

VILLA FLORIO FROM FAVIGNANA ISLAND: ARCHITECTONIC AND FUNCTIONAL HISTORY

Grazia VECCHIO*

** Doctor in Philosophy of Geography and Lecturer, University of Catania, Faculty of Literature and Philosophy, Department of Humanistic Sciences, Monastero dei Benedettini, No. 32, 95124, Catania, Italy
email: vecchio_grazia@tiscali.it*

Abstract: *Villa Florio from Favignana island: architectonic and functional history.* The far Sicilian West which, besides the Egadi islands, includes the area between Marsala and Trapani is characterized by a specific landscape and socio-economic unity. In this context, the island of Favignana may be considered as the last vertex of a hypothetical economic-industrial triangle (Palermo – Marsala/Trapani – Favignana) characterized by a whole series of activities referable to the bourgeois house of Florio, one of the most powerful in Sicily from the second half of 19th century to the first decades of 20th. In the area under examination it is in Favignana that, after having bought the Egadi in 1874, they had Villa Florio built by G. Damiani Almeyda. At the same time this was intended to be an official country house and link with their tuna fisheries which were then the first industry in the Mediterranean and now significant testimony of industrial archaeology. Starting from the architectonic and functional history of the Villa and tuna fisheries and passing to an analysis which through the Florio family events, connected to those of some great English entrepreneurs, outlines their ascent and decline, in this paper we aim at reconstructing the interconnection between the Florio enterprises and the history of the aforesaid territory in relation to that of Sicily. This history has been highly influenced by the process of accumulation that in the 19th century allowed these few figures of entrepreneur-financiers to start the first Sicilian industrialization. Moreover, the fact that this residence not only had its typical official function but had also assumed an economic one, clearly symbolizes the underwent passage from the hegemony of the old aristocracy to that of the rising middle-class.

Rezumat: *Vila Florio din insula Favignana: o istorie arhitectonică și funcțională.* Vestul îndepărtat al Siciliei, care pe lângă insulele Egadi include și aria dintre Marsala și Trapani, este caracterizat printr-un peisaj particular și printr-un potențial socio-economic unitar. În acest context, insula Favignana poate fi considerată vârful ipotetic al unui triunghi spațial (Palermo – Marsala/Trapani – Favignana) caracterizat printr-o serie de activități referitoare la casa burgheză Florio, care a găzduit



una dintre cele mai puternice familii din Sicilia de la cumpăna dintre secolele al XIX-lea și al XX-lea. În acest spațiu de analiză se află Favignana, unde remarcăm vila Florio, construită de G. Damiani Almeyda. Aceasta se dorea o reședință de țară cu un destin strâns legat de activitățile piscicole și cele industriale incipiente din Bazinul Mării Mediteraneene, astăzi fiind o mărturie reală a arheologiei industriale din aceste locuri. Pornind de la istoria arhitecturală și de la funcționalitatea acestei reședințe și trecând în revistă evenimentele particulare familiei Florio conectate la antreprenorii englezi, vom încerca să relevăm ascensiunea și decăderea precum și reconstrucția conexiunilor dintre întreprinderile patronate de familia Florio și dinamica spațiului sicilian. Istoria acestor realități a fost influențată de procesele de acumulare specifice secolului al XIX-lea, care au permis și favorizat reprezentanților acestei familii debutul primelor faze de industrializare siciliană. Mai mult decât atât, faptul că această reședință a avut și o funcție economică alături de cea de reședință oficială, simbolizează în mod cert trecerea de la hegemonia vechii aristocrații spre conturarea clasei de mijloc la nivelul regiunii siciliane.

Keywords: history, Villa Florio, aristocracy, Favignana.

Cuvinte cheie: istorie, Vila Florio, aristocrație, Favignana.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rather small distance that divides the part of western Sicily which has Palermo and the Conca d'Oro at its centre from the farthest strip of the Sicilian West, characterized by a low terrace whose coasts between Trapani and Marsala through the Sicily Channel overlook the Mediterranean Sea, doesn't prevent the latter from outlining a territory which differentiates itself from the area of Palermo in order to form a specific and homogeneous landscape and socio-economic unity. This vast tableland area, which spreads as far as the coast and which is delimited to the north by mount S. Giuliano fringes first in the Isole dello Stagnone, where lies the ruins of Mothia, and then in the archipelago of the Egadi which includes the islands of Favignana, almost equidistant from Marsala and Trapani, Levanzo, Marettimo and finally the islets of Formica and Maraone. Favignana the most southern and largest among all, called *Aegusa* until it assumed the Latin appellation of *Favoniana*, whose etymological derivation is probably related to the constant presence of the wind on the island, is referred to also as «the island of the tuft» and «the queen of tuna fisheries», and is characterized by having the shape of a butterfly, on which a mountainous rib stands out, with two large plains stretching eastward and westward.

During one of its periods of maximum splendour between the 19th and 20th centuries, the economic history of this area was highly influenced by the enterprises of a powerful family, the Florio, which together with some great English traders settled in Sicily affected the industrial and agricultural development of Marsala, and in a some peculiar way that of Favignana. Therefore, Favignana may be considered as the last vertex of a hypothetical economic-industrial triangle in which the other two are made up of the city of Palermo and of those of Marsala and Trapani together, and whose area is characterized by a whole series of activities referable to the Florio; these range from the wine industry, for which Marsala has represented one of the main Sicilian poles, to the saltworks of Trapani, from the shipping companies of Palermo, of which the Florio, as owners, took advantage of for the carriage and export of their products, to the very ancient ones of the tuna fisheries which reached their peak prosperity in Favignana. In this area, the consonance among the mentioned sectors of the economic development and the harmony of elements as the snow-white saltworks grid, the windmills with their double connotation given by their functional

and aesthetic values, the storehouses of the tuna fisheries, the *bagli* and the endless rows of vineyards have taken the form of a spontaneous environmental architecture in which the prevalence of the horizontal dimension and of the interpenetration among the natural elements, have integrated also the Egadi islands and the Mediterranean Sea.

In such a context, set on the northern part of the island of Favignana, stands the homonymous built-up area, endowed with a port in the surroundings of which you can distinguish the extensive denticulate outline of the saddle-roofed buildings of the Florio's tuna fisheries, the Florio Villa, built on the site of the demolished fort of S. Leonardo and the church of S. Antonio which together seem to constitute a rather unitary architectural complex, able anyway to impose itself and to add an original connotation to the look of what, for the rest, has been above all a Mediterranean seafaring village, and whose planimetric structural design and bare structural elements reflect up till now an authority of Arab origin.

2. FLORIO VILLA AND TUNA FISHERIES - TWO ARCHITECTURES ON A LITTLE ISLAND OF THE MEDITERANEAN

Villa Florio in Favignana or also "Florio Castle" (photo 1, photo 2), planned by the architect Giuseppe Damiani Almeyda (1834-1911) as a country house for the Florio family and intended above all to be connected to the company activities of the tuna fisheries of Favignana and Formica straight after they bought the Egadi islands (1874), can be considered a fundamental residence junction in the area of Marsala and Trapani for the rich network of acquaintances that this bourgeois family maintained here too, through a periodic and full worldly life, at the same time complementary and alternative to that they had in their buildings in Palermo. In the area under examination, the palace in Favignana, indeed, is the one expressly commissioned by the Florio, unlike what occurred for the master's house of the *baglio* in Marsala that in this sense had a much more modest role, to accomplish the further purpose of exalting their public image; such a choice implied that this island would become their favourite place of rest and retreat, as well as point of convergence of many of their entrepreneurial affairs. Indeed, the history of the construction of Villa Florio cannot be separated from that of the tuna fisheries, which were renovated by the same Damiani who practically redrew all the seaward front of Favignana.

Beginning in the latter half of the 19th century, this engineer-architect¹ played a key role in the history of Sicilian architecture, realizing most of his works in Palermo, a city whose bourgeois aspect he contributed to by redrawing². The figure of Damiani, not only considered an eclectic architect but also an exponent of the neo-Graecism and of the neo-Renaissance style, is a composite one owing to the fact that he had felt the effects both of his

¹ G. Damiani Almeyda born in Capua of a father from Palermo, studied in Naples until when in 1859 he moved to Palermo, where he held important institutional duties at the Civil Engineering Office and at the City Council. Since 1878 he taught at the University of Palermo. He left various writings among which: *Istituzioni ornamentali sull'antico e sul vero* (1890) and its continuation *Istituzioni architettoniche*, still unpublished. Instead, two manuscripts were published posthumously: *The History of Modern Italian Art* (2005) and the *The Ups and Downs of My Life* (2001).

