



LIFE SAVING BUSKETT

Soil stabilisation measures to protect Annex I habitats in Buskett-Girgenti Natura 2000 site - LIFE12 NAT/MT/000182



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**Soil stabilisation measures to protect
Annex I habitats in Buskett-Girgenti
Natura 2000 site**

LIFE12 NAT/MT/000180

Life + Information Session

A Historic Appraisal of Buskett Woodland

Eman Portelli (Operations Manager - Buskett)



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Girgenti - Natura 2000 site

01/07/2013 - 31/06/2018

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Buskett – General Overview



Buskett consists of a 47 hectare (470,000m² - Government owned) which forms an integral part of Buskett / Girgenti Natura 2000 site.

It is both a Site of Community Importance (SCI) and a Special Protection Area (SPA), ergo a place of National and European importance.

It also has a concentration of Annex I habitats that is unparalleled in the Maltese Islands, home to a large variety of indigenous and endemic species.



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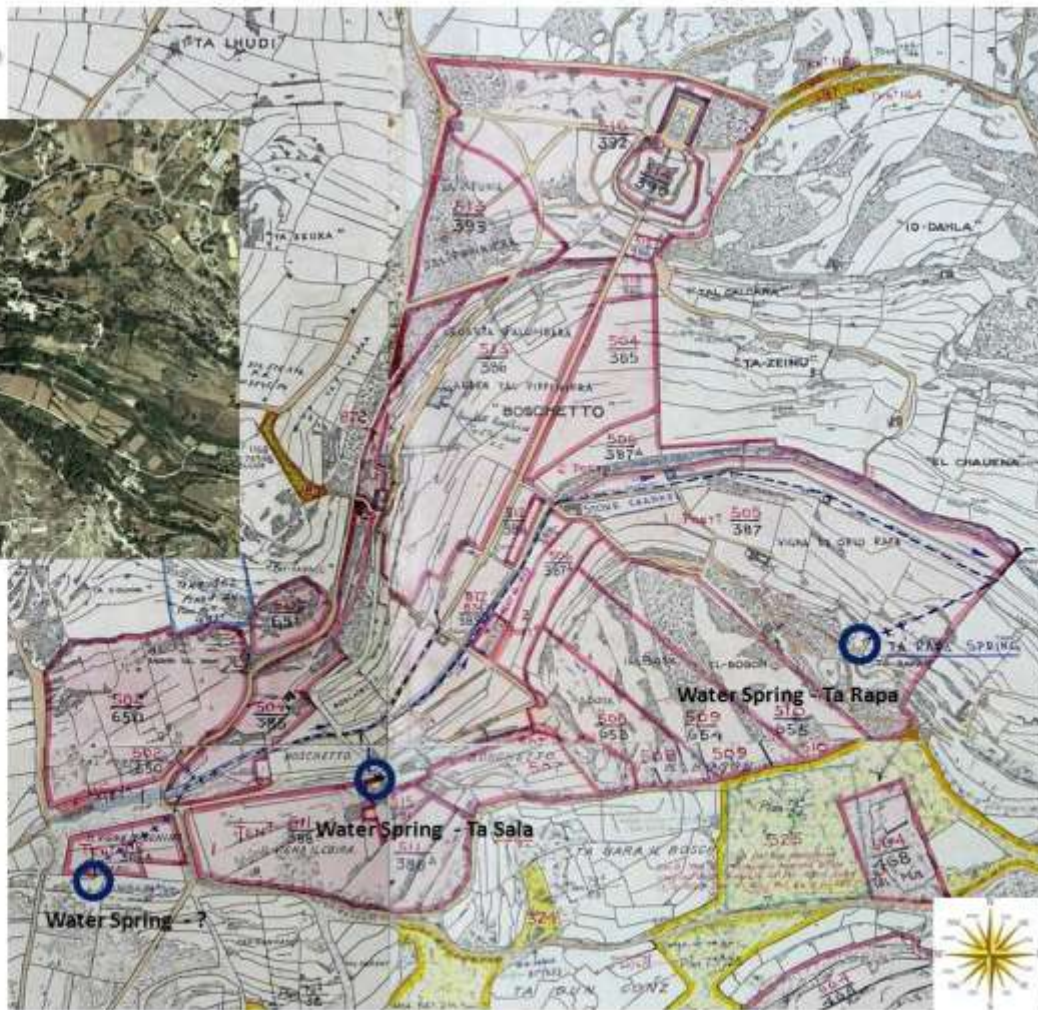


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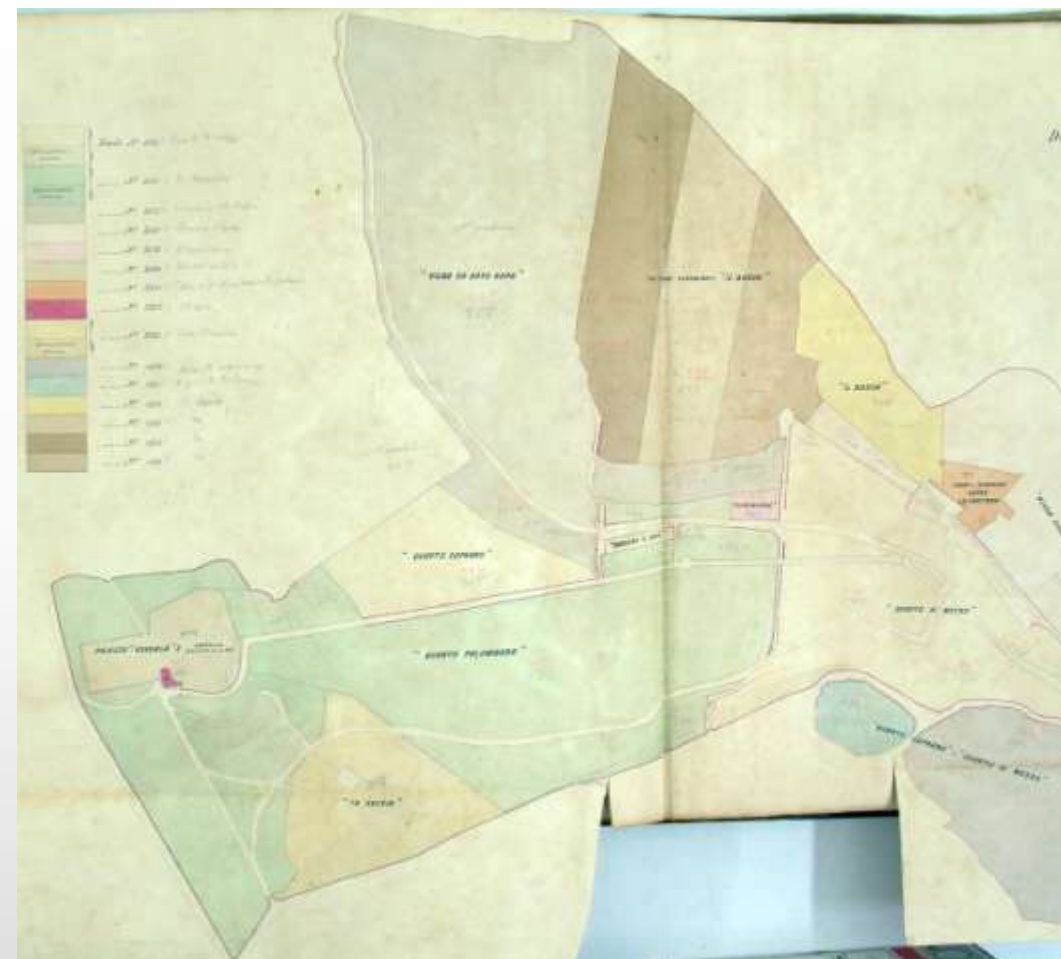


"il Boschetto"



A survey sheet dated 1919, depicting in red, Government property.

Records and Archives Section, Project House, Floriana.



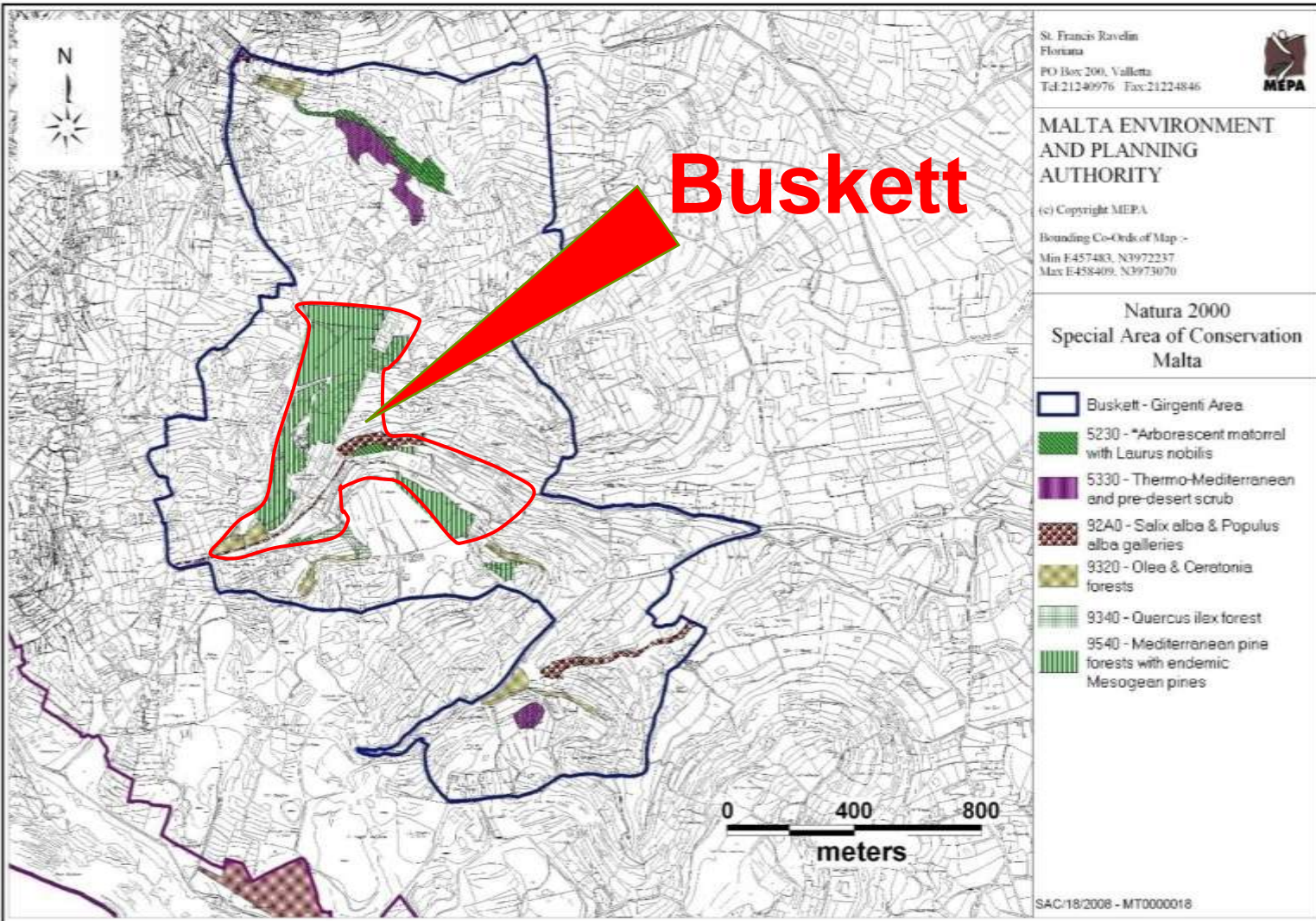
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Buskett Woodland – Forms part of the Buskett / Girgenti Natura 2000 site and is both a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a Special Protection Area (SPA)



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Buskett - Present Legal Protection Laws & Legal Notices.

