

# Sicily

Europe - Mediterranean

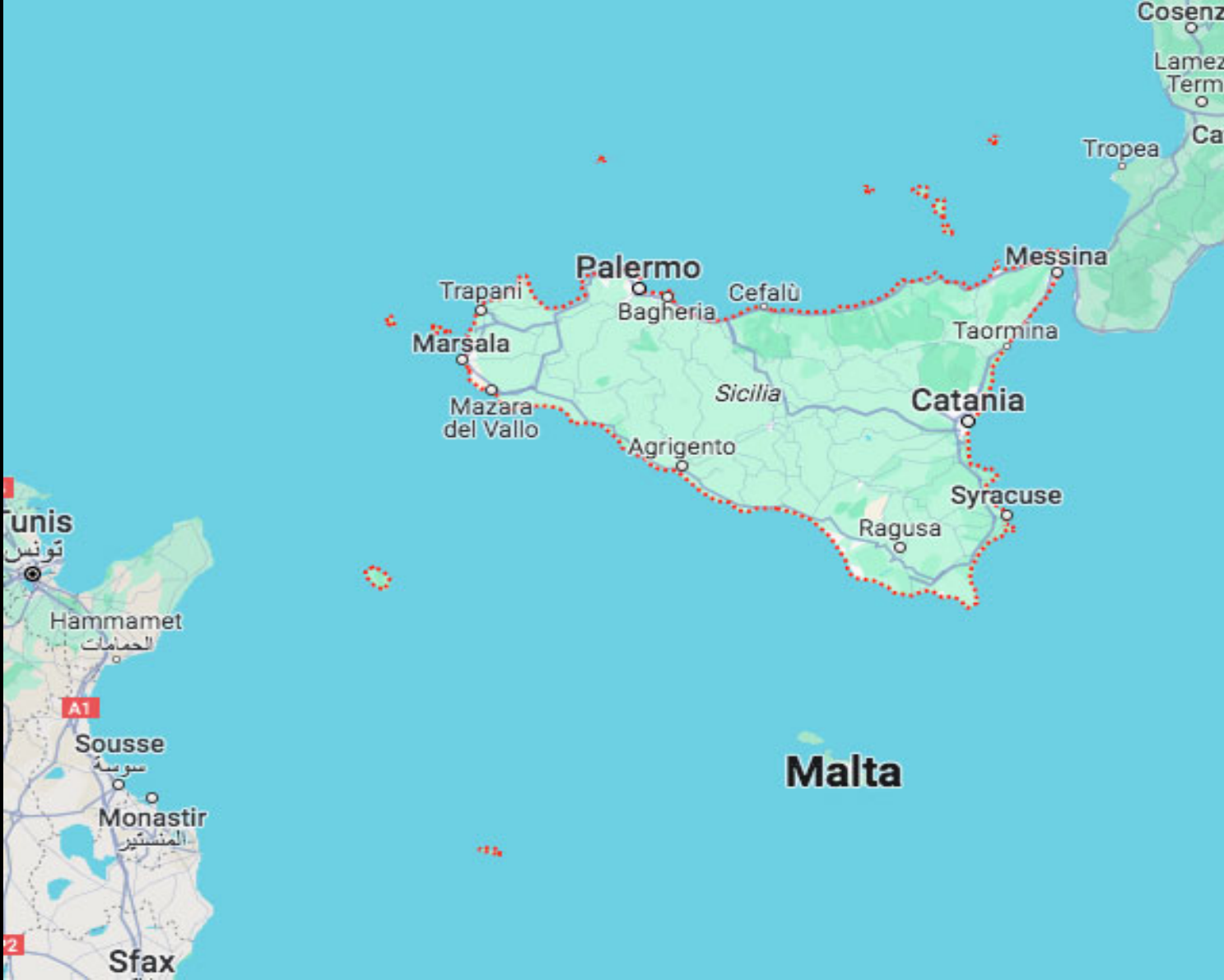
Teaching the Bahá'í Faith

Bahá'í Geography - Sicily

# Sicily

Sicily is the largest island in the Mediterranean at 25,711 km<sup>2</sup>, and one of 20 regions of Italy. It is on the northern edge of the African Plate colliding with Europe. Mount Etna is the tallest active volcano in Europe at 3,357 metres and covering an area of 1,190 km<sup>2</sup>. Most of the island is hilly and intensively cultivated.

