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Final thesis

***Journeying through the Florio Family's  
legacy.***

A study of their story, the Historical Novel, and  
their enduring impact.

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The Places of the Florio's



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## Introduction

The history of the Florio family constitutes a fascinating and significant narrative in Italian history, particularly relevant to Sicily between the 19th and 20th centuries. The family's origins date back to the move of Paolo Florio and his brother-in-law Paolo Barbaro from Bagnara Calabria to Palermo in 1799. They took over a *putia* in Palermo on 'Via dei Materassai'. This was the starting point for a series of entrepreneurial ventures that characterized the rise first of Paolo and then later of Vincenzo Florio in the commercial landscape of Sicily.<sup>1</sup>

Through this research work, the goal has been to immerse ourselves in the vicissitudes of the Florio family, which has profoundly affected Sicily's economic and social fabric. The choice to dedicate this research work to the history of the Florio family is not accidental. It is rooted in my deep connection with Sicily, the land where I was born and raised.

These places, rich in history and culture, have shaped my identity and fueled my interest in rediscovering the island's past. The Florio family's fascinating history and enduring influence on Sicily represent a crucial aspect of this rich and complex history. This work, therefore, aims to explore and enhance the historical heritage of my homeland. It offers an in-depth analysis of the Florios' contribution and their impact on the island over the centuries.

Chapter 1 analyzes 19th-century Sicily, with all its complex political and social dynamics. This is the historical context in which the Florio narrative is set. The historical period ranges from 1806, with the establishment of the British protectorate, to 1859, the year of the death of King Ferdinand II of the Two Sicilies. In this seemingly short period, Sicily experienced a series of transformations that profoundly affected its development.

Chapter 2 analyzed the relationship between public history and the historical novel. Public history is based on the idea that history should be accessible to all; also the public's involvement in the creation of history itself can enrich the understanding of the past.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Giuffrida R., Lentini R., Troisi S., Lanza Tomasi G., *L'età dei Florio*, Palermo, Sellerio editore, 1986, p. 17-19

<sup>2</sup>Colombi V., Sanicola G., *Public history La storia contemporanea*, Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, Milano, 2017, pp.43-47



The historical novel, instead, offers an opportunity to bring the general public closer to history by telling compelling stories set in eras and places of the past.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis will examine how these two fields, Public History, and the historical novel, intertwine and influence each other.

Chapter 3 will analyze the Florio family's journey, rich in innovation and entrepreneurial spirit. Coming from humble beginnings, they became among the island's leading entrepreneurs. From their first business activities to diversifying their investments outside Sicily to their international involvement, the Florios demonstrated Sicily's potential. Sicilian products, from wine to tuna to sulfur, assumed incredible status thanks to Vincenzo Florio's activities.<sup>4</sup>

Special attention will be paid to Stefania Auci's historical novel *I Leoni di Sicilia*. This novel tells the story of the Florios from their arrival in Sicily until Vincenzo Florio's death. Then, it will analyze how historical novelists, in this case Stefania Auci, can reinterpret historical events and real characters through a narrative lens. This will provide an emotional and subjective perspective to enrich the understanding of historical facts.<sup>5</sup>

It will be crucial to compare Auci's novel with the more conventional historical narrative. Indeed, it will analyze how fictional representation can influence the public's perception and understanding of historical events. Finally, it will highlight the challenges and opportunities this contribution can bring to historical popularization.<sup>6</sup>

The thesis work also includes a project, explained in Chapter 4. The project uses explanatory videos uploaded to a dedicated website to tell the highlights of the Florio family history. This stems from the desire to make this narrative accessible to a wide and varied audience. The use of videos as the primary tool makes it possible to capture the attention and interest of viewers. They make the historical events being recounted tangible and engaging. Indeed, the project aims to educate and engage the public through this multimedia and interactive approach. At the same time, it helps to preserve and disseminate the historical memory of one of Sicily's most influential families.

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<sup>3</sup>Sorrentino G., *Il romanzo storico: prerogative e controindicazioni*, Novecento.org, n. 9, febbraio 2018

<sup>4</sup>Paladino Florio C., *I luoghi dei Florio: dimore e imprese storiche dei "viceré" di Sicilia*, Italia, Rizzoli, 2022, pp. 12-14

<sup>5</sup>Shaw H., *An Approach to the Historical Novel*, In *The Forms of Historical Fiction: Sir Walter Scott and His Successors*, Cornell University Press, 1983, pp.20-22

<sup>6</sup>Ivi, pp. 29-30

The main goal of this thesis, as a Public History work, is to make an essential chapter of Sicilian history accessible and engaging to the public. In particular, it seeks to innovatively transform academic research into a narrative suitable for a broader audience outside academics and professional historians.

This compelling and richly detailed narrative approach is intended to arouse the public's interest in the events of the Florios. Indeed, attention is to be focused on their impact on the economic, social, and cultural history of Sicily in the 19th century. Following the cornerstones of Public History, public involvement in local history increases historical awareness. More importantly, it helps to enhance cultural heritage and promote a sense of belonging and identity even among Sicilian citizens.

Finally, an attempt is made to stimulate reflection on the practice of public history. They are, indeed, exploring the challenges and opportunities in communicating history in a way that is accessible and engaging to the public. These innovative approaches and digital technologies are intended to create an emotional and intellectual connection between the public and the history of the Florio family. This way, historical learning transforms into an interactive and meaningful experience.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Colombi, Sanicola, *Public history La storia contemporanea*, pp.43-47

## Chapter 1 Sicily between 1806-1859

The 19th century for Sicily was a turbulent one, with the aftermath of the French Revolution and the final defeat of Napoleon, it was about to experience one of the most important periods in Sicilian history.

The purpose of this chapter will be to illustrate the highlights of Sicilian history from 1806 until 1859. In that year Ferdinand II of Bourbon died and marked the beginning of the end of the Bourbon monarchy that had ruled Sicily for centuries.

### 1. The English decade

#### 1.1 The Bourbons in Sicily

The Peace of Pressburg, signed on December 26 of 1805, marked a turning point in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, as the rulers, Ferdinand IV of Sicily and Maria Carolina, along with the rest of the court were forced to abandon Naples. They retreated to Palermo on Nelson's flagship with British help; what has been called the "English decade" began. The reasons that prompted the rulers to rely on British protection were mainly the reconquest of Naples and the defence of Sicily; the British, on the other hand, put the defence of the island from French attacks first and foremost.<sup>8</sup>

British aid was manifold: many loans and capital investments had resulted in a boom in industry, trade, and even agriculture. It should also not be forgotten that, unlike the rest of Europe, Sicily, thanks to British aid, did not suffer post-Napoleonic war.<sup>9</sup>

During the years of the protectorate, an "English party" began to be created: several enlightened Sicilian intellectuals and nobles, including Balsamo, Castelnovo, and Belmonte were part of a line of thought that wanted to transform Sicilian society, still based on the feudal system, to instead move closer and closer to an English-style model.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The Peace of Pressburg was signed on December 26, 1805 between Napoleon and Francis I of Austria following the latter's defeat at Austerlitz. Capra C., *Storia moderna, 1492-1848*, Milano, Mondadori education, 2016, p. 380. Rosselli J., *Lord William Bentinck e l'occupazione Britannica della Sicilia 1811-1814*, Palermo, Sellerio editore, 2002, pp.16-17

<sup>9</sup> Smith M., *Storia della Sicilia medievale e moderna*, Bari, Editori Laterza, 1983 pp.443

<sup>10</sup> Rosselli J., *Lord William Bentinck e l'occupazione britannica della Sicilia 1811-1814*, pp.19-21

## 1.2 The baronial revolt

Sicily's apparent peace was shaken by the economic crisis and rampant inflation throughout Europe, to such an extent that a parliament had to be convened in 1810 to discuss baronial finances and immunities. The barons had to be persuaded to pay, as burdening the people was unthinkable at the time as it would have been a drag on the economy. Thus two factions were created: on one side we have the leaders of the parliament: the Princes of Butera, Trabia, and the Neapolitan archbishop of Palermo who supported the king. On the other hand, Giuseppe Ventimiglia, the Prince of Belmonte, convinced the barons to go against the King's demand by halving the amount of money that was required of them. After that he persuaded the clergymen to join his cause and go against the archbishop.<sup>11</sup>

They then abolished the eighteen donatives as they were too difficult to collect and also renounced the feudal tributes, unexpectedly deciding that they would pay a tax of 5 percent on the income of all real estate except those located in and around Palermo. Unfortunately, all this was likely done to annoy the King and the rest of the parliament, partly because the King could always count on English money; even if it meant a further loss of independence and a liberal-style policy. Instead the latter, in February 1811, abstaining that the Crown could use its power to impose new taxes, especially in a time of emergency, imposed a 1 percent tax. The barons, led once again by Belmonte, declared how the king had acted without first talking to parliament; Princes Butera, Campofranco, Cutò, and other members, on the other hand, declared how the King as such could impose the taxes by exercising his power. Unfortunately, no one was against this, so Belmonte was forced to turn to the British to usurp Ferdinand from the throne and insert a new monarch. The consequence of this revolutionary attack on the monarchy was the arrest of five of the barons, including Belmonte, the Prince of Castelnuovo, and others who were eventually taken to penal establishments.<sup>12</sup>

## 1.3 The arrival of Lord Bentinck in Sicily

It was no coincidence that the arrest of the barons coincided with the arrival of Lord William Bentinck, the new British minister plenipotentiary. Bentinck's presence in Sicily proved crucial to the growth of the patriotic spirit of the Sicilian people; for the first

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<sup>11</sup> Smith, *Storia della Sicilia medievale e moderna*, pp.443-444

<sup>12</sup> Ivi pp.445-446

time, the Sicilians had someone who truly believed in their potential. During the meeting between Ferdinand and Bentinck on January 10, 1812, the British made it clear that they did not want to undermine the authority of the dynasty in the kingdom of Naples. Moreover, the barons received English support for their request to govern Sicily, thanks to the promulgation of a constitution they had asked for. The consequence was that finally on January 16 Ferdinand had signed an act giving the vicariate to his sons, furthermore on January 20 the five barons were freed. Thus came the creation of this new government devoid of Neapolitans, "Belmonte was elected adviser and minister of foreign affairs, Cassaro minister of grace and justice, Castelnuovo of finance, and Aci of war and navy" (Balsamo). The plan for the constitution was to create one 'habillé à l'anglaise' but it was to be worked out by the parliament itself; On June 17 and 18, 1812, Bentinck and the vicars exchanged notes, and a treaty was signed between Britain and the Sicilian dynasty. This established the basis of the constitution and provided a clear line of action.<sup>13</sup>

One has to wonder if these came from a genuine national and reformist motion, and especially if it was not just a way of the baronial class to maintain and increase their power. Nevertheless, at least at that time, there is the certainty that the parliamentarians had sacrificed what were their interests for the common good. In this regard, the session of July 20, 1812, is given the value it deserves and that is that it was the moment of Sicily's rebirth.<sup>14</sup>

#### 1.4 The promulgation of the Constitution of 1812

The parliamentary constituent activity can be divided into two phases. The first phase, from June 18 to July 19, 1812, involved debating and approving the foundations of the constitution. The second phase, from July 20 to November 3, focused on approving the text of the constitution. The Parliament convened at the behest of Lord Bentinck and initiated the series of reforms that led to the end of the Ancien régime on the island. These reforms brought about significant socio-political changes and innovations.

The barons had laboured to draft the text of the constitution based on the English division of powers. The legislative, entrusted to Parliament, the executive, which remained strictly in the hands of the King, including the right of veto and dissolve the

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<sup>13</sup> Giarrizzo G., D'Alessandro V., *La Sicilia dal Vespro all'unità d'Italia*, Torino, UTET, 1989, pp. 652-654

<sup>14</sup> Rosselli, *Lord William Bentinck e l'occupazione britannica della Sicilia 1811-1814*, pp.126-127

Parliament, and the judicial system was based on the 'Pari'. Parliament therefore was constituted by two chambers whose duties were to meet annually to take up new financial bills put forward by the Commons, legislate, and impose taxes. It should be remembered during this time that when all these changes took place on the island, it was safeguarded by British military power. This prevented any potential issues that might have arisen with other European powers.<sup>15</sup>

One of the consequences of the constitution was the formation of a middle-class bourgeoisie, who invested in non-traditional crops and took advantage of opportunities offered by the administration of gabelle and baronial latifundia. They also enriched themselves by lending large sums at high interest rates to aristocrats and peasants.<sup>16</sup>

The emergence and growth of the new social class was made possible by the abolition of feudalism and its tributes and privileges through Articles XII and XIII. This split the nobility in two as some feared losing their privileges, while others saw it as an opportunity to gain greater authority over the King, and remove their obligations to the peasants. On the horizon loomed the possibility of an autonomous Sicily untethered from the old kingdom of Naples.<sup>17</sup>

### 1.5 Bentinck's difficulties

It was widely known that the King and the Queen favoured the drafting of the charter as they were convinced that it would never be approved. The King only agreed due to the English insistence and pressure from the parliament, as some of his ministers had abandoned him. He was forced to capitulate by authorising the Prince to give his approval to the articles.<sup>18</sup>

The new constitution thus had not been born under good auspices, and in the long run, the difficulties increased. One of the main reasons for the political stability in Sicily was

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<sup>15</sup> The peers were all those ecclesiastics, and their successors, and all those barons, and their successors, possessors of the current peerages, who had the right to sit and vote in the two ecclesiastical and military arms. Each lord entered parliament by only one of his titles, and had only one vote. C. Calisse, *storia del parlamento in Sicilia, dalla fondazione alla caduta della monarchia*, Torino, UTET, 1887, p.232-233.

Giarrizzo G., D'Alessandro V., *La Sicilia dal Vespro all'unità d'Italia*, pp. 656-658

<sup>16</sup>Smith, *Storia della Sicilia medievale e moderna*, p.449-450

<sup>17</sup>Article XII establishes that there will be no more fiefdoms, and all the lands will be owned in Sicily as in 'allodii', maintaining however in the respective families the order of succession that is currently enjoyed. Article XIII establishes that the so-called 'angaric' and privative rights will be abolished. Palmieri N., *Saggio storico e politico sulla Costituzione del regno di Sicilia infino al 1816*, S. Bonamici e compagni, Losanna, 1847, p. 131. Ivi p.451-452

<sup>18</sup>Rosselli, *Lord William Bentinck e l'occupazione britannica della Sicilia 1811-1814*, p.134

the absence of Bentinck, who had left for Spain in May 1813. He was the only one capable of calming tempers and giving stability to the parliament. In the two years of 1813-14, parliament met three times but to no avail; many did not want the constitution to be implemented for all intents and purposes, and Bentinck himself said that "they want freedom, but no one is willing to make sacrifices to get it."<sup>19</sup>

Upon his return, a session was held on October 20 which resulted in a motion to approve the budget once for all, contrary to Bentinck's expectations. This made him question the value of keeping the constitution if the Sicilian people were not prepared for independence. Nevertheless, he formed a new cabinet, but this time he set aside the post of captain-general and became the dictator of Sicily. He took charge of the security of the kingdom and condemned those who opposed his policies.<sup>20</sup>

#### 1.6 The End of the Constitution

This new position of 'virtual dictator' was a natural consequence of the attitude the British crown had taken toward Sicily. The Crown had lost interest in maintaining the protectorate, and ministers were opposed to keeping their presence on the island once the war with France was over. Moreover, in the aftermath of the war, what was the new European political order had to be taken into account.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, conservative Sicilians continued to oppose constitutionalist ideas. With the possibility of the King regaining the Kingdom of Naples after the war, the constitution's existence and the country's independence were at risk of being lost, which they could not afford to let happen. The Belmontists began to approach Ferdinand, when he realised he needed to adopt more liberal principles to regain Naples and popular support. On June 23, the Sicilian political crisis was resolved by the King, Belmonte, who proposed to join the monarch rather than coalescing with the Peers. The King was then asked to support the constitution or change the government's formation, which he accepted. Ferdinand returned to Palermo on July 4, 1813, with an acceptance of liberal ideas and a commitment to maintain the constitution. Bentinck, on the other hand, reluctantly accepted the memorandum and sailed from Sicily for the last time on July 16, still mulling over the lost possibilities resulting from this latest move.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Smith, *Storia della Sicilia medievale e moderna*, p.457

<sup>20</sup>Rosselli, *Lord William Bentinck e l'occupazione britannica della Sicilia 1811-1814*, p.196-205

<sup>21</sup>Smith, *Storia della Sicilia medievale e moderna*, p.459

<sup>22</sup>Rosselli, *Lord William Bentinck e l'occupazione britannica della Sicilia 1811-1814*, pp.241-249

The fate of the Kingdom was decided after Napoleon's defeat when the five major European powers agreed to rebuild Europe in Vienna by establishing a new order that prevented hegemony and revolution. Austria, Russia, Prussia, England, and France agreed to try to return Europe to the pre-revolutionary situation.<sup>23</sup> With Russian assistance, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies gained some independence. In May 1815, Ferdinand returned to Naples, dissolved the parliament, and laid the groundwork for the destruction of Sicily's constitution and independence. He unified the two kingdoms in 1816, proclaiming himself king under the name Ferdinand I of the Two Sicilies.<sup>24</sup>

## 2. The creation of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies

### 2.1 Ferdinand I and the establishment of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies

The establishment of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies as a single kingdom under King Ferdinand I was received differently in Sicily and Naples. The reactions on both sides highlighted the difference between the two kingdoms and shed light on the king's attempt to create an absolutist monarchy. Contemporary scholars studied the whole issue a great deal; one of the fundamental questions is how was it possible to bring the two kingdoms together if not even at the Congress of Vienna was there any mention of creating this southern monarchy. Because as anticipated earlier at the congress they had tried to restore pre-revolutionary Europe and seek a balance, obviously this situation in the kingdom was completely the opposite.<sup>25</sup>

Luigi de' Medici, plenipotentiary at the Congress of Vienna, adhered to the Austro-Napolitan "preliminary convention" of April 29, 1815, which established the situation in the Kingdom and was also approved by the other powers. But scholars doubt that this convention supported the unification of the two Kingdoms. In favour of this thesis the original document didn't guarantee the return of the Bourbon dynasty or security and stability. However, the King was named 'His Majesty the King of the Two Sicilies'; but the confusion comes when it proclaims: "His Majesty King Ferdinand IV is re-established, both for himself and his heirs and successors, on the throne of Naples and recognized by the powers as King of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies".<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Capra, *Storia moderna*, p. 398

