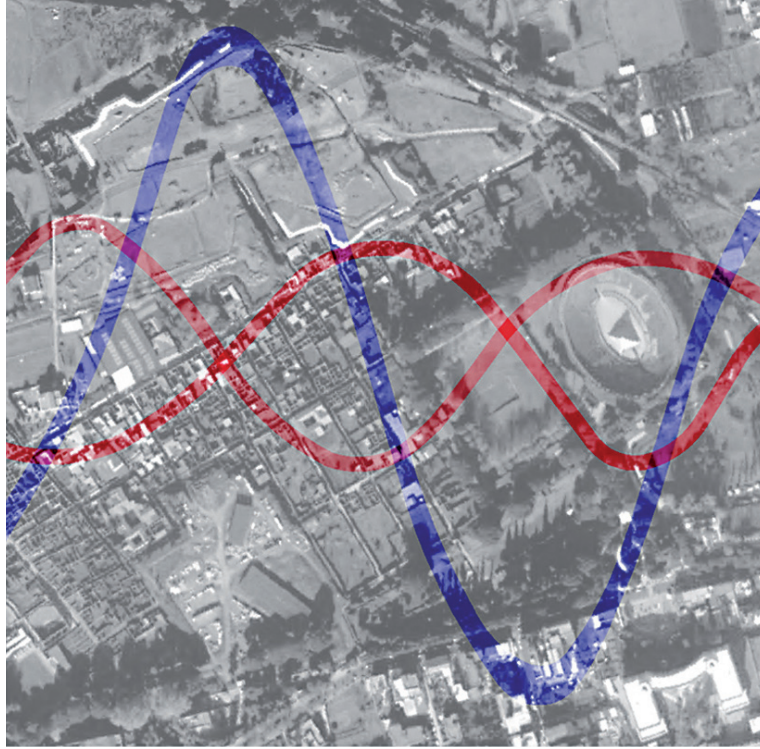


ARCHITECTURE HERITAGE and DESIGN

Carmine Gambardella

XVII INTERNATIONAL FORUM

Le Vie dei  
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# WORLD HERITAGE and LEGACY

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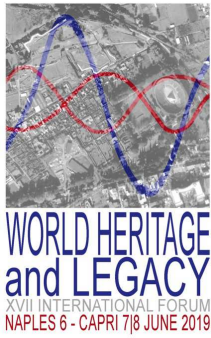
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Culture, Creativity, Contamination**

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## The Sirocco's chamber of Micciulla manor in Palermo A bioclimatic archetype symbol of legality and civil redemption

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### Abstract

The Sirocco' Chamber in Micciulla manor is one of more than thirty examples of a forerunner hypogeum passive cooling system, which spread in Palermo between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Artificial caves dug under or near the palermitan mansion where the rich families took refuge to escape the high summer temperatures, often made unbearable by the hot African Sirocco wind. Among all, the Sirocco' Chamber in Micciulla manor is perhaps the best known not only for its particular and unique "open-air" structure, but also and above all for the historical past linked to it.

This contribution intends to retrace the most significant phases of the history of this asset: the casual discovery of an ancient cave from which a spring flowed and a qanāt inside an area characterized by the presence of limestone quarries, the periods of complete abandonment and those of great interest on the part of the owners - Jesuit fathers, local nobility - who succeeded in the ownership of the manor; and then the years of illegality and decay, under the mafia control and the years of redemption thanks to the work of brave men, first of all the judge Giovanni Falcone who seized the Micciulla estate and with it the Sirocco' Chamber to this pertinent and determined the fate of what a few years later became the first property confiscated from the mafia. Today the manor hosts a Scout base managed by the Agesci association to which the asset has been assigned. The young volunteers, despite the continuous acts of intimidation by local criminals, have recovered the entire area from the degradation, returning it to its original beauty and taking care of its preservation and maintenance. Structural recovery interventions made by the Superintendency for Cultural Heritage, have allowed to deliver the Sirocco' Chamber to public use.

**Keywords:** passive cooling, cultural heritage, legality, Palermo.

### 1. Introduction

In the expressions of the pre-modern architectural culture of the Mediterranean area and in particular in the Arab-Islamic one, the attention to the themes of cooling is evident.

These issues have been addressed in various ways through the experimentation of appropriate technologies and the specialization of passive ventilation construction techniques that have made it possible to adapt human settlements to even extreme environmental systems.

Water, thermal mass and ventilation were the possible remedies to fight the heat and to which they used to resort also in Palermo where the influences of Middle Eastern countries and the inheritance of the historical and cultural heritage of the Arab people have left a deep mark. And it is precisely to the Arab world and in particular to the old Persia that the origins of the rooms of the sirocco date back, which appeared in Palermo to a certain moment in history. These are underground structures that draw inspiration from the sirdáb, a term deriving from the Persian *sard* (cold) and *ab* (water); semi-underground rooms with fountains, water mirrors or canals that cool and humidify the air.

The Sirocco' Chamber of Palermo are a prerogative of the local nobility and of wealthy lords residing in the sumptuous palaces of the city center and in the villas of the suburbs, almost all datable between the 17th and 18th centuries.

When the already high summer temperatures were made unbearable by the warm African sirocco wind (from the Arab *shurhūq*), which blows from the south-east to envelop the city in an unbreathable blanket of sand and stifling air, the rich families took refuge in large artificial caves excavated underground, below or near homes [1]. The rooms, in fact, mainly with a square or circular plan and bordered by rocky walls, were isolated from the external environment due to the thermal inertia of the calcarenite which allowed the air temperature of the underground room to be kept constant.