² Here, among other items of his, are the plans of the *Ruggero Settimo Monument* and of the *Teatro Politeama Garibaldi*, of the restoration of the *Palazzo di Città* and that of the *Aula Grande* of the *Archivio Storico Comunale*.

Neapolitan education and of many European influences, first among all that of the “polychrome architecture”. Damiani is often mentioned also because «he set himself against the “modernism” of Basile, with a deep bond with classical architecture and its principles [...]» (P. Barbera, 2008, p. 7).



*Photo 1: Main facade or Side towards the city
(source: Vecchio, 2011)*



*Photo 2: Back facade or side towards the tuna fisheries
(source: Vecchio, 2011)*

The theme of classicism is, therefore, one to which Damiani was always interested to in a constant research work directed to make up-to-date the models of the past through a method that allowed him «to fish with an eclectic abundance from the entire succession of the history of architecture, recognizing the originality of the individual contribution» (Fundarò A.M., 1999, p. 33). Apart from the great works in Palermo, Damiani also created different plans expressly for the Florio family, with whom he first got in touch in 1865. It is noteworthy that the members of the Florio family had always entrusted great architects for the realization of artistic projects whose image became highly symbolic of their role in that age³ and that for Damiani the most profitable collaboration⁴ was that with Ignazio sr. for whom he would have worked until the death of the latter. In the meantime, as far as the farthest west is concerned, he would have given other important contributions with the restoration of the Marsala Cathedral (1892) and the rebuilding of its collapsed ancient dome (1893) and still in Marsala with the realization of a “memorial column to Garibaldi” (1893). The planning of Florio palace in Favignana represented for Damiani a demanding and also rather unusual commission, not only because the house architecture was one of the fields on which he had less ventured but even for the type of structural and practical devices that building an official palace in a peripheral island could require.

Thanks to the Damiani archives, where also lie the numerous letters sent to Damiani from his disciple Filippo La Porta, who was used to oversee the works in the yard of Favignana in his absence, the scholar Anna Maria Fundarò has been able to reconstruct the planning and constructional events of this building⁵. From these it appears that Damiani, who was entrusted with the task between 1874 and 1875, proposed his first outline plan in February 1875, while an epistolary evidence which mentions a «topography for Mr. Florio» drawn up by the engineer Simone Biuso dates back to April 1875. The definitive plan, which was proposed to Florio in May 1875, consisted of ten Tables of which Fundarò has discovered the four pertinent to the plan of the building, each one containing the inscription «Country house in Favignana. For the “Comm.re” I. Florio» and the two tables of the sections; the tables referring to the four prospects haven't been found yet. Apart from the Tables there also exists a plan for an octagonal garden, a “Tender” and an estimate of expenditure which together supply precious information about the techniques used and building materials. Then Damiani inserted three different tables (plans, prospect of the façade and section) of this Villa, which he defined Pavilion for «princely hunting lodge» in his *Ornamental Architectonic Institutes*; they serve not only to make manifest the importance which the author assigned to this building but above all to evaluate the stylistic changes undergone by the palace in the passing from what was its effective practical realization to a following abstract revision, which turned out to be more complex as well as closer to his first drafts.

An eclectic work in the neo-Gothic style which overlooks Piazza Marina, this building looks like a big compact and openwork cube with smoothed voluminous areas which in some of its parts leans forward thanks to the existence of two bow-windows, the

³ With regard to their contribution to Sicilian artistic development, referring to modernism, Sergio Troisi points out that: «The Florio [...] didn't assign to the art a task that would have gone beyond the society decorum; and they didn't perform in this field that dynamic function that instead marked their activities in the economic sphere. In this meaning the manifestations of a showy eclecticism are then more understandable [...]» (Troisi S., 1985, p. 142).

⁴ It is possible to establish a binomial link client-architect between Vincenzo and C. Giachery, between Ignazio sr. and Damiani Almeyda and finally between Ignazio jr. and E. Basile (Barbera P., 2008, p. 157).

⁵ They have been published, together with all the extant material, in Fundarò A.M., (1999).

octagonal staircase, two cuspidate turrets and a clock tower overlooking the main front. In this building Damiani seems to be willing to diverge from the Classicism and the neo-Renaissance of his public buildings to draw on the Middle Ages south (Troisi S., 1985, p. 117). Even though the palace is inserted in a non-urban Mediterranean context, for some of its features it recalls more some buildings of European countries as Belgium, France, Great Britain and Germany than that of Italy, as it is pointed out by Fundarò, who reports some of the illustrations of a volume⁶ to which it is likely Damiani had drawn from⁷. While in the façades, the main appearing stylistic marks, often medieval and gothic, are represented by the embattled cornice, double lancet windows, rose windows and by perforated parapets. As far as the four façades of this Renaissance palace are concerned, in front of the main and front one is situated the flight of steps which represents the main entrance and is indicated by Damiani in the pertinent plan as "Side towards the city".

Then you can observe the opposite façade, the back one, named "Side towards the tuna fisheries" which is connoted by a large iron veranda included between the bow windows corresponding to the first-floor above, and the two side façades, the "Side towards the harbour", characterized by the projection of the semi-octagonal tower and the "Side towards south". From the drafts going back to even before the outline plan of February 1875, in which the palace already had three floors, you can see that the original plan provided for just two floors which probably the architect considered more suitable for the urban structure of the village. It may have been for living requirements that in the final version of the plan the three floors (Ground floor, Noble floor, Guestrooms, besides the Cava" or cellars), which have conferred to the building a greater vertical soaring, have been maintained. Furthermore, according to correspondence with La Porta, the building of the Villa was begun in September 1876 and, with the exception of some finishing touches, finished in May 1878.

Therefore you can enter the villa, surrounded by a little park, from the flight of steps of the ground floor, slightly raised, characterized by the three arches which lead to the Porch through which you can enter the Hall; from the latter, after having passed through the Study, situated on the right side, you can reach the Chapel. As we can recognize from the plans of the palace, through which we can read the original specific destination of each room, having gone beyond the Hall we can find the centre of the house which consists of the wide and rectangular Lobby, which on the left leads to the staircase and on the right to the Library, while going on you can reach the reception Room which in its turn is connected to the Billiard Room and to the Dining Room that jutting out form the bow-windows above which opens the veranda. By means of a great flight of steps you can reach the Noble Floor which is very articulate and has at its centre the Common Hall, characterized by a rooflight: various rooms of the floor lead off it, including the Wedding Room with the "Back Room and Dressing Table for the Master", "Back Room and Dressing Table for the Mistress" and other rooms for the maidservants, the study, a wing reserved as the two "Gentlemen's Rooms", the Study and the room for the Tutor and a wing dedicated to "Daughters and Nursemaids", close to the places for the servants and the housekeeper. You can reach the Guestrooms, also illuminated by a skylight, through the little staircase that leads to what also

⁶ We refer to: PETIT VICTOR, *Habitations Cosmopolites-Ducher & C.*, Parigi. See Fundarò A.M., 1999, p. 153.

⁷ Fundarò highlights the points of contact among the buildings in these illustrations, each one tending to embody a particular architectonic style symbolizing a country, and Florio palace. They are given body in some details as the iron roofing added to compact bodies, present also in a typology of Belgian houses, the cylindrical angular turrets and the cusps of the roof of the French and German houses, as well as the octagonal jutting bodies which are possible to be found in English houses (Fundarò A.M., 1999, p. 31).

on this floor is the centre of the house, that is the large Hall surrounded by about eighteen rooms for the most part intended to carry out the function of bedrooms. As regards the interiors in which the movable furniture is no longer present and whose flooring in some rooms has been substituted during previous restoration work, the details concerning the fixed furniture can also be inferred from the observations written by La Porta to Damiani in the mentioned letters. One of the issues which drew La Porta's attention most was the decoration to be reserved to the various rooms, about which Damiani, who usually particularly liked to linger over the decorative part, in this case proved to be less interested. La Porta wondered, for example, whether to use in the dining room calcareous material or tuff, about the iron banister of the inner staircase created in Oretea Foundry, the decoration of the vaults, in whose frescoes the floral subject predominated, as well as about the choice of the materials for the flooring⁸.

