

AN OVERVIEW OF HISTORIC HOUSES AND LANDSCAPES IN SICILY

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Abstract: *An overview of historic houses and landscapes in Sicily.* This article is a preface or a general outlook on historic houses in Sicily. The aim of the author is to introduce and point out the main values of Sicilian historic houses, debated on specifically by other colleagues from University of Catania in this volume. The author is introducing us in the Sicilian artistical and architectural framework, showing the importance of patrimony villas and farmhouses, old dwelling, places to inhabit and cultural symbols of belonging in Sicily.

Rezumat: *O privire de ansmanlu asupra clădirilor istorice si a peisajului istoric din Sicilia.* Acest articol este o introducere asupra clădirilor istorice din Sicilia. Scopul cercetării efectuate de autor este să ne semnaleze principalele valori culturale ale clădirilor siciliene, studiate punctual de alți colegi de la Universitatea din Catania în acest volum. Autorul ne introduce în cadrul artistic și arhitectural sicilian, prezentând importanța vilelor, clădirilor rurale de patrimoniu, a vechilor spații locuite și a simbolurilor Siciliei.

Key-words: historic houses, historic landscape, cultural symbols of belonging, Sicily
Cuvinte cheie: cladri istorice, peisaj istoric, simboluri culturale de apartenenta, Sicilia.



OLD DWELLINGS: PLACES TO INHABIT AND SYMBOLS OF BELONGING

1. INTRODUCTION

Nobody can deny that some tenacious cliché act more or less secretly in the Sicilian historiography of modern age. The island's aristocracy and the associated burden of profiles and conventions, signs of luxury and literary myths, led to a collective imagination (fueled by movies and literature), which is a limit to a more appropriate interpretation of the reality's complexity. The idea of a static and motionless Sicily, echo of obsolete and outdated representations, reduces the island to a single dimension, wearily repetitive or pleasantly oleographic, good for eye-catching tourist myths. The deep-rooted idea is that one of a monolithic and compact noble Sicilian society, intent on idleness and waste who safely goes through a few centuries.

To build an effective antidote and defuse common and almost impervious convictions it is necessary for us to affirm that the idea of stillness, irreplaceable component of the Sicilian world and history, is unacceptable in every field of events and achievements realized through a long history by the Sicilian people and its ruling classes. For instance, in certain stages the edificatory activity, although reflecting the above mentioned conservative soul, shows signs of vitality and originality. Therefore it is not surprising that the historic dwellings show peculiar dissonances. A watchful visitor travelling across Sicilian territory, across its cities and its countryside, often enjoys the extraordinary cultural heritage, made of cluster or isolated works of art and involving multiple readings, from art and architecture to even economy, sociology and anthropology, if we focus on the daily life of wealthy upper classes. We have to bear in mind that a whole society in Sicily has moved around historic houses for centuries and has imprinted indelible characters and codes to the Sicilian world. Today we know that these constructions, irreplaceable documents, make us understand languages and customs of former times. The constructions of scenic houses and land transformations have been tightly linked over time and have proceeded together with the characterization of Sicilian society and landscape. The island civilization, with its small and medium-sized cities, with its hilltop villages and its big cities, with its wide and sunny countryside seems to have the high ambition to choose a valuable and precious architecture for baronial mansions and palaces. Like the mother churches, which were many for the role played by ecclesiastical power on the island, the dwellings represented the public artistic heritage of a whole community and were unmistakable signs of power (or arrogance).

Investigations on Sicilian modern history have traditionally seen the close bond between the landed aristocracy and the feudal centres of the island starting to relax from the early seventeenth century, when the rapid urbanization of the barony began. This study aims to emphasize the main aspect of this complex phenomenon that is the race for building "noble mansions", whose outcome is a considerable estate heritage, especially in large cities like Palermo. In this city the great work of "modernization" of the fabric of the city has often been interpreted as the result of new needs of urban representation, influenced, at least in part, by the urbanization of the powerful feudal lords. Another aspect to be aware of is the widespread abandonment of the fortified residences dated back to the feudal Middle Ages.

