

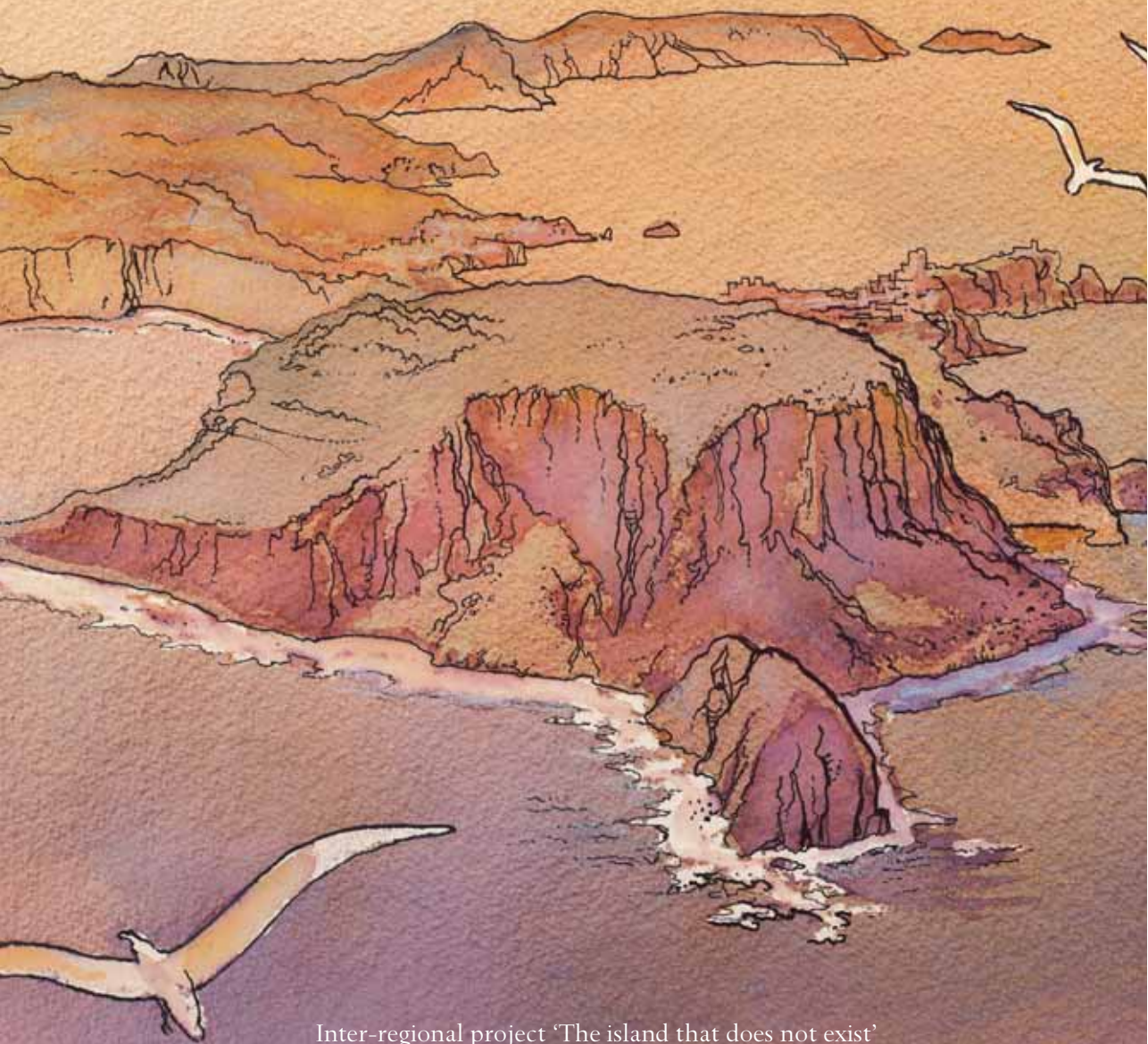
Islands

THE ARCHIPELAGO OF THE PONTINE ISLANDS in Nature

*Travelling the Pontine Archipelago,
by Folco Quilici and
Maurilio Cipparone*



Concept: APT DI LATINA
Texts: FOLCO QUILICI AND MAURILIO CIPPARONE
Translation: THE ARTS DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP, EAST SUSSEX, UK
Illustrations: MILO MANARA
Photographs: ARCHIVIO APT LATINA, FABRIZIO ARDITO,
I-BUGA, ADRIANO MADONNA, PAOLO PETRIGNANI,
LUCIANO ROMANO, SANDRO VANNINI
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THE ARCHIPELAGO OF THE PONTINE ISLANDS

Islands in Nature

BY

Folco Quilici e Maurilio Cipparone

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THE ARCHIPELAGO OF THE PONTINE ISLANDS

PALMAROLA

PONZA

A BRIEF GEOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The Pontine Islands, known as the *Ponziiane*, comprise two groups: Ponza, Palmarola, Zannone and Gavi to the northwest and Ventotene and Santo Stefano to the southeast.

These groups are separated by about 22 nautical miles. Some 6 km to the south of Ponza the solitary rock known as “The Botte” rises from the sea. The geographical coordinates from the meridian of Monte Mario in Rome are northerly latitude 40° 58' 56” and 40° 47' 50” and easterly



ZANNONE

SANTO
STEFANO

VENTOTENE

longitude $0^{\circ} 23' 40''$ and $1^{\circ} 4' 50''$. The Ponza group of islands looks northeast towards the curving Sabaudia-Circeo peninsula (the shortest distance being between Zannone and the Circeo – 12 nautical miles), while Ventotene faces Gaeta (21 miles distant).

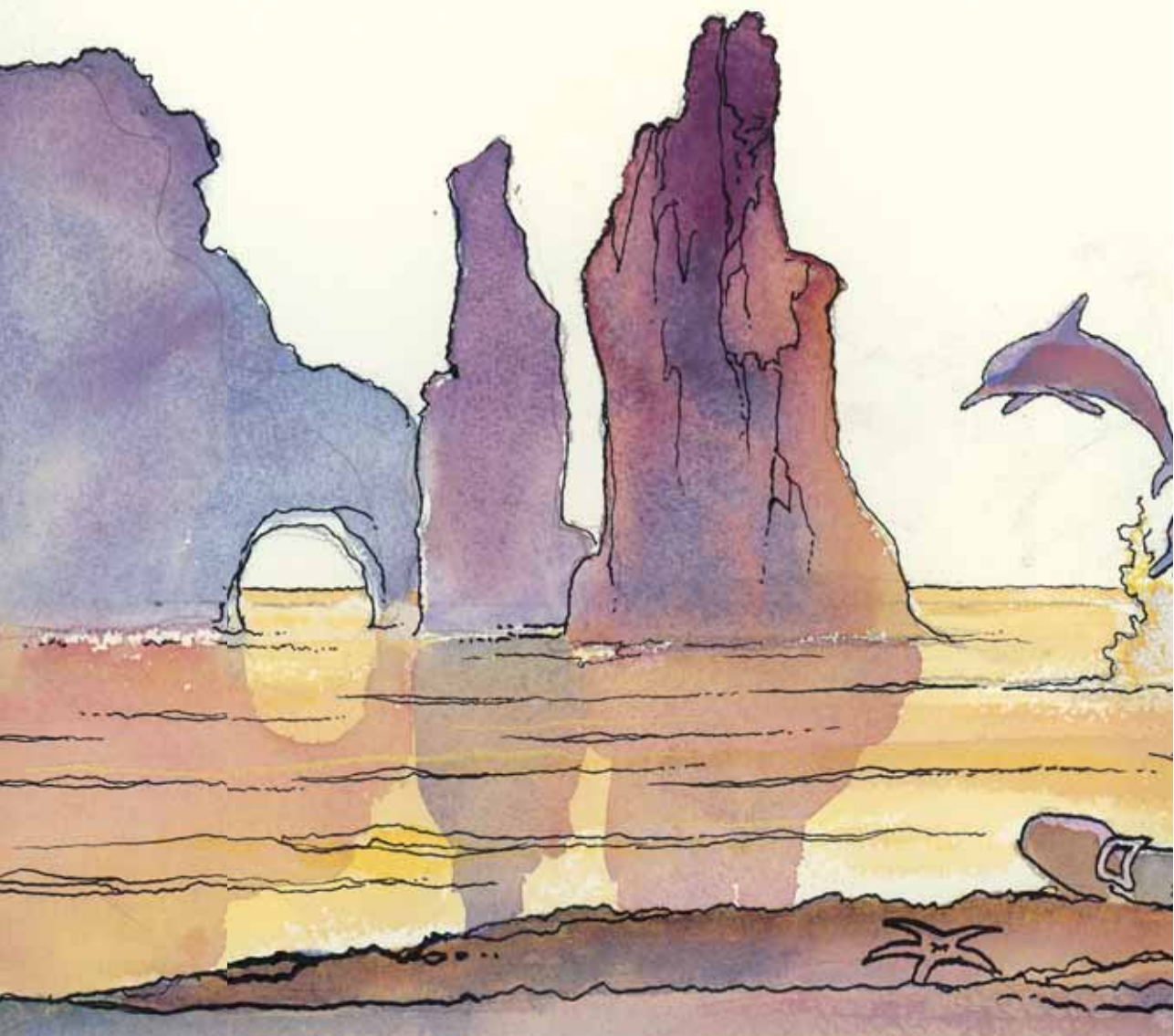
Ventotene could be described as the “umbilical” centre of the Tyrrhenian Sea and is also the halfway point between Ponza and Ischia, each 20 miles away. Ponza and Ventotene are populated; the smaller islands are not. Ventotene and Santo Stefano are land and sea conservation areas, supervised by the Ministry of the Environment, administration being in the hands of the Municipality.

