

Sicily

By Marck Lauxtermann

Siracusa

It was around nine o'clock in the morning when we (I was accompanied on this journey by a good friend from Holland) arrived at Catania airport. Even though it was early, it was already 30 degrees Celsius, so we were glad that we quickly found a bus to Siracusa. I had heard great stories about Siracusa, so I was surprised that, when we arrived in what the bus driver described as the historic centre, we found ourselves surrounded by chaotic traffic and ghastly buildings built somewhere in the 70's. We headed to the Isola d'Ortigia and soon realised that Siracusa had more to offer than this misery and squalor. We walked along the Corso Umberto where the stately homes of the local aristocracy from the 19th century stood, but which had been in steady decline since then. The Corso Umberto led us to the harbour and the two bridges that connect the Isola d'Ortigia to the mainland.

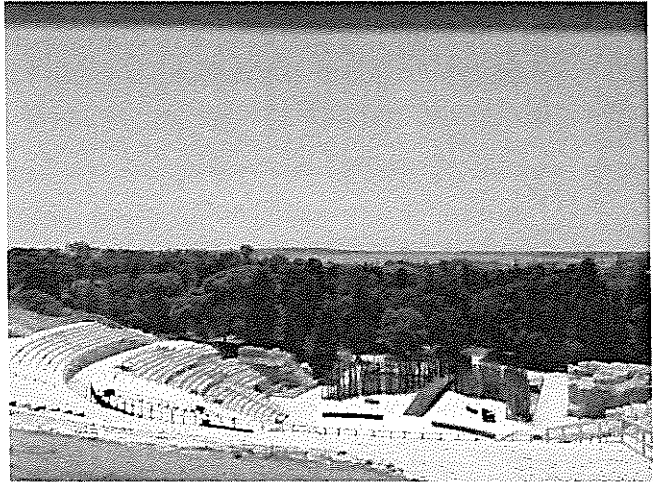
Most traffic is restricted on the island, so the chaos of earlier didn't find its way to the quiet, romantic alleys of Ortigia. The island, like most parts of Siracusa, is not well-preserved, despite the high amounts of EU-subsidies to renovate and restore the islands old buildings and monuments and has therefore been abandoned by most of its former inhabitants, who prefer the soulless outskirts of the city. My guidebook said that most projects didn't get off the ground due to the alleged incapacity and lethargy of the local administration.

When we had found our apartment, we dropped off our bags and made our way to the market for lunch. We arrived at primetime and the food stalls were loaded with huge piles of fruit and vegetables. We saw vendors with crates filled with snails, but our eyes were mostly drawn to the majestic fish stalls with enormous sword fishes and tunas, which we cut in pieces by big men with even bigger knives. We decided to sit down next to an oyster-and-mussels guy, where we were given freshly opened oysters and drank a cheap, extremely cold white wine, which was the perfect accompaniment on this hot midday. Sitting there with our food and wine, being protected from the blazing sun by some umbrellas, we had time to observe the vendors and visitors of the market. The first thing we noticed was that most visitors were inhabitants of Siracusa. A refreshing contrast with markets such as Borough Market, which is really merely a glorified eatery for foreign tourists. We also noted that there were only a few tourists and all of them were Italian tourists, besides my friend, me and an old English couple. The vendors were constantly screaming to everybody and nobody at the same time as if they were not trying to praise their products and attract customers, but as if every shout was an instinctive reaction to one of their colleague's outcries. Thomas and I could easily have set there in the shadow for the rest of the afternoon, but actually wanted to see something of the city, but minutes after we had embarked on our stroll we realised the temperature had risen to at least 40 degrees Celsius, so we decided to go back to our apartment and spend the hottest hours of the day near the beach.

