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Images courtesy of
Fabrizio Fiorenzano

city of WHEAT



IN THE WARM SPLENDOUR of Sicily, between Catania and Enna, lies Raddusa, a town of 4000 inhabitants at an altitude of 350 metres. It is the perfect spot to seek out ancient rural traditions.

The first mention of Raddusa was in 1300 when this part of Sicily was divided into three broad valleys: Val di Mazara, Val Demone and Val di Noto. Raddusa lies in the Val di Noto. Until the 14th century, the area was ruled over by the powerful Pietro Fessima and was handed down to his descendants. Following the marriage of Vincenzina Fessima to Gianfrancesco Paternò, a Knight of the Holy Roman Empire, Raddusa became a more organised settlement until,

Raddusa, in Sicily, is a town with a unique festival.
Fabrizio Fiorenzano explains all





in 1810, it was made an independent Comune by the King of Sicily, Ferdinando III, who named Francesco Maria Paternò Marchese of Raddusa.

This small country town is best reached by car and this is an impressive experience, as for mile after mile the road winds across an almost desert-like landscape of rocks, brush and cactus, like a scene from an old western film. On arriving at the town, the visitor is greeted by a sign saying *'Benvenuti a Raddusa, città del grano'* ('Welcome to Raddusa, city of wheat').

WHAT'S IN A NAME

The origin of the name 'Raddusa' is probably from the Arabic meaning 'split the rock' or 'quarry', a clear reference to the appearance of the land. Another explanation is that it comes from another Arabic word, *rabdusa*, meaning 'land of luxuriant vegetation'.

The town is perched on a plateau in the Sicilian hinterland and its streets are laid out in a very simple, and very modern, geometrical pattern. The *palazzi*, as in much of Sicily, are quite low, with no more than three storeys. Although the town is not blessed with a large number of historical or architectural monuments, the Chiesa Madre 'Immacolata Concezione' (1866) which was restored in 2005, is a good example of modern architecture.

At the Giumenta crossroads, ten kilometres from the town, stands the Torre del Feudo (1700) a well-preserved tower on an octagonal plan. A little outside the town is the Castello dei Gresti, built from the living rock and overlooking the valley.

In this setting, for three days every September the whole town enjoys a festival – and the occasion is to celebrate wheat.

MEMORIES OF TIMES PAST

The *Comune*, together with the Tourist Office and other organisations, sets out to recreate, through the now famous *Festival del Grano*, scenes from the life of a typical Sicilian farming community in the 1950s, a time when Raddusa was closely linked with farming traditions and when rural activity was synonymous with sweat, but also with bread, work and joy.

The event has become famous all over Sicily because of the wonderful folklore performances and for the care, love and professionalism with which the townsfolk prepare for these three days.

The pace of life changes and the town is full of colour and happiness. Sheaves of corn and ears of wheat of all sizes decorate the town centre, the mother church, the shops, cafés, gardens, balconies and all the streets. Guests are welcomed with hot, tasty pancakes and the locals are only too willing to be photographed.



colourful costumes represent the seasons. Children adorned with flowers and teenagers dressed to represent various divinities carry wheat in their arms.

But the most eagerly-awaited part of the parade is a carriage carrying a lady and gentleman elegantly dressed in costumes recalling the Marchese of Raddusa, Francesco Maria Paternò, and his consort (*above, right*). Thus the town pays homage to the memory of the man who founded the independent *Comune* of Raddusa in 1810. The carriage is followed on foot by the local dignitaries, led by the mayor.

Since the folklore and the produce of the land are not simply things to be seen, the organisers have worked hard to make the event into something which involves the visitors. All over the town, craftsmen, farmers and market gardeners organise tastings of food made from their produce, greatly enjoyed by the public. In Piazza Milite Ignoto they can try homemade bread dressed with oil, oregano and chilli. The people line up in an orderly manner to receive from the hands of the bakers a taste of this simple local delicacy and wash it down with a drop of local wine.

EVENING MEAL

As the evening draws in there is another treat in store. It is time for the '*Cuccia*', a delicious dish based on boiled grain and pulses, which is also traditionally eaten on 13th December, the festival of Santa Lucia.