- The first legal protection for Buskett was for avifauna and was published as far back as **1932**. This was strengthened throughout the years and today Buskett is still protected under the current **Conservation of Wild Birds Regulations**.
- A cluster of trees has been protected since 1933, through Government Notice GN 269 of 1933 which gives the List of Historical Trees having an Antiquarian Importance. Hence, Antiquarian Trees at Buskett Gardens are all protected.
- In 1996 Buskett was scheduled under the Development Planning Act as an **Area of Ecological Importance, a Site of Scientific Importance**, an area of high landscape value and a scheduled woodland, by Government Notice GN403 of 25 June 1996. Buskett is designated as a Special Area of Conservation.
- **Candidate Site of International Importance** and as a **Special Protection Area** via Government Notice GN112 of 2007, as declared through the provisions of the *Flora, Fauna and Natural Habitats Regulations of 2006 (Legal Notice 311 of 2006)*.
- Buskett Woodland/Gardens together with Verdala Palace and Girgenti are two **bird sanctuaries** designated via Legal Notice 79 of 2006 - **Conservation of Wild Birds Regulations**, both of which fall within the candidate SAC in question.
- Gnien il-Kbir, il-Buskett and Wied il-Girgenti have been designated as a **Tree Protection Area** via Government Notice 473 of 2011 (through the provisions of the Trees and Woodlands Protection Regulations of 2011 - Legal Notice 200 of 2011).
- Buskett and Wied il-Luq has been also been declared as an **Important Bird Area of EU Importance** and is also a **Global Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA)** declared by BirdLife International.
- Scheduling of a number of buildings at Buskett designated as Grade 1 in terms of Structure Plan Policy UCO7 Section 46 of the Development Act, 1992 - GN 403 dated 1996
- **ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNING ACT - 4. Scheduling and Conservation (Article 81)**
- **CULTURAL HERITAGE ACT - CHAPTER 445**
ACT VI of 2002, as amended by Acts XVIII of 2002, II of 2005 and XXXII of 2007; Legal Notice 426 of 2007; and Act XXIII of 2009.



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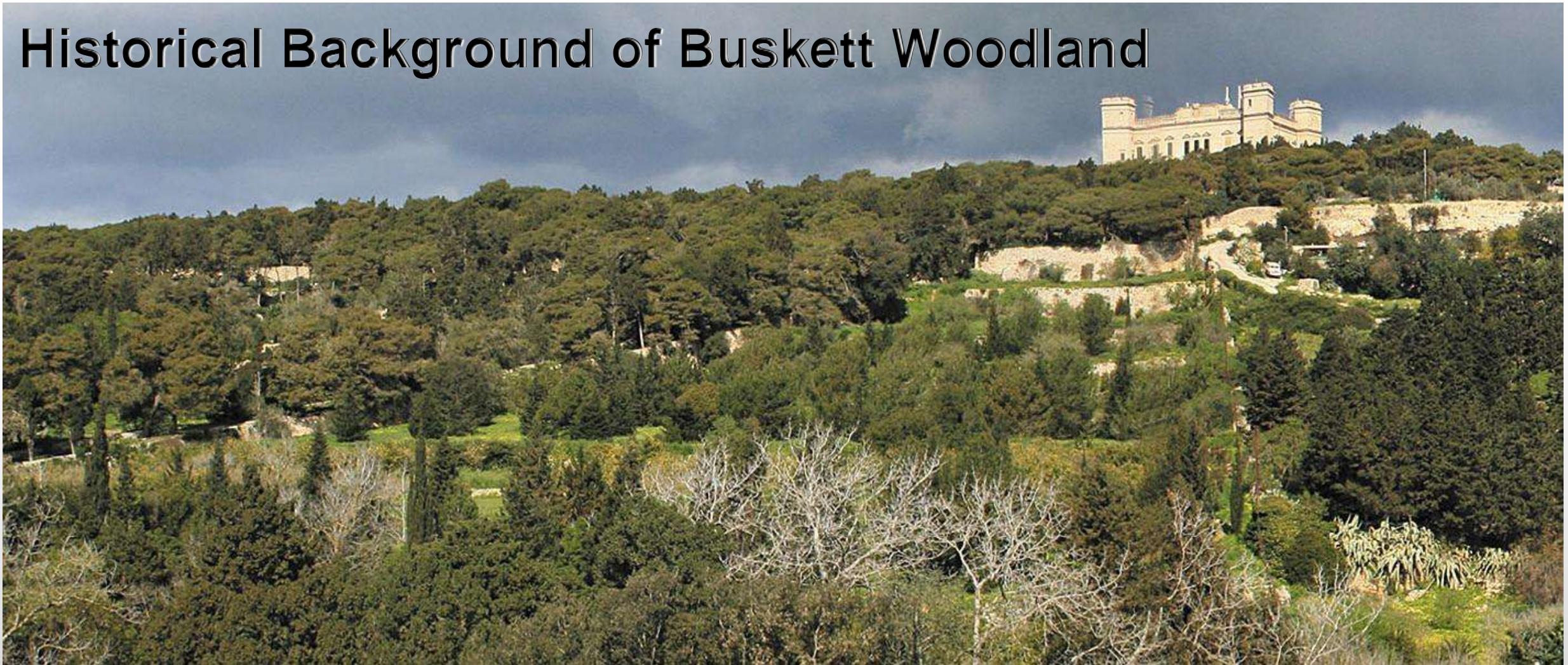


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Historical Background of Buskett Woodland



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General View of Buskett from Verdala Palace



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Buskett woodlands *“il Boschetto”* was collated together by various Grandmasters of the Order of Saint John, thus forming this important and unique woodland as it is known today.

This presentation will be focusing mainly on the history of various infrastructural works forming this woodland including a brief description of some portions of land adjoining the **Palazzo Verdala**. Historical data was researched and compiled from various original first source plans and manuscripts spanning over a period of circa 300 years (1625 -1655), (1770), (1866) and (1919).

*Emphasizing mainly on **Grand Master Giovanni Paolo Lascaris tenure (1636-1657)**, who was Grand Master of the Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem in Malta, and as described in the **Descrizione di Monte Verdala col Boshetto** a book by **Fra Giovan Francesco Abela published in 1647**.*



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- It is well documented that in the Baroque period the aristocracy owned spectacular gardens and, in some cases, were also directly involved in the creation of their gardens.
- Seventeenth century garden writers seem to have provided abundant advice. Their books were aimed to reach rich landowners, who would be then building or improving their country properties. The content and tone of the gardening books, coupled with the virtual absence of relevant advice in the architectural treatises, suggest that masterminding fine gardens around a house was one of the accomplishments expected of the owner himself. However a skilled gardener would be sought to convert the bare ground into the planned complex gardens and orchards.



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Buskett Woodland and its Gardens owe its origins mainly to the Knights of St. John, when Grandmaster de Vallette between 1557 and 1568 built a small hunting lodge and some structures used as stables. Other buildings were added later, such as the imposing Verdala Castle, several farmhouses, reservoirs, fountains, water channels including a 1081m engineered water culvert. The magnificent castle and its surrounding gardens were designed and built primarily not only to serve as a summer residence but also as a private hunting grounds for the personal use of the Grand Masters of the Order.

During the period of the Knight's 260 years stay in Malta, a great amount of fruit and other indigenous trees were recorded to have been planted here, thus creating the gardens and woodlands more or less, as it is known today. This entailed also the construction of game enclosures, complex irrigation works, fountains and fish tanks. Wied il-Luq was extensively modified in this process. Its banks were reinforced by dry stone and ashlar walls, thus converted into an artificial engineered water channel along most of its course throughout Buskett.



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Grandmasters of the Order of Saint John

Philippe Villiers de L'Isle-Adam	- 1534-1535
Piero de Ponte	- 1534-1535
Didier de Saint-Jaille	- 1535-1536
Juan de Homedes y Coscon	- 1536-1553
Claude de la Sengle	- 1553-1557
Jean Parisot de Valette	- 1557-1568
Pierre de Monte	- 1568-1572
Jean de la Cassière	- 1572-1581
Mathurin Romegas	- 1581-1581
Hugues Loubenx de Verdalle	- 1581-1595
Martin Garzez	- 1595-1601
Alof de Wignacourt	- 1601-1622
Luís Mendes de Vasconcellos	- 1622-1623
Antoine de Paule	- 1623-1636
Giovanni Paolo Lascaris	- 1636-1657
Martin de Redin	- 1657-1660
Annet de Clermont-Gessant	- 1660-1660
Raphael Cotoner	- 1660-1663
Nicolas Cotoner	- 1663-1680
Gregorio Carafa	- 1680-1690
Adrien de Wignacourt	- 1690-1697
Ramon Perellos y Roccaful	- 1697- 1720
Marc'Antonio Zondadari	- 1720- 1722
António Manoel de Vilhena	- 1722-1736
Ramon Despuig	- 1736-1741
Manuel Pinto da Fonseca	- 1741-1773
Francisco Ximenes de Texada	- 1773-1775
Emmanuel de Rohan-Polduc	- 1775-1797
Ferdinand von Hompesch zu Bolheim	- 1797-1799