These indications turn out to be all the more useful because the palace, having become common property of the town council has changed its destination of use and in the last decade not only housed some municipal offices but also the "Antiquarium" Museum where underwater archaeological finds were situated. At present the villa is undergoing restoration work, carried out with regional funds and oriented to a new destination of use, thanks to which it will be used as a conference room and museum.

The buildings of the Favignana tuna fisheries, nearby and closely connected to Villa Florio, have a much more ancient history than that of the palace and for this reason in the last decades have been the subject of various studies in the field of industrial archaeology. To the building of tuna fisheries on land, which until the period prior to the Florio had been modified in a non-systematic manner, adding new rooms whenever a need arose, Damiani, on commission of Ignazio sr., with his work of restoration and extension (1874) gave them the look which they would keep until recent years⁹, before the last renovation with which their destination of use has been modified.¹⁰ In order to understand the structure of the tuna fisheries of Favignana, it is useful to consider that «a tuna fishery, historically determined, is first of all, a site and the construction of a trap which remains set up some months» (Lo Curzio M., 1991, p. 13). This trap consists of a complex system of fix different sized nets, mounted during the period of tuna migration and made up of a basic part called *isola*, and of the *pedale* or *costa*¹¹. The *isola* and the *pedale* are the part of tuna fishery

⁸ Finally for some rooms such as the billiards room it was parquet, for others such as the kitchens and the passages it was "flint tiles" and for the bedrooms "tinned bricks".

⁹ The situation of the tuna fisheries was very effectively described by Vincenzo Consolo: «By now all is flaking off, corroding and collapsing in those sheds; every plaster, wall, stone, plate or iron part is eaten up by the plague of saltiness and saltpetre [...]. And in these abandoned sheds the grass doesn't grow among the joints of the bricks, nor do ivy, brambles or moss climb up the walls; you can see neither an animal, nor mouse, lizard, gecko or spider: it seems that life has withdrawn from here; [...]» (Consolo V., 1999, p.61).

¹⁰ The presentation of the restoration works of the ex Florio Factory, property of the Sicilian Region from the nineties on, took place on 26th September 2009. The requalification of the buildings cost fifteen million euros and financed with the POR 2000-2006 funds from the European Community, was overseen by the Cultural Estate Office of Trapani. The plan of restoration is due to the architect Stefano Biondo who also began the works in 2003, which were completed afterwards by the architect Paola Misuraca. With the restoration, whose purpose was to keep the architectural features, volumes and structural characteristic, more than two thirds of the tuna fisheries have been recovered, for a total area of about 32 thousand square metres. It has been designed as a museum with exhibition space, conference room, additional services, guestrooms and so on. See *Giornale di Sicilia, Speciale Tonnare di Favignana*, 24 settembre 2009.

¹¹ The *isola* is subdivided in chambers whose walls are separated from vertical mobile nets each one representing the doors which allow the passage of tunas which are driven into the different chambers till they reach the last one,

whose activity is marine and mobile. As far as the tuna fishery of Favignana is concerned it was an “outward tuna fishery” which indicated that the tunny killing occurred when the tunas completed the first cycle of their migratory journeys, ranging from May to June, and a “stand tuna fishery”, that is to say it had many chambers whose doors could be closed at will. With tuna fisheries architecture, instead, we refer to the other part of the tuna fisheries, which serves to accomplish the activities on land and which is made up of all the buildings of the tuna fisheries, also called as a whole *malfaraggio*. The last ones are intended to be storage for the equipment and nets, laying up of boats, conservation of the catch and sometimes also shelter for the crew of fishermen. Obviously a deep connection exists between the sea activities and the typology of the tuna fisheries buildings on land.

The reshaping of the structure on land of the Favignana tuna fisheries, characterized by a Renaissance outside composition and by interior ogee cross arches, for which the architect took the idea from the English industrial buildings, ranges «from local tradition to import culture» (Terranova F., 1987, p. 61) and refers to the morphological scheme of the Sicilian *baglio*¹², very widespread in the area of Marsala. The new configuration drawn by Damiani consisted, indeed, of «a courtyard shaped building whose wings are determined by the differentiated functions of the single parts [...]» (*ibidem*). The *malfaraggio* of the Favignana tuna fishery is situated between the little port of S.Leonardo and the Plaja. The entrance, which is followed by the rooms of the storehouse and administration leads to the inner courtyard (“*baglio*”) and is composed of three parts: the storehouse for the nets (*camparia*), the dockyard (*trizzana*) and the storehouse for the ropes and floats. The rectangular-shaped *camparia* has ten bays and a saddle roof. The nave inside has ogee arches, while the aisle has round arches. The *trizzana*, where the boats were built and repaired, consists of two rooms with saddle-roofs with its interiors characterized by ogee and round arches too. The storehouses, situated between the *camparia* and *trizzana*, consists of three rooms where the body of the tuna fishery and all the other tools were kept. The outward appearance of the whole series of buildings of the *malfaraggio*, which shows an achieved balance between decorative sobriety and architectonic stateliness shows that Damiani succeeded in obtaining a compromise between his own aesthetic-structural needs and the functional demands of the production logic of what was the first and biggest tunny fishing industry in the Mediterranean¹³.

without door and from tighter and tighter meshes, that is the “chamber of death” where the tunny killing takes place. The *isola* is placed at the extremity near to the coast of the *pedale*, which is instead the wall of nets that starts from the shore and pushes up to the open sea in order to cut off the tunas route.

¹²Between the 17th and the 18th centuries the Sicilian *bagli* were used above all for the conservation of cereal. It was because of the increase in vine cultivation that they become wine farms. Structurally a *baglio* now indicates: «the whole complex of rural buildings laid out around the courtyard and often fortified» (Maurici F. in Kalos, n. 44, 1997).

¹³ In the buildings of the tuna fisheries, in whose gardens two of Florio’s busts are also situated, three plaques whose inscriptions commemorate the best haul years are still in existence (1848-1853-1859). The 1848 one bears the word: «During the Lord’s year 1848- In this tuna fishery 4,345 tunas were killed - Outdoing the memorable haul of 1771- During the tallage of Mr Ignazio and Mr. Vincenzo Florio- Administrator Ribaudò - Rais Michele Casubolo».

3. A FAMILY OF SICILIAN ENTREPRENEURS BETWEEN THE 19th AND 20th CENTURIES: THE FLORIO FAMILY

The bourgeois house of the Florio¹⁴, one of the richest and most powerful in the history of Sicily from the second half of the 19th century to the first decades of the 20th century, a period during which it became married into the high aristocracy of Palermo, comes from a Calabrian family of minor entrepreneurs, whose progenitor is recognized in Tommaso, a craftsman, perhaps a blacksmith, who was born after 1650 and lived in Melicuccà, in the neighbourhood of Bagnara Calabria. It is from he, then, that the parabolic curve of their ascent and decline is made to date back (Cancila O., 2008). It is emblematic that right for its bourgeois origins this family didn't identify itself with a coat of arms but with the symbol which accompanied many of its activity, adopted afterwards in the labels of marsala that is to say the "leo bibens"¹⁵. In this sense although the Florio had become related both to the d'Ondes Trigona family, thanks to whom they could have obtained the title of Count, and afterwards to the Lanza Branciforte, and in spite of the fact that with the purchase of the Egadi they could have acquired the title of nobility due to their owners, they were never interested to join also nominally that aristocracy that actually they took part in.

Domenico, son of Tommaso, moved to the coastal town of Bagnara Calabria, practised the trade of smith and horseshoer and began to amass small properties. Vincenzo who continued the paternal line as he was the only to have a large progeny, concentrated with his hands on a part of the real estates bequeathed by his father, by buying them from his brothers, until the earthquake that hit the Calabria in 1783 brought it all up for discussion again destroying the possession of Vincenzo who probably in that occasion lost also his wife, as it turns out that he married again after a very short time. Among his eight children the fundamental outcome sprang from the marriage between Mattia and Paolo Barbaro who belonged to a merchants and sailors family who were used to buy goods in many Mediterranean harbours, and to resell them in others, the Tyrrhenian and Sicily ones included. Together with him another Florio brother, Paolo (1772-1807) started his activity of sea itinerant and in 1793 formed a partnership, which would have been dissolved in 1803 and which had its offices in Palermo, where, among the other things, the two men ran a grocery shop. It was with Paolo that the turnabout in the history of the Florio family began.