To this was added the water present in the calcarenite aquifer, this last prerogative was essential for the excavation of the chamber itself because the work of carving of the staircase, the room and the vault beginning, starting from the bottom, only after having dug a well and reached the water. Therefore, the well remained as a ventilation and communication channel to the outside.

In very rare cases the Sirocco' Chamber is crossed by the water network of "ngruttati" canals and *qanāt*, built during the Arab domination of Sicily and which have made Palermo a luxuriant city, rich in parks, public baths, fountains and have transformed the neighboring countryside in beautiful gardens, orchards and citrus groves.

The Sirocco' Chamber were thus made preferably where there was a crossing of a natural or artificial watercourse, not very deep, in order to be able to intercept the passage of fresh water which, by evaporating, contributed to the cooling of the air inside the cave.

In addition, the air current generated by the flow of moving water pushed the heat by conveying it upwards of the vault that covered the chamber and in which an opening was made that served as an aspirator to conduct the hot air outside, also providing some light to the hypogeum.

The temperature of these rooms, almost constant throughout the year, made these premises an ideal place for the preservation of perishable foodstuffs, thus also acting as primordial refrigerators. These rooms were accessed through staircases that started from the ground floor of the houses or that were built in proximity and whose access was usually evidenced by the presence of two pillars.

Today there are over thirty specimens of these precursors passive cooling systems, some crumbling, others unreachable, others well kept or recovered. Among these, the Sirocco' Chamber of Micciulla manor, also known as the "Sirocco' Chamber of Villa Savagnone", in the Altarello di Baida district, is perhaps the best known both for its historical background and for being the only example of an open-air room.

## 2. The territorial context

Micciulla manor is the site where the hypogeum monumental complex is located. It includes the Sirocco' Chamber of Villa Savagnone, the medieval *qanāt* of Scibene (*Uscibene* or *Xibene* or *Sirene*, terms derived from Arabic) and the medieval limestone quarries, in disuse since the '700. The site is located in the piedmont area in the south west portion of the "Plain of Palermo". Structurally the Plain can be framed in the evolutionary context of the "Mountains of Palermo", which constitute a portion of the Sicilian mountain range.

The Mountains of Palermo therefore surround the large Quaternary limestone plain on which the city is built and consist largely of highly fractured synorogenic Mesozoic carbonate rocks and sometimes overturned to the Numidian clayey-arenaceous *Flysch* of oligo-Miocene age. The limestone of the plain is mostly juxtaposed with the carbonate mountains and settled in the quaternary, filling the more depressed areas of the *Flysch*.

At about 1.3 kilometers further upstream from the Sirocco' Chamber, towards the SW, this lying, in which the carbonate formations, permeable by fracturing, are sometimes superimposed and sometimes juxtaposed with the little permeable *Flysch*, determines in the carbonate rocks an aquifer on whose natural discharge is represented by the "Gabriele" source group. In this area the rugged and steep profile of the carbonate mountain, called Monte Caputo, changes into a softer profile until it becomes sub-flat, thus leaving the place to the *Piana di Palermo*, which in turn slopes down gently eastwards to the sea. At this point, where the ground changes slope, there is also the juxtaposition of the aforementioned carbonatic mountain with the Quaternary limestone and both are based on the *Flysch*.

It is here that a part of the water discharged by the carbonatic aquifer, in addition to forming the Gabriele springs, siphon into the limestone formation and into the sandstone layers of the *Flysch* and are then captured by the cunicular works called *Qanāt* and 'ngruttati. These structures also capture the waters that infiltrate into the calcarenitic formation of the Plain of Palermo which feed the water table that forms above the contact with the *Flysch*. In this area the calcarenites have a thickness of about 10 meters.

*Qanāt* are hypogeal cunicular structures and are among the oldest water systems that document the technique of capturing and exploiting water, according to the system of emerging drainage tunnels, very much used in the Palermo area until the last century and probably of pre-existing origin to the medieval Islamic period. In particular, the *qanāt* of Scibene and the annexed Sirocco' Chamber represent a *unicum* because they are derived within the same cunicular path in the calcarenitic formation.



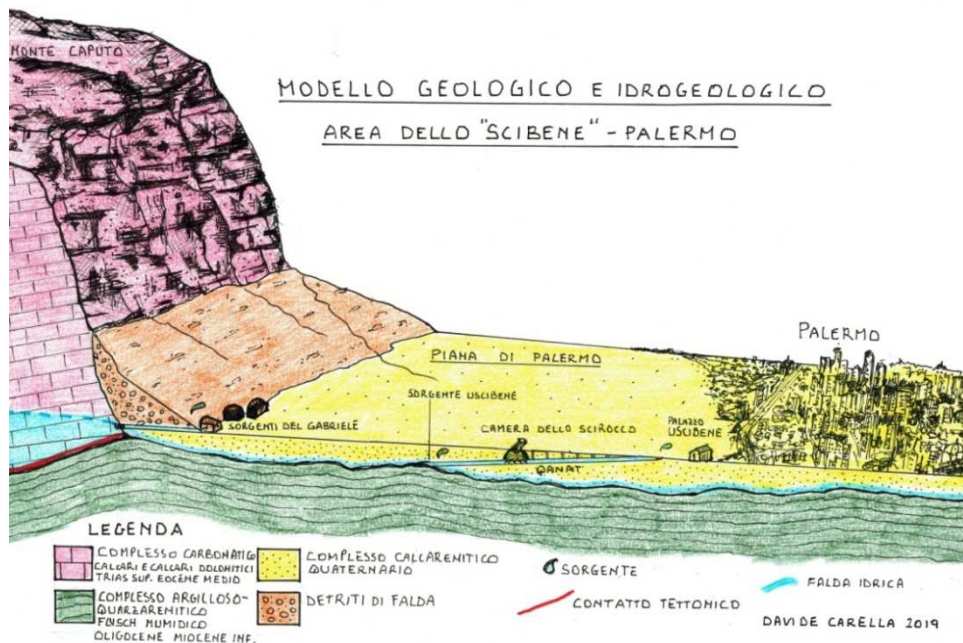


Fig. 1: Geological and hydrogeological model of the Scibene area; illustration by Davide Carella.

