

Writers' Landscapes

SARDEGNA





REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA

Writers' Landscapes

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ASSESSORATO DEL TURISMO, ARTIGIANATO E COMMERCIO
Viale Trieste 105, 09123 Cagliari

Guide produced within the Interregional Project "Itinerari turistici dei paesaggi d'autore" [Tourist Itineraries in Writers' Landscapes], in accordance with bylaw 135/2001, section 5, paragraph 5

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Introduction

This is a guide to *writing places*.

These places exist and come into being again, if someone mentions them or photographs them. It may be an existence that is less consistent than an actual physical presence but it is still an existence. In 1854 the Frenchman, Edouard Delessert, photographed the island for the first time and captured characteristics which are still visible today. Those features that still make Sardinia so recognisable, that have withstood misconstrued modernity and make the Island so easy to identify even in a faded photo picked up from the ground.

These places come even more into being if someone writes about them. And when these places have undergone so many changes that they are no longer recognisable, then it is the written word that will remind us of what they were like. Maybe these words will be forgotten, but someone will hold onto them as they keep a postcard, an object or any kind of memento.

And these places can be talked about without describing them. It is enough to talk about what happened there, because these things were decided and defined by the places themselves.

Giulio Angioni, one of the island's writers, speaking as an anthropologist, describes man's existence in the historical region of Trexenta, where the almost sacred nature of the natural cycles is preserved. In his book entitled "*Sa laurera*", he describes the hard work of peasants, who need great knowledge to be able to gather the fruits of the earth. He talks about corn, the hard work and the complex knowledge that is needed to bring about this cycle.

In this description of daily life, of harvesting and the use of corn, we can imagine the whole agricultural landscape, an entire land that lies in the very actions that are being described. Yellow plains and hills, canalised water, sweat, fruit trees and shade, the blue skies of summer. And the landscape becomes an indelible story.

Everyone tells the story of their very own landscape.

They describe it and imprint it in their minds and in the memory of the reader.

Everyone preserves their own deep-rooted geological memory. A memory that moves them when they return home and inspires them whenever they talk about the land that had defined their very being. This is because the landscape provides the next most important stimulus after a mother's breast, one that is so strong as to never be forgotten. And it is this landscape that decides how we are made. The traveller goes on a journey and his touchstone is the land where he lives and to which his life has been conformed. To such an extent that in the end, people resemble their native land.

This guide will take us to writing places and to the landscapes that have lasted from the time they were written about, even though they had existed long before. Sometimes, they are landscapes from the past. And they need, indeed they are calling out to be recognised. Nuoro, Cagliari, the mining areas are all landscapes which have undergone profound changes. In some cases they have actually disappeared and their only trace is to be found in the written word. The contemporary landscape has cancelled out the past, but writing has preserved everything and makes it all the more vivid than real life itself, without the use of the five senses. Whosoever follows the traces in these writing places will make use of far more than just these five senses.

In the following pages, the suggested routes through these landscapes are just a part of those described in the pages of writers who have chosen Sardinia as a place to live and as the land of their very own literary imagery.

Cagliari and the surrounding area

The first itinerary takes us to the Island's capital city, which has always fascinated travellers and writers alike for its narrow streets in the historic centre, the Castello quarter that overlooks the town, its panoramic views and glimpses of the sea. We learn about Cagliari through the words of a number of writers who talk about the town at the time of the Second World War (Agus); about the town where he grew up (Pintor); about a metaphysical town (Todde); about Cagliè on the threshold of the contemporary period (Atzeni) and about worldly life in the capital city with a number of noir consequences (Abate). From the historic quarters to the salt marshes and the beaches, with a number of places which are off the beaten track of the usual itineraries.

Cagliari,
the Elephant's Tower



Between the war and the *Mal di Pietre*

The people of Cagliari lived one of their most dramatic moments during the bombings of the Second World War, which were intensified after 8 November 1942.

Cagliari,
the San Remy
Bastion



Even today, as you walk through the historic centre, you can still see damaged buildings and empty spaces where buildings once stood. In February and May 1943, the air raids were so violent that many of the locals were forced to leave the town and seek refuge in the far safer countryside.

Mal di pietre is the story of the narrator's grandfather who after losing his wife and children to the Allied attacks, decides to evacuate to the countryside near Cagliari, where he goes to live in the family house of the novel's main character, the narrator's grandmother. He decides to ask her to marry him, even though she is certainly neither a young nor beautiful woman and has actually scared off all her suitors with her "*madness d'amour*".

The second novel is by **Milena Agus**, an Italian and History teacher, who was born in Genoa to Sardinian parents. The novel is to all effects, a tribute to the atmosphere and to the local people's usages during the pre and post-war period in Cagliari, when the air raids had forced the inhabitants to evacuate the city en masse. In fact Cagliari had no bomb-shelters and during these attacks, people found refuge

in the caves of the city, such as those found beneath the **Giardini Pubblici** [Public Gardens]. In May 1943, the grandfather in the story goes to these very gardens in the hope of being reunited with his family, who had actually been wiped out under the ruins of their house.

The Public Gardens in Largo Giuseppe Dessi have just been restored and are the site of the **Galleria Comunale d'Arte** [Civil Art Gallery], where you can visit the “Ingrao” collection, containing works by major artists from the twentieth century. The Gardens can be reached along Viale Regina Elena, the western edge of Villanova, and then by going up the wonderful panoramic **Terrapieno**.

The house, which was destroyed in the bombings, is situated in the central **Via Giuseppe Manno**, where you can take a stroll and admire all the shops. It stood right next to the **Church of the “Santi Martiri Giorgio e Caterina”**, the see of the homonymous confraternity prior to the war but destroyed by bombs in May 1943. Via Manno is defined as the “nicest street in Cagliari” and the

Cagliari,
the Terrapieno
promenade



bombed-out house is recalled during the course of the novel as “an opening in a pile of rubble” or a “mutilation”. A painful wound that will remain open until a new house is built in the same place. We find ourselves in the historic quarter of the **Marina**, close to the port, an area with popular roots and which nowadays is a multi-ethnic centre, the heart of the social-intellectual life of Cagliari. Already a popular

Cagliari,
the Church of
Sant'Antonio Abate



quarter before the war, in the book, the grandfather often pays a visit to the brothels located here.

Together with the other historic quarters (Villanova and Stampace), the Marina quarter lies below the noble quarter of Castello, with its "narrow dark streets [...] that all of a sudden open up onto a sea of light". This district is extremely significant and characterises the inhabited part of the city, also due to its commanding position. Even today its name still identifies the capital city, known in Sardinian as "*Casteddu*".

The town of Cagliari which welcomes the main character after her marriage is the Cagliari of 1945: she does not set up home in the elegant Via Manno but rather in **Via Sulis** in the **Villanova** quarter, where the young couple are forced to live in straightened circumstances, sharing their house with another family in a classic "poor but happy", with very little to eat, no running water, electricity or sewers, at the mercy of the black market prices but always ready to be cheered up by having a good laugh. It is in the memory of these years in particular, that the three churches of the Marina are

mentioned, places where the main character goes with her neighbours from Via Sulis: the **Church of Sant'Antonio Abate** in Via Manno, built in the second half of the seventeenth century, whose façade has an elaborate niche containing a statue of Saint Antonio with a piglet at his feet, since he is the patron saint of pets; the **Church of Santa Rosalia** in Via Torino with its wonderful façade in Piedmontese Baroque style rising alongside the Monastery of the Order of the Friars Minor, which catches your attention thanks to its magnificent doorway and arch that lead onto the Via Principe Amedeo and presumably the **Church of the Beata Vergine della Pietà**, the church which the book tells us belongs to the Capuchins. It has a simple and bare façade and can be reached from Via Manno, turning into the Scalette delle Monache Cappuccine, part of the neighbouring monastery, both built at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Apart from all these places, the atmosphere in the town is often described: the sea, the blue sky, “the washing hung out to dry in the Mistral wind”, the view of the Marina from the buildings

Cagliari,
Tramer café



in Via Manno, the views as far as the eye can see from the **Bastions**. Moving into the neighbouring area of Piazza Yenne, another special mention is given to the **Santa Chiara Market**, where her grandmother used to buy the octopus that she would then “boil with oil and parsley”; the local market which can still be found on the flight of steps known as the Scalette Santa Chiara. One of the local

customs is to buy pastries every Sunday in the historic **Tramer Café**, the oldest café in the town (dating from 1857), found in Piazza Martiri near to Piazza Costituzione: although there is no seating and you have to eat standing up at the bar, it is still well worth stopping off just to soak up the great atmosphere.

Other places in the novel found in the **Stampace** area are **Via Angioy**, where every day the grandmother accompanies her son to the Sebastiano Satta School, the sloping **Via Don Bosco**, reachable from Via Angioy, continuing along Via Porto Scalas and Via Sant'Ignazio until you get to the tree-lined **Viale Luigi Merello**, which is still a residential quarter today. Here we find the home of the two spinsters for whom the grandmother worked as a cleaning lady, unbeknown to her family because "she had in mind to send her son for piano lessons". All this effort certainly paid off because her son actually did become a concert pianist.