# Sicily between Italy and Tunisia



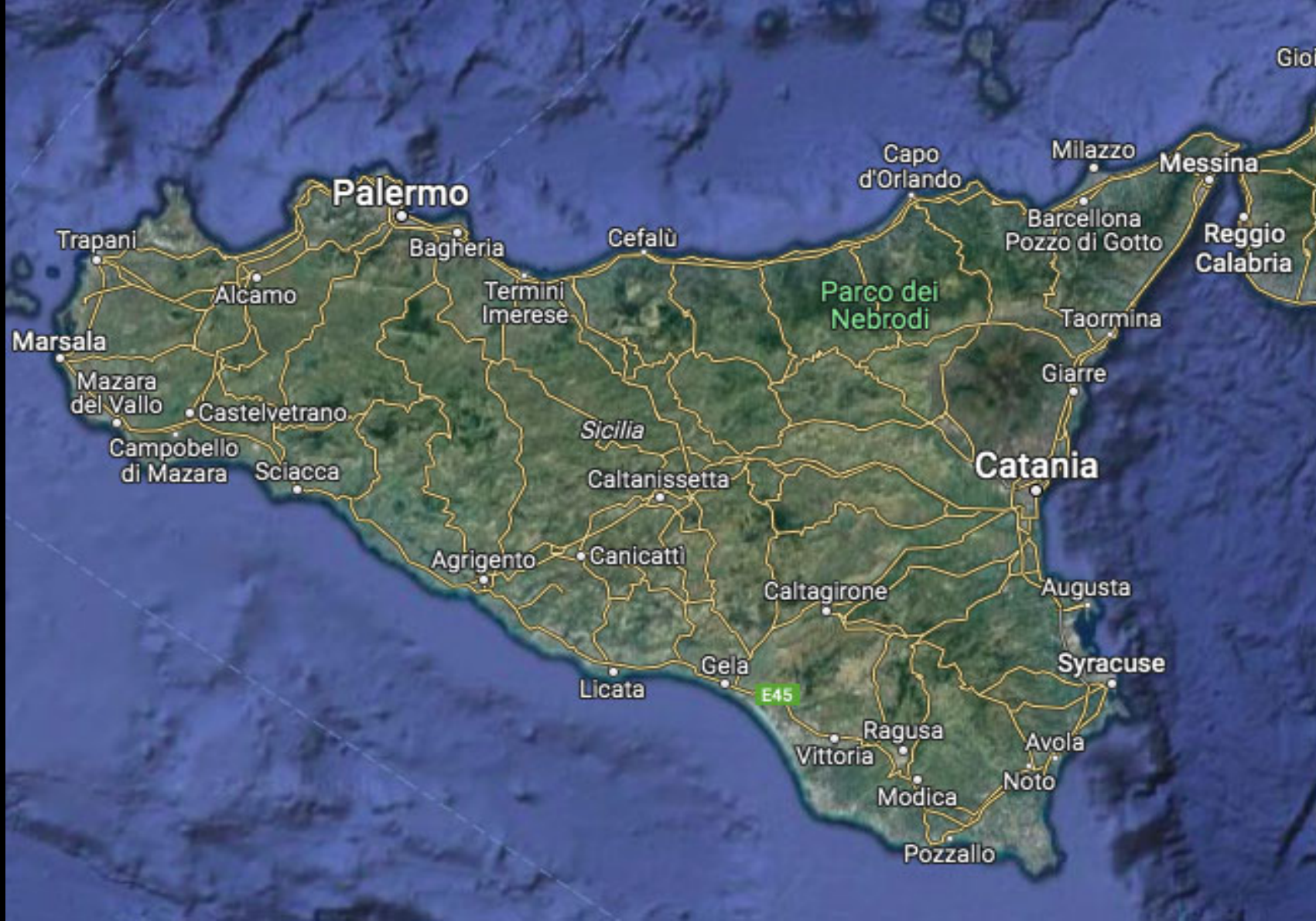
Sicily  
on the  
north edge  
of the  
African plate



# Sicily



# Sicily





Mt. Etna and Catania, Sicily

# Inland Sicily





Olive groves  
Sicily



# Sicily

The population is 4.8 million today and the capital is Palermo. Sicily had Phoenician and Greek colonies by 750 BC, was an object of the Punic Wars between Rome and Carthage, was a Roman province until the fall of Rome in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, was then ruled by the Vandals, Ostrogoths, Byzantines, Arabs and Normans. It was the Kingdom of Sicily from 1130 to 1816, when it was unified with the Kingdom of Naples, becoming part of Italy in 1860.