Jean Parisot de Valette



Hugues Loubenx de Verdalle



Alof de Wignacourt



Giovanni Paolo Lascaris



Raphael Cotoner



Nicolas Cotoner



António Manoel de Vilhena



Manuel Pinto da Fonseca



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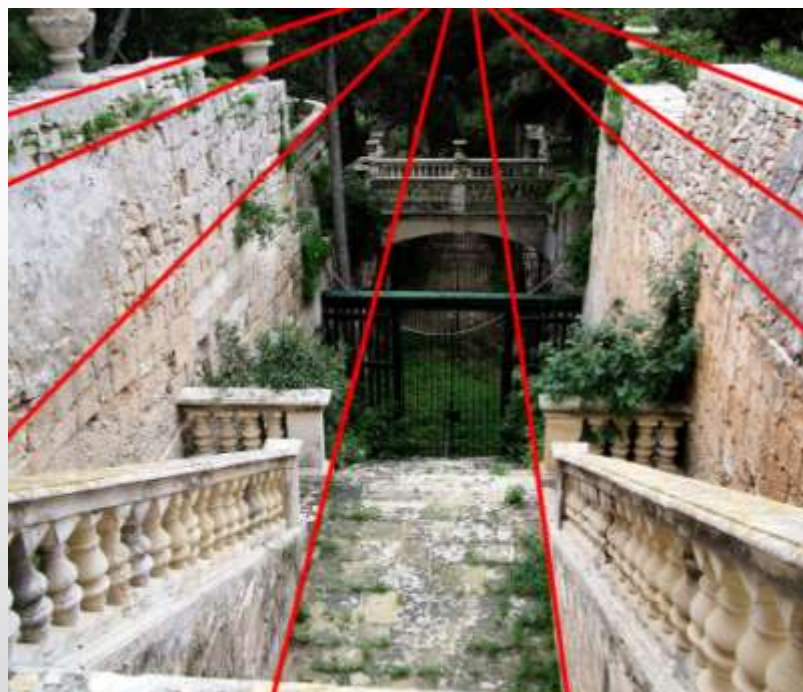
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Grandmasters of the Order of Saint John

Jean Parisot de Valette	- 1557-1568
Hugues Loubenx de Verdalle	- 1581-1595
Alof de Wignacourt	- 1601-1622
Giovanni Paolo Lascaris	- 1636-1657
Raphael Cotoner	- 1660-1663
Nicolas Cotoner	- 1663-1680
António Manoel de Vilhena	- 1722-1736
Manuel Pinto da Fonseca	- 1741-1773



- **Grand Master Jean Parisot de Valette** built a cool, shady grotto, which inside had an abundant natural spring (Ta'Sala). This grotto was constructed with sea shells and rustic rock. De Valette also built a small edifice above the grotto (hunting lodge) which later was used by succeeding Grandmasters for their own amusement until finally the Castle on Mount Verdala was constructed. - Gio. Francesco Abela - 1647
- **Grand Master Verdalle** built a summer Palace/Castle (Verdala Palace) in Buskett. In the process he commissioned the planting of new trees in the vicinity of this palace.
- **Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt** built the aqueducts from which natural spring water situated in Rabat and Dingli was directed towards Valletta via arched aqueducts.
- **Grand Master Lascaris (1637-57)** enlarged the woodland park and built paths, watercourses, fountains and various farmhouses. An arched gateway leading to a nearby farmhouse in Buskett (Razzett Tal-Baghal) is adorned with a coat of arms of Grand Master Lascaris. Ir-Razzett tal-Ghorof most probably dates before Grand Master Lascaris period as can be verified from old plans depicting farmhouses/structures built in Buskett.
- **Grand Masters Raphael Cotoner** and **Nicolas Cotoner** built the chapel near the Verdala Place dedicated to Saint Anthony.
- **Grand Master António Manoel de Vilhena** built the second floor of the Verdala Palace.
- **Grand Master Manuel Pinto da Fonseca** restored the old hunting lodge situated above the Grotto.



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In 1647, Giovanni Francesco Abela wrote:



“At the base of the hill which faces West, a copious and abundant spring rises inside a cool, shady grotto built with shells and rustic rock in imitation of nature and to please the eye. This place with the small edifice above it was built by Grand Master La Vallette and later used for their own amusement by his successors until finally the castle on Mount Verdala was constructed”

Della Descrizione di Malta, Isola nel Mare Siciliano - Giovanni Francesco Abela - 1647

fra due mōti alpestri, aspri, e sassosi. Alle falde d'vno di questi, che sorge cōtra Ponente, scaturisce fra gl'altri vn fonte assai copioso, & abbondante d'acqua, ricouerto d'vn nicchio fatto di pietre rustiche, o marine, per imitar la natura, e dar diletto maggiore alla vista. Questo luogo con la stanza, & edificio, che di sopra si vede, fu fatto fabricare dal G. Maestro Valletta, del quale servendosi i suoi Successori, vi andauano à diporto fin tanto, che si edificò la Rocca di Monte Verdala. Qual capo d'acqua in più canali compartito, e distinto viene ad inaffiare gran parte del



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Vaulted Grotto and the Majestic stairs leading from Palazzo Verdala to Buskett Woodland

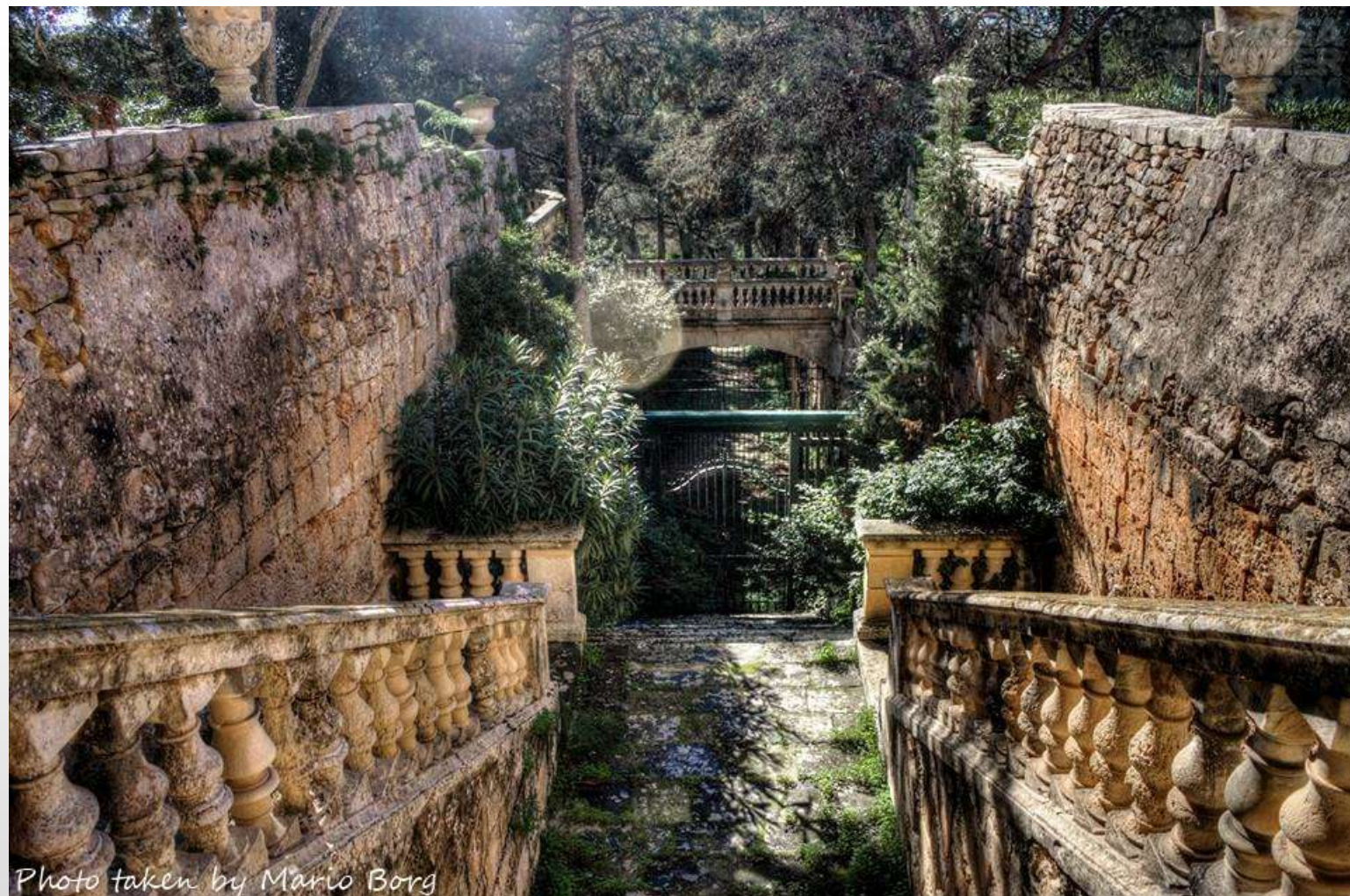


Photo taken by Mario Borg



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In 1663, during his visit in Malta, Albert Jouvin De Rochefort's wrote:

“.....this garden occupies a small valley surrounded by hills, making it look like a gondola. We descended through a more than a mile long avenue of orange trees, cedars, lemon trees, olive trees and fig trees. We then found several smaller gardens, each containing something of special interest. In one of them, for example, there were fruit trees which normally cannot grow in such a hot climate, such as different kinds of the pear trees, plum trees, cherry trees and apricots. That is why there are in all seasons, small streams which render the place even more pleasant in the winter than in the summer when, were it not for these streams, everything would dry up because of the great heat. In another garden, we saw flowers which did not usually grow in Malta and, in this same setting, there were small meadows where greenery is present all the year round, due to the presence of water which flows from a cave situated on one side of this little worldly paradise. This cave is decorated with shells and small natural rocks, as well as with statues of nymphs, dolphins and sirens while Neptune demonstrates his authority and power, standing in the centre of a most pompous following. We then entered a small wood, where we saw many wild beasts which were kept here for hunting together with other delights; making this garden a most accomplished one.”