<sup>24</sup>Rosselli, *Lord William Bentinck e l'occupazione britannica della Sicilia 1811-1814*, pp.251-258

<sup>25</sup>Galasso., *Storia del regno di Napoli vol. 5*, Torino, UTET, 2007-2012, pp.43-44

<sup>26</sup>Capefigue B., *Le Congrès de Vienne et les traités de 1815 : précédé et suivi des actes diplomatiques qui s'y rattachent. Partie 2 / avec une introduction historique par M. Capefigue*, Paris, 1863, pp.1126-1128



It can be seen how the King is referred to by the order number in Naples, IV, (while for Sicily it was Ferdinand III), and no mention was made of the island. Once again, therefore, it seems unlikely from the documents received from Vienna that Ferdinand's power would be restored by the union of the two Kingdoms. It was Luigi de' Medici himself who came from this to be the main author of the new institutional formula that reunited the Southern Monarchy.<sup>27</sup>

## 2.2 Sicily of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies

The attitude of the Sicilians had changed over the years in favour of the monarch, even though he had destroyed 'their liberal experiment'. Not only he had dissolved the two Chambers, but going against the 1812 statute that he had promised in his 'liberal' period to respect, he returned to Naples once he had reconquered it; above all was happy to punish and avenge 'those cannibals' who had humiliated him during his stay in Palermo. Unfortunately, the constitutional monarchy so much dreamed of by the Sicilians was only a pretext for continued British aid; when Austria offered its aid to the Neapolitan court, Ferdinand renounced any compromise with constitutionalism. In the aftermath of the proclamation of the unified state, the 'Kingdom of the Two Sicilies', the Sicilian flag was abolished, and freedom of the press was also greatly curtailed, moreover the laws now were those of the continent i.e., Napoleonic-style. The British could do nothing as the Austrians had been instrumental in liberating the continental provinces that had been occupied by Napoleon. Bentinck had tried to make the parliament and especially the constitution work but could do nothing against Austria, especially against a population that had lost interest in the cause.<sup>28</sup>

But why had it been necessary at that time to unite the two kingdoms? Blanch had asked this very question referring mainly to the usefulness of this new 'enterprise'. Scholars agree that this unfortunately was an obligatory path since after the constitutionalist

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<sup>27</sup>Galasso, *Storia del regno di Napoli vol. 5*, 47-49. Luigi de' Medici of Ottajano born April 22, 1759, to Prince Michele de Medici of Ottajano and Carmela Filomarino de' Principi della Rocca. In 1814 he was appointed plenipotentiary at the Congress of Vienna, and finally following the Restoration of 1815 he was entrusted with the finances and general police of the Kingdom. Ceva Grimaldi G., *Elogio del cav. Luigi de Medici*. Italia: Stabilimento tipografico di Gaetano Nobile, vicoletto Salata a' Ventaglieri num. 14, 1855, pp.4-8

<sup>28</sup>The Sicilian Flag is represented by a two-tone yellow and red drape and in the centre the symbol formed by the Triskelion, that is, the Trinacria the mythological being with three legs, and the Gorgoneion, that is, the head of the Gorgon also called Medusa with snake hair intertwined with ears of wheat, from which radiate between the legs that are bent at knee height. Musolino F., *Le incredibili curiosità della Sicilia*. Italia, Newton Compton Editori, 2019. Smith, *Storia della Sicilia medievale e moderna*, pp.462-464

period, it was impossible to establish the Sicilian constitution in Naples. Moreover, it was also not a solution to promulgate a new one, nor was it possible to re-establish the situation before 1812. Unfortunately, what might have seemed like a great moment for both Kingdoms, at least on the facade, was not. One should not think that this situation was easy for Naples; the two Kingdoms were two too different entities, and this union did not lead to blatant changes both historically and institutionally.<sup>29</sup>

### 2.3 The 'Carbonari' revolution of 1820

A new sentiment had increasingly developed in Europe, based on the revolutionary motto 'libertè, egalitè, fraternitè'. The consequence was that the Kings of the kingdoms that had been put under Napoleon's yoke, in the aftermath of his defeat, began to establish an absolutist and at times tyrannical regime. In Italy, King Ferdinand I founded this 'new' kingdom on tyranny, on the denial of all freedom, quelled where possible any small revolutionary sentiment. It also turns out to be a natural consequence of the creation throughout Europe of several secret societies whose goal was the freedom and independence of their country. In Italy, it was to be the Carboneria: a secret society, a political expression of the bourgeoisie, but not only in that within it one could also find state officials, the lower clergy, and the more progressive wing of the aristocracy.<sup>30</sup>

Thus stood the figure of Guglielmo Pepe, leader of the Italian Carbonari who dreamed of 'an independent, liberal and united Italy'. The situation in the Kingdom of Naples precipitated to such an extent that the help of the Carbonari was required; there had been unsuccessful uprisings in Spain, but the Neapolitans took inspiration and on July 1, 1820, a small insurrection broke out in Avellino. Guglielmo Pepe arrived in Avellino and took command of the revolt; he also declared that they would not surrender until the King signed a new constitution taking the Spanish one as a model. Eventually, five Carbonari presented themselves to the King asking to sign and were met by the royal secretary, the Duke of Ascoli, who told him that Ferdinand had 'promised' to grant this new constitution. The rebels, not believing the King's promises, formed a new

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<sup>29</sup>Bonanno C., *L'età contemporanea nella critica storica*, Padova, Liviana Editrice, 1983, pp.73-75.

Luigi Blanch (Lucera 1784-Naples 1872) was an intellectual, politician, and military man during the path of Southern liberalism. He would confront in his life both the revolution of 1820, the revolution of 1848, and finally the revolution of 1860 and the end of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Parente L, *Luigi Blanch e La Sua 'Scienza Militare.'* Studi Storici, vol. 35, no. 3, 1994, pp. 705-40

<sup>30</sup>Cucinotta G., *Breve storia della Sicilia*. Messina, G. d'Anna, 1958, pp. 121-122

government, and Pepe returned to Naples triumphant on July 9. On July 13 the King decided to swear allegiance to the constitution.<sup>31</sup>

In the aftermath of the '20 uprisings in Naples, the situation precipitated. As was to be expected, many believed that Sicily was not ready to assume a popular-type government. While many still believed in the English-style constitution, others were pressing for a Spanish-style one; once again the island was split in two. The protagonist was Giuseppe Alliata, Prince of Villafranca, who first asked for an audience with the Crown Prince, the future King Francesco I, to show that the Sicilians would not accept the news from Naples; later he was summoned by the King, who asked him to announce to the lieutenant of Sicily the news that the constitution of 1812 would be proclaimed. When the first Carbonari landed in Palermo on July 14 announcing the revolution had taken place, they were debating how to proceed in such a delicate situation, since the Villafranca had not yet returned. The Sicilians demanded independence, but the king cancelled the old constitution allowing for it, by unifying the two kingdoms under one crown.<sup>32</sup>

If the Palermitans were again pointing to the independence issue, Messina, Catania, and Syracuse took sides, demanding that the rebellious city be tamed. The reaction to this sparked an uprising to the cry of 'independence or death', Palermo wanted to forcibly subdue all the cities that went against it. The people and the cities were divided, and the Neapolitan government aimed only at its interests; the spark that turned all the cities against Palermo was 'the year of murder,' which started with Nicolao Galletti, Prince of San Cataldo, destroying the city of Caltanissetta. Villafranca decided to deal with Pepe, making Palermo capitulate in exchange for a general amnesty; but the people rose against the government army, preventing it from entering the city for six days. In the end, the Palermitans accepted the Spanish constitution but still demanded an autonomous Sicilian Parliament. The king could not accept this as it undermined the basis of his new kingdom, which in this way was no longer united under a single parliament. All the progress of Pepe, who resigned, with the Palermitans was nullified and General Pietro Colletta was sent in, who had the revolutionaries arrested and sworn into the Spanish constitution. The revolt was taking unexpected turns, and no one would have been surprised if these spread to the rest of Europe as well; this angered Austria,

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<sup>31</sup>Norwich J.J., *Breve storia della Sicilia*, Palermo, Sellerio editore, 2018, pp.398-404

<sup>32</sup>Palmieri N., *Storia della rivoluzione di Sicilia nel 1820: opera postuma di Nicolò Palmieri*, Italia, n.p, 1848, pp.1-9

which summoned the major European powers to quell the revolts. Austria, Russia, and Prussia thus signed a protocol at Troppau.<sup>33</sup>

Once again foreign powers were taking charge of Italian affairs and imposing their dominance accordingly; in March 1821 they managed, thanks to General Johann Frimont, to break into first Rieti and then Antrdoco, succeeding in annihilating Guglielmo Pepe's army. Still belligerent Sicily tried to unite against the Austrian 'monster,' but it all came to nothing and General Rosaroli, leader of the revolt fled to Spain. Thus ended the revolutionary movement of 1820 in Naples and Sicily.<sup>34</sup>

#### 2.4 The five-year reign of Francesco I

After the riots of 1820 King Ferdinand I had only managed to return to Naples on August 6, 1823, after fleeing to his nephew in Florence on December 13, 1822. He returned to a country once again under the yoke of a foreign power, Austria, which as mentioned earlier had managed to quell the revolt. For a few years the King continued to rule his country strenuously until on January 2, 1825, he fell ill during a hunting trip and was found dead the next day.<sup>35</sup> When Francesco I finally ascended the throne in 1825, a different kind of government was expected; unfortunately, expectations were dashed right from the start as it was not only inefficient but above all corrupt. During his short reign, corruption was rampant throughout the country, allowing even his incompetent valet and maid to get rich through bribes and gifts.<sup>36</sup>

Despite this and perhaps considering the status quo, his reign was not marked by any particular incidents; we could say that the King's worst flaw besides, of course, those already mentioned, was the complete change of political course. Over the years he had distinguished himself by being different from his father, more liberal and attentive to the people, especially the Sicilian people; but in those years he unfortunately began to have an increasingly conservative and at times tyrannical attitude. But why was there such a noticeable change? Scholars suggest that his attitude developed with age, but it could

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<sup>33</sup>Between October and December of 1820, Opava (Troppau) hosted a congress attended by representatives of five major European powers: Austria, Russia, Prussia, Great Britain, and France. The congress came to be associated with a policy of reaction and intervention in the affairs of European countries and was viewed by Metternich and subsequent Austrian historians up to H. von Srbik and H. Hantsch as a victory for Austrian policy and Habsburg imperial hegemony. Poliřensky, Josef. "Il Congresso Di Opava (Troppau) e La Politica Europea Degli Anni 1820-1822 Nei Fondi Degli Archivi Cěchi." *Studi Storici*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1963, pp. 293-301. Norwich J.J., *Breve storia della Sicilia*, pp.404-405

<sup>34</sup>Cucinotta, *Breve storia della Sicilia*, pp. 125-126

<sup>35</sup>Norwich, *Breve storia della Sicilia*, pp.411

<sup>36</sup>Smith, *Storia della Sicilia medievale e moderna*, p.483

also be argued that he was trying to keep the population calm after the revolt of 1820, to avoid the risk of further reform. Nevertheless, his reign is often remembered as that period when it was more the police and the army that ruled as there was probably an unwillingness to actively govern the country. Francesco I's short reign is remembered mainly because he had the merit of having the Austrian army, which had been in the kingdom since 1822, withdrawn in 1827. After that, he began a cloistered life and died in 1830.<sup>37</sup>

### 3. Sicily between 1830-1848

#### 3.1 Ferdinand II to the throne

In 1830 a new chapter opened for Sicilian history when Ferdinand II ascended the throne; he would rule for about thirty years, and it could be said that his decline went hand in hand with that of the Bourbon kingdom. This period is unfortunately remembered for the sadness and misery that reign supreme throughout the island; in fact, it is under Ferdinand's regime that the most gloriously bleeding pages of Sicilian and Neapolitan martyrology will occur. This great southern kingdom dreamed of by the rulers, however, would have little life. It was impossible to maintain a non-liberal regime in a Romantic civilization that demanded instead the respect and freedom of the people.<sup>38</sup>

In the first eighteen years of Ferdinand's reign, Sicilian society expanded and improved economically as well; in fact, it began to insert itself into what was the European, as well as the world, panorama. Improving the island's situation was challenging, as the government's attempts to strengthen indigenous industries were often ineffective, given their small size and outdated practices.<sup>39</sup>

By now, however, there was inherent in Sicilian society a general discontent, a yearning for independence and freedom, and a desire for change. In the years 1831 to 1838 the Neapolitan government sought even more to centralise its power by changing most of the men in power to Neapolitans rather than Sicilians; the point of no return came when Leopold of Bourbon, Ferdinand's brother, was appointed lieutenant of Sicily in place of the Sicilian Marquis Ugo in March 1831. To such an extent did the situation degenerate

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<sup>37</sup>Norwich, *Breve storia della Sicilia*, pp.411-412

<sup>38</sup>Chiesi G., *La Sicilia illustrata nella storia, nell'arte, nei paesi*. Italia, E. Sonzogno, 1892. pp. 597-598

<sup>39</sup>Smith, *Storia della Sicilia medievale e moderna*, pp. 504-506

that Ferdinand himself had to go, probably for the first time in many years, to Sicily to reassert his power.<sup>40</sup>

### 3.2 Cholera-infested Europe

In 1832 Leopold had informed his brother of the instability in which the island found itself; it was obvious that the type of monarchy and government perpetrated by the Bourbons was no longer sustainable. In the air by now was that omen of change that the rulers could not and would not accept. Unfortunately, 1837 was a baleful year for all of Europe because of the rampant cholera epidemic that had slowly reached even Sicily; it was estimated that out of a population of about two million, nearly 70,000 people died. It was obvious that the tragedy was especially a problem for the lower and middle classes, as the labour power that ran the kingdom was lost.<sup>41</sup>

At a time when it seemed that at every slightest inconvenience, an uprising would break out, it was not surprising that the aftermath of the epidemic sparked yet another insurrection. The problem arose when rumours began to spread, even among the upper classes, that the cholera was due to a plan by the king to vent his hatred for the Sicilians. Rumours of the 'royal plan' reached Syracuse and the ignorance of the population prevailed and the uprising against the foreigners broke out; attempts were made to curb the violent wave but the authorities and doctors fled the city for all intents and purposes to take refuge in the countryside. In Catania, on the other hand, the yellow flag symbolising independence was placed and even a revolutionary committee was formed; it already looked like an organised uprising. Efforts to encourage other cities to join the Catania cause failed, and even some members of the patrician class in Catania abandoned the uprising to support the Bourbon counterrevolution. They could not risk losing their status, and some even helped rebuild the statue of the King that had been destroyed.<sup>42</sup>

### 3.3 Toward the revolutions of 1848

Since 1830 there had been growth in many countries of both the entrepreneurial, mercantile, and financial classes. The working class was beginning to uproot itself from

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<sup>40</sup>Cingari G., *Gli ultimi Borboni: Vol. 8. Storia della Sicilia*. Napoli, Società editrice Storia di Napoli e della Sicilia 1977, pp. 28-29

<sup>41</sup>Ivi pp. 29-30

<sup>42</sup>Smith, *Storia della Sicilia medievale e moderna*, pp. 541-542

its peasant origins and was trying to place itself instead in a more urban and modern environment. But as was to be expected a period of growth was followed by one of shortages; the two-year period before '48 was a period of poor harvest that led to commodity inflation. This was compounded by other causes, for example in Italy expectations were disappointed following Pio IX's ascent to the papal throne, and in France Guizot's government was dismissed.<sup>43</sup>

By the time he ascended to the papal throne in June 1846, he had increasingly configured himself as the reforming Pope, a symbol of political and national freedom; as a consequence, the other Italian princes began to grant liberal reforms to keep the population at bay. It seemed as if Italy was finally trying to fit into a more liberal European context and seemed united by a common ideal of territorial unity. The only voice out of the chorus was Ferdinand II, who was increasingly shaping up as a tyrant; in fact, in those years a boundless hatred for the regime grew. It was only a matter of time before there were the first signs of yet another revolt against the king. The population was tired of the abuse of power and was finally trying to fight back; as the climate of terror grew, upstanding citizens began moving their possessions off the island and attempting to flee. Their goal was simply to maintain their well-being in both failure and victory. This was not going in favour of the population that was rising, and the Bourbons were even aware that they lacked an authority figure to guide them.<sup>44</sup>

### 3.4 The Revolution of 1848

On January 9, 1848 Sicilians were urged to rise against the King on his birthday; if they were not granted their due rights they would take up arms. On January 12, when Palermo rose, the rebellion broke out. On the 13th, many peasants and mountaineers also reached Palermo to join the uprising, and finally, the revolt laid a secure foundation for victory.<sup>45</sup> Anarchy began to spread, as those who were in charge of the Sicilian government began to flee for safety. The situation worsened as the revolutionists sought to topple powerful families and seize power, with the help of the Mafia's financial and arms support. In Palermo, it was realised that the Bourbon army would prove useless, it

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<sup>43</sup>Capra, *Storia moderna*, pp.420-422

<sup>44</sup>Smith, *Storia della Sicilia medievale e moderna*, pp.554-555

<sup>45</sup>Mulè Bertòlo G., *La rivoluzione del 1848 e la provincia di Caltanissetta*. Italia, Tip. dell'Ospizio prov. di beneficenza, 1808. pp.17-18

was not trained for a revolt of such magnitude, there was no contingency plan for such a situation, and the population did not respect any laws.<sup>46</sup>

The army, not knowing what to do then decided to bombard the city, so they destroyed the city's pawn shop; in response to this the rioters looted and burned the state records and archives but fortunately, the Palatine Chapel was spared. They even freed hundreds of prisoners. Many soldiers were killed until it was decided to declare defeat and return to Naples.<sup>47</sup> The objectives were twofold: to stabilise the situation and to gain the popular support of the cities that had remained outside the revolt such as Messina and Catania. Meanwhile in Naples, the King was forced to grant a liberal constitution: he continued to be the king but granted the island local self-government, but the leaders of the revolution demanded independence from Naples. The Sicilian parliament and the 1812 constitution demands were revived, leading to a moderately conservative parliament that included aristocrats and exiled intellectuals in the lower house.<sup>48</sup>

On March 25 Ruggero Settimo was appointed president of the government of Sicily; in the following days, all the rest of the government was formed. On April 1 Sicily's freedom and independence were declared and Ferdinand II of Bourbon and his entire dynasty were declared to have fallen from the throne of Sicily. The flag of the Bourbons was replaced by one depicting the trinacria, the symbol of a mythical creature with three legs.<sup>49</sup> The few who remained loyal to the monarchy were declared traitors to the homeland. Sicily now became part of the Italian federation, and some Sicilians were even sent north to help liberate Lombardy from the Austrians.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Smith, *Storia della Sicilia medievale e moderna*, pp. 558-559

<sup>47</sup>Norwich, *Breve storia della Sicilia*, pp.419-420

<sup>48</sup>Smith, *Storia della Sicilia medievale e moderna*, pp. 560-561

<sup>49</sup>Trinacria is a symbol that features a mythical creature with three legs. These legs actually represent the three extreme points of the island: Punta del Faro in Messina, Syracuse's Cape Passero, and Marsala's Cape Lilybaeum. The Triskelion, which features the Gorgoneion at its centre, is a depiction of the head of the Gorgon, also known as Medusa. The Gorgon's hair is made up of snakes that are entwined with ears of corn, and from these protrude the three legs that are bent at the knee. Musolino F., *Le incredibili curiosità della Sicilia*. Italia, Newton Compton Editori, 2019, in section 1 La trinacria.

