



LE STRADE DELLA
CERAMICA
SICILIANA



IDENTITY
takes
shape

Artistic ceramics are not just “souvenirs” or furnishing elements typical of Sicilian homes: they have recently achieved the status of **true icons of Sicilian identity**, recognized and appreciated throughout the world. Artistic and artisanal creations that unite art and craftsmanship, this ceramics are the result of quality workmanship and the flagship of the Sicilian cultural heritage.

The production of artistic ceramics is present in almost the entire island. However, it is an art whose tradition is found mainly in six cities: **Burgio, Caltagirone, Collesano, Monreale, Santo Stefano di Camastra** and **Sciacca**, which are part of the Association Italian City of Ceramics and which together gave life to the “**Strade della ceramica siciliana**” (**Sicilian ceramic routes**).

A **new way of experiencing tourism in Sicily**, through routes made of nature, art and culture, off the beaten track.

An experience suitable for those who want to know the most **intimate and profound identity of Sicily**, with unforgettable experiences inside the workshops of Sicilian ceramists, who will reveal their ancient and noble art of working with terracotta.

There is a whole world to discover around master potters. An ancient world but still lively and bubbly, made up of places and people that the visitor can get to know through the Ceramic Road Passport.

With this special passport it will be possible to access the network of Ceramics Museums but also many other places of art and culture in our six cities. It will be easy to enjoy unique experiences in the ceramists' workshops, in other artisan workshops and in those of the pastry chefs and bakers who, through their own ovens, share with the ceramists the skilful art of heat that gives shape - and color - to their mixtures. Typical Sicilian cuisine certainly cannot be missing from such an experience!

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BURGIO

The history of ceramics in Burgio began at the end of the 16th century with the arrival of some families of ceramists from Caltagirone. The expert ceramists chose to move here, with their families around 1589, to practice their art by virtue of the large quantity and high quality of clay that the area offered, the ease to obtain coal from the numerous woods in the surrounding area, the presence of the Garella stream, the growing demand of the market linked to the building development of the nearby towns. The first to move was Vincenzo Maurici with his son Matteo, subsequently Antonio Merlo, Bartolomeo Daidone, Pietro Gangarella, Giuseppe Savia, Nicola and Giovanni Maurici, an expert in the construction of stoves for calcining tin and finally, Giacomo Sperlinga and Stefano Vinci.

The first ceramic production in Burgio was in harmony with that from Caltagirone. The workshops did not suffer from competition from manufactured goods imported from Naples and Vietri, which for years had already been exporting good quality bricks to Sicily in ever-increasing quantities, made in an industrial manner at low cost, painted with the aid of the mask so as to put crisis in the major centers of the island. The factories were able to adapt to the needs of the market.



In the second half of the century the workshops entered into crisis and the more valuable production was supplanted by cheaper industrial products. At the fairs a lot of objects of common use continued to be sold, flower vases to be placed on balconies and terraces and also nativity scene figurines rich in creativity and devotion. At the end of the century, many shops put out their fires due to the continuous export of Neapolitan and especially Vietri artifacts.

The establishment of MUCEB (the ceramic museum of Burgio), originates from the desire to safeguard and enhance a fruitful activity carried out by local and territorial workers, who over the centuries have taken turns in making the production of majolica increasingly precious and appreciated of this place.

Tourist route

The origins of Burgio are linked to the events of the oldest monument, the Castle, built during the period of Arab occupation in the highest part of the current town. Later, the stronghold was conquered by the Normans, who rebuilt the fortress. Next to the castle stands the beautiful Mother Church, founded in the 12th century. From here the visit of the city begins.

The mother church, dedicated to Sant'Antonio Abate, patron saint of Burgio, houses many works of art, including a Madonna and Child by Vincenzo Gagini (1568); some precious stuccoes and five large statues by Orazio Ferraro (1596). Inside there is also a wooden crucifix, coming from the Sanctuary of Riesi, probably from the 13th century.