In addition, the Sirocco' Chamber has a characteristic open-air vault which documents a different construction method compared to the other sirocco rooms known in the district: it was obtained by enlarging and modeling the ancient cave in which the source of the Scibene sprang. In fact, the Sirocco' Chamber is placed in such a way as to divide the qanat into two sections, the first develops in the NW direction for a length of about 48 meters and then forks into two branches for the catchment of spring waters, respectively of 38 meters and 46 meters; the latter then changes in a northerly direction for the first 28 meters and then returns to the last 18 meters in the NW direction. The two branches, in the terminal tract, intercept the fractured quartzarenitic layers from which the ancient Scibene spring flows, slightly under pressure. These terminal sections have a significantly lower section than the calcarenitic ones due to the difficulty in drilling the quartzarenite, which is much harder than the calcarenite. The second is the real water transport tunnel that runs in the ESE direction for about 120 meters and then changes into a trench that is not viable and leads to the point where the waters emerge. The cunicular system leads in the direction of the city and feeds both a *gebbia* used for irrigation use, and a *catusato* which from the 15th century fed the city's water needs with the water towers system. From literature it is still to be proved, that in more remote times the same water emerging from the trench fed a fountain and a fishpond present in the adjacent Norman Scibene palace. Only the second tunnel presents along its course 7 aeration wells (or better of service) placed at a regular distance between them of about 17 meters.

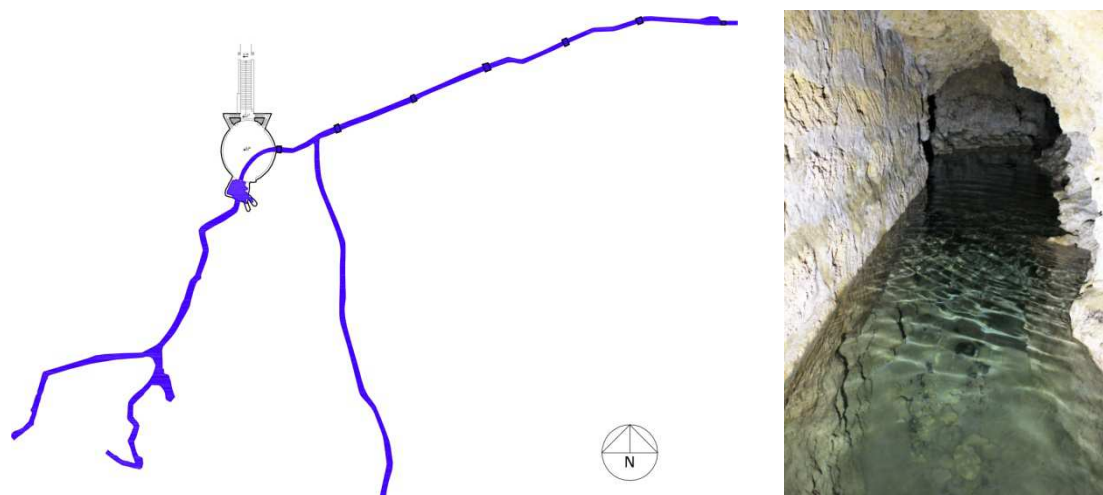


Fig. 2: On the left: scheme of the path of the Scibene qanāt that crosses the Sirocco' Chamber; illustration by Carmelo Bustinto. On the right: interior of the Scibene qanāt; ph. Davide Carella.



It is recognized that these wells have been functional to the excavation of the tunnel and its maintenance. For this reason some of these wells have vaults with inspection openings, others are definitively closed, their dimensions have a quadrangular shape with a side of about one meter and a variable depth to reach the ground level from the bottom of the tunnel.

In the Sirocco' Chamber the passive cooling of the room is due both to the presence of water carried by the qanāt, and to the presence of water retained by capillarity in the porous and permeable walls of the calcarenitic rock in which the chamber itself is carved.

This water supply and transportation system, as well as the refrigerating properties of the Sirocco' Chamber are made possible thanks to the particular geo-hydrogeological structure described above.

### 3. History

The origins of the sirocco chamber can be traced back to the presence of an underground cave located within an ancient Arab park *Gennet al ardhy* (or *Gannat al ard*), "paradise of the earth". The park extended from the slopes of Grifone Mount to the walls of the city of *Panormo*, the current Palermo, occupying part of the Plain of Palermo, called Conca d'Oro. The park was dotted with pavilions, beautiful buildings such as *Cuba* and *Cuba Soprana*, *Maredolce Castle* and luxuriant oases that developed around water mirrors fed by the numerous springs present [2] that made luxuriant the whole area.

The happy hydrogeological situation of the entire Palermo plain was widely exploited by Muslims who introduced new irrigation techniques, made possible through a network of underground aqueducts (qanāt), irrigation canals (*saie*), tanks for collecting water (*gebbie*), cisterns (*giarre*), wells and norie (*senie*).

In the first half of the 12th century, the Norman king Roger II of Sicily chose the western portion of the plain, including the old Arab park, for the planting of the new royal park called *Genoard* (from the ancient Arabic name *Gannat al-ard*). The estate extended from the Orecchiuta mountains to the city walls and was surrounded by a boundary wall that delimited an enchanted place with a rich fauna and lush gardens, palm trees, orchards, fish ponds and refined pavilions that constituted the so-called places of solace (*sollatia*), designed for recreation, relaxation and entertainment.

