

S E G E S T A

- P. MARCONI, Segesta, scoperte varie, Roma, 1931 in NS.
N. RAPISARDA, Topografia e toponomastica antica di
Segesta, Catania, 1918.

ENTE PROVINCIALE PER IL TURISMO
TRAPANI

GAETANO FALZONE

SEGESTA



Segesta, the city founded by the Elymians whose dawn goes back, as history says, to the 12th century before the coming of Christ, famous for its superb Greek beauty, is one of the most attractive spots of the Trapanese Province Touristic Zone, which, as widely known, is exceptionally rich of archeological monuments.

It can be reached very comfortably by auto, following the national Highway, the Trapani Palermo Road. It is 45 kms. distant from Trapani or 32 kms. by rail. In Trapani you get into *Corso G. B. Fardella* which leads to *Borgo Annunziata*, the most fertile territory of Western Sicily, the land of innumerable water springs and geometrically posted vineyards and typical because of its slightly undulated surface. Erix remains now on the left, once the silent and isolated fortress of the Mediterranean Sea, on a rock 2465 feet o.s.l., where the Temple of Venus Aphrodite stood on the twin summit. It can be ascended by a very interesting climbing and winding road which displays an ever increasing pleasant panorama of natural vividness.

When at 33,8 kms. from Trapani, you get at the *Gel-ferraio Trivio* junction, on whose hill there stands solemnly and mute the Ossuary «*Monument of the Fallen*» in the Calatafimi Battle headed by Garibaldi, whose heroic deeds are narrated by the English Historian, G. M. Trevelyan in his Book «*Garibaldi and His One Thousand Men*». Forthcoming from Marsala, Garibaldi's One Thousand Heroes had found, at the foot of the «*Pianto dei Romani*». Hill, their road barred by the Bourbon troops who dominated the hill tops. «Here the unity of Italy either be made or else let us die!»

had cried Garibaldi while his red shirted men fought courageously and with all their might against the enemy, superior in number and armed equipment. Of this very decisive battle, Trevelyan states: «that was the road, nay, the only road that led to Palermo, to Naples and to Rome.» And following his extreme desperate cry, not only the living combatants but the dying as well of the bold youth invested the terrible ascent of the summit and triumphed over the contested peak. To day, in the light of historical experience and verity, it can be undeniably affirmed that the fate of the unity of Italy was shaped on this sacred spot.

On the morrow of that glorious day, May 15 1860, the men could not resist the temptation to visit the Temple at Segesta which appeared to be springing from the ground as a toy on a floor. It certainly arose great enthusiasm and pride for ancient glories. After which, their march continued uninterrupted, even through bayonet charges, unto Palermo.

At a short distance from the Monumental place, there is a junction road that leads to the Temple of Diana.

Your mind is assailed with many legendary memories recalling the wars waged between the Selinuntines and the Segestans against Carthaginians, and alliances with the Athenians and you even recall a Trojan Acestes of divine origin as Virgil describes in his Fifth Aeneid.

Going ahead on the Alcamo-Calatafimi Road, at the *Gaggera road-post* marked with km. 86, there is a junction and the road to the right leads to Segesta, it is 33 kms. long, it was built 22 years ago, a reinforced cement bridge on the stream takes you to a flat footground just below the Temple: Here is Segesta! Mr. René Bazin, an Academician of France, visited Segesta half a century ago starting from the Zucco where he had been feted there and undertook the trip on foot in company with friends of his and writes as follows:

«We walk one after the other and lay our feet on withered grass and trace a path, wrapped by strange heavy air vapors in the untold sadness of the dark evening. We are plunged in this dense vegetation that hides the soil up to our waists. No horizon before us except the brief distance ahead of us, towards sunset, where the mountain tops still appear clear against the sky. And nothing breaks this silence, not even the chirping of

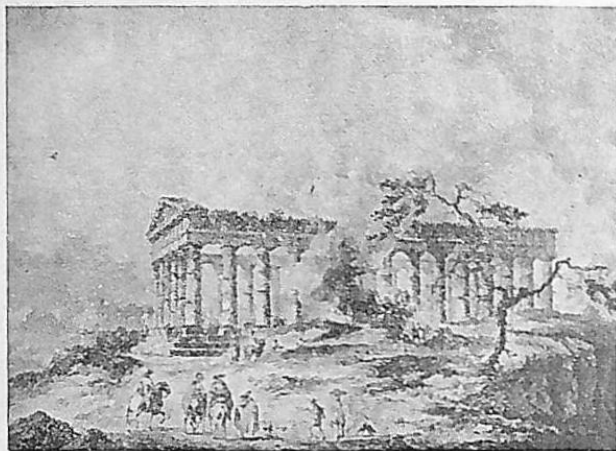


View of the Temple of Segesta
(from a print by Saint-Non, 1785)

a bird or the barking of a dog nor the rolling wheels of a cart which might prove like comforting words and recall the incessant traffic over country roads in France!.

Now is the time to go up to the Temple. Few steps more and the position allows you to admire it in all its grandeur of solitude. Around it is the immense stillness of the fields, real peace for men and things. The Temple is a marvellous and imposing example of Doric Style, it raises its formidable 16 columns, 9.36 m. high including the capitol and 1.95 m. in diameter. The front has six columns. When inside, a better view may be had of the robustness of the columns; they are not chiselled and with the plain methopes, their massiveness recall works of giants. Each column is formed with the superposition of 10 or 12 pieces. It is not without commotion to learn that this very ancient city dates back to the 12th century before the coming of Christ, and that the construction of the Temple was interrupted in the year 409 b. C., when the Carthaginians sacked it and dispersed any footprints of Greek Civilization.

