Ancient Wooden Roofs in Sicily: the Heritage of Taormina

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The aim of this paper is to contribute to the study of late-medieval architecture in Sicily, emphasizing the use of wooden structures as part of the Sicilian Renaissance. Unfortunately, to date only few cases of this historic carpentry work have been analysed by scholars (Bologna 1978, De Francisco 1996), and these studies focused on the artistic aspects more than architectural or constructive ones. Moreover, this woodwork has been poorly documented. The large number of ancient wooden structures that still survive in Sicily shows how highly they were regarded at the time - their detailed surfaces bearing testimony to the ancient taste in arranging rooms and churches. The present poor condition of many of these works induced us to investigate their history and to try and ensure their survival.

INTRODUCTION

A large group of churches that we can see today in Sicily, mainly built from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, is often marked out from other contemporary buildings because of the presence of wooden roofs. Indeed, we can recognize specific features that are always present in all of these roofs, sometimes with different details, but belonging to the same constructive concept, so we can identify a *family* of wooden structures.

Today it is still possible to find this typical roof in several towns all over the island, either in churches or in civil buildings, like castles or palaces. The churches always have a roof with a main structure made of timber trusses, while in some of the other buildings the horizontal timber floor is still surviving. Both structure-types were conceived to be admired from below, and to serve this purpose they are decorated. The decoration is a way by which we can assign a piece of carpentry to our *family*, but as shall be shown below, it is not the only one.

The diffusion of these wooden historic roofs and floors in Sicily **(figs 1 and 2)** should be analysed in a comprehensive way, but in this paper I am focusing on the ones in Taormina, one of the towns where these structures survived in considerable number. The town of Taormina grew up in the post-medieval period, and the small town where cruel battles and heavy destruction have previously often occurred quickly more than double in size. The newfound richness caused the most important families to build new houses, and the Church to construct new buildings. Many foreign master builders invited to erect new buildings, following the models of the most important contemporary architects and builders of the main towns on the island. This paper will show how the roofs and the

floors became central in the realization of these projects. Together with other decorative features, they became a basic element of building during those centuries.

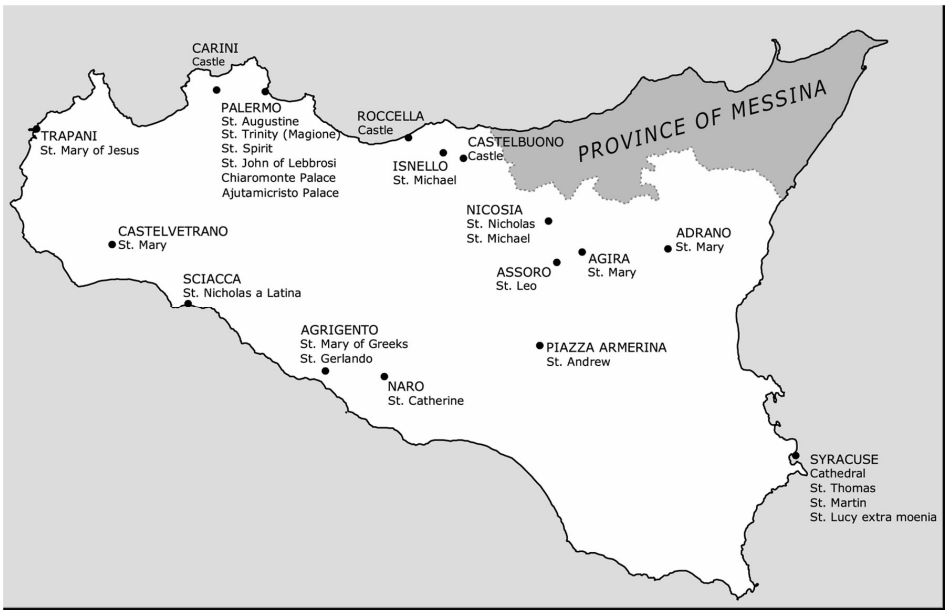

Figure 1. Location of the historic timber roofs and the floors in Sicily, except the Province of Messina (see fig. 2)

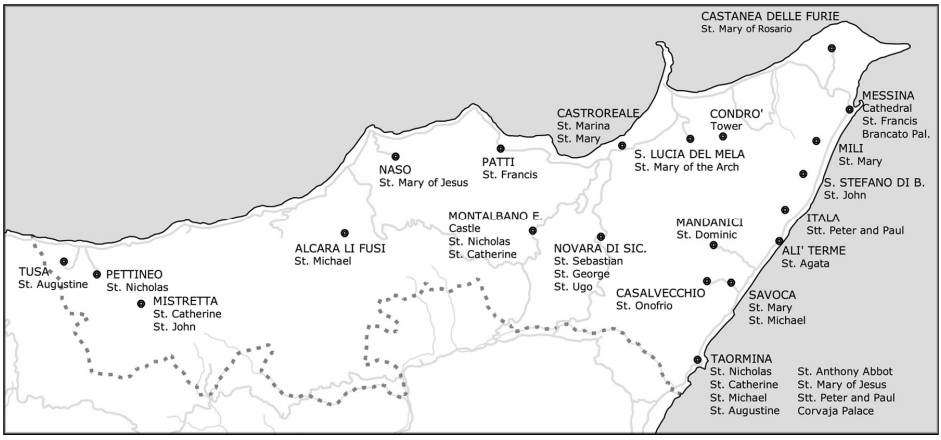

Figure 2. Location of the historic carpentry work in the Province of Messina

CONSTRUCTIVE AND DECORATIVE FEATURES

One of the main peculiarities of the carpentry is the absence of any false-structure (such as a suspended ceiling, or decorative panels forming lacunars). In order to reach an aesthetic aim structure and decoration are combined, creating a unique complex. The combination became the starting point for both roofs and floors as a sort of basic, first input for the builders when they conceived of these. In the course of the article the nature of this design concept will be explained.

