

## ***SOME VALLEDOLMO HIGHLIGHTS***

[IMAGE]



In a pleasant valley of the Palermitan hinterland, along the old Catanese highway, before reaching the heart of Sicily, Valledolmo wedges itself in some mild hilly high grounds and tiny plots of land, made fruitful and



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well-cultivated by the presence of water. Some Sicilian barons spent their life developing the land and making colonial improvements. The barons didn't care about their privileges or their external appearances. These endeavors resulted in beneficial effects for this territory.

This valley, which under the Normans, the Swabians and the Angioins, belonged to the powerful SCLAFANI, PERALTA, MONCADA AND DE LUNA families, was called "DELL'ULMO" because of the existence of a gigantic elm tree that grew in a nearby farm.

In 1636, ANTONIO CICALA (a nobleman from GENOA) began his work developing a village around the farm. When he took possession of THE VALLE DELL'ULMO BARONY, Antonio took good care not to ask about the established and burdensome "Licentia populandi" of the Spanish crown, which was given to his grandson some years later.

It was 17 August 1650 when Count GIUSEPPE CUTELLI CICALA finally began to continue the work of his grandfather in developing the valley of the Ulmo, known as "CASTELNORMANNO", as the SICILIAN VICEROY decreed the new center to be called.

By the end of the Bourbon domination (in 1860), the name CASTELNORMANNO was followed by "SEU VALLIS ULMIS" or VALLE DELL'OLMO, today VALLEDOLMO, is the official name.

You can get to **VALLEDOLMO** which runs through a meandering wooded path which goes from the end of the wide valley, that spreads like a fan out of the CAMMARATA mountain, to the PIZZO SAMPIERI, for over 1000 METERS (ABOUT 1/2 MILE).

VALLEDOLMO is located at an altitude of 700 meters (2,300 FEET) on the COZZO CAMPANARO western mountain slopes.



**THE URBAN STRUCTURE** is organised according to a regular system that traces very extended rectangular blocks. It follows the simple town-planning scheme outlined by Baron CICALA, improved by his grandson GIUSEPPE and completed by Baron LUCCHESI-PALLI a century later. It is considered one of the best of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Sicily. The plan consisted of four streets, which today are called VIA ROMA, VITTORIO EMANUELE II, FRANCESCO CRISPI, and PRINCIPE UMBERTO.

The old suburb, an area in a very central position, represents the most significant and typical urban component in VALLEDOLMO. Here is found the most important civil and religious structures.

Today almost nothing is left from the original **BARONIAL BUILDING**, after the restoration, according to its owner's will (Cav. DOMENICO CASTELLANA), in 1860. Baron CICALA had put up the building, developed the farm and then later his grandson GIUSEPPE CUTELLI enlarged it. It was possible to reach it through a wide entrance and some rooms surrounded the courtyard with arches.

A part of THE CUTELLI BUILDING (his successors had finally moved to PALERMO) was given to the **COLLEGIO DI MARIA (MARY'S COLLEGE)**, founded by the archpriest MONSIGNOR GIUSEPPE RANDAZZO, who was also founder of the CONFRATERNITY "DEL ROSARIO." The collegial nuns began an important apostolate and educational activity for the girls of the common people, after their settlement.

Along the South of the farm, Baron Cicala had a little church built in 1645. The Baron's grandson enlarged the little church and dedicated it to the "MADONNA DEL BUON PENSIERO."

Named after ANIME SANTE, the church was remodeled and a large outside stairway was removed to construct a street.

The church tower has a bronze bell that Don Antonio Cicala had made for use in the chapel of the new-born village in 1645.

The church "**DELLE ANIME SANTE**"(OF THE SAINTS SOULS) is without aisles but has two chapels one on each side. The high altar was dedicated to the Blessed "Virgin del Rosario," whose society provides for the religious devotions.