<sup>50</sup>Ruggero Settimo (Palermo, 1778-La Valletta 1863) served his country in political offices from 1812 and was appointed President of the Sicilian Parliament in 1848. In the aftermath of the revolution he took refuge in Malta, where he died. *Orazione in morte di Ruggero Settimo detta da Francesco Perez in occasione dei funerali seguiti in San Domenico*, a cura del municipio di Palermo il dì 12 maggio 1863, Palermo, Stamperia Lornsniden pp. 9-15. Mulè Bertòlo, *La rivoluzione del 1848 e la provincia di Caltanissetta*, pp. 23-25. 2023 vedi anche Canciullo G., *La Nobiltà Siciliana Tra Rivolte e Restaurazione: Il 'Partito Costituzionale' (1812-1860)*. Studi Storici, vol. 37, no. 2, 1996, pp.647



### 3.5 The failure of the revolution

Problems slowly began to arise, for this newly independent state because they lacked an autonomous governmental apparatus, trade collapsed, and unemployment began to increase more and more. The legal system appeared completely disorganised, and brigandage had gone completely unpunished in that year. Many believed that Ferdinand had been defeated and would not resume the war, but in case he did, the Sicilian government hoped for support from England and France, who were obligated to defend Sicilian independence. The prospect was that the other Italian states would also help especially after the Sicilians themselves had helped them.<sup>51</sup>

On September 1, 1848, the Neapolitan fleet commanded by Lieutenant Filangieri crossed the Strait of Messina to restore order to the island. The city was even bombarded for eight hours and later surrendered. On February 28, 1849, Ferdinand gave Sicily an ultimatum: a statute based on the constitution of 1812, then with a separate parliament and viceroy but again it was refused.<sup>52</sup> As the Filangieri advanced toward Palermo, it became increasingly clear that no one, Italian or otherwise, would help the Sicilians. Ministers began to resign and no one was now willing to take responsibility; given the premises, Baron Riso, Baron Grasso, Vincenzo Florio, and other members of the National Guard who had initially supported the revolution became openly reactionary. On April 24, 1849, a deputation embarked toward Catania from Filangieri to submit to the King after the failed revolution. This same deputation had incited the population to revolution and resistance less than a month prior.<sup>53</sup>

On April 30, 1849, Filangieri entered Palermo triumphant that he had reconquered Sicily in the name of the king; unfortunately, the Sicilian army was not strong and organised enough to challenge the lieutenant's army. The population remained loyal to revolutionary ideals, but the aristocracy and administration quickly rejoined the Bourbon ranks, grateful for being freed from the 'Palermo yoke'.<sup>54</sup>

Despite challenges, Ruggero Settimo's faith in the homeland and desire for freedom endured, and Sicilian politics saw a glimmer of hope with capable leadership at the helm of government. In the instability that prevailed throughout Sicily and the internal

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<sup>51</sup> Smith, *Storia della Sicilia medievale e moderna*, pp. 561-567

<sup>52</sup> Mulè Bertòlo, *La rivoluzione del 1848 e la provincia di Caltanissetta*, pp. 28-32

<sup>53</sup> Candela S., *I Florio*. Palermo Sellerio editore, 1986 .pp. 88-89 vedi anche M. Smith, *Storia della Sicilia medievale e moderna*, pp. 570-571

<sup>54</sup> Smith, *Storia della Sicilia medievale e moderna*, pp. 570-571

division that the revolts had exacerbated, Ferdinand II's rapprochement with Sicily seemed inevitable.<sup>55</sup>

#### 4. The last years of the Bourbons

##### 4.1 The Aftermath of 1848

The revolutions of 1848 were characterised by a national, political, and social sense that had not been seen in Europe in recent times, so it is not surprising that they were considered the most important turning point of the entire 19th century. Even Klemens Von Metternich, one of the leaders of the Restoration, spoke of them as the most dangerous revolution in modern history, from which more was to be expected than 1793. These revolutions were the full embodiment of the intellectual thinking that prevailed at that time; there was not simply a fight for freedom, but an inherent desire for equality that had already been acclaimed during the French Revolution. The whole of Europe had united with common ideas and a unified program to finally overthrow the order created by Metternich. Over time, ideals of unity faded, replaced by nationalist thoughts that pitted European powers against each other. Opinions vary on the cause of the revolution's failure. Some blame the leaders for being unprepared and imprudent, while others fault the people for lack of organisation.

As for Italy, there had been talk of a union of classes for years, the people spoke of freedom and above all of the independence of Italy. We know that the Palermo revolution forced Ferdinand to grant the constitution on 29 January 1848 throughout the kingdom, becoming the straw that broke the camel's back for everything that would later happen in the rest of Italy. Despite their failure, the revolutions reinvigorated the Risorgimento. It became clear that achieving independence requires the support of the Savoys, royal house of Piedmont, the strongest military power of the time.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Carlo Filangieri (Cava de' Tirreni, 1784 – San Giorgio a Cremano, 1867), son of Gaetano Filangieri. The Filangieri family has been illustrious since the birth of the monarchy. In 1848 he led the expedition to Sicily and was appointed lieutenant until 1855. Calà Ulloa P., *Di Carlo Filangieri nella storia dei nostri tempi*, Napoli, Tipografia dei fratelli Tornese, 1876, p. 17, pp. 150-157  
Bonanno, *L'età contemporanea nella critica storica*, pp. 77

<sup>56</sup> Ivi pp. 75-83 see also Knapton, E. J., *Historical revision, No. XCVIII: The Origins of the Treaty of Holy Alliance*, History, vol. 26, no. 102, 1941, pp. 132-140

## 4.2 General Filangieri and the Ruins of post-revolution Sicily

Peace was restored in Sicily thanks to General Filangieri who was proclaimed governor in May 1849. Many reformers were granted amnesty, except for 43 opposition leaders who were exiled at the start of his mandate. Most of them, in order not to lose their wealth, formally asked the King for pardon and claimed that they had been forced to participate in these revolts. Filangieri was on shaky ground, most of the population had truly believed that they could drive the royal house out of their territory; while the parliament was dissolved, a kind of autonomy was instead granted about justice, finance, and police, and unlike in previous years, now all officials had to be Sicilian. To better control the countryside the new police chief, Salvatore Maniscalco, formed his ranks of Sicilians who knew not only the place but also the systems that ran it. With only 200 officers Maniscalco joined forces with armed gangs, using any means necessary to maintain security.<sup>57</sup>

Burned by the last revolution, Ferdinand II, cracked down on liberal ideas with repression and violence. Freedom of movement and press was restricted, and dissidents were imprisoned on prison islands such as Lampedusa or Favignana. William Ewart Gladstone, an English politician, visiting the Neapolitan prisons in 1850-51, described them as the negation of God erected into a governmental system.<sup>58</sup>

The King's vindictive madness led to huge debt burdening the plebs, as he charged military expenses from the revolution to the Neapolitan government. Despite punishment and persecution, the Sicilian spirit endured, as the population united and conspired, more organised than ever. In fact, not only provincial committees reporting to a main one were created but also international committees in London, Malta, Paris, and even the rest of Italy. Crispi, carrying on Mazzini's ideas, placed himself at the head of everything and together with other exiles such as La Masa, Nicola Fabrizi, the Amari brothers, Francesco Ferrara, Gioacchino Ventura, and others carried forward the Sicilian cause. This time aiming not simply at independence but at union with Italy.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Salvatore Maniscalco (Palermo 1813-Marseille 1864) was director of the Palermo Police. He had joined the Neapolitan gendarmerie as a young man and won the favour of General Del Carretto. By 1849 he was already captain of the gendarmerie and following the revolution of '48 was appointed Grand Profosso of the army. Rüstow W.F., Bizzozero G. traduttore. *La guerra italiana del 1860*. Italia, Stabilimento Giuseppe Civelli, 1862 p.84. Smith, *Storia della Sicilia medievale e moderna*, pp. 572-573

<sup>58</sup> Norwich, *Breve storia della Sicilia*, p. 420

<sup>59</sup> Francesco Crispi (Ribera 1818 - Naples 1901) lawyer and patriot. He was a member of the Sicilian-Neapolitan Revolutionary Committee and promoted the insurrection in Sicily. He was a member of parliament in 1848 and voted for the removal of Ferdinand II from the Sicilian throne. Following the revolution he was forced into exile and was one of the forty-three who did not receive amnesty. Later

### 4.3 The economic situation

The island faced economic challenges. Poor wheat harvest prompted grain imports, followed by an oversupply due to better harvests and stagnant exports during the Crimean War. Unfortunately, the Sicilian economy was at rock bottom: there was little capital, there was not much investment in agriculture, and above all the industrial sector was struggling to take off. Everything was due to the rigidity of the economic-fiscal system that once again burdened the population, especially the peasants, because the latter suffered from famine but did not benefit from abundance.

To defend itself against inflation, the Sicilian government had accepted government protectionism, it now found itself in a diametrically opposite situation. It asked to liberalise the market and reduce the duty to export the oil in the first place, but this would have weighed on the poorer classes. A political crisis compounded the situation. The police started to operate autonomously, with many incarcerations and executions, even the illustrious and cultured were often exiled. The consequences of Maniscalco's activities meant that one of the pillars of Sicilian politics was missing: the political union between the government and the educated and wealthy classes. In fact removing or arresting these meant that this founding political link was broken.<sup>60</sup>

Despite everything, there was a certain economic prosperity on the island, as steam navigation began to increase and consequently the Sicilian merchant navy grew. In addition, exports of sulphur increased as it was identified as a cure for a fungus that attacks vineyards; a necessary consequence of which was the implementation of new techniques to extract sulphur while reducing costs. In addition, more and more vineyards were spread, especially in the western area, to produce and trade wine; to this end, the major Sicilian ports were implemented, first that of Palermo and then also those of Catania and Messina. Despite the premises, Sicily lacked both raw materials and capital to continue investing in industry. The Neapolitan government was aware and knew that the only way to restore the island's economy was to increase government spending but this would lead to an increase in taxation and at that time this was not possible. However, this was a perfect weapon for the revolutionaries who could use the proposal to decrease if not eliminate duties on the millstone to gain popular support.<sup>61</sup>

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during the Risorgimento, he played a decisive role regarding Garibaldi's Expedition of the Thousand. In 1887 he even became president of the council. Riccio V., *Francesco Crispi: profilo ed appunti*. Italia, L. Roux, 1887 pp.17-18. Cucinotta, *Breve storia della Sicilia*, pp.153-154

<sup>60</sup>Cingari., *Gli ultimi Borboni: Vol. 8. Storia della Sicilia*, pp. 63-68

<sup>61</sup>Smith, *Storia della Sicilia medievale e moderna*, pp. 577-580

#### 4.4 The last years of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies

The last years of Ferdinand II's reign were marked by an ambiguous sentiment on the part of the population; if on the one hand, there were still those who faithfully supported the monarchy, there was also opposition. Sicilians had limited knowledge beyond their island and maybe Naples. Most did not desire a united Italy, except for a small population that had the opportunity to see beyond Sicily.

On the other hand, the leaders of the Sicilian government were also aware that the Sicilians did not have the political consciousness to form an independent state; if they had once seen England as the possible saviour of the island's destiny, they now increasingly began to think of an alliance with northern Italy. Two political parties now headed the Sicilian government: the moderate liberals who placed their hopes on aid from the Savoys, who opposed violence and even social revolution, and the radicals who instead had a more republican orientation and denied Piedmontese aid. On one thing they agreed: the creation of a Sicilian state. They began an operation of political education with books smuggled in and the return of exiles, following an effort to raise awareness abroad. The aim was to bring about a feeling of freedom that they had lost and to develop a mature political awareness.<sup>62</sup>

There began to grow not only hatred towards the Bourbons but the realisation that the only way to get rid of tyranny was to unite with the other Italian forces; by this time, a national outlook had been established. It was a matter of time until Cavour spoke out against Italian problems at the Paris Congress in 1856, highlighting the territorial division caused by Austria, the Papal States, and the Bourbon Kingdom. France and England after that blocked diplomatic relations with the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. The problem of the liberation of the south became more present as the countries in the north were slowly freed from the Austrian monster; it began to dawn on them that the situation was finally ripe for attack.<sup>63</sup>

In the meantime there had already been an attack on the King, he emerged unscathed but the wound he received with a bayonet became so infected that it was thought to be Ferdinand's last moments. He died three years later, in May 1859. However, Ferdinand II should not be remembered only for his tyranny; he succeeded in establishing

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<sup>62</sup>Ivi pp. 579-581

<sup>63</sup>Camillo Benso, Conte di Cavour (Torino, 1810-Torino 1861), belongs to one of the oldest and most respectable lineages in Piedmont. He was minister of foreign affairs and finance and the first president of the Council of the Kingdom of Italy since 1861. Benso C. *Opere politico-economiche del Camillo Benso di Cavour*. Italia, Mirelli, 1860. Cucinotta, *Breve storia della Sicilia*, pp.156-157

telegraphic communications between Naples and Palermo, Italy's first steamship was part of his fleet and he built the first railway in Naples. But his popularity fell completely during the revolution of 1848 when he earned the nickname 'Bomb King'. When he died, he was succeeded by his son Francesco II who, however, reigned even less than his predecessor of the same name, by which time the Risorgimento was inevitable.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Norwich, *Breve storia della Sicilia*, p.420

## Chapter 2 Public History and the Historical Novel

In recent years, it seems that the term Public History has gained popularity and is now being used to describe a new branch of history. This branch utilises innovative techniques to actively engage and involve the public in the historical process itself.

This chapter will delve into the concept of Public History and explain how it is applied in everyday life.

In addition, the chapter will introduce the historical novel, a literary genre that took on incredible fortune after the publication in 1814 of Walter Scott's *Waverley*. This chapter will explore how Public History and Historical novels can be interconnected, creating the possibility of learning and knowing history through innovative means.

### 1. Public History

#### 1.1 What is Public History?

Giving a definition of Public History over the years has always proved complicated. Just think of how the Italian translation, *Storia Pubblica*, can completely change the very definition of the discipline, leading world associations to keep it untranslated.

Robert Kelley, professor and historian, in 1975 coined this term and tried to define it by talking about how Public History "refers to the employment of historians and historical methods outside of academia."<sup>65</sup> But why do we talk about historians outside the academia? There are some things that public historians differ from traditional ones: one of them is the emphasis on engaging with the public. Traditional history was criticised for being isolated and failing to establish a meaningful relationship with the public. In contrast, public historians make history more accessible to everyone, regardless of academic background. Additionally, it was important to provide a sense of identity to historians who were not affiliated with academia. These historians discussed the practice of public history extensively, although its definition remained undefined.<sup>66</sup>

Alix Green, professor and public historian, argues that 'Public history' is the only specialisation that is differentiated from 'history' by any definition, unlike other areas of

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<sup>65</sup>Kelley R., "Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects." *The Public Historian*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1978, pp. 16–28. Robert Kelley (June 1925-August 1993) was an historian and professor at University of California, Santa Barbara. He was the first to talk about the term 'Public History' and to introduce the first course of PH in the university in 1976. Cauvin T., "The Rise of Public History: An International Perspective". *Historia Crítica* n. ° 68, 2018, pp. 3-26.

<sup>66</sup>Cauvin T., *Public History: A Textbook of Practice*. New York, London, Taylor & Francis, 2022, pp. 11-13.

study like social history, economic history, black history, or women's history, consequently it is problematic to assign a definition.<sup>67</sup>

## 1.2 A History of Public History

In 1932 Carl Becker, one of the most influential American historians, defined history as the knowledge of the events that happened in the past. He was aware that knowledge of this did not stop with the books found in libraries and historical archives. It goes beyond that, encompassing every action and event that humans have ever been a part of. Unfortunately, it was not until 1970 that these ideas, which now form the basis of Public History, began to be seriously considered.<sup>68</sup>

Thus in 1980, the National Council on Public History was born, which is still the largest association of public historians in the US; their motto is to encourage collaboration between historians and the public. For this very reason annual meetings are organised, a blog has been compiled since 2012, and a journal "The Public Historian" has been published since 1978. The journal serves as a platform for academic research and case studies in the field of public history to be published.<sup>69</sup> As early as 1980, the need for a relationship between historians with society was recognized. This was done in order to break down the 'ivory tower' in which traditional historians who operated only within universities were locked up. The goal was to train young historians and create opportunities for them outside the university.<sup>70</sup>

Over the past 50 years there has been an increase in public history courses in academia; how is it possible that a discipline that was created to break away from academia is then established as such? The surge in university courses in Public History may be due to the increasing demand for professionals with expertise in preserving and promoting historical knowledge and heritage. This trend is likely fueled by the rise of digital technologies and social media, which have made historical information more accessible.

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<sup>67</sup>Ibidem. Alix Green is a lecturer in History at the University of Essex; she founded the Public History seminar series at the Institute of Historical Research in London, and is a juror for the Public History Prize. Green A., "From Cultural Case Studies to Global Conversations: Towards an Interconnected Community of Enquiry in Public History." *The Public Historian*, vol. 40, no. 4, 2018, pp. 56–60.

<sup>68</sup>Apostolopoulos P., *What is the Public of Public History? Between the Public Sphere and Public Agency*, Magazén, *International Journal for Digital and Public Humanities* vol.2, 2021 pp. 313-314.

<sup>69</sup>The public historian is the voice of the public historian profession and provides the latest research and applications in the field. It is sponsored by the national council on public history and the university of california, santa barbara, with support from rutgers university- camden. "The Public historian." *The Public Historian*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2016.

