Frederick II, based on the theoretical numeric succession of the kings of Sicily (but no one ever called Frederick I of Sicily, the Emperor and king Frederick II 'of Hohenstaufen') has resulted in the latter being attributed with architectural initiatives that almost certainly or most probably should be attributed to Frederick III, the Great.

A blatant example is that of the **Castle of Giuliana (fig. 20)**, sited at the southern outskirts of the province of Palermo. The complex is attributed to Frederick III, the Great both by the 16th century scholar Fazello and then later, in the 18th century, by Vito Amico. However, both authors number the Monarchs with reference to the theoretical Sicilian succession, so that Frederick *tercius* or III of Aragon is called King Frederick II by both of them. This leads to the usual confusion.

The attribution of the Castle of Giuliana to the Swabian King, evidently felt to be





more prestigious, had already been proposed by Calandra, subsequently adopted by the local historiographers, in the catalogue of Frederician castles, edited in 1975, with reservations, by Giuseppe Bellafiore and at least partly in the catalogue of the Great Frederician Exhibition held in Palermo in 1994, after which the complex was subjected to a challenging restoration. Marchese, a shrewd local scholar, has however conclusively proven that the castle should be attributed to the Frederick III of Aragon. The scarcity of historical documentation on the region does little to help arrive at a definitive chronological attribution of the complex. Giuliana is first mentioned in Norman times only as a manor house. After this original annotation at the end of the 12th century, there is no specific mention of the locality during the Swabian era. The next certain source on Giuliana comes from the tax returns of the Angevins and Aragonese in 1277 and 1283, noted as a small residential area. In 1280 there is mention of a *castrum Iullani* and of the lords Fulco and Henry de Puigrichard. It is however, impossible to ascertain whether *Iullanum* is the correct interpretation and above all, that it refers to Giuliana and not to Giugliano in Campania, which seems almost more probable, given that it is not possible to examine the original document. Davì wrote about the ‘iconographical singularity’ of Giuliana, while Santoro described it as being ‘the most atypical [building] of Sicily’ because of the floorplan and shape adopted. The fortified complex is sited at the highest point of the relief, where the inhabited centre is clinging on, at 734 mts, on the cliff overhanging the valley. It

is formed of a large block building with two rectangular wings at an obtuse angle, from which a pentagonal tower projects. Apparently the structure is laid out with mathematical precision, both internally and externally. The donjon seems to be the natural fulcrum from which the two almost identical wings spread out. It is strange that no one has thought to describe the ground plan as imitating the Swabian eagle. But in fact, a simple visit to the site confirms the theory put forward by Meli: that the structure must have been built in phases, even if relatively in quick succession. The two wings were added to the pre-existing Tower, and the southern walls of the tower were chipped away. The complex formed by the pentagonal donjon and the rectangular wings, is protected to the north—towards the inhabited area—by a curtain wall, which forms half of an irregular polygon. The wall, together with the pentagonal donjon and the castle, are built of chalk blocks of varying sizes, usually accurately hewn and placed with a certain need for regularity. There are some buildings attached to the inside of the wall, constructed or adapted in modern times for Olivetan monks. A rectangular tower projects from the north corner of the curtain wall, immediately to the east of the access gate, which has the date 1663 engraved on one of the ashlar blocks. The wall tower, where the lack of plaster allows one to look closely, appears to be clamped to the curtain wall and built of the similar material and techniques. The polygonal buttress to the west of the access gate is simply leant against the wall and appears to be a later addition.

21

Regiovanni. The castle

The transformations to which the curtain wall has been subjected do not permit the detection of any original battlements, although at least thirteen infilled flat-arched loopholes about half way up, are very visible.

To the south, between the southern façade of the Palazzo and the edge of the cliff overlooking the valley underneath, there is a modest area, which is difficult not to label as a 'pleasure' space, for the occupants of the Palazzo. It was most likely some kind of garden-panoramic viewpoint, from which, in fact there is the most wonderful view over the valley of the river Sosio and the Caltabellotta mountains. The central palace, if one excludes the pentagonal tower, has only a ground floor, consisting of three rectangular halls, with intercommunicating doors and covered by ogival vaults. The west and central halls, separated by a small courtyard with a two ramp staircase leading to the covering terrace and to the first floor of the donjon, are punctuated by two spans of ogival arches. The west hall is further divided in two by a partition wall. In the central hall, the median arch abuts on the impost blocks supported by corbels with the shape of truncated inverted pyramids, which are similar to those of the Castles of Augusta and Catania.

The overall iconography of the Palazzo allows a comparison to be drawn with the Castelluccio of Gela and with the 'palacia' of the Castle of Milazzo as well as that of Lombardia of Enna. The Swabian influence is undisputed, even if it must be considered probable or certain its dating to the era of Frederick III, as argued by Marchese.

The pentagonal donjon has only one internal space on the ground floor and one on the upper floor, which are not directly interconnecting. Both ceilings are barrel vaulted and combined with irregular semi-domes (conches) resting on the triangular salient of the pentagonal building. The upper room is accessed via a door that opens onto the ceiling of the underlying central hall. An internal wooden staircase leads via a second ramp attached to the wall, to the donjon terrace. The upper part of the tower, but only on the south side, shows traces of crenellations in the infilling of the walls. Concluding, the Castle of Giuliana, is not just a military garrison, but a residential Palazzo, whose defense was entrusted to the external semi-polygonal curtain wall and to its strategic siting on the sheer cliff-face overlooking the valley. Under Frederick III, and particularly after the damage suffered by the walls because of the Angevin assault of 1325, the city of Palermo, at great expense, restored and in part reconstructed *ex novo*, the perimeter wall, abandoning entire segments of the old wall dating from the Norman era or even from Islamic times.

