

CATANIA

ITINERARIES AND MAPS



PROVINCIA REGIONALE
DI CATANIA



LIFE IN CATANIA

From the harbour to the hill

Meet in Piazza Duomo (1) and head straight for the Amenano fountain on your way to the fish market or 'Pescheria' (2). The steps behind the fountain lead down into Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto, where your senses will be assailed by a riot of colours, sounds and smells: the glistening fish, fruit, cheeses, meat, vegetables and countless other foodstuffs; the cries of the stallholders as they compete to sell their wares; the unmistakable perfume of parsley and basil, the heady smell of brine from the mounds of fresh fish. Such an onslaught could fool you into thinking you are in an exotic Arabian souk. Nearby is the Fontana dei Sette Canali, (the Seven Channel Fountain). Pass through Porta Uzeda and head towards Villa Pacini (3). This park was laid out on reclaimed marshland and dedicated to a local musician G. Pacini (you can see his statue in the park) and was initially called the park on the port (la villa della marina) because it was so close to the sea. Before the opening of Villa Bellini in 1885, Villa Pacini was the only park in the city, and the locals named it 'vill'e varagghi', the park of 'yawns', a haven of peace and quiet for the old and retired who used to come here (and still do) to enjoy a good chat about politics or play Sicilian card games like 'scupa' and 'briscula'. The Archi della Marina carry the railway line and have cut the town off from the sea since the viaduct was built in 1866, making it impossible to build a seafront walk for the townspeople. Go under the arches and you will find



Fish market



Fontana dell'Amenano

yourself at the entrance to the port (4). Modernisation began in the first half of the nineteenth century, and guaranteed a continuing period of prosperity for the port, which has seen a steady increase in traffic. The 'Molo vecchio' (old jetty) separates the Old Port (filled with lava during the 1669 eruption) from the New Port. Follow the line of the railway and you arrive in Piazza dei Martiri (5) where, in the centre, you can see the statue of Saint Agatha crushing the dragon, which represents the 1734 plague, placed on top of a column taken from the Roman Theatre. Continue along Via VI Aprile to Piazza Giovanni XXIII (6) where you can admire the monumental fountain created by the sculptor Giulio Moschetti, which represents the Rape of Proserpine, daughter of Zeus and Demeter who was kidnapped by Pluto, god of Hades, and carried away on a huge shell drawn by mermaids and horses. The square is also the location of the main railway station, built in 1866 to connect the city with Messina. Further along Viale Africa you come to the city's old industrial zone, and the disused sulphur refineries which treated sulphur coming from the Sicilian interior. The refineries were close to the port and railway, which ensured easy transport and marketing of the finished product. This old industrial complex has

now been converted to house the highly modern “Le Ciminiere” Cultural and Exhibition Centre (7). Continuing along Viale Africa, you arrive in Piazza Europa (8), which has beautiful panoramic views over the jagged lava shorefront. The square also has an old watchtower, built on a lava ridge in the XVI century, which once served as a lookout post for Saracen ships.

Follow Viale Ruggero di Lauria which winds along the coast, and take the first turning off to the right, where you will discover a miniscule, unspoilt fishing village, that has remained untouched by the rampant building that has engulfed the town over the last fifty years. This is the tiny port of San Giovanni Li Cuti (9), a sliver of land where brightly-coloured local fishing boats tie up in the harbour overlooked by charming little houses. If you then proceed the short distance along Via San Giovanni Li Cuti, you will arrive in Piazza del Tricolore, with its recently completed War Memorial. Not far from here, on the seafront, you pass by Piazza Nettuno and continue along Viale Artale Alagona to reach the enchanting fishing hamlet of Ognina (10). The place takes its name from the River Lognina, which once flowed overground before being covered by lava in the 1381 eruption. At the centre of the picturesque little square is the church of Santa Maria di Ognina, built in the XIV century and then rebuilt after being damaged by the 1693 earthquake and a fire in 1885. Every year on 8th September, local people celebrate the feast of their patron saint, known affectionately as “a Bammina”, the little girl. The Saracen Tower is still visible today. There are also a number of holiday homes which belonged to well-off local families who used them during the summer months. Ognina still attracts thousands of tourists and holidaymakers every year, all of them drawn by the special magic atmosphere of the little port, framed by brightly coloured murals. Take the ring-road which changes name from Viale Ulisse to Viale Marco Polo and then Viale Odorico da Pordenone, until you get to Parco Gioieni (11), from where you can look out over the splendid panorama of city roofs and down the length of Via Etna, busy with traffic at all times of the day, back towards Piazza Duomo and Porta Uzeda, where your tour started.



