



Our legends

EUROPEAN LEGENDS – NATIONAL LITERARY HEROES

Calabrian

The legend of Donna Canfora

The legend of Donna Canfora refers to a sad affair, occurred along the shores of Costa Viola, in the Southern Tyrrhenian Sea. Donna Canfora was a charming Calabrian woman with long hair and unusual beauty, who was kidnapped by the Saracens, who landed at the small port of Pietrenere in Taureana, near Gioia Tauro. For over a century, the Saracens terrorized the population by taking away men, women and children with their belongings. Sometimes to consume their raids with greater ease they presented themselves on the beaches in disguise of Eastern merchants.

With this trick one day they tried to kidnap the legendary Donna Canfora on the coast of the Southern Tyrrhenian Sea, precisely at the Tonnara Di Palmi in Pietrenere.

Donna Canfora, according to the local legend, was a very rich lady, endowed with the rarest virtues and supreme beauty. Still a young widow, rejecting every offering of love, she wanted to consecrate her life to the memory of the unhappy lost husband.

One day, when her maid arrived home, she announced that on the beach she saw a ship coming from the far east, full of silk fabrics, of big buds, of white feathers like the sea foam, of skins, of very rare carpets, of beautifully painted majolica. Everyone ran down to the beach, to admire so many beautiful things on the ship, at the sides, at the trees, at the bow, at the stern, everywhere among a thousand vivid colours.

„They are marvels,” the maid said to Donna Canfora, who had left the spinning-wheel to listen to her-“marvels that you can see only once in life. Come on, Madam; you will find your friends down there, let’go”. But Donna Canfora was very sad that day and fearsome presentations crossed her mind. She said: - “This morning the spinning machine creaked too much. - What do you think?, Is not this perhaps a warning from the Lord?”

- What are you saying, Madam! The spinning wheel has been greased for a few days. Is it possible that squeaks?”

Donna Canfora answered: My heart beats strongly. This night I had sad dreams and several times it seemed to me to see here in front of me, my poor husband. What will ever happen?”

Before going out Donna Canfora wanted to visit the whole house, then finally sad and thoughtful she started towards the sea. On the bank there was a large crowd, while a light breeze swelled the sails of various colours making them sparkle in the sun.

As soon as Donna Canfora appeared, the crowd split into two wings making her pass in the middle as a queen. The Captain of the ship met her with a smiling face and said to her: "The fame of your

virtues came to the farthest shores of Arabia and Persia. Donna Canfora thanked him and let him guide her to the ship.

Suddenly, however, the crew, at a mention of the commander, began to pull the anchor and hoist the sails. The crowd, aware of the danger, shouted furious shouts and desperate curses, but the ship, free from the moorings, slipped lightly on the calm water and the commander dragged the beautiful Donna Canfora towards his cabin. Then, seeing herself alone among those barbarians, she asked to be left free for a moment to say goodbye to her home and her homeland.

Straight on the stern she looked at the great expanse of the sea for a long time, her friends waving their arms in a desperate gesture, the bank moving away quickly and then, raising her eyes to heaven, as if asking for forgiveness from everyone, and devoted to her husband she threw herself into the sea, challenging the waves and succumbing to death rather than losing her freedom and her honour.

While she was throwing herself into the sea, she cried: "Learn, oh tyrant, The women of this land prefer death to dishonor!". Just to honour the sacrifice, the sea changes colour every hour and takes on all the shades of the blue dress worn by Donna Canfora, while the echo of the waves crashing against the shoreline is nothing but the poignant lament with which Donna Canfora says goodbye every night to her beloved land.

In that place, in memory of Donna Canfora, the waters became shimmering blue, sometimes emerald green, sometimes turquoise streaked with gold and silver and the bottom was covered with algae, actinias and beautiful asteras with varied forms and a thousand colours. So when the echo of the rush of the wave on the shore is lost in the countryside, driven by the sea breeze, the local farmers tell their children the legend of Donna Canfora and teach them that the monotonous sound is nothing but the heartfelt lamentation with which she greets her home and her homeland every night.

Hungarian

János Arany: The legend of the "Miraculous hind"

The lark's aloft from bough to bough,
the song is passed from lip to lip.
Green grass grows o'er old heroes now
but song revives their fellowship...