According to this interpretation, the parallel phenomenon of the new foundation of agricultural cities, which reached surprising levels during the seventeenth century, thanks to the aristocracy, gives evidence for the spread of entrepreneurial projects, with a strong economic, political as well as demographic impact, not necessarily binding on the housing choices of the noble families involved. We are undoubtedly in the presence of large voids on cognitive constructive chronology of individual episodes however they are not so large to prevent us to interpret the true extent of the building process promoted by Sicilian nobility and enterprises. In an attempt to clarify the overall picture, thanks also to numerous studies in recent decades, we present here some dwellings, which, despite their small number, help us to understand ways of life and living of Sicilian nobility.

We proceeded through the overall analysis of constructive programs referable to the concerned families, the individual site and building in order to express an interpretation of the relation between cities, towns and the feudal landed gentry in pre-modern and modern Sicily. The single sections deal with the analysis of these cases, selected among those dated back to the late seventeenth century and the mid-nineteenth century and widespread across Sicily. In order to frame a broader case of studies and to portrait a common background for the events exposed, we believe it is useful to present a brief historical-territorial showcases. This is a quick summary which does not pretend to be comprehensive on the subject.

2. THE ARTISTIC AND ARCHITECTURAL FRAMEWORK

Even the earliest Roman villas, among them the Villa in Piazza Armerina is the best known, attest a vocation to residentiality which let us pleasantly surprised by its numerous stylistic and architectural merits. During a cultural climate in which feuds and cities become places of fortified residences and castle building is widely favoured, there are also residential buildings and dwellings, born in a period which is not congenial to this construction. In general they are promoted with no distinction both in the cities and countryside and bear the marks of a cultural exceptionality.

This can be attributed to deep foreign influences like Arab technology, fountains, well-watered gardens or “amusements” found in Norman constructions, sometimes contaminated with oriental elements. Saracens, Jews, monks, Greek and Latin, led Sicily to the greatest culture and politic splendour. The Eastern Christian empire lasted barely a hundred years: the golden age of the island. The Palatine Chapel, the Cathedral of Palermo, Monreale and Cefalù are the evidence of the cultural splendour at that time. Normans in a fascinating way managed to fuse the architecture of northern France, where they came from, with Saracen and Byzantine decorative forms. Although influenced by the feudal model of the fortified building, dwellings with singular features and a reasonable level of comfort spread over heralding a new age. The territory turns over a new leaf towards a strong process of urbanization: Scafani palace rises in Montalbano Elicona, Federico II d'Aragona castle, built after the Peace of Caltabellotta, dates back to 1302. Other dwellings rise in Caccamo, Mussomeli, Misilmeri, Cefalù, Castronovo, Sutera, Favara, Naro. In 1316 Francis I Ventimiglia sets his residence in Paternò, in the mid-fourteenth century the Moncada family fortress restore the Norman Rock. Regained power in 1392 the Catalans reward the victorious warriors with the possessions of the Latin part. Martin junior assigns Carini Castle - founded by Rodolfo Bonello, one of the warriors who had accompanied the Count Ruggiero in the Sicilian campaign, and

later gone to the Abbate's, one of the leading families of the Latin part - to the Grua Talamanca. In these buildings and in those built up in the middle of the sixteenth century, the Sicilian identity adheres to their historical origins.

The workers gradually change the Islamic-Mediterranean patterns first in the possible concordance with the Gothic then they adopt the segmental arch, the external stairs with a flight, the rustication which characterize the Catalan of the fifteenth century. Florence is really far away and when the Ajutamicristo's and the Abatellis's commission, around 1480, to Matthew Carnilivari their palaces in the city, and at the same time, the Bellomo's restructure their building in Syracuse, or when the Steripinto in Sciacca is built. In spite of this the importation of humanistic style takes place in parallel, especially due to the sculptors trained in the North, from Laurana to Gagini da Bissone, who both set a tradition that will reproduce their Renaissance training for over two centuries in tombs and in madonnas in every corner of Sicily and thereafter, especially in Messina, mannerism.