<sup>70</sup>Savelli A., *La Public History dalle origini alla costituzione dell'Associazione Italiana di Public History: movimento o disciplina?*, Università di Firenze, 2019, pp.10-12.



The survey of 220 university courses reflects this growing demand for trained professionals in the field.<sup>71</sup>

### 1.3 What are the objectives of Public historians?

Who are historians? One might think that anyone who has had a background in history can be considered one. So a division was made between academic historians, and trained historians, who work in cultural institutions or for private companies; finally, we have community historians who instead refer to family and local historians. As far as Public History is concerned, one is much more flexible in that one can participate in the processes of public historians without necessarily being a researcher or professional historian. Cauvin for example states: "Instead of asking whether a professional is a historian or not, one could ask what role they play in Public History and how they relate to others".<sup>72</sup>

Public historians embrace what are the elements of the traditional historian's profession, but implement their work with interpretive methods of the past. They also place themselves in an attitude of openness toward the public, which now finds itself part of the critical processes that serve precisely to make history. Public History conducts different and innovative research concerning the past that finds in the public a fundamental ally; research therefore stands in opposition to the past since it must be critical, participatory, and above all capable of synthesis. The goal turns out to be to keep alive the memories of the past and in doing so includes and involves the public.<sup>73</sup>

### 1.4 How to work in Public History

History has always been put down in writing for posterity so that we can learn about the events of the past. What has always been lacking has been a proposition to the future, to the present, what exactly can be done with it, how to connect it to an audience that requires greater participation; above all to find new ways to disseminate it in an

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<sup>71</sup> Ivi pp. 14-15

<sup>72</sup> Cauvin, *Public History: A Textbook of Practice*, pp. 18-19

<sup>73</sup> Colombi V., Sanicola G., *Public history La storia contemporanea*, Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, Milano, 2017, pp. 43-47

innovative way-this is the task of Public History. The goal is precisely to create new points of view and find ways to bring the present into dialogue with the past.<sup>74</sup>

New interpretive methods are thus used and the critical process is thus opened up to the public so that they actively participate in the making of history; this is why we speak of a public purpose of history. The public historian must use a suitable approach to engage with the memories of communities but still respect traditional historical methods, such as treating sources critically and showing the past as it is, sharing with the public the contradictions and inconsistencies of the past. Finally, it must involve the audience in history-making.<sup>75</sup>

Public History is not only based on the work of the Public Historian but is based on the union between the historian and the public; but how does this happen? Michael Frisch in his book *A Shared Authority* foregrounds how Oral History and Public History are interconnected to each other and introduces the concept of shared authority. Frisch believes that the historian cannot be the only one given the task of deciding what is truly historically significant. He believes that the public must be allowed to help in creating this dialogue about the past. Historians need to engage the public both in exploring the past and more importantly to bring these memories back into the present and not just leave their evidence in footnotes. It must be understood that history and the process behind it belong to everyone.<sup>76</sup>

Therefore, there has been a growing beginning to place social groups, which were usually on the margins of history, at the centre instead of what is historical research. Now ordinary people, endangered populations, and small groups topped by large ones must be the ones to speak. History has immense social responsibilities, the public is hungry for history and wants to participate in it. But to do so, we have to get out of the old and traditional view that sees history as what happened in the past and does not apply to the present.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Ivi pp. 36-38

<sup>75</sup>Ivi pp. 43-47

<sup>76</sup>Frisch M., *A Shared Authority: Essays On The Craft And Meaning Of Oral And Public History*, 1990 pp. 539-541

<sup>77</sup> Apostolopoulos, *What is the Public of Public History? Between the Public Sphere and Public Agency*, pp. 317-318.

## 2. The Historical Novel

### 2.1 How the historical novel was born

In 1814, the *Waverley*, the first historical novel by Walter Scott, writer, poet, and novelist, was published. This was the date considered for the birth of this literary genre. The spread and development of the historical novel during the nineteenth century is also due to the peculiarity of this period. Indeed, a new historical consciousness began to develop in the population, as people no longer saw history as an organic process.

The consequence was that empirical thinking began to prevail in historiography, which over the years would later turn into purely philological thinking. It's interesting to note that the way we view history has changed over time. In the past, it was common to view history as a way of understanding the present. However, nowadays there seems to be a desire to know and reconstruct the past with almost maniacal exactitude.<sup>78</sup>

Now the reader, too, no longer sees it as an essentially anti-historical struggle of human reason against the irrationality of feudalism and absolutism. Instead, the focus is on how modern society emerged from the conflict between the nobility and the bourgeoisie, culminating in the French Revolution. This gives rise to a desire to rationalize history by trying to subdivide historical periods with a rigorous and scientific intent to later analyze the origin of the contemporary age. Thus a new humanism is born as a concept of progress; one does not want to lose the achievements won during the French Revolution. They put these as the basis of the new society that is now indispensable for human progress.<sup>79</sup>

### 2.2 What is an historical novel

The historical novel presents itself as composed of two basic elements: history and, of course, the novel. Romanticism had made it possible to give a feeling to history in fact before the 19th century one could not yet speak of a historical novel; the first examples will be from 1810 to 1820 when the first novels of Walter Scott, the pioneer of this genre, began to come out.<sup>80</sup>

The Historical Novel Society in the U.S. tried to give a definition, failing, but we could say some requirements that a historical novel to be defined as such must possess: it must have been written at least fifty years after the events it describes or the author must not

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<sup>78</sup>De Tommaso P., *Rovani e il romanzo storico*, Belfagor, vol. 23, no. 3, 1968, pp. 257-260

<sup>79</sup>Lukács G., *Il romanzo storico*, Editore G.Einaudi, 1965 pp. 21-25

<sup>80</sup>Cataudella M., *Il romanzo storico italiano*, Napoli, Liguori editore, 1964, pp. 17-18

have been alive at the time of those events.<sup>81</sup> Jill Paton Walsh, novelist, and children's writer, argues that a novel can be considered historical when it relates at least in part to the public events and social conditions that constitute the material of history, regardless of when it is written.<sup>82</sup> Mackinlay Kantor, journalist, novelist, and screenwriter, on the other hand, believes that the author has a moral obligation to history and that the historical novel has its dignity and for this reason should be considered as such only when an attempt has been made to recreate the past.<sup>83</sup> Trying to give a definition one can say that it is important that within the novel there are real historical characters both in challenges they faced but also in imaginary situations; fictional characters but in documented historical situations. One can also speak of stories where a modern character is transported back in time or a historical character who existed is instead brought into the present; stories where there is a 'what if' event. According to H. Scott Dalton, writer of historical fiction, the important point is that historical fiction is a fictional story in which the elements of history, whether people, events, or settings, play a central role. The historical novel cannot be considered 'related' to history, but it should be seen as a revisiting of what happened. After all, those who write and read historical novels do so precisely to read them and not to learn history, this will be the next step, but to live it.<sup>84</sup>

### 2.3 The Historical Novel in Italy

After its debut in the United Kingdom with Walter Scott, the historical novel increasingly began to spread to the rest of Europe. Especially in Italy the British works were translated but also a standard was increasingly beginning to be created for new works to follow. The greatest example of the Italian historical novel would be Alessandro Manzoni and his *Promessi Sposi*, which was inspired precisely by Walter Scott.<sup>85</sup>

As the historical novel began to spread in Italy, its particular connotations began to emerge; while in 1820-21 a Scott-like production continued in the fundamental concept,

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<sup>81</sup>Rodwell G., *Defining the Historical Novel. Whose History?: Engaging History Students through Historical Fiction*, University of Adelaide Press, 2013, pp. 47-54

<sup>82</sup>Paton Walsh J., 'History is Fiction', in Paul Heins (ed.), *Crosscurrents of Criticism, The Horn Book*, Boston, 1977, p. 221

<sup>83</sup>Kantor M., *The Historical Novelist's Obligation to History*, Macon, Georgia: Wesleyan College, 1967, p. 2.

<sup>84</sup>Rodwell G., *Defining the Historical Novel. Whose History?: Engaging History Students through Historical Fiction*, University of Adelaide Press, 2013, pp. 47-54.

<sup>85</sup>Alessandro Manzoni in 1821 began writing the historical novel *Fermo e Lucia*, the first edition of his masterpiece, which would later see two subsequent editions: in 1827 and 1840 under the name *I Promessi Sposi*. Bologna C., Rocchi P., *Rosa fresca aulentissima*, vol.4 Loescher editore, Torino, 2015, p. 448, p. 503

slowly rules began to emerge that must be followed for a novel to be connoted as historical. According to Cataudella the rules of the historical novel are: chapters must necessarily begin with a quotation whether it be from a poet or a prose writer; it also begin with a topographical description, of a mountain, a town, or a castle (think of Manzoni in the first line of the *Promessi Sposi*: "That branch of Lake Como"). In addition, a historical passage and a paraphrase of a topographical map can always be found at the beginning. Cataudella also asserts that characters in the Historical novel are introduced through dialogue. In addition, the characters are presented both physically and character-wise. Finally, a character that can never be lacking in a novel is the jester, picking up that thread already started by Alfieri, which serves to downplay the work.<sup>86</sup> To write history, however, one must provide both evidence and arguments for what one is telling, that is, one must represent historical truth; Manzoni's work is classified as 'archival historical novels' because he brings historical truth thanks to the analysis and comparison of the material used.<sup>87</sup>

Unlike Scott's novels, where documents are almost absent within the narrative, Manzoni's readers are led to wonder how the historical facts were reconstructed. Manzoni's novel anticipates the 'new history' theory proposed by some historians, such as Ginzburg. Manzoni highlights the corrective role his work aims to play: rather than focusing on significant events, the novel aims to showcase men, places, and humanity in its purest form.<sup>88</sup>

### 3. Public History and the Historical Novel

#### 3.1 Why do historians write fiction

In recent centuries there has been an increasing development of this new form of writing produced mainly by literati, generally non-historians, entering this world. A natural consequence has been the attitude of historians who would like to enhance this new 'rediscovery of history.' However, this enhancement carries the risk of deviating from what historians have traditionally considered as history. Literature, however, is a formidable tool for revealing more facts about a historical era than had ever been afforded to historians. Moreover, one of the insights that can be taken from the literature

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<sup>86</sup>Cataudella, *Il romanzo storico italiano*, pp. 56-57

<sup>87</sup> Pucci L., *Ginzburg e Manzoni: Tra La Storia e Il Romanzo*, Italica, vol. 89, no. 2, 2012, pp. 221-229

<sup>88</sup>Ibidem. Carlo Ginzburg is an Italian essayist and historian. His most famous work is *Il Formaggio e i Vermi* published in 1976, based on Friulian society in the 1500s. Zambelli P., *From Menocchio to Piero Della Francesca: The Work of Carlo Ginzburg*. *The Historical Journal*, 28(4), 1985 pp. 983-999.

is precisely its inability to present a single 'real' meaning, unlike history. Historians focus on the surface-level interpretation of the text. Contradictions between characters and messages are not typically examined in depth.<sup>89</sup>

Joanna Grochowicz, author and historian, tells the importance of examining a well-documented historical period to write a faithful tale. However, there is always the temptation to romanticise the truth to make the readers care more about the facts. This does not mean distorting the characters or the historical facts but simply adding details that we will not find elsewhere; some elements then lie in the author's imagination, such as the interiors. Grochowicz: "It is not my job to invent or replace history. Maybe what I do is colour".<sup>90</sup> Writing a historical novel is precisely to tell the details that are overlooked in scholarly books: personal feelings, reflections, doubts, fears, and the, therefore, more human aspects of the characters.<sup>91</sup>

Writing historical fiction can be quite a challenge. One of the most important aspects of it is making sure that the world created by the writer is believable and immersive. Especially for readers who may have a deep understanding of the historical context. After all, it's essential to capture the essence of the period accurately to truly transport the reader back in time. Historians are often tasked with investigating the past and its particularities. While it is important to document historical dates and major events, there is also value in exploring the human character and its influence on history. One way historians can achieve this is by writing historical fiction, which combines history and literature to create a more engaging and relatable narrative. Historians can use historical fiction to offer a deeper understanding of the past that goes beyond mere factual accounts. This approach provides a more nuanced perspective that is essential to understanding the future and shaping it accordingly. Therefore, the act of writing historical fiction is a crucial aspect of historical research and can greatly benefit both historians and their readers.<sup>92</sup>

What is put in writing in historical novels shows who individuals and societies were in the past. By examining the human character and its influence on history, historians can gain a better understanding of the past, which can help shape the future accordingly, as

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<sup>89</sup>Wiener M., *Treating 'Historical' Sources as Literary Texts: Literary Historicism and Modern British History*. The Journal of Modern History, vol. 70, no. 3, 1998, pp. 619-621

<sup>90</sup>Conroy T., Grochowicz J., Sanders C., *Interpreting History Through Fiction: Three Writers Discuss their Methods*, Vol 29, Public History in Aotearoa New Zealand Public History review, 2022, p. 199

<sup>91</sup>Ivi, pp. 198-199

<sup>92</sup>Mortimer I., *why historians should write fiction*

a society. In summary, Ian Mortimer, British historian and writer, argues that historians should write historical fiction because it provides a valuable opportunity to bring the past to life, make emotional connections with the reader, and present new perspectives on history. This kind of writing can make history more engaging, human, and meaningful for all who read it.<sup>93</sup>

### 3.2 The relationship between Public History and historical novel

The textual forms that can be used to tell the story are part of the public historian's expertise; whether we are talking about novels or art, photography, television, and films as they are methods of approaching an audience with a language that turns out to be simpler and especially every day. During the first conference of the Italian Public History Association held in Ravenna in 2017, there was a lot of discussion on this topic and many experts in the field gave their opinions on it; Gabriele Sorrentino, author and historian, gave his thoughts on the connection between fiction and history. He explores whether historical novels can be seen as a form of Public History.<sup>94</sup>

He admitted that the historical novel can be a problem for Public History. It often indulged in details and nuances that have little to do with history itself. Also, the narrator or novelist must choose what to tell and what not to tell, meanwhile, the historian needs to be neutral. Indeed, talking about how the novel becomes a site of not only critical but also philosophical reflection, and as was mentioned earlier, memory becomes the pivotal point, no longer the event.

Nevertheless, the historical novel, or at any rate fiction in general, turns out to be one of the best ways to bring the public closer to and understand the past. But where does the figure of the public historian fit in? He or she is the one who possesses the tools and the proper training to accomplish this fundamental step. It is also what distinguishes him or her from a traditional historian. If the historian asks the questions and exposes them, the public historian will be the one who finds the right balance between history and public demand.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Ibidem

<sup>94</sup>Moronti E., Sorrentino G., Corbino E., *Il racconto della Storia. Un passato da leggere, scrivere e insegnare* (AIPH - 23), Ravenna, 2017

<sup>95</sup>Sorrentino G., *Il romanzo storico: prerogative e controindicazioni*, Novecento.org, n. 9, febbraio 2018.

Professor and author Alessandro Barbero also commented on the combination of history and fiction, explaining how his desire to start writing these kinds of books was a desire of the reader himself who requires historical popularisation suitable for the general public and not simply for scholars. There is also a risk of oversimplification and trivialization of facts. For him, the most challenging aspect of writing a historical novel is not the research or rendering of actual events but the imaginative part. Writers must draw the line to balance their inventiveness.<sup>96</sup>

### Reflections

At the end of the chapter, we can say that Public history has emerged as a relatively new discipline over the past five decades. Public history prioritises and engages with the public. It also explores the dynamic relationship between the historian and the audience. Consequently, the traditional academic historian has evolved to adapt to the changing needs and expectations of the public.

Public historians start to focus on significant events of the past. Nowadays, there is a growing interest in the untold stories of ethnic minorities who are at risk of disappearing. Public historians start even more to listen to the stories passed down through oral history and the need to examine the past in a new light. Thanks to this process of rediscovery, we can continue to understand the past and shape a more informed and inclusive future.

The discussion also focused on historical novels. It sheds light on their birth and evolution over the past few centuries. It has also been addressed how such novels nowadays play an important role in narrowing the distance between non-history scholars. In the end, it was fundamental to understand how historical novels, TV series, movies, podcasts, and videos are the core activities for public historians to engage with people to delve into history books.

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<sup>96</sup>Sbalchiero S., *Divulgazione e Storia: Intervista al professor Barbero*, in *Historical eye, l'occhio attivo sulla storia*, 2017.



## Chapter 3 The Florio's Family

### 1. Introduction

The Florio family embodies redemption and stubbornness, challenging societal norms with revolutionary ideas and far-reaching entrepreneurial projects. The Florios' growth is akin to a river in flood, brimming with initiatives and business flair. Beginning with a small local store, they have ventured into more significant investments outside Sicily. Their initiatives reflect the typical Sicilian mentality and a willingness to take risks. A tale of perseverance, hard work, and innovation, the Florios' success is driven by a deep understanding of their roots and a remarkable entrepreneurial spirit.

#### 1.1 The beginning

Their story began with Paolo Florio and his brother-in-law Paolo Barbaro, who had already engaged in mercantile trade on the island for years.

