

VAL D'AGRÒ

Seven villages
a common magic





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Promotion
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VAL D'AGRÒ

Among the motivations that drive the tourist to make a trip to Sicily, there are attractions that are part of the official image of touristic Sicily. We refer to the Greek-Roman archaeological testimonies, the most famous cultural aspects of the various periods along the traditional itineraries. Against this, little is known of a Sicily that we improperly refer to as medieval; the other Sicily, untouched, or touched very little, by the big historical events that affected it.

So we think it is very interesting to propose this other Sicily. It is an unknown Sicily: a travel experience among the most interesting, and one to be discovered with attention, but also with the great love that one feels for simple things.

Charming landscapes, boundless silences, and the melancholy of works that are stationary, changeless. A land of men with the sacred sense of hospitality. There is no splendour, no aristocracy of the beautiful, but a succession of spontaneous events in the most authentic human dimension.

In the trace of an exciting reading of the territory, rediscovered through the old streams, true nervations of the landscape, but above all ancient tracks of human movements, offers of nature, sea, green countryside, landscapes going as far as the eye can see, traditions and typical produce, are being enriched, day by day, with new offers: hotels, residences, restaurants, holiday farms and facilities... For most of the year the Valley can enjoy a prevalently mild climate and a tepid and clear sea. There is everything, or more exactly we believe we have put everything into it. What is missing the reader can add after a holiday.



■ Limina

The Ranciara Gorges are a rock formation of remarkable beauty, whose name probably derives from the presence of orange trees that flourished in the area.

■ Sant'Alessio Siculo

The Capo Sant'Alessio promontory was strategically important for control of the coast, and this led to its being fortified.



Val d'Agrò Seven villages a

■ Casalvecchio Siculo

The Saints Pietro e Paolo d'Agrò abbey is a synthesis of different cultures that over the centuries conquered Sicily.

■ Antillo

The Peace Bell, blessed by Pope John Paul II in 1993, has tolled for the missing of all wars, from atop Pizzo Monaco.



This Valley in eastern Sicily - which takes its name from the stream, Agrò, which has hewn out a route in it towards the Ionian Sea - is a treasure of spontaneous beauty and the tradition that is shared by the seven villages in it, though each preserves its own identity. For in the Agrò Valley you can admire the crystalline waters of Sant'Alessio Siculo, dominated by the silvery dolomite limestone promontory on which there rise, solemn guardians, the two keeps of the ancient Saracen castle. With your gaze you can encompass the four kilometres of golden beach of Santa Teresa di Riva. Or again, you can walk among the ruins of the Pentefur castle, in the 15th century village of Savoca, and thence dominate the splendid coast as the

Saracens once did and the mysterious Pentefur people before them. Next a stop at Casalvecchio, an old village whose profile stands out between the mountain and the valley in a remarkably beautiful natural environment. In the valley you can breathe in very pure air and enjoy the peace and quiet of the village of Antillo. Yet again, you can be enchanted by the quiet little streets of Limina, which almost of a sudden appear in the green Agrò valley. And lastly, you can walk around the silent streets of Forza d'Agrò as in an outdoor museum, going up the charming steps of the Norman castle, and admire the 18th century Cathedral. Walking among the ancient abodes and the streets in the historic area you get the sensation that here time



common magic

has really stopped. All this is the Agrò Valley. Nature, beauty, culture, tradition. Like the facets of a diamond, the Valley is united in depth by a common atmosphere, a common magic.

It is not by chance that the villages of **Antillo, Casalvecchio Siculo, Forza d'Agrò, Limina, Sant'Alessio Siculo, Santa Teresa di Riva, Savoca** have decided to join together in a consortium for tourist promotion - like a seal on a document that was signed centuries ago.

United, the seven villages in the valley afford pathways in synergy. In them there live different cultures and multiple traditions, which in the course of centuries have become complementary to one another to arrive at a result of rare and incomparable perfection.

■ Santa Teresa di Riva

The large steel sculptures by the artist Nino Ucchino, displayed on the waterfront, make this seafaring town an outdoor museum.

■ Forza d'Agrò

The medieval village is home to the historic SS Trinità Brotherhood, founded in the seventeenth century together with the Triade church.

■ Savoca

The many churches testify to the historical importance of this place, the summer residence of the Archimandrite of Messina.

1. Savoca.
2. Sant'Alessio Siculo.
3. Casalvecchio Siculo.
4. Santa Teresa di Riva.
5. Limina.
6. Antillo.
7. Forza d'Agrò.

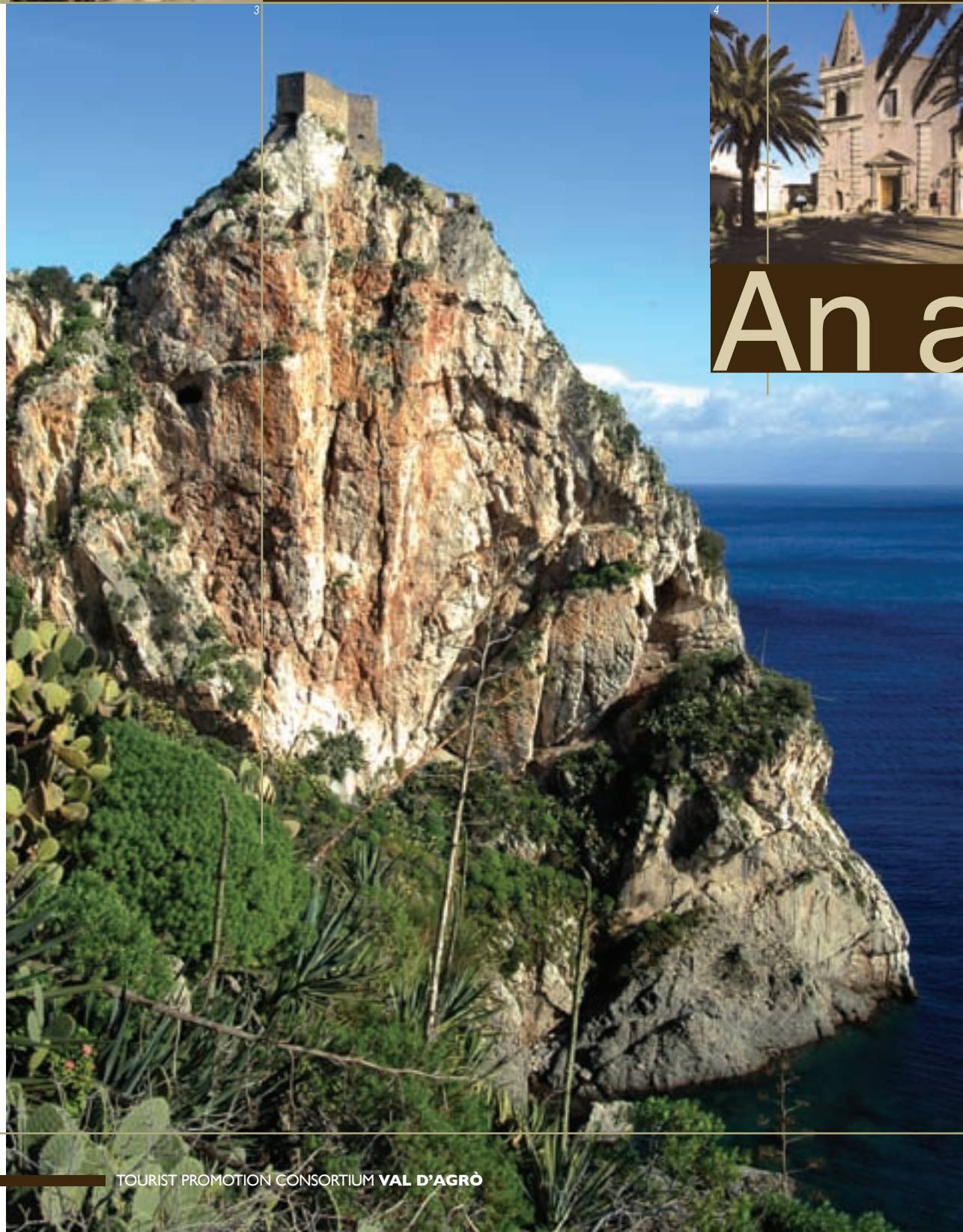




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Before a detailed description is given of the nine villages in the valley, something must be said about its history: there is a lot of it. And it goes beyond what you will read. In order to encounter the history of this valley, you must approach it with patience and wait for it to talk about itself. From the ruins of a rock. From the roof of an old church. From the gestures of a farmer toiling in his field. It will be a whisper at first: but if you listen, you will be enchanted.

ancient story

The Agrò Valley was colonized in the time of the Phoenicians, who in Sicily set up numerous commercial bases and true towns. It is likely that there were Neolithic settlements in the valley, but the first proper settlement was Phoenician. It was Tamaritio, a commercial station that is identified with present-day Santa Teresa di Riva. However, in the 5th century it was the Greeks that took over: in that epoch they dominated the coasts of the whole of eastern Sicily. After that the history of the valley followed that of the rest of Sicily, with the Roman, Byzantine and Arab invasions.

There are the remains of a Roman villa at Scifi, a hamlet of Forza d'Agrò. The Arabs left more numerous traces, as we see from the Saracen Gate at Castelmola, the Baglio, Catalmo, Avarna and Varata towers at Santa Teresa di Riva, the Forza d'Agrò lookout tower and the Pentefur Castle at Savoca, all dating back to the period from the 7th to the 9th centuries.

At Casalvecchio there is the most important monument in the whole Valley: the church of SS Pietro and Paolo d'Agrò (560 AD), a destination of cultural and religious tourism. There are even

more numerous vestiges of the subsequent dominations during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, especially monastic buildings and castles.

