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TREASURE MAPS

Twenty Itineraries
Designed to Help
You Explore the
Cultural Heritage
of Palermo and
its Province

Soprintendenza per i Beni culturali
e ambientali di Palermo

VILLAS AND PALACES IN THE 18TH CENTURY

by **Maddalena De Luca** and **Ciro D'Arpa**

REGIONE SICILIANA
Assessorato dei Beni culturali
e dell'Identità siciliana



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Twenty Itineraries Designed to Help You Explore the Cultural Heritage of Palermo and its Province

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PALERMO “PRIMA SEDES, CORONA REGIS, ET REGNI CAPUT”

Palermo and Messina divided the role as the seat of the monarchy from the constitution of the Kingdom of Sicily by the Norman kings, up until the second half of the mid-17th century. For this reason there was a Royal Place in each of these two Island cities. Both had the title as the ‘Sacred Royal Palace’ as the kings of Sicily administered religious justice as well as civil justice, by virtue of their title as Apostolic Legate, granted in 1098 by Pope Urban II to Count Roger the ‘Conqueror’. Sicily also had its own Parliament from 1097; this acted as an advisory organ to the King and was formed by three branches: the military formed by members of the nobility, the ecclesiastical branch and the branch of the representatives of the state-owned cities. The role of capital city shared between Palermo and Messina resulted, for many centuries, in the need for the periodic transfer of the complex administrative machinery, including Parliament, from one city to the other. This was one of the reasons why the great Sicilian estate owners, the Barons, did not consider it necessary to own a residence in either of the two cities so that up until the mid 17th century, they continued to live on their estates, fostering important building sites for the construction or enlargement of their respective palazzi. In the 1670s Palermo, ‘Very Faithful’ to the crown, consolidated its role as the sole capital city, to the detriment of its rival, the city of Messina, fallen into disgrace after the pro-French rebellion of 1674-78, as a result of which it had been stripped of all its antique privileges including that of hosting, from

time to time, the Viceregal Court. From this moment on the aristocracy represented in the Sicilian Parliament decided to settle in Palermo. Their urbanisation in the capital triggered radical transformations both in the urban structure of Palermo and in the countryside. The Sicilian nobility, throughout the 18th century, gave rise to a kind of competition emulating each other in magnificence, resulting in the construction of even more sumptuous Palazzi and on the other in the building of Villas outside the city walls.

The Royal family of Charles III of Bourbon, King of Sicily. Engraving, 1736 by C. Barbera Azzarello. *Raffigurazioni, vedute e piante di Palermo.* [Depiction, view and plans of Palermo]. Caltanissetta, 2008



THE PALAZZI

The crossroads of Via Toledo (once Via Cassaro now Corso Vittorio Emanuele) and Via Maqueda, Via Alloro and the other roads close to and overlooking Piazza Marina were the area most hotly contested by the aristocracy for their palazzi. The rank of an Aristocrat is reflected by the prestige of his home. The first impression is given by the **façade**, which not only has a refined architectural design but above all, also has an imposing length fronting the road. Generally, on the main floor, known as the '*piano nobile*', there are large French windows opening onto deep balconies supported by artistically sculpted corbels.

The entire design of the façade is dependent on the positioning of one or more entrances. In the 18th Palazzi the portal, generally with an architectural order of marble columns, creates, together with access to the *piano nobile* [main floor] a kind of grandstand reserved for the noble owner, a private viewing area. Inside one or more courtyards, for the most part nobilitated by colonnades, allowed freedom of movement for the carriages. The **grand staircase** opens out from the courtyard, the focal point of access to the Palazzo. The design is often very original with the ramps and landings frequently occupying an entire wing of

the building; quality marble, stucco and wrought iron all contribute to the overall magnificence of the staircase that often opens both inwards into the courtyard and outwards so as to be as resplendent as possible. The staircase normally ends on the *piano nobile*, where a **loggia** opening onto the courtyard acts as an antechamber to a large room, which divides the principal reception rooms from the private living quarters. In these interconnected reception rooms the internal layout permits the passage from the first to the last room in the manner known as '**enfilade**'. The most important Palazzi have, on the *piano nobile*,

Palermo, along the seafront. Engraving taken from *Lo stato presente di tutti i paesi e popoli del mondo...* Venice, 1762





Plan of Palermo.
Watercolour
drawing Madrid
1686, from L.
Dufour. *Atlante
storico della Sicilia*.
Palermo, 1992

panoramic terraces, hanging gardens or internal courtyards known by the French term '**parterre**'. These open air spaces constitute an effective extension of the reception areas externally. The *parterres* are often embellished with fountains, aviaries and potted plants together with marble or stonework seats.

C.D.

Palermo, Palazzo
Cutò. Engraving by
J. J. Hittorff from
the book by L.
Zanth. *Architecture
moderne de la
Sicilie*. Paris, 1835



VUE DU PALAIS CUTO ET PLAN ET COUPE DU PALAIS CONSTANTINO A PALERME

Horion 1835

PALAZZO FILANGERI DI MIRTO

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The lavish home of the Filangeri is made up of a collection of buildings from different eras, which in the course of the 17th, 18th and 19th century were united in the present architectural arrangement. The oldest nucleus of the Palazzo, attested to by the stretch of mediaeval wall on Via Merlo, was once the home of the Resolmini and then, from 1578 of the De Spuches. In 1594, through marriage, the Palazzo passed to the Filangeri, Counts of San Marco and Princes of Mirto. In 1683 don Giuseppe Vincenzo Filangeri completed the definitive asset of the property with the acquisition of the buildings next to the original nucleus thanks to which it was possible to begin the work of modernisation and enlargement



of the Palazzo, including the unfinished façade on Via Lungarini, documented by a contemporary print of that time. The last substantial works of modernisation of the Palazzo date from the early 19th century after the marriage of Vittoria Filangeri to Ignazio Lanza (1830). In 1982 the Palazzo was donated by the last heirs to the Regione Sicilia with the obligation of turning it into a museum.

The Palazzo is built on several floors distributing the various spaces vertically according to a codified hierarchy. On the ground floor are all the utility rooms, the kitchens and the stables, comprising the 'cavallerizza' – three stalls divided by columns – and the vast spaces associated with these. The *piano nobile* is reached from the courtyard via the staircase. This area was entirely dedicated to the reception rooms '*enfilade*' so that each was visually connected to the next via aligned, interconnecting doors. An incorporated terrace projects the reception rooms outside and from these, through the large French-windows it is possible to see the



monumental nymphaeum. This fountain is an exceptional piece of ‘*rocaille*’ art in Palermo, almost certainly attributable to a design project of the architect Paolo Amato dating from between late 17th century and the first two decades of the 18th century. The other intermediate floors form the private residence of the family.



C.D. Teodoro Gigante, he commissions the restructuring of the *piano nobile* of the Palazzo. Bernardo intends updating the furnishings in the neo-classical style in vogue amongst the more avant-garde of the city's nobility and takes on a key role in the various commissions, thus enabling him to furnish precise instructions to the artisans involved as to which iconographies and

In 1787 Prince Bernardo Filangeri is invested with his grandfather's, Vincenzo Clemente, titles of nobility and holds the prestigious position of Magistrate of Palermo. Under the guidance of the most famous architects of the time, Andrea and



VILLAS AND PALACES IN THE 18TH CENTURY



artistic technologies were to be utilised. In January of 1793 the Prince commissioned Elia Interguglielmi, a 'figurative painter' and Francesco and Gioacchino Navarra, 'decorative (Adornist) painters', "to carry out all the paint decorations in the first two antechambers on the *piano nobile*" on the basis of the designs by Teodoro Gigante. The original decorations, which today can only be seen in the first antechamber, nowadays known as 'studiolo' [the small study] is characterised by the severe geometric lines of the painted compositions that cover the walls and for the mirrored repetition of the ornamentation with grotesques, vases, griffins, garlands of plants and birds, following a model already proposed by Andrea Gigante in his designs for the flooring of Palermitan residences. Of note is the intimate correlation between the architectural, pictorial and decorative division—where the architect, author of the preparatory drawings, together with the painters – both the decorators and the figurists – clearly show the updating of their style to the French decorative models—and

the establishment of the neo-classical taste amongst the aristocratic Palermitan patrons. Here Elia Interguglielmi decorates the walls with mythological images and the vault with the painting of the 'fable' of *Diana and Endymion*.

In the same document of January 1793, Interguglielmi and the Navarra were commissioned to carry out the four overdoor paintings on canvas with landscapes and figures in the first antechamber and five landscapes with classical architecture, again painted on canvas, in the second antechamber. In the 'Camera di Stirato' [Withdrawing Room], nowadays the 'The Baldachin Room', Elia Interguglielmi signs and dates, in 1793, the fresco on the vault composed of *The Triumph of the Virtuous Prince*





in the centre and all around allegorical figures of the Seasons and scenes from the *Labours of Hercules*, as well as the overdoors with monochromatic *Allegorical Figures* reminiscent of Raphael.



The console tables with their imposing mirrors are magnificent pieces of local cabinet making, in line with a decorative style that exalts the technique of antiquing, characterised by refined *intaglio* work with motifs of candelabra and medallions that blend extremely well with the pictorial decorations of the room. The furnishings were commissioned from the Palermitan cabinet-maker Gaetano Spinoso, who also worked on the Royal residences of the Casina in the 'Chinese style' and the Ficuzza. In 1794 he also makes for Prince Bernardo the fine wooden furnishings in the adjoining '*camera dell'alcova*' [Alcove Room]. On the walls there are 14 precious silk panels embroidered with stories from *Jerusalem Delivered* by Torquato Tasso. In the upper border of each panel there are the arms of the Montaperto next to those of the Filangeri, in memory of the marriage in 1744 between Rosalia Montaperto and Giuseppe Antonio Filangeri, Prince of Mirto, who died prematurely in 1766. The very capable Sicilian embroiderers who created the panels presumably around the time of the wedding, used, as the preliminary drawing the elegant engravings of Giambattista Piazzetta for the important

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Venetian edition of *Jerusalem Delivered* printed by Giambattista Albrizzi in 1745. Bernardo Filangeri on the 18th October 1793, in order to complete the complex pictorial decoration of the Reception Room, once again commissions Interguglielmi and the Navarras with the decoration, consisting of feigned pilasters, niches with statues and aedicules with gables, of the hanging garden with a fountain adjoining the Reception Room. The Prince, lover of classical antiquity, envisualises the space as a *hortus conclusus* (enclosed garden) dedicated to the Muses, reproducing the decorations of the courtyards of the Roman and

Renaissance villas, which connect extremely well with the *rocaille* nymphaeum, the aviaries and the use of shells and marine encrustations similar to those in artificial grottoes. The adjoining room, known as '*of the alcove*' presents a refined and complex iconographical composition dedicated to the *Stories of Cupid and Psyche* created by Giuseppe Velasco together with the decorator Benedetto Cotardi. The four large embroidered wall panels are inspired by the same theme, mythological love, dating from the beginning of the 19th century, most likely based on the preliminary drawings by Elia Interguglielmi. A significant attestation

of the well documented interest of the southern nobles for the art and life style of the Orient, established from the mid-18th century, through to the end of the 19th century is the Small Drawing Room, decorated in the Chinese style between 1858 and 1859 by the painter and decorator from Trapani, Giovanni Lentini (1829-1890), who paints the vault, the floor, the overdoor and the wooden fixtures. On the walls are an interesting sequence of silk panels with scenes illustrating the productive cycle of silk in China, probably imported from the Orient and painted in tempera. The Small Drawing Room is further embellished by original black-varnished wooden furnishings, with elegant gold and tempera decorations created by Antonio Catalano, the Palermitan cabinet-maker, who worked during the second half of the 19th century. Vittoria Filangeri and Ignazio Lanza carried out further reshuffles in the course of the 19th century and in fact it is to them that we owe the rearrangement of the rooms on the second floor. Here there is a succession of richly furnished rooms, used as a card room and a reception room, a second dining room,

two well stocked libraries, the Empire style bedroom and other private rooms. The precious family collection of porcelain is exhibited in glass showcases in the various rooms on the first and second floors. It consists of porcelain from all the major Oriental and European manufacturers, principally Capodimonte, Sèvres and Meissen, especially the priceless serving dishes of the 18th century decorated with insects and birds. Of note also are the rare wooden furnishings (coin cabinets with inlays of ivory, mother of pearl and tortoiseshell, monumental chests of tortoiseshell, glass show cases and dressers), a valuable collection of rare timepieces, a variety of minute examples of the decorative arts, a collection of arms, of glassware and four important musical instruments, recently restored. These include a Jakesch fortepiano in the *Biedermeier* style, made in Vienna around 1820, a Pleyel pianoforte made in Paris in 1858 and a very rare cylinder organ from the first half of the 19th century, made by the Viennese craftsman Anton Beyer.

