

LOUIS NOTARI

**THE
LEGEND**



**OF SAINT
DEVOTA**

Song one



FIRST PREAMBLE

Around the year three hundred AD, Monaco was a small country; and yet, in the midst of the gray mountains, far from appearing sad, it must have looked more handsome than today.

Our ancestors, who lived on the Rock, were not numerous; but already our port was well known to all those who sailed, and in truth, more ships entered there each year than now, although there was less business going on.

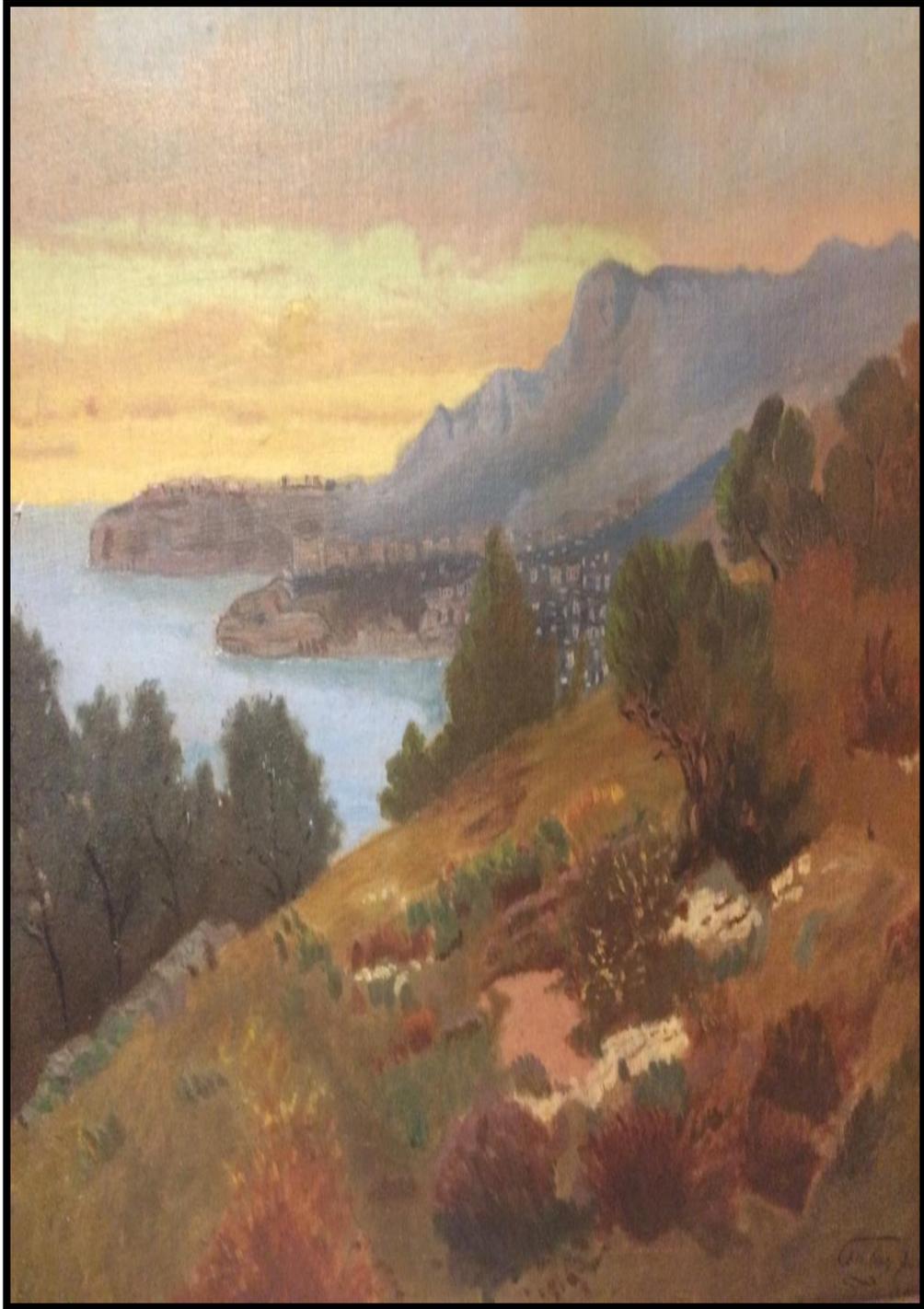
Near the gasometers, there was a cemetery discovered last year; there was still a small oil mill, and we all know that this treasure which is in the Museum was also found there, which means that even without having made any great studies, everyone will be able to think with us that in this part of the Cundamina, there were also some houses; and everything else, up to the top of the hill, was just countryside, but not forsaken countryside!