Among the many possible examples, there is the splendid fifteenth-century S. Michele church at Savoca, the castle with two big keeps at Sant'Alessio Siculo and the Santissima Trinità church (you get to it up a splendid flight of steps) from the end of the sixteenth century. There is also no lack of testimonies to the seventeenth century and the eighteenth century in Sicily, like Palazzo Trimarchi, also immortalized by the famous film "The Godfather".

1. Savoca. Sicilian-Gothic sandstone portal of the fifteenth-century San Michele church.
2. Casalvecchio Siculo. Detail of the exterior decoration of the Santi Pietro e Paolo d'Agrò abbey consisting of bricks arranged in a herringbone pattern and blocks of lava stone.
3. Sant'Alessio Siculo. The cape on which the castle stands.
4. Forza d'Agrò. The Santissima Trinità church.
5. Savoca. Fresco from the Byzantine era at the main Church.
6. Santa Teresa di Riva. The tower of the Saracens incorporated in the little Palazzo Bucalo.

The **watch towers** had a fundamental role in defence against attacks by pirates, who infested the Mediterranean.

In the Santa Teresa area there are these military structures. Some are now destroyed, like the Avarna tower, while of others a few ruins remain, like the Baglio tower.

The tower of the Saracens is the best preserved. It is located next to the Madonna del Carmelo church and has been incorporated into the little palazzo of the Bucalo family.

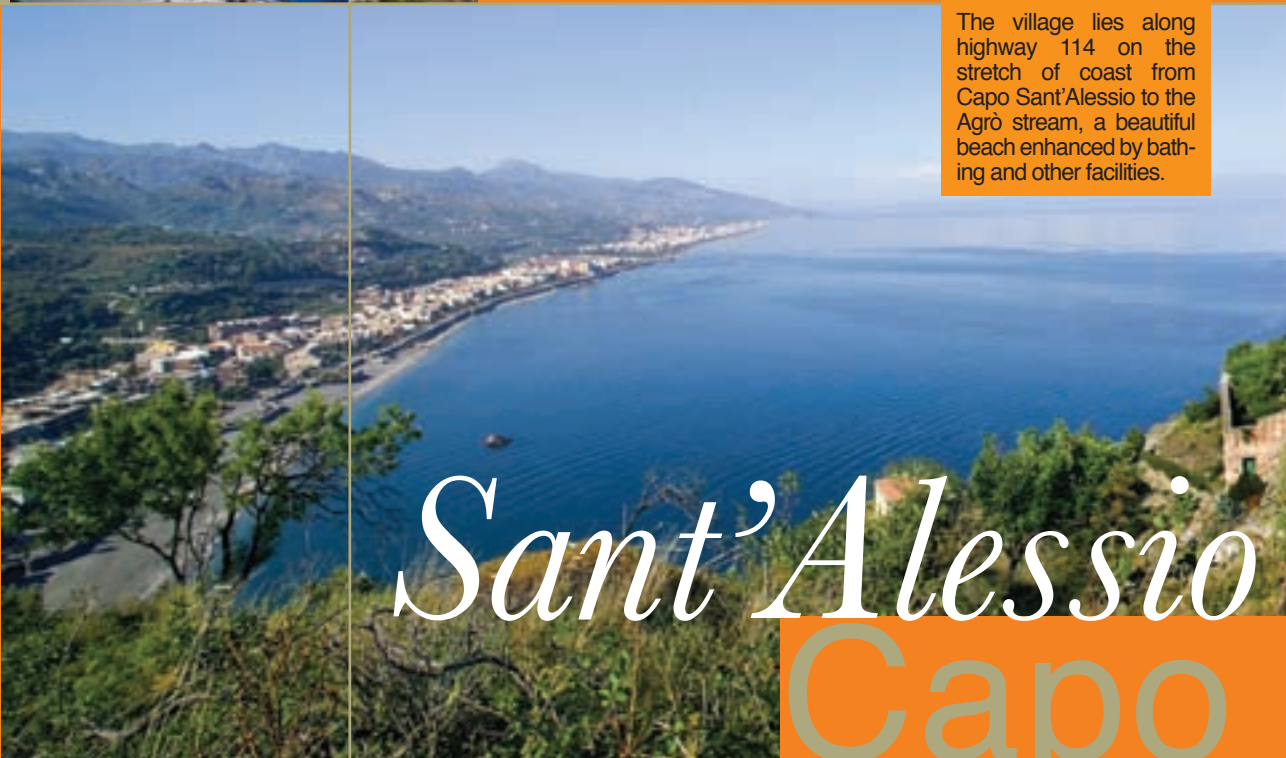
In the Catalmo hamlet there is the oldest tower in the area. It is of great strategic importance because of its proximity to Savoca.





Sant'Alessio Siculo

The village lies along highway 114 on the stretch of coast from Capo Sant'Alessio to the Agrò stream, a beautiful beach enhanced by bathing and other facilities.



Sant'Alessio Capo

1. The beautiful beach of Sant'Alessio Siculo.
2. Abandoned furnace.
3. Villa Genovesi.
4. Ancient roman amphorae found in a wreck.
5. The old church dedicated to Santa Maria del Carmelo.
6. Saracen Castle.

Saracen Castle

The castle was most likely built by the Arabs. The Normans rebuilt it, and the British restructured it against the French in the early nineteenth century. The complex consists of two structures from different periods and has an access path largely cut out in the rock. The oldest nucleus occupies the eastern portion of the cliff and has an irregular polygonal shaped building. On the western side of the promontory there stands a cylindrical bastioned tower with a circular ring structure. Being private property it cannot be visited, but from outside it is worth admiring the silhouette of the castle that for over a thousand years protected the coast dominated by Capo d'Argento.



Mezzo quarter

It is the oldest part of Sant'Alessio. It dates back to the 17th century and you can still observe the structures from that period, such as the old gateway to the quarter engraved with the date of construction, 1770.

Villa Genovesi

Set in the centre of the village, it is a building in Swiss style, with a pitched roof typical of the Alps and a cylindrical tower topped by the characteristic weathercock.

Lime furnaces

After World War II, fishing and agriculture were accompanied by the production of hydraulic lime. This was a thriving activity, as we see from the ruins of numerous furnaces, now abandoned.

The cliff caves

You can make a boat trip to visit the cliff caves.

to be seen

Siculo d'argento



Villa Genovesi

Built in the late seventeenth century, it was acquired by the Council and restructured to be opened to the public and host important cultural events. Inside there are three archaeological finds from the first century AD, namely a North African amphora, an amphora with a flat bottom and an anchor stock with astragals, recovered, along with other items on display at the Giardini Naxos Archaeological Museum, in the seabed off Capo Sant'Alessio.

The Romans renamed Sant'Alessio *Promontorium*. The Arabs called it "The Staircase", *Ad dargah*. The present-day name first appears in a document of 1117 as *Scala Sancti Alessi* and probably derives from Alexius I Comnenius, the emperor of Constantinople, who was a guest at the castle around which there later developed the whole village.

So the Castle, as we see it today, dates from the Norman period. It was restructured at the start of the nineteenth century by the English, who also built the outer ring of walls, to defend it against attacks by the French, who were preparing to invade Sicily from Calabria. It has had various owners down to the present day.

Off Capo Sant'Alessio wrecks of Roma ships have been found with cargoes of amphoras. Until June 1948 Sant'Alessio Siculo was part

of Forza d'Agrò, and then it became independent.

Today its economy is based on fishing and tourism.

Of course it is prevalently summer and bathing tourism, which has accredited the image of Sant'Alessio as one of the prettiest and most welcoming places on the Ionian coast. The hotels, the restaurants and the residential areas are all along the coast, which goes without a break as far as Santa Teresa and Furci Siculo.

It has a lot of accommodation, and its position makes it an ideal base for exploring the whole Agrò Valley, through villages rich in history, art and traditions, and for interesting tourist visits and excursions all over Sicily, but not without first visiting the local monuments.



S. Maria del Carmelo

The church already existed in 1308, but the date of foundation is not certain. It is believed to date back to the Byzantine era.

The style is sober, the structure rectangular.

The dimensions are proportional to the arch that separates the central part from the presbytery, against whose wall there is an altar, now partly buried. To its sides there are two sandstone columns, whose capitals support a split pediment, in the midst of which is set an architectural frame to house the icon of Mary.



Forza d'Agrò

An open-air m

Triade Church

It was built at one of the highest points in the village, at the end of the fifteenth century. It is accessed via a big flight of steps topped by a splendid **Durazzo portal**. The façade of the church, which dates back to 1576, replaced the previous structure, which is still visible. Inside there are important works from the 15th and 16th centuries.

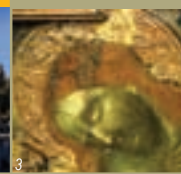
Set against the church stands the **Augustinian monastery**, built in the early 17th century. Recently restored, it is now used as a conference centre and museum space.

An open-air museum, with an incredible panorama and history and culture transuding from every stone. This is Forza d'Agrò, whose present urban nucleus is rooted in the Middle Ages, from which it still preserves the atmosphere, alleys and the castle. The other two urban nuclei, Scifi and Fondaco Prete, complete this museum in an original manner. Fondaco Prete is the pride and glory of tourism, with fascinating and impenetrable sheer rocks over the Ionian Sea, which support the Sant'Alessio castle and further down vanish into the broad beaches of fine sand. Scifi, with its Roman-Byzantine diggings, is the youngest place in the Valley, being just 150 years old, but at the same time it is also the most ancient, with the archaeological finds bearing witness to human presence in the Roman epoch. The history of Scifi intertwines with that of the origin of the monastery of SS Pietro and Paolo d'Agrò. It was from this

monastery that there also started the history of the present-day nucleus of Forza d'Agrò. Indeed, from 1117 there dates a document giving a notice of a farmstead, *Vicum Agrillae*, donated to the monastery. But it was only in the middle of the 14th century that this "farmstead" took on the name "Forza". This fortress watching over the rocks looking out on the Ionian over the centuries has nurtured numerous legends and mysteries, above all with its castle, erected by the Normans and several times altered. Its strategic position truly made it the fortress of the Valley, as is also demonstrated by the fact that the English occupied it in 1810 for defence against the French. It was the seat of the University and the theatre of battles and other historical vicissitudes of major importance for the life of the whole area. Forza d'Agrò has preserved all the atmosphere of the Middle Ages. Its houses, made of lime and stone,

Forza d'Agrò

A ridge immersed in Mediterranean maquis, an old castle dominating the dramatic landscape, houses and palazzos hugging each other, barely separated by a dense network of narrow streets.