The 1783 earthquake in Bagnara Calabria took 29,000 lives, leading to an economic crisis. As a result, the family had to leave Calabria and move to Palermo in 1799. That was also the year when the Neapolitan court had shifted to Palermo, beginning a period of turmoil throughout Sicily. Against all odds, the two men took over the 'putìa' that mainly sold spices to the locals. The two brothers-in-law succeeded in taking over the 'putìa,' which had been controlled by their compatriot, Padron Bottari. By the time of his death, his widow had not only sold the store to the two partners but also all the 'drugs' within it, thus giving an initial boost to the Florio and Barbaro business, already established in Bagnara Calabria in 1793. In 1803, society was officially broken up for social reasons, and it remained in the sole hands of Paolo Florio.<sup>97</sup>

What distinguished this family from the beginning was their flair for business and the opportunities that the city placed before them. The society needed to be moved within the lodge; only in this way, in fact, could they secure a bourgeois and noble clientele: thus was born the Florios' putìa 'Alli Matarazzari,' which became a symbol of prestige and distinction for society. The whole story unravels with the mournful and non-mournful events of the family. The will drawn up by Paolo Florio in 1807 in favor of his 8-year-old son, Vincenzo, led to a series of events that included the recall of his brother-in-law Ignazio by Paolo's wife, Giuseppina Saffiotti. Ignazio Florio was still living

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<sup>97</sup>Giuffrida, Lentini, Troisi, Lanza Tomasi, *L'età dei Florio*, pp. 17-19

in Bagnara Calabria, but he continued Paolo's work and desires after his brother's death.<sup>98</sup>

Paolo Florio's death did not have many repercussions on either the family's habits or, more importantly, on business performance. By the time Ignazio took the reins, a growing positive trend had begun to lay the foundation for the success of Casa Florio. He started increasing business by traveling annually to Malta, the Mediterranean's main trading post. Ignazio purchased many products on the island to sell in the putìa (cortices, saffron, rhubarb, cinnamon, etc.). Ignazio's expertise shines through in renovating the aromateria on the 'Piano San Giacomo'. His attention to detail and dedication to the craft make him the perfect choice for any renovation project. In 1808, the lease was first converted into perpetual emphyteusis before proceeding with the work. He had a marble floor installed, and a painter painted a sign where there was a lion between a country landscape and a forest. Later, over the years, the Lion drinking in the water of a stream coveting the roots of a cinchona tree would become the symbol of the firm 'I. and V. Florio'. Finally, all the furniture was changed to make the place luxurious and elegant.<sup>99</sup>

As anticipated in Chapter 1, the Bourbon court in 1806 had moved to Palermo following the French occupation of the Kingdom of Naples. Nevertheless, the English presence on the island favored the Sicilian economy, as many English merchants had moved the central hub of Mediterranean business to Sicily and Malta. This period did not last long, and after both the British and the Neapolitan court left the island, the economic crisis affected all merchants, including the Florios. During the four years from 1814 to 1817, 'Casa Florio' profits fell sharply.

Despite this, Ignazio's management was quite profitable, managing to triple its initial assets. In this same period, Ignazio also began to form friendships with the great English merchants such as Benjamin Ingham and I do not remember the name Woodhouse, who by then had settled on the island permanently. As a result of these new contacts, the house's business interests expanded more and more, going into international trade.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>Paladino Florio, *I luoghi dei Florio: dimore e imprese storiche dei "viceré" di Sicilia*, pp. 12-14

<sup>99</sup>Cancila O., *I Florio: Storia di una dinastia imprenditoriale*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino Editore, 2020, pp.16-17

<sup>100</sup>Ibidem

## 1.2 The rise of Vincenzo Florio

During those years, Vincenzo grew up in affluence, which allowed him to have a private tutor. He was able to attend the workshop to serve 'apprenticeships' alongside his uncle, both in business and mercantile practices. Upon his uncle's death in 1828, Vincenzo became proprietor of the firm. He now possessed all the qualities to tackle this new chapter in his life and to take the firm I. and V. Florio.<sup>101</sup>

Vincenzo was fortunate enough to have the support and approval of his mother and uncle, which allowed him to embark on a journey of exploration across Europe, particularly in France and England. Through his travels, he was able to experience different cultures and ways of life, gaining valuable insights and broadening his perspectives. He understood that it was necessary to expand their trade and create different collateral structures that would decrease operating costs. The discovery of natural resources in Sicily led to the creation of shipping companies, cotton and chemical industries, and even tuna fisheries.<sup>102</sup>

In 1828, Vincenzo owned the firm and the 'Giacchino Fortunato,' as he was called by the people of Palermo themselves, and managed to create a business empire that would remain in Sicilian history. He continued his project, begun with his uncle, of diversifying his business and no longer sold only drugs but wine and tuna; he created a shipping company and, thanks to his friendship with Benjamin Ingham, an English merchant, began to take an interest in all the opportunities that the national and international markets offered him. For this reason, during the 1930s, a period of economic recovery for Sicily and the rest of Europe, he began expanding his trade, especially in the United States, Brazil, and Russia.<sup>103</sup>

Despite all the success, new businesses, and international trade, Vincenzo Florio stayed in the grocery store on Via dei Materassai. In 1834, he was authorized to sell cortices, a product with which they became famous, even though he was not a pharmacist. Four years later, in 1838, taking advantage of the death of a fellow aromatist, Don Pietro Gulli, Vincenzo acquired his pharmacy between Via Giovanni Meli and Via dei Materassai, not far from his own. Finally, he even managed to obtain the title of pharmacist.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>Lentini R., *Dizionario del liberalismo*, Soveria Manelli, Rubbettino editore, 2015, tomo II, pp. 492-496

<sup>102</sup>Paladino Florio, *I luoghi dei Florio: dimore e imprese storiche dei "viceré" di Sicilia*, pp. 14-15

<sup>103</sup>Benigno F., *Una 'Dynasty' Siciliana*, Meridiana, no. 64, Roma, 2009, pp. 259-260

<sup>104</sup>Cancila, *I Florio: Storia di una dinastia imprenditoriale*, pp. 23-24

Following his uncle's death, Vincenzo had devoted himself wholeheartedly to business; even the position as a member of the chamber of commerce council, which he held from 1834 to 1859, was exploited to control his activities and to give him greater visibility and prestige. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, Vincenzo's goal was to remove himself from the appellation of 'porter,' which is now attached to his family name. His personal and private life was closely linked with the progress of the firm; when Vincenzo Florio met the Milanese Giulia Portalupi in 1833, he had intertwined with her a tortuous and clandestine love affair, as he was expected to marry her that would bring prestige to the family, perhaps within the nobility. From this relationship, three children were born: Angelina, Giuseppina, and Ignazio, the future heir of the company.

The relationship between the two was a scandal in nineteenth-century Palermo as these children were born out of wedlock. It was not until 1840, probably also prompted by the birth of the male heir, that Vincenzo decided to marry Giulia Portalupi, abandoning that dream of reentering the Palermo nobility that would later be pursued by his son Ignazio.<sup>105</sup>

### 1.3 The activities

The southern coast in the province of Trapani is a place of great beauty, characterized by a picturesque landscape of rolling hills covered with vineyards that produce some of the finest wines in the world. The Marsala region, in particular, is renowned for the quality of its wine, which has become a symbol of Sicilian excellence. Interestingly, this reputation dates back to the 18th century, when an English merchant named John Woodhouse was struck by the quality of the wines produced in the Marsala countryside. He found them so similar to the finest wines of Spain that he decided to market them by imitating Madera, resulting in a great success that continues today.<sup>106</sup>

Later, Benjamin Ingham, who had settled in Sicily as early as 1806 during the British protectorate, opened a winery in Marsala in 1812. He thus paved the way for other Sicilian entrepreneurs, including Vincenzo Florio.<sup>107</sup>

The latter entered the business many years later, in 1833, when he set up an arrangement with his cousin Raffaele Barbaro to run it. He later had his factory built, at

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<sup>105</sup>Paladino Florio, *I luoghi dei Florio: dimore e imprese storiche dei "viceré" di Sicilia*, pp. 15-16

<sup>106</sup>*Giornale vinicolo italiano.*, N.p., n.p., 1892, pp.371-373

<sup>107</sup>Neu I.D., *My Nineteenth-Century Network: Erastus Corning, Benjamin Ingham, Edmond Forstall*. Business and Economic History, vol. 14, Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 6-8

the center of whose courtyard was a mansion for his family. The Florio estate is much more imposing than the Woodhouse and Ingham estates.<sup>108</sup>

In 1839, Vincenzo Florio became the sole owner of the winery. Breaking away from his cousin Raffaele Barbaro, he reached incredible heights. He also obtained various awards, such as the gold medal 1856 at the Paris Agricultural Exposition.<sup>109</sup>

Vincenzo Florio undertook various activities to diversify his firm. These include the maritime business undertaken first and foremost to increase trade and avoid the freight rates that foreign shipowners imposed on him. For this reason, as early as 1824, the first ship, the *Diligent*, was launched, followed a few years later, the *Lion* served mainly for trade with North America. Over the years, the number of ships launched in the name of House Florio increased. The turning point there was when, in 1840, they opted for self-propelled steam navigation. With entrepreneur and friend Benjamin Ingham, Florio formed the first steam-powered shipping company, whose first ship launched was the *Palermo*. Following the revolution of '48 and the separation from Ingham, Vincenzo began to invest more and more in steam navigation in the name of House Florio. The *Corriere Siciliano* was finally launched in 1853 and served as a postal service to Naples and Marseille, subsidized by the Bourbon government.<sup>110</sup>

Finally, one must count the island of Favignana among the examples of the great activities undertaken by the Florios. Indeed, in 1841, Vincenzo Florio took the tuna fisheries of Favignana and Formica as a form of tax contribution, and together with that of Arenella, they constituted the lifeblood of their trade and more. Tuna fishing has ancient roots in the Egadi Islands, as seen and admired in the graffiti in the Genovese caves on Levanzo or the tuna fishery that existed in 1272. An ancient craft passed down from generation to generation; it is a 'ritual' accompanied by dirges and local songs that rhythmically mark atavistic actions and techniques.<sup>111</sup>

The island has represented Casa Florio the ability to employ in marfaraggio the local population in its entire chain: from fishing to processing involving entire families or using the inmates of the prison house in May and June.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup>Paladino Florio, *I luoghi dei Florio: dimore e imprese storiche dei "viceré" di Sicilia*, pp. 168-171

<sup>109</sup>Giuffrida, Lentini, Troisi, Lanza Tomasi, *L'età dei Florio*, pp. 29-31

<sup>110</sup>Paladino Florio, *I luoghi dei Florio: dimore e imprese storiche dei "viceré" di Sicilia*, p. 216

<sup>111</sup>Ivi pp.184-193

<sup>112</sup>Marfaraggio refers to the entire body of the tuna fishery building. Some also add part of the beach front; unfortunately, however, there is no unambiguous definition of what is or is not part of the establishment. *Annali di agricoltura*, Italia, n.p, 1905, p. 92

Each season punctuates the type of work: the men are dedicated to fishing and slaughtering, and the women provide the preservation. During the cold months, the boats are repaired, and the nets are patched continuously. Favignana is not only a land of fish trade for Florio's family but a soul refuge with the sounds of the sea, the wind, introspection, and search for one's identity, a source of serenity and deep despair.

In 1859, Vincenzo Florio gave up holding the two islands in Gabella, ceding them to Giulio Drago, more for political rather than commercial reasons. That year, he would leave his position as the Palermo Chamber of Commerce councilor, sensing tensions and changes.<sup>113</sup>

The island of Favignana would remain an opportunity for the Florios to fully express their entrepreneurship, the foresight of those who sensed how caught tuna could be preserved no longer in salt. There had been a slowdown in marketing because there was a rumor that salted tuna caused scurvy. For this reason, Vincenzo Florio, probably taking inspiration from the French, began marketing tuna in oil in his original tins that bear the name Casa Florio.

Favignana boasts various dominations over the centuries: Greeks, Phoenicians, Romans, Saracens, Goths, and then the Normans, who fortified it up to the baronies of the Genoese Pallavicini family. In 1874, Vincenzo's heir, Ignazio Florio, bought the Egadi Islands, mending the deep earthly and spiritual bond with the island.<sup>114</sup>

Vincenzo Florio passed away in 1868, leaving an economic empire in the hands of his son Ignatius, who further consolidated his father's legacy.<sup>115</sup>

## 2. I Leoni di Sicilia

Stefania Auci, a teacher and writer, tells the story of the Florio family in a new and captivating way. The story, which unfolds in two books, *I Leoni di Sicilia* and *L'inverno dei Leoni*, opens the door to the myth of the Florios in their golden years until their inevitable decline. Using the historical novel, one can relive a golden age of the family and nineteenth- and twentieth-century Palermo.

Following the course of the work done, the talk will focus on the first of the two books, *I Leoni di Sicilia*, and then examine how Auci decided to proceed with his historical novel.

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<sup>113</sup> Giuffrida, Lentini, Troisi, Lanza Tomasi, *L'età dei Florio*, pp. 39-41

<sup>114</sup> Fiore F., *Favignana l'antica tonnara alla vita*, La gola in viaggio, 2019, pp.2-3

<sup>115</sup> Paladino Florio, *I luoghi dei Florio: dimore e imprese storiche dei "vicere" di Sicilia*, p. 16

## 2.1 The book

*I Leoni di Sicilia* is the first of two books by Stefania Auci that make up the Florio Saga. The story of the Florio Family begins from the very start when a terrible earthquake shook Calabria and triggered an economic crisis. Because of these events, Paolo Florio leaves Bagnara Calabria for Sicily with his family. Stefania Auci thus puts in writing all those details that historians could never describe in history books. Only through the tool of the historical novel can the reader fully experience and appreciate.<sup>116</sup>

As was mentioned earlier, the historical novel represents historical environments in terms of narrative probability. Many people believe that a work should accurately convey the external world; in the historical novel, this happens with its own internal rules and patterns. For example, when characters speak to themselves in a play or story, it's not a word-for-word representation of how people talk in real life. Instead, it is based on what the reader expects that character to say. What has been called narrative probability derives from the reader's ideas about the life and society of the historical period he's reading. If the novel truly reflects the events, idioms, or culture of its time, it can transport the reader into the past and allow them to empathize with the context. Crucially, however, one of its strengths is that it does not specify what role history plays in the structure of the novel, as it has distinct roles within historical novels.<sup>117</sup>

Within Stefania Auci's book, this is translated comprehensively. The writer puts the whole story in writing without omitting anything by doing world-building that turns out to be in continuity with reality. From the book's first pages, Palermo in the early nineteenth century is described as "cupola di maiolica, Torri malate, toggle. Ecco la Cala, affollata di feluche, brigantini, schooner, un'insenatura a forma di cuore, stretta tra le due lingue di terra. [...] Su ogni cosa incombe il monte Pellegrino. Dietro una cintura di montagne coperte di boschi. C'è un profumo che arriva dalla terra e aleggia sull'acqua: un misto di sale, frutta, legna bruciata, alghe e sabbia. Paolo dice che è l'odore della terraferma. Ignazio, invece, pensa sia il profumo di questa città" ("tiled domes, crenellated towers, shingles. Here is the Cala, crowded with feluccas, brigantines, schooners, and a heart-shaped inlet squeezed between the two tongues of land. [...] Over everything looms Mount Pellegrino behind a belt of forest-covered mountains. A scent comes from the land and hovers over the water: a mixture of salt, fruit, burnt wood,

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<sup>116</sup>Auci S., *I leoni di Sicilia*, Milano, Casa Editrice Nord, 2019

<sup>117</sup>Shaw, *An Approach to the Historical Novel*, In *The Forms of Historical Fiction: Sir Walter Scott and His Successors*, pp.20-22

seaweed, and sand. Paul says it is the smell of the land. On the other hand, Ignatius thinks it is the smell of this city").<sup>118</sup>

This is how the author describes Paolo and Ignazio Florio's first impression of Palermo as soon as they touch Sicilian soil. With a few images, she recreates and gives an idea of the city's beauty. In these words, the fear and uncertainty of the main characters emerge, who find themselves in a completely new situation.<sup>119</sup>

These are the kind of details that are often found in historical novels. Feelings, anxieties, fears, and excitement can be masterfully portrayed within this type of composition. This cannot happen in a history book, which must be more analytical. Historiography seeks to generalize the process that must necessarily lead to the present.

The historical novel reconstructs a world, must locate it, and must likewise see its human nature. The task of the historical novelist is precisely to create and render the atmosphere of a time in the past; he must capture the fleeting moment, the perfect moment to be able to describe.<sup>120</sup>

The book *I Leoni di Sicilia* succeeds in creating what the world is in which the story unfolds. It isn't easy to place historical facts within a narrative, which develop from these events but are separate simultaneously. At the beginning of each chapter, the author explains the events of the period described to give the reader an idea of the historical moment he is in. In the chapter Cortice, each chapter is named after one of the products marketed by the Florios; the period 1820-1828 is recounted. The page that opens the chapter presents as is the rule for the historical novel, a quotation, in this case, an ancient Sicilian proverb ("U pisu di l'anni è lu pisu cchiù granni. The weight of the years is the greatest weight.").

The author always tries to contextualize where the story takes place, always showing the Sicilian background. The second page, on the other hand, presents, as already mentioned, the historical context, which in this one turns out to be the uprising of the 1920s led by the Carboneria and the ascent to the throne of Francesco I of the Two Sicilies (see Ch.1). Finally, on the third page, the reason for the choice of the chapter's name is explained. The importance of cortice, a miraculous plant from the Americas, is recalled. The cortex was initially used to cure malaria and later for a simple ailment.