One of these pleasant places is the Scibene or Xibene, (perhaps sybian: "young"), in which there was a fish pond fed by the homonymous spring, a water mill [3] and a mansion (Scibene Palace), whose original structures probably date back to the Arab period although, according to some scholars, it presents a Norman structure. The Scibene plant gave its name to the entire district until the current name of Altarello was born in the 16th century. The Scibene subsoil was crossed by a qanāt mentioned for the first time in a deed of 1415.

With the advent of the feudal system the real estate assets was assigned to the Norman leaders and to the ecclesiastical bodies. It so happens that in 1177 William II the Good grants to the Archbishop of Palermo Gualtiero the house of Baida, a large fiefdom that also included the district of Scibene, which became a holiday resort for the Palermo Archbishops until 1499. The thirteenth century is marked by a serious crisis in Sicilian agriculture due to the abandonment of land by farmers, exploited by the lords and reduced in conditions of extreme poverty. The Norman *sollatia* are slowly abandoned together with the once luxuriant gardens and plantations. The arrival of the Angevins in Palermo completes the action of devastation of the land, carried out in 1325 by the troops of King Robert of Naples who besieged the city destroying even the surrounding countryside.

In an attempt to contain the phenomenon of the countryside decline, starting from the XIV century, under the Aragonese government, there were numerous concessions of land and agricultural funds by the Archbishops of the Palermo church to ecclesiastical bodies and private persons, among which also exponents of the city nobility that succeed in the management and cultivation of the lands and waters of the area in exchange for cash payments [4]. Thus, starting from 1367, the abbots of the monastery of S. Martino delle Scale, began to concede in emphyteusis part of the land belonging to them to private individuals who, over time, acquired more and more land rights until they themselves became owners of portions of these. In 1468 Luca Pollastra, exponent of the Palermo nobility, bought a land bordering on the properties of the monastery of San Martino, including a garden with olive trees, some rural buildings, pergolas and the underground cave from which gushed water from the Scibene spring, also acquiring the right to take part of it for irrigation purposes. Luca Pollastra transformed the existing factories into a fortified *baglio* and in the following years bought other portions of land bordering on its property thus forming a vast estate with olive trees and vineyards that from 1653 will be named Santacolomba Estate.

In 1525 Luca Pollastra's son, Pietro, grants in emphyteusis to the Genoese merchant Gerardo Battaglia a portion of the land for extractive use for 2 annual onze, including the underground cave. On the death of Pietro Pollastra, which took place in 1545, his son Luca inherited all his father's possessions and in 1556 sold the large site cultivated with olive trees and vineyards, where the cave was dug, to the magnificent Sigismondo Rustici, a merchant from Lucca. In the sales document was

written: *con vigne, terre scapole, olivi, grutta, stanze e con ore 16 d'acqua da prendersi dall'ora sesta della notte di lunedì all'ora quattordicesima di martedì e dalla quattordicesima fino alla diciottesima* [5]. Sigismondo Rustici later bought other neighboring lands and from 1560 transformed part of the house made by Luca Pollastra into a beautiful villa (today Villa Belvedere). The heirs of Sigismondo Rustici, in order to sell the water to the city of Palermo, built a conduit that, starting from the cave, crossed the Scibene garden, fed five fountains and reached the plain of Santa Teresa. As mentioned above, in 1653 the estate passed into the hands of Don Pietro Santacolomba count of Isnello who gave the name to the fiefdom.

The Santacolomba family built a series of rustic buildings for the agricultural needs of the estate within the original walls of Villa Belvedere. Among these is a small dwelling, built on a natural embankment, which over the years undergoes a series of alterations that turn it into a small stately home, with eighteenth-century lines, also used as a holiday residence. The villa (today Villa Savagnone) was at that time another small jewel that embellished the estate.

In 1680 the Jesuits purchased the estate including the Scibene estate which, together with the adjacent Micciulla estate, already bought in 1636 by Giuseppe and Vittoria Micciulla, became the noble summer residence of the prelates until 1767, the year in which they were expelled from the kingdom [6]. In 1894 the villa was sold at auction to Giovanni Savagnone, along with the vast garden and the ground that houses the Sirocco' Chamber.

The conditions of the Sirocco' Chamber dated 1928 are thus described by the historian Nino Basile on the occasion of a visit made to the places: *Go down it by means of a ladder preceded by pillars. At some point the ladder forks in such a way that you enter the cavern for a double door; the one to the right of the descending is still in operation, the other has been walled up. At the bottom in this room carved into the rock is the source, around the wall seats. We observe the traces of artificial combinations of water games. Each particularity is a sure testimony of the use this room was intended for. I invite readers to visit such a chamber of the sirocco, which although buried and poorly reduced for long neglect, also presents itself as a whole with a very tasty pictorial character. The ivy, the moss, the lichens, the clinging maidenhair, the foliage that goes down from the branches from above, give it a great artistic interest and I hope that some landscapist worthy of the name, worthily illustrate this sure testimony of refinement building of ancient Palermo* [7].