Only two hundred years later, after several important interventions in the 15th century, the city was forced to erect, at far greater cost, a formidable curtain wall fortified with ramparts, as defence against the dreaded attack by the Turks.

The volumes of the *Acta Curie Felicis Urbis Panormi*, relative to the reign of Frederick III, are full of information relating to the building of the walls and the construction of ulterior defenses, as for example the construction of bartizans and stone



throwing weapons. In one of the most dramatic moments of the war, which allows the Angevin forces to overrun the Castello a Mare in the city, a provisional wall was built around the Castle itself, this side of the moat. In this way, the Angevins, shut up in the Castle, were not able to make a sally, and the besieging Sicilian troops were given cover.

From the years following the Revolt of the Vespers and before the rebuilding of the walls, the city of Palermo organised (or perhaps perfected) a coastal guard with observation points and signal stations on summital points— Mount Pellegrino, Cape Gallo, Mount Catalfano—from which it was possible to control a large stretch of coastline. The system appeared to work relatively efficiently: an alarm given by the guards of *cap de Gall* (Cape Gallo), who, in 1299, had spied the arrival of the fleet of the Prince of Taranto, was able to reach Frederick III, sheltered inside

Castrogiovanni, extremely quickly. During the war fought by Frederick III, the site of **Regiovanni (fig. 21)** appears for the first time as a *castrum*, south of Gangi. It was a spectacular rock castle, partly constructed and partly dug out of a very high rocky pinnacle, in which there are underground burial vaults, no longer reachable as well as pole holes, which would appear to document the existence of wooden structures no longer standing. Regiovanni is part of a relatively substantial group of medieval Sicilian rock castles, together with—to cite a few well known examples—Sperlinga and Gagliano. One of the sections of the Sicilian shoreline particularly open to Angevin landings and offensive inland sorties, were the long sandy beaches stretching from Cefalù (Cape Plaia) to Termini. The valleys of the rivers that flow out into the sea at this point—the river Torto, the Roccella stream, and above all the Northern Imera River—offer just as many

22
Gibilmanna. The original site of the Castle of Mount Sant'Angelo, no longer in existence

MEDIEVAL CASTLES

penetration routes to the hinterland. Here, at the beginning of the 14th century, with an operation that recalls the one carried out at Bonifato above Alcamo, the ancient

Norman hamlet of Brucato is revived and fortified. A propos of this it is important to remember Bresc's hypothesis of the fortification of the entire area, wanted and once again overseen by Frederick III himself. Yet again, along the Tyrrhenian shore, this time in the immediate vicinity of Cefalù, on the Pizzo Sant'Angelo (**Gibilmanna**) (fig. 22), there is documentation in the 1430's of a "*castrum et terram Sancti Angeli*



