



PALERMO MONREALE and CEFALÙ

Mini

MINI TRAVEL GUIDE



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PAMA GRAPHICOLOR

PALERMO

Palermo was born as a Sicanian-Phoenician village under the name of **Ziz**, which in Phoenician means "flower", and the importance of this town arises from its flourishing trade. People settled there after the arrival of the Carthaginians. The town was called **Panormus**, from the Greek "all port", and kept this name also under the Roman Empire, that improved its growth. Between the VI and XI century AC the Roman Empire declined, so that Palermo became odd property of the Vandals, Heruli,

Chatedral



Ostrogoths and finally of the Byzantines, who were driven out by the Arabs in 831. Under the Arabs the city, that survived the terrible slaughters of the conquest, repopulated, invigorated and grew among palaces, public buildings, mosques, thermal baths, fountains and luxuriant gardens. In 948 Palermo became the seat of Sicily's emir, or capital city of the island, thanks to its geographic position and its large port. The second phase of the Muslim conquest was based on a tolerance policy that included also religion

and a civil and cultural progress. After the Arab rule, the Norman kings and Frederick II confirmed it as capital city: wonderful buildings and amazing monuments were erected. Here the vernacular poetry and the most civilized society in Europe were born. After the death of Frederick II (1250) the decline of Palermo began and had its peak after the transfer of the capital to Naples and the power alternation between Angevins and Aragonese. The revolution of the "Sicilian Vespers" (1282) led to the end of



the Angevin rule and there was a recovery under the kings of Sicily during the Aragonese Age.

The long period of the viceroys and the chairmen of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and of the Bourbon-Spanish age (1415-1860) was characterized by an indisputable building magnificence, but the economic and social growth was limited, to the detriment of the humble classes. The city looked as a big monumental capital, the nobles paraded their own wealth and richness, but the masses suffered poverty. That is the reason why here more than elsewhere the insurrections of the Risorgimento became more and more frequent and numerous and came to an end with Garibaldi's Expedition of the Thousand. His army settled in Palermo on 27th May 1860.

Today Palermo is a big city that

witnessed two wars, the last of which caused huge damages to the artistic heritage. The desire to bring back the ancient splendour made it a modern city with countless masterpieces from all epochs and styles, from the Norman period to the Middle Ages and the baroque era, including the Arab influence.

CITY TOUR

Our tour starts from Corso Vittorio Emanuele towards the **Palace of the Normans** with its Palatine chapel and the royal apartments.

The Palace of the Normans is one of the most valuable examples of Arab-Norman architecture in Palermo; also known as Royal Palace, it is the seat of the Region of Sicily. The palace was erected by the Arabs in the IX century over the pre-existent structure

Palace of the Normans



Chinese Villa

of a Phoenician fortress that was still in use until the Roman epoch. The fortress had four quadrangular towers, of which only the **Pisan Tower** exists today. The Normans turned it into a wonderful royal residence.

During the two centuries of the Norman rule, the royal palace performed upper representative functions, but afterwards was forsaken and in the XVI century appeared heavily dismantled, except for the Palatine chapel.

As the Aragonese viceroys decided to settle there, they were forced to make considerable restorations that modified intensely the appearance of the building.

Accurate studies, carried out from 1921 on, led to the recovery of some rooms that were supposed to be lost. Inside the Pisan Tower, the **Treasure Room** with double escape door and four big earthenware jars used as strongboxes is worth a visit. The **Palatine Chapel** is on the first floor, on the royal arcade's right side and is one of the most beautiful Norman buildings ever, even if its interior keeps some Arabian, Romanesque and Byzantine elements. It was dedicated to Roger II, who was crowned there in 1130.

With an enchanting combination of architecture and pictorial dec-



orations, the Chapel has always been important for the inhabitants of Palermo, who saved it from the ruin which the building fell into from the half of the XIII to the XVI century.

The Chapel has the shape of a basilica, with three naves divided by arches: the one in the middle has a valuable wooden ceiling, coffered "muqarnas", while the lateral naves have a painted weathered roof. The floor, created by Arab artists, is a mosaic made from semiprecious stones; the walls are covered with marble, while on the top mosaic scenes represent the life of Christ and the Old Testament.

Marvellous is the royal throne, covered with mosaics, and next to the three-apse sanctuary there are a valuable ambo, also decorated with mosaics, and a 4.5-metre paschal candelabrum.

Among the numerous works dating back to the XII century, the only modern element is the wooden choir. The inner decoration of the Chapel represents a real masterpiece, with its golden-bottomed mosaics that adorn the upper part of the naves and the sanctuary. Inside the shrine, the most ancient mosaics are kept, dating back to 1143. The cupola represents the Blessing Christ Pantocrator with the book closed, surrounded by angels and archangels, while the apse vault repropose the Blessing Christ

with a clear Byzantine iconography. The Annunciation and Presentation of Christ at the Temple are on the presbytery's arches.

The **royal apartments** show the Hercules' Room in the middle, dating back to 1560-70, where today the Sicilian regional assembly meets. The King Roger's Room, dating back to the XII century, guards, on its vaults and walls, magnificent Norman mosaics representing hunting scenes, of evident Oriental influence.

Once left the Palace and turned into Via dei Benedettini, we find the church of **St. John of the Hermits**. Built by Muslim workers in 1136 on the place of a more ancient Gregorian monastery and at the behest of Roger II, the Arab church has a cubical shape with five unmistakable red cupolas.

The interior has a single nave di-



St. John of the Hermits

vided into two bays and a cupola rising above it, also with lateral apsidal premises. On the left side there is a bell tower, while from the right side one can enter an adjoining building, probably an ancient mosque. Its large hall keeps a fresco representing the Madonna with Child and Saints dating back to the XII century. Next to it, in the square courtyard, the ruins of an Arabian porch.

The garden is rich in citrus trees, jasmines, pomegranate trees and Indian figs. Once it was used as cemetery and still guards a Benedictine cloister of Norman age and an Arabian tank for water.

We are in the **Albergheria quarter**, which takes its name from the numerous hotels and inns it hosts, as well as the typical markets. One of them is the **Ballarò Market**, from the Arab term al-Bhalharà, characterized by the smells coming from fish, fruit and meat stalls.

Noteworthy are also remarkable buildings such as the **Sclafani Palace**, which is currently used as garrison.

We have now reached Piazza del Carmine, a square that hosts the **Church of Carmine** with its cupola made from majolica. Inside the wooden **Our Lady of Carmel** is kept.