TRAVELLING THE PONTINE ARCHIPELAGO

By Folco Quilici

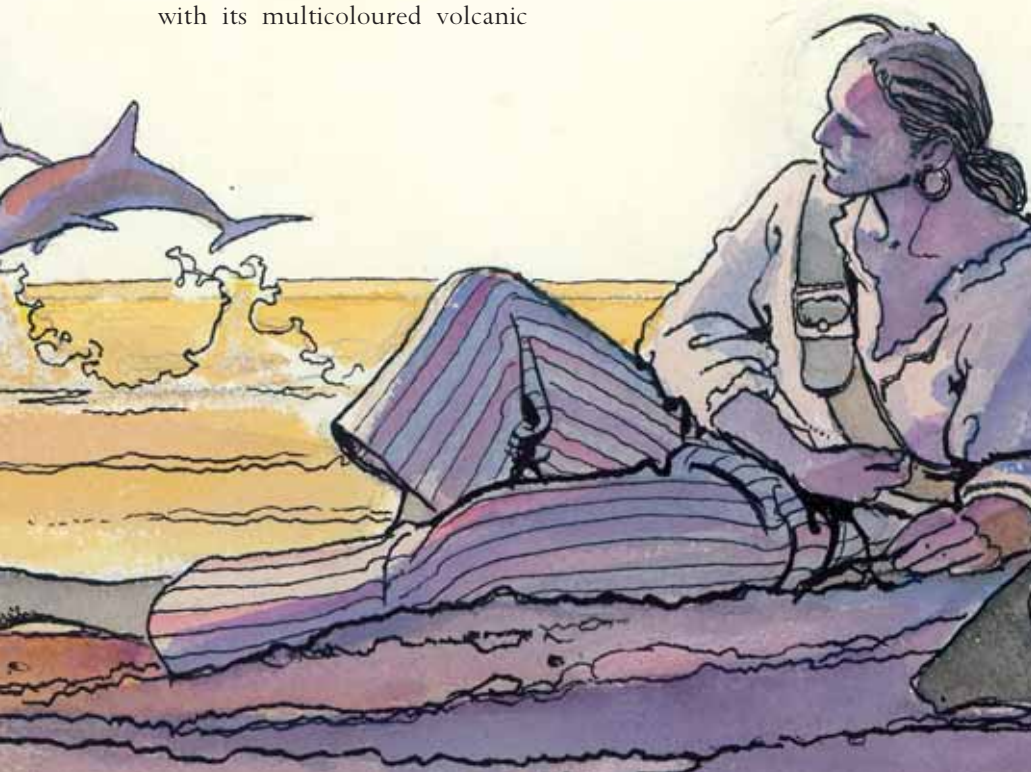
In spring, the anticipation is intensified by a desire to get the boat back in the water, and make the crossing to the Pontine Islands just as the smell of land and sea infuse one another, when the

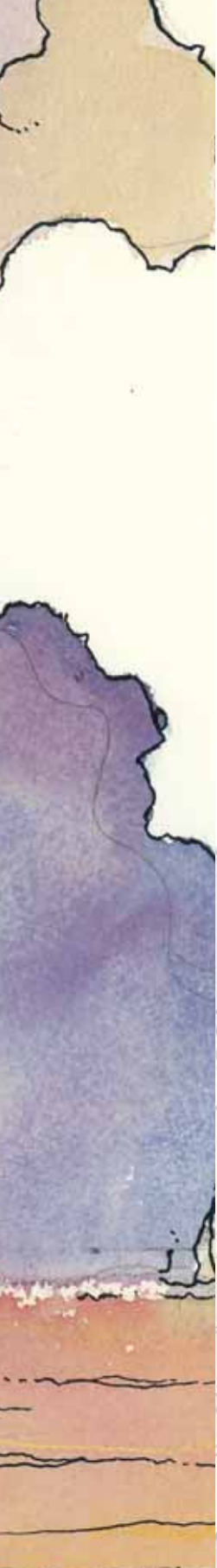
islands turn green, when flower and bud add fragrance to the air. I cannot recall a year without feeling this urge for the sea, the start of another summer season that will continue until next autumn's first northwest breezes. That I should make the connection between my yearning for the sea and the islands – as one who



has visited so many islands in the world — is not only because of their beauty, above and below the water, but because these islands were my first “archipelago”. Ponza, crowned by its uninhabited rocks, Palmarola and Zannone in the wings, and the black stone monolith of the “Botte” rising from the deep blue of the high seas as one heads towards Ventotene.

My first dives were in the shallows and deeps of those islands; and it was here I learned to use a breathing mask. I delighted in the first sensation of putting a foot on a deserted island, magnificent and all my own. I speak of Palmarola, gem of the Archipelago, and for me one of the most beautiful islands ever to have been born of the sea. Here are solitude, silence, emptiness and wonder. Alone with its multicoloured volcanic





rocks, its deep and limpid waters, Palmarola is a mirage of sea beds to explore and to discover, an island bewitching in its protected sleep, cradled by a whispering and reassuring sea.

The sails open with a stiff gust of wind and the boat slips along on a friendly sea. We are sailing round another island, green as the back of a lizard, and we drop anchor at Zannone, which is part of the Circeo National Park and supervised by forest guards. The lighthouse recalls the old films of intrigue and adventure. We are in the custodian's house, visiting the small natural history museum, before wandering the nearby ruins of a medieval convent. Just thinking about the life of a community in search of God, solemn, without boundaries, sets the imagination racing. This tiny island universe reaches beyond itself, and into a mirror-like sea, reflecting onto its surface and way down to the seabed.

Diving at Palmarola, the crystal waters reflect the shadows and lights of extraordinary rock formations, like those all around the island. As it is above the water so it is below - caves, passageways, and magical

plays of light. At Zannone, also, the underwater world reflects the reality on the surface: a cover of fine green woods above and many escarpments below, leading down to the seabed, covered by a mantle of marine vegetation, forests of dense and shimmering sea fans whose violet-tipped foliage turns fiery red when we switch on our lamps.

As we emerge we find ourselves opposite an archaeological ruin, a fishery dating from Roman times, cut into the rocks. It is connected to the sea by an underwater tunnel, accessible by external steps, close to the Port of Varo.

At Ponza, the overall view and the surrounding landscape have changed little since that summer many years ago when I disembarked from the Anzio mail boat. On the island I rented a room overlooking the port. The window gave me a comprehensive view of the port that for me, architecturally speaking is one of the most beautiful in the world. Many islands of the Mediterranean were formerly places of exile. Ponza was one such, 2,000 years ago, for important people such as Agrippina, and again during the 1920s and 1930s, in the period of Fascism. This role, however, had an important positive side in the decades when Italy began to redraw her landscape (too often for the worse) because it saved the island from being damaged as elsewhere by urbanisation and tourism.

Ponza eventually entered the large and colourful circle of Mediterranean tourism, becoming one of the star attractions, but without losing character and identity in the process. I have been coming back to Ponza every year for forty years, and the island still awaits me like a girlfriend who never ages and needs no makeup. Certainly, it has

undergone transformations, some far-reaching. From being poor the island has become wealthy. From having been its own unchanging mirror image, now the island hums with an almost explosive vitality. We no longer refer to 'them', the fishermen and sailors of the island, the "Ponzesi", known throughout the Tyrrhenian region for their qualities of quietness and efficiency. Thinking of them, and trying to remember their advice and their stories, the old boats come to mind, their method of fishing for the *Coryphaena hippurus* or the passing tuna fish and their old-fashioned way of gathering coral on the Sardinian coast. A parade of hulls, characters and wit, of orders given through clenched teeth. Even today, going to sea, I well remember these things because fishermen's sayings, though apparently banal, could become irrefutable wisdom in the right context. Their seafaring lore became famous long ago - when the Romans, in difficulties against the Carthaginians during the Punic wars, sought their help; when, in 1757, after many naval victories against barbaric pirates, ships from Ponza, Rome and Naples defeated the pirate fleet at Palmarola. And when, in the early nineteenth century, the inhabitants of Ponza became fearsome seamen and pirates as well as enemies of the Bourbons.