The Savagnone family continued to spend their holiday at the villa until the 1950s. Since then we have no news of the estate until 17 December 1979, the date on which part of the property is sold by the Savagnone heirs to Filippo Piraino, a leading exponent of the Palermo *mafia* of the time and nephew of Salvatore Inzerillo (*u zù Totò*), brother in law of Rosario Inzerillo [8]. These are dark years for the city of Palermo, which has become the scene of bloody clashes between gangsters who compete for territorial control. The Micciulla estate is transformed into the mafia lair of the Spatola-Inzerillo clan and the reinforced concrete villa, built on the ruins of an artifact, near Villa Savagnone and the Sirocco' Chamber, is transformed into a meeting place for "men of honor" during which blood pacts are stipulated and the fate of men and families are decided [9]. The entire area is left to total decay, as is the Sirocco' Chamber which turns into an open-air warehouse. Brambles and weeds hide the garden that turns into an escape route with electric wires and flying light bulbs that show the way to the fugitives who often used the passages that depart from the Chamber to hide and run along the intricate network that unfolded in the Palermo underground.

On 17 June 1980, the mighty iron gate that prevented entry to the property was opened by judge Giovanni Falcone who freed the property by seizing it from the mafia.

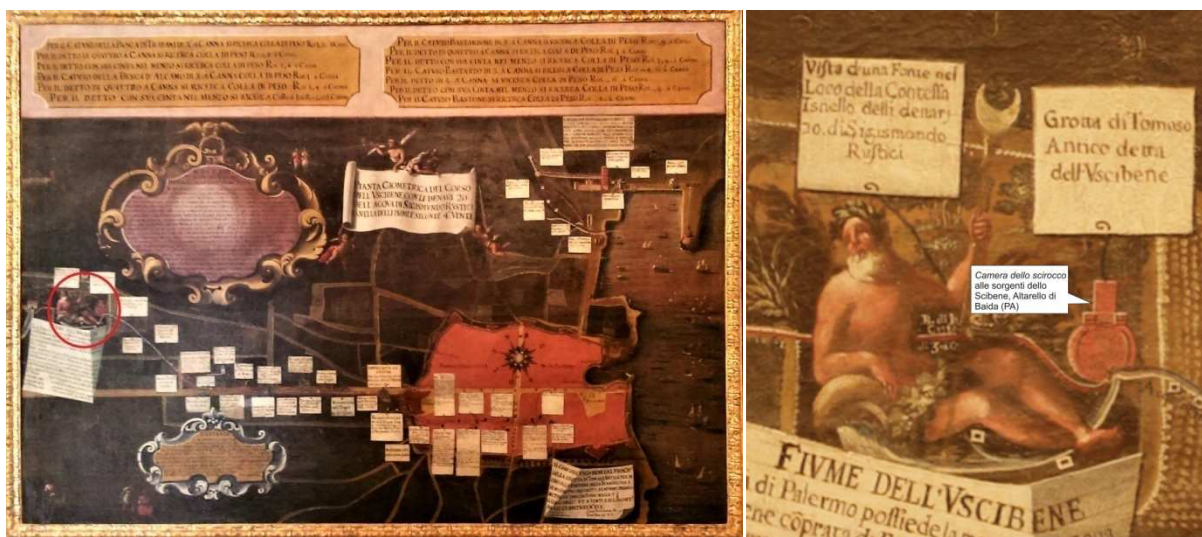


**Fig. 3:** On the left: Giovanni Falcone and Giusto Sciacchitano in front of the gate of Micciulla Estate on 17 June 1980; ph Letizia Battaglia. On the right: The gate from inside the estate. Source: <https://www.lasicilia.it/gallery/archivio/7979/palermo-agli-scout-la-villa-dove-i-boss-decidevano-gli-omicidi.html>

In 1998 some interventions of structural recovery are carried out by the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage of the Sicily Region in order to secure the Sirocco' Chamber and bring back to life a splendid monument belonging to the historical and cultural heritage of the city. The restoration work involved the architraves and the jambs of the entrance to the Chamber, the recovery of the seats along the wall perimeter, the covering of the channel connecting the two portions of the qanāt. One year after restoration, in 1999, the fund is entrusted to AGESCI, which has actively worked to recover and maintain it.

#### 4. The Sirocco' Chamber

The transformation of the hypogeum into the Sirocco' Chamber, expanded and enriched with seats and fountains, dates back to the period between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, bibliographic sources raise some doubts about the real dating of the plant that has been the subject of interventions that have taken place over the years. It is likely that the Genoese merchant Gerardo Battaglia, as early as 1525, made changes to the cave by extending it to facilitate water extraction. It is certain that in a large oil painting of 1722, in which the course of the Scibene is represented, we note a detail in which the cave-spring of Villa Savagnone is depicted, in the shape of a hemicycle with the allegory of the river at the foot.



**Fig. 4:** On the left: the painting representing the course of the Scibene which is part of a series of four picture painted painting by the Senate of Palermo to represent some of the main waterways that supplied the city; ph Davide Carella. On the right: the detail of the source with the cave-source; ph Pietro Todaro.

Today the Sirocco' Chamber, completely cleaned and restored, presents itself in all its suggestive beauty. A fragrant citrus grove accompanies to a staircase, composed of twenty-six steps taken from the calcarenitic rock and preceded by two powerful pillars that delimit its width. The staircase leads to a rest area, located about five meters below the ground level, with a parapet from which it is possible to look out on the room below. From the rest area there are two opposing gates, dug into the rock, from which two ramps start, these too carved into the calcarenite which, following an acute angle path, lead to the base of the chamber located about three meters below.