Proceeding towards Piazza Professa, we can admire the **Church of Jesus** or **Professed House**, one of the first churches established by the Jesuits in Sicily. It has been built in a baroque style and dates back to

a period between the years 1564 and 1633. It is covered by coloured marbles and inlays, embellished by puttos, angels and flowers created by Giacomo Serpotta. **Piazza Pretoria** is among the most beautiful and ancient squares of Palermo. It is located in a raised position, on the left side of Via Maqueda, dedicated to the homonymous Spanish viceroy, and takes its name from the **Praetorian Palace**, seat of the town council. Built in 1463, it used to host Palermo Senate meetings. The eastern side is occupied by the **Church of St. Catherine**, erected in 1566-96. This church is not always open and guards a statue of the Saint just above the portal and a second statue inside the building.

In the middle of Piazza Pretoria there is a big **fountain**. This great marble complex has been built by the Florentine Francesco Camilliani between 1554 and 1555 and commissioned by Don Pietro di Toledo for one of his country seats in Florence. The son of the latter sold it in 1573 to the city of Palermo, which arranged its current position. This work is famous all over the world as the "Square of Shames" because of the nudes represented on it.

Placed on an adequate elevation and with a fine flight of steps, it is surrounded by a balustrade and enclosed into railings with more than one entrance. The plane is made up of four bridges, under which the waters of many riv-



Porta Felice

ers meet and are directed into a single round tank. The complex includes different marble groups of statues and pagan divinities, allegories and animals' heads.

They are represented in the action of drawing and pouring water into the large tank and the four smaller basins, creating an extraordinary play of lights, especially at night, when the fountain is illuminated.

Going ahead, we find another characteristic church of Palermo: the Church of **Saint Mary of the Admiral or Martorana**, owing its name to the fact that in 1433 it was given from King Alfonso of Aragon to the Benedictine monastery founded by Eloisa Martorano. This sublime example of Norman church underwent different construction stages that compromised its original structure.

Commissioned by George of Antioch, Roger II's admiral, it has a baroque façade and some original parts brought to light by restoration works. The bell tower

with pointed arches at its base and three series of double lancet windows are the remains of the former structure, as well as the square plant of the church with its cupola.

The interior, which used to have a Greek-cross plan, presents a series of seventeenth-century bays that have replaced the porch which connected the church to the bell tower. The upper part of the original church is entirely decorated with marvellous mosaics, created according to the Byzantine style. The subjects depicted are Christ Pantocrator with angels, the Prophets, the Nativity of Jesus, the Annunciation and the Presentation of Christ at the Temple, as well as the most famous mosaic of Roger II crowned by Christ.

The wooden imposts are an Arab manufacture and date back to the XII century.

The adjoining church, the **Church of San Cataldo**, is also an example of Norman architecture. Over the centuries,

several structural works have compromised remarkably the original plan of the church, but an extreme nineteenth-century restoration allowed many features to come back to light. Erected by the admiral Maio of Bari around 1160, today it is the seat of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre Knights and shows typical elements of the Arab-Norman architecture, such as its square shape, the blind arches, the merlon frame and the three small cupolas rising above the tambour.

The rectangular plan has three naves with small apses divided by ancient columns with beautiful

capitals and its bare but essential walls are fascinating. The central nave guards the three small cupolas, which are visible from outside, while the mosaic floor dates back to the XII century, as the altar with Evangelists' symbols, cross and lamb.

In the heart of the old town centre admirable palaces stand out, at a short distance from each other, and once seats of the nobles of Palermo. We are talking about **Santa Croce-Sant'Elia Palace**, dating back to the XVIII century, with baroque balustrades and balconies made from wrought iron or



I Quattro Canti

Comitini Palace, which still owns its marvellous frescoed halls.

Mirto Palace is also worth a visit. From the XVII century, it became the noble residence of the Filangeri, princes of Mirto. This family has very ancient origins and it is told that the Filangeri princes from Naples were not used to take their hats off even before the king.

Mirto Palace was donated to Sicily in 1982, perfectly intact and with all the furnishings and treasures belonged to the noblewoman Maria Concetta Filangeri. Its current appearance is mostly owed to the extension works and rearrangements carried out at the end of the XVIII century, such as the sumptuous façade overlooking Via Lungami. It is possible to visit a museum which is in part open to the public.

The baroque style gives a marked and pompous magnificence to the sites where the fountain decorated with shells and stones and

the ceiling paintings are showed. Moreover, chinoiserie can be admired in the rice-paper sitting room embellished with lacquered furniture, just as a small Versailles!

The palace, which escaped bombing during the last war, is annexed to wide stables decorated with wood intaglios and marble columns.

It is a pity that they are not open to the public. Walking through Via Roma we run into another noteworthy building. It is **Gangi-Valguarnera Palace**, whose baroque halls are simply marvellous and not by chance they have been chosen by the director Luchino Visconti as the setting for some scenes, such as the ball in the movie "The Leopard".

Within a short distance we find **Ajutamicristo Palace**, whose construction was commissioned by Guglielmo Ajutamicristo, with its magnificent five-arch arcade that overlooks the palm and banana-tree garden.

Mura delle cative



Teatro Massimo

Behind this building there is an Arab-Norman church, the **Church of Magione or Basilica of the Holy Trinity**, built by Matteo Ajello in 1191 to donate it to the Cistercians. Six years later, King Henry VI gave it to the Teutonic Order that preserved it until 1492. Its three-nave interior presents several reconstructions, some of which date to modern times. The ruins of the XII-century **cloister** belong to the Norman era. It has been probably built by the same workers who erected soon after the Monreale Cathedral's cloister.

The small ogival arches are supported by twin columns that show original sculpted capitals.

The **Church of Pang** is located near that of Magione. Around 1506, Giacomo Basilicò, who was particularly devoted to "Our Lady suffering in front of crucified Christ", donated some lands to the fathers of Mount Oliveto in order to erect there a church

and a convent.

The construction works began in 1509 but never came to an end. The Senate of Palermo bought the complex because of military needs and the monks had to move somewhere else. In 1520 the building was enriched with a priceless-value masterpiece, "**Sicily's pang**", painted by Raffaello Sanzio and representing the Virgin Mary's dismay in front of Christ collapsed under the weight of the cross.

After the monks transfer, the building fell into disuse and the viceroy of Palermo Don Ferdinando D'Ayala gave it to the King of Spain Philip V in exchange for some favours.