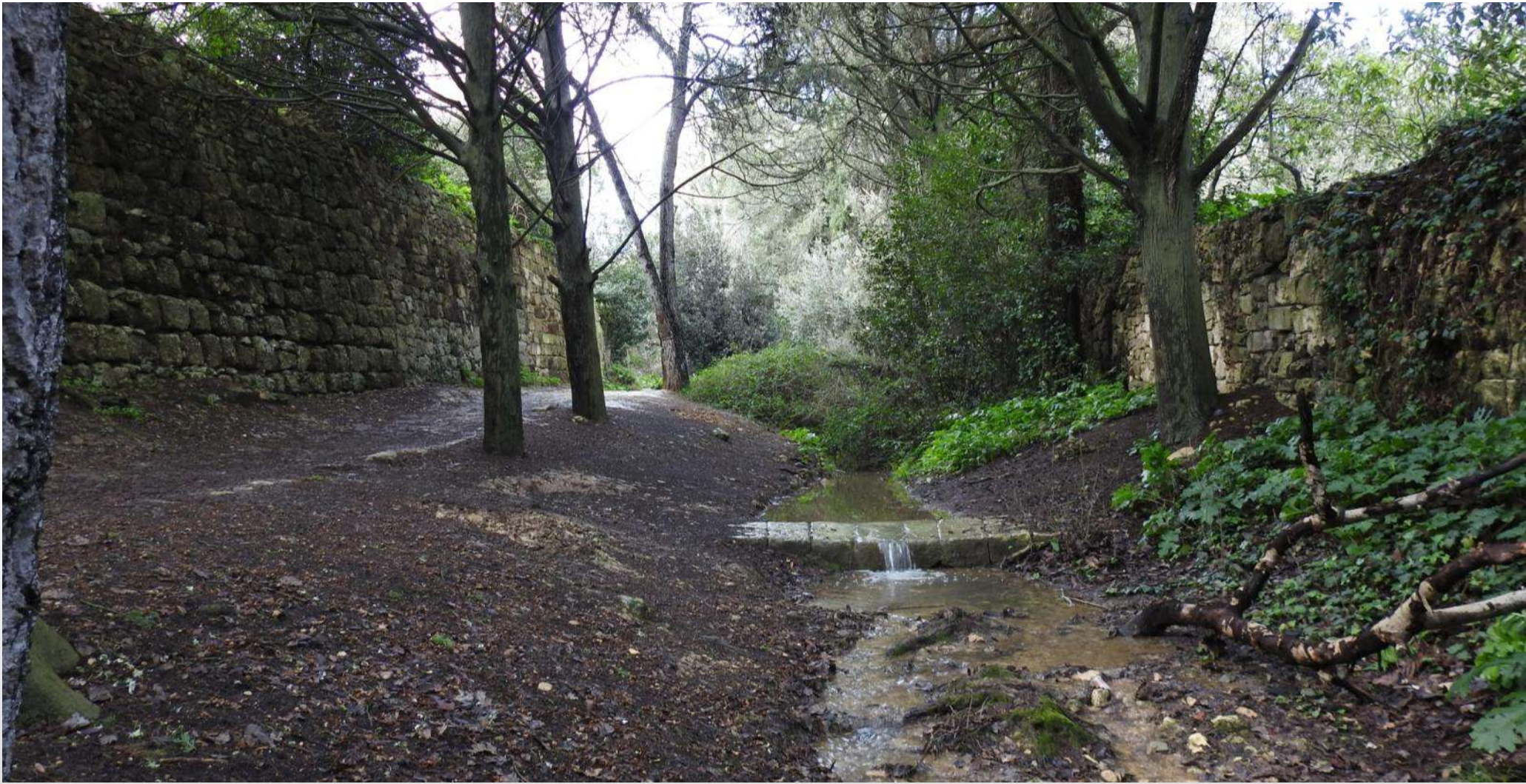
Albert Jouvin De Rochefort's visit to Boschetto - 1663





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Period Description of *Boschetto* in the *Descrittione di Malta Anno 1716*

"The country about the city abounds with delightful gardens . . . that in particular called Boscheta, or pleasure-garden, belonging to the Grand Master, and situated on an eminence on the west side of the city, yields the most beautiful prospect, from the great quantities of stately trees which grow upon it, as orange, lemon, citron, pomegranate, olive, peach, nectarine, and other fruit trees. One part of this delicious spot is made into a warren, and breeds a great quantity of hares and rabbits, another, planted with olive-trees abounds with stags, deer, etc. The whole is finely variegated with springs, cascades, and other water-works, and adorned with a most stately palace, whose apartments and lofty walls are magnificently furnished and adorned".





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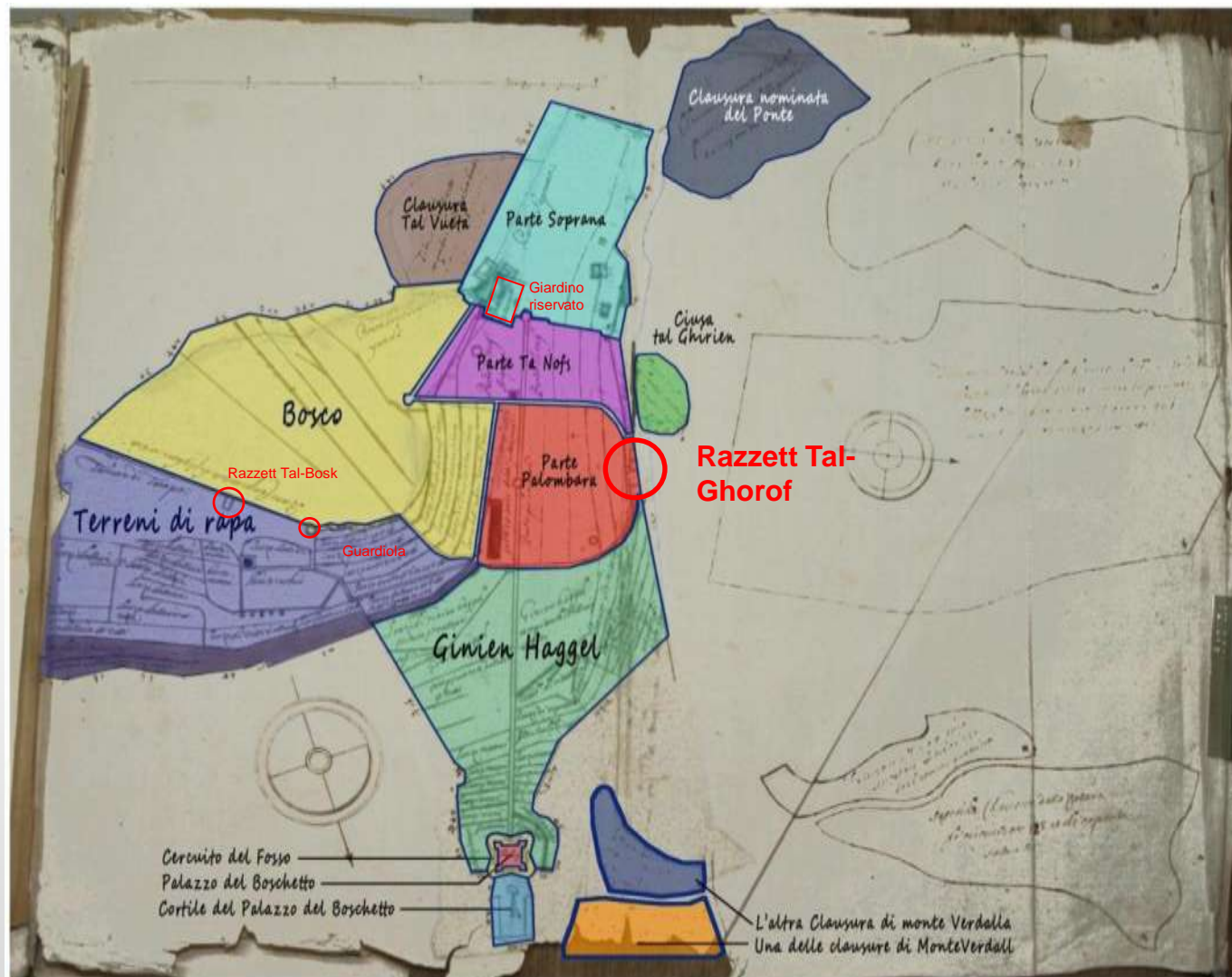
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Il Boschetto - as described in a period plan and manuscripts dating circa early to mid 17th Century and shown as being formed or composed of 14 named portions of land (some portions of land were leased to 3rd parties).

These 14 main divisions of land were:

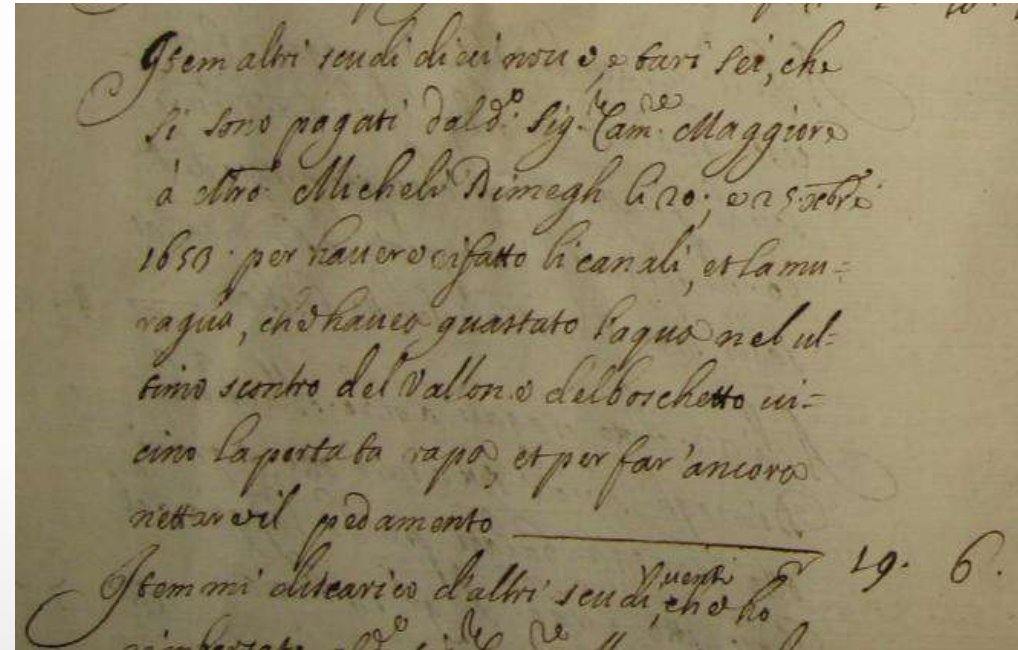
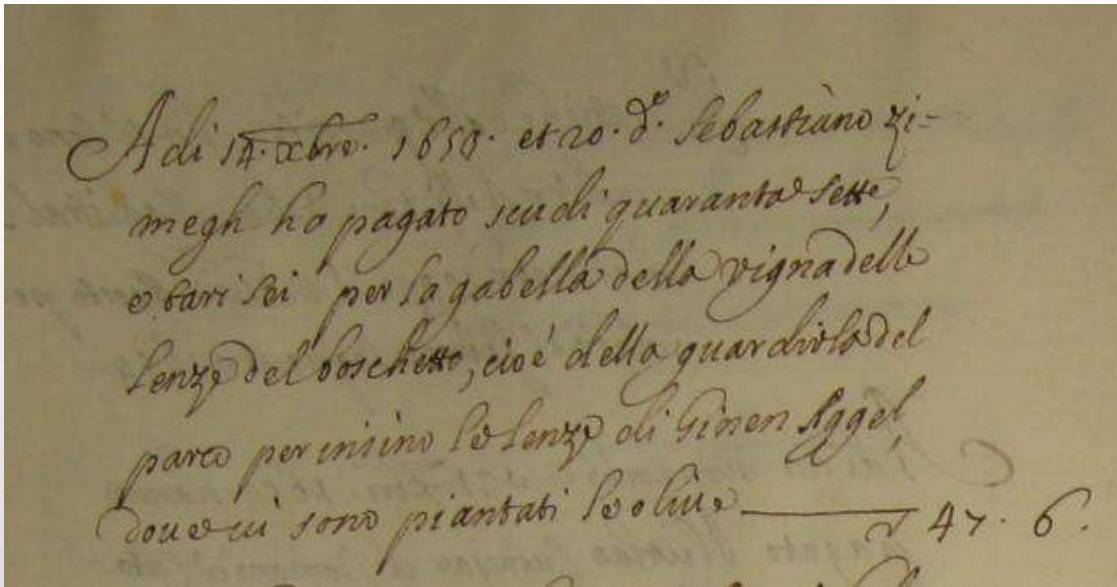
1. **Cortile del Palazzo del Boschetto**
2. **Palazzo del Boschetto**
3. **Cercuito del Fosso**
4. **Bosco**
5. **Ta Rapa**
6. **Ginien Haggel**
7. **Parte Palombara**
8. **Parte ta Nofs**
9. **Parte Soprana**
10. **Clausura tal Vueta**
11. **Clausura nominata del Ponte**
12. **Ciusa tal Ghirien**
13. **Una delle clausure di MonteVerdalla**
14. **L'altra Clausura di Monte Verdalla**