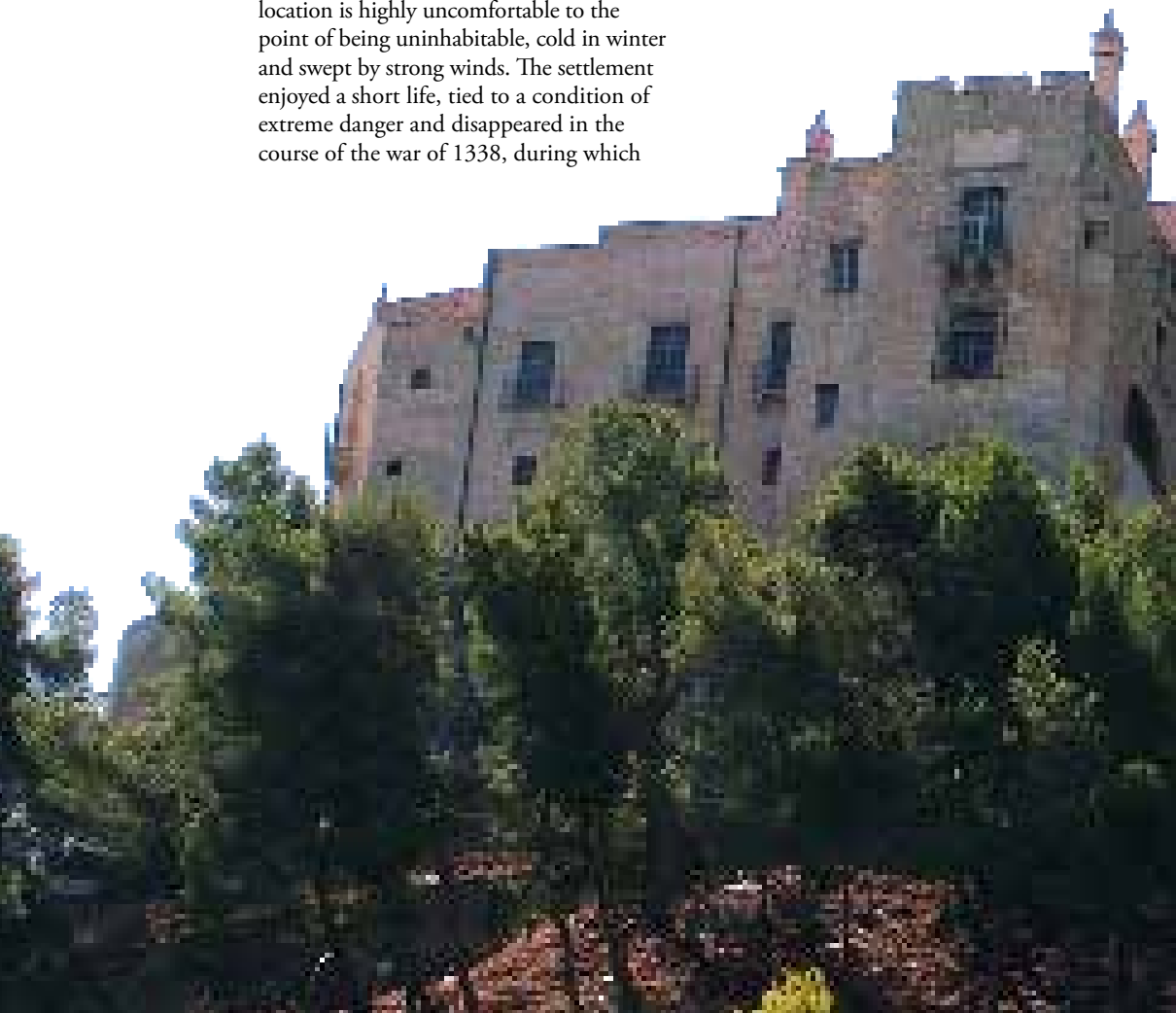
23
Castelbuono.
The Castle



24
Carini. The Castle

Bonvicini”, under the control of Frances I of Ventimiglia, Count Geraci. The site was excellently placed for defense but not so pleasant as a residence. It is extremely high up, (1,081 mts above sea level) from which there was a commanding view of a large tract of the shoreline and the sea. The location is highly uncomfortable to the point of being uninhabitable, cold in winter and swept by strong winds. The settlement enjoyed a short life, tied to a condition of extreme danger and disappeared in the course of the war of 1338, during which

also Brucato was wiped out. Only a few, almost imperceptible traces remain of the *terra* [ancient inhabited area] and the Castle, both placed under the protection of Sant’Angelo, Prince Archistrategist of the Heavenly Militia. Not far from Pizzo Sant’Angelo, on the



site of the old manor house of Ipsigro (*belvidiri de Ipsigro*), the Castle and lands of **Castelbuono** (fig. 23) were sited, on the initiative of the same Frances I of Ventimiglia: thus it would appear that the county centre of influence of the Ventimiglia was to be transferred from Geraci, distant, high up and accessible with difficulty. For the moment, however, the Rock of Geraci maintained its role and becomes the centre of the tragic rebellion of Frances I of Ventimiglia in

1338. As already documented by Bresc, it is unthinkable that Ventimiglia decided to build Castelbuono without the permission or even the encouragement of the Sovereign.

Castelbuono vaguely resembles the Castles of Frederick II, with its fairly regular ground-plan, and the actual buildings organised around a small central bailey,



MEDIEVAL CASTLES

25

Partinico. Remains of the 'Castellazzo della Sala Partinico'

26

Roccella. The Castle, during early 20th century

protected by corner wall-towers. It is also obvious of the desire of the Ventimiglia, to build a residence, a palazzo-castle that was less forbidding than the crude fortalices sited on rugged ridges, like that of the old Castle of Geraci, the original centre and eponymous locality of the county of

Ventimiglia. The Castle of Castelbuono, in its final configuration acquired during the course of the 14th century, resembled a tetragon with a small central *bailey* and corner wall-towers, also square except for the one in the northeast corner which was circular. If, as has been suggested, the east corner wall-tower was also circular, then the iconographic ground-plan of Castelbuono would have been replicated not long afterwards in the Castle of Alcamo, built by the Ventimiglia half way through the 14th century. The Ventimiglia, are therefore, after the Monarchy, the most important protagonists of the great period of construction of important fortified buildings that took place during the reign of Frederick III.

Another great military family, the Abbate, would appear to have fortified, during the course of the 14th century, the residential area of **Carini** (fig. 24), one of their fiefdoms, by raising new walls. The Gulf of Carini, to the west of Palermo, was another position of strategic importance and was violently attacked by the Angevins in 1314. Not far from Carini, at the extreme east end of the Gulf of Castellammare, starting in 1315, a new garrison was built on the site of **Partinico** (fig. 25). The place had probably been deserted from the time of the Muslim wars of Frederick II, and the new Castle, for centuries known as *Sala Partinici*, was the initial nucleus aimed at repopulation. There was already a Castle in Partinico, from Norman times, perched on Mount Cesarò, and almost certainly deserted at the beginning of the 14th century. For the new fortalice, nowadays



reduced to a few remains and known as the Castellaccio, a less impassable position was chosen, a rocky spur at the foot of Mount Cesarò.

