

# PALS

THE MEDIEVAL TOWN

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THE LEGENDS

## The roar of the lake

Close to the small lake of Pals, a small wooded hillock inaccessible to men rises out of the boggy expanse. Its prickly thorn brambles form an impassable dense thicket. Only a few hunters, chasing after wild pigs or rabbits, ventured into those paths of briars and brambles flanked with sharp-pointed thorns and rapidly threaded their way out of that gloomy and mysterious shrubbery. At night, nobody dares roam near that shadowy pond.

Legend has it that long ago, the bellow of an animal had been heard. Maybe, it was just the roar of the *Tramuntana* wind howling through the shrubs and stimulating people's imagination.

A dragon was said to dwell in the lake. He was said to be a prehistoric reptile, descendant of those first vertebrate inhabitants that had become extinct millions of years ago. Some people had even seen the countenance of that frightening creature on moonlit nights. He used to wander along the rice fields mournfully bellowing like a soul in turmoil. Those who had seen him said he was both scary and shy and that at the slightest suspicion of being observed, he would hide himself in the shadows of the tangle of hawthorn, taking refuge in some hidden cave. Perhaps he was just a lonely dragon searching for his other half whom he had lost through the tangles of time.

## The Coll's ponds

Two tame oxen slowly pulled a haycart. Enslaved by men and tortured by flies piercing their skin and swiping at them with their tail and ears, they carried the heavy yoke laid across their necks with saintly resignation. At dusk, when the sun was dimming, carter, cart and oxen constituted an age-old image set aside from progress, as if time was at a standstill in that lonesome place.

The ponds were covered by ash trees where wild ducks could hide from hunters. The cartwheels sank slowly into the mud, gradually, as the hours passed in those unruffled fields on the far distant horizon. Suddenly carter, cart and oxen plunged into that paddy plain and were never seen again. Some folks around the area followed the track the cartwheels had left behind but all traces had vanished exactly where the *Coll's* ponds environs were.

A few days after the mysterious disappearance, some children explained that they had seen bubbles coming out of the water of the pond where the cart, oxen and their master had vanished. They said that, near the banks of the pond, the ground shook and they could hear a subterranean resonance of cart-rattling and banging and of the oxen's roar.

## The Tower of the Hours (“La Torre de les Hores”)

Before the reconstruction of the village of *Pals* and when the ramparts were still in ruins, part of the homage tower served as shelter to *Maria* from *Can Pals*. *Maria* was a strange, plain and lonely woman who lived with her innocent son who never got to call her mother and enjoyed the company of about twenty mewling cats.

The village women used to visit her in secret, so that their husbands did not know. She would predict their future and look at the lines on the hand and sell them ointments and love potions. Legend has it that this hideous woman practiced black magic ceremonies with other witches and that they worshipped Satan. On Fridays, after midnight, on the witches’ sabbath, they all met next to a black stone called *Buet’s* rock and danced around a bonfire until dawn. It was a frenzy of singing, drinking and taking hallucinogenic fungi that took witches and wizards down to their underground world.

*Maria* from *Can Pals* awakened a great fear in every person in the village. People used to keep themselves away from her, crossing themselves and whispering a prayer asking God to prevent her from casting bad spells on them.

Whenever the bells of the church of *Pals* struck midnight, a faint gleam of ashy coloured light made a halo round the “*Torre de les Hores*” as if the circle of light of the moon was crowning those rough stones. It was there where *Maria* was said to work wonders and prepare drinks that contained magic powers. She performed strange rituals and called on the souls of the dead who were still clung to their relatives and were distressingly struggling and roving around this world. Some widows turned to her in order to bring back their beloved and so badly missed husbands, in a brief and sad encounter.

One night, *Maria* forsook her ruined tower and went deep into the woods to never return. She left her orphan and the twenty cats behind. Her body was found on black rock. How she died would never be known: some claimed it was the devil’s walk, other people say it was fanaticism. But fact remains that she was burned at a secluded and isolated place, in the depth of the woods, known as the *Buet’s* Rock.

## The Arab Tower

During the reign of Charles I of Spain, around 1542, a squadron of Saracen galleys captained by the famous Corsairs *Kara Hassan* and *Dragut* sailed along the Catalan shores coming from *Marseilles*. The pirates sheltered in the *Illes Medes* and from there weighed anchor to capture men and raid their farmhouses. Contrary to what was expected, these violent looters preferred male prisoners to women. They took young men with them and they sold them as slaves at a high price in the Argelian market to work in the fields.

In one of these Saracen incursions in the bay of *Pals*, a family of *Masos* who lived in a farm house near the coast line was taken entirely by surprise. When this family caught sight of the

disembarkation of an Argelian pirate squad, they rushed to take refuge in the “tower of the moors”, but unfortunately one of the sons was captured in his hasty flight.

The wicked *Dragut*, who was the head of the Moorish squad, made his way to the tower and at its base stood shouting at the family that he would take their son with him and they would never see him again unless they paid a ransom of ten gold coins before sunset. The desperate mother wanted to give herself up to the deadful pirates in exchange for her son’s release. But the evil *Dragut*, “Long Ears”, scoffed at the idea that he might exchange a young cock suitable for hard labour for an old weak hen.

After talking about the matter, the pirates realised that the family did not have enough money to set their son free. Thus, they decided to take the young hostage with them and hold him captive in one of the galleys where he would row as a galley slave to the harbour of *Algiers*.

The family was in an extreme state of distress. The mother could not resign herself to the fact that she had lost her son and blamed her husband for not having had enough courage to face up to the pirates. Fear, the best adviser when struggling for survival, had over taken that father of a family from the *Empordà* region, who could not foresee that his life would become hell after that violent incident. His wife harassed him night and day accusing him of being a coward. The other sons, influenced by their mother, had lost their respect for him. The situation came to such a point that the head of the family got up enough nerve to secretly go to his son’s rescue. He had heard of some monks of the *Merce* order in *Barcelona* who could find out where his son was, and he set forth to find them.

A mercenary friar apprised him of the fact that in all the churches money was collected to ransom prisoners. These charities raised money to provide salvation for the souls of those who, burdened with wearisome work and cruel ill – treatment, abandoned their Christian faith and accepted Mohamedan beliefs. The friar volunteered to take personal action for his rescue. He set out for *Algiers* where he would offer himself in exchange for the young man’s freedom until enough money was raised to set him free as well; a deal that had been crowned with success on previous occasions.

The farmer made his way back to *Masos* and told his wife everything he had learnt. From that day onwards, they lived engulfed in uncertainty and hope. They heard, from mercenary friars, that their son was said to be still alive working on the fields for an Algerian family who treated him fairly. Every evening, the mother would stare out of the window, gazing down toward the water to spot a sail on the horizon. What once had been a horrifying sight was now the cause of great delight, since she longed for her son to be in one of those galleys. Months went by and the family from *Masos* heard no news about their son. As time went by, anxiety and nervous concern overwhelmed the couple again.

One day, while the farmer was working in the fields, a man attired in a religious mercenary habit showed up in the skyline and slowly approached the farmhouse, his face was almost totally concealed by a hood. The farmer’s wife rushed out of the barn towards that newly – arrived friar, longing from some news from *Algiers*. Once she got closer to that mysterious person and at the very first moment she saw the features of his face, she realised, to her surprise, who that man was: her son had come home at last!