Main Church

It dates back to the 15th century, but was destroyed by the 1648 earthquake. Rebuilt in the 18th century, it retains some elements that survived the earthquake like the splendid and richly carved 16th century portal alongside the majestic and simple 18th century façade. The three-aisle interior has a rich wooden 18th century chancel. Among the precious sacred trappings and important paintings there stands out the impressive 16th century painting depicting the Annunciation by Stefano Giordano.

museum

with wooden floors and steep flights of steps, are never higher than two floors; in the visitor's mind they evoke images of a history that is still not lost here. Going up the narrow little streets you still perceive the precious gift of silence. In addition to the castle, with its bartizan, its loopholes and its walls, you can contemplate the imposing Cathedral in the heart of the village. In the structure of this building there is a wonderfully harmonious blend of elements from the fifteenth century, when it was founded, and the 18th century, when the edifice was rebuilt after an earthquake. Not far from the Cathedral there is the Triade church, from the late 15th century, and the Durazzo arch surmounting its charming flight of steps. Here there is also the Augustinian monastery, dating from the 17th century. Alongside so much history, there is the Damuseddu Belvedere, a place giving a truly unique view going from Aspromonte to Etna.

Norman Castle

Dating back to the Norman period, it was rebuilt by Count Roger I of Hauteville and rebuilt at the end of the sixteenth century. You can still see the walls with arrow slits in them and the remains of the bell tower. The castle was occupied by the British in 1810.

San Francesco church

Dating back to the 16th century, it is known as the S. Caterina d'Alessandria church, because of the presence of a statue of the saint in Carrara marble by an alumnus of Montorsoli.

Miano, Mauro, Bondi and Garufi palazzos

All majestic and prestigious buildings from the 17th century.

1. Watchtower of the castle.
2. Crenellated bell-tower of the main church. In the background the Norman Castle.
3. Fourteenth-century wooden crucifix in the main church.
4. Main church.
5. Durazzo portal.
6. The medieval village.





Santa Maria del Carmelo church

Built in 1929 on the site of an old church from 1507, the main church is a fine example of Neo-Romanesque style with a nave and two side aisles. Inside it there is the wooden statue of the Madonna del Carmelo (19th century). In the apse there is a fresco depicting the four evangelists. On the façade above the three entrance doors there are three mosaics, done in 1934, representing the Madonna del Carmelo, St. Teresa of Avila and St. Albert.

Santa An enchant



Saracen Tower

Built for sighting pirates, in 1850 it was incorporated in the little palazzo of the Bucalo family. At the end of the nineteenth century, its dome was truncated and was adorned with battlements.

Its splendid beach was noted over two thousand five hundred years ago, when the Phoenicians, where the present-day village is, founded a commercial colony, which they called Phoenix. Then the fate of this place, for good or for bad, was always linked to the crystalline waters of the Ionian, for from the sea there came, in addition to natural riches, the perils of piracy, which for centuries infested the Mediterranean. For this reason, Santa Teresa di Riva was above all a place of lookout towers. From the time of the Arab invasion down to the Norman period, there were at least five of them. All that remains is the square Baglio Tower, with the remains of a perimeter wall, the Saracen Tower, and the Catalmo Tower, encompassed in the urban texture of the medieval part of the village. Santa Teresa di Riva was always linked to the old

barony of Savoca, and for centuries it was the seaside part of the latter. In 1849 the Bourbons destroyed almost all the houses at Marina di Savoca. However, the people that survived rebuilt the village, which in the end became independent of Savoca, thanks to Frederick II of Bourbon, in 1854. And, as homage to the sovereign's wife, Teresa of Austria, the inhabitants called it Santa Teresa. After the Unification of Italy, the words "di Riva" were added, to distinguish it from other villages with the same name. But at Santa Teresa there is not just history and testimonies to the past. In the village there are a lot of modern sculptures and murals in the squares, on the seafront, and in various other places in the village. Today Santa Teresa di Riva is also the most important commercial centre on the Ionian side of Messina province.

Santa Teresa di Riva

Four miles of beautiful Ionian coast, enclosed between the Agrò and Savoca streams, are the natural backdrop to Santa Teresa di Riva, a splendid Sicilian tourist resort.

Teresa di Riva ing marina

Porto Salvo church

Although it is a reconstruction, to it there is linked a story of the sea and of faith. At the end of the eighteenth century some fishermen, caught in a violent storm, invoked the Madonna, promising they would build a church. Today the old Porto Salvo church is gone, but the new building maintains the testimony of faith of fishermen in the area.

Catalmo Tower

It was built in 1506 on the left bank of the river Savoca, by the Savoca man Don Pietro Trimarchi. Until the eighteenth century it played an important strategic role due to its proximity to the Pentefur castle.

San Vito Martire church

Located in the hill village of Misserio, it was built in 1706 by the master builder Girolamo Conte from Roccalumera. Inside it there are six lunette frescoes de-

picting scenes from the Holy Scriptures, done by the artist Nino Ucchino in 1983. In 1968, in the basement of the church, an old crypt was discovered where, in the eighteenth century, the faithful, priests and nobles of Misserio, were buried. This crypt was restored by the Superintendence in 2004 and can be visited.

Artwork on the seafront

The seafront is a true open-air art gallery where the fantastic steel sculptures of the Santa Teresa artist Nino Ucchino are on display.



1. Aerial view of the coast.
2. The beach.
3. Santa Maria del Carmelo Church.
4. Catalmo tower.
5. Saracen tower.
6. Porto Salvo church.
7. The Siren. A steel work by Nino Ucchino.

7





1. The town gate, a gothic arch from the late Middle Ages.
2. San Michele church.
3. 15th century mullioned window.
4. Mummy on display in the crypt of the Capuchin convent.
5. San Nicolò church.
6. Vitelli Bar - Palazzo Trimarchi.
7. Main church.

Pentefur Castle

According to tradition it was built by the people called the Pentefur. It was rebuilt by the Arabs, and later, the Normans, who enlarged its structure. It was the summer residence of the Archimandrite of Messina until the eighteenth century. For centuries it expressed the hegemony of Savoca.

castle. It has two beautiful Gothic-Sicilian portals in sandstone. Inside: an eighteenth-century pulpit and a painting on wood of St. Michael from the 15th century.

Capuchin Monastery

The building dates back to 1603 and includes the Sant'Anna church. In the refectory there are interesting frescoes. In the crypt there are preserved the mummified remains.

Calvario church and Via Crucis

The Beata Vergine dei Sette Dolori and Santa Croce (or Calvario) church was restored in 1736 by the Jesuits.

Immacolata church

Built in 1621 by the lesser Franciscan friars, it is now used as a Philharmonic Centre.

Ethno-anthropological Museum

Steel Museum

Main church

Built in the 15th century and dedicated to the Assumption, it has a Renaissance rose window above the main portal. The interior is divided into a nave and two side aisles with Romanesque capitals. It contains some frescoes from the Byzantine period.

San Michele church

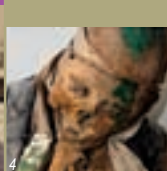
In Gothic-Renaissance style, it stands at the foot of the



to be seen

Savoca

Located on twin peaks 300 metres above sea level, it dominates the surrounding area. Once on the silk trade routes, today it is an art town, since 2008, inserted in the circuit of the most beautiful villages in Italy.



San Nicolò church

Also known as the Santa Lucia church, it was built in the fifteenth century on a rocky outcrop overlooking the valley of the river Savoca.

The structure, on three floors, is impressive and makes it look like a fortress. Next to it, there is a bell tower with battlements.

Inside there are fine marble altars and sculptures in wood and gypsum from the 17th century, as well as many modern works.

ital

In the early medieval period (before the year 1000), the mysterious Pentefur population settled here. Perhaps they were Greek pirates who built a stronghold here, on which, at the time of the Arab occupation, the Saracen Castle was built, from whose ruins you dominate the surrounding landscape. On the origin of the name the most accredited hypothesis is linked to the elder plant (sambuco), which grows luxuriantly in the area. According to others, the name derives from two Arabic words, Kalat and Zabut, meaning Òelder rockÓ, and indeed a little elder branch is sculpted in the blazon of the town. The certain date of the foundation of Savoca as a true town, however, is 1134, the time of Roger II; the provisional seignior of the Savoca barony was the archimandrite of Messina. The village developed at the end of the fifteenth century, outside the walls. Until 1492,

there was a Jewish community with its own synagogue.

Bearing witness to the strong religious sentiment of the people there, there were 17 churches, almost all built between the 14th and 15th centuries, and many others now open to the public. Savoca, which regained its independence as a commune in 1948, an old, tidy and clean place, is today one of the most interesting and charming destinations for cultural and religious tourism in Sicily. It has for some time also been a popular place with holidaymakers. In the 1950s the village lost much of its population through emigration, but today it is trying to recover old things, natural beauties and signs of work. In this connection the council is valorising the historic area as an artistic workshop and has assigned some workshops to local ceramists to favour the development of artistic craft.



