



Exhibition Concept „Sicily: From Ulysses to Garibaldi“

25th January - 25th May 2008

Press Conference: 24th January 2008, 11 a.m.

Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany (Bonn)

The exhibition „Sicily“ aims at pointing out the cultural diversity of Sicily, one of Italy’s great regions that has for some time been at the centre of attention in Central Europe – in historical, literary and tourist contexts. This diversity is the result of an overlay of cultural strata that have for millennia spread across the largest island in the Western Mediterranean. They are named after the changing predominance of the Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans, Swabians (Hohenstaufen) and Spanish and finally after the dynasties of the Habsburgs and Bourbons.

Within the exhibition (and in the catalogue) Sicily’s cultural variety can be presented as a historic series of strata:

1. The Prehistoric indigenous cultures of the Sicans and Sicels, and the first Greek settlers in Sicily: myths and topography
2. The Archaic and Classical culture of the Greeks and Punians in Sicily: art and urban development
3. Sicily as the first Roman province and part of the Roman Empire: granary and empire
4. The development of the Christian culture in Late Antiquity and the mark of Byzantine dominance: the Saints of Sicily
5. Sicily in the Middle Ages since the arrival of the Arabs; the Normans, Swabians and Spanish in Sicily: architecture and science
6. Renaissance and Baroque in Sicily’s sculpture, painting and applied arts: the metamorphosis of role models
7. The 19th century up to Garibaldi’s disembarkation

The exhibition will have a narrative character. In the individual sections the local materials of art and crafts will be shown and, where possible, also the change in nature and landscape. Moreover the constant inclusion of characteristic shapes in the continuous cultural



development of Sicily – up to the monumental and museum-like evidence still visible even today – will be highlighted.

The historic panorama will be connected with the important historic figures of Sicily, such as Gelon and Hannibal, Archimedes and Ibn Hamdis, Roger, Frederick II, and Garibaldi. The objects chosen for the documentation of the development will be arranged around especially characteristic works of art that represent the importance of the respective cultural layer. These identification points can be e.g. the Kourotrophus from Megara Hyblaea, the Motya Youth and the Boy from Agrigento, the works of Antonella da Messina as well as those of the Gagini or the stucco pieces of Serpotta.

In the Prehistoric section the different cultures succeeding each other in pre- and protohistoric times will be portrayed. That enables the viewer to see Sicily as a place where the cultural traces reveal unmistakable original provenance but also a creative potential of their own. The suggested materials present a synthetic panorama over some important sculptures to the manufacturing of vases in the main cultures of pre- and protohistory (Castelluccio, Thapsos, Pantalica, Valle del Marcellino/Villasmundo).

The cultural production of the Greek era in Sicily is certainly one of the most fascinating and best known of the Island. Here it will be important to show that the encounter with the indigenous cultures and that of the Punians in the West of the Island has defined the distribution and development of the Greek culture in Sicily as opposed to that in Greece right from the beginning. With the will, the successes and the identities of the colonies, ambitious monumental complexes emerged (e.g. Selinunt), but also ornaments and sculptures, votive and art objects of highest quality. This quality will be emphasised by the respective loans. In the Classical era new standards in private, social and cultural life developed. The objects displayed in this section therefore come from cult sites and temples (Demeter, Dionysus) and show the significance of the theatre. The section is completed by a precise selection of Attic vases of choice quality from the necropolises of Agrigento and Gela.

The Roman section spans the Hellenism of the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC and all of the Roman era up to the end of the 3rd century AD with its tension between the idea of an enormous granary for Rome and the political marginality of the island. The cultural significance of the Island was certainly defined by its geographical location in the Mediterranean. This part of the



exhibition cannot offer a comprehensive picture but rather a selection of marble works (mainly official and private portraits and sarcophaguses), of bronze art, marble sculptures used in cult contexts, mosaics, Punic-Roman funeral art and silversmith art as well as of trade with some underwater discoveries and of the epigraphic administrative documents.

In Late Antiquity and the Byzantine era Sicily was quite significant for the connection between Italy, Africa and the Middle East. In those days one spoke of a mixed population of Greeks, Latins and Orientals who lived mainly in the Eastern part of the Island, with a notable Jewish presence not only in the large cities. After an era dominated by the cities and the colonies that had emerged near the large latifundia, new forms of settlement developed at the beginning of the 7th century, a time of constant uncertainty. Those settlements included fortified estates (l'habitat rupestre), small agglomerations in quarries, the Byzantine castra. The objects displayed in this section illustrate the research of recent years (e.g. the complex of Sofiana, the necropolis of Sant'Agata) and demonstrate with a number of representative examples such as the sarcophagus of Adelfia the length of this period from the cultural development in Roman times to the Middle Ages.

The section concentrating on the Middle Ages covers the time from the Arab dominance in Sicily up to the onset of the reign of the house of Aragon. Within this section a differentiated insight shall be given into the culture of sovereign rights with particular consideration of the Normans and the Staufer Dynasty. We are looking especially at the history of knowledge, illustrating the strong scientific focus of this era. The affluent culture at court in those days will be explained by means of objects from treasure art, textiles and sculpture fragments, placing special emphasis on those objects that show the adoption of the Arab culture. The framework for this presentation will be provided by the introduction of the most important architectural monuments of this era which will be displayed with photographs and a three-dimensional documentation of the capitals of Monreale (Project CENOBIUM, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, Max-Planck-Institut).

The Renaissance era in Sicily does not manifest itself so much by its own style but rather by the work of certain artist personalities. Therefore this part of the exhibition will be dominated by great names: Antonella da Messina and the not Sicilian-born sculptors Francesco Laurana, Domenico Gagini and his son Antonello. A highlight is the reconstruction of the Altar built by Antonello Gagini for Raphael's painting "lo spasimo della Sicilia". Above all the



magnificent Sicilian craftwork that characterizes Sicilian art up to the 18th century – pieces made from corals, silver and coloured marble – will be introduced.

The art of Caravaggio will lead into the Baroque era. Sicilian Baroque with its decorative elements will be presented within the exhibition in its numerous facets: e.g. the paintings of Pietro Novellis, the stucco works of Giacomo Serpotta or the depiction of religious feasts. The architecture will be presented by means of plans, views, models and parts of the original furnishings – altar pieces, stucco and marble decorations as well as architecturally designed altar hangings (palliotti) – the emphasis being placed on the architecture and interior of churches and palaces of the gentry which mirror the social and political development of the Island.

Throughout the exhibition, a selection of photographs can depict how those monuments were seen through the eyes of the 19th century. The uniformity of the historic narrative will be guaranteed by a selection of coins in all the different sections.

The exhibition summarizes the research of the last twenty years, according to which this diversity and change cannot be understood without the background of the cultural characteristics of the Sicilian Island and their continuous progression. They are the result of the Island's location in the Mediterranean, its financial and natural resources and the combination of the various cultural influences named after the “foreign regimes” mentioned above. Having met and merged in the succession of cultures, those influences have left important marks still visible today. The exhibition project is quite bold and groundbreaking insofar as it sees the coexistence of different cultural strata as a model for the current cultural situation in Europe.

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