In consequence of the difficult occurrences following the proclamation of the Parthenopean Republic and some new seismic tremors, since 1799 the situation in Bagnara became harder and harder. This is likely to have been one of the reason for P. Florio to move definitively with his family to Palermo, where a large colony of Bagnara people was still present. On the death of don P. Florio, who although his having amassed a conspicuous capital, didn't possess any house of his own, the family moved to Via Materassai and the business was carried out by his brother Ignazio (1776-1828) who contributed considerably in the House prosperity by tripling its capital. Another turning point passed around 1818-19 when Paolo's heir, Vincenzo (1799-1868) by coming of age could take the reins of the

¹⁴ The Florio family private archives have gone astray. The sources which the scholars of this family report to have drawn from are those of the Record Office, notary archives, Bank of Italy Archives, Commercial Bank Archives, the Raziocini from 1808 to 1814, correspondence and so on.

¹⁵ The sick lion which drag itself to drink the water gushing out the china root that would have made it to recover appeared around 1810 painted on a wooden sign of a grocery store. After 1820, when the grocery store was renovated, the lion theme was taken up in the bas-relief of a new sign (Lentini R., 1985a, p. 20).

family company in order to insert it gradually in the international trade, not only by diversifying its sectors but also by putting it actively on the productive process. But the two Florio still preferred not to divert any found from their investment to buy some house of their own. In the meantime, after in 1809 the first experience with leasing of the Vergine Maria tuna fisheries proved to be unprofitable, owing to a later positive development of the tuna fisheries crisis Vincenzo decided to undertake the management (1827) of the San Nicolò l'Arena tuna fisheries and later on of the Arenella ones. On his uncle Ignazio's death the sole heir and follower of the family business was Vincenzo, who was defined «lucky porter» by baron Francesco Cotella on account of the swiftness with whom he managed to increase greatly the pace of their business carrying out a «consistent company logic of vertical integration on the spice-wine-sulphur-tuna-ship-foundry axis» (Cancila O., 2008, p.74). The figure of Vincenzo, who was a member of the Superior Council of the National Bank in the Palermo branch and since 1864 senator of the Kingdom of Italy is still that of the typical great southern entrepreneur. It was he, later named “Sicilian Briareus”, one hundred arms giant, who built the wine factory in Marsala and paid the toll for the tuna fisheries of Favignana and Formica (1841) and who took part in 1840 to the Society of Sicilian Steamer; moreover to him again is due not only the acquisition of the Oreteia Foundry (1844) but also the setting up of the Florio family shipping activity (1847) and since 1856 also the postal service for the government. Vincenzo married Giulia Portalupi only after the birth of their children: Angelina who got married to Luigi De Pace, belonging to a fitter-out family owner of the *Sicilian transatlantic Company* founded in 1853 and already wound up in 1856, Giuseppa and Ignazio the future heir by then of the rich Florio House; moreover, it was only in 1832 that Vincenzo, also in order to give visibility to the obtained prestige of his family, decided to buy its first residence in Palermo, the one in Via Materassai.

After the death of his father, Ignazio sr. (1838-91) took over and further consolidated the House, and in 1866 married Giovanna d'Ondes Trigona, the daughter of the Count of Gallitano Gioacchino d'Ondes Reggio and of Eleonora Trigona, of older nobility. The couple had four children: Vincenzo (1867-79), Ignazio jr. (1868-1957), Giulia (1870-1947) who married the Prince of Trabia and Butera, Pietro Lanza Branciforte and Vincenzo (1883-1959). Senator since 1883, it was Ignazio sr. who bought in 1867 the prestigious Villa at Olivuzza and who, in 1874, purchased the Egadi islands together with the tuna fisheries of Favignana and Formica, where he had Villa Florio built, and who set up, after the purchase of the *Trinacria* and thanks to the incorporation to the Rubattino of Genoa, the *Italian General Navigation* (N.G.I) in 1881.

His son Ignazio jr. who would have gone not only through the years of the Florio apogee but also through that of their inexorable decline, that had begun with his father's death, married the very celebrated Franca Jacona of San Giuliano. Between the 18th and the 19th centuries he took it upon himself to construct the Shipyard of Palermo and created the Grand Hotel Villa Igiea which, at the same time, became the most important hotel in Palermo and one of the residences of the Florio. In 1900 he founded the national daily *L'Ora*, in 1905 undertook the enterprise of Teatro Massimo and of Politeama while, dating back to 1925, is another attempt to invest in the fishing industry in the Canaries, followed by a further attempt in Tunisia. His brother Vincenzo, who had no children from his two marriages, left the administration of their business to Ignazio and preferred to devote himself to the organization of sport and tourist initiatives, such as the “Florio Targa” (1906). Instead, Ignazio jr. had five children, three of whom didn't live long while each of the other two

sisters – Igea, who got married to the Duke Averardo Salviati and with whom she moved onto the estate of Migliarino Pisano, and Giulia, who married the marquis Achille Beloso Afan de Rivera and resided in Rome – both had five children and led a more stable life than their parents did. Indeed, towards the end of the Thirties the decline of the Florio, whose worst years spanned from 1929 to 1935, had already taken place following the loss of the remaining capital shares of all their activities, the sale by public auction of their personal property and demesne too and the definitive departure from the city of Palermo. They had already been living in Rome since 1924 but frequently used to go back to Palermo, staying at the Arenella or Villa Igea (Candela S., 2008, p. 449). However, after 1939, only Ignazio periodically went back there to visit his brother Vincenzo and the wife Lucie, while Franca preferred never to go back there again (Pomar A., 2006, p. 313).

4. THE FLORIO FAMILY IN THE HISTORY OF THE FAR WESTERN PART OF SICILY

The history of the relationship between the Florio family and the area of Marsala and Favignana is closely connected to the process of accumulation that in the 19th century allowed a few figures of entrepreneur-financiers to start the first Sicilian industrialization and the rise of a middle-class which was soon to be alongside the old large-estate-owner aristocracy in social terms. Therefore, if in the afterwards defined “age of the Florio” «[...] the Florio family marked time and the ways of being bourgeois in Palermo» (Lentini R., 1985b, p. 93), it did so even more in the other areas which hinged on their economic predominance.

The first businesses that led them to invest in this part of Sicily were linked to the production of marsala. An analysis of these activities could throw light not only upon the way their having already successfully taken root in this territory could have become a decisive factor afterwards in inducing them to increase the sector linked to the tuna fisheries, but above all on how this taking root allowed them to face up to the problems pertinent to fish transport from an island so far from the merchant circuit in an age of such great competition with the Spanish and Portuguese tuna fisheries¹⁶. Instead, as regards the introduction of the Florio family to wine activities, it was facilitated by the opening up of the markets already carried out by their English forerunners, who had already changed the history of Marsala since the last decades of the 18th century. It was, indeed, exactly due to the wine industry that Marsala saw its own trade increase considerably, so becoming one of the richest towns in Sicily, while development of the industrial sector was still almost totally lacking for the rest of the island.

The first of these Englishmen who settled in Sicily was John Woodhouse who decided to move to Marsala and create the first marsala factory, the Woodhouse *baglio*. The trade of marsala for which he firstly used the port of Trapani, therefore increased greatly thanks to his friendship with Nelson. Following the Woodhouse's *baglio* in 1813 was that of Benjamin Ingham. Ingham reached Sicily in 1806, exactly the same year in which Ferdinando IV fled from Naples following the defeat of his coalition from the French and took refuge there, paving the way towards the trade agreement that was to come in 1808

¹⁶ These reasons induced Ignazio to stop the shipment of fish to Palermo and the conservation of salted tunny in 1882.

between the Bourbon government and the English, who were asked by the French for military defense of the island in exchange for greater ease of trade. And the English traders were just the ones who decided to put an end to the problems springing from the inadequacy of the Marsala infrastructure¹⁷ with the construction of a new port¹⁸, which would make the changed mercantile requirements easier.

V. Florio, to whom Ingham represented a model to follow,¹⁹ encouraged by the approval that marsala²⁰ met with, created (1834) together with Raffaele Barbaro, a wine company that was dissolved already by 1839, leaving only Florio at the head of the activity. It appears therefore, that already in the 1880s, the Florio factory had assumed an industrial size. The increasing control of the market by these few producers took place nevertheless also thanks to the system of loaning capital to the wine-growers, which allowed the latter to make up for the lack of an efficient credit system and the producers to secure large amounts of must at a favourable price²¹. This system shows deep analogies with the one through which the tuna fisheries of Favignana and Formica managed to be highly profitable. Indeed, the strong fluctuation of the annual results of tunny killings required figures of tuna fisheries managers who, like the Florio, could afford exacting long-term investments in order to face up to the losses caused by negative cycles.

