



Sicilia Parra



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Arba Sicula Tour XII: Another Successful Experience

The jet lag has not worn off completely from our recent tour of Sicily but as we are a bit late with the present issue of *Sicilia Parra* I need to share our experience with all those members of Arba Sicula who could not come with us. This year the tour filled up especially early for some reason. We had not even announced it in *Sicilia Parra* and we had already reached the maximum number of passengers. I regret that we had to leave at least a dozen, if not more, members on the waiting list. But with 45 passengers we were over the self imposed optimal number of 40. More than that becomes more cumbersome. Someone suggested that we take two buses, but that would become difficult to manage for the type of tour we run. I suppose all I can say to you is try to book as early as possible. By late December 2006 I will know some details of the next tour, so you may want to give me a call at that time. I don't like to

take deposits so early but I suppose that it would be one way of guaranteeing those who definitely want to go a place on the tour.

Unlike like year when we experienced problems with a strike of air controllers which caused us to lose one day of our tour in Milano, this year the flight to Sicily was smooth and uneventful. There was not even one missing piece of luggage, which in retrospect is a first for us. On many previous tours we had to wait to fill up reports for lost luggage. This was a good omen for things to come. This tour ran as smooth as silk. The only negative was the weather which was unusual for

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Gaetano Cipolla Receives Prize in Palermo

The Region of Sicily through its Assessore for Emigration, Francesco Scoma launched a new Prize entitled "Siciliani nel Mondo: Ambasciatori di Cultura" which recognizes Sicilians who have distinguished themselves around the world. For the first ceremony of its kind 18 outstanding Sicilians living in the United States, Canada, South America and Australia were flown to Palermo to receive the honor at a ceremony held in renowned hotel Villa Igia on April 27, 2006. Professor Gaetano Cipolla was one of the four people from the New York Metropolitan area to receive the Prize. The others were Andrea Mantineo, the Editor in Chief of *America: Oggi*, Angelo Siciliano, President of ASU, Joseph Sciamè, former National President of OSIA and Vice President of St. John's University and Arturo di Modica, the famous sculptor who made the bull that stands in front the Customs House in Manhattan's financial district. There were also other important personalities representing many different professions from Marcella Mammana, an artist from Argentina who specializes in art restoration to Calogero Pace, who became a specialist in transportation in France, to Emanuele Viscuso who organized a Sicilian Film Festival in Miami Beach and Giovanna Li Volsi Guzzardi, a poet who publishes an important anthology of poetry in far away Australia.

The group was given a tour of the city which included places not usually visited by tourists, such as the market at Capo, the Opera house and a few recently restored churches that underscore the im-

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Sicily. It rained a bit in Palermo and all day while we were in Cefalù. After Marsala, however, it returned to the usual beautiful weather we are accustomed to having in Sicily at this time of the year. I actually enjoyed the cooler temperatures more. Visiting the Villa del Casale mosaics when the sun is hot could be trying for the guide and for the passengers. One feature we tried out there worked like a charm. Diana rented earphones for everyone so could follow her description without having to crowd around her. This is one feature we will definitely look into for next year's tour. It may add 50 dollars to the cost of the tour but it definitely makes the descriptions clearer and more easily understood.

Many people contributed to making this tour special. Although we always try to include a few official meetings with local authorities, this year we were privileged to be received by the Vice Mayor of Palermo in the beautiful Villa Niscemi. Although the Mayor himself could not be present, we were treated royally by the Vice Mayor and by Cerimonial chief. They offered what they called "cocktail rinforzato" which meant wines and drinks with meticulously prepared *hors d'ouevres*. The group was then treated to a wonderful dinner by the president of the COES, Dott. Emanuela La Rocca at a great restaurant in Mondello called Il Gabbiano. This, together with the first welcome dinner at the Antica Focacceria San Francesco, began what I will-



ingly admit was a shameless giving in to satiating our taste buds that went on for the entire tour. I am having difficulty isolating the best meals we had on the tour. Was it what was supposed to be the "light lunch" (consisting of a five course meal) we enjoyed in Marsala before the wine tasting? With light lunches such as that we all would gain ten pounds in a week. Or was it the great Lucullian feast that the Vice Mayor of Taormina offered us in the restaurant with the marvelous view of the bay in Castelmola? No doubt everyone in the group will have his/her own favorite. Mine, I must say, was the incredible fish dinner we enjoyed at the Galatea Restaurant outside of Catania, in Acicastello to be precise. I am glad to say in view of the quality and quantity of what we ate and

drank (some people drank more than others!) the cost was very reasonable. We were also fortunate enough to taste home cooking Sicilian style at my cousins' house. Those fruit cakes made from locally grown peaches were superb. I think without exaggeration, this was the best culinary experience we have ever had, and that is saying a lot because we have never had a bad meal in Sicily.

Other events stand out in my mind: the wonderful performance of the Greek tragedy in the Greek theatre of Siracusa which was made possible by Dottor Mirabella, the Director of the Siracusa Tourist Board, the meeting with the Mayor of Catania who received us graciously at Palazzo degli Elefanti; the wonderful performances by the folk group



Top: The group inside the Abbatellis Museum in Palermo.

Left Florence and Hindman Doxey posing for the twelfth consecutive time in the same spot overlooking Letojanni.

Right: Angela Mattone, who has done the tour 5 times, with Florence, Gaetano and Hindman who hold the record.

