

MARIANA STARKE AND THE GRAND TOUR IN EUROPE, ITALY, AND SICILY BETWEEN THE EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURY

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Abstract

This article examines the British writer and traveller Mariana Starke (1762-1838), with emphasis on her accounts of her journey to Italy and her first guide-book on Sicily: *Travels in Europe between the years 1824 and 1828 [...] comprising an historical account of Sicily with particular information for strangers in that Island* (London: John Murray, 1828). The analysis aims to consider Starke's work within the typical and "European" contexts of representation of the *Grand Tour* while, at the same time, highlighting some of the peculiarities related to said author: not only because the traveller is a woman (relatively unusual in Sicily for that time), but also because, with the practical information she imparted (food prices, transportation costs, etc.), Mariana Starke made a significant contribution to the development of modern travel guides.

Keywords: History, Grand Tour, Europe, Italy, Sicily

Letters from Italy (1800 and 1815) and Travels in Italy (1802)

The writer and traveller Mariana Starke (1762-1838) was born in south-east England (in Epsom, County Surrey) to Mary Hughes and Richard Starke (former deputy governor of Fort St. David, Madras, on the south-east coast of India from 1752 to 1756).¹ Mariana spent her first thirty years in her father's English estate, Hyland House, writing plays (*The Sword of Peace*, 1788; *The British Orphan*, 1790), a long poem (*The Poor Sol-*

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1 For an essential bibliography, see Benjamin Colbert, "Starke Mariana, 1762-1838", in "Women's Travel Writing, 1780-1840: A Bio-Bibliographical Database", British Travel Writing, University of Wolverhampton, accessed October 20, 2022, <https://btw.wlv.ac.uk/authors/1135>.

dier. *An American Tale*, 1789) and some tragedies (*The Widow of Malabar*, 1791; *The Tournament*, 1800).

In 1792, 30-year-old Marianna, together with her parents and her sister, Louisa, moved to the south of France and Italy for treatment of tuberculosis, which had afflicted her and all her family at various stages. For the seven years following her return to health, Starke witnessed the death of her sister (in Nice, 1792), her father (in Pisa, 1794), and her mother on her return to England in 1798. Having overcome these vicissitudes, Mariana decided to write about her travelling and living experiences in Italy, and in 1800 completed her two volumes of travel notes, under the imprint of Sir Richard Phillips in London, with the long title: *Letters from Italy, between the years 1792 and 1798 containing a view of the revolutions in that country [...] likewise pointing out The matchless Works of Art which still embellish Pisa, Florence, Siena, Rome, Naples, Bologna, Venice, &c. With instructions for the Use of Invalids and Families who may not choose to incur the Expence attendant upon travelling with a Courier*². On the title page, Starke also introduces her aforementioned tragedies *Widow of Malabar* and *The Tournament*, while the also volume includes a rare map of the theatre of war in Italy in 1799.

The title – *Letters from Italy* – evidenced the epistolary style of the piece, a narrative form that had already been in vogue even within travel literature since the end of the 18th century³ (consider, for example, Goethe's *Italienische Reise*, the account of his journey to Italy between 1786 and 1788, only published after, in 1816 and 1817).⁴ The subtitle, on the other hand, states the objectives clearly: to bestow a direct testimony of the events of

2 For the full titles of Starke's guides, see the bibliography at the end of this article.

3 For the *Grand Tour* in Italy see, Cesare De Seta, *L'Italia nello specchio del Grand Tour* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2014) and Rosemary Sweet, *Cities and the Grand Tour. The British in Italy, c. 1690-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2015) and Arturo Tosi, *Language and the Grand Tour. Linguistic Experiences of Travelling in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). For the *Grand Tour* in Sicily, as well as the classic text by Hélène Tuzet, *La Sicile au XVIII^e siècle vue par les voyageurs étrangers* (Strasbourg: P. H. Heitz, 1955), see Enrico Iachello, *The territory of Sicily and its representations (16th-19th centuries)* (Palermo: New Digital Frontiers, 2018). A list of the voyagers in Sicily in Salvo Di Matteo, *Viaggiatori stranieri in Sicilia dagli Arabi alla seconda metà del XX secolo. Repertorio, analisi, bibliografia* (Palermo: Ispe, 2000).

4 See Karin Baumgartner, "Travel, Tourism, and Cultural Identity in Mariana Starke's *Letters from Italy* (1800) and Goethe's *Italienische Reise* (1816-1817)", *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, Vol. 83 (3), 10/2014: 177-195.

the revolution (which were listed),⁵ but also to provide a practical guide for those having to travel to Italy and the south of France, especially for health reasons. In fact, the introduction in the first edition reads:

I am likewise encouraged by a hope of being serviceable to those of my Countrymen, who, in consequence of pulmonary complaints, are compelled to exchange their native soil for the renovating sun of Italy, to insert a few observations (relative to health), the result of seven year experience, during which period my time and thoughts were chiefly occupied by endeavours to mitigate the sufferings of those most dear to me. I presume not to imagine myself correct in every thing which I have advanced. The occupation of a Nurse has often prevented me from obtaining accurate knowledge on points worthy of minute investigation. Nevertheless, general outlines will sometimes convey tolerably just ideas of a country, even though the picture be not shaded by a Master's hand; hence, I trust, that the little knowledge I have been able to collect may so far inform Travellers [sic], as to guard them against those serious inconveniences which too generally retard, and not unfrequently prevent, the recovery of consumptive Persons.⁶

In 1802, the book was reprinted by Phillips in London, with a new title, *Travels in Italy*, and with an additional subtitle (*also a Supplement comprising Instructions for Travelling in France*), with only mentions of the revolutionary events.⁷ Both the *Letters* and the *Travels*, in 8" format (approximately 20 centimetres), were divided into 25 chapters (or "letters")⁸ in which the account of events in revolutionary and Napoleonic Europe was interwoven with historical and artistic information and details of Starke's travels from Nice to Italy (down to Naples, and then on to Florence), and then from Vienna to Prague, Dresden, and Hamburg, before finally returning to England. Moreover, to her texts, the author adds an appendix with the expenses incurred and the costs that families could expect. Here we see one of the main characteristics of Mariana Starke's successive works: she did not limit herself to *récit de voyage*, but also gave practical advices. The result thus seemed to mix the two main trends of the period: "the first-person travel essay or travel memoir, and the travel guide-book."⁹

5 *Containing a view of the revolutions in that country. From the capture of Nice by the French Republic to the expulsion of Pius VI from the Ecclesiastical State.*

6 Starke, *Letters from Italy*, v-vi.

7 *Containing a view of the late revolutions in that country.*

8 From letter I to XVI in the first 383-page volume; from XVII to XXV in the second 409-page volume.

9 Baumgartner, "Travel", 178.

After the publication of *Letters from Italy* and *Travels in Italy*, more than ten years would pass before our writer, who had in the meantime devoted herself to poetry, finally decided to publish an updated and heavily expanded edition of her guidebooks. In 1814, she had, in fact, contacted the well-known London publisher, John Murray III (who, since the 1930s, started the famous Murray's *Handbooks for Travellers*), and "with a keen business eye" wrote to scholar Benjamin Colbert, "Starke predicted that a work that 'comprehends every kind of information most needful to continental travellers' would, in the event of a peace between England and France, support the 'immediate & immense' emigration likely to ensue". "Allow me to enquire" she wrote to Murray "whether, if that event occurs, you would like to purchase the above-named work."¹⁰

In 1815, however, a new edition of *Letters from Italy (the Second Edition)* was published in London (Printed for G. and S. Robinson, 25, Paternoster-Row). While similar to *Letters*, it contained some additional content and updates to the title. The new edition, for example, therefore listed *The expense incurred by residing in various Parts of Italy, France &c. so that persons who visit the Continent from economical motives may select the most eligible Places for permanent Residence*, and included *instructions for Invalids, relative to the Island of Madeira; and for the use of Invalids and Families who may not wish to avoid the Expense attendant upon travelling with a Courier*, and finally presented as a *Revised, corrected, and considerably enlarged, by an Itinerary of Chamouni, and all the most frequented Passes of the Alps, Germany, Portugal, Spain, France, Holland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Russia, and Poland*.

Travels on the Continent (1820)

The collaboration with the publisher Murray began a few years later in 1820, with *Travels on the Continent written for the use and special information of Travellers*. The three hundred pages of this new publication were collected still in 8", but in a slightly smaller format: 19 centimetres. The book was preceded by an *Advertisement* that reassured readers of the safety of their travels in Europe, particularly regarding the "disbanded soldiers, converted into *banditti* [sic]" who after 1814 infested "the post-roads of southern France, the Alps, the Apennines, and the countries bordering those mountains; especially the borders of the Roman and Neapolitan territories". By

10 Colbert, "Starke Mariana".

1820, “that all the above-named countries, except the tract between Terracina and Mola, are now, and have long been, exempt from so serious an evil.”¹¹

This was followed by the *Introduction* written in London in October 1819, in which the author, aware of “how impossible it is to give an accurate and circumstantial account of any country, without residing in it”, declared that she had decided to revisit the continent: “and become an Eye Witness of the alterations made there, by the events of the last twenty years: events which have so completely changed the order of things, with respect to roads, accommodations, and works of art, that new Guides for Travellers are extremely wanted in almost every large city of southern Europe.”¹² Rather than simply republishing her previous books, she therefore wrote a new one, “and being ambitious to prove myself a faithful historian, I spent two years, namely, from May, 1817, to June, 1819, in the countries it has been my endeavour to describe; that I might write from the spot, and trust nothing to memory.”¹³ This was the typical “je l’ai vu” rhetoric of the *Grand Tour* used to lend credibility to the travel narrative.

Eight years later, in 1828, after an interlude of several “new” editions titled *Information and directions for travellers on the Continent*¹⁴, a new and rejuvenated copy of what had by then become one of the most famous guidebooks for English travellers made its first appearance.