Today the painting is kept at the Prado Museum in Madrid.

In 1582 the church was used as seat for public performances while in the following century was turned into a lazaretto due to a plague.

Once the pestilence had gone, it was used as barn and ware-



house.

Today the Church hosts cultural events, theatrical and musical performances.

Behind the whole Pang complex there is the **botanical Garden**, the most relevant didactic-scientific structure of the region. Since 1795, when it was opened, the garden boasts innumerable vegetal species, many of which originally come from tropical and subtropical areas.

Abatellis Palace was built between 1490 and 1495 by Matteo Carnelivari for the magistrate Francesco Abatellis.

The palace, severely damaged during the last war, is an architectural example of late Gothic and Renaissance style. Today it is the seat of **the Regional Gallery of Sicily**.

Two battlemented towers enclose the façade with elegant double lancet windows. A stately

portal overlapped by coat of arms leads us to the interior. The gallery contains an exhibition of Sicilian figurative arts between the XIII and XVII century, as well as the changes of the Sicilian art that had been affected by other foreign schools.

The gallery collection is composed of acquisitions, donations and confiscated items from suppressed religious organizations. These art works used to belong

to the Picture Gallery of the Royal University and from 1866 on to the National Museum of Palermo. The major works of art are the marble bust of Eleanor of Aragon, a masterpiece of Francesco Laurana, the Virgin with Child in the Gagini's room and the Madonna del Buon Riposo. One of the halls is dedicated to the artist Antonello da Messina, the greatest Sicilian painter ever, and the room contains the pic-

torial masterpiece of the gallery, the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, dating back to 1473. As the Virgin heard the annunciation of the angel, she interrupted her reading and began a secret meditation while raising her hand towards the divine messenger, as a sign of respectful acceptance. Three of the other four paintings displayed in this room and dating back to 1470 belong to Antonello. They are dedicated to the Doctors of the Church and represent St. Gregory, St. Jerome and St. Augustine. Other halls are dedicated to Riccardo Quartaro di Sciacca, the second most important Sicilian painter after Antonello da Messina. Noteworthy

is also the famous fresco Triumph of death separated by a wall of Sclafani Palace.

This masterpiece of an unknown fifteenth-century artist was firstly attributed to a Catalan painter, then to a Flemish one and finally to a pupil of Pisanello. The painting represents the death riding a horse while shooting deadly arrows against joyful characters. Among the figures on the left there is the unknown artist as well. Nearby the museum we find the **Church and the Convent of Saint Mary of the Angels**, also called "La Gancia" (a shelter for foreigners). It owns two visible façades: the main one has typical fifteenth-

Porta Nuova



Porta Politeama

century architecture while the lateral one, facing Via Alloro, has been altered by works and restorations. The convent dates back to 1430 and its façade shows portals with pointed Late Gothic arches. The Greek-cross interior has a wide central nave and several side chapels.

The **Archaeological Regional Museum** is among the most important ones in Italy for its valuable archaeological collections displayed in several large rooms. The museum was arranged in the early nineteenth century in the former Convent of Philippine Fathers. It preserves almost unchanged original features of the seventeenth century, although it was restored in the post-war period to compensate the damages

caused by the war.

It would be a tough job to describe the many archaeological treasures kept in the museum. However the visitor can appreciate the finds of the millenary Sicilian history, from the upper Palaeolithic to the Neolithic civilization. There is an exhibition of weaponry and Sicanian-Sicilian furnishings, as well as Phoenician-Punic finds, Hellenic finds, a valuable collection of Greek-Sicilian sculptures proceeding from Selinunte and sculptures of the Roman period. Etruscan pieces dating back to the VII century are also present.

The showroom of Selinunte contains sculptures of city temples with the well-known *metopes*, important both for their plastic

beauty and for the knowledge and evolution of the Siceliota¹ sculpture over time. The halls of the small and big bronzes contain a collection of little Greek, Etruscan and Roman statues representing mythological subjects. Magnificent is the room of Greek Sculptures, where the marble statue of "Satyr pouring wine" stands out. The rooms of Greek pottery and Mosaics are also very important; in the latter, one can admire the "Four Seasons Mosaic" and "Orpheus and the Beasts". In the bronzes room the Ram, a work of art of the III century BC and proceeding from Syracuse, shows up. An entire book would not be enough to list all the collections of the museum, therefore we made a selection.

¹ Name given to the Greeks who settled in the Greek colonies in Sicily

But through a minute and careful visit it is possible to appreciate all the non-mentioned works of art of the museum. Towards Via IV Aprile, we reach a beautiful square, **Piazza Marina**, once lapped by the sea and theatre of public performances, including hangings of people sentenced to death and who sometimes were kept hanging for weeks. In 1863 the Town Council decided to turn it into a wonderful garden dedicated to Garibaldi and designed by Basile.

In the middle of it, there is a huge ficus magnoloides. Today the square is a meeting point, full of cafés, restaurants and bars, where one can taste all the sweet and salty Sicilian specialties, in particular the famous ice-creams and water-ice.

The square is surrounded by important buildings, such as the majestic **Chiaramonte Palace**,

also called "**lo Steri**", erected in 1306 by one of the most powerful Sicilian families.

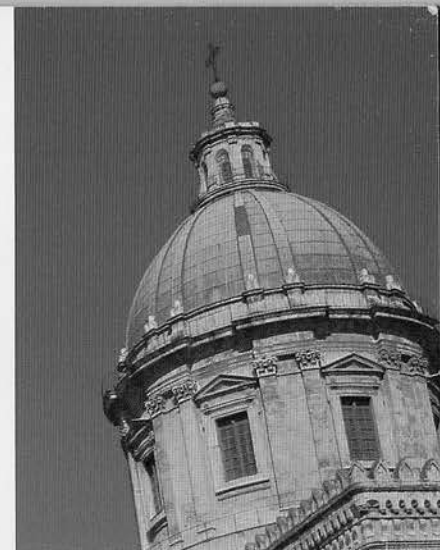
During the centuries it was restored and widened, becoming the residence of the Royal Family and later of the viceroys. Ancient Inquisition Court, today is the seat of the Rectorship and keeps a wonderful medieval wooden ceiling.

Several palaces with solemn façades overlook the square, such as **Notarbartolo di Villarosa Palace**, dating back to XVIII century, or the seventeenth-century **Palace of St. Onofrio Castle** that became Hotel de France in the early nineteenth century, one of the most renowned hotels of the city.