One of the places outside the city that is recalled in the pages of *Mal di pietre*, are the Saline (salt-works), still a fascinating and pleasant spot even today, despite their vicinity to the four-laned road that leads from the town to Poetto. Unfortunately the Saline are no longer in use and remain closed within the confines of the **Molentargius Regional Park**, which encloses the area and which is officially closed to visitors, except for on a few rare occasions, such as when pelicans chose to make their nests here in the winter of 2008. The area is the normal habitat to among others, the **pink flamingos**, who once used to stop off here during migration to the Camargue but who have taken up permanent residence since 1993.

If you are arriving from the town, the Saline are on your left; on the right you find **Poetto**, the locals' beach, recalled in these pages in all its ancient splendour, when it was still a "long stretch of desert with white dunes and crystal-clear water which never gets deep however far you walk out and where you find shoals of fish swimming around your ankles": true to say, that this seems like a description of a Caribbean style beach, but it appears that it really was like this at the time.

Agus also remembers post-war Poetto for its wooden **casotti** [beach huts], painted with light-blue, red and orange stripes, which were practically home to many local families during the summer period.

Many people including the book's protagonist remember the dishes of *malloreddus* [typical Sardinian pasta] after a swim, served with sauce and sausage. And then Poetto in the winter, with piles of sand heaped up by the wind, blocking the way into the beach huts and “when you looked back from the shore, it looked like a snow-covered landscape”. On the outskirts of the city we find the **Monte Claro Lunatic Asylum**, where once the grandmother's parents had considered shutting their young daughter away; she had always been considered a little crazy for that “madness d'amour” which she vented by writing in a secret diary which she kept hidden away. “To her parents the lunatic asylum seemed a good place to put grandmother, with its huge forest-covered hill [...] And then it wasn't a gloomy single building [...] but rather a series of villas dating from the early twentieth century, all of which were well looked after and surrounded by a garden”. The ex-lunatic asylum of Villa Clara is still the same today; it stands in Viale Romagna but never counted the protagonist as one of its inmates since she was saved by Italy going to

Cagliari,
“Villa Clara” mental
health centre



war. Nowadays, it is the seat of the “Cittadella della Salute” [Health Department] and has undergone restoration work on both the buildings and the gardens. The book ends up in the house in Via Manno, protagonist of a new cycle of life that is beginning, the home of family ties and the hub around which the lives of all the characters in the novel rotate.

The city of my childhood

Cagliari, in the autobiographical memoirs of ***Servabo*** by **Luigi Pintor**, is a city that in his memory is a synonym for freedom with no restrictions, the exploration of a child who knows no limits, bathing in the sunlight and the sea. Born in Rome in 1925 of Sardinian origins, he became a partisan at a very young age. Later, he was an MP for the PCI [Italian Communist Party] and a journalist for *L'Unita* newspaper, after which he founded *Il Manifesto* and was expelled

Cagliari,
sunset at Porta
Cristina



from the party due to his somewhat critical position towards the party leaders. His memories of the island go right up to the outbreak of the Second World War, when Pintor left Cagliari with his mother and two sisters to move to Rome. “We lived then on the isolated island of the Sardinians, when travel to and from the mainland was such a great enterprise. It felt as if the steamship was crossing the ocean and the

rare seaplanes fired your imagination". This is how Pintor remembers the seaplanes that from the terrace of his house in Via Porcell, he used to see taking off and landing in the lagoons of Cagliari "just like in the islands of the southern seas, discovered at the cinema or in adventure novels". The house was located in the north-west part of the Castello quarter; the spot is marked by a memorial tablet in honour of Giaime Pintor, Luigi's brother, who died as a partisan at the age of 24, whose "manuscripts in miniscule handwriting fill two chests, I don't know how he could have done so many things in so little time". Now, just as then, this portion of the city walls of Castello is overrun with caper bushes that almost hide the memorial tablet. From the part of the city where Pintor's house once stood, you can see as far as the coast to the west of Cagliari, in the direction of Pula where the Santa Gilla lagoon stretches out, framed by the mountains in the background. In the first pages of *Servabo*, Pintor offers us a description of an ideal city: the urban area dreamt of by so many sociologists and town planners, and as Pintor himself states, a place that he will never stop missing. A city on a child's scale, with no constrictions, a huge play ground with the "Piazze d'armi for a football pitch" and bike rides that offered you "endless physical freedom". The quarter of Castello, perched up on the rock, the bastions, scene of those first dates, the towers and the little winding narrow alleyways that wend their way down to the port. The bastions are those of Saint Remy and Santa Croce. The **Bastion of Saint Remy** was built in two terraces by the Piedmontese between 1899 and 1902, neatening the old Spanish buttresses; originally planned as a promenade and a panoramic viewpoint, its long flight of limestone steps and triumphal arch spectacularly descend towards Piazza Costituzione below. The **Santa Croce Bastion** can be reached from the Saint Remy Bastion, along Via Università and passing under the fourteenth century Pisan **Torre dell'Elefante** [Elephant's Tower], which overlooks the port and is characterised by its little stone sculpted elephant. The Elephant Tower's twin is the **Torre di San Pancrazio** [San Pancrazio Tower] which was built in 1305 on the highest point of the Castello hill. Originally, both towers were closed on only three sides; the fourth side was left open and showed the wooden stairs and

landings of the internal structure. All these places are not only magnificent and charming but also offer incredible panoramic views of the surrounding areas, even for anyone not brave enough to climb up the towers. From the Saint Remy Bastion, you get a sweeping view stretching from the roofs of the Marina as far as the Saline and the Sella del Diavolo; while from Santa Croce, your gaze will take in the nearby **Ghetto degli Ebrei** [Jewish Ghetto] with the historic quarter of Stampace below and the nearby **Largo Carlo Felice, Piazza Yenne**, and **Via Ospedale**, as far as the coast that leads from Cagliari in the direction of Pula, somewhat ruined today by the smokestacks of the Sarroch refinery and chemical works. From the Torre di San Pancrazio, passing through the Porta Cristina, one reaches **Viale Buon Cammino**, where you can marvel at enchanting and often fiery sunsets. The whole area is extremely close to Pintor's house in Via Porcell which can be reached from Via Santa Croce. As a child, Pintor knew "every secret" of the then three cinemas in the town which he mentions, all of which evoked emotions that no

Cagliari,
Poetto beach



stadium or TV programme could ever match. In Pintor's Cagliari, the hinterland did not exist and beyond the city walls lay an expanse of countryside, unpaved roads, salt marshes and the huge and windy beach, which the writer recalls as the destination for summer outings taken on a little train right out of the wild west. **Poetto beach** is also

Cagliari,
Poetto beach



remembered as being a place of absolute freedom; with swimming in the sea right from the start of the school holidays up to the Autumn storms, days measured only by sunrise and sunset, in and out of the water, for at least a thousand days in a childhood where every day was filled with “fun and joy” on “those African beaches”. Days which have left the author with a tangible memory like a bundle of unaltered sensations.

Just as in Agus's work, we are offered the images of an enchanting Poetto; the Poetto of a long time ago which no longer exists; with the passage of time the sand has been naturally eroded, also partially due to the dismantling of the beach huts, and what was left was covered by an extremely controversial beach nourishment in 2002, using sediments dredged from the sea floor and dumped on the Cagliari seaside, despite the numerous protests of local people and conservationists. At the time, the experts claimed that the grey colour of the new sand, its coarse grains and its unpleasant smell would soon change under the effects of atmospheric agents; to see whether this has come about, just take a trip to the **coast of Quartu** and

check out the colour and consistency of the sand on a part of the beach which has not undergone beach nourishment. Poetto, with its beach huts, is also the place where you bid farewell to the island before you leave for Rome; a fond farewell as if you were saying goodbye to your nearest and dearest.

The town with two faces

A step back in time and a completely different vision of Cagliari is what expects us in the lengthy tale of ***Apologo del giudice bandito***, which marked the start of **Sergio Atzeni**'s literary career and bears witness to his fondness for history; an author who unfortunately became more successful after his tragic death in the waters off the Island of San Pietro.

The story is set in the year that America was discovered and the events take place in the Cagliari of 1492 (called Cagliè here, but also Kallari). It is the story of the trial brought by the Holy Inquisition against a plague of African locusts who had invaded the surrounding countryside. Cagliari always plays the leading role in the novel: a town which Atzeni, just like in many other written works, loves to describe through the world of the people who live on the fringes of society, the outcasts, the underworld. "At dawn the towers and bastions of the walled city are bleached by the sun; they loom high on the horizon at the top of the highest hill and hide a quarter of the sky. The gates are closed. Lilliccu imagines the tramps seeking shelter in the alleyways of the lower part of the town, in the lemon grove, in the mud houses and the stink of the stable in the high part of the town, the noise of hoofs on the cobblestones, the stone houses, the striped sky". Almost right at the beginning, this is the town told through the eyes of Lilliccu, the peasant, who is a witness to the plague of locusts. The town is divided into the upper and lower part, the part belonging to the nobles and the titled - who are not always described in the most flattering of terms - and the poor part. Atzeni takes us through the **Porta dei Leoni**, built by the Pisans together with the homonymous tower which was destroyed during the eighteenth century.