Travels in Europe [...] comprising an historical account of Sicily (1828)

In London in 1828, Murray published *Travels in Europe between the years 1824 and 1828 adapted to the use of travellers comprising an historical account of Sicily with particular information for strangers in that Island*. As Colbert noted, by this time Starke’s works “emphasise their ‘usefulness’ and became the prototypes for Murray’s own handbooks for travellers, not to mention other guidebook series.”¹⁵

This new edition of *Travels*, with more than 600 pages collected “within the compass of One Portable Volume”, had as its “chief object” to “comprise all the information necessary for Travellers on the Continent

11 Starke, *Travels on the Continent*, iii-iv.

12 Ibid. v.

13 Ibid.

14 *Fifth edition*, in 1824 and in 1826, with editor Murray; *Sixth edition, thoroughly revised, and with considerable additions adorned with plates*, in 1825, for Glaucus Masi, an Italian editor that frequently reprinted English works.

15 Colbert, “Starke Mariana”.

of Europe, and the Island of Sicily.”¹⁶ But why was Sicily added? The reason is clearly in the *Advertisement* written in Exmouth, in September 1827, explained in: “and a Guide for Sicily being much wanted, she has given a concise historical account of that Island, and its antiquities, added to Information and Directions for Travellers who may intend going thither.”¹⁷ However, things were not exactly so. There was no shortage of guidebooks on Sicily. From the first half of the 18th century, Magna Graecia and Sicily had been included in the *Grand Tour* itinerary (particularly after the archaeological excavations in Herculaneum and Pompeii, promoted in the late 1730s by the new Bourbon dynasty of Naples) and new travel accounts of Sicily and Malta had been published as well. In the 1770s, the Scotsman, Patrick Brydone, wrote an important guidebook in English, titled *A tour through Sicily and Malta. In a series of Letters [...]*¹⁸ From then, numerous other English-speaking travellers had visited the island, often publishing an account of their journey, not to mention *récits de voyage* written in other languages (French, German, Italian etc.) and subsequently translated into English.

It is true, however, that reports by female travellers were not yet very widespread at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and there was above all a lack of guidebooks with practical information. From this point of view, Starke’s was perhaps the first example of such a guidebook for Sicily. We shall therefore briefly analyse her pages dedicated to Sicily (Chapter XI). We will thereby try to identify which elements in *Travels* were traditional and which were new.

Starke’s Tour of Sicily

Starke begins the chapter on Sicily with a *Concise History of the Island* based mainly on the information provided by classical authors, from Homer to Diodorus Siculus to Herodotus (following the customary obligation to consult and quote classical texts). This “classical” introduction is followed by the first practical information on the island, in particular the *Most eligible months for visiting it* from March to June, when “the sun is not sufficiently fervent to be dangerous (if Travellers guard their heads properly against it), neither is there, at this seasons, much *Mal’aria*.”¹⁹ The main ports (Messi-

16 Starke, *Travels in Europe, Advertisement*

17 Ibid.

18 Printed for W. Strahan and T. Cadell: London 1773.

19 Starke, *Travels in Europe*, 366.

na, Syracuse and Trapani, Catania, and Palermo) and small landing-places are then listed and, to draw the traveller into an air of adventure, it is noted that “to avoid being surprised by Corsairs, the Sicilians have encircled themselves with Martello Towers”²⁰ (in reality, these fortifications had been built between the 16th and 17th centuries, when the Iberian monarchy had to defend itself against Ottoman attacks, in a completely different historical context to that of the first half of the 19th century).

Having completed her overview of the island, the guide proceeds with the recommended travel itinerary. The first city to be described is Palermo, which is reached by sea from Naples. The approach to the city is described as “fine scenery: the Æolides [Aeolian Islands] forms a beautiful group on the left, near Sicily, [...] and Ætna is likewise seen at a distance.”²¹ The exotic aspect of Palermo is emphasised: “the gaiety and Asiatic appearance of Palermo are peculiarly striking; an effect produced, in part, by numerous palm-trees, and a species of weeping cedar, which flourishes here. Palermo, however, displays other features of an Asiatic Town; some of its buildings are Saracenic”. It also mentions the best hotel, *The Prince of Wales*, “kept by Mr. and Mrs. Page: the latter is an English woman.”²² Even in the first pages dedicated to Palermo, we already find all the characteristics of a *Grand Tour* narrative with the addition of the usual practical information and historical and artistic indications, and with new focus, typical of the period, not only on Greek-Roman monuments, but also on medieval examples, especially Sicilian-Norman ones. Customs and traditions, always points of interest on the *Grand Tour*, are also taken into account. For example, when the guide describes the “splendid Quay, called the Marina, and furnished with Marble Seats and a Small Theatre”: “during summer, a select Band of Musicians execute music, generally of their own composing, to amuse the Palermitan Nobility, who drive daily, and even twice a day, to the Marina, for the benefit of sea-breezes.” Starke adds: “Foreigners, on arriving in the Harbour of Palermo, are welcomed by a Boat filled with a Band of Music”; and at the same Marina “may usually be seen idle Palermitans, of the lower rank, assembled round a Storyteller, whose histories, though not equal, perhaps, in merit, to ‘The Arabian Tales’, excite the interest of his auditors. This exhibition seems to be derived from the Asiatics” and, in a footnote: “These Story-tellers [itinerant *cantastorie*, ndr] exhibit all the year round, at a given hour, in Palermo, delivering expositions of Ariosto, Tasso, &c., al-