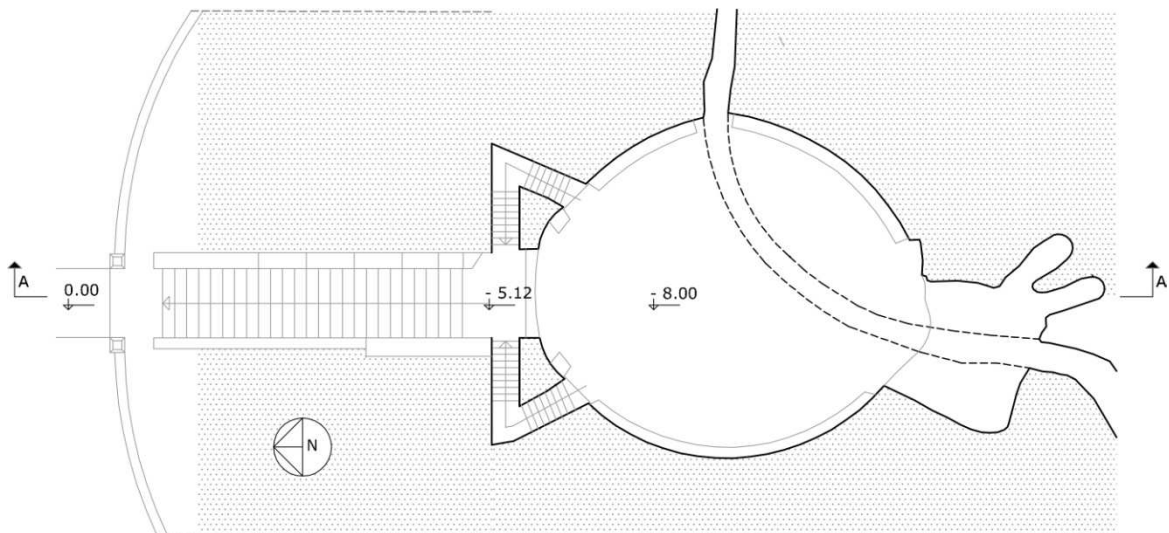
**Fig. 5:** The entrance and the access ladder to the Sirocco' Chamber; ph Carmelo Bustinto.



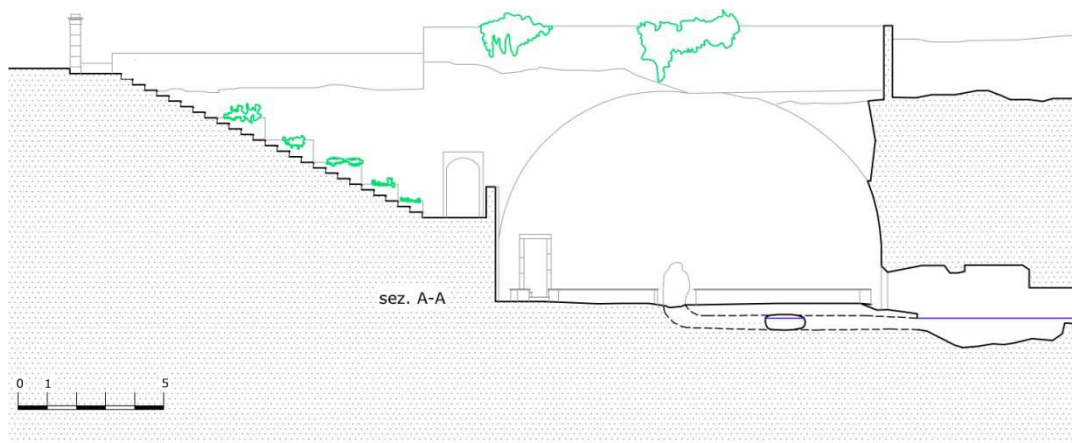


**Fig. 6:** The rest area and the Sirocco' Chamber; ph Carmelo Bustinto.

The curvilinear plant extends over an area of about 100 square meters and the perimeter is bounded at the base by a seat carved into the calcarenitic rock. Along the walls of the room there are two openings that mark the passage of the qanāt built in the Arab period and interrupted due to the presence of the cave. The connection between the two portions of the qanāt was guaranteed by a canal, now covered, that crossed part of the floor of the chamber contributing to the cooling of the hypogeum. In correspondence of one of the two gates of the qanāt, in front of the access stairway, at the base of the rocky wall, you can see a small basin in which converge the waters captured by a trap that winds in the subsoil for about 50 meters, up to reach the Scibene source.



**Fig. 7:** Plan of the Sirocco' Chamber; architectural relief and graphic restitution by Carmelo Bustinto.



**Fig. 8:** Section of the Sirocco' Chamber; graphic restitution by Carmelo Bustinto.



**Fig. 9:** On the left: passage of access to the qanāt of the Scibene to which comes the water of the canal, now covered, which crosses part of the floor of the chamber. On the right: the collection basin into which the waters captured by the Scibene source and those of the waterfall generated by the Gabriele source flow; ph Carmelo Bustinto.

The small basin also welcomes the waters of a waterfall coming from the Gabriele springs. These waters were conveyed into “*catusi*” embedded in the rock (whose traces can still be seen today) and descended from above with a crash, offering a pleasant sound and scenographic effect, together with the possibility of bathing directly at contact with the water collected in the natural basin below. The waters of the waterfall and those that flowed from the source were thus conveyed into the canal along the floor and flowed into the downstream stretch of the qanāt.

The Sirocco’ Chamber and the entire underground system that also includes the Scibene qanāt are now bound, with D.A. 7602 of 09.09.1996, by the Superintendency for Cultural Heritage of Palermo pursuant to Law 1089/1939.

## 5. “The garden where men are reborn”

After the seizure by Giovanni Falcone and thanks to Law 646/82 “Rognoni-La Torre”, on 12 May 1983 the Micciulla estate was subjected to final confiscation, re-entering the first assets seized from the *mafia* in Italy. On 31 January 1997 the property was transferred from the Ministry of Finance to the Municipality of Palermo to be used as a “Public Park and / or Seat for the Community of Boys”.