Writing about the Mediterranean, I could not resist rereading the accounts, carefully edited in the eighteenth century by the papal marine historian, the Dominican Alberto Guglielmotti, describing the Pontine Islands as being suitable as a hideout and for the laying of ambushes. The islands, for fear of pirate incursions, were already abandoned by the sixteenth century. Even the monks

moved to the mainland, to places offering greater security. Around 1550, three captains of the flotilla of the notorious pirate Dragut were out "hunting" in the Tyrrhenian sea, when they discovered in the now deserted islands of the Pontine Archipelago a secure base for carrying out repairs after storms. The islands further afforded an ideal hideaway from which to launch attacks on passenger vessels - capturing cargo, passengers and equipment and taking them as far away as the "coast of Barbary" and to Gerba (in Tunisia), that lair for pirate fleets. We can keep our daydreams alive since the island setting, of hidden bays and secure hideaways, is quite sufficient to invoke the same spirit of adventure, discovery and challenge.

The wonderful world of underwater adventure came to the Pontine Archipelago in the late 1940s. Sport was first to arrive in these waters, then exploration and research, which owed their expansion to the sheer size of the area. Other "islands" dot the Archipelago as well, still little known and yet to be fully discovered. These are the submerged islands of iron, the remains of vessels lost during the two world



wars – the hulk of the *Corriere di Ponza* sunk by a German submarine on the 21st of March 1918, off Zannone, and the fractured hull of the steamer *Santa Lucia* sunk near Ventotene on the 21st of July 1943 by British torpedo aircraft. These two lost ships excite and stimulate the imagination of explorers. Another wreck is that of an American Liberty ship, sunk during the storm of March 1944 near the coast of Ponza, off Punta del Papa. It was on its way to Naples carrying German prisoners of war. Caught by the storm close

to the northern shore, it was thrown up against the rocks of Ponza and began to sink vertically. The prisoners, released from the hold, were saved along with the escort and equipment. The islanders then came to the assistance of both captors and captured. The vessel now lies some twenty-five metres down, continually targeted by divers. I have known it for forty years and I follow with some emotion its slow transformation from a dead iron skeleton to one of this sea's living reefs - covered with infinite forms of life, now clinging to it, inviolable hide-outs for colonies of sea bream and small grouper. The Pontine Archipelago, spread out at the centre of an "historic" ocean (which the Tyrrhenian sea certainly is), was bound to make its contribution to underwater archaeology. In



fact, in 1985, two inhabitants of Ponza, Silverio Mazzella and Roberto Calo, located the wreck of a Roman ceremonial vessel laden with amphorae, in the open sea near Secca dei Mattoni (on the eastern face of the island). The recovery operation yielded the experts a treasure of over seventy perfectly conserved amphorae, now held in the rooms of the Municipality.

PONTIUS PILATE'S FISHERY

The old Roman fisheries are another noteworthy reminder of the classical period. Nowadays these can only be reached by sea. It takes ten minutes by rowing boat from the port. No longer prisoners of men, but freely, numerous moray eels live here and have adapted to

the environment. Whoever watches them carefully settling into the tanks might imagine them as the direct descendants of the eels once bred by slaves, in the service of greedy patricians, guests of the overlooking villa. They dedicated themselves passionately to the breeding and were excellent administrators (the story of slaves being thrown into the tanks as food to fatten the eels is just folklore that the people here enjoy recounting to passing tourists!). I am by now accustomed to the gloom, flecked by random spots of light from the play



of sunrays refracted on the waves outside the cave. Slowly I make my way in under the mountain, where the tunnel is

at sea level. I swim through tortuous shafts; labyrinths that on close inspection are a real masterpiece of hydraulic engineering, the seawater levels being constantly topped up in the various compartments, so that the balance between the fresher, plankton-filled water and other nutritional waters vital to the rearing of fish is never lost. Visited by hundreds of curious people each summer, it is a dense network of tunnels and two separate water systems allowing different types of fish to be reared. Traces of ancient artistic embellishment remain on the bottom, inside the tanks. When the Ponza fisheries were built at the beginning of the first century A.D.,



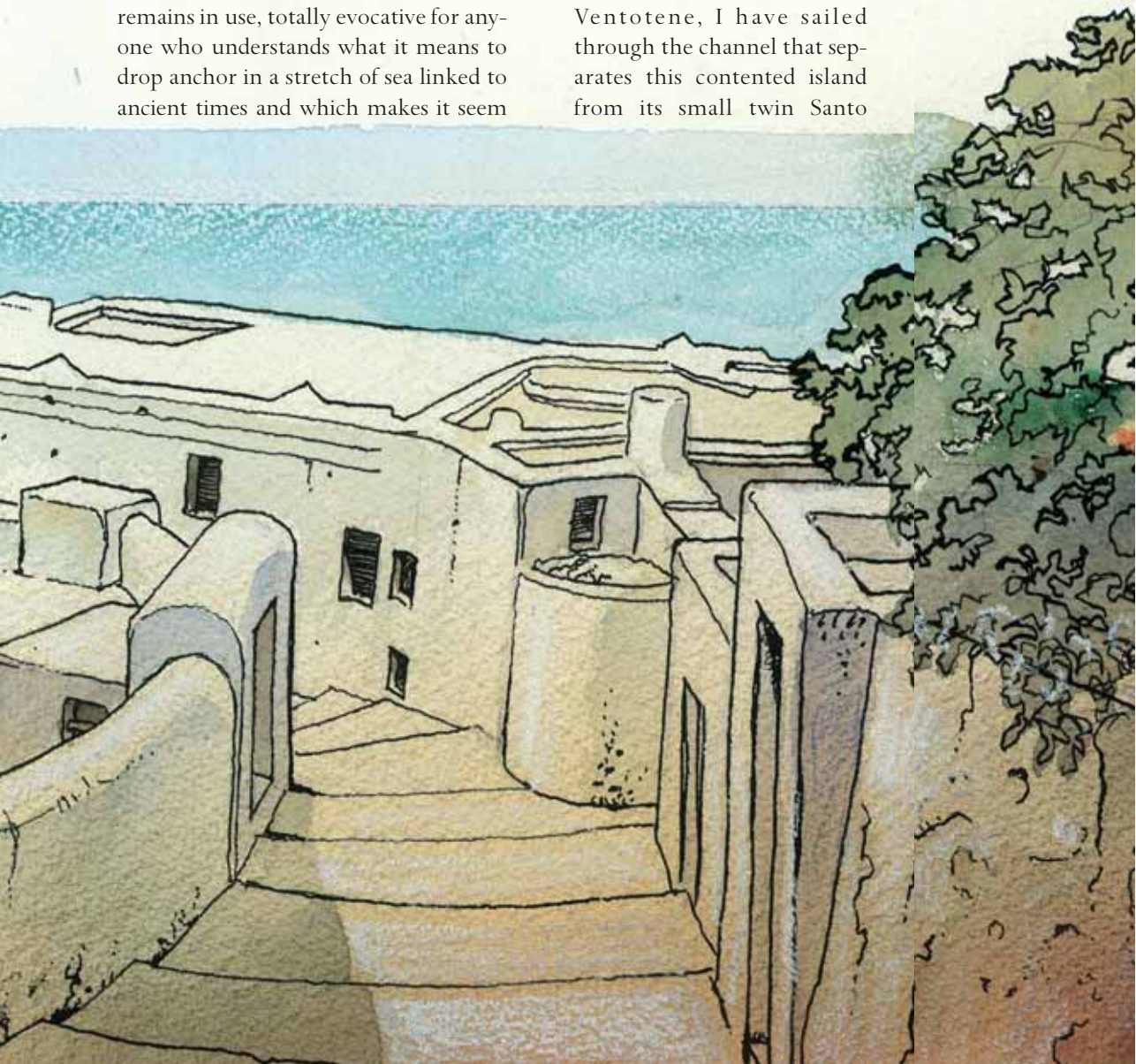
at the height of the reign of Augustus, another similar development was taking place on the island of Ventotene, the most secluded land of the Archipelago, towards which we are now heading.


VENTOTENE, THE SOUTHERNMOST ISLAND

Another centre of flourishing tourism, Ventotene draws people not just by its beauty but also because, architecturally speaking, Rome is still alive here. Its port remains in use, totally evocative for anyone who understands what it means to drop anchor in a stretch of sea linked to ancient times and which makes it seem

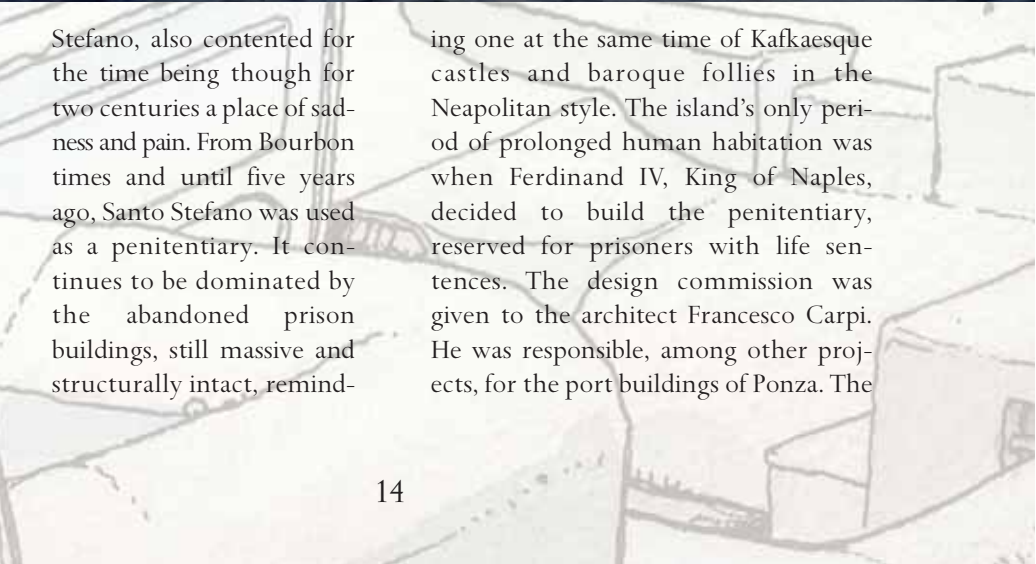
as if 2,000 years had not passed. In fact the port jetty with its two bollards and shops cut straight out of the soft local volcanic rock, are exactly as they once were. Arriving here and tethering the boat to one of the stone bollards, I am doing just what any sailor from a Roman galley or Aragonese man-of-war would have done in his time.

