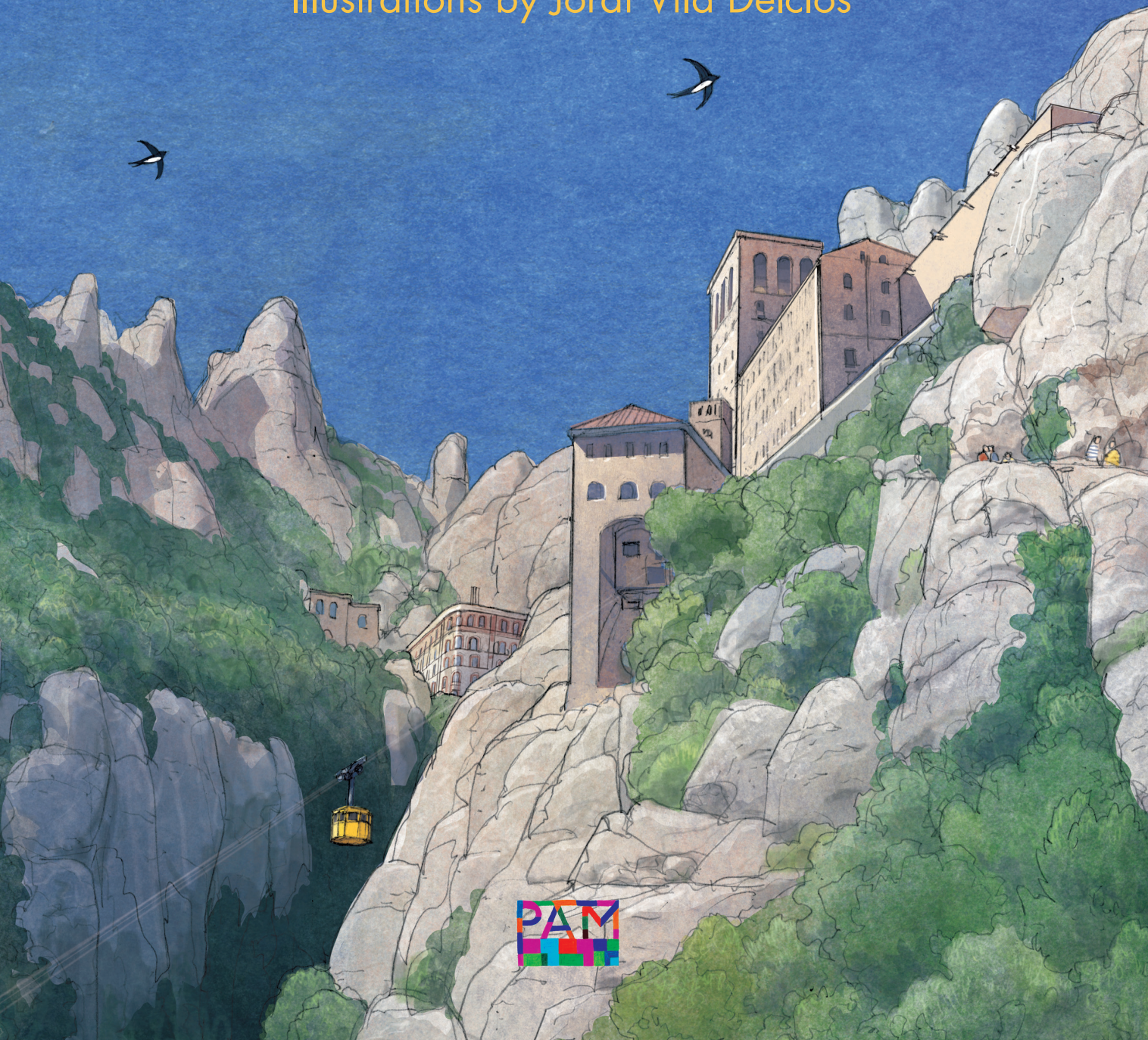


THE BOOK OF MONTSERRAT

Salvador Comelles
Illustrations by Jordi Vila Delclòs



Contents

The mountain	8
The monastery	12
The library	14
1,000 years of history	15
The Escolania	18
The <i>Virolai</i>	25
Three Montserrat moments	26
The tale of Bernat the horse	28
A recipe	32
Visiting Montserrat Museum	34
Some Montserrat riddles	37
Three walks	38
Two short walks	38
A longer walk	40
Three stories	42
Going to Montserrat	45
How to get there	45
Can you sleep there?	45
Do you want to see Montserrat right now?	45



The mountain

If you live in Catalonia, you're bound to have seen the mountain of Montserrat! It's very special, and you can't mistake it for any other mountain.

