

22 – Round and About

This itinerary comprises places that don't fit into other itineraries and probably require independent travel by local bus or by car. An order of some sort was required; it is determined by a semi-meaningless topographical arc.

Paola – Santa Maria Addolorata Cemetery

If you are visiting the Tarxien Temples and the Hal-Saflieni Hypogeum independently (Chapter 21 itinerary), you may want to include the Addolorata in your visit. Paola (Pawla) is a seventeenth-century town tacked on to the north edge of Tarxien, and the address of the cemetery is Vjal Santa Lucija, Paola. If you follow the signs to the airport it is clearly visible.

There have been nearly 300,000 burials there so you need to know in advance what you are looking for, either by going online or enquiring at the information office. The first burial was of a 'beggar' from Naxxar, Anna Magro, in 1872. You may want to visit the grave of Christina Ratcliffe if you have been taken with the story of her life in Malta told in Chapters 14 and 15 and Chapter 17 itinerary. Frederick Galea has taken the trouble to provide coordinates for her grave: East Division, Section MA-D, Grave No. 4. Inscribed on the headstone is 'Christina of George Cross Island'. Henrietta Chevalier (Chapters 15 and 20) is also buried here, as is the nurse of the Hastings/Henry family (Chapter 9), Elizabeth Bonomo.

Luqa

The village of Luqa was not always overtaken by an airport and, since the building of the nearby Malta International, it is returning to some semblance of its past though one still talks of Luqa airport, even of the newer one. Chapter 6 tells of the women from Luqa who helped build Valletta following the Great Siege of 1565. Chapter 7 tells of Maria Caruana, widow of Luqa, who inherited her husband's quarry and was successfully managing it in 1737.

Rosanne Dingli's *Death in Malta* (2001) is a mystery set near Luqa and near the limestone quarries. An Australian writer has rented a farmhouse in the hopes of overcoming writer's block. As well as trying to solve the mystery of some large wine jars, he falls in love with a Maltese woman and has to deal with the remnants of his marriage in Australia while maintaining links with his daughter. A good read for coming in to land, or taking off.

Gudja

Gudja is on a slight hill hard by the airport and, indeed, overlooks it. It is not hard to spot Bettina's Palazzo: it stands proudly on the main road between Gudja and Ghaxaq. It is known as Palazzo Dorell or Palazzo or

Villa d'Aurel. Some sources say that Bettina built it in 1770, others date it to before her time. What is clear is that, as Chapter 7 relates, she lavished great care, and money, on her summer place, particularly the gardens.

Bettina does not seem to have been in Malta, in spite of suggestions to the contrary, when the British Army took over her palazzo as their headquarters during the French occupation, 1798–1800. Emma Hamilton and Cornelia Knight visited General Thomas Graham there with Nelson in 1800 – a visit which Cornelia briefly describes (Chapter 8). There is a suggestion that Napoleon stayed there, but that is unlikely: he did stay in the Palazzo Parisio, Merchant Street, Valletta. But the Palazzo does vie with the Palazzo Falzon in Mdina as that from which Maria Teresa Moscati-Falsoni-Navarra eloped in 1754 (Chapter 7), thus contradicting its date of construction.

In 1830, Bettina paid to have the roof of the nearby fifteenth-century church of Santa Marija Ta' Bir Miftuh repaired. A fresco on the north wall of a woman in early sixteenth-century dress holding a lily may be the portrait of a benefactor from the Bonici family whose emblem is a lily. The medieval church is on the Luqa–Gudja road and almost overtaken by the airport.

Qrendi

Consider stopping in Qrendi if you are visiting the nearby archaeological sites of Ħagar Qim and Mnajdra independently. The thirteenth-century chapel **Tal-Hniena** (our Lady of Mercy or Our Lady of Ransom, also known as Chiesa Della Misericordia) on the south-east of the village was rebuilt in 1650. Its attraction for this itinerary is that it contains the painting 'Christ's Crucifixion', attributed to Suor Maria de Dominici (Chapter 6). The chapel was firmly closed, not to say deserted, when I visited. There were, apparently, no mass times available.

A short and easy walk from Qrendi is the **Maqluba Depression** caused, probably in 1343, by a collapse of the underlying limestone strata, either by a violent storm or an earthquake. Not surprisingly, a myth grew up. A group of bad people were living in the new hamlet. God warned them, through a virtuous woman, to mend their ways, but they took no notice. So God made the earth swallow the hamlet and all save the good woman.

Fawwara

Formally in the Siggiewi area, but right on the Gebel (Garden) Ciantar heights overlooking the sea is **Our Lady of Carmel**, first built in 1616 at a time of severe drought by Girolama Ciantar; a spring then emerged from the rocks. Girolama was introduced in Chapter 6 concerning the setting up of the Ciantar Foundation and the funding of the Maddalena. Nearby is the **Annunciation Church**, rebuilt in 1708 by Maria Xerberras.

