

Sicily (Sicilia)

General

Sicily (Italian: *Sicilia*) is an autonomous region of Italy, in Southern Italy along with surrounding minor islands, officially referred to as *Regione Siciliana*.

Sicily is located in the central Mediterranean Sea, south of the Italian Peninsula, from which it is separated by the narrow Strait of Messina. Its most prominent landmark is Mount Etna, the tallest active volcano in Europe, and one of the most active in the world, currently 3,329 m (10,922 ft.) high. The island has a typical Mediterranean climate.

Administrative Divisions

Administratively, Sicily is divided into 9 administrative provinces, each with a capital city of the same name as the province. The areas and populations of these provinces are:

- Province of Agrigento 3,042 km² pop. 453,594
- Province of Caltanissetta 2,128 km² pop. 271,168
- Province of Catania 3,552 km² pop. 1,090,620
- Province of Enna 2,562 km² pop. 172,159
- Province of Messina 3,247 km² pop. 652,742
- Province of Palermo 4,992 km² pop. 1,249,744
- Province of Ragusa 1,614 km² pop. 318,980
- Province of Siracusa 2,109 km² pop. 403,559
- Province of Trapani 2,460 km² pop. 436,240

The City of Palermo is the Capital City of the region

Small surrounding islands are also part of various Sicilian provinces:

- Aeolian Islands (Messina),
- The isle of Ustica (Palermo),
- Aegadian Islands (Trapani),
- The isle of Pantelleria (Trapani) and
- Pelagian Islands (Agrigento).

Geography

Sicily is the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea. It has a roughly triangular shape, earning it the name *Trinacria*. To the east, it is separated from the Italian mainland by the Strait of Messina, about 3 km (1.9 mi) wide in the north, and about 16 km (9.9 mi) wide in the southern part. The northern and southern coasts are each about 280 km (170 mi) long measured as a straight line, while the eastern coast measures around 180 km (110 mi); the total coast length is estimated at 1,484 km (922 mi). The total area of the island is 25,711 km² (9,927 sq mi), while the Autonomous Region of Sicily (which includes smaller surrounding islands) has an area of 27,708 km² (10,698 sq mi).

The terrain of inland Sicily is mostly hilly and is intensively cultivated wherever possible. Along the northern coast, the mountain ranges of Madonie, 2,000 m (6,600 ft), Nebrodi, 1,800 m (5,900 ft), and Peloritani, 1,300 m (4,300 ft), are an extension of the mainland Apennines. The cone of Mount Etna dominates the eastern coast. In the southeast lie the lower Hyblaean Mountains, 1,000 m (3,300 ft). The mines of the Enna and Caltanissetta districts were part of a leading sulphur-producing area throughout the 19th century, but have declined since the 1950s.

Sicily and its surrounding small islands have some highly active volcanoes. Mount Etna is the largest active volcano in Europe and still casts black ash over the island with its ever-present eruptions. It currently stands 3,329 metres (10,922 ft) high, though this varies with summit eruptions; the mountain is 21 m (69 ft) lower now than it was in 1981. It is the highest mountain in Italy south of the Alps. Etna covers an area of 1,190 km² (459 sq mi) with a basal circumference of 140 km (87 mi). This makes it by far the largest of the three active volcanoes in Italy, being about two and a half times the height of the next largest, Mount Vesuvius. In Greek mythology, the deadly monster Typhon was trapped under the mountain by Zeus, the god of the sky. Mount Etna is widely regarded as a cultural symbol and icon of Sicily.

The Aeolian Islands in the Tyrrhenian Sea, to the northeast of mainland Sicily form a volcanic complex, and include Stromboli. The three volcanoes of Vulcano, Vulcanello and Lipari are also currently active, although the latter is

Sicily (Sicilia)

usually dormant. Off the southern coast of Sicily, the underwater volcano of Ferdinandea, which is part of the larger Empedocles volcano, last erupted in 1831. It is located between the coast of Agrigento and the island of Pantelleria (which itself is a dormant volcano).

The autonomous region also includes several neighboring islands: the Aegadian Islands, the Aeolian Islands, Pantelleria and Lampedusa.

Rivers

The island is drained by several rivers, most of which flow through the central area and enter the sea at the south of the island. The Salso flows through parts of Enna and Caltanissetta before entering the Mediterranean Sea at the port of Licata. To the east, the Alcantara flows through the province of Messina and enters the sea at Giardini Naxos, and the Simeto, which flows into the Ionian Sea south of Catania. Other important rivers on the island are the Belice and Platani in the southwest.

Climate

Sicily has a typical Mediterranean climate with mild and wet winters and hot, dry summers with very changeable intermediate seasons. On the coasts, especially the south-western, the climate is affected by the African currents and summers can be scorching.

Sicily is seen as an island of warm winters but also, above all along the Tyrrhenian coast and in the inland areas, winters can be cold, with typical continental climate.

Snow falls in abundance above 900–1000 meters, but stronger cold waves can easily carry it in the hills and even in coastal cities, especially in the northern coast of island. The interior mountains, especially Nebrodi, Madonie and Etna, enjoy a fully mountain climate, with heavy snowfalls during winter. The summit of Mount Etna is usually snow-capped from October to May.

On the other hand, especially in the summer it is not unusual that there is the sirocco, the wind from the Sahara.

Rainfall is scarce, and water proves deficient in some provinces where water crisis can happen sometimes.

According to the Regional Agency for Waste and Water, on 10 August 1999, the weather station of Catenanuova (EN) recorded a maximum temperature of 48.5 °C (119 °F). The official European record, measured by minimum/maximum thermometers, is held by Athens, Greece, which reported a maximum of 48.0 °C (118 °F) in 1977. Total precipitation is highly variable, generally increasing with elevation. In general, the southern and southeast coast receives the least rainfall (less than 50 cm (20 in)), and the northern and northeastern highlands the most (over 100 cm (39 in)).

Flora and Fauna

Sicily is an often-quoted example of man-made deforestation, which has occurred since Roman times, when the island was turned into an agricultural region. This gradually dried the climate, leading to a decline in rainfall and the drying of rivers. The central and southwest provinces are practically devoid of any forest. In Northern Sicily, there are three important forests; near Mount Etna, in the Nebrodi Mountains and in the Bosco della Ficuzza's Natural Reserve near Palermo. The Nebrodi Mountains Regional Park, established on 4 August 1993 and covering 86,000 hectares (210,000 acres), is the largest protected natural area of Sicily, and contains the largest forest in Sicily, the Caronia. The Hundred Horse Chestnut (*Castagno dei Cento Cavalli*), in Sant'Alfio, on the eastern slopes of Mount Etna, is the largest and oldest known chestnut tree in the world at 2,000 – 4,000 years old.