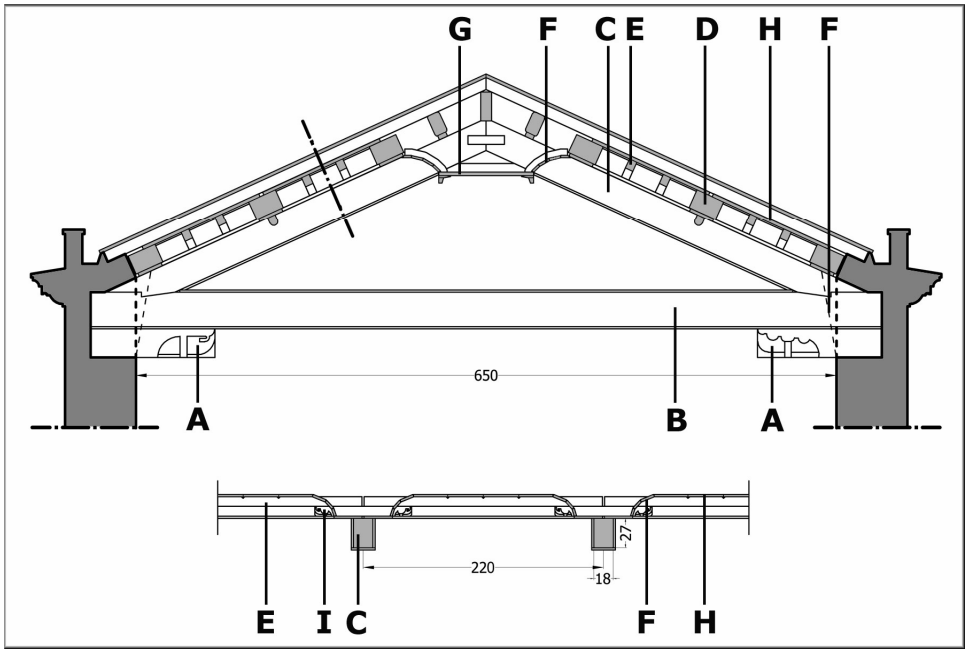

Figure 3. Sections of the roof in the Cathedral of Nicosia. A=carved ancones, B=tie-beam, C=rafter, D=main joist, E=subordinate joist, F=curved boards, G=horizontal lacunars, H=boards of the big lacunars, I=small ancones

Roofs

In order to explain how the carpentry is constructed, it is useful to examine the roofs first, and then the floors since the latter are conceived as a horizontal *translation* of the trussed-structures.

Some features are recurrent in almost all the roofs that survived in Sicily **(fig. 3)**:

- The structural bond is achieved by a main structure formed of simple trusses consisting of a tie beam and two rafters;

- The connections between the members of a truss are shear joints with a single saw-toothed connection between the rafters and the tie beam near the walls. The rafters are not joined up, but simply abutted without, for example, a tenon and mortise joint;
- The number of the trusses usually varies from 12 and 14, except in some particular cases such as the construction of a new roof over an ancient church (Copani 2005, p. 192);
- The trusses rest two ancones or brackets that are often the most interesting elements of the decoration. When the roof is not painted, the ancones are the only carved members of the ensemble. The ancones are not the same from a roof to another, as they follow three or four different models;
- Over the trusses, a system of joists and boards form one or two inclined lacunars for each side of each bay. The lacunars are enclosed by boards and sub-divided by thinner joists;
- The "weak" connection between the rafters is hidden by a set of boards, arranged horizontally under the ridge as a continuous series of lacunars. These are hung from the rafters and connected to the other sloping surfaces by some curved boards;
- A similar connection made of bent or curved boards form the junction between the sloping boxed-in ceiling and the bearing walls;
- The two trusses at both ends of the roof are different from the others, particularly in terms of structural behaviour. The gable-ends can bear the weight of the joists, so the two trusses are *demoted* by the absence of the tie beam or, in some cases, by the reduction of the section of the members. They are reduced in size, but still present, with the aim of completing their bay and, as a result, the decorative scheme.

