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Through the theatrical mask. The Archaeological Museum of Lipari

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1. Introduction to the visit of the Museum

The Aeolian Archaeological Museum "Luigi Bernabò Brea" is located on the Rock of Lipari, surrounded by inaccessible high vertical crags. This place (fig. 1) represented a natural fortress and offered a safe place for the inhabitants since prehistoric times. The fortress was inhabited in villages of huts, from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age (fig. 2); with the arrival of the Greeks in 580 BC, it became an Acropolis in the Greek and Roman ages and later a fortified citadel, today called Castello (Castle).



Fig. 1 - Aeolian Islands. Lipari and the Rock of Castle site of the Museum.

The Museum is composed of eight visit sites placed on outdoor street in Castello park (Bernabò Brea & Cavalier, 1979; Bernabò Brea et al, 1994; Martinelli & Mastelloni, 2015): 1) Prehistory of Lipari and Greek town foundation; 2) Prehistory of the Smaller Islands; 3) Territory-Man-Environment and Volcanology; 4) Greek and Roman Ages; 5) Epigraphic hall and Garden; 6) Museum and Excavations History and teaching room; 7) Santa Caterina church for temporary exhibitions; 8) "Mare Motus", Contemporary Art exhibition in the old prison.



Fig. 2 - Lipari. The archaeological area on the Rock of Castle with the remains of Bronze age settlements.

The visit begins in the Museum and the archaeological excavations History Hall, set up in 2015 on the ground floor of the first building, at the Castle entrance. The cultural enterprise story began after the end of the Second World War and is told by ample panels and vintage photos in b/w. A film is dedicated to the biography of Luigi Bernabò Brea (Genova 1910-Lipari 1999), the well-known archaeologist founder of the Lipari Museum, to whom the museum is entitled. He reconstructed the most ancient history of the Aeolian Islands with his studies. The archaeological exhibition starts from the two Prehistoric Pavilions of Lipari and Smaller Islands where the evolution the Aeolian Islands cultures is documented, from the Neolithic to the Late Bronze Age. The exploitation of obsidian, the black volcanic glass,

allowed the stable population in the archipelago, starting from the middle of the 6th millennium BC. In the Bronze Age, large stone hut villages were built in perched and defended locations, and fully incorporated into Aegean trade routes.

In the Prehistoric and Greek foundation Pavilion, the last room (X) is dedicated to the Greek foundation of "Lipara" in 580 BC, where the finds from the Acropolis of Lipari are collected, in particular the objects found inside the *bothros* (votive well) dedicated to the god Eolo. This is the only trace of a sanctuary existence in which the Greeks reorganized the Aeolus indigenous cult. In the Greek and Roman Ages Pavilion, the historical and cultural framework of the Greek and Roman town is reconstructed, above all through the rich documentation from the funerary objects (vases of different shapes, personal objects, statuettes, masks, jewels) founded in Contrada Diana necropolis in Lipari, where about 3,000 graves have been discovered. Archaeological research has also spread under the sea: the room XXVII is dedicated to underwater archaeology where hundreds of finds, found in the wrecks on Aeolian islands seabed (amphorae, anchors, various vases, cannons), are exhibited.

The relationship between man and territory in antiquity and described the volcanic products use (obsidian, pumice, sulfur, alum, sulphurous water) is explored in the Volcanology Hall. The volcanoes history is exposed through panels, models, maps and photographs and local volcanic rocks samples and the Aeolian Islands and volcanoes in general geomorphological features are explained here, too. The Garden and Epigraphic Hall preserve the numerous Greek and Roman ages cippus and *stelai* with inscription found in the necropolis.

The Museum path last stage concerns the most recent history, with *Mare Motus* contemporary art permanent exhibition, set up in 2015 in ex jails.



Fig. 3 - Lipari. Archaeological Museum. A prison cell with works of Thar Ben Jalloun in the contemporary art exhibition.