Sicily has a good variety of fauna. Species include fox, least weasel, pine marten, roe deer, wild boar, crested porcupine, hedgehog, common toad, *Vipera aspis*, golden eagle, peregrine falcon, hoopoe and black-winged stilt.

The Zingaro Natural Reserve is one of the best examples of unspoiled coastal wilderness in Sicily.

Surrounding waters including Strait of Messina are home to varieties of birds and marine life, including larger species such as flamingos and fin whales.

History

Ancient tribes

The original inhabitants of Sicily were three defined groups of the ancient peoples of Italy. The most prominent and by far the earliest of these was the Sicani, who were said by Thucydides to have arrived from the Iberian Peninsula (perhaps Catalonia). Important historical evidence has been discovered in the form of cave drawings by the Sicani,

Sicily (Sicilia)

dated from the end of the Pleistocene epoch around 8000 BC. The arrival of the first humans on the island is correlated with the extinction of the Sicilian Hippopotamus and the dwarf elephant. The Elymians, thought to be from the Aegean Sea, were the next tribe to join the Sicanians on Sicily.

Recent discoveries of dolmens on the island, dating to the second half of the third millennium BC, seems to offer new insights into the culture of primitive Sicily. It is well known that the Mediterranean region went through a quite intricate prehistory, so much so that it is difficult to piece together the muddle of different peoples who have followed each other. The impact of two influences is clear, however: the European one coming from the Northwest, and the Mediterranean influence of a clear eastern heritage.

There is no evidence of any warring between the tribes, but the Sicanians moved eastwards when the Elymians settled in the northwest corner of the island. The Sicels are thought to have originated in Liguria. They arrived from mainland Italy in 1200 BC and forced the Sicanians to move back across Sicily and settle in the middle of the island. Other minor Italic groups who settled in Sicily were the Ausones (Aeolian Islands, Milazzo) and the Morgetes of Morgantina. Studies of genetic records reveal that peoples from various parts of the Mediterranean Basin mixed with the ancient inhabitants of Sicily, including Egyptians and Iberians.

Phoenician, Carthaginian, Greek and Roman period

The Phoenician settlements in the western part of the island predates the Greeks. From about 750 BC, the Greeks began to live in Sicily establishing many important settlements. The most important colony was in Syracuse; others were located at Akragas, Selinunte, Gela, Himera and Zancle. The native Sicani and Sicel peoples were absorbed into the Hellenic culture with relative ease, and the area became part of *Magna Graecia* along with the rest of southern Italy, which the Greeks had also colonized. Sicily was very fertile, and the successful introduction of olives and grape vines created a great deal of profitable trading. A significant part of Greek culture on the island was that of the Greek religion, and many temples were built throughout Sicily, including several in the *Valley of the Temples* at Agrigento.

Politics on the island was intertwined with that of Greece. Syracuse became desired by the Athenians who set out on the Sicilian Expedition during the Peloponnesian War. Syracuse gained Sparta and Corinth as allies and, as a result, the Athenian expedition was defeated. The Athenian army and ships were destroyed, with most of the survivors being sold into slavery.

Greek Syracuse controlled eastern Sicily while Carthage controlled the West. The two cultures began to clash, leading to the Greek-Punic wars. Greece had begun to make peace with the Roman Republic in 262 BC, and the Romans sought to annex Sicily as their republic's first province. Rome attacked Carthage's holdings in Sicily in the First Punic War and won, making Sicily the first Roman province outside of the Italian Peninsula by 242 BC.

In the Second Punic War, the Carthaginians attempted to take back Sicily. Some of the Greek cities on the island sided with the Carthaginians. Archimedes, who lived in Syracuse, helped the Carthaginians, but was killed by the Romans after they invaded Syracuse in 213 BC. They failed, and Rome was even more unrelenting in its annihilation of the invaders this time. Roman consul M. Valerian told the Roman Senate in 210 BC that "no Carthaginian remains in Sicily".

Sicily served a level of high importance for the Romans, as it acted as the empire's granary. It was divided into two quaestorships, in the form of Syracuse to the east and Lilybaeum to the west. Some attempt was made under Augustus to introduce the Latin language to the island, but Sicily was allowed to remain largely Greek in a cultural sense. The once prosperous and contented island went into sharp decline when Verres became governor of Sicily. In 70 BC, noted figure Cicero condemned the misgovernment of Verres in his oration *In Verrem*.

The island was used as a base of power numerous times, being occupied by slave insurgents during the First and Second Servile Wars, and by Sextus Pompey during the Sicilian revolt. Christianity first appeared in Sicily during the years following AD 200. Between this time and AD 313, Constantine the Great finally lifted the prohibition on Christianity, but not before a significant number of Sicilians had become martyrs, including Agatha, Christina, Lucy, and Euplius. Christianity grew rapidly in Sicily over the next two centuries. The period of history during which Sicily was a Roman province lasted for around 700 years.

Sicily (Sicilia)

Germanic period (440–535)

As the Western Roman Empire was falling apart, a Germanic tribe known as the Vandals briefly took Sicily in AD 440 under the rule of their king Geiseric but in 476 the island was returned to Odoacer, who was ruling Italy, 476-93, in the name of the Byzantine (Eastern Roman) Emperor. The Vandals had already invaded parts of Roman France, Spain, and Portugal, asserting themselves as an important power in Western Europe. However, they soon lost these newly acquired possessions to another East Germanic tribe in the form of the Goths. The Ostrogothic conquest of Sicily (and Italy as a whole) under Theodoric the Great began in 488. The Goths were Germanic, but Theodoric sought to revive Roman culture and government and allowed freedom of religion.

Byzantine period (535–965)

Forty-seven years later the Gothic War (535–554) began between the Ostrogoths and the Eastern Roman Empire, also known as the Byzantine Empire. Sicily was the first part of Italy to be taken by general Belisarius, who was commissioned by Eastern Emperor Justinian I as part of an ambitious attempt to restore the whole Roman Empire, thereby uniting the Eastern and the Western halves. Sicily was used as a base for the Byzantines to conquer the rest of Italy, with Naples, Rome, Milan, and the Ostrogoth capital Ravenna falling within five years. However, new Ostrogoth king Totila drove down the Italian peninsula, plundering and conquering Sicily in 550. Totila, in turn, was defeated and killed in the Battle of Taginae by Byzantine general Narses in 552.

In 535, Emperor Justinian I made Sicily a Byzantine province and, as in Roman times, Greek continued to be the predominate language spoken on the island. After the advent of Islam, Sicily was invaded by the Arab forces of Caliph Uthman in 652, but the Arabs failed to make any permanent gains and returned to Syria after gathering some booty. Raids seeking loot continued until the mid-8th century.