As regards the Whitaker house, among Joseph sr.'s children there was Joseph jr., called Pip²², who would have been remembered above all for his great passion for archaeology which in 1906 allowed him to start the excavation in Mothia, purchased a short time before. On this island very near to the Egadi, which holds important archaeological discoveries too²³, he built a house, with a not-accidental parallel to that of Florio with whom he not only shared entrepreneurial events but also worldly and social relations. In the diaries of Tina Scalia it is written, for example, that she and her daughters used to see Franca in a Palermo club and that on the occasion of the English sovereigns' arrival in 1908, the coaches were actually provided by the Florio and the Whitaker families (Candela S., 2008, p. 428). A continuous interlacement between the Whitaker and the Florio families as well as between Palermo and the area of Marsala.

¹⁷ The railway line Palermo-Trapani via Castelvetrano, that became a central hub as alternative to the port, was completed in 1883, while road communication was still decidedly inadequate.

¹⁸ In 1810 the English entrepreneurs started the construction of a first tract of mole, whilst the construction of the port was started in 1837. In 1839, while paying a visit to Marsala, Ferdinando II approved and helped to finance the works that were, however, interrupted in 1847 before the construction of the mole up to the shore was completed.

¹⁹ Indeed, Ingham, whose residence was in Via Materassai, was a financier and a fitter-out who succeeded in creating one of the largest mercantile fleets of the island (Cancila O., 2008, p. 72), managed jointly in 1839 by V. Florio.

²⁰ About marsala the writer Frances Minto Elliott, who had the chance to meet the Florio family during one of their receptions, said: « In return, I suggest "marsala" [...] I cannot say much for the cuisine, not for the waiting; but the wine is first-rate [...] » (Elliot F, 1882, p. 196).

²¹ As far as the wine production is concerned, the greatest problems arose from the phylloxera vine invasion. Afterwards the first step towards the concentration of producers took place with the establishment (1904) of "Florio e C.-Savi", followed by its acquisition by Cinzano. In 1929 the Woodhouse and the Ingham-Whitaker companies would have been merged to the ex Florio enterprise, by then property of the Northern Italy capitalists.

²² He married Tina Scalia, author of the diaries through which Raleigh Trevelyan reconstructed the Anglo-Sicilian relations of the time.

²³ Various caves of great Prehistoric importance dating back to the Upper Paleolithic and a necropolis of Phoenician origin lie in Favignana; here there are also a Hellenistic necropolis and a ninphaeum of Roman origin. In the Levanzo caves of the Upper Paleolithic period is also the famous *Cave of Genoese* which, among its wall pictures of Paleolithic and Neolithic origin, has one of the first iconographic representation of the tuna fishing.

The business that cemented the relationship between the Florio family and Favignana, was that of the tuna fishery, which notwithstanding having already been tried by Florio elsewhere, was successful only in the Egadi islands in expressing itself as «organization of an entire cycle in an industrial key» (Lentini R., 1985a, p. 23). The history of Favignana and of its tuna fisheries can be retraced through various historic testimonies of events that sometimes intersected with those of Sicily and sometimes assumed a rather independent course. Indeed, the Egadi islands²⁴ during the course of centuries have seen the alternation of different families whose actions in some circumstances have inevitably accentuated their insular character. The first known rulers of Favignana prove to have been Palmieri Abate of Trapani under the Swabians, Niccolò at the time of Martino and then his daughter Alleanza who married firstly Matteo of Moncada and then Luigi of Carissimo. His daughter married Issio Riccio Inquisitor in Trapani, to whose descendant Andrea is due the reconstruction of the S. Giacomo castle in 1498 (Amico V., 1855, p. 442), now a prison. After Riccio the domination passed to Giovanni La Nuzza who in 1494 had been viceroy of Sicily, then to Girolamo from whose marriage with Caterina del Bosco was born Francesco, baron of Favignana. To his son Giovanni Andrea succeeded Giovanni Francesco who was then unable to rule because of his «mental deficiency» (Cataliotti A., 1924). In 1590 the rulers of this island²⁵, which after 1568 was bought by the viceroy marquis of Pescara (Cancila O., 1972, p. 136) Francesco Ferdinando d'Avalos II, who had two towers built there, resulted to be the Filangieri.

In 1637 Camillo Pallavicini²⁶ as a financier of Filippo IV had the rights to buy the Egadi islands²⁷ and the tuna fisheries from the Spanish government that had put up for sale this and other State properties to fill the lack of the funds needed to conduct his wars. The purchase of these tuna fisheries which were considered baronial properties and which since 1634 resulted to be already rented by Ottaviano del Bono *abbonato* (“tenant farmer”) of Giacomo Brignone (La Mantia V., 1901, p. 18), became perpetual and without possibility of redemption in 1640, the right year in which the *licentia populandi* for Favignana was granted. The Pallavicini who left uncultivated and inhabited Marettimo and Formica, from then on did their best to make cultivable and populated Favignana by improving a large part of the soil and, as it lacked water, by filtering the brackish water that flowed among the rocks (Giuffrida R., 1985, p. 42). In 1648 the dominion of Egadi, which conferred to their possessors the rule of the islands and the administration of their civil and criminal justice appeared to be in the hands of two Pallavicini brothers²⁸.

Later on, in 1651, these islands were raised to the status of county while in 1726 it would appear that they had the concession of marquisate. Yet the possession of the Egadi islands for the Pallavicini proved to be always rather tormented. For example it was during

²⁴ In these islands during the First Punic War took place the “Battle of Egadi” on 10 March 241 B.C.

²⁵ Favignana, which in those centuries was ravaged by the piratical raids, suffered the presence (1553) of a Barbarossa disciple, Draguth, who chose it as base for his operations and who was defeated by the viceroy Duke of Medinaceli.

²⁶ The Pallavicini family came from Germany to Italy in 960, on account of the assignation of vicariate of Lombardy. From Genoa some descendants spread all over Sicily where Giovanni was already baron of Fiumefreddo in 1313 (Cataliotti A., 1924, p. 87).

²⁷ For the events of the Pallavicini family in the Egadi we refer to N. Calleri (2006), in which unpublished sources, found in the Archives of Pallavicini family, were analyzed and published.

²⁸ To that year dates back a first detailed description of those islands and of the apparatuses of tuna fisheries that the Pallavicini had got done before beginning to colonize them, while another version drawn up by Gioachino Napoli, one of their ex attorneys in Sicily is dated 1723 (Calleri N., 2006, p. 31).

their dominion that Favignana was sacked by the Duke Enrico of Giusa (1654) who had arrived there on account of the defeat suffered in the attempt at obtaining the throne of Naples. Moreover, among their innumerable adventures, they saw also the unfavourable reaction of the Sicilian aristocracy who in 1641 gathered in a Council to disapprove the selling of the islands and a dispatch from Charles II of Spain who claimed their restitution; nevertheless the Pallavicini, who in 1668 with a transaction overcame this predicament and afterwards also the further problems arisen with the accession of the Bourbons (1734), succeeded in keeping the dominion which was exercised nominally by only five members of the family for another two centuries. Meanwhile, in 1760, they had the Madrice Church of Favignana built and a few years later the little church of Formica. Another episode that contributes to insert Favignana in the orbit of the European events, is the stay made there from 4 to 6 June 1798 by Napoleone Bonaparte in order to get supplies before assaulting Malta during the expeditions to Egypt. In this historical phase, from the end of the 18th century to the following decades, the Pallavicini found themselves compelled to face up to, firstly a subsequently revoked confiscation of the islands and, later on, the disputes caused by the abolition of the exemption for the tuna fisheries that the cessation of the feudal system (1812) had involved; yet in 1823 these controversies turned out in their favour.²⁹

In the meantime the following decades would have promised to be a decisive period both for the history of the Egadi islands and of Italy. After the Restoration of 1815 followed indeed the age of *Risorgimento* which saw the events that would have led to the Unity of Italy and which also marked the passage from the *Ancient Régime* aristocratic society to the post-Unity liberal one. After the first constitutional risings of 1820-21, the anti-Bourbon revolution of 1848 broke out in Palermo, anticipating the general European revolution. In this historic phase V. Florio, from whom the revolutionaries had already requisitioned one of his boats, managed to avoid regrettable outcomes as he adopted a conservative position. Indeed, he, who firstly had joined in the National Guard, afterwards drew back becoming plainly reactionary. So not only did he not need the Bourbon amnesty but since 1850 he enjoyed the protection of the king who favoured his transport and mail services³⁰.