The **Inland Revenue Office Palace**, resulting from the transformation of the Royal Zecca Palace (1699) and the **Church of St. Mary of the Miracles**, dating back to the sixteenth century, are worth a visit as well.

The **Puppet International Museum**, which is located inside the **Massa-Pojero Palace**, contains a collection of marionettes and typical puppets of the Sicilian tradition.

Adjacent to the museum there is the magnificent **Branciforti di Butera Palace**, built in seventeenth-century style with a large view over the Umberto I Italic Forum, where Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa wrote the novel "The Leopard". It is all surrounded by a wall curtain called "**the Walls of the Wicked**



Women" or "the Walk of the Wicked Women".

The place has this peculiar name because the widows were used to have a walk there, and they were called "captive" that means "prisoner" of the mourning.

The entrance steps lead to the small square of S.Spirito.

The **Church of Saint Mary of the Chain** was built between 1490 and 1520 by the architect Matteo Cernelivari and took this name because of the chain's end on one of its walls that was closing the port of Cala.

The building combines perfectly Renaissance and Gothic-Catalan elements. The interior, with Gothic-Renaissance features, contains the Nativity with the Worship of the Shepherds, by a seventeenth-century unknown artist and a Nativity and Worship of the Magi, bas-reliefs of the XVI century attributed to Vincenzo and Antonello Gagini who sculpted also the capitals of the columns and the entrance



portals. The church's conventual house dates back to 1602 and since 1844 is seat of the State Archives. A bit further back, we find the stunning **Church of St. Francis of Assisi**, built between 1266 and 1277. The façade has a Romanesque style, while the interior underwent lots of changes since the Renaissance to the eighteenth century and contains several works of art, such as the masterpieces of Antonello and Domenico Gagini and of Francesco Laurana.

Along the narrow street close to the Church there is the **Oratory of Immacolatella** dating back to the early seventeenth century and full of elegant stuccos. Straight after we find the **Oratory of St. Lawrence**, whose hall was designed by Giacomo Amato in the seventeenth century.

It contains an amazing series of sculptures by Giacomo Serpotta. Here, there is also the famous "Nativity" of Caravaggio, purchased in 1969.



Le Catacombe dei Cappuccini

We have now reached **Capo**, an ancient village of Palermo. Here it is possible to have a walk through a street market that still preserves the Arabian taste of vegetables, meat, fish, fruit and spices. Right here is the **Teatro Massimo**, completed in a twenty-year period, between 1877 and 1897 and open to the public after having been closed for 25 years. This theatre is one of the major opera houses in Europe and can host over 3,200 people. Here Enrico Caruso, Lina Cavalieri and the composer Giacomo Puccini trod the boards.

The flight of steps with two bronze lions overlapped with Tragedy and Opera representations leads to the neoclassical façade. The interior is wonderfully furnished with comfortable armchairs and well-decorated stages. We are now in front of a real artistic mosaic: the **Cathedral**, result of the several dominations that succeeded in Palermo. The Church keeps a complex structure, because of the continuous alterations and changes over the centuries.

In 1184 the archbishop Gualtiero Offamilio decided to build the Church in place of an ancient basilica transformed into a mosque by the Arabs and which the Normans brought back to Christianity. Between 1781 and 1801 the building underwent profound changes, such as the Latin-cross plan, the construction of lateral naves, the transept and the cupola. In 1767 the archbishop Filangieri commissioned to Ferdinando Fuga a restoration of the build-

this entrance has been designed by Antonio Gambara in 1426, while the two wall monuments dating back to the early eighteenth century represent Charles III of Spain on the right and Victor Amadeus II on the left.

The left side underwent many changes and hosts a great portal of Gagini dating back to the early sixteen century.

The interior has a Latin-cross plan, with a nave and two aisles, divided by pillars. By starting our



ing, but the works began after several years and were entrusted to Giuseppe Venanzio Marvuglia from Palermo.

In this occasion the precious gallery of Antonello Gagini, dating back to the early seventeenth century, was destroyed.

The right-hand side of the building with its typical turrets and the vast Gothic-Catalan porch overlooks the square and is the current entrance. The portal of

visit to the Cathedral, we can admire the exterior four towers of Norman age, the cupola and the two large pointed arches that connect the church to the Archbishop's Palace, and the bell tower with the clock. The Gothic appearance derives from the presence of double lancet window towers with small columns, from the battlements and the little arches placed all along the right side of the building.

As we have already mentioned, the **interior** underwent several changes between the end of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century; the last works concerned the construction of the Latin-cross plan divided into three naves.

On the right nave, the first and the second chapels guard the **imperial and royal tombs of the Normans**: Roger I, king since 1130 and Frederick II, whose sarcophagus is overlapped by a canopy with porphyry columns. The other tombs belong to Constance, sister of the King of Aragon and wife of Frederick II, to William, duke of Athens, son of Frederick III of Aragon and the empress Constance of Hauteville, daughter of Roger II. To the right of the presbytery there is the **Chapel of Saint Rosalie** with the altar guarding the seventeenth-century silver urn that contains the relics of the Patron Saint of Palermo. The side walls are embellished with marble reliefs representing the Saint.

Noteworthy is also the rich bronze **Altar of the Sacra-**

ment with lapis lazuli and coloured marbles dating back to XVII century.

On the floor of the central nave, in front of the main altar, a marble **sundial** with coloured inlays representing the zodiacal signs has been built during the modern restoration works.

Inside the presbytery there is the beautiful **wooden choir**, in Gothic-Catalan style, and the **bishop's throne**, restored with fragments of ancient XII-century mosaics.

The Church contains also frescos and canvas of Mariano Rossi, Gagini and works of Laurana. The **Treasure of the Cathedral** is composed of holy ornaments, monstrance, calices, an illuminated breviary of the fifteenth century, the golden tiara of Constance of Aragon, taken from her tomb, which is a wonderful medieval jeweller's craft with enamels, embroideries, gems and pearls.

The left side of the Cathedral leads to the **crypt** that contains the tombs and the sarcophaguses dating back to the Roman age. This evocative place guards the



Catedral, Cappella Palatina

tombs of the archbishop Giovanni Paternò, dead in 1511 and benefactor of Antonello Gagini, who sculpted his touching laying figure, and the sepulchral monument of Gualtiero Offamilio, founder of the Cathedral.

Here Victor Amadeus II and Charles III of Bourbon, important figures of the Sicilian history, were crowned kings.