M.D.

THE SILK PANELS IN PALAZZO MIRTO

Roberta Civileto

The room known as the ‘Sala degli Arazzi’ or the Tapestry Room perfectly exemplifies the aesthetic principles and the decorative grammar that characterised the interior of many of the Palermitan aristocratic residences during the Neoclassical period. The room, initially designed to be an ‘alcove’, has been embellished with wall panels of embroidered silk with polychrome

silk threads, worked in satin stitch and paint, over a tempera painted base together with underside couching with metal thread embroidery. The wall coverings are composed of four panels in a pearly satin hung in pairs on the left and right walls, depicting four mythological subjects taken from Ovid’s literary poem *Metamorphoses*, *Venus and Adonis*, *Jupiter and Io*, *Perseus and Andromeda*, *Hercules and Omphale*. These are interspersed by eight narrow mirrors of Oriental taste, reproducing tree trunks that

VILLAS AND PALACES IN THE 18TH CENTURY



are undulating, leafy, growing out of large lumps of earth, interspaced with birds. Wide burgundy satin borders, hand embroidered with a variety of gold and silver threads, closely laid over thick hemp thread, frame the whole wall panel with motifs of birds and sinuous floral shoots. The embroidered tapestries, contrary to those worked on a loom, were commissioned from local master embroiderers. Via their needlework they translated the requested designs, using cartoons executed by the painter-decorators most in vogue at that moment on the Palermitan artistic scene.

In keeping with the reformed conception of Neoclassical taste, which equated the aesthetic function of figurative textile interior furnishings with frescoes and paintings, the composition of the silk panels were similar to the artistic style of the painter who decorated the room, Giuseppe Velasco, with scenes taken from the myth of Cupid and Psyche from the fable of the *Golden Ass* by Apuleius. The silk scenes, closely worked by hand, are inserted in a simple naturalistic framework in 'crewelwork' of marked exotic taste, leaving free ample sections of the pearly satin background.

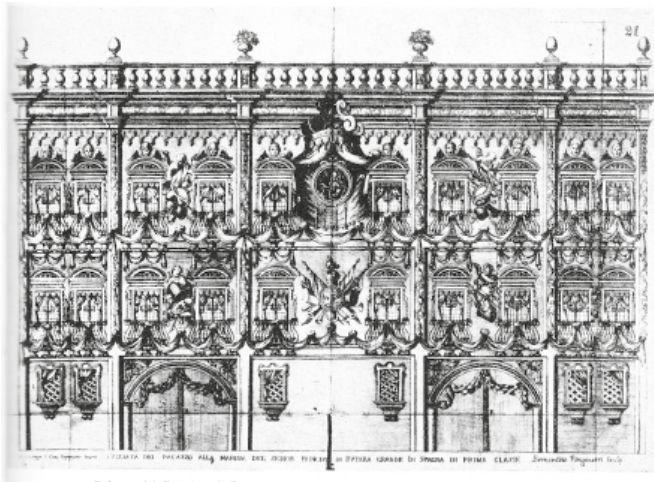
The choice of colours is original, combining all the shades of green, yellow, beige and brown. The only frame that differs from the others in its chromatic impact is the one depicting Hercules and Omphale. This is painted in tempera and almost certainly never finished with embroidery and therefore the basic cartoon is still visible. This hypothesis is suggested by the schematic composition and the painting of the background with flat, overlaid and vivid polychromatic brush strokes. A probable model for the cartoon is the painting of *Hercules and Omphale* by François Le Moyne in 1724, nowadays hanging in the Louvre. Another possibility, even more likely given the close cultural, chronological and formal ties with the silk wall coverings in question is the fresco which reproduces the same subject as that painted by Elia Interguglielmi between 1796 and 1797 for Villa Trabia in Bagheria. It might be appropriate to imagine that the same artist collaborated in the creation of the cartoon for the needlepoint tapestry in consideration of the fact that in 1793 Interguglielmi is working, in the same residence, on the realisation of the decorative cycle of the vault of the Baldachin Room as well as on the overdoors of the same room, dedicated to the *Labours of Hercules*. The Filangeris' preference for textile furnishings is again to be seen in the 'Sala degli Arazzi' [Tapestry Gallery] with the presence of two brocades embroidered with polychrome silk threads and gold thread, worked in crewel stitch, satin stitch and laid stitch. These can be dated to the second half of the 17th century. These brocades are two



'toselli' (baldachins), one of which depicts the episode in which King David, having conquered the Ark of the Alliance, strips down and dances, covered only by a linen ephod. It is framed by foliate scrolls of an extraordinary chromatic quality. The second brocade, probably originally intended as an ecclesiastical ornament, given the floral theme depicting large corollas growing out of sinuous shoots interspersed with butterflies, birds and snakes, nowadays covers a pouf.

VILLAS AND PALACES IN THE 18TH CENTURY

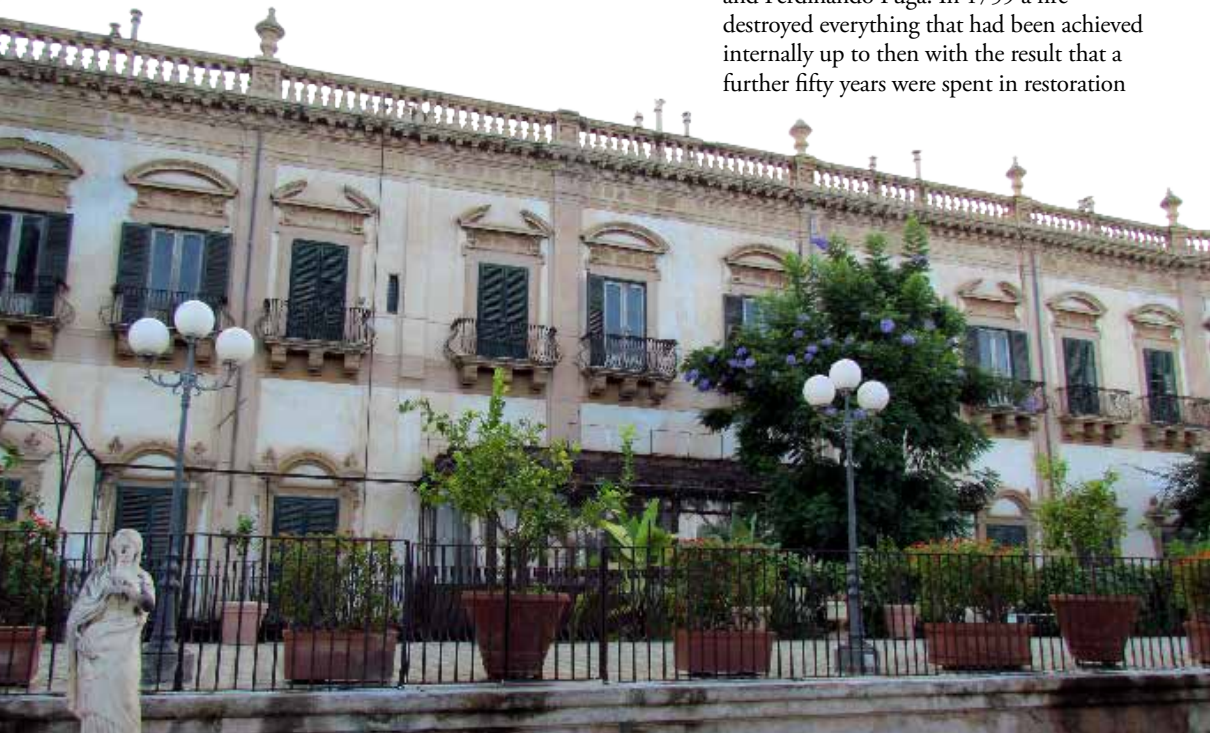
Palazzo Branciforte di Butera. Engraving
by P. La Placa. *La Reggia in Trionfo*.
Palermo, 1737



PALAZZO BRANCIFORTE DI BUTERA

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In 1701 Ercole Branciforte and Gravina married Caterina Branciforte and Ventimiglia, universal heir of don Nicolò Placido, Prince of Butera; the couple were given as their residence, the Palazzo in the Kalsa, sited next to the city walls, close to the sea. Between the end of the 17th century and the 1730s the building had undergone a series of architectural and decorative interventions overseen by Giacomo Amato and Ferdinando Fuga. In 1759 a fire destroyed everything that had been achieved internally up to then with the result that a further fifty years were spent in restoration





and interventions by the architects and engineers Paolo Vivaldi, Salvatore Attinelli, Carlo Chenchi and Pietro Trombetta. The Palazzo, further enlarged, assumed its present aspect with eighteen apertures. Access is via one of the two entrances opening onto Via Butera, into the entrance hall and from here to the monumental grand staircase with central stairwell decorated with red marble steps and columns. On the *piano nobile*, a large Reception Room leads into the usual sequence of connecting Reception Rooms on the same level as the city walls, which are, however, sufficiently distant from the Palazzo. This restriction has permitted the realisation of one of the most fascinating views in Palermo. The flat roof of the service block of the Palazzo up against the city-walls supports, in fact, the grandiose panoramic terrace, a real external appendix to the Reception Rooms of the princely residence as it was directly connected to the *piano nobile* with an elevated walkway that crosses the internal courtyard. The austere monumentality of the seafront façade of Palazzo Butera has a highly privileged view, graced by the Passeggiata delle Cattie, created along the city walls by the Marquis Lucchesi Palli in 1813.