Forth to the hunt they ride again
two brave sons that fair Enéh bore,
Hunor and Magyar, champions twain,
Ménrót's twin sons in days of yore.

Each chooses fifty doughty knights
to go in escort at his side;
armed as for bloody war's delights,
they seek out game in youthful pride.

Wild beasts in pools of blood they drag;
they slaughter all the elk they find;
they have already killed the stag,
and now they all pursue the hind.

They chase the hind continually
along the Salt Sea's barren shore,
where neither wolf nor bear may be
lest it be lost forevermore.

But 'cross those wastes of prairie earth
the panther and the lion yelp;
the tawny tiger there gives birth
and in her hunger eats her whelp.

On flies the bird, the song flies on
of Enéh's sons' fair fellowship:
the lark's aloft from bough to bough,
the song is passed from lip to lip.

The sun is passing from their view,
piercing the clouds with fiery spears,
but still the hind they all pursue...
at sunset, lo, it disappears.

They find themselves as daylight sinks
where Kur's broad waters sweep and swell.
on meadows by the river-brinks
their weary steeds may pasture well.

Says Hunor: "Let us bivouac,
water our steeds, and turn to rest."
Says Magyar: "When the dawn comes back,

let us go homeward from our quest."

But "ho, ho my heroes, knights of mine,
what mystifying land is this?
To eastward see the sunset shine.
it looks to human eyes amiss!"

"It seems to me," a warrior claims
"the light from down south issues forth."
Another vows "No, it remains
and it is glowing in the north..."

Dismounting all, their steeds they tend
and slumber by the river's foam,
and purposed, when the night should end,
to journey with their escort home.

The dawn is cool; a light wind blows;
the broad horizon brims with blue;
the hind across the river goes
and bravely leaps before their view.

On flies the bird, the song flies now
of Enéh's sons' fair fellowship:
the lark's aloft from bough to bough,
the song is passed from lip to lip.

"Now, my quick lads! Speed on the chase,
let's catch this apparition hind!"
Blithe or reluctant, forth they race
and press on, to their task resigned.

So then they ford the river Kur,
and find the waste-land still more wild;
no drop of water dewes the moor
no blades of grass in verdure smile.

The crumbling surface of the land
sweats soda from its sterile brow,
springs ooze with poison from the sand
and sulphur stinks in many a slough.

With bubbling oils the springs are bright;
they burn untended here and there;
like watch-fires in a gloomy night
their fulgor flickers everywhere.

Each night they bitterly repent
their longing for this game they traced
with such unwearying intent
into the mazes of the waste.

But when the dust of morning thins,
to chase the hind their hearts are stirred
as thistledown obeys the winds
or shadow-wings pursue the bird.

On flies the bird, the song flies now

of Enéh' sons' fair fellowship:
the lark's aloft from bough to bough,
the song is passed from lip to lip.

They search the waste: they track the Don
as far as Meót's lesser sea;
through boggy marshes they press on
to isles of fenny greenery.

And there the hind, like fleeting mist
of fog about her in the skies,
-again? But how could they have missed?-
now disappears before their eyes.

"Halloo!" they cry, "where is the game?"
"Yonder she dashes!" one does call.
Another shouts: "this way she came!"
A third: "she is not here at all..."

Through every nook and copse they search;
through every bush they track the hind,
by lizard-lair and partridge-perch,
but what they seek they cannot find.

Then Magyar speaks with many a sigh:
"Who knows the way that leads us back?
on every side there's boundless sky-
we'll perish on this far-off track."

Says Hunor: "Let us not retreat!
But build a camp and call it home-
the grass here's soft, the water's sweet-
and trees with sap are all afoam.

Bright fishes are the river's gift,
and tawny game makes tasty food.
The bows are taut, the arrows swift,
and booty-our adventure's gift..."

On flies the bird, the song flies now
of Enéh's son's fair fellowship:
the lark's aloft from bough to bough
the song is passed from lip to lip.

But soon they wish to venture out,
they yearn for newer, different game-
as they get bored with fish and trout,
and so they enter on the plain.

And there across the level prairie
at dead of night, strange music streams,
out in the wasteland, wide and airy,
as if from heaven or in dreams.

There fairy maidens did subsist
and danced with joy in elfin measure;
housed in a tent of woven mist,
they passed their nights in tuneful pleasure.