In the evening we explored the island. We had already seen that Ortigia was very beautiful, but especially in the evening, when the air was cool and the lights were dimmed, did Ortigia have a magnificent ambiance. We first walked past the tempio di Apollo, which is the oldest temple on Sicily. It was found underneath the remains of Norman and Arabic structures, which implies that the temple once served as a church and mosque. Within the maze of little streets, behind the temple stands the Duomo of Siracusa. Its facade is an example of baroque for beginners and even though it was rather beautiful, it was not the most interesting aspect of the temple. The most striking about this church were the Greek columns on the left side of the temple, which were once part of the

temple of Athena. This mixture of elements from different times and cultures is something often seen on Sicily, but it is more common to see it on the inside than on the outside. After this we went to the rather famous Fonte Aretusa, which is where Aretusa, after having been chased by Alpheus, is supposed to have transformed into this source of fresh water. The locals make a big deal about this fountain and yes, it is a charming sight with the fishes and ducks swimming in the water, but I found it more interesting that there was a source of fresh water on the island, which is the result of a miraculous rupture through which the fresh water flows from The Iblei Mountains. This in part explains why Siracusa was incredibly difficult to conquer. The citizens could hide on Isola d'Oritigia when they were under siege and could stay for a very long time thanks to the fresh water supply.

The next day we woke up early to see the most famous attraction of Siracusa: the Parco Archeologico della Neapolis. There are several beautiful constructions on this site, such as a well-preserved Roman amphitheatre, but the absolute beauty of them all is the Greek theatre, which looks like it hasn't changed a bit over the many years and I thought it rather wonderful to see to that they were preparing the theatre for a performance later that week, so that this place still serves the purpose it had 2000 years ago. The setting of the theatre is



imposing as well, placed as it is on one of the highest hills in the area, from where you can look down on the complete valley and the azure sea. One can only imagine the serenity of this place 2000 years ago when there were no houses and radio towers below, but only pine trees.

The quarries were not far from the theatre. They were used as a prison. In ancient antiquity for, for example, the prisoners who took part in the Athenian expedition to conquer Siracusa were held here. Walking there in the heat, it was not difficult to understand why most of the soldiers, who must have been packed together like sardines since the area was quite small, died in large numbers. It is said that you can still see the marks of their chains in the ore di Dionysius (a high man-made cave). Whether that is true or not, these quarries are an impressive stone testimonial of the hardships, which the prisoners had to endure.

In the evening we decided that we wanted to try one of Siracusa's restaurants. We found a family-run trattoria near the Fonte Aretusa, where we first ate pasta with vongole and then tripe. The latter was one of the few meat dishes on the menu, which is always a reminder that Siracusans have endured periods of time in which there was no money for more meat and if there was only for the inexpensive parts. But as always, the greatest recipes are a result of having to work with the few things that are around and this time too the result was agreeable.

On our last full day in Siracusa we spend the morning at the Museo Paolo Orsi. This museum probably has the most extensive collection of archaeological artefacts in Sicily. The collection consists of many things ranging from small statues and vases to coins and arrow points. The influence of the Greek mainland was obvious and many objects could have come from Athens for all I knew. But there were also some very interesting objects I had never encountered before, such as masks with terrifying Aztec-like features and a statue of the head of a woman, who was said to be Medusa. She is a very important person on Sicily and is not only shown prominently on the flag of the island, as the centre of the triskelion. But she is also painted on the streets and more than a few restaurants and hotels

are named after her. This explains in my eyes the dubious choice to call this woman Medusa, because the statue lacked Medusa's most striking feature: snakes as hair.

On our way back to Ortigia we walked past the Santuario dell Madonna della lacrima. This church is the highest building in the centre, if not in the whole of Siracusa, so we had already spotted this giant, stone pyramid, which would have been more suitable for the local scientology community than the good people of Siracusa. Especially when we entered the megalomania of the building became apparent. The decorations were scarce, but unlike normal churches, this church didn't try to impress its visitors with beautifully painted ceilings and big, marble statues, but with its immense height. The church was built in honour of a miracle that took place in the 50's; a depiction of the Virgin Mary supposedly cried for several days. The fact that in this day and age an undocumented phenomenon is the reason to build the most visible landmark of the city is evidence that the church still has a firm grip on the life of the Siracusans.