Byzantine Emperor Constans II decided to move from the capital Constantinople to Syracuse in Sicily during 660. The following year, he launched an assault from Sicily against the Lombard Duchy of Benevento, which then occupied most of southern Italy. Rumors that the capital of the empire was to be moved to Syracuse probably cost Constans his life, as he was assassinated in 668. His son Constantine IV succeeded him, a brief usurpation in Sicily by Mezezius being quickly suppressed by the new emperor. Contemporary accounts report that the Greek language was widely spoken on the island during this period. In 740 Emperor Leo III the Isaurian transferred Sicily from the jurisdiction of the church of Rome to that of Constantinople, placing the island within the eastern church.

In 826 Euphemius, the Byzantine commander in Sicily, having apparently killed his wife, forced a nun to marry him. Emperor Michael II caught wind of the matter and ordered General Constantine to end the marriage and cut off Euphemius' head. Euphemius rose up, killed Constantine, and then occupied Syracuse. He in turn was defeated and driven out to North Africa. He offered the rule of Sicily to Ziyadat Allah, the Aghlabid Emir of Tunisia, in return for a position as a General and a place of safety. A Muslim army was then sent to the island consisting of Arabs, Berbers, Cretans, and Persians.

The Muslim conquest of Sicily was a see-saw affair and met with much resistance. It took over a century for Byzantine Sicily to be conquered; the largest city, Syracuse, held out until 878 and the Greek city of Taormina fell in 962. It was not until 965 that all of Sicily was conquered by the Arabs. In the 11th century Byzantine armies carried out a partial re-conquest of the island under George Maniakes, but it was their Norman mercenaries who would eventually complete the island's re-conquest at the end of the century.

Arab period (827–1091)

The Arabs initiated land reforms, which increased productivity and encouraged the growth of smallholdings, undermining the dominance of the latifundia. The Arabs further improved irrigation systems. The language spoken in Sicily under Arab rule was Siculo-Arabic and Arabic influence is still present in some Sicilian words today. Although the language is extinct in Sicily, it has developed into what is now the Maltese language on the islands of Malta today.

A description of Palermo was given by Ibn Hawqal, an Arab merchant who visited Sicily in 950. A walled suburb, called the Al-Kasr (the palace), is the center of Palermo to this day, with the great Friday mosque on the site of the later Roman cathedral. The suburb of al-Khalisa (modern Kalsa) contained the Sultan's palace, baths, a mosque, government offices, and a private prison. Ibn Hawqal reckoned 7,000 individual butchers trading in 150 shops.

Sicily (Sicilia)

Palermo was initially ruled by the Aghlabids; later it was the center of Emirate of Sicily under the nominal suzerainty of the Fatimid Caliphate.

Throughout this reign, revolts by Byzantine Sicilians continuously occurred, especially in the east, and parts of the island were re-occupied before being quashed. Agricultural items such as oranges, lemons, pistachio and sugarcane were brought to Sicily. Under the Arab rule, the island was aligned in three administrative regions, or "vals", roughly corresponding to the three "points" of Sicily: Val di Mazara in the west; Val Demone in the northeast; and Val di Noto in the southeast. As dhimmis, the native Eastern Orthodox Christians were allowed freedom of religion, but had to pay a tax, the jizya, and experienced some limitations to actively participate in public affairs.

The Emirate of Sicily began to fragment as intra-dynastic quarrelling fractured the Muslim regime. During this time, there was also a minor Jewish presence.

Norman Sicily period (1038–1198)

In 1038, seventy years after losing their last cities in Sicily, the Byzantines under the Greek General George Maniakes invaded the island together with their Varangian and Norman mercenaries. Although Maniakes was killed in a Byzantine civil war in 1043 before completing a re-conquest, Normans would complete a conquest of Sicily from the Arabs under Roger I. After taking Apulia and Calabria, Roger occupied Messina with an army of 700 knights. In 1068, Roger was victorious at Misilmeri, but the most crucial battle was the siege of Palermo, which led to most of Sicily coming under Norman control in 1072. The Normans finished their conquest in 1091, when they captured Noto, which was the last Arab stronghold.

Roger died in 1101 and was succeeded by his son Roger II, who was the first King of Sicily. The elder Roger was married to Adelaide, who ruled until her son came of age in 1112.

The Norman Hauteville family, who were descendants of Vikings, came to appreciate and admire the rich and layered culture in which they now found themselves and they began implementing their own culture, customs, and politics in the region. Many Normans in Sicily also adopted some of the attributes of Muslim rulers and their Byzantine subjects in dress, language, literature, and even in to presence of palace eunuchs and, according to some accounts, a harem. The court of Roger II became the most luminous center of culture in the Mediterranean, both from Europe and the Middle East, like the multi-ethnic Caliphate of Córdoba, then only just eclipsed. This attracted scholars, scientists, poets, artists, and artisans of all kinds. Laws were issued in the language of the community to whom they were addressed in Norman Sicily, still with heavy Arab and Greek influence. The governance was by the rule of law, so there was justice. Muslims, Jews, Byzantine Greeks, Lombards, and Normans worked together to form a society that historians have said created some of the most extraordinary buildings that the world has ever seen.

Kingdom of Sicily period

Palermo continued on as the capital under the Normans. Roger's son Roger II of Sicily succeeded his brother Simon of Sicily as Count of Sicily, and was ultimately able to raise the status of the island to a kingdom in 1130, along with his other holdings, which included the Maltese Islands and the Duchies of Apulia and Calabria. He appointed the powerful Greek George of Antioch to be his "emir of emirs" and continued the syncretism of his father. During this period, the Kingdom of Sicily was prosperous and politically powerful, becoming one of the wealthiest states in all of Europe, even wealthier than the Kingdom of England.

Significantly, immigrants from Northern Italy and Campania arrived during this period. Linguistically, the island shifted from being one third Greek and two thirds Arabic speaking at the time of the Norman conquest to becoming fully Latinized. In terms of the church, it became completely Roman Catholic; previously, it had been Eastern Orthodox under the Byzantines.

Hohenstaufen dynasty

After a century, the Norman Hauteville dynasty died out. The last direct descendant and heir of Roger, Constance, married Emperor Henry VI. This eventually led to the crown of Sicily being passed on to the Hohenstaufen Dynasty, who were Germans from Swabia. The last of the Hohenstaufens, Frederick II, the only son of Constance, was one of the greatest and most cultured men of the Middle Ages. His mother's will had asked Pope Innocent III to undertake

Sicily (Sicilia)

the guardianship of her son. The pope gladly accepted the role, as it allowed him to detach Sicily from the rest of The Holy Roman Empire, thus ending the specter of the Papal States being surrounded. Frederick was four when, at Palermo, he was crowned King of Sicily in 1198. Frederick received no systematic education and was allowed to run free in the streets of Palermo. There he picked up the many languages he heard spoken, such as Arabic and Greek, and learned some of the lore of the Jewish community. At age twelve, he dismissed Innocent's deputy regent and took over the government. At fifteen he married Constance of Aragon, and began his reclamation of the imperial crown. Subsequently, due to Muslim rebellions, Frederick II destroyed the Arab presence in Sicily, moving all the Muslims of Sicily to the city of Lucera in Apulia between 1221 and 1226.