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<sup>118</sup>Auci, *I leoni di Sicilia*, pp. 32-33

<sup>119</sup>Ibidem

<sup>120</sup>Shaw, *An Approach to the Historical Novel, In The Forms of Historical Fiction: Sir Walter Scott and His Successors*, pp. 23-24



First, Paolo and Ignazio Florio and, later, Vincenzo became among the major sellers of this prized spice. Following the spatial, temporal, and literary characterization, the story to be told begins.<sup>121</sup>

## 2.2 The link between the book and history

One of the most heated debates surrounding the historical novel is how it tells the truth about history. Primarily, if one disregards the status of the view of history that it has now assumed within historical fiction. Indeed, adopting such a definition would suggest that every novel written in the nineteenth century is also historical. This minimizes what is the very concept of this literary genre. Given these premises, one might mistakenly think that historical fiction is a mode of knowing history itself, leaving out the original idea that the historical novel never posed itself as a book of historiography.<sup>122</sup> While historical novels can potentially be valuable for exploring the past, they can also be problematic if not approached thoughtfully. For example, some readers may take issue with how historical events are portrayed or the accuracy of the historical details. Some say that historical novels have the power to say and do what a historian cannot do. In contrast, others argue that historical novelists spend much time ensuring their fictional accounts are as reliable as possible. Regardless of where you stand, there's no denying that historical novels can bring history to life in a way that few other mediums can. Some think those who read historical novels to hone their knowledge have corrupted the criteria for knowing the past. The argument holds that these would have accepted a fusion of reality and fiction. Therefore, it is impossible to decree that these people know about history just because they 'read the book.' The novelist, however, does not claim to write the facts as they are but as he thinks they might be. Thus, there is a common ground between the reader and the writer between factuality and transcendence, about what might have been accurate and what is false and provable.<sup>123</sup> Returning to the novel *I Leoni di Sicilia*, two examples are pertinent to demonstrate this, and both concern the figure of Ignazio Florio. In the prologue, it is recounted how, in the aftermath of the earthquake, the entire Florio family consisting of

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<sup>121</sup>Auci, *I leoni di Sicilia*, pp. 161-166

<sup>122</sup>Shaw, *An Approach to the Historical Novel, In The Forms of Historical Fiction: Sir Walter Scott and His Successors*, pp. 29-30

<sup>123</sup> Litt T, *Against Historical fiction, Irish Pages* 5, no. 1, Languages and languages, 2008, pp. 111-115

Paolo and Giuseppina, their son Vincenzo, their orphaned niece Vittoria, and Paolo's brother Ignazio undertake the journey to Sicily.<sup>124</sup>

In the analysis, it emerged how the tale was romanticized for the story itself. The story tells how Paolo Florio and his brother-in-law Paolo Barbaro landed in Palermo in 1799 and took over their famous workshop. The business began to increase until the company was dissolved and Paolo's death in 1809. The first differences with the *Leoni di Sicilia* can be seen here. If the book describes Ignazio as being with his brother from the beginning, the historical reality is quite different. It was Giuseppina Saffiotti, on the day after her husband's death, who called Ignazio, who had remained in Bagnara Calabra until then, to take over her brother's company.<sup>125</sup>

As for the second example, in the first chapters, when Ignazio is still alive, one can perceive how the author wants to allude to a mutual feeling between Ignazio and the widow Giuseppina. This is one of the best examples of how historical reality is modeled to create a more exciting and captivating tale for the reader who finds 'the love story' between two of the protagonists. No one knows whether this is an author's license or facts. There is no evidence of this also because the book does not speak of a relationship between the two but of a single feeling they both have for each other. In conclusion, the book sets out all the facts that occurred and succeeds in making the reader participate. It is acknowledged that although the story is beautiful and flowing, it is fictionalized and not relevant to historical reality.<sup>126</sup>

## Reflections

The Florio family's journey is a remarkable tale of resilience, innovation, and entrepreneurial spirit. Originating from humble beginnings, the family's ability to adapt to challenging circumstances and relentless pursuit of success has been central to their story. From their early ventures in mercantile trade to their expansion into more significant investments outside Sicily, the Florios have demonstrated a deep understanding of their roots and a willingness to take risks. The Florios' endeavors in the winemaking industry, particularly in the Marsala region, have contributed to Sicilian excellence and the family's lasting legacy in fine wines. Additionally, the family's engagement in international trade, including their expansion into the United States,

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<sup>124</sup> Auci, *I leoni di Sicilia*, pp. 10-25

<sup>125</sup> Paladino Florio, *I luoghi dei Florio: dimore e imprese storiche dei "viceré" di Sicilia*, pp. 12-14

<sup>126</sup> Auci, *I leoni di Sicilia*, pp. 161-191

Brazil, and Russia, underscores their global impact and influence. The Florios' commitment to innovation, diversification, and community engagement, exemplified by their involvement in tuna fishing and preservation, reflects their multifaceted approach to business and deep connection to the local population. Overall, the Florio family's journey is a testament to their pioneering spirit, adaptability, and enduring legacy in Sicilian history. The historical novel *I Leoni di Sicilia* by Stefania Auci offers a captivating and immersive experience, providing a unique perspective on the family's story. The book's ability to blend historical facts with narrative probability creates a compelling portrayal of the Florio family's rise to prominence and the societal context of the time. It's interesting to see how the historical novel reconstructs the world in which the story unfolds, capturing the nuances of the past and allowing readers to empathize with the context. However, it's essential to remember that while historical novels can bring history to life vividly and engagingly, they often incorporate fictional elements and may not always align perfectly with historical reality. This balance between factuality and transcendence in historical fiction creates a thought-provoking experience for readers.

## Chapter 4 The project

### 1. Background and Objectives

The history of the Florio Family, as was already analyzed in the previous chapter, represented a fascinating but significant chapter of Italian history, particularly of Sicily between the 19th and 20th centuries. The glories of the family have entered the collective imagination as legends of pre- and post-unification Sicily, that Sicily full of hopes but at the same time of lost illusions.

The Florios have left an indelible imprint on the economic and social fabric of Sicily; the entrepreneurial ability that distinguishes them, one that transcends its boundaries and even broadens its horizons. The Florio Family anticipated what we call globalization in the 21st century.

The upcoming multimedia project will delve into the journey that Paolo and Ignazio initially, and later Vincenzo Florio, embarked upon to carve their places in Palermo society and beyond. The analysis will be facilitated by a collection of videos seamlessly incorporated into a specialized website.

#### 1.1 What is Digital Public History

To describe the project, let's take a moment to define what Digital Public History is and why it's crucial to the work being done.

Digital Public History represents one of the most significant manifestations of the radical change that has taken place over the past 50 years across the humanities when digital technologies first emerged. Gerben Zaagsma, professor and digital historian, noted how digital History is not simply a subfield of traditional History but a methodological approach that uses digital technologies to examine and represent the past.<sup>127</sup>

This new approach to the humanities, especially in History, has facilitated the creation of new teaching materials and the collection of scholarly data. It also dictates the creation, definition, interrogation, and annotation of associations from the past. This approach has significantly impacted the study and understanding of History.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup>Noiret S., Tebeau M., Zaagsma M., *Handbook of Digital Public History*, De Gruyter, Oldenbourg, 2022, pp. 14-19

<sup>128</sup>Weller T., *History in the Digital Age*, Routledge, United States of America, 2013, pp. 3-5

In this case, however, we are talking about Digital Public History, which has emerged from the intersection of Public History and digital practice, thus offering scholars and others new dimensions to historical practice. As Serge Noiret, public historian, has pointed out, one should not think of the digital turn as simply a change of tools or an improvement of those but instead represents a reworking of how History is studied, constructed, disseminated, and shared.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, the Public History movement has slowly broken down the barriers between academic historians and those working in affiliated fields. By tearing down the ivory tower in which they stood, they could engage the public in the process of historical creation in unprecedented ways.

The increasing use of digital tools has played a crucial role in this process. Indeed, this has transformed how historians work with sources, mainly how they communicate with the public. Digital public history projects have used networking technologies, software, and computers to create a platform where the public can read, view, and follow a particular topic that relates to a historical issue. Naively, one might think this is simply a way to make History more accessible to all. While that might also be true, it must be recognized that this is instead a methodology that takes advantage of the connectivity and interactivity that the digital age has afforded us. In this way, historians can ask new research questions and explore data on unprecedented scales.

Public involvement is a cornerstone of Digital Public History. As Noiret aptly puts it, Digital Public History is characterized by the mutual interaction and codependence of historians and audiences. They collect, consume, disseminate, and interact with History and its sources, not just as passive recipients, but as active participants. This concept of digital History for the public and with the public has been one of the most democratic developments in historical practice, empowering individuals to contribute to the creation of digital History.<sup>129</sup>

Necessary, however, is to analyze the difficulties in this discipline. While computers are now standard for research in the humanities and social sciences, the success of networked personal computers has made physical machines and software more accessible to scholars. Digital Public History faces several challenges, however, including the abundance of digital materials and the need for new analysis tools suitable for handling such a large amount of data, which is growing yearly. However, these tools also

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<sup>129</sup>Noiret, Tebeau, Zaagsma, *Handbook of Digital Public History*, pp. 7-15

offer unprecedented opportunities to analyze and interpret this vast amount of data, even detecting patterns and structures that would be impossible to discern with the naked eye.<sup>130</sup>

Mastering Digital Public History requires proper training and an informed acceptance of these new methodologies. As Zaagsma emphasizes, it's crucial to integrate traditional and digital approaches for this new historical practice that is hybrid. This concept of hybridity is essential for navigating between old and new practices. Digital History is not an option but an inescapable necessity for the quality of historical research. The use of digital tools, such as bibliographic databases and online resources, is an indispensable component of the historian's work, underscoring the importance of continuous skill development in this field.

In summary, Digital Public History represents a fundamental transition in historical practice, integrating the public into creating and disseminating History through digital means. This transformation expands the possibilities for research and communication and invites critical reflection on historical methods and practices. Digital History should not be seen as a separate discipline but as an inevitable and necessary integration of new technologies into historical practices. Finally, the ability to collaborate with the public and use digital tools to co-create History represents one of the most promising developments in the discipline's future.<sup>131</sup>

## 1.2 The web-site

Creating a website for collecting and sharing historical videos fits entirely into the context of Digital Public History. There are several reasons for this. First, this kind of project makes historical materials accessible to a broad audience, thus breaking down geographical barriers and democratizing access to historical resources. Second, one of the main goals of Digital Public History is to involve the public in the enjoyment of history; in this way, active participation can be enabled.

Videos are indeed a suitable tool for communicating history in an engaging and immediate way. Indeed, one can present reconstructions of historical events, interviews with experts, oral testimonies, etc. In this way, one can have an immersive and stimulating experience.

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<sup>130</sup>Rieder B., Röhle T., *Digital Methods: Five Challenges. In: Understanding Digital Humanities*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2012

<sup>131</sup>Noiret, Tebeau, Zaagsma, *Handbook of Digital Public History*, pp. 14-19.

Videos can combine audio and images to create a more vivid and memorable narrative than, for example, written text alone.

By creating a website, one can use new digital technologies to organize and present this content in innovative ways. Within it, one can categorize videos by theme, historical period, or even geographic region; in addition, one can integrate interactive maps that amplify the site's educational and training potential. This approach allows users to explore and understand even complex historical topics.<sup>132</sup>

This project fosters a collaborative environment, encouraging interaction between historians and the public. Visitors are not mere spectators but active participants, able to leave comments, engage in discussion forums, contribute their own videos or stories, and even participate in research projects in collaboration with historians. This sense of shared responsibility and community is a cornerstone of the project. The interactivity distinguishes such a project and fosters a sense of community and active participation in constructing historical knowledge. In this way, the basic principles of Public History, but especially Digital Public History, are embodied.<sup>133</sup>

## 2. Description of the project

One of the goals of this project is to educate and mainly engage the public through this visual and interactive approach. Through the use of multimedia tools, we set out to share and make the history of the Florios accessible and vivid for a wide audience. This obviously includes historians, history buffs, and casual visitors to the site.

The Florio family has had a fundamental impact on the history of Sicily. Thanks to the videos, it was possible to capture not only the simple historical facts but also the emotions and nuances that made the narrative unique and, above all, exciting.

Another goal is to preserve and disseminate the historical memory of the Florios.

### 2.1 Structure

The website is structured to offer the user an intuitive yet engaging experience. The home page already provides an overview of the project by highlighting the goals from the outset.

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<sup>132</sup> Weller, *History in the Digital Age*, pp. 3-5.

<sup>133</sup> Noiret, Tebeau, Zaagsma, *Handbook of Digital Public History*, pp. 7-15

As a user, you have the power to navigate through thematic sections, each dedicated to a particular aspect and historical period in which the Florios were protagonists. These sections highlight their entrepreneurial activities, cultural initiatives, and especially their social impact, putting you in the driver's seat of your historical exploration.

The site integrates some features:

- Maps: users already on the homepage will find a map where the cities where the videos and, consequently, where the story took place and was told are included. On the specific pages where the videos are featured, there are other maps where the exact locations shown in the videos are indicated
- Historical timeline: a timeline to show the chronology of significant events with links to the videos

This project aims to change the way the history of the Florios is told and especially experienced. The potential of new media is thus used to achieve the goal. Historical storytelling will be more accessible, engaging, and interactive in this way.

## 2.2 Navigation of the website

Before continuing with the description, a preliminary view of the website's structure is needed.

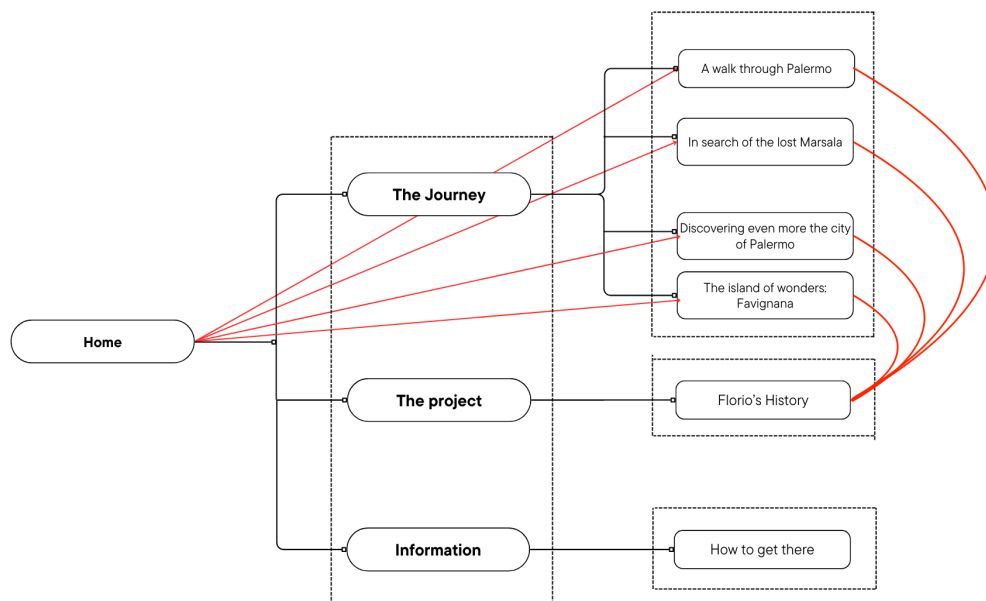


Image 1. Navigation of the website



The above image shows how the site has been structured in terms of both vertical and horizontal navigation and the choice of any shortcuts. The site opens on the homepage, which contains shortcuts for the pages containing the videos.