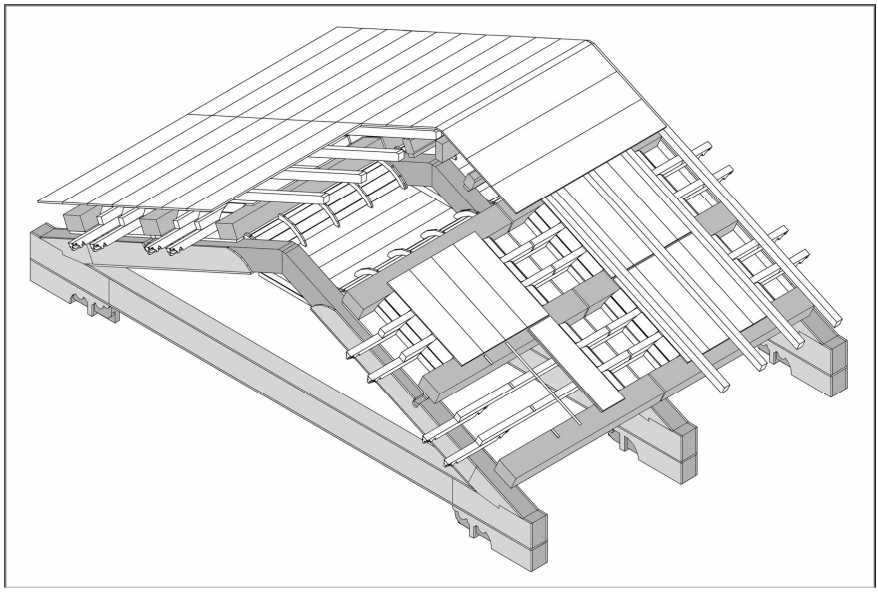

Figure 4. Nicosia, St. Nicholas: schematic view of the timber structure (the main structure is shaded)

These common features and the way in which the ancient Sicilian timber roofs are structured provide evidence of the existence of a coherent typology of carpentry. Obviously, one can notice some differences amongst these structures (currently there are original wooden roofs in at least 55 churches, while about 10 floors have survived) the most evident of which is the presence of painting in some of them. This reflects the ambition of those builders and contractors who wanted to create a roof that would remain unequalled for centuries. The most important painted roof in Sicily is the one that covers the main nave of the Cathedral in Nicosia (Funis 2005, Tampone 2005). The so-called *Tetto Ligneo* (Wooden Roof) of Nicosia **(fig. 4)** is certainly the most resolved in terms of constructive and decorative design, but there are other fine painted roofs surviving in Palermo (church of St. Augustine), Agrigento (Cathedral) and Assoro (Church of St. Leo).

Floors

The floors built in Sicily from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century have a timber structure realized with almost the same elements used for the roofs: between the main beams, that are supported on two ancones, a system of joists and boards form lacunars in numbers of two or four. The bays enclosed by the main beams sometimes are divided in two by a long strip of boards, set perpendicular to the beams and directed along the length of the room. This set of boards is similar to the boxing that covers the joint between the rafters of a saddle roof, but sometimes has more suggestive decoration, where wooden stalactites (pendants) hang from the boards. Like the ancones of the same floors their surfaces reveal the traditional influence of the Palermitan *muqarnas*. This unusual device can still be admired in the Chiaromonte Palace in Palermo and in the Carini Castle, near Palermo.

The decorative concept behind the structural frame

The Sicilian carpentry was made to impress the people attending the church ceremony, and the visitors to an elegant palace either by its simple but effective structure and/or the richness of its unique decoration. The builders realised the owners' requirements by creating a sort of inverted ship form in the church roofs, where the principal as well as subordinate structure is exposed to view. The accomplishment of this intention is particularly evident where the roof (or the floor) is painted, with some parts of the structure being covered by painted boards and the rest painted in their own right. In the other carpentry work we can see that the intent of builders was to hide the principal joints, such as the one between the rafters, or the insertion of the trusses inside the wall; also the connection between horizontal and sloping lacunars. All these covers, made of boards sometimes curved or just angled, create a ceiling surface without interruption from one wall to the opposite one, similar to the inverted-ship form one finds in medieval architecture, but not separated from the main structure.

The system of the lacunars (boxing) of the floors is similar to the one found in the sloping ceilings. Some floors, such as the ones surviving in the Corvaja Palace in Taormina, are simpler in their construction than others, for example, the painted floor of the *Sala Magna* (Main Room) in the

Chiaromonte Palace in Palermo. The same distinction is evident in the roofs: some of them (in Trapani, Syracuse, for example, or commonly in the Province of Messina) are not painted and their structure is simpler than that of the *Tetto Ligneo,* mentioned above. In general we can say that the painted roofs and floors have a richer structure and, therefore, belong to a *sub-family*, generally more ancient than the one where the timber of the floors is not painted. The floor of the Chiaromonte Palace, for example, was erected between 1377 and 1380 (Bologna 1972, p. 3), probably at the same time that the main churches of Nicosia, Agrigento and Assoro were roofed, or, at most few years later. The unpainted roofs and floors are generally date from the beginning of the XV century to the first decades of the sixteenth (for example, the roof of the church in Mili was built in 1511 and the floor in the Franciscan Monastery in Taormina in 1539).