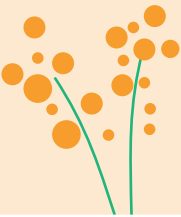
If you look on a map, you'll see that Montserrat is located in central Catalonia, and can be seen from a long way away. You can see it from many villages and towns in the region, such as Terrassa, Martorell, Manresa and Vilafranca del Penedès.

The mountain is about ten kilometres long, and five kilometres from one side to the other. If you went all the way around the mountain on foot, you would walk about twenty-five kilometres.

Because the foot of Montserrat is at a low altitude compared to sea level, the mountain appears to be very high. The peak of Montserrat, its highest point, is Sant Jeroni, and it is 1,235 metres high.

What is most striking about the mountain is its shape, which makes it unique. Think of its name: Montserrat ("serrated mountain"), as if it were a mountain that had been sawn. That's why there's a mountain range on Montserrat's coat of arms.

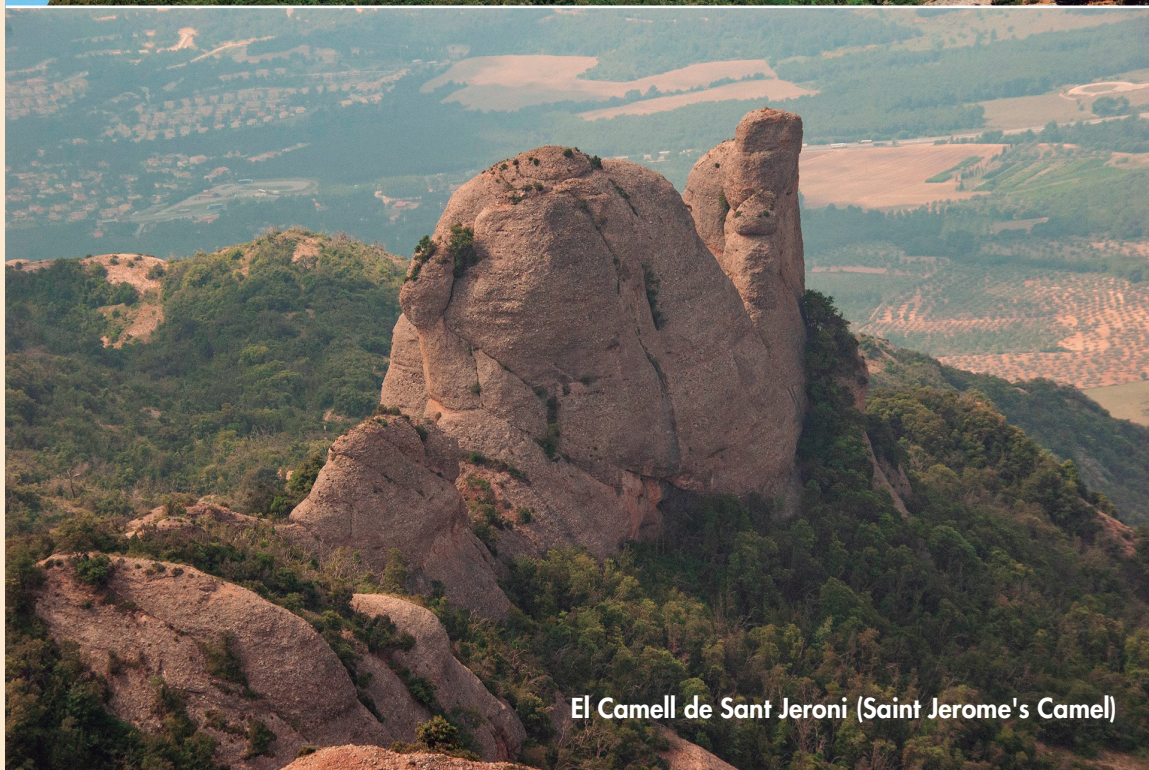
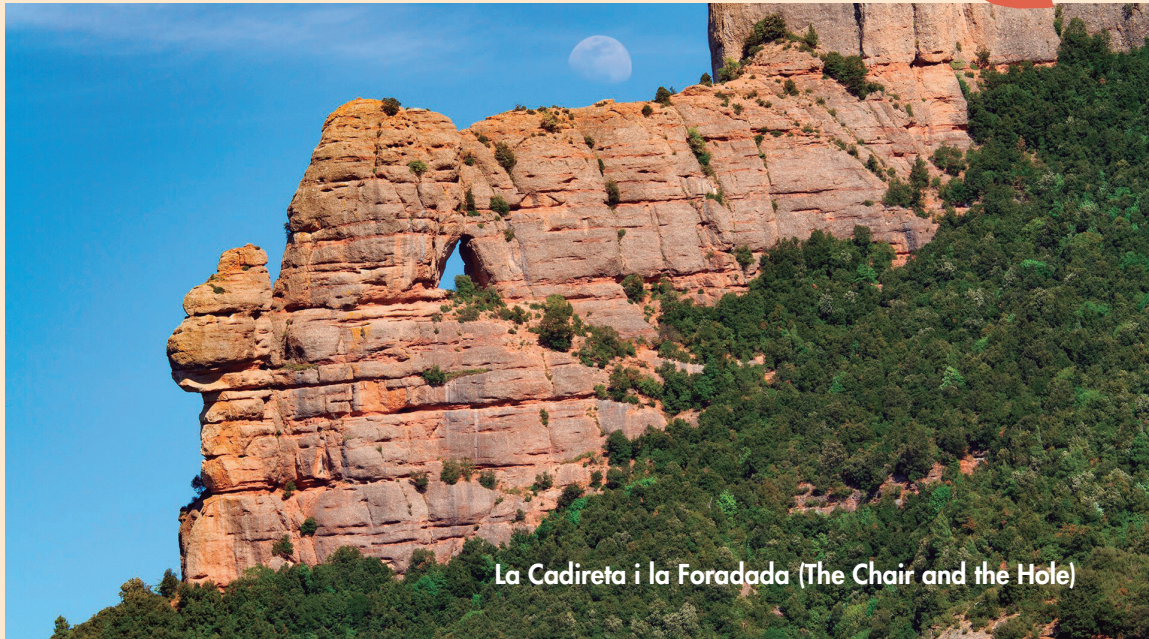