The latter remained deserted, leaving a few ruins and the vestiges of the old Norman

castle: in 1340 sources write *ubi erat castrum Parthenici* [where the castrum of Parthenici was]. The repopulation of the settlement and rebuilding of the Castle, authorised and probably also encouraged by Frederick III, was carried out under

27
*Roccella. The Castle
before restoration work*

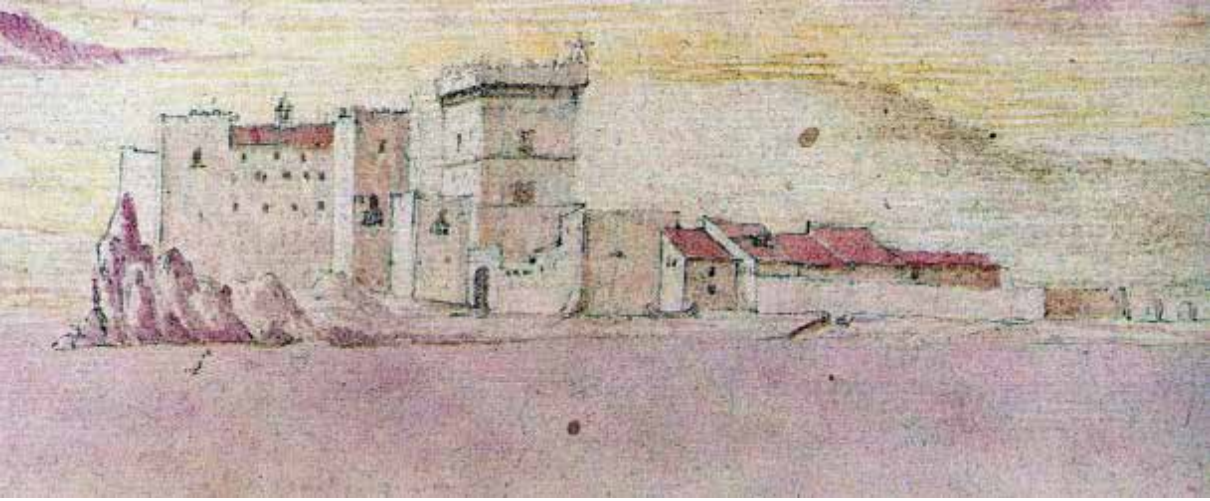




28

*Roccella. View of the
Castle from the sea,
before restoration work*





29

Roccella. The Castle in a drawing by C. Camilliani, late 16th century

the aegis of a great ecclesiastic Order, the Cistercian Abbey of Altofonte [Monastero di Santa Maria di Altofonte in the Park, nowadays the town of Altofonte], who had feudal tenure. It is therefore possible to follow, through this research on 14th century Sicilian castles, the titanic efforts made by Frederick III the Great to hold the kingdom of Sicily, free and united under the rule of the Monarchy. Bresc maintains that this was the ultimate demiurgical act (at least for the medieval period) of the Sicilian Monarchy, but that against this background of Sovereign domination

the power of the aristocratic military was inexorably growing. Important aristocratic families commission imposing architectonic works such as the Palazzo Chiamonte and Palazzo Sclafani in Palermo, and in the heart of the Ventimiglia fiefdom, castles such as that in Castelbuono. The military aristocracy is destined to dominate the scene in the second half of the century



30
Cefalà. The Castle





and literally, to encase its power with the elevation of dozens of new small fortresses. This era will be interrupted by the invasion of the Martini. In 1418, well into the 15th century, the besieging by the Viceregal troops of a baronial castle, could be held to symbolise the end of the long period of the Sicilian 14th century, which began with the rebellion of Easter Monday in 1282. The bombarding of the Castle of Roccella, belonging to the Ventimiglia family and rebuilt in the second half of the 14th century, definitively destroyed the ambitions of the rebellious Giovanni and Cicco Ventimiglia.

The baronial initiatives during the reign of Frederick III can be considered a prologue to the intense programme of encastellation, desired and executed by the military aristocracy during the second half of the 14th century, often without the consent, theoretically necessary, of the Monarchy, whose powers continued to weaken.

After the death of Frederick IV and the abduction of his daughter, Queen Mary, [this power vacuum] was replaced, after a rather unfortunate period of internecine fighting, by a kind of aristocratic, decentralised, collective government, the so-called government of ‘*Quattro Vicari*’ (Four Vicars).

The comital families— Chiaramonte, Ventimiglia, Alagona, Peralta—are the undisputed executors of the construction of castles in the second half of the 14th century, whilst the Monarchy disappears from the scene. It is Jaime or Gaimo Alagona who builds the Castle of Casa Nuova, really just a Tower added to the east wall of Ortigia in Syracuse. To the Alagona,

or more precisely to Artale of Alagona, can be attributed to reconstruction of the *arx* of Bicocca on the Catanian plain, after it had been destroyed by the Chiaramontan troops. It was the Chiaramonte who founded, in the first half of the century, the *terra* and Castle on the site of the ancient Gulfi, from which it took the name. The *hosterium* of Favara, built by the Chiaramonte, also dates from the first half of the 14th century. The family name was also given to the Castle of Montechiaro, already in existence in 1355.

It is also probable that the Chiaramonte ordered the building of the Tower of Misilcassim and of Camastra, of the Castle of Siculiana and of Alcamo. Other more or less important construction works are traditionally attributed to the Chiaramonte, as in the case of the Castles of Mussomeli, Naro and in the present day province of Palermo, of Misilmeri and Vicari amongst others.

The Sclafani, lords of the homonymous Castle and residential area in the Madonie, fortified and encastled the municipality of Chiusa, which added the family name to its own.

