



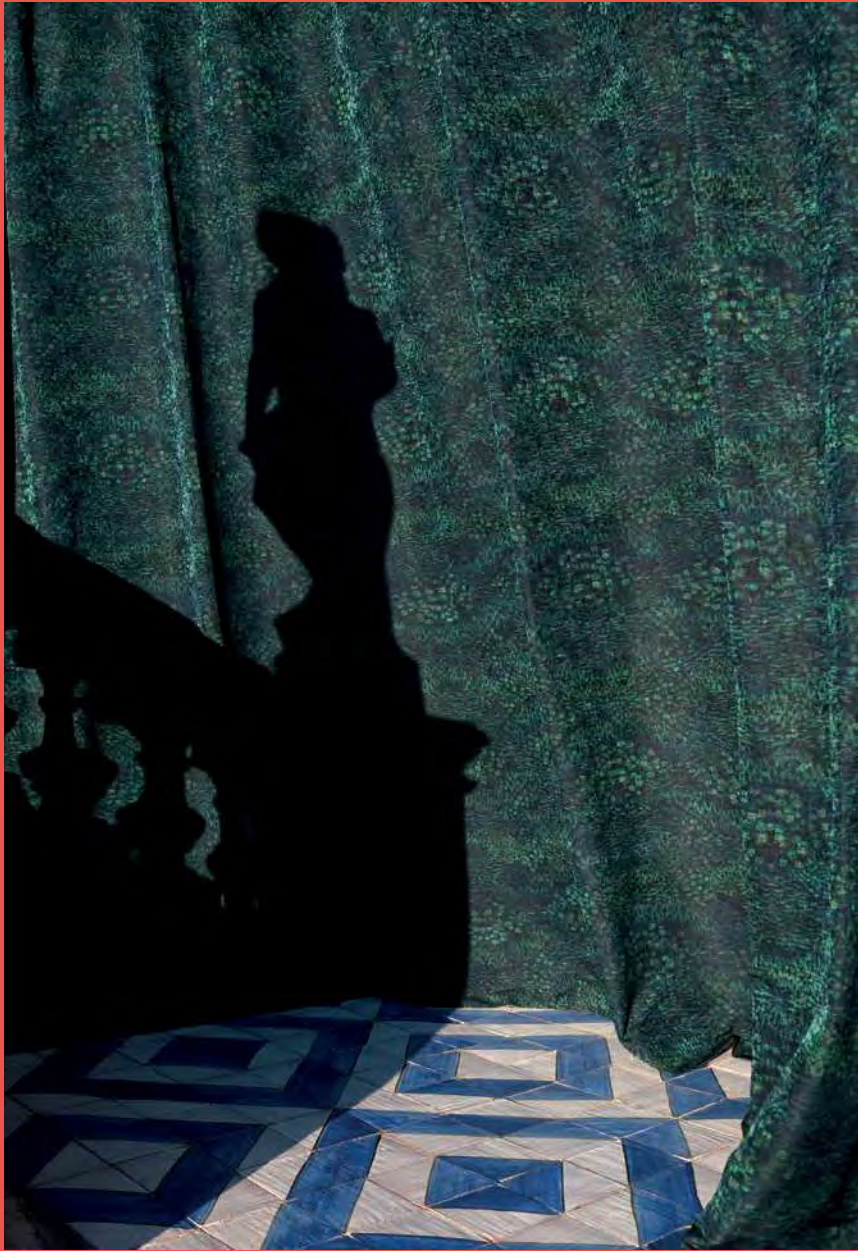
Villa Valguarnera

Sicily, 1712













An act of love commissioned by Princess Anna Gravina as a gift to her husband, Villa Valguarnera was designed in 1712 by architect, mathematician and monk Tommaso Maria Napoli. Grandiose and inviting, the palace sits atop a hill in Bagheria, Sicily, overlooking lush green parks and the immense turquoise sea of the gulfs of Palermo and Cefalù. In this setting, a magnificent expression of Sicilian historical and cultural identity, neoclassical meticulousness, Baroque scenery and Islamic influences coexist and overlap; a testament to an island that has been the crossroads of extraordinary encounters and mingling over centuries of history.

A workshop for free spirits and distinguished representatives of Enlightenment thought, admired by Goethe, and a rich source of inspiration for architects such as Schinkel and Dufourny, this key-shaped villa of esoteric wisdom houses neo-classical sculptures, arabesques, grotesques and Sicilian ceramic floors in an infinite interplay of associations. Here, amidst sumptuous gardens and balustrades, between the sky and the sea, a journey comes to life among new fabrics that revisit the archetypes of textile art, intertwining techniques and splendour in an endless exploration of expressive insights, colours, yarns and weaves.

In the following pages a historical glimpse of Sicily and Villa Valguarnera by the noted writer and arabist Vittoria Alliata, princess of Villafranca and Valguarnera.