After the landing of the *Mille* of Giuseppe Garibaldi at Marsala³¹ and the consequent events that put an end to the Bourbon reign, for V. Florio³², the situation improved again, as he could enter a larger trade circle. It was during this twenty-year period of rebellion that he undertook by tallage from marquis Ignazio Alessandro Pallavicini³³ the management of the Favignana and Formica tuna fisheries for nine years beginning from 1841, extendible for other nine, therefore until 1859, the year when he preferred not to renew the contract. Considering that the profits obtained from the running of the tuna fisheries had been very good, the decision of Vincenzo, perhaps has to be attributed to the necessity of concentrating capital in order to assign it to the creation of the Steamer

²⁹ A description of the Favignana tuna fisheries during those years is due to Francesco C. D' Amico, Duke d'Ossaria S. Giorgio: *Osservazioni pratiche intorno alla pesca, corso e cammino dei tonni*, Messina, 1816.

³⁰ It is noteworthy that between the two shipping Companies of Florio, the one directed to Trapani and Girgenti from Palermo, included a call at the islands of Favignana, Pantelleria, Lampedusa and Ustica.

³¹ Before landing at Marsala (11 May 1860) two Garibaldian ships hugged the coasts of Favignana while a British corvette arrived to reassure the English traders (Alagna G., 1998, p. 173). In 1862 Garibaldi returned to Marsala and visited the Florio factory in which a plaque was affixed to commemorate this event.

³² On this occasion to Vincenzo some steamers were again requisitioned first by the Bourbons and then by Garibaldi.

³³ Since 1841, for succession reasons, the possession of the Egadi islands resulted as being shared by Pallavicini and Rusconi; then, since 1871, after the death of I. A. Pallavicini, the male line of Pallavicini died out.

Company. Indeed, during his management he introduced new methods to tunny fishing which included the use of a different system of nets for capture.³⁴ Moreover, his introduction of the method of conservation under oil in Sicily brought great advantages, not least that of contributing to resolve the local crisis in this sector, which among its causes counted the fact that the salted tunny was erroneously believed to be the cause of scurvy among the sailors; in this way the market of tunny in oil could also be expanded to the northern regions. From 1859 to 1877 to the management of the tuna fisheries by the Florio family took over from that of the tenant farmer Vincenzo Drago who in 1861 had a new factory for fish conservation built.

The decisive event in the history of the relationship between the Egadi islands and the Florio family occurred on 7 march 1874, when Ignazio sr. purchased from Pallavicin Rusconi the Egadi islands together with the Favignana and Formica tuna fisheries and the surrounding sea at the price of £ 2,750,000, even though his direct management began only in 1878, on the expiry of the contract of Drago. After the purchase, which also included the houses, the wild and cultivated land and the emphyteutic rents, Ignazio undertook the process of urbanization of Favignana, his plan being approved in 1890, and the building of the harbor (Requirez S., 2007, p.118). In the village of Favignana, whose look was indeed like that of a medieval burgh renovated in the 17th century and overlooked by the fort of S. Caterina³⁵, the situation of the shore in the past was that mentioned by Vito Amico (1697-1762): «There are many inlets fit for very numerous fleets that number up to 26 in Niger and Ventimiglia, but that of Calarossa is the widest and the safest of all» (Amico V., 1855, p. 441). In those years, while the wine industry of Marsala went through a phase of full growth, even the purchase of the Egadi islands turned out to be a profitable business, so that in the decades that went from 1881 to 1910 there were annual averages of fishing so high as to exceed even those of the previous two centuries.³⁶

But the financial difficulties the Florio were heading for, forced them to raise a mortgage on the Egadi islands since 1899. Indeed, if in the “decade of Crispi” (1887-1898), during the which the Sicilian Francesco Crispi held the office of head of National Government for two ministries the Florio family had a long period of prosperity, with the coming of the age of Giovanni Giolitti, which marked the end of the Sicilian will to be in the limelight, matters changed. From then on the Florio family, who in the past had managed to secure important grants for their shipping companies, lost part of their influence on the central government and directed towards a crisis that would have let the weak points of the Sicilian ruling class emerge. However, in 1908, at the time the claims of the commercial Bank became more pressing, the Egadi islands represented for the Florio family a third of their property and a not negligible source of income. As the plan of the Bank of Italy to save them provided the control of their patrimony, in order to get round this situation Ignazio thought that to mortgage the tuna fisheries of Favignana and Formica would have been a less coercive alternative; this was the reason why from 1910 to 1915 he conceded the product of the tuna fisheries to the Genoese Pedemonte-Lavagetto-Parodi.

³⁴ This consisted of the *montaleva*, lighter than the *corpo* utilized in the past and able to catch the tunnies one at a time.

³⁵ The fort of S. Caterina (1120) was utilized by the Bourbons as prison for the revolutionaries and political prisoners.

³⁶ These tuna fisheries around the 1890s employed about 900 people.

In 1914 while they were mortgaging many of their properties the Florio family extended another mortgage also on the Egadi islands. Meanwhile since 1915 a new agreement was renewed with Lavagetto-Parodi, in which this time the Florio family became sharers. From 1926 the management of the tuna fisheries was entrusted, together with that of all their patrimony, to the administrator Carlo Augusto Linch, who renewed the contracts with Parodi-Pedemonte-Lavagetto for another five years. The establishment of the “Società Anonima Tonnare Florio” dates back to 1928, followed by the “Società Anonima Finanziaria I. e V. Florio” by means of which the Florio family ceded the Egadi islands, Villa Florio included, as their shares; but unfortunately the fishing haul of 1929 finished with an unfavourable balance. The situation had by then so come to a head that «Florio in 1931 owed to the “Società Tonnare” 300,000 £, very probably on account of the non-payment of the rent of Favignana palace[...]» (Cancila O., 2008, p. 583). The end took place when in 1937, while the winding-up of the “Società Finanziaria Florio” was going on, the tuna fisheries of Favignana and Formica³⁷ were put up for sale and purchased by Parodi. A society that maintained the Florio name until 1945, when it assumed that of Parodi S.P.A. was then created³⁸. The tuna fisheries remained working and profitable until the end of the seventies, when their system was definitely surpassed by that of the more modern fishing systems of their competitors, above all the Japanese one. As a consequence of the staggering plunge of the catch, this factory was sold to the Regione Siciliana, while the fishing rights were purchased by the firm of Nino Castiglione from Trapani who, however, dropped the enterprise in 1998.

Tunny fishing, which in Sicily has been practiced since antiquity in full freedom, as is testified by many Greek and Latin historians, assumed more evolved systems with the presence of the Arabs to whom is due the introduction, between the IX and XI centuries, of the modern terminology. As Vito La Mantia reports, while Sicily was falling under Muslim rule «since the XI century in the Greek-Roman law was begun the system of private dominion with fixed devices for fishing and with designate distances» (La Mantia V., 1901, p. 5). Since the Middle Ages onwards, the tuna fisheries concessions were very numerous and it isn't unusual to find them in the neighbourhood of saltworks³⁹. The tuna fishery of Favignana, which seems to have already been documented since 807 A.D. (Alfieri G., 2007, p. 30), has always been one of the most productive and in modern times has increased its fame because it has been one of the last to continue tunny killing, which has attracted the curiosity of foreign travelers everywhere in Sicily. The tunny killing or *mattanza*, named also “sea bullfight” is a very ancient fishing ritual during which the tunnies that reach the Mediterranean Sea to reproduce, spend the last minutes of the roundup struggling to fight in the attempt to escape the vice of the nets before their blood tinges the surrounding water. If this fishing, on the one hand for the bloody way of its carrying out can be compared to other spectacles of struggle or hunting in different countries, or even more to the epic of the

³⁷ For its dimension Formica has been a sort of Island-tuna fishery, whose history has followed that of Favignana, also as far as its large productive power is concerned. Recently this tuna fisheries gone to ruin after the end of its fishing activities have been renovated.

³⁸ Actually, already in 1939 the IRI had completed the purchase of the stake of the tuna fisheries, by then since some years for most part of it in the hands of the state, which in the attempt to save Casa Florio lost thirty million lira.