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid. 367.

ternately exciting the laughter and the tears of their hearers; and receiving, as a recompense from each of them, a grain or two.”²³

After visiting Palermo and nearby sites (Monreale, the Benedictine Abbey of San Martino, the Capuchin Catacombs with the mummies, the Prince of Palagonia’s “villa of the monsters” in Bagheria, etc.), the tour of Sicily begins, not without first explaining the way people travelled at that time: “Travellers who wish to make the Tour of the Island, usually set out on the Carriage-road, which extends some way; ordering their Mules, or Lettiga (a litter) to be in waiting at its termination.”²⁴

After following a route through a country described as “beautiful” (with “butterflies superb”) the Travellers arrive in the town of Alcamo, which “abounds with Churches and Religious Establishments.”²⁵ This was a common observation of Sicilian cities made by travellers, not only English-speaking ones, who noticed an excessive and oppressive presence of the Catholic Church in Sicilian society. In Alcamo, one could stay overnight in a hotel “kept by an Abate”, where there is a gentleman whom several travellers (we do not know if Starke does as well) “have taken as their Guide to the Sulphureous Hot Springs, and Ruins of Segesta.”²⁶ This introduces the local element with an insider perspective, the Sicilian guide that in some way influences the traveller’s perception of Sicily.

The next stop of the tour is Trapani, where the Carriage-road ends. The city, with its “safe Harbour” (mentioned by Virgil in the *Aeneid*) is also “famed for having been the place where Anchises died, and where Æneas celebrated funeral games in his father’s honour.”²⁷ It appears “strongly fortified, and enriched by Coral and Thunny Fisheries. Ivory, Coral, Conchs and Alabaster, are manufactured in the town.”²⁸ Unfortunately, however, the hotel in Trapani is not a good one. From Trapani, travellers usually

23 Ibid. footnotes *g* and *h*.

24 “A Lettiga, the national carriage, holds two persons; and is, in shape, something like the body of a Vis-à-vis. This Vehicle, provided with strong poles, resembling those of a Sedan-chair, is carried by very powerful porter-mules [...] Two mules go before, and one behind, accompanied by a muleteer on foot, armed with a stick, ten or twelve feet long, to guide the mules; and another muleteer mounted, and riding at the head of the Cavalcade. A Lettiga is not usually furnished with cushions to sit upon; but has a dirty lining, and a gaudy outside: it goes up and down every hill, however steep [...] The motion of Lettiga is fatiguing, and apt to produce drowsiness [...]” (Ivi, 405).

25 Ibid. 372.

26 Ibid. footnote *z*.

27 Ibid. 373.

28 Ibid.

“make an excursion to the summit of Eryx, the highest Mountain of Sicily, Ætna excepted.”²⁹ Or they go to Castel Vetrano, through Marsala and Mazzara. Starke visits Erice and its antiquities, and afterwards heads to Marsala, a city remembered because it was “erected by the Saracens on the Promontory of Lilybæum”; that is, on one of the three points of the island, at a famous site of ancient history, especially for the battle that ended the first Punic war.³⁰

After sleeping in Marsala, travellers usually proceed through Mazzara to the *Stone Quarry* south of Campobello (today known as “Cave di Cusa”): “the Quarry excites a peculiar interest; because the stone of which it is composed, whether destined for shaft of pillars, was hewn out of this Quarry in shape and size precisely such as the builder required; instead of being cut into large shapeless blocks, and fashioned afterwards.”³¹ As we know today, the columns of the quarry were intended for the construction of the Greek temples of Selinunte.

In Selinunte, travellers arrive “through lanes bordered with white roses, and a path shaded with ilexes, as it approaches the sea, is lovely. And the first view of the three largest Temples is most striking, in consequence of the colossal mass of ruins they exhibit.”³² After admiring the temples, one then moves on to Sciacca “called Termæ Salinuntiae from its Baths, said to have been constructed by Dædalus.”³³ Here, the only hotel one can find is intolerable, and “travellers, if compelled to sleep in Sciacca, usually endeavour to obtain a private Lodging.”³⁴

From Sciacca, through immense rice fields (“and the air in this neighbourhood must, consequently, be unwholesome during warm weather”) one arrives at the “the solitary House of San Patro” (current Casale San Pietro) and then to the town of Siculiana: “the country is dreary, and Siculiana is a wretched town with a bad Inn.”³⁵

Another important stop is Girgenti (Agrigento). The New Port, or Wharf, of Girgenti “presents a busy scene: here are immense quantities of sulphur cake, with other articles for exportation, lining the shore; ships taking in their respective cargoes; and boats loading with corn [...] The mod-

29 Ibid. p. 373 and footnote c.

30 Ibid. 374.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid. 374-375.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid. 376.