Conflict between the Hohenstaufen house and the Papacy led, in 1266, to Pope Innocent IV crowning the French prince Charles, count of Anjou and Provence, as the king of both Sicily and Naples.

Sicily under Spanish rule

Strong opposition to French officialdom due to mistreatment and taxation saw the local people of Sicily rise up, leading in 1282 to an insurrection known as the War of the Sicilian Vespers, which eventually saw almost the entire French population on the island killed. During the war, the Sicilians turned to Peter III of Aragon, son-in-law of the last Hohenstaufen king, for support after being rejected by the Pope. Peter gained control of Sicily from the French, who, however, retained control of the Kingdom of Naples. A crusade was launched in August 1283 against Peter III and the Kingdom of Aragon by Pope Martin IV (a pope from Île-de-France), but it failed. The wars continued until the peace of Caltabellotta in 1302, which saw Peter's son Frederick III recognized as king of the Isle of Sicily, while Charles II was recognized as the king of Naples by Pope Boniface VIII. Sicily was ruled as an independent kingdom by relatives of the kings of Aragon until 1409 and then as part of the Crown of Aragon. In October 1347, in Messina, Sicily, the Black Death first arrived in Europe.

The onset of the Spanish Inquisition in 1492 led to Ferdinand II decreeing the expulsion of all Jews from Sicily. The eastern part of the island was hit by very destructive earthquakes in 1542 and 1693. Just a few years before the latter earthquake, the island was struck by a ferocious plague. The earthquake in 1693 took an estimated 60,000 lives. There were revolts during the 17th century, but these were quelled with significant force, especially the revolts of Palermo and Messina. North African slave raids discouraged settlement along the coast until the 19th century. The Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 saw Sicily assigned to the House of Savoy; however, this period of rule lasted only seven years, as it was exchanged for the island of Sardinia with Emperor Charles VI of the Austrian Habsburg Dynasty.

While the Austrians were concerned with the War of the Polish Succession, a Bourbon prince, Charles from Spain was able to conquer Sicily and Naples. At first Sicily was able to remain as an independent kingdom under personal union, while the Bourbons ruled over both from Naples. However, the advent of Napoleon's First French Empire saw Naples taken at the Battle of Campo Tenese and Bonapartist King of Naples were installed. Ferdinand III the Bourbon was forced to retreat to Sicily which he was still in complete control of with the help of British Naval protection.

Following this, Sicily joined the Napoleonic Wars, and subsequently the British under Lord William Bentinck established a military and diplomatic presence on the island to protect against a French invasion. After the wars were won, Sicily and Naples formally merged as the Two Sicilies under the Bourbons. Major revolutionary movements occurred in 1820 and 1848 against the Bourbon government with Sicily seeking independence; the second of which, the 1848 revolution resulted in a short period of independence for Sicily. However, in 1849 the Bourbons retook the control of the island and dominated it until 1860.

Italian Unification period

The Expedition of the Thousand led by Giuseppe Garibaldi captured Sicily in 1860, as part of the *Risorgimento*. The conquest started at Marsala, and native Sicilians joined him in the capture of the southern Italian peninsula. Garibaldi's march was completed with the Siege of Gaeta, where the final Bourbons were expelled and Garibaldi announced his dictatorship in the name of Victor Emmanuel II of Kingdom of Sardinia. Sicily became part of the Kingdom of Sardinia after a referendum where more than 75% of Sicily voted in favor of the annexation on 21

Sicily (Sicilia)

October 1860 (but not everyone was allowed to vote). As a result of a Kingdom of Italy proclamation, Sicily became part of that kingdom on 17 March 1861.

The Sicilian economy (and the wider *mezzogiorno* economy) remained relatively underdeveloped after the Italian unification, in spite of the strong investments made by the Kingdom of Italy in terms of modern infrastructure, and this caused an unprecedented wave of emigration. In 1894, organizations of workers and peasants known as the *Fasci Siciliani* protested against the bad social and economic conditions of the island, but they were suppressed in a few days. The Messina earthquake of 28 December 1908 killed more than 80,000 people. This period was also characterized by the first contact between the Sicilian mafia (the crime syndicate also known as Cosa Nostra) and the Italian government. The Mafia's origins are still uncertain, but it is generally accepted that it emerged in the 18th century initially in the role of private enforcers hired to protect the property of landowners and merchants from the groups of bandits (*briganti*) who frequently pillaged the countryside and towns. The battle against the Mafia made by the Kingdom of Italy was controversial and ambiguous. The Carabinieri (the military police of Italy) and sometimes the Italian Army were often involved in terrible fights against the mafia members, but their efforts were frequently useless because of the secret co-operation between mafia and local government and also because of the weakness of the Italian judicial system.

20th and 21st Centuries

In the 1920s, the Fascist regime began a stronger military action against the Mafia, which was led by prefect Cesare Mori who was known as the "Iron Prefect" because of his iron-fisted campaigns. This was the first time in which an operation against the Sicilian mafia ended with considerable success. There was an allied invasion of Sicily during World War II starting on 10 July 1943. In preparation for the invasion, the Allies revitalized the Mafia to aid them. The invasion of Sicily contributed to the 25 July crisis; in general, the Allied victors were warmly embraced by Sicily.

Italy became a Republic in 1946 and, as part of the Constitution of Italy, Sicily was one of the five regions given special status as an autonomous region. Both the partial Italian land reform and special funding from the Italian government's *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* (Fund for the South) from 1950 to 1984 helped the Sicilian economy. During this period, the economic and social condition of the island was generally improved thanks to important investments on infrastructures such as motorways and airports, and thanks to the creation of important industrial and commercial areas. In the 1980s, the Mafia was deeply weakened by a second important campaign led by magistrates Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino. Between 1990 and 2005, the unemployment rate fell from about 23% to 11%.

Demographics

Sicily is a melting pot of a variety of different cultures and ethnicities, including the original Italic people, the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Saracens, Normans, Swabians, Aragonese, Lombards, Spaniards, French, and Albanians, each contributing to the island's culture and genetic makeup. About five million people live in Sicily, making it the fourth most populated region in Italy. In the first century after the Italian unification, Sicily had one of the most negative net migration rates among the regions of Italy because of the immigration of millions of people to other European countries, North America, South America and Australia. Like the South of Italy and Sardinia, immigration to the island is very low compared to other regions of Italy because workers tend to head to Northern Italy instead, due to better employment and industrial opportunities. The most recent ISTAT figures show around 175,000 immigrants out of the total of almost 5.1 million population (nearly 3.5% of the population); Romanians with more than 50,000 make up the most immigrants, followed by Tunisians, Moroccans, Sri Lankans, Albanians, and others mostly from Eastern Europe. As in the rest of Italy, the official language is Italian and the primary religion is Roman Catholicism.