Le Ciminiere



Piazza Duomo - detail Palazzo degli Elefanti



- 1 Piazza Duomo
- 2 Pescheria
- 3 Villa Pacini
- 4 Porto
- 5 Piazza dei Martiri
- 6 Piazza Giovanni XXIII
- 7 Le Ciminiere
- 8 Piazza Europa
- 9 Borgo San Giovanni Li Cuti
- 10 Borgo Ognina
- 11 Parco Gioieni

-  'Le Ciminiere' Cultural and Exhibition Centre
-  Beach
-  Bathing Area
-  Park

BAROQUE CATANIA

Reconstruction and rebirth after the 1693 earthquake

The second half of the XVII century saw the terrible eruption of 1669 and the catastrophic earthquake of 1693, which almost destroyed Catania. Only the cathedral apse, the Norman Castello Ursino and a few houses escaped destruction. Giuseppe Lanza, Duke of Camastra, applied rational town-planning criteria to his blueprint for the new town envisaging “straight, wide roads”, interrupted at regular intervals by squares where the town’s people could gather in case of earthquakes. Via Uzeda (the present day Via Etna) and Via Lanza (the present day Via di Sangiuliano) were built in this period. A number of excellent architects including G. B. Vaccarini (nominated city architect in 1730), Girolamo Palazzotto and Antonino Battaglia contributed to the reconstruction. From Via Dusmet, go under Porta Uzeda (1) (built in 1695 in honour of the Spanish viceroy Paceco de Uzeda, who commissioned the reconstruction of the city) to Piazza Duomo (2), a triumph of Sicilian Baroque style. On your immediate left stands Palazzo dei Chierici (4), built in the early years of the eighteenth century by the architect Alonzo Di Benedetto. Opposite stands Palazzo degli Elefanti (3), now the Town Hall, designed by Vaccarini (1741), with rusticated pilasters and windows with balconies, while its interior courtyard houses the splendid vintage Senate carriages, and a high-relief image of Sant’Agata. To your right stands the Cathedral (2). This magnificent church is surrounded by a marble balustrade decorated with statues which