Palazzo Trimarchi

In 1971 some scenes from the film "The Godfather" were filmed at Savoca. The subject of the shooting was the S. Nicolò church, the streets of the old village and Palazzo Trimarchi. In the 17th century structure of the building there is the bar of Signorina Maria, and here the Vitelli Bar, mentioned in the novel by Mario Puzo, was reproduced.

The sign "Bar Vitelli" still stands on the front and evokes the charm of the location chosen by Francis Ford Coppola as the setting for the scene.



San Teodoro church

The building has no side aisles. Unfortunately it is in a state of neglect. However, it is significant for the history of this area. In this connection, in 1661, the church was offered to the Augustinian Fathers of Messina for them to found a monastery there.

In 1671 the Diffinitorio declared this convent a Priory House, choosing Damiano di Sant'Antonio as the first prior.



SS Annunziata church

In the baroque style and rich in 18th century stuccoes, the church was subservient to the Basilian monks, who set up the Annunziata Confraternity there.

Inside it there is a 1760 painting of St. Anthony Abbot and a seventeenth-century painting of the Virgin Mary.

Casalvecchio Siculo

Located 420 metres above sea level, on the slopes of Monte Sant'Elia, it dominates the valley and is a reference point for cultural, artistic, architectural and nature tourism.



The original name of the village was Palachon, which in Greek-Byzantine meant "old farmstead", according to an Aragonese deed of 1351. A denomination that with the passing of time was translated into Latin as "Rus Vetus", "Old Farm" and the present-day "Casalvecchio". From the start of the Norman age down to the eighteenth century it was under the Savoca family. It came under nearby Santa Teresa di Riva from 1928 to 1939, when it became an independent commune. Of particular architectural interest are the cathedral church, the San Teodoro church, and the SS Pietro and Paolo church from the Norman epoch.

The SS Pietro and Paolo d'Agrò abbey has for years been at the centre of an important cultural initiative: the proposal has officially been made to UNESCO to make it world heritage. The former monastery of the Basilian

friars has today been restored and made available to local people and the many tourists that every year visit the monumental Santi Pietro e Paolo d'Agrò church. But between the 17th and 18th centuries the monastery was a true cultural centre as well as being a Christian one: for artistic, scientific and humanities studies, and for agricultural experiments. The work of these monks came to an end in 1794, when they moved to Messina.





Siculo e art is at home

Santi Pietro e Paolo d'Agrò abbey

Main church

Built in the seventeenth century and dedicated to Sant'Onofrio, it was rebuilt in 1935. The entry portal was part of the original church. The interior has a remarkable wooden coffered ceiling and a floor in Taormina stone. Among the numerous works of art there is a 1686 holy water stoup, a seventeenth-century octagonal font, a sixteenth-century silver statue of Sant'Onofrio, the side altars of St. Sebastian, St. Michael, the Crucifix, the Madonna del Carmine, the Holy Family and the Epiphany surmounted by a painting of the Madonna with Blessing Child done by Camarda in 1622.

Parish museum of sacred art

It contains works of art, vestments and sacred trappings that were the heritage of the adjacent church.

San Nicolò Church

The oldest of the dependent churches in the village (liturgies were already celebrated in 1795) contains a painting of St. Nicholas by an artist of the School of Antonello, and a 16th century wooden statue of St. Anthony of Padua.

Historic fountains

Acqua Ruggia (or Reggia) is the oldest of the fountains in the village. It is called this way because it seems that here Roger II quenched his thirst.

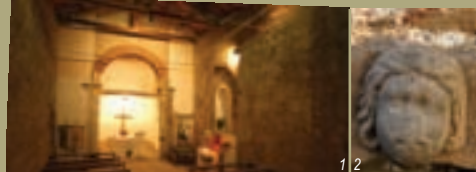
San Pietro Fair

Every year on the last Sunday in June the old San Pietro fair is held in the Cristuri district. It is an opportunity to appreciate local traditions.

Pizzo Vernà

1. "Acqua Ruggia" Fountain.
2. Dome of the Santi Pietro e Paolo d'Agrò abbey.
3. San Teodoro church.
4. Trade Fair of St. Peter.
5. Sant'Onofrio church.
6. SS Annunziata church.
7. Santi Pietro e Paolo d'Agrò abbey.





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View o

Passo Ranciara Gorge

The gorges are a rock formation of remarkable beauty. In the winter season the Agrò stream flows through them, crossing the territory of two communes: Limina and Casalvecchio Siculo.

Here you can practice rafting or canyoning, a discipline that consists in going down watercourses with steep gradients.

This activity allows you to know remarkable unspoiled places that are otherwise inaccessible.



Limina is a pleasant hill village in the Agrò Valley, with a long history going back to the time when the Romans and Carthaginians were vying to dominate the island. Indeed, north of the territory in which the village was to come into being, in 260 BC there was a battle between the two rival and powerful city-states in the Mediterranean. Also, near here, in what is now the Passo Murazzo area, in 66 AD St. Philip the Syriac, who was going from Rome to Aira, founded a Christian community. This was certainly a remote event, but one that left deep traces at Limina. Worship and veneration for St. Philip is now of very great importance to the inhabitants of Limina. The celebrations in his honour are characterised by a very ancient popular and religious tradition. Limina people emigrated to both the Americas, but they still proudly preserve devotion to the saint and regularly celebrate his feast day.

The first certain notices of the existence of the village of Limina (the name comes from the Latin limen, referring to the confine between the territories of Messina and Taormina, or from the Greek limn., with reference to marshes that were once there) date from 1095: the village is mentioned as a "village with the title of Marquisate" in the Lexicum Topographicum siculum by the Benedictine abbot Vito Amico. During the Middle Ages, from Norman times on, Limina was a village that was not only well defended and self-sufficient, but also a political, commercial and religious centre of some importance. In ensuing centuries the economic importance of the place grew and this is demonstrated by the presence of a Jewish community that was very active in the field of silk trade and processing, as well as the presence of six mines, all active, which extracted coal, lead, silver and tin, and of a small foundry.

Limina

Green hills and breathtaking views of the valley of the Agrò for a holiday in contact with nature that is still genuine and authentic. Limina offers history, culture, arts, crafts and traditions.

Limina of the valley

Today Limina is a place with a series of facilities that make a stay there pleasant. Squares and streets have been redone with quality stone, and in addition there is a five a side pitch, a tennis court (both with imitation grass), and a football pitch with natural grass where even third-division matches can be held. Also, inside an old recently restored nineteenth-century building there is a modern and well equipped Multifunctional Centre with a conference room attached to it. Lastly, for the purpose of creating adequate accommodation but also restoring the historic area, buildings in the urban centre have been restructured and fitted out, making it possible for holidaymakers to spend an unforgettable holiday, at a reasonable price, between the sea of the Ionian Riviera and the Peloritani mountains, all accompanied by well-known Limina hospitality.

Madonna delle Preci church

Built in 1396 on an old ninth-century synagogue, the church was closed for worship in 1935. It was restored in the 90s and reopened in August 2002. Inside you can see the different floors put in over the centuries, the niche for the Holy Oils, the basin font in the sacristy, the crypts for the burial of the notables of the time, and a wooden statue of Most Holy Mary of Prayer done by Gangemi in 1860.

San Filippo d'Agira church

Fountain of the saint walking on water

Murals

San Sebastiano church

The church became a parish church in 1753. It was rebuilt in the thirties after the damage caused by the 1908 earthquake (it was reopened for worship on 13 August 1935). It contains a 1508 crucifix, an 1858 wooden statue of Maria del Carmine with St. Simon, the marble statue of the Annunciation (Gagini school); pictures of St. Sebastian and St. Anthony Abbot or St. Leonard done by A. Vasta in the 18th century, an 1860 picture of Our Lady of Prayer and a painting of St. Philip.

1. Madonna delle Preci church.
2. Architectural detail of an old sandstone portal.
3. Murals.
4. Multipurpose Centre.
5. San Sebastiano church.
6. San Filippo d'Agira church.
7. Canyoning in the Passo Ranciara gorges.





Antillo

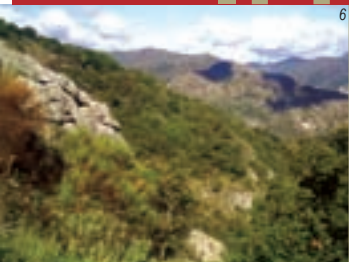
This village nestled in the heart of the Val d'Agrò was made a commune with a Royal Decree issued by Ferdinand II of Bourbon, King of the Two Sicilies, on 17 February 1845.

Bell for Peace

Dedicated to people who went missing in wars of all time, it is on Pizzo Monaco. It weighs 5 tons and has a circumference of 6 metres. It was commissioned in 1992 from the Pontificia Marinelli Foundry, and Pope John Paul II blessed it on 21 April, 1993.

Antillo

In the heart of th



Mountain stretch of the basin of the Agrò stream

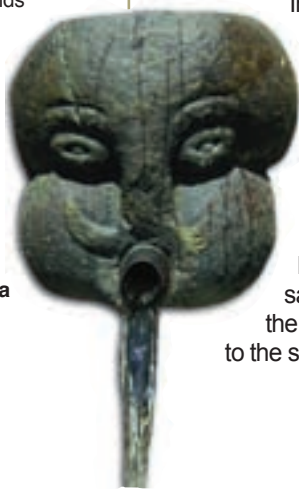
It is a Site of Community Importance (SCI) whose area corresponds for about 90% with the municipal area.

Going along the road into the most inland part of this territory, immersed in the silence of the valley, almost ravished by the pure mountain air and the scents of the rich vegetation, after a long succession of bends, as by enchantment you come to Antillo, where the red roofs of the houses suddenly appear to us, resting on the slopes of a hill surmounted by an imposing rock known as the "Castle Rock".