After the entry into force of Law 109 of 7 March 96 (Law of popular initiative promoted by Libera), specifically in March 1999, the Micciulla estate is entrusted to AGESCI to make it an International Scout Base. It is the first time that an asset has been entrusted to an association for reuse for social purposes.

Today, twenty years after the concession, the “Volpe Astuta” Scout Base of Micciulla estate is a symbol of legality and rebirth.

The realization of the base scout project, dedicated to the rebirth of the garden and of men, however, had several stages and a suffered path. It all started in 1999, through the voluntary and free scout work, with the aim of reviving this important historical, landscaping and monumental asset outraged by *mafia* brutality. This “pact” that the AGESCI has stipulated with citizenship is experienced as a “mission” aimed at returning this renewed corner of land, managed by the scout presence; but also and above all to propose an alternative to the neighborhood and in general to young people, with particular attention to those who are disadvantaged, through activities based on education to memory, legality, gratuitousness, acceptance, culture and spontaneous participation which each citizen can implement for the care of the “Common Good”.

At the time of custody, the estate was in a state of neglect and degradation as from the seizure of 1980 to the assignment to AGESCI, in 1999, the local underworld had regained possession of the places and it was almost impossible to access. The entire surface - more than three hectares of land - was covered with brambles, the house, built by the mafia clan on the ruins of an old pre-existence, appeared scarred by vandalism, remains of stolen motorcycles were scattered on the ground, trees devastated by fires. There were also concealed marijuana crops. The monumental complex constituted by the Sirocco’ Chamber and the Scibene qanāt was almost entirely covered by garbage and scraps.





**Fig. 10:** Photos of the conditions in which the estate and the Sirocco' Chamber paid at the time of delivery to the AGESCI; ph Michelangelo Salamone.

There was the awareness of being in a place still in the hands of criminality which, hampered in the performance of its shady business by the new presence of boy scouts, did not hesitate to retaliate through constant intimidation and vandalism. The criminals from time to time destroyed everything that was done, on the example of the famous Penelope canvas, so that what was done by day, the night was destroyed.

*"... I remember the first time I entered that house, it was a beautiful spring day, but crossing the threshold of that door the light was swallowed up and remained in a disturbing darkness ... the walls were devastated by vandalism, all the interiors and the ceiling were totally blackened by the lampblack given off by the burnings of the cable sheaths that the criminals burned inside to obtain the copper ..."* [10].



**Fig. 11:** Interior of the house at the time of delivery to AGESCI. Ph Davide Carella 2007.

The years between 1999 and 2005 were very difficult, suffered and discouraging for the association, unprepared to face so much hostility from the territory. But the support of the Judiciary, of the Mayor and of the Libera Association of Don Ciotti has allowed the volunteers of AGESCI to carry on the project of reconversion of a territory that has been returned to the citizens thanks to the restoration of the Sirocco' Chamber by the work of the Superintendency for Cultural Heritage. The restoration work has brought to light and given back to the enjoyment of the entire community a monumental asset of rare beauty which, together with the qanāt of Scibene, constitutes a settlement of extraordinary historical and geological interest.

After 2005, AGESCI set up an organization aimed at managing the estate. The organization took the name of "Operational Patrol". it was made up of experienced Scout Leaders who in addition to having educational skills had professional skills in the field of territory, law, architecture, administration, communication.



In addition, the Patrol brought together Chiefs and young people with the task of establishing a “garrison” through the site management and maintenance service. Through this new strategy it was possible to “build” faster than it was destroyed by piloted vandalism. Over time, crime became “tired” and intimidation began to decline.

After 2006 the projects carried out by the boys followed each other regularly and the base has become a symbolic place of memory and venue of great events, such as the recurrences of the 1992 massacres that broke the life of the judge Giovanni Falcone, the judge Salvatore Borsellino and all the men and women who had fought the mafia in those years. With the first funding obtained thanks to the self-taxation of the members, it was possible to start the work of recovery of the vandalized house, the replacement of the external gate, originally made of metal panels, with another one with metal bars that allowed to look inside; light and water were brought and the house began to be fully enjoyed.

The non-specialized workforce of all the works carried out (called “micro-projects” because they are suitable for children) was entrusted to the Palermo scouts and was carried out by free and weekly service shifts; moreover, since 2007, a National building site AGESCI takes place in September on the topic of legality called “*Da Aquile a Volpi Randagie*” which involves boys from all over Italy and carries out site improvement works. Today the event has reached the 12th edition. Adding to the aforementioned workforce, starting from 2007, in the months between June and August, entire scout communities as well as groups belonging to other associations arrive from all over Italy to work both to the house and in the garden: hundreds of boys have helped to change the face of this place.

The history of the fund has a fundamental stage which was a crucial moment for the possibility of enjoy the Sirocco’ Chamber, the Qanat Scibene and the Quarries. This refers to the funding obtained from the Ministry of the Interior for a project entitled *Restructuring of a building confiscated from the mafia for the establishment of an AGESCI international scout base called “Volpe Astuta”, aimed at promoting the culture of legality*, under the “National Operational Program Safety for Development”.

The project was carried out by AGESCI Zona Conca d’Oro in collaboration with the Municipality of Palermo and allowed the recovery of a historical context of enormous importance for the visibility of the city on a national and international level offering to citizenship the chance to live the beautiful historic complex. All this through scouting work that elevates it to a symbol of legality, an example of environmental, social and cultural conversion of a territory devastated by mafia abuse.

The renovation took place from December 2013 and ended on June 23, 2015 with a solemn inauguration ceremony and delivery to the AGESCI Zona Conca D’Oro of the “Scout House” in the presence of the authorities.