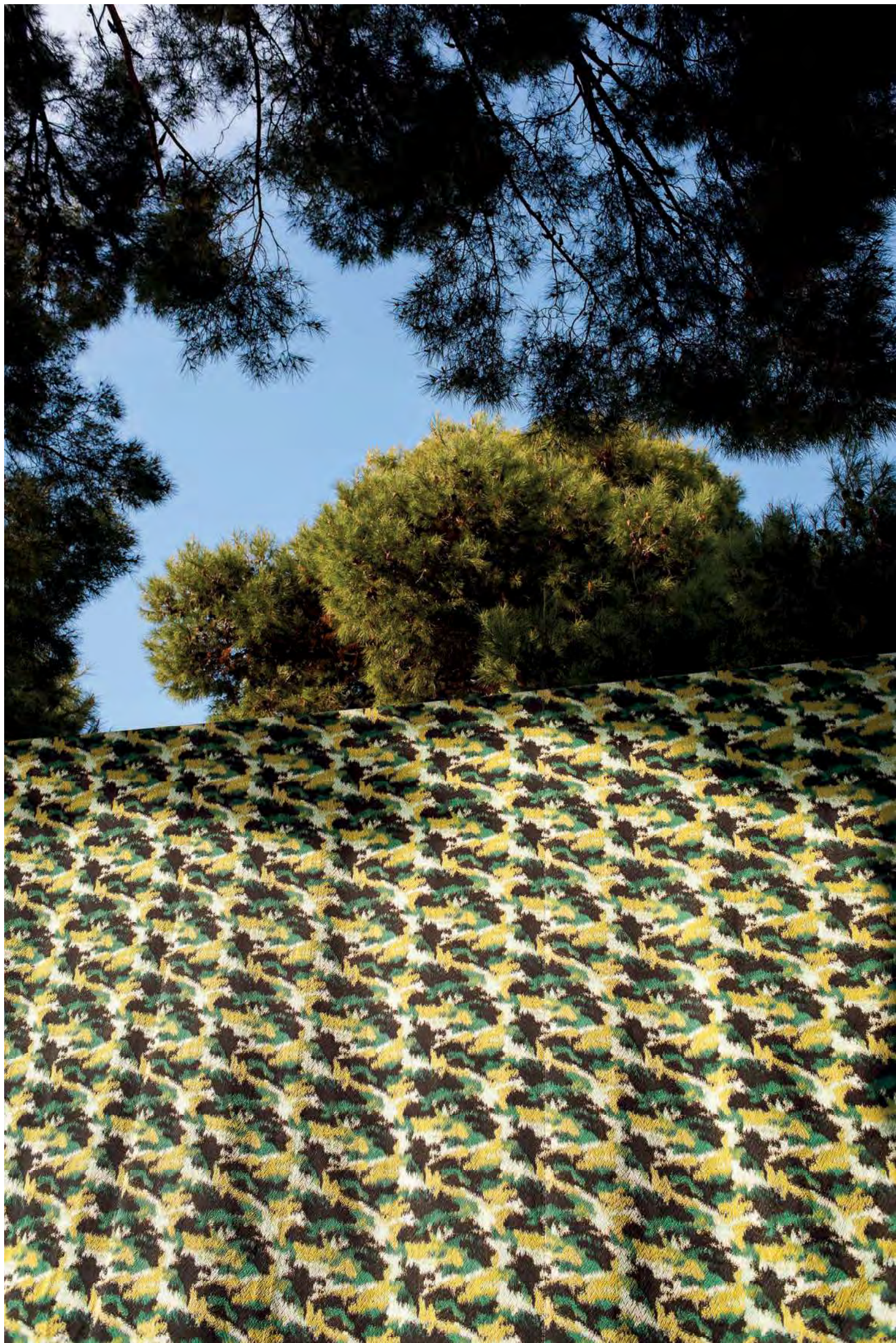




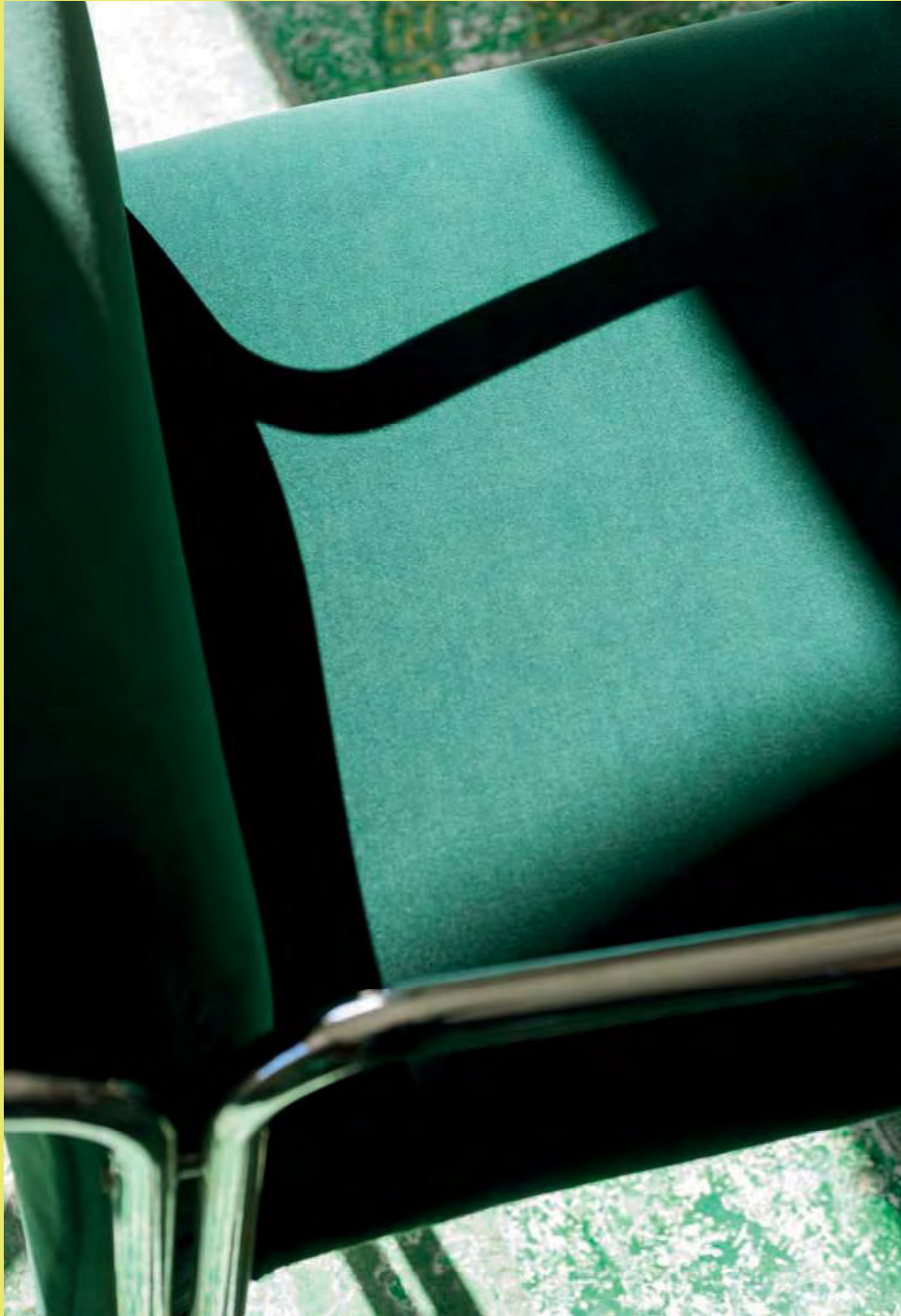
Once upon a time, when the Silk Road crossed the Taklamakan deserts, the Golden Thread Road crossed the seas. For centuries, its mythical crossroads was Sicily. All the way east, it reached - with stopovers in Egypt and Baghdad - Malacca and the kingdom of Srivijaya. Southward, coming from the African caravan metropolis of Sigilmassa, it led to Bijaya, the capital of wax, where Fibonacci learned from beekeepers the Arabic numerals and introduced mathematics into medieval Europe; then, inland to the holy city of Fes, and, beyond, to Mauretania.