35 Ibid.

ern Mole of Girgenti may indeed be called an Emporium for corn.”³⁶ In the Girgenti Hotel (served by the Bishop’s Cook), one can meet Mr. Politi, “an Artist who keeps for sale a collection of Greek-Sicilian Vases, found in the Tombs of Agrigentum”, and who “has fitted up Apartments for the accommodation of Travellers” (Raffaello Politi was also actually a scholar who had collaborated with the most important archaeologists of the time). But also a “banker, named Granet, who resides at Girgenti, and speaks English, and that is very kind and useful to Travellers.”³⁷ The verdict on the ancient city of Girgenti is clearly positive. Less so for the modern one. “Modern Girgenti stands near the Site of the Citadel of the ancient Agrigentum; and though apparently magnificent, when seen from a distance, is found, on closer examination, to consist of small houses, and narrow streets.” The hill crowned by the modern town, however, is the site of ancient Agrigentum, where travellers can admire “the stupendous Temples, worth seeing than any other antiquities Sicily contains.”³⁸

After visiting Agrigento, one continues to Palma, which is pleasantly situated in a lush valley, and then, across a bleak plain, to Licata, the ancient Phintia with wider roads than those we usually find in Sicily. Regarding the stay in Licata, the guide is very clear: “Persons fortunate enough to procure a letter of recommendation to Sig. Giuseppe Parainfo, are most hospitably received, and comfortably lodged, by that Gentleman, who resides at Licata: but those who are under the necessity of going to Hotel, are wretchedly accommodate.”³⁹ One finds the same situation in the town of Terranova whose description follows (a town built by Emperor Frederick II, that stands near the site of ancient Gela): “the Hotel at Terranova is tolerably good; but persons acquainted with Mr Wilding, Prince Butera’s brother, and a Resident here, are entertained at his house most sumptuously.”⁴⁰

At this point, almost all travellers on the *Grand Tour* cut towards the centre of the island, skipping south-eastern Sicily. Starke’s guide also observed this trend. Thus, after sleeping in Terranova, travellers usually proceed to Caltagirone, “famous for a Manufactory of small Figures of Terracotta, beautifully executed, and representing the lower class of people in coloured costumes.”⁴¹ From there it was on to Mineo and Palagonia, with a distant view of Ætna, and a pass through which a torrent

36 Ibid. 377.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid. 381.

40 Ibid. 381-382.

41 Ibid. 382.

of lava seems to have passed, and then on to Lentini, the ancient Leontium, and Carlentini, built and fortified by Charles V. Here there was the Biviere of Lentini, a lake that “contains myriads of Leeches, which might endanger the life of any person tempted to bathe in its pestiferous water”, and that “causes exhalations so peculiarly noxious, that they poison the surrounding country with *Mal’aria*.”⁴² Passing through Augusta, one finally arrived at ancient Syracuse.

Those who, in any case, did not want to follow the usual route and preferred to venture into the south-eastern part of the island, especially to visit Baron Gabriele Judica’s Museum and Excavations in Palazzola (the Baron’s town of residence, today Palazzolo Acreide), “usually went from Terranova to Syracuse either by Biscari, or Chiaramonte: but this road is extremely bad, and may, indeed, be called dangerous”: the result, however, was worth the effort, in fact “Baron Judica receives Travellers with great kindness and hospitality” and “wish to sell all of his Antiquities.”⁴³ Returning to Syracuse, the first part of the road to this city reveals Ætna towering majestically above all else. Of this city most famous for Greek and Roman antiquities, Starke describes all the monuments already known to travellers on the *Grand Tour*, and summarising her indications are therefore not of great interest for the purposes of our analysis. She does, however, make interesting references to hotels (*The Albergo del Sole* [Hotel of the Sun] near the Duomo, and “another, but a very inferior Inn, *The Leone d’oro* [Golden Lion]”) and two towns that Starke does not visit: Noto, “a beautiful little Town, containing a collection of Medals & co. on sale”, and Avola, where “small Sugar Plantations may still be seen” with “the cultivation of the Sugar Cane.”⁴⁴

The next stop after Syracuse is Catania, with its good hotels: “*The Elephant Inn* [the elephant is the city’s symbol] in Piazza del Duomo, which is very comfortable; and the *Corona d’oro* [Golden Crown], the master of which Hotel, Sig. Abbate, is an excellent Guide to the summit of Ætna.”⁴⁵ The tour of Catania is the usual one which naturally includes the city’s two most important museums: that of the Benedictine monastery, which, however, “is shewn to Travellers of the male sex” (this is one of the few mentions of the difficulties and impediments female travellers encountered in Sicily), and that of the Prince of Biscari, one of the points of reference for all *Grand Tour* travellers in Catania during the second half of the 18th cen-

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid. 382, footnote *k*.