Cagliari,
the Viceroy's Palace



By going along Via Università in the direction of Via Mazzini you pass through this gate, which takes its name from the two lions' heads set above the archivolt. Baron "Jaune, proud as a peacock, rejoices at the reflections of the sun on the bejewelled sheath of his sword. Nobody notices that his spirit is resolute as he comes through the Porta del Leone, so pompous on his Arabian horse". As well as the Porta dei Leoni, we later find a mention of the **Porta dell'Elefante**, the only gateway left open in preparation for the procession to be held to ward off the plague of locusts.

The atmosphere is quite different in the lower part of the city, with its mud houses, the smells and the shouts of the people: "in the midst of the mud houses, lethargic men and women stroll around enjoying the cool of the evening, the smells of empty bottles, wine, fishing nets, women sprawled at the entrance to the brothels, the shouts of drunkards from the inns, whiffs of the smell of stockfish hanging in front of some squalid dwelling". The capture of the feared bandit Itzoccor Gunale also takes part in the upper part of the city: he is taken to the **Palazzo Viceregio** [Viceroy's Palace] where he is thrown

into a well, but contrary to all expectations, manages to survive being eaten alive by rats. "His whip made a huge gaping wound along the prisoner's cheek, blood fell from his curls onto the white Lebanese wood floor of the Viceroy's Grand Audience Chamber, where the Viceroy had wished to meet the newly-captured prisoner for the first

Cagliari,
a view of the city



time, so as to impress him with all his wealth and power". The Palazzo Viceregio is found in the upper part of Castello in Piazza Palazzo. It was built by the Aragonese in 1337 and was the residence of the Spanish and later the House of Savoy viceroys. The frescoes that decorate the Main Hall are inspired by Sardinian historical events and date back to the end of the nineteenth century. Today it is the seat of the Prefecture and also houses the Provincial Council. Alongside the Palazzo Viceregio, we find the **Cathedral of Santa Maria**, founded by the Pisans in the fourteenth century in Romanesque-Pisan style. The façade has undergone a number of renovations: in Baroque style in the eighteenth century; in Neo-Romanesque style in 1933, right up to the façade that we can see today. The wonderful square bell-tower remains from the original construction. When Itzoccor somehow manages to survive his imprisonment and is set free, he sees before his very eyes the vision of a landscape of different colours and shades, stretching way beyond the Santa Gilla lagoon: "Below, way down below, the black roofs, the red domes, green, the yellow bastions of the walled city, the sea, the

marsh, the dark mountains beyond the lagoon to the west". The town described by Atzeni is also brought to life by places that can no longer be found on the map, such as the Porta dei Cavoli, or the lively square in front of the law courts, with its market filled with beggars, octopus vendors yelling at the top of their voices, women selling bags of fried pumpkin; an anthill crammed with men and women of all ages and walks of life, all of whom had come to Cagliari "to see the warriors of Jesus, the Dominican monks, declare war on the locusts".

The transformed town

From this historical vision, we return to a period closer to our times in ***La matta bestialità***, a novel about male characters with the most particular names. This is the second novel by Cagliari's writer and ophthalmologist, **Giorgio Todde**.

The solitary weatherman Ugolino Stramini and his friend Costante

Cagliari,
the Antico Café



Verderame, scholar and assistant lecturer to the Chair of Medieval Literature, are regulars at the Caffé Onirico in Viale dei Tigli: they have ritually met up here every evening at eight o'clock for the past eleven years. The itineraries around Cagliari in *Matta bestialità* cannot be followed to the letter, but they can be envisaged within a metaphysical vision of the town, since a final note informs us that the

town and the characters are fruits of the author's imagination. Nonetheless, it is easy to recognise several parts of the Sardinian capital. The **Caffè Onirico** is described by Todde as being the oldest café in the town, from whose windows you can see the port: in actual fact, the oldest café is Tramer, but the tables where the leading

Cagliari,
medieval walls



characters meet and often eat (salads, even “healthy foods”, hazelnut dessert, fig salad,...) might make us think of the **Antico Caffè** in Piazza Costituzione, or of the **Caffè Svizzero** in Largo Carlo Felice. The Viale dei Tigli might thus be **Viale Regina Margherita** or **Largo Carlo Felice**, which both lead to the port in different ways. The seasons following one after another are highly reminiscent of the **climate** in Cagliari: “Autumn in the town started gently because September paid a certain amount of respect to the locals, reminding them with those gradually fading red sunsets that the light was beginning to slip away. October created pensive clouds that Ugolino used to watch every morning at dawn [...]”. Even the sight of the quarter of **Castello** seems to fit the description of a town “rising on two steep hills that sloped down brusquely towards the neighbourhood of the port. Surrounded by walls as white as snow, the two high hills were the ancient nucleus [...]. Everything became yellow in the summer, even the fat pigeons in the upper part of the town”. Last but not least, the wind that so often lashes the Sardinian capital: “During the night the breeze becomes wind and dusts away

all the stars. The trees of the town shout out their joy, shaking their branches and those standing in a line have fun pushing each other over". The novel takes place in the heat of summer when the high temperatures affect people's capacity to think, dimming their clearness of mind. African heat, typical of the summers in Cagliari, but offering some respite in the cool of the evenings: "It was eight o'clock [...] at this time the city was enlivened by the wind [...] and going home on foot was a pleasure for both of us".

It is during this hot summer that Inspector Ferfuzio investigates into a series of deaths: the way the bodies are found and the cause of death clearly show Todde's passion for the perfection that animates Clemente Susini's wax models, made at the beginning of the nineteenth century: accurate realistic anatomical copies of dissected corpses and of which a prized and impressive collection can be seen at the **Museo delle cere anatomiche** [Anatomical Wax Museum] in Cagliari's Cittadella dei Musei. Furthermore, the cover of *Lo stato delle anime*, the first book by this writer from Cagliari, actually shows

Cagliari,
San Giovanni di Dio
hospital



a detail of one of Susini's waxes. One of the places that is continually mentioned in Todde's city is the **Orto Botanico** [Botanical Garden], where Inspector Ferfuzio carries out his investigation on the trail of Cosmino Sannita, a patient "at the Santa Teresa Clinic, the one above the Botanical Garden". In actual fact, the **San Giovanni di Dio Hospital** is to be found above the Botanical Garden. The hospital is a valued building designed by Gaetano Cima and built halfway through the nineteenth century; however, the place that really deserves a visit is the Garden itself in Via Fra' Ignazio, where more than 3,000 species of plants grow and which, in the book, seem to come to life in Autumn: "the plants in the Botanic Garden were in a state of fervour due to the nocturnal rains. They were all talking to each other but nobody was listening to anybody else".

In *La matta bestialità* the garden is said to have been founded by a missionary from the Indian forests and we find a description of "the cave" where this Brother has taken refuge. In actual fact, the **Gennari cave** is to be found in the Botanical Garden, which together with the **Roman cistern**, the last part of the aqueduct that brought water to the city from Villamassargia and the **Roman well**, are evidence of the Pre-Roman and Roman period. In fact, it was the very presence of all these infrastructures belonging to the Romans that caused the Garden to be constructed in this part of the city sheltered from the Mistral wind: the system of cisterns, a trefoil-shaped bath, a *Calidarium* (precisely the Gennari cave) and a *Libarium* (the well) that made the site extraordinary and unique. Nearby there are other remains of this period: the **Roman Amphitheatre** dating from the second century BC with its tiers and arena, mostly excavated from the bare rock, which can be visited both as an archaeological site and as the site for concerts and theatrical performances during the summer months. Also the **Villa di Tigellio** from the first century BC which at the moment is closed to visitors.

The town of the early hours

The Cagliari of Rudy Saporito, in *Il cattivo cronista* by **Francesco Abate**, is the Cagliari of nightclubs and discos, where loud music

pounds the ears of the people of the night, spiced with a few episodes of overindulgence and - because of Saporito's work as a reporter- facts from crime news.

From the pen of Francesco Abate, Cagliari's 1964 contingent, a professional journalist known on the island with the name of Frisko, comes the portrait of a skilled reporter who for the sake of a scoop, neither worries about who gets hurt nor considers ethics a reference parameter. A born actor in getting his own way, he comes from a family of powerful lawyers, who only see a career as an architect as a possible variation to practicing law.

The description of these clubs, some of which are still open today, guides us through the town. In particular, **L'Ampurias**, whose owner really is the Italo talked about in the novel, where the bad reporter goes for a pizza and a beer at 11pm, a seemingly rather tardy hour but in fact, quite a normal time for the Sardinian capital city.