Fawwara is, it seems from the internet, the sort of place you hike to in order to explore this area of the island, partly wild cliff tops, partly well-cultivated fields.

Girgenti, Buskett Gardens and Verdala Palace

In the fertile Girgenti valley, close to Siġġiewi, is the Prime Minister's summer residence, known as both the **Inquisitor's Summer Palace** and the Girgenti Palace. Though it is occasionally open to the public, perhaps it is only worth noting if you are passing by. It was built by an Inquisitor in 1625 and became, thereafter, the summer residence of the Inquisitors. It is there, rumour had it, that Inquisitor Angelo Durani regularly took married Bettina Dorell whose daughter, Angela, was christened in his Birgu palace chapel (Chapter 7 and Chapter 18 itinerary).

In 1827, Judith Montefiore and her husband held a dinner party in what was then the lieutenant governor's summer place, to thank the silk-workers (Chapter 10). On 30 January 1839, the account of Queen Adelaide's stay in Malta records that:

The Queen, accompanied by the greater part of her suite, drove to the Inquisitor's Palace, the country residence of Mr Greig, the Secretary to the Government. ...

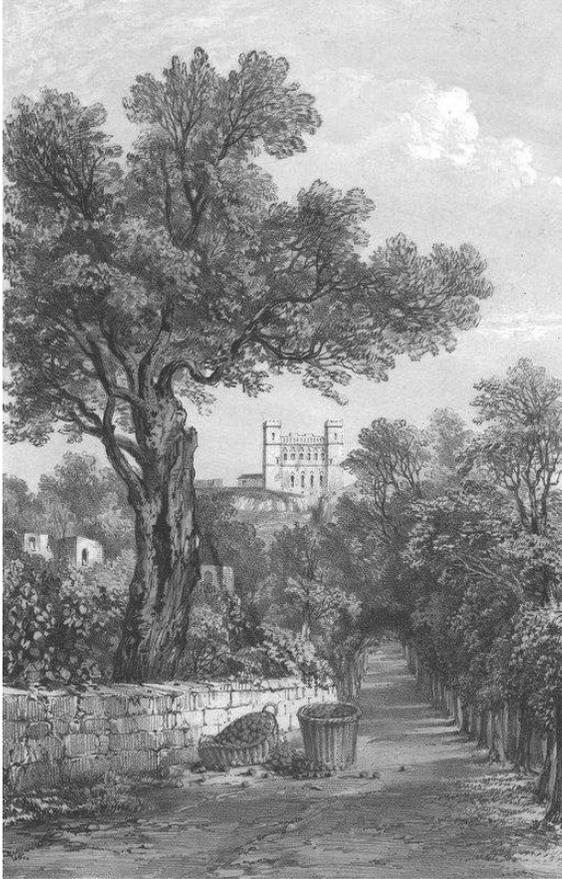
Her Majesty was much pleased with the scenery in that neighbourhood, and with the grounds and garden of the *Gran Fontana* which adjoin the house, and the day being one of those fine mild days for which the winter season in Malta is remarkable, with a clear and transparent atmosphere that gives life and vivacity to every object, the Queen had a full opportunity of observing the verdure and beauty which the island presents at this season of the year.

After partaking of luncheon, the Queen and party left the Inquisitor's about 3 p.m.

The whole record of the Queen's Malta visit is said to be the notes of her host at the palace, Sir Hector Grieg. He noticeably wrote that entry from happy experience.

North of the palace are the **Buskett Gardens** (il-Buskett – Boschetto – Little Wood). Where mulberry trees were planted in the nineteenth century for the silk experiment (Chapter 10) is now a public park, continuing the function described by the Duke of Buckingham following his 1828 visit (except that there are now cafés and pizzerias): 'Here on the feast of St John, all the natives of Malta come in picnic parties and the most of them, especially the old people, wear the dresses they were married in which they carefully preserve for this purpose and day.' Today, you can hold your wedding, or other event there. For a simple outing to get away from the heat and enjoy trees, as the Maltese have done for generations, take a local bus, continuing from Rabat.

As you drive up to the Buskett Gardens, you can see the **Verdala Palace**, built in 1586 as a country retreat for the Grand Master. It is now that of the president, and only open to the public for a charity ball in August. Like the Grey Lady ghost at San Angelo, Birgu, Verdala has its Blue Lady, said



55. Verdala Palace by Eliza Gardner, from *A Series of Views in Malta*, courtesy of Yale Center for British Art Paul Mellon Collection (file no. 2038523-0001)

to have been the niece of Grand Master de Rohan. She rejected the suitor chosen for her so was imprisoned in her room. Trying to escape through the window, she fell to her death. Several people over the centuries have experienced her presence.