And why is the mountain shaped like that? Because millions of years ago, the sea was where the mountain is today, and rivers carrying a lot of stones and pebbles ran into that sea. That's why if you look closely at the rocks of Montserrat, you'll see that they're made up of a mixture of many stones of different sizes and shapes.

The large rocks are very unusually shaped because they originally come from the sea, and they have been shaped by the movements of the earth's crust and by the erosion of the rain and wind. They have been given names that are both strange and funny as a result.

The names of some of these rocks are:



The Escolania



The Escolania de Montserrat is a choir for boys, and its members are known as "escolans". There are about fifty of them, aged between nine and fourteen years old.

The Escolania de Montserrat is one of the oldest boys' choirs in Europe. It is mentioned in documents from the fourteenth century, and it is one of the most famous choirs because they sing very, very well.

The boys in the choir study, learn music and may live on the mountain of Montserrat itself, in one of the monastery buildings. They mostly sing religious music.

But what's life like for a schoolboy at Montserrat? In the morning they study the subjects taught at any school: mathematics and the sciences, among other subjects. The age groups range from the fourth year of primary school to the second year of secondary school, and there

are only ten or twelve boys in each class. The afternoons are given over to music. Each boy learns to play two instruments (the piano and one of the orchestra instruments) and above all they work on their voice.

Arnau, one of the students, explains:

"We're doing a composers' competition at the moment. We do a different composer every week, and we have to guess who it is. We're given a new clue every day, and we all have to vote for who we think it could be. We have to write it on a piece of paper, and put it in a box."

The boys in the Escolania come from various villages and towns. The choirboys used to live in the monastery all week and very rarely went home - only during the school holidays. Now they can come and go from home every day. But of course,





Albert

"Don't they sing well!" "Aren't their voices beautiful!" We choirboys often heard things like these when we used to sing the Salve. We liked to hear it, but we didn't really sing so much for other people, but because we had a good time singing. Otherwise, we wouldn't have been able to sing in church twice every day (at midday and in the evening), as well as at rehearsals and concerts!

"This habit and enjoying singing with

others means that those of us who have been members of the Escolania still sing wherever we are, in one way or another. Because once you discover the pleasure of singing, you never stop. So it's not surprising that a few years later, when I was about to finish my degree to become a music teacher, a classmate was talking about me to the rest of the class, and she said: "Albert sings from when he wakes up until he goes to sleep!"



The choirboys' bishop

A very old tradition at the monastery of Montserrat is known as the "bisbetó". It has taken place on Saint Nicholas Day since the Middle Ages.

The choirboys choose one of them to

be the "bisbetó", a little bishop who will be the leader of the choirboys that day, accompanied by his assistants. He is dressed up as a bishop and a ceremony takes place in which he gives a sermon, which is usually only half-serious.