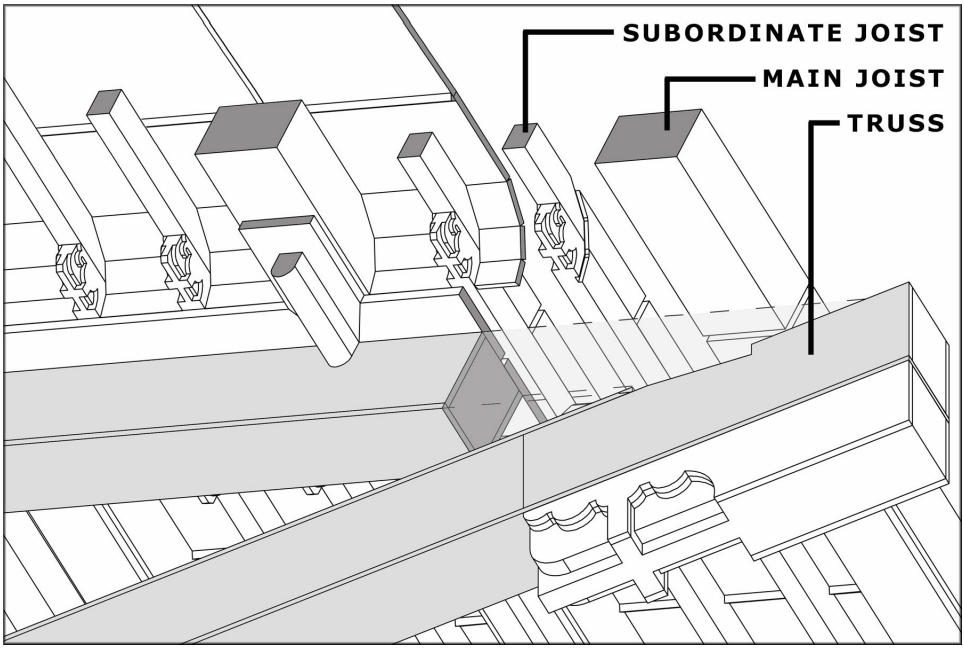

Figure 5. The carpentry of the roof in St. Nicholas, Nicosia. Detail (the truss is shaded).

Apart from the matter of painting, there is a detail that marks another difference between the two categories: in the more complex carpentry there are two types of joist that are laid over the rafters, or directly over the beams. The bigger joists are usually laid, three to each side of the roof, between them there are a couple of joists, smaller in section and half as high as the main joists. The smaller joists are laid over little ancones, carved like the ancones under the main trusses **(fig. 5)**. This device helps the carpentry achieving more *chiaroscuro*, apparently increasing the depth of the lacunars without loading too much on the structure. A small purlin, with a rounded surface, is placed under the bigger joists; it has the function of emphasising the separation between the lacunars, while

adding further *chiaroscuro*. Neither this purlin nor the small ancones and the joists, are found in the later carpentry where the decorative power converges in the ancones placed along the bearing walls, supporting the trusses.

The ancones

The ancones are often the key elements that allow us easily to recognize a type of carpentry as belonging to the family of roofs and floors made in Sicily in the late and post-medieval period. Indeed, in this historic carpentry the ancones are always carved with many different figures derived from the medieval bestiaries, or portraying persons, armorial bearings, fruits, vegetables, or mere geometrical friezes. Two main groups of ancones can be distinguished according to shape, and other smaller groups according to decoration.

For instance, the ancones of the Chiaromonte Palace floor belong to the first type, which is one of the more ancient: they have a L-shape, with the same dimension in height and depth. Their surface is very sunken and reminds one of the *muqarnas*. This type of ancone makes the carpentry appear slender and *Gothic*, in terms of its proportion and its attenuated shape. Even when made of a single piece of timber, it is conceived of as boards, differently shaped, whose surfaces are connected like the *trabes compactiles* mentioned by Vitruvius (Tampone 2005, p. 166). The reference to the connected boards is more or less evident in all types of ancone present in Sicily, but the direct linkage with the Roman constructive tradition is not proven.

Compared to the one mentioned, the other types of ancone have different proportions, and in fact they are carved in one long piece of timber, often having the same section as the main beams. The length protruding from the walls is about one metre (generally from 80 to 110 centimetres). Other groups may be distinguished amongst these ancones, by simply looking at the different decorations: geometrical drawings, armorial bearings, Latin crosses on the lower surface, medallions on intersections **(fig. 12)**, or a lancelet figure that reminds one of a half fleur-de-lis on the side surfaces **(fig. 9)**.

Two of these decorative carvings are particularly important: the medallion and the cross. The medallion is crucial in identifying this kind of carpentry since it is so recurrent that it has come to be recognized as a distinctive sign. The cross has a precise value when it is found in a church, but it was also used in some secular building such as the Corvaja Palace. It was always shown to the people who were looking at the roof and sometimes even highlighted by painting **(figs. 6 and 7)**. Finally, it seems that another type of ancone was used in the first carpentry constructed in Sicily after the Muslim rule. This ancone does not have squared faces, but full-relief figures from different sources: men, animals, vegetables, and so on **(fig. 9)**.

