

## Sicily Sacred and profane

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Sicily, a land in which the scorching July sun has found a home, forging the nature of people.

Land of Saints, of Myths, of legends. Island in which the boundary between sacred and profane is faint, and the pagan interferences are still visible.

Sicilian people and Saints, what a strange relationship they have.

Here Saints are 'domestic', people speak frankly with them:

"Fine Saint Paul, says the believer when he makes his Promise- If you grant me that certain grace, I'll carry your statue on my bare shoulder!"...

In this way, as in an ordinary agreement, the believer feels the duty to fulfill his promise only when the grace he asked for has been fulfilled [the prayer he made has been answered], as if he were thinking that "to trust is good, but not to trust is better" even when dealing with Saints!

The Sicilian man makes the saint live an almost worldly life he knows that, i.e., even a Saint has his needs, and a budget to deal with: fix the church's floor, a new roof, and fireworks for the Feast. A behavior that Sicilians have in common with the Greeks, who choose to move to Sicily centuries ago. Even Greek gods were often guilty of the same human sins.

Travelling in the inland villages and in the cities of the island, it's easy to come across the local religious feasts, especially in summer - time when each village shows its best clothes to pay homage to its Patron Saint. During these occasions, women, children and men flock to the church to hail the Saint.

An outburst of colors and sounds salutes the saint's coming out from the church.

The saint stands on heavy palanquins and appears to the faithful believers.

Each year during the Feast the newborn babies, the human pets are shown to the saint as a good omen. Inside the church, there are scenes of collective frenzy, and through litanies and prayers the devotees reach ecstasy.

During the Feasts there are people that work selling small medals portraying Saint Agata, and in the meanwhile they keep their ear closed to a small radio because the local football team is going to enter the Premiere League: maybe by intercession of the Saint Herself?

The faithful believers devote themselves into exhausting processions carrying on their shoulders church-candles that weight almost like a man this is the Promise they made to the Saint...

Spectacular and scenographic is the Easter celebration in Enna. Here, the entire population takes part into the sacred rites as members of different brotherhoods, wearing clothes of different colors and the typical, classic white headgear.

The origin of such Feasts is lost in the mists of time: they have been the same through centuries and also through different religions, as i.e. the bread rite in

Palazzolo Acreide, a rite that is strictly linked with both the Greek and roman celebrations for the Goddess Demeter/Ceres.

Even nowadays the ears of wheat and the bread are offered to the Saint as a sign of gratefulness for the annual harvest, and then they're sold to the faithful.

Demeter, the goddess syncretically associated with the Holy Virgin with the Child, is carried by the faithful on their shoulders under August scorching sun, even nowadays.

It happens very often to meet people that never go to the Mass on a single Sunday a year, and then, during the Patron Feast, this same people, imbued deeply with Faith, almost risk an heart attack carrying the heavy palanquin of the Patron Saint.

In this land of magic each single thing, even the apparently less significant one, is a piece of history, the outcome of a remote age.

Past ages that sometimes have been cruel, soaked in blood, torn apart by conquers, but also often resulting in shafts of splendour, peace, and civilization.