Politics

The politics of Sicily takes place in a framework of a presidential representative democracy, whereby the President of Regional Government is the head of government, and of a pluriform multi-party system. Executive power is exercised by the Regional Government. Legislative power is vested in both the government and the Sicilian Regional Assembly. The capital of Sicily is Palermo.

Traditionally, Sicily gives center-right results during election. From 1943 to 1951 there was also a separatist political party called Sicilian Independence Movement (*Movimento Indipendentista Siciliano*, MIS). Its best electoral result

Sicily (Sicilia)

was in the 1946 general election, when MIS obtained 0.7% of national votes (8.8% of votes in Sicily), and four seats. However, the movement lost all its seats following the 1948 general election and the 1951 regional election. Even though it has never been formally disbanded, today the movement is no longer part of the politics of Sicily. After World War II Sicily became a stronghold of the Christian Democracy, in opposition to the Italian Communist Party. The Communists and their successors (the Democratic Party of the Left, the Democrats of the Left and the present-day Democratic Party) had never won in the region until 2012. Sicily is now governed by a center-left coalition between Democratic Party and the center-party Union of Christian and Center Democrats. Rosario Crocetta is the current President since 2012.

Economy

Thanks to the regular growth of the last years, Sicily is the eighth richest region of Italy in terms of total GDP. A series of reforms and investments on agriculture such as the introduction of modern irrigation systems have made this important industry competitive. In the 1970s there was a growth of the industrial sector through the creation of some factories. In recent years the importance of the service industry has grown for the opening of several shopping malls and for a modest growth of financial and telecommunication activities. Tourism is an important source of wealth for the island thanks to its natural and historical heritage. Today Sicily is investing a large amount of money on structures of the hospitality industry, in order to make tourism more competitive, however, Sicily continues to have a GDP per capita below the Italian average and more unemployment than the rest of Italy. This difference is mostly caused by the negative influence of the Mafia that is still active in some areas although it is much weaker than in the past.

Agriculture

Sicily has long been noted for its fertile soil due to the volcanic eruptions in the past and present. The local agriculture is also helped by the pleasant climate of the island. The main agricultural products are wheat, citrons, oranges, lemons, tomatoes, olives, olive oil, artichokes, almonds, grapes, pistachios and wine. Cattle and sheep are raised. The cheese productions are particularly important thanks to the Ragusano DOP and the Pecorino Siciliano DOP. Ragusa is noted for its honey and chocolate productions.

Sicily is the third largest wine producer in Italy (the world's largest wine producer) after Veneto and Emilia Romagna. The region is known mainly for fortified Marsala wines. In recent decades the wine industry has improved, new winemakers are experimenting with less-known native varieties, and Sicilian wines have become better known. The best known local variety is Nero d'Avola, named for a small town not far from Syracuse; the best wines made with these grapes come from Noto, a famous old city close to Avola. Other important native varieties are Nerello Mascalese used to make the Etna Rosso DOC wine, Frappato that is a component of the Cerasuolo di Vittoria DOCG wine, Moscato di Pantelleria (also known as *Zibibbo*) used to make different Pantelleria wines, Malvasia di Lipari used for the Malvasia di Lipari DOC wine and Catarratto mostly used to make the white wine Alcamo DOC. Furthermore, in Sicily high quality wines are also produced using non-native varieties like Syrah, Chardonnay and Merlot.

Sicily is also known for its liqueurs, such as the Amaro Averna produced in Caltanissetta and the local limoncello. Fishing is another fundamental resource for Sicily. There are important tuna, sardine, swordfish and European anchovy fisheries. Mazzara del Vallo is the largest fishing center in Sicily and one of the most important in Italy.

Industry and manufacturing

Improvements in Sicily's road system have helped to promote industrial development. The region has three important industrial districts:

- *Catania Industrial District*, where there are several food industries and one of the best European electronics industry centers called *Etna Valley* (in honor of the best known Silicon Valley) which contains offices and factories of international companies such as STMicroelectronics and Numonyx;
- *Syracuse Petrochemical District* with chemical industries, oil refineries and important power stations (as the innovative Archimede combined cycle power plant);
- the latest *Enna Industrial District* in which there are food industries.

Sicily (Sicilia)

In Palermo there are important shipyards (such as Fincantieri), mechanical factories of famous Italian companies as Ansaldo Breda, publishing and textile industries. Chemical industries are also in the Province of Messina (Milazzo) and in the Province of Caltanissetta (Gela). There are petroleum, natural gas and asphalt fields in the Southeast (mostly near Ragusa) and massive deposits of halite in Central Sicily. The Province of Trapani is one of the largest sea salt producers in Italy.

Transportation

Roads

Highways have recently been built and expanded in the last four decades. The most prominent Sicilian roads are the motorways (known as *autostrada*) running through the northern section of the island. Much of the motorway network is elevated by columns due to the mountainous terrain of the island. Other main roads in Sicily are the *Strade Statali* like the SS.113 that connects Trapani to Messina (via Palermo), the SS.114 Messina-Syracuse (via Catania) and the SS.115 Syracuse-Trapani (via Ragusa, Gela and Agrigento).

Railways

The first railway in Sicily was opened in 1863 (Palermo-Bagheria) and today all of the Sicilian provinces are served by a network of railway services, linking to most major cities and towns; this service is operated by Trenitalia. Of the 1,378 km (856 mi) of railway tracks in use, over 60% has been electrified while the remaining 583 km (362 mi) are serviced by diesel engines. 88% of the lines (1.209 km) are single-track and only 169 km (105 mi) are double-track serving the two main routes, Messina-Palermo (Tyrrhenian) and Messina-Catania-Syracuse (Ionian). Of the narrow gauge railways the Ferrovia Circumetnea is the only one that still operates, going round Mount Etna. From the major cities of Sicily, there are services to Naples and Rome; this is achieved by the trains being loaded onto ferries which cross to the mainland.

In Catania there is an underground railway service (metropolitana di Catania); in Palermo the national railway operator Trenitalia operates a commuter rail (Palermo metropolitan railway service), the Sicilian Capital is also served by 4 AMAT (Comunal Public Transport Operator) tramlines; Messina is served by a tramline.