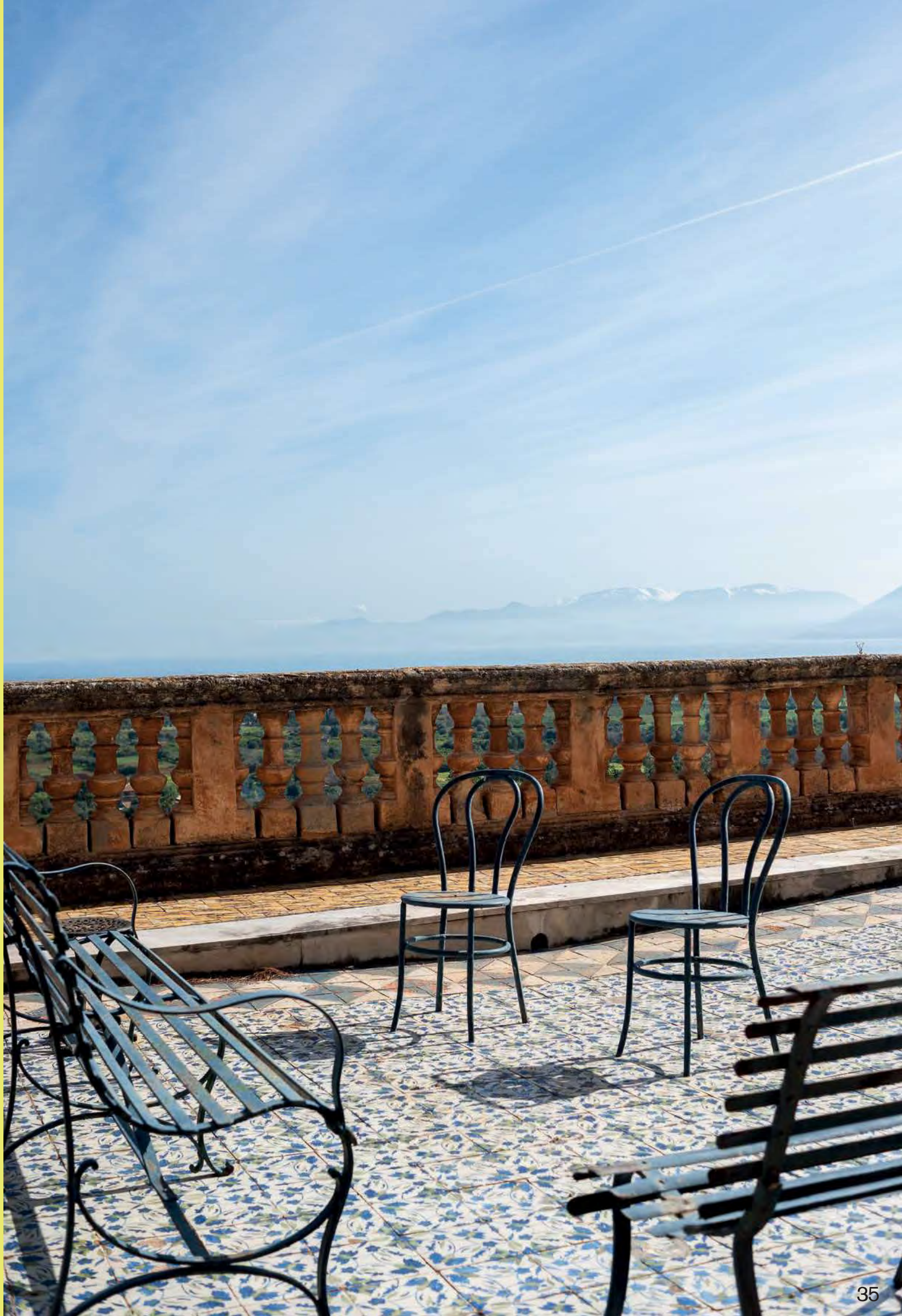




As recorded by Jewish merchants, gold, ostriches, dates, glass, Gulf pearls and sumptuous shamites woven and embroidered in the Palermo “tiraz”, traveled thousands of kilometers, crossing a sea no longer “nostrum” but Muslim, without borders or taxes. The most precious amongst 38 thousand silks with figures of elephants, horses, camels, peacocks, that draped the Abassid ruler al-Muktadir’s palace as a welcome to the Byzantine ambassador during his visit to Baghdad in 917 A.D., were brocades embroidered with gold thread in Siqillya: the distant legendary island had been conquered a few decades earlier on behalf