To the Ventimiglia, lords of the Madonie, can be attributed the Castle, the *turris* of Resuttano, the *castrum* of Bilici, whose ruins nowadays house a sanctuary, and the spectacular reconstruction of the coastal **Castle of Roccella (fig. 26-29)**. An enormous donjon, recently restored, represents the most massive monumental ruin left from those times, whilst of the grand Palazzo opposite (attested by 16th century drawings but difficult to date accurately), only the ruins of the ground

31 *Cefalà. The ‘Mastio’*



32
The Margana Castle

floor remain. The donjon, together with the underground cistern were originally only accessible from the interior, a ground floor accessible by a stone staircase with a drawbridge at one end and separated by a wooden ceiling on beautifully sculptured corbels, whilst the top floor is covered by two elegant groin vaults with a central ogival arch. From here steps carved out of the wall lead to the terrace, which was once crowned by merlons and machicolations supported by corbels. The view of the Tyrrhenian sea

and the coast of Termini must have been breathtaking, before the defacement of even this part of the Sicilian coastline. The presence of the donjon, found in many of these new 14th century castles built by the military aristocracy, is equally to be found in the splendid **Castle of Cefalà (fig. 30)** in the province of Palermo. It replaced, but there is no certifiable date, during the course of the 14th century, a preceding Norman *castellum* sited on Mount Chiarastella nearby. The Castle

(**fig. 31**), visible from afar, from almost every corner of the Baronial Cefalà, oversees the countryside, protecting the farmsteads and the harvest from enemy incursions, keeps an eye on the road that leads to Palermo and when necessary, obstructs the transit and the supply lines of grain to the capital. The Castle visually dominates the huge territory for miles around. The donjon, sited on a cliff of conglomerate, material also used for its fabrication, towers, powerful and forbidding, over the territory. Other isolated castles in the various

fiefdoms, that is with no surrounding residential areas, are in time of war, the logical evolution of preexisting manor farms or rustic *hospicia* and *mansiones*, originally footholds marginally defended or not at all, which the feudatories had constructed in less bellicose years under strict Monarchical control. This is the case of **Márgana (fig. 32)**, belonging to the Teutons of Vicari, and Bilíci, **Colobria (fig. 33)**, and Melia all appear similar. In the case of Palazzo Adriano, of which only a few ruins remain, it was annexed to a preexisting municipality, some time during the 14th century.

33
Colobria. The Castle





34

Corleone. The Upper Castle

The 15th century: return to Sovereign supremacy and the coastal defences

One of the first acts after the Catalan-Aragonese reconquest [of Sicily] at the end of the 14th century, by King Martin, the Younger and above all by his father Martin, Duke of Monblanc (subsequently King Martin the Older), was the reinstatement of the '*demanio reale*', the allodial title, whittled away for decades by baronial government, and therefore of the ring of Castles belonging to the Crown. In the present day province of Palermo, the most important were *in primis*, the Royal Palace of Palermo (*sacrum regium palacium*) and the Castello a Mare. The Castles of Termini and Cefalù were also of strategic importance, whilst less important were the Castles of Polizzi, nowadays almost nonexistent and the two Castles of **Corleone (Upper and Lower)**.

In 1409, the Castle of Cefalù was garrisoned

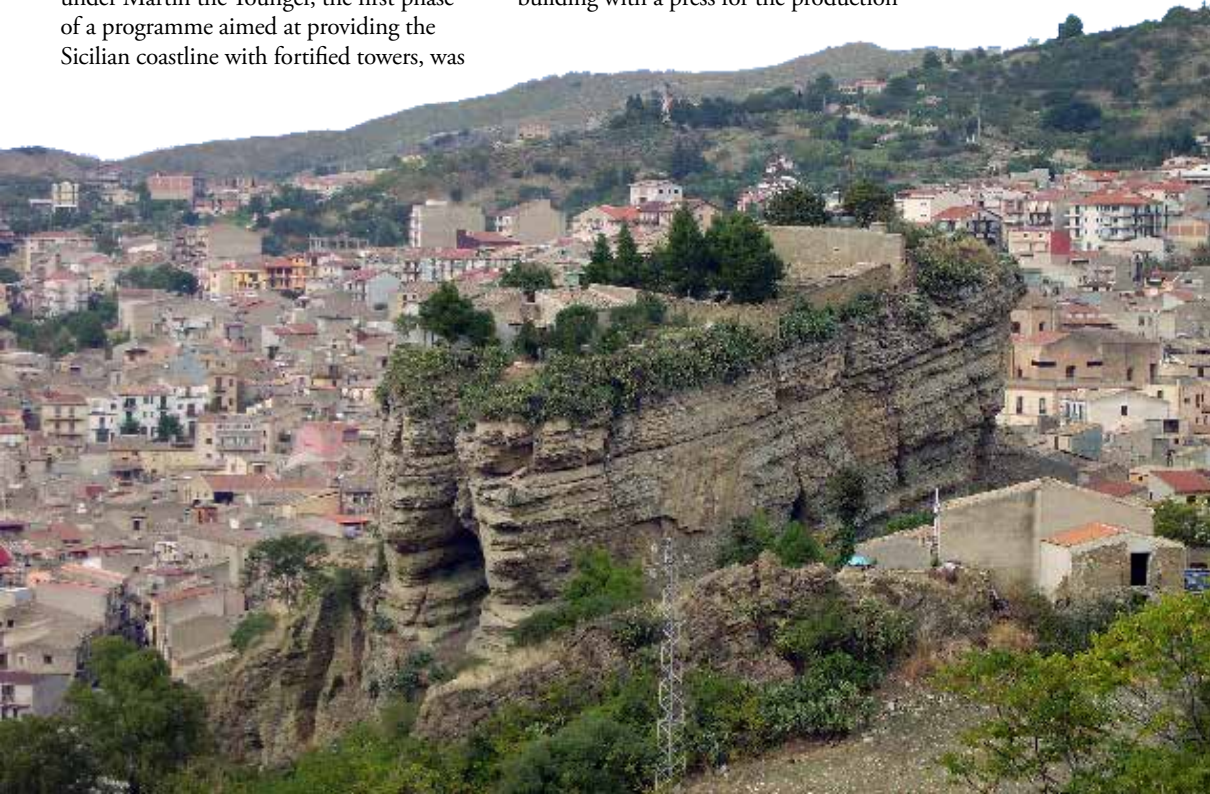
by 40 soldiers as well as the castellan and his vice; Termini housed 24; the Royal Palace in Palermo 18 and Castello a Mare 21. Polizzi housed only 9 and the Upper (**fig. 34**) and Lower (**fig. 35**) Castles of Corleone had respectively 9 and 8. Having retired the old fashioned counterweight throwing engines (trebuchets), the Castles were by now generally armed with cannons (bombards), of which the earliest Sicilian source can be found in the painted wooden ceiling of Palazzo Steri. In 1409, the Castello a Mare had no less than 6 cannons and 2 were in the Royal Palace. In the Upper Castle of Corleone there was only one bombard and there is still the wooden frame of a trebuchet. The soldiers wore a cuirass [breastplate], bassinet [helmet], gorget [stiff collar] and were armed, together with their personal sword, with a crossbow and large rectangular or heater shields. Every castle had a good stockpile of munitions and