Originally there was a venerated statuette to "Our Lady of Good Thought." Today the nuns take care of the statuette in the "Mary's College." The church has two large artistic burial mausoleums, which are opposite of each other. The right mausoleum, made of bronze, was willed by Don Giuseppe Cutelli and his first wife, the Countess Anna Sammaniati who died in 1655. Don Cutelli died 18 years later, but he was not buried in the same church, despite his will. On the left side of the church, don Cutelli's son, Antonio, is buried in the marble mausoleum. He was killed in 1711.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century chapel of the "Most Holy Rosario" society is in the old farm. The frescoes that embellish the chapel represent "The Mysteries of Rosario," and some moments in the life of Saint Domenico of Guzman. Two 18<sup>th</sup> Century statues are preserved here, representing Rosario's Blessed Virgin and Saint Domenico.

The Countess Cristina Cutelli Joppolo had a new and larger church built, when the "Church of the Saint

Souls" became too small to dispense the devotion of the church.

The church was finished in 1755, and it became the Mother Church. It was elevated to the parish church two years later in 1757.

This church has been the center of the Saint Anthony of Padua religious devotions, as the patron of Valledolmo since 1775. The church is dedicated to the Virgin Immaculate Conception. This is the largest Holy Sacrament Society. It has existed since 1733, as the historical document certifies.

The church has a long hexagonal staircase planned by the architect Domenico Marvuglia. He reduced the engineer Giuseppe Caldara's original ambitious project .

The internal church space is without aisles, has a Romanesque-Baroque style, and even though it has been restored during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the church still has valuable plasters of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Above the high altar, which was restored in 1869, one can find a contemporary painting of the Virgin, made by the artist Sarullo from Ciminna. The painting took the place of a 16<sup>th</sup> century statue of the Virgin, made in a polychromatic wood, which may be viewed in a painting after the restorations.

The wooden statue of Saint Anthony of Padua, engraved by an unknown artist in 1775, is kept in the niche of the high altar. Two miracles of the Saint had been painted in two pictures by the sides of the presbytery, by Corrado Attanasio, in 1912.

The Crucifixion is the object of fervent devotion as Valledolmo people pray for help to Christ on the Cross during difficult moments of their lives.

Today, as in the past, people here accompany the statues during the procession. It remains "in penance," until the requested miracle occurs.

Two types of stone work are comparable to the 18<sup>th</sup> century original construction of the Church: a stairway, that leads to the bell tower, and an artistic holy-water font, is placed at an angle to the Sacristy.

There are valuable works of art in the Sacristy (restored in 1997 by Prof. Francesco Garozzo) which represent some Valledolmo Parish contributions to the creativity of the local artistic-cultural heritage.

The oldest is an 18<sup>th</sup> century oil painting which represents San Pietro, by an unknown artist.

Our Lady of Sorrows painting, Madonna della Mercede's image and a Saint Rosalia oil painting on canvas date back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

A small golden wooden shrine, refined and carved for

conservation of the Eucharist, by an unknown artist, and a small wooden throne for the exhibition of the Holy Sacrament, both date back to the same period. The latter was created by an unknown artist who assembled three pieces (base, halo rays, and crown).

To satisfy a growing community's demands, a new religious place began to be built in 1884. Caldara's project for the "Matrice of the Virgin" was resumed to construct a new religious edifice. It became the new Mother Church and was dedicated to the Graces' Most Holy Virgin. But after the formulation of the Virgin's dogma, in 1854, as homage to this Marian title, Holy Virgin of the Purity, became the Church title.

The Church was completed a few years later and today it is the "Confraternity of Purity" and "The Saint Rita of Cascia Women's Society Center".

The economic development of Valledolmo has been influenced by the abundance of water. During the first ten-year period precious water was drawn from wells that were dug at an angle on the ground floor of the houses. It was during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that the Lucchesi-Palli family wanted an enormous (for that time) water reservoir to be built. It was called the "**Stagnone**" and received the waters from sources near the village.

Still today the structure is artistically very valuable, and is well preserved.