**Fig. 12:** The residency of the mafia bosses (on the left) today transformed into the “Scout House” of the “Volpe Astuta” base; Ph Giuseppe Fradella and Carmelo Bustinto.

The future objectives of “Fondo Micciulla” project are:

1. Establishment of an international scout base as an educational place in which acceptance, encounter and integration between cultures is experienced: Palermo is a city that over the centuries has been an example of harmonious integration and exchange of cultural riches, today it represents a welcoming social reality that is the school for the Country.
2. Recovery of the historic citrus grove, intended as a recovery of both the ancient irrigation systems of the Conca d’Oro and as a reconstitution of the ancient citrus grove in the quarries. Recovery of the rural culture of the district: it is, in fact, an area where tampering with the agro-ecosystem occurred also and above all due to the events that happened at the estate in the years in which it was abandoned and devastated. The irrigation systems of the Conca d’Oro are a peculiar element of agriculture in this area.
3. Realization of social and educational gardens for the involvement of schools, for integration and for self-sustenance, with particular attention to the participation of disabled children.

4. Agora of citizen commitment and memory. Creation of spaces of memory and culture to give "lymph" to rebirth and education: With the passage of time the Micciulla estate has become a symbol of legality and rebirth on a national scale, it has become an example of resistance and social commitment. To honor the history of this place it is necessary to know and pass on to the new generations the illustrious historical past that this place has had from the Middle Ages to the '900, to recount the period of its environmental and moral degradation, which occurred at the end of the 1900s by the Mafia and to document its subsequent rebirth starting from the early 2000s by the voluntary service.

The first objective of this project is to identify, equip, highlight and connect through a historical, museographic, environmental and legality path, the so-called "PATH OF MEMORY". As described, the site contains a series of realities that allow the reconstruction of historical memory from the Middle Ages to the present. They are: the waterways, represented by the Arab Qanāt of the "Scibene" system, from medieval times; the Sirocco' Chamber, a splendid bioclimatic archetype that can host meetings, concerts, cultural events; the ancient quarries of the Middle Ages, in disuse since the '700 [11]; the historical citrus orchard embedded in the quarries, the *gebbia* and the *saia*; the "Scout House", testimony of the recovery of mafia abuse by the intervention of the Municipal Administration and the scouts.

The objective is to use the aforementioned path for educational visits for schools, associations, for citizenship also involving the resources of the district that could represent the memory of the territory.

## 6. Conclusions

The experience is set up as an example through which citizens reappropriate themselves what the mafia has usurped, take care of it as their own, thus creating opportunities for encounter, culture and inner growth.

As a matter of fact, today, the Micciulla estate-International Scout Base Volpe Astuta represents in Italy the only example of a scout base open to citizens, center of meetings between associations operating in the educational and cultural field and it is a perfect synergy between the world of volunteering and institutions. Today, at the base, through agreements and collaborations with external institutes, events concerning history and memory are promoted such as conferences, seminars and activities related to the academic world, concerts, theatrical performances, vigils, recreational activities.

*"The presence of the Volpe Astuta Scout Base goes beyond the mafia and the antimafia, it is about everyday normality, being a citizen and understanding the importance of being."* [12].



**Fig. 13:** On the left: view of the Sirocco' Chamber during a vigil; ph Emanuele Di Vita. On the right: group photo of the students of the University of Palermo visiting Sirocco' Chamber; ph Carmelo Bustinto.

## 7. Quotations and Bibliographical References

[1] In the manuscript of the ecclesiastic Francesco Baronio e Manfredi, *De Majestate Panormitana*, appeared in 1630, some "refreshment rooms" are mentioned below the noble palaces of the city including the residences of the baron della Favara, the duke of Terranova, the family D'Aragona, the lords Pietro Corsetto and Giacomo Pesce. D. Francisci Baronii Ac Manfredis, *De Maiestate Panormitana*: Libri IV.

[2] Some springs had Arabic names, as mentioned by the Arab traveler Ibn Hawqal; among these Garbal "sieve" and Bayda "white", from the color of the earth of this district.

[3] The abundance of the waterways of the area, characterized by a fairly constant regime in all seasons, determined since the Norman period the rise of numerous mills that gave this area the name of "Land of archbishop's mills".

- [4]. These are concessions in emphyteusis with a three-year duration through which the beneficiary was obliged to *beneficare, meliorare et non reducere* property, penalty of various kinds. It often happened that the emphyteutes themselves sub-leased the lands to the peasants.
- [5] (ASP, Fondo CC.RR.SS., Mon. S. Maria lo Spasimo, vol.17.
- [6] From the Micciulla spouses derives the name by which today the site of the Sirocco' Chamber is indicated.
- [7] BASILE, N., *La camera dello scirocco*. In *Giornale di Sicilia*, 5-6 maggio 1928, n.107.
- [8] Salvatore Inzerillo has been a district leader since 1978 of the gang of Passo di Rigano, a friend and in business with Stefano Bontade.
- [9] It is here that the well-known politician Giulio Andreotti, accompanied by Salvo cousins - leading exponents of the Palermo underworld - and by the Sicilian parliamentary Salvo Lima, meets Stefano Bontade to discuss the assassination of the president of the Sicilian Region Piersanti Mattarella.
- [10] Taken from an interview by Francesco Trotta with Davide Carella, already in charge of AGESCI for the Volpe Astuta Base.
- [11] This site, consisting of a lowered area and of tunnels and lateral enclosures, is an important testimony of human work; furthermore the lowered part was reused as a citrus grove in periods after the '700.
- [12] Taken from an interview by Francesco Trotta with Davide Carella, already in charge of AGESCI for the Volpe Astuta Base.
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