of Shehrazade and her Caliph to become the islamic world’s Jannatul Ard, its Paradise on earth.







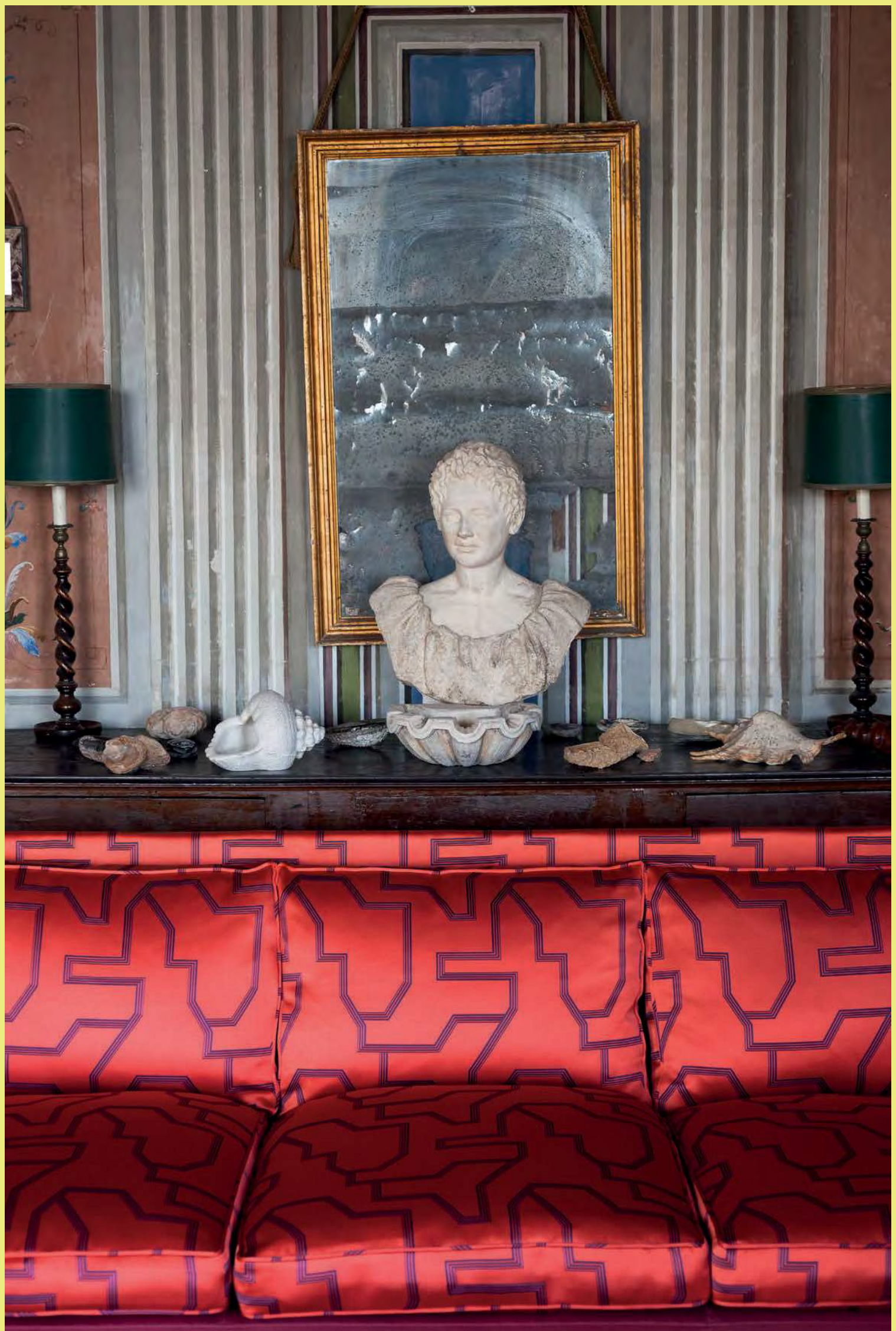




























Persian engineers from Khorassan had transformed the landscape thanks to the qanat system, underground tunnels that allowed flash floods and braided waters of seasonal streams to be controlled and conveyed for kilometers, conjuring up leisure lakes, citrus gardens, mulberry crops, underground cisterns, public hammams and air-conditioned scirocco rooms. Everything blossomed in that great nursery of Europe, even the souls of the rough warriors who later invaded Sicily from the North.