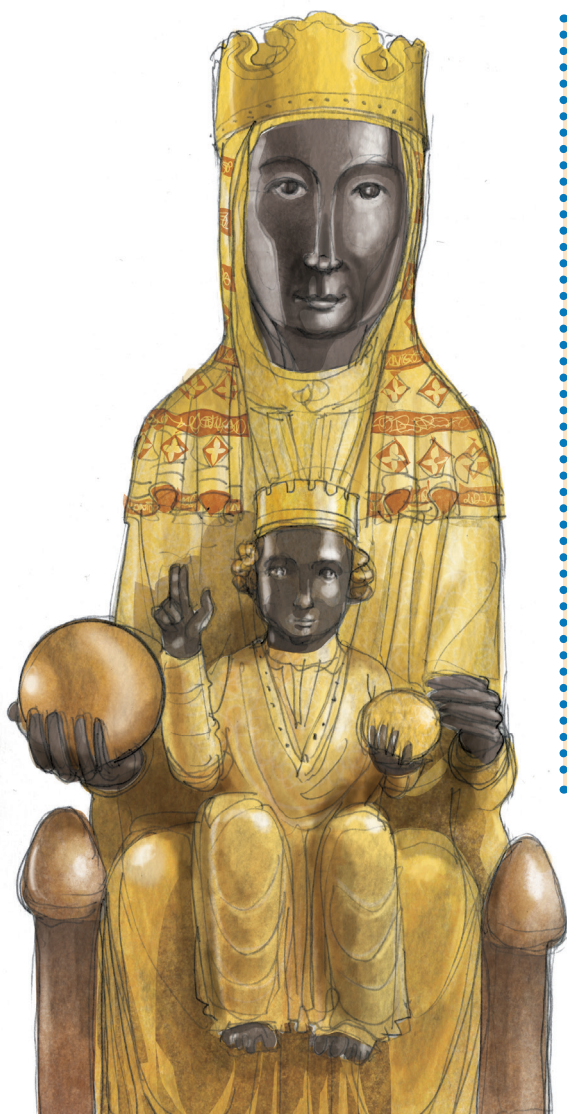


The Virolai

The *Virolai* is a very popular poem and song in Catalonia. The words were written by the poet Jacint Verdaguer, and the music by the composer Josep Rodoreda.

It was first performed on 25 April 1880, and is sung in the church at Montserrat every day.

Here are the first verses:



Rose of April, Dark Lady of the Mountain,
the star of Montserrat:
enlighten the Catalan land,
guide us to Heaven.
With a gold saw the cherubs cut
those hills, to build you a palace:
Queen of Heaven, brought down to earth by
the Seraphim,
shelter us under your blue veil.
Emerging dawn crowned with stars,
City of God dreamed of by David,
the moon lies at your feet,
while the sun dresses you with its rays.
You shall always be the Princess of all the
Catalans,
and for the Spaniards the Star of the Orient;
Be a pillar of fortitude for the virtuous,
and a haven of salvation for sinners.

You can hear it sung and interpreted in Catalan sign language by the Escolania here:



Three Montserrat moments

THE RACK RAILWAY

The train gradually sews up the track,
pulling up the zipper,
until it reaches the tunnel
and it makes a final effort in the darkness;
and when it leaves and sticks its head out
it is dazzled and amazed
at being on top of Montserrat.

THE FOG

Like a wizard
who deceives me,
the fog first shows me
and then hides from me
the trees and the rocks;
the magician blows suddenly
and the white cotton frays;
the sun comes out to greet us,
but it just winks at me
as once again
the great white curtain falls.
And it seems that for today
the performance is over.





IN THE CHURCH

In the midst of silence
voices arise
born in the hearts of the choirboys,
they scatter around the nave
and reach everyone's heart.
And they inspire us.