To reach the Roman port of Ventotene, I have sailed through the channel that separates this contented island from its small twin Santo





Santo Stefano, also contented for the time being though for two centuries a place of sadness and pain. From Bourbon times and until five years ago, Santo Stefano was used as a penitentiary. It continues to be dominated by the abandoned prison buildings, still massive and structurally intact, remind-



ing one at the same time of Kafkaesque castles and baroque follies in the Neapolitan style. The island's only period of prolonged human habitation was when Ferdinand IV, King of Naples, decided to build the penitentiary, reserved for prisoners with life sentences. The design commission was given to the architect Francesco Carpi. He was responsible, among other projects, for the port buildings of Ponza. The

penitentiary buildings were completed on the 2nd of September 1795. Over the years the prison of Santo Stefano “hosted” many important persons, among them Luigi Settembrini, the anarchist Bresci who assassinated King Umberto I, Sandro Pertini who was to become President of the Republic and other anti-fascists. For some time there has been a plan to turn the buildings into a marine biology laboratory and conference centre for historical and scientific research. Meanwhile, the years have taken their toll on Santo Stefano and the once impenetrable walls of the sinister jail and its outside service buildings have been severely damaged. Wild flowers have overgrown the old cemetery, the now empty graves are without headstones or inscriptions, and the words which once dominated the entrance - “here ends the justice of men, here begins the justice of God” - are now almost illegible.

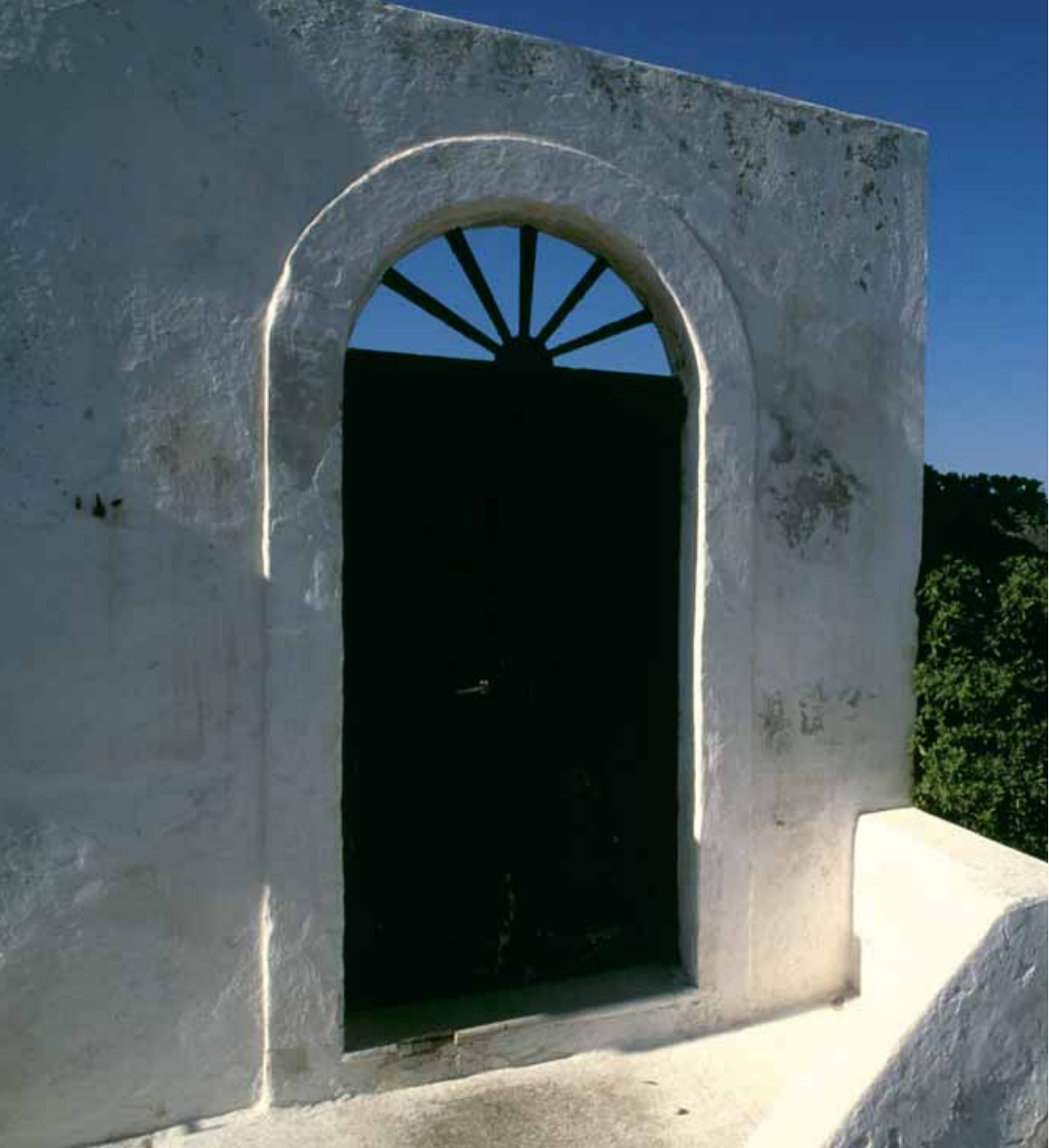
At Ventotene, the ancient Romans had also established a small industry for the rearing, production and conservation of fish with a system of breeding tanks even more sophisticated than the one in Ponza. A young boy from Ventotene, squeezing without mask or flippers into the tunnels of the underwater tanks, takes me to a point where one can see, still in working condition, the oldest contraption dating back to when the fishery was last in use: a dividing grate in the form of a slab of stone densely perforated by tiny holes so to permit the circulation of water but not of fish. I like to imagine this man-made cave, like the one in Ponza, to be not just a fish nursery but also a sacred space dedicated to the gods, to beauty, carved from the belly of earth and sea. From there I am

further tempted to imagine it as a channel through which to immerse myself in the motherly womb of the Mediterranean: that fertile, abundant, resplendent and mysteriously beautiful divinity.

Mine is not fantasy; or, better still, perhaps up to a point it is. There are facts, experiences, and archaeological discoveries that can give expression to these images of the cave, hewn from land to sea, as being not only a physical channel but also one that is mystical, even magical.

THE UNDERWATER ISLAND

The inexhaustible archaeological richness of the sea in this archipelago rewarded explorers with yet another treasure. In 1981 the wreck of a Roman ceremonial vessel surfaced from under a cover of sand with its cargo: ivory handles, lead fittings, marbles and tiles, fired brick and an infinite quantity of copper nails still penetrating the lead coverings of the wood. There is another particular curiosity: a box containing a bundle of ivory pens – surely the Roman equivalent of the modern



“biro”. Once again there were amphorae, all hermetically sealed, their contents grapes and spices. Of greatest value on board was an altar-piece, a sheet of