There were other repeaters, Sebastiana Rothuis and Dolores Lenane, but they did not make the climb.



Ciuri d'Acanto organized by Nina Stallone Ferreri that entertained us in the lobby of the Hotel delle Palme in Marsala, the great sweet Marsala wine brought to us by Diego Maggio, the great group of singers under the leadership of Salvo Bottaro who delighted us with their singing in Siracusa and I cannot forget the young pianist Giuseppe Vasapolli who came to Agrigento to play for us after dinner. All of these people performed for us free of charge because they appreciate what Arba Sicula is doing for Sicily. Needless to say the people who work behind the scene are as important as those who stand in the light. I want to thank Enzo and Nini Pagano for all their help in making the many arrangements, as well as my cousins Nunziatina Cipolla-Cagnone and Peppino and Rosetta



Above: The courageous group who braved the climb to the top of the Greek-Roman theatre of Taormina, where there is a magnificent view of the bay.

Left: The group posing after enjoying delicious home baked cakes at the Giamboi residence, Gaetano's cousins in Francavilla.

Below: the Vice Mayor of Palermo greeting the group at Villa Niscemi in Palermo. The Vice Mayor presented Prof. Cipolla a medallion representing the City of Palermo and a book on the history of the villa. Prof. Cipolla reciprocated with copies of Arba Sicula and his translation of the Meli's *Don Chisciotti and Sanciu Panza*.

Giamboi who entertained us in their home in Francavilla. Their contribution undoubtedly enriched the tour. Last but not least, I thank Diana Mazza, our guide, and Mario Fili, our driver, who make a good team. Many of the participants have written to praise the tour identifying Diana's expertise as on of the key ingredients that made the tour so successful. I also want to thank Lina De Farfalla of CATA Hotels who handled the land arrangements with her usual professional expertise. ☒



Letters about our Tour

Many members who came on the tour have written us letters. We can only print a few excerpts.

Dear Gaetano:

Thank you for a very moving and enlightening experience. It was a pleasure meeting you and your charming wife, Florence. There was so much information to absorb that it was nigh impossible keeping the facts from one site merging into the next. Fortunately I kept a diary of sorts that enabled me to digest and savor the many tidbits of Sicilian history. Some of the misinformation that we had received on our initial visit in 2000 was corrected and clarified by our wonderful tour guide, Diana Mazza. She made the experience a real pleasure with her in depth knowledge and love for the island. Mario Fili was also a wonderful addition not only because of his driving skills but also for his congeniality. You definitely have a winning combination!

There were so many interesting events that occurred during the tour, but the memories that we cherish the most are of the music and the many friends that you shared with us. The trip to Francavilla is something that Cathy and I found to be very enjoyable and moving. Churches, temples and ruins are nice to look at, but the true picture of Sicily is in the people. How I envy you those experiences of your youth. I can appreciate why you are so willing to share your love of Sicily.

I was surprised and dismayed to learn that there is a separatist movement in Sicily. I can appreciate the desire of many Sicilians; you included, in rekindling the heritage and the Sicilian language. I feel that separation from Italy is not the answer. It will only bring isolation and a resurgence of the "secret societies" that helped to stagnate the island's growth and development.

Dear Jim,

There was an attempt to separate Sicily from Italy after the II world war, but today even the Sicilianist parties don't want separation. They want, however, a greater degree of autonomy or

at least the autonomy which is guaranteed by the Sicilian Statute. Sicily as you learned on the tour is one of 5 autonomous regions in Italy and its Statute which was signed even before the Italian Constitution was, grants the Region the most ample powers to legislate. But people complain that the many of the Statute's articles are not observed by politicians in Rome. I think all Sicilians want more attention to its problems and the ability to exploit its numerous resources better and for the benefit of Sicilians.

Dear Gaetano

We've been home for more than two weeks now and we're still reminiscing about the wonderful time we spent on Sicily. We realized more than ever what an exceptional experience we all had—so much more than an ordinary tour, and so much more meaningful to all of us. Thank you again and a special thank you for your cousins for their warm welcome. Their generosity and their unbelievable hospitality. We will never forget such a gorgeous garden!

Richard and Camille Sinatra

Dear Professor Cipolla

Just a few words to thank you for the very recent trip to Sicily. I am still savoring wonderful memories of the beautiful mosaics, temples and theatres we visited. The delightful evenings over fine meals in very good company!

Diana is a super guide who kept us on target at all times. And I do appreciate the hospitality of your family in your home

town!

best of luck on all future tours and may your continued scholarship continue to further appreciation and respect for beautiful Sicily. My best to you and your wife

Mary Ellen Baldwin

Dear Professor Cipolla:

Please excuse this tardy correspondence, but I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for the subject trip. It was educational and exciting to see Sicily in its current and past glory. The trip was made very enjoyable by Diane and her commentary and the safe, professional driving of Mario.

Notable exceptions were the airline accommodations provided. (Mr. Dougan went on to complain about Alitalia's seating arrangement, on both transatlantic flights at the back of the plane, and poor service. They did not get choice of meals.)

I trust you can bring these problems to the attention of the airline and they will serve to compliment not detract from a very enjoyable experience.

Charles and Connie Dougan

Dear Mr & Mrs. Dougan,

Unfortunately there is not much I can do about the flights. You may recall what happened to us on the previous tour when we were forced to spend a night in Milano at my expense! Try to think of the good times you had on the tour which by your own estimation by far outweigh the discomfort on the flights.

Gaetano ☒

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