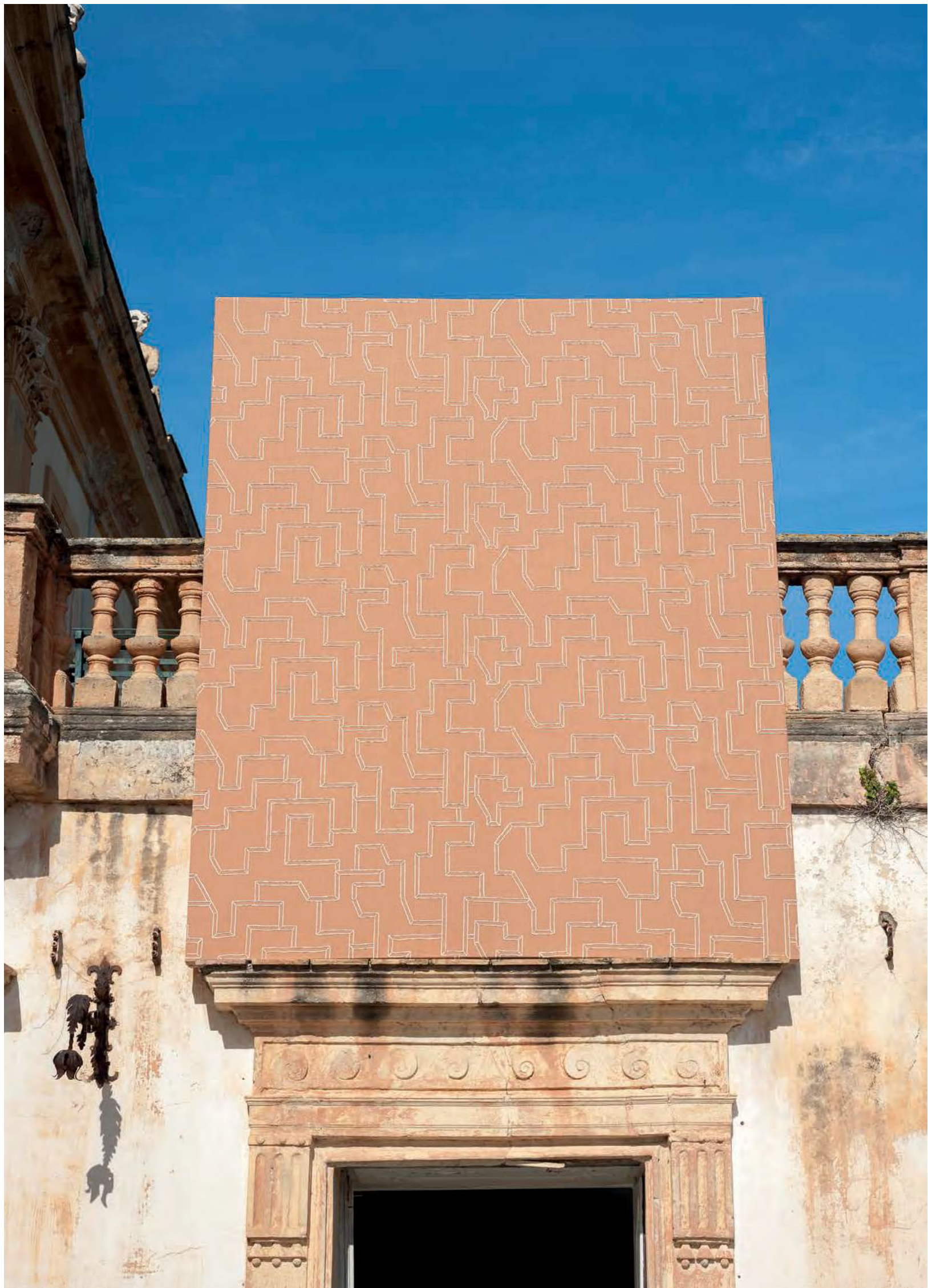




There they discovered the Persian vaulted arch and those apotropaic figures that for some strange reason would be known as “Gothic” when the Normans, regretting the havoc they had wrecked, tried to rebuild in their cathedrals the exotic dream they had swept away during the conquest. Once the emirs had been expelled, the poets exiled, the wealthy banished and the last Muslims deported by Frederick II, only the humble folk were left to preserve such precious legacy over the centuries: weavers, farmers, potters, builders, cooks, seamstresses, housewives...











