



La Sicilia è più che un'isola, è un mondo nel mondo dell'Italia e del Mediterraneo. Tutta la Sicilia è ricca di monumenti di ogni epoca storica. Mille popoli si sono succeduti, si sono battuti per il possesso delle sue terre, dei suoi porti e persino delle sue donne. La Sicilia del Sud Est è un ... altro mondo, il suo paesaggio è profondamente diverso dal resto dell'Isola e, forse, anche le sue genti, le persone che qui vivono e lavorano ... proviamo a spiegare perché.

*Sicily is more than an island, it is a magic world set in the astonishing world of Italy. All of Sicily is rich in monuments from every historical era. A thousand peoples followed one another, fought for the possession of his lands, of his ports and even of his women. The Sicily of the South East is another world, its landscape is deeply different from the rest of the Island and also the people who live and work here ... let's try to explain why.*

## A Very Brief History of Sicily

### Why South East Sicily is different from the rest part of Sicily?

As concerns Eastern Sicily, and in particular the part strictly connected with the towns of Modica and Ragusa, starting from XV Century, during the countship of Enriquez - Cabrera powerful family (XV Century – beginnings of XIX C), people took in lease small plots. It was a particular kind of lease; really, it was (and still is) named “*emphytheusis*”, by which the Count remains the landlord, but the farmer would have maintained the possess of the plot of land for ever, paying the Lord in kind.

Owners began to build white - not tall - stone wall that became a sort of feature of the landscape, in particular in the surrounding of Ragusa, Modica and Scicli.

Often, as happened in England with the “enclosures”, the owners took more land they could take, doing a sort of usurpation that the Count came to tolerate, because they paid regularly.

Inside the enclosures cattle pastured freely, and a greatly important consequence of livestock farming was that people necessarily became to live in the countryside. With this aim, they built houses with the ground floor only, in which they lived all the year and in which they had: the apartment, the cowshed and the rooms devoted to the creamery.

Those buildings were the first kind of “*masseria*”, a rural construction that became a typical one of the highland “ibleo” (the mounts around the towns of Modica and Ragusa are named “iblei”).



From this period of great development there are remains of late Gothic architectural vestiges, such as splendid portals in Scicli in the *Monastero della Croce*, in Modica in *Santa Maria di Gesù* church, and in Ragusa in the portal of old *San Giorgio* church and a whole nave in *Santa Maria delle Scale* church. So, the characteristics of the provinces

are determined by the countryside and the Ibla plateau, the "plain", as it is better known. This is a triangular calcareous plateau with its vertex to the north and its base to the south, in direction of the Mediterranean, further divided by the deep groove of river Irmínio into Modica plain and Ragusa plain. In the picture, The *Monastery of the Croce*, which dominates the town of Scicli.

Afterwards, in 1812, Ferdinand of Bourbon King of Sicily was obliged from Lord William Bentinck to promulgate a Constitution. In the same year, a law was issued concerning the transformation of



the feuds (big land extension owned from the nobles and badly cultivated) in "*allodii*" (singular: *allodium*) which means that nobles became full landlords (before the landlord was the King). At first, this appeared a great victory for the nobles. But soon, the action against the right of primogeniture entailed the allotment of the

land; moreover, the civil code issued in 1819 (art. 1784) delivered a final blow to the nobles, because they were obliged to pay debts.



Thus, the other side of the coin was that nobles began to sell the land. In south east Sicily all those laws reinforced the middle class of farmer that already lived in countryside and increased their members. So, there the feuds ended and the wealth spread; farmers could build "*villas*", a building with a second floor in which they lived with all the comforts.

The path from "*masseria*" to "*villa*" was completed and nowadays many wonderful villas and the white - not tall - stone wall, together with the evergreen carob trees are all together feature that mark the very lovely landscape around the towns of Ragusa and Modica.

As concerns the urban landscape, certainly you've noted in Scicli, in Modica and in Ragusa Ibla (Ibla is a historic district of Ragusa) the Churches and the large number of buildings in which the walls are built with slightly yellow limestone. All those buildings belong to Late Baroque architecture.

In 1693, January 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, a huge earthquake destroyed south east Sicily, involving 45 towns and killing more than 60.000 victims (but some authorities tell 93.000), reaching the 7,4 Richter magnitude; in some site it exceeded the XI *Mercalli* scale.



The reconstruction of each town came from very skilled local workers and in spite of this circumstance, the result was a great homogeneity. That style was named “tardo barocco” (*Late Baroque*), rather than “*baroque*”, because the baroque style was by that time reaching its end in other European countries.

*The picture concerns San Bartolomeo Church, a typical expression of late baroque architecture, characterized by a sort of third floor, with the bell.*

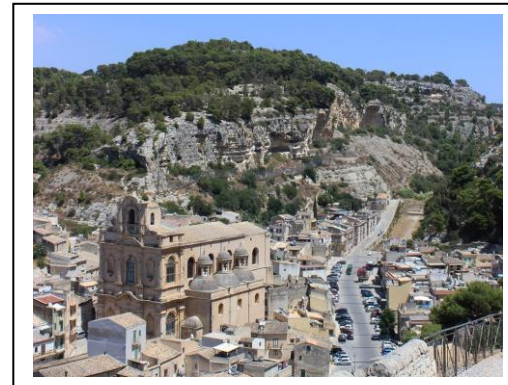


*Scicli - Consolazione Church (Church of Consolation) can't be attributed to the Baroque style, showing only a second floor. Its great peculiarity is the bell tower separated from the body of the church, the only example in*



Scicli

*Walking forward you'll meet Santa Maria La Nova (The church of Saint Mary La Nova), that was the last church to be built in Scicli in that period of time. The lateral chapels highlight the transition from Late Baroque to neo-classical architecture*



In 2002 UNESCO put eight towns all together in the World Heritage List, creating the UNESCO site “*Late Baroque Towns of Val di Noto*”. The towns are: Catania, Caltagirone, Militello in Val di Catania, Palazzolo Acreide, Noto, Modica, Ragusa, Scicli. We can see the same late Baroque style in other very beautiful small towns, for example in Acireale (a town next to Catania), and also in the small but gorgeous towns of Buscemi, Ferla, Sortino (all those little towns watch the beautiful town of Palazzolo Acreide staying from the other side of the river Anapo valley). All of them were destroyed, but all they were rebuilt with

the same criteria and with limestone, so their architectures appears very similar each other.

So, the history of Sicily starts very away in the time, but starting from XV Century a.C. south east Sicily took a its own way, that has caused different landscape and probably people with own behaviour, different from the rest of Sicily ... as you can better note travelling slowly, preferably riding a bicycle!

Sicily is a planet and not everything that happens here can be easily accepted ... however, here in Sicily there are a lot of things to see, to hear, to feel, to taste, more than we can in one lifetime. Sometimes, live here seems a challenge, and some of us decide to take up this challenge.

*Thank you for your attention, but ... please, take in account all this as a very short and hurried story!*

*With the compliments*



*The picture 2-6-7 are precious gifts from Armando Rotoletti, a great photographer artist*

*The first picture, above in the text, represented the “muragghiu San Filippo”, in the countryside between the lake of Santa Rosalia and the small town of Chiaramonte Gulfi*

*Alessia and Giampaolo*

*Scicli - IT - South East Sicily*