After lunch we strolled some more through the city and tried to find a bar to watch the final of the World Cup. We ended up watching it on our room, because we could not find a bar that showed the match. Apparently the Italians were not very interested in a final without the Italians playing in it themselves. After the match we went into town to check out Siracusa's nightlife, which turned out to be dominated but the ice-cream shops near the Fonte Aretusa. The public, which consists of everything between babies and senile old men, walk around, all dressed-up, and spend their evening watching everybody else who is walking around. Not a bad way to spend your time, but I wondered whether there was some nightlife here that resembled the way I would spend my night out in England or Holland. We ended up talking with a group of Italian youngsters and we asked them about the Siracusan nightlife. A boy of our age replied: 'No nightlife, only in Catania.' This did not seem ideal to me, but they seemed to enjoy their evening, so who are we to judge. We drank a beer, said good bye and went home, because we had to wake up early for the train to Noto.

Noto

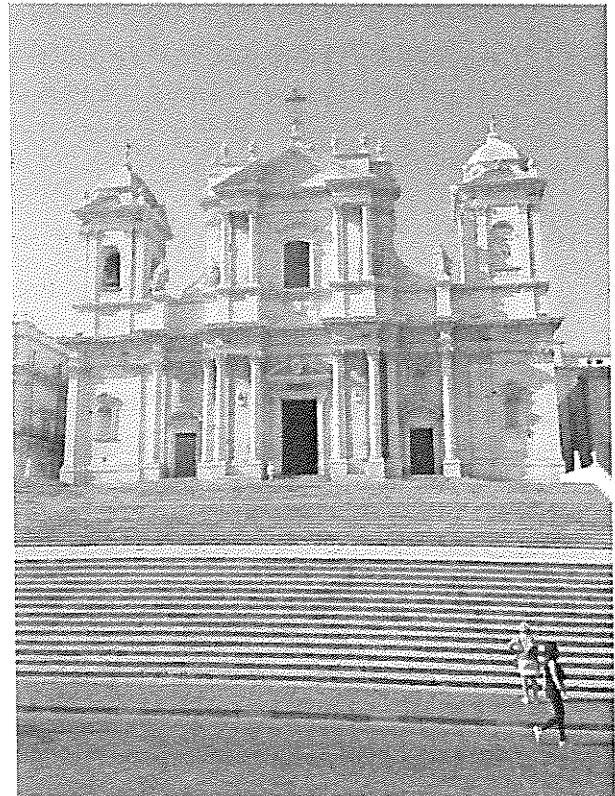
We arrived around 10 o'clock at the train station and discovered that our train had some delay. After half an hour we finally boarded our train, which brought us in an hour from the coast of Siracusa through the Valle di Noto with its many pine, citrus, almond and fig trees to Noto. I had read that that the citizens of Noto had to rebuild Noto five miles away from the old Noto, after an earthquake had destroyed the old town. They decided to build their new town on the gentle slope of a hill and rebuild the whole town, making it a great example of the Sicilian baroque.

Again we first had to make our way through depressing looking buildings before we arrived in the historic centre, where our apartment was located. Just as in Siracusa it was evident that Noto has dealt with serious poverty in its recent past.

Noto has a very interesting New York-like town plan, due to the fact that they had to rebuild their city completely. Three parallel streets were built next to each other on the slope of the hill with numerous smaller streets crossing them at right angles. Three impressive piazzas are built along the Corso Vittorio Emmanuelle (the second of the three streets), which is the busiest street of the historic centre. Almost all the bars, gelaterias and restaurants are here, leaving the rest of the streets nearly abandoned by tourists. Each piazza has a church on the higher side. Because we had quite a lot of time on our hands we visited most of the churches around the Corso Vittoria Emmanuelle. We first visited the piazza Immacolata, where the Chiesa di S. Francesco is located. We climbed the steep stairs, which led to the exuberantly decorated façade. The interior however was a big contrast with the splendour of the exterior, since it was soberly decorated. Most baroque

churches I visited were as heavily decorated on the inside as they were on the outside, but this was a welcome variation, because the lightness of the interior was a striking contrast with the streets of Noto, where the constant sunlight was reflected by the honey-coloured stones of the palazzos and churches, so that there was no respite from the warm sunlight. Being inside this church, where it was cool and light, therefore really made me experience the Chiesa di S. Francesco as a place of salvation. All the other churches of Noto were either very light or very sober on the inside and therefore constituted the same sort of contrast with the outside.