victuals. Under the new order established by the Aragonese Monarchy, the royal Castles played an important role, whilst the political ambitions of the military aristocracy, once the Chiaramonte and other elements opposed to the Martini had been removed from the scene, were drastically redimensioned. The military aristocracy underwent substantial and radical transformations through the new order imposed by the Crown of Aragon. After the bellicose 14th century, the new century is characterised by a renewed fealty to the new dynasty.

At the beginning of the 15th century, under Martin the Younger, the first phase of a programme aimed at providing the Sicilian coastline with fortified towers, was

initiated, in an effort to tackle the continual Barbary incursions (in particular from Tunis). Amongst the forty towers that were planned either *ex novo* or in restructuring, are those that were effectively built in those years such as Capo Rama (**fig. 36**), on the promontory opposite the 'Isola delle Femmine' at Mongerbino. The first two are still in existence; the third has disappeared, probably in the last 50 years. During the 15th century the two Towers of Mondello, (the Tonnara and the Ficodindia, 1442?), that of the Rotolo, the Addaura (1409?), the one at Sferracavallo (1417), at San Nicola l'Arena (1440), the *Trappeto* [fortified building with a press for the production

35
Corleone. The Lower Castle



MEDIEVAL CASTLES



36
*Capo Rama. The
Tower*

37
*Montelepre. The
Ventimiglia Tower*

of sugar] at Partinico (1448) and others as well, more or less close to the coast, were all built by private or feudatory subjects. However it is necessary to wait until the end of the 16th century and the grandiose projects of Spannocchi and Camilliani, before the Sicilian coastline is provided with a considerable number of towers, including some forty built and administered directly by the State through a specific office (Deputation).

Very different from these early, small, coastal guard towers is the large tower (21 x 17 mts), commissioned by the Archbishop of Monreale, Giovanni Ventimiglia, to be built in the fiefdom of **Montelepre** (fig. 37-38). The external aspect is austere, rigidly geometrical, closed in and with





38
*Montelepre. Trifora,
 mullioned window in
 the Tower*

39
*Montelepre. Groin
 vault in the Tower*

the façade barely softened by a couple of bifore and trifore lancet mullion windows, whilst internally, in direct contrast, there is on the first floor a marvelous **ribbed and groin vaulted ceiling** (fig. 39). In a small centre certainly not on the grand tourist circuit, there is this jewel of Sicilian gothic art. Later, from 1468, Peter Speciale commissions the building of a great Tower to protect his sugar cane press at Ficarazzi. The 15th century will also see the readaptation of the Castle of Carini (fig. 40-41), of the La Grua, embellished with a wooden ceiling over the Large Hall. Another important building site opened during the 15th century was that of the Castle of Misilmeri (fig. 42), commissioned by the Ajutamicristo in 1487 and 'signed' by the one of the most important Sicilian architects of the 15th century, Matteo Carnalivari. These transformations, whilst improving the luxuries and the comforts of the building, at the same time, however, reduced its military efficiency.