Away from the centre of Palermo there are some interesting monuments. We can start from the **Zisa**, a magnificent Arab-Norman building, commissioned by William I as summer residence and completed by William II in 1165.

The name derives from the Arabic term "aziz" that means wonderful. The massive building has a regular plan, two towers on the shorter sides and blind arches on three orders. It is characterized by an embattled crowning of the sixteen century and an interior

divided into several residential areas.

It underwent lots of changes, and after a dereliction period, the Region of Sicily has restored it. At the beginning it was included in the wide park of Genoardo, one of the beautiful Norman gardens that occupied the whole territory of the Conca d'Oro, and it overlooked a little artificial lake.

We recommend the visit to the Hall of the Fountain, with a cruciform plan, cross vaults and bird mosaic walls. The **Cuba** is an ancient and historic building. Giovanni Boccaccio in the thirteenth century chose it as the setting of his tales. (Decameron, Day V, 6).

Two centuries later, it was used as lazaretto, and during the Bourbon age was incorporated into a cavalry barrack.

The building has a rectangular plan and arches along the whole surface, where niches alternate with blind windows surmounted



by an Arab epigraph with the name of King William II and the foundation date, 1180.

Originally it was built in the middle of a small artificial lake, in a big garden of the park of Genoardo. Inside, the Cuba has just a single room, where the royal family used to have parties and receptions during the Norman epoch.

Saint John of the Lepers is located in the middle of a nice garden and dates back to the most ancient

Norman domination. In fact, it was built under Roger I by Arab workers and completed with the adjacent leper hospital in the XII century. The interior has a basilican plan and is divided into a nave and two aisles, with a hemispheric cupola upon the transept. The altar hosts a Crucifix of the XV century.

Close to the building there are few ruins of the castle of lehia

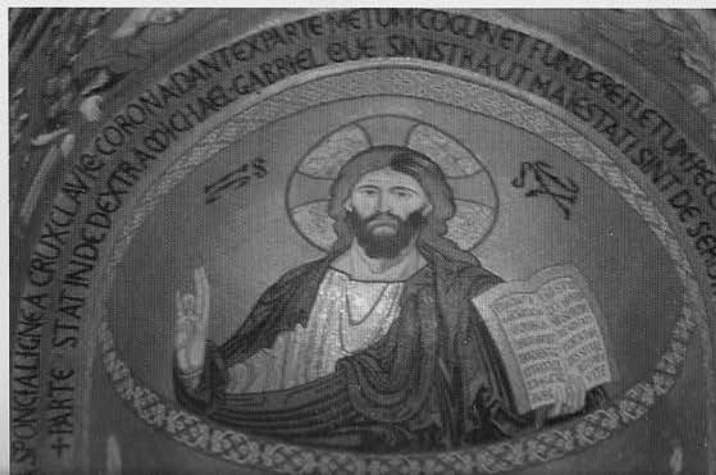
(meaning John), erected by the Arabs and which was once connected to the Church. One of the features in existence of Palermo is the visit to the **Catacombs**. These are underground sites whose walls display around 8000 standing and seated mummies, some of them also kept inside urns. Women and priests are located in separated corridors. They are the corpses of Palermo clergy's and middle classes' members who from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century were used to be buried in these catacombs.

Visiting this place is not recommended to people who are particularly sensitive. From 1881 depositing corpses is no longer allowed. The whole area preserves scattered ruins of shelters where ancient Arab and Norman lords used to idle about, surrounded by gardens and citrus orchards.

The **Chinese Villa** stands in the Park of the Favourite, a wide public park. This building was designed by the architect Venanzio Marvuglia for King Ferdinand I of Bourbon and Maria Carolina and dates back to 1799.

It is a great blending of neo-classic architecture with exotic and oriental style, which can be also noticed in the interior of the building displaying furnishings, silks and Chinese prints. From the second-floor terraces visitors can enjoy an enchanting view over the Conca d'Oro plain. In the same park we find also the **Pitrè Ethnographic Museum**, established by the homonymous founder in 1909 and which houses a collection of items that reflect Sicilians' domestic habits, hunting, fishing and agriculture, amulets of folk and religious magic. The **Sanctuary of Saint Rosalie**, patron saint of the city, rises on **Mount Pellegrino**. The cave was discovered on 15th July 1624 by a hunter, while the city was devastated by a terrible plague.

The hunter found in the cave the bones of Virgin Rosalie, daughter of the Norman noble Sinibaldo, grandson of William II, who some centuries before had chosen this place for praying. He took the bones and brought them to town, and thanks to this intervention, the plague came to an end. From this discovery, many suggestive legends originated. Every year, on 4th September, the people of Palermo celebrate the patron saint with pilgrimages and processions that start at night and during the day bring cheerfulness to this place. The interior of the church is simple, but as soon as you enter, you can feel a great astonishment while noticing that the arcade is as wide as the church opening in front of the nave. It looks like an open and extended courtyard; on the right, it is enclosed by the coarse mount rock and on the left by the continuation of the arcade. The marble floor is slightly sloping to allow rainwater to flow away. In the middle of the nave there is a fountain.



MONDELLO

It is the beach of Palermo, holiday resort and renowned centre for the community life.

The town rises around the old fishing village, once animated by the "tonnara", place where tuna-fishing nets were set and which was still working until the beginning of the twentieth century. Its ruins are visible in the fifteenth-century tower of the built-up area. Another contemporary sighting tower rises on the nearby promontory. The marshy area surrounding the old village was reclaimed and during the Belle Époque age Montello has been enriched with Art-Nouveau buildings. In the period between the two wars, an elite tourism developed. Today the village welcomes anyone who likes having a good time but also enjoying a breathtaking panorama.