The tale of Bernat the horse

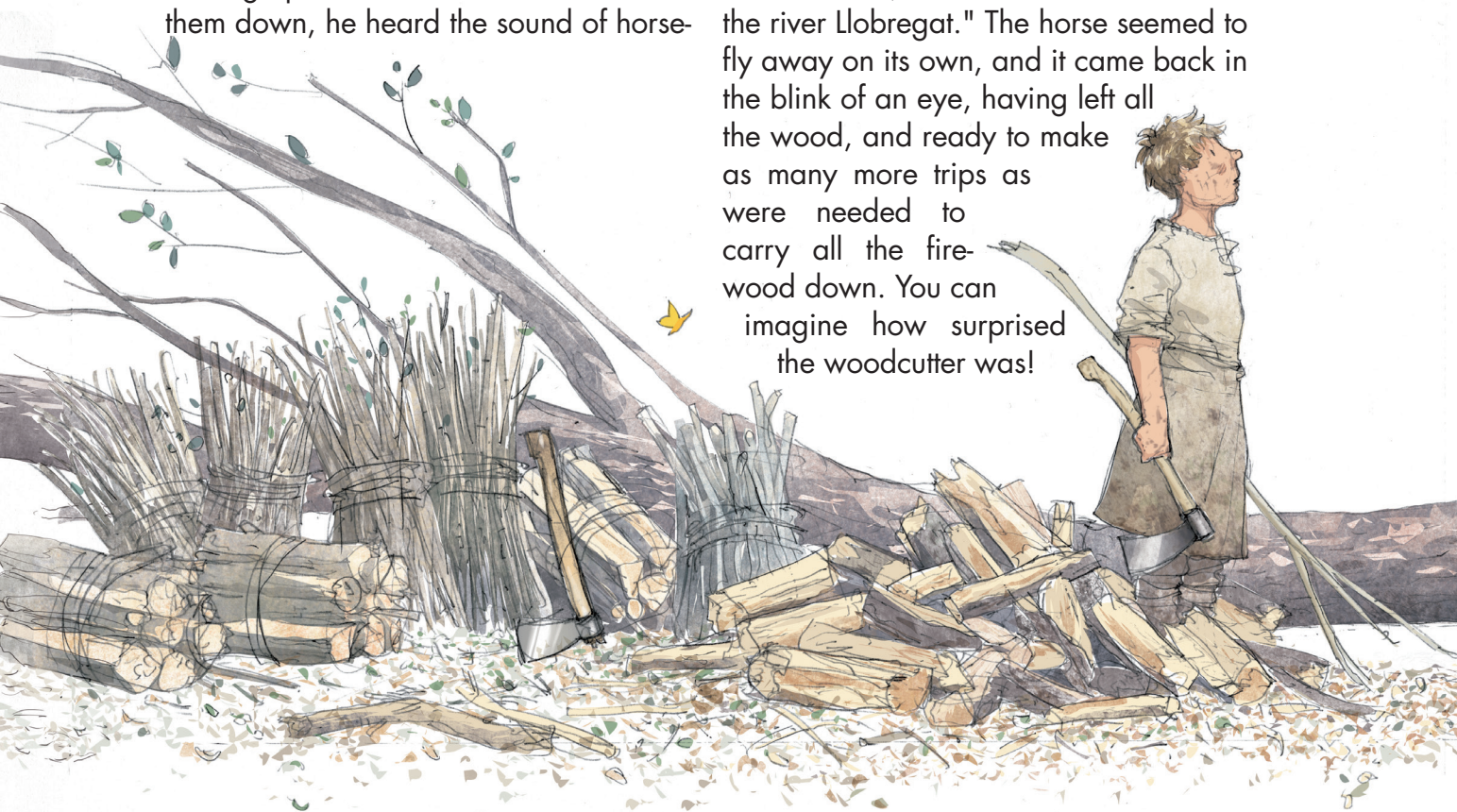
Many, many years ago, there was a very poor woodcutter who lived on the mountain of Montserrat. He lived in a humble hut made of logs in the middle of the rocks, and he earned his living by cutting firewood, bringing it down to the plains, and selling it. He spent his days chopping trees to pieces; at dusk, he made bundles and with great difficulty carried them down to the river, where those who needed it would come to buy the firewood from him.

One evening, when he had finished making up the last of his bundles to take them down, he heard the sound of horse-

shoes, which surprised him, because the rocky outcrop where he lived was not a good place for riding horses. Then he raised his head and saw a tall fat man, like a giant, riding a horse.

The enormous man offered to carry the firewood to the river. The woodcutter immediately said yes, and so between the two of them they loaded the enormous horse with so much firewood that in the end it was impossible to see the animal.

Then the man patted the horse, and said: "Bernat, take this firewood down to the river Llobregat." The horse seemed to fly away on its own, and it came back in the blink of an eye, having left all the wood, and ready to make as many more trips as were needed to carry all the firewood down. You can imagine how surprised the woodcutter was!





Shape the coca. It's a good idea to use a rolling pin to flatten it and give it an oval shape.

Place some baking paper on the tray where you're going to bake it, and brush the coca with egg yolk. Leave it somewhere where there are no drafts, such as inside the turned-off oven. Leave it there for at least a couple of hours.

Remove the tray with the coca from the oven, and heat up the oven to 220

degrees centigrade. Then sprinkle some sugar over the coca, and bake it.

It will take 15 to 20 minutes to cook. Place it on a wire rack and let it cool down.

And now you have a delicious coca! Bon appetit!

(Recipe included in *Les coques catalanes* [Catalan cakes], by Eliana Thibaut i Comelade, and kindly provided by the Barcelona Provincial Pastry Guild)



Visiting Montserrat Museum



The Montserrat Museum has some very valuable collections. For example, it has objects from ancient Egypt, Persia and Mesopotamia.