### 2.2.1 The Home page

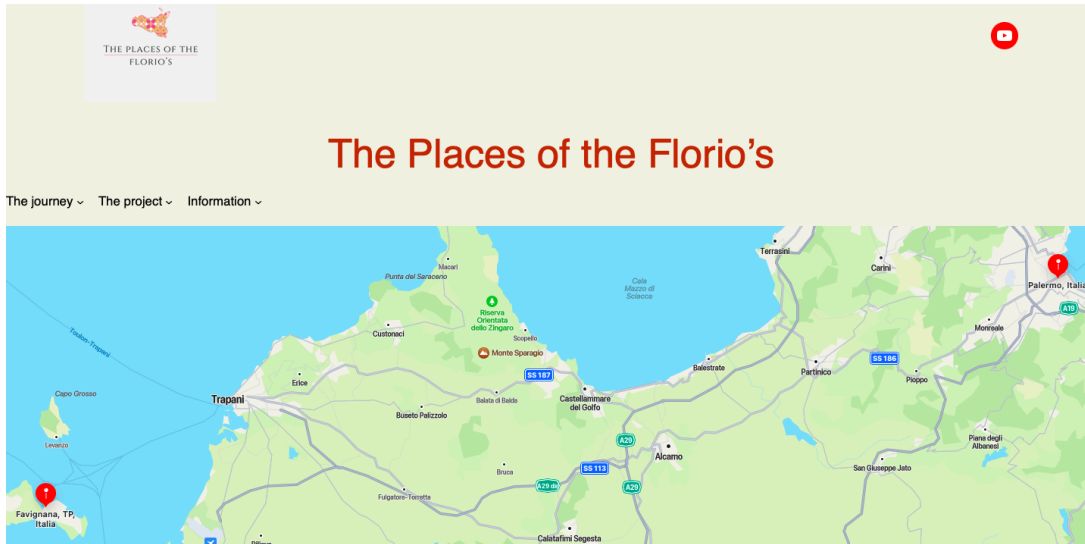


Image 2. Home page of the website

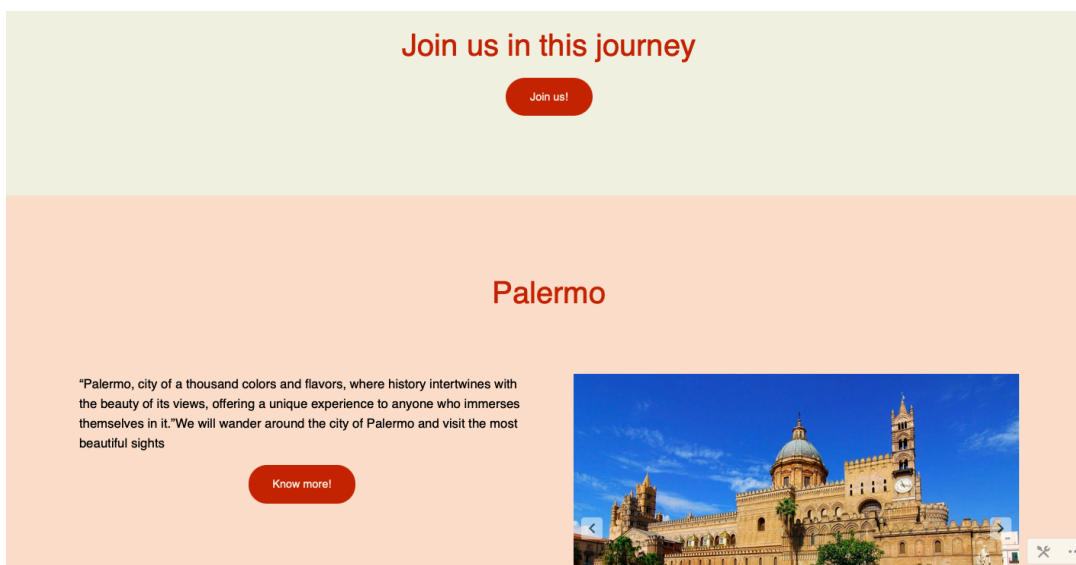


Image 3. Home page of the website

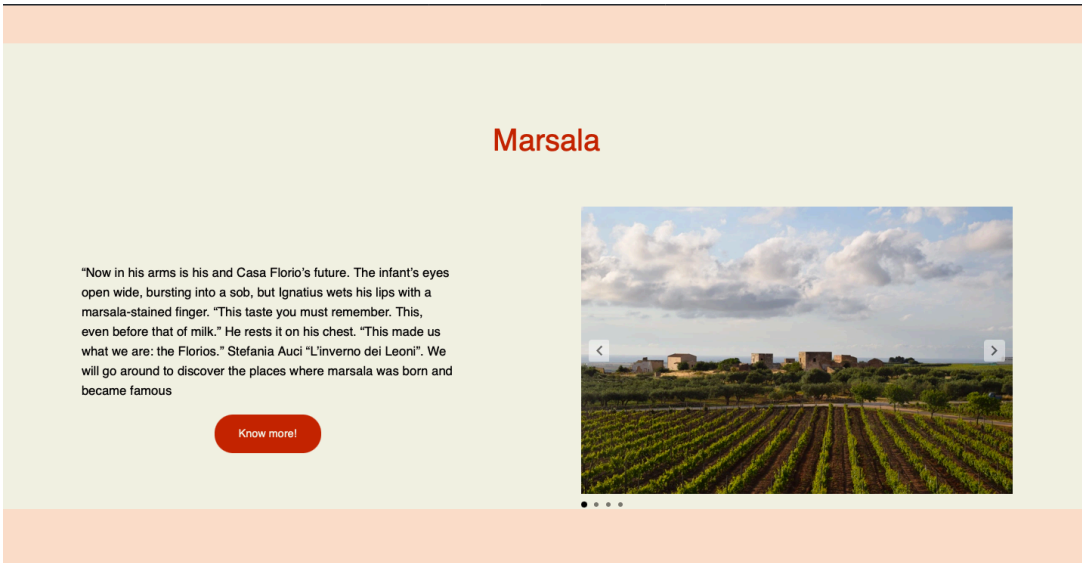


Image 4. Home page of the website

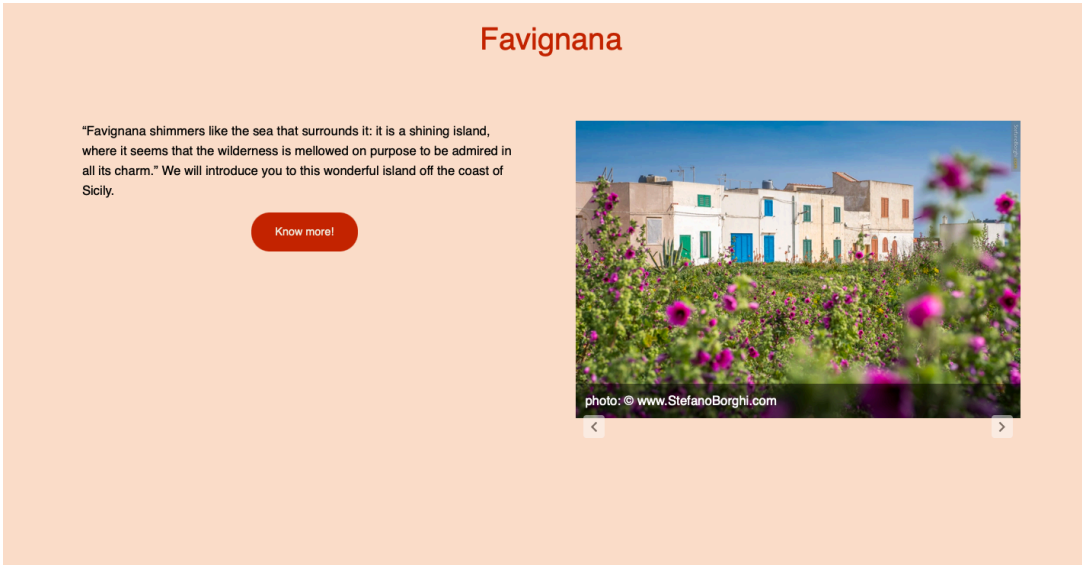


Image 5. Home page of the website

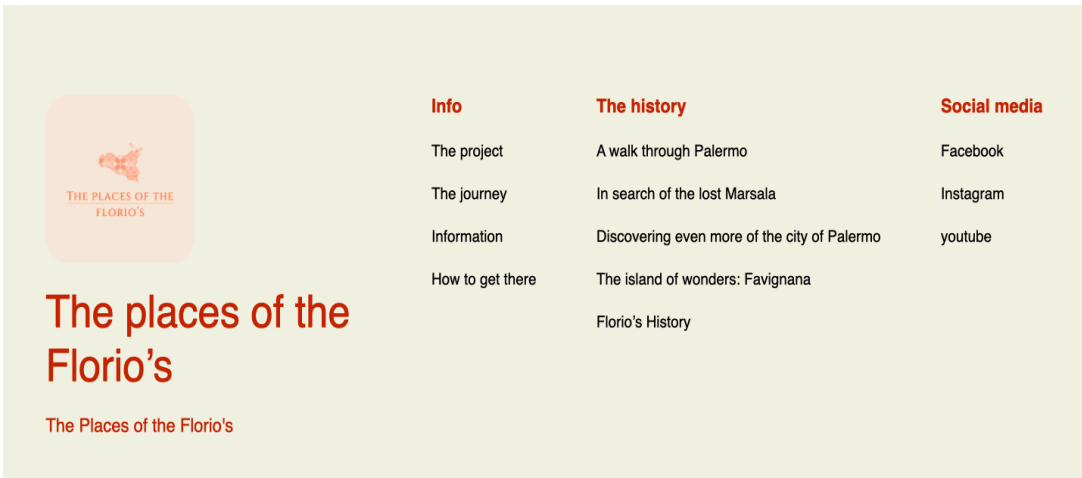


Image 6. Footer of the web site

Images 2 to 6 show the website's home page. At the beginning, there is a map showing the cities where the video was filmed. After that, there is a button linked to the 'The Journey' page. The third section shows the places, a little description of them, some images of them, and a button linked to the specific pages to see the videos. Image 6 is the website's footer.

### 2.2.2 The second level



Image 7. The journey page

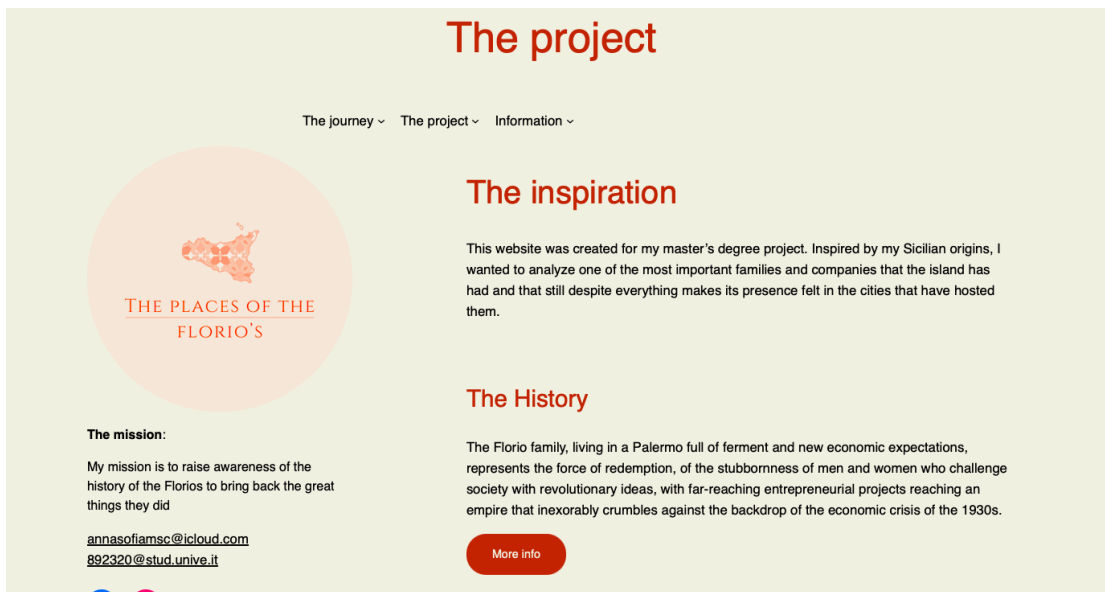


Image 8. The project page

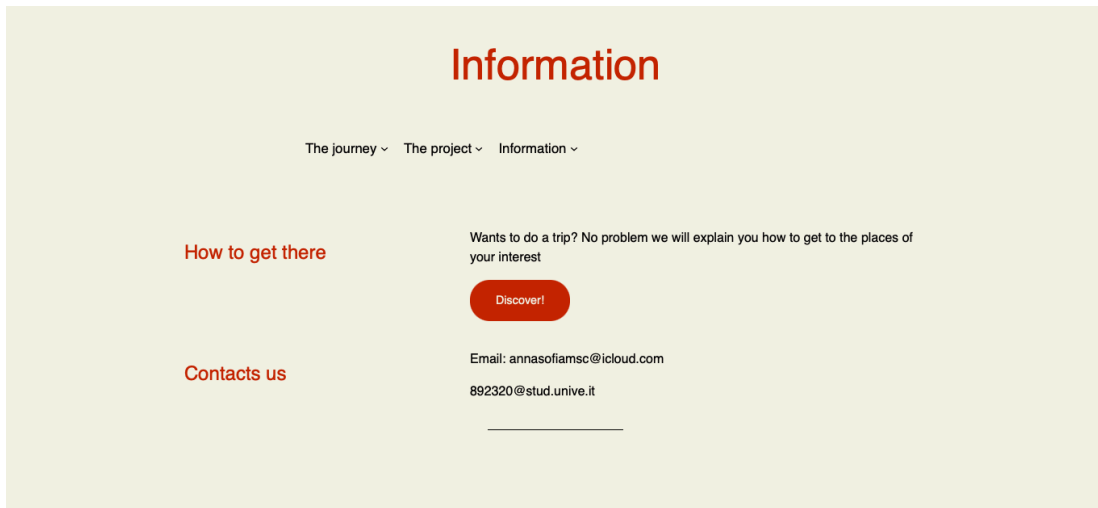


Image 9. Information page

Image 7 represents the 'The Journey' page. Inside, we can find a small description of the project's intent; then, the route taken through three cities and four stops is traced: Palermo, Marsala, and Favignana. On the page are links to all the pages containing the videos.

Image 8 represents 'The Project' page, where the reason for choosing this theme and the mission set at the beginning is explained. Also, from this page, one can navigate to 'The History' page, where the history of the Florios is briefly told.

Image 9 is home to 'The Information' page, a vital resource for anyone planning to embark on this journey. It provides essential details about the places we explore and, importantly, contact information for further inquiries.

## 2.2.2 The third level

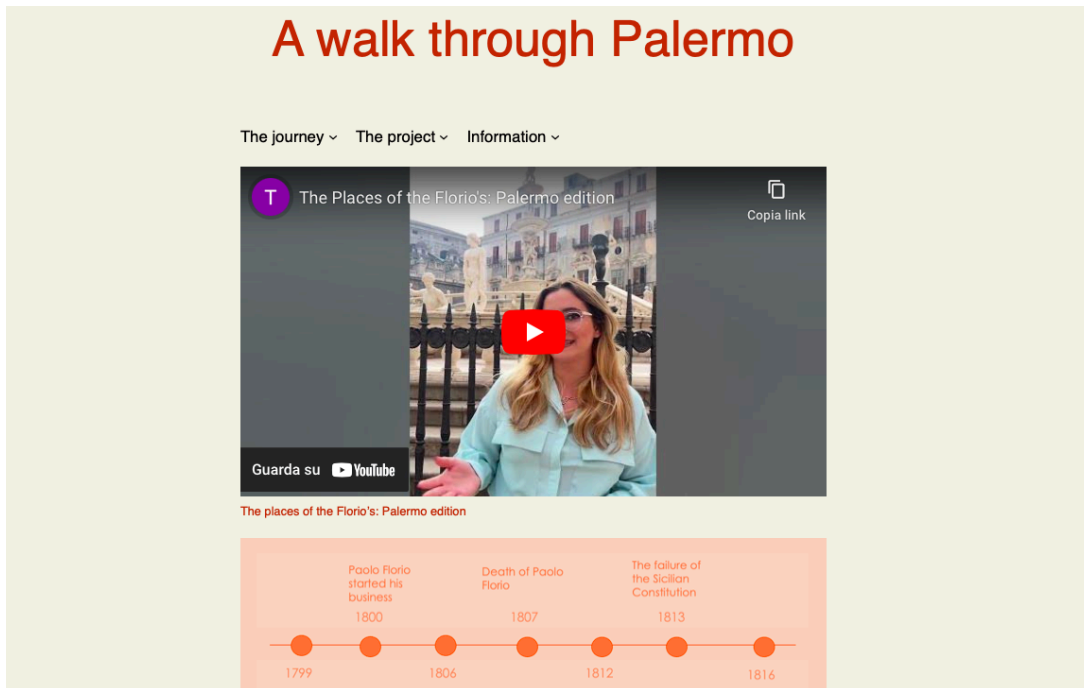


Image 10. A walk through Palermo page

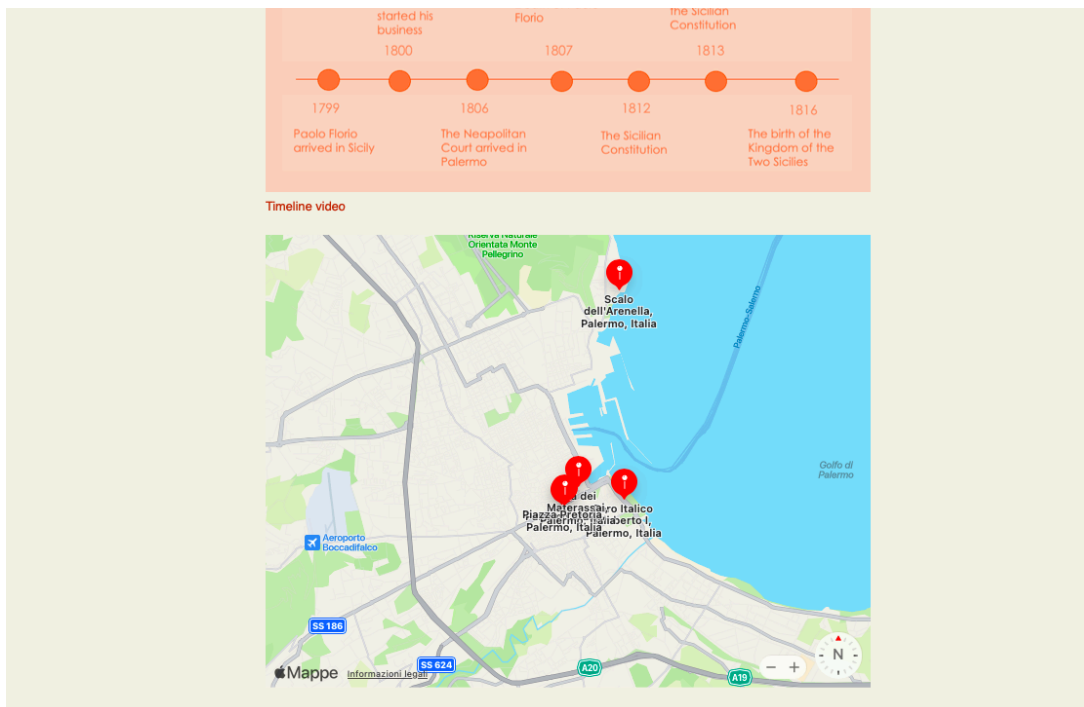


Image 11. A walk through Palermo page

Images 10 and 11 show the first page containing the videos. The architecture is the same: the video, the timeline of the video and the map of places visited.

# In search of the lost Marsala

The journey ▾ The project ▾ Information ▾



The Places of the Florio's: Marsala edition

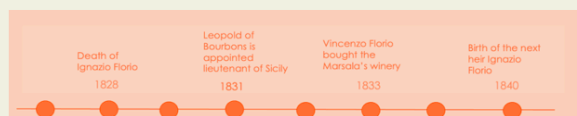


Image 12. In search of the lost Marsala page

# Discovering even more of the city of Palermo

The journey ▾ The project ▾ Information ▾



The Places of the Florio's: Palermo edition part two



Image 13. Discovering even more of the city of Palermo page

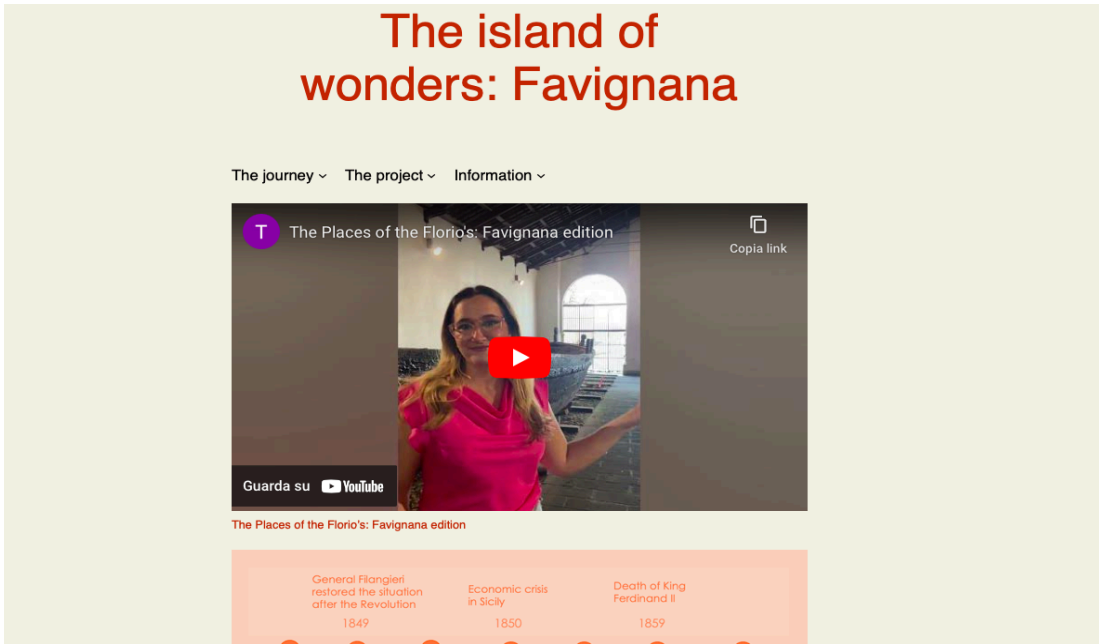


Image 14. The island of wonders: Favignana page

Images from 12 to 14 show a glimpse of the other pages that have the same architecture as the one in image 10.