44 Ibid. 388.

45 Ibid. 389.

ture: “and Travellers, anxious to see it to advantage, should signify their wish, over night, to the principal Custode [Keeper], a gentlemanly, well informed person, who, thus called upon, shews the Museum himself.”⁴⁶

From Catania, then begins one of the most fascinating experiences for travellers: the ascent to Mount Etna. In this regard, Starke cites a report made by “an English Gentleman and his Wife, who ascended to the Crater of Ætna at Midsummer, 1826, under the direction of Vincenzo Carbonaro, a judicious guide from Nicolosi” [the little town called “la porta dell’Etna”, the gateway to Etna], and an account of the journey of another English Gentlemen who ascended to the crater at the end of November, 1824.⁴⁷

The next stop after visiting Mount Etna is Taormina, reached via the road to Acireale, Giarre, Francavilla, and Giardini, not without first visiting some of the province’s principal attractions: the Port of Ulysses at Ognina; the Castle of Aci, “a strongly situated Fortress built on ancient Lava which run into the sea”; the Scopuli Cyclopus at Trizza, that “some writers conjecture that are the Rocks described by Homer, as being near the Cave of the Cannibal, Polyphemus, who feasted on the ill-fated followers of Ulysses”; and the Castagno dei cento Cavalli [the Hundred Horse Chestnut], “that looks like six trees close together.”⁴⁸ Travellers mainly visited the Roman Theatre in Taormina, located in a “lovely situation, commanding a view of the Streights of Messina, Giarra, Aci, Ætna, and the whole country near Taormina, which is highly cultivated, and richly clothed with olive and mulberry-trees.”⁴⁹ The last important stop is Messina, a city rebuilt after the earthquake of 1783. From here it was also possible to make an excursion by water to visit Scylla (opposite her counterpart Charybdis) and land at Reggio.

At the end of the journey, “Travellers, in order to complete their Tour round the sea coast of Sicily, usually prefer embarking in a *Speronaro* (a very safe kind of boat) at Messina, visiting the Lipari Islands, and going thence to Cefalù; instead of going by land to the latter Place”; for this last route, “good as far as Melazzo, bad and mountainous thence to Cefalù”, Starke quotes an extract from the journal of an English Gentleman and his Wife.⁵⁰ Finally, Starke’s guidebook, like many other travel accounts, contains a section on the character of the Sicilians, the climate, and the roads.

46 Ibid. 390.

47 Ibid. 394-397.

48 Ibid. 397-398.

49 Ibid. 399.

50 Ibid. 401-402.

Practical suggestions

The part devoted to practical information is very interesting, with prices given in “tari” (a coin equal to 10 grana), in “carlini” (3 tari, thus 30 grana) and in “piastre” (12 tari, thus 120 grana). To give an idea, the storytellers in the Palermo Marina were rewarded with one or two “grana”.

The hotels prices are the following items to be discussed: in the big cities “beds are six tari each person; and dinners eight [...] In smaller towns beds for masters are four tari each, beds for servants two tari each; and the Guide, belonging to the Travellers, provides the table. This Guide who acts as Cook, and Purveyor, and who is indispensable appendage to every party of Travellers in Sicily, expects, for wages, one piastre a day.”⁵¹

The price of a “Lettiga carried by three mules is about thirty carlini (900 grana) per day, while travelling; and about fifteen carlini for every day of the rest. Mules for persons who ride may be engaged at Palermo, and throughout the Island, for ten tari each mule, on travelling days, and five on resting days. At Catania the hire of mules is somewhat cheaper than at Palermo” and “for every Guide from Nicolosi to the summit of Ætna, including his mule, and charcoal for the Casa degli Inglesi, the price is two piastres and half.”⁵²

The list with the days, hours, and miles required to reach each stage is very useful. In addition to these, and much other practical information, the names of the guides are to be noted (in addition to those already mentioned, in Palermo the best guides for travellers intending to make the Tour of the Island were Camello [Carmelo, ndr] Catalani and Francesco Mursalona), as well as the reference to the “Letters of Recommendation”, namely “lettere commendatizie” that, especially in the 18th century, allowed the traveler to rely on the private hospitality of some important person in the city visited (using all possible networks: diplomatic, cultural, freemasonic etc.). When Starke writes, things had changed a bit:

Letters of recommendation to all the Civil Authorities, from the Luogotenente at Palermo, are desirable; and letters of recommendation, from the British Consul General to all the Vice-Consuls, are, for British Travellers in Sicily, most useful. Passports, on leaving Naples to visit this Island, on leaving Palermo to make a tour round the sea coast to Catania and Messina, and on leaving Messina to visit Rheggio, or the Lipari Isles, are, at present, indispensable.⁵³

51 Ibid. 406.

52 Ibid. 405-406.

53 Ibid. 406.

The chapter ends with the final acknowledgements by the author:

The Author feels that it would be assuming a merit to which she has little claim, did she not most thankfully acknowledge how much the foregoing account of Sicily has been improved by the minute, accurate, and valuable Observations, in manuscript, of E.I. Rudge, Esq; and the Notes of other intelligent British Travellers, who have recently visited the Island.⁵⁴

Thus ends the chapter on Sicily. From then on, the island has been duly included in the numerous editions of Travels published even after the author's death.

