

BIBLIOTECA GENEALOGICA

Sicilian Printing, 1704-1893

Samuel Vincent Lemley

*[Their] world is a world of artifacts.*¹

This collection offers a representative sample of Sicilian printing and ephemera from the 18th and 19th centuries, a period in which my maternal ancestors lived in the Sicilian provinces of Palermo and Agrigento. The chronological limits of the collection, 1704 to 1893, reflect the years for which genealogical records (births, baptisms, and deaths) for the Militello and Marchese families survive: Gabriele Militello, my earliest documented ancestor, was born in Bivona in 1704; my great-grandfather, Pietro Marchese, was born in Pollina in 1893. These are the genetic bookends of my Sicilian family tree and the figurative bookends of this collection.

This gathering of books, manuscripts, and pamphlets is thus envisioned as an artifactual supplement to a genealogical history compiled and written over several decades by my grandfather, Vincent J. Militello, and finished last year.

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The materiality and design of the titles in this collection reveal their origin: Sicilian print culture was insular and idiosyncratic, overshadowed throughout the 18th and 19th centuries by syndicates and long-running publishing houses in the more affluent, international, and industrialized north. During this period, publishers and printers in Milan, Rome, Florence, and Turin were early adopters of the Neoclassicism of Bodoni, and could rely on ready access to some of the best paper in Europe. Sicilian printing in contrast displays a rustic tendency toward material and typographic anachronism, a characteristic that inevitably invites operative stereotypes that my collection largely disproves. While

¹“Our world is a world of artifacts”, G. Thomas Tanselle, *A Rationale of Textual Criticism*, p. 44

Palermitan and provincial Sicilian printers were late to adopt modern sophistications (modern type fonts, mechanization, publisher's bindings), their work shows a material neatness that is somehow distinctly Sicilian: in their paper and bindings, these are solid books, displaying an unlooked-for regularity in pagination, presswork, and signing. The paper in these books is often thick and ductile, while the type, arabesque rules, and lighthearted printers' ornaments disclose the cultural diversity that gives Sicily and Sicilians their myriad senses of self. This multiculturalism is still legible in Sicily's landscape: the Northern Gate of Agrigento is known as *Bibbirria*, from the Arabic *bab al-riyah*, 'Gate-of-the-Winds'.

Sicilian printers primarily served a local, insular market, and so the books, broadsheets, and pamphlets in this collection are largely ephemeral, topical, and generically 'popular.' In searching for additions to my collection, I have found this to be a rule with few exceptions: a vast majority of Sicilian imprints were apparently intended for local consumption and not for export, whether to the Italian mainland or the continent farther north. Sicilian pamphlets in particular are often endearingly specific to a region and culture beyond which they appear improbable and lost. Item dated 1840 below, *Catalogo dei molluschi terrestri e fluviatili delle Madonie e luoghi adiacenti* [Catalog of river and land mollusks of the Madonie], is a case in point: the Madonie (*Madunì* in the Sicilian dialect) are the low mountains in which two of my ancestral villages, Castelbuono and Pollina, nest. At risk of anthropomorphizing, the books gathered here are typographic emigrants still seeking a home.

In assembling this collection, I have sought to represent my ancestral past by gathering material products of my ancestral culture. Invariably, books bear traces of their human makers, sometimes literally, as with so-called 'vat-man's tears' (translucent blossoms in paper left from drops of water falling from papermakers' sodden hands), but always figuratively: books are hieroglyphs of an absent human presence, evidence that cultures far off or forgotten wrote, read, thumbed, and discarded books as we do. In this vein, I have sought to follow G. Thomas Tanselle's primary 'rationale' for collecting, albeit in a narrower, genealogical sense: each title listed here tells "something about a human being who lived in a particular time and place."² In this case, the human beings happen to be my forebears.