Various payments Boschetto (Leases and repairs)

14 Ottobre 1653 et 20. Sebastiano Zimegh ho pagato scudi quaranta sette e tari sei per la **gabella** della vigna delle lenze del boschetto, cioe della guardiola del parco per insino le lenze di Ginien Hahhel, dove vi sono piantati le olive. Scudi 47 Tari 6

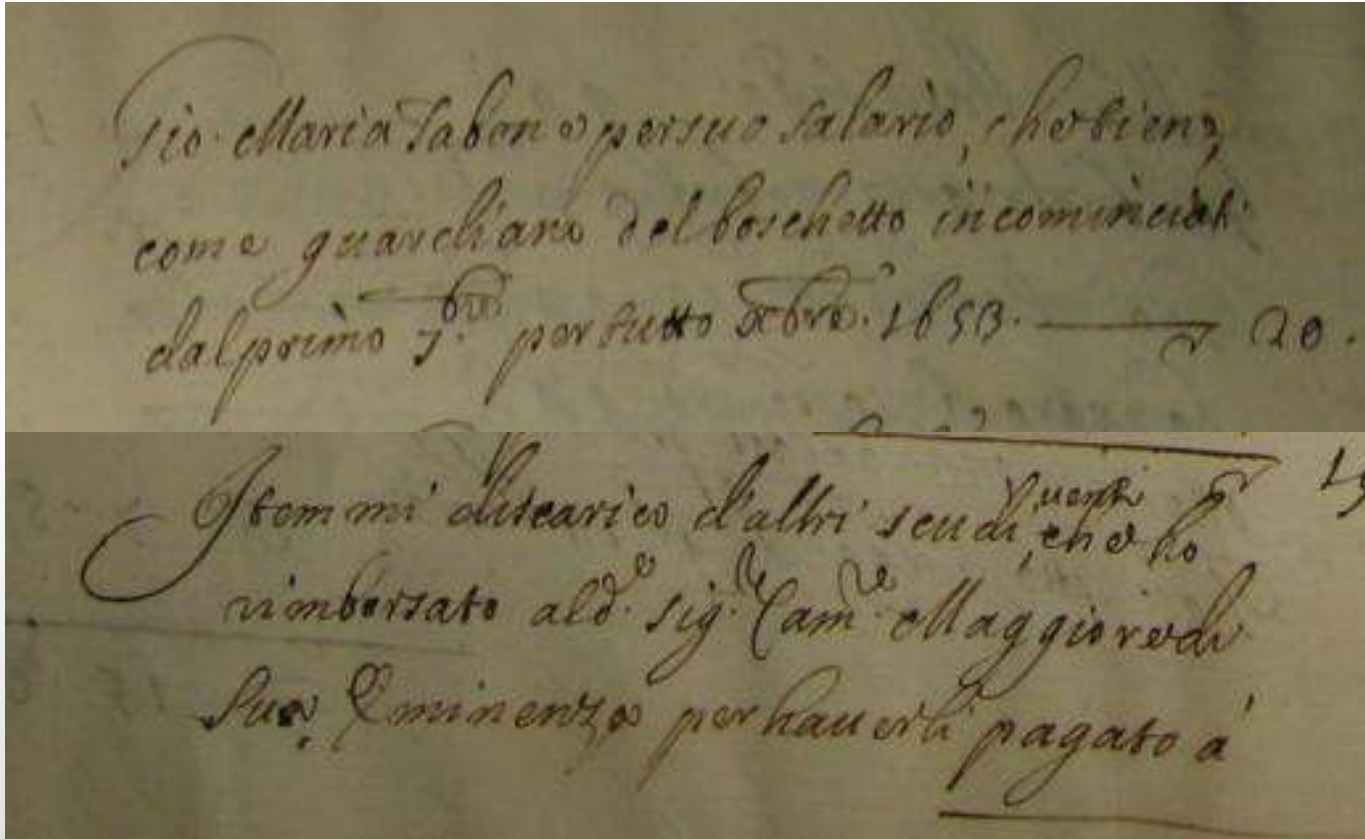


Altri scudi dicanove e tari sei, che si sono pagati dallo Sig Cam. Maggiore a Mro Micheli Dimegh li 20 e 25 Ottobre 1653 per havere rifatto li canali et la muraglia, che haveva guastato l'aqua nel ultimo scontro del vallone del boschetto insino la parte ta Rapa et per fare ancora mettere il pedamento. Scudi 19 Tari 6





Various payments Boschetto (Salaries)



Mi discarico d'altri scudi venti che ho rimborsato al Sig, Cam. Maggiorelli Sua eminenza per haverli pagato a Gio. Maria Tabone per suo salario, che viene come guardiano del boschetto incominciare dal primo 7 Ottobre per tutto Ottobre 1653.

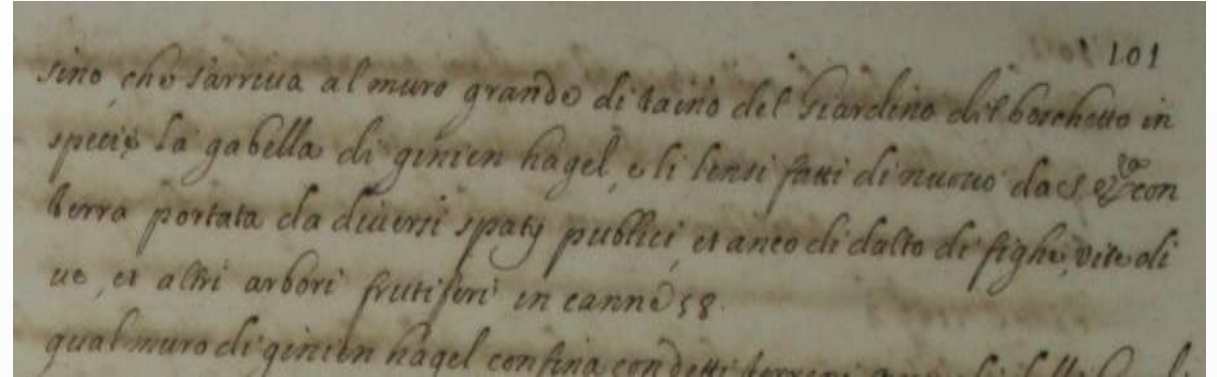




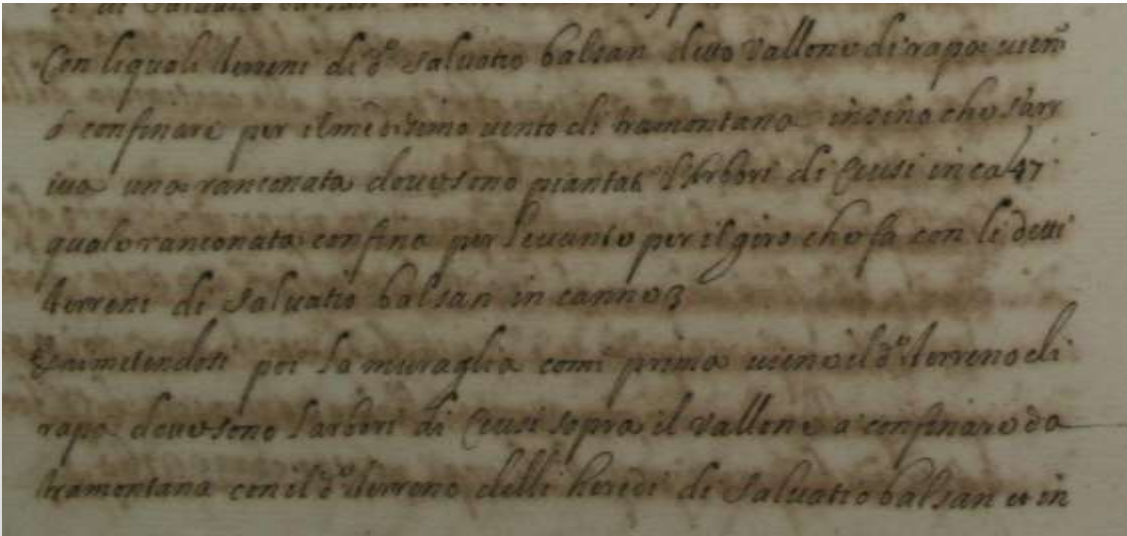
Past land use at 'il Boschetto' during the Knights of Saint John's period.

Trees present at Boschetto – and as indicated in original period manuscripts.

*Con liquali terreni di Salvatio Balsan ditto vallone di rapa viene a confinare per il medesimo vento di tramontana insino che s'arriva una ranconata dove sono piantati **l'arbori di leusi** in canne 47 quale ranconata confina per levanter per il giro che fa con li detti terreni di Salvatio Balsan in canne 3.*



Rimetendosi poi la muraglia come prima viene il codesto terreno di rapa dove sono **l'arbori di leusi** sopra il vallone a confinare da tramontana con il terreno delli heredi di Salvatio Balsan et insino che s'arriva al **muro grande di taino del giardino** del Boschetto in specie la gabella di ginien hagel, e **li lensi fatti di nuovo** da ? con **terra portata da diversi spatie publici** et anco di dalto di **fighe, vite, olive et altri arbori frutiferi** in canne 58.