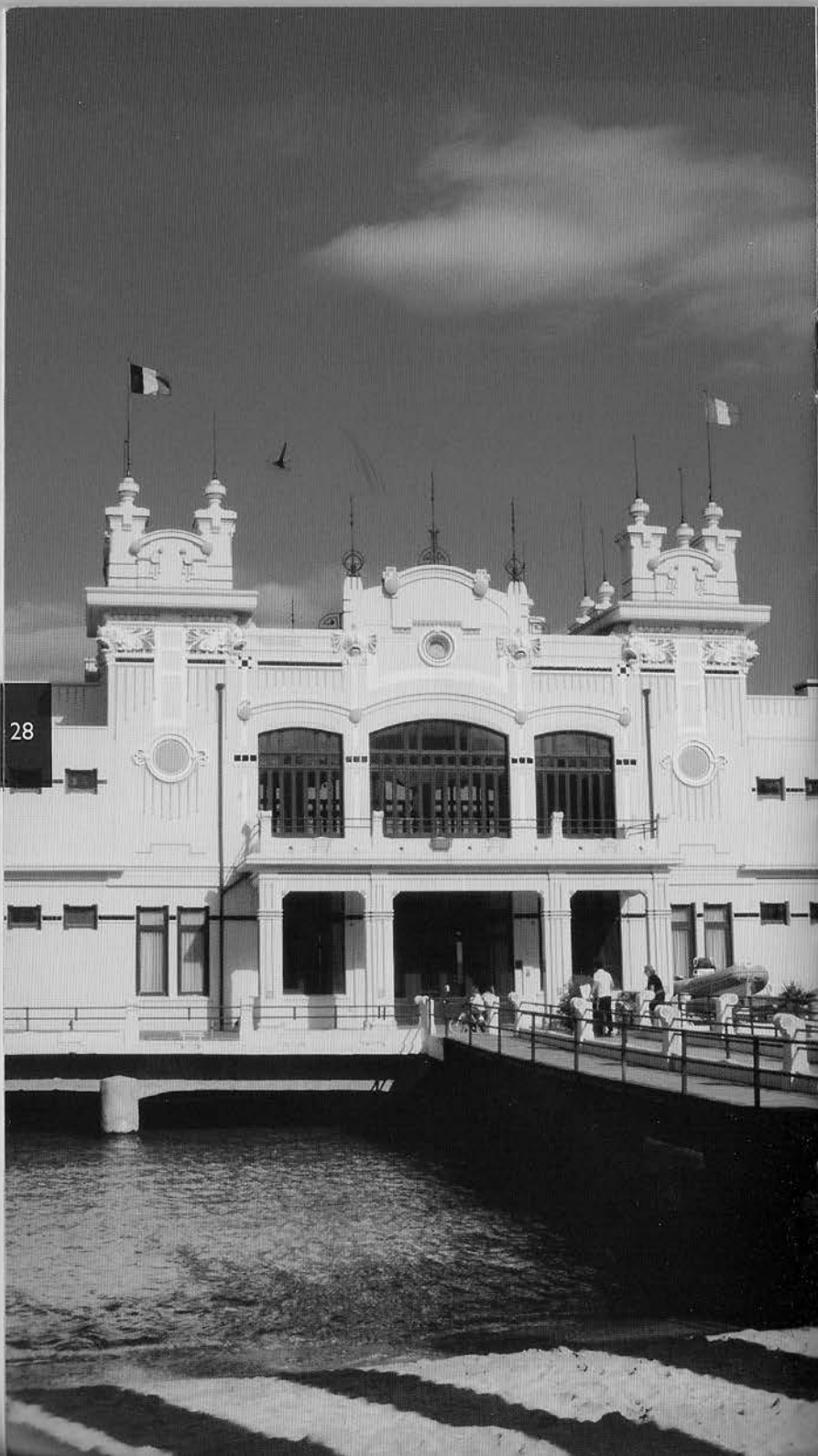
The **caves of the Addaura** are famous for some rock carvings dating back to the upper Palaeolithic representing men and animals.

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The **PLAIN OF ALBANIANS** is the most important Albanian colony in Sicily. Bounded by high mountains and a blooming green setting, it overlooks a beautiful lake. It was founded in the second half of the XV century, when after the Turkish invasion of the Balkan Peninsula, groups of Albanian refugees looked for a shelter along the coasts of Southern Italy. Still today, after five centuries, this place has preserved its ethnic-linguistic identity.

Particularly interesting is the late medieval urban structure of the village with its typical fountains made from local stone and the urban architecture of the town centre with old houses and alleys.

LA CONCA D'ORO

Cultivated fields and patrician villas, orange groves with brilliant colours and age-old castles: this used to be the **Conca d'Oro** until the years of great construction development, the fertile semi-lunar area that stretches from Bagheria to Mount Pellegrino and which the nobles and the rich of Palermo have always considered as a place of delicacies. First the Arabs and later the Normans turned the natural setting behind Palermo into marvellous gardens and holiday residences. Then, the aristocracy of the Sixteenth, Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries built here sumptuous villas and recently a wild construction development has caused many damages by spoiling this enchanting landscape.

BAGHERIA



It developed at the end of the eighteenth century after the renovation of one villa of the prince Giuseppe Branciforte, who had built his famous Villa Butera in the middle of an estate cultivated with citrus fruits. One century after, one of his descendants renovated the residence, tracing out two perpendicular roads along which the following built-up area had expanded. The housing boom has finally prevailed over the existing buildings, suppressing the beautiful gardens first and then the structures themselves. Bagheria is the birthplace of famous people such as the painter Renato Guttuso, the poet Ignazio Buttitta and the well-known director Giuseppe Tornatore.

VILLA BUTERA: This marvellous building shows a façade that has been renovated in the eighteenth century, while the original plant in the garden still remains intact, with a large two-flight staircase leading to a monumental entrance, surrounded by stuccos and adorned with the **bust** of Giuseppe Branciforte.

VILLA CATTOLICA: It dates back to 1736 and was built around a wide courtyard. Today it houses the *Municipal Gallery of modern and contemporary Art* to collect the works of Renato Guttuso. Over the years the collections have expanded, welcoming works of other contemporary artists such as Mario Schifano and Ernesto Treccani.

VILLA PALAGONIA: It can be considered as the most famous villa of Bagheria, thanks also to the eccentric garden populated by stone monsters that surrounds the construction. Built in 1715 by order of Ferdinando Francesco Gravina, prince of Palagonia, and described by Goethe himself, it has a wavy structure with decorative motifs that alternate tuff and white plasters. The interior hosts a fresco representing the *Labours of Hercules*, and the rooms are decorated with marble and mirrors. Peculiar grotesque figures surmount the fence outside the villa; they were built by order of the prince's grandson Ferdinando Gravina Alliata in 1747.

VILLA VALGUARNERA: This is the most striking villa in Bagheria, surrounded by an age-old park. It dates back to 1721 and, like villa Palagonia, was designed by Tommaso Maria Napoli. Still today, its beauty can be admired, as well as the statues of Ignazio Marabitti placed on both façades.