The second essential stop is the complex of the Reformed Minor Fathers, now home to the Muceb, the ceramic museum of Burgio. Among the other monuments to visit is the Church of San Giuseppe: the interior is entirely adorned with a seventeenth-century decorative apparatus of frescoes and stuccoes; a large scene of Paradise is frescoed in the barrel vault. The Church of San Vito (1522) which houses the famous statue of San Vito by Antonello Gagini.

For an immersive tourist experience to discover Burgio ceramics, a fundamental stop is the historic Caravella workshop.

A magnificent place where time has stopped and where the master ceramist Paolo Caravella, considered the living heritage of Sicily, still creates his splendid ceramics according to the most ancient tradition.





CALTAGIRONE

The history of Caltagirone ceramics is a thousand-year history. The 18th century, however, marks the period of greatest development and diffusion due to the distinctive characteristics of the eighteenth-century majolica of Caltagirone: the plastic decorations combined with the rich polychromy, mark the golden age of Caltagirone ceramics. The late nineteenth-century production of terracotta for architectural furnishings it has been relevant. The Vella factory excelled in this activity and was responsible for some of the noble chapels in the area, a splendid cemetery designed by G.B. Nicastro. True works of art of exquisite workmanship are the balconies, the garden furniture, the finishes of the facades that the Vella factory created in the style of the time, in close collaboration with the architects who worked in Caltagirone at that time, chosen by the Mayor Luigi Sturzo to construct public buildings.



Facing the decline that marked the production of majolica, the activity of figurine makers became established in Caltagirone and spread throughout Europe. Their founder was Giacomo Bongiovanni, who revolutionized the technique of making figurines which were covered with thin leaves of the same clay representing scenes of popular life. The tradition of the nativity figurine continued with his nephew Giuseppe Vaccaro, Giacomo Azzolina, Francesco Bonanno, Don Benedetto Papale, author of tiny nativity scenes, Salvatore Morretta, who depicted the costumes of the Sicilian countryside and, in more recent times, Giacomo Vaccaro, son of Giuseppe, his son-in-law Salvatore Scuto, Giuseppe Nicastro.

On 25 January 2006, Caltagirone ceramics and the art of nativity scenes were included in the Book of Knowledge of the Register of Intangible Heritage of the Sicily Region at number 22, considered an intangible heritage of humanity by UNESCO.

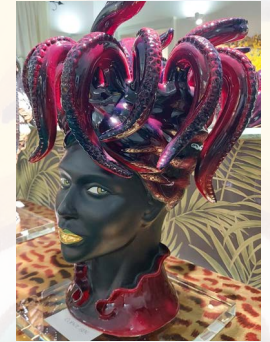


Tourist route

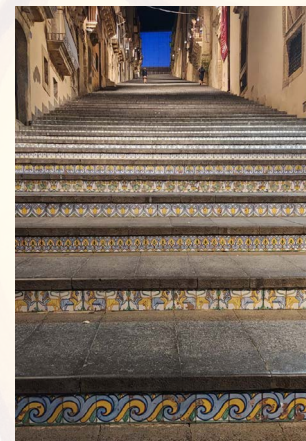
Caltagirone is a splendid city rich in history and extraordinary artistic and architectural beauty. Impossible to visit everything in one day. The best way to do this is to “get lost” among the alleys and ups and downs of the town, full of ceramists’ shops. Absolutely not to be missed is the Caltagirone Ceramics Museum.

After admiring the treasures it holds, you can move to the beautiful and imposing church of San Pietro, with its particular Gothic style which gives it a certain “mysterious charm”.

Once the visit is over, the time has come to move towards another church, the one dedicated to San Francesco di Paola, guardian of numerous treasures from other churches destroyed or damaged by earthquakes.



Near the church there is the famous “Tondo Vecchio”, a panoramic point overlooking an expanse of mountains and valleys. From here you arrive at the Ponte di San Francesco. Completed in 1665, in order to connect two of the three hills on which the city stands, the bridge is finely decorated with ceramics in relief and has five majestic arches.