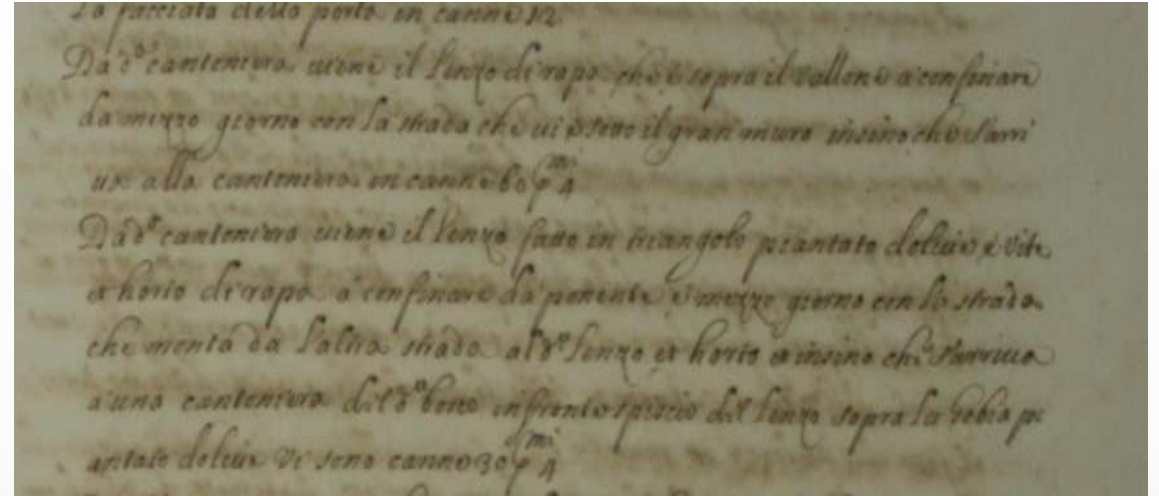
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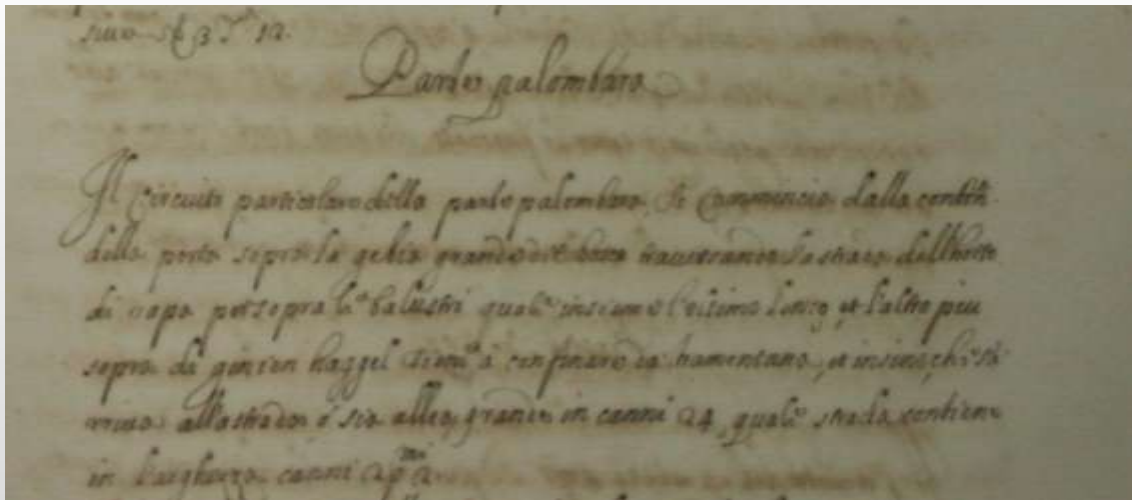


Trees planted and used at Boschetto – as indicated in original period manuscripts.

*Da questa cantoniera viene il lenzo fatto in triangolo **piantato d'olive e vite et horto di rapa** a confinare da ponente e mezzo giorno con la strada che monta da l'altra strada al ? lenzo et horto et insino chi s'arriva a una cantoniera del bosco in frontespicio del lenzo sopra **la Gebia piantato d'olivi** vi sono canne 30 palme 4*



*Il circuito particolare della parte palombara si comincia dalla confine della porta sopra **la gebia grande** del bosco traversando la strada **dell'horto di rapa** per sopra **li balustri** quali insieme l'ultimo lenzo et l'altro piu sopra di ginien hagle viene a confinare da tramontana, et insino che s'arriva alla strada o sia allea grande in canni 24, quali strada contiene in larghezza canni 2 palme 2.*





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Trees at Buskett listed in original manuscripts included a substantial number of:

Figs (*fighare*)

Almond trees (*leusi*)

Olive groves (*olivi*)

Grape Vines (*vite*)

Citron (*cedro*)

Orange (*arangi*)

Lemon trees (*limoni*)

Cherry trees (*ciraze*)

White poplars (*pioppi*)

Carob trees (*carubie*)

Holm oak trees (*quattro arbori di giande*)

and Vegetable gardens (*horto*)



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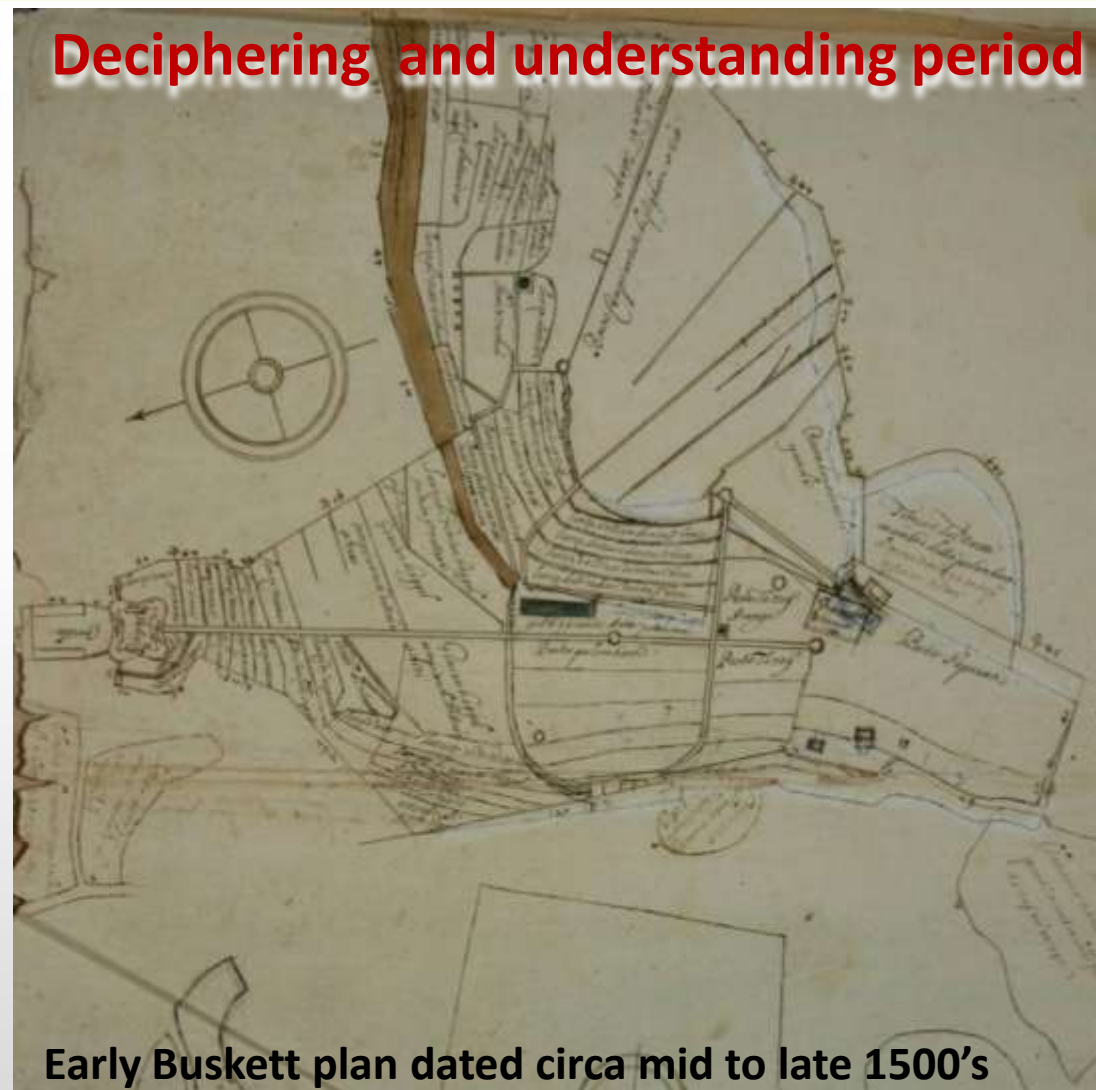