No man may spy the elfin school;
for mortal maids surpassing fair-
daughters of Kings, Belár and Dúl,
are learning elfin magic there.

Fairest are Dúl's two girls to view,
old Belár's twelve are sweet and warm;
their company, five-score and two,
are poised to take on fairy form.

To win it, each must kill a man,
bewitch nine youths with magic lure,
tease them along to love's hot plan
yet keep their own white bodies pure

Thus are they taught the fatal art
the fearful knowledge of the fairy;
each night their progress they impart,
each night in dancing they make merry.

On flies the bird, the song flies now
of Enéh's sons' fair fellowship-
the lark's aloft from bough to bough,
the song is passed from lip to lip.

The men follow the fairy-sound
they stalk a-tiptoe on the sly;
the flickering lights they spy and hound,
as if chasing a butterfly.

Says Magyar: "Brother, that sweet fife
tickles my marrow through and through!"
Says Hunor: "Nothing in my life
has stirred me as those maidens do!"-

"Up, knights, and at them! Join the chase!
Let each one bear a woman back,
holding her tight in his embrace!
The wind will cover up our track!"

They spur their horses on and fling,
the reins aside that they may seize
the maidens dancing in a ring
all unprepared for deeds like these.

The girls run wild with piercing cries,
but fire and stream hem in their charms;
whichever way a virgin flies,
she falls into a rider's arms.

Away their fairy teachers fly,
on frightened wings they flutter free...
But what can mortal maidens try
to save their sweet virginity?

Now, in that place, no maid remains;
the horsemen gallop with a will,

exultant; and upon those plains
the empty night is dark and still.

On flies the bird, the song flies now
of Enéh's sons' fair fellowship-
the lark's aloft from bough to bough,
the song is passed from lip to lip.

King Dúl's two daughters, the most fair,
to Hunor and to Magyar fall.
The hundred knights in rapture share
the hundred girls, and love them all.

Proud maids in time do reconcile,
though thwarted in their virgin plan.
They seek their homes no more, but smile
atonement, bearing sons to man.

Their isle becomes a country sweet;
their tents become a treasured home;
their beds become a blest retreat,
from which they do not wish to roam.

They bring forth boys, brave clans to please,
fair girls they bear for love's warm hour-
the handsome slips of youthful trees
in place of their lost virgin flower.

Heroic children, two by two,
become the heads of every clan;
five-score and eight their branches grow,
and fertile marriage spreads their span.

Brave Hunor's branch become the Huns,
and Magyar's is the Magyar nation;
beyond all number are the sons
that overrun their island station.

On Scythia then they sweep in spate,
King Dúl's rich empire in the south-
since when, O pair of heroes great,
your glory flies from mouth to mouth!

*Watson Kirkconnell, Anton N. Nyerges and
Makkai, Adam (translators)*

Portuguese

Legend of Santa Iria - how the name of our city changed into Santarém

The Legend says that Irene was born in Nabância, present-day Tomar, near Santarém in Portugal. She was born into an influential family, and her parents, wishing to protect her, sent her to a convent school and a private tutor. The only times she left her house was to attend Mass or pray at the sanctuary of Saint Peter. A young nobleman named Britald saw her once and fell in love with her. Every time she left to go to church, he would follow her. Eventually he came forward with his proposal to court her; however, Irene made it clear that she would never marry him. When Britald became depressed, Irene hastened to make it clear to him that the reason for her celibacy was that she had given herself to God as a nun.

Meanwhile, her tutor, a man of no trust who was a monk named Remigius (or Remígio) made improper advances to her, and when she declined, quit and spread vicious rumors about her. When asked why he was no longer tutoring the girl, he replied that he had left upon having learned that she was pregnant. In addition, he managed to give her a drink that brought about her belly to inflate. All these news circulated around the town, and eventually Britald learned of her supposed infidelity. Enraged, he hired a mercenary soldier to kill her. So, as Irene was returning home from visiting an elderly disabled man, the assassin approached from behind and killed her with a single stroke of his sword.

Her body was thrown into river Nabão, that flows into River Tagus. Later, it was recovered uncorrupted from this river by Benedictines near the town of Scalabis. Legend says that her uncle Celius had received from Christ a revelation about the true story of her niece and the location of her body. The monks gave her a proper burial, and spread her cultus. Eventually, so great was the reverence paid to the virgin saint, that the name of the town of Scalabis was changed to Santarém ("Saint Irene").

