



2021 Walk to Bethlehem



SYRACUSE, SICILY, home of St. Lucy

Syracuse is a historic city on the Italian island of Sicily, the capital of the Italian province of Syracuse. Syracuse is located in the southeast corner of the island of Sicily, next to the Gulf of Syracuse beside the Ionian Sea. It is situated in a drastic rise of land with 6,600-foot depths being close to the city offshore although the city itself is generally not so hilly in comparison.

The city is notable for its rich Greek and Roman history, culture, amphitheaters, architecture, and as the birthplace of the pre-eminent mathematician and engineer Archimedes. This 2,700-year-old city played a key role in ancient times, when it was one of the major powers of the Mediterranean world.

Greek Heritage

The city was founded by Ancient Greek Corinthians and Teneans and became a very powerful city-state. Syracuse was allied with Sparta and Corinth and exerted influence over the entirety of Magna Graecia, of which it was the most important city. Described by Cicero as "the greatest Greek city and the most beautiful of them all", it equaled Athens in size during the fifth century BC.

Roman and Byzantine Rule

Eventually, Syracuse became part of the Roman Republic/Empire. Though declining slowly through the years, Syracuse maintained the status of capital of the Roman government of Sicily and seat of the praetor. It remained an important port for trade between the Eastern and the Western parts of the Empire. Christianity spread in the city through the efforts of Saint Paul (Acts of the Apostles 28:12) and Saint Marziano, the first bishop of the city, who made

Roman Amphitheater



it one of the main centers of proselytism or religious conversion in the West. In the age of Christian persecutions massive catacombs were carved, whose size is second only to those of Rome.

The patron saint of the city is Saint Lucy. She was born in Syracuse in 283 and was put to death in 304 for refusing to pay homage to the Roman emperor's image. Her feast day, Saint Lucy's Day, is celebrated in Syracuse on December 13th.

After a period of Vandal rule in the mid-5th century, Syracuse and the island was recovered for Roman rule under Odoacer and Theodoric the Great, by Belisarius for the Byzantine



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Empire. For a short period, Syracuse was the seat of the Greek-speaking Emperor Constans II, as well as a capital of the Byzantine (Eastern Roman) Empire and metropolis of the whole Sicilian Church. Constans II was assassinated when his plans to permanently replace the Byzantine capital of Constantinople with Syracuse became suspected.

Later Years

From the 800's to the unification of Italy, Syracuse was ruled by various military powers including Muslims, Normans, Sicilian monarchs and the Bourbons of France.

Over time, Palermo later overtook Syracuse in importance, as the capital of the Kingdom of Sicily. Eventually the kingdom would be united with the Kingdom of Naples to form the Two Sicilies until the Italian unification of 1860. With the unification, Syracuse regained its role as a provincial capital.

The city was struck by two ruinous earthquakes in 1542 and 1693, and a plague in 1729. The 17th century destruction changed the appearance of Syracuse forever, as well as the entire Val di Noto, SE portion of Sicily, whose cities were rebuilt along the typical lines of Sicilian Baroque, considered one of the most typical expressions of the architecture of Southern Italy. The spread of cholera in 1837 led to a revolt against the Bourbon government and the to the temporary-lived Two Sicilies.

Today, Syracuse has a population of approximately 125,000 people and many sites of historical significance, such as the Ear of Dionysius, a limestone cave carved in to a hillside with unique acoustical effects.

In the modern day, the city as shown below is listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site along with the Necropolis of Pantalica.



Ear of Dionysius