Once you have crossed the bridge, proceeding straight on via Roma, you will soon arrive at the central Piazza Umberto I, overlooked by Monte delle Prestanze, Palazzo Crescimanno d’Albafiorita and Palazzo Libertini di San Marco. And then comes the splendid staircase of Santa Maria del Monte and the church of the same name. Built in 1606, the Staircase of Santa Maria del Monte connects the old part of the city to the new one, located on the upper part. The staircase is over 130 meters long, for a total of 142 steps decorated with ceramic tiles. Dominating the work is the church of Santa Maria del Monte, particularly loved by the citizens and considered guardian of a rare sacred image.





COLLESANO

The activity of Collesano ceramists has a centuries-old history. From a production point of view, initially the workshops were dedicated exclusively to the production of building materials and terracotta pottery, only later they begin to make ceramic objects.

In the 19th century, Collesano exclusively produced pottery for everyday use, sold at a low price, especially at fairs in western Sicily. These objects, painted only in yellow, green and manganese, are particularly original in their shapes and relief decoration. The lamps are transformed into ladies and knights, the flasks take on the shapes of vegetables and the vases are covered with leaves and flowers. There are four artisan workshops present in Collesano and involved in the production of ceramics: Ceramiche Iachetta, Comed, Cotto Meli, Manganello Arte.



Collesano ceramics have their own peculiar identity, evident in the way in which shapes and colors are combined. Among the productions that remain over time there are pottery for daily use, tiles, paving bricks (or glazed for bell tower spiers), but also vases, glasses, flasks. There are also productions intended for more demanding buyers: for example albarelli and cylinders from the mid-17th century, which present a very varied palette: from green to cobalt blue, from manganese to orange, to honey or lemon yellow; or even the human figure lamps or the eighteenth and nineteenth century holy water fonts in yellow and green.



Products that have given identity to Collesano ceramics are also the monks, almost always with yellow heads and the rest manganese-coloured, and the flasks in the shape of vegetables, especially aubergines. The characteristic color of the Collesanese ceramics is also obtained with the use of a particular sand dug from the rocks of the Lino River downstream from the town centre.

Tourist route

Visiting Collesano is certainly a fascinating experience. The relaunch of the history of ceramics as a tourist development is driving a much broader path. Crossing the town on foot is the best way to experience the most authentic atmosphere of the ancient village.



The vital center of the village is Piazza Mazzini which in ancient times was its forum and today is called "carricaturi" where the Tourist Office is also located. Unmissable the Churches and the Minor Basilica to discover some works of great artistic value. Inside the village you can also walk along a "ceramic route".

From the Stazzone district, with the ancient kilns as the starting point, continues to Piazza Castello with a visit to the Spire of Santa Maria la Vecchia and the ancient Moncada district. The ancient stellar district, home to the ancient Collesanese ceramic production workshops, passing by the railings of Via Roma. And then viale Vincenzo Florio, via Isnello, via Polizzi, piazza Santa Maria di Gesù with the ceramic panels depicting the historic Targa Florio. Going back through via Polizzi with the staircase entirely made of ceramic which incorporates all the colors and decorations typical of the Collesanese ceramic tradition and viale Vincenzo Florio, with the Welcome sign entirely made of ceramic. Inside and outside the town center there are the Iachetta and Manganello, Comed and Cotto Meli shops.

During the entire urban route you will be able to admire ceramic creations depicting architectural, artistic and religious heritage. But also ceramic panels displayed along the religious route of the Cerca, procession which takes place at dawn on Good Friday.

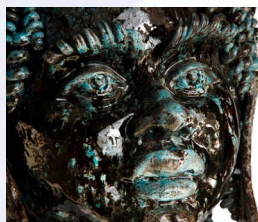




MONREALE

The recovery and relaunch of ceramic production in Monreale is due to Benedetto Messina (Monreale 1919-2009), a painter and sculptor who, in 1959, hosted evening ceramic courses in his studio subsidized by the Provincial Consortium for Technical Education, attended by numerous students destined to open the first shops involved in the production of objects intended for visitors to the city. Professor Messina's initiative favored the birth of the current "Mario D'Aleo" Art School for Mosaic, of which he himself was director for the first years.