The name originates in the legend of martyred Saint Iria who, legend tells us, was thrown into the river at Tomar, having been killed for not being chaste, and her body washed up at Santarem. The then ruling Visigoths named the settlement Santa Iria in her honour, to become Xantarim under the Moors in the 8th century, and finally Santarem under the Christian reconquest.

Sicilian

The legend of Colapesce

Cola (Nicola) lived near Capo Peloro in Messina and spent all his days more at sea than on land. The sea was his whole life, his passion, and exploring the silent and immense depths made him feel more free and alive.

But his passion was not well seen by his mother, because many times the boy had the habit of throwing back the fish into the sea, so one day the desperate cursed him saying this: "May you become like a fish!" done!

Over time, his skin became more and more scaly, his hands and feet like fins. His fame spread throughout Sicily, reaching the court of King Roger *.

The king wanted to know him and so he arrived in Messina where he immediately put his sea skills to the test by throwing a golden cup into the sea.

Colapesce immediately jumped into the sea recovering the precious object.

The king rewarded him, but immediately subdued him to two other tests. The king this time threw a crown at a particularly deep point of the sea and while Colapesce was looking for it, he saw that Sicily rested on three columns: two were intact while the third was consumed by a fire that was between Catania and Messina.

Colapesce, returning to the surface, told King Ruggero what he had seen, but the sovereign did not believe him and forced him, threatening him, to bring that fire back from the sea. Colapesce answered him:

„Majesty, do you see this piece of wood? I will dive with it, and if you see it come back burnt, it means that the fire is really there, as I say; but it will also mean that I will be dead, because fire will burn me too.”

Colapesce bravely plunged into the sea and everyone, from the king to the nobles and the people, waited for him to return to the surface. But only the piece of burnt wood returned to the surface.

Colapesce remained in the sea in the middle of that fire to support (as still does!)

that damaged column, helping the third column to remain stable and if sometimes the land between Messina and Catania trembles a little, it is only because Colapesce changes the side of his shoulder.

*someone says King Federico II of Sicily

Transylvanian

Prince László rescues the kidnapped Hungarian maiden

While Szent László (Saint Ladislaus) was still a prince, the pagan Cumans broke through the borders at the upper part of the Meszes gorge and invaded the country. They ruthlessly plundered the whole area, ravaged the Nyírség, reached the town of Bihar, and took lots of men, women and animals away. They met no resistance while crossing the Lápos and the Szamos rivers, and left with the ill-gotten gains.

But King Solomon and Princes Géza and László summoned their troops and went after the Cumans. They hastily crossed the Meszes gorge, before the Cumans even got there. Then they spent nearly a week in the town of Doboka, waiting for the pagans to arrive.

One day, the spy named Fancsik reported that the Cumans were approaching. The king and the princes aligned their forces and marched out to face the pagans.

When the Cuman lieutenant, Ozul, saw the Hungarians, being overconfident, he said:

- We will only send the youngsters against the Hungarians. They will play around with them.

Actually, Ozul believed that no one was able to withstand him and his army.

Yet, when the rest of the pagans had seen the size of the Hungarian army, they warned Ozul of the peril.

Then the Cuman leader brought his army together and led them to the peak of a mountain. The name of this steep mountain is Kerlés. The Hungarian army gathered at the foot of the mountain. In the meantime, the pagans had occupied the mountain top, the bravest among the archers had even descended midway and having tasted blood they started pouring their arrows on the Hungarians. The Hungarians, however, tackled them bravely and started cutting them to pieces. Frightened, the archers turned round and galloped up the mountain. They would beat their horses with the arrows in order to escape.

King Solomon was all fired up: he climbed the steepest slope without taking a single step back, though the archers sent thick clouds of arrows towards him.

Prince Géza, who had always been cautious and far-seeing, chose to ascend a more gentle slope, shooting his arrows at the Cumans.

Prince László had slain four of the strongest pagans during the first raid. When he took on the fifth one, he got wounded by his arrow. Prince László took no notice of his injury; he killed the fifth Cuman as well.

The Hungarians gave the Cumans a rough time, and the latter tried to flee. Yet the Hungarians picked up more speed in pursuing them and immersed their swords into their blood. They split the clean-shaven heads of the Cumans with their sharp swords as if they were unripe pumpkins.