L'Ampurias together with another two cafés overlook one of the busiest squares in the Marina quarter, the so-called **Piazzetta Savoia**.

Cagliari,
Piazza Savoia



During the winter, the **Manamanà** restaurant-café and the **Savoia Café** often host literary meetings and book presentations. During the summer the number of dates dedicated to reading, gradually give way to concerts in the evening and crowded tables both in the day and even more at night.

At the start of the novel, the evening begins with couple of glasses of

Cagliari,
Poetto beach



myrtle and then continues in the different atmosphere of the **Ribot**. From the streets in the Marina, we move to the more modern but less central **San Benedetto quarter** (in Piazza Michelangelo), with the pub where “you can eat till midnight, then dance. On the tables I tell you. All kinds of music”. On from club to club where “downstairs they sweat and dance, they dance and sweat. It’s a bit quieter in the gallery. You can watch the crowd sliding around beneath your feet without even touching them”, to “the youngsters’ bar”, to “discos filled with rotten young female pill poppers”. Saporito goes to all these places because he can dance or dine till late, often in the company of his friend Gepi, a pusher whom - acting within his somewhat loose code of ethics - the reporter often protects from the police. Obviously, Poetto could not be missing from Saporito’s haunts: he goes there with his current girlfriend, Angela, to “lap up the sun” just like the locals, who often take their lunch breaks on the beach to top up their tan right up until the first warmth of Spring. This is such a widespread habit that if you leave the beach at four in the afternoon, it only takes you ten minutes to get back to town, but

leave just five minutes later and you will get caught up in the traffic of all these workers who have to get back to the office. This does nothing to spoil the joys of having a beach so close at hand: “Angela says that this beach is paradise. Never seen a town with such a clean sea and beach. Sea and beach only five minutes away”.

An earthly paradise most certainly, but it is also the place where for one of his articles, Rudy meets *sa cricca*, a gang of youths who, in the novel, hang out on the beach which is also called *dei Centomila*: this is actually an encounter with destiny since Saporito will fall victim to the fists of the gang leader in a dispute over “women”.

Other news items or invented stories are interwoven into the story about the events in Saporito's life.

The old lady, who after years of harassment and numerous complaints, takes her revenge on a group of lads by taking a gun and shooting from her balcony: the action takes place in **Via dei Caprai**, situated in the Piazza Giovanni XXIII area.

The story of Ciano (a diminutive of *cianotico* which means puce) who

Veduta
a view of the
Villasimius coast



discovers a religious vocation; he is the main character in a story from the pen of Saporito set about 40 kilometres from the town, as the summer social life moves to **Capo Boi** near Villasimius. After several bouts of heavy drinking over quite a few summers, after numerous returns from Capo Boi “with his face bleached white”, by mere chance, Ciano undergoes a similar experience to Don Giovanni who

set up a school for homemakers, instead of disco girls, and through which discovers his vocation as a missionary father. As well as in the Capo Boi disco, Ciano speaks of days spent basking on the **Timiama Beach**, a stretch of white sand set in a typical Sardinian landscape, (mountains in the background, a pine forest, Mediterranean shrub), interrupted by the buildings of a hotel.

The books

Milena Agus, *Mal di pietre*, Nottetempo, 2006

Luigi Pintor, *Servabo*, Bollati Boringhieri Editore, 1991

Sergio Atzeni, *Apologo del giudice bandito*, Sellerio editore, 1986

Giorgio Todde, *La matta bestialità*, Il Maestrale, 2002

Francesco Abate, *Il cattivo cronista*, Il Maestrale, 2003

Cagliari,
Sella del Diavolo



Capo di Sopra

This second itinerary is dedicated to the north of Sardinia, on the trail of the striking images evoked by Salvatore Mannuzzu and Alberto Capitta; from Sassari, the ancient capital of Capo di Sopra, to the natural beauties of La Maddalena, Bosa and the beaches of the north.

Hints of winter

Bourgeois **Sassari** is gold and wintry, a provincial town which **Salvatore Mannuzzu** only briefly mentions in his novel ***Le fate dell'inverno***. Judge and politician but above all a storyteller and poet, Mannuzzu tells us the secrets and misfortunes of the Quai family and of Franz, the main character and narrator. Franz is a complex character whose social position as ex-president of the law courts might lead us to think that he would never suffer from the misery and frailty of the human condition, but on the contrary whose cultural background and knowledge, mockingly and with devastating consequences, heighten these effects.

One of the few places in Sassari that is cited explicitly by Mannuzzu is the **Liceo Azuni** [Azuni Secondary School] (in the book called "Asproni"), "by definition the Liceo", whose former students have been two heads of State, Antonio Segni and Francesco Cossiga, two Secretaries of the Italian Communist Party, Palmiro Togliatti and Enrico Berlinguer, as well as intellectuals and artists like the painter Giuseppe Biasi and writers like Sebastiano Satta, Salvatore Mannuzzu himself and Gavino Ledda. Extremely worthy of note is the Aula Magna decorated with paintings by Mario Delitala.

Bare and frozen, the landscape in the novel is coloured by the state of mind of the characters, with touches of warmth and light only during trips and outings. Such as the usual trip to the sea, possibly in

September "as far as **Platamona** beach, which in the meantime had been depopulated". Platamona is the nearest beach to Sassari, about half way between Stintino and Castelsardo, and together with **Marina di Sorso** is the locals' beach. It is huge and welcoming and striking because of its great width, so unusual in these days of beaches which are continually being eroded away. Every now and then, there are dunes at the back of the beach that make the landscape even more interesting, completed by the deep green of the pine forest. Another interesting beach, for this union between sand and rocks and for the particular colour of the sea, is the one at **Balai** on the way to Porto Torres.

The most dramatic and intense moment, when the leading character inescapably draws near to Bia, his son Giacomo's widow, takes place in **Bosa**: "so that when we moored - at the quay at the mouth of the river, where erstwhile the Ponza coral fishers used to anchor their boats - there were still a few waves out at sea and a few small boats that were coming in alongside the Isola Rossa, robbed of all their

Sassari,
historic centre



strength". Bosa, which dates back to the time of the Phoenicians, stretches out on the right bank of the River Temo, the only navigable river in Sardinia. Its great charm lies in the **Sas Conzas** buildings, (factories where they once used to tan and work hides), which are mirrored in the waters of the river and also in the **Sa Costa** quarter, which is all little streets and flights of steps where you can still see

some women sitting in their doorways spinning thread. "Along the Temo there was, (and still is I believe), a line of palm trees; and opposite on the other bank, a row of identical houses, standing one alongside each other, their roofs at right angles, most of which were dilapidated and in a state of neglect, which at certain times of the day

Bosa



were reflected in the waters: the tanneries of long ago". Not to be missed are **Bosa Cathedral**, which retains all the majesty of its nineteenth century renovation in late-Piedmontese, late-Baroque style and the Romanesque **ex-Cathedral of San Pietro** in the rural area of Calamedia on the left bank of the River Temo, built in pink trachyte and dating from the second half of the XI century.

The best way to reach Bosa is along the **coastal road** that from Alghero "drops sheerly down to the sea. The steep slopes above and below us shone brightly with the wonderful green of winter." Along the road you can catch sight of the **griffin vulture**, the only predatory bird remaining among those originally present in Sardinia, which survives in the two colonies left in Bosa and Alghero: "We stopped in a panoramic clearing on the right and everybody got out of the car. Beyond the overhanging rock, in the distance, the sea was smooth and glistening; further on, the slopes of the Capo with the other cliff rise up in the shade. And it was right in that direction, in the sky, there were [...] two moving dots that were hard to make out".