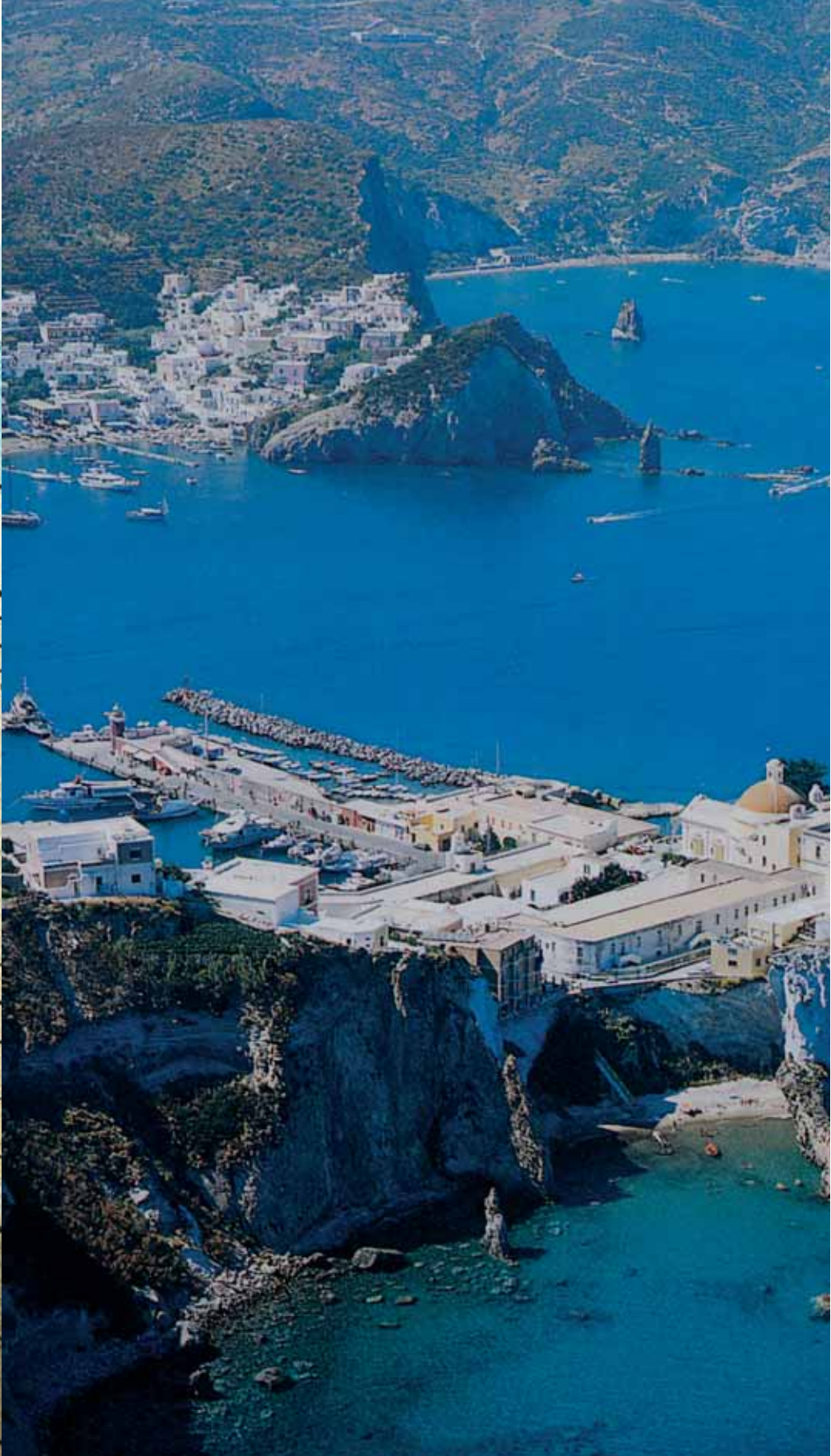
marble on which a fire would burn either for on-board necessities or to give thanks to the gods of the sea. The ancient world, in the Pontine Islands, has other presences. At times this world comes alive.



As soon as I started to weigh anchor I realised that it was trapped. I am still unsure, but its fluke seems to have penetrated the eye of another anchor lost on that same seabed very many years ago. It got stuck in the “button-hole”, chiselled through the soft stone by a Phoenician so that a rope could be attached. Primitive and roughly fashioned, though functional in its day, here was a stone anchor dropped from a boat millennia ago finding its way to the bottom of this bay, where I was also taking shelter. Yesterday the Phoenicians; today ourselves! The beauty and uniqueness of the Archipelago can be summed up in this one description: it belongs both to the sea and to the past. Whoever disembarks here crosses into a world of mystery, through the unseen gates to another dimension.

PHOENICIAN GHOSTS

This island still offers surprises and ghosts, like the one I encountered one day as I was sheltering in a small bay from an easterly wind. It was nearing dusk.





A watercolor illustration of a pirate in a red coat and black hat, seen from behind, looking out over a body of water towards a rocky coastline. Two seagulls are flying in the sky. The pirate is standing on a rocky shore, and the water is a mix of yellow and blue tones. The sky is a pale yellow. The overall style is artistic and hand-drawn.


ZANNONE AND VENTOTENE - ISLANDS IN NATURE

By Maurilio Cipparone



IN PRAISE OF THE ISLANDS

Before describing the distinctive features of islands such as Zannone and Ventotene we must remember that islands bear no comparison to mountains and plains. Mountains are majestic, snow-capped, steep, high - if not exceedingly high. Non-climbers are excluded from views of the furthest horizons. They are obstacles in the way, challenges to overcome. Who, however, would want to have a mountain all to themselves? And what about a plain? This can be extensive, sometimes stretching as far as the eye can see, its fields often flowering and its grasses undulating like the sea. As in so many film backdrops, it can be crossed on horseback, by wagon or on a train puffing clouds of steam. Yet, who would want a plain all to themselves? Islands, however, stand apart. They are like ships of rock anchored in the sea. The most distant of them make one long to go out to them, instead of pushing one away. They wear necklaces of surf over their sea-blue clothing while the seagulls trace their floating wisps of hair and their romantic lighthouses speak and befriend, each with its own language of silent lights. Islands can be deserted, or inhabited by communities that are often a race apart. On islands, time stands still, beating its different rhythms and



governed not by working hours or frantic agendas but by the wind alone, stirring the sea that divides them.

An island is, by definition, evocative. It is romantic, a destination for well-heeled or casual tourists, naturally iridescent, perfumed and alluring, beautiful in summer and perhaps more so in winter. Who has not dreamt of taking refuge on a distant island? And, to return to “our” Pontine Islands in the Mediterranean, who, among those familiar with them, has not wanted to live a while in the old Zannone lighthouse or get away for a sabbatical in a comfortable cave on Palmarola or a hut on Ventotene? Whether called Ponza, Palmarola or Zannone, Santo Stefano or Ventotene, it is their status as “islands” that really makes us want to explore them, to live on them as Nature, in all her secret ways, intended.

PART ROCK, PART VOLCANO

We begin our exploration with Zannone. Having a surface area of only 102

hectares, it is a cross between a rock and a small island. Here we find written an extraordinary if not yet completely deciphered page in the geological history of the Tyrrhenian Sea. Zannone, in fact, is the only island off the Pontine coast on which can be observed a complete chronology of rock strata spanning, according to some writers, the last 400 million years. According to others, however, the most reliable history traced in the rock is “only” 250 million years old: a millennium here or there, what differ-



ence does it make? On Zannone the oldest rocks, dating with relative certainty to around the Mesozoic and Superior Triassic eras (from 290-250 million years ago), are to be found in the region between the Punta di Levante, Punta del Lauro and Capo Negro. They are metamorphic rocks, those that have emerged from the depths of the earth due to tectonic phenomena, where they were first formed over time under unimaginable pressure and in hellish temperatures. On the same side and slightly beyond



Capo Negro, is a blend of sedimentary rocks, made up of limestone, dolomite rocks, clays and sandstone, deposited there 250-20 million years ago. In other words, when the mountains were forming on the continent, a very shallow reef probably formed here to submerge and resurface over the course of millions of years, possibly many times, hence bearing the traces of various sedimentary strata. At a certain point, however, the bed of the Tyrrhennian Sea stopped moving. Between the end of the Pliocene and the start of the Pleistocene eras, give or take one and a half million years, the Pontine sea became violently active and was battered by strong volcanic eruptions for around 500,000 years. The debris from these went on to form the rest of Zannone: the part including Monte Pellegrino (a dome-shaped protrusion that rises to 194 metres above sea level), the rock of Monaco and the slope of Varo. Today there are working sites which the geologists refer to as “lava layers” and “pyroclastic flows” which by all accounts complete the extraordinary practical encyclopaedia of geodynamic events that have characterised the whole Mediterranean region.

EXPLOSIONS AND ERUPTIONS

On Ventotene the “stomach

eruptions” of the Tyrrhenian Sea revealed themselves in a different way. On this island there is no evidence of ancient rock formations or of the effects of the sea. The island’s 150 hectares of flat, stretched and tortuous terrain is made up of lava (surrounding the western edge from Cala Battaglia to the Semaphoro) and for the most part of stratified tuff. This means that the periods of volcanic activity that took place here up to about one million years ago witnessed not only gigantic explosions with unending clouds of pulverised volcanic material that fell to form the other strata of tuff present across almost

all exposed surfaces but also periods in which the eruption was predominantly effusive, with the lava in some places interwoven with the tuff and in others sitting on top of it. The island’s genesis is also the reason for its greater beauty compared to Zannone – at least in so far as the form and colours of the volcanic mass are concerned. It is a beauty best appreciated by slow moving boat. This enables one to see superimposed layers of grey and blackish lava, tuff that displays all the possible combinations of brown dappled with light hazelnut and even violet hues, and vertical cliffs decorated with strange lattice work and occasionally pock-marked by caves, pillars of varying dimensions, some arches and an occasional small beach.

