

Geraci

the true face of Sicily

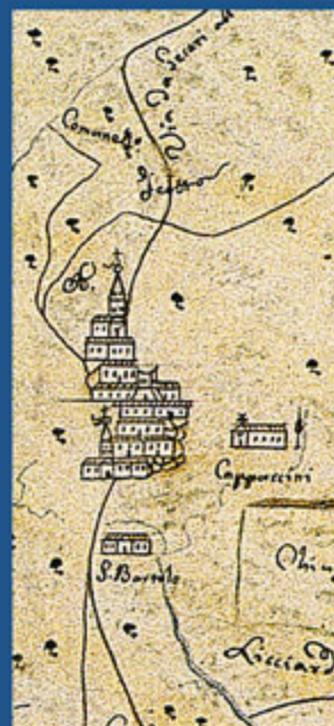
HISTORY

Geraci Siculo is located on the eastern border of the province of Palermo, on a rocky ridge alongside the path that leads to the hinterland from the northern coast of Sicily, in a strategic position that dominates the most part of the island, from the Tyrrhenian sea to the Valley of the southern Imera and from the slopes of the Etna to the highest mounts of the Madonie. Although the territory had been populated since Prehistoric times, Geraci became a village in the middle of the 8th century, during the last stage of the Byzantine dominance in Sicily. The first documentary proof dates back to 840, the year which, according to chronicler An Nuwâiri, marks the transition to Arabic dominance.

During the following Norman conquest, the city was overcome by Roger I of Sicily and included in the vast territory given as a vassalage to his grandson Serlo II of Hauteville, the knight who, in 1063, became famous after combatting against the Saracens in Cerami. During the Norman period, Geraci was one of the few « fiefs of the Commitees » in Sicily, which kept existing in the 12th and 13th centuries under the continuous control of restricted family groups, namely Barnavilla, and then Craon.



Under the emperor Frederick II, Geraci was seized from the royal property, while around the middle of the 13th century it became the property of Henry, a major spokesperson of the Counts of Ventimiglia in Liguria, who married the heir of the Dominion of Geraci Isabella di Candida. During the following centuries, the Ventimiglia became one of the most aristocratic families among the Sicilian Nobles: from the fief of Geraci they acquired the neighbouring dwellings, creating a homogeneous feudal dominance and



expanding a political action in the debates within the entire Realm of Sicily. Among the most notable characters, we must mention the Count Francis I, a brave fighter and diplomat serving Frederick III of Sicily, who sent him to Avignon in 1318 to serve the pope John XXII, as well as the marchess Giovanni I, the first person to receive the title of nobility in Sicily. Giovanni I occupied different positions in the public area and, along with the Ventimiglias, reached significant political and financial power.

GERACI SICULO
(Province of Palermo)

Population: 1770
Area: 11297 hectares
Altitude: 1077 meters a.s.l.

How to get there (by car): take the motorway
Palermo-Catania (exit Irosa),
or Palermo-Messina (exit Castelbuono)

Municipality tel. 0921 643080
Tourist office tel. 0921 643607
www.comune.geracisiculo.pa.it





MONUMENTS AND ARTWORKS

The urban layout of Geraci, reinforced by the construction of ramparts in the Middle Ages, includes many architectural and artistic tokens, the castle towering over the village being the most remarkable of them. Beyond the powerful ramparts, remains the palatine chapel, built in 1311 by Francis I Ventimiglia on a previous construction dating back to the Swabian period.

The corners of the main square have been characterized since the 18th century by the college of Maria and the church of Santa Maria Maggiore.

This church shields numerous art treasures, such as the Madonna della Neve by the Gagini's workshop (from 1561), or the wooden choir with painted seatbacks dating back to 1650.

In the crypt are exposed some refined goldworked objects, such as the three-hundred-year-old reliquary of San Bartolomeo, crafted in Tuscany, as was the beautiful painting of the Annunziata from the end of the 16th century hailing from Santa Maria della Cava's Benedictine priory.



The church of San Giuliano was the first parish church in Geraci and at the end of the first Italian Renaissance, it was added to the monastery of the Benedictines, who, in 1505, ordered a statue of Santa Caterina to the sculptor Giuliano Mancino, which is even now exposed in the main altar.

The church of Santa Maria la Porta (literally «Saint Mary the Door») has been called this way because it is located next to one of the urban doors; at the back of the nave it is possible to admire a fresco representing Virgin Mary on a throne, hailing from the first half of the 15th century, during the international gothic period.

In addition, the church is home to refined marble sculptures, such as the Madonna col Bambino (Madonna and Child) from 1475 that can be attributed to Domenico Gagini, and the gate, made in 1496.

Outside the ramparts arises the old church of San Bartolomeo, connected to the 17th-century convent of the Agostiniani, which guards the outstanding marble triptych made by Antonello Gagini, with the help of the Giacomo sons, Fazio and Vincenzo.

From the 18th century remains the church of Santo Stefano and its elliptical structure, with lateral chapels, while on the wide valley on the west stands the convent of the Cappuccini (joined to Geraci in 1689), which nowadays hosts the ethnographical Museum of the Madonie, which contains all the historical archives of the Municipality, as well as the old library of the monks, with more than 1500 volumes that date back from 16th and the 19th centuries.



NATURE AND ENVIRONMENT

The territory of Geraci (mostly mountainous, with summits reaching 1600 meters a.s.l.), is situated for the most part in the Natural Park of the Madonie. The quality of the environment is high, at both naturalistic and geological levels.

Many rivers with extremely pure water are gushing from the ground, surrounded by precious endemic flora, such as the beechtree, the holy, the juniper, the *rizzidda*, as well as some varieties of wild orchids which, in spring, form a constellation of intense colours. In the areas of Cixé and Pietra Giordana, between 1300 and 1450 meters of altitude, are *margi e gurchi*, the moist environments which reproduce some aspects of the peat bogs, creating fascination among scientists.

At lower altitude, a lush cork forest spreads between Geraci and Castelbuono.

All these places, perfect for grazing, have always been visited by men, as evidenced by numerous proofs, namely sheepfolds made of stone, and small constructions for cheese-making.