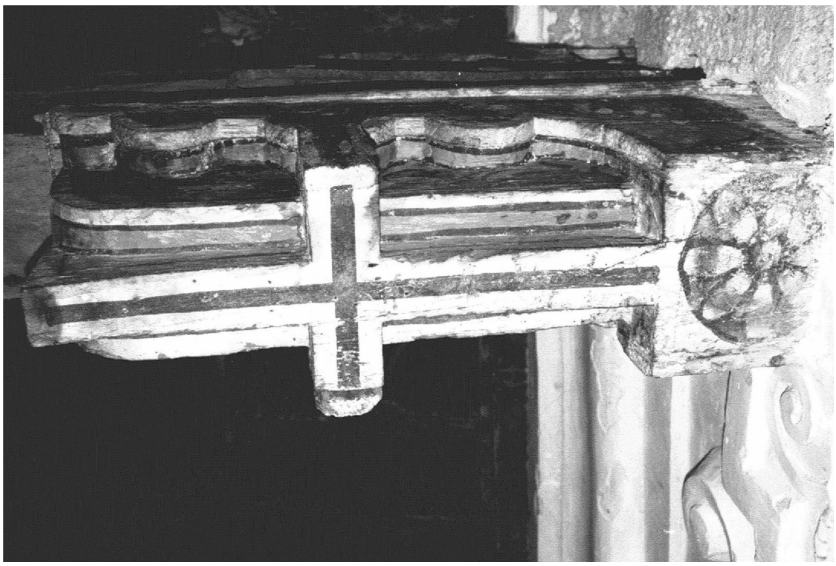

Figure 6. View from below of an ancone in Nicosia Cathedral

Figure 7. St. Nicholas , Taormina. Roof over the main nave:
an ancone with a cross in relief on the bottom section

ORIGINS AND *FORTUNES* OF THE SICILIAN CARPENTRY

So far we have concentrated on the roof and the floor carpentry, built from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries in Sicily, but it must be emphasised that other similar carpentry work were built both before and after this period. With regard to the roofs and the floors built previously, that is, after the Normans defeated the Muslims and conquered the island, they can be considered as ancestors of the woodwork under investigation, because they have many similar features, even if it seems that they were not produced, both in terms of quality and quantity to the same extent than during the succeeding centuries. However, the roofs that survived were destroyed by several wars, fires or earthquakes, and then reconstructed, a factor that has to be taken this account in our studies. We refer in particular to the roofs of huge or very important churches, such as the Cathedral of Messina, the ones in Cefalù and Monreale, the churches of St. Spirito and St. Trinity in Palermo. For example, the roof of the Cathedral of Messina was reconstructed at least twice following the pattern of the one built in 1254, and it became a model in the neighbouring territory.

The *imitation of models* surely must be one of the principal reasons for the diffusion of our type of carpentry in the late-medieval period in Sicily, but it not the only one. At that time many master builders, often coming from northern Italy, went around the island, working in several yards, ecclesiastical and secular (Meli 1958). This is demonstrated by the discovery of architectural features in different towns of Sicily due to the workmanship of the same builders (Rotolo 1985), and it probably would be true also for the carpenters. We can therefore consider the wooden roofs built from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century as traditional construction, consolidated after a long period of experimentation and widely diffused, thanks to a new strong impulse that started in Sicily around the second half of the fourteenth century.

It is possible to identify another historic phase in the construction of carpentry in Sicily, lasting from the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries. We have no information about roofs built around the period 1550-1700 (except for the one in the church of St. Catherine in Taormina, dated about 1630). It is probably that a change in architectural taste motivated the builders to find new ways for covering the churches, or else the great earthquake in 1693 destroyed some of the buildings erected in that period.

As a result of that earthquake, which surely was one of the main reasons behind the phenomenon of *Val di Noto Baroque*, several buildings were seriously damaged and in many cases the roofs were partially or totally reconstructed. We can assume that the builders made them similar to the ones just destroyed, but with different proportions, general appearance and technique, according to contemporary practice. In fact these later roofs generally have a slighter structure, made by simple trusses with thin members. Although the general design remained basically the same, some other details changed, for example the ancones that became more gentle and elegant in their shape and decoration; also the finishing of the truss members, whose borders are underlined with black-

painted grooves **(fig. 15)**. Moreover, a particular device is often visible in the trusses at the two ends of the later roofs: they no longer have a complete tie-beam, this it is cut near the two ancones so that these appear to be longer and doubled in height **(fig. 15)**. This latter way of building roofs survived in the constructive tradition in Sicily at least until the second half of the eighteenth century – the latest dated example is the little roof that covers the church of St. Michael in Savoca, built in 1761.

HISTORIC WOODEN ROOFS AND FLOORS IN TAORMINA

The roofs and the floors we are studying in this paper are located all around the island **(fig. 1)**, but there is a concentration particularly in the territory of Messina **(fig. 2),** probably because of the main Cathedral's influence, even if, as we said, it can only be one of the reasons. Taormina was one of the most important towns in that territory, and the need of building new constructions there encouraged many master builders, especially coming from Messina to move to Taormina, although today we can clearly see also the influence of stone-cutters from Palermo or northern Italy in many features of the buildings situated in the centre of the town.