The clash of cultures lasted until the mid-sixteenth century and it was first solved by the arrival of the Counter-Reformation religious orders. These, particularly the Jesuits, favored a centralized planning construction. Once the ecclesiastical intellectuals arrived the succession of the architects of the Senate of Palermo was settled, made up of professionals well informed of treatises and generally trained in Rome. For long time nobility live in the feuds, the Moncada's in Paternò, the Branciforti's in Cammarata and in Mazarino, the Ventimiglia's in Castelbuono, the Graffeo's in Partanna, the Lanza's in Trabia. The work of territorial reorganization, but also the artistic and architectural one, begins in Sicily in the modern times. In the sixteenth century, later than elsewhere, the last gleam of feudal architecture fade away. Even if the constant piracy aggression forced to build along the entire perimeter of Sicily, an infinite number of fortress. As regard this work the genius of Camilliani shines out, a foreigner architect designed to build a ring of towers to defend the island continuously under threat. During the same period the city walls are completed, with moats, ramparts and fortifications: last traces of a declining architecture. Since the beginning of the sixteenth century new centers are founded. Sicily realized one of the largest phenomena of urbanization in Europe. The phenomenon of the new cities foundation, already significant at the end of the sixteenth century, has a sudden rise during the seventeenth century and then significantly decreases at the end of the century. During that space of time over a hundred of new centers are created, about half of those during the Thirty Years War.

The application of engineering and fortress models characterize the structure of the new centers inspired by an abstract and regular chessboard urban planning co, which is easy to implement and expand. Therefore there is a strong pressure to build, mainly beautiful and comfortable houses, due to the elite genius of the aristocratic society. At this time the island is influenced by foreign culture: the Tuscan Renaissance classicism and Mannerist forms of Michelangelo's inspiration, imported to Sicily by Giovanni Angelo Montorsoli. The importation in Messina of forms from central Italy is manifest also in painting with the arrival, between the second and third decade of the century, of Cesare da Sesto and Olidoro from Caravaggio, architect, decorator, painter. The Lombard-Roman artistic culture influenced many local artists. Vincenzo degli Azani from Pavia carried out his work in Palermo, on this basis and according to a production from Spanish, Sicilian and Neapolitan area, while the

international Mannerism with Flemish origin spreads over Sicily due to Simone from Wobreck since 1557. From mid-sixteenth and early seventeenth century, Palermo undergoes several reconstructions which changed its urban planning: the renewal of the fortified wall, the transformation of the ancient castle by the sea into a fortress and expansion of the defense of the Royal Palace.

The city was artificially divided into four parts and its orientation, from the sea to the interior, was replaced by several lines of expansion. Palermo, which for long time has been the definitive goal for the most important families of the Kingdom, moves large pieces of residential areas to a part of the city perceived as peripheral, but which is in reality the consolidation of a network of symbolic devices in different places. There are dwellings such as Ajutamicristo's, the Praetorian Palace, the current Raffadali's Palace, but there are dwellings in the countryside too, such as Villa Belvedere, Villa La Nave property of Ventimiglia's family, Villa Tasca Lanza di Calastra, originally built by Aloisio da Bologna. The mechanisms of differentiation and competition which characterize the behavior of an urban society must therefore extend to large areas, even to the whole region. Certainly the models for the new buildings can be very far, but it is also evident the overall need to be inspired by modernity and internationalism.

During the sixteenth century also Messina has been transformed after a season of commercial vitality, which became stronger after the battle of Lepanto, and lasts until the mid-sixteenth century, even if the interventions are lost due to the earthquake of 1908. The story of the urban area of Catania has different evolution. First of all, the eruption of 1669 and secondly the earthquake of 1693 have taught a lesson to all the men who believed their palaces, their cathedrals and their city walls were eternal. The result of such a quick and laudable reconstruction is a unitarian city, characterized by a particular baroque, the so-called baroque of Catania, to whom some liberty has been added. Two men stand out among the others, authors of the reconstruction: the energetic Duke of Camastra, who is entrusted with the rule of the new urban planning, and Giovanni Battista Vaccarini, modest and brilliant architect. A lively aristocracy takes actively part in the reconstruction, whose aesthetic common feature is the two-tone black and gray lava.