Airports

Mainland Sicily has several airports which serve numerous Italian and European destinations and some extra-European;

- Catania-Fontanarossa Airport, located on the east-coast is the busiest on the island (and one of the busiest in all of Italy).
- Palermo International Airport, which is also a substantially large airport with many national and international flights.
- Trapani-Birgi Airport, a military-civil joint use airport (third for traffic on the island). Recently the airport has seen an increase of traffic thanks to a low-cost carrier.
- Comiso-Ragusa Airport, has recently been refurbished and re-converted from military use to civil airport. It was opened to commercial traffic and general aviation 30 May 2013.
- Palermo-Boccadifalco Airport is the old airport of Palermo and is currently used for general aviation and as a base for the Guardia di Finanza and Police helicopters.
- NAS Sigonella Airport, it is an Italian Air Force and US Navy installation.
- Lampedusa Airport
- Pantelleria Airport.

Ports

By sea, Sicily is served by several ferry routes and cargo ports, and in all major cities, cruise ships dock on a regular basis.

- Mainland Italy: Ports connecting to the mainland are Messina (route to Villa San Giovanni and Salerno), the busiest passenger port in Italy, Palermo (routes to Genoa, Civitavecchia and Naples) and Catania (route to Naples) .

Sicily (Sicilia)

- Sicily's small surrounding islands: The port of Milazzo serves the Aeolian Islands, the ports of Trapani and Marsala the Aegadian Islands and the port of Porto Empedocle the Pelagie Islands. From Palermo there is a service to the island of Ustica and to Sardinia.
- International connections: From Palermo and Trapani there are weekly services to Tunisia and there is also a daily service between Malta and Pozzallo.
- Commercial/Cargo Ports: The port of Augusta is the 5th largest cargo port in Italy which handles tonnes of goods. Other major cargo ports are Palermo, Catania, Trapani, Pozzallo and Termini Imerese.
- Touristic Ports: Several "Touristic ports" along the Sicilian coast are in the service of private boats that need to moor on the island. The main ports for this traffic are in Marina di Ragusa, Riposto, Portorosa, Syracuse, Cefalù and Sciacca. In Sicily, Palermo is also a major center for the Boat Rental with or without crew in the Mediterranean. It is the home of some of the charter companies such as Velasud Yachting Italy, with the nautical base in Palermo Marina Arenella Yachting Club with a fleet of 10 yachts including sailboats and catamarans up to 52 feet. In Palermo, and in general in Sicily, there are a number of boat rental companies, many of these do not have the ownership. Most of them are just simply brokers. Other companies well known in Palermo and Portorosa (Messina) are Best Charter and Jonio Yachting.
- Fishing ports: As all islands, Sicily also has many fishing ports. The most important is in Mazara del Vallo followed by Castellammare del Golfo, Licata, Scoglitti and Portopalo di Capo Passero.

Planned bridge

Plans for a bridge linking Sicily to the mainland have been discussed since 1865. Throughout the last decade, plans were developed for a road and rail link to the mainland via what would be the world's longest suspension bridge, the Strait of Messina Bridge. Planning for the project has experienced several false starts over the past few years. On 6 March 2009, Silvio Berlusconi's government declared that the construction works for the Messina Bridge will begin on 23 December 2009, and announced a pledge of €1.3 billion as a contribution to the bridge's total cost, estimated at €6.1 billion. The plan has been criticized by environmental associations and some local Sicilians and Calabrians, concerned with its environmental impact, economical sustainability and even possible infiltrations by organized crime.

Tourism

Sicily's sunny, dry climate, scenery, cuisine, history and architecture attract many tourists from mainland Italy and abroad. The tourist season peaks in the summer months, although people visit the island all year round. Mount Etna, the beaches, the archaeological sites, and major cities such as Palermo, Catania, Syracuse and Ragusa are the favorite tourist destinations, but the old town of Taormina and the neighboring seaside resort of Giardini Naxos draw visitors from all over the world, as do the Aeolian Islands, Erice, Castellammare del Golfo, Cefalù, Agrigento, the Pelagie Islands and Capo d'Orlando. The last features some of the best-preserved temples of the ancient Greek period. Many Mediterranean cruise ships stop in Sicily, and many wine tourists also visit the island. Some scenes of famous Hollywood and Cinecittà films were shot in Sicily. This increased the attraction of Sicily as a tourist destination.

Archeological sites

Because many different cultures settled, dominated or invaded the island, Sicily has a huge variety of archaeological sites. Also, some of the most notable and best preserved temples and other structures of the Greek world are located in Sicily. Here is a short list of the major archaeological sites:

- Sicels/Sicans/Elymians/Greeks: Segesta, Eryx, Cava Ispica, Thapsos, Pantalica.
- Greeks: Syracuse, Agrigento, Segesta, Selinunte, Gela, Kamarina, Himera, Megara Hyblaea, Naxos, Heraclea Minoa,
- Phoenicians: Motya, Soluntum, Marsala, Palermo.
- Romans: Piazza Armerina, Centuripe, Taormina, Palermo.
- Arabs: Palermo, Mazara del Vallo.

The excavation and restoration of one of Sicily's best known archaeological sites, the Valley of the Temples in Agrigento, was at the direction of the archaeologist Domenico Antonio Lo Faso Pietrasanta, Fifth Duke of Serradifalco, known in archaeological circles simply as "*Serradifalco*". He also oversaw the restoration of ancient sites at Segesta, Selinunte, Siracusa and Taormina.

Sicily (Sicilia)

Castles

In Sicily there are hundreds of castles, the most relevant are:

- Castello Ursino in Catania
- Zisa Castle in Palermo.
- Castle of the Counts of Modica (Alcamo) in Alcamo.
- Castello di Donnafugata near Ragusa

Coastal towers

The Coastal towers in Sicily (*Torri costiere della Sicilia*) are 218 old watchtowers along all the coast of the isle. In Sicily, the first coastal towers date back to the period between 1313 and 1345 of the Aragonese monarchy. From 1360 the threat came from the south, from North Africa to Maghreb, mainly to Barbary pirates and corsairs of Barbary Coast. In 1516, the Turks settled in Algiers, and from 1520, the corsair Hayreddin Barbarossa under the command of Ottoman Empire, operated from that harbor.

Most of the existing towers were built on architectural designs of the Florentine architect Camillo Camilliani from 1583 to 1584, and involved the coastal periple of Sicily. The typology changed completely in '800, because of the new higher fire volumes of cannon vessels, the towers were built on the type of Martello towers that the British built in the UK and elsewhere in the British Empire. In 1805 the U.S. Marines and Navy, in the Battle of Derne, near Tripoli, destroyed all of the Barbary pirates, and to put an end to piracy acts.

Culture

Sicily has long been associated with the arts. Many poets, writers, philosophers, intellectuals, architects and painters have roots on the island. The history of prestige in this field can be traced back to Greek philosopher Archimedes, a Syracuse native who has gone on to become renowned as one of the greatest mathematicians of all time. Gorgias and Empedocles are two other highly noted early Sicilian-Greek philosophers, while the Syracusan Epicharmus is held to be the inventor of comedy.