On the contrary, it formed a flower garden, all planted with large lemon trees, mandarin trees, fig trees, palm trees and other plantations that seek sun.

Formerly this garden was surrounded by a vast dark forest which took up the whole mountain up to Peira-Cava, and from Esterel up to very far near Savuna and the Sabassi, going down to the rocks of the sea and all around our country, a few steps from the edge of the gardens of our ancestors.

Both in the Cro district and towards Barmarina, you can still see little oak trees the age of which is not calculated in centuries but in hours, poor offshoots that find it hard to get their head out of the bush to tell the nobility of their race to the casual hunter or poacher.

The pines at Grima are also very small when compared to those of times gone by; and yet, behind the Town Hall there is one that, though not very old, shows us what an aging pine can be.



*Mùnegu eřa ün picenin paise,
Ma u so aspetu, lonsi d'esse tristu,
Ûn mesu d'ë muntagne ün pocu grise,
Eřa ciü belu che nun è auřa*

Two thousand years ago, it was not the practice to cut down forests as soon as they turned thirty; almost no one hurt them, and it was rare to see a forest burn.

At that time, millenary oaks used to grow around Monaco, huge ash trees and gigantic pines that soared up towards the sky in the midst of elm trees. Towards Mount-Agel the holm oaks and the oaks climbed almost to the top, and how magnificent was our Mountain with its dark mane. Like an old person, it would powder white in winter; sometimes its whole summit was wrapped in clouds, and the heavens lowered to make it communicate with the eternal world.

And our torrents, which we now only see when it rains at least for several days, used to flow continuously, and around, on all the heights you can see, everything was green and healthy, everything was alive and strong.

The Russignola pass, the Müre Mount, the Büstagni district were covered with large pines that had perhaps seen the first companions of our Grand Ancestor, so elderly and beautiful they were.

Everywhere the murmur of sources and everywhere the song of birds, and in this world that we have destroyed all the races of wild beasts abounded. The bones that we found in the caves are unequivocal proof, brought there by men or by water. Whether in Saint-Martin or on the rock of the Observatory, we have found huge numbers of these accumulated remains in what appears to have been shelters, and these are foolproof testimonies.

No one will be able to say exactly for how long these animals have all been sleeping in earth, the bear and the wolf, the hyena and the panther, the deer, the roe and the chamois all discovered in our caves with the wild horse and the bison, without counting hares and marmots: how it all pushes the horizon far away!

But without having to date these bones, we can think that formerly all these animals, small as large, lived there near our ancestors, and to move freely and hide, they needed vast forests all around them: white water, deep caves where you can go and come back night and day. However, around the year three hundred, like the Romans, our ancestors had already put some order on the rocks, using the land for farming: towards the Dog's Head, the Monegasques had arranged beautiful green pastures as well as terraces of wheat, rye and barley which Turbiasques later took!

If one day you go up to the Grotto, you will see that in the morning, lost in the wasteland without arousing attention, there are still some remains of the walls built at that time.

In the district of Revere, these big olive trees we can see nowadays had just been planted, and despite the threats of destruction we may manage, with the help of God, to save them!

Not all of them will be saved, of course, but we will always have a few in the kindergarten; and in this well protected sacred wood, the grand children of our children will come to play under their shade and, who knows?, perhaps meditate on the advice of early Monegasques.



Song 2



SECOND PREAMBLE

In those days, the entire coast of Spelügue was planted with almond trees – zestful plants that even during the long winter season set us an example: that you must awaken from sleep and open your eyes in order to glimpse the sun.

The Beaurivage Hotel which stands on that spot today may take its name from another from that bygone time, and it was a marvel to see this sunlit shore when, as January drew to a close, it was blanketed with flowers.