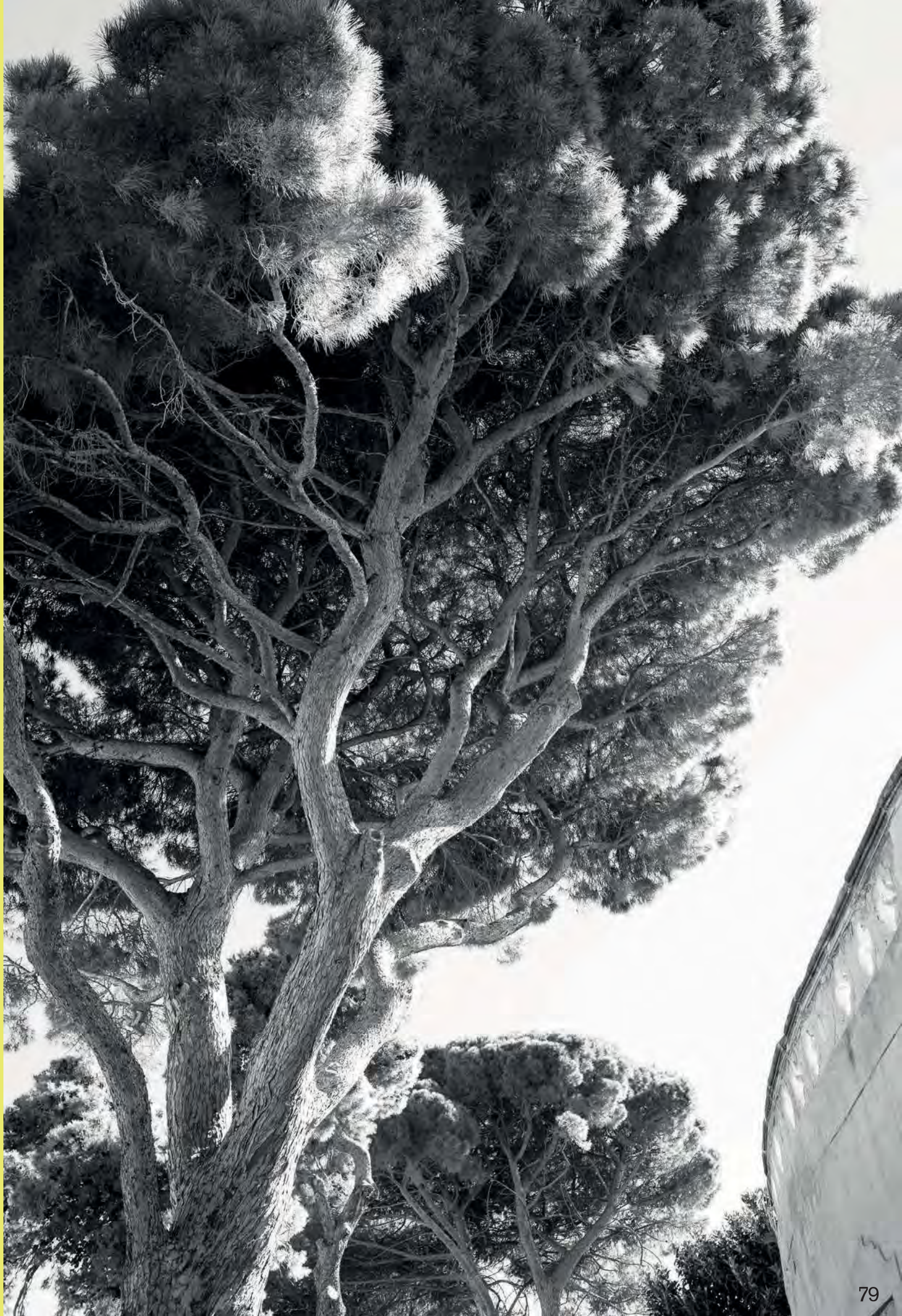
Thus it was, that in the throes of full-on Baroque, under the watchful eye of an Arcadian princess and a disciple of Bernini, Villa Valguarnera, an utopian palace in the shape of a key, saw a surge of qanats, norias, salsabil fountains, carved ashlar frescoes with lapis lazuli, glazed tiles with geometric patterns and intricate stuccos gilt with bole, silver leaf and shellac, following a technique until now known as “Mecca”.