² Tanselle, "A Rationale of Collecting" (*Studies in Bibliography* 51), p. 3

My as-yet modest collection (24 bound volumes, two printed broadsheets, and 32 manuscripts) is the result of acquisitive bouts and chance discoveries. Most of the items in the collection were purchased online from Italian dealers, though some of the best were found in nondescript shops and back-alley flea markets in Sicily. A particularly thrilling discovery produced item dated 1825, below (*Per la solennità del santissimo Natale*). In a dimly-lit antiques shop in Palermo, amidst a tumbled assortment of knick-knacks and kitsch, I found it: an unbound sheaf of four folded sheets bearing a manuscript homily in Italian. After glancing through it and determining that it was apparently a Christmas sermon written by a Sicilian priest sometime in the nineteenth century, I offered the shop's owner a wadded ten Euro note and left to decipher the manuscript's contents over dinner at a nearby trattoria. Hauntingly, the text of the sermon is apparently unrecorded elsewhere. This manuscript therefore carries a scribal record of a voice that echoes still across two centuries or more. Beyond its intrinsic value and interest, however, the manuscript carries personal associations that will remain forever bound in with my collection: that same morning I had met with distant cousins at their home in the northern Sicilian countryside and visited the room in which my great-grandfather had died. Near the end of his life, he had returned to his Sicilian hometown, leaving family and America behind to die on his mother's land, south of Cefalù.

In a way, then, this collection is an attempt to make sense of a story that is profoundly mine, but also foreign and impossible to fully reconstruct. My first purchase was prompted by the realization—then still inarticulate—that the aims of book collectors resemble those of genealogists: both are committed to an often benighted search for comprehensiveness, completion, and understanding. The items collected here were assembled in search of an affinity with individuals long dead; these books, documents, and pamphlets are both a recognition of their absence and individuality and a tenuous representation of a past that is simultaneously unknown and manifest in me. Lacking direct or even vicarious mementos of these individuals, I seek objects that bore witness to their lives, or at least to the world and moment they inhabited.

The collection was formed and will evolve according to the following criteria and guidelines:

- I. One item (book, manuscript, or pamphlet) will be acquired for each of my documented Sicilian ancestors by direct lineal descent—i.e., my matrilineal grandparents, great-grandparents, and great-great grandparents, etc. At minimum, then, when complete the collection will comprise more than 160 items (the number of my Sicilian ancestors for whom some dated documentary record survives) but will likely include more. Books will be selected according to the following criteria:
 - A. Each item must have been published or produced in the same decade as the birth or death of the ancestor it represents. Emphasis will be placed on acquiring a book published in the birth year of a given ancestor, when available. Given the relative scarcity of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Sicilian editions, however, this rule is often impossible to follow rigorously. As a result, books published in the respective decade of the ancestor's birth, rather than in the exact year, will be acquired.
 - B. When possible, each title must have been printed or produced within one hundred miles of the given ancestor's local parish or place of birth (if known). In the case of particularly remote parishes, a book from the nearest city in the region of the ancestor's residence (Agrigento in the south, Palermo or Cefalù in the north, Siracusa in the east, Messina to the west) will be acquired. However, a vast majority of Sicilian imprints derive from Palermo and Messina, a fact that has determined the makeup of this collection so far.
- II. In selecting items for inclusion, I aim to seek out ephemeral or quotidian publications, i.e. 'popular' genres relevant to the lived experience of my ancestors. As such, academic publications (law, medicine, science), learned theology (Latin works), and books in languages other than Italian or the Sicilian dialect will be avoided or included only when provenance or local significance justifies their inclusion. The content of the works should ideally reflect some feature of my ancestors' daily lives; for example, descriptions of well-known historical events or phenomena: earthquakes, the death of kings, sightings of comets, plague, or records of political, social, or agricultural upheaval. Lay-theology and vernacular devotional literature will also be represented, reflecting the important function of Catholicism, ceremony, and Saints' cults in the popular imagination and devotional practices of 18th- and 19th-century Sicilians.
- III. Each item will be fully described (collation, pagination, etc.; title page transcription; and note on binding/condition) and paired with a brief note on the item's significance. Occasionally,

genealogical data relevant to the printing of each book will be recorded. Each item in the collection will therefore serve as a genealogical mnemonic, underscoring the contemporaneity of each book, pamphlet, or document with one (or many) of my Sicilian ancestors.