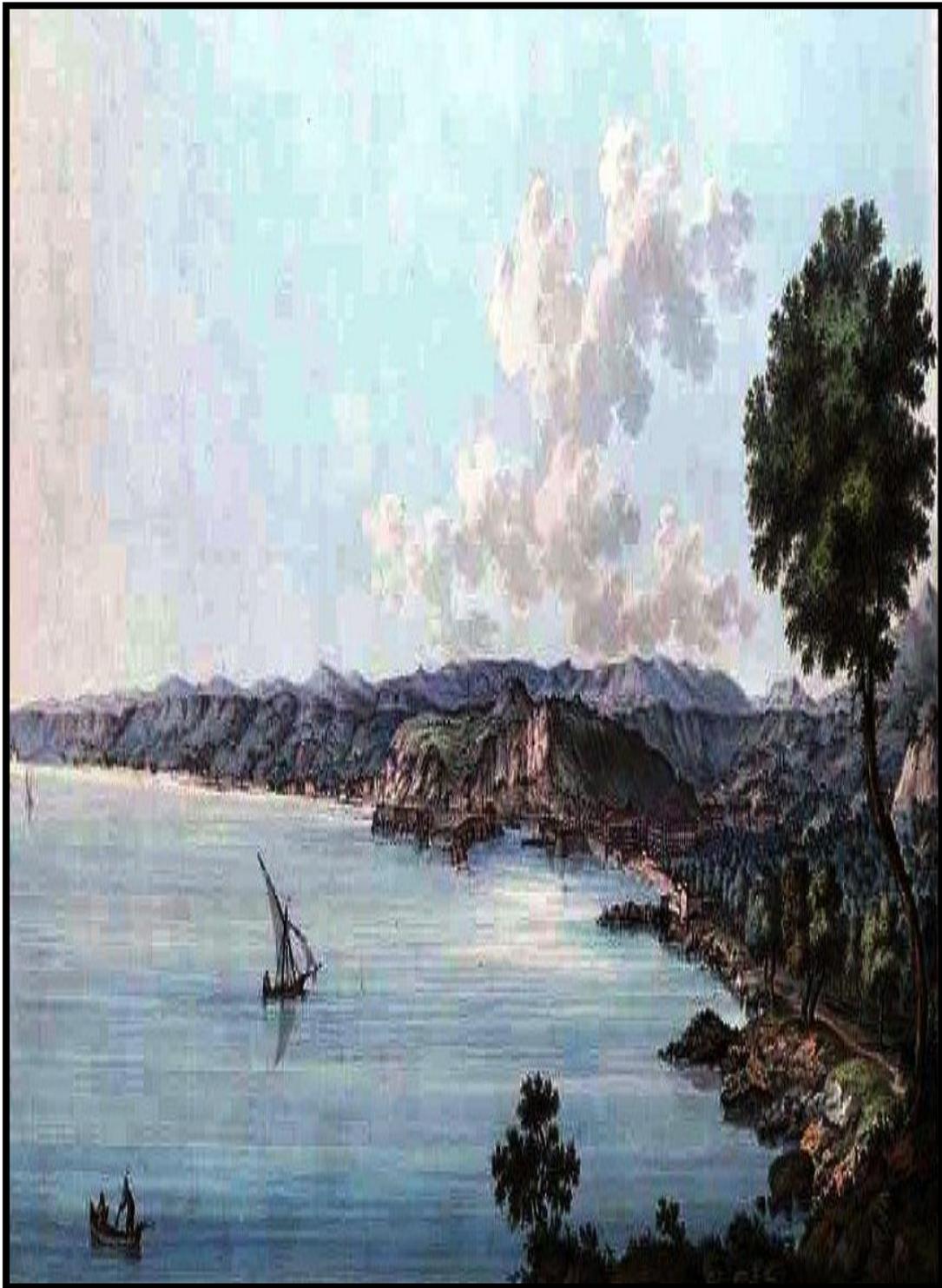
Under the blossoming almond trees the first roses and violets would appear: just as fragrant as they are today, and their intoxicating scent would make the young girls dizzy.

Travelling from Provence, a Roman poet passed by this place and, enchanted by its beauty, he halted. Some say he lived there, passing in solitude the most joyful years of his life; then, as his days drew to an end, he built for himself in that place a temple: a pretty temple, very small and made all of white marble of the finest quality, surrounded by an arbor covered with lilac and jasmine. At the back of this temple, on an altar, could be seen a statue of the divinity which in Rome represents Spring – a statue so well made that you would have thought it alive.

This Roman poet left an important legacy to his neighbours: that every year they would organize a feast there, as was the ancient custom in Rome.

And every year in January, when the almond trees bloomed, all the young girls of the region would gather to make merry and to cover themselves with flowers. Around the small temple of white marble, all perfumed with jasmine, rose and lilac, they all came to become intoxicated with the scent of violets.

Sometimes this celebration chanced to fall on the same day as another even more ancient one, which, in the custom of the Phoenicians, took place on the shore of the sea.



*De chili tempi, řa nostra mařina
Deviva se semiyà ün lagu d'eři,
Sürtù au mitan d'u Portu, a Cundamina ;
Ma d'eři verdu e blü...*

According to the mood of the sea – the tides; the currents; the high winds and the lulls; the days of rain and the days of drizzle – since ancient times fishermen and seafarers have devoted the month of February to the fishing of whitebait, and the month of January to limpet-picking. Which means – and there is no need to explain, since everyone has already understood it – that when it comes to the sea, January is the most pleasant month.