Art and architecture

Terracotta ceramics from the island are well known, the art of ceramics on Sicily goes back to the original ancient peoples named the Sicanians. It was then perfected during the period of Greek colonization and is still prominent and distinct to this day. Nowadays, Caltagirone is one of the most important centers in Sicily for the artistic production of ceramics and terra-cotta sculptures. Famous painters include Renaissance artist Antonello da Messina, Renato Guttuso and Greek born Giorgio de Chirico who is commonly dubbed the "father of Surrealist art" and founder of the metaphysical art movement. The most noted architects are Filippo Juvarra (one of the most important figures of the Italian Baroque) and Ernesto Basile.

Sicilian Baroque

The Sicilian Baroque has a unique architectural identity. Noto, Caltagirone, Catania, Ragusa, Modica, Scicli and particularly Acireale contain some of Italy's best examples of Baroque architecture, carved in the local red sandstone. Noto provides one of the best examples of the Baroque architecture brought to Sicily.

The Baroque style in Sicily was largely confined to buildings erected by the church, and palazzi built as private residences for the Sicilian aristocracy. The earliest examples of this style in Sicily lacked individuality and were typically heavy-handed pastiches of buildings seen by Sicilian visitors to Rome, Florence, and Naples. However, even at this early stage, provincial architects had begun to incorporate certain vernacular features of Sicily's older architecture. By the middle of the 18th century, when Sicily's Baroque architecture was noticeably different from that of the mainland, it typically included at least two or three of the following features, coupled with a unique freedom of design that is more difficult to characterize in words.

Music and film

Palermo hosts the Teatro Massimo which is the largest opera house in Italy and the third largest in all of Europe. In Catania there is another important opera house, the Teatro Massimo Bellini with 1,200 seats, which is considered one of the best European opera houses for its acoustics. Sicily's composers vary from Vincenzo Bellini, Sigismondo

Sicily (Sicilia)

d'India, Giovanni Pacini and Alessandro Scarlatti, to contemporary composers such as Salvatore Sciarrino and Silvio Amato.

Literature

The golden age of Sicilian poetry began in the early 13th century with the Sicilian School of Giacomo da Lentini, which was highly influential on Italian literature. Some of the most noted figures among writers and poets are Luigi Pirandello (Nobel laureate, 1934), Salvatore Quasimodo (Nobel laureate, 1959), Giovanni Verga (the father of the *Italian Verismo*), Domenico Tempio, Giovanni Meli, Luigi Capuana, Mario Rapisardi, Federico de Roberto, Leonardo Sciascia, Vitaliano Brancati, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, Elio Vittorini, Vincenzo Consolo and Andrea Camilleri (noted for his novels and short stories with the fictional character Inspector Salvo Montalbano as protagonist). On the political side notable philosophers include Gaetano Mosca and Giovanni Gentile who wrote *The Doctrine of Fascism*.

Language

Today in Sicily most people are bilingual and speak both Italian and Sicilian, a distinct and historical Romance language. Some of the Sicilian words are loan words from Greek, Catalan, French, Arabic, Spanish and other languages. Dialects related to Sicilian are also spoken in Calabria and Salento; it had a significant influence on the Maltese language. However the use of Sicilian is limited to informal contexts (mostly in family) and in a majority of cases it is replaced by the so-called *regional Italian of Sicily*, an Italian dialect that is a kind of mix between Italian and Sicilian.

Science

Catania has one of the four laboratories of the Istituto Nazionale di Fisica Nucleare (National Institute for Nuclear Physics) in which there is a cyclotron that uses protons both for nuclear physics experiments and for particle therapy to treat cancer (proton therapy). Noto has one of the largest radio telescopes in Italy that performs geodetic and astronomical observations. There are observatories in Palermo and Catania, managed by the Istituto Nazionale di Astrofisica (National Institute for Astrophysics). In the *Observatory of Palermo* the astronomer Giuseppe Piazzi discovered the first and the largest asteroid to be identified, Ceres, today considered a dwarf planet, on 1 January 1801. Catania has two observatories, one of which is situated on Mount Etna at 1,800 metres (5,900 feet).

Syracuse is also an experimental center for the solar technologies through the creation of the project Archimede solar power plant that is the first concentrated solar power plant to use molten salt for heat transfer and storage which is integrated with a combined-cycle gas facility. All the plant is owned and operated by Enel. The touristic town of Erice is also an important science place thanks to the Ettore Majorana Foundation and Centre for Scientific Culture which embraces 123 schools from all over the world, covering all branches of science, offering courses, seminars, workshops and annual meetings. It was founded by the physicist Antonino Zichichi in honor of another scientist of the island, Ettore Majorana known for the Majorana equation and Majorana fermions. Sicily's famous scientists include also Stanislao Cannizzaro (chemist), Giovanni Battista Hodierna and Niccolò Cacciatore (astronomers).

Education

Sicily has four universities:

- The University of Catania dates back to 1434 and it is the oldest University in Sicily. Nowadays it hosts 12 Faculties and over 62,000 students and it offers undergraduate and postgraduate programs. Catania hosts also the *Scuola Superiore*, an academic institution linked to the University of Catania, aiming for excellence in education.
- The University of Palermo is the island's second oldest University. It was officially founded in 1806, although historical records indicate that medicine and law have been taught there since the late 15th century. The Orto botanico di Palermo (Palermo botanical gardens) is home to the University's Department of Botany and is also open to visitors.
- The University of Messina, founded in 1548 by Ignatius of Loyola. It is organized in 11 Faculties.
- The Kore University of Enna founded in 1995, it is the latest Sicilian University and the first University founded in Sicily after the Italian Unification.

Sicily (Sicilia)

Religion

As in most Italian regions, Christian Roman Catholicism is the most predominant religious denomination in Sicily, and the church still plays an important role in the lives of most people. Before the invasion of the Normans, Sicily was predominantly Eastern Orthodox, of which few adherents still remain today. There is also a notable small minority of Eastern-rite Byzantine Catholics which has a mixed congregation of ethnic Albanians; it is operated by the Italo-Albanian Catholic Church. Most people still attend church weekly or at least for religious festivals, and many people get married in churches. There was a wide presence of Jews in Sicily for at least 1,400 years and possibly for more than 2,000 years. Some scholars believe that the Sicilian Jewry are partial ancestors of the Ashkenazi Jews. However, much of the Jewish community faded away when they were expelled from the island in 1492. Islam was present during the Emirate of Sicily, although Muslims were also expelled. Today, mostly due to immigration to the island, there are also several religious minorities, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism. There are also a fair number of Evangelical Church members and practitioners who reside on the island.