Around the Piazza Immacolata were two other noteworthy buildings located: the seminary of the Chiesa di S. Salvatore, which looked like a prison and was evidently in a very bad state (again despite funding from the EU to restore the buildings of cultural significance in Noto), and the Chiesa di S. Chiara. The Chiesa di S. Chiara houses a beautifully delicate statue of the Virgin Mary with the child, which is possibly made by the famous Gagini. Another nice feature of the church is the bell tower, which provides a view of Noto's surroundings and gives a good overview of the street plan. The second and most impressive square is the Piazza Municipio. It is surrounded by several palazzos, which are elegant and majestic at the same time. And so are the incredibly broad and high stairs which lead to the biggest attraction of the city: the San Nicolo. The dome of this large cathedral was only recently restored after it had collapsed in a storm. The sheer size of the cathedral and the stairs make it worthwhile to visit, but I found the façade the most magnificent one of all the churches so far, because it showed an aspect of the baroque, which I had only seen before in paintings of Caravaggio and Rembrandt. The columns which often adorn the facades of baroque churches in Italy, were placed of few centimetres off the wall, which gave the façade a three-dimensional quality. This created a beautiful contrast between light and dark, chiaroscuro, as the sun moved around the church. On my to-do list was also the S. Carlo, which compared to the other churches was quite a disappointment. More interesting were the Montevergine church, which looms over one of the cross-streets and the S. Domenica with its convex curve. But Noto has more to offer than only ecclesial buildings. Especially the Pallazo Villadorata and in particular its balconies were a welcome change from all the Christian and classical elements of the churches. The balconies are carried by several different kinds of figures, such as horses or the bodies of old man and monstrous looking creatures. All of them show a certain degree of originality and playfulness which is not easily found in Noto's churches.



In the evening we went back to the old town. Unlike in Siracusa it was quite calm and the people that were around were mostly tourists; and again unlike in Siracusa not Italian tourists, but tourist from North-western Europe. Despite the fact that the cathedral was even nicer at night I missed the spirit and soul of a city that depends on the presence of its own inhabitants rather than on rich

tourists from England, Holland and Germany. I sincerely hope that our money makes up for the loss of character, because here I learned that is the people and not the buildings that create the ambiance of a city, however beautiful they may be.

We had planned to visit Piazza Armerina before going to Agrigento (in contrary to what was said on the itinerary. When I wrote the itinerary I must have been under the false assumption that Piazza Armerina was located between Palermo and Agrigento.). The day before our departure we ran into some trouble, when we tried to arrange an accommodation and transport. First of all we couldn't find a cheap place to stay the night and secondly we were told that there was no train nor a bus to Piazza Armerina.. If we wanted to go to Piazza Armerina we had to go all the way back to Catania. This also meant that when we would travel to Agrigento from Piazza Armerina, we would run into the same problem. We concluded that going to Piazza Armerina would cost us a lot of money (which was not the biggest problem) and a lot of time, which could be spend more wisely. Even though Villa Romana del Casale is supposed to be one of the most exciting sights on the island, we knew that there were lots of other interesting places to see too. We decided to exchange our day in Piazza Armerina with a trip to Cefalu during our stay in Palermo.

Agrigento

So in the morning we went to the train station. Having arrived there, we discovered that we had to call a certain phone number to buy the train tickets, so we did and ten minutes later a man arrived on a scooter with the two tickets. Unfortunately we did not have any cash so he had to bring me to an ATM on the other side of town. We returned just in time, or so we thought. Because this train was the same train we had taken the day before. Where the delay in Siracusa had been a mere fifteen minutes, now the delay had amounted to at least an hour.