- IV. Finally, the titles collected must be documentary or textual, though not necessarily printed or in the form of a codex. Manuscripts, broadsides, and pamphlets all find a place, as do tickets, receipts, *cartoline*, cryptic notes, and other 'textual' ephemera—the main criterion will be the item's Sicilian provenance, and therefore acquisitions will be fairly indiscriminate. Though not exceedingly scarce, Sicilian imprints are not often viewed as collectible, and therefore only infrequently appear on the market; by that same token, though, Sicilian imprints are relatively affordable, rendering my acquisitive ambitions justifiable, if not entirely responsible.

DESCRIPTIONS

Sicilian Printing, 1704-1893

1743 Palermo. *Relazione storica della peste di Marsiglia dell'anno 1720*

RELAZIONE | ISTORICA | DELLA | PESTE | DI MARSIGLIA | Dell'anno 1720. | *Tradotta dal Francese.*
| [ornament, 41 x 32 mm.] | IN PALERMO MDCCXLIII. | Appresso Angelo Felicella. | [rule, 75 mm.] |
CON LICENZA DE'SUPERIORI.

COLLATION. 8° (10.3 x 15.5 cm.): *4 (—*4) A-2D⁸ 2E⁴ [\$1-4 (—*1, *3, A1, C3, E3, E4) signed; A3 mis-signed 'A2'], 223 leaves, pp. [6] [1-2] 3-440 (misprinting 266 as '166', 294 as '194', 347 as '147').

BINDING. Bound in contemporary vellum with decorative painted endpapers; title stamped and framed in gold on spine; edges flecked in brown; blue-green woven silk marker sewn-in at headband.

NOTE. This small volume, bound in contemporary vellum, is a macabre reminder of the realities of urban life in the early-modern Mediterranean. Originally published in French, this treatise was intended to educate city health officials in the French port city of Marseille after an outbreak of plague in 1720. It was likely translated into Italian and published in Palermo for a similar purpose; Palermo was a frequent epicenter of plague throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

1813 Palermo. *Argomenti di Storia Siciliana*

ARGOMENTI | DI | STORIA SICILIANA | DIVISATI IN PITTURA. | [swollen rule] | PALERMO |
DALLA TIPOGRAFIA REALE DI GUERRA. | MDCCCXIII.

COLLATION. 8° (18.2 x 11.5 cm.): [a]-f⁴ g² [\$1-2 signed (—a1, g2)], 26 leaves, pp. [1-2] 3-52.

BINDING. Contemporary half leather over marbled boards; five sets of gilt double rules on spine.

REFERENCES. Mira 381

1813b Palermo. *Costituzione del Regno di Sicilia*. (Messina, Istituto di Storia dei Diritto [...], 2000)

PAGINATION. pp. lxiii, XXXXII, 160

BINDING. Half cloth; title and publisher in gold on spine.

NOTE. A facsimile reprint of the Sicilian constitution, ratified and printed in 1812. As Andrea Romano observes in his preface, the constitution embodies an unprecedented settlement between the professed authority of the Sicilian state and the Bourbon monarchy that ruled Sicily remotely from Naples: "...votato nel 1812, aderente ad un modello espressione di un maturo equilibrio fra libertà e autorità" (xi). Colophon/edition statement: "Tiratura di 500 copie delle quali 200 numerate a disposizione dell'Istituto di Storia del Diritto e delle Istituzioni | Esemplare n. 99"

1819 Palermo. *Della Cometa Apparsa in Luglio del 1819*

DELLA COMETA | APPARSA IN LUGLIO | DEL 1819 | OSSERVAZIONI E RISULTATI | DI NICCOLÒ CACCIATORE | DIRETTORE DEL REALE OSSERVATORIO | DI | PALERMO | [engraving of the Royal Observatory, Palermo] | DALLA REALE STAMPERIA | [multi-lobed rule] | 1819

COLLATION. 8vo (untrimmed, 22.5 x 15.3 cm.): π²1-9⁴ [\$1-2 signed (—6₂), 5₂ mis-signed "2*"], 38 leaves, pp. [iv] 1-72 (+ fold. plate)

BINDING. Cased in patterned blue-and-white decorative printed wrappers.