Lady Layard, staying with the Duke and Duchess of Connaught at San Anton in 1908, wrote in her journal on 29 November:

At 3.30 the D and Dss drove me in their motor to Verdala to see the Governor's summer palace. We passed thro' Notabile [Mdina]. We found the Govr and Lady Grant waiting to receive the Connaughts. The Palace is a sort of medieval strong tower in a pine wood – built abt 1583 by G. Master Verdala & most picturesque. It is surrounded by a moat now made into a garden – & has terraces going down the side of the hill. The interior consists of one large hall surrounded by rooms on each side & 4

small towers at the 4 corners – The rooms on this floor have all wagon roof ceilings. The 2nd floor was added by Pinto & the ceilings are square. We went by the winding staircase on to the roof wh is flat & made of big slabs of stone. From there the view is magnificent – One can see the sea at intervals all the way round & one realizes that one is on a not very large island.

You may not be able to have the same experience, but there is a pleasing YouTube tour of the palace and Buskett Gardens.

Żebbuġ

My main reason for visiting Żebbuġ was the parish church which contains two paintings by Maria de Dominici (Chapter 6). We went easily by local bus (62; from the stop you wiggle round to your left to St Philip's Square).

Like most churches, **St Philip's** has its hours and we had to hang around until 6 pm. With permission to enter the Sacristy, I found Maria's 'Visitation' easily enough, though not hung to its advantage. The 'St John of the Cross' eluded me, but I have since learnt from the parish priest that it is in store and exhibited during the feast of St Philip that starts on the second Sunday in June.

Further down the main street is the church of **San Rocqe**. As Chapter 6 recounts, in 1592 plague hit Malta. Katerina Vassalo and her husband Tomas vowed that they would build the church if Żebbuġ were spared, which it was, and they did. They also bequeathed a nearby field so that produce could be sold to pay for an annual celebration of Holy Mass on the French saint's feast day. Żebbuġ, meaning Olives, produced them in Roman times, and the town was later famous for sailcloth made from locally grown cotton (Chapter 10). Restoration of the church was completed in 2007. On the outskirts of Żebbuġ is the little church of **Tal-Hlas**, dedicated to mothers in labour.

On her way back from visiting the Inquisitor's Palace, Queen Adelaide 'stopped a short time at *Casal Zebbug* where the clergy of the parish were in waiting to receive her at the church, surrounded by the numerous population of the *Casal*'.

Castello Zammitello

You could catch a bus to Mġarr, then change to one taking you to Gnejna Bay, or you could walk the half mile from Mġarr. It would fit in well if you planned to visit the Skorba archaeological site (Chapters 1 and 21). More than one guide book suggests that this castle was built in the nineteenth century; they are mistaken: it dates from the seventeenth century and its story should be read with that of the Cumbo Tower in Chapters 4 and 20, for it was from here, it is said, that Lucia, only daughter of Baron Bernado Zammit, disappeared from her bedroom on the morning of her wedding to a

rich, elderly Sicilian count. The castle is now a wedding venue! Don't forget the Gauci Tower near Naxxar with its Turkish corsair kidnap connection.



56. Castello Zammitello, photograph by Caroline Bayly Scallon

Selmun Palace

There are three places either to visit or observe from a distance on the way to catch the Gozo ferry. Dominating the landscape – the hill and the Mistral Valley – as you pass St Paul's Bay and drive towards Mellieħa, is the fortified Selmun Palace. In her heyday, it was owned by Caterina Vitale and it and the surrounding lands are what, in 1619, she bequeathed to the *Monte di Redenzione degli Schiavi*. In the nearby chapel, dedicated to Our Lady of Ransom, is the portrait of Caterina by Antoine Favray (Chapter 6). Selmun was at one time a hotel and it would be easy to be misled on the internet that it is still so. Its future is, I gather, yet to be decided. There is a short but useful YouTube look at the outside.

Mellieħa

Mellieħa, also on a hill, is a popular resort town leading down to a beach. But it also contains two chapels, or sanctuaries, dedicated to the Madonna. **Our Lady of the Grotto** (il Madonna Tal-Għar) is an underground chapel where believers pray for intervention for their sick child, and the walls are hung with children's clothes and letters of supplication or thanks. The

nearby **Sanctuary of Our Lady of Melleiħa** is the oldest Marian shrine in Malta. The rock painting of the Madonna is attributed to St Luke from when he and St Paul are said to have been shipwrecked nearby. But the style dates somewhere between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries. The marine archaeologist, Honor Frost, found evidence of Roman shipping in the bay (Chapter 18).

St Agatha's Tower

Further on towards the ferry terminal, this time on the left, on the Marfa Ridge, is St Agatha's Tower, also known as the Red Tower, for obvious reasons. It was built in 1647–48, and dedicated to the martyred saint believed to have saved Mdina in 1551 (Chapters 2, 5 and 20); it had a St Agatha chapel set into an alcove. It has been restored and is open to the public – worth it for the view over Ġhadira Bay and the wetland and saltland **Wild Life Sanctuary** run by Birdlife Malta, where hunting of the migrating birds is prohibited. It is a bit of a climb up steps to reach the tower from the carpark, but there are those who walk it from Melleiħa Bay.

A little further from the tower, and it is only a 20 minute ferry ride to Gozo – not counting queuing time!