There is a particular reason why I am boring you with my jibber-jabber about the logistics of trains and buses on Sicily. The reason is that I believe that might be a symptom, and a particularly annoying one at that, of the Sicilian nature.

In 1814 a British governor claimed that the Sicilians always expected you to do everything for them. He added that they always have been accustomed to authority. Sicilians have often been criticised for a lack of self-reliance and many have had problems with governing the Sicilians. I have not spend enough time in Sicily or read enough about Sicily to know whether that is completely justified, but the badly organised railway system did make me wonder. The delay, the lack of connections between important cities (e.g. from Siracusa o Agrigento) and the absence of a decent ticket vending machine are all things I have never seen on the mainland of Italy. Obviously it is possible that the bad infrastructure is a problem caused by the poverty of Sicily or that the Mafia is somehow involved. Who knows? But on the other hand it is easy to see why the Sicilians are not interested in governmental projects, such as infrastructure, but also the restoration of important cultural sites and buildings (payed for by the EU, mind you). Since the Romans the Sicilians have nearly always been ruled by foreign entities, such as the Romans, Arabs, Normans, Spanish, French and the Neapolitans. If you have always depended on a government that is all but your own and, more importantly, is not serving you, but their own countrymen, you might understand that the Sicilians have become lax when it concerns governmental issues such as decent infrastructure. In a way this maybe should be considered a problem of the past, since Sicily has gained a lot of autonomy after the Second World War. They have their own regional government, their own regional assembly and their own president. But then again, I guess that a sentiment that has been developed over centuries of oppression by foreign powers eventually becomes part of the Sicilian identity.

After a long day of travelling we finally arrived at our hotel. It was located in the centre of Agrigento, which meant we had to find our way through small streets, which are the only physical remains of Agrigento's Moorish past. Small streets have always a certain charm if you ask me, but beside that I can't say else than that Agrigento is one bulk of unaesthetic mayhem. The houses in both the city centre and the outskirts are either in a very bad state or just downright cheap and ugly. They form a confusing contrast with the 2000 year old temples down below in the valley. Siracusa may have been the most powerful Greek colony on Sicily, but Akragas (Agrigento) was the richest and most luxurious town. It was a big city too: it stretched from the acropolis to the sea. The Valle dei Templi is all that remains from Agrigento's illustrious past. It however has done a great job at preserving some of that once so abundant splendour. We decided to visit the temples early in the morning in order to stay ahead of the masses, but when we arrived the place was already swamped with visitors. Nevertheless it was still hard to remain unimpressed by the enormity of these temples. I, as a classicist in spe, have a tendency to look for reasons which might show that the Greek culture was more human and modern than the culture of their contemporaries. For example, when I compared the Egyptian section in the British museum with the Greek section I detected a certain form of megalomania in the statues of the pharaohs, which I couldn't see in the Greek statues. Standing in front of the temple of Concordia however I realised that also the Greeks must have been fuelled by a fair share of megalomania. The temple is incredibly big and it is placed on top a rather high hill. The guides might tell you that this was useful for incoming sailors, but I can't possibly believe that utility was the only reason. Despite the fact that the all the temples are big, there is a certain elegance and harmony to the whole thing. This is obtained by the position and shape of the columns; they lean a bit towards the centre and are a little bit thicker in the middle. In our day and age temples have a completely different outlook that they used to have; they used to be coloured and decorated. The telamons, man-shaped pillars, which lay next to the temple of Zeus were a useful reminder of the fact that the Greeks also had an eye for decorations and that they were not only masters of great structures

Palermo

After our visit to the temples we took the train, which brought us first through what used to be the grain silo of ancient Rome and then along the northern coast of Sicily after which we finally arrived in the chaotic centre of Palermo. After we had encountered some problems at our first accommodation, we decided to book another apartment, where we prepared ourselves for the first night in Palermo.