The **OLD "BEVAIO,"** that has an original hexagon

shape, was built, thanks to the Lucchesi - Palli family. The oldest **Bevaio** is the so-called "**ACQUA DELLA SIGNORA**," whose name refers to the Countess Cristina Cutelli, who imposed its construction. Other **watering troughs** were constructed far from populated areas, for servicing some rural functions: they are in the Cifiliana and Mandranuova districts .

People from Valledolmo are tireless workers who have taken advantage of the water availability and the fertility of the land in a tenacious and determined way. They have worked hard for centuries, despite weather adversities, famines and epidemics, sacrificing themselves for the development of the village. Today the economy of Valledolmo is essentially based on agriculture and stock breeding .

Valledolmo is one of the richest Sicilian centers for **WHEAT** production. People from Valledolmo are particularly expert in this cultivation. They produce a large quantity of wheat in the surrounding areas. This wheat is used for making "pasta" and selected seed production. Valledolmo produces, in fact, the basic seed used by the farmers for reproduction .

Here the fertile land produces a large quantity of red and juicy **TOMATOES**, a first-rate product called "**Siccagno**". A Siccagno feast is organized every year in September.

The savoury **GRAPES** that are suitable for winemaking is another esteemed fruit of this land. Its cultivation dates back to the village foundation. Immediately after

the Second World War the vineyards were enlarged, including the districts around Valledolmo. The famous village vineyards are Castellucci, Miano and Regaleali, that today are parts of the D.O.C. Sclafani County.

Some wine producers of this area founded in 1975 the **COOPERATIVE STORE CASTELLUCCI MIANO**, for the sale of wine.

Today that cooperative store is an important element of the wine activity in Valledolmo. The climatic characteristics of the area of these vineyards allow maturation of golden and wholesome bunches. The final product is sold by measure, "in a bag in a box," and in bottles.

"Castelnormanno" wine grows in the Sclafani County vineyards (as the red "nero d'Avola" and the white "insolia"). It has a dry and harmonious flavour and it is a real jewel for the local wine production.

Only the best grapes are used to produce famous "Valledolmo" wine: the whites (fresh, sparkling, lightly acidulous, from uniquely aromatic plantings); the reds (rich in colour and odorous); and the rosé (it is served very cold, and good for many couplings).

**A "bottle in a box" of 5 and 10 litres is harmonious full-bodied wine (long lasting conservation, good for transport and pouring).**

The entrepreneurial management of the **Castellucci**

**Miano oenological establishment**, the modern tendency to consume wine (it is not merely consumed at meals anymore), the growing interest for the gastronomy and typical products contribute to qualify Valledolmo wine, allowing it to have a deserved place, and not only on Sicilian tables.



**Since Baron Cicala promoted STOCK-FARMING upon his arrival in this area in 1636, many workers have been traditionally connected to this activity.**

**Milk and cheese are typical products of this area from mountain pastures. Cattle-breeding is of high quality thanks to the nature of the forage and to animal husbandry.**

**SAN GIOVANNI AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE, is tied to the territory and its traditions, specializing in the production of sheep milk, cheese and "ricotta," thanks to the experience of Orazio Conti and sons. These products still have the old aromas and flavours and are sold in high quality delicatessen shops.**

More than 15 partners produce the milk that comes from healthy stock -farming. It is chosen after careful selections and competent health-officers periodically examine them. The guaranty certificate assures the quality of the products and the respect of the laws in force.

San Giovanni Agricultural Cooperative is the point of reference for the producers but it has also acquired a

very important role in the field of research. It has been chosen as The Pilot Firm by the Sicilian Agricultural Development Organization which follows its activities.

While agriculture and stock-farming dominate the landscape, giving it soft and varied colors, one may catch the beauty of the territory by looking into the distance from one of the many panoramic places surrounding Valledolmo.

The wonderful view of the Madonie peaks, the valleys, the green mountains and the grey houses of little villages in the mountains are in answer to rustic, charming sceneries that hide some pleasant and peaceful places where time seems to have stood still .



An old rural **LITTLE CHURCH** is situated in a solitary position in Mandranuova County. It witnesses the secular agrarian vocation in this zone.

