# Creating Identity: Hidden Cultural Heritage, Ancient Landscapes, and Cultural Routes in Sicily

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**Abstract**  In recent years, the phenomenon of "cultural routes" has increasingly spread all over European and Mediterranean countries. Different actors in Sicily have followed the trend, introducing these cultural products and adopting a bottom-up approach to the management of "minor cultural heritage." An analysis of the narratives underlying these routes allows the identification of the cultural features involved in the creation of the island's identity. To achieve this goal, the present paper will focus on two case studies, the Antica Trasversale Sicula and the Magna Via Francigena, and scrutinize the narratives used in the communication strategies at these sites (press, websites, and social media). Scholars have not yet considered the implications of this phenomenon for local historical narratives, nor have they assessed its significance in terms of economic gains and cultural identity formation. What historical documents and archaeological data have been used and how? When have these been misunderstood or deliberately modified? In the light of the scientific literature attesting the existence of ancient tracks, it is interesting to assess to what extent the proposed narratives match the historical-topographical evidence and investigate the connection between these experiences and the creation of new local identities.

## 1 Introduction

Sicily displays a wide spectrum of natural environments (jagged and sandy seacoasts, narrow river valleys, alluvial plains, rocky highlands, etc.) where hidden cultural heritage is widespread. Despite the recent upsurge of interest in diachronic landscape research, the Sicilian hinterland has not been extensively studied in the panorama of Mediterranean Archaeology. Moreover, most archaeological sites scattered across the Sicilian landscape tend to be overlooked by stakeholders involved in cultural heritage management. However, some

**Fig. 1** Ramacca, eastern Sicily, part of the beaten track of the *trazzera* n° 344 (R. Brancato).

of these so-called "minor sites,"[1] which today appear marginal and inaccessible, were, at some point in history, central places[2] along the networks of routes that partially survive in the form of *trazzere* (Fig. 1), i.e., rural paths.[3] Despite their importance for the history of the island and economic potential as tourist destinations, these "minor" cultural heritage assets have not yet been fully exploited; their preservation for future generations is threatened by

1   With this term, we refer to the large number of cultural sites that have so far received little scientific and public attention.

2   Christaller (1933) defined a "central place" as a place endowed with a relative surplus of meaning due to its primacy in provisioning goods and services for the surrounding market area. For a contemporary reassessment of the centrality theory, see Mahr 2008; for application models of centrality in archaeology, see Nakoinz 2012; for a definition of landscape as "work in progress," see Ingold 2010. Contemporary landscapes may be seen as the result of centrality-shifting phenomena occurring cyclically throughout history.

3   The Sicilian *trazzere*—sheep tracks similar to the *tratturi* of peninsular Italy—are pathways linking inland summer pastures to winter pastures in the valleys and coastal areas; for an overview on the "trazzere," see Tesoriere 1994; Dufour 1995; Uggeri 2004; cf. Santagati 2006, 11–17. For the first description of the *trazzere* as relics of ancient routes, see Orsi 1907, 741–78, and 750, n. 1; for the first attempt of reconstructing Roman routes starting from the network of *trazzere,* see Uggeri 2004; for ancient route paths and the modern Grand Tour tradition in southeastern Sicily, see Buscemi 2008. For more details on the topic of route persistence, see Van Lanen et al. 2016.
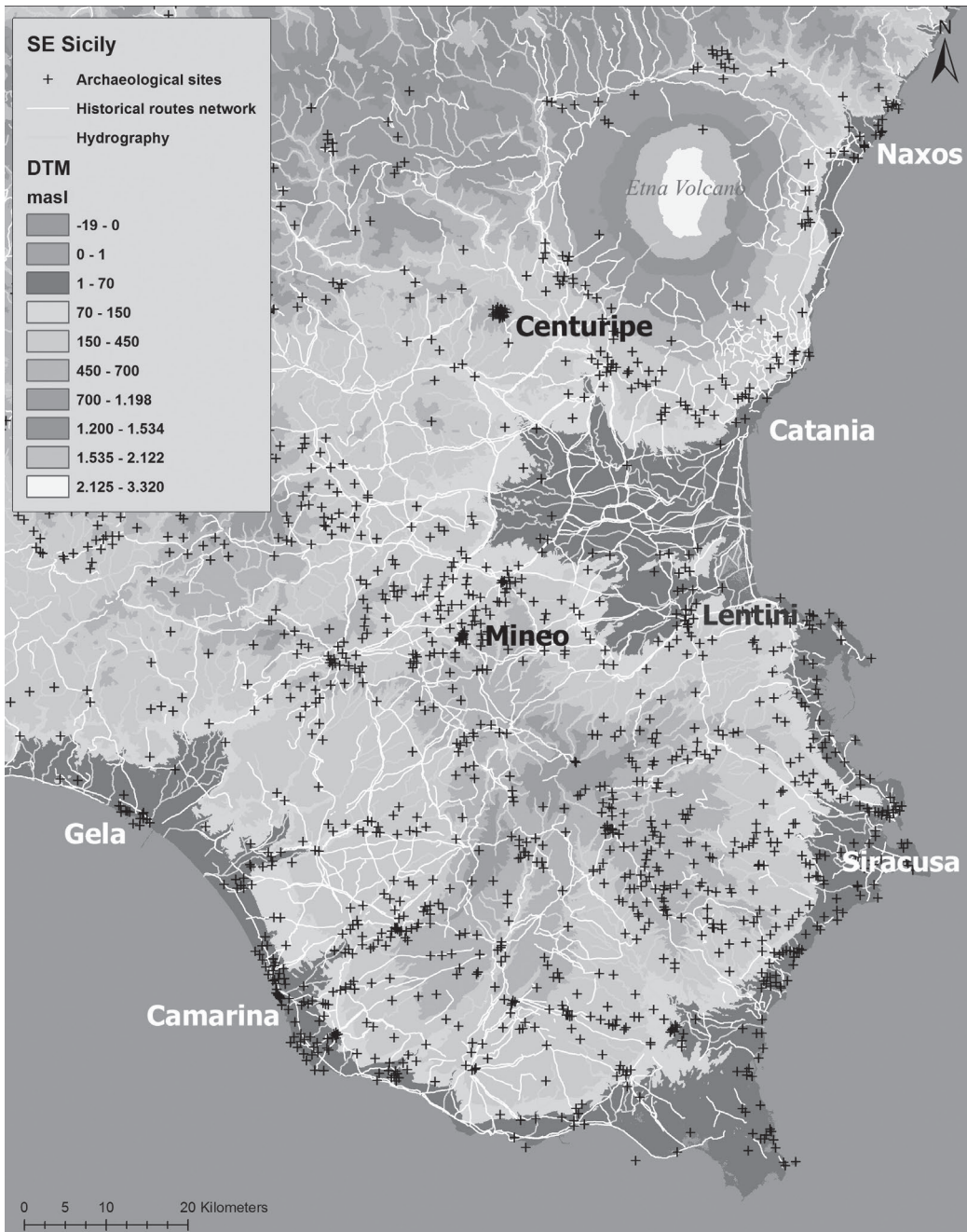
**Fig. 2** Southeastern Sicily, historical routes network and archaeological sites (R. Brancato).

a general lack of interest—an attitude that both scholars and local institutions show. The multilayered archaeological landscape of the island, which is comprised of settlements, *necropoleis,* route networks, and material deposits from the prehistoric to the medieval period, is yet to be embedded in the heritage management system.[4]

Route networks constitute the backbone of past and present cultural landscapes.[5] A road is not only a physical connection between distant and often scattered inland settlements, but also a chain link in wider economic and cultural networks.[6] The routes of Sicily, the largest island of the Mediterranean, encompass several local traditions in ancient and modern landscapes, overcoming geomorphological limits and cultural borders (Fig. 2). Research into ancient communication networks is a useful tool not only for reconstruction of the economic, social, and political history, but also for promotion of tourism in marginalized areas.