We did not really have a plan, but when we stumbled upon the Vucciria market we decided to spend our night here. It is hard to describe this market, because when I try to put every noise, smell, sound and taste to paper, all the sensations rear their heads at once and just as when the type bars of typewriter come up from the belly of the machine at once, they get entangled and it is impossible to write a single letter. But I will try. The basic concept is simple: the Vucciria market consists of a little square surrounded by bars, where you can get cold beer and different food stands, where vendors grill fresh fish, meat and other sorts of food. This might not seem very exciting, but the energy of the place, the smell of the freshly grilled octopus and prawns, the cold Nastro Azzuro's, and the cheerful Palermitans around us created an ambiance, which I had never encountered before in Italy or Europe for that matter. Most

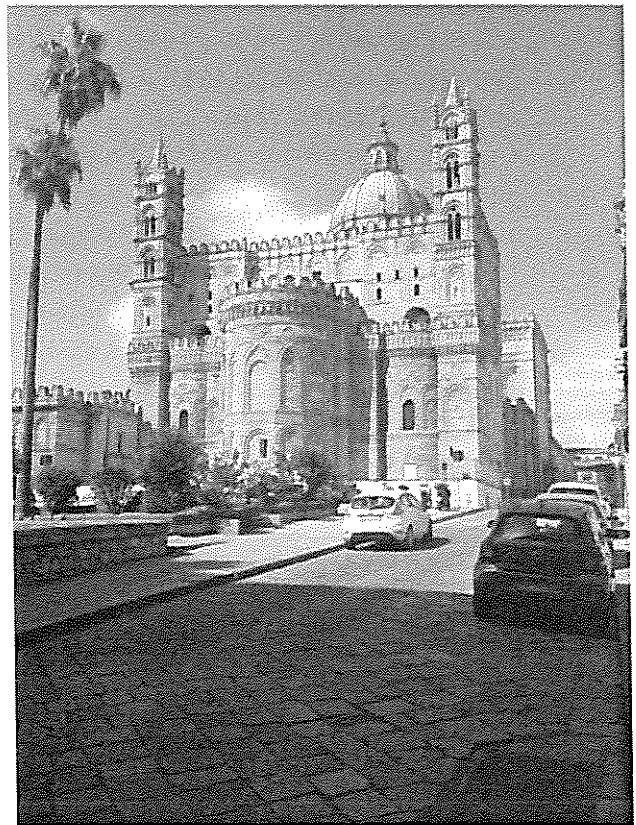


Sicilians we had seen did not drink late into the night, but ended their nights after a walk in a gelateria, but here they stayed until 4 o'clock in the morning. The whole place would have seemed more at place in Morocco on the Djemma el Fna square or in Bangkok. Also the food was not typically Italian. There were typical dishes such as pane ca meusa (bread with spleen), stichiola (grilled intestines of a calf) and fried balls of chickpeas and potato, which were flavoured with mint. There was even a Norman touch to the food: the Palermitan who worked the grill had blue eyes and blond hair.

I am not exaggerating, when I say that this may be my favourite place on Sicily. Not because of the great food, the beer or the nice people, but because the food, the beer and the people together are tell us more about Sicily and its people than the chapel of a rich king, the temple of the Greeks or the palazzo's of the decadent nobility of Noto. Only a few of the Sicilians have been rich and, quoting J. Norwich, 'it is always the poor, those who have drawn the shortest straw in the lottery of life, who constitute the vast majority and whom history – for want of evidence and written record – tends to overlook.' This place solves to a certain extent that lack of evidence. It gives us insight in the life and history of that immense group of Sicilians; insight in the life of the modern ones, but also of their ancestors who learned from Arabic immigrants to use mint in their dishes or the Jewish Palermitans who learned how to prepare spleen.