The magic of La Maddalena

Il cielo nevica, the first book by **Alberto Capitta**, the author from Sassari shortlisted for the Strega Prize in 2005 with *Creaturine*, is set in the heavenly **Archipelago of La Maddalena**. The story is about Domenico, the grown-up son of Norma D'Apice, known as "Cuntessa", a witch, siren, foul-mouthed and irreverent woman. They live on the fringe of society in a continuous struggle to survive; defeated and astray, they are welcomed with open arms by a splendid but endangered nature. Domenico's surreal and anachronistic companion is Giuseppe Garibaldi, and in fact the novel opens right in the **compendio Garibaldino** [Garibaldi's Residence], where the protagonist works as a gardener: "Domenico got there along one of the many paths that encircled the Garibaldi museum. He had spent the whole morning way beyond Domenichino's hill, pruning the young pine trees, transplanting the shoots alongside the path, trimming the branches of the older trees, gathering myrtle leaves and blackberries". We are on the **Island of Caprera**, famous for being home to Guiseppe Garibaldi and where today you can visit the Garibaldi museum; the stables, his white house, the rooms filled with memorabilia, as well as the hero's grave and the small family cemetery. All are found in the midst of a spectacular pine forest in one of the most unspoilt areas in the whole of the Mediterranean. We are within the boundaries of the **National Park of the Archipelago of La Maddalena**, made up of more than sixty granite and schist isles and islands: "I mentally run through the layout of the coasts, the bays, the gorges, the names: **isola del Porco, del Toro, della Pecora, cala di Lupo, delle Bisce, di Volpe, liscia di Vacca, capo d'Orso, stretto degli Asinelli, Porcara**", which are all places of incredible beauty. Although they are not mentioned in the novel, not to be missed are the islands of **Spargi, Budelli** (famous for its pink sand), **Razzoli, Spargiotto, Barrettini, Mortorio** and **Nibani**. These can all be visited on one of the numerous boat trips on offer in the area, either on a simple sailing boat or even on a luxurious yacht. Domenico's trip in his *ape* [three-wheeler] with his first love Rita Gutierrez is impressive. From the characteristic defensive fortification of **Guardia del Turco**, where the young lady used to live, in the hilly

Isola di Spargi,
the witch



zone to the north east, they travel along the western coasts as far as the **Strangolato headland**. The route follows the panoramic route that leads to **Abbatoggia**. The area is full of beaches and little bays; the first we come across is the beach called **Uomo Morto**, characterised by its fine white sand and its crystal-clear waters. Further on we find tiny bays with rocks and coarser sand. Continuing along the main dirt road, we get to the little beaches known as “dello Strangolato”. Numerous fortifications were built all over the Island, from the end of the XVIII century onwards by the reigning House of Savoy and then up until the Second World War by the Italian Government; some of the most impressive are those of Colmi, Guardia Vecchia and Trinità, from which you can enjoy splendid views of the Archipelago. Domenico has a most curious and romantic way of thinking, that from one of these *casamatta* [fortifications] on **Mount Teggiolone** (or Teialone), leads us to imagine underwater routes, admiring the waters, “where in ancient times, Roman warships, Saracen vessels and Turkish galleys used to loom on the horizon”, as well as the *Mille* (Garibaldi's troops) heading from

Quarto to Marsala, and also where, “Napoleon lost his battle against the skipper Millelire”. Here, “the waves had swallowed up everything: the shields, the cannons and the galleys, the red caps, the jars, the dishes, the wines, the lions’ heads on the prow, the amphorae filled with oil and the submarines. Nowadays everything is conserved beneath a heavy sheet of water”. Numerous diving centres offer **underwater excursions** to wonder at the unspoilt sea bottom of the protected area and at all the wrecks that have come to rest on the seabed. Apart from its incredible natural beauty, La Maddalena, the scene for everything that happens to Norma and Domenico, also offers its visitor the chance to appreciate its picturesque town centre, with its narrow cobbled alleyways overlooked by the esteemed **eighteenth century buildings**, offering glimpses of a bluer than blue sea ending up in the characteristic tourist port of **Cala Gavetta**.

La Maddalena
Island, the port



The books

Salvatore Mannuzzu, *Le fate dell'inverno*, Einaudi, 2004

Alberto Capitta, *Il cielo nevica*, Il Maestrone, 2007

Nuoro, Barbagia and the Baronia areas

Our third itinerary takes us from the snow-white and unspoiled sands of the Archipelago of La Maddalena towards the south, into the most rugged area of Baronia and on again into the scraggy Barbagia of Nuoro, as far as the Nuroro of Salvatore Satta, passing through the surrounding luxuriant countryside described by Fois and taking in the gloomy village as told by Niffoi.

Satta's Nuoro

Il giorno del giudizio, the posthumous masterpiece by Nuoro's great jurist, **Salvatore Satta**, might even seem more like a guidebook to **Nuoro between the nineteenth and twentieth Centuries**, rather than a novel; a huge wall painting crowded with human beings, things and places. With the precision of a geographer, Satta places Nuoro on the map, the place that will be the setting for his theatre of ghosts: "Nuoro lies at the point where Mount Orthobene [...] almost forms an isthmus, becoming a plateau: on one side the dreadful Marreri valley, marked by the robbers' pass, on the other the gentler, if anything can be gentle in Sardinia, Isporòsile valley, which ends in a plain and stretches as far as Galtelli and the sea, under the watchful eyes of the Oliena mountains". The town is then divided into three historic centres: **Seuna, the peasants' quarter**, "a cluster of low little houses, scattered all over the place, or perhaps with the order that springs from disorder, all on the same level, [...] with roofs of rusty tiles..."; **San Pietro**, or *Santu Pedru*, "**the townfolks' extension of the sheepfold**"; "the black heart of Nuoro, [that] has no colours: it already has tall houses that overlook narrow streets that are no longer alleyways and you have to look up to see the sky..."; and finally **il Corso**, "the symbol of the third Nuoro, the Nuoro of the

Francesco Ciusa,
"La madre dell'ucciso"
[The Mother of the
victim]



law courts, the town hall, the schools, the bishopric, [...] of the rich or poor folk whoever they might be", with its "huge shop-windows displaying pastries or toys or books".

Today very little is left of the historic quarter of Seuna; the little low houses have now given way to renovation work that favours modern two or more storeyed buildings. However, the very few remaining buildings have still kept their inner courtyards which until the early part of the century, were used to store carts and all kinds of agricultural tools and products. At the heart of the neighbourhood stands the little eighteenth century **Church of the Grazie**, which has recently been renovated.

The Santu Pedru quarter, on the other hand, still has most of its narrow little alleyways and its spontaneous architecture. One of the historical buildings with an inner garden mentioned by Satta, now houses the museum dedicated to the Nobel Prize winner, the writer **Grazia Deledda**, who was born here. Other great people from Nuoro are remembered here in San Pietro: the eighteenth century **Church of San Carlo** houses the mortal remains of the sculptor **Francesco**

Ciusa, together with a copy of one of his most famous works, "**La Madre dell'Ucciso**", first prize at the 1907 Venice Biennial. Then a square designed by **Costantino Nivola**, the sculptor from Orani, is dedicated to **Sebastiano Satta**, Sardinia's bard; huge irregular granite rocks brought here from Mount Ortobene with inset small bronze sculptures are set out on a surface paved with small white granite stones. The **MAN Contemporary Art Museum** overlooks the nearby Via Satta, housed in a three-storeyed building from the XIX century.

Even Corso Garibaldi does not look so different from Satta's description: "The Corso stretched out with a gentle slope from the Piazza di San Giovanni, where the market was, to the Ponte di Ferro: halfway along, just before a wide bend and just after the little square with all the balustrades, we find a flat part overlooked by the prestigious houses".

Even the **Tettamanzi café** still exists today, with its antique mirrors hanging on the walls and its ceiling with painted cherubs, even

Nuoro,
Man Museum



though nowadays it bears the name of Bar Majore: "it was a charming café, with tiny rooms decorated with red settees just like, with all due respects, cafés in Venice".

But Satta does not stop at a description of Nuoro. His fresco also takes in the areas around Nuoro, like **le Baronie**, the region that slopes down to the sea from Nuoro, towards the Gulf of Orosei: "La

Baronia was a garden in winter. And if every now and then the river went mad, bursting its banks and flooding the fields and the absurd little villages that had sprung up here and there, [...] it made up for this by leaving behind among the rocks a fine, humid earth that was already wheat and barley, but it was particularly the broad beans and those melons with their azurine flesh that spread the name of Baronia throughout Sardinia [...] The only problem was that this paradise in Baronia only lasted three months: afterwards, the sun turned nasty, it started to think about how much joy it had brought to men and started to go mad too. In the space of a week it brought the desert." Right at the centre of this drought and malaria impoverished area, lies **Galtelli**, like "a scrape in the midst of the savage limestone of Mount Columbu", once the see of the diocese which was later moved to Nuoro and thus described by Satta: "whosoever manages to survive the clouds of flies and dust, will find themselves in front of a church and a bell-tower that are still here, even though the bishop has gone away and they are examples of the purest Romanesque style; filthy

Galtelli



miserable hovels alongside still-standing rusty and abandoned buildings, with the windows boarded up in the form of a cross, but with a sculpted doorway or at least an architrave of volcanic rock on which one might even be able to make out a date from the past". Even today, Galtelli still offers one of the most characteristic and best-kept historic centres in the whole of Sardinia.

Satta also dedicates a few lines to **Oliena**, a village in the Barbagia overlooking Nuoro: "It is a marvellous village set at the foot of one of the most incredible mountains ever created by God and the wine produced here is permeated with all the aromas of our land, myrtle, arbutus berries, cistus, lentisk. The mountain is calcareous and hence

The Oliena mountains



is studded with the white dots of the lime ovens. [In Oliena] everyone is rich and poor, and they are happy, the only happy Sardinians."