Lipari was used as a penal colony by King Ferdinand II in 1792, like all the smaller islands in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. The walled city, or the castle, became a place of detention since 1884. The medieval village ruined houses were turned into lodgings or prisons. In 1863 it was occupied by the *coatti* (internees), common criminals but also politicians, anarchists, or anyone who offended authorities. Some more isolated rooms were used for disciplinary prison and living conditions were miserable. In February 1916 the colony of *coatti* was finally suppressed but in 1926 under the fascist government the penal colony was restored in the castle. On 28 August 1926 Lipari people opposed themselves by destroying the castle's prisons. The revolt action was useless because Mussolini's government brought back the internees, especially politicians, intellectuals and artists. The castle was then divided into two parts, the first with San Bartolomeo Cathedral, the other closed by a wall, with prison and fascist militias dormitories. After the end of World War II, in 1949, the internment camp was abandoned, while the prison was finally closed in the 1990s. The cultural enterprise was undertaken from 1941 by Luigi Bernabò Brea as archaeology heritage Superintendent for Eastern Sicily and it started on the Castle Fortress, which was the subject of restoration and research until the establishment of the first nucleus of the Museum in 1954. From that date more and more spaces were accessible to visitors and scholars. The permanent exhibition of contemporary art (fig. 3) is one of the last interventions. It evokes feelings of freedom and escape from isolation, through the works of the artists placed in the prison rooms. There are works and installations by Mimmo Paladino, Gonzalo Borondo, Riccardo Monachesi, Tahar Ben Jalloun, Piero Pizzi Cannella, Maurizio Savini, Fabrizio Plessi, Fati Hassan, Igor Mitoraj, Teresa Emanuele, Matteo Basilè, Carlo Gavazzeni Ricordi, Alessandro Giovannoni, Carin Grudda, Maria Elisabetta Novello, Gregorio Botta. Even the prison door has become a work of art, covered with metal panels by Alex Caminiti and with two small oil paintings by Ettore De Conciliis, instead of the peephole.

2. Brief history of the preparations

The Aeolian Archaeological Museum Luigi Bernabò Brea, created in 1954 by Luigi Bernabò Brea and Madeleine Cavalier (*Museo Archeologico Eoliano*, 2002; Cavalier, 2015; Spigo et al, 2013; Martinelli & Spigo, 2015), exhibits complex findings from excavations conducted by the two scholars in the Aeolian Archipelago from 1948 to 2000 and nowadays as archaeological of the new generation. Due to its characteristics as a living museum, in relation to the territory it belongs to, it is directly connected to the constant progress of studies. The exhibition is based on a chronological itinerary accompanied by scientific and educational information that is updated following an illustrative clarity criteria to make the visit pleasant even for non-specialists. The panels and captions are in Italian and English. A particular impact on the

public evoke, for example, historical reconstructions, with the original elements of excavation contexts: the late Bronze Age necropolis of ex Piazza Monfalcone in Lipari, the prehistoric cemeteries of Milazzo; a sector of the Greek necropolis of Lipari; the stratigraphic panels; the bronze age hut. The formal and scientific realization of the Museum began in the 1950s when the restoration of the buildings acquired by the State to start the exhibitions were started and completed (fig. 4).