In this hill village, the sensation you have is of an old place like the valley that guests it with sweetness, even confirmed by the name: Antillo from ante illius, which precisely gives the idea of "before that", almost before the others. Others say the name derives from the Greek *antelios*, "exposed to the sun", and in the light that in

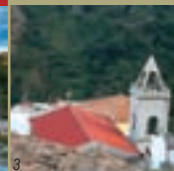
this valley shines all year round see a confirmation of their theory. Over and above names, light and antiquity are certainly two characteristics of Antillo.

It is right in this area, in a hollow in the Montagna Grande that protects the village, that the inhabitants of the area, surprised by the universal flood, are said to have sought a refuge. However, as long ago as the time of the Roman domination, the first inhabitants gathered around the only church, erected on the Monte Schia in honour of St.



Acquavena Fountain





Santa Maria della Provvidenza church

The church built at the end of the seventeenth century. Until 1755 it was named after the Most Holy Sacrament. Then in 1773 it was dedicated to St. Mary of Providence. After extensive restoration, it was rebuilt in 1937. Paintings and statues adorn its interior: the statue of St. Mary of Providence done in 1845, the statue of St. Anthony done in 1861; and a magnificent wooden Crucified Christ, life-size, done in 1850.

the valley

George; they later moved into what is now the Pinazzo area and into the areas around the Agrò stream giving the name to the whole valley, where archaeological finds have been made that date from the Roman and Byzantine epochs. When the territory later went to the Arabs, the Basilian monks erected a monastery on the Monte Schia. For many centuries, starting from the time of the Norman Conquest, Antillo's destiny was tied to that of Savoca, though it gained its independence in 1846. Visiting the village, in an atmosphere of serenity and of balance with nature, one can understand why right there, amid limpid springs, olive trees and pine woods, there arose the idea of placing the imposing "Bell of Peace" - a sturdy bell blessed by Pope John Paul II, which is waiting to be placed on Pizzo Monaco to ring out its knells for people who have gone missing in all wars.

Agriculture and Sheep-Raising Museum

Set up in the Multipurpose Centre in the village, it displays many tools and objects that were once used by farmers and shepherds in the area.

Artistic ceramic mosaic

A work that adorns the centre, showing the landscape of Antillo and rural scenes.

Old Foundry

The blast furnace, built in 1276, testifies to mining in the area in the middle age.

Borgo Morzulli

An interesting village of medieval origin

Platani valley

1. Garden of Redemption.
2. Artistic mosaic.
3. Bell tower of the main church.
4. Bell of Peace.
5. Piazza Municipio.
6. Upper valley of the Agrò.
7. The "Castle" rock dominating the town.
8. Quaint little street.

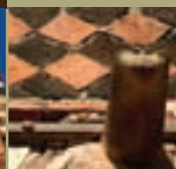




Testimonies to a

Santi Pietro e Paolo d'Agrò
Abbey

TOURIST PROMOTION CONSORTIUM VAL D'AGRÒ



Subsequently, during the sixteenth century, the church underwent various transformations, which however did not impair the original structure. The monastery was abandoned once and for all in 1794.

The layout of the church is singular. The pseudo-basilica plan with a nave and two side aisles shows a synthesis between central and longitudinal plan. The exterior has the appearance of a fortified ecclesia, and this appearance is even more accentuated by the perimeter battlements of the apse and the verticality of the building, similar to a tower. The church is decorated with a dense series of intertwined pilasters and arches that develop on the surfaces around the perimeter, with bright colour effects obtained by the use of different materials. This masonry apparatus has strong correspondences in the Byzantine tradition of the island's workforce, despite two centuries of Arab rule. The contribution of the latter culture is, however, clearly visible in the "umbrella" shape of the central dome or in the little hemispheric dome of the presbytery, as well as in the use of interwoven arches in the external facing.

The **inscription** engraved on the lintel of the main portal is crucial for dating the church. The translation of the Greek is the following: "This temple of Saints Peter and Paul was rebuilt by Teostericto, a catechumen of Taormina, at his own expense. May God remember him in the year 6608. Foreman Gherardo the Frank." The Greek chronology refers to the possible origin of the world, 5508 years before Christ's birth; therefore the date of the restoration of the church could refer to 1172.



The **abbey** is characterized by an outer surface marked by a series of thin pilasters culminating in little entwined arches, surmounted by a band of red and black diamonds, below the battlements crowning the building. The decoration is distinguished by its vibrant colouring, due to the use of different materials, which vary in both colour and arrangement: brick, sandstone, limestone, lava stone and Taormina marble are arranged in horizontal rows, in knife, fishbone and saw tooth patterns.

ancient civilisations

the same name, to give" auditorum ac facultatem erigendi, raedificandi monasterium situm et positum in fluvio agrillae: quod quondam fuit nominatum in nomine principum apostolarum petri et pauli." The inscription in Greek engraved on the pseudo-lintel of the entrance testifies to the reconstruction of only some parts of the building and dates the completion of the work to around 1171.



Capo *Sant' Alessio*

In 1983 tourist building reached Sant'Alessio Siculo, affecting its most picturesque part, which we can see depicted in some printed engravings in famous works belonging to the Grand Tour literature. The new holiday homes went up in the area close to the cape and the little bay below, depriving the hamlet of Sant'Alessio Vecchio of a few houses, a little church and a fountain. The results of archaeological probes in the area around the bay assure us of continuity of life there from the Greek colonial period (6th century BC) to the later imperial Roman age (3rd-4th century AD). The place name of Tamaricios sive Palmas is clearly linked to luxuriant tamarisk vegetation, which is unusual in that areas. The existence of a spring in the area must have contributed not a little to this aspect. In the fine engraving in the infolio work by Jean-Frédéric d'Ostervald you can easily make out the promontory rising sheer over the little bay, while the palm tree is an effective allusion to the old name, as well as bearing witness to the unchanged appearance of the place down to the early nineteenth century.

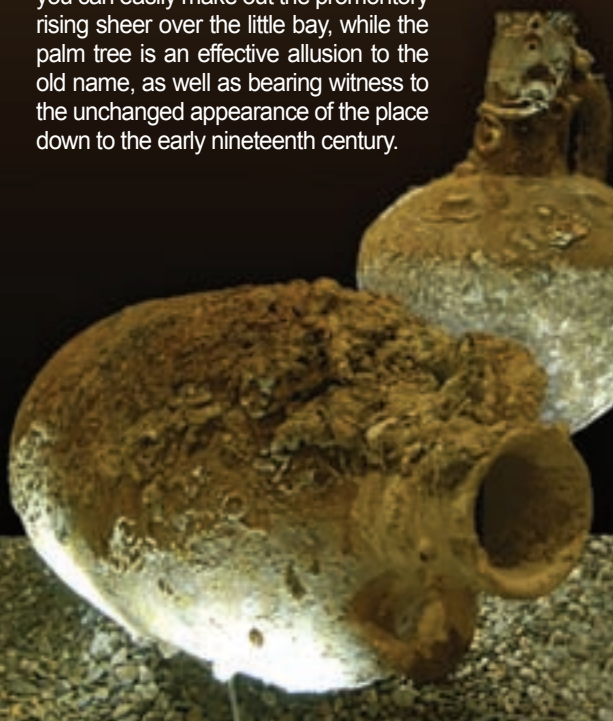


The latest finds prove the hypothesis, several times made, that at Capo Sant'Alessio there was the statio of Tamaricios sive Palmas, which along the Capo Peloro-Syracuse coastal road is mentioned both in the Tabula Peutingeriana and the Itin. Anton. Aug., where it is specified that it is 20 miles from Messina and 15 from Naxos.

As is frequently the case in Sicily, the statio coincides with a harbour. The bay below the cape was certainly used as a landing place. This is also proved by the recovery of a lead anchor chain with astragals on the arms, now on display at the antiquarium at Villa Genovese.

The Wreck of Cape Sant'Alessio

In the 90s, a few hundred metres from the coast, north of Capo Sant'Alessio, about 70 metres down a wreck was located. From subsequent explorations the cargo seems to consist exclusively of small flat-bottomed amphorae produced in Naxos and dating from the Augustan age (first century BC). Eight exemplars were retrieved and are on display at the Naxos Archaeological Museum. One of the jars on display at the Villa Genovese antiquarium certainly came from the same wreck.



The Castles



In Val d'Agrò there are several castles and fortresses. In addition to the one that dominates Capo Sant'Alessio, important ones are the Norman manor of Forza d'Agrò, rebuilt by Count Roger I of Hauteville, and the Pentefur castle at Savoca, whose construction dates back to the mythical inhabitants of those places; it was rebuilt by the Arabs and later by the Normans. Although the passage of time has eroded the structures, the charm of these places has remained unchanged and bears witness to the cultural, political and economic importance of villages in the Val d'Agrò.



The archaeological area of Scifi

The archaeological finds made between 1995 and 2002 just outside Scifi were the first to be yielded by the Agrò Valley.

Remains of walls in stones and bricks tied by mortar are found on the slopes of the cemetery hill. Perhaps relating to a single building arranged on different levels they are dated to between the end of the fourth and the first half of the fifth century AD.

Below the modern cemetery road 5 rooms can be seen, two of which have preserved their floors. To the east, at a lower level, others have been discovered that, having the same orientation, probably belong to the same building. Here, on a side window, two clay shelves were found on which the Greek name *Ippicon* was engraved, certainly indicating the name of the manufacturer or the owner of the estate.