Further, in Suvari County, a rocky ridge covered with spontaneous thick vegetation hides unexpected nooks. The abundance of **CORK - OAKS** explains the name of the County.

Some **CAVES** open up the rock. These rocky hollows were once upon a time used as dwellings. Then they became a refuge for animals. Some of them are still used today for agricultural activity and they are a safe place for those small animals that have always used them as an ideal habitat for life and reproduction.

The area around Valledolmo is rich in historical,

environmental landscape property and natural resort farms which offer all the pleasures of the outdoors.

Visitors may stay at the Resort Farm, MASCARELLA VILLA DAFNE, which runs along the "Catanese" highway a short distance before reaching Valledolmo. It stands in the center of a dell, on high ground near Alia which overlooks pleasant land and green pastures. The Villa Dafne Resort Farm has been refurbished and remodelled. A swimming-pool has been installed and it is an ideal place to spend unforgettable days with the beauties of nature and animals.

The rooms are well furnished and heated. They have all that is necessary to have a pleasant and relaxing stay. Many of the rooms open onto the valley. The large living -rooms form a charming frame to brighten the guests' stay.

The ovine stock-farming and the vegetable cultivation by the traditional system, allow the resort farms to serve meals prepared with natural products: domestic meats, products of the earth, exquisite sweets, and great local wines. Everything in Villa Dafne provides old country flavours and fresh farm air.

People who love to relax and want to immerse themselves in nature, may go for a hike, go out for a cycle ride along the nearby fields, sheep-pens, farms, and simple stone shelters which are a refuge for men and animals.

A gentle ride is an ideal means to discover the fertile

and hilly wooded zone (on the Madonie slopes, a few miles from Valledolmo). Here you can find Gioia and Sons' AGRICULTURAL-RESORT FARM, "FONTANA MURATA" which provides an experience into a reality that seems to be out of our time.

Between a tennis match and a walk in the middle of nature, it is still possible to see old rural activities, such as the preparation of ricotta and cheese .

The 18<sup>th</sup> century structure developed around a 16<sup>th</sup> century tower was constructed on a pre-existing Arabian installation. A little church, which dates back to the end of the 19th century, embellishes the view of the whole in the opposite open space.

An entrance with arches introduces the courtyard with pleasant rooms and luminous and well-furnished comfortable flats. A little rustic restaurant, heated by a chimney during the winter, is an ideal place to appreciate a genuine cuisine.

The tradition and the vocation of the farm allow enjoying the good local wine and various typical courses, prepared with natural ingredients cultivated in the surrounding luxuriant fields.



The Sicilian art of "good eating" can be also appreciated at the Cosimo Gioia and sons' "ANTICA MASSERIA" VACATION RESORT FARM. One may get there through an avenue which is bordered by a peaceful green meadow which provides a beautiful scene.

Waterfalls and coloured flowers line a long hall, whose walls show rural cultivation tools.

One may enter the rustic and refined rooms through an internal courtyard. There you can taste the best Sicilian gastronomic flavours, thanks to the cultivation of local products.

The great tastes, healthy air and mild temperature all year long, with the immense expanses of luxuriant verdant land, along with a variety of entertaining experiences, make this Vacation Resort Farm, along with others around Valledolmo, an incentive to admire the historical and environmental harmony that is a very rich part of Sicily.

People from Valledolmo are hard working, strong-willed, warm and cordial. They want to exalt the cleanliness and the serenity that marks the village and its life. People from Valledolmo hold their old traditions jealously so they don't lose the culture passed down to them by their ancestors. These customs lead to the discovery of one's own origins and identity .

Among the traditions, is the love for music which has a particular importance, since it is intimately tied to their culture. The founding of the "VINCENZO BELLINI GROUP" in 1923, exemplifies this. During recent years it specialized more and more and it became rich in elements. Today it is a necessary choreographic element for the religious and civil festivals in Valledolmo and in other nearby villages.