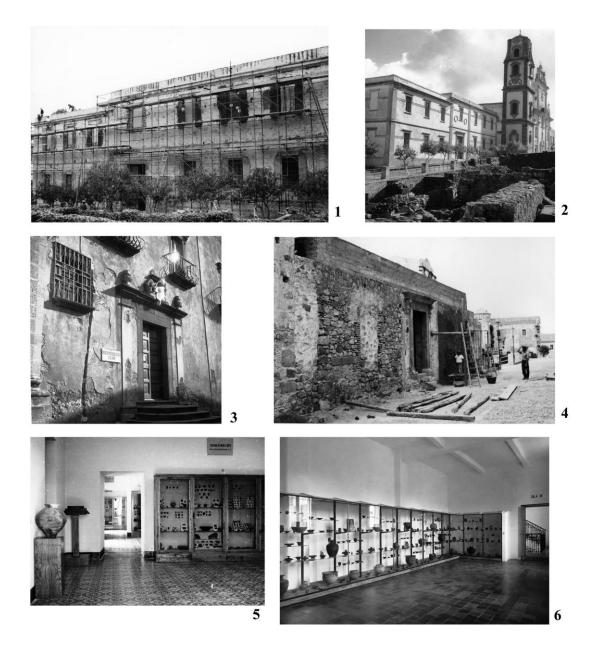


Fig. 4 - Lipari. Archaeological Museum. The restoration and construction works since 1950. 12) Greek and Roman age Pavilion; 3) Prehistoric age Pavilion; 4) Prehistoric of minor islands Pavilion; 5-6) Preparation of exhibition during 50s-70s.

The first group of finds was exhibited in 1954 in a building that later became the epigraphic pavilion, while in 1956 the Bishop's Palace was completed where the pavilion of the Prehistory of Lipari was definitively set up.

The exhibition sectors, the depots and the laboratories progressively divided into several historic buildings within the fortress of the Castle: the Greek and Roman pavilion in a large building of the fascist confinement camp, expanded between 1987 and 1990 (Ceschi, 1996) with the construction of three large halls: Marine Archaeology, Theatrical Terracotta, Roman, Byzantine and Medieval Age. The Prehistory of the Minor Isles located in a modern building was completely reworked in 2015 with a project co-financed by the European Union, as well as the room dedicated to the history of the Museum (fig. 5).



Fig. 5 - Lipari. Archaeological Museum. The hall of the history of Museum.

The Volcanology pavilion and the Man Territory and Environment section, designed by Luigi Bernabò Brea and the volcanologist Alfred Rittmann which was developed in the 1990s (Cabianca, 1996) and later updated in 2013 on the ground floor (Martinelli & Lo Cascio, 2015), is now included in a study of remodeling of exhibition spaces and contents.

The complexity and richness of archaeological research in the small Aeolian archipelago has been transferred to the rooms of the Museum with a careful didactic vision of communication. The routes prepared by the founders, Luigi Bernabò Brea and Madeleine Cavalier, are intentionally preserved while updating the contents and graphics of the didactic apparatus. Certainly, in the architecture of the halls and showcases, the continuous evolution of the installations that have developed over the course of 70 years of life is visible. This spirit of conservation linked to respect, to feelings of affection and to the deep esteem towards the founders, makes the Aeolian museum unique in the complex of archaeological museums of Magna Graecia.

3. Through the theatrical mask: room XXIII

One of the rooms (fig. 6) of greater museographic interest is the one in which the terracottas of theatrical content are the subject of an important study by Luigi Bernabò Brea (Bernabò Brea, 1974, 1979, 1981, 1985, 1993, 1995, 1997, 1998 a; 1998 b; 2001; 2002; Bernabò Brea et al, 1987) and is still considered to be of fundamental scientific relevance.

The scholar personally took care of the selection of the finds and their placement in the showcases, creating a scenographic path enriched also by miniatures of theatrical stages (fig. 7). The emotional impact on the public can be perceived by looking at the windows made up of small boxes arranged in a sequence like a labyrinth, which do not lead to being lost but on the contrary, they transmit attention and curiosity. The visitor comes into direct contact with the exposed object, the mask, which immediately shows its communicative character.



Fig. 6 - Lipari. Archaeological Museum. The hall XXIII of the theatrical terracottas. Fig. 7 -The theatrical reconstructions in the showcases of hall XXIII.

The hall hosts numerous examples of statuettes and masks that can be traced back to the theatrical genres in use at the time (tragedy, satirical drama, comedy and *fliacica* farce). Most of the terracottas come from the grave goods of the Contrada Diana tombs and from the votive pits located in the area of the necropolis. These are miniature reproductions of the masks that the actors wore on their faces while acting, both to amplify the tone of the voice, which could

reach even the most distant spectators, and to interpret the different roles assigned to them, including female ones. Next to the masks are figurines of women and men dancers, comedians, jugglers, satyrs, silens, faithful and cheerful companions of Dionysus, the god to whom theatrical performances were dedicated. Dionysus (fig. 8), god of wine, banquets and theatre, exercised his influence also in the realm of the underworld where he dispensed eternal beatitudes to those who had begun his mysteries.