In many places and as late as Roman times, the “body” of the island was altered by a series of excavations (to make tanks, fish-farms and the spectacular Roman port), and by the materials





used to strengthen these constructions. Here and there old caves are still recognisable, gouges that throw up vertical walls and geometric structures beyond even Nature's most creative moments. Other changes, less obvious to the untrained eye, were caused by erosion and landslides, which continue today due to the particularly fragile tuff. Thus the entire profile of the island alters with the passing of time. Some call Ventotene the "fragile island"; others, more poetically, prefer to imagine it as wanting to change appearance all the time, as perhaps did those unfortunate ladies who in ancient times lived here in long and lazy exile.

IN SEARCH OF LEGUMINOUS PLANTS

The vegetation of the islands grouped with Ponza differs greatly from those grouped with Ventotene. The former, aside from what is endemic to it, is much wilder and similar to what is found on most of the central Mediterranean islands. On Ventotene, however, the natural vegetation has been almost entirely replaced by cultivation, vital for the survival of the island's inhabitants although more so in the past. The perfumed myrtle bushes, the clumps of white and pink flowers and perhaps even Holm-oaks and privet shrubs have been replaced by less exotic

but more edible vegetation: queen of them all is the lentil, Ventotene's true gastronomic legend.

Not all is lost, however, as the botanists would say. On the most precipitous crags, in amongst the fissures of plain tuff can still be found aromatic plants such as the curry plant and samphire and others just as rare and

precious, for example thickets of a variety of cornflower, whose leaves are covered with thick white down, some dwarf palms that must be relics of drier and hotter climes and, above all, the lemon tree of Ventotene. The latter is the most famous floral treasure of this little island, an indigenous plant that only lives here and which characterises the particular environment of the island whilst also representing its most vulnerable and threatened element. Its name



derives from the Greek “leimon”, meaning lawn. It grows ten to fifteen centimetres tall, can take root even in the tightest cracks and wraps itself around the rocks covering them with small blue-violet flowers that resemble lavender from July to September. On Ventotene, the lemon tree is found above all on the promontory of Punta Eolo. For those who love their flights of both fancy and poetry, it is perhaps a floral bouquet to the ladies who in times past lived in the

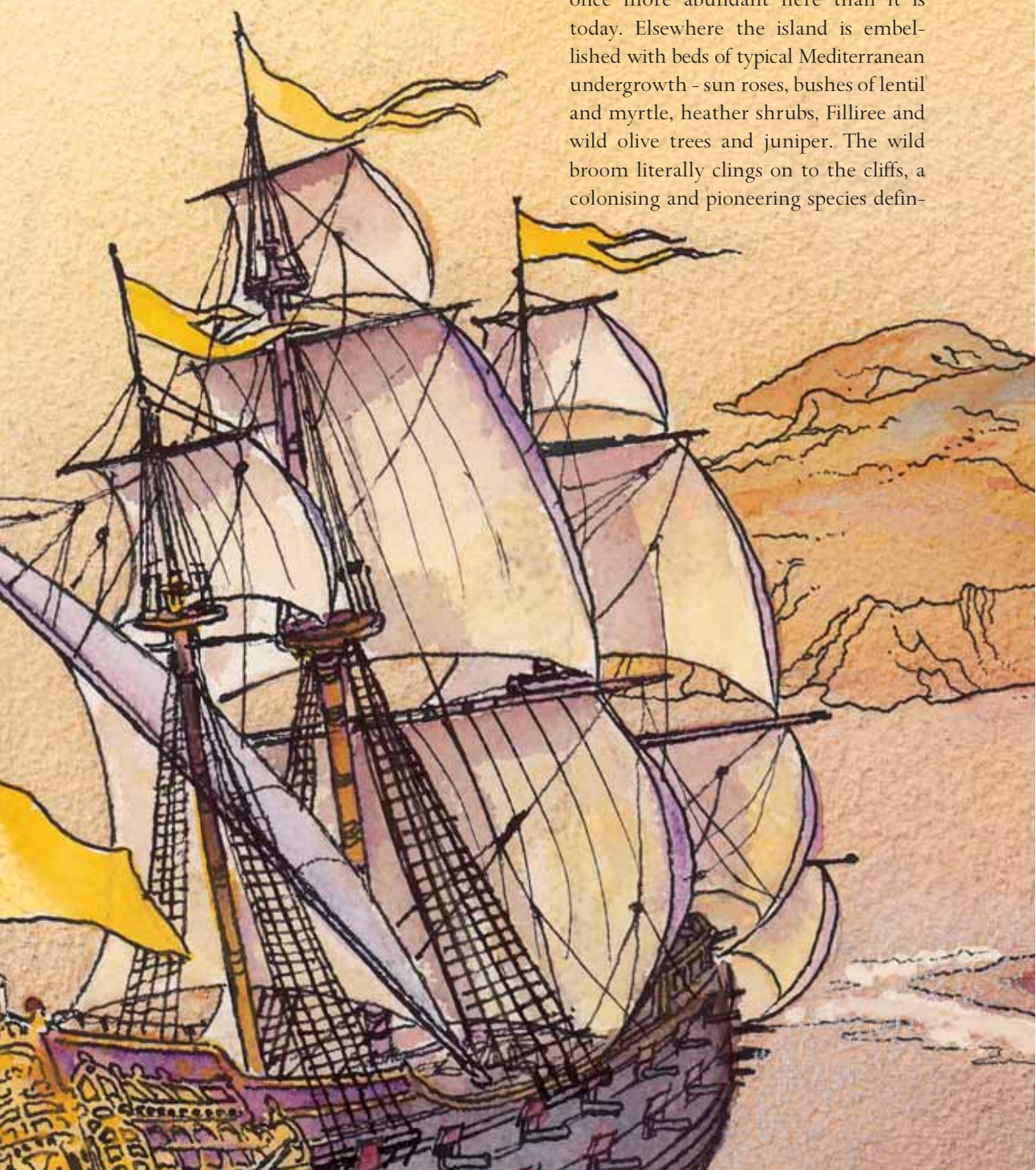
Roman villa.

Trees and not just typical shrubs are to be found on Zannone. Historical documents tell us that in 1800 the island was so completely wooded that it had specially appointed timber watchmen. Employed by the council of nearby Ponza, they were there to supervise the use of the trees from which the inhabitants would make stakes, timber sup-



ports for the vines, or charcoal for baking the lime. Today, on Zanone, there remains an evergreen strip of woodland, small but no less

interesting for it, consisting of medium-sized Holm-oaks interspersed with pistachio trees, hardy heathers as well as laurels that grow in the Cave of Lauro, whose name suggests that the laurel was once more abundant here than it is today. Elsewhere the island is embellished with beds of typical Mediterranean undergrowth - sun roses, bushes of lentil and myrtle, heather shrubs, Filliree and wild olive trees and juniper. The wild broom literally clings on to the cliffs, a colonising and pioneering species defin-