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The sequence of Reception Rooms on the *piano nobile* opens with the entrance Gallery, with the ceiling decorated with frescoes attributed to Gioacchino Martorana (1735-1779) and the quadraturists Gaspare and Giuseppe Cavarretta and Benedetto Cotardi, who similar to those in the successive rooms, propose illusionistic architectural motifs with, in the case of the Gallery, angels and putti holding the Branciforte coat of arms



(lion rampant with standard and the front paws cut off). On the walls above an elegant wainscoting, are large canvases with family portraits and in the overdoors views of the estates of the powerful House of the Princes of Butera. The following Reception Rooms also have decorated vaults with diverse figures looking out over feigned railings, painted with the usual characteristically captivating and inventive flair of the rococò style. Young cavaliers and ladies, shepherds, fishermen and figures taken from the Oriental iconography of Japanese girls and Turks. In the Gothic Room the walls have wooden mouldings in the neo-mediaeval style of early 19th century. *Diana, huntress on her chariot* is depicted on the vault. The successive Room is identified by the pictorial representation of *Apollo riding the chariot of the Sun*; here on the walls are sumptuous rococò *boiseries* of vertical panels with lavish gilded carvings and large mirrors. Characteristic moulded wax groups depicting bucolic pastoral scenes are encased in the walls. In the last Room





the vault is decorated with *rocaille* stucco, interspersed with putti and there are portraits of Prince Salvatore Branciforte and his wife Maria Anna Pignatelli Aragona. The openings are decorated with paintings of Arabian and Chinese influence dating from the 18th century. Only the original maiolica flooring of Palermitan

manufacture from the first Room has survived, dating from the second half of the 18th century. Some of the rooms on the second floor are frescoed with allegorical figures symbolising the planets: *Mercury and Venus, Jupiter and Mars, the Sun and Saturn*.



PALAZZO VALGUARNERA DI GANGI

.....
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.....

The aristocratic residence, chosen by Luchino Visconti to film some of the scenes of the film '*Il Gattopardo*' [*The Leopard*] was built in one of the more fervid and creative moments of the Palermitan civil building programme, that is from mid 18th century. Starting in 1755 the Princely couple, Pietro and Marianna Valguarnera, transformed the pre-existing family residence into an aristocratic Palazzo after complex and prolonged works of

modernisation, which also required annexing the adjacent buildings. Historiographers attribute the overall design project of the Palazzo to a young architect from Trapani, Andrea Gigante, who was working at the time on the Palazzo of the Stella family, Dukes of Casteldimiro and Barons of Bonagia, where he created the magnificent pincer-shaped grand staircase in red marble from Castellammare, identified as the architect's first project and which, more than any other work, would reveal his extraordinary talent. The works in Palazzo Gangi, originally initiated by Gigante, were directed after 1759 first by the architect Mariano Sucameli and then by Giovanni Battista Cascione Vaccarini (after 1780). The Palazzo offers the visitor the incredible experience of the theatrical nature of the Baroque style with unusual architectural decorative solutions similar to the famous set-designs of the Galli-Bibiena, a family of architects and scenographers who worked in all the major European theatres. Having crossed the threshold of the entrance portal off Piazza dei Vespri, the internal arcaded courtyard frames the proscenium comprised of the large atrium of double-height containing the grand staircase inspired by theatre settings created by the Bibiena family. Its originality stems from the two symmetrical winding stair-ramps that take the visitor on a 360° tour before they reach the landing overlooking the internal courtyard from a Serlian loggia. On the *piano nobile* the Entrance Hall leads into the sequence of connecting Rooms preceding the immense Ballroom, all of which are sumptuously decorated and furnished. In this Room there is an unexpected large terrace, which, similar to a 'Royal box', dominates the city skyline of what was once known as the Piano della Misericordia, overlooked by both the Palazzo and the curvilinear Baroque façade of the Church of Sant'Anna. Returning inside the Palazzo the itinerary concludes in the vast Gallery, which occupies an entire



wing of the Palazzo. Of note is the exquisite double cutaway vault, an architectural artifice in which the pictorial illusionism of the '*quadratura*' is rendered more realistic by actual openings [through which the frescoes above can be seen]. The building, belonging nowadays to the Vanni Calvello family, Princes of San Vincenzo, has hosted numerous illustrious personalities including Gioacchino Rossini, Vincenzo Bellini, Richard Wagner, Edward VII and Queen Elizabeth II.

C.D.

The influence of the architect Andrea Gigante on Palazzo Gangi can be seen principally in the grand staircase and the construction of the new wing off Piazza dei Vespri. In this wing is the magnificent 'Sala degli Specchi' [Gallery of Mirrors] with its scenographic wooden double cutaway ceiling, recalling to mind those invented by the Bibiena scenographers. Between 1757 and 1758 the Main Reception Room, namely the Ballroom, and the Gallery of Mirrors, together with other rooms, were homogeneously decorated in a lavish rococo style. The decoration of the *boiserie* as well as all the wall carvings—large windows, doors, embellishments, overdoors—were entrusted to the master craftsmen Giuseppe Melia and Giovan Battista Rizzo, to be executed on the basis of drawings by Venetian cabinet-makers.

The frescoed vault of the Ballroom depicting the *Triumph of Faith*, is the work of Gaspare Serenario who also executed other painted decorations in the Palazzo, *in primis* the one present on the double cutaway ceiling of the Hall of Mirrors, with feigned architectural elements, volutes, putti, shells and triumphs.

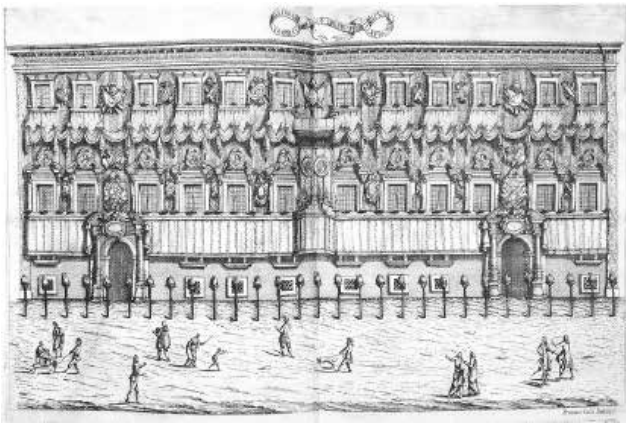
Prince Pietro also commissioned, during the same period between 1759 and 1764,



the magnificent maiolica flooring depicting, in the Gallery, the *Labours of Hercules* and *Scenes of Battle* in the Ballroom, as well as the majority of the furnishings on show today. The pictorial decorations of some of the other Rooms such as the Green, Red and Skyblue Reception Rooms can be dated to the end of the 18th century. In these Rooms are exhibited the magnificent collection of porcelain from the most famous European manufacturers, Sèvres, Meissen, Vienna and Capodimonte, together with collections of Murano glass, lace and fans. The decoration of the Oval Reception Room with the painting of *Pysche conducted by Mercury to Olympus* on the vault is attributed to the neoclassical Palermitan painter Giuseppe Velasco. It is Elia Interguglielmi, however, who signs and dates in 1792, the fresco of *Mars presenting the Prince to Jupiter* on the vault of the Bedroom. Other accredited painters in the Palazzo are Giuseppe Fiorenza in 1781, who probably painted one of the overdoors of the Skyblue Reception Room and Eugenio Fumagalli for a variety of non-specified works.

M.D.





Palazzo Alliata di Villafranca.
Engraving by P. Vitale. *La Felicità in trono*. Palermo, 1714

PALAZZO ALLIATA DI VILLAFRANCA

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In 1567 don Carlo Aragona-Tagliava and Luigi di Bologna, by virtue of their position as political administrators responsible for the complex urban reorganisation of the ancient *Cassaro*, ordered a new square, denominated Piazza di Aragona, to be built in the heart of mediaeval Palermo. The new public area was named after the first of the two Administrators, at the time President

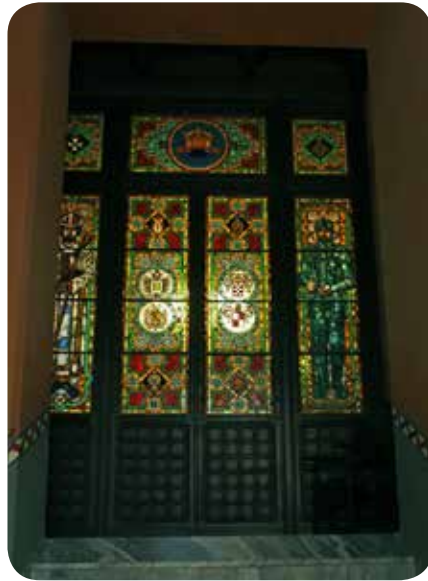
of the Kingdom, but was generally known as the '*piano de' Bologni*' because of the old factories, on the south side, belonging to the family of don Luigi, the Beccadeli from Bologna. These factories had been acquired in 1653 by Francesco Alliata e Lanza, who, in 1668, initiated a building programme to turn them into an aristocratic residence. An early 18th century print documents its façade, still the same shape and size today, of four floors, two entrances and twelve openings per floor. This building was damaged during the earthquake of 1751 and then immediately radically restored by the architect Giovanni Battista Vaccarini. The architects Francesco Ferrigno and Giovanni Battista Cascione Vaccarini completed work on the Palazzo twenty years later. The dates 1752 and 1753, engraved on the entrance portals, clearly indicate that the façade was one of the first restoration projects undertaken: the earlier façade was entirely covered in banded rustication,





dividing the long frontage into seven sections of varying widths that punctuate the sequence of twelve openings, whose frames were rebuilt with a different design. Particular attention was given to the sections corresponding to the two entrances. Here the solution adopted was that of a portal with an order of columns and pilasters supporting the projection of a large balcony onto which the French windows on the *piano nobile* open, consulting a grandstand surmounted by the large stucco pediment framing the coat of arms of the Alliata. In 1804 the marriage of Giuseppe Alliata e Moncada to Agata Valguarnera e La Grua offered the perfect occasion for a complete restyling of the interior of the Palazzo.

C.D.



The Palazzo housed one of the most important art collections of the city with paintings, statues and furnishings that the Prince Francesco II had set up and jealously protected in the Gallery of the Palazzo. The grand staircase granting access to the *piano nobile* is decorated with plaster casts, 16th century decorative stone tiles, plaques, helmets, marble shields and finishes with

a decorated glass door created by Pietro Bevilacqua (1929), who also carried out the restructuring, in a neo-mediaeval revival style, of the entire grand staircase and the '*Sala dei Musici*' [Musicians' Room] (1929-1931), commissioned by the heirs of Prince Gabriele Alliata e Bazan (1874-†1929). The four panels of the elegant door are variously decorated with the coat of arms of the



Alliata, Bazan, San Martino and Ortuzar families, emblems of chivalric orders, the Crown of the Sacred Roman Empire, of which the Alliata held the Princely title and lastly with the figures of the bishop San Dacius, and Leone Cavaliere, particularly venerated by the family. The entrance Reception Room—or the ‘*Sala dei Musici*’ as it is now called—housed the Alliata family’s historical picture gallery [quadreria]. The walls are covered with a *lambris* painted to resemble marble with plaster Greek motifs and wood and wrought-iron sconces. The wooden ceiling is decorated with foliate and affronted animal motifs of mediaeval inspiration. Of note the marble statuary, a draped female figure from the Roman era, a headless Apollo, the goddesses Vesta and Diana, the last two originally on the façade and subsequently substituted by copies. Only some of the paintings are still visible from the original *Quadreria*: *Orpheus enchanting the Animals*, *the Miraculous catch* both by Pietro d’Asaro known as the ‘Monocolo of Racalmuto’, the *Study of a virile figure*, a red

pencil drawing by Mattis Preti, the *St. Joseph with the adolescent Jesus* and the *Addolorata* (*Our Lady of Sorrows*), by an unknown 17th century painter of Pietro Novelli’s school. Of note the archaeological remains including an Attic column krater, oil lamps and terracotta small plates.