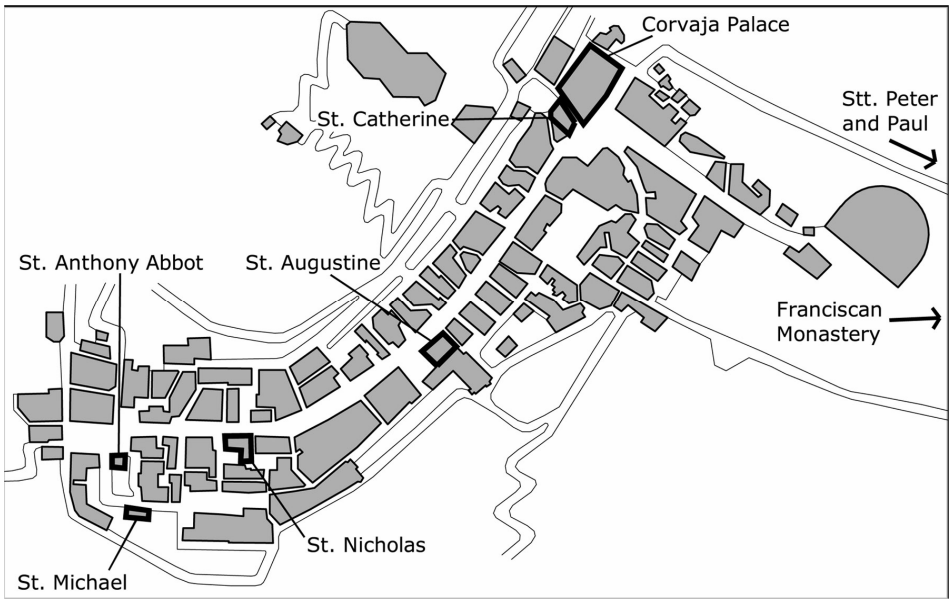

Figure 8. The town centre of Taormina, with the location of the ancient carpentry.

The architecture of the new buildings erected in Taormina, as all over Sicily between the end of the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, is known as the *Sicilian Renaissance* because of its peculiarities, derived from the presence in the island of workers and architects from different cultures: from Muslim territories like Spain, or from the North, the French and *Lombardic* lands (Rotolo 1985). As

with the use of stone of different colours, depressed arches and graceful three lancet windows, the carpentry certainly is a typical feature of those centuries. The rooms with decorative woodwork became so characteristic and exceptional that they were imitated all over the island. In Taormina we have identified 11 of these carpentry works, in eight different buildings: three floors in Corvaja Palace and one in the Franciscan monastery; two roofs in the main church of St. Nicholas and single roofs in the churches of St. Peter and St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Michael, St. Anthony the Abbot and St. Catherine.

A short description of this historic woodwork follows. However, as their principal features generally are the same as described for all the Sicilian carpentry for that period, only the peculiarities will be here elucidated. Almost all the ancient buildings in Taormina have no historical documentation about their foundation, so any suppositions about their age come from a limited number of scholars that studied these monuments, or from hypothesis based on architectural comparisons. This paper focuses on the carpentry belonging to some of the most important buildings of Taormina.

The three floors of the Corvaja Palace

This building is the most important in Taormina, because of its history, architectural interest and size. It was built in different phases, and completed as seen today in early fourteenth century (a restoration project attempted to restore the building to his original appearance in the 1940s). The palace is a compound of three parts, built independently. Each part has a wooden floor, the two smaller of which seem to be more ancient than the larger one (Dillon 1948). This theory is supported by the analysis of the decorative features of the three floors. In fact the ancones of the first two are very different from the ones belonging to the larger floor: the first mentioned are each carved in a different way (full-relief figures, animals, armorial bearings appear on their surfaces) and the local tradition call them *Arab*; the other ones are made following the simple design of a cross over the lower surface flanked by a half fleur-de-lis on either side.

The big room covered by a decorative carpentry floor is the one where the Sicilian Parliament had his first meeting in 1410, and the room was probably finished especially for this event (Rizzo 1902, Calì 1912). The presence of these three floors in the Corvaja Palace let us appreciate a significant difference among the ancones: the ones in the big room are standardized, while the others look eccentric and unique. This difference in approach might have been caused by the great meeting of 1410 which probably obliged the builders to finish the work quickly and, therefore, adopted mass-production methods. However, as we shall see a similar situation occurs in the main church of the town, where carpentry of different periods can be found. The Corvaja Palace was recently restored and a museum is now housed in the three rooms with the wooden floors.

The floor in the old Franciscan Monastery

The building where the Franciscan Monastery was until 1866 is very close to the site of the Roman Theatre. Today this complex of buildings is a private hospice. Into their interior spaces we can observe some typical expressions of the Sicilian Renaissance, but there is also evidence of works from different ages. The main room of the ancient monastery has an interesting ceiling, with very closely set beams and little carving. The figures over the ancones are mere geometrical frets on the lower surfaces and the typical half fleur-de-lis on the sides. The whole design is very simple and the most interesting aspect is that this floor is one of the few works of carpentry in Sicily actually dated. The date 1539 is carved over an ancon. This element has helped us dating similar carpentry that has no documentation.

Figure 9. Some of the ancones found in the earliest floors of the Corvaja Palace, during the restoration of 1947. All of these have the motif of the half fleur-de-lis on their side surfaces, except the one with a carved human figure (photograph courtesy Archive of the Soprintendenza of Messina)

The two roofs of the church of St. Nicholas

We have really very little information about the early history of the main church of Taormina, dedicated to St. Nicholas. Some scholars (Dillon 1948, Rizzo 1902) think that the church was built in the second half of the fourteenth century, over the ruins of a Byzantine church or chapel. We can only add that some architectural features seem to date from the 1300s, but perhaps the building yard went on for several years. Indeed, the most sophisticated elements of the church (i.e. the two side doors and the rose windows) seem to be typical of the 1400s. In 1716-1722 the church was completely re-designed, by the superimposition of stuccoes over the medieval structure, which remained covered until 1947, when a restoration project took the building back to its original appearance.