NOTE. The Royal Observatory at Palermo occupies an important (if under-recognized) place in the history of astronomy. It was there, in 1801, that Giuseppe Piazzi discovered the dwarf planet Ceres and where Niccolò Cacciatore, Piazzi's successor as director of the observatory—and author of this tract—made substantial additions to Piazzi's unprecedented star catalog. Cacciatore's name was immortalized by this catalog's publication in 1814. The catalog assigned the names *Sualocin* and *Rotanev* to Alpha and Beta Delphini, two stars of the Delphinus constellation. Forty-five years later, Thomas Webb, a British astronomer, deciphered Cacciatore's conceit: Cacciatore's name, Latinized to *Nicolaus Venator* and reversed yields *Sualocin Rotanev*. The comet of 1819, depicted here, would have been seen by my ancestors in the night sky above Sicily and was the first comet observed using polarimetry.

1820? Palermo. [MSS — *Financial receipts & records of exchange*]

DESCRIPTION. 31 leaves, unnumbered.

NOTE. Manuscript transactional records and financial receipts, apparently on Sicilian paper; a number of sheets bear watermarks of the Sicilian triskelion (a Gorgon's head and three bent legs representing the three corners of the triangular island). I found these tied together with a piece of twine in Palermo's *Mercato delle Pulci* in summer, 2015.

1825? Palermo? *Per La Sollenità del Santissimo Natale*

DESCRIPTION. 4 leaves, pp. 1-8.

NOTE. Found in a dimly-lit antiques shop in Palermo amidst a tumbled assortment of knick-knacks and kitsch, this manuscript records an intimate and charming homily in Italian, apparently a Christmas sermon written by a Sicilian priest sometime in the nineteenth century. Occasional interlinear corrections suggest that this was a fair copy made and used in delivering the sermon. Hauntingly, the text of the manuscript is unrecorded elsewhere; this document thus carries a scribal record of a voice that echoes still across two centuries or more.

...e per intercessione della mamma celeste e dell'amabilissimo patriarca San Giuseppe vi preghiamo a gradire I nostri poveri cuori, e specialmente il mio che io consacro tutto a voi o mio dolcissimo Gesù

[and for the intercession of the heavenly mother and of the most amiable patriarch Saint Joseph, we pray that you lift our poor hearts, and especially mine that I consecrate fully to you, my sweetest Jesus]

1826 *Reali Finanze - Pagatoria Generale* (Prescribed form for the Controllaria Generale, L'uffiziale del carico)

DESCRIPTION. Half-sheet, verso blank, unsigned & unpaginated

NOTE. A printed form (dated 4 August 1826) with MS additions authorizing the distribution of payment from the Banco di Palermo. Authorized by the general comptroller of Royal Finances and signed by the 'L'uffiziale del carico' [the cargo official], Benedetto Accesiello? Numbered '10243'.

1830? *Illustri pari, ed onorati rappresentanti della camera de' comuni*. (Palermo, Giovanni Barravecchia)

DESCRIPTION. Half-sheet, recto and verso, unsigned & unpaginated

NOTE. A proclamation addressing the Sicilian parliament, the 'Camera de' Comuni'; date indeterminate.

1831 Palermo. *Elogio Funebre di Francesco I, Re Del Regno Delle Due Sicilie*

[*cursive type*, **outline type**] **ELOGIO FUNEBRE** | DI FRANCESCO I. | RE DEL REGNO DELLE DUE SICILIE | *recitato* | NEL DUOMO DI MONREALE | *il giorno 2 dicembre 1830* | DAL PADRE | D. GIO. BATTISTA TARALLO | BENEDETTINO CASSINESE | E CANONICO DELLO STESSO DUOMO. | PALERMO | DALLA TIPOGRAFIA DI FILIPPO SOLLI | 1831.

COLLATION. [Unsigned single gathering of 12 leaves], pp. [1-3] 4-5 [6] 7-22 [2]

BINDING. Disbound. Title and final blank detached.

NOTE. The death of Francesco I, King of the Two Sicilies, would have been a major-minor event in the lives of Sicilians. Ruled for centuries by foreign kings, Sicilians existed on the periphery of international politics in Europe. However, the vernacular character of this book—its small format and markings of Sicilian religiosity—suggests the extent and complexity of local interest in Francesco and the reign of his family, the Bourbon monarchy. Francis (Francesco) I was nephew to Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI; his death therefore emblemizes the decline of foreign monarchies in Europe and foreshadows the nationalist *Risorgimento* of Italy in the 1860s.