was erected in the nineteenth century. The cathedral itself was rebuilt after the 1669 earthquake on the remains of pre-existing buildings; the Roman Baths (Terme Achilliane) and three apses and a transept dating from Norman times. It boasts a marvellous façade erected by Vaccarini between 1733 and 1761 that recalls the work of Borromini. The dome was constructed by Antonino Battaglia and the bell tower by the architect Carmelo Sciuto Patti in 1868. The interior of the church is divided by pillars and the Norman apses into three naves. The relics of Sant’Agata, the city’s patron saint, and a part of her ‘treasure’ are safeguarded in a delightful chapel protected by a wrought iron grill. The Cathedral is also the final resting place of a number of famous local celebrities, including Vincenzo Bellini, Cardinal Giuseppe Benedetto Dusmet, Costanza D’Aragona, and members of the Aragonese royal family who settled in Catania when the city became the centre of their kingdom in the XIV century. The striking Fontana dell’Elefante (2), which has graced the square since 1736, is a curious mixture of pagan and Christian, past and present. It was assembled by Vaccarini, inspired by a similar work by Bernini, the Elefante della Minerva in Rome. Catania’s fountain is composed of the ‘Liotru’, a lava stone elephant dating from the Roman period (which has since become the city’s symbol), surmounted by an Egyptian obelisk from Syene (now Aswan). The obelisk’s eight sides are covered in hieroglyphic carvings which refer to the cult of the goddess Isis. According to legend, the locals identified the elephant with the magus Eliodorus or Diodorus, who lived during the VIII century AD, his name becoming Liotru in Sicilian. The magician apparently changed men into beasts and used the elephant to travel between Catania and Constantinople. The elephant apparently had magical powers and was said to have been instrumental in calming the ire of Mount Etna. At the statue’s base are allegorical representations of the local rivers, the Simeto and Amenano. The obelisk is mounted with a sphere and the emblem of Sant’Agata, protector of the city. To the left, beyond Palazzo dei Chierici, you can admire the Fontana dell’Amenano (4), behind which sprawls Catania’s loud, colourful fish market. The river Amenano which once ran over-ground, and on the banks of which the Greeks founded the city of Katane, is represented by a youth



Via Crociferi

bearing a cornucopia which pours water into the fountain's basin. The fountain was built in 1867 by the sculptor Tito Angelini and is better known to the people of Catania as 'l'acqua 'o linzolu', because of the 'sheets' of water which flow down into the basin. Another fountain, the Fontana dei Sette Canali (4) (1642), stands in Piazza Alonzo Di Benedetto. It is built into the side of the Seminario dei Chierici, and is the only fountain from which the people of Catania actually drew water from the Amenano, the previous two being only decorative. Going through the tunnel, once the quarters of the city guards, on the right is the Porta di Carlo V (5) (Charles V Gate), which leads into Piazza Pardo. Via Garibaldi, lined with splendid aristocratic buildings and eighteenth-century churches, leads to Piazza Mazzini (6), once the site of the weekly market. The square is lined with graceful porticos supported by 32 columns, originally part of a Roman basilica. Via Garibaldi ends in Piazza Palestro, dominated by the bulk of Porta Garibaldi (or Ferdinandea) (7). The name is misleading, as the Gate was never part of the city walls, but was designed by Stefano Ittar in 1768 as a wedding gift from the people of Catania to Caroline of Austria and King Ferdinand IV. Locals call the Gate the 'Fortino', confusing it with the arch of a military fortification (1674) at the end of Via Sacchero, a side street off Via Garibaldi. The Gate is crowned with a sculpture of a bird with out-stretched wings. It is not an imperial eagle, but a phoenix, symbol of a city that has so often risen from own ashes. It was made from two materials commonly used in local architecture: black lava stone from Etna and white limestone from Syracuse. From here you turn into the splendid Via Vittorio Emanuele, which runs from Piazza del Risorgimento to Piazza dei Martiri, and is lined by many secular and ecclesiastical buildings with spectacular baroque facades. Via Verginelle takes you to Piazza Dante, site of the monumental former Benedictine Monastery (8), which now houses the university's Faculty of Arts and Philosophy. Passing through the fine baroque



Cattedrale - detail



Benedictine monastery - detail

your left. Once back in Piazza Duomo, head left towards the sea down Via Vittorio Emanuele. One of the most impressive buildings in this street is the magnificent Badia di Sant'Agata (16) designed in pure Baroque style by Vaccarini in 1742. Opposite, on the right stands the seat of the Archbishopric. A little further on in Piazza San Placido, you can visit the Church of San Placido (17) designed by Stefano Ittar. You can also discover the striking decorative richness of the courtyard of the former Convent of San Placido, with the superb balcony of the Palazzo dei Platamone, and the terrace of Palazzo Biscari (18). Palazzo Biscari is a masterpiece of secular eighteenth-century art. It was built in Baroque style on the remains of the city walls, at one time battered by the sea. The superb facade, designed by local architect Antonio Amato, overlooks Via Dusmet. Among its many sumptuous rooms, the palace also boasts a magnificent banqueting hall and grand gallery with an enchanting Rococo style spiral staircase. Moving on down the last part of Via Vittorio Emanuele, (known as the Corso) you come to Piazza Cutelli and the Convitto Cutelli (19) (formerly attended by the children of Catania's rich, noble families). The street ends in Piazza dei Martiri (20) which at its centre has a column taken from the city's ancient Roman theatre. The column bears a statue of