The ‘Sala dello Stemma’ [Armorial Reception Room] has a large, polychrome maiolica panel on the wall, executed by Neapolitan ceramists in the second half of the 18th century, which had originally been created as flooring, where, in the guise of a carpet, it was placed in the centre of the surrounding coat of arms of the Alliata-de Giovanni-Paruta-Colonna-Morra families encircled by a repetitive motif of the Borbonic *Fleur-de-lys*. The ceiling was covered with elegant stuccos by Serpotta with *puttini*, symbols and religious scenes and various allegorical figures. In the centre was a fresco by Gaspare Serenario depicting *Fame pointing out the Prince’s glories* painted in 1756, damaged by the bombing during the Second World War. Doors, windows

and overdoors are all characterised by elegant rococò carvings in gilded wood. The neighbouring Green Reception Room—known as the Prince Fabrizio Alliata Colonna room because of the large portrait of him hanging there—houses, together with an original sedan chair, carved, gilded and painted in the rococo style, two works of art of the school of Caravaggio by the artist Matthias Stomer, originating from Flanders but very active in Rome and Sicily. The two massive paintings respectively depict *The Tribute Money* and *The Stoning of St. Stephen* and were probably bought when Prince Giuseppe Alliata e Gravina was head of the family, between 1637 and 1648. The ceiling was stuccoed with allegorical figures framing the fresco, which no longer exists, of *The Princess admiring the Temple of Glory*, also painted by Serenariò.

The baroque Green Drawing-room, occasionally used as the family chapel given the built-in altar cupboard, is furnished with console tables carved of gilded wood and decorated with the arms of the de Spuches Lanza, French pendulum table clocks and 18th century Murano glass candelabra.

The overdoors are decorated with baroque Sicilian and Neapolitan paintings and on the wall a small *Crucifixion* attributed to Anthony van Dyke from 1625. On the ceiling the fresco by Gaspere Serenariò with *St. Dacius being presented to the Virgin*, between stuccos from the school of Serpotta. Of note is the large *veilleuse* or night light with painted glass supported by a small octagonal table and surmounted by a temple-like covering, in line with the Empire style of furnishings from the early 19th century, placed in the Leather Room or *fumoir*, entirely covered in tooled, gilded leather made in the 20th century. The '*Sala dei Musicì*' leads into the Pink Room,

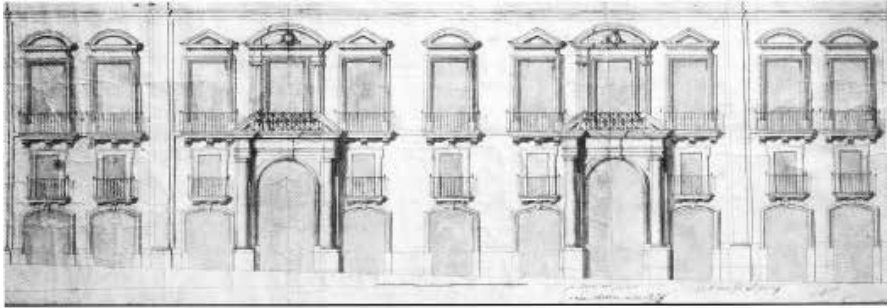
which is furnished with period furniture, silver, ceramics, porcelain, a showcase of archaeological artefacts, lace, Neapolitan moulded wax figures and the portrait of Anne Mary of Orléans, wife of Victor Amedeus II, attributed to the school of Jean Marc Nattier and gifted directly to the Alliata family by the King of Sicily.

M.D.



VILLAS AND PALACES IN THE 18TH CENTURY

Palazzo Gravina di
Comitini. Drawing
of Nicolò Palma (?).
1754



PALAZZO GRAVINA DI COMITINI

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The Palazzo is the result of a long process of transformations and aggregations, starting from the oldest nucleus on the Via del Bosco, bought in 1670 by donna Violante Bonanno, Princess of Rocca Fiorita. The aristocratic lady, immediately after having acquired the old residence built for the aristocrat Stefano Bologna in

1528, commissioned the architect Lorenzo Ciprì to superintend the work of the substantial transformation of the building. Subsequently, by the wish of her great-nephew Francesco Bonanno, the residence was enlarged under the direction of the architect Nicolò Palma. Of these early interventions only the internal courtyard and the façade on Via del Bosco are still visible, documented in a print of 1736. Michele Gravina, Prince of Comitini, bought the Palazzo on Via del Bosco in 1739 with the intention of transferring his family there. Between 1752 and 1757,





the aristocrat finished the unification of the neighbouring buildings and those overlooking Via Maqueda, indispensable for the realisation of what would soon become one of the most sumptuous noble dwellings in Palermo.

The architectural design was entrusted to Nicolò Palma, the architect of the Sicilian Senate. The work was carried out between 1768 and 1771. A vast façade on three floors was built on the Via Maqueda, the *piano nobile* contains eleven openings overlooking balconies symmetrically disposed on the sides of the main terraces, placed so as to correspond with the two entrance portals. The peculiarity of the Palazzo consists in the layout of three courtyards in an L-shape, accessed by as many distinct and separate entrances, two on Via Maqueda and one on Via del Bosco. The left portal on Via Maqueda is the arrival point of the access ramp of the grand staircase that is the focal point of the deep visual perspective that sequentially crosses the two courtyards, separated by a portico resting on columns. The secondary access from Via del Bosco leads directly to the courtyard of the grand staircase, allowing a glimpse in the background of a marble fountain framed by a pictorial *trompe d'oeil* composition placed in the centre of a portico.

The loggia opens out above this portico,





connecting the last ramp of the grand staircase to the first Reception Room on the *piano nobile*. In 1926 the Palazzo was acquired by the State for use as the Provincial seat. The Palazzo was restructured and adapted for this purpose by the architect Salvatore Caronia Roberti, and the exigencies of its new administrative functions required the addition of a fourth floor.

The grand staircase of red marble leads to the first Room on the *piano nobile*, characterised by a vault decorated in the illusionistic style [quadrature] with a feigned balcony supported by brackets and decorated by vases of flowers and the arms of the Comitini in the four corners. On the walls there is a painted portico with a loggia with an exedra balustrade decorated with vases and curtains and opening out onto ill-defined countryside scenery.

C.D. To the right the Room leads to the part of the Palazzo where the original décor is still visible, with a succession of Rooms designed to accommodate the Prince's guests. In the Yellow Room, or first antechamber, heavily restored, the overdoors still have their neoclassic paintings of landscapes and ruins; nowadays there is an exhibition of contemporary artists collected by the Provincial Administration that includes names such as Lia Pasqualino Noto, Renato Tosini, Giambecchina and Nino Garajo. Following on is the Green Room or second antechamber, with a ceiling decorated with stucco and *rocaille* motifs, and overdoors depicting marine and architectural *Landscapes* and three *Putti playing* symbolising the *Seasons* inspired by French paintings and attributed to Elia Interguglielmi, painter and decorator of





some of the most representative interiors of 18th century Palermo.

A gilded wooden console table stands against the wall surmounted by a mirror dating from the mid-18th century, flanked by portraits of Giuseppe Malvica and his wife Giovanna Bazan from the end of the 18th century. Diverse paintings and sculptures from late 19th century and early 20th century furnish the room. The paintings *Woman with a jug* and *Woman at the fountain* are by Ettore De Maria Bergler, evocative of late Realism and Liberty décor: the views and glimpses of Palermo are by various different artists such as Giacomo Marchiolo, Salvatore Marchesi, Salvatore Maddalena, Mario Mirabella and Michele Mirabella. In the successive Red Room the overdoors are painted with figured allegories of *Virtue*, again attributed to Elia Interguglielmi and two *Portraits of the Dukes of Reitano* and the monochrome Landscapes underneath dating from around 1768. The realistic portrait of an Old Man in bronze is by the sculptor Mario Rutelli, whilst *The Large Bather* is by Emilio Greco from 1956. The 'Sala Sciascia', the Reception Room of the original Palazzo, with a coffered ceiling, exhibits canvases by Maria Giarrizzo, Ida Nasini Campanella, Renato Guttuso, Pippo Rizzo, Michele Dixit, Salvatore Mirabella,



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Lia Pasqualino Noto, Rocco Lentini, Umberto Valentino, Laurenzio Laurenzi, Mario Folisi, Eustachio Catalano. The bronze sculpture of Leonard Sciascia, by Mario Pecoraino is excellent. The famous Gallery or Martorana Room follows on, named after the well known Palermitan artist, Gioacchino Martorana, who in 1770 decorated the vault with frescoes with the *Triumph of Love* in the centre, *Marine Landscapes*, *Frolicking Putti* and in the corner medaillons the Four *Cardinal Virtues* set in elegant rocaille frames in gilded stucco.

On the walls the boiserie is also decorated by rococò motifs and in the overdoors 17th century canvases of biblical inspiration with a southern influence and a series of



Landscapes with ruins and *River Landscapes* above the mirrors, made by one of Martorana's circle. The maiolica flooring was certainly influenced by the Neapolitan workshops. Turning back, from the Yellow Room it is possible to access the private apartments with the Bedroom, built ex novo by Prince Michele, with a stucco decorated ceiling and rococo furnishings with 18th century paintings depicting *Ports* and *Architectural ruins*. The overdoors hold 17th century canvases after the school of Caravaggio.

The walls of the two neighbouring *boudoirs* are entirely decorated with wavy frames gilded with floriated vines that border mirrors engraved with Arcadian and courteous figures and embedded plates in painted maiolica from the early 20th century, in substitution of the original French, German and Neapolitan porcelain. The décor recalls in part the porcelain wall coverings of the Boudoir of Amalia of Saxony, realised in Portici at the end of the 1750s.



PALAZZO CELESTRI DI SANTA CROCE (later Trigona di Sant'Elia)

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The family of the Marquis of Santa Croce owned this Palazzo from the 16th century when Pietro III Celestri e Migliaccio—*Conservatore del Real Patrimonio and pretore* [Registrar of the Royal Wealth and Magistrate] of Palermo (1611-1612)—having married in 1596 Francesca Cifuentes e Imbarbara, acquired the title of Baron of Alia and with it the ancient Palermitan residence. The history of the building before its radical transformation in mid-18th century, when Giovanni Battista Celestri e Grimaldi decided to extend and modernise it, is unknown. The works in 1758 were followed and terminated by Tommaso, who married the daughter and universal heir of his dead brother, thereby inheriting the title and the property in 1775. As was the case for other Palermitan Palazzi, the 18th century intervention started out as an extension and restructuring of preexisting buildings, in this case the residence of the Imbarbara family, which occupied the north part between Via Divisi and Via Maqueda.