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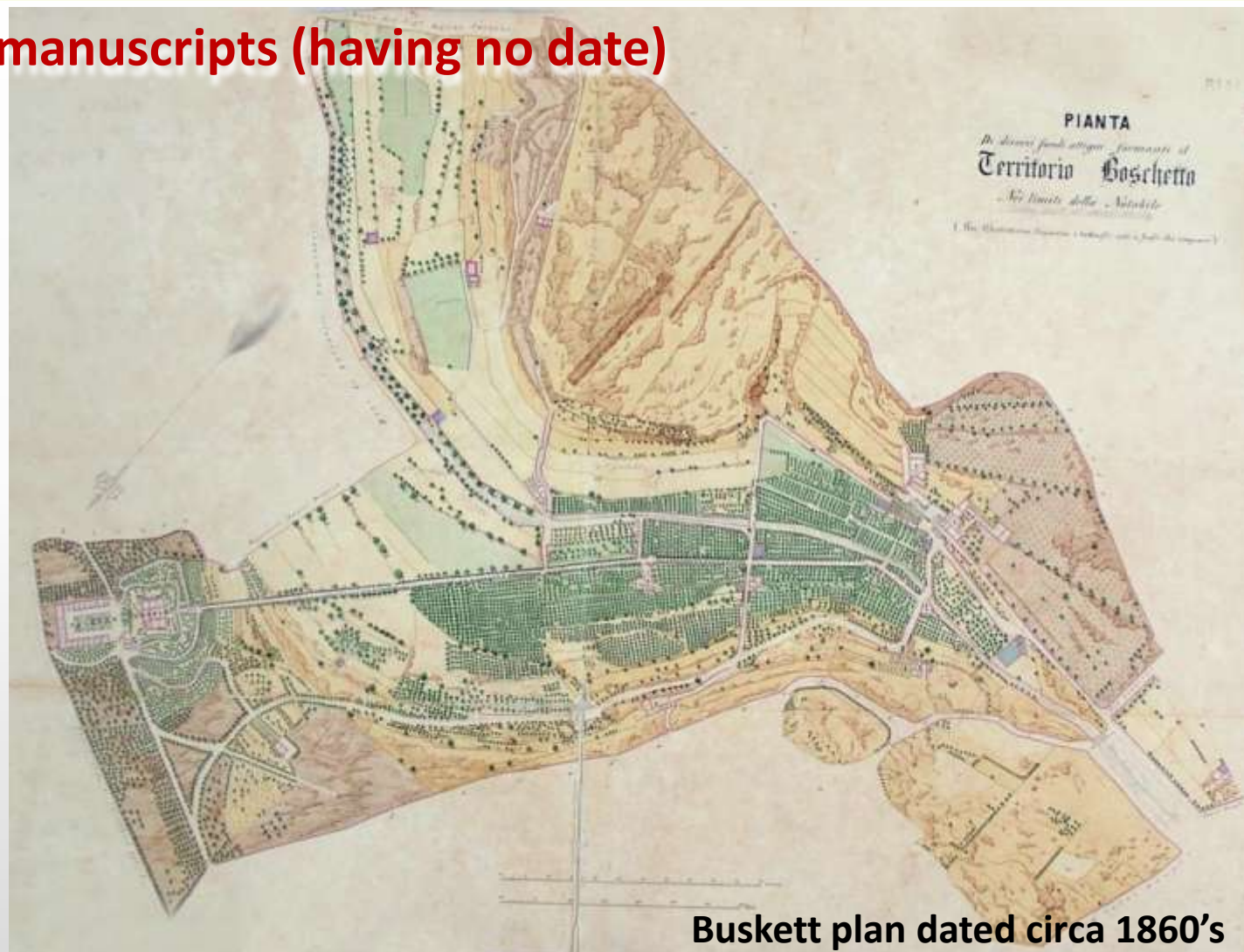
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Deciphering and understanding period manuscripts (having no date)



Early Buskett plan dated circa mid to late 1500's



Buskett plan dated circa 1860's



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Dating of A Historical Map of *il Boschetto* and *il Verdala*

The description in Gio F. Abela's book may shed some light on the approximate dating of a 17th Century Map (having no date) When close examining map, it was observed that the new Chapel of Saint Anthony is not shown on map. Therefore this map must have been drawn prior to 1660's i.e. both before Raphael (3 years) and Nicolas Cotoner (17 years) tenure as Grand Masters of the Order, for which the new chapel has been attributed to.

dinal Verdala, che però in riguardo di lui sopra la porta principale si vede scritto in marmo. MONTI VERDALÆ ROS, ET PLVVIA. MDLXXXVI. e nella porta di dentro per dove s'entra nella sala, si leggono questi caratteri. CEDANT CVRÆ, LOCO le quali pitture dimostrano le principali, e più segnalate attioni, come anco le promotioni di esso G. Maestro. Nella parte anteriore fuori del fosso, che la cinge, e difende per tutti i lati, è vn gran cortile con la sua cauallerizza per venticinque, e più destrieri, e ne due lati di esso sono fabricate all'intorno officine per la famiglia bassa. Euui la sua Cappella dedicata à S. Antonio Eremita. Nel resto tutto l'edificio (disegno dell'Ingegniero Girolamo Cassaro Maltese) è così ben inteso quanto si può desiderare, non vi restando vn palmo di terreno inutile, ma tutto compartito per seruigio, & aprò della Corte. Hoggi dal Sig. G. Maestro Lascaris mio Signore è stato il boschetto abbellito, &

*“Nella parte anteriore fuori del fosso, che la cinge e difende per tutti i lati e' un gran cortile con la sua cavallerizza per venticinque e piu destieri, ce ne due lati di esso sono fabricate all intorno officine per la famiglia bassa. E qui la sua cappella dedicata a **S. Antonio Eremita**. Nel resto tutto l'edificio (disegnato dell'ingegniero Girolamo Cassaro Maltese) e cosi ben inteso quanto si puo desiderare, non vi restando un palmo di terra inutile, ma tutto compatito per seriggio e apro' della Corte.”*





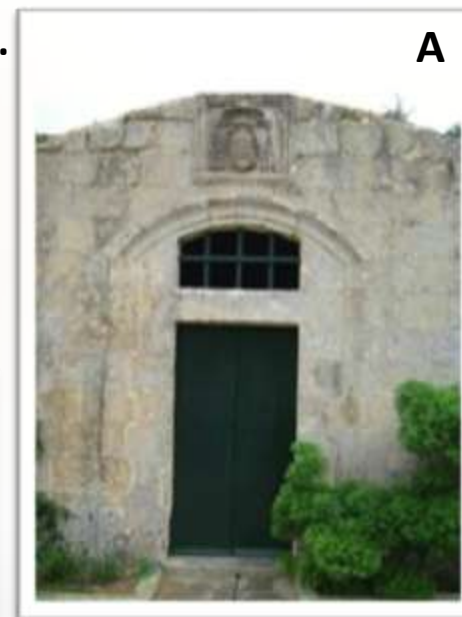
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A – The old Chapel dedicated to St Anthony the Hermit.

B - The New chapel dedicated to St Anthony is not depicted on the Map. Therefore Fra. Gio F. Abela was surely referring to the old chapel (A)



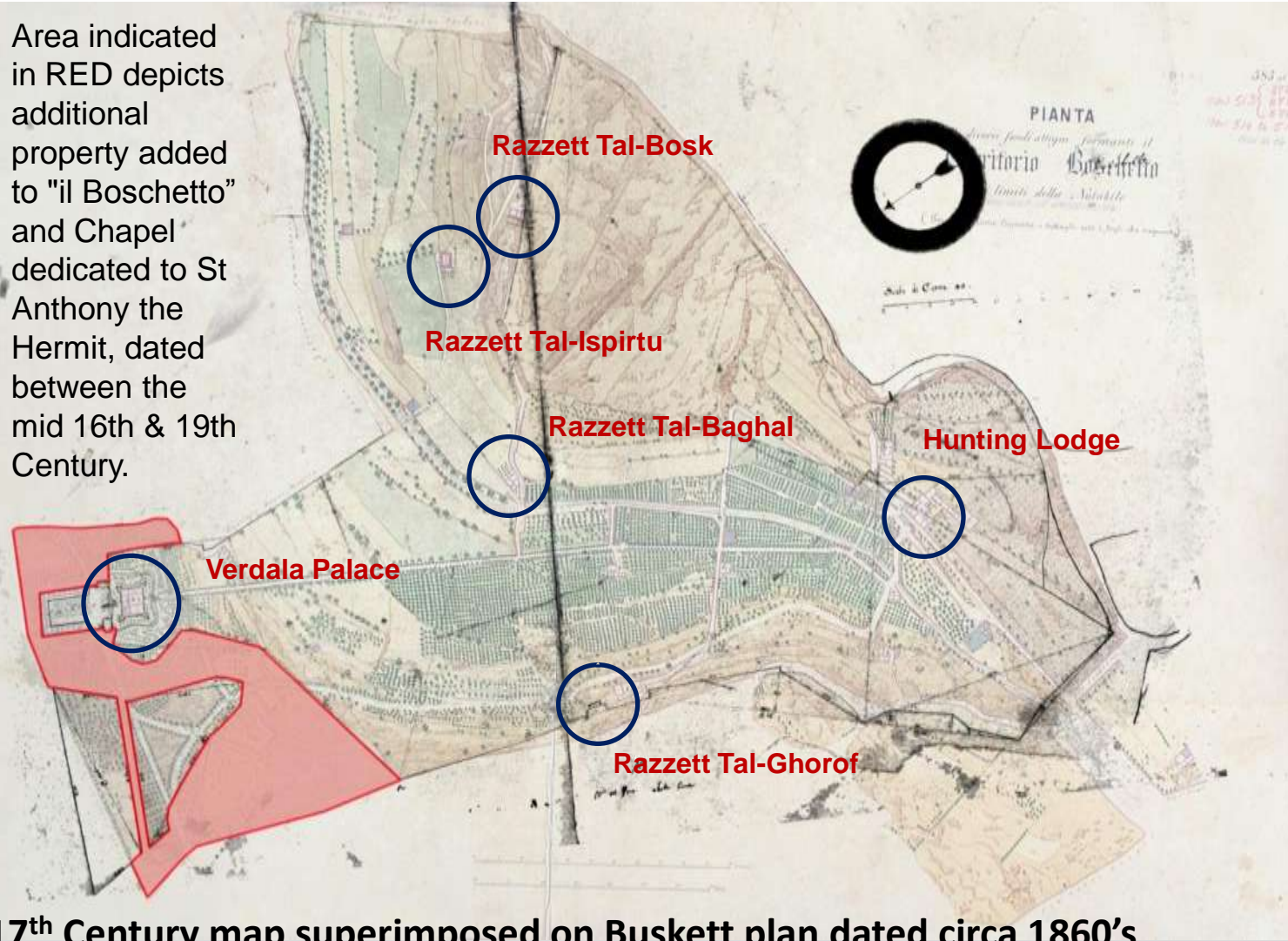


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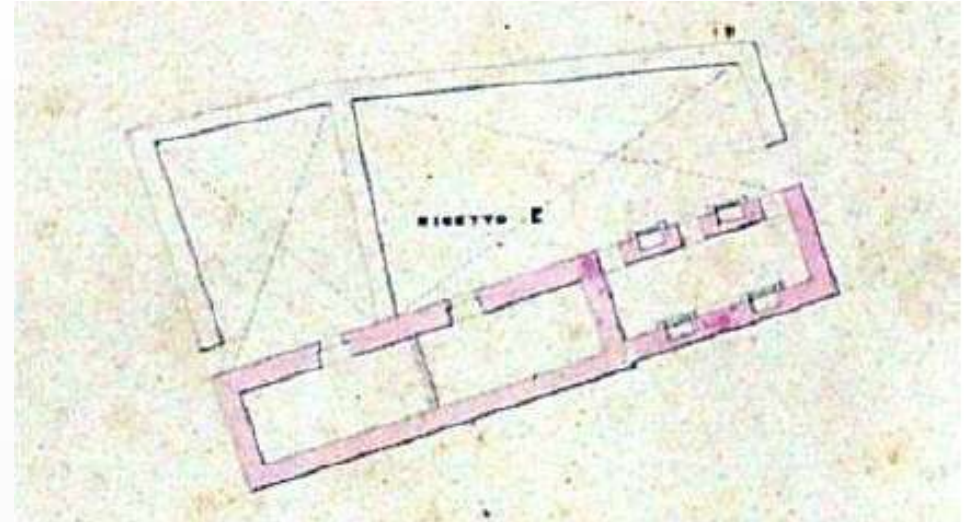
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Area indicated in RED depicts additional property added to "il Boschetto" and Chapel dedicated to St Anthony the Hermit, dated between the mid 16th & 19th Century.