There are many other organic products which can be purchased, such as flour, pancakes and biscuits.

Another very interesting phase of the festivities is a historical reconstruction of harvest-time, known in the local dialect as '*pisatura do granu*'. Sheaves of corn are carried to the threshing-floor by horses, accompanied by songs to attract good fortune.

In addition to these three days of celebration, Raddusa holds another festival to honour San Giuseppe, the town's patron saint.

CARTS AND COSTUMES

The attractions of the second and third days, which are even more interesting, include the opening of the 'Farm Animals Zoo', an exhibition of tractors and a picturesque costume parade. A long column of farmers dressed in traditional costume, aboard typical Sicilian carts pulled by magnificent masked horses decorated according to ancient local traditions, winds its way along the central via Regina Margherita. The last cart is loaded with ears of wheat which are distributed to the onlookers to bring happiness and prosperity. All this takes place amid the deafening din of trumpets and drums of the 'La pigia' folk group from Raddusa. Four lovely girls wearing beautiful,



This takes place twice a year, on 19th September and 19th March. The 'Table of San Giuseppe', also known as the altar, is laid out. This is laden with all the gifts of God, with bread baked in different shapes to represent St. Joseph's beard, staff and saw. Tradition dictates that at midday a man, a woman and a child must take their places at this table, representing Joseph, Mary and baby Jesus. After they have eaten, food is distributed to the rest of the people.

LUCKY LOAF

Another part of the ritual is that the first piece cut from the 'beard' must not be eaten, but should be kept to ensure good luck. In times past, in the event of foul weather, a small piece of this bread (*below*) was thrown from the house to bring better weather.

This, then, is Raddusa, the city of wheat. For centuries, wheat has constituted the principal wealth of the town and has held a special place in the hearts of the people for its generosity and the abundance of the harvest.

Thanks to the efforts of the Catania local authority, the tourist office and the *Comune* of Raddusa, every year thousands of people come to be a part of this journey through history, with its legends, customs and costumes of a farming tradition which might have been lost, but lives on to fascinate us through the memories of the old folk - exciting for the younger generation and interesting for tourists.

A word of warning - like anywhere in the world, it is not advisable to leave your camera or videocamera, with its precious memories, in your hotel room. You might live to regret it!



details

information

General Information

Wheat festival: www.festadelgrano.it

Comune of Raddusa: www.comune.raddusa.ct.it

More Images of the event:

www.frcreations.it/fabgallery/pictures/Italy/Raddusa/Raddusa01.htm

getting there

BY CAR: From Catania, leave the Catania-Palermo autostrada at the Catenanuova exit, take the SS 192 towards Enna and at 20 km turn left onto a minor road for Raddusa. From Enna, take SS 192 for 26 km and immediately after Raddusa-Agira Station turn right onto the minor road.

BY BUS: From Catania/Enna/P. Armerina/Aldone/Ramacca/Caltagirone with buses of the ETNA Trasporti company

where to stay

Several families provide Bed and Breakfast accommodation in Raddusa. For Information: Ufficio Pro Loco tel. (+39) 095 61

where to eat

Trattoria - Pizzeria:

El Sombrero - Via Margherita 86 Tel. (+39) 095 662170

Felice - Via Margherita, 35 Tel. (+39) 095 662291

La Cometa - Via Scalo Tel. (+39) 095 662995

Gastronomia Pistorio - Via Margherita, 75 Tel. (+39) 095 61

Fast Food: 'Il Buongustaio' Piazza Umberto I, 11

things to do

On booking, the craftsmen of Raddusa can demonstrate the baking of votive bread, the making of local cheeses, cakes and work in the fields using period implements. Guided tours can be made to the archaeological sites at Morgantina, Eryké, Palikè and Hergetum.

La Casa del tè
(www.lacasadelte.it)

Twice featured in the Guinness Book of Records, this is a collection of 600 types of tea from all over the world and also the world's biggest teapot and teacup! You can sample more than 100 types of tea.