From the necropolis of Lipari comes the richest and oldest, "corpus" of terracotta with a theatrical subject. Well over a thousand pieces including models of masks and statuettes, all of local production so far found in a single site: a documentation of extraordinary interest for the most in-depth knowledge of important aspects of the Greek theatre. The collection of masks in addition to providing complete documentation on the ancient theatre from the end of the 5th to the 3rd century BC, attests to the early diffusion on the island of theatrical performances, as well as of the Dionysian religion and also clarifies some particular aspects of the cult of Dionysus. Their exclusive presence, in Lipari, in funerary contexts, in tombs and in votive tombs, finds its explanation, in the triple aspect of the personality of Dionysus, god of wine, theatre and together, god who assures the initiates of his cult the otherworldly beatitudes. In Lipari, more than in any other centre of Western Greece, the funerary aspect of the god appears to be closely connected with the theatrical aspect.



Fig. 8 - Lipari. Archaeological Museum. The mask of Dionysus (tomb 1502 inv. 10979).

The diffusion of theatrical terracotta in burials is not a phenomenon completely new to the Greek world, but the findings of Lipari are characterized by at least two peculiar aspects: the abundance of the specimens present among the grave goods and the chronology.

The theatrical terracottas of Lipari, except for some specimens dating back to the 5th century BC, can all be assigned to a period between the 4th century BC and 252-251 BC, when the city was destroyed by the Romans. The exhibition order respects the chronological sequence: masks of Ancient Tragedy and Comedy, Satirical Drama; masks of the Middle Comedy and finally masks of the New Comedy and the Hellenistic Tragedy. Characters have been recognized in the complex of the masks relating to the ancient tragedy, in most cases, due to famous works represented throughout the Greek world even after the death of their authors, but there are also characters of little-known or scattered works of which it has been possible to reconstruct the contexts. Among the groups found associated in a single tomb, the characters of various tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides have been identified, some of which are known only from fragments of the text. The characters of Heracles, Acheloo and Deianira (tomb 890) of the background of the Trachinias 438-425 BC are relevant to Sophocles (496 BCE / 406 BCE); Oedipus and Jocasta (tomb 406) of the Oedipus king 430-420 BC (fig. 9); Philoctetes and Paris (tomb 1725) of the lost Philoctetes at Troy. To Euripides (485-407 / 406 BC) the characters of: Ecuba and Taltibio (tomb 2486) in the last scene of the Trojan women (415 BC); Heracles and Admetos (tomb 1287) in Alcestis; Priamo, Paride, Deifobo and Cassandra (tomb 74) of the lost Alexandros; Chrysippos, Polydoros and Polymetor (tomb 1613) in Hecuba (425-426 BC). In addition, the faces of Hecuba and Hector (tomb 198) of the lost Ettore of Astidamante the Younger (tragedy of the 4th century BC).



Fig. 9 - Lipari. Archaeological Museum. Masks of Ancient Tragedy: Oedipus and Jocasta (inv. 2301f, g).

The genre of ancient comedy was mainly aimed at caricature aspects of political and social life of the time. Its main exponent was Aristophanes (died in 386 BC). These masks do not have individual characters (with the exception of sex and age), but they respect the canons of comedy. Their interpretation is more difficult than the masks of the tragedy which, being legendary figures, were always characterized by an iconographic tradition. In the case of the comedy masks, those of Hades and Heracles (fig. 10) were recognized as probably belonging to a mythological comedy and the group of old women in the parliament (*Ecclesiazuse*) of Aristophanes.

There are numerous statuettes of actors of the so-called Middle Comedy, mainly from the second half of the 4th century BC represented by old and young people, slaves, women in various types with different attitudes and characters.