Churches, dwellings, squares and streets are built in a very short time. Biscari Palace is the most conspicuous achievement of the late seventeenth century. Famous travelers, who want to discover Sicily, stay for a while in the Palace, including Goethe. Even a small town like Ragusa springs up again. In the aftermath of the earthquake a clash between different villages lights up around the site on which to build the new city. The middle class win and build from the beginning the city in the district of Pato. Noto, a small town in the southeast of Sicily, rebuilds its town lay-out according to geometrical grid-plan layout. Outstanding palaces and monumental churches are built along the main axis. From the end of the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century, the church property increases and many city centres were transformed into monastic towns. Since the seventeenth century the profession of architect emerged in Sicily: churches, convents and the most representative public buildings were built, until the eighteenth century, by local religious, trained in the monastic libraries of the island and specialized in the Roman residences of the orders. In 1660 Guarino Guarini arrived in Messina, who designs his first works in Sicily: the destroyed Chiesa dell'Annunziata with Teatino Palace and Chiesa dei Somaschi, never made.

The work by Angelo Italia, Paolo Amato and Giacomo Amato led Sicilian architecture to entered a new Baroque phase. Oratories, home to confraternities and companies who took care of the execution, expressing their economic and social prestige, are very usually built. The naturalism of Caravaggio, who leaves his major works in Sicily, has been accepted by Alonso Rodriguez, from Messina, and especially by Pietro Novelli from Monreale, who designs the arsenal and the new fortifications. The production of the second half of the eighteenth century is under the hegemony of Ignazio Marabitti, who follows sources and iconography encoded by the various religious orders (high-relief for the Jesuit church in Caltanissetta, depicting St. Ignazio with the four parts of the world). After 1693, the maximum financial, political and planning commitment concerns the reconstruction, after the earthquake, of the towns settled in the Val di Noto (Catania, Ragusa, Noto, Palazzolo Acreide, Scicli).

The work of territorial reorganization and the urban development in western Sicily is remarkable too. Here powerful aristocratic families create major construction firms. But overall the Sicilian building experience during the premodern period witnesses the revival of the ecclesiastical class, which had a significant role both as an entrepreneur and as an artist. This gives rise to the reaction of the most traditional part of the feudal aristocracy, which promotes foundations where the traditional structure is maintained as in the case of Avola, which has a radio-centric town layout. The baroque with Roman origin shines in western Sicily. In this regard it is worth mentioning Giovanni Biagio and Andrea Palma from Trapani. In the Baroque era Juvarra and especially the Vaccarini are very active. In 1730 the latter as architect of the city of Catania designed the square courtyard of the university and since 1735 supervises the arrangements of Piazza del Duomo square. Since 1750 he was active in Palermo too. From 1713 to 1734 the relationships between Sicily and Austria increase. This leads Central European trends to influence the new buildings. In the latter half of the eighteenth century Sicily has international cultural references again, from the French Enlightenment to a marked Anglophilia, which is attested in the work by Giuseppe Venanzio Marvuglia who makes the royal garden Favorita in English style and transforms the villa owned by the anglophile prince of Belmonte all'Acquasanta. From the eighteenth to the nineteenth century in the major centres the enclosed spaces and projected toward the interiors of the building according to the local and Mediterranean tradition was replaced by a new urban plan of the spaces, more European.

On the paths of the walls boulevards, squares parks waterfront are set up. At the end of the eighteenth century the road system is improved and the process of urbanization focuses on the sea, causing into the island an unbalanced relationship between the inland and the coastal areas. In the Borbonic Sicily, excavations of cities and ancient monuments become an opportunity for the visual arts. Between the Revolution of 1848 and the exploits of Garibaldi, in 1860, in the Risorgimento atmosphere architects but in general artists, entered into a larger circuit. They broaden trough new national authorities and undertake the struggle for independence. Recurring themes are Sicilian Vespers, allegory and aspirations to independence of the Sicilian people, Garibaldians. This anspiration often form an alliance with places where modern art movements develop, such as Paris and Florence.