The next morning went to the Ballarò market to get some breakfast. Compared to this market, the market in Siracusa is a dwarf. Almost every street around the Piazza Ballarò is filled with food stands. The products were not very different from what we had seen in Siracusa, except for the larger number of butchers that was around. We were most surprised by something that you do not see until you notice it, and when you have noticed it, you can't stop seeing it: the absence of women. After almost a week in Sicily we, tragically androcentric animals as we are, finally realised that there were little women on the streets of Palermo, but also – in retrospect- of Agrigento and Siracusa. We wondered whether this was because Sicily has always had to endure a lot of violence, on the countryside and in the cities alike. Or maybe it was one of the unpleasant remains of the Arabic immigration. I am afraid that this will remain quite a mystery, but a largely

womanless market again made me realise that Sicily can be so different from the Italian mainland. After the market we paid a visit to the magnificent cathedral of Palermo. This extraordinary building is the result of many different cultures. The outside is one big mixture of different styles. There are the baroque little cupolas and the walls that are adorned with Arabic decorations. And there is the baroque portico made by Gagini, which is particularly interesting. It should not be a surprise to find out that this cathedral was built and rebuilt and redesigned over the years, but the baroque portico, a rather small part of the colossal cathedral, has an inscription of a



Koran verse and a mosaic of Byzantine origins. The cathedral also houses many interesting things, among which the sarcophagus of Emperor Frederic II.

The Cathedral shows how in Palermo different cultures have mingled and coexisted for over a longer period of time. The Palatine chapel, one of the most exciting sites of Palermo, showed how during the reign of Roger II those different cultures worked together to build one of the most exciting chapels in the world.

The chapel is not very big, but houses some of the most beautiful decorations I have ever seen. One of the highlights was the muqarnas ceiling. These honeycomb vault-like decorations are a common element in Arabic architecture and depict many different plants and animals, as well as scenes of daily life. I especially like the depiction of Roger II on the ceiling, because this depiction of him in Arabic style showed to me the greatest accomplishment of this king, namely that he, as a Norman, could be the king of Arabs as well. I had read about this place, so I was aware of the muqarnas, but one can only imagine the reaction of pious Christians, who visited this chapel for the first time and looked up to the ceiling only to find out that somehow their house of prayer had been decorated by Muslims in the most obvious Islamic fashion.

The next day we took the train, which brought us to Cefalu. The journey took an hour and having arrived at the train station we quickly went to the centre to visit the cathedral of Cefalu. It was nice to see that we didn't come all the way from Palermo to see yet another baroque church. No, this cathedral is something else. It was built by the Normans and has a sober ex- and interior and looks more like a fortress than a church. It looms over all over the small town and I am quite sure that Roger II, who built this church, wanted to show some of his Norman supremacy. I called the interior sober earlier and that is actually not exactly true. There is an immense, beautiful mosaic of the Christ Pantokrator. Roger II would not have been Roger II if he hadn't invited Greeks from Constantinople to create this mosaic in their Byzantine style. Some, including J. Norwich, call this the most sublime depiction of the Redeemer in all Christian art. I am afraid I am still a very big fan of the one in the apsis of the Santa Maria della Trastevere, but I do agree that the splendor of the mosaic is overwhelming, especially because it is surrounded by sober, gray walls.

The rest of the day we strolled through the little streets of Cefalu and spend the afternoon on the beach. This was particularly enjoyable, because we had not been able to swim since Siracusa, which had been quite a nuisance in the Sicilian summer heat.

The next day we walked to our favourite neighbourhood of Palermo, La Kalsa. After an espresso we decided to visit the Galleria Regionale della Sicilia, which is housed in the magnificent Palazzo Abatellis. The museum has a beautiful collection of Sicilian artists such as a fresco named 'trionfo della morte'. It shows Death entering the scene on a horse, while he is shooting arrows at the nobility. Corpses of emperors, popes and friars are shown on the lower part of the work. Every corpse has a particular originality to it: one corpse misses a leg, the other has a grimace of pain on his face and others are still battling Death after they have been hit with an arrow. On the left of the fresco you can see a group of poor people, who are spared by death even though they are begging for salvation. This attention to suffering creates a bigger stress on the cruel and the macabre than other pieces of Sicilian or Italian art from the late Middle Ages that I have seen.

