

Mapping Memory

Linking the Landscape of Sicily's Tuna Fisheries

One of the many elements that link Sicily to the sea is its tuna fisheries. These fisheries have been the backbone of Sicily's economy for most of its recorded history: tuna fisheries, or *tonnare*, were established (and had likely already been in operation for centuries) throughout the island as early as the 1100s by North African colonists. Comprised of coastal factories, Sicily's *tonnare* are paragons of the island's medieval vernacular architecture, combining elements of both North African as well as European factory buildings. They were host to many important cultural and technological practices, from fishermen's folksongs heavily derived from Arabic to advanced net construction to the fishing ritual *mattanza*, or tuna "massacre," as memorialized in Vittorio de Seta's 1955 short documentary film, "Sea Countrymen." Today, half a century after Sicily's fisheries closed due to the dwindling population of tuna and fishermen and changing attitudes about the use and value of industrial space, the *tonnare* remain as relics of the once essential role that tuna fishing played in the island's economy and culture.

Most Sicilians are aware of the historic, cultural, and poetic power of tuna fishing and celebrate their municipalities' attempts to adapt their *tonnare* to contemporary cultural and hospitality uses. While historians are aware of the significance of Sicily's *tonnare*, many scholars have considered them individually. **Placing the *tonnare* in dialogue with each other allows for an understanding of them as components of a larger, expansive landscape of collective memory and experience that has shaped Sicily's relationship to the sea.**

My aim is twofold. First, I will document and analyze the distinctive architecture of these factory buildings, an in-

depth study of which has not been done. The *tonnare* express a unique mingling of architectural styles found only in Sicily, including Norman, North African Islamic, and Byzantine motifs. Furthermore, these structures are fascinating examples of early Mediterranean industrial architecture, featuring large halls spanned by wooden beams to which the tuna, which could weigh up to 400 pounds, were hoisted and hung for processing. Second, studying the contemporary use of the *tonnare* in relation to each other and wider Sicilian culture will provide an understanding of the import of these structures for Sicily's post-industrial fishing landscape. Findings from this research will serve as case studies for larger concerns about preserving factory buildings.

I will visit eight *tonnare*, which range in states of preservation: a couple are ruins, enjoyed mainly by beachgoers, and others have been restored as maritime museums, luxury hotels, or cultural centers (Fig. 1). Beginning with the *Tonnara di Portopalo* in the southeast, I will travel west from Siracusa to Palermo and Trapani, ending at the *Tonnara di Capo Granitola* (Figs. 2.1 - 2.8). Through documenting the *tonnare*, examining archival material, and interviewing stakeholders* and community members (I am fluent in Italian and proficient in Sicilian), I will develop a catalogue of maps, drawings, and narrative accounts that explores how medieval industrial structures can be experienced and utilized in the present. This research will serve as valuable sitework for my M.Arch thesis in my third year.

* Stakeholders include Sicilian culture and preservation agency officials, members of local cultural groups, museum directors, developers, proprietors (if fishery is privately owned), and historic preservationists.



Fig 2.1 Tonnara di Portopalo



Fig 2.2 Tonnara di Marzamemi



Fig 2.3 Tonnara di Santa Panagia



Fig 2.4 Tonnara di Arenella



Fig 2.5 Tonnara dell'Orsa



Fig 2.6 Tonnara di San Cusumano



Fig 2.7 Tonnara di Favignana



Fig 2.8 Tonnara di Capo Granitola



Fig 1 Map of Sicily with Itinerary

Itinerary

Days 1-10 – Siracusa

- Days 1-3: *Tonnara di Portopalo*
- Days 4-7: *Tonnara di Marzamemi*
- Days 8-10: *Tonnara di Santa Panagia*

Days 11-20 – Palermo

- Days 11-13: *Tonnara di Arenella*
- Days 14-16: *Tonnara dell'Orsa*
- Days 17-20: Archives (*Palermo Istituto Centrale per gli Archivi*)

Days 21-33 – Trapani

- Days 21-23: *Tonnara di San Cusumano*
- Days 24-26: Archives (*Trapani Archivi di Stato*)
- Days 27-30: *Tonnara di Favignana*
- Days 31-33: *Tonnara di Capo Granitola*

Estimated Budget

Airfare	\$	2,000
Car Rental	\$	2,200
Public Transport	\$	500
Accommodation	\$	2,650
Food	\$	1,650
Research Expenses	\$	500
Contingency	\$	500
Total	\$	10,000