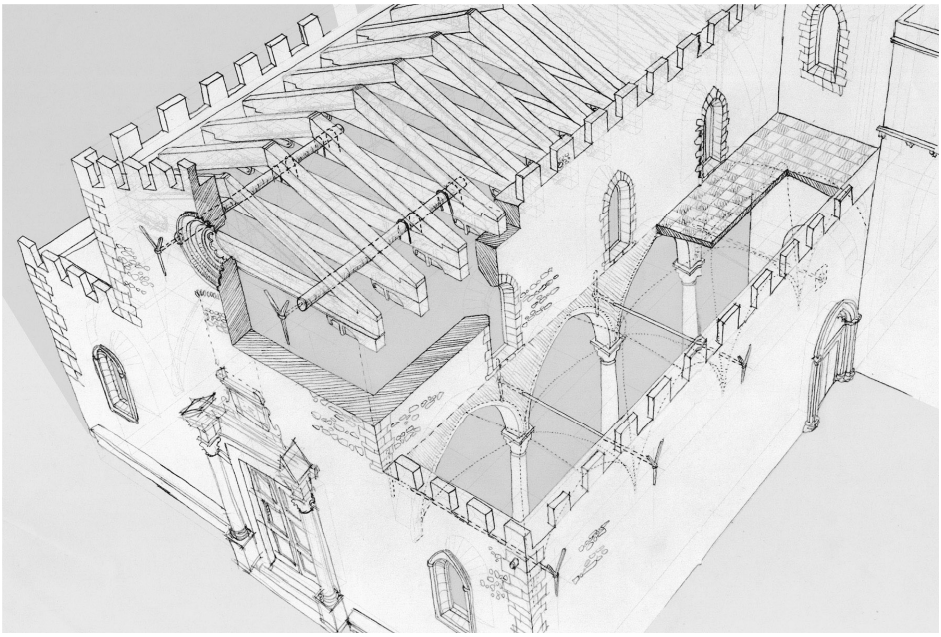

Figure 10. Drawing of St. Nicholas, Taormina. The tie-rods were inserted after the great earthquake of 1693.

The church has three aisles, separated by four lancet arches. The nave is covered by a wooden roof, the side aisles by vaults. The transept is a simple volume, higher than the nave and covered by another roof, perpendicular to the first one. An apse and two chapels open to the transept. The two timber roofs are very similar. Between the trusses single lacunars form the ceiling at each side of the roof. The principal members have a large section (about 30 x 50 centimetres), and the trusses have a narrow span. The finishing of the trusses and the joists is simply a torus carved on the edges. In the nave there is no horizontal lacunar, but this was probably planned as the torus on the rafters stops just before the connection at the top. Both the roofs have a catwalk made of boards positioned over the tie beams. Looking at the two roofs, one can easily see an important difference: the ancones of the main nave roof are all the same, decorated with a Latin cross, visible from below, and two half fleur-de-lis over each side; by contrast, the ancones of the other roof have different shapes, each carved with a particular figure. It may be asserted that the roof over the transept is the more ancient, because here we find the same situation as at Corvaja Palace, where the chronological information is more precise.

The more impressive of the two roofs at St. Nicholas is, obviously, the more ancient one, because of the variety of its ancones. Each truss has the same figure over its two ancones (the decoration is organised very similar to St. Nicholas in Nicosia) and one can observe carved snakes, people, or fruits like pomegranates, pinecones, artichokes **(fig. 11)**.

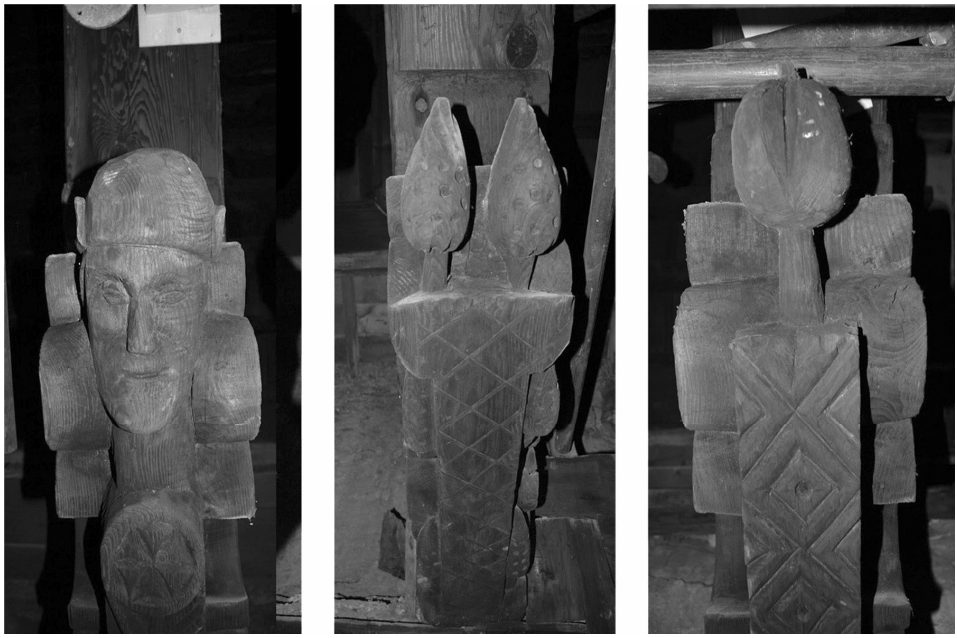

Figure 11. Some examples of the ancones of the roof over the transept, St. Nicholas, Taormina.

The roof over the nave was restored in 2002, while the other one is going to be restored soon, so that the church could be entirely re-opened again.