Conclusion

The pages written by Mariana Starke, and in particular those dedicated to Sicily, seem to therefore largely reflect the earlier *Grand Tour* travel narratives. They always (or almost always) had the same characteristics and were written according to a common model that could be defined as "European" (as Enrico Iachello demonstrated): a "je l'ai vu" rhetoric (I saw it with my own eyes) to confirm the reliability and truth of one's own account (and to sometimes contradict that of a predecessor); an adventurous pattern that sometimes leads to an amplification of the difficulties encountered (dirty hotels, uncomfortable roads, brigands, etc.) to ensure the reader remains captivated; an interest in ancient monuments, in Nature (volcanoes, Etna, vegetation), in local customs and habits; and, finally, a reference to classical Greco-Roman texts and contemporary Sicilian guidebooks that influenced, with their local vision, the travellers' "foreign" perspective. This demonstrates the openness of the Sicilian elite and people, who welcome foreign travelers and establish with them a network that is not only economic but also socio-cultural.

But there is something comparatively new in Mariana Starke. As we have stated, one of the main characteristics of her works was that they did not limit themselves to travel narratives, but also provided practical information, intended not only for male or female tourists (Starke does not consider the difficulties faced by women travelling alone), but also addressed to people forced to travel due to health problems. This level of practicality is hardly present (if at all) in previous guidebooks.

These features are, above all, the important novelties: not only because the protagonist of the trip is a woman (quite an unusual fact in Sicily for

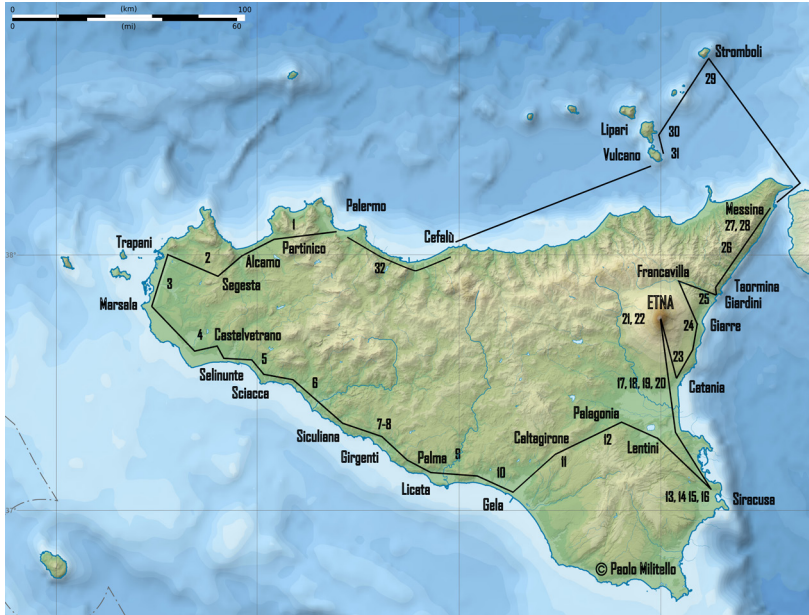
54 Ibid. 409.

that time), but also because, with her practical information (food prices, transportation costs, etc.), Mariana Starke made a significant contribution to the development of modern travel guides.

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- motives may select the most eligible Places for permanent Residence. With instructions for Invalids, relative to the Island of Madeira; and for the use of Invalids and Families who may not wish to avoid the Expence attendant upon travelling with a Courier. By Mariana Starke, Author of the "Widow of Malabar", "The Tournament", "The Beauties of Carlo-Maria Maggi paraphrased" &c. &c. The second edition, Revised, corrected, and considerably enlarged, by an Itinerary of Chamouni, and all the most frequented Passes of the Alps, Germany, Portugal, Spain, France, Holland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Russia, and Poland. In Two Volumes. London: Printed for G. and S. Robinson, 25, Paternoster-Row, 1815.*
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Route round the Sea Coast of Sicily, on mules; between the latter part of May and the Early part of July, 1826 (Starke, *Travels in Europe*, 406-408) Cartographic reconstruction.

- 1st day. From Palermo to Sala di Partinico+ miles 19. Hours employed in riding, 5 $\frac{1}{4}$. From Partinico to Alcama*, miles 12. Hours employed in riding, 3 $\frac{1}{2}$. Objects best worth notice: Morreale – its Cathedral – Picture, by Morrealese, in the Benedictine Convent – View of the Valley.
- 2^d day. Temple of Segesta+ miles 9. Hours employed in riding, 3. – Trapani* [sic] miles 21. Hours employed in riding, 6 $\frac{3}{4}$. Objects best worth notice: Temple of Segesta – Theatre.
- 3^d day. A Vineyard +. Hours employed in riding, 4. – Marsala*, miles 18, from Trapani. Hours employed in riding, 2 $\frac{1}{2}$. Objects best worth notice: Monte S. Giuliano, the ancient Eryx.
- 4th day. Mazzara, miles 12 – Hours employed in riding, 2 $\frac{3}{4}$. Stone Quarry + [Cave di Cusa] near Campobello [di Mazara], miles 8. – Hours employed in riding, 2 – Castel-Vetro*, miles 8 – Hours employed in riding, 2. Objects best worth notice: the Stone Quarry.