Sant'Agata crushing a dragon, symbol of the 1743 plague. From here you can go left and follow Via VI Aprile to Piazza Giovanni XXIII and the Fountain of the Rape of Proserpina (20) designed by Giulio Moschetti in the early years of the twentieth century, which represents the kidnapping of Proserpine by the god Pluto. Alternatively, you can head right along Via Dusmet following the Archi della Marina viaduct built in 1886 to carry the railway line and arrive back where you started at Porta Uzeda (1).

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 Porta Uzeda | 7 Porta Garibaldi | 16 Abadia di Sant'Agata |
| 2 Piazza Duomo - Cattedrale | 8 Monastero dei Bendettini | 17 Chiesa San Placido |
| 3 Fontana dell'Elefante
Palazzo degli Elefanti | 9 Chiesa San Nicolò l'Arena | 18 Palazzo Biscari |
| 4 Palazzo dei Chierici - Fontana
Amenano - Fontana dei
sette Canali | 10 Piazza San Francesco | 19 Convitto Cutelli |
| 5 Porta Carlo V | 11 Via Crociferi | 20 Piazza dei Martiri |
| 6 Piazza Mazzini | 12 Chiesa Minoriti | 21 Fontana del Ratto
di Proserpina |
| | 13 Basilica della Collegiata | |
| | 14 Palazzo Università | |
| | 15 Palazzo Sangiuliano | |



ANCIENT CATANIA

A stroll back in time through centuries of archaeology

The city of Catania has undergone profound changes over the centuries, not least because it has been destroyed nine times by natural disasters only to rise again, reborn and revitalised, from its own ashes. Catania's history is a long chronicle of domination by a succession of peoples and dynasties that followed on from one another from the VIII century BC to the recent past; Greeks, Romans, Barbarians, Goths, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans, Swabians, Angevins, Aragonese, Spanish, the House of Savoy, Austrians and Bourbons. All of them shared in their appreciation of the beauty of this fertile land, once bathed by the waters of the River Amenano, they all coveted its strategic position, and the warmth of its people. Drawing on their own rich cultures, and through a continual, fruitful intercultural exchange, the successive invaders left indelible traces of their time here and bequeathed the city as it stands today, in all its splendour. Your stroll through history begins in Piazza Dante, site of the sprawling Benedictine Monastery and the imposing bulk of the Church of San Nicolò. Pause here to consider the first colonisers, the Chalcidian Greeks who, according to ancient historian Thucydides, settled in the highest part of the city in 729 BC, and built here the centre of their religious and political life, the acropolis. Traces of ancient Katàne are slowly coming to light, thanks to the patient and painstaking excavations that have been carried out around the monastery grounds since 1982. The Greeks greatly appreciated this land, already so familiar to them from the heroic adventures narrated by their forefathers in Homer's poems. The Romans also loved it and much clearer signs remain of their time here. Rome conquered the city in 263 BC, and it became a colony proper in 21 BC. Emperor