As in a large number of small Sicilian villages, Holy Week rituals and the Patron festival represent a very involved and popular event in Valledolmo. By a frenetic sequence of words, sounds and actions, which have their culminating moment during the processions, people from Valledolmo live and discover once again their tradition, sharing, uniting the religiosity which has been a Sicilian's character and pride for centuries .

On the THURSDAY BEFORE EASTER, during the Mass in "Coena Domini," the parish washes twelve Brothers' feet, representing the Apostles.

On GOOD FRIDAY the Passion of Our Lord is celebrated. After "Christ descent" from the Cross and the collocation of the image in a golden wooden artistic urn, the Procession goes along the streets in the evening, with the Ecce Homo, dead Christ and Our Lady of Sorrows' statues.

The Long-awaited, everlasting day when peace, harmony and life repeat once again every year, finally comes. It is Easter.

A rainbow of colours and an enchanting sequence of sounds wrap up Valledolmo as a frame and a sound track for a collective solidarity inspiration and expression of an authentic popular religiousness. Sadness and melancholy give way to joy. Life comes back, triumphing over death.

The traditional "meeting" between Resuscitated Christ and His Mother's images is represented on Easter in the middle of the large street of the Village, near the Mother Church, after the solemn Mass .

The so-called "Descent of the Angels" is a particular tradition: two boys, dressed like angels, go down from a big triumphal arch, expressly realized, and they announce the Resurrection of Christ.

The emotion pervades the souls. The charming procession of statues, followed by the crowd of believers, makes the symbolic representation of Man's liberation from the Devil's slavery as Our Lord Jesus Christ passes from death to life, more impregnated with religiosity.

It is the last act of the Holy Week celebrations: it is a sequence, which narrates the Christian religious commemoration, and it refers to a symbolic rituality where Easter symbolizes the passage from a phase of death of nature (Winter) to a moment of life and awakening (Spring).

Some months later, when the hot summer sun wraps up the village, Valledolmo pays homage to its Patron, SAINT ANTHONY OF PADUA, who is very venerated, as in many other parts of Sicily, Italy and Europe.

Anthony of Lisbon (where he was born in 1195), later called "of Padua" (where he died when he was 36 years old) carried out also in Sicily his activity of evangelizing and his apostolic life.

The memory of Anthony is immense and widespread in Sicily, and many communities founded churches and convents in his name, perpetuating his religious devotions.

Baron Antonio Cicala of Valledolmo introduced the devotion to Saint Anthony of Padua in 1643, and it began to expand from the ancient Church of Castelnormanno.

People from Valledolmo prayed to Saint Anthony for help (still today) to get over serious illness, but also to avoid dangers and famines, epidemics and natural calamities .

The Patron Saint is celebrated on June 13<sup>th</sup>, (his death day) and on August 18<sup>th</sup>, a solemn procession is organised on this date. In addition to the believers, the civil and religious authorities participate, together with the 5 Confraternities: Holy Sacrament, Holy Rosario, Holy Virgin of the Purity, Merciless Brotherhood and Saint Rita's .



In the evening the procession goes along the streets up and down Valledolmo, making the scene more charming, in answer to which there are new and old structures.

A statue of Saint Anthony of Padua is carried on

shoulders, and advances slowly, while the notes of the musical band fill the air with a sweet melody, opening people's minds to hope and giving a sort of sacral character to the streets and places where the procession passes .

The soft colours of the sunset hangs over the village and the evening air is touching to the heart when the procession passes the people.

Thoughts fly far away in time and space, toward other ages, other places.

The Patron festival is an occasion for Valledolmo to recover the past through a ritual that has been repeated for centuries, doing over again some old ways of expression, thanks to a deep popular devoutness .

The memories and story of Valledolmo are seen in the faces, in the actions and in the scenario. A story written on the walls of the houses, in the streets, in the places, in the lands, in the hills. A lot of people from Valledolmo took this story with them in far countries, preserving it jealously. They, with pride, hand it down from generation to the new generations.

## Sicilian Cart



It is a story that began 350 years ago and still goes on as a fairy tale between dream and reality.



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[Back to Beginning](#)