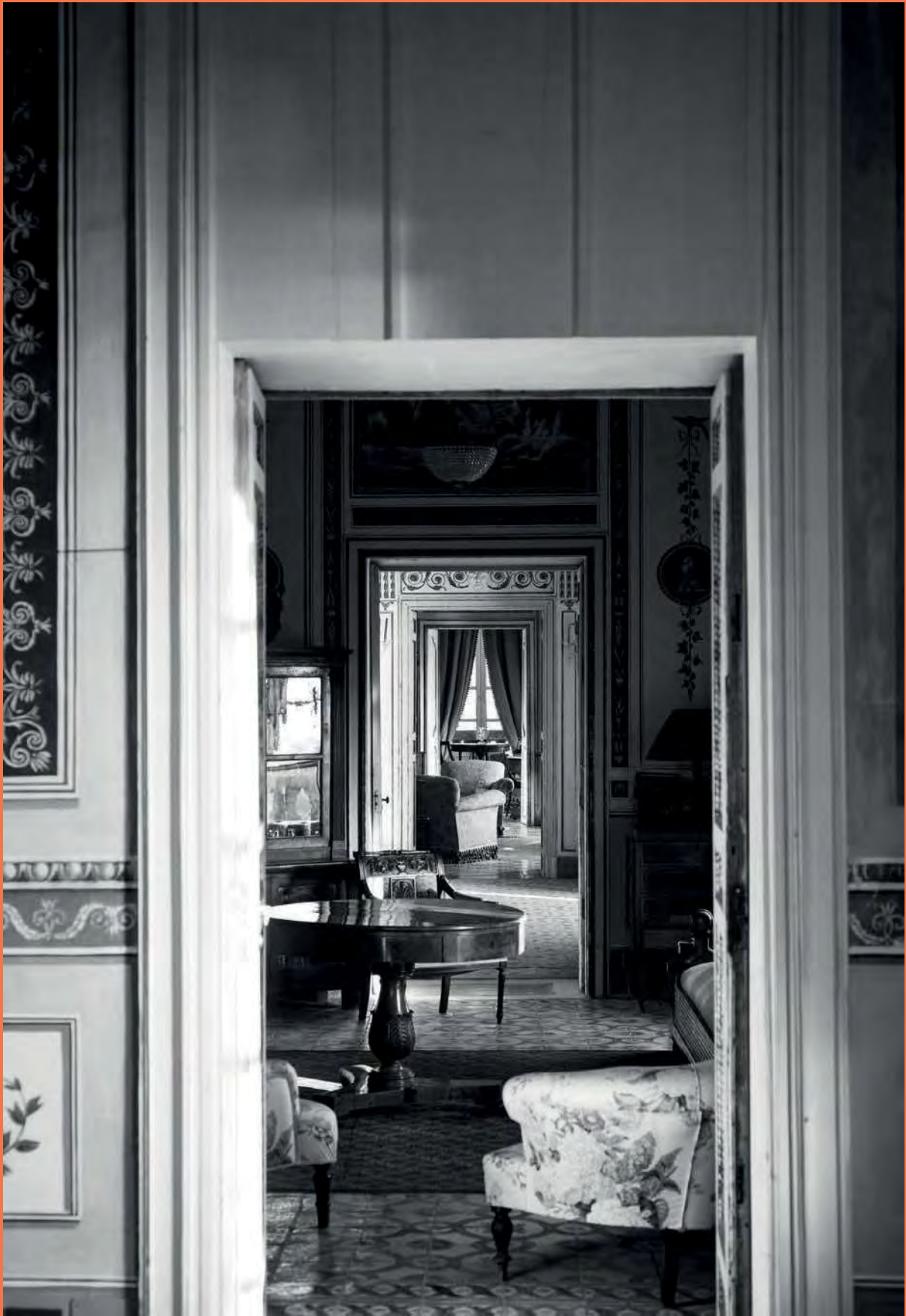




OBÉREA RINVNZIA L'ISOLA DI TAITI AL CAPITANO WALLIS.





















No wonder therefore that until now, in those very same halls, still draped with damask silks spun by the ancient family mills, the Lady of the Snows of Sicily, last descendant of a dynasty that inherited from the Arabs the “cultivation of snow” in mountain caves and its export to Malta and Tunisia, offers her guests cinnamon sherbets and jasmine frost amidst puffs of sweet scented aloes wood.