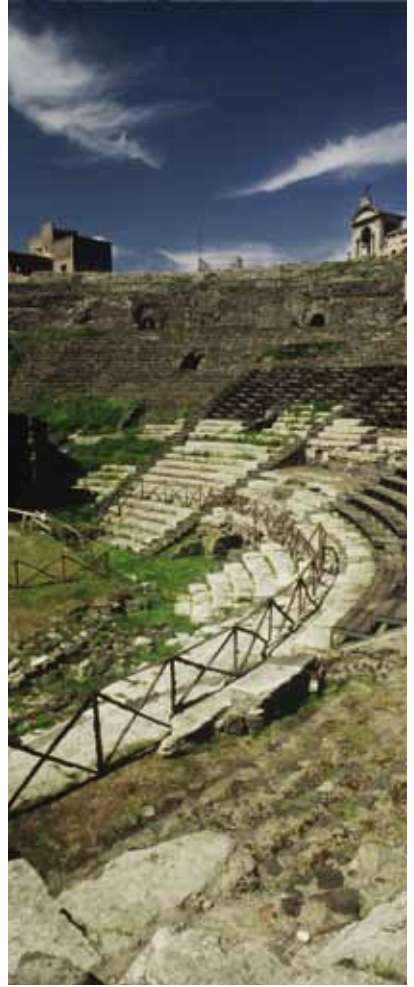
Terme dell'Indirizzo – detail



Roman theatre

Augustus wanted to embellish the city and under his auspices Catania later acquired a number of historically significant public buildings. Piazza Dante contains the remains of one of the many 'terme' (1), or bathhouses, built during the Roman period, while nearby in Via Rotonda there are the remains of the Terme della Rotonda (2). The existence of so many baths or spas in Catania can be explained by the ready access to the waters of the River Amenano, and by the fact that the baths played a major role in Roman society. Not only were they appreciated for their therapeutic and curative properties but also because they were excellent meeting places. You now head for Via Vittorio Emanuele where you can stop to visit the magnificent ancient Roman theatre and adjacent Odeon (3). The Roman theatre was probably built between the I and II century AD, on the site of a pre-existing Greek theatre. It could seat up to 7,000 spectators for theatrical performances and also, in the late imperial period, for mock naval battles made possible by flooding the orchestra. The nearby Odeon could seat 1,300 spectators and was used for choral competitions and rehearsals. Head back down to Piazza Duomo, and go up Via Etnea to Piazza Stesicoro (named after a Greek poet from the VI century BC). Here you can admire the impressive spectacle

of the Roman Amphitheatre (4), brought to light during excavations carried out between 1904 and 1906 by the architect Francesco Fichera as commissioned by the mayor, Giuseppe De Felice. The Amphitheatre dates from the II century AD. It is oval in shape, built from lava stone, brick and marble. It could easily accommodate up to 15,000 spectators, but only a part of it is visible today, as most is still buried under Piazza Stesicoro and the nearby Via Manzoni and Via Penninello. Visitors can discover its grandiose charm accompanied by a guide. Large parts of the structure were removed and used in the reconstruction of other public buildings. Christianity began to spread before the IV century, as the stories of the local martyrs Sant'Agata, the patron saint, and Sant'Euplio clearly demonstrate. Various places of worship are dedicated to the two saints, including the church of Sant'Agata al Carcere (5), where Agatha was tortured and killed, or the church of Sant'Agata la Vetere (6), built on the remains of an Early Christian basilica. There is also the underground sepulchre beneath the little church of Sant'Euplio (7), destroyed by bombing in 1943. The surviving far wall now bears round sculptures in relief, representing the Apostles. Excavations carried out under the Central Post Office building (1924) confirmed the existence of an extensive burial area, or necropolis, from the Roman period. Head back down Via Etna to Piazza Duomo. Under the cathedral are the remains of the Roman Terme Achilliane (8), as well as remains dating from Norman times. After having been dominated by the Barbarians, Goths, Byzantines and Arabs, Catania was conquered by the Normans in 1071, and the city's medieval layout dates from that period. The Cathedral (9), dedicated to Sant'Agata, and surrounded by powerful walls, is a striking example of 'ecclesia munita', or fortress-church. It was strategically placed, so as to control the port and the city walls, and its high tower also acted as a military lookout post. It was rebuilt after the 1669 earthquake, and its splendid façade (recently restored) was the work of the architect Giovan Battista Vaccarini. During the Middle Ages, the Cathedral close or square became the town centre, the seat of religious and secular power, the so-called 'platea