Palermo, Sicily



Port of Palermo, Sicily



Palermo, Sicily



Palermo, Sicily



Palermo, Sicily



Palermo, Sicily





Palermo, Sicily



Palermo, Sicily



Palermo, Sicily

# Knights of Bahá'u'lláh

Emma Rice from Boston, and the Bagleys and their three children from Michigan arrived in Sicily in October 1953, with Emma first settling in Taormina and the Bagleys in Palermo.

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 354-359)

# Emma Rice

Emma Rice (1898-1985) heard of the Bahá'í Faith in Boston in 1940 but her husband was opposed, so only when she wrote to and received a letter from the Guardian in 1942 did she declare her Faith. Her wealthy family rejected her. She went on pilgrimage in 1942, carrying gold leaf for the Shrine of the Bab. When the Guardian raised the call for pioneers in 1953, she went to Sicily, arriving in Palermo on 20 October 1953 and continuing to Taormina the next day. She was horrified at the poverty, the unsanitary conditions and her inhospitable reception, but she quickly adapted.

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 354-359)

Emma Rice

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# Emma Rice

“I was obliged to pray aloud... in Italian (a language entirely foreign to me); greet them as they came down their donkey trails from school and from work; eat what they had to offer, on their doorsteps and in their homes; admire their babies; visit the sick; sew with them; draw pictures for them; translate Bahá’í stories and share my hand-written excerpts copied from the only Italian Bahá’í book that could be had; show slides and photographs of our Temple and of our people; go to their fiestas, churches, christenings, graduations, pageants, etc.... The tourists and Bahá’í visitors... helped maintain my equilibrium and release the solitude of a homesick heart.”

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 354-359)

# Emma Rice

Success came quickly. An English-speaking chambermaid saw her picture of 'Abdu'lBahá, and within two months became a Bahá'í along with the hotel laundress. 25 others soon followed, but they were never incorporated into the Sicilian Bahá'í community and were lost. The authorities did not like her open teaching, and her visa extension was refused, forcing her to leave in October 1954.

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 354-359)



# Emma Rice

She spent a year in Geneva before the American State Department helped her to return to Sicily, where she settled in Palermo and joined Gerrold Bagley. There it was three and a half years before anyone accepted the Faith. One success was the first declaration on Lipari, one of Sicily's offshore islands.

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 354-359)

# Emma Rice

Other pioneers arrived in 1956, and Emma, in poor health, returned to America in 1958 dividing her time between Boston and the Green Acre Bahá'í School in Maine, where she moved in 1961 and passed away in 1985.

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 354-359)

# The Bagleys

Florence (1914-1990) and Stanley Bagley (1912-1993) and their children 14-year-old Carol (b.1939), 16-year-old Gerrold (b.1937) and 17-year-old Susan (b.1936) arrived in Sicily on 27 October 1953 and settled in Palermo.

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 354-359)



Carol, Stanley, Florence, Gerrold and Susan Bagley

# The Bagleys

Florence accepted the Bahá'í Faith in 1930 at the age of sixteen, as Stan did five years later. After their marriage they moved to Flint, Michigan. In May 1953, Florence, Gerrold and Susan attended the Intercontinental Teaching Conference in Chicago. Gerrold remembers:

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 354-359)

# Gerrold Bagley

“a call for pioneers was addressed to the 2,200 Bahá’ís gathered there. Amatu’l-Bahá encouraged the friends to arise and come up on the stage to announce their intention and where they wanted to go. She said the elderly should go and plant their bones for Bahá’u’lláh. She stated that all that was needed was the travel ticket and a passport. The believers were few in those days so encouragement was plentiful.”

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 354-359)

# Gerrold Bagley

“The stage was overflowing with the friends awaiting their turn at the microphone. It was a moving moment. My sister Susan and I were sitting together and wondered why we didn’t see Mom on the stage with the others. Later, Mom said that we could not make a commitment without consulting Dad and my sister Carol who were arriving the following day.”