Sources attest to the fact that a building site was reopened in 1756 for the completion of the Palazzo and that a structure was built ex novo on Via Maqueda, probably designed by the architect Nicolò Anito appears to have been involved in a technical capacity only at the start of the project. Anito was rapidly followed as director of works by the architect Giovanni Battista Cascione e Vaccarini, who masterfully completed the construction in 1765. The Palazzo, one of the most monumental in Palermo, has a



VILLAS AND PALACES IN THE 18TH CENTURY



façade with two entrances: over the first floor above ground, which includes a mezzanine, the architectural order of Ionic pilasters punctuates the fifteen French-windows giving onto projecting balconies. The crowning fretwork balustrade terminates the high entablature which accomodates the attic windows in the frieze band. The vault of the entrance vestibule is frescoed with the family coat of arms and its heraldic symbols: the eagle holding a snake in its talons, the phoenix emerging from the flames and the radiated star. The grand courtyard introduces the visitor into a space full of light, and of superb architectural design, thanks to the columns on the two floors. Niches with allegorical statues depicting *Justice* and *Prudence*, works by Gaspare Firriolo (1762-63), flank the access to the grand staircase, in axis with the entrance. On the *piano nobile* two loggias overlook the courtyard, the one open on two sides also offering a panorama





over the city, whilst the other constitutes the vestibule leading into the first of the main Reception Rooms from which, to the left and the right, there are the perspectives en *enfilade* of the Reception Rooms.

C.D.

The same patron, Giovambattista, through his procurator, his brother Tommaso, provided the design sketches or the draught drawings for the wall decorations and the furnishings, where, via a pictorial laudatory depiction of the dynasty, the principal finalities turned out to be the glorification of the family coat of arms, the ostentation of the power wielded by the family and the virtues of the owners. The *first enfilade* includes, besides the Entrance Hall, three antechambers used as Reception Rooms—and therefore extreme

care was taken with the original furnishings, much of which is no longer in existence, and in its rich and lavish decoration. The first of the reception rooms is frescoed with a feigned balcony, profusely festooned, with vases and flowers, and, in the centre, winged putti holding the coat of arms, created, on the basis of previous frescoes, by Rocco Nobile, an artist who also restored some of the 17th century over-door paintings. The second antechamber is decorated by Mariano Di Paola, Pietro Bilardi and Nicolò Noto, whilst the over-doors are the work of Mariano Di Paola (1757).

In the third antechamber, the representation of the *Glory of the Illustrious Proprietor*, with symbols of his Virtues, also by Rocco Nobile; in an articulated and magnificent composition putti hold the crown of laurels of *Glory*, the Prince himself holds a copy of the book of Wisdom, another putto holds the shield of *Fortitude*, in the centre

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a winged figure holds the trumpet alluding to *Fame* and underneath a putto with a bolt of lightning drives away the forces of *Evil*. The most important of the Reception Rooms comes next, the *Galleria*, where the ceiling depicts a *Supper of the Gods* with the Triumph of Diana and Jupiter with sceptre and crown. There is also Apollo with his harp, Diana with two dogs, bow and quiver, Mercury with the caduceus in his hand, Mars with the plumed helmet and sword, Minerva and Venus and Saturn, all painted by Ottavio Violante, a pupil of Gaspare Serenario, with some interventions by Rocco Nobile; the architectural embellishments and the stuccos are by Aloisio Romano. The Neapolitan ceramist Nicolò Giustiniano creates the maiolica flooring with mythological depictions in the same Gallery, signing and dating it in 1761. The *quarto antico*, or the apartment to the right of the entrance hall, has rooms with vaults painted in a neoclassical style by one of the Manno brothers and by the Neapolitan Benedetto Cotardi for the decorative parts (1785).

M.D.

THE VILLAS

The 'Conca d'Oro' can be identified in the municipality of Palermo as the plain enclosed by a mountain crown guarded along the seashore by the solitary bulk of Mount Pellegrino which Goethe, in the 18th century, called "the most beautiful promontory in the world"! This natural and favourable location had been elected, in the 8th century BC, by the Phoenicians to establish 'Panormus', meaning 'complete port'. From then on, history has continuously shaped Palermo, once called 'the Happy City'. The fertility of the soil, the abundance of water, both indispensable elements for the furthering of agriculture progress were the basis of this 'happiness'.

In Sicily the tradition of the art of gardens goes back to the Arabs who enhanced the natural agricultural vocation of the Palermitan countryside by utilising and exploiting to their full potential the numerous sources of water; traditionally the

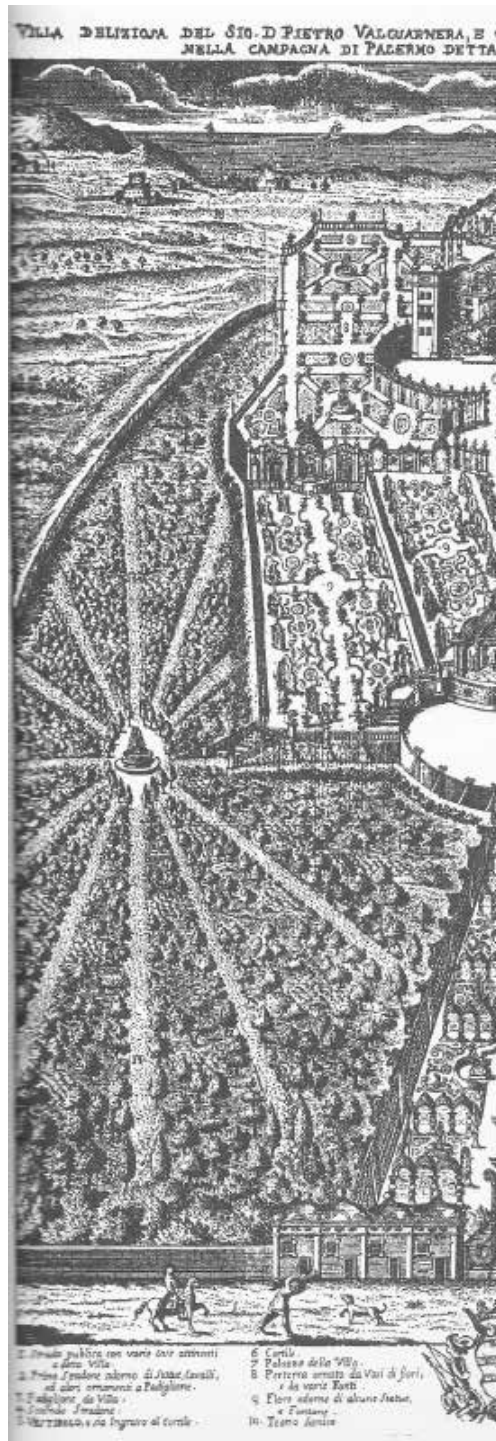
Palermitan 'u jardino' [Palermitan dialect for garden] is not ornamental but productive. The Norman conquerors subsequently adopted the Islamic garden culture creating, just outside the city walls, three parks: the Genoard, the 'Parco Vecchio' and the



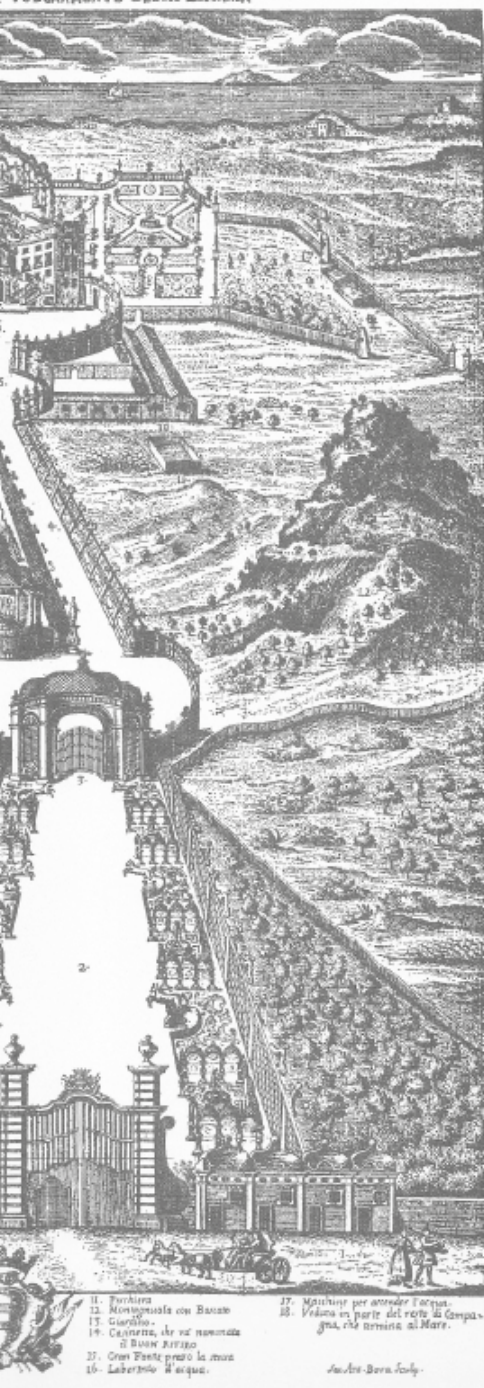
Palermo and its territory. Engraving from D. Scinà. *La Topografia di Palermo...* Palermo.1818

VILLAS AND PALACES IN THE 18TH CENTURY

‘Parco Nuovo’ [the Old Park and the New Park], where the palazzi, the pavilions and the Norman *sollazzi*, nowadays very rundown, document a paradise on earth, which has been irremediably lost. In the 16th, 17th and 18th century the cultivation of the Palermitan gardens favoured the construction of a variety of architectural structures such as the fortified baileys, the *casene* [country dwellings] and the villas. The distribution of all these structures over the Palermitan countryside follows three different directions, spreading out from the walled city to the east, south and west. In 1580 the Viceroy Marcantonio Colonna promoted the creation of the modern ‘Mezzomonreale roadway’, which followed the ancient road that used to connect Palermo to nearby Monreale, crossing the Norman park of the Genoard. Along this route, next to the Norman architecture, a few important Villas were built during the Renaissance, none of which still exist. In the Piana dei Colli, to the west, and in the Piana di Bagheria to the east, the countryside, grouped into fiefs, for centuries maintained their preeminent function as agriculturally productive entities serving the city. They were managed through the legal institution of *emphyteusis*, by which the feudatories favoured the creation of small and medium sized farms. Up until the mid 17th century this countryside was subject to marauding of Barbarian pirates and for this reason fortified baileys and towers were initially built for the defense of the agricultural activities and of the communities working and living there. The transformation of closed, fortified buildings in something different, such as



CRAVINA PRINCEPE DI VALGUARNERA, CONTE DI ANORO &c.
VOLGARMENTE DELLA BAGARIA



Bagheria, Villa Valguarnera.
Engraving by A. Bova from A.
Leanti's. *Lo stato presente della
Sicilia*. Palermo, 1761