17th Century map superimposed on Buskett plan dated circa 1860's



An 1866 detailed layout plan of Ir-Razzett ta' l-Ghorof (WD Records and Archives)
Structure consisting of 3 rooms / stables & 2 areas presumably used as paddocks.

This farmhouse today known as Razzett tal-Ghorof is described in original manuscripts as the *casa dove habitano li giardinari* (Gardener's House)



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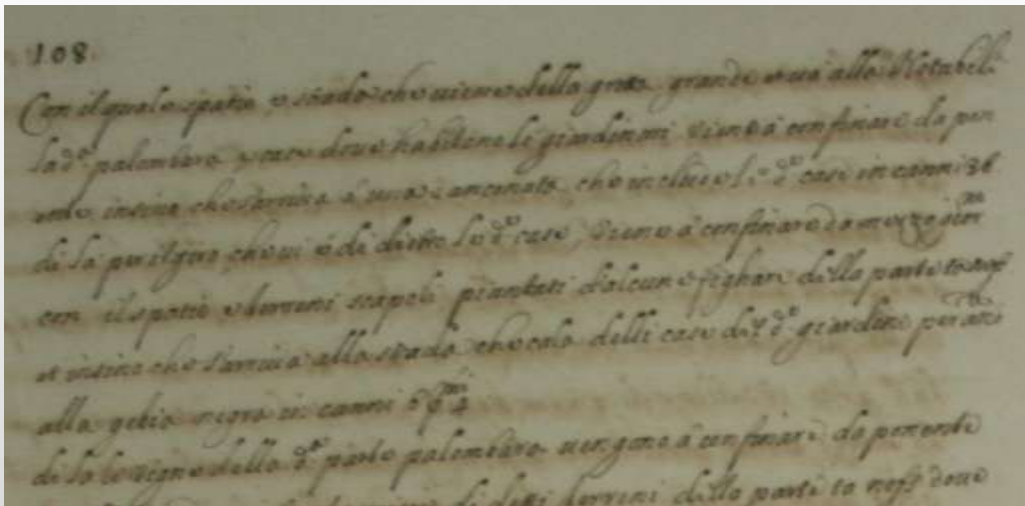


Extract from original manuscript describing zone near Razzett tal-Ghorof.

Con il quale spatio e strada che viene della grotto grande et va all Notabile la palombara e **case dove abitano li giardinari** viene a confinare da ponente insino che s'arriva a una ranconata che include le case in canne 36. Di la per il giro che vi e dietro le codeste case, viene a confinare a mezzo giorno il spatio e terreni scapoli piantati d'alcuni **fighari** della parte ta nof(s) et insino che s'arriva alla strada che cala delli case di questi giardini per andare alla **gebia negra** in canne 6 palme 4.



Razzett tal-Ghorof





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Existing Buildings and Restored Farmhouses - Razzett tal-Baghal, tal-Ispirtu, tal-Bosk and tal-Ghorof.

Under normal circumstances, the precise dating of the construction of this farmhouse would be very difficult to establish. The determination of a period of construction based solely on stylistic grounds would be grossly inaccurate. In this case, the period when parts of the farmhouse were built, date back to the time of Grand Master Lascaris (1636-57).

After Grand Master Verdalle (1581-95) built a summer Palace and the vaulted grotto in Buskett, Grand Master Lascaris (1636-57) **enlarged the extensive woodland park**. It is documented to have been involved in the building of the engineered watercourse, as well as various fountains, water pools, and various buildings, including three farmhouses. - *(Descrizione di Monte Verdala col Boshetto - Fra Giovan Francesco Abela - 1647).*

An arched gateway leading to ir-Razzett tal-Baghal is adorned with a coat of arms of Grand Master Lascaris (1636-57) on the exterior. Ir-Razzett tal-Bosk probably dates back from the same period as can be verified from old plans depicting the three farmhouses built in Buskett. Various modifications might have been carried out over the years. Most probably, during the 19th and 20th century some alterations were carried out to the buildings.



Razzett tal-Baghal



Razzett tal-Ispirtu

Razzett tal-Bosk





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Mnarja – is the national feast of St Peter and St Paul celebrated at Buskett since the time of the Knights of St John.

The word *Mnarja* is derived from ‘*Luminarja*’ meaning lights, and refers to bonfires lit around the whole island.

The feast was so popular in the old times that a man **had** to promise his wife-to-be and her parents on the eve of marriage that he would take his bride to Buskett for the next Imnarja.

Painting Oil on canvas - Favray 1744/98 - Imnarja



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Late 19th - Early 20th Century - British period mural at Palazzo Verdala - Buskett



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Late 19th - Early 20th Century - British period mural at the Presidential Palace - Valletta



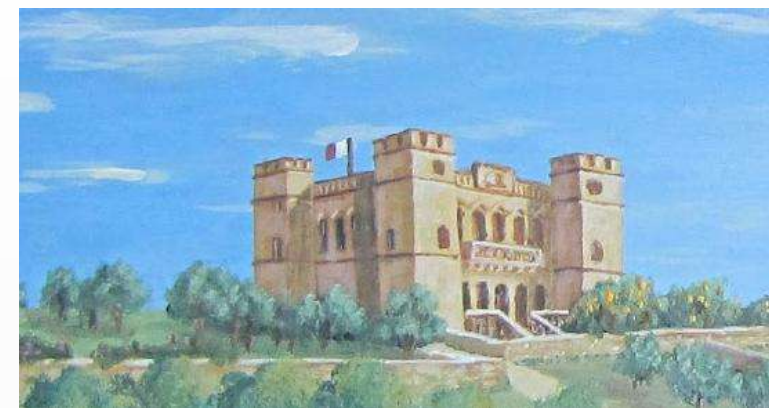
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Old photo and painting depicting Verdala Palace and its immediate landscaped areas.



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Gauguin

www.delcampe.net

Early 19th century Photos of Buskett Woodland



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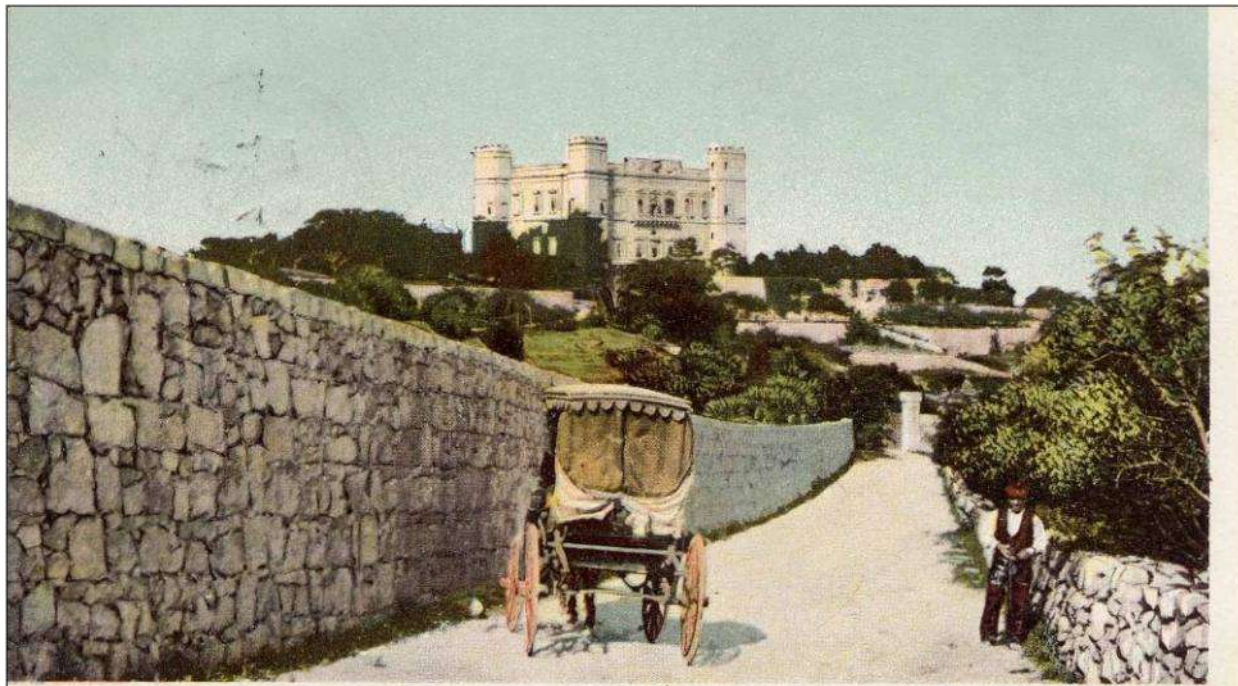


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Early 19th century Photos of Buskett Woodland



Malta. *Si curiosissimo lo spacio alla Vendala Palace Boschetto.*
Londra 7 Mayo 903 *del marano alla targetta*



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Conclusion

Baroque symbolised prestige, power, and wealth, bringing with it a continued change in philosophical thought. It also brought great changes in all the arts especially in architecture with the introduction of more elaborate curvilinear forms. Facades were now built more adorned with imposing entrances, grand staircases and with all sorts of coats of arms and other various architectural ornaments. Noble palaces' rooms were made more luxurious than before, whilst interior courtyards were more architectonically decorated. In this period, one can also observe another great change in landscape designing, witnessing a range of complex, outstanding gardens ever being created across all Europe such as those at Versailles.

The Knights of the Order of Saint John in Malta were primarily formed up of knights originating from noble families from all Europe. Thus their nobility together with their strong European political, business and social ties saw them taking this advantage to keep their pace with this new European trend.

In Malta, during the Baroque period, the Grandmasters of the Order are seen looking and commissioning the best European artists and architects to embellish their properties. Sometimes works are known to have required minimal remodelling but occasionally it necessitated the full rebuilding of their properties using the period's much elaborate Baroque style, thus finishing up with the period contemporary grand style exhibiting their grand status as rulers of the Island.



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Thank you for your kind attention.

Eman Portelli



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