The hill of solitude

On the other hand **Marcello Fois** in his ***Sempre Caro*** offers us the chance to take a leap into the luxuriant and scented nature that surrounds and envelops the town of Nuoro. The novel is the first part of a trilogy followed by *Sangue dal cielo* and *L'altro mondo*, set in Nuoro at the end of the nineteenth century, whose main character is Bustianu, a shy lawyer, nature-lover and champion at any cost of the rights of the poor. The author drew his inspiration from the lawyer-poet Sebastiano Satta, a character born between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and to whom the homonymous square in Nuoro is dedicated.

The novel starts with Bustianu's daily walk towards **Sant'Onofrio**, called precisely "**the ever dear**", which, "meant that he used to go

to enjoy the cool of the evening up on high and admire the panorama and the livestock while getting a breath of fresh air". We are in the north east part of the city on the hill that is today a public garden and houses the buildings of the **Museo della Vita e delle Tradizioni Popolari Sarde** [Museum of Life and Popular Traditions],

Nuoro,
the Church of the
"Solitudine"



reproducing the structure of a typical nineteenth century Sardinian village. Continuing along to the end of the long panoramic route of Viale Ciusa, we find the little **Church della Solitudine** at the foot of Mount Ortobene, designed by Giovanni Ciusa Romagna and inside which we find the mortal remains of the writer **Grazia Deledda**. Another favourite walking place for the locals from Nuruoro is on **Mount Ortobene**, with its bronze statue of the Redentore [Redeemer], dating back to the beginning of the twentieth century, where every year an important religious festival is held on August 29. Bustianu regularly takes a walk here, day in, day out, come rain or shine, at the same time after lunch; on the way he admires the town of Nuoro, plunged into the surrounding countryside: "in this part of the world that they call plateau, but which is really a basin with its bottom inhabited by six or seven thousand souls, with the Cathedral and Law Courts that almost touch each other. A basin that has the most beautiful edges that one could ever imagine, with rocks and lush moss, as strigose and curly as an Ethiopian beard. With holm-oaks and junipers and strawberry-trees. With wild fennel and chicory,

ferula and thistles. Silver and ochre and every shade of green. And finally the beauty of its eyes, and its nose and its chest and its ears.” Even today the mountain's vegetation is mainly characterised by forests of holm-oaks, inside which we even find **strawberry-trees, red junipers, cistus** and lower down **cork-oaks, oleasters, mastic trees** and the eighteen species of **spontaneous orchids** that have been recorded here. Furthermore in the higher areas, near the springs, you can find a botanical rarity: the *Cystopteris Dickieana* fern. However the top of the mountain also offers a number of different views: “My space was in a bare clearing that was like a terrace facing the eastern slopes of Badde Manna [....]. The green of the valley was so luxuriant, it seemed as if the land was ready to explode in silent unrest[....]. A huge green spirit that makes its way through the dreary granite [...] Now you can make out the wavy smudge of the horizon, far away at sea, beyond the powdered peaks of Oliena's Dolomites. And the ash-grey mist that breaks through the turquoise blue arc of the Gulf of Orosei”. The most famous view from Mount Ortobene,

Dorgali,
the river Cedrino



which the locals simply call “*su monte*”, is the splendid panorama opening out onto **Badde Manna** (the wide Cedrino valley), the Supramonte of Oliena and Mount Corراسi. It can be reached from the northern outskirts of the city following the old road for Orosei; to the west you can admire Nuoro; to the north, the plateau of Orune and Bitti; Mount Albo towards the north-east, the Marreri valley (scene of

the main murder in the novel), the Baronie, the mountains, the Dorgali sea as far as the waters of Orosei. And, as Fois writes at the end of his novel: "...and being shipwrecked is so sweet to me..." .

The Gennargentu mountains



Reinventing Barbagia

Our journey continues through the heart of Sardinia, in the rugged lands of Barbagia which spread out around the **Gennargentu** massif. Considered an isle within an island for its inaccessible nature which has kept it free from any kind of pollution, it owes its name to its resistance against Roman colonisation: the term *barbaria* (land of the barbarians) was in fact used to indicate those peoples who did not speak Latin.

The author who guides us in our journey is the "barbarian" **Salvatore Niffoi** who, novel after novel, has reinvented the toponymy of the *barbaricini* villages: Oropische, Piracherfa, Orotho, Ularzai, Abacrasta, Taculé, Pirocha are all invented names, but at the same time they are real places because each one of them in some way, describes **Orani** where Niffoi was born and still lives. Though it is difficult to recognise each site exactly, as these also have invented names, it is however possible to grasp a few hints that allow you to

link them to some real places in the village and the surrounding area. One of these imaginary villages is where Melampu Camundu, **Il postino di Piracherfa** [Piracherfa's postman] in the homonymous novel, lives out his dull and ordinary day to day existence, tormented by the memory of a tragic family past. The only consolation in his dreary life is wine, Galdina the prostitute and his passion for writing that will make him reply to the letters of his dead friend Mitrio Zigattu.

"Piracherfa is a village, stuck at the feet of the Licosu plateau, which at dawn opens its frightened eyes on the Burthulè cliffs and at night closes them under the weight of a pitch-black night that envelops houses, beasts and men". Orani is however overlooked by the granitic **Mount Gonare**, with its seams of marble limestone, standing out from the plateau with its famous cone-shaped peak. Above, on the Orani and Sarule territory, stands the Sanctuary dedicated to **Nostra Signora di Gonare**, one of the most well-known and venerated in Sardinia. It can be reached by car from Orani in the direction of

Orani,
Mount Gonare



The *barbaricina*
countryside



Mamoiada as far as the open space of Sa Corte and then by climbing a natural flight of steps in the rocks. The footpath of around seven kilometres from the village is also quite spectacular. The sanctuary comes alive on three occasions: 25 March for the Annunciation, when ***Su pane e vintichimbe*** (the bread of the twenty-five) is handed out to all the pilgrims; the last week in May for the Coronation and **8 September for the “festa grande”** [main feast] when the believers tread all the ancient pathways to come and receive Mass in the church. Not far from the church are the ***cumbissias***, the small houses often built around a sacred building, which are used to host the pilgrims who gather for the feasts. “In the afternoon, Melampu went to the *cumbissia* to light the fire and do a bit of cleaning. He had set up a camp-bed covered with the snow-white sheet of an awning, skewered the side of kid on the spit, lit the fire in the chimney place”. The Barbagia is also rich with the remains of an important historical past: the **nuraghi**. The postman, “every summer afternoon, when the sun burned relentlessly, used to climb up on the old Sa ‘e Talio nuraghe, and sitting on an ashlar, observe the new neighbourhoods

that had replaced the orchards, olive groves and vineyards". The Orani area is the site of around thirty nuraghic remains, among which the **mighty quadrilobated nuraghe of Nurdole** stands out, characterised by its interior sacred well, but also the **Domus de Janas** (S'Arrandau, Littos, Nidu 'e corvu, Sos Venales) and the **Tombe dei giganti** [Giants' Tombs] (Liscoi, Oddocaccaro, Istelenneru, Su Vrusciu, Oddini). To get a better idea of the traditions and the ancient skills of Orani, an important date is the *Cortes Apertas* in September, when old courtyards and churches are open to the public. On this occasion, just like in all the other feasts, it is quite common to see men and boys playing at morra, the traditional game which is so widespread in Sardinia and is described thus by Niffoi: "The height of repressed anger and useless rage is reached when two pairs are formed to play a game of morra. Four morravano [played morra] and two counted. The wagon was filled with music and singsong, accentuated with swear words, that every now and then seemed to be about to break into a fight but which instead came to a halt when that flask of bluish water was passed from hand to hand. It was all "battorò... seisei... setiu! Chimbe chimbe... a linna! Murramù... mudu!", insulting each other and picking fights, with bulging veins in their temples, stretching their necks and puffing out their chests, as if they wanted to hit goodness knows who or protect themselves from goodness knows what".

The books

Salvatore Satta, *Il giorno del giudizio*, Adelphi, 1979

Marcello Fois, *Sempre caro*, Il Maestrale-Frassinelli, 1998

Salvatore Niffoi, *Il postino di Piracherfa*, Il Maestrale, 2000

Amidst woods and mines

This short itinerary takes us to the places which provided the island with its main income in centuries past, the mines and the forests; from the spectacular galleries of the mines with their outlets onto the sea in the area of the Iglesiente, to what remains of the dense forests that once covered most of the Sardinian mountains; a journey back in time that unites both past and present.