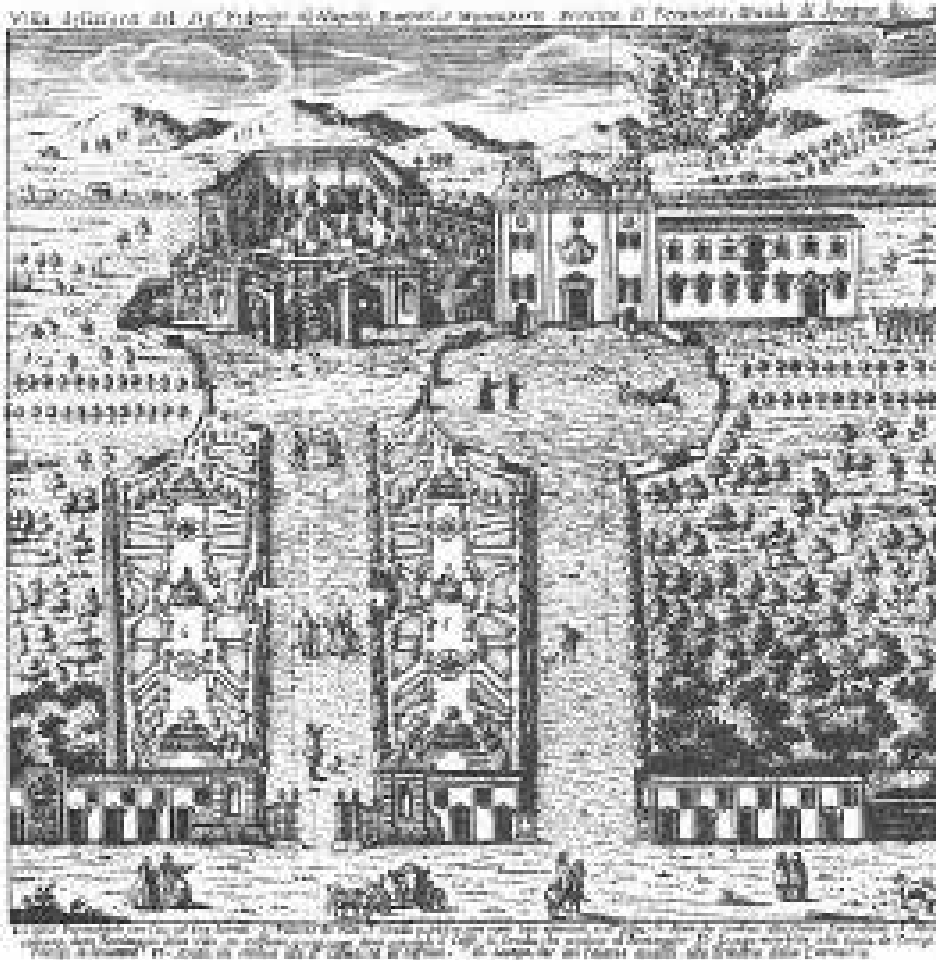
country villas, required greater political stability in order to guarantee a higher degree of security.

In 1734, after the rapid succession of Philip IV of Bourbon (1700-1713), Victor Amadeus I of Savoy (1713-1720) and Charles IV of Habsburg of Austria (1720-1734), the crown of the Kingdom of Sicily passed once again to the House of Bourbon with Charles III, who by simultaneously inheriting the Crown of the Kingdom of Naples, became King of the Two Sicilies, establishing his permanent residence in the Parthenopean city. At this historical juncture the conclusion of the process of urbanisation of the Sicilian aristocracy in Palermo marks the beginning of the fashion for living in the country in the villas built in the Piana dei Colli and Bagheria.

The fashion for *villeggiatura* [spending time in one's country villa] explodes in Palermo as a social phenomenon around the 1720s. In order to satisfy the tastes of the nobility and their requirements for representativeness, the architects created a typological and architectural model, offered with innumerable variations. Along the ancient roads serving the countryside a pair of elegantly designed and decorated **pillars** marks the entrance to the land belonging to the villa, the so-called '**firriato**' or '**girato**', enclosed within high walls. In some cases the residence is reached by a long drive, crossing the productive part of the estate. At the end of the drive another, simpler gate leads into the **courtyard**, in front of the noble residence. This space, rectangular or with a more complex geometric perimeter, is

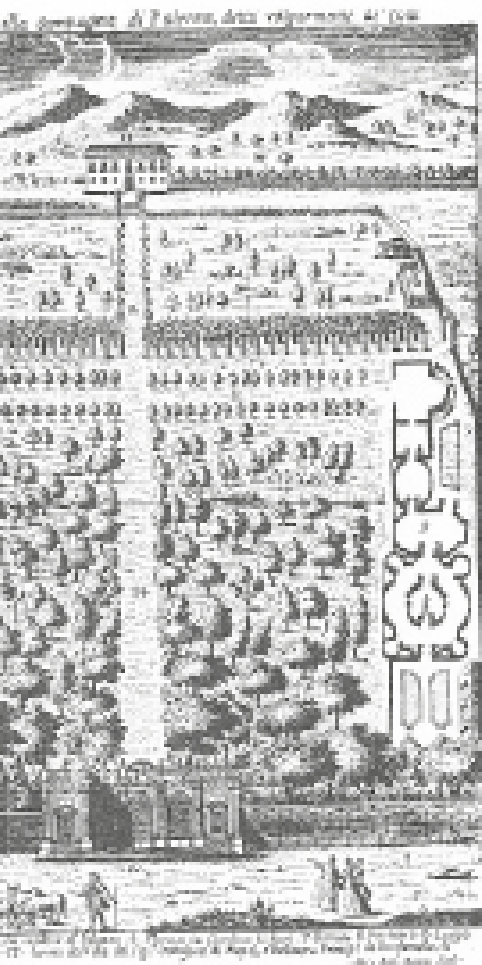
VILLAS AND PALACES IN THE 18TH CENTURY

Palermo, Villa
Resuttano.
Engraving by A.
Bova from A.
Leanti's *Lo stato
presente della Sicilia*.
Palermo, 1761



created by a line of one-storey buildings, which house the staff, the workshops and also the **chapel**. In the courtyard the side opposite the entrance is closed in by the façade of the main residence, which is generally a simple rectangular block, spread out horizontally rather than vertically, with only two or three storeys. The **staircase**

leading to the *piano nobile* is normally placed against the façade overlooking the courtyard. The outdoor staircase is the characteristic architectural element of the Palermitan villa. The inexhaustible supply of creative flair of the architects gave rise to a continuous experimentation of new techniques and forms that has no equal



generally by slightly embossed pilasters, which have the function to punctuate and organise the distribution of the apertures and figuratively support the attic cornice, often finished with a balustrade. A series of plaster or carved stone vases are occasionally placed above the cornice, and in rare cases alternated with busts or sculptures. In the centre of the façade there is generally a fanciful **fastigium** [pediment] towering from the attic cornice supporting the proprietor's **coat of arms**, often framed by relief stucco with decorative motifs. The apertures on the *piano nobile* have cornices and gables, often with bizarre rococo decorations; they are mainly French-windows that open out on the projecting **balconies** bordered by characteristic parapets of wrought iron with a goose's breast profile. The openings at each end of the *piano nobile* usually give onto wide terraces built on top of the buildings around the courtyard. The **terraces**, bordered by stone balustrades, are paved with decorative motifs known as 'waves', realised with maiolica bricks enamelled half and half in white and in green or blue. The interior layout was more informal with respect to the city palazzi, with a series of rooms that could be used both for private and for representative purposes.

Only the more important villas had proper Reception Rooms sumptuously decorated with vault and wall frescoes and maiolica flooring '*alla napoletana*' [in the Neapolitan style] as if it were a figured carpet. The villa was completed by other areas on the other sides of the house, where there was often a shade **garden**, organised with paths

anywhere else. The staircase, above all in the less important villas, has a psychological function; oversized with respect to the overall dimensions of the villa it focuses the visitor's attention diverting it from the rest of the villa, usually rather simple and banal. The architectural design of the façade rarely offers architectural orders, replaced

VILLAS AND PALACES IN THE 18TH CENTURY

threading through pergolas, known as the '*passiaturi*', passing alongside flowerbeds in bloom as well as through orchards before reaching, at the outer edge of the garden, grottoes, fountains, nymphaeum and fish ponds. Sometimes the villa would have a '**camera dello scirocco**', an artificial grotto, well ventilated and refreshed by a channel of running water.

Only the villas belonging to the most important names in Sicily were different from the standard plani-volumetric models. For these villas more articulated layouts were experimented with, with protruding wings attached to the main body of the house by means of curved walls so as to create an exedra embracing the grand staircase (villa Cattolica, villa Valguarnera). Experiments with more complex geometric forms were pretty sporadic. An example is villa Larderia in Bagheria, a completely original layout with a circular central building from which three similar wings spread out in various directions. In Palermo another example is villa Partanna, built in the shape of a triangle.

The architectural season connected to the building of summer villas outside the city walls was protracted up until the end of the 19th century, with a comparable variety of villas, though this time they are no longer generated by an architectural lexicon based purely on the Baroque but more varied because it includes examples in the Neoclassical, in the Chinese style and lastly in the Eclectic one.

C.D.

18TH CENTURY PRINTS OF THE VILLAS

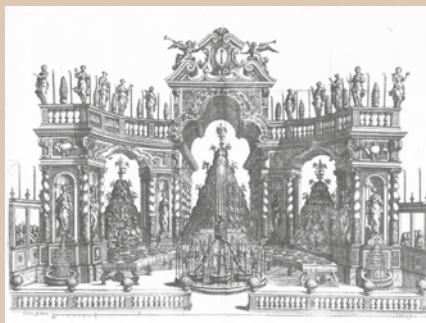
The era of *villeggiatura* [spending time in one's country villa] in the 18th century Palermitan villas is documented by contemporary prints. Two of these constitute iconographical evidence as they are of two ephemeral buildings designed by the architect Paolo Amato in 1704 and 1707 on the occasion of the open air musical performances promoted, in both cases, by the Magistrate in charge, Calogero Gabriele Colonna Romano, Prince of Cesarò. On the evening of the 15th August, the Feast of the Assumption, near the



artificial lake of Mareolce, immersed in the Palermitan countryside, these two magnificent semicircular architectural machines were presented to the Sicilian nobility and the people of Palermo, in the presence of the Viceroy. The first (1704), was in the form of a large nymphaeum and the second (1707) took the shape of an unusual public building. These two images symbolically synthesise the two complimentary aspects of the artistic phenomenon of the villas: a residence for seasonal pleasure and its garden. The two engravings by Amato, with their early dating, can be considered to be modern

architectural referral models. The other two prints are well known, drawn by the Palermitan engraver Antonino Bova in 1761, depicting two emblematic examples of villas constructed: Villa Resuttano in Palermo and Villa Valguarnera in Bagheria. Aggressive and inconsiderate modern buildings nowadays surround both villas.

C.D.



Architectural theatre, an ephemeral structure designed by P. Amato for the Feast of the Assumption in Mareolce. Engraving from *Il Tripudio delle ninfe nella spiaggia di Mare Dolce*. Palermo, 1704



Architectural theatre, an ephemeral structure designed by P. Amato. Engraving from *La Concordia di Pallade e Nettuno nella spiaggia di Mare Dolce*. Palermo, 1707

Palermo, villa Trabia di Campofiorito, nymphaeum

VILLA FILANGERI DI SAN MARCO

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Visits by appointment only

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In 1669, Prince Vincenzo Giuseppe Lanza Filangeri commissioned the construction of the Villa based on the project by the Dominican architect and mathematician Andrea Cirrincione. The villa of the Counts of San Marco and the slightly earlier villa Butera-Branciforte are the first examples of residential architecture for the nobility in the Bagheria Plain.