3. VILLAS AND FARMHOUSES

From the second half of the seventeenth century the habit of going on holiday is widespread especially among the aristocracy of Palermo, who builds a lot of villas surrounded by gardens and citrus orchard in areas immediately outside the city. Another group of villas, fewer but larger, is also built around the gulf of Palermo. The result is one of the most well-known phenomena of the late Baroque of Sicily which, although it occurs mostly with an aggressive expansion, also consists of villas sometimes quite isolated. The style of these buildings is not based on the cooperation of many artistic mediums, but uses as basic elements, theatrical effects and colour tones contrasting with the striking colours of the local nature. In general, the villa complex consists of a main part, the patrician residence endowed by a symmetrical composition, and lower buildings used as outbuildings.

The latter, connected to the ends of the patrician residence and perpendicular to the main façade, enclose the rectangular courtyard delimited at the front by a fence wall, where the entrance gate is set. The space in front of the building was thus clearly defined and isolated from the surrounding nature, while the back front of the building overlooks the garden. The main building, which formed the conclusion of the perspective and the limit point for the access to the road is free of closed courtyards, and has a characteristic element which is the external and double staircase with symmetrical flights leading into the noble floor. From the end of the seventeenth and eighteenth century the aristocracy expresses their interest in "outside Palermo" in order to fulfil their own need to go on holiday. In the north western part of the city lots of villas are built up: Villa Bonocore, Villa De Cordova, Villa Partanna, Villa Lampedusa. In the same Piana dei Colli, Ferdinand IV of Bourbon establishes Parco della Favorita, which from Piazza Leoni Mondello's square reaches to lido Mondello, rich in villas in Liberty style. In the district of Palermo Bagheria plays an eminent role, which in the eighteenth century is chosen to place noble dwellings. As soon as you get there, you come across in Villa Cattolica dating back to the half of the eighteenth century, completed by Francesco Bonanno in 1736. It is a massive building with two parallel exedras.

The villa is emblematic building, symbol of a society, whose feudal power is identified in a fortified farm which includes the owner's house. Today the villa achieves new prestige due to the fact that it is the seat of Modern Art Gallery, named after the painter Renato Guttuso, buried in Bagheria. Another eighteenth-century site in Bagheria is Villa Palagonia, which Prince Ferdinando Gravina ornamented with monsters and singularities: statues, halls of mirrors, waterworks, upholstered chairs of pins. Perhaps a Freud's interpretation of the Latin expression "*cupio dissolvi*" strikes the nobles from Palermo, whose palaces and villas are the only memory that the city preserves. The architectural features of the eighteenth century villas can also be found, even if in a small number, in the farm-houses and manor houses located in the eastern part of Sicily: for example along the Alcantara valley and in the Etna area there are several dwellings built between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Baglios, farms, cottages, manors and so on, are the result of the most important architectural phenomenon in the suburban areas in Sicily. This is a widespread phenomenon, except for the typical mountain areas (Etna, Nebrodi, Peloritani), made up of a rich architectural and monumental heritage which connotes the landscape. The farms are elementary rural clusters, scattered in the interior plateau of Sicily - but also in the valleys and along the river routes - usually they are located very far from the

built up centers, in areas with extensive cereal and zootechnical, inhabited by a floating population that ranges from a few men who to keep an eye on the property during the winter season to a hundred units during the crop season.

They can be large tenements of old feuds, dating back even to the seventeenth or the eighteenth century, or they can be groups of buildings built after the abolition of feudal rights, dating back to the nineteenth century or the beginning of this century, sometimes of smaller size. They are often erected in some dominant position, from which it is easy to watch over the company. Their external appearance is similar to fortifications with high walls, few and small windows with iron bars and located on elevated position. In the western part of Sicily the court is the recurrent feature of the farms. This is called *Baglio* in the district of Trapani, while it is called courtyard in the district of Palermo.