³⁹ Often visited by Genoese, Pisan and Venetian traders from the middle of the 18th century, Trapani had, in first place among the exported products, salt, which this city was a great producer of until the crisis following the Second World War.

struggle between the man and the sea represented by the whaling of Melville or by the fishing of swordfish in *The old Man and the Sea* by Hemingway, on the other hand has peculiar features owing to the mildness of the tunnies and to the specific ritual and anthropological characteristics that the work of the tunny fishermen employs, sharing both the essence of water and of land. The various implications that the close bond between man and tunny fishing involve, have been investigated by Vincenzo Consolo in *La pesca del tonno in Sicilia*, in which is highlighted the seasonal and marine organization of the tuna fisheries work, the rigidly hierarchical relations among the workers, who have as undisputed chief, the *rais*, and among whom the convicts of Favignana were employed in the past, and the use of age-old songs of accompaniment to the labour, the *cialome*, with regard to whose specificity, in relation, for example, to the songs of the reapers, Consolo has so expressed his meaning: «This confirms once more our mind about the sea, about the feeling of sea as anti-historical dimension, as place of invasion and possession of nature, existence, myths and symbols.

Ambiguous symbols that often express at the same time opposite values, striking like life and death» (Consolo V., 1999, p. 66). This is probably one of the keys to reading the fact that the tuna fisheries, even though threatened by the financial instability characteristic of their organization system, haven't generally been concerned by the trade-union needs of the Socialist movement, which instead in 1893 induced the sulphur miners and the peasants to join the *Fasci Siciliani*. As a matter of fact, notwithstanding the non-inconsiderable importance of the tuna fisheries in the Sicilian economy, their role has also been undervalued by the historians, probably as a consequence of the «progressive alienation of the maritime culture coinciding with its definitive subordination to the agricultural economy (Lentini R., 1987, p. 33). Indeed, after the fall of the Crispi government (1896), the latter was favoured by the subsequent government which in the southern regions adopted an agricultural protectionist policy – which benefited above all the great landowners – while in the North of Italy it carried out an industrial protectionist policy. In a similar predicament the same Florio, whose family had only marginally invested in landed property in the past, considered opportune that the old agrarian block, backed up by Giolitti, should have been replaced by a new industrial-agrarian block, in which the agrarian aristocracy and the entrepreneurial class formed an alliance for the cause of Sicilianism⁴⁰.

In addition to such understandings in the agrarian field, which after all aimed at protecting the industrial and entrepreneurial activities from the competition of Northern Italy, for the rest the business of the Florio family, with a few exceptions like that of the sulphur mines, always had a more or less direct link with the sea, from which they derived their greater wealth and from which they were also always very attracted in their private life, as can be inferred by the fact that they owned a little pleasure fleet, among which were the famous *Sultana* and *Aegusa*. It was with their yacht every year that they reached Favignana to follow the tunny killing and to offer it as a privileged spectacle to their guests. Indeed, since 1878, they used to go to the villa of Favignana, alone or together with a little court with whom they were also used to travelling elsewhere⁴¹. New guests, sometimes foreign

⁴⁰ To this end he joined the *Progetto Sicilia* which provided a technical modernization of the agriculture that had to be carried out with the help of the *Sicilian Farmer's Cooperative* (1899) presided over by he himself.

⁴¹ It appears that in 1889 Ignazio sr. and his family stayed there for a month in succession (Candela S., 2008, p. 205).

ones, reached Favignana during the period of tunny killing thanks to the fact that the geographical position of the island allowed the Florio family to give hospitality to some sovereigns on a cruise in the Mediterranean Sea. One of the first testimonies of illustrious guests at Villa Florio is that rendered by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa in the first chapter of *I luoghi della mia prima infanzia*⁴². In it, Lampedusa recalls an episode, which has probably to be related to 1902, as follows:

«We stayed with the Florio in their Favignana villa, at the height of summer. I remember that the nursemaid Elvira came and waked me up earlier than usual, about at seven o'clock, she washed in a hurry my face with a sponge soaked in fresh water and then she dressed me with great care. I was dragged downstairs, I went out into the garden through a little side door and then they made me go back up to the main veranda, entrance to the villa which overlooked the sea and to which we entered through a perron of six or seven steps. I remember the blinding sun of that morning in July or August. On the veranda, which was protected from the sun by great orange cloth curtains that the onshore wind swelled and shook as sails (I hear their smacking), there were sat in some wicker chairs, my mother, Mrs. Florio (the "divine beauty" France) and other people. In the middle of the group a very old and bent lady with a hooked nose was seated and wrapped by furiously flapping widow's weeds. They took me in front of her who said some words I didn't understand, she bent even more and kissed me on the forehead (I should have been very young if a sitting lady had to bent to kiss me). After which I was dragged away and taken again to my room, undressed of my formal dresses, dressed again in more modest clothes and led to the beach where there were already the Florio children and others with whom, after having bathed, we stayed for long under the very scorching sun and played our favourite game that was that of searching for some little piece of very red coral which could be found quite frequently in the sand. In the afternoon it was revealed to me that the old lady was the ex-empress of the French, Eugene, whose yacht rode at anchorage in front of Favignana; [...]» (Tomasi Di Lampedusa G., 2002, pp. 83-84).

In that year in this villa were a good 24 guests of Ignazio and Franca, among whom were the Duke of Palma, Giulio Tomasi of Lampedusa with his wife Beatrice (Bice) Mastrogiovanni Tasca of Cutò and their son Giuseppe, the author of the mentioned works and the sisters of Bice, Giulia⁴³ with her husband Romualdo Trigona⁴⁴. In *I luoghi del Gattopardo*, Gioacchino Lanza Tomasi, son of Tomasi of Lampedusa, thinking back about the places and the events which later on would have been noted in the memories of the writer, inserts some photos referring to the summer of 1902 in Favignana, among which there was one in which Franca Florio and Beatrice Cutò were portrayed together, in a boat.

Meanwhile, as the Florio were spending the years of the *Belle Epoque* moving from one fashionable place to another, some very difficult events were preparing to strike their family probably marking their future, that is the loss, between 1902 and 1903 of their

⁴² It was written in June 1955, prior to the draft of *The Leopard* and published posthumously in *The short stories*.

⁴³ Giulia Mastrogiovanni Tasca di Cutò, lady in-waiting of Queen Elena, in 1911 was murdered in a Rome hotel by her lover, the officer Vincenzo Paternò del Cugno, met at the Florio family's Villa Igiea.

⁴⁴ Other guests were: the marquis Francesco Tomasi of Lampedusa, the marquis Carlo Rudinì, Paolo Mastrogiovanni Tasca, Franz Jacona of San Giuliano and the baron of Ramione Vincenzo Palizzolo Gravina (Cancila O., 2008, p. 297).

firstborn Giovanna, of Ignazio and of stillborn Giacobina. Franca in a similar predicament looked for a refuge in Favignana, where at dawn along the seashore she was seen to walk by the tunny fishermen⁴⁵ who greeted her (Requirez S., 2007, p.118). It was during that period in 1904 that lady Paget Walburga, a friend of the Whitaker family, went and visited her in Favignana. Of that occasion Tina reported the comments made by lady Paget on Villa Florio, so related afterwards by Trevelyan: «As for the floreale decorations of the Favignana Villa the energetic northern certainly did not take to them; they were an “unpleasant and over-expensive version of William Morris’s least good phase”» (Trevelyan R., 2002, p. 310). In the subsequent years to Beatrice Cutò, who often met the Florio family in Favignana and who also went with them to France, was attributed an affair with Ignazio that became a topic of the newspapers of the time. Anna Pomar wrote that on 5 June 1905, on the occasion of a reception at Palazzo Reale held by the prefect De Seta, Bice showed off a bracelet with diamonds, a gift from Ignazio and also on 17 March 1906 Tina made a note of this: «I noticed that Bice was wearing the bracelet that Ignazio Florio had given her. Poor Franca!» (Trevelyan R., 2002, p. 326).

