

# ***THE ROOT OF SICILIAN CULTURE***

## ***CHRISTMAS IN SICILY***



A crib

Interview (Giuseppe age 85)

*In my town the custom of preparing the crib, dating back to the 16th century, was very common as well as the tradition of inviting the 'sunaturi uorbi' (i.e. blind musicians in Sicilian dialect), who performed novenas and lullabies during the 9 days preceding Christmas. In these 9 days, on the exterior facades of the houses people prepared a small altar with a central framework of the 'Holy family'. These sacred representation were decorated with the fruits of our land such as oranges, pumpkins, tangerines, lemons. Each altar was prepared by more than one family.*

There were many hidden messages and stories that often pass by to the visitors. On the small altar the icon comes to life: in front of the image of St. Joseph is put a glass of water; in front of Jesus a cruet of wine; in front of the Madonna a cup filled with water, in which is dissolved few flakes of 'heavenly stone' or blue vitriol. The result is 3 colors: white, red and blu respectively simbolising Purity, Passion and Virginity. In fact St. Joseph is the symbol of innocence and purity. The Jesus' blood was later paid for the redemption of Catholics sins. The water mixed with 'petra azure' in front of the 'blessed among women' is the immaculate character of the Virgin. In this way archaic meanings are still surviving.



Interview (Maria aged 78)

*The cities that primarily enriched Christmas altars with citrus fruits were the biggest producers: Lentini, Scordia, Ribera, Palermo, Monreale, Ramacca, Calatafimi, Licata and many others. Above this altar on a wall it was recreated a dome, a snowy sky: fennel branches and pieces of cotton. The cotton represented the snow. Walking along the streets you could admire these altars in the most beautiful corners of a square or set up on a wall or on a balcony.*



*In every house there was a crib, made by the whole family in a corner of the living room. The characters were made of earthenware and were handed down from one generation to another within the same family. Some cribs were full of little statues some others had only Maria, St. Joseph, the donkey and the ox. Jesus had to be put only at midnight.*



Interview (Rose aged 80)

*“When I was a child Christmas arrived when we heard the song of the ciaramiddari, players of wind instruments. They were poor shepherds coming from inner villages who came to Catania to earn some money. After they sang they expected to have some money from the families, sweets or food”*

The term ‘*Novena*’ means a Christmas carol that in ancient times, during the 9 days before Christmas Eve, was executed in front of the crib by the ‘*ciaramiddari*’, the players of wind instruments. The luthiers and bagpipers went around the town and were standing even before the ‘*Putie*’, accompanied by the music of the Christmas cantatas that until 1867 were carried out at night. They were surrounded by the children of the neighborhood, who gathered to hear those sweet lullabies taking advantage of the occasion to eat together, singing a song that originally was a hymn of praise to the Holy Child.

The musical traditions related to the celebration of Christmas remained in Sicily particularly vital. With songs, instrumental music and dramatic actions to return each year to celebrate the Nativity: from November 29th, when the *Novena* of the Immaculate began, to January 6th, the feast of the Epiphany.

Interview – (Grazia aged 70)

*From the 17<sup>th</sup> of December and for 9 days consecutively in each town they celebrated the Novenas. Every morning um called us at 5 a.m. and we, still sleepy, hade to take part to the morning mass that was celebrated at 6 o’ clock. Each day was sponsored by a category of town workers such as shepherds, builders, farmers, carpenters etc.*

In the past, when the night before Christmas people went to the church to attend the vigil, they brought food and sweets of any kind consuming them during the function. From the beginning of the Christmas period Sicilian tables were decorated with legumes, fresh vegetables and also vegetables preserved in oil, meats seasoned with Mediterranean herbs, free-range poultry, fish, including herring, wines, desserts and homemade liqueurs. For the Sicilian people it is fundamental to use high quality ingredients, the best on the market: Avola almonds, Bronte pistachios, tangerines and oranges.