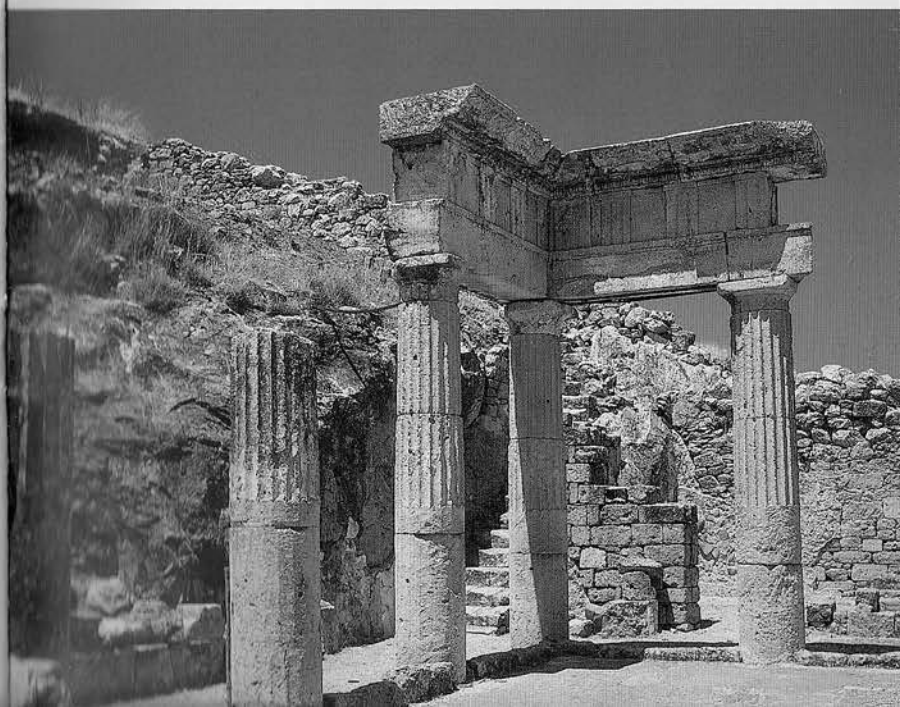
SOLUNTO



A few kilometres from Bagheria, we find Solunto, one of the main Punic colonies founded in Sicily and whose ruins are on the slopes of Mount Catalano.

Established in the IV century BC with the name of **Solus**, it remained under the Carthaginian domination until the Roman conquest, which took place in the mid-third century BC. Flourishing town during the imperial age, it was abandoned at the end of the II century AD and later destroyed by the Saracen raids. In 1826 it was brought back to light; it shows an urban orthogonal plant and preserves part of the original flooring, the main route and some cobblestones of minor streets.

Many houses still keep a complex water supply system based on tanks and pipelines. The entertainment area offers a **theatre** dating back to the Hellenistic age, an **odeum** for dancers, and a circular **bouleterion** for popular assemblies.



MONREALE

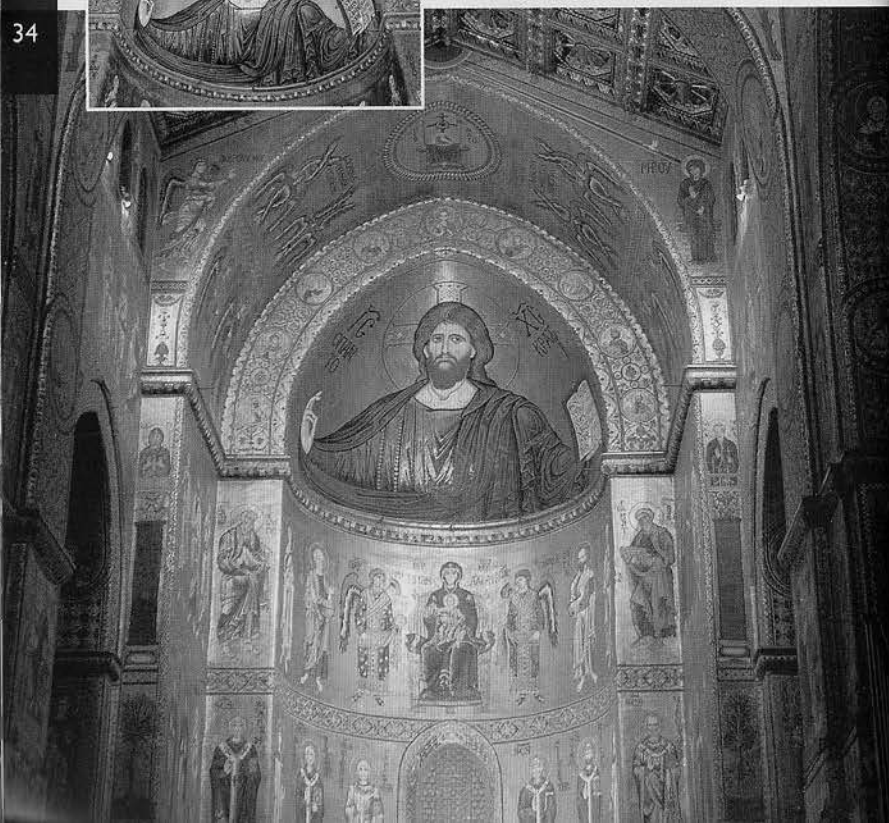
The pretty town of Monreale is located at eight kilometres from Palermo. The village, perched on a rocky promontory, overlooks the Conca d'Oro. Its origins date back to the Benedictine abbey that assumed importance and power at the end of the thirteenth century and became the Archbishop's residence. World-wide famous for its beautiful Cathedral, the town had a strong development between the XVII and the XVIII century, period that coincided with the construction of several Baroque buildings that still exist.

The **Cathedral** is a Norman-architecture masterpiece and



shows evident Romanesque, Arab and Byzantine influences just as other buildings of the island. Built by order of William II in 1174, it was completed in just ten years and dedicated to Our Lady. The cathedral was committed to the Benedictine monks and thanks to the Archbishops who have succeeded to the papal throne this marvellous masterpiece of art and faith has reached the current times preserving its original shapes.