The satirical drama was a kind of farce that was recited after a trilogy of tragedies to amuse the spectators. Among the protagonists are satyrs (*papposileni*) young and old people (fig. 11) and others of semi-feral appearance, cheerful and orgiastic, followers of Dionysus. Among the latter are the *fliaci* (as twaddlers), as they were called in Taranto, known to us from the vascular depictions of southern Italy dating back to the IV-III century BC. They had a constant feature: a huge belly on which a narrow and short shirt is knotted under which the phallus comes out with obscenely exaggerated dimensions. They played satirical farces, quite scurrilous parts. These *fliaci*, date back to more ancient periods, to the sixth century BC, in which they appear as demons of fertility connected in some way to the cult of Dionysus. Also the phallophorias, ancient exhilarating processions in which phallic and obscene songs were performed, carrying the phallus, symbol of fertility, will be absorbed by Dionysus and by the cults that celebrated him (Giardini, 1979).



Fig. 10 - Lipari. Archaeological Museum. Masks of Erakles and Hades (tomb 1986 inv. 14584; 14585).



Fig. 11 - Lipari. Archaeological Museum. Satirical characters, satyrs (inv. 12524; 15210).

Even more rich is the group of masks (over five hundred specimens) of characters from the New Comedy of Menander (born in Athens in 342-341 BC), of bourgeois environment, whose production, is placed between 290 BC, the year of the Athenian's death that took place during a bath at Piraeus and 252-251 BC, year of the conquest of Lipari by the Romans. The innovative genius of the playwright Menander (fig. 12) was not then understood, but was appreciated only after his death when a statue was erected in the theatre of Dionysus in Athens.



Fig. 12 - Lipari. Archaeological Museum. The mask of Menander (inv. 6921).

The theatrical organization of early Hellenism was considerably modified by attaching importance to the type of characters that were pre-established and tended to expressive realism. Reducing the number of masks and eliminating the copies, the wardrobe of the troupe, especially itinerant ones, was simplified. The satirical drama had no more space in a society greatly changed, as well as the political and satirical drama that characterized ancient comedy. The society was deprived of its freedom and was gentrified. The new comedy is therefore a bourgeois comedy that reflects the family life of the Athenians and the comedy derives from particular situations or misunderstandings. The masks are no longer ridiculous, but try to express the intimate temperament and mood of the individual characters, each of them has a well-defined social and family position.



Fig. 13, 14, 15- Lipari. Archaeological Museum. Mask of New Comedy. Courtesan (inv. 9768); The young men (inv. 9730); The young men with wavy hair (inv. 11289).

The conventions, that were deducted from the studies on the physiognomy of individuals (*physiognomonikà* was very fashionable in medical and philosophical schools), determined the individual temperament. Therefore the colour of the complexion varied according to the type of life. White for women who lived indoors, (fig. 13) brown for the young man (fig. 14, 15) who attended the gym and played gymnastic games outdoors, for the soldier and for the vainglorious. The red colour of the hats indicates bad character but also cunning (from the red fur of the fox). Wrinkles on the forehead indicate reflexive character, meditation. Their absence suggests a lack of thought as for the adulator (fig. 16). Lowered eyebrows or closed eyes are an example of gentleness and good nature. The raised eyebrows, instead are excitement, anger; the eyes wide open are courage. Sometimes the masks have a double expression, but this also happened in ancient comedy (tomb 1558, fig. 17). On Lipari there are 33 of the 44 types listed by Giulio Polluce in *Onomastikon Encyclopedia*, write in the 2nd century AD. He divided into five categories: old, young, slaves, old women, young women (family

women and courtesan). We do not know the source to which Pollux was inspired, probably by the theatre of Menander, Philemon and Difiro.

Finally, among the terracottas there are a group of small clay reproductions, masks and statuettes, copied from bronze and marble portraits, of famous men: Sophocles, Euripides, Menander, Homer, Socrates, Lysias, Alexander the Great (Bernabò Brea, 2000; Bernabò Brea & Cavalier, 2000).



Fig. 16 - Lipari. Archaeological Museum. Mask of New Comedy: the flatterer (inv.11243; 9751).



Fig. 17– Lipari. Archaeological Museum. Mask of Ancient Comedy: character with double face (inv. 11114e).

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