In accordance with EU policies aimed at encouraging the creation of new relationships between communities and landscapes, in the last decade, several cultural routes have been established in Sicily.[7] These are structured around various types of experiences at a re-

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4    Geographers define a cultural landscape as "a concrete and characteristic product of the interplay between a given human community, embodying certain cultural preferences and potentials, and a particular set of natural circumstances" (Fowler 1999, 56). The term "cultural" thus denotes the presence of tangible and intangible cultural values in a given landscape (Mitchell et al. 2011; Donadieu 2012). For example, cultural landscapes may reflect specific techniques of sustainable land-use that take into account the affordances and limitations of the natural environment, as well as peculiar spiritual beliefs attached to the landscape itself. For a reevaluation of the terminology of landscape for the purpose of cultural heritage management, see Szmelter 2013.

5    Routes should not be thought of as straightforward, simple connections between individual settlements; they rather should be conceived as links between settlements on a variety of scales (e.g., local, regional, supra-regional) and between settlement areas and the surrounding natural environments. As such, they are the product of and are influenced by both cultural and geographical dynamics. Research on route networks is therefore essential in order to fully understand the complex interactions between builtscapes and natural landscapes (Van Lanen et al. 2016, 1037–39); see also Ingold and Lee Vergunst 2008.

6    For the relationship between settlement patterns and ancient route paths research, see Hitchner 2012.

7    On cultural routes, see Majdoub 2009, 4–6; European Institute of Cultural Routes 2019. In this regard, the ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Routes (October 2008) specifies: "Any route of communication, be it land, water, or some other type, which is physically delimited and is also characterized by having its own specific dynamic and historic functionality, which must fulfill the following conditions: it must arise from and reflect interactive movements of people as well as multi-dimensional, continuous, and reciprocal exchanges of goods, ideas, knowledge and values between peoples, countries, regions or continents over significant periods of time. It must have thereby promoted a cross-fertilization of the affected cultures in space and time, as reflected both in their tangible and intangible heritage." The existing literature on cultural routes mostly focuses on the historical, geographical, and phenomenological aspects thereof (Candy 2004; Alonso Otero 2010; Griselin and Salvador 2010; Berti 2012; Serenelli 2013; Idone 2013), or on the specific factors influencing the spatial configuration of

gional, local, and sub-local level, and accommodate interests as wide as archaeology, history, art, gastronomy, religion, and natural landscape. Despite their heterogeneity, these newly established cultural routes all rely on a common strategy: the promotion of the cultural aspects of local entities and experiences. The proposed activities, in line with current policies, focus on the enhancement of cultural heritage as an agent for the development of local communities. In particular, the Sicilian itineraries seem to conform to the numerous other European initiatives promoting the creation of transnational cultural routes. As emphasized in the Document of the European Year of Cultural Heritage (2018),[8] tracing cultural routes across nations to link historical sites is the best way to implement and promote new relational networks based on a common understanding of cultural heritage. In a broader sense, as outlined in the Joint Communication on Culture in Europe's external relations,[9] re-tracing historical routes may help in surmounting the typical limits of local management of cultural sites, while contributing to the development of durable and sustainable networks across cultural operators and heritage sites within the European Union. As cultural heritage plays an important role in fostering a shared sense of history and identity, the establishment of historical routes, which is usually supported by local institutions, consists of measures directly affecting material and intangible forms of heritage.[10] The ubiquitous aim of such projects is the creation, through a sustainable approach, of a network of cultural sites designed to preserve, promote, and enhance the "hidden" cultural heritage dispersed across the natural landscape, transforming it into growth assets. This requires the involvement of several actors and stakeholders;[11] archaeologists, architects, landscape designers, and economists should be called upon to design new management solutions that take adequate account of sustainability and innovation to ensure the survival of cultural routes. This category launches the model of a new type of cultural heritage: indeed, a cultural route also illustrates the contemporary design of heritage values for participant local communities as a resource for sustainable social and economic development. In this context,

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the land (Lombardeiro Folgueira 2011); for research focusing to cultural and social issues, see Torres Feijó 2011; specifically concerning the "Camino de Santiago de Compostela," see Nageleisen 2014; for "Via Francigena," see Bettini et al. 2011.

8   Cf. Cultural Routes 2018.

9   Joint Communication 2016, 1–2.

10  For a definition of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, with references to the resolutions introduced and adopted by international organizations such as UNESCO and ICOMOS, see Ahmad 2006.

11  Serenelli et al. (2017): ancient route paths represent an interesting topic for applying a 'landscape approach' to regional planning, and they are interesting mainly for their ability to activate processes of local development based on the enhancement of local peculiarity and vocations. It is furthermore a fertile ground for building a dialogue among various stakeholders-administrators, people involved in the marketing and productive sectors, inhabitants, tourists, pilgrims, and occasional visitors.

the concept of cultural route is innovative, complex, and multidimensional: it represents a qualitative contribution to the notion of heritage and its preservation.[12]

R. B.

## 2    The phenomenon of cultural paths in Sicily

A preliminary attempt to offer a general overview of cultural routes in Sicily has been made through an analysis carried out on the internet (websites, repositories, social media, etc.) between September-December 2018. The data collected provided a broad and articulated view of the creation and management of Sicilian cultural routes.[13] Our findings suggest that out of 74 items the key drivers in this regard are the actions promoted by private companies (40%) (i.e., tour operators and travel agents), cultural associations (30%), public institutions (26%) (cultural heritage authorities/Soprintendenze, municipalities, districts, and regional institutions), and research institutes (4%). Common goals are the promotion of a new relationship between local identities and cultural landscapes and the development of tourism in the inland. In this scope, the creation of routes across different Sicilian districts has been encouraged.