Misilmeri must not have feared incursions from the coast, as in the restored era of peace inside Sicily, this had once again become the only really dangerous border of the Kingdom of Sicily, with the Mediterranean world in continual turmoil. On the contrary, along the coast, the fear of Tunisian pirates and at least from 1453, of the Turks, was to result in the first phase of the construction of the ring of Towers. The more important cities and Royal lands were also involved in these fortifications, often

designed, at the end of the 15th century, by the Spanish architect Baldiri Meteli, a name made famous by the recent research by Alessandro Gaeta. The capital of the Kingdom, Palermo, was obviously the object of particular attention. The **Castello a Mare (fig. 43)** and the Royal Palace, will be at the centre of continuous interventions, prolonged throughout the 16th century, eventually merging into the colossal modernisation of the urban fortifications under the Viceroy of Charles V. The great

40
Carini. The entrance to the Castle

41
Carini. The Castle tower

MEDIEVAL CASTLES



gate of the Castello a Mare, which has very meritoriously been recuperated and restored by the Soprintendenza di Palermo, together with what was left of the Castello itself, has an inscription dated 1496, with the arms of the Catholic kings. The conflict between the Spanish power and the Turkish Empire, which will dominate the 16th century history of the Mediterranean, begins to unfold.

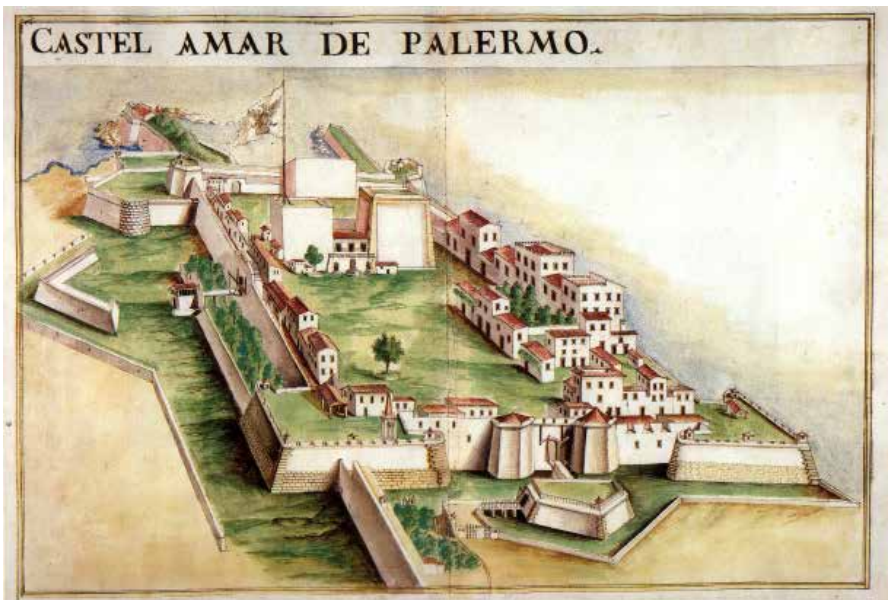
Sicily is forced to build bastions around all the main cities (Palermo, Milazzo, Messina, Catania, Augusta, Syracuse, Trapani), and a little later to finish the defensive circle of coastal towers. On the Island, what is known as the century of Iron, will really do credit to its name.

42

Misilmeri. The Castle

43

*Castello a Mare.
Anonymous 1686
(Madrid, Arch. of the
Ministry of Foreign
Affairs)*



INFORMATION SHEETS

1 CASTELLO A MARE OF PALERMO

Archaeological area of the Castello a Mare monument. 12th century.

Via Crispi, entrance from Via Patti Palermo

Tel. +39 0917071317/+39 0917071411

Email: sopripa.uo5@regione.sicilia.it

Opening Hours

Monday Wednesday Thursday Friday:

9.00-13.30

Tuesday and Saturday: 9.00-17.00

First Sunday of every month: 9.00-13.30



2 CASTLE OF CACCAMO

12th century

Via Castello Caccamo

Tel. +39 0918103207/+39 0918149252

Email: turismo@comune.caccamo.pa.it

Opening Hours

Tuesday to Sunday: 9.00-13.00; 15.00-19.00



MEDIEVAL CASTLES

3 CASTLE OF CARINI

12th century

Via del Castello Carini

Tel. +39 0918815666/+39 0918680871

Email: castello@comune.carini.pa.it

Opening Hours

Tuesday to Sunday: 9.00-13.00; 16.00-20.00
(during winter: afternoons 15.00-19.00)

4 CASTLE OF CASTELBUONO

14th century

Piazza Castello Castelbuono

Tel. +39 0921671211/+39 091677126

Email: info@museocivico.eu

Opening Hours

Tuesday to Sunday: 9.30-13.00 15.30-19.00

5 KASSAR OF CASTRONOVO

8th to 9th century

Contrada Kassar Castronovo di Sicilia

Tel. +39 0918218822 / 0918218890 /

0918218898 Email: sportspettacolo@
comune.castronovodisicilia.pa.it sindaco@
comune.castronovodisicilia.pa.it

Opening Hours

Visits only on request with prior booking

6 CASTLE OF CEFALÀ DIANA

14th century

Via Castello Cefalà Diana

Tel. +39 0918201184 (Town Hall)

Email: segreteria@pec.comune.cefaladiana.pa.it

Opening Hours

Free admission

7 LOWER CASTLE OF CORLEONE

13th century

Convento dei Frati Minori Rinnovati
Corleone

Tel. +39 0918467910

Opening Hours

Prebooking required
Please call between 8.45 and 10.45 and
from 18.00 to 19.00

3



4



5



6



7



MEDIEVAL CASTLES

8 ROCK OF ENTELLA AND PIZZO DELLA REGINA

12th to 13th century

Tel. +39 3474322207

Email: grottaentella@libero.it

Opening Hours

Prebooking required

The site can be reached by taking the nature excursion organised by the CAI Trust to the Nature Reserve of the Grotto of Entella