Instead the court is sometimes absent in the farms of eastern Sicily, both in the small ones scattered in the plain of Catania and used only temporarily by a small number of people for the unhealthiness of those places, both in the large ones which are characterized by a compact unit. The farms of the inland are very large and emblematic and particularly those in the district of Enna where the grandeur of the building structures is increased by the presence of towers, watchtowers and so on. The farms of the Iblean areas are of two kinds: Siracusan and Ragusan. The Siracusan farm is characterized by a larger area, by a more capacious courtyard and above all by a two-floor building, which covers a substantial proportion of the rural complex. The Ragusan farm is more intimate and restrained, without the bright colors of the Siracusan farm. The areas where the Ragusan farms are spread are Ragusa and Modica. Instead, the Siracusan farms are spread along the eastern part of the Iblean area, from Augusta to Pachino. Depending on production, the farm (*baglio*, dwelling, manor, etc..according to the location) contains rooms and special equipment: underground storage for cereals, oil mills, almonds drying rooms, wine cellars and willstones, the last always present in the *baglios* of Trapani. In any case, the farm is the typical result of landlordism and represents the symbol of a particular farm structure. Part of it has been destroyed, some still resists but less stronger than before. However it is still alive and is the core of a very fervent farm activity, which is looking for a new balance.

4. PLACES TO INHABIT AND SYMBOLS OF BELONGING

Of the 75 families of the Parliament in 1599 only 33 held a dwelling in the chief town. Through the analysed documents we can deduce that more than 180 noble dwellings were owned by minor nobility, wealthy state officers, lawyers and doctors. In the 16th century not more than half of the families of feudatories lived in the chief town of the island. However, all the noble families had at last one of their dwellings in the city centre. The other urban dwellings of the members of the Parliament were in all the urban centres of the island, mainly in Messina and Catania, even though it is impossible to make sure of it because of the distribution of the heritage of the 16th century. Among the 30 families living in Palermo there were the 5 most powerful of the island: the *Moncada Aragona* of Paternò that succeeded in obtaining 11 parliamentary votes and the domination over a population of 48.088 vassals in the Parliament of 1599; the *Branciforte* (or *Branciforti*), divided into the three branches of *Butera*, *Cammarata* and *Raccuja*, that obtained 10 parliamentary votes and controlled about 30.000 vassals; the *Ventimiglia* of *Geraci*, with 7 parliamentary votes and 21.879 vassals; the *Gioeni* of *Castiglione*, owners of other 7 estates who had the right to

vote, with a population of 20.423 inhabitants; the Tagliavia of Aragona, duke of Terranova, with 5 votes and 23.240 vassals. The aim of this research work is to analyse the relationship between feudal lords and their chief town and which kind of architectural works were in act or had been done by the elite in the city. The most evident marks of the importance of old families of contractors are shown in the centre of Palermo. It appears to the visitors as full of old palaces with the name of historical Sicilian families: Chiaromonte Palace, also known as Steri Palace and dated back in the 14th century, that was the seat of the Inquisition and today is the head office of the University Rectorate, Alliata di Villafranca Palace (15th century), Ventimiglia di Belmonte Palace (16th century) and Butera Palace, built in the first half of 1700's. The Lampedusa family was of feudal origin and founded Palma di Montechiaro in 1637. The father of the writer, Giulio, duke of Palma, was one of the protagonists of the liberty period in the "città felicissima" together with the Florio and Whitaker families. In their palaces they received the most important guests of Sicilian society.

In 1893 the noble woman Donna Franca Florio of San Giuliano married Ignazio Florio jr, member of an important family of the middle class; in fact Palermo was called "Floriopoli" because of the reputation and power of the family in the city. The architect Ernesto Basi was assigned to build the Palace "Villino Florio", a masterpiece of "art nouveau" style in Palermo. The Palace mirrored the tastes of its designer: modern "villa" with a big multi floor house. The Whitaker family arrived in Sicily from England at the beginning of 19th century. Peppino married Tina Scalia from Palermo and they lived in Villa Malfitano Palace, built in the new area of the city (close to the Florio Palaces) down the street *Via Dante*. In the 1800's nobility and middle class were ready to manage a new urban planning of the city: the Lampedusa, the Whitaker and the Florio were the protagonists of the "Felicissima Palermo".

The situation of the Moncada family was different as their parliamentary position was. Antonio Moncada of Paternò, who held the noble title of the family, was the owner of the palace of Ajutamicristo, defined as "the most beautiful private house of the city". It is important to remember that the prince had only bought the palace built at the end of 1400's from the Ajutamicristo, rich banker family from Pisa, who had owned it until 1588. It is possible that, after he bought it, the new owner started some renovation work, but he didn't finance any prominent architectural project. The urban residence of the main representative of the Branciforte family had a different structure. Fabrizio Branciforte, prince of Butera and Pietraperzia from 1591, count of Mazzarino and first noble of the Sicilian Reign, was the owner of 5 big estates with 12.400 vassals. His house had been inhabited by the Platamone, barons of Cutò.