A. REGINA OBEREA RIVINZIA/L. COLA DITATI AL CAPITANO VALLIS L. S. 17 DISTAN DI SICILIA 10,004

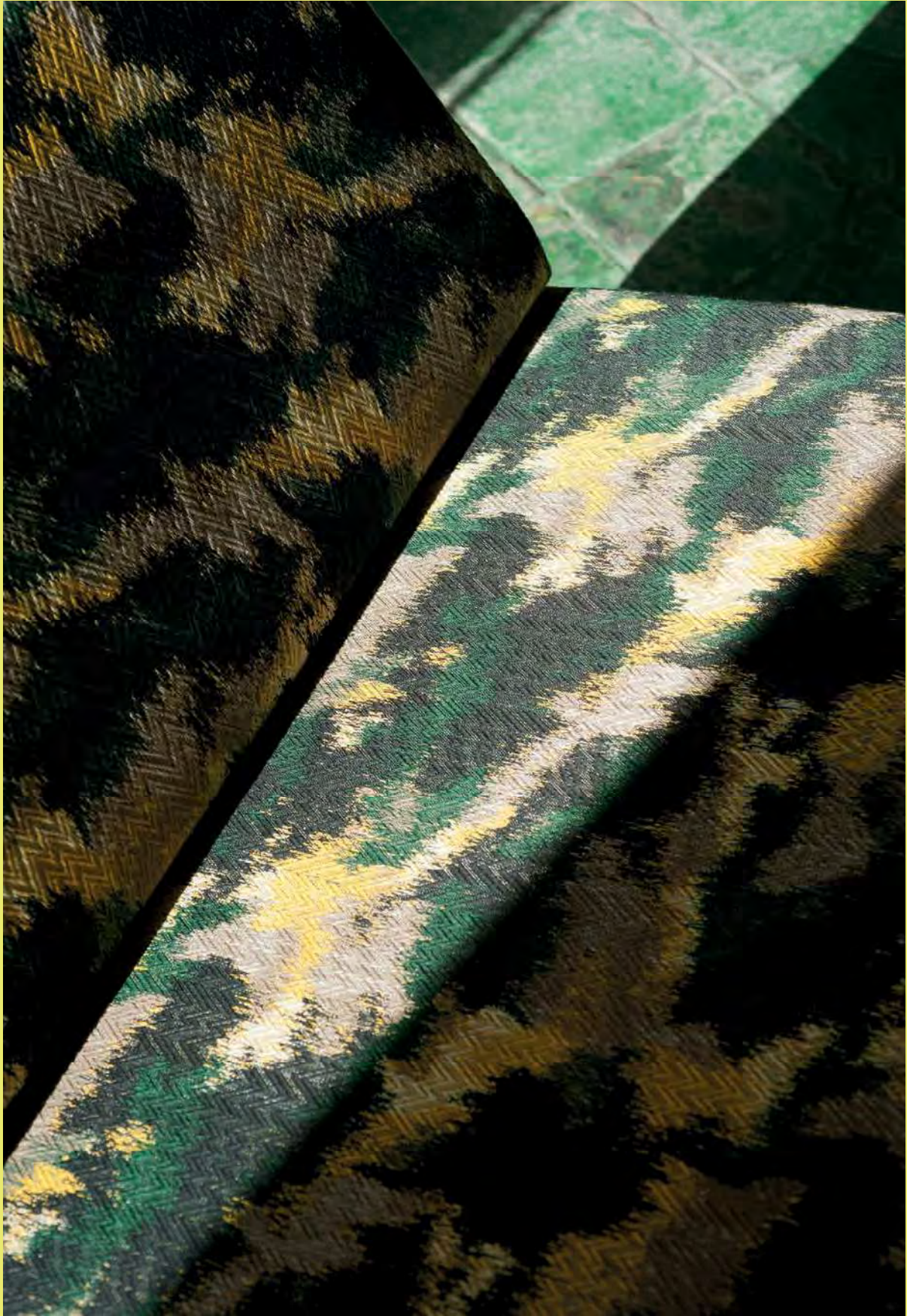


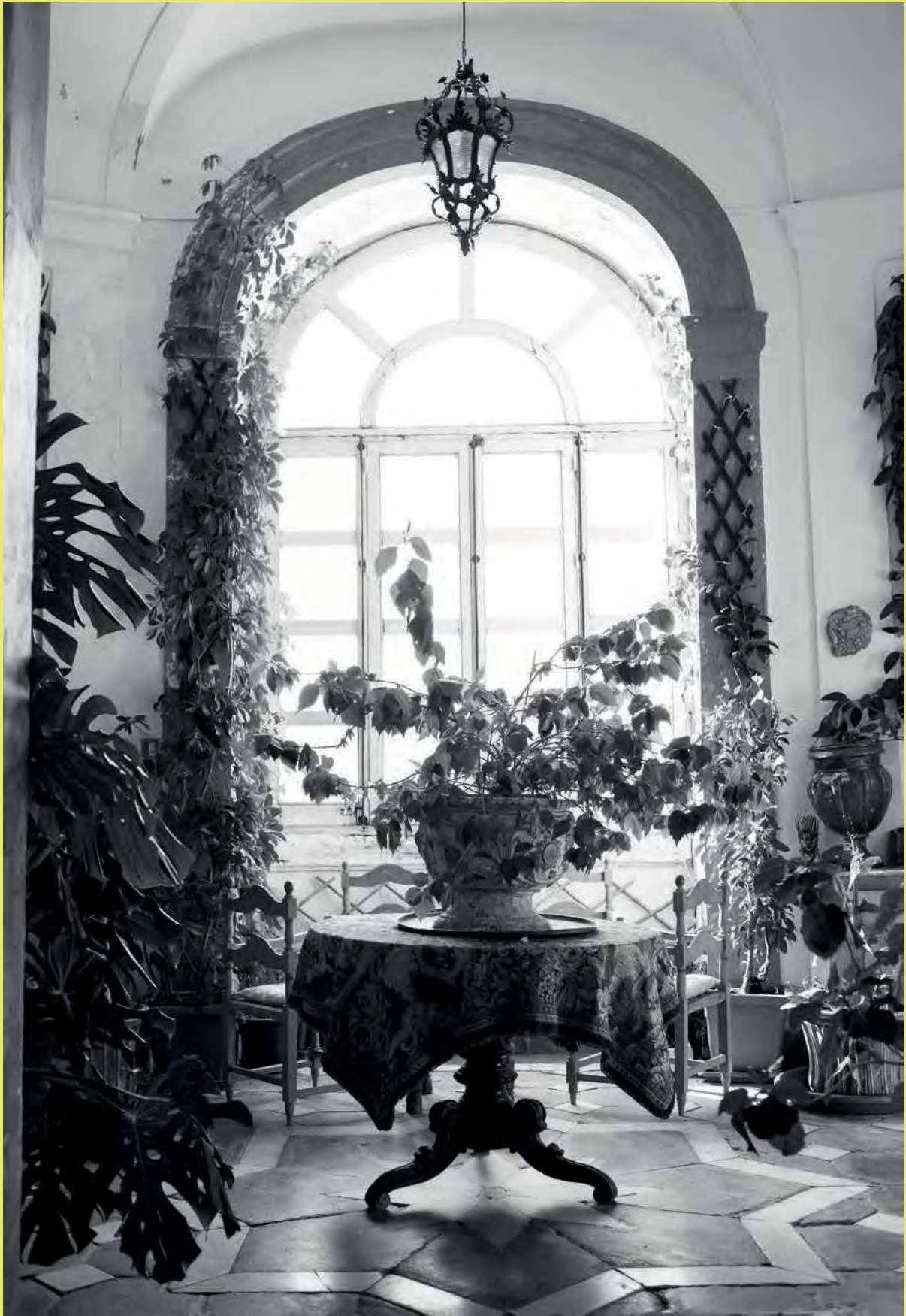












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