REFERENCES. Mira I 396

1840 Palermo. Pirajno, Enrico. *Catalogo dei molluschi terrestri e fluviatili delle Madonie*

[*outline type*] **CATALOGO** | DEI | MOLLUSCHI TERRESTRI E FLUVIATILI | DELLE MADONIE E LUOGHI ADIACENTI | PER | ENRICO PIRAJNO | BARONE DI MANDRALISCA | [*ornaments*] | PALERMO | DALLA STAMPERIA ORETEA | Via dell'Albergaria num. 240. | [*rule*, 4 mm.] | 1840.

COLLATION. 4to (14.5 x 21.9 cm.): π1 (=χ1) [1]-5⁴ χ2 [\$1 signed (-1)], pp. [1-3] 4-7 [8-9] 10-40 [2]

BINDING. Uncut. Cased in yellow printed paper wrappers; title printed on front wrapper, publication and printer's information printed on back.

NOTES. Sicilian printers primarily served a local, insular market, and so the books and pamphlets in this collection are mainly ephemeral, topical, and generically 'popular'. Sicilian pamphlets in particular are often endearingly specific to a region and culture beyond which they appear improbable and lost. This catalog of river and land mollusks endemic to the Madonie is a case in point: the Madonie (*Madunì* in the Sicilian dialect) are the low mountains in which two of my ancestral villages, Castelbuono and Pollina nest.

REFERENCES. Mira I 223 (Mira's description: "Descrive 72 molluschi, parecchi per la prima volta illustrati, pei quali visitò quei luoghi.")

1860 Palermo. *Vita di Santa Veronica Giuliani*

VITA | DI | S. VERONICA GIULIANI | ABBADESSA DELLE CAPPUCCHINE | IN S. CHIARA | DI
CITTÀ DI CASTELLO | SCRITTA DAL SACERDOTE | FILIPPO MARIA SALVATORI | [ornament, 17 x
9 mm.] | PALERMO | STABILIMENTO TIPOGRAFICO DI FRANCESCO LAO | DECORATO DELLA
MEDAGLIA D'ORO DEL MERITO CIVILE DELL'ORDINE DI FRANCESCO I | E PREMIATO CON
MEDAGLIA D'ORO DAL R. ISTITUTO D'INCORAGGIAMENTO. | Salita de' Crociferi n. 86. | — |
1860.

COLLATION. 8vo: [1]-20⁸, 21⁴ [\$1 signed], 164 leaves, pp. [1-2] 3-10 [11] 12-75 [76-77] 78-155 [156] 157-172
[173] 174-318 [319] 320-321 [322] 323-324 [325] 326-328 (+ frontis. portrait)

BINDING. Half leather over marbled boards; title stamped in gold and six gilt decorative rules
enclosing five compartments on spine.

NOTES. The prevalence of lay theology and vernacular devotional literature in early Sicilian printing
reflects the importance of Saints' cults in the devotional lives of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century
Sicilians. Saint Veronica Giuliani (1660-1727) was canonized in 1839, explaining the popularity of her
cult and life in the middle of the nineteenth century. The marks of the crown of thorns were said to
have appeared on her forehead in 1694 and the five wounds of the stigmata appeared on her body in
1697. After death, a cruciform was found impressed upon her heart, and her body remained
preternaturally uncorrupted.

1860b Palermo. *Epigrammi per La Sicilia nel 1860* [Francesco, Duca di Sorrentino]

[decorative type resembling wooden sticks] EPIGRAMMI | PER | LA SICILIA | NEL 1860 | [ornament
depicting two doves? on rose branch, 32 x 40 mm.] | PALERMO | STABILIMENTO TIPOGRAFICO DI
FRANCESCO LAO | Salita Crociferi n. 86. | [rule, 2 mm.] | 1860.

[on rear cover:] Vendibile nella libreria del signor Salva- | tore Biondo in via Toledo n. 187. | Prezzo
Iari uno.