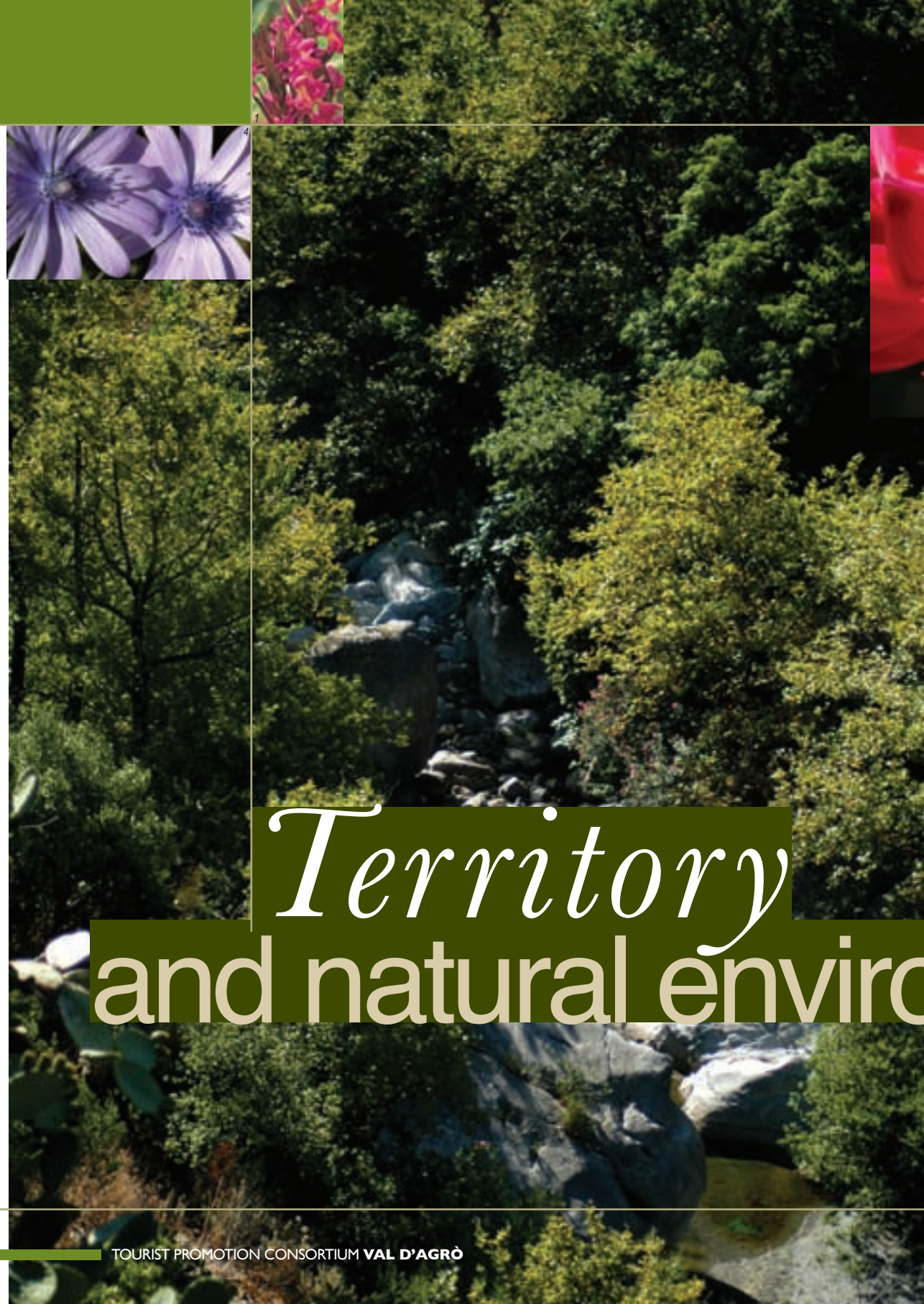
It is a very common name in the Roman age, referring both to characters of the equestrian order and more generally to equestrian events.

The location and the features that remain render plausible the hypothesis that the structures discovered belonged to a small villa linked to a large estate, a halting place along a road that crossed the Peloritani Mountains, connecting the Ionian and Tyrrhenian coasts of Sicily.



The different excavation campaigns conducted by the Superintendence for the Cultural Heritage and the Department of Classical Studies of the University of Messina showed the damage to the structures in recent times as a result of bulk excavation of the ground. This has made it more difficult to make out the plan of the building, which seems to have had a central courtyard. The roof is to be assumed to have been a plain one with tiles, and the walls are built with rough medium-sized and medium-small stones, bound together with mortar. Rows of bricks prove to have been used in the piers and arches of a window and a door opening, as well as in the vault of the room. The floors are made of clay mixed with mortar and crushed stone, which makes them vulnerable to damage by rainwater.





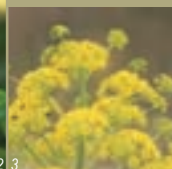
Territory and natural enviro



5



2 3



Agrò stream

Seasonal watercourses are typical of the mountain ranges of Calabria and Sicily. The bed of the Agrò stream, about 18 km long, in the summer is particularly dry, but during the winter, rains make the waters tumultuous.



North-eastern Sicily is characterized by the Peloritani mountain range, which stretches to the west, until it joins the Nebrodi range, and to the south as far as the Alcantara basin. This mountain range is characterized, on the Tyrrhenian side, by gentle slopes that near the coast form extensive alluvial plains, while on the Ionian side it becomes tortuous, marked by narrow valleys carved by deep and tumultuous seasonal streams that near the mouth become broad, slow rivers. The whole area can be defined as a big puzzle made up of three valleys, each with a different appearance regarding nature: the valleys of the Alcantara, the Nisi and the Agrò.

onment

The splendid valley of the Agrò stream opens up precisely on this versant and was used by man in remote times due to fertile lands, abundance of water and ease of access to inland regions where there was plenty of timber and game.

The beautiful rock pyramid off Capo Sant'Alessio is the milestone of this valley, enriched by a fine castle, now a refuge for numerous species of birds, among which we can mention a pair of peregrine falcons, the solitary thrush and hordes of noisy jackdaws. Its natural position makes it a halting place for numerous marine birds during their migrations.

As you go back up the valley, there are a lot of places to visit and from which to start interesting excursions bearing in mind that often the absence of signals is easily overcome by the kindness and helpfulness of the local people, which means you can safely entrust yourself to chance if you want to wander round.

If you start from the coast, you are at once struck by the hill slopes transformed into big terraces on which there is flourishing lemon and olive cultivation.

There is particularly important production of verdello and production of oil with a delicate flavour.

In the past there was also intense cultivation of mulberries used to raise silkworms. Near each farmhouse there are also isolated walnut and fig trees, symbols of fertility.

In this rural landscape it is easy to come across the hack tree, also called spaccasassi ("stone-splitter") because it grows in stony places: its black berries are tasty for both people and birds.

The winding provincial roads rapidly take you into the inland mountain areas, where there are stretches of Mediterranean maquis together with downy oak and holm oak woods. In the marshy area where the Agrò stream starts, there survive poplars, elms and relicts of oriental plane - many believe that the latter is a native subspecies of major botanical value.

1. Orchid (*Orchis laxiflora*).
2. Mulberry (*Morus L.*).
3. *Ferula* (*Ferula communis*).
4. *Anemone hortensis*.
5. *Hedysarum coronarium*.



One of the characteristic aspects of the valley is the numerous flocks of sheep and goats that graze on the hills and high mountain areas, giving the place the appearance typical of inland areas of Sicily.



The Downy Oak

This arboreal patriarch belonging to the family of the fagaceae grows primarily on the sunny south-facing slopes, at altitudes between sea level and 1000 metres. Resistant to drought, it is recognizable in the winter because, unlike other species of oak, it keeps dry leaves attached to the branches.



The bridge over the Agrò

So that people could cross the torrent on foot at any time of the year a wooden bridge was built that easily allows you to reach the left bank.

The best-preserved natural areas are at the edges of the Peloritani crest. You have to go past the villages of Antillo to find a natural environment that has not yet been wholly transformed by man and is covered by very big woods.

Going along the various roads penetrating into the area you can visit particularly fine woodland environments in which the Forestry Commission has set up a lot of picnic areas, pleasant and quiet places where you can relax on hot summer days.

Taking the municipal road from Antillo in the direction of Rimiti, (Casalvecchio) after a series of junctions, amid chestnut tree woods, you come to the Cavagna forestry area with a fine

anthropomorphic fountain; this area is renowned for mushrooms and a very beautiful panorama.

Another interesting excursion is a climb up Pizzo Vern. (1286 metres above sea level) in the Casalvecchio territory. From here there is a beautiful view of the Aeolian Islands, Pizzo Novara and Calabria. In the whole territory the vegetation is subject to the particular microclimatic conditions of the Peloritani chain, with arid summers and very rainy winters, with major variations in temperature. The fact is that this mountainous area acts as a barrier against perturbations from the sea, favouring violent and impetuous storms. Among the plant species there stand out the beautiful wild



orchids that colour the meadows and turkey oak woods from the start of March. There are a lot of very refined species, including red and yellow ones and others. In the shade of the woods there also grows the peony, the biggest wild flower in Sicily, whose petals vary in colour from delicate lilac to intense purple-red. On the summital chain of the Peloritani there are also big areas covered in heather, which in some places forms thick and impenetrable barriers; its wood is used for little jewels and excellent pipes. The wild animals have met the same fate as the woodland areas, having been decimated by hunting and fires.



6. Pot marigold (*Calendula arvensis*).
7. Cistus (*Cistus Salvifolius*).
8. Dandelion.
9. Thistle (*Carduus crispus*).
10. Mediterranean asphodel.
11. Corallina peony (*P. macula*).
12. Papillonacea Orchid.

The Flora

Of the old forests of oak, holm oak, beech, pine and chestnut there are only a few remaining formations that occupy the most inaccessible areas of the Peloritani. Fires, grazing and human pressure have greatly reduced the areas of evergreen and deciduous Mediterranean forest that once covered the entire island.