About 20 years ago, Gabriel Faure visited these famous places and the reminiscence of these far distant origins



The Temple of Segesta
(from a print by Saint-Non, 1785)

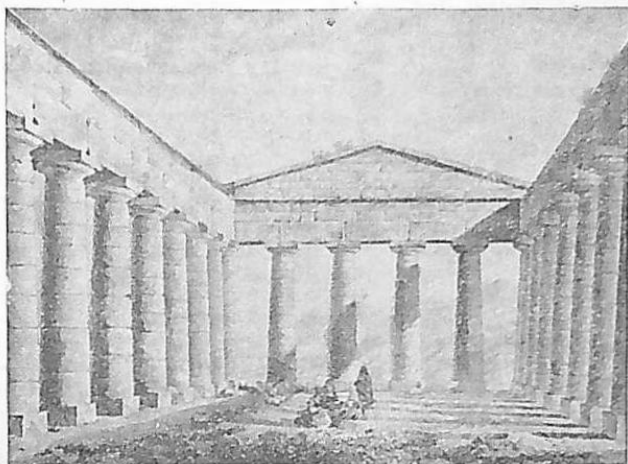
suggested to him to write a vivid page of description, the history of the past and the actual which meet and justify mutually. He says:

Segesta! It is the strongest impression had in Sicily. And yet, it may be condensed in few things: a half ruined temple in a desert of barren hills. It is impossible to get a picture of a plane, lines and more simple decorations.

Ah! though near to Palermo as we are, yet so far distant from marvellous art but so complicated and overcharged of the Palatine Chapel and of the Cathedral of Monreale!

No researches, no effects of shades and of mystery and yet an emotion arises; an emotion of different nature, perhaps a deeper one that derives from this perfection of which the Greeks held the secret as well as from the enigma that this Temple reigning in silence and solitude exerts like the Egyptian Sphinx.

I know — either by having read it or because the remains of a great theatre prove it — that there was here a city, perhaps even a great City where people came to take sulphurated baths. Had it been founded by Aeneas, who after his vessels took fire, being unable to take with him many of his followers, other than the bravest of his warriors, there he left the others and the Trojans under the leadership of Acestes?



The Temple of Segesta
(from a print by Ostervald dated 1822)

Segesta, at any rate, claimed for herself this illustrious legendary origin, then when, after she had been half destroyed by Selinunte, her rival, the Romans became masters of the Island. But this did not prevent her decadence; She became ever poorer and poorer and desert under the Empire; in the Middle Ages she had totally disappeared.

The Temple, which had not yet been finished at the time Agatocles besieged and plundered Segesta, appears to have been erected always on this horizon of bare summits and partake of the rough nature of the grounds. Non one, except during this Primavera Siciliana (Springtime Festival in Sicily) comes to disturb its wild isolation. How beautiful shall it be during the splendor of its torrid summer or in the desolation of wintry days when the ravens and other rapacious birds enliven with their raucous shrieks the silence of these deserted hills!

Noy, abandoned and no longer solemnizing any prayer towards the forgotten deities, it preserves the boldness of the times when men knew how to build temples worthy of their ideal.

At the same time, it proclaims the power of those who built it and their frailty, since nothing remains of them, not even a name reminding other men, not even their ashes in a grave.

Besides the Temple, on going up a foot path leading to St. Barbara there is the Theatre in the heart of the remains of the ages old Greek City. There is about 30 minutes walk; the effort of going up hill is compensated by the splendid panoramic view. On concluding the excursion day and on returning to Palermo, you cannot fail to approve René Bazin's impression that the spirit at the moment of admiration is captured in the souvenir of little things and details. In effect it is so: there are moments in our life when in reviewing scenes and things and people, in virtue of their extraordinary features, our memory recalls all and any minute detail and even the most insignificant wont lapse. Bazin, therefore, was right in writing this pleasant and yet formidable page; it plucks the secret of what is immortal and that which appears to be feeble and fugitive and yet it is not.

In these very moments of admiration, the soul is raptured by the very little things. And these have a sense and the soul is moved by what they mean or say. I remember there was a star which appeared as if placed just above the prospect. It was a blue trembling star like two eyes I used to know. I began to walk attracted by it as well as by the Temple and since I was compelled to follow an unlevelled soil, at times it appeared above the columns and at times in the intervals that separate them as if floating in between them.

When I reached the lower marble steps, it had disappeared. Three birds swung out across the peristyle structure and without beating their wings and noiselessly, flew out into the darkness. Then, wandering in the midst of the tall grass which grew inside of the ruins and that the wind only sow or reap, stunned by these enormous constructions that suddenly became grey-dark, I was assailed by the sentimental spirit of the hour, the chilly temperature and by the depressing sense of solitude right there where we were.

After which, and with these enchaning scenes deeply impressed in you, you may plan your return trip to Trapani. Segesta, actually, is the millenary landmark favored by all Touring Organizations which, approving an intense program of road maintenance and the institution of comfortable and hospitable inns and rendez vous, tend to render very pleasant the trip or sojourn in the realm of art.

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