## **CHRISTMAS CAROLERS**

### **Interview**

**( Sandy an American tourist aged 76)**

The Christmas season is a wonderful time to visit Italy and there are many festivities to enjoy throughout the country. Some of these traditions are more or less universal from region to region, but most regions also have their own special traditions that are unique and particular. Two years ago, my wife and I spent the holidays in her home region of Sicily, touring around the east side of the island during the week between Christmas and New Year's Day. For me, it was very meaningful to learn about the many traditions that she grew up with. And we even discovered a few that were unknown to her, too. For example, instead of Christmas carolers, in Sicily and throughout the south of Italy, there are men who play la zampogna, which is a type of bagpipe instrument. They go from door to door playing a tune, for which they usually receive a small tip for their efforts. When we were in the town of Modica, we saw some unusual Christmas ornaments fashioned from fichi di India (prickly pears), a favorite of the Sicilian diet. They were placed throughout the town, decorating the many trees that lined the main street of the historical center. Speaking of unusual uses of food, in the baroque village of Noto, we happened upon a pastry shop that had created a large presepe (manger scene) entirely out of butter.



!

## TRADITIONAL DISHES

Interview (Angelo aged 85)

*At Christmas my mum, my aunts and my sisters prepared a lot of traditional dishes. In r area that is the estern Sicily the Scacciata was the typical dinner on the Eve. It's like a stuffed pizza which is usually filled with cheese, anchovies, olives and onions. In the area of Palermo they make a similar dish which they call sfincione. The dough is softer and usually done in layers. It also contains cheese, anchovies, and onions, but can also include artichokes.*

Another Christmas Eve “must” in most Sicilian homes is pasta al forno- pasta baked in the oven. One of the most famous of these is called lasagna caciata, typical of Modica. In Sicily, desserts play a prominent role in the holiday menus. The most famous of these are buccellati, which are circular cakes filled with almonds, pistachios, and dried fruit. Some recipes also include grappa or Marsala wine. And they are large...very large. In fact, the tradition says that the bigger they are, the more luck will have who eats them.



## THE MIDNIGHT MASS

Interview (Pippo 69)

*When I was young I remember that a lot of people attended Midnight mass, which was often accompanied by a living nativity scene. Often, the youngest baby in the village is given the privilege of representing baby Jesus. One of the most famous places to watch this tradition is in the Sicilian town of Ispica, Ragusa. Every year, thousands of people met in this village to gaze at some forty scenes that are presented in the Parco Forza area of the Cava d'Ispica, which is an 8-mile valley that stretches between Ispica and Modica. This area—and its caves—have been inhabited since prehistoric times. The rocky cliffs and hidden catacombs make it the ideal spot to display these annual scenes.*

## CHRISTMAS TREE

Nativity scenes, lights, Xmas trees and many traditions make this period very special: it doesn't matter if you will stay in a big city such as Palermo or Catania, in a resort or in a small town, you will feel **Christmas** on your skin. **Christmas in Sicily** lasts more than a day, in fact several celebrations begin on December 8<sup>th</sup> (Feast of the Immaculate Conception) when people start decorating their houses and adorn the **Xmas tree**. Did you know that it became popular only after the II World War?



In fact, a much more common Sicilian tradition is the **Nativity scene** (in Italian it's called *Presepe*). They say that Saint Francis invented it! In any case, if you visit churches around Sicily, you can find them inside but probably you will be surprised to find a couple of Nativity scenes even under the sea or in other weird places.

## CHRISTMAS FOOD

Interview (Maria Luisa 60)



First rule about Christmas in Sicily on **December 24<sup>th</sup>** is to organize the *cenone* (a big dinner) with seafood on the table. On Christmas Eve we open the presents and we go to the Mass at midnight. On **December 25<sup>th</sup>**, all the family have lunch all together with relatives and we mainly cook meat.



Desserts are the centerpiece of any Christmas menu. Everybody knows **cassata** and **cannoli** and even if they are not specifically for Xmas, most of the times they are the first choice of many Sicilians!



The most famous sweets of this period are ***Buccellati***. They are biscuits filled with fig jam, almonds and dried fruits, sometimes the recipe includes also grappa or Marsala wine. According to the tradition, the bigger they are, the more luck will be donated to the people eating them.