In the sample examined, the main components of the community involved in the management and enhancement of cultural heritage are represented, i.e., cultural associations, private companies, research institutes, and public institutions (Fig. 3). Considering the tourist potential of the region, it is understandable that a large percentage of routes are planned and offered by tour operators. However, the number of initiatives promoted by cultural associations and public bodies is also remarkable (Fig. 3). As for international projects financed by European funds, western Sicily is part of the cultural route *La Rotta dei Fenici*—a Mediterranean network that incorporates the trajectories of ancient Phoenician routes. This project provides opportunities for cooperation among numerous research institutes and for the implementation of a common plan for cultural and economic development, something that is generally negotiated at a local level.[14]

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12  Majdoub 2009, 5; see also Majdoub 2010.
13  The applied data collection methodology and first results were presented in a preliminary report at the conference *Oltre la convenzione. Pensare, studiare, costruire il paesaggio vent'anni dopo* organized by the Società di Studi Geografici (Florence, 2020), cf. Brancato et al. 2021.
14  In 2003, the cultural route *La Rotta dei Fenici* (The Phoenicians' Route) was accepted by the Cultural Route of the Council of Europe as a pilot project for the enhancement of European cultural tourism and thus included in its institutional program. In 2004, the International Association Phoenicians' Route was established as the management authority of the itinerary. This led to the establishment, in 2011, of the International Phoenicians' Route, which is today the *réseau porteur* of the itinerary. The international confederation is composed of in-
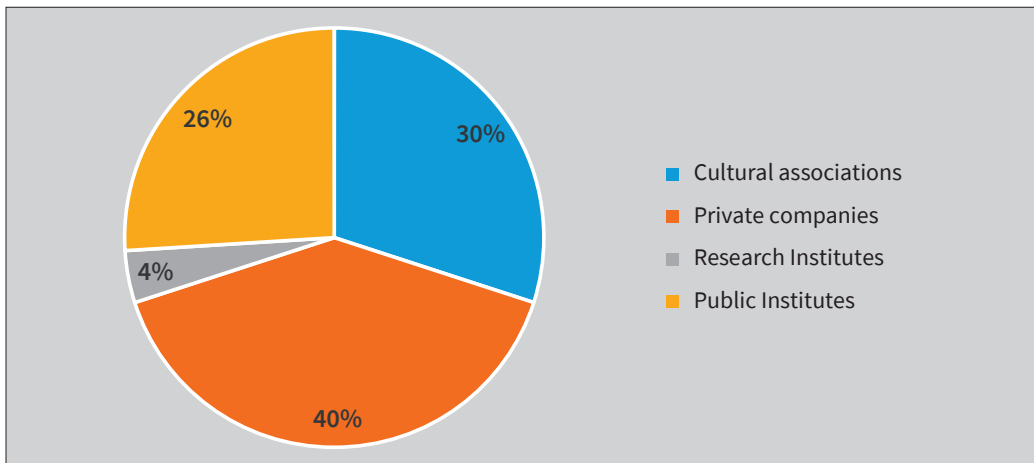
**Fig. 3** Graph of percentage of organizers of cultural route in Sicily (2010–2020) (R. Brancato).
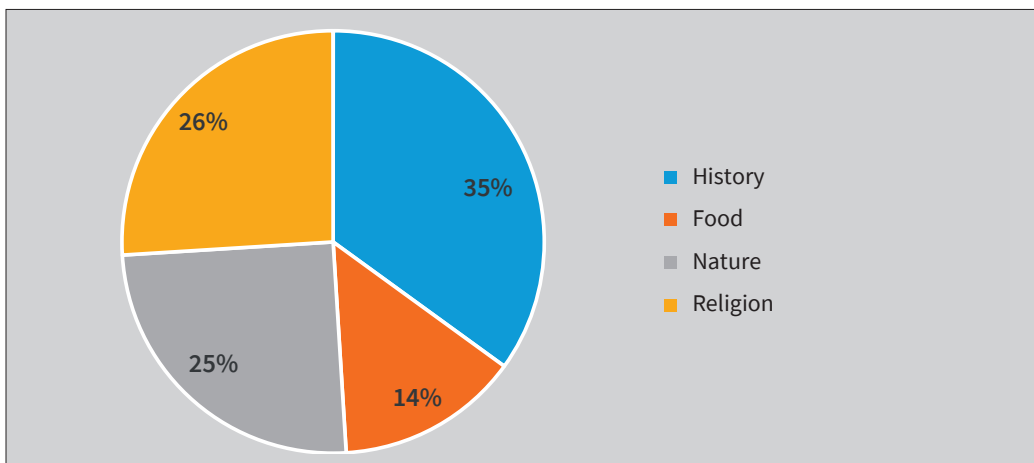


**Fig. 4** Graph of percentage of themes of cultural routes in Sicily (2010–2020) (R. Brancato).

The preliminary data also give us clues about the topics commonly addressed in the narratives accompanying the promotion of cultural routes (Fig. 4). In online descriptions, the following features are intentionally rehearsed: the historical interest of the route (35%); the links between cities and ancient settlements across remote rural areas where significant

stitutional and territorial authorities from the partner countries, as well as private operators in different sectors. Since 2016, the itinerary is the focus of the World Tourism Organization, which established a specific Core Working Group. The Phoenicians' Route encompasses many Mediterranean countries located in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, thus contributing to strengthening their historical connections. For this reason, it has been designated as the Itinerary of Intercultural Dialogue.

monuments are located; the religious value of the journey and the spiritual dimension of the destinations, which are often sanctuaries or monasteries (26%); the natural interest of routes passing through fascinating and unspoilt natural scenery, mostly untouched by tourist flow (25%); and, finally, the variety and richness of local dishes and wines (14%), whose peculiarities are vaunted by the local communities. Needless to say, most of these aspects are closely interconnected; for example, the spiritual and the historical go hand in hand, since the rediscovery of religious paths is based on hagiographic sources and Christian monuments from the medieval and/or modern times. The same applies to natural attractions and historical monuments, which are often presented as being linked via hiking trails.

V. G.

## 3    The *Antica Trasversale Sicula*

### 3.1    The route

The cultural route named *Antica Trasversale Sicula* extends for almost 650 km inland, spanning—as its name suggests—the entire island diagonally; it is divided into 37 stages, one for each day of the journey (Fig. 5). Starting from Mozia and ending in Kamarina, the path stretches from the western to the southern coast of Sicily. The *Antica Trasversale Sicula* runs
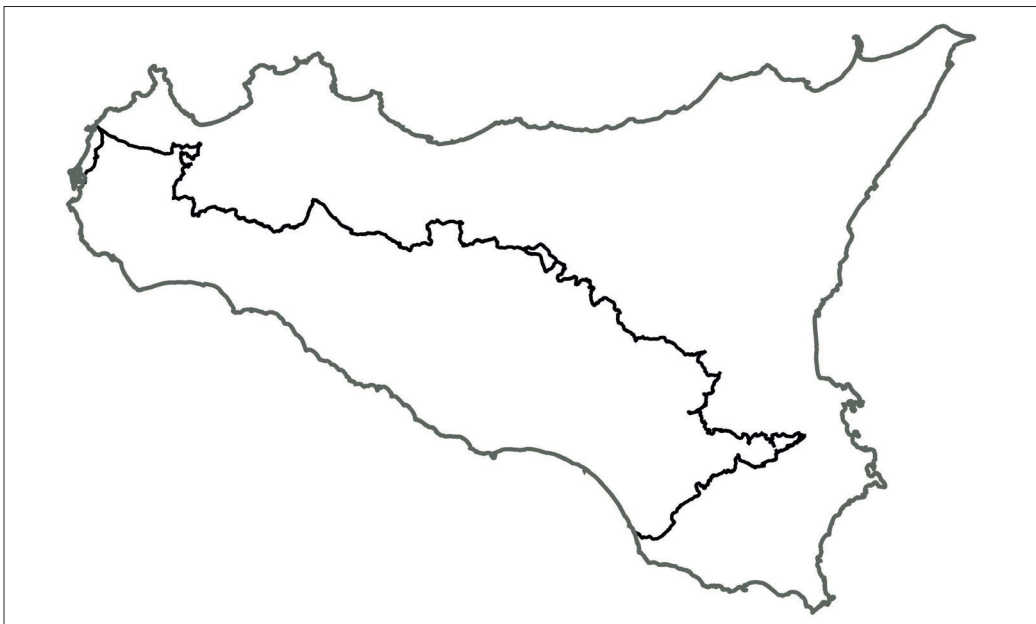