Roman theatre



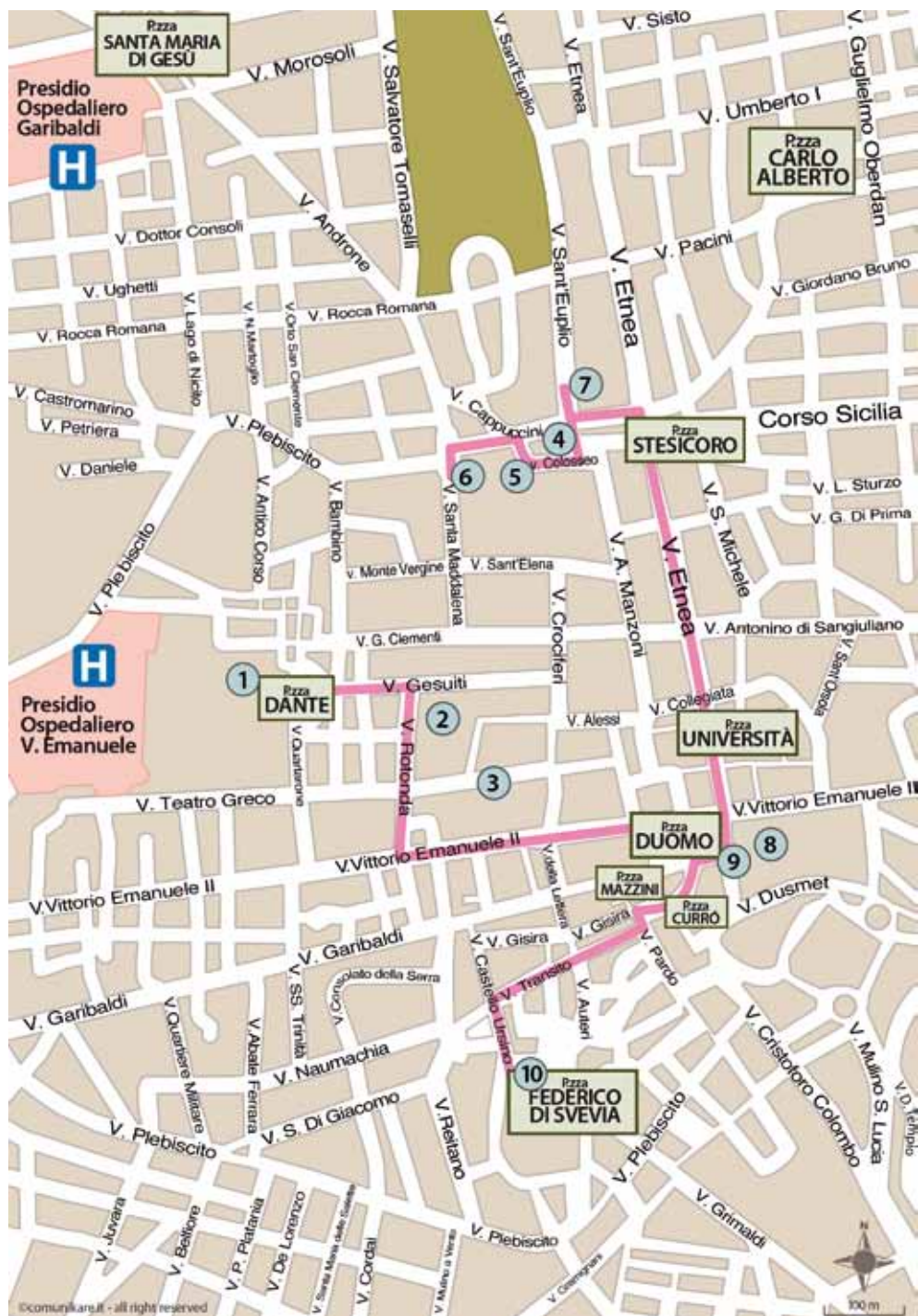
Ursino Castle

magna'. Many noble palaces were erected around it (the Civita district), as well as administrative offices and shops, and the part of the city wall that overlooked the sea, which at that time covered the area now occupied by Via Dusmet. From here move on to Piazza Currò, and the ruins of the Terme dell'Indirizzo. The baths are partially set into the wall of the former Convent of Santa Maria dell'Indirizzo (today the entrance to the 'Vespucci' middle school). From nearby Via Zappalà Gemelli, continue along Via Transito and Via Castello Ursino, to reach Piazza Federico di Svevia, site of the Norman fortress, Castello Ursino (10). In 1239 the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II of Swabia commissioned the building of Castello Ursino. According to some interpretations, the name derives from the Latin, *Castrum Sinus*, or 'castle on the gulf'. Completed in 1250, it is a magnificent example of medieval castle architecture, on a rectangular floorplan with four large cylindrical corner towers, and occupied a central position on the gulf of Catania. However, lava from the 1669 eruption filled the moat, encircled the castle and effectively distanced it from sea and the coast. Its original position can be clearly seen in the 1679 painting by Giacinto Platania, which now hangs in the Cathedral sacristy. The River Lognina and the River Amenano were also completely buried by lava at this time, as was Lake Nicito. The castle served two purposes: it was meant to defend the city from attack, but it was also a forbidding reminder to the population that the emperor would not tolerate rebellion, that imperial troops were on hand to destroy and sack the city, should the upheavals of 1232 be repeated. Further warning came in the form of the sculpture placed to the right of the main castle entrance: an eagle subduing a lamb, a clear reference to the local rebels who were punished by Emperor Frederick II. In its time, the castle has been a royal palace, prison and garrison. Now it houses the invaluable collections of the