### THE FEAST OF "I morti"

Ognissanti (All Saints) is celebrated on 1st November, and the 2nd of November, commonly called "i Morti" in Italian, is the day dedicated to the dear ones who passed away. People start visiting the cemeteries already some days before, so that on the two festive days fresh flowers, also left on the old forgotten tombs, not visited any more for decades, give to the Italian cemeteries an explosion of colors. In some regions it was tradition to leave one more seat at the table for the dead that they would return to visit. In Sicily there is the custom of preparing gifts and sweets for the children, who are told that gifts are brought by the deceased relatives: parents tell their children that if during the year they were good and recited their prayers for the souls of the dead, these ones would bring them gifts. In some areas there are sweets and groceries made specially for the Day of the Dead. This food, even if they belong to the Christian tradition, often have a previous pagan origin. Anthropomorphic cakes and bread for ritual purposes existed already at the time of the Romans. In Sicily there is the "mani" (=hand), a bread shaped like a single arm in a ring that joins two hands, and the "pane dei morti" (=bread of the dead), an anthropomorphic loaf which was originally supposed to be an offer food to the souls of dead relatives. The traditional sweets of the Feast of the Dead in Sicily were i pupi, figurines made of a mixture of water and sugar, pasta martorana, marzipan made into the shape and colors of a variety of fruits and nuts, and the cookies known as crozza ri morti, bones of the dead, a sugar biscuit with a white topping



## FRUTTA MARTORANA

The Martorana fruit is a typical Sicilian sweet, similar to marzipan but sweeter and tastier, made with the ground almonds and sugar; its preparation and packaging creates perfect imitations of fruits and sometimes vegetables or fish. The product is included in the list of traditional Italian food products of Sicily. It was traditionally prepared in the Celebrations of the Dead, and owes its name to the Church of Santa Maria dell' Ammiraglio or della Martorana, built in 1143 by George of Antioch, an admiral of Norman King Roger II in the vicinity of the nearby Benedictine monastery founded by the noblewoman Eloisa Martorana in 1194, from which the fruit took its name; it used to be prepared also in the monastery of Santa Caterina in the historic center of Palermo, where the nuns still prepared and sold it until the middle of the 20th century.

According to a well-known tradition, the Martorana fruit was born because the nuns of the convent of Martorana, to replace the fruits harvested from the garden on the trees, created new ones with almonds and sugar, to decorate the convent for the visit of a the pope or another important person.

November 2nd is the day in which Italians remember all who are deceased. However, over the years, the tradition has not been the same in Sicily as in the rest of Italy. In Italy, November 2nd is La Commemorazione dei Defunti, Commemoration of the Deceased. In Sicily November 2nd is the Feast of the Dead, A Festa ri Morti.

The *Festa dei Morti* has pagan origins celebrating the end of the summer and the beginning of fall and winter. Versions of this feast are seen in cultures and civilizations around the world. For the ancient Druids for example, on their holiday of Samhain, meaning "summer's end," a precursor to All Saints Day, the sacred flame was extinguished and a new flame lit to mark the start of a new year. Similar to the beliefs of Sicilians, the Druids believed that the souls of the departed would return at this time to visit the living. In some Sicilian traditions, families set an extra place at the table for their departed loved ones to welcome them home.

### Interview (Rosanna aged 87)

For the “Festa dei Morti” my grandmother prepared a basket of sweets for the children, filled with "frutta di martorana," hand painted sweets shaped like fruit Also in the basket were sugar dolls, figurines called "pupi di zucchero" made of sugar and painted to resemble ceramic sculptures. Very

white, almond based cookies called "ossa dei morti," or "bones of the dead," were included, along with dried figs, almonds, walnuts and tangerines. My grandmother preferred that the children did not eat them right away, so they would be placed high on a dining room credenza for all to admire. Later on my mother told me that she and her brothers would find their way to the treats and nibble the hidden back part of their sugar dolls so as not to attract attention --until their mother discovered them or the dolls collapsed!

## LEGENDS

### Aci and Galatea

A great love united Aci, a humble shepherd, and Galatea, a beautiful sea nymph. The love between the two young men turned on the jealousy of the monstrous Cyclops Polyphemus, who after the rejection of Galatea, threw a giant boulder that crushed the young Aci. At the sight of the body of her beloved, Galatea fell on him crying all the tears in his body. The cry of the nymph aroused the compassion of the gods, who transformed Aci into a beautiful river that descends from Etna and flows into the beach where the two lovers lived.