**Fig. 5**  Sicily, Antica Trasversale Sicula trail (P. Santospagnuolo).

across nearly all the provinces of the island, touching 55 municipalities and communities, 6 archaeological parks, 47 sites of historical and archaeological interest, as well as several nature reserves and museums. The trail, winding through country paths (some of ancient origin, some more recent), *trazzere,* and abandoned rail lines, leads to some of the main Sicilian archaeological sites, such as Segesta, Morgantina, Pantalica, and Kamarina; smaller and lesser-known sites are included too. The website Geoportale Sicilia[15] informs us that the creators of the initiative and founders of the Antica Trasversale Sicula Association are G. Melfi and G. Decaro, who studied the route together with the archaeologists G. Labisi and S. Gheys. Agreements were concluded with local municipalities and associations keeping in mind the common benefits in terms of socio-economic development of minor heritage and the rediscovery of Sicilian history, traditions, and food through the provision of reception facilities and events, according to the formula of "slow tourism."[16]

In 2017, the organizers and a few other participants undertook the first systematic exploration of the route. The enterprise was supported by the *Dipartimento Turismo Sport e Spettacolo* (Department for Sports Tourism and Entertainment) of the Sicily Region, which had also coordinated the advertising of the event on the web. Thanks to the collaboration with the LabGIS Office of the *Osservatorio Turistico Regionale* (Regional Tourist Observatory), the photos and geolocations recorded during the journey were processed on different cartographic platforms and made publicly accessible on a web application.[17] Moreover, the website Geoportale Sicilia made it possible to follow the excursion stage-by-stage by providing daily updates, photos, logistical details, and historical-archaeological information.[18]

The success of this first venture, although undertaken on a small scale, raised the attention of official bodies: in 2018, the route was included, as *Primo Cammino Internazionale dell'Antica Trasversale Sicula,* among the events of the European Year of Cultural Heritage promoted by the MiBAC (Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activity)[19] and nominated for the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe, as well as for the *Premio Nazionale del Paesaggio* (National Landscape Award) of the UNESCO Club.[20] A large group of hikers joined the formalized *Primo Cammino Internazionale dell'Antica Trasversale Sicula,* which took place from October 7th to November 18th, 2018; among the participants, some walked the en-

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15  Geoportale Sicilia 2017.

16  Among the main supporters and collaborators, there are Club Sicilia Patrimonio UNESCO, Legambiente, WWF, UNPLI (National Union Pro Loco of Italy), A.S.Te.S. Sicily (Sustainable Territorial Development Association), Assocamping (National Association of Open-air Tourist Accommodation Companies), and CAI Sicilia (Club Alpino Italiano).

17  LabGIS 2019.

18  These last were provided by the cooperation with the Laboratory of Ancient Topography of the University of Palermo, whose guide helped the organizers define the route.

19  MiBAC 2018.

20  Premio Paesaggio 2020.

tire route, others only a few stages. The salient moments of the "itinerant event" were made available in real-time on social media pages through daily reports accompanied by photos and comments.[21] Ad hoc signs were set up to mark the trails, and the data collected the year before were updated and published online through the Google service *My Maps.*[22] During the almost forty days of the *Primo Cammino Internazionale,* walkers enjoyed different activities, such as visits to archaeological sites, museums, and artisan workshops, conferences, and tastings of traditional food and wine. These occasions proved to be an opportunity for walkers to come into contact with the local authorities and associations, and for local people to become acquainted with the cultural route.

The second event, called *Secondo Cammino Internazionale,* took place from October 4th to November 16th, 2019, with the renewed support of the *Assessorato Regionale del Turismo* (Regional Tourism Council). Besides the support of a greater number of sponsors, new developments in this second edition were the participation in the project *Sicily En Plein Air*[23] and in the expo BTE-*Borsa del Turismo Extraalberghiero* (Non-hotel Sector Tourist Board).[24] The great relevance given to environmental ethics was shown in both symbolic gestures, such as the adoption of historical trees by the participating municipalities,[25] and practical actions, such as the planting of new trees in archaeological parks in the frame of the "Green Link" project[26] and the use of electric vehicles. In addition to daily updates on social media and radio stations,[27] each stage of the journey was documented in real time through the web application of the *Osservatorio Sicilia.*[28] Videomakers accompanied the walkers to record material for a dedicated documentary.

The activities of the Antica Trasversale Sicula Association are nonetheless not limited to the annual journey from Mozia to Kamarina; throughout the year, several collateral

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21  Trasversale Sicula 2020.
22  Google MyMaps 2020. Besides the exact route and its division into stages, the map also displays the main sites located on or near the trail. These have been thematically grouped into "museums," "areas with facilities," "luoghi del gusto" (literally "places of taste", i.e., venues to taste traditional food), and "archaeological sites." As for museums and archaeological sites, a link to the official website and information about opening hours and ticket prices are provided.
23  Project supported by *Assocamping Sicilia* and *Assoturismo Confesecenti* (Assocamping 2020).
24  According to the official social media page of the Antica Trasversale Sicula Association, all accommodation facilities will be "advertised at the next BTE in Bagheria" (Trasversale Sicula 2020, post of the 1st October 2019).
25  Each "monumental" tree was identified by means of a signal as "keeper of local traditions", and its presence indicated on the online map.
26  The project is supported by LIFE Climate Change Adaptation and envisages the "restore [of] desertified area with an innovative tree growing method across the Mediterranean border to increase resilience" (The Green Link 2017). Palm trees were planted as a symbol of the goddess Athena, protector of Kamarina.
27  Specifically, on a radio that reports on trekking and cultural routes (Radio Francigena 2020).
28  LabGIS 2019.

events linked to the *Cammino* take place. An example is the initiative "Weekends Trasversali," which combines trekking with cultural initiatives and is aimed at those who wish to walk only a few stages of the *Antica Trasversale Sicula.* Besides sharing regular updates on social media to keep alive the followers' interest, the Association regularly takes part in events thematically related to the *Antica Trasversale Sicula* (such as conferences and book presentations); it also extends its support to the activities of other associations, galvanized by common goals and interests.

## 3.2 Historical data and the construction of a narrative

Numerous sites along the *Antica Trasversale Sicula* bear the traces of prehistoric frequentation; these are embedded in road networks that, in a number of instances, are still in use today.[29] During and after the Greek colonization, the newcomers took advantage of some of the existing roads to venture into the Sicilian hinterland; at the same time, they established new routes to link colonies, sub-colonies, and indigenous settlements.[30] Although the Greeks were the first to organize an interregional road system, it was only with the unification of Sicily under Roman rule that the island was fitted with solid road infrastructure, mostly coinciding with pre-existing routes. In Imperial times, the routes connecting the centers of production with the main harbors were the first to be associated with the *cursus publicus* and thus to be equipped with rest stops (*stationes*).[31] In the Middle Ages, a lack of maintenance caused the dilapidation of the great Roman roads, and the subsequent creation of an alternative road system made up of narrow and hardly accessible trails developed after the new settlement patterns (cave and hill dwellings) following the Arab conquest in the

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29  For the identification of the various ancient tracks partly mapped out in the stages of the *Antica Trasversale Sicula,* reference was made to Uggeri (2004).