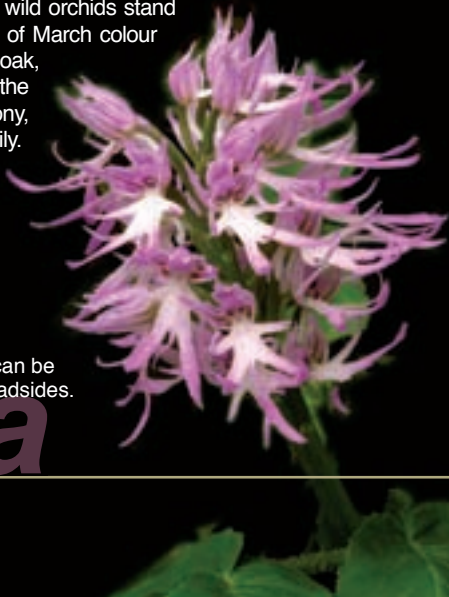
The most widespread arboreal vegetation consists of deciduous trees, particularly chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), oak (*Quercus ilex*) and downy oak (*Quercus pubescens*). Some examples of oriental plane (*Platanus orientalis* L.) are present along the waterways. The undergrowth consists of Mediterranean vegetation mainly formed by heather (*Erica arborea*), broom (*Cytisus scoparius*), and Spanish broom (*Spartium Junceum*). In the highest areas with few trees we find the strawberry tree (*Arbutus unedu*) and different kinds of rock rose (*Cistus monspeliensis*, *villosa* and *salvifolius*). In areas close to the coasts, from sea level to 200 metres above sea level, we find Oleo-Ceratonion, which in the parts richest in water evolves towards Mediterranean maquis.

Among the species of flora wild orchids stand out that from the beginning of March colour the meadows, and turkey oak, while in the shadows of the woods there grows the peony, the largest wild flower of Sicily.

Among the species introduced by man, citrus fruits, olives, grapes, hazelnuts and almonds are widespread.

Orchis Italica

A beautiful wild orchid that can be observed even along the roadsides.



flora



Hedgehog

This small mammal, *Erinaceus europaeus*, has its back covered with prickles that have a defensive function. It is an omnivore that goes into hibernation so you can only see it in spring and summer.

Pyrgus Malvae

This moth belonging to the family *Hesperiidae* and can easily be seen throughout the valley.



Tawny owl

Along with the barn owl, the kestrel, the kite, the peregrine falcon and the owl it is one of the birds of prey that inhabit the valley.



La Fauna

Although strong human pressure has caused a depletion of the fauna in the territory it is still possible to observe many species typical of the Peloritani: mammals such as the wild cat (*Felis silvestris*), the wild rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), the porcupine (*Hystrix cristata*), the European hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*), the dormouse (*Glis glis*), the garden dormouse (*Eliomys quercinus*), the marten (*Martes martes*), the weasel (*Mustela nivalis*), the wild boar (*Sus scrofa*) and the fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), and numerous birds that nest in the valley, including many diurnal and nocturnal raptors such as the kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*), the peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), the barn owl (*Tyto Alba*), the little owl (*Athene noctua*) and the tawny owl (*Strix aluco*). At certain times of the year you can observe several migratory species that fly over the area, in transit on the Straits of Messina.

Taormina



Weasel

The weasel (*Mustela nivalis*) is a small mammal about 30 cm long. Covered with hair, fawn-coloured on the back, grey-white on the belly, it is a carnivore that hunts at night. Usually it lives in a hole in the ground or tree trunks, even in human environments.





River crab

The river crab is a crustacean that settles in wetlands, and its presence indicates a low level of water pollution. You can observe it in the Passo Ranciara gorges during the summer, when it leaves the nest to mate.



Despite this, more or less everywhere there are a lot of small mammals, like rabbits, foxes, weasels and boars - the boar was only recently introduced, as it did too much damage to agriculture. In the trees the dormouse nests, but it is a shy animal and difficult to sight.

You can find more fauna in the demesnal area, where hunting is closed and the animals are better protected. In the woods above all the marten survives, but there are also a few wild cats, though they are twilight animals and difficult to sight. Among birds there are many major birds of prey like the buzzard, the windhover and the golden eagle, which often flies over the peaks in search of prey. Of course, there are a lot of other species that the birdwatcher can observe in the woods or along the stream.

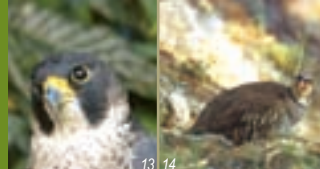
Of major importance is springtime migration of birds of prey, in search of a favourable rising warm current to get over the Straits of Messina. These birds follow this route to get over the Straits of Messina and

continue their journey northwards. In particular climatic conditions from the highest mountain peaks you can observe hundreds of honey buzzards, kites, storks, etc., natural spectacles giving every observer an unforgettable emotion.

The peaks, that here are also called pizzi, are exceptional places for visitors, since the view of the Straits of Messina and the valleys below goes beyond all imagination.

A few kilometres before Antillo, in the Limina territory, of major interest are the Ranciara gorges, under the bridge over provincial highway 15, a very beautiful place thanks to the rock formations and the little waterfalls formed by the Agrò stream.

The Savoca demesnal area has splendid natural features and big woods, and allows you in a short time to blend art and nature by going along numerous earth tracks leading into the forest areas mentioned. Above the Casalvecchio village there is a big "green lung" rich in flora and fauna, valorised by work done by the Forestry all over.



Savoca State Forest

It covers about 832 hectares and the tree canopy is characterized by the dominance of deciduous chestnut. Also present, though to a lesser extent, are maritime pine, black pine, Douglas fir, robinia and oriental plane. The picnic areas of Pizzo Vernà lace, Monte Pietre Rosse and Cavagna allow you to enjoy this lush wooded area.

13. *Peregrine Falcon. Falco peregrinus* is a bird of prey with rapid and accurate flight that finds an ideal habitat for nesting on the walls of Monte Kalfa.

14. *Sicilian Rock Partridge. Alectoris graeca whitaken* is a bird of the Phasianidae that populates sunny steep slopes dominated by herbaceous vegetation and rich rocky outcrops.



Kestrel

The *Falco tinnunculus* is a bird of prey that has found an ideal habitat among the steep slopes of the valley. It is not uncommon to observe its "Holy Spirit" flight while hunting among the clearings in the area.



Religious feasts and



Antillo Carnival

"U Picuraru", the shepherd, is the typical mask of the Antillo carnival. In addition to the traditional headdress, "a meusa", he wears a white smock, a jacket of goat's hair, goat leather pants and leather shoes. Bells hang from his belt and he carries a bag that contains a piece of cheese and a flint. "U Picuraru" wants to exorcise fear of regression to the primordial state.

Religious sentiment as found in the Valley has expressions of a popular type. Often places are made sacral by giving them the names most linked to cult and devotion, and by creating sanctuaries, which, placed in the natural landscape, become reference points for feasts, halts and prayers, giving rise to processional and devotional itineraries corresponding to the pathways of faith. In the Agrò Valley the tradition is manifested with religious feasts and festivals and still maintains strong roots. So it is mainly in spring and summer that you can take part in a lot of different events. Feasts for patron saints feature a procession with a bier, followed by the faithful and the religious rites

that accompany it. Certainly the dominant cult is the Marian one.

On the *first Sunday in July* there is held the feast of the patron saint, **Our Lady of Mount Carmel**, at *Sant'Alessio Siculo* and *Santa Teresa di Riva*, where in *August* there is the feast dedicated to *Our Lady of Porto Salvo*.

Antillo is a place where various religious feasts take place, but certainly the biggest one is that of the **Madonna of Providence** (*Patron saint of the village, 22 August*).



Also, in the course of the year at Antillo three festivals are held that draw visitors from all over Sicily: the **maize festival** (around the middle of August), the **chestnut festival** (October-November) and the **pig and boar festival** (1st weekend in December) involving all local people, who display much appreciated typical local produce and refined craft creations. Special mention must be made of some feasts that are among the

St. Lucy

On the second Sunday in August at Savoca they stage the temptations suffered by Saint Lucy in a strange procession that takes place in the streets of the village. The parade starts from the church dedicated to St. Nicholas. A little girl of about six, who embodies the saint, is carried on a man's shoulders. The little girl keeps her gaze absent or lowered so as not to be distracted by what surrounds her. In her hands she clutches a palm branch, a symbol of martyrdom, and the end of a long rope that is attached to the yoke of two oxen decorated with ribbons of various colours. The saint is preceded by soldiers of the prefect Paschasius, called Jews, who wear yellow or purple clothes and a helmet. Holding on to the rope, the Jews stage the act of pulling it with all their strength, helping the oxen in an attempt to move it, swaying from side to side. The character that most of all enlivens the scene is 'u diavulazzu: a sort of clown dressed in red wearing a fifteenth-century wooden mask, showing admirable facture, and a belt of bells; in his hands he holds a kind of gallows, 'u croccu. 'U diavulazzu, moves tirelessly, running and hopping along the road, in a vain attempt to distract the saint, and then, reaching the Jews, incites them to pull harder. Just before the procession ends at the Capuchin monastery, with a goad the cowherd incites the oxen to run in a last desperate attempt to move Lucy, but she remains firm, imitating what the story says: "failing to pull the saint, the rope broke." The Jews, surprised by the sudden breaking of the rope, fall to the ground overwhelmed and disperse among the crowd.



festivals

most significant events in the Sicilian tradition: a must at Savoca is the feast in honour of the patron saint, **St. Lucy** (second Sunday in August). This singular procession is a scenic representation of the story of the Sicilian martyr. At Savoca this cult is a very old one, and according to some sources the Spanish introduced it. At *Casalvecchio Siculo* we must mention the feast of the patron saint, **Sant'Onofrio Anacoreta**, which goes on all through the second week of September with festivals and shows.