The activity of Elisa Messina (Monreale 1933-2011), however, began in 1961 when, after completing her studies at the "Ceramiche San Polo", in Venice, she founded a ceramic workshop-school in the Norman town. Of particular importance in the ceramic production of Monreale was the role played by Calogero Gambino (born in Torretta and died prematurely in Monreale in 2008) who, before meeting Benedetto Messina, of whom he became an assiduous collaborator, had the opportunity to attend the School of Ceramics from Santo Stefano di Camastra.



Today in Monreale we find the ceramics of Elisa Messina, Nicolò Giuliano, the terracottas of Umberto Bruno, the ceramics of Byzantium, Ezzina Chokri, the art ceramics of La Carrubella, the terracottas of Rorò, the Norman workshop, Francesco Bruno, the Ro&Mar ceramics.

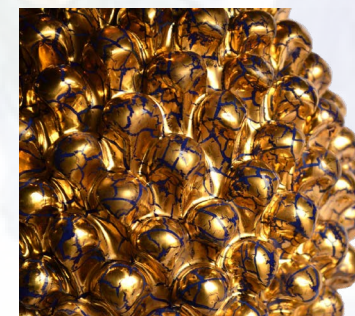
Tourist route

The best way to start the visit of Monreale is the magnificent Cathedral, a heritage site of Unesco, with its famous mosaics which, together with the production of ceramics, represent a strong and persistent artistic tradition, demonstrated by the precious composition of the mosaic tiles depicting the story of the Old Testament and the life of Christ inside the Cathedral and the three Absidi with three levels of intertwined arches which are enriched with polychrome decorations obtained from the skilful use of burnished limestone, grey-black lava and red bricks in horizontal bands. Another must-see stop in Monreale is Chiostro dei Benedettini, included in the Unesco Heritage List as well. It hosts Fontana del Re, the columns depicting scenes from the Old and New Testament, and Orto dei Semplici, a garden where medicinal plants were growth.



Another fundamental stop in discovering the ceramics of Monreale is the Art Institute where, together with other schools of master ceramists, the skills necessary for working with terracotta, casting, molding and hand shaping are preserved and handed down. and the press.

A walk in the historic centre, between Piazza Vittorio Emanuele, Via Dante Alighieri and the historic Via Torres will give the opportunity to live the experience of a real "street of workshops", including that of Elisa Messina, the ceramics of art "La Carrubella", the terracottas of Umberto Bruno and Talia, the ceramics of Byzantium and the Terracottas of Rorò, in via Veneziano. Other beautiful shops are located in the Ciambra district and along via Circonvallazione where you can visit the magnificent laboratories of the master Nicolò Giuliano.





SANTO STEFANO DI CAMASTRA

The history of Santo Stefano di Camastra can be enclosed in two toponyms: Noma, civilization of shepherds and farmers and Santo Stefano di Camastra, the modern and current city. Information on Noma and its civilizations is fragmentary and uncertain: Thucydides (4th century BC) and Polybius (2nd century BC), Cicero (1st century BC) in the "Verrine" and Silio Italico (1st century BC) mention it. AD) in the work "Punica".

The current settlement was founded in 1683, after a landslide hit the old town on 6 June 1682 and caused its destruction. The Duke of Camastra ceded his lands to the population to build the new center and it was he himself who drew up the urban plan, on the model of Versailles which was taken up in the plan of the subsequent Villa Giulia.

The Stefanesi, a population of shepherds and farmers, transformed into a population of fishermen and artisans. The fate of the "new" Stefanesi was soon linked to the exploitation of clay. Traces of kilns and archive evidence also suggest the existence of a ceramist activity since Arab times.



The center of the town has moved several times, where the "clay bread" was mpastatu (kneaded), scanatu (worked), nfurnatu (baked) and cucinatu (cooked): not the center of political power, which always remained within of the palace in the rhomboidal quadrilateral, but that of productive work, putii (shops) and stazzuna (workshops), located now at the sea near the embarkation points, now near the clay mountain, now in a south-east direction, but always outside the historic centre, and lastly along the national road when the improvement of the road network allowed the transport of goods to be entrusted to carts and no longer to red passages (large boats).