And consider that a thousand years ago, the seasons were much more regular. You would not need to think twice to know what the sea would be like in January. At the Cundamina especially, in the middle of the Port, it must have resembled a lake of oil – but a green and blue oil where young girls would willingly go to gaze at their reflections at dusk in the same way as, when the moon shines bright in the sky, the marble arbors, spangled with flowers, gaze at their own reflections too.

Taking advantage of the period of greatest calm, the Monegasques chose the month of January to honor the Great Divinity who, according to our ancestors, lived in the uttermost depths of the sea and ruled the winds and the waves.

On that all the old tales agree, and tradition has it that for our ancestors this celebration was the most popular of the year – as you can well imagine, for they were all seafarers by trade. All of Greek and Roman Antiquity tells us that the feast of the Divine Flora was then the most beautiful, alongside that feast dedicated to Neptune.

However, in the year 304 (and it is God Himself who dictates all things), it chanced that the feast of Neptune fell on 27 January, just at the time when the almond trees looked like a white bouquet of flowers. At that time there were no schools here, nor were there local officials or dignitaries, and no-one complained that the two festivals flowed together, merged and became one. On the contrary, the idea was pleasant to ladies of good breeding, to workers and businessmen alike.

It pleased everyone else just as much, for everyone who had little occupation was always waiting – just as you are – for an opportunity to have fun.

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Song three



THE MORNING

It was one of those beautiful, bright days as can only be witnessed here, though even here we don't see many, except after rain or a persistent mistral: a day resplendent with soft, thin sunlight which caresses you, seeps into your veins and fills you with wellbeing, just like the little lizards that also like to come out and bask in it.

On days such as these, from the Canunera, you can see the far distance as if it were very close: the Cap-Martin, the Bordighera, the summit of Mount Agel and as far as the Bressu.

The air was so pure, so light, that it seemed that the Earth and the Sky were one. If you are possessed of an overactive imagination, you might have thought you were able to fly very high, very high, on the wings of a bird, to that place where God will one day wait for us. There was so much brightness all around, and the sky was so blue, so serene, that you could have expected, without being at all surprised or astonished, to hear the voices from the Beyond.

Early in the morning, before dawn and without anyone helping them wake up, the fishermen had blown into the sea conch (the same as we use in the mines) in order to unclog the ears of the sleepers and to alert the people who were to go to the ceremony: men, women and children, boys and girls. This ceremony was quite long – lasting longer than our high Mass, even when it is held in great pomp with lengthy blessings.

For – although they were pagans who worshipped totems that would not merit the homage of the least of men, or even of a dog – our ancestors had for their religion a level of devotion which can serve as an example for us: that can be said without bias.

First of all, they would gather around the temple that, in homage to our first Ancestor, the Phoenicians had wanted to build on the most advanced point of our Rock: where the Museum is located, more or less.



*E'ra ün de chili giurni beli ciaiři
Cuma fe'ra d'aiçi nun se ne vide
E, meme aiçi, nun ne vidimu gaiři
Che depu l'aiga o ün bon Mistrau sulide.*

After invoking the Ancestor of the race in all ways – on their knees, standing or with the help of prayers – with a heavy blow of a club that reminded people of the Ancestor they sacrificed a black bull with a broad head, woolly hide and a fierce visage that they had brought from the Camargue.

Together as one, they swore to defend the independence of our land, the individual right and the right to wage war on oppressors, without ever compromising.

And singing the glory of the Great Ancestor, according to custom, they lit a mighty pyre and burned over a great heat this black bull, which symbolized all the monsters and all the wretches that Hercules had vanquished during his lifetime.

Then they all left in procession – the elderly at the head and the youngest ones in their wake – and walked down to the Cundamina to celebrate, in front of a large crowd, the religious feast of the divinity of the sea.

Because there were, in addition to the Monegasques, people coming from the surrounding area: from Eza, from Rocabrüna and others who, coming down from the mountains, had walked for two days and took advantage of this holiday to buy glasses, bronze or remedies for illness; remedies that came from far away and could only be found in a port such as ours, where traders from far and wide used to stop over, whether they had white skin, yellow or black like ink.

A Latin book bears witness to this: when the silver trumpets sounded to give the signal for the great ceremony, every boat hastened to hoist its flag to the wind and all fell silent: men, women and children knelt, all the sailors uncovered their heads and the trumpets launched four times the same signal to the four winds: sirocco, mistral, Greek wind and tolibech, the southwest wind.

A priest then read from a grimoire which has not been found in the archives; approaching the surf's edge and on a small altar they had built, he prepared salt with flour; then he burned the incense and, full of meditation, he bled a white ram whose two horns and four legs had been gilded, and the blood stained the running water the color of pomegranate flowers.