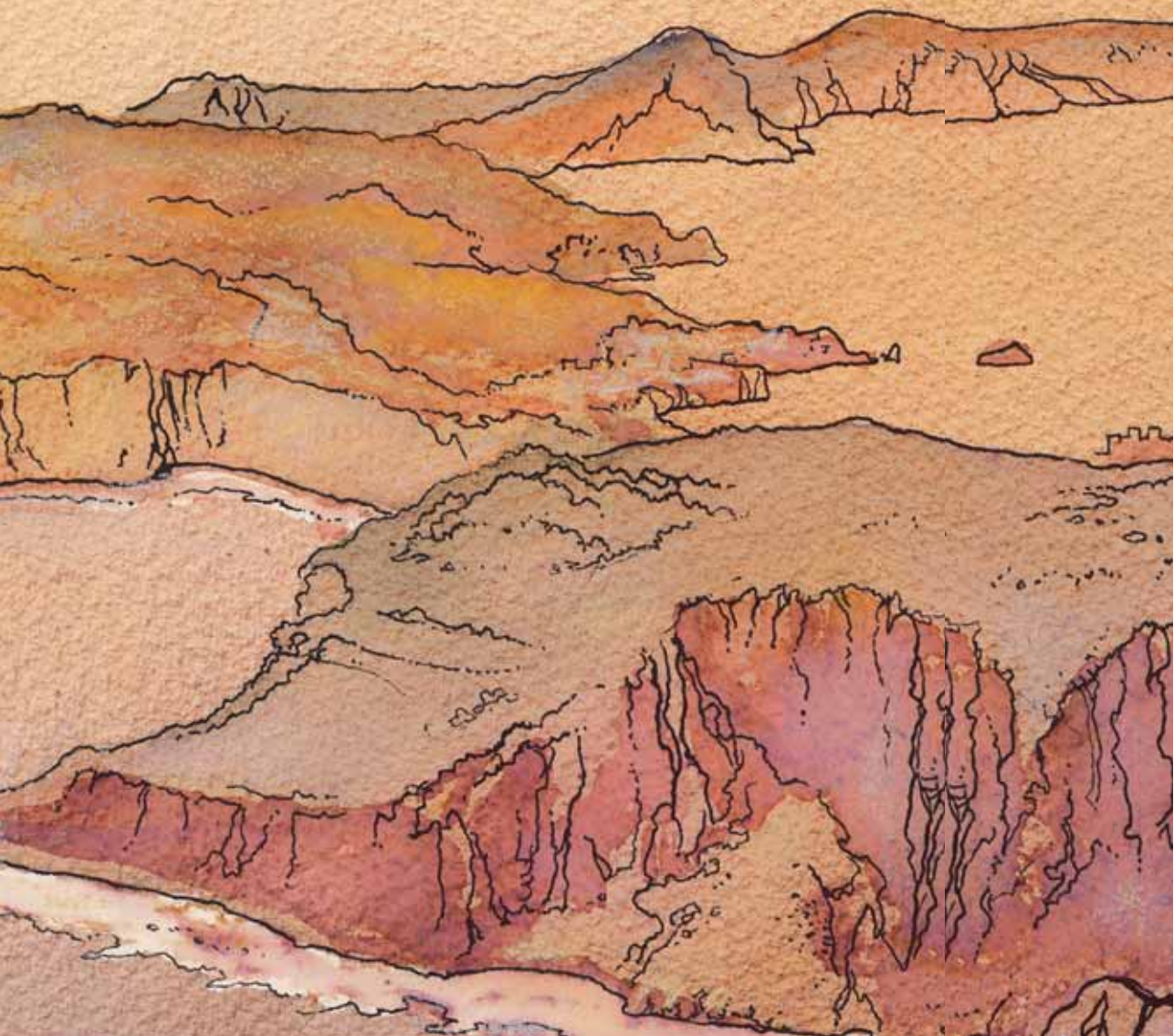


able by its hardiness. In the cracks of the cliffs, fighting against the wind, we find the *Helicrisum*, the *Senecio*, the corn flower and, no less than on Ventotene, the *Limonium pontium*, var. *pontium*, another “sea lavender”, an indigenous lemon plant that adapts itself to the particular conditions on Zannone. There are over 350 plant species to be found on the island, some of them extremely rare.

FLYING IN THE WIND

Thus far we have discussed earth and

plants but the wildlife of the islands also includes animals. The predominant characteristic of Zannone and Ventotene, compared to the other islands, is that they are at the same time a sort of radio beacon to help migrating birds follow the proper route on their extraordinary voyage. They also act as a stepping stone allowing the birds to land, rest and feed albeit at risk of the traps,





arrows and snares that were and (in some cases) remain a danger on the Pontine Archipelago. These hunting techniques were understandable in the old times when the islanders could not afford the luxury of rejecting animal proteins fallen from the sky. They may be traditional, but today they are an unjustifiable, even cruel abuse. On Ventotene around 200 species of bird have been sighted (a little under half of those that make up the entire Italian bird population). Almost all are migratory species, mainly petrels and shearwaters. The more ten-

acious and fortunate birdwatchers can also expect some surprise sightings by perhaps catching, in the small frame of sky in their binoculars, flocks of collared doves, ibis, various species of falcon, the blue-throated diver, red-rumped swallow and even black-throated divers, gannets, cranes and swans. On this island as much as on Zannone (and more generally across the Archipelago) both the Manx and the Great shearwater are common. Some pairs remain on the tips of the island even during winter, but the greater number arrive in summer having journeyed many thousands of miles from South Africa and along the western coast of the African continent before coming into the Mediterranean. Here they disperse to nest amongst the rocks, outcrops and cliffs, arriving in the Italian Adriatic and continuing to the Tremiti Islands. On the Pontine Islands the sea-



skimming flight of the Manx shearwater has attained legendary status. It is wonderful spectacle, like a fast ride on a cushion of air, the birds flashing their white breast feathers as they skim the waves. The night-time song of the shearwater is actually similar to the cry of a new-born baby, a fact still feeding the popular myth that it is the lamentation of Diomedes' companions grieving at the disappearance of the Greek hero. On Zannone birds have been studied for a long time and the

most complete observations are owed to the Marchese Camillo Casati di Soncino, once the island's only tenant. He identified 138 species, out of more than 160 resident or migratory species now recognised. Among these are the marsh owl, sparrow hawk, queen hawk, the peregrine and fisher falcons, the solitary sparrow, woodpecker, black stork, fieldfare, woodcock and quail. Of the latter species a local nineteenth-century enthusiast, Giuseppe Tricoli, records the bagging of 10,000 head per season and recounts that "in the woods of the Cavone del Lauro there were vast numbers of turtle doves". Zannone is also the first Italian island to be included in a national park, that of the Circeo, from the 23rd of January 1979. All this is by way of highlighting the island's rich endowment of indigenous species representing a significant segment of the an-

imal kingdom, from protozoa to vertebrates, shellfish, spiders and scorpions, crickets, water beetles, day and night-time butterflies and, perhaps most visible to non-experts, the Patrizi lizard.

PROTECTED NATURE, NATURE BELOW THE SURFACE

We mentioned that Zannone was the first island to become part of a national park. Finally protected, its marine life attracts much attention. In this stretch of the Tyrrhenian Sea between the Pontine and Campanine islands, a campaign run between 1991 and 1995 by a number of enthusiasts reported 330 sightings of sea mammals: not only dolphins and striped dolphins, the most common, but also Risso's dolphins, fin whales, and sperm whales, well known by old fishermen who sometimes had to compete with them on September nights as they fished for the *Todarodes sagittatus* and squid. Around Zannone, then, are abundant beds of ocean sea grass, which demonstrate the quality of the waters and environment just as a fishery dug into the rock by the Romans near the Varo indicates the great variety of fish. On the shallower beds of the rocky ridge between Zannone and Gavi reside large quantities of spider crab, a fat (and to its own misfortune a very tasty) crustacean relative of the crab. The





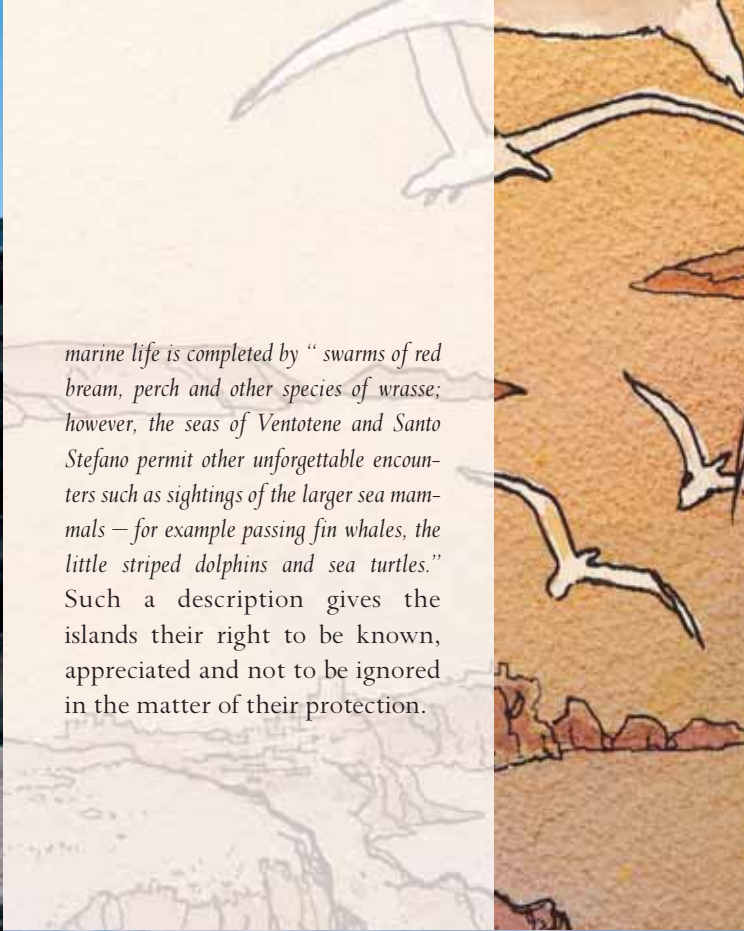
protection of the wildlife of the islands ought to be extended out to sea but despite many scientific studies and completed conferences the proposal has always been received with scepticism, if not hostility. Since the 11th May 1999, Ventotone (and the little island of Santo Stefano) have been state-owned nature reserves. As early as the 12th December 1997, a part of the surrounding sea (2799 hectares) had already become a marine protection area. The Touring Club tells us that “the clarity of the water is remarkable. The

reefs continue under the surface with long walls covered in crustacean organisms and full of nooks and crannies and caves carpeted by multi-coloured sponge, hiding grouper of different sizes, octopi and moray eels and rarer species such as cleaner prawns or the *Cypraea* sp. On the shaded slopes of many stretches of coast the large markings left by colonies of orange-coloured sea stars are still clearly visible. At greater depths, mainly below thirty metres, we come across yellow and red sea fans and the delicate trails of the bryozoans, otherwise known as sea moss, that can grow to notable dimensions in these waters.” This description of the richness of the





marine life is completed by “ swarms of red bream, perch and other species of wrasse; however, the seas of Ventotene and Santo Stefano permit other unforgettable encounters such as sightings of the larger sea mammals — for example passing fin whales, the little striped dolphins and sea turtles.” Such a description gives the islands their right to be known, appreciated and not to be ignored in the matter of their protection.





USEFUL INFORMATION

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND OTHER SIGHTS

THE PORT OF PONZA.