## **Polifemo**

Polyphemus (from the ancient Greek Polyphemos, which means 'talkative, who speaks a lot') is the name of a character from the Greek myth. Polyphemus was a cyclops, monstrous and gigantic creature with only one eye. He was the son of Toosa, a sea nymph, and of Poseidon, the king of sea. The figure of Polyphemus appears in various myths, but above all in the Odessa. In fact, Homer tells that Ulysses, while trying to return to Ithaca from Troy, and having lost the way back, landed in the land of the Cyclops (which would be the current Sicily). Ulysses was an extremely curious man and so decided to visit the cave of Polyphemus, considered the most cruel of all the Cyclops. Ulysses and his companions, the Achaeans, began to devour the large amount of food they found inside the cave, until the Cyclops returned to his home. Finding the men sitting at his banquet, angry for the sacking, he devoured two. All the other comrades, including Ulysses, were locked up in a large cave closed with a huge boulder, impossible to move for men. Thus Ulysses, putting his ingenuity and cunning to the test, devised a plan to escape.

First of all he decided to offer the giant a sweet but also very strong wine. Polyphemus liked it and drank a lot, so much so that he fell asleep. But first he asked the name of Ulysses, and he cunningly told him to call himself "nobody". After Polyphemus fell asleep, Ulysses and his companions burned the tip of a large olive tree trunk, and with it blinded the only eye of the Cyclops. Polyphemus awoke screaming and calling his companions, but when they asked him who had done this, he replied, 'No one was'. His companions will believe him drunk and let him lose. The next morning, while Polyphemus drove the flock out of the cave, Ulysses put in place the third part of the plan: he clung his men under the fleece of the sheep, so they could go out with the flock from the cave and escaped to the ship. Polyphemus, furious and red with anger, detached three large boulders from the ground and threw them towards the sea, in an in vain attempt to destroy the Greek ships. Then they escaped to the ship, and Polyphemus, aware of the flight, began to throw stones at random towards the sea. Here Ulysses made a big mistake: in fact, to mock the Cyclops, he said his real name. So Polyphemus begged his father, Poseidon, not to return home. These three huge boulders, the stacks, have remained still and unchanged, still admirable today in the waters that bathe Aci Trezza

## **Legends of Catania**

In Piazza Università there are four lamp at the four corners of the square that tell 4 legends of Catania history

### **The Legend of Uzeta.**

Once upon a time there was a boy. He was neither rich nor well-connected, but he was very skilled at fighting, so King Federico II (who you'll notice pops up a lot in these stories) made him a knight, and asked him to fight against the Saracen giants – the Ursini. If I were cynical I might say that he was given the task because he was more expendable than one of the knights from a well-respected family, but I'm not, so I won't. Cynicism aside, however, the low-born boy confounded all expectations and not just fought, but won. A Sicilian David and Goliath story, if you will. The King was mighty pleased, of course, and in some versions Uzeta even wins the hand of the King's daughter

### **The Legend of the Pii Fratres**

The two 'pious children' of the title were called Anfinomo and Anapia and they lived with their parents here in Catania, a city which has been rebuilt, according to popular legend, seven times after destruction by either earthquake or one of Etna's volcanic eruptions. Unfortunately for Anfinomo and Anapia, their life in Catania coincided with one of the eruptions. Fortunately Etna is gentle and her lava is slow-moving, so as a general rule she causes more damage to property than loss of life. All around the children their neighborhoods were therefore hard at work removing their possessions from their houses. However, Anfinomo and Anapia were more concerned about their elderly parents, who were even more slow moving than the lava. Faced with a choice of possessions or parents, the children chose to save their parents by carrying them on their backs.

Carrying someone in this way is no easy task. Despite the children's best efforts, they found it hard to keep ahead of the lava. As they struggled on, it inched ever closer, putting all four of them in mortal peril. Still Anfinomo and Anapia refused to leave their parents behind.

It looked as though all would be lost. However, just as they were about to be consumed by the lava, the gods took pity and split the flow in two around them, saving both the children and their parents. The story goes that this was the basis for Virgil's legend of Aeneas and the fires of Troy. Whatever the truth of this claim, it's a strong allegory for filial piety, which is important to this day in Sicily.

## **Gammazita**

Gammazita was – as all girls of legend seem to be – a young, virtuous woman of humble stock. She lived in Catania in the days when Sicily was occupied by the French and was engaged to be married to a Catanese boy. One day, as she went to the well to draw water, a French soldier sidled up to her and made a lewd proposition. Gammazita, horrified by the thought, tried to walk away, but found her exit blocked by soldier. Her only escape was to dive into the well– so that’s exactly what she did.

Gammazita’s well exists to this day in Catania, 12 metres below ground level, near Castello Ursino. The legend goes that her blood still stains the walls; in truth, it’s iron deposits, but that’s not half such a good story. Like Sant’Agata, the patron saint of Catania, and Santa Lucia, the patron saint of Siracusa, Gammazita was a girl who was forced to choose between death or rape.

## **Colapesce**

Colapesce was the son of a fisherman. His real name was Nicola, and in the most well-known version of the story, came from Messina. He was famous for being able to swim and dive, so he became known as Nick the Fish: ‘Cola (short for Nicola) plus Pesce (fish). Nick the Fish. Anyway, he used to dive from his father’s fishing boat and would come back with fantastic tales of the things he’d seen underwater including, on some occasions, treasure. King Federico II (there he is again) heard of Colapesce’s magnificent diving abilities and, curious, wanted to test out the boy’s prowess. He therefore boarded a boat, along with all of his Court, and sailed out to sea, where he dropped a cup overboard. Colapesce promptly dived into the water and retrieved it. Impressed, King Federico sailed out to deeper water and this time threw his crown overboard. Again, Colapesce dived into the sea and brought back the treasure. For the final test, the King sailed out yet further and threw a ring overboard. Again, Colapesce dived after it – but this time he didn’t return. Colapesce stayed underneath the island rather than coming back to the surface, in order to hold it up and stop Sicily from sinking into the sea.

## **Eliodorus the magician and the origin of the Liotru**

One of the most ancient legends of Catania begins with the descendant of a noble Sicilian family. He dedicated his life to the Catholic religion and he wished to become bishop of the town. But Leo II the Wonderworker was appointed bishop. And, after this, Heliodorus devoted himself to magic. After the humiliation, according to the legend, Heliodorus met a Jewish magician who gave him an ancient tome. Heliodorus read it at night, on the top of an ancient column, during a ritual to summon the devil. The devil appeared and asked him what he wanted. Heliodorus replied that his greatest wish was power. The devil's proposal was that Heliodorus would have repudiated the Christian Faith if the devil had given the power he wished for. So it was. Heliodorus used his powers against the people of Catania. The stories of his jokes are several. In one of the most famous, Heliodorus, during a horse race, turned the winner horse into a demon that flew away, and the nephew of the bishop, who had bet on that horse, couldn't collect his winnings. The most famous episode concerns *u Liotru*, the elephant symbol of Catania that still today is in the Cathedral Square. It is said that Heliodorus forged it from using the lava of Etna, and he rode *u Liotru* and cast spells on the people of Catania. One day, while St. Leo, Bishop of Catania, celebrated the Divine Office in the ancient church of Santa Maria di Betlemme, Heliodorus came into the church with his disciples swearing and cursing against the Catholic religion and the bishop. St. Leo continued with Divine Office and, after, challenged Heliodorus to walk through the fire. If he were not burned he would have been the bearer of the truth. St. Leo walked safely through the fire. Instead, Heliodorus was burned by flames and died.





## The 100 horses Chestnut Tree

The legend tells how the Neapolitan queen Giovanna I d'Angiò (who ruled between 1343 and 1381), was, with a hundred knights and ladies, on the Etna woods during a hunting trip; it was not rare to find at that time wild boar, deer and fallow that populated the park. The noble hunters, however, were surprised by a large storm and as they could not return found an emergency shelter inside the hollow trunk of the chestnut in Sant'Alfio, which managed to accommodate the entire armament until the storm passed. Once proved that the Neapolitan queen was never in Sicily, the legend was watering everywhere, but the popular story tried not to throw this story into oblivion and attributed the story of the chestnut to Queen Joan of Aragon or to the empress Isabella of England (third wife of Federico II)



# FOLK STORIES

## Betta Pilusa

It is said that in a beautiful Sicilian town, near a forest, lived a king with the queen and their son Prince Riuzzu full of dreams and fantasies.

In another green and laughing kingdom, but much farther away, she lived instead a beautiful little princess who was driving her parents' gifts crazy because she did not decide to choose the prince to marry.

One day Princess Spera di Suli, named for her golden hair, made a decision: since she could not find a husband she liked in her kingdom, because it seemed that everyone was looking for her because she was rich and beautiful, would leave in disguise to find it elsewhere.

To be unrecognizable, the princess wore poor and worn clothes and wrapped herself in a big donkey skin that covered her all, she named herself Betta Pilusa. She mounted on an old wagon and set off in search of the great love.

She walked and walked until she arrived in the realm of the young prince.... noticed the handsome young man ... and immediately fell in love with him.

What to do? In the meantime, it was necessary to stop in that city.

Luck helped her, in fact in those days the baker of the royal palace had fallen ill and they looked for another. Spera di Suli, indeed Betta Pilusa, knew how to cook well and made an excellent pizza, so she had no difficulty to obtain the job. As a baker of the king she had the opportunity to live in the palace, in a small house adjacent to the local bakery and remained there for a while.

During the day she worked, in the evening she closed herself in the house without giving any confidence to anyone and met with her fairy godmother who cuddled her and gave her good advice.

One evening Prince Riuzzu did later than usual with his friends, and, passing in front of the little house of Betta Pilusa, he had the impression of hearing a soft song and catching glimpses of luminous flames. He looked out of the keyhole and gasped: in the old house a beautiful girl danced, while a fairy said to her: "Hope of Suli, Spera of Suli, you will be queen if God will ..."

Prince did not waste time and knocked on the door. Immediately the door opened, allowing Betta Pilusa to glimpse in his poor, dark room.

"What happens? What do you wish, Majesty? .....

The prince felt very bad ... He spent his days wondering what happened to the girl who had seen from the keyhole ...

He did not go out any more, he did not eat any more ... and he got sick ...

Doctors were called to treat him could not cure him and his parents were desperate ...

Until one day a wise old man said that the prince to get well had to eat a cake prepared by the hands of a queen ... At this point the queen went into crisis: she had never cooked, how could she prepare a focaccia? He tried to make one, but it was too raw and the little prince gave it to his dog, the second one was scorched, the third too salty, the fourth insipid ... In short all the pizzas ended inevitably in the belly of the dog.

The queen was desperate and the prince became increasingly sad, pale and thin.

At one point the queen's maid had an idea: why not have the focaccia prepared by Betta Pilusa, which was very good? The little prince would never have understood that it had not been made by the queen, he would have eaten it and it would have healed.

The two women decided to try: the queen wanted to meet Betta Pilusa, explained the problem to her and waited anxiously ..

Spera di Suli prepared the most delicious focaccia she had ever made, but she did not notice that her little ring had ended up in the middle of the flour.

The same evening the queen offered the focaccia to the prince, who smelled it, exclaimed satisfied: "This yes, which is good ... and is made by the hands of the queen ... and began to eat it tastefully among the exultation of all.

Suddenly, however, he found something hard in his mouth, he realized that it was a little ring and hid it under the pillow without talking to anyone. That little ring, he thought, would make him find the girl of his dreams. Day after day he resumed his strength and recovered

At this point he decided to discover the mystery and commissioned a soldier to have the ring tested for all the girls in the kingdom, but it was too small, nobody entered and the prince was so disappointed that he could get sick again ... then he remembered Betta Pilusa and asked the soldier if she too had tried the ring. The soldier answered no. Then the little baker, was summoned to court and, at the request of the soldier, came out of the coat of hair a delicious white hand, in whose ring the ring came to perfection among everyone's amazement ... at that moment the fairy godmother made fall from the shoulders of Spera di Suli, the coat of hair, showing the girl in all its splendor ... "It's her! She is the girl I saw that night !!! "The prince shouted ...

They got married ... and lived happily ever after



## The “Marrabbecca” or the lady of the Cisterns

The Marrabbecca was a popular myth, a creature that infested the cisterns, a sort of female Babau invented who knows when by Sicilian mothers to keep their children away from those sheet metal traps placed on almost every roof and terrace of the island. How many children were drowned dead climbing in there?

*“when I was a child and we went to the countryside with my family, in a place where there was a cistern, the first thing that my mum recommended me was not to go near the cistern because the Marrabbecca could suddenly come out and put me down into the cistern with her. I have always imagined she was an old woman, a sort of witch and I was really frightened of her”* - Maria 72 years old.





## **GIUFA'**

Giufà is a character of the Sicilian oral popular tradition which existed in various parts of Sicily. He hasn't any mischief, he is gullible, easy prey for rascals and scammers of all kinds. During his life he will be robbed in a fraudulent and extremely easy way, of a pot, a pig, a roast chicken, a donkey, a hen, a turkey. Giufa is a child, very ignorant, who expresses himself by sentences and knows only a certain oral tradition imparted to him by his mother. In his adventures he often gets into trouble, but he almost always manages to get out of it unharmed, often involuntarily. Giufa lives a day, in a candid and carefree, careless of an outside world that seems always on the verge of collapsing on him. Character created in a comic, caricature of all Sicilian children, Giufa makes you smile, with his incredible stories of misfortune, nonsense and wisdom, but also has the great merit of making known the dominant culture in Sicily in the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

### **Giufà, his wife and the donkey**

When his wife died, Giufa was not able to shed a single tear, but when, after a few days, the donkey died, he did nothing but cry. As soon as a friend asked him how he was, he immediately began to cry for the loss of the donkey and to those who pointed out to him this strange behavior, Giufa answered: - I do not accept your reproaches and try to understand my pain !! When my wife died all my friends came to comfort me. "Do not worry, over time, you'll see a wife, there are many women," you told me. "My sister could be the right wife for you!" it was proposed to me. And still others offered me their daughter without having to pay anything! But when my donkey died, none of you said, "Do not worry, I'll give you another donkey in his place!"

### **Giufà and the two brigands**

One day two brigands, armed to the teeth, barred Giufà's way and, brandishing a long knife, threatened him:- Or the bag or life! To Giufa, scared to death, their legs trembled. He sat down and asked for a drink. But the two brigands threatened him with more force and one of them said in a tremendous voice: - Take out the money, what water we do not give you! Giufa tried to play with cunning. He calmed himself and said:- You're really lucky. I have a lot of money with me. But, I only want to give it to one of you. So, get along and tell me who I have to give the money to. A brigand said:- Money touches me! I saw you first. The other bandit specified: - But, I was the one to say that the right man to

steal could On this statement the two brigands began to fight, each presenting their own point of view. The two brigands began to argue with each other and shout ever louder. Giufa took the opportunity and said: Since you do not agree, I will give money to the one that is stronger between you two! A brigand threatened saying: - If I want I can spread my partner on the floor with just one punch! The other, on the verge of life, raised his voice and said: I could break his head with just one punch, because I'm the strongest. be you From the words, the two brigands passed to the facts and gave them a good reason. In the end, the two brigands overhung tired and bloodied deaths on the ground. Giufa took advantage of the situation and, while taking care of the wounds, ran away like hell. He ran so far that they could not find him anymore.



### **Giufà and the eggs**

Leaving for a long business trip, Giufa went to a farmer to buy hard-boiled eggs to eat during the journey. But, not having enough money, he borrowed the eggs, promising to pay them on their return. Giufa, stayed away from the country for a few years, as he had found a job. When he had enough silver coins, he decided to return home, where he was welcomed by everyone. The farmer who had sold his hard-boiled eggs, also knew that Giufa had made some money, so he came to Giufa's house to collect the credit and asked for 500 dinars. Giufa, amazed by the exaggerated request, refused to pay and, given

the insistence of the farmer, decided to turn to a judge. Having set the day for the hearing, the peasant presented himself to the court punctually, but Giufa did not arrive. When everyone was almost impatient with waiting, Giufa arrived in court. The judge began the hearing and first wanted to hear the farmer, who said:- I asked five hundred dinars, because, he didn't pay me the eggs and went away for a lot of time. From those eggs, Mr. judge I could get 12 chicks which once grew would have created other chicks, which in turn would have created so many roosters and hens to make me a huge breeding. The judge seemed convinced by the peasant's reasons, but he correctly wanted to hear Giufa's reasons and said: - Giufa, explain why you arrived so late and then let me hear your reasons! Giufa answered: - I apologize for my late arrival Mr. judge, but at home I had some boiled beans left and then, I decided to plant them in the garden so as to have new plants for the harvest next year. The judge, already fed up with waiting, became very angry and told Giufa in a loud voice: - You're a stupid presumptuous! How do you think that a plant can be born from cooked beans? Never heard such a thing! Giufa, then answered:- You're right, Mr. Judge. But, why don't you ask the farmer how chicks can be born from boiled eggs? Does this not seem incredible to you? Convinced by the reasons explained with wit, the judge won Giufa, who paid only the cost of 12 hard-boiled eggs.



### **Giufà and the shopkeeper**

Giufa was hungry but had no money, passed a shop, where they were roasting some meat. The smell caused him hunger even more, but not having enough money to buy meat, he went to the baker and bought a piece of bread. Then he went back to the shop and sat down nearby so that he could accompany the bread that ate the smell of the meat. When he finished eating bread, the owner of the shop approached him and said: - Since you enjoyed the smell of my roast with pleasure, now you have to pay for it! Giufa, having no more money to pay, was forced by the judge. The owner of the shop told

the judge: - As a man eating his bread, he tasted the smell of my roasted meat. He has to pay me for it, but he refuses to do it. Giufa struck by the singular request, asked the shopkeeper: - How much money do you want for the smell of your meat? The shopkeeper specified: - You have to give me five dollars! Five deniers for the smell of my flesh! At this request, Giufa took five deniers from his pocket and dropped them on his table, so that they could clink. Then, he asked the shopkeeper: - Did you hear the sound of the five deniers? The shopkeeper replied: - Definitely! It was a pleasant tinkle! But, what do you want me to understand? Giufa answered: - As I fed on the scent of your flesh, you can be considered paid with the sound of my coins. And now you can go with it.

.

### **Giufa and the three wise men**

When they reached the village of Giufà, three monks, in search of wise men, inquired with the villagers if there was anyone who was reputed to be so. Giufà was indicated to them and they went to visit him. A monk asked him right away: - Where is the center of the earth? Giufa answered without hesitation: - Just where my donkey supports the foot. If you want, try measuring the earth to find out if that is the center! The monks surprised by the answer pressed on with a new question: - How many stars are in the firmament? Giufa calmly said: - They are a lot! As much as the hairs of my donkey! Try counting the hairs and the stars and you'll see if I'm not right! - But who has ever counted the hairs of a donkey? - said a monk "And who ever counted the stars in the sky," said Giufa. To put Giufa in trouble, a monk asked him. - Tell me, how many are the hairs of my beard? Giufa answered slyly: - You have as many hairs as there are on the tail of my donkey. If you try to tear off the beard and tail hairs, you will see that they will be two equal piles! The three monks were satisfied with Giufà's incontestable answers and went away convinced they had found a wise man.

### **Giufà and the key of the safe**

Following a theft to the Municipality, Giufa, who had the reputation of being honest and trustworthy, was commissioned by the mayor to keep the key to the safe. Giufa took office, felt very empowered and took with him, wherever he went, the key and never left it. One day, while he was home in the dark, Giufa could no longer find the key. Then he started looking for her, but being pitch dark, he went out looking for her outside because there was a bit of light. The friends who saw him so busy, asked



him: - Giufa, roughly, where did you lose the key? - At home!! - answered Giufa. - So why are you looking for her on the street? - Because in the house there is no light, but not here! The day after Giufa found the key at home and said to his wife: - If I had lost the key and if the box had been stolen again, I would have been the only one responsible! I have to find a way to protect the safe and the key! And he began to think until he found the solution. When the mayor met Giufa, asked him if he had found a safe place for the key. Giufa, triumphant, said: - It's a very safe place! So sure that from now on the safe can no longer be opened! - What do you mean, Giufa? - I put the key in the safe and then I closed it definitively. Nobody can open it anymore!

### **Eat my dresses**

Giufa, half an idiot as he was, no one offered him a courtesy, as if to say to invite him or give him something. Giufa once went to a farm, to have something. When the owners saw him dirt and mischievous sent him away. His mother understood the thing, and made him a nice shirt, a pair of breeches and a velvet waistcoat. Giufa, smartly dressed, returned to the same farm and there, you should have seen what great ceremonies! .they invited him to dinner with them and at the table everyone continued with the compliments. Giufa, while eating, with one hand put the food in his mouth and with the other hand he put the food into the pockets, in the cap, under the shirt. To everything he kept, he said: "Eat, my little dresses, that you guys have been invited, not me."