The noble families who owned a palace in Palermo wanted to show their power and influence, while other Sicilian cities became the symbol of social standing and riches. The city of Caltanissetta, for example, became the most prominent among the cities under control of the *Moncada* and there they built their family palace. Even though the chronology of the project isn't really clear, it is interesting to notice that the palace of Caltanissetta, still under construction, was described as something to be proud of in a laudatory publication dedicated to the Moncada family: "va sorgendo per dare all'isola di Sicilia, vincitrice dell'altri Regni nella fecondità, con che li sfidi e vinca in vanto nell'architettura" The Branciforte family decided to have a magnificent palace and the annexed stable built in Leonforte. And Tomaso II of the Gioeni of Castiglione, the 3rd most powerful family of the Parliament, loved to live in Chiusa Sclafani, in a palace whose original building had been made in the 14th century. Despite the beautiful dwelling in Palermo the dukes of Terranova

preferred to live in Castelvetrano, reference point of their patrician family. A big ducal dwelling was built in Palma di Montechiara, founded by the *Tomasi*. The Naselli family built their palace in Aragona. The palace of the princes of Biscari was raised in Acate. Carlo Maria Garafa, prince of Butera realized his project in Grammichele. And the same happened with the palaces of Raccuja, Cattolica, Geraci, Villafranca and Notarbartolo .

Other palaces around Sicily give evidence to a noble class that symbolised an era. Sicilian aristocracy influenced the organization of the urban territory. "Vengono per insegnarci le buone creanze, ma non lo potranno fare perché noi siamo dei". This was the response of Gattopardo to Chevalley who offered him a senatorial post within the Savoy reign. Inside their magnificent palaces and beautiful dwellings noble families kept authentic treasures: decorations, tapestries, furniture, silverware, picture-galleries. These palaces were also the favourite meeting places of aristocracy, who had always represented a privileged social status in the collective unconscious from the *Gattopardo* to the *Vicerè*: a mixture of wisdom and know how to live, of elegance and glamour, of a fatalistic view of the present and respect for the traditions. Today it is possible to live the same experiences of a living past. We can walk around the favourite hunting estates of Federico II and to visit the rooms of the Biscari Palace. Some old aristocratic families of the island make their familiar histories available to visitors.

NOTES

¹ F.Benigno, *Aristocrazia e Stato in Sicilia nell'epoca di Filippo III*, in M. A. Visceglia (edited by), *Signori, patrizi ,Cavalieri in Italia centro-meridionale nell'età moderna*, Roma-Bari 1992, pp. 76-93, mainly p. 76.

² The manuscript is dated back between 1615, the last year of the government of the duke of Ossuna, and 1627, when the author died. Cf. V. Di Giovanni, *Palermo restaurato*, (manuscript of 1615), edited by M. Giorgianni and A. Santamaura, Palermo 1989.

³ To focus on the subject: M. Verga, *La Sicilia dei grani. Gestione dei feudi e cultura economica fra Sei e Settecento*, Firenze 1993.

⁴ Historiography has always concentrated on studies about medieval castles in the island. The most recent ones, with references to Modern Age, were edited by Rodo Santoro. Cf. R. Santoro, *L'età moderna*, in *Nobili pietre. Storia e architettura dei castelli siciliani*, Palermo 1999, pp. 91-114. This text can be useful to focus on castle architecture in Sicily. Other references: R. Santoro, *La Sicilia dei Castelli. La difesa dell'isola dal VI al XVIII secolo*, Palermo 1986; F. Maurici, *Castelli medievali in Sicilia. Dai Bizantini ai Normanni*, Palermo 1992; A. Drago Beltrandi, *Castelli di Sicilia*, s.l. 2000, and *Castelli medievali di Sicilia. Guida agli itinerari castellani dell'isola*, Palermo 2001