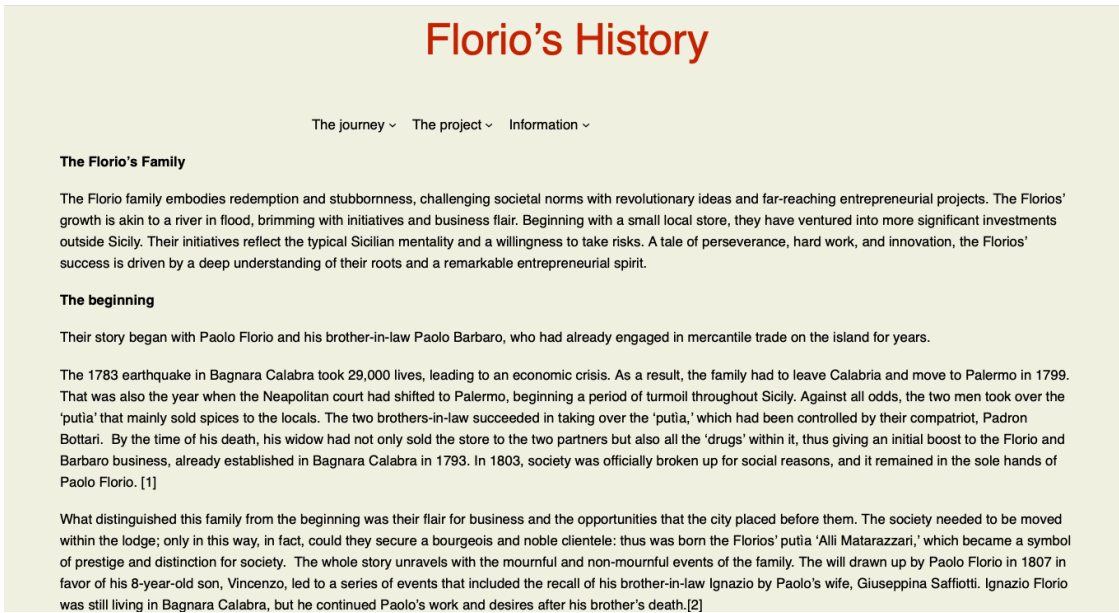


Image 15. Florio's History page

Image 15 represents the page where the story of the Florios is told for those who may prefer to read rather than listen to the videos.



Image 16. How to get there page

Finally, image 16 represents the 'How to get there' page, where users can see how to get to the locations where the scenes were filmed.

### 3. The videos

#### 3.1 Why use videos as the main tool

The decision to use video to tell the story of the Florio family was based on a few key factors. First, videos offer a powerful medium for making the story accessible and more vivid. In addition, compared to written texts, videos better capture the audience's attention through images, sounds, and narration. Through the use of this format, emotions and atmosphere can be conveyed, making historical events more tangible and engaging for the viewer.

Videos can also present information dynamically and, above all, multisensorily. Indeed, they can combine narrative voice, music, sound effects, archival images, reconstructions, and interviews, thus offering a 360-degree educational experience. This interactive approach is effective for a diverse audience that includes both history buffs and casual visitors to the site, as it not only facilitates the understanding of complex concepts but also actively engages the viewer in the storytelling process.<sup>134</sup>

One of the video's main advantages is its ability to capture and hold the audience's attention. In an age of continuous exposure to digital content, videos stand out for their ability to attract interest and maintain user engagement. This concept is paramount for

<sup>134</sup> Ascher S., Pincus E., *The Filmmaker's Handbook*, Penguin, USA, 2012, p.24



historical dissemination, as the main challenge nowadays is to make past events and personalities captivating and relevant.<sup>135</sup>

### 3.2 Production of the videos

The videos were produced using a structured process consisting of several stages, each of which was essential to ensuring the quality and accuracy of the final product.

- Information Research: Thorough historical research was essential in the first stage. Primary and secondary sources, including archival documents, historical books, and academic articles, were consulted. This made it possible to build a solid knowledge base on which to develop the videos' content.<sup>136</sup>
- Script: A detailed script was developed for each video. Suitable locations were chosen to shoot each scene, and care was taken to ensure that each location best represented the chosen topic.<sup>137</sup>
- Recording: the recording phase took place in the designated cities. Filming was done using state-of-the-art iPhones, which provided professional video quality and the flexibility to capture sharp images in various urban settings.
- Editing: Finally, editing software called Cupcut was used. All footage, visual, and sound elements were integrated to create a cohesive and appealing final product.<sup>138</sup>

### 3.3 Video contents

The project videos cover various aspects of the Florio family history, each focusing on a specific theme.

#### 3.3.1 First video

The first video of the project, immersed in the enchanting atmosphere of Palermo, takes us through the streets and places that once witnessed the history of the Florio family. The footage, immersed in the ancient beauty of the Sicilian capital, captures the essence and spirit of the places that were once the beating heart of the family's exploits and affairs. The streets, squares, and especially the historic buildings of Palermo serve as an

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<sup>135</sup>Irving D.K., Rea P.W., *Producing and Directing the Short Film and Video*, Taylor & Francis, United States of America, 2010, p.78

<sup>136</sup>Ibidem

<sup>137</sup>Ascher, Pincus, *The Filmmaker's Handbook*, p.45

<sup>138</sup>Rabiger M., *Directing the Documentary*, 6th ed., Focal Press, Burlington, MA, 2015, p.135

evocative backdrop for telling the story, giving the tale a unique depth and authenticity. The video offers a glimpse into the Florio family, placing it in the historical context of a Palermo fervent with new economic and social opportunities in the 19th century. A picture is then painted of the financial difficulties the Kingdom of Sicily faced under the rule of the Bourbons, the British influences, and especially the awakening of patriotic sentiments among the Sicilian people.

Next, the history of the Florio is explored, starting with the very progenitor Paolo Florio and his brother-in-law Paolo Barbaro. The latter, as discussed earlier, had just moved from Calabria to Palermo in 1799, where they had started a modest grocery store that would soon, however, become a point of reference for the local bourgeoisie and nobility. The focus then shifts to young Vincenzo Florio, who was educated by his uncle Ignatius following his father's death. It is recounted how Vincenzo saw an opportunity to expand the family's business beyond the island, investing in innovative sectors such as shipping, the chemical industry, and tuna fisheries. The narrative concludes by reflecting on the Florios' legacy and highlighting their avant-garde entrepreneurial vision.<sup>139</sup>

### 3.3.2 Second video

The second video, shot in the picturesque streets of Marsala, offers a compelling look at the tumultuous history of Sicily in the 19th century. During political upheaval and social tensions, the Florio family emerges as a beacon of innovation and resilience. Vincenzo Florio emerges as an enterprising entrepreneur, capable of seizing the opportunities that that turbulent period offered him. Indeed, despite the economic challenges and trade restrictions imposed by foreign powers, Vincenzo dared to invest in Marsala's burgeoning wine industry. Thanks to his visionary spirit and, above all, his determination, he created one of the region's most celebrated wineries, helping to raise Sicily's prestige on the international scene. In the historical context of the time, marked by continuous popular uprisings, dynastic changes, and geopolitical tensions, the Florios' enterprise represents boldness and entrepreneurial foresight. Through their business activities and social commitment, the Florios left an indelible mark on Sicily's economic and cultural history.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup>Paladino Florio, *I luoghi dei Florio: dimore e imprese storiche dei "viceré" di Sicilia*, pp. 12-14

<sup>140</sup>Ivi, pp. 168-171

### 3.3.3 Third video

The third video takes us back to the bustling streets of Palermo. In the heart of bustling 19th-century Palermo, the Florios emerged as one of the most influential and dynamic families of the time. Their story was intertwined with that of the city itself as Vincenzo Florio, through his entrepreneurial vision, transformed Sicily's economic and social fabric. Vincenzo distinguished himself as one of Sicily's most influential merchants through bold and innovative ventures. The Florios' efforts transcended the boundaries of entrepreneurship and influenced the political and social landscape of the time. While the city was shaken by the uprisings of 1848 against a repressive regime, the Florios prospered, facing economic and political challenges with boldness and determination. Despite the complexity of the period and the political difficulties that ensued, the Florio family nevertheless maintained a prominent position, earning the respect and admiration of the Palermo community.

The sumptuous Villa dell'Olivuzza, the family's home, remains a symbol of their prestige and influence in Sicilian society. Indeed, the villa became an icon of status and sophistication, even hosting the Russian royals during their stay in Sicily. The purchase and restoration of the villa testify to Vincenzo Florio's desire to be fully accepted into Palermo's aristocratic elite.<sup>141</sup>

### 3.3.4 Fourth video

As one ventures through the streets of Favignana, where the fourth video was shot, one can breathe in an atmosphere that mixes history and contemporary vitality. The ancient stones of the buildings testify and tell centuries-old stories of domination and change, while the bright colors that mark the small town paint a picture of modern, dynamic life. Walking through the streets, one can sense the legacy of the Florios, who helped shape not only Favignana's economy but also its social and cultural fabric. In this picturesque setting, the Florio tuna fishery emerges as a focal point, a symbol of the business activity and the family's deep connection with Favignana. Indeed, the activity of the tonnara offered employment to hundreds of fishermen, thus creating a network of relationships that extended beyond the island's borders. In this way, Vincenzo Florio also configured himself as a philanthropist by investing in the island's infrastructure and the welfare of its people. Its grandeur tells of bygone days of fishing and trade, while the waves of the

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<sup>141</sup>Candela, *I Florio*, pp.88-89

sea lapping against its walls tell stories of ancient rituals and traditions passed down from generation to generation. The family also left an indelible imprint on the history of Favignana, helping to build the Castello Florio, a luxurious home for the family and a symbol of past grandeur and splendor. Through their exploits, charitable works, and commitment to the island's progress, the Florios have left an indelible mark on this enchanted corner of Sicily.<sup>142</sup>

### 3.3.5 The interview

Finally, Maria Guccione, a prominent historian and leading expert on the history of Favignana and the Florios, was interviewed. This interview provided an in-depth and accurate perspective on the history and legacy of this iconic family.

Thanks to her expertise, the interview provided valuable and insightful information about the lives and businesses of the Florios and their impact on the island of Favignana, the interviewee's birthplace, and beyond. Her participation allowed us to view some areas of the Florio castle, usually closed to the public, and dispelled any doubts about the grandeur of this family and its role in the history of Sicily.

## 4. Conclusion

The project has several goals that can be achieved through the videos on the dedicated website. Indeed, one of the goals is to educate the public about the history of the Florios and the historical context in which they operated. Indeed, the videos provide an engaging and accessible narrative that conveys historical information effectively. In this way, a broad and diverse audience can be reached: researchers, students, and ordinary historians.

As a second objective, we set out to promote local history and raise awareness of the importance of Sicily's cultural heritage. By presenting significant places linked to the Florios and their entrepreneurial activities, we aim to arouse greater interest in exploring Sicily and its rich history.

The website created plays a central role in providing the resources the viewer needs, allowing users to explore specific topics in-depth and access educational materials. This approach may stimulate further research and personal insights into appreciating local history.

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<sup>142</sup>Giuffrida, Lentini, Troisi, Lanza Tomasi, *L'età dei Florio*, p. 39-41

Finally, the project could positively impact Sicily's cultural tourism, attracting visitors interested in the history of the Florios and Sicilian culture. The website can serve as a resource for these potential tourists, as it offers suggestions on what to see and do on the island and how to get to specific points.

## Conclusion

The objectives of the research were to embark on a journey to discover the History, specifically the events, of the Florio family, one of the most influential and fascinating entrepreneurial dynasties in Italy between the 19th and 20th centuries.

Thanks to this journey, it has been possible to explore not only the humble origins of the Florios, but above all, it has highlighted the extraordinary commercial success that saw them as protagonists in various sectors such as shipping, wine production, and especially the tuna industry.

This research also highlighted how Paolo Florio and later Vincenzo Florio laid the foundations of the family empire through an innovative entrepreneurial vision, followed by the expansion and diversification implemented by their descendants.

Thanks to an in-depth analysis of historical sources, archival documents, and expert testimony, the Florios' social and economic context was also reconstructed, highlighting the strategies that enabled them to establish themselves as one of the most powerful and respected of their time. Also examined were the political and social relations that Vincenzo Florio weaved and, significantly, how these later influenced economic activities and their role within the first Sicilian and then international society of the time.

Sicily in the nineteenth century was characterized by a series of revolutions and upheavals that profoundly marked it. Among the most significant were the Carbonari Revolution of 1820-1821 and the Revolution of 1848-1849, both part of a more significant European revolutionary movement. These revolts were driven by a desire for political reform and, above all, nationalist aspirations. In Sicily, during 1848, they even went so far as to proclaim an independent government that lasted about sixteen months before Bourbon troops suppressed it.

Amidst the political and social turbulence of the nineteenth century, the Florio family's ability to adapt and navigate through these periods of instability is truly inspiring. Vincenzo Florio, in particular, demonstrated a natural gift for adjusting their business strategies and seizing every opportunity that came their way. Their success was not only a result of their business acumen but also their skill in establishing advantageous political and social relations, which ultimately solidified their economic empire.

A significant aspect that emerged through the sources and their study was Florio's contribution to culture and society, through their patronage and support of the arts, literature, and science.

Vincenzo Florio and his descendants left an indelible mark on Sicily, not just through their economic achievements, but also through their efforts to promote the cultural development of the region. Their patronage and support of the arts, literature, and science stand as a testament to their commitment to the enrichment and progress of Sicilian culture and society.

The History of the Florios is inevitably intertwined with that of Sicily, reflecting but at the same time influencing the changes and dynamics of the time. Despite everything, their story has represented and continues to represent an example of how private initiative can interact with the historical and social context. The ultimate goal is precisely to generate development and progress.

This research also analyzed Stefania Auci's novel *The Lions of Sicily*. This step was fundamental as the historical novel was examined as a tool to narrate and interpret the events of the Florios. This fits within Public History as the historical novel can help make History accessible and engaging to a much wider audience. Indeed, through historical fiction, authors can reconstruct significant episodes and vividly characterize historical figures. This also fosters a greater understanding of History and an interest in it.

However, the research also complemented the analysis of sources using digital tools. Thus, the accessibility and impact of the Florios' History could be expanded. A dedicated website was structured, and explanatory videos were produced. The History of the Florios, thus, was effectively communicated within the sphere of Public History, specifically Digital Public History. The digital tools used make reaching a broader and more diverse audience possible. These new technologies are also used to promote historical knowledge interactively and engagingly.

Research has shown how History can be told in new and creative ways. They are leveraging digital resources to educate and engage audiences in innovative ways. The results obtained offer numerous possibilities for practical application. First, the historical reconstruction of the Florio family and their impact on the economic and cultural context of Sicily are essential educational resources. In fact, these contents can be used in school and university settings. History, economics, and cultural studies curricula could be enriched in this way; in fact, students are thus provided with a

practical and concrete example of how historical dynamics can also influence the socio-economic development of a region.

As mentioned earlier, the website and the videos represent innovative teaching tools; therefore, they can be used in formal and informal educational settings. Schools could use these resources to create lessons that are interactive and engaging. In addition, museums and cultural institutions can integrate these materials within their exhibitions. Finally, the usability of this content online allows it to reach a global audience. This promotes knowledge of Sicilian History beyond Italy's geographic boundaries. It should also be remembered that it could be a factor in the development of cultural tourism. Thematic itineraries, guided tours, and cultural events inspired by the History of the Florios can even attract visitors to discover Sicily. This kind of historical storytelling, also supported by digital tools, can become an engine of social economic development. Not only could it create new job opportunities, but it also promoted Sicily's cultural identity.

Finally, integrating the historical novel and public history can serve as an example for other projects to enhance historical and cultural heritage. Indeed, the methodologies used can be adapted and applied to different regions and their related histories. This contributes to the dissemination and accessibility of historical knowledge. In conclusion, it emerged how the research has not only enriched the field of historical studies through a new perspective on the Florio family. However, it has also provided concrete and innovative tools for disseminating and enhancing historical and cultural heritage. In addition, there are many educational, cultural, and economic benefits. Despite the achievements, it is crucial to recognize any limitations of the research. Primarily, limited access to some primary sources and archival documents has undoubtedly affected the completeness of the historical reconstruction. Although considerable effort was expended in finding and analyzing the available sources, some crucial information may have needed to be included. Another limitation is the generalization of the conclusions obtained. Although the research was conducted rigorously and thoroughly, the history of the Florios is a particular case within a specific historical and geographical context. Moreover, the conclusions drawn may only apply to some contexts; they would require further study and investigation.

Mention should also be made of the challenge of gaining access to some places related to the Florios' history. Indeed, they were often closed to the public or difficult to access.



The lack of access to these places has limited the possibility of conducting field research and obtaining information about the historical sites related to the Florios.

In conclusion, it is also essential to consider how these limitations are an opportunity for future developments and insights in historical research on Florios and Sicily.

Indeed, the research opens up a variety of future perspectives for studies and applications. Indeed, one of the most promising developments is the deepening of the socio-economic dynamics of Sicily, especially in the context of the globalization of the 19th century. Future studies could focus on how the Florios interacted with international markets. And how their entrepreneurial strategies could be compared with the period's European and American industrial realities. Implementations of digital technologies could lead to further research and exploration of other forms of digital and multimedia storytelling. The use of augmented reality and virtual reality may be the next frontier. This may provide new ways to learn about and experience history. Users can become even more immersed in the historical context of the Florios and 19th-century Sicily.

Regarding Digital Public History, further studies could focus on the effectiveness of digital platforms to engage different segments of the public. In-depth analyses of user interaction with the website and also with the videos uploaded to YouTube could provide valuable feedback. These will be needed to improve the accessibility and the impact of these digital resources.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, enhancing the history of the Florios can contribute to cultural tourism initiatives. Indeed, creating tourist apps and audio guides and designing thematic itineraries based on Florios' historical places can attract tourists who are passionate about history. Collaborations with local authorities, cultural associations, and tourism companies can also implement the effect of these initiatives. This thesis work not only sheds light on the history of the Florio family but opens the possibility for future exploration and application. Indeed, the prospects are many and, above all, promising. The history of the Florios can continue to offer valuable and inspirational lessons in various disciplines and fields.

Despite all the limitations and challenges encountered, this thesis work has made a significant contribution to our understanding of the history of the Florios and the historical context of nineteenth-century Sicily. The multidisciplinary approach, which combined historical sources, literary analysis, and even digital technologies, has allowed

us to rediscover this great dynasty of the 19th century, underscoring the importance and relevance of this research.

The discoveries and reflections that have emerged from this research provide a solid foundation for further studies and insights in the field of economic, social, and cultural history. The interest sparked by the history of the Florios, and the innovative methodologies employed, have opened up exciting opportunities to continue exploring and enhancing the historical heritage of Sicily, inspiring the audience about the potential impact of this research.

The use of digital and narrative tools as a storytelling thread offered a perfect example of how history can be made accessible and engaging to an increasingly digital audience. This kind of work and approach can inspire other cultural-historical outreach projects and contribute to the preservation and promotion of local communities' historical memory.

In conclusion, this research has testified how history is a fundamental tool for understanding even the present and shaping the future. Indeed, information on economic, social, and cultural dynamics can be gained by studying the Florios' histories and the historical context in which they operated. Moreover, these can be used to understand how they still influence society and our way of life. Finally, by keeping alive what has been the memory of past generations, we can draw inspiration for the challenges along our path and seize the opportunities that the world gives us.

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