Because of the fact that the villa was built before the countryside round Palermo was completely safe, it has the aspect of a fortified building with bastions at the four corners of the square layout and a crenellated tower emerging from the closed volume of the building. The external staircase is detached from the building so



that access to the *piano nobile* is now via an artificial gangway, suspended between the staircase and the building. Surrounded by a luxuriant Mediterranean garden, the residence is bordered by a containing wall annexed—on two sides—by the service quarters, housing the family carriages and a large chapel with paintings dating from between the 17th and 19th century. On the ground floor is the barrel vaulted *Stanza della Cisterna* [Cistern Room], surrounded by the old kitchens.

On the first floor, crossing the drawbridge, there is access to a large Reception Room where some of the family's collection of arms and ancestral portraits are exhibited. The Drawing Rooms, still inhabited by the heirs of the Camerata di Casalgismondo family, contain paintings, porcelain and valuable decorative artefacts from the collection of



the Filangeri di San Marco, Princes of Mirto who donated in Palermo their homonymous Palazzo to the Regione Siciliana and who used to spend the summer in this house. Amongst the works of art of note there is a tondo panel painting depicting Parnassus in the Tuscan Mannerist style and an elegant sculpture of Psyche by Valerio Villareale.

C.D. M.D.





VILLA BONANNO DI CATTOLICA

.....
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In 1712 Francesco Bonanno e Bosco, Prince of Rocca Fiorita e della Cattolica, bought the

lands with the farmhouses and the towers in Bagheria from the Convent del Carmine in Palermo. He started construction of a sumptuous three-storey villa almost immediately, under the direction of the architects Giuseppe Musso and Giuseppe Diamante and work was finished in 1725. The compact volume of the villa is hollowed out on two sides counterposed by deep exedrae that on one side house the exterior staircase and on the other side a terrace built post 1734 with other extension works. All around the villa the service blocks form a mixtilinear courtyard, which opens out scenographically on the side facing Palermo. The villa is home to a vast collection of the Bagherese painter Renato Guttuso, whose mortal remains rest in the garden of the villa in a tomb sculpted by Giacomo Manzù.

C.D.



From 1973, following a generous donation on the part of Renato Guttuso to the town of Bagheria, the *piano nobile* has become the seat of the Galleria d'Arte Moderna

e Contemporanea [Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art], and amongst the many works of art, can boast of the most important collection of the painter's canvases. Amongst the most significant works are those of his youthful period in the 1930s and a series of interesting portraits: *Portrait of the Father Land-surveyor* and the *Portrait of Mimise* in Room XII and the *Portrait of Franco Angeli* in Room XIV. Amongst the more complex works is the polyptych *Women, Rooms, Landscapes, Objects* from 1967 and *Women come and go* from 1986.

The Museum hosts, besides the works produced by Guttuso in more than forty years of activity, works from 20th century artists who had been friends of Guttuso and had shared his cultural and political views: amongst the many one remembers a few; Alberto Ziveri, Antonietta Raphael Mafai, Corrado Cagli, Carla Accardi, Mario Schifano and Tano Festa. In the first Rooms there are also works of numerous artists of the same generation as Guttuso such



as Nino Garajo, Eustachio Catalano, Leo Castro, whilst there are various works by Pippo Rizzo spanning from his Futuristic period to his return to the Figurative under the aegis of the Group of the Novecento Italiano.

In 2006 the Upper Floor was also returned to public use and dedicated to an exhibition of photographs by important local artists from Bagheria, Ferdinando Scianna and Giuseppe Tornatore. The lower rooms host the laboratories of the Ducato brothers, well known decorators of Sicilian carts, the workroom of Maestro Durante, who sculpted Aspra stone [calcarenite] and a panelled section dedicated to Historical Films.

M.D.





VILLA GRAVINA DI PALAGONIA

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The noble residence, otherwise known as the villa *'dei mostri'* [of the monsters], was begun in 1715, commissioned by the Prince of Palagonia don Ferdinando Francesco Gravina. Even though built in the space of a few months, the building was the object of successive interventions for its completion and embellishment, which continued up until the second half of the 18th century. The villa's design has traditionally been attributed to the



Dominican Tommaso Maria Napoli, but the building site saw a succession of different architects. The design project is very original with a complex architectural layout with two opposite sides respectively convex and concave that develop in height both protruding and receding volumes. The concave side embraces the monumental external staircase whilst the convex side has a loggia and a portico on the two

floors, one of which is walled in whilst the other is closed with glass shutters. The villa is renowned for its so-called 'monsters', innumerable bizarre statues aligned along the wall of the courtyard. Access to the house is via a long drive and through an entrance archway embellished with gigantic figures of soldiers.

C.D.



VILLAS AND PALACES
IN THE 18TH CENTURY



The entrance walls of the Elliptical Reception Room are decorated with frescoes depicting *The Labours of Hercules*, framed by feigned architectural elements and landscapes, dating from post 1788, as can be inferred from the inscription on a scroll referring to the new Prince of Palagonia, Salvatore Gravina. The Ballroom that follows on is, in its own way, unique, as it is entirely covered in mirrors with feigned painted frames, embellished with architectural motifs, *rocaille* elements and fictional animals. Patrick Brydone visiting in 1770 and Jean Houel in 1777 were both able to admire the realisation of its exuberant decoration, carried out on the orders of Prince Ferdinando Francesco Gavina jr. Many other famous foreign travellers, before and after them, specifically visited the borough of Bagheria in order to admire the whimsicalities of the well-known summer residence in Palagonia.

C.D. M.D.



VILLAS AND PALACES IN THE 18TH CENTURY

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This building is one of the most representative of the 18th century villas on the Piana dei Colli and for this reason was chosen by the film Director Luchino Visconti as the setting for the opening scenes of his famous film *Il Gattopardo* [rendered in English as *The Leopard*]. The building was constructed for Giovanni Maria Ramondetta and San Martino, Duke of Montalbo, and work was commenced in 1722 under the direction of the architect Gaetano Lazzara. The entrance façade, still in its original rustic state, has an avant-corp incorporating the external staircase, whose twin series of long ramps jut out into the



courtyard. The façade looking out over the garden, later completed in the style of Louis XVI, presents an order of giant pilasters that punctuate the apertures on the two floors. The ones on the *piano nobile* are framed as aedicules whilst those on the ground floor are surmounted by a series of stucco panels with feminine figures in classical poses. The décor in the Reception Rooms are from 1796, the year in which Stefano is succeeded by his son Giovanni Maria, governor of the Monte di Pietà, Gentleman of the Royal Bedchamber, Knight of the Order of San Gennaro.

It is presumed that it was Giovanni Maria who finished the construction and the decoration of the interior in a style that was, by this time, fully neoclassic.

C.D. M.D.



CASINA CINESE, THE 'CHINESE STYLE' ROYAL PAVILION

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The building is unique in its way, as the 'Chinese' style, widespread throughout all the European courts in late 18th century normally includes only single rooms or smaller garden pavilions furnished and decorated in the oriental style. The building replaces a preceding *casena* [country dwelling] in the Chinese style from the end of the 18th century, designed by the architect Giuseppe Venanzio Maravuglia for judge Benedetto Lombardo, Baron della Scala. The original *casena* belonging to Lombardo was located in the heart of the Piana dei Colli, surrounded by other villas belonging to the nobility. In 1798 the Court of Ferdinand I of Bourbon, King of the Two Sicilies, moved from Naples to Palermo in order to escape from the invading French Revolutionary army. During his stay in Palermo this *casena* was chosen as the summer residence of the Royal Couple. The King had acquired this *casena* in 1799, together with other neighbouring agricultural estates. The Royal presence in the Piana dei Colli encouraged the aristocratic Sicilian families with neighbouring properties to donate them to the King thus creating a hunting park for him: nowadays this is the city park known as the Favorita.

The work was once again entrusted to the architect Marvuglia with orders to transform the original construction into a proper Royal Residence, maintaining, however, the original Chinese style. Construction work was terminated in 1807; the complex



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comprises besides the *casina*, the propylaea or monumental gateway and the two pavilions that house the chapel and the service quarters, respectively in the Chinese style and the Turkish style.

According to the inventorial description of the various rooms in the Villa compiled in 1807, in the basement is the Grand Reception Room intended for balls, with a frescoed vault by the Neapolitan decorator and scenographer Raimondo Gioia and furnished with two consoles supporting neoclassical alabaster and painted porcelain

vases originating, like other furnishings in the Casina, from the Royal Residence of Villa Favorita in Ercolano. Hanging on the walls are a series of English watercoloured engravings of landscapes and people and from the ceiling three large chandeliers in gilded bronze. In the neighbouring room the walls and ceiling are strikingly decorated with feigned archaeological ruins with a recessed vault, created by Gioia himself with the help of Vincenzo Riolo for the inserts of the feigned monochromatic figured bas-reliefs. Other Rooms on the same floor





are what is called the Billiard Room and the Bathroom with its large marble bath and paintings from the early 19th century depicting a *Cupid* and a *Dancing Maenad* [Bacchante].

On the *piano nobile*, the Central Reception Room, the Gallery, has a magnificently decorated ceiling vault with feigned loggias and Oriental figures, painted in circa 1806 by the well-known neoclassical painter Vincenzo Riolo with the 'adornist' Rosario Silvestri. On the painted wooden consoles are two inlaid marble tops with representations of fruit baskets and birds manufactured in the Neapolitan '*Real Fabbrica delle Pietre Dure*'. On the walls are panels of silk painted with flowered tracery of Chinese manufacture from the early 19th century. In the wing with the King's bedroom, formed by three connecting rooms, the ceiling vaults are decorated with feigned balconies from which Oriental people look out, the work of Giuseppe Velasco, official painter to the Bourbon court and Director of the School of Design of the Academy of Palermo, with the collaboration of the well-known decorator Benedetto Cotardi. On the walls precious polychrome silk materials manufactured in the Orient and in the centre a well-structured four-poster bed recently rebuilt, surrounded by eight

columns of white marble with porphyry bases. In the other wing on the same floor is the Dining Room with painted murals of an exotic inspiration and the exceptional Mathematical Table constructed around the year 1800, copied from the *Table mouvante* commissioned by Louis XV for Madame de Pompadour in the Petit Trainon in Versailles. In the neighbouring Room, the original *Camera di Compagnia* or *Small Drawing Room*, the walls and the ceiling are decorated with Oriental figures and scenes



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executed by Vincenzo Riolo between 1805 and 1808 and there is a small mahogany table enhanced by six watercolour landscapes of Royal domains and four octagonal stools in inlaid mahogany taken from the Belvedere in San Leucio. On the mezzanine floors are two apartments, one known as that of the Cavaliers and the other as that of the Ladies, in reality at least one destined for the King himself, and on the second floor the Queen's Apartment. Here the first Room is the so called *Turkish Room*, decorated with painted stuccos reproducing Arab style decorations, the second is the *Herculaneum room*, in which the décor is inspired by the paintings and classical decorations taken from a selection



of Hellenistic-Roman motifs, particularly in vogue from the second half of the 18th century, after the discoveries of the archaeological sites of Herculaneum and Pompeii. On the walls are elegant paintings with *Female Figures* by Vincenzo Riolo. Of note amongst the furnishings are two *Tripod easels* of Neapolitan manufacture from the end of the 18th century holding delicate tempera on parchment depicting the Roman frescoes in Villa Negroni in Rome, discovered in 1777. Of note is also the small studio, covered in wall decorations with geometric motifs realised in polychrome marble.