Civic Museum. The Norman and Swabian rulers were succeeded by the Angevins and Aragonese. The Aragonese added greatly to the city's prestige, establishing their court there and declaring it the capital of the Kingdom of Sicily. The port was improved and redesigned and in 1434, Alphonse V the Magnanimous inaugurated the Sicularum Gymnasium, Sicily's oldest university. The Spanish viceroy Vega ordered the construction of new city walls (1541-1553), which more or less followed the line of the modern day Via Plebiscito. One of the seven gates that pierced the walls is still visible today, the Porta dei Canali otherwise known as Porta di Carlo V, now part of the picturesque fish market.



Roman amphitheatre



- 1 Edifici Termali
- 2 Terme della Rotonda
- 3 Teatro Romano - Odeon
- 4 Anfiteatro Romano

- 5 Chiesa Sant'Agata al Carcere
- 6 Chiesa Sant'Agata La Vetere
- 7 Chiesa Sant'Euplio
- 8 Terme Achilliane

- 9 Cattedrale
- 10 Castello Ursino

USEFUL INFORMATION

REGIONAL PROVINCE OF CATANIA INFORMATION POINTS

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Information on accomodation in the province of Catania
<http://turismo.provincia.ct.it/ospitalit/>

MUSEUMS AND PLACES TO VISIT

Archivio di Stato - Via V. Emanuele, 156 - Catania
095 7159860

Archivio Storico Comunale - Via S. Agata, 2 - Catania
095 7422771

Biblioteche Riunite "Civica e A. Ursino Recupero"
Via Biblioteca, 13 - Catania - 095 316883

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Via Sant'Anna, 8 - Catania - 095 7150598

Castello Ursino Pzza Federico di Svevia - Catania
095 345830

Chiesa San Francesco Borgia - Via Crociferi, 17 - Catania
095 310762

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Teatro Romano e Odeon
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