COLLATION. Unsigned, 9 leaves, pp. [1-3] 4 [5] 6-18

BINDING. Single-stitched pamphlet in blue paper printed wrappers.

NOTES. Though printed in Palermo, this pamphlet of patriotic epigrams was financed by Salvatore
Biondo, a Neapolitan bookseller, and was sold in the northern Italian city of Genoa (the name of a
Genoese bookseller is blind-stamped on its cover). The book's peripatetic journey is explained by the
fact that Sicily entered into Italy's popular imagination during the Italian *Risorgimento*, or
unification movement. For the first time, Sicily was viewed as integral to a budding *Italianità*. In
1860, the year in which this pamphlet was published, Giuseppe Garibaldi led a cadre of one thousand

volunteers from Genoa to Sicily, wresting Palermo from the Bourbon-ruled Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Manuscript attribution has been added on title page in ink: 'del Duca di Sorrentino'.

1875 Palermo. *Bibliografia Sicilia*, Giuseppe M. Mira (New York, Burt Franklin)

[blackletter [on volume two t.p.]] BIBLIOGRAFIA SICILIANA | OVVERO | GRAN DIZIONARIO BIBLIOGRAFICO | DELLE OPERE EDITE E INEDITE, ANTICHE E MODERNE | DI AUTORI SICILIANI O DI ARGOMENTO SICILIANO | STAMPATE IN SICILIA E FUORI | OPERA | INDISPENSABILE AI CULTORI DELLE PATRIE COSE NON CHE AI LIBRAI | ED AGLI AMATORI DI LIBRI | [premiata con medaglia di argento dal casino delle arti iv esposizione industriale 1875] | PER | Giuseppe M. Mira | VOLUME PRIMO [SECONDO] | A.L. [M.Z.] | *Burt Franklin: Bibliography and Reference Series #67* | [wooden press device] | BURT FRANKLIN | NEW YORK

DESCRIPTION. 3 vols., pp. 540 (vol. 1); 484 (vol. 2)

BINDING. Bound in blue buckram; title and author stamped in gold on spine.

NOTES. A facsimile reprint of the standard reference work on Siciliana and Sicilian imprints before 1875. When they are listed in Mira's bibliography, books in my collection have been assigned a citational 'Mira' number. Though I have come across copies of the original edition, printed in 1875, the frequent use my copy would see could damage its fragile pages. As such, a facsimile edition suits best.

1881 Palermo. *Giunte e correzioni a Mira*, Giuseppe Salvo-Cozzo (New York, Burt Franklin)

GIUSEPPE SALVO-COZZO | [rule] | GIUNTE E CORREZIONI | ALLA | LETTERA A | DELLA BIBLIOGRAFIA SICILIANA | DI | G.M. MIRA | [decorative rule] | *Burt Franklin: Bibliography and Reference Series #67* | [device: hand press] | BURT FRANKLIN | NEW YORK

DESCRIPTION. 3rd volume of 3 (see '1875', above), pp. 216.

BINDING. Bound in blue buckram; title and author stamped in gold on spine.

NOTES. A volume of corrigenda and a continuation to Mira's *Bibliografia Siciliana* [1875] (see above).

1958 New York. *Words are Stones: Impressions of Sicily*, Carlo Levi (New York, Farrar, Straus & Cudahy)

[sans-serif] CARLO LEVI | WORDS | ARE | STONES | Impressions of Sicily | Translated from the Italian by | Angus Davidson | FARRAR, STRAUS & CUDAHY | NEW YORK

COLLATION. Unsigned (20.5 x 12.2 cm). 110 leaves, pp. [8] [1-2] 3-212 (27, 28, 97, 98, 134, 135, 136 unnumbered).

BINDING. Half white cloth over brown paper boards, with dust jacket; 'CARLO LEVI' in black and 'Impressions of Sicily' in pink, embossed on front cover; author, title, and publisher on spine. Yellow endpapers.

NOTES. Printed in New York in the year my mother, Joy Militello, was born, this book indicates a possible direction this collection might take: evolving to become a collection of genealogically significant *Siciliana* rather than a collection of books printed in Sicily.