It then happened that Prince László saw a pagan, who seized a Hungarian maiden and rode away with her. The prince spurred his horse named Szög (=Nail) and dashed after him. They were only at a spear's length from each other, but the distance would not lessen, as the prince's horse could not run faster, nor did the Cuman's steed slow down. They rode on for quite a while, as there was an arm's length between the spear and the Cuman's back. When the prince saw that he could not catch up with the Cuman, he shouted at the girl:

- Pretty sister! Grab the Cuman by his belt and throw yourself onto the ground!

The girl did as she was told.

Prince László attacked the kidnapper, and though the girl had begged him to spare his life, he cut through his veins and killed him.

This battle was a huge success for the king and the princes; they had exterminated almost all of the pagans and had set the Christian prisoners free. They celebrated their victory with a glorious feast.

The Turda Gorge

King László fought huge battles against the Cumans in Transylvania, and he suffered great defeat once near Turda. The Hungarian army beat a hasty retreat, and so did the king himself. They were dashing on the crest of the mountain above Turda, followed by the bloodthirsty Cumans. Glancing back, Szent László saw that the Cumans were so close that they could almost slash him with their axes. Then the king heaved a sigh, and addressed the Lord in prayer:

- Deliver me, my Lord, I've been fighting for you!

And God listened to his prayer, and performed a miracle. As he had parted the Red Sea for Moses long ago, he now split the mountain for Szent László.

The Cumans pulled back their horses in terror, because in an instance, there was an abyss as deep as a tower's height between them. The footprints of the king's horse could be seen for centuries, and were always shown to people who passed by.

(based on the Hungarian original by Dénes Lengyel in Régi Magyar mondák)

Ladislaus I or **Ladislav I**, also **Saint Ladislaus** or **Saint Ladislav** ([Hungarian](#): *I or Szent László*; [Croatian](#): *Ladislav I.*; [Slovak](#): *Svätý Ladislav I.*; [Polish](#): *Władysław I Świąty*; c. 1040 – 29 July 1095) was [King of Hungary](#) from 1077 and [King of Croatia](#) from 1091. He was the second son of King [Béla I of Hungary](#). After Béla's death in 1063, Ladislaus and his elder brother, [Géza](#), acknowledged their cousin, [Solomon](#) as the lawful king in exchange for receiving their father's former [duchy](#), which included one-third of the kingdom. They cooperated with Solomon for the next decade. Ladislaus's [most popular legend](#), which narrates his fight with a "Cuman" (a [Turkic](#) nomad marauder) who abducted a Hungarian girl, is connected to this period. The brothers' relationship with Solomon deteriorated in the early 1070s, and they rebelled against him. Géza was proclaimed king in 1074, but Solomon maintained control of the western regions of his kingdom. During Géza's reign, Ladislaus was his brother's most influential adviser.

Géza died in 1077, and his supporters made Ladislaus king. Solomon resisted Ladislaus with assistance from King [Henry IV of Germany](#). Ladislaus supported Henry IV's opponents during the [Investiture Controversy](#). In 1081, Solomon abdicated and acknowledged Ladislaus's reign, but he conspired to regain the royal crown and Ladislaus imprisoned him. Ladislaus [canonized](#) the first Hungarian saints (including his distant relatives, King [Stephen I](#) and Duke [Emeric](#)) in 1085. He set Solomon free during the canonization ceremony.

After a [series of civil wars](#), Ladislaus's main focus was the restoration of public safety. He introduced severe legislation, punishing those who violated property rights with death or mutilation. He occupied almost all [Croatia](#) in 1091, which marked the beginning of an expansion period for the medieval [Kingdom of Hungary](#). Ladislaus's victories over the [Pechenegs](#) and [Cumans](#) ensured the security of his kingdom's eastern borders for about 150 years. His relationship with the [Holy See](#) deteriorated during the last years of his reign, as the popes claimed that Croatia was their [fief](#), but Ladislaus denied their claims.

Ladislaus was canonized on 27 June 1192 by [Pope Celestine III](#). Legends depict him as a pious knight-king, "the incarnation of the late-medieval Hungarian ideal of chivalry."^[u] He is a popular saint in Hungary and neighboring nations, where many churches are dedicated to him.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ladislaus_I_of_Hungary