Between Carbonia and the west

Il figlio di Bakunin, perhaps the best work by **Sergio Atzeni** is set in the mining area of the **Sulcis-Iglesiente**, between Guspini, Buggerru and Carbonia. Through the extremely personalised opinions of all the people who knew him, the book reconstructs the life of Tullio Saba, the first-born privileged son of a nouveau riche craftsman, who later, after financial ruin, becomes a miner, a trades unionist and an official in the Communist party. Tullio's father, Antoni Saba, commonly known as Bakunin for his anarchist sympathies, was a skilful cobbler who had got rich by supplying the miners' boots for the Montevecchio galena mine. He often mixed with the French manager of the mine and treated himself to such luxury, the likes of which had never been seen in Guspini, since the golden age of **Buggerru**, "the little Paris" of the Iglesiente, which at the beginning of the twentieth century was one of the first villages in Sardinia to have electricity, a hospital, a theatre, a band with seventy musicians and even a cinema showing silent films with its very own piano player, in fact, one of Atzeni's characters says "there were clothes shops and tarts just like in Paris". After his father's death and fall into ruin on the arrival of the new Fascist manager of the mine, who could obviously no longer be served by a notorious anarchist, Tullio adapts

to the life of a miner, but to avoid the humiliation of having to go underground amidst the looks and the jeers of the men who had always seen him dressed as a gentleman, he decides to go to **Carbonia**, to the new **Serbariu mine**.

In fact, this was the very period when mines and towns were rising out of nothing at the will of the regime. Even before *il Duce* arrived to officially inaugurate this **symbol of rationalist architecture**, Tullio goes to live in a basement on the outskirts of the city, on the edge of “the countryside, an ugly countryside, yellow grass, dry thistles”. When his mother falls ill, he gives up even this last form of pride and returns to **Guspini**, leaving his still elegant house every morning to go to work in the **Montevecchio mine**, at about ten kilometres from the village.

The mining areas talked about in *Il figlio di Bakunin* are today the focus of a plan to re-evaluate the area in a recovery operation of the places of memory, that albeit with difficulty, is trying to restore life to the centres of an economy which fell into decline during the second

Carbonia,
the Serbariu mine

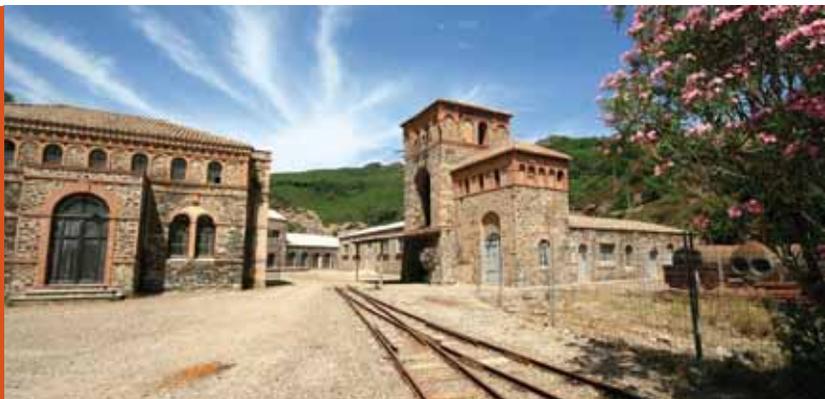


half of the twentieth century. In 2001, with Regional and State commitment, a **Geo Mineral Park** was set up comprising eight areas of the island, offering visitors the chance to take a guided tour of **industrial archaeological sites and museums**.

Some of the most interesting sites in the Sulcis-Iglesiente-Guspinese area are: **Nebida** and **Masua**, two small centres overlooking the sea,

amidst breathtaking cliffs buffeted by the Mistral wind and galleries that open out directly onto the blue sea, the genuine pearls of **Porto Flavia** and the **Lamarmora washing plant**, the **Henri Gallery** and the **Mining Museum at Buggerru**, scene of a protest in 1904 that ended with the death of four miners and resulted in Italy's first

Guspini,
the Montevecchio
mine



general strike and finally the village of **Montevecchio**, which concentrates all the symbolic-buildings of a mine (offices, hospital, school, church, social club) in a single space, all of which were built in different styles according to the different periods in which they were constructed, from Art-Nouveau to Rationalism.

Even if they are not directly mentioned in the novel, **Ingurtosu** and **Piscinas**, which are just a few kilometres from Guspini in the municipality of Arbus, are definitely worth a visit. The former, which today is almost in a complete state of abandon, is one of the most important examples of a Sardinian mining town dating back to the second half of the nineteenth century; in the village covered by layer of dense vegetation, **the manager's offices**, called "*Il castello*" [the castle], stand out, built in Neo-Gothic style and located in a dominant position, as well as the clerks' houses, the church, the shop, the post office, the cemetery and even a hospital.

When the mines were in operation, a narrow-gauge railway led from the **Naracauli washing plant**, not far from Ingurtosu to the **beach at Piscinas**, where the ore was loaded onto sailing vessels to be

taken to Carloforte and from there, on larger ships to the mainland. During the fifties, the shed for storing the coal was converted into a summer camp for the miners' children; nowadays, it is a prestigious hotel set amidst the spectacular dunes of Piscinas, which are almost a hundred metres high and dotted with centuries-old junipers.

A sea of pines

Passing along the other slope of Mount Linas, it is not difficult to identify Nordio, the imaginary setting for all the events in **Giuseppe Dessi's** masterpiece ***Paese d'ombre*** (Strega Prize 1972), as **Villacidro**, the writer's hometown.

The protagonist Angelo Uras's long life story stretches from the time when he was a barefooted orphan up to when he becomes a rich landowner and mayor of the village. The work was inspired by the figure of the writer's grandfather and is also the story of Villacidro

Villacidro,
the wash-house



itself, from the **Unity of Italy** up to the **First World War**.

When the book opens, with the murder of the old lawyer Fulgheri and the discovery of his will, in which he leaves all his earthly goods to little Angelo, Villacidro is still mainly an agro-pastoral centre.

Angelo becomes the owner of the lawyer's **olive grove**, with the olive trees that "seen from the road might seem all the same; but now, for the very first time, he noticed that they were all different: each one had particular features, like a person". Between one small - holding and another, fields are divided by dry-stone walls and interrupted by the gravelly river bed of the streams flanked by oleasters. The signs of country life can also be seen in the village: the **grain mountain** overlooking the square (nowadays converted into an archaeological museum), the **water-troughs**, the woodsheds. And then the **mills**, from the most primitive kind, still moved by a blindfolded horse whose slow circle turns the heavy granite millstones in the hopper, to the steam mill of Angelo's future father-in-law, where the work proceeds at a much faster pace.

Century-old olive trees



But even then, the future was already beginning to loom on the horizon: not far from the olive grove stood the **foundry**, “that darkened the grey Autumn sky with the sooty smoke from its stack which poured out over the Leni orchards”. Villacidro thus becomes the symbol of a history of exploitation that concerns the whole of south-western Sardinia, the exploitation of the mines: the foundry's need for wood becomes more and more demanding, stripping the slopes of the mountains and parching the springs downstream. Gradually of the age-old forests, “nothing remains but ruins: huge toppled trunks, enormous stumps, piles of sawn branches ready to be loaded”. With no trees to restrain it, the rain is transformed into “a thousand rivulets [that] rolled down the mountain and joining together, formed streams that as they flowed carried with them earth, stones, brushwood, bushes and even whole trees with their roots that obstructed the course of the water and made it flow even more violently”.

Dessi's novel tells of events that still have traces in today's Villacidro. When Angelo becomes mayor, he has a public drinking trough built and later, when he decides to come to the needs of the washerwomen with their arthritis deformed hands, he adds a washing sink with a cover in wrought and cast iron. The latter, unlike the drinking trough, still exists today and has in fact become a symbol of Villacidro, the last remaining example in Nouveau Art Style in Sardinia.

However, the most monumental deed carried out by the protagonist of the *Paese d'ombra* (as already noted the alter ego of Dessi's grandfather and who really was mayor of the town), is undoubtedly the town's purchase of a number of pieces of land on Mount Linas and their reforestation with pine trees, not oaks or olive trees because even if they do not produce fruit, “they are lovely, they clean the air, they stop the water... they are no good for burning in the foundries”. And again in 1972, Dessi was able to write: “After a few years the pine trees were fifteen thousand: a real young and thriving pine forest. Today, almost a century later, despite bad management and the often threatened and always impending urban development, the pines number one hundred and fifty thousand and when the wind blows, they sound like the sea”.

Villacidro,
the “Sa Spendula”
waterfalls



Today, Mount Linas is the favourite destination for spectacular excursions on foot or by mountain-bike; popular destinations are the **Sa Spendula waterfalls**, just outside the village, to which D'Annunzio dedicated a poem, and the **Muru Mannu falls**, which drop from around 70 metres and are the tallest in Sardinia. In 1989, plans were made to set up a Regional Park (Mount Linas - Oridda and Marganai Park), but this has never come about. However, a few months ago saw the constitution of the **Giuseppe Dessi Cultural Park**, to exploit the natural and environmental heritage of the Villacidro territory and the towns in the Linas area.

The books

Segio Atzeni, *Il figlio di Bakunin*, Sellerio editore, 1991
Giuseppe Dessi, *Paese d'ombre*, Mondadori, 1972

From north to south

This last itinerary indicates the various stages in an ideal journey into the heart of Sardinia. From north to south, from the wild countryside of Ledda's Logudoro, to the villages of Gramsci's childhood told by Giuseppe Fiori, to the impenetrable forests of Lussu's youth. A Sardinia that is genuine and rugged, far different from the glossy images of its coasts and high society.