30  The stage between Segesta and Salemi seems to retrace a path mentioned by Diodorus (XXIII, 21). The account of the war between Syracuse and Himera at the end of the fifth century BCE proves the existence of an internal route between Termini and Catania. At the time of the Syracusan penetration into the Hyblaean territory (seventh century BCE), marked by the foundation of Acrae, Kasmene, and Kamarina, new routes were created. Because of its prominent role, Syracuse was the terminus of two roads, today, part of the *Antica Trasversale Sicula:* the so-called *Via Elorina,* and the *Via Selinuntina;* cf. Uggeri 2004, 14–19.

31  The *Antica Trasversale Sicula* overlaps and intersects some of these Roman roads. In particular, the first four stages, from Mozia to Terme Segestane, follow more or less faithfully the Roman *Via Valeria,* which linked Marsala (Lilybaeum) to Messina, on the northern coast. The section of road between Corleone and Prizzi mostly retraces the Roman road connecting the northern coast (Palermo) to the southern coast (Agrigento). Although its path is mentioned several times in ancient itineraries, we deduce its name, *Via Aurelia,* from a milestone. This road retained its importance also under the Arabs and the Normans, which is the reason why it was renamed *Magna Via Francigena.*

eight century AD.[32] Many of these Roman and medieval routes would be later incorporated into the system of the *regie trazzere*—unpaved tracks used for transhumance.[33]

In the attachment available on the website of the European Year of Cultural Heritage, the *Primo Cammino Internazionele dell'Antica Trasversale Sicula* is presented as "an important element of European cultural heritage," and "one of the oldest historical routes in Sicily and the Old Continent."[34] This statement echoes a quote by B. Pace, in which he claims to have recognized a fragment of a *trasversale sicula* between Kamarina, Comiso, and Licodia, in the southern corner of Sicily.[35] According to him, two roads departed from the crossroad in Licodia: one towards Catania, the other towards Palermo; the latter must have been the "real" *trasversale.* As a further proof of the antiquity of the route, the webpage Geoportale Sicilia reports G. Uggeri's[36] statement that "in ancient Sicily there was not a single *trasversale,* but a series of *rotte trasversali*" connecting the main Sicilian cities with indigenous centers and sanctuaries. In the same webpage, the creators of the *Antica Trasversale Sicula* emphasize how the presence of this *trasversale* favored not only the trade of main Sicilian agricultural products (i.e., wheat, oil, wine, honey, etc.) but also, broadly speaking, the contacts between "Greeks, Sicels, Sicani, Elymians, and Carthaginians." Such a reference to the ethnic diversification of ancient Sicily presents the *Antica Trasversale Sicula* as a symbol of tolerance and peaceful coexistence between different cultural groups, thus reaffirming Sicily as a land of age-old hospitality. Interculturality is, after all, one of the most peculiar features of cultural routes. The *Antica Trasversale Sicula* is inspired by, and aligned to, the European-wide phenomenon of revival of historical cultural routes in a contemporary perspective. Placing itself as a *Cammino Internazionale* ("international trail"), it welcomes foreign participants and leads them on the tracks of the many populations who followed one another on the island, thus offering them the possibility of traveling both in space and time. In this way, the *Antica Trasversale Sicula* is presented as a means par excellence to reach the roots of the Sicilian identity.

Specific choices of narratives communicate the historical identity of the route, as it is presented and advertised to the public. Descriptions in both the webpages and social media emphasize the role of certain historical phases to the detriment of others; for example, ref-

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32   The work of Idrisi (12th century) reveals the existence of these new paths but also bears witness to the continuous use of some sections of the imperial road system (such as the *Via Valeria,* the *Via Aurelia-Magna Via Francigena,* and the internal road between Termini and Catania); see Amari 1880–81, 31–135. Some of the sites touched by the *Antica Trasversale Sicula* were connected to the new settlements, such as Calatafimi, Salemi, the Arab-Norman castle of Calathamet (near the Terme Segestane), Castronovo and the nearby Casale San Pietro, Calascibetta, and Pantalica.

33   For the meaning of *trazzere,* see n. 3.

34   PDF downloadable from the webpage MiBAC 2018.

35   Pace 1958, 464. See the article published online by Labisi (2019).

36   Geoportale Sicilia 2017. See also Uggeri 2004, 19.

erences to the indigenous population of Sicily (Elymians, Sicels, and Sicani) are significantly more abundant than those made to the Greeks, Arabs, and Normans. The Roman period remains rather in the shadow, despite its significant impact on the Sicilian landscape. The will to turn the spotlights on "minor" local realities, highlighted by the choice of focusing on the history of the Elymians, the Sicels, and the Sicani, also manifests in the attention devoted to the festivities, products, and gastronomic traditions of the lesser-known towns of the Sicilian hinterland. The association also seeks to establish a direct link with the indigenous peoples of Sicily, in particular the Sicels, through a series of dedicated events organized throughout the year.[37] Within this narrative strategy, references to local expressions of religious devotion, too, are a useful tool to emphasize the founding principles of the cultural route: the *Antica Trasversale Sicula* is akin to a "pilgrimage through the sanctuaries of proto-historic and Greek Sicily," as a passage from a 2017 travel diary puts it.[38] In this regard, a prominent role is entrusted to the cult of Demeter and Kore, which were chosen as the protective deities of the journey for their "divinity symbolic of Indigenous and Greek cultures." The predilection for this mythological story, so closely connected to the cycle of the seasons and agricultural production, further reaffirms the wish to celebrate and care for the land and its products. Ancient religiosity thus serves the purpose of establishing a more direct contact with nature and connecting with the most ancestral, genuine, and hidden core of Sicily.

P. S.

## 4    The *Magna Via Francigena*

### 4.1  The route

The *Magna Via Francigena* (Great Francigena Way) traverses the island from north to south, linking two of the major port cities in the region: Palermo and Agrigento (Fig. 6). It is part of a network of four walks,[39] *Le vie Francigene di Sicilia,* which in the past five years has been the focus of increasing interest.

The project of revival and enhancement of the *Magna Via Francigena* started in 2009 upon the initiative of Davide Comunale, a Sicilian researcher at the University of Rome Tor Vergata, whose interests include the study of ancient roads in medieval times through doc-

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37  For example, one of the "Weekend Trasversali" entitled "From the Temple of Sicels to the Castle of Ducezio" (Palagonia–Mineo), follows in the Sicels' footsteps among those locations considered to be their sanctuaries and places of power.