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9 CASTLE OF GERACI

11th century

Via Castello Geraci Siculo

Email: servizituristicici@pec.comune.

geracisiculo.pa.it

Opening Hours

Free admission

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10 CASTLE OF GIULIANA

13th century

Salita Castello, 5 Giuliana

Tel. +39 0918357017/098356722

Email: comunedigiuliana@alice.it

Opening Hours

Monday to Saturday: 9.00-13.00 15.00-19.00

(1st May to 30th September) Monday to Saturday: 8.30-13.30

Saturday: 15.00-18.00 (1st October to 30th April)

11 CASTLE OF MARINEO

16th century

Piazza Castello Marineo

Tel. +39 0918726491/0918725193

Email: info@comune.marineo.pa.it

Opening Hours

Tuesday to Saturday: 9.00-13.00

First Sunday of the month: Prebooking required

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12 CASTLE OF MISILMERI

11th to 12th century (reconstructed in the 15th century)

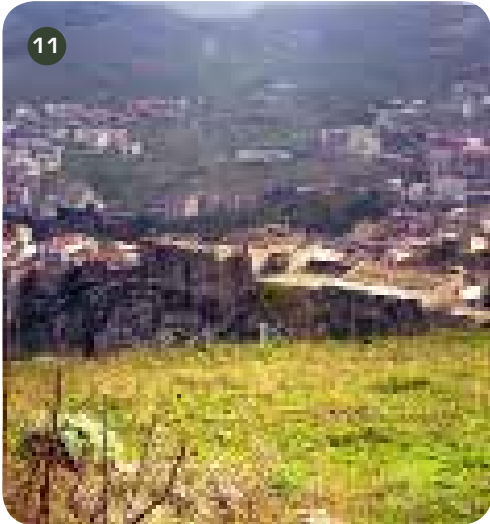
Strada provinciale n. 38

No. 38 Provincial road from Misilmeri to Belmonte Mezzagno (Km 1), (access only on foot).

Tel: +39 0918711300

Email: comune@comune.misilmeri.pa.it

Not open to the Public



MEDIEVAL CASTLES

13 'CASTELLACCIO' OF MONREALE

12th century. Reopened in 1906 and operated by the Sicilian Alpine Club of Monte Caputo. It can only be reached via a nature path.

Tel: +39 091581323

Email: segreteria@clubalpinosiciliano.it

Opening Hours

Sundays and Holidays: Prebooking required

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14 VENTIMIGLIA TOWER OF

MONTELEPRE

15th century

Via della Torre Montelepre

Tel: +39 0918940111

Email: affarigenerali@comune.montelepre.pa.it

Opening Hours

Prebooking required

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15 CASTLE OF POLLINA

13th century

Via Castello Pollina

Tel: +39 0921425009 (Town Hall)

Email: segreteria@comune.pollina.pa.it

Opening Hours

Free admission

16 CASTLE OF PRIZZI

12th century

Via Castello Prizzi

Tel. +39 0918344611/0918344648

Email: comunediprizzi.protocollo@certificata.com

Opening Hours

Saturday: 15.00-18.00 Sunday: 11.00-17.00

From June to August: First and last Sunday of the month 10.30 -16.00

From September to May: Prebooking required

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17 CASTLE OF VICARI

11th century

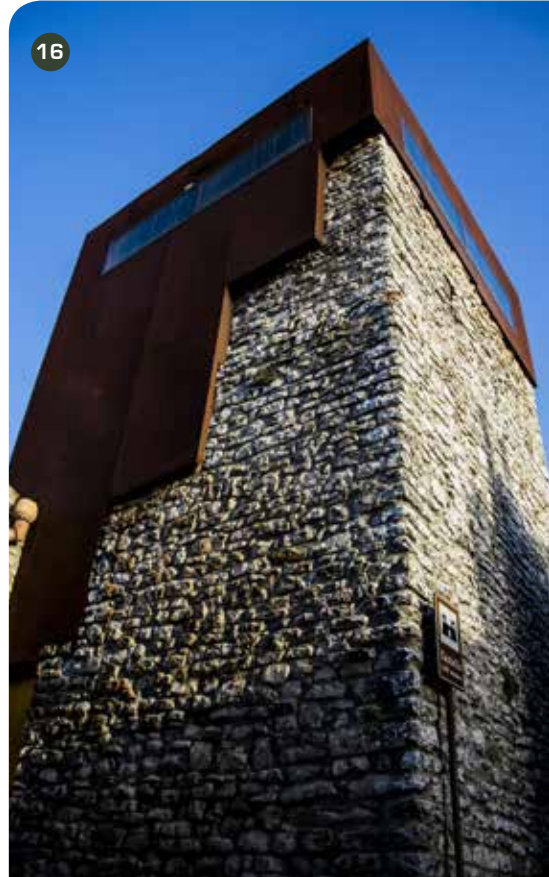
Via Santa Maria del Castello Vicari

Tel: +39 0918216020

Email: comunevicari@pec.it

Opening Hours

Prebooking required. Open everyday



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