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 354-359)

# The Bagleys

Someone suggested they go to Sicily, so they wrote to the Guardian who approved the choice. On 17 October, Gerrold's 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, the Bagleys sailed for Sicily, arriving in Palermo ten days later, and the whole family became Knights of Bahá'u'lláh. Carol, just 14 and Gerrold, 16, became the youngest Knights. They first stayed in a hotel while looking for an apartment.

Gerrold wrote:

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 354-359)



# Gerrold Bagley

“The city seemed strange to us. There were horse-drawn carriages, donkey carts carved and painted, and unremitting noise as vehicles rolled over the cobblestone streets. Odor was ever-present due to the donkeys and horses in traffic. Swarms of people crowded the sidewalks and overflowed into the streets. Drivers seemed to use their horns rather than their brakes. At first it was daunting to venture out far from the hotel, but gradually we became more adventurous and extended the range of our investigations.”

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 354-359)

# The Bagleys

They found an apartment, and the young members of the family opened doors in making friends, starting with Franco, a youth in the same building.

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 354-359)

# Gerrold Bagley

“It was the custom in those days when women were still chaperoned, that young people would entertain afternoons with tea dances in their homes to celebrate birthdays, name-days, and family events. In each gathering we would receive invitations from others. Franco was our social guide, arranging at least two dance parties each week. A number of parents were invited to tea in our home and learned that we were Bahá’ís. But Palermo was still tradition bound and practiced the state religion.”

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 354-359)

# Gerrold Bagley

“My sisters and I shared the same friends since girls had to be accompanied. Carol being the youngest had to grow up fast. I learned Italian more quickly than my parents and was therefore doing much of the shopping and took on responsibilities beyond my age.”

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 354-359)

# The Bagleys

During that first year, many wonderful Bahá'ís came to visit, but Stanley could not find work, and they asked Shoghi Effendi if they could change posts. He agreed and they all moved to France in 1954, except for Gerrold who stayed in Sicily for the next ten years. When Emma Rice had to leave in October 1954, Gerrold, not yet 17, was the only pioneer on the island.

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 354-359)

# Emma Rice and Gerrold Bagley

When Emma returned in late 1955, she joined Gerrold in Palermo. Teaching was slow but Gerrold kept at it. His sister Carol came for two months in the summer of 1956, and the teaching efforts began to bear fruit. A friend of Gerrold's was the son of a general in the Italian Air Force, who invited all of them to their beach cabin each day, where they met many important people and aristocrats.

# Gerrold Bagley

“While the other guests were being served cocktails, one of my friends... rather loudly remarked that Gerry wasn’t drinking. One of the guests, Carlo di Giorgis, asked ‘Why not?’ I said, ‘Because I am a Bahá’í’. As he was curious to know what that was, Mrs Rice immediately invited him and his family to tea the next afternoon to learn more about the Faith.”

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 354-359)

# Gerrold Bagley

“They came with three children. Magda Di Giorgis [Carlo’s wife] believed immediately, but wisely waited for her husband to investigate... He came occasionally to firesides... but as he was a busy businessman, we had to find subtle ways to involve him.”

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 354-359)



# Gerrold Bagley

“Finally, during a visit of Dr Ugo Giachery, Hand of the Cause, he declared on 22 May 1957. Mrs Rice immediately insisted that they all stay to dinner to celebrate. I accepted the task of going outside to the public telephone to inform their children that their parents would be coming home late. I recall running and skipping up the street with great joy.”

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 354-359)

# Gerrold Bagley

“Magda waited until the next day to add her declaration. What Joy! Two of the children also became believers later on. Within that year there were three more local Bahá’ís. The LSA was formed in 1958. I was too young to serve on that first LSA until the following October when I turned 21, and replaced a pioneer who had transferred to another city.”

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 354-359)

# The Bagleys

The rest of the Bagley family stayed in France for nine years, returning to America in 1963, before pioneering in the Caribbean and Latin America. After leaving Sicily, Gerrold pioneered to Ecuador, Brazil, South Korea and Albania, serving on National Spiritual Assemblies in each country, before going to the Ivory Coast. He returned to Sicily between 2000 and 2011, where he was also a member of the National Spiritual Assembly.

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 354-359)

# Sicily

The National Spiritual Assembly of Sicily was first elected in 1995. By 2014, Sicily had 13 Local Spiritual Assemblies and 500 Bahá'ís.

(based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 354-359)



Sicily