38  Geoportale Sicilia 2017.
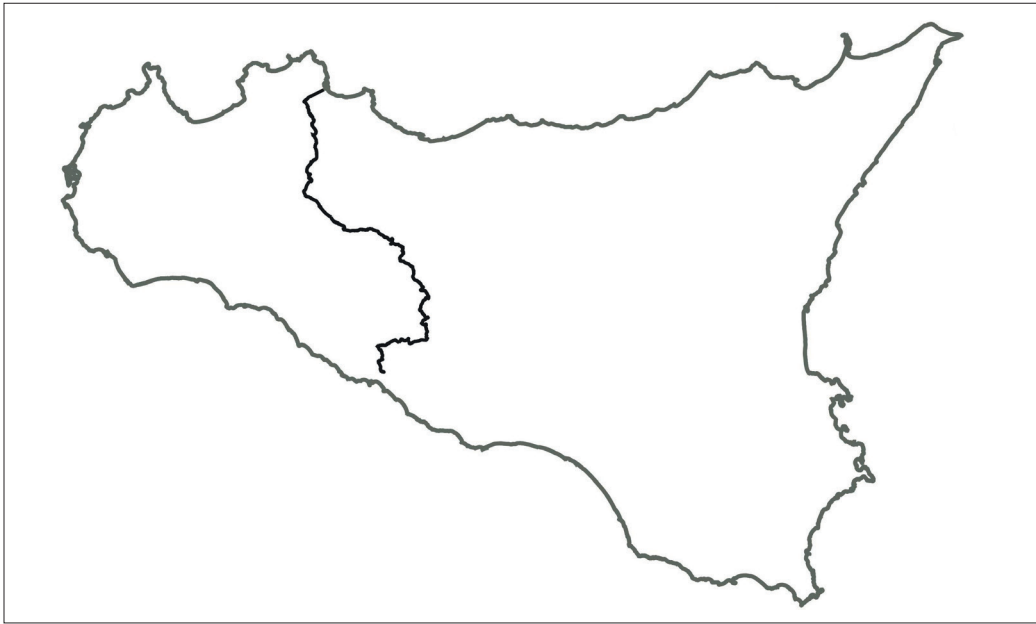
39  Cammini Francigeni.

**Fig. 6** Sicily, Via Francigena trail (P. Santospagnuolo).

uments and archaeological data.[40] In 2010, Comunale funded an association of volunteers known as "Amici dei Cammini Francigeni di Sicilia," with the aim of valorising this Sicilian heritage and promoting the exchange of good practice, in particular concerning the Itineraries called *Vie Francigene di Sicilia* and pilgrimage, thus encouraging social development through better presentation of the cultural, anthropological, and traditional heritage as well as of museums and landscape[41]. To this end, a series of actions needs to be undertaken: supporting, together with local authorities, the creation of infrastructure and services for the pilgrims; taking measures to improve the public awareness as well as coordination and enhancement of these itineraries; and promoting trekking tourism as a sustainable option for the development of the territory.[42]

In 2013, thanks to the partnership with other cognate associations, such as ItiMed (*Itinerari Mediterranei*), and the creation of a network involving public authorities, universities,[43] and local stakeholders[44], the project of the *Magna Via Francigena* started for the first time. In a few years, it spawned many cultural initiatives at different levels; among these are the conference *Le Vie e i Cammini di Sicilia: icercar e associazionismo in . . . cammino,* held at

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40  Comunale 2017a.
41  Cammini Francigeni 2015, Art. 3.
42  Cammini Francigeni 2015, Art. 4.
43  Trinacria news 2014.
44  Trinacria news 2014, Interview to Antonella Italia.

Piazza Armerina in 2014 and involving some of the major Italian experts on medieval mobility; the celebration which took place in May 2016 on the occasion of the VIII National Day of the *Cammini Francigeni;* several conferences and trekking, across the region;[45] the publication of two guidebooks, one to the *Magna Via Francigena* (2017),[46] the other to an itinerary called "Palermo–Messina throughout the mountains;"[47] an event-walk supporting people affected by fibromyalgia and medical research in 2019.

According to a press release on the website of *Cammini Francigeni di Sicilia,* in 2018, more than 1700 "pilgrims"—almost twice as many as in 2017—walked the two main trails, the *Via Palermo-Messina per le montagne* and the *Magna Via Francigena.*[48] The participants had the chance to visit small inland villages otherwise excluded from the mainstream touristic itineraries.

The *Magna Via Francigena* begins at the Cathedral of Palermo and ends at the Duomo of Agrigento, bisecting the island from north to south. The route is roughly 160 km long and is divided into nine legs of about 25 km each; it passes through the towns of Palermo-Monreale-Santa Cristina di Gela (1), Corleone (2), Prizzi (3), Castronovo (4), Cammarata (5), Sutera (6), Racalmuto (7), Joppolo Jancaxio (8), and Agrigento (9). The itinerary follows the tracks of the *regie trazzere*[49]—which, by the end of the 19th century, had been catalogued in the royal land registry. All walking paths are signposted with arrows and the red symbol of a pilgrim underlined by a red and white line. In 2016, upon the initiative of Giovanni Guarneri, an amateur cyclist who came to know about *Magna Via Francigena* project through social media, a parallel bike trail was established. The cycling route is 150 km long and is divided into five legs; for the most part it runs parallel to the walking route, with a few slight deviations due to the ground conditions.[50]

Today, the project is endorsed by 19 municipalities,[51] and directly involves all members of the local communities, as well as private and public institutions. The project's creators, Davide Comunale, Irene Marraffa, and Giovanni Guarneri, encouraged local institutions (e.g., churches, schools, and municipalities) to provide accommodation to the pilgrims upon payment of a symbolic sum understood as a donation, in line with the model of Santiago de Compostela. They also launched a pilot project to prompt local families who owns spare rooms or empty houses to rent them out for a maximum price of 20 euros per night.[52]

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45  Catania Giovani 2016.
46  Comunale 2017b.
47  Comunale 2018.
48  Cammini Francigeni 2019.
49  See note 3.
50  e-Lios s.r.l. 2020b.
51  e-Lios s.r.l. 2020d.
52  Geo & Geo 2017.

Strategic choices such as those delineated above not only help generate new sources of income for local families and towns, but also foster the expansion of the Italian hosting model known as *Albergo Diffuso* (Dispersed Hostels).[53] This hosting paradigm, focusing on the restoration and reuse of old houses in place of creation of new structures, provides a more sustainable and eco-friendly alternative to more traditional hosting solutions in the tourism sector. Moreover, according to a medieval custom, anyone who approaches the *Via Francigena* can ask for a *credenziale,* a document attesting its owner's status of "pilgrim," to be stamped by the authorities of the places visited along the journey. The collection of stamps entitles one to the *testimonium,* an official certification personally signed by the bishop of Agrigento, attesting that he or she—much like an ancient pilgrim—has reached the Duomo of Agrigento after covering a minimum of 100 km on foot or 150 km by bike.[54]

## 4.2   Historical data and the construction of a narrative

According to historical data, the road linking Palermo and Agrigento had a military purpose from its very inception to the times of the Norman monarchy, when it was cited under the name of "via exercitus."[55] Indeed, it was first traveled from South to North by Theron in the fifth century BCE to reach Himera and fight against the Carthaginians, and in reverse during the Roman conquest of the island.[56] Known as *Via Aurelia* in Roman times, it was most likely commissioned during the First Punic War between 252 and 248 BCE by the consul Aurelius Cotta, as attested by the only *miliarum*[57] ever found in Sicily.[58] The *miliarum,* unearthed near Corleone and kept in the local museum, is the only historical evidence that explicitly refers to this ancient route[59].