1. Savoca. During the festival in honour of Saint Lucy, "the Jews" try to move the martyr with the help of oxen too.
2. In the feasts that take place in the villages in the valley coloured balloons are always present, to the delight of children.
3. Sacred representation.
4. The meeting between the brotherhoods of Forza d'Agrò and Gallodoro, for the feast of the Most Holy Trinity.
5. Antillo. The bier of Our Lady of Providence carried in procession through the streets of the village.
6. Casalvecchio Siculo. The festive exit "du camiddu", of the camel, during the feast of the patron saint, St. Onofrio Anchorite.



7 8



7. Forza d'Agrò. The Easter Monday procession.

8. Limina. Feast of St. Philip of Agira.

9. Limina. The arrival of St. Philip in the church in the Murazzo district.

10. Limina. The artistic fountain dedicated to St. Philip of Agira.

11. The typical "cuddura".



In this context an important moment is the traditional joyful "exit" du camiddu (of the camel) through the streets of the village, commemorating the time when Casalvecchio Siculo became independent of Savoca (1793); the feast of brotherhood, a historical evocation of the end of the quarrel between the Santissima Annunziata and San Teodoro confraternities, dating from

the 17th century; the events and rites for Holy Week; the centuries-old San Pietro fair, which is held every year at the last weekend of June, in the area below the Santi Pietro e Paolo Basilian abbey and continues to arouse major interest thanks to the rediscovery of oenology and gastronomy, of Arab origin; and lastly the music school and the band, whose origin goes back to the insurrectional activities by the Carbonari in the 19th century and Garibaldi's landing in Sicily.

Forza d'Agrò is the village that preserves most folk and religious traditions with remote origins and where the confraternity doggedly survives, though this is an institution that has almost totally disappeared in this

The signs of the presence of monks first and the religious orders afterwards are evident in the Val d'Agrò. The fact is that several religious communities settled in the territory of the valley. Some structures have been lost, while others have been restored, at times with a change in use. Certainly among the monastic buildings the oldest and most important is the monastery attached to the Santi Pietro e Paolo d'Agrò church, but there are other very interesting structures in some of the historically important places in the valley. At Forza d'Agrò, for example, there is the Sant'Agostino convent that dates back to 1591. The large structure leaves no room for decorations, but relies on the simplicity of the lines and on its size to manifest its importance. Inside there is the Santu Nicola room, today a museum complex; a particular feature is the frescoed crypt below which monks were buried. In Savoca the Capuchin monastery is a must-see place. Built in 1603, it contains interesting frescoes in the refectory, but above all it is the crypt housing the mummified remains of Savoca notables that arouses attention.



10



part of Sicily. One of these is the Triade confraternity, which arose in the seventeenth century together with the church of the same name. To it there is linked the feast of the Most Holy Trinity or Triad, held on 1st June. There is also a confraternity dedicated to San Teodosio, in the nearby village of Gallodoro.

In the Forza Agrò tradition something singular is the presence of bread. At midday it is distributed to the population in the form of *cuddura*, on which the seal of the confraternity is impressed. Bread is also present in another old rite that takes place on Easter Monday, with the blessing of laurel and holy oils. For the occasion standards covered with laurel and flowers are made.

At *Limina* on 11 and 12 May an old tradition is the celebration of San Filippo of Agira. On 11 May, in the early hours of the morning, the saint's bier is carried fast by the faithful to the Murazzo area, on the right bank of the Agrò stream. In the afternoon in the square it makes *u giru*, which consists in some frantic comings and goings symbolising the saint's victorious struggle against demons. On 12 May the saint's death is evoked. There is similar intensity in the "Octave" (eight days after the feast) with a fascinating procession.

In all the villages in the Valley, events linked to these religious feasts are markets-fairs and festivals to promote typical local produce. Among the oldest and most traditional is the religious feast for St. Philip of Agira, held in the Murazzo area at *Limina*.

Feast of the Most Holy Trinity

The festival is held every other year (odd years), on the first Sunday in June.

The most intense moment of the feast is the encounter between the two brotherhoods, the Forza d'Agrò one and that of nearby Gallodoro.

The "brethren" of the Most Holy Trinity wear white robes covered with a red cloak on the head enwrapping a white headdress. The meeting takes place in open country. The banners, carried in a procession, approach, and after this metaphorical kiss, a symbol of good luck, continue together to the Triade church.

During the procession along the main street of the town, when the procession reaches the vicinity of the main church, as a sign of friendship small doughnuts are distributed to the people present; they are baked in the oven and called "*cuddure*."





1. Red Forza d'Agrò wine.
2. Limina Honey.
3. Sweet-and-sour rabbit.
4. Pasta with sardines.
5. Pasta with anchovies and breadcrumbs.
6. Homemade macaroni.
7. Granita and brioche.
8. Triumph of fresh fish.



Aromas and



Homemade macaroni

People in rural society needed to cook with a few easy-to-find ingredients. Macaroni represent "poor" food that is easy to prepare. The dough is made with simple ingredients: durum wheat flour, a few drops of olive oil and slightly salted water. The compound thus obtained is allowed to stand in a damp cloth for about 10 minutes. Then it is worked and stretched using a stalk of sorghum which gives the typical shape.

We are happy to guide you towards a particular itinerary allowing you to discover another aspect of this enchanting valley through the presentation of local products and typical dishes.

A primary resource of the economy of the villages of the coast is fishing, and there are a lot of dishes typical of the tradition. You should try *pasta with anchovies and breadcrumbs*.

Non-industrial confectionery and ice cream are the gastronomic boast of Santa Teresa di Riva, but here too you can enjoy excellent fish-based dishes, like *swordfish alla ghiotta*.

Walking through Savoca, you can quench your thirst with renowned *lemon granita* or try delicious *pancondito*.

At Casalvecchio gastronomy is linked to typical local agricultural and animal raising produce. The good land gives a good harvest of olives, corn, grapes and lemons. Bovine and ovine breeding give good meat for the traditional dishes.

Antillo is the highest and most inland village in the Valley. Its products include chestnuts, hazelnuts, walnuts, mushrooms, grapes, olives, sweet corn, products linked to sheep raising like soft and seasoned cheeses, Salami, kid and goat's meat. There are renowned second course enriched with edible boletuses from Antillo and homemade preserves.

Moving further inland in the Peloritani you move further and further into areas where the old flavours live on in the daily gestures of the people.

This is the case of the village of Limina, with good typical products; *homemade macaroni* with





In order to understand Sicily to the full it is necessary and important to be aware of the profound identity of its rich and colourful cuisine. The fact is that gastronomy has always been considered the "jewel" of this region, with striking aromas and flavours. The various peoples that dominated Sicily helped to enrich the typical local dishes with unusual flavours. The Sicilian civilisation is a multiethnic one, which in the course of time has maintained its own characteristics intact. The table thus becomes an expression of fantasy. In town or in the country, in the poorest houses or in aristocratic villas, the specialities have nothing to envy the most renowned gastronomies. It is essentially agriculture and maritime cuisine, sometimes modest but always genuine, which brings with it myths, legends, religious sentiment, aristocratic beauty and sweet poetry. Even the frugal fare of the farm labourer becomes an opportunity to exhibit a series of dishes with an intense and alluring taste. The preparation and combination of flavours, scented and colourful dishes, are served with important wines, also Sicilian, and pasta is enriched with delicious condiments and natural elements from the land like eggplants, basil, or from the sea, like sardines, or with meat.

Flavours

a condiment of tomato sauce and ricotta baked in the oven, roast meat with onions, honey, biscuits and *homemade mostaccioli*. A nice recipe: *omelette with asparagus*.

The gastronomy of the hinterland is characterized mainly by meat. A nice dish is roast rabbit. There are also processed pork meats, sausages, ricotta and other cheeses, oil, fruit and vegetables, wines, hares, woodcocks and quails, and mutton cooked in a wood-burning oven.

You go through a picturesque landscape of undulating hills and green meadows to find more particular flavours at Forza d'Agrò.

We recommend *bucatini pasta with swordfish*, as well as

homemade macaroni with tomato sauce, *stockfish a ghiotta*, *beccafico sardines* and red wine from Forza. The last tessera of this mosaic of flavours is at Sant'Alessio Siculo. Typical local dishes are *pancakes* and *Easter cuddure*.



The Recipe

Pasta with anchovies and breadcrumbs

Serves 4

350 gr. spaghetti
10 salted anchovies
100 gr breadcrumbs
2 garlic cloves
parsley
extra virgin olive oil
salt and pepper

Preparation

Desalt, clean and chop the anchovies.

Toast the bread crumbs with a little oil.

Brown the garlic in a pan with four tablespoons of olive oil. Remove the garlic and dissolve the anchovies in the condiment until you get a smooth sauce.

Soften the sauce with a little of the water used to cook the pasta, add salt and pepper.

Sauté the spaghetti, cooked al dente, in a pan with the sauce and add the breadcrumbs.

Garnish with parsley leaves and serve.





The Val d'Agrò is located halfway between the cities of Messina and Catania, and is easily reached with different means of transport. A few kilometres away are Catania Fontanarossa international airport (65 km) and Reggio Calabria Tito Minniti airport (40 min ferry + 48 km). In the territory there are also two train stations: Sant'Alessio Siculo and Santa Teresa di Riva. Lastly, on the A18 Messina-Catania motorway there are two exits: Taormina (south) and Roccalumera (north) from which in a few minutes you can get to Sant'Alessio Siculo and Santa Teresa di Riva. There are also several companies running buses to the chief towns in the provinces of Messina and Catania, along both the A18 motorway and state highway 114.

Connections and distances in Val d'Agrò



Messina km 35



Giardini Naxos km 12



Catania km 55



Etna km 40



Palermo km 275



Taormina km 10



Eolie km 80 ⚓ 1h30'



Alcantara km 25



Siracusa km 120



Agrigento km 230



N.B. The distances are measured from the headquarters of the Consortium for Promoting Val d'Agrò Tourism at Sant'Alessio Siculo.





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