The roof of the church of St. Sebastian or St. Augustine

The church is dedicated to St. Sebastian, but it was part of the monastery dedicated to St. Augustine, so it is known with both the dedications. Only the nave of the church, decorated with stucco in eighteenth century, has a roof with decorated ancones. The whole design is typical of the Sicilian roofs, but it was heavily restored after World War II. During the restoration many structural members were replaced, so one cannot say exactly how they looked before. Fortunately the ancones did not suffer serious damage, and were replaced **(fig. 12)**. This situation is common for the restoration projects during the first half of the twentieth century in Sicily: the architects found the ancones entirely sufficient for their role and decided to re-used them in their original positions. The condition of the ancones is often good, because the timber used for them (usually chestnut), was stronger than that used for the rest of the structure (generally oak or pinewood). This difference probably has little to do with the different weight that the members has to bear, but was simply due to the fact that elaborate carvings required an extremely hard timber to be durable.

Figure 12. The Church of St. Augustine. A head of a snake comes out from the carvings

The roof in the church of St. Anthony Abbot

The little church of St. Anthony Abbot, located just outside of the southern gate of the medieval town walls, has a roof with trusses made from slender members **(fig. 13)**. Generally, it is believed that this feature is typical of the later carpentry, but in this church we find that some ancones look very ancient due to their design. If this theory is true, this must be one of the cases where the roof was rebuilt, maybe in the 1700s, following the older methods. The roof has a horizontal strip, located under the ridge, with lozenges in relief. Is very common to find this motif in that position on the boards, but generally the lozenges are made of shallower timber pieces in the later roofs.

Today, the church of St. Anthony Abbot no longer used for religious rites: a Christmas crib take up a half of the nave of the church, so the space is not visible in its entirety.

The roof in the Church of St. Michael

The recent history of the Church of St. Michael is very similar to that of St. Anthony Abbot: both buildings were heavily damaged during World War II, and restored a few years later. Likewise the roof, whose members were, in many cases, considered unrecoverable. For this reason the roof is mostly made of new beams, joists and boards. However, all the ancones were reused in their old position. The ancones of the St. Michael's roof have a particular carving on their sides, a series of incisions creating the shape of a palm-tree, often coming out from armorial bearings **(fig. 14)**. We cannot find a similar design in any other historic carpentry on the whole island.

Figure 13. The elegant design of the roof in St. Anthony Abbot
(Photograph. Archive, Soprintendenza of Messina)

Figure 14. The palm-tree motif on the ancones in St. Michael
(Photograph, Archive Soprintendenza of Messina)

The roof of the Church of St Peter and St. Paul

This church, sited not far from the town of Taormina, was built near the Muslim necropolis probably during the fourteenth century. From 1732 to 1763 many excavations were made at the necropolis, discovering some Greek, Roman and medieval objects. The church was probably restored during those decades. In fact, both the facade and the roof can be assigned to the eighteenth century. The internal aspect of the church was also modified in those years, but in the 1940the church was restored back to its original appearance. The nave roof is similar in shape and decoration to the ones in the churches of St. Anthony Abbot and St. Catherine. We cannot be sure about the dating of the roof, because the constructive tradition seems to strongly resemble that of carpentry from the 1600s and 1700s.

The roof of the Church of St. Catherine

The church of St. Catherine is one of the most recent in Taormina. It is located near the Corvaja Palace and it was built over part of the Greek theatre, the Odeon. The church was probably built around 1630, and perhaps erected over a church more ancient. In those years the roof was probably also constructed as it looks more slender than the other carpentry work in Taormina; some details are finely articulated by the use of thin painted lines that emphasise the main structure and the carvings. These carvings are concentrated almost all on the long and narrow ancones.

Here we find the particular feature mentioned above, namely, *doubled-ancones* instead of the tie beams at the gable-ends of the roof **(fig. 15)**. We can imagine that this device was very common; in fact there are similar situations in several churches, either more ancient or more recent than St. Catherine. In he medieval churches of Nicosia and in St. Michael in Savoca the same device is found, while in other churches (e.g. St. Mary in Mili, St. Nicholas in Taormina) the master builders preferred to make complete trusses at the two ends, but halved its structural members in depth. In these cases boards hide the gaps so that the tie beam and the rafters seem to have a full section.

Figure 15. The double ancone in a corner of the roof of St. Catherine's.
The difference from a usual ancone (on the right) is very clear

CONCLUSION

The ancient wooden structures of Sicily have been part of the constructive history of the island for centuries. We saw how they are spread throughout the territory, covering the big and important churches, but also the little ones and many palaces or castles. They have been built in the same way from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century, apart for few differences, so this type of carpentry is one of the most persistent elements in the historic Sicilian architecture.

On the basis of the this research, we can conclude that the historic floors and roofs built in Sicily can be chronologically divided into three main phases: the first one, lasting until the end of the fourteenth century, is distinguished by experimentation; the second one, from the end of the fourteenth to the first half of the sixteenth century, carpentry of this kind became diffused and common, covering all the principal buildings of the time; during the last phase, until the 1760s, we find only roofs that imitate the old ones, but with a new design of a more slender structure. This work, apart from the two most important painted works of carpentry in Palermo and Nicosia, was conducted of a number of years, and we must continue to improve our knowledge in order to conserve or restore the Sicilian carpentry in the most correct way.

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