The silent valley

Our first stop is in **Siligo**, a small centre in Logudoro, at about thirty kilometres from Sassari. As well as being the birthplace of Sardinia's and probably even Italy's greatest folk singer, Maria Carta, Siligo is the setting for **Padre padrone**, the masterpiece by **Gavino Ledda**, on which the homonymous film (winner of the 1978 Golden Palm at Cannes) was based, directed by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani in 1977. Ledda, ex-illiterate shepherd, later glottologist and writer, spent his childhood and teenage years here, returning after having completed his studies and built himself a new life. The novel opens in the village Primary School, where young Gavino finds refuge for three months before his father arrives to take him away with him to the countryside to work as a shepherd: "I've come to take my boy back. I need him to look after and tend to my sheep. He is my..." Throughout the book however, the village only appears in brief flashes (the steps at the town hall, the ring fixed in the wall of his house where you could tether your donkey, the dusty road that leaves the last houses of the village behind, the alleyways where he could run around with his friends on the few occasions he went back to the village). The real inspiration for *Padre Padrone* is obviously the countryside surrounding Siligo, which young Gavino learns to recognise and to



find a name for every minute detail. In fact, Gavino from the age of six, lives in the lands of **Baddhevrustana**, a place eight kilometres to the east of Siligo, in the direction of Ardara, until he leaves to do his military service at twenty-one. It is a **majestic and unspoilt landscape**, a series of hills and valleys coming one after another, scattered with oaks, boulders and bushes. One of the most beautiful panoramic points that deserves a mention is **Mount Santo**, a basalt plateau of clear volcanic origins, shaped like a truncated cone, which can be reached after about an hour's walk. The summit overlooks a vast panorama, from the other volcanic hills that are scattered over the Meilogu territory to the west, to the wide plain of the Campo di Chilivani that stretches as far as the slopes of Mount Limbara to the northeast. On the top you can also visit the little **Church of Sant Elia ed Enoch**, built in 1065 by the monks from the Montecassino Abbey on the remains of an even older church. Then, at the foot of the mountain stands the **Church of Santa Maria Bubalis**, built in the Byzantine age on the site of a pre-existing Roman baths, dating from the Imperial period and rebuilt in 1063 by Benedictine monks.

In summer 2007 the Sardinian Region put forward a proposal to set up a literary park in the valley to valorise and protect the artistic cultural value of these places on the lands that once belonged to the Ledda family.

On Gramsci's trail

Right in the centre of Sardinia, at the edge of the Abbasanta plateau, we come across the places where **Antonio Gramsci**, one of Sardinia's most influential and important sons, spent his childhood and teenage years. His father, a civil servant who had moved from the Italian mainland to work in Sardinia at the Registry Office, married a young woman from Ghilarza, in the province of Oristano. Due to his father's transfer, Gramsci was born in **Ales**, which is also in the Province of Oristano, and he stayed there until he was one year old. Even so, Ales offers just a few memories of Gramsci.

Ghilarza,
Gramsci Museum



As **Giuseppe Fiori** wrote in 1974, in his precious *Vita di Gramsci*, "the house where he was born, after Mr Ciccillo's [Antonio's father, ed.] departure was occupied by a priest, Priest Melis, and then for around twenty years it was the **sede del Fascio** [headquarters of the Fascist party] and nowadays the ground floor has been transformed into a bar [...] Above the doorway, a memorial tablet from 1947 is



Ales,
the Cathedral of
San Pietro

almost unseen amongst all the metal plaques advertising bitters, aperitifs and drinks". Fortunately things have changed since then: the house is now the headquarters of the **Associazione Amici di Gramsci** [Friends of Gramsci Association] and in 1977 the local council named the erstwhile market square after Gramsci,

Ghilarza,
the Church of
San Palmerio



commissioning **Giò Pomodoro** with a commemorative sculpture entitled *Piano d'Uso Collettivo*. The sculpture consists of a triangular flat area where you can walk, containing a number of symbolic elements, like a fountain and a fireplace and has a square centrepiece, lower than the rest of the square paved with red and black basalt cobblestones.

The family then spent a few years, from 1892 to 1898, in **Sorgono**, in the province of Nuoro. But the family home, where Gramsci spent all his summer holidays and to which he would always feel attached, is the house in **Ghilarza**, a hospitable village with characteristic reddish basalt buildings. After the Seventies, Gramsci's birthplace was bought by the PCI [Italian Communist party], who used it first of all as the headquarters for the "Amici di Gramsci" [Friends of Gramsci] Association and then, after careful renovation at the beginning of the Eighties, as a House Museum dedicated to the Sardinian intellectual. Together with a library with around three thousand books written in different languages (ranging from Spanish to Japanese) on the history of the workers' movement in Sardinia and the world, as well as on

Santu Lussurgiu,
the Church of
San Leonardo



Gramsci's school of thought and works, the museum also offers its visitor a number of rooms containing the original furniture, (the kitchen and bedroom) and an educational tour covering the most important moments in Gramsci's life through images, photos, articles, certificates and personal effects, elaborated by Elsa Fubini, the editor of *Le lettere dal carcere* with Caprioglio. Another place which played an important role in the formation of this Sardinian politician is **Santu Lussurgiu**, a prosperous and charming centre in Montiferru, where Gramsci went to grammar school when he was almost fifteen. Gramsci, Fiori tells us, remembers it as "a somewhat shabby grammar school", "a grammar school where three would-be teachers, with a great deal of nerve, took care of teaching all the five classes". But despite all these flaws in his education which came to the fore at the school-leaving certificate, Gramsci had an excellent relationship with his schoolmates and with the whole village. Even today Santu Lussurgiu is still a very hospitable village, with a splendidly-preserved historic centre with **typical tower-shaped houses in basalt stone** and cobbled streets, where at any time of the year, it is not unusual to

come across local men and boys on horseback. One of the best times to visit is during the carnival period, when one of the Island's most spectacular and foolhardy horse races takes place, called *Sa Carrela 'e nanti* ("the road that lies in front", after the road where the event traditionally takes place). Gramsci's fondness for his village is demonstrated by the fact that in 1937, just a few months before the end of his sentence, writing from the nursing home in Rome where he had been moved for health reasons, he asks his niece to find him a room to rent in Santu Lussurgiu. Unfortunately, he was never to return to Sardinia, since he died of a brain haemorrhage on April 27 1937, just a few days after his prison sentence expired.

The village on the plateau

At the southernmost point of our journey, we find **Armungia**, a little village of the Gerrei about seventy kilometres from Cagliari, famous

Armungia,
the "S'omu de is
Ainas" Ethnographic
Museum



as the birthplace of **Emilio Lussu**. In fact, the woods that surround the village are the setting for *Il cinghiale del diavolo*, the only invented story by the writer and Sardinian politician, founder of the Partito Sardo d'Azione [Sardinian Action Party]. Armungia rises in a mountainous and inaccessible area, only reached along just a few fixed routes and consequently one of the last places

The lake in the
mid-course of the
Flumendosa



to be occupied by the Romans and able to avoid invasion by the Saracens who came upstream along the Flumendosa river. At the time of Lussu's youth, at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was surrounded by dense forests and inhabited by families of shepherd-hunters, considered as being the "patrizi" [patricians] of the village and by peasants and civil servants, who despite being quite well off, were still having some difficulty in throwing off the definition of "plebs". Nowadays, the forest has partially given way to Mediterranean shrub and cultivated areas (especially orchards and vineyards), but the area has never lost that savage charm that pervades Lussu's story, in which he describes a hunting expedition, inspired by the ones in which he used to participate when he was a boy and even later, every time he returned to the village. Even today oaks, ilexes and juniper trees alternate with oleasters, lentisks, strawberry-trees and myrtle and heather shrubs, interspersed with plateaus covered with "green expanses of white flowered cistus, alternating with dark blue bushes, seen way up on your horse in the Spring".

The Flumendosa, Sardinia's second river, once represented an almost insurmountable barrier for many months of the year during the disastrous flood period, but today has far less devastating effects due to the dams which have been built along its course, and offers varied and fascinating landscapes for **walks and trips**.

Armungia itself also offers interesting views. As well as the well-preserved nuraghe that rises right in the very centre of the village, worthy of mention is the group of museums comprising **Sa domu de Is ainas** (the Ethnographic Museum of Traditions and Ancient Agricultural Skills), **Emilio Lussu's birthplace** and the **Casa del Fabbro** [The Smithy] (an old craftsman's studio which has been renovated and returned to its original state).

The books

Gavino Ledda, *Padre padrone*, Il Maestrale, 2003

Giuseppe Fiori, *Vita di Gramsci*, Laterza, 1966

Emilio Lussu, *Il cinghiale del diavolo*, Ilisso, 2004



SARDEGNA