The last famous guest that Ignazio took to Favignana when he was still the owner of the tuna fisheries in 1924 was the Duke of Puglia, later Duke of Aosta, who, in that occasion fractured an arm following an episode of the tunny killing. But within that period the beginning of the First World War had already marked the end of an age also for the Florio, whose financial situation, by then seriously compromised, further deteriorated on account of the retrenchment of the world market. During the conflict the Florio family who had previously declared themselves in favour of Italian neutrality, expressed their sympathy for Germany and committed themselves actively: so, while Ignazio and Vincenzo left for the front as volunteers, Franca devoted herself to the activity of Red Cross nurse in Palermo hospital. Meanwhile, in the immediate post-war period, Benito Mussolini founded the *Fasci di Combattimento* and then the *National Fascist Party*, originating what was to be the *Twenty-year Fascist period* that, in Sicily, saw the old ruling class, of democratic-liberal inspiration, for a long time already in crisis, completely exhaust its power of action. Moreover, notwithstanding this historic phase, during which the Florio family had joined Fascism⁴⁶ and, as a matter of fact, had been helped by Mussolini with whom they requested an audience in 1928 so that he would intervene in their favour, their situation came to a head. Many years later, by which time they lived in Rome, the results of the referendum for the Monarchy-Republic (1946), on whose occasion Igiea and Giulia mobilized in favour of the former, represented a further reason of disappointment for Franca and Ignazio. The latter, who since the end of the thirties had been interdicted by will of all his relatives excepted his brother Vincenzo, lived almost to the age of 90 «enduring his new condition of person with no property» (Cancila O., 2008, p. 603) and died in Mondello, where he stayed with Franco Lanza of Scalea, husband of his granddaughter Arabella Salviati.

The slow and golden decline of the economic empire of a family that like that of the Florio had been among the most representative of the rising industrial Italian class and that had conquered the international market, has contributed towards nourishing a sort of myth-

⁴⁵ The subject of a mature Franca who in front of the Marina in Favignana thinks over the most important moments of her life, is proposed in the two-act ballet by Luciano Cannito with music by Lorenzo Ferrero, *Franca Florio regina di Palermo*, performed as absolute first-night in 2007 at Teatro Massimo of Palermo.

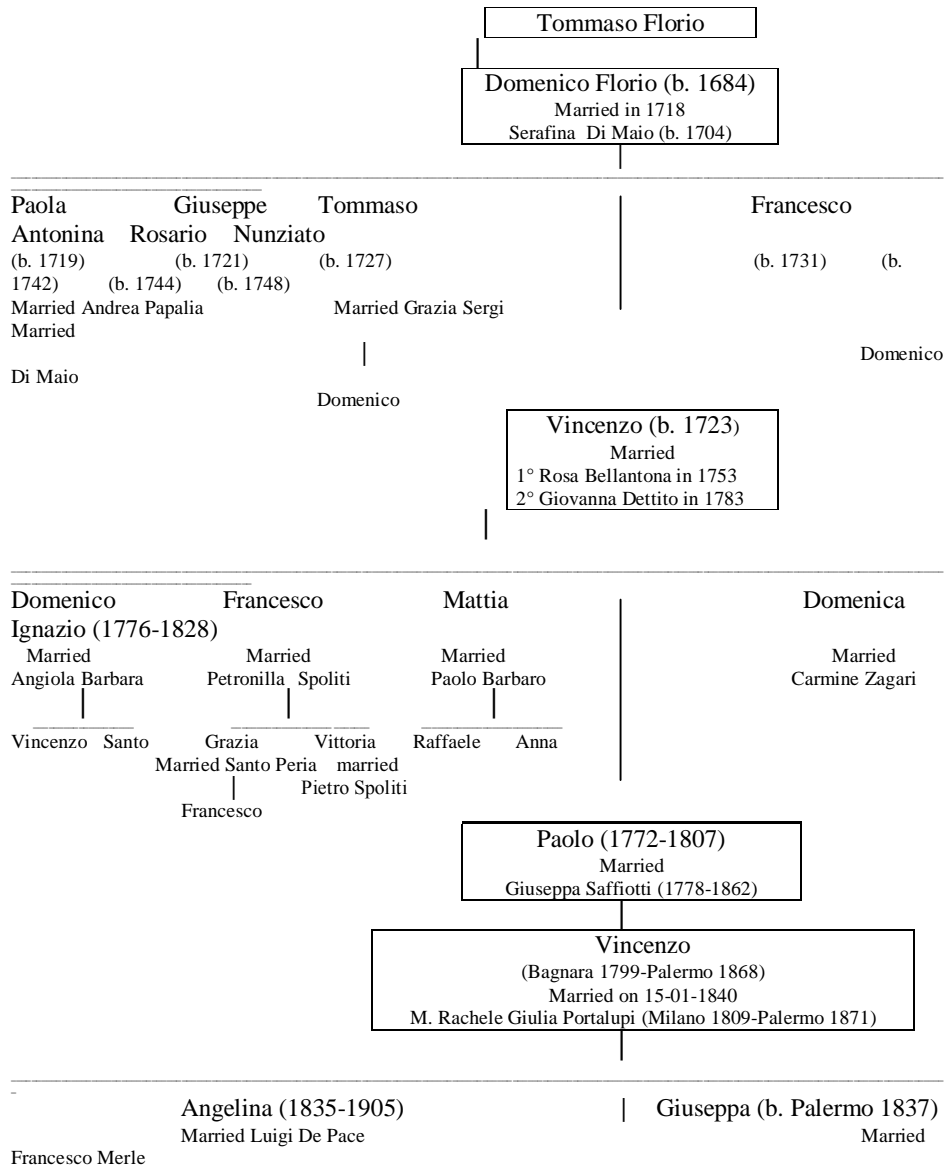
⁴⁶ On 8 May 1924 after having reached Marsala on board of a battleship, Mussolini went to the Florio factory. In the same year during the general election Ignazio supported the Fascist roll that were more successful than expected.

making of the Florio family, but has also been a subject of various research projects inquiring about its causes. The most probable can be subdivided into two main groups: the ones internal to the last members of the Florio family, who according to some scholars have been guilty not only of squandering their property but above all of not having been able to exploit the new entrepreneurial opportunities that the changing times offered them, at least not with the swiftness with which their ingenious ancestors managed to be ahead of their time, and the external ones, due both to historical-political reasons and also to factors contingent to the Sicilian and national economy. Undoubtedly, these reasons are interwoven but it is undeniable that the Florio family felt, right in the moment in which they most necessitated the opportunity of competing to a national level, the structural and industrial backwardness of a Sicily whose social and economic web wasn't in a position to stand the deep historic changes which, instead, northern Italy had been able to take advantage of.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Villa Florio in Favignana is typical just in so far as it shows the strong will of a powerful upper middle class family of the 19th century to take root in a territory and at the same time to affect the shaping of society's taste of that period. In this sense this building, which not only had an official function, as happened for the residences of the aristocracy, but also served to support the activities of the tuna fisheries, clearly symbolizes the passage that took place from the hegemony of the old aristocracy, still linked to land rent, to that of the rising middle-class who tried to combine profits and worldly life. On the other hand, even though the Florio family eventually assumed a standard of living similar to that of the feudal class, nevertheless they showed a conception of dwelling marked by a strong dynamism and modernity and a sense of the worldly life that induced them to look for «[...] the prestige in the offering of entertainment rather than in the representation» (G. Lanza Tomasi, 1985, p.156). For the rest this just as sober and imposing as eclectic building, which for its features could have been situated in an urban area and which instead is situated on a little fishermen island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, displays all the originality that its geographic position and the talent of the architect Damiani Almeyda have been able to confer on it.

**ANNEX 1:
FAMILY TREE
Casa Florio**



Grazia VECCHIO

Ignazio sr. (1838-91)
 Married in 1866
 Giovanna D'Ondes Trigona (1843-1917)

Vincenzo
 (1883-1959)
 Branciforte
 1° Annina Alliata di Montereale
 2° Lucie Henry (1885-1960)

Giovanna

Giulia
 (1870-1947)
 Married in 1885 Pietro Lanza
 Principe di Trabia (1862-1929)

Giuseppe Ignazio Manfredi Sofia

Ignazio jr. (1869-1957)
 Married on 11-02-1893
 Franca Jacona di Sangiuliano (1873-1950)

Giovanna
Giulia
 (1893-1902)
 14-10-1903
 Married in 1939
 Marchese Achille Belloso
 Afan De Rivera (1896-1973)

Ignazio (Baby Boy)
 (1897-1903)
 (1909-1989)

Costanza Igiea
 (1900-1974)

Married in 1921
 Duca Averardo Salviati

Giacobina
 (b. and d. Venezia)

Sources: Cancila Orazio, *I Florio*, Bombiani, Milano 2008 – Modified
 Pomar Anna, *Franca Florio*, Novecento, Palermo 2006 – Modified

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