Look at the little boat above. It was built 2,000 years ago!

In the museum, you can also see clay tablets that come from the Middle East which show us a very ancient writing system, known as cuneiform. And there's even an Egyptian mummy!

The museum has a collection of paintings by very important artists. And some rooms with religious images - especially works of art featuring the Virgin Mary.

The Museum game

Here's a game for you: look closely at these four paintings in the Montserrat Museum for two minutes. Look carefully at all the objects in them. Then turn the page and you'll find the same pictures, but an object will have disappeared from each one, and you have to say what it is.

Are you ready? You have two minutes.



Ramon Martí Alsina (Barcelona, 1826 – 1894)
The artist's son
 1864



Joaquim Torres Garcia (Montevideo, 1874 – 1949)
The family
 1917



Xavier Nogués (Barcelona, 1873 – 1941)
Between sardanas (Musicians resting)
 1940



Santiago Rusiñol (Barcelona, 1861 – Aranjuez, 1931)
Blue courtyard
 1892

Three walks



There are a lot of beautiful walks to do on the mountain of Montserrat. We suggest three here: two short walks and a longer hike. We have included a link where you will find many more on page 40.

Two short walks

- **The cross of Sant Miquel**

Total distance you will cover: 3 kilometres

Total time: 50 minutes

What you'll see on the walk: at the end of the walk you'll reach the shrine of Sant Miquel and the cross of Sant Miquel, which is a great viewpoint: you'll have a beautiful view of the entire monastery, as well as a panoramic view of the Bages, Vallès and Baix Llobregat regions.

Starting point: in the plaça Abat Oliba. With the fountain behind you, the paved path begins ahead of you on the right.



- **The Path of the Degotalls**

Total distance you will cover: 3.2 kilometres

Time: 50 minutes

What you'll see on the walk: the path runs through the woods (consisting mainly of oak trees). You may see signs of wild boars or birds (blackbirds, tits, etc.). There is a series of monuments and tributes to famous figures in Catalan history along the route.

Starting point: on the road towards Monistrol, go past the building at the Apostles Viewpoint, and you'll find a path that begins on the other side of the road.



A longer walk

- **Sant Jeroni**

This walk takes you to the highest point of Montserrat.

Total distance you will cover: 7 kilometres

Time: two and a half hours

What you'll see on the walk: you'll have fantastic panoramic views of the mountain and Catalonia.

Starting point: take the Sant Joan rack railway. The path that leads to Sant Jeroni is on the right as you leave the station.

Coming back: you can return along the same path and take the Sant Joan rack railway down the mountain, or go down the path with stairs that leads to the plaça de la Font (you will have seen it to the right of the paved path which you took on the way up).

You can find a map of the walk, information about these trips and many others here:



Sant Jeroni

Path of the Degotalls



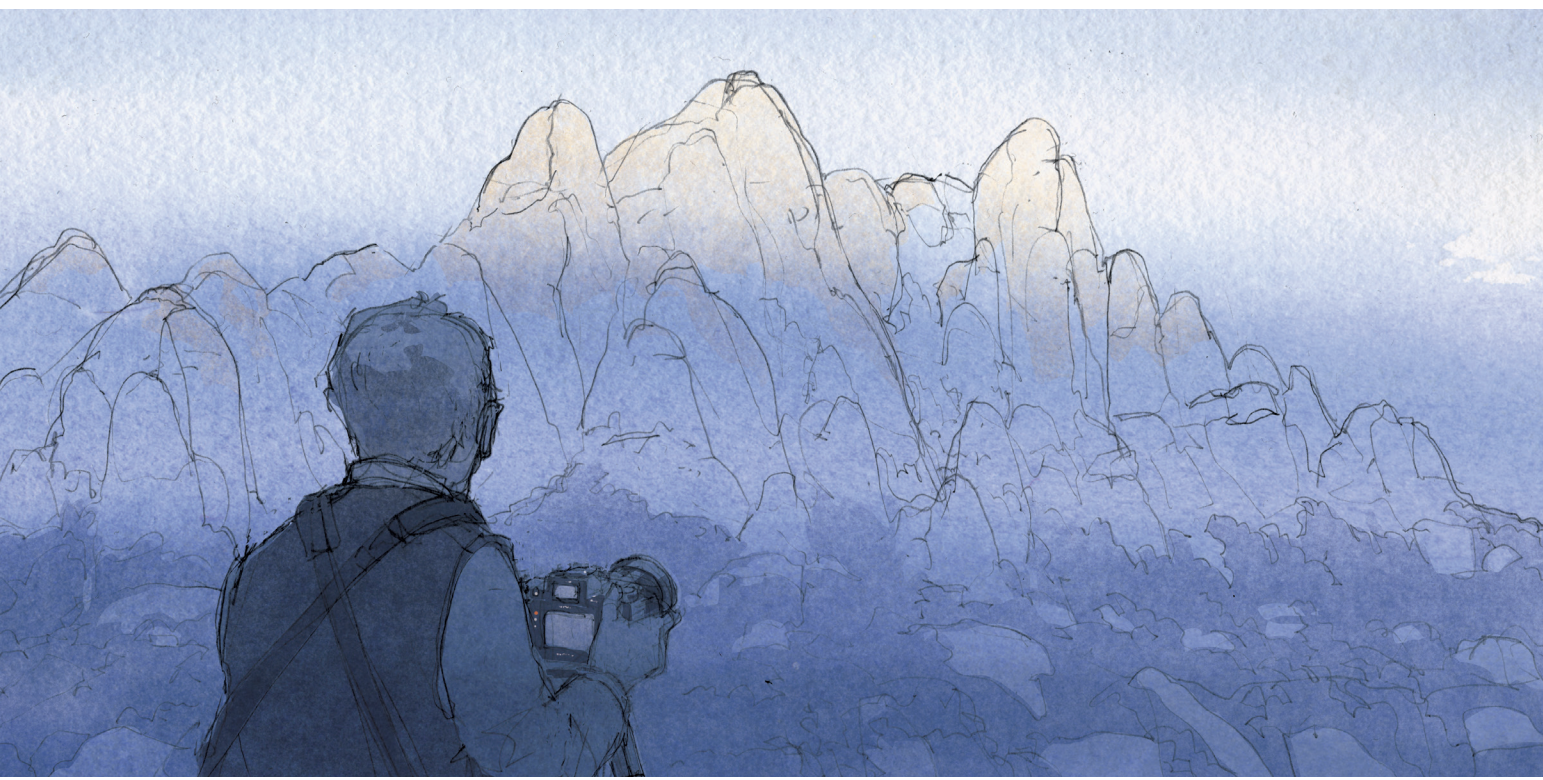
Three stories

FRANCESC. Photographer
IN LOVE WITH MONTSERRAT

I'm sure that if we were asked to choose ten outstanding landscapes in Europe, Montserrat would be one of them. But we Catalans are so used to its walls, peaks and troughs that they seem quite normal to us. But because I'm a landscape photographer, I'm lucky enough to have a trained eye. My eye makes me look at the same shapes and the same forms hundreds of times; at how the light that illuminates them changes, and at how those changes transform the landscape. And I must say that I'm in love with Montserrat. Because the mountain is a symbol of my country, it's inspired this unconditional love in me, but it was

my perspective as a photographer that made it take shape.

But capturing Montserrat with a camera is no easy task. You have to go inside it, and lose yourself on all the paths that cross it from end to end. Every clearing in the forest and every little corner provides spectacular landscapes. If you want to photograph Montserrat you have to get up early, walk around at night, and be in the right place at the right time. Or sleep there under the stars, accompanied by the sounds of the night, after taking advantage of the sunset or waiting for the dawn. The effort is always worthwhile at Montserrat, because the mountain always gives you much more than you imagined.



JORDI. Mountaineer
THE MOUNTAIN GOAT

I love mountaineering, and I've climbed a lot of mountains all over the world, ever since I was a boy. But I've always been inspired by the mountain of Montserrat, because it was where I learned all the techniques you need to be a good climber.

One day, I was climbing the famous Elephant rock with my friend Marcel. I was leading the way as we were climbing, when Marcel shouted: "Look out! It's a rockfall!" We were very frightened -

stones were falling from above us very quickly. But the stones bounced down the mountainside and fortunately neither of us was hurt.

We carried on climbing, enjoying the majesty of the Montserrat landscape, and when we had almost reached the summit, a goat suddenly appeared above me, looking down at me intently. I was surprised to see it calmly climbing around, and I realised that it had started the rockfall. Then I said to myself: "This goat is crazy!" Of course, the goat must have thought: "These humans are crazy!"



Going to Montserrat

1

How to get there

You can visit Montserrat by car, of course. You can also get there on foot if you want a nice hike.

And there are two very nice ways to get there: by rack railway and by cable car

You'll find all the information you need here:



2

Can you sleep there?

If you want to spend more than one day at Montserrat, there are three types of accommodation available: a hotel, a hostel and some accommodation known as cells.