- 5th day. Selinuntium +, miles 9. Hours employed in riding, 2 ½. Sciacca*, miles 21. Hours employed in riding, 4 ¾. Objects best worth notice: two Sets of Temples; three in each, at Selinuntium. Hot Springs, at Sciacca.
- 6th day. San Patro, on the banks of the Platanus+, miles 19 – Hours employed in riding, about 4 ¾. – Siculiana*, miles 11. Hours employed in riding, about 2 ¾.
- 7th day. Girgenti+, miles 12 – Hours employed in riding, 3 ½. Objects best worth notice: the Mole – the Temples, and other Antiquities – the Cathedral, its Baptismal Font, and Echo.
- 8th day. Occupied in seeing the remains of Agrigentum.
- 9th day. Palma+, miles 16. Hours employed in riding, 5 ¼. – Licata*, (commonly called Alicata) miles 12. Hours employed in riding, 3 ½.
- 10th day. Half a day of rest, Terranova* [today Gela], miles 18. Hours employed in riding, 5.
- 11th day. A Barn+, miles 17 – Hours employed in riding, 4 ¼. Caltagirone*, miles 7. Hours employed in riding, 2 ¾. Objects best worth notice: a celebrated Manufacture of small Clay Figures, at Caltagirone.
- 12th day. A Brook+, beyond Palagonia, miles 17 – Hours employed in riding, rather more than 5 ½. Lentini*, miles 13. Hours employed in riding, 3 ¾. Objects best worth notice: the Biviere di Lentini: an extensive, but very unwholesome Lake, well stored with fish.
- 13th day, Walnut-trees+, miles 17. Hours employed in riding, 5 ¼ – Siragusa, miles 13 – Hours employed in riding, 3 ¾. Objects best worth notice at Syracuse: Amphitheatre – Theatre – Ear of Dionysius – Tomb called that of Archimedes – Strada Sepulcrale – Catacombs – Remains of Fort Labdalus – Subterranean Passage for Cavalry, &c. – Garden of the P.P. Cappuccini – River Anapus – Temple of Jupiter Olympicus – Papyri – Fonte Ciane – Duomo – Statue of Venus, in the Museum.
- 14th, 15th and 16th day, at Syracuse.
- 17th day. Scaro d' Agnuni*, miles 24 – Hours employed in riding, 6 1/2. Catania*, miles 18 – Hours employed in riding, 4 1/4. Objects best worth notice: on leaving Syracuse, Scala Græca – Trophy erected in honour [sic] of Marcellus. At Catania: Theatre – Amphitheatre – Baths – and other Subterranean Antiquities – Duomo – Church of the Benedictines, their Garden and Museum – Prince Biscari's Museum.
- 18th, 19th, and 20th day, at Catania.
- 21st and 22^d day. Expedition to Ætna, now called Mongibello.
- 23^d day. At Catania.
- 24th day. Trizza*, miles 7. Hours employed in riding, about 2. Giarra*, miles 17 – Hours employed in riding, 3 ½. Objects best worth notice: Scopuli Cyclopus at Trizza. As the ride from Catania to Giarra occupies only half a day, Travellers frequently employ the other half in visiting the Castagno di Cento Cavalli, situated about six miles from Giarra.
- 25th day. Francavilla+, miles 18. Hours employed in riding, about 5. Giardini*, miles 10. Hours employed in riding, about 3.

- 26th day. Dining Place, miles 14. Hours employed in riding, and visiting the Ruins of Taurominium, 2 miles beyond Giardini, $5 \frac{1}{4}$. Messina*, miles 20. Hours employed in riding, about 5. Objects best worth notice: Church of S. Pancrazio – ancient Piscinæ – Naumachia – Theatre, and view from it, at Taormina. At Catania [sic. mistake: it's Messina]: convent of S. Gregorio – Cathedral – Citadel – Faro – Surrounding Country.
- 27th, and three following days, Messina.
- 28th day, by sea – From Messina to Acqua Nero, hours 6.
- 29th day, at nine in the morning Stromboli. To examine the Crater here occupies the better part of a day.
- 30th day, at ten in the Morning, Lipari. To examine this Island occupies the better part of a day; and Travellers usually sleep here.
- 31th day, at five in the morning, Vulcano. The walk to and from the Crater here, occupies hours $2 \frac{1}{2}$. And if the wind be tolerably fair, Cefalù is reached before midnight.
- 32th day, on mules, from Cefalù to Termini+, miles 24. Hours employed in riding, $5 \frac{1}{4}$. Palermo, miles 24 – in a four-wheel carriage, hours $3 \frac{3}{4}$.