Thus, it is necessary to inspect the reliability of an ancient itinerary called *Via Francigena* in regard to the origin of its name and whether it should be traced back to the famous European pilgrimage route leading from Canterbury to Rome and thence to Jerusalem. If so, should we assume that this, too, was a pilgrimage route in ancient times?

In order to reconstruct the ancient tracks, in addition to archaeological data, scholars took into consideration occupation and distribution patterns, local toponyms and, where

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53  Dall'Ara 2010.
54  e-Lios 2020b.
55  Amari 1933, 345.
56  Uggeri 2004, 98.
57  Di Vita 1955, 11–20.
58  Uggeri 2007, 230.
59  Arlotta 2005, 870, n. 125.

available, written sources.[60] Research suggests that the route was in use for centuries,[61] thus fitting Braudel's model of the *longue durée.*[62]

In particular, analysis of the archaeological and written documentation dating between the 11th and the 13th centuries CE allowed scholars to identify the traces of an ancient path referred to as "Via Francigena." The sources point to the existence, between Palermo and Agrigento, of at least three *hospitales,*[63] structures for the reception of pilgrims similar to those identified along the Palermo–Messina way.[64] The first is the *Hospitalis Sanctae Agnes,* which a Norman document dating to 1182[65] locates "on the way leading from Corleone to Palermo."[66] On the basis of the ancient association between S. Agnes and S. Agata,[67] it was proposed to locate the *hospitalis* in the area of a Late Roman (fifth–sixth centuries C.E.) settlement with a necropolis in Contrada Sant'Agata,[68] south of S. Cristina di Gela (Palermo); the site was investigated by the Archaeological Service of Palermo.[69] The second is the 13th century *Hospitium Flace*[70] in the territory of Prizzi (Palermo), in Contrada Filaga; this is possibly the site of an earlier Byzantine watch-tower, as the toponym "Filaga" suggests (φύλαξ—"guardian"; φυλάκιον—"guard post").[71] The third building, dating to the 12th century, was located in the premises of Castronovo (Palermo) and was under control of the Teutonic Order Church of Maria dei Miracoli.[72] A further evidence is the expression "τὴν ὁδὸν τὴν μεγάλη τὴν φραγκικὸν τοῦ Καστρονόβου," reported in a document in Greek of the year 1096[73] that describes the boundaries of a parcel of land given by the king to the diocese of Messina.

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60  Uggeri 1986, 2004; Arlotta 2005.

61  Uggeri 2004, 97–104; Patitucci and Uggeri 2007.

62  Braudel 1982, 162.

63  All the structures identified are in the province of Palermo. In accordance with the model of the *longue durée,* it has been noted that several medieval stopovers coincide with Roman ones, especially those described in the *Itinerarium Antonini.* The archaeological evidence confirms this fact (Uggeri 2004, 97–104). The *Iinerarium Antonini* mentions four *stationes* along the Palermo–Agrigento route: *Pirama, Petrina, Comitiana,* and *Pitiniana,* falling respectively just within the territories of Sant'Agata, Prizzi, Castronovo, and also Aragona. This suggests that a fourth *hospitalis,* on which no documentation survives, might have existed near Aragona (Agrigento).

64  Arlotta 2005, 837–55.

65  Cusa 1868, 179–97.

66  Translation by the author.

67  Morin 1910.

68  Arlotta 2005, 872–73, n. 131.

69  Greco 1985–1987; Greco and Mammina 1993–1994.

70  Collura 1961, 305, Uggeri 2004, 103.

71  Uggeri 2004, 103.

72  Mongitore 1734.

73  Cusa 1868, 289–291; the same text reached us in Latin, since it was copied together with other Greek documents at the behest of the Empress Costance in April 1189, see Költzer 1983, 194–97, n. 53.

Should we succeed in mapping out the northern section of the *Via Francigena* with some degree of certainty, it will be reasonable to assume that the same route continued from south of Castronovo to Agrigento. This conjecture, which takes into account the aforementioned theory of *longue durée,* may be proven through an investigation of the archaeological evidence of earlier periods[74] and of the *regie trazzere.*

As for what concerns the name "Magna Via Francigena," the latter appears in four documents[75] of the Norman chancellery dealing with the demarcation of estate boundaries (*periorismos*) in the context of notarial deeds. By this name, the documents refer to different routes running across the island.[76] The route from Palermo to Agrigento is mentioned in the 11th century Greek text cited above as "τὴν ὁδὸν τὴν μεγάλη τὴν φραγκικὸν τοῦ Καστρονόβου."[77] The term "φραγκικὸν" ("francigeno") unquestionably reminds us of the *Via Francigena,* which, from the end of the 9th century onwards, connected the transalpine regions to Sicily. According to Arlotta, the term was transferred to the denomination of the Sicilian route through a linguistic phenomenon known as "synonymic irradiation:"[78] since the *Via Francigena* was the most important European pilgrimage route in the Middle Ages,[79] the borrowing of its name must have highlighted the special role that the Palermo–Agrigento route had at the time. The fact that the Sicilian route was divided into several stages seems to endorse this hypothesis. However, other scholars disagree with this explanation and read the term "francigeno" as a mere reference to the origin of Norman people in France.[80] More straightforwardly, a document of the year 1182 provides the Arabic name of the road, *tariq al-'askar,* which in Latin translates as *Via exercitus.*[81] Hence, we may assume that during the Norman kingdom the road leading from Palermo to Agrigento was still used for military purposes, most likely for penetration inland during the conquest of the island.

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74　See n. 64, concerning the *Itinerarium Antonini;* Uggeri 2004, 106–16; Comunale 2017a, 78.

75　The first one is a Greek document of 1089, which has come down to us through a Latin copy dating back to 1189, a will by Empress Constance, citing the *viam ad aliam Francigenam* as a border in the context of a land donation in the estate of Messina; see Költzer 1983, 194–97, n. 53. The second one, already mentioned, is the Greek document dating back to 1096; see n. 74. The third document, dating back to the period 1105–1130 and referring to a *uiam francigenam uiam Fabariam,* is a donation of a land plot in the estate of Vizzini from Achinus de Bizino to Ambrosius, abbot of the monastery of Lipari-Patti (ME); see White 1984, 389, n. 6, cf. Sidoti and Magistri 2006, 224. In the last one, which dates back to 1267, a *via francigena* close to Mazzara del Vallo is mentioned; see Santagati and Santagati 2016, 108.

76　These documents led to the reconstruction of the itineraries promoted by the Association "Amici dei Cammini Francigeni di Sicilia," see Cammini Francigeni.

77　Cusa 1868.

78　Arlotta 2005, 817.

79　Cfr. Arlotta 2005, n. 2 with references.

80　Uggeri 2004, 103; Santagati and Santagati 2017, 102. The MVF website offers the same explanation regarding the origin of the name, see e-Lios: http://www.magnaviafrancigena.it/faq/.