**THE IMPORTED ORIENTAL TEXTILE
FURNISHINGS IN THE ROYAL CASINA
IN THE 'CHINESE STYLE'**

Roberta Civiletto

The style defining the architecture and the decorative imprint of the interiors, the furnishings and the textile wall coverings of the Casina Cinese, generally displays an extraordinary linguistic uniformity characterised by what is known as '*chinoiserie*'. In order to confer a perspective unity between the gardens outside and the spaces inside, the walls of the Reception Rooms are, for the most part, covered in materials, either printed, painted or embroidered, made either in China or India and depicting exuberant floral subjects, inhabited by birds and insects, which integrate harmoniously with the frescoed surfaces reproducing bursts of insight into the fantastic Oriental world where nature appears luxuriant. The vast selection of textiles used, minutely inventoried in 1807, inform us of the preferences of the Royal owner, in line with the style prevailing throughout Europe at the time. In particular the exotic atmosphere is completed by the wall coverings in the Reception Rooms and in those destined for the King's bed. In the first large Room the walls are covered by numerous panels, tall strips of satin painted with watercolours, manufactured in China. The iconographic theme reproduced is part of a category known as 'flowers and birds', amongst the oldest of the exotic figurative traditions widely in use in China and very much appreciated by the Imperial Court and by scholars. It is characterised by large flowering branches, birds and insects, in



which the representation reaches a level of exasperated naturalism expressed in the minute and particularised detailing of the feathers of the birds, in the accurate description of the petals of the flowers and in the various species of plants and trees. The presence of similar textiles in the palazzi of the Italian nobility is very rare because they preferred painted wall paper. Comparable examples are to be found in Villa di Poggio Imperiale in Florence and in the Quirinale in Rome. The wall coverings in relation to the colonnade surrounding the King's bed are a series of overlapping layers

of textile, the top one is characterised by an elaborate embroidery with applications of shaped inserts outlined in gold thread, which depict sinuous tree trunks of various botanical species, amongst which is the peony and the jasmine, each growing out of a single clump of earth, on which are doves and swifts. The panels were most likely created specifically for these Rooms at the time of the modernisation of the Casina. The textiles were assembled *in situ* reutilising material woven in the Royal Workshop in San Leucio, such as the sky blue lining, the ivory coloured taffetas and the metallic brocades with fine transversal bands alternated with horizontal fasciae of minute inflorescences, the background for the applied embroidery created with shaped Chinese materials. The Sicilian artist Vincenzo Gallo probably painted some portions of the silk wall ensemble in order to create the compositions placed below the silk surface. The hangings are of note for their typological originality and the rarity of their appearance as wall coverings in a non-religious situation. The Room to the right of the Room with the colonnade is embellished by an Indian wall covering of ivory cotton printed with metal matrices from the Royal Villa Favorita in Naples. There are 10 wide panels depicting sinuous foliated tree trunks, lanterns and ostentatious birds. Furnishing material similar to these, known as 'chintz', 'Indian cotton', 'pintado' [a painted chintz], typical for their bright colours and particularly suitable for furnishings, are to be found in the Castle of Charlottenburg near Berlin, the out-of-town Royal Residence chosen by Frederick I of Prussia, following the example of the

Sun King at Versailles and copied by many European sovereigns. The neighbouring Room to the left of the Room with the colonnade is covered, however, in a silken material of Chinese manufacture known as pékine [pekin], characterised by alternating broad stripes of satin and taffeta, over which wind fine, sinuous shoots bearing inflorescences [clusters of flowers] or single flowering branches, and this also originated from the Royal Villa Favorita in Naples.



VILLA WHITAKER IN MALFITANO

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In the 19th century the rich entrepreneurial upper middleclass initiated the permanent colonisation of the countryside closest to the city, where magnificent residential villas with large English style gardens were beginning to spring up. This fashion was



doubtlessly influenced by the presence, in the city of Palermo, of an English colony who monopolised the commerce of the dessert wine produced in Marsala. The Whitaker family was one of these. In 1885, Joseph Whitaker, recently married to Tina Scalia took the opportunity of buying a vast estate in the borough of Malfitano, a very strategic location because it was served by a wide road, nowadays Via Dante, connecting the Piazza Politeama—hub of the new expansion of the 19th century outside the city walls—to the contrada dell'Olivuzza close to the Norman Palazzo of the Zisa, which ever since the late 18th century, had been the most sought after area for summer houses by the Palermitan nobility. Promptly the couple let realise a sumptuous residence, entrusting the project to the architect Ignazio Greco and at the same time the informal park was landscaped by Emilio Kunzman with the supervision of Joseph Whitaker, himself a competent botanist. The proprietors specifically requested the architect to draw inspiration from the Florentine Villa Favard, designed in 1857 by the architect Giuseppe Poggi. The residence is built in a sober neo-Renaissance style with an entrance portico and loggia overlooking the park.





The furnishings and the decoration of the interiors, especially those on the ground floor, destined as Reception Rooms, bear witness to the artistic culture of Eclecticism in Palermo. An interesting example of a residence both

house and museum, the Villa is built on four floors consisting of a basement for the kitchens, the main floor with the Reception Rooms, the first floor with the private apartments and the attic for the staff. Of special interest are the elements in iron, cast iron and glass designed by Ignazio Greco and commissioned to the French Izambert foundry, which are still present in the original orangerie, an elegant panoramic loggia built on the south side, the skylight on the first floor and the spiral staircases leading down to the basement. On the main floor it is possible to visit various rooms destined for the social relationships of the family: two Drawing rooms, one in the style of Louis XV and the other Louis XVI, the Billiard Room, the Dining Room, the *Fumoir* or Smoking Room, the Library, the Ballroom and the so-called Summer Room. The connection between the various Rooms is created by the majestic Gallery corridor, subdivided in spans with barrel vaults and groin vaults, decorated in the Pompeian style with elegant classic-style grotesques, mythological stories, floral motifs. The sumptuous décor consists of 19th century paintings, a variety of valuable



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decorative objects such as the two cloisonné elephants from the Royal Palace in Beijing, the imposing bronze zoomorphic lamps and the extraordinary Gobelin tapestries in wool and silk (1565 circa) with the *Stories from the Aeneid* on the walls of the staircase. The creator and director of works is Rocco Lentini, Palermitan painter, from the school of Francesco Lo Jacono, together with a team of artists amongst the most successful from the renowned Italianate 'Stile Liberty' period: the stucco decorator Giuseppe Enea, the sculptor Salvatore Valenti, Giovanni Nicolini, Ettore de Maria Bergler, Francesco Padovani who were also the authors of the smaller decorations with bucolic and genre scenes, painted in the doors, the over-doors, the window frames of the two rococo style Drawing Rooms. The Summer Room, decorated between 1887 and 1889 by Ettore De Maria Bergler, reproduces an entire artificial garden with exotic plants and a variety of birds. The Palermitan sculptor Salvatore Valenti carries out the woodwork and the wainscoting for the Dining Room. The tempera decorations

of the first floor rooms are given to Rocco Lentini and in particular the illusionary reed ceiling covered in creepers and swallows painted in the Library, the fake stucco frieze in the Small Study, the recessed ceiling of the Bedroom and the various types of birds in the Aviary Room. The Villa also houses an important historical-artistic collection attesting to the owners' passion for antiques. Eclectic collectors with excellent taste, their interests spanned from maiolica to textiles, from coral, ivory and glass objects to fans, porcelain and furniture of differing styles and origin. From amongst the diverse pieces of decorative art (chevets, aspersoria, reliquaries) are the two Triumphs, one of the *Annunciation* and the other the *Triumph of Apollo*, two works of art in coral, made by the Master coral workers of Trapani dating from between 17th and 18th century. Lastly to be appreciated is the lacquered and painted harpsichord made by the Belgian harpsichord maker Nicholas Peson in the second half of the 18th century.

THE TAPESTRIES FROM THE WHITAKER COLLECTION

Roberta Civiletto

Flemish tapestries have always played a very important part in the furnishing of aristocratic palazzi throughout Europe. The mobility and versatility of these works of art, defined as the 'portable frescoes of the North' explains why the members of the nobility collected them in large numbers. Between the 15th and 16th centuries, Italian patrons would send cartoons drawn by Italian artists to Flanders to have them transformed into tapestries by skilled Flemish artisans. The supremacy of the Flemish tapestries was due to their superior planning and technical expertise together with a well-organised artistic industry. In order to prevent fakes and protect this industry from competitors, Charles V

introduced, in 1528, the use of a trademark with the intent of distinguishing the panels made in Brussels from those made and sold by itinerant sellers, who were everywhere. The 16th century tapestries, often inspired by historical, literary or biblical references were executed in series and when the story was popular it was repropounded in several editions. The series of the five tapestries in the Whitaker collection, dating from around 1565, can be considered a rarity in Sicily, both for its number and for its thematic completeness, the only local comparison being the eight panels from Brussels, created around 1570, now in the Tapestry Museum in Marsala. The Palermitan series was originally composed of seven panels, all of which were 'entitled' and composed a slightly reduced edition of the more grandiose 16th century series from the *Stories of Aeneas and Dido*, taken



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from book I and IV of Virgil's Aeneid. The original series was composed of at least fourteen scenes, narrating the adventurous meeting of the hero, who had escaped from Troy, with the Queen of Carthage, right up to the tragic epilogue with the death of the latter. The cartoons had been assembled mixing preexisting Flemish models with new ones. It was most likely Andrea Doria, vassal of Charles V, who commissioned the first series, on the basis of drawings and graphic '*modelletti*' [miniaturised finished models of the larger original] by Perin del Vaga, the well known painter of the school of Raphael. This original group of tapestries, now dispersed, dating from between 1530 and 1535, consisted of six elements in wool and silk, created expressly for the Oriental

Reception Room in the new Palazzo Doria in Genoa, matching the frescoes on the ceiling vault. Perin del Vaga did not create the actual cartoons, which were, in fact, painted in Brussels based on his drawings sent to Flanders. Around 1540-1545, eight new cartoons were added to these original six, similar in style even though they were conceived and painted quite autonomously by a Flemish painter of the 'Romanist' tendency. Various series of tapestries were created from these cartoons, all of them realised in Brussels around the first half of the 16th century. It is likely that the principal edition, the most numerous, was woven for Ferrante Gonzaga around 1548, found in the inventories under the title of *Historia di Enea* [The History of Aeneas] and lost during the 18th century. In 1876 the series of seven tapestries depicting the *Stories of Aeneas*, part of the Roman estate of Olympia Doria, descendant of Andrea Doria, must still have been intact. A short time later, however, the series was dismembered: the tapestry entitled *The Banquet of Aeneas and Dido* was sold to the Österreichisches Museum für Angewandte Kunst of Vienna in 1882, the one where *Aeneas reveals himself to Dido*, has hung in the *Civiche Raccolte d'Arte di Milano* since 1953. The other five tapestries were bought at auction in London at the beginning of the 20th century by the well-known industrialist and archaeologist Joseph Whitaker for his splendid new family residence known as Villa Malfitano. Two of the five tapestries in the Whitaker collection bear, in the lower border, the two initials of the Flemish tapestry manufacturer (BB Brussels-Brabant).

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