Cuisine

The island has a long history of producing a variety of noted cuisines and wines, to the extent that Sicily is sometimes nicknamed *God's Kitchen* because of this. Every part of Sicily has its specialty. For example, Cassata is typical of Palermo, even if available everywhere in Sicily, as is Granita, a Catania specialty. The ingredients are typically rich in taste while remaining affordable to the general public. The savory dishes of Sicily are viewed to be healthy, using fresh vegetables and fruits, such as tomatoes, artichokes, olives (including olive oil), citrus, apricots, aubergines, onions, beans, raisins commonly coupled with seafood, freshly caught from the surrounding coastlines, including tuna, sea bream, sea bass, cuttlefish, swordfish, sardines, and others.

Perhaps the most well-known part of Sicilian cuisine is the rich sweet dishes including ice creams and pastries. Cannoli (singular: *cannolo*), a tube-shaped shell of fried pastry dough filled with a sweet filling usually containing ricotta cheese, is in particular strongly associated with Sicily worldwide. Biancomangiare, biscotti ennesi (cookies native to Enna), bracciatte (a Sicilian version of doughnuts), buccellato, ciarduna, pignoli, bruccellati, sesame seed cookies, a sweet confection with sesame seeds and almonds (torrone in Italy) is cubbaita, frutta martorana, cassata, pignolata, granita, cuccidati (a variety of fig cookie; also known as buccellati) and cuccia are amongst some of the most notable sweet dishes.

Like the cuisine of the rest of southern Italy, pasta plays an important part in Sicilian cuisine, as does rice; for example with arancini. As well as using some other cheeses, Sicily has spawned some of its own, using both cow's and sheep's milk, such as pecorino and caciocavallo. Spices used include saffron, nutmeg, clove, pepper, and cinnamon, which were introduced by the Arabs. Parsley is used abundantly in many dishes. Although Sicilian cuisine is commonly associated with sea food, meat dishes, including goose, lamb, goat, rabbit, and turkey, are also found in Sicily. It was the Normans and Swabians who first introduced a fondness for meat dishes to the island. Some varieties of wine are produced from vines that are relatively unique to the island, such as the Nero d'Avola made near the baroque of town of Noto.

Popular culture

Each town and city has its own patron saint, and the feast days are marked by colorful processions through the streets with marching bands and displays of fireworks.

Sicilian religious festivals also include the *presepe vivente* (living nativity scene), which takes place at Christmas time. Deftly combining religion and folklore, it is a constructed mock 19th century Sicilian village, complete with a nativity scene, and has people of all ages dressed in the costumes of the period, some impersonating the Holy Family, and others working as artisans of their particular assigned trade. It is normally concluded on Epiphany, often highlighted by the arrival of the magi on horseback.

Oral tradition plays a large role in Sicilian folklore. Many stories passed down from generation to generation involve a character named "Giufà". Anecdotes from this character's life preserve Sicilian culture as well as convey moral messages.

Sicilians also enjoy outdoor festivals, held in the local square or *piazza* where live music and dancing are performed on stage, and food fairs or *sagre* are set up in booths lining the square. These offer various local specialties, as well

Sicily (Sicilia)

as typical Sicilian food. Normally these events are concluded with fireworks. A noted *sagra* is the *Sagra del Carciofo* or *Artichoke Festival*, which is held annually in Ramacca in April. The most important traditional event in Sicily is the carnival. Famous carnivals are in Acireale, Misterbianco, Regalbuto, Paternò, Sciacca, Termini Imerese.

The Opera dei Pupi (Opera of the Puppets; Sicilian: Òpira dî pupi) is a marionette theatrical representation of Frankish romantic poems such as the Song of Roland or *Orlando furioso* that is one of the characteristic cultural traditions of Sicily. The sides of donkey carts are decorated with intricate, painted scenes; these same tales are enacted in traditional puppet theatres featuring hand-made marionettes of wood. The opera of the puppets and the Sicilian tradition of *cantastorì* (singers of tales) are rooted in the Provençal troubadour tradition in Sicily during the reign of Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor, in the first half of the 13th century. A great place to see this marionette art is the puppet theatres of Palermo. The Sicilian marionette theatre Opera dei Pupi was proclaimed in 2001 and inscribed in 2008 in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists.

Today, there are only a few troupes that maintain the tradition. They often perform for tourists. However, there are no longer the great historical families of marionettists, such as the Greco of Palermo; the Canino of Partinico and Alcamo; Crimi, Trombetta and Napoli of Catania, Pennisi and Macri of Acireale, Profeta of Licata, Gargano and Grasso of Agrigento. One can, however, admire the richest collection of marionettes at the Museo Internazionale delle Marionette Antonio Pasqualino and at the Museo Etnografico Siciliano Giuseppe Pitrè in Palermo. Other beautiful marionettes are on display at the Museo Civico Vagliasindi in Randazzo.

Regional symbols

There are several cultural icons and regional symbols in Sicily, including flags, carts, sights and geographical features.

The Flag of Sicily, regarded as a regional icon, was first adopted in 1282, after the Sicilian Vespers of Palermo. It is characterized by the presence of the *trinacria* (triskelion) in its middle, the (winged) head of Medusa and three wheat ears. The three bent legs are supposed to represent the three points of the island Sicily itself. The colors, instead, respectively represent the cities of Palermo and Corleone, at those times an agricultural city of renown. Palermo and Corleone were the first two cities to found a confederation against the Angevin rule. It finally became the official public flag of the *Regione Siciliana* in January 2000, after the passing of an apposite regional law which advocates its use on public buildings, schools and city halls along with the national Italian flag and the European one.

Familiar as an ancient symbol of the region, the Triskelion is also featured on Greek coins of Syracuse, such as coins of Agathocles (317–289 BC). The symbol dates back to when Sicily was part of Magna Graecia, the colonial extension of Greece beyond the Aegean. The triskelion was revived, as a neoclassic and non-Bourbon emblem for the new Napoleonic Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, by Joachim Murat in 1808. Pliny the Elder attributes the origin of the triskelion of Sicily to the triangular form of the island, the ancient *Trinacria*, which consists of three large capes equidistant from each other, pointing in their respective directions, the names of which were Pelorus, Pachynus, and Lilybæum. The three legs of the triskelion are also reminiscent of Hephaestus's three-legged tables that ran by themselves, as mentioned in Iliad xviii.

The Sicilian cart is an ornate, colorful style of horse or donkey-drawn cart native to Sicily. Sicilian wood carver George Petralia states that horses were mostly used in the city and flat plains, while donkeys or mules were more often used in rough terrain for hauling heavy loads. The cart has two wheels and is primarily handmade out of wood with iron components.

The Sicilian coppola is a traditional kind of flat cap typically worn by men in Sicily. First used by English nobles during the late 18th century, the *tasca* began being used in Sicily in the early 20th century as a driving cap, usually worn by car drivers. The *coppola* is usually made in tweed. Today it is widely regarded as a definitive symbol of Sicilian heritage.

Above information obtained from Wikipedia, 2018