81　Amari 1933 2, 345–46.

Quite apart from the name issue,[82] what scholars agree on is that the *Magna Via Francigena Catronovi,* after passing Corleone, must have merged into a road leading to the city of Messina.[83] If we take the road to be a pilgrimage route, it makes sense to assume that Messina was the last stopover: thanks to the special favors that the Norman Kings granted the Sicilian monastic relationship with the Holy Land[84], it was from its harbor that the pilgrims would leave the island to reach Jerusalem and other pilgrimage destinations such as Rome and Santiago.

Even operating under the assumption that the *Magna Via Francigena* was a pilgrimage route comparable to other existing *Vie Francigene*—which remains a hypothesis—neither the historical sources nor the narrative that Comunale[85] proposes is able to explain what kind of religious devotion inspired medieval pilgrims to travel the route from Palermo to the Duomo of Agrigento.

What is clear is that we need to justify the choice of enhancing these cultural routes both historically and ideologically by creating a semantic connection with Norman Sicily. This venture, which may be taken as a symbol of a well-integrated society at a cultural level, has recently been a subject of great interest. Consider, for instance, the creation of the UNESCO Arabic-Norman Itinerary in Palermo in 2015, and, more generally, the wider interest in the famous European pilgrimage routes, such as the *Via Francigena* and the Compostela trail. Cultural routes are clearly a burning issue in the broader panorama of European cultural policies which deserves greater attention.

T. M.

## 5    Final remarks

The analysis of cultural routes enabled us to reflect on the implementation of a bottom-up approach to the management of cultural heritage in Sicily. The study provided a useful picture of the current engagement of local communities with the scholarly research on the history and archaeology of the island. Our critical investigation of the storytelling around two selected case studies clearly reveals numerous discrepancies between the extant archaeological evidence and the narrative attached to Sicilian cultural routes. These

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82  This is not the place to discuss the issue, for which further philological studies would be needed.
83  Uggeri 2004; Arlotta 2005, 866, n. 115 with references.
84  White 1984, 109, 327–31, 352–55.
85  It is worth noting that the MVF website refers to Messina as the main arrival point for pilgrims, see Cammini Francigeni.

underlying narratives, resulting from the combination of historical and archaeological data and local traditions, need to employ an integrated approach in studying these cultural products.

While acknowledging the great cultural value of the *Antica Trasversale Sicula,* which has spurred interest in the lesser-known heritage of the Sicilian interior, we recognize that its narrative risks presenting a misleading image of the ancient route network. Indeed, the available archaeological and historical data do allow us to posit its existence as an uninterrupted road in the past.[86] What clearly emerges from examining in detail the stages of the *Antica Trasversale Sicula* is that the path is made up of segments of ancient roads, differing from each other in layout and chronology—among which some were created *ex novo,* some had been in continuous use for centuries. Therefore, rather than the rediscovery of a unitary, ancient path, the *Antica Trasversale Sicula* should be considered as a contemporary cultural product and contextualized as a contribution to the broader European-wide phenomenon of requalification of cultural routes.

Unlike the *Antica Trasversale Sicula,* the path of the *Magna Via Francigena* seems to follow the tracks of a documented ancient route—the Roman *Via Aurelia* connecting Palermo to Agrigento. The proposed cultural route is based on the results of a research project focusing on medieval route networks; attempts to create a thematically homogeneous product starting from this material have resulted in a well-balanced selection of historical and archaeological data. Yet, it is interesting to observe that, despite the topographical persistence of the Roman road, local actors chose to emphasize the importance of the *Magna Via Francigena* only in the context of medieval Christian pilgrimages, neglecting the previous periods.

Among the numerous cultural routes attested in Sicily, both the *Magna Via Francigena* and the *Antica Trasversale Sicula* have strong narratives and show all the features listed by CIIC_ICOMOS as characterizing Cultural Routes, i.e., context, content, and cross-cultural significance.[87] The comprehensive set of actions promoted by the organizers with the help of numerous local actors (cultural authorities, associations, companies, etc.) is clearly aimed at fostering a new relationship between the local communities and their cultural heritage. It constitutes an interesting case study of bottom-up management of cultural routes hinging on the values of historical landscape preservation as well as community engagement.[88] The networks of *trazzere* seem to be a geographically diffuse sustainable asset of cultural heritage, an important territorial resource for which a *mise en développement/tourisme* of rural areas can be envisaged. Indeed, this landscape feature (i.e., the routes network) is the ex-

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86  Uggeri himself, in fact, as reported on the website Osservatorio Turistico, speaks of "a set of transversal routes" (Geoportale Sicilia 2017); see also Uggeri 2004, 19.
87  ICOMOS CIIC 2009.
88  Work paper for promotion of transnational culture 2016.

pression of a shared historical process which still shapes identity values and cultural heritage of small villages of Sicily just as in other European, Mediterranean, and Middle Eastern regions.[89] Due to the territorial diversity of the island, the creation of cultural routes could become the glue in a renewed territorial cohesion, confirming its role at the local level.[90] Seen in this way, these cultural routes may represent a starting point for settling disputes and recomposing fragmentations as part of a territorial system of sustainable local development and internationalization.[91] The historical routes of Sicily, particularly the system of Greek, Roman, and Medieval roads, are a valuable resource not only because of their cultural and spiritual value, but also as an economic resource when they are included in a strategy to maximize the profitability of a sustainable territorial design. Being sustainable and inclusive, they may become the basis for a diffused developmental model and be better integrated into processes of territorial inclusion.[92] Over the past 30 years, the growing numbers of scientific contributions, and the booming success of Europe's cultural itineraries (pilgrimages and Roman routes) provide evidence of the increased capacity-building potential of these new projects[93] for sustainable local development.[94] The creation of historical routes is a complex action, as it connects physical and intangible cultural heritage—hence the importance in Sicily of strengthening the link between knowledge (historical documentation and academic research) and scientific dissemination, and also of enhancing social cultural itineraries in relation to the major and secondary destinations in the European and Mediterranean network.

Finally, as recently highlighted by G. Volpe, it is necessary to stress the relevance of the bottom-up approach to the management of the cultural heritage in Italy.[95] Indeed, as the Sicilian case has clearly underlined, in order to make the cultural heritage a living entity and a shared opportunity for local communities, it is necessary to valorize the large number of small foundations, associations, companies, cooperatives, and individuals involved in the management of cultural heritage management. The numerous cultural routes planned in Sicily by bottom-up initiatives are signs of the strong relationship existing between local communities, historic roads, and cultural landscapes. Choosing the road as an icon of identity clearly indicates the shared will to create a common island identity which overcomes

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89 Dallari 2018, 54–56.

90 Dematteis and Rivolin 2004.

91 Becattini 1987; Dematteis 2003; Dallari 2007.

92 Several trails also developed along the most famous Roman monument of the UK, i.e., the Hadrian's Wall, in the Pennines (htpps://www.national.trail.co.uk/hadrian-wall-path) and in Wales and on the Welsh Borders (htpps://www.national.trail.co.uk/offa-dyke-path): for an analysis of the Hadrian's Wall path National Trail as an inclusive monument, see Hingley 2012, 301–25.

93 Azzari and Dallari 2019.

94 Swyngedouw 2004; Baldersheim and Rose 2010; Reed and Bruyneel 2010.

95 Volpe 2019, 107–30.

inequalities in centralized cultural heritage management and enhances the cultural and natural small scattered sites that characterize the inland.

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