The powerful and massive structure of the Cathedral has no exterior decorations of particular



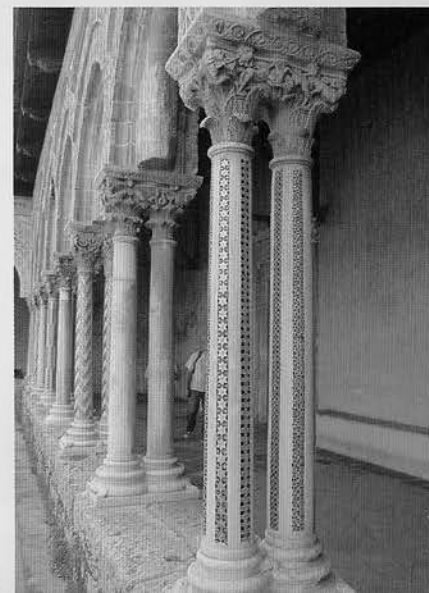
importance, except for the three apses that are adorned with entwined arches and columns with lava and limestone inlays.

Two magnificent portals open up the building: the one of the main entrance, with mosaic friezes and marble sculptures, includes two bronze imposts composed of 42 panels in relief that tell episodes of the Old and New Testament. The other bronze door on the left side of the Church, framed by the elegant sixteenth-century porch, represents the Saviour and the Saints and is a work of Giovanni and Fazio Gagini.

The façade is flanked by two massive square towers but most of all it is the interior that reveals its magnificence. The beauty of the mosaics creates an amazing atmosphere of indescribable solemnity and mysticism.

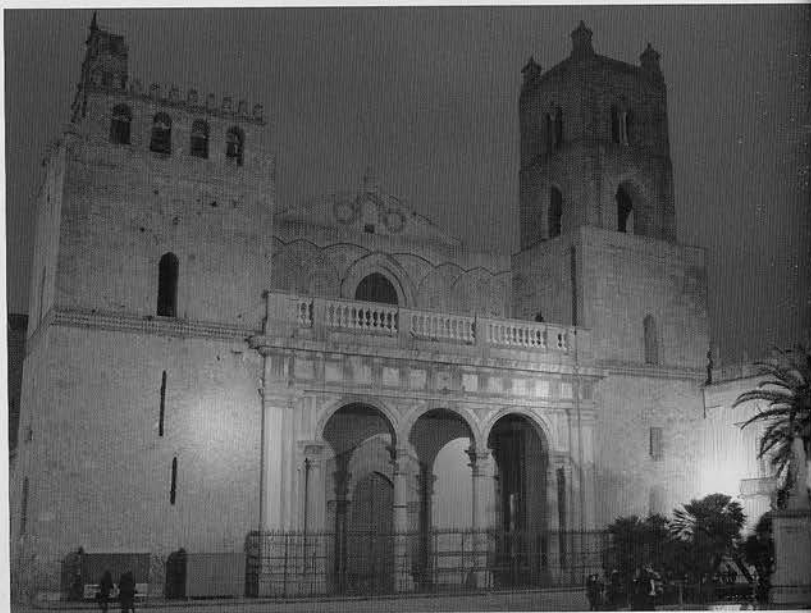
The columns of the three-nave interior are ancient, as the capitals that support Moorish pointed arches. The building has a floor which is in part original.

What surprises most while entering this Cathedral are the



mosaics that cover almost completely the inner surface, reaching the remarkable extension of 6300 square metres. Dating back to the end of the XII and the beginning of the XIII century, they were made by local craftsmen and Venetians of evident byzantine inspiration and represent stories of the *Old and New Testament*. The central apse shows the giant figure of *Blessing Christ* with the *Pantocrator* inscription, meaning Almighty, and that stands above the *Virgin with Child*.

The sarcophagus of William I and William II are kept on the right side of the Cathedral, while on the left there are the tombs of Marguerite de Navarre, wife of William I, and of her sons Henry and Roger. A small urn placed under the altar guards the heart and the vital organs of St. Louis of France. From here we get to



the Chapel of the Holy Crucified, example of Sicilian Baroque, built with materials proceeding from different parts of Sicily. The sacristy of the Chapel preserves some objects that are part of the Treasure of the Basilica, such as sacred paraments, liturgical furnishings and gothic reliquary of the XV century.

Facing the façade of the Cathedral, on the right side, there is the **Cloister** of the Benedictine convent, erected simultaneously with the Church. With a perfectly square plan, its arches are supported by 228 fine twin columns with several decorations. Besides, there is a fountain where water spurts from a palm-shaped column.



SAN MARTINO DELLE SCALE

A few kilometres from Monreale we reach San Martino delle Scale, a health resort surrounded by pine trees and placed at the centre of an unpolluted environment. The Benedictine abbey, which according to the legend was founded by Gregory the Great in the VI century, was razed by the Arabs in the year 820 and later rebuilt several times. In 1770 it has obtained the current appearance. Still inhabited by monks, the town is also the seat of one part of the Academy of Fine Arts. The monastery rises next to the church and was built between the 1770 and 1786.



CEFALÙ

Placed at the foot of an imposing rocky promontory, Cefalù is one of the most picturesque seaside resorts of Sicily. The enchanting coasts are framed by green hills covered by age-old trees and the built-up area is considered a valuable artistic and cultural heritage of great importance.

The medieval town centre consists of alleys, courtyards and winding narrow streets.

The construction of the **Cathedral** began in 1131 at the behest of Roger II to fulfil a vow, since he had escaped a storm in the waters off the town. The two towers of the church, for a visual effect, seem to converge in the middle of the Norman square façade. In 1472 the porch has been added and, behind it, the marvellous portal *Porta Regum* opens up with



Christ Pantocrator



marble inlays. The interior has a nave and two aisles and hosts, in the apse, beautiful gold mosaics that represent the great figure of *Christ Pantocrator*.

Both arches and naves underwent several changes over the centuries, while the glass windows date back to the XX century. The original cloister was partially destroyed during a fire in the sixteenth century.

On the Cathedral's square, the late-Baroque **Palazzo Maria** stands out and was probably a royal residence.

In front of the Cathedral the **Mandalisca Museum** is worth a visit. It owes its name to the founder of the collections, the baron of Mandalisca Enrico Piraino, who lived in Cefalù around 1860. Among the works kept in this house-museum we

must mention the *Portrait of an unknown man* by Antonello da Messina, an oil painting dating back to 1465.

Within easy reach is the **ram-part of Marchiafava**, where one can enjoy a striking view of Cefalù and its shore, as well as the ruins of a town megalithic fortification dating back to the Greek settlement age.

From here, we soon reach the small harbour, where fishermen houses and the prospect of the walled town form a charming complex.

To admire another stunning panorama from the top, it is necessary to face a hard slope up to the **Stronghold**, where there are the ruins of Byzantine fortifications and the Greek Temple of Diana dating back to the IX century BC.