Another beautiful work in the museum is the 'Virgin Annunciate' by Antonello da Messina. The picture instantly reminded me of the Mona Lisa, because Mary has the same serene and yet mysterious look on her face. Interesting about the painting is that the angel of the Annunciation is

not depicted and that her veil and her book are very simplistic; Messina is clearly focused on her face, which is painted with extreme concern for detail.

In the afternoon we walked around in La Kalsa and visited a park called Villa Giulia, which was a typical example of Sicilian negligence: the fountains did not work, there was a lot of rubbish on the floor and again despite pan-European funding to restore it. For shame!

So we decided to visit the Orto Botanico instead, but just as we were about to enter the gardens it started to rain. It was quite late already so we decided to have lunch and visit another neighborhood, where the San Domenico church was located. We had heard that this church housed a work by Van Dyck and a great work of stucco by Serpotta, but, alas, this church was closed for unclear reasons. After an afternoon filled with some disappointments we decided to have a drink at our usual spot. We had gone there a few times by now and we had to cross the second busiest street of Palermo to get there. The busiest one crosses this street at a right angle, so together they divide the city in four different parts. To get from one block to the other, you will always have to cross at least one of those two streets. So the days before, as one might expect of Palermo's equivalent of Oxford Street, it had always been rather busy, but now there was not one car. So we stopped and looked to our right. At first we could only see some banners that were being carried by some people, but as they came closer we were also able to hear the sermon (or something like it) of a priest. And a few minutes later the parade passed us and we were able to see that it was an immense group of people, divided up into different fraternities. Each fraternity had their own flag and each member wore some kind of bib of their own fraternity. As we stood there at least fifty different fraternities passed. It was interesting to see how visible the difference in social status and affluence were. Some groups were bigger, some groups wore suits and other groups were small and wore their working clothes. And despite this, there was still a sense of unity. I am not a big fan of organized faith, but it is hard to resist the appeal of this kind of cohesion.

Just as in Siracusa, the Sicilians did not hesitate to rub it in our faces that religion is incredibly important. Not only in the more traditional and poorer south, but also in the biggest city of the island.

The last day on Sicily had come and we decided to go to the Capuchin catacombs. After a long walk (it is located north of the historic centre) we finally arrived, but we were two late, because the monks' siesta had just begun. We did not have the time to wait two hours, because we still had to pack our bags and make arrangements for our departure so we went back to the historic centre, strolled around, had lunch and went back to the apartment. After a last *pane ca meusa*, I went to the train station and boarded the train to Rome. And thus came an end to this marvelous journey in Sicily.



Epilogue

After buying our entrance tickets for the Palatine Chapel, we found out that the entrance to a temporary exhibition about A. Ligabue was included in the price. Antonio Ligabue was not a Sicilian and he never painted on Sicily. He lived in the 20th Century and was a misunderstood expressionist painter. He has painted and drawn Swiss villages and hunting scenes, but was also interested in exotic and fierce animals, such as lions and tigers, leopards and snakes.

Ligabue's paintings were in no way related to Sicily, but I think that his paintings embody everything that I have encountered in Sicily. Sicily can be calm, traditional and Italian in some cases. We saw this on the train from Siracusa to Noto and from Agrigento to Palermo. We saw it during the religious parade. We saw it in the baroque of Noto. But on the other side, Sicily can be ferocious, modern and oriental. Sicily is an island that has endured a lot of violence of the years, an island that has seen kings that were able to create a society in which Norman, Arabic and Latin cultures not only coexisted and an island that has seen Arabic invaders bring their art and food and traditions, but prospered together. And much like the paintings of Ligabue, Sicily does everything, whether it is traditional or oriental, calm or wild, with so much colour and vitality.

I can't say anything conclusive about what it means to be Sicilian or about how history has formed Sicily. But this trip has removed at least some of the fog that used to conceal this strange island in the Mediterranean Sea. I am therefore immensely grateful to UCL and especially the family and friends of Mr. Instone for having given me this incredible opportunity.