Tourist route

Santo Stefano di Camastra is an open-air museum famous for its ceramics. Walking through the streets of this wonderful village, you can admire the countless artisan workshops of master ceramists, who for centuries have shaped and dominated earth and fire, rigorously decorated by hand. They are made according to traditional Sicilian techniques and fill the streets of the small village with colours.



In Santo Stefano di Camastra, the art of ceramics reigns supreme and for this reason the Ceramics Museum, inaugurated in 1994 and located inside the Baron Sergio Palace in Piazza Duca di Camastra. The museum collects various precious objects, majolica tiles and some works by some contemporary artists such as Lorenzini, Caruso, Carlos Carré and many other national and international artists.

Walking along the street, visitors will come across the beautiful municipal Villa of the town with its dancing fountain.

Among the many things to visit, Viale delle Palme and the "Old Cemetery".

Its uniqueness is represented both by the architectural structure of the 96 tombs present, called "cappuccina", and by the covering of the tombs themselves, made up of ceramic tiles, called "ambrogette", decorated with ornamental motifs on a white background.

Worth visiting are the parish church dedicated to the cult of the Holy Cross of Christ or "Holy Bed" and the ecclesiastical complex home to the Monastery of Santo Stefano with its Norman origin.





SCIACCA

The history of Sciacca ceramics arises from the significant quantity of glazed ceramic fragments found in the San Domenico fiefdom dating back to the Norman period. In 1971, the discovery of fourteenth-century kilns for working clay allowed the recovery of several fragments of glazed objects attributable to the second half of the fourteenth century, now preserved in the Ceramics Museum of Caltagirone. Ceramics with the Incisa coat of arms have been found in Gela and Agrigento.

The first information on the fifteenth-century maicolari masters of Sciacca concerns Guglielmo Xurtino followed by that relating to the ceramist Nicola Lo Sciuto son, who in 1170 signed four albarelli (spices containers), one of which is today in the National Museum of Malta.

Sciacca is a center of production of majolica bricks: since the late fifteenth century as evidenced by documents relating to these artefacts in Palermo, Monreale and Trapani. The oldest document related remains the panel of San Calogero located in the cave on Mount Cronio which bears the date 1545 and the name of its author, the presbyter Francesco Lo Sciuto, great-grandson of the more famous Nicola.

The 16th century is the period in which Sciacca majolica definitively established itself, produced by masters such as Antonio Ramanno, the Lo Boj brothers and Giuseppe Bonachia, known as Mayharata.

In 1940, after a period of oblivion, Sciacca majolica flourished again thanks to the painter and ceramist Calogero Curreri, even if the real turning point took place in the 60s and 70s, thanks to some artists who simultaneously dedicated themselves to painting, sculpture and ceramics, giving an artistic and technical twist to local production.



Tourist route

The visit to Sciacca can start from the meeting place of the city: Piazza Scandaliato, a splendid terrace overlooking the sea embellished by the Church of S. Domenico and the Jesuit College, now the seat of the town hall.

A few steps away there is the Cathedral, built in 1108 and renewed in 1656; of the first structure it only retains the three apses. Recognizable by its diamond-pointed ashlar work is Palazzo Steripinto, a singular building with mullioned windows and battlements in Sicilian-Catalan style, dating back to 1501.



Along Corso Vittorio Emanuele you will find most of the ceramists' workshops. Heirs to the tradition of the great masters of the 16th century, including Antonio Ramanno, the Lo Boj brothers and Giuseppe Bonachia, the best-known tile painter in Sicily, known as the Mayharata. He was responsible for the creation of the imposing majolica band inside the chapel of San Giorgio del Genovesi in Sciacca. Built in 1520 and unfortunately demolished in 1952. To compose the band and the floor of the chapel, 2175 tiles were produced. Some art historians argue that, had it survived, it would have deserved the name of the Sistine chapel of Sicilian majolica. Of the vast tapestry, depicting scenes from the Old and New Testament, six large panels remain, preserved at the Art Institute of Sciacca.

An experience absolutely not to be missed is that of the Museum of the 5 Senses which offers various opportunities for "immersive" tourism, including the path of touch, in which the tourist, expertly guided by local artisans, will be able to live the experience of creating and decorate vases, amphorae, plates and other ceramic objects.