Roman and pre-Roman ruins: the fish nursery of Pilate's Cave; the tomb over Chiaia di Luna and that of the Bagno Vecchio; the tunnel of Chiaia di Luna and Santa Maria; the aqueduct carved into the rock at Le Forna - Cala Inferno - Santa Maria; and cisterns for water gathering (Dragonara, Grotta dei Serpenti, at Aniello Tagliamonte, Migliaccio and Bagno Vecchio). In the 18th-c. town centre: the semi-circular port (1772-93), with the Molo Musco benches (outside) and the Tenente di Fazio (inside); the municipal church, the parish church of the Trinity (1761-79), dedicated also to the patron saints Silverio and Domitilla, and the Corso Pisacane with its multi-coloured shops. To the rear of the town and slightly above is the Tower of the Bourbons, today a hotel. On a small hill that dominates the entrance to the port is the little cemetery.

PONZA LE FORNA

The Church of the Assumption (1772-74); the ruins of Fort Papa.

PALMAROLA

The cave houses: homes, shelters, ruins excavated in the 17th c. and before.

ZANNONE

The island is part of the Circeo National Park, which has its own small archive. Forest guards supervise the park. Near the Jetty of Varo is a roman fishery, and above it are the ruins of the convent of Santo Spirito di Zennone, abandoned at the end of the 18th c.

VENTOTENE

Roman remains: the old port, carved into the rock, and a fishery fed by an under-water conduit with a platform covered in cup-shaped holes for the harvest of salt; the ruins of Villa Giulia and of the tuff quarries; the Municipal Antiquary with statues, anchors and amphora and the excavations at Villa Giulia; the extensive cave system of Villa Stefania. The 17th-c. Town centre: the little square, the castle (1768-70) that is now the town hall, the church of Santa Candida (1769-73), the pathways, arches and the Pozzillo.

SANTO STEFANO

The building that housed the state penitentiary (1795) is in poor condition (although there have been minor attempts at maintenance) but is open to the public by means of guided tours.

TRADITION

Ponza celebrates the feast of San Silverio on the 20th of June and in February it is also celebrated in the village of Le Forna. At Easter the town festival of Casatiello

takes place, while on the 21st of July the feast of the Madonna della Cività is celebrated. On the 20th of September Ventotene celebrates Santa Candida with the launch of a hot air balloon.

NATURE

It is difficult to list nature's myriad gifts to the islands - unique, unusual and subtly coloured. They include: On Ponza: the Faraglioni of Calzone Muto, the beach of Lucia Rosa, the large marine reefs of Casocavallo, Montagnello, del Felce, Spaccapolpi; the beaches of Chiaia di Luna, S. Antonio, Cala del Core, Frontone; the bays of Cala Feola, Acqua and Fonte. On Palmarola: the Faraglioni of San Silverio and of Mezzogiorno, the bays of Porto, Tramontana and Brigantina; the reefs of the bay of Nave (Nave di terra, Nave di fuori and Scoglitello), the beaches in the bays of Nave, Rossano and Parata. This is an extraordinary sea.

TRANSPORT

The islands are reachable from various ports:

PONZA

from Anzio

(hydrofoil and ferry all year)

from Formia

(hydrofoil and ferry all year)

from San Felice Circeo

(motorboat in season)

from Terracina

(ferry all year)

VENTOTENE

from Anzio

(hydrofoil and ferry all year)

from Formia

(hydrofoil and ferry all year)

from Terracina

(ferry in season).

PONZA AND VENTOTENE

are linked by hydrofoil and ferry services, and in the summer also by local transport connections. In the summer period there are services from Fiumicino (Rome), catamaran, and from Naples, ferry.

CONTACTS OFFICES AND GENERAL ASSISTANCE

In Latina:

**AZIENDA DI PROMOZIONE TURISTICA
DELLA PROVINCIA DI LATINA**

Via Duca del Mare 19, Latina

tel. 0773.695404 – fax 0773.661266

www.aplatinaturismo.it

e-mail: info@aplatinaturismo.it

UFFICIO INFORMAZIONI

Piazza del Popolo (Latina)

tel. 0773.480672

In nearby towns:

UFFICI INFORMAZIONI E

ASSISTENZA AL TURISTA (I.A.T.)

FORMIA *Viale Unità d'Italia 30*

tel. 0771.771490 – fax 0771.323275

GAETA *Via E.Filiberto 5*

tel. 0771.461165 – fax 0771.450779

MINTURNO-SCAURI *Via Lungomare 3*

tel. 0771.683788 – fax 0771.620829

TERRACINA *Via G.Leopardi*

tel.0773.727759 – fax 0773.721173

On the Islands:

COMUNE DI PONZA *Piazza Pisacane*

tel.0771.80108 – fax 0771.809919

COMUNE DI VENTOTENE *Piazza Castello 1*

tel. 0771.85014 – fax 0771.85265

ASSOCIAZIONE PRO LOCO DI PONZA

Molo Musco tel. 0771.80031

ASSOCIAZIONE PRO LOCO DI VENTOTENE

Via Roma 2 tel. 0771.85257

COMUNITÀ ARCIPELAGO ISOLE PONZIANE

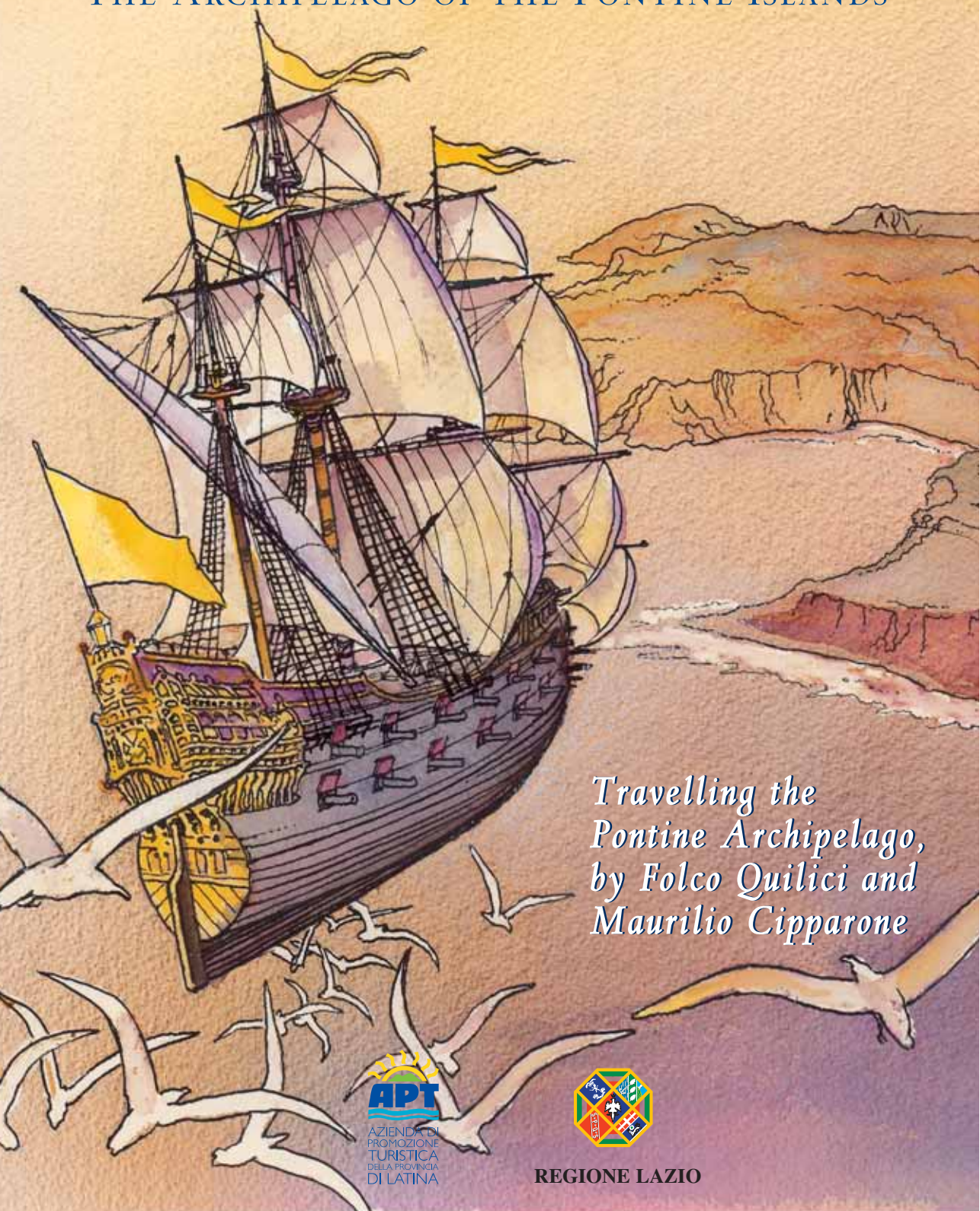
Via Roma 10 (Ponza)

tel. 0771.809893



Islands in Nature

THE ARCHIPELAGO OF THE PONTINE ISLANDS



*Travelling the
Pontine Archipelago,
by Folco Quilici and
Maurilio Cipparone*