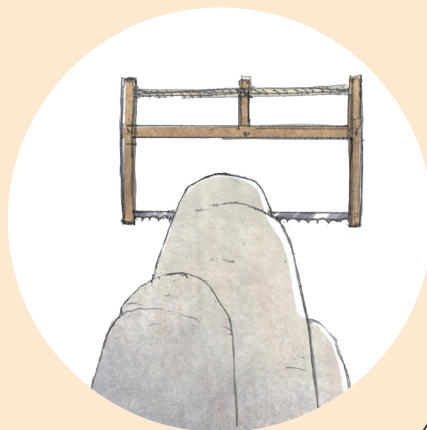
You'll find more information here:

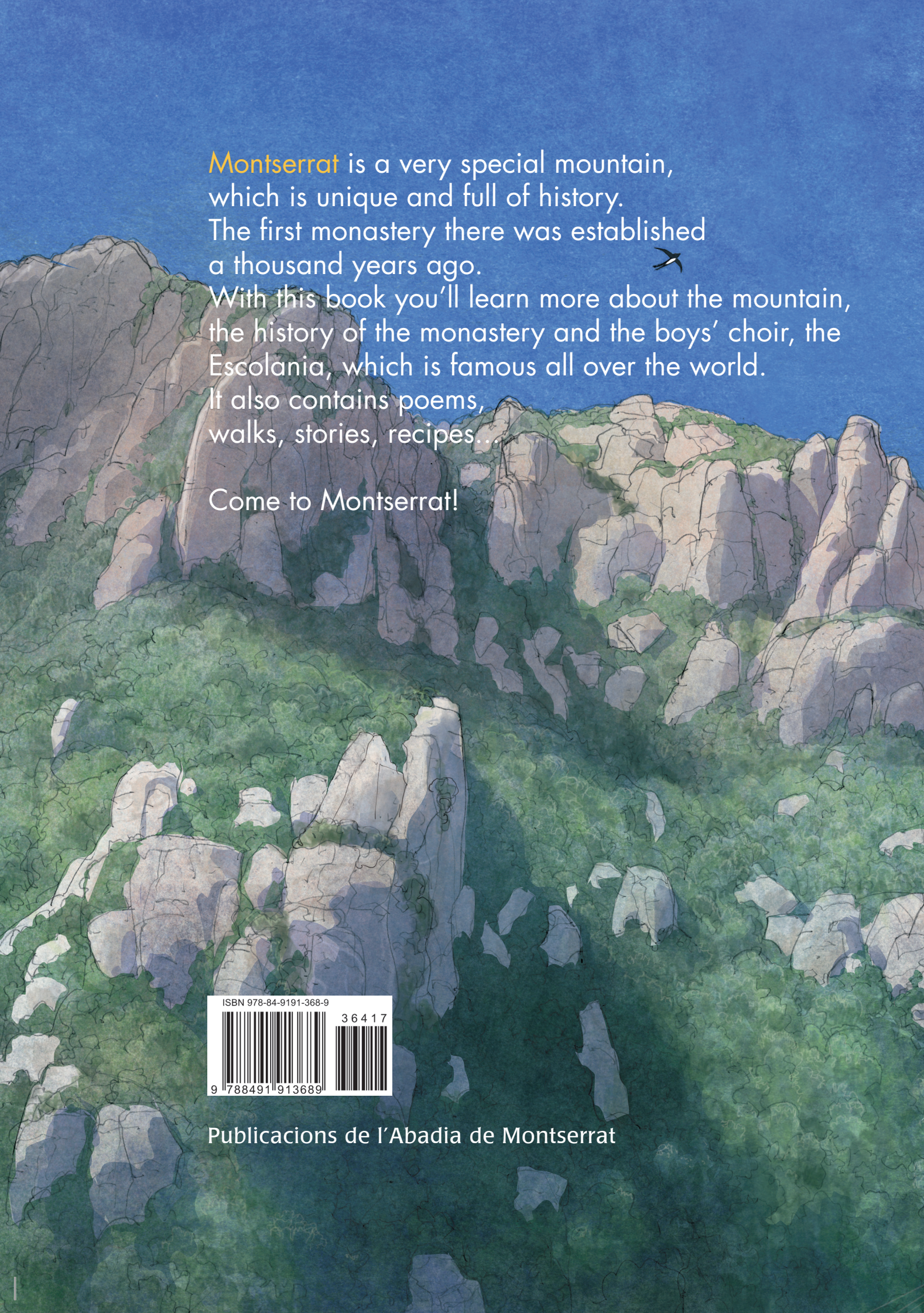


3

Do you want to see Montserrat right now?

You can see the monastery live when you scan the code.





Montserrat is a very special mountain,
which is unique and full of history.
The first monastery there was established
a thousand years ago.

With this book you'll learn more about the mountain,
the history of the monastery and the boys' choir, the
Escolania, which is famous all over the world.
It also contains poems,
walks, stories, recipes...

Come to Montserrat!



Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat