



ENGLISH GUIDE



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LOCOROTONDO

(Giuseppe Tursi & Pasquale Montanaro)

The town rises on a hill, located at 410 meters above sea level, which is part of the South-Eastern branch of the uneven plateau with hills called *Murgia*, commonly known as the *Murgia of the Trulli*, for the high concentration of these typical and characteristic rural dwellings.

The Murgia of the Trulli, extends itself approximately from the Gioia del Colle hills on the north-west side, sloping down towards Ostuni on the south-east; on the east side it is interrupted by the steep Fasano terracings whereas on the south side it gently slopes down towards the large Taranto amphitheatre.

Formed in shallow sea-waters during the Superior Cretaceous period (120 : 65 million years ago), Murgia is part of a wide limestone basement called the *Apulian Carbonate Platform* created by the sedimentation of carbonate mud and sea organisms. From the Tertiary to the Quaternary the Platform surfaces and then sinks again in the sea, thus undergoing continuous modelling and erosion processes. Presently Murgia plateau, made up of various calcareous and dolomitic-limestone layers, rises as high as one to two kilometers above the level of the underlying basement.

Murgia's south eastern landscape is morphologically varied and discontinuous, there are no high ground undulations, valleys are not very pronounced, there are grottoes, ravines and dolines. The result of the calcareous crumbling caused by the floods is the typical red soil, the Bole which makes the nature of the land less harsh and rocky, thus helping agricultural cultivations otherwise hardly feasible. Surface hydrology is practically non existent however, a few hundred meters under the subsoil, there is a large water layer which has only been used for a few decades due to the chronic and secular lack of rainfalls.

THE ITRIA VALLEY

Locorotondo, located in the heart of the Itria Valley, a unique Murgia valley, is in a delightful, enviable position overlooking the surrounding towns such as Martina, Cisternino, Alberobello and Noci.

Till today there still is no real written history of the Itria Valley, also called *Polje* by geologists, but there are only a few literary anecdotes about this typical karst valley which extends itself from East to West in the middle of the South

Eastern Murge and whose history is strictly linked to the towns located therein.

The high concentration of population on agricultural land, the ancient and peculiar rural houses (*trulli*), the millennial grape tradition, make this valley, which is crossed by a crammed road system, very unique in the whole Murgia hill complex.

There is a very controversial question on the origin of the mysterious place-name designating, from time immemorial, this territory.

Among the many hypotheses, the most fascinating and at the same time the most believable appears to be the one suggesting that the place-name originates from *Our Lady of Hodegitria* (the guide and protectress of all travellers) an oriental imported cult; in fact, it had been known for a long time that the Virgin Hodegitria, patroness of Constantinople, worshipped for centuries in the Orient, had arrived to Italy thanks to the fugitive Baldovino II, the last latin emperor of Byzantium, who in 1261 brought a holy picture of the Virgin to southern Italy. The cult of the Virgin was later spread all over the territory through the building of several *extra-moenian* chapels all with different dedicatory titles.

The valley was certainly inhabited since the third millennium, and at different times until the pre-Greek age (IX -VIII cent. B.C.) when on these plains of wavy limestone hills, the wild nature and the high tree density, allowed the Pelasgian and Illyrian populations to settle there; hunting, sheep-breeding, and cultivating the land.

During the classical period (V-IV cent. B. C.), thanks to the culture and ability typical of Greek colonization, the first intensive grape and cereal farming as well as cattle-breeding were started, skillfully taking advantage of the special climate and land conditions. The Romans later developed and boosted the previous experiences exploiting them in the best known way, up until the beginning of the Middle Ages, when barbarian culture took over thus weakening the agricultural and economic situation for several centuries. The olive and grape-growing, typical Southern cultures, collapsed dramatically.

Only around the year 1000, was there an inversion of trend due to the new agricultural techniques introduced by the religious movement historically known as the Basilian Monasticism.

The new oriental cultural wave improved the *modus vivendi* of the Itria Valley's population, by promoting agriculture and cattlebreeding through the creation of farms and the first rural units, and also by developing trade and communication.

During the Middle Ages the Valley was involved in the vicissitudes of several wars which took place along the coasts thus forcing large groups of people to abandon the coast and to take shelter in Murgia's woodlands. This demographic increase brought new life to the oldest dwelling units hence creating the premises for the establishment of the first groups of houses, the *Casali*, which originated the present towns of the Itria Valley.

THE ENVIRONMENT: FLORA AND FAUNA

The natural environment of Locorotondo, only vaguely resembles the way it actually looked like some centuries ago. The drastic reduction of woodlands, the total disappearance of the already poor surface hydrology worsened by the chronic rainfall shortage, have drastically impoverished Murgia's ecosystem, which in spite of everything, still survives almost untouched in some strips of the territory.

What is left of the fauna today is a meagre heritage of a past rich with varied and splendid specimens witnessed by the numerous rous and famous foreign travellers. In the remainders of the ancient brushwoods and of the fertile forests which used to cover the territory, now reduced in both quantity and quality, several animals are still discreetly present: the fox, the hedgehog, the mole, some species of bats living in the many natural country caves; the clever beech-martens and the shrewd weasels which endanger the hen houses. Instead, a prey very sought-after by hunters is very rare: the hare; on the contrary there has been a stunning increase of magpies which are massively moving to the city; among the other birds we find the little owl, the owl, the sparrow, the tit, the chaffinch, the blackbird, the kestrel, the buzzard and the starling.

Reptiles proliferate as they have found a favourable environment due to the weak presence of natural predators; among them we can trace the asp viper (the only poisonous reptile in Apulia), the grass snake with the characteristic black colouring, the long four-lined snake, the leopard snake and the mythical Aesculapian snake, the common rural lizard and the green lizard. Furthermore, we can frequently find the Apulian gecko typical of this area, some cute Hermann's turtle and the common toad.

Among the insects, we'll mention the tarantula, the black widow with the painful sting, the scorpion, the balm cricket and beautiful varieties of butterflies. With regard to the flora, although suffering from the water shortage, south-eastern Murgia presents tree varieties typical of this restricted Italian area such

as the Macedonian oak, a species of oak found singularly in groves or mixed with the bay oak and the holm oak. Other plants grow as well, especially shrubs, which belong to the well known Mediterranean bush, such as the wild pear tree, the italian arbutus, the terebinth, the mock privet, the lentisk, the Taranto myrtle, the omnipresent bramble and the many varieties of the scented rock rose. In the endless world of wild plants we can enumerate the country chicory, the thistle, the *boccioni*, the wicked dog's tooth, the squirting cucumber, the pellitory, the savoury wild asparagus, as well as the *lampascioni* (wild onions), also called plume hyacinth and the butcher's broom. Finally, among wild flowers there are the delicate cyclamen, the pot marigold, the sage, the borage with the violet flowers, and the tiny wild orchids, real miniature beauties, finally oregano which does not have striking flowers but does have an incredible Mediterranean fragrance.

THE CLIMATE

The territory where the town stands is located in a temperate Mediterranean climatic zone with a secular tendency to dry heat and a certain shortage of rainfalls which usually occur only from fall to spring. Altogether rainfalls measures up to 600 mm. yearly.

With regard to the climatic situation throughout the year, summer is characterized by nice weather with Afro-Tropical heat and oceanic humidity. Storms are not very frequent and July is the hottest month with high peaks of 30° C. The rainy season is in the fall, which stands out for its mild temperatures. The winter season almost always brings low pressures; snowfall, although quite rare, always caused by Balkan infiltrations, occur in the months of January and February. Minimum temperatures drop a few degrees below zero. The harsh signs of winter are mitigated by the approach of spring, characterized by extremely variable weather conditions, where warm and cold days alternate.

The winds mainly blowing here are the humid scirocco from south-east, the cold north wind, as well as the west wind and the south-west wind. Humidity is around 60%.

Source of pride for the town is the oldest rainfall recording station in Apulia, which has been supplying data almost non-stop since 1829.

POPULATION AND DISTRICTS (*CONTRADE*)

Locorotondo has about 14,000 inhabitants on a territory of more than 47 sq.km. with a density of about 294 inhabitants per sq.km. Over the course of history as well as during this century, the urban population, except during periods of serious famine or epidemic, has increased slowly but surely, despite the two world wars and the remarkable migration flows. The unique peculiarity of this town, which marks its demographic aspects, is the high percentage of population on rural land, now amounting to 50% but which in recent past it even reached 70%. Thus, we find a highly populated farm-land, where several districts as well as scattered houses surround the urban center.

The *contrade*, in the town's territory, cannot be identified with any of the classical, accepted meanings of the word, nor with the common one of fraction, which is rather restrictive; the *contrada* must be regarded as a demografic territorial unity. In practice it is a group of *casedde* (trulli) working around common spaces and which use (especially in the past) common services: the well, the threshing floor, the small church and so on. In more recent times, stores, schools and post-offices have enriched it, using a capillary and efficient road system which connects the districts to each other and to the urban center. The etymology of the name *contrada*, for many still obscure, apart from fascinating us, once resolved, furnishes manifold indications of historical and cultural character. Of the almost one hundred and fifty districts of Locorotondo we will list some, joining them together in groups that possess the same peculiarity:

Sant'Anna, San Marco, San t'Ella, Pantaleo, Rocchella... (from the small churches located therein);

Caramia, Campanelli, Casalino, Montetessa, Quei di Carlo, Santacroce... (from the noble families that had possessions and residences there);

Carbottiello, Cupa, Grotta, Pentimi, Pentimone... (from the name of some geomorphological particularity);

Casellone, Mulino, Serralta, Ospedale, Piergolo, Pozzomasiello, Tritto... (from structural elements or buildings);

Calascione, Tagaro, Cerrosa, Mancinella, Uacella... (from country tools or natural elements).

THE ECONOMY: AGRICULTURE

Despite the unfavourable wheather and land conditions, a large part of

Locorotondo's economy still relies on agriculture. Grape growing is certainly the number one cultivation, infact it has always been very important in this area, with a cultivated area covering 15% of the useful rural surface. There follows the noble olive cultivation, also deeply rooted on these lands. This cultivation is hardly ever pure, it is usually combined to cereal growing or mixed with leguminous or even with grapes.

Among the cereals cultivated here, common wheat prevails followed by durum wheat used to make pasta. Amid the leguminous the record goes to broad beans, however, beans, chick peas and lupines are not lacking. There is a fair increase of almondgroves, cherry-groves, peach-groves and apple-groves. The cultivated vegetables that stand out are artichokes, fennels, beets and potatoes whose production never satisfies local demand. Besides farmyard animals, such as: chickens, pigeons, turkeys and geese rarely bred in an intensive way, in the last years rabbit breeding has been increasingly successful, especially the New Zealand White breed and the California breed. In the Itria Valley, they also breed sheep, of the typical Apulia *Gentile* breed, as well as pigs, oxen, horses and even donkeys.

LOCAL PRODUCTION

During the last years, Locorotondo has been undergoing a change from the solely agricultural economy of ten years ago, to a mixed economy. Grape growing, which still represents a large part of agricultural activity, has taken on concrete form with the creation of some large wine industries, such as the Cantina Sociale and the Azienda Agraria Basile-Caramia, as well as some fairly important cooperative wine industries.

On the contrary, in the oil field, even though there are more companies, they are small or medium-size; however, both in the wine and oil field, companies have become promoters for the dif fusion and enhancing of the two products which are the pride of agricultural economy: the Bianco Locorotondo, a fresh, sunny white D.O.C wine (controlled designation of origin), and the generous and precious extra-virgin olive oil, both genuine products of the noble mediterranean tradition. Following the steps of these successful activities, small and medium-size industries have been created, dealing in different fields, such as clothes manufacturing, construction and other related products (floors, tiles, artworks, murals, etc...).

Handicraft, once very flourishing, despite its slowing-down has managed to modernize without losing sight of the ancient, brilliant and creative teachings

fruit of an old local tradition. All this has taken on concrete form with small family owned businesses, located in the city as well as throughout the municipal territory, dealing in almost all fields, among which we can list the following artisan-productions: stone-craft, trullari, wrought iron, wood and furniture, as well as special soft and fresh cheese.

CUISINE

The typical and traditional cuisine of Locorotondo is deeply rooted in the healthy principles of the ancient mediterranean cuisine. A large part of the local gastronomical tradition originates from popular and country cooking; the rich cuisine of the upper middle-class, once destined to few people, has had very little influence on social reality.

Among the basic foods consumed, we must mention wheat, meat, cheese, vegetables and legumes. For seasoning, olive oil is essential and irreplaceable; there are different types of cheese, such as *cacioricotta*, which is evermore renowned, and tomato sauces.

With regard to wheat there are two varieties, common and durum, and three versions: white flour, bran flour and wholewheat flour, all largely used for recipes of country-style cooking.

Common wheat flour is used to make many types of tasty *focacce* (flat buns seasoned with tomato, oil, oregano, onion...), home made bread, fragrant *taralli* (ring-shaped biscuits), excellent *friselle* and several sweets (*pettole*, *cartellate*, *fagottini*, *panzerotti*).

With common, durum and wholewheat flour, different kinds of home-made pasta are prepared: tasty *tagliatelle* with ragout, dried salted cod and chickpeas; *cecolini* served with different kinds of legumes; *triddo*, one of the few recipes to attribute to the opulent middle-class cooking, a typical home-made pasta made with eggs and cheese, seasoned with savoury turkey broth; finally *orecchiette*, symbol of the true tradition of Murgia, produced in different versions can be served in several ways: with fresh tomato sauce *crudaiola-style*, with turnip iops, with *ricotta* cheese, with strong *ricotta*, with *cacioricotta*, with lamb ragout, rabbit ragout and many others.

Regarding meats, the ones of best quality are *agnello* (lamb) and *agnellone* (older lamb), because they are locally bred, but in the local gastronomy there

is a large use of the less valuable meat-cuts: *frattaglie* (the entrails), and *trippa* (tripe). Two dishes that must absolutely be tasted are the so called *gnumeredde suffuchete* (filled roulades in broth) and *involtini rossi arrosto* (roasted red roulades).

As far as legumes, broad beans have the place of honour, raw or with a few slices of bacon, or even in the classical well-known style, mashed and served with healthy wild vegetables. Besides beans, chick peas and lentils, there are also *orobanche* (broodrape), *lampascioni* (wild onions), asparagus, *rucola* (garden rocket), small peppers; all of them are savoury vegetables with an original and distinctive taste. Among the sweets, the best ones are *copeta*, a kind of nougat with honey and almonds, *fagottini*, roll ups filled with jam, and dried figs.

TRADITIONS AND FESTIVALS

A good part of Locorotondo's social life revolves around two events: the first regarding the celebration of the town's patron saint, St. George martyr; the other concerns the celebration of the protector saint, St. Rocco.

The cult of St. George martyr goes back to the origin of the town since it appears that the archaic name, Casale San Giorgio, was in fact linked to the saint for it was the site of a former church. The festivities take place on the 22nd and 23rd of April with a classic fair and the emotionally moving ceremonies of the gift for the saint. Alongside the liturgical and traditional celebrations, there are sports events, spectacular and gastronomical events.

The festivity of St. Rocco, which takes place during *ferragosto* (the August holidays), goes exactly from the 14th to the 17th of August, and becomes more spectacular and exciting in concomitance with the hot holiday period.

It all begins on August 14, with the big village fair, it continues the next day, while the whole town is decorated with blazing lights and there is excitement in the air due to the arrival of family members and relatives living elsewhere, as well as several tourists, this way the general rehearsal of the feast takes place. The saint day starts early in the morning on August 16, with the *Diana* (a dirge played along the town's streets by a small band), the day goes on with all the liturgical ceremonies, and all the profane events in a sweet and thrilling succession, until its conclusion with the late night firework display with an explosion of colours and roaring sounds which bring the feast to an end. The following day, the feast goes on in a more subdued tone, almost for the

exclusive benefit of the residents of Locorotondo, who in this day enjoy the remnants of the festivity by participating to the traditional festival of *involtini rossi al fornello* (red roulades cooked on the stove).

A very important festival linked to the August holidays, occurs on the first Sunday of August, and regards the tasting of a Locorotondo specialty: the *gnumeredde suffuchete*. This festival takes place in particular areas of the old town, where this typical dish and other local specialities can be tasted, while cheered by songs, music and dances, sipping a glass of nice Locorotondo white wine, and enjoying the magnificent view of Locorotondo in the cool evening.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The passion for investigating ancient times, and in particular the origin of one's native place, has encouraged, until the end of 1700, documents research and several hypothesis have been advanced on the subject.

Going beyond some of these hypothesis, spiced with a touch of mythology, according to which Locorotondo was originated by the work of some Greek settlers many centuries before Christ, we can now assert that the site where the town is located, has actually had a very ancient human presence.

In the beginning, as well as in modern times, these studies, made even more fascinating by the aura of mystery due to the shortage of data, essentially have been started and patiently carried out by amateur historians or archaeologists (the specialists have come at later stages to examine the matter closely), inspired by a great love for their home town.

In 1840, the discovery of some tombs attributed to Roman soldiers, and in more recent years the archaeological find dated to the third millennium and up to the VII cent. B. C., as well as the discovery in 1989 of ruins and votive graves, have supported the hypothesis of a steady human presence, linked to sheep rearing and agriculture, in the area at the foot of the hill of Locorotondo, toward the Itria Valley, in the district called Grofoleo.

However, the creation of an actual town, located further up on the hill, must be dated back to the year 1000. Some date it around the year 1080, when Locorotondo was reported on the lists of feudal estates under the name of *casale S. Giorgio* (hamlet of St. George).

In fact a document dated to 1195, under the rule of Swabia, describes the

luogo detto ritondo (the place called round) with its church of St. George and its possessions, as part of the estate of the Benedictine Monastery of St. Steven, close to Monopoli.

What is certain is that around the mid 1200 it had taken on the characteristics of a non-fortified hamlet, with a more urban aspect.

Unfortunately, from its birth until modern times, the small town was constantly subject to many feudal lords who did nothing to encourage its development and promotion.

Until 1385 the small hamlet remained under the jurisdiction of the above mentioned monastery; up to most of 1400 it was dominated by the Del Balzo-Orsini family. In 1486 it fell into the hands of another noble neapolitan family, the Loffredos. But after a brief period (1499) they were replaced and succeeded by the Carafas, the Loffredos again, the Figueroas and then the Borrassas.

Despite the climate of exploitation and oppression, during the 1500 Locorotondo had a population increase and subsequently, a fair expansion of the building trade, as well as the formation, at a dear price, of its own state property. Together with five other nearby towns, on September 28 1566, in the presence of the Commissioners of the Royal Spanish Court, a document, still existing, was drafted to redeem the territories belonging to each University, as the city units were called. The mayor of Locorotondo, Marino Morelli, was present.

The walls and the castle were then built; new churches were erected and old ones were enlarged and enriched; two hospital-ospices were created, and a doctor, Antonio Bruno, trained in the school of Naples, sent for printing a philosophical treatise on the immortality of the soul.

In 1645 started the last feudal period: the Caracciolos, dukes from the nearby Martina Franca, remained until the beginning of 1800. In 1799 Locorotondo, just like the majority of the nearby towns, was involved in the revolutionary risings which overwhelmed southern Italy following the proclamation of the Roman Republic at first (1798), and the Parthenopean Republic after (1799). Even during the nineteenth century the people of Locorotondo contributed to the achievement of freedom by becoming members of the Carbonari secret society, participating to insurrectional risings and enduring jail.

Today, Locorotondo lives on and develops the fruits of its ancient agricultural and handicraft traditions and of the new born trend of tourism, an economic and cultural resource which is compatible with the other two and which should not be given up.

THE MONUMENTS

The art works produced by the people of Apulia throughout the centuries are well known and are characterized by a very unique personality. Even Locorotondo, although its subjection has for centuries prevented the growth of a well to do social class that could have been a potential client, still keeps to this date some noteworthy artistic wealth. For the same reason, it must be noted how this artistic wealth is almost entirely made up of religious monuments. Thus, some churches have stylistically melted with the taste and architecture of other regions, and other smaller ones are strongly influenced by the local building style.

Visitors who wish to visit Locorotondo should start their itinerary from the old town: built in concentric circles, medieval style, it attracts the visitor for the charm and intimacy of its alleys, where there is almost no difference between the inside and outside of the houses. There are no striking buildings nor sumptuous church façades, however every corner, alley or building is undoubtedly interesting. The sloping roofs, made with stone slabs, are its most unique characteristic: some people have suggested a presumed French influence to explain these shapes, but they are so simply because the underlying stone vaults are also raised since it is statically more convenient. The arches between houses were also built for similar structural reasons.

The following are among the monuments to visit:

the church of Our Lady of Sorrows, built in 1858 on the site of the old castle which was torn down for this purpose in 1855 under the initiative of a priest who, by so doing, wanted the people of Locorotondo to forget the injustices and the abuses of power committed in its dungeons. In the interior of the church there are some late-eighteenth-century wooden statues (Our Lady of Sorrows, St. Gaetano and Our Lady of the Cross) and two more dated to 1888 respectively of the Redeemer and of St. Anthony abbot by the local artist Antonio Semeraro. Even the small stone statue kept in the sacristy, of uncertain origin, portrays St. Anthony. On the outside, at the end of the façade, there are two stone statues depicting the sybils Delphic and Eritrea, once belonging to the old Mother Church.

In the town center, in Fra G. Andrea Rodio square, the massive structure of the Mother Church towers above everything; it is a monumental edifice called after St. George martyr and erected between 1790 and 1825 on the same site where

once stood two churches, one after the other, which were respectively dated to 1195 and 1500. The neo-sixteenth-century façade, with two rows, has a relief picture of St. George with the dragon in the tympanum, and lower down at the end, the statues of St. Peter and St. Paul. At the four corners of the church tower, which overlooks the valley, the statues of the Veronica and the three Mary, once part of the previous church, can be seen. The flat arched dome, was once covered with multi coloured enamelled terra-cotta tiles, destroyed by lightning in 1841. It is shaped like an inscribed Greek cross and its composition is characterized by the simple and clear neoclassical style which blends with the baroque and Renaissance art works survived from the previous church. In the interior, in addition to the baroque high altar, there are four more altars, two on each side, also baroque, with marble mosaic-works; three of them, the altars of St. George, of the Holy Sacrament and of the Holy Rosary, were built in Naples in 1764. Very admirable are the 42 stone relief pictures (dated to the mid XVIth cent.), with scenes from the Old and the New Testament which form two pilaster strips ornating the chapel of the Holy Sacrament on the left side. Of great artistic interest are the large canvases by the Neapolitan painter Gennaro Maldarelli: "The Assumption of the Virgin", "St. George" and "St. Michael the Archangel" painted between 1838 and 1841, which decorate the respective altars, and "The Last Supper" which embellishes the chapel of the Sacrament; the canvas and the ovals which decorate the altar of the Holy Rosary are the work of the painter Francesco De Mauro of Martina, in 1769.

Beside the Mother Church, there is the seventeenth-century church of Our Lady of the Annunciation, erected on the site of an oratory in 1633. The building englobes in the back part a groundfloor room survived from the 1560's hospital. In the inside of the church are kept wooden statues from different periods: the ones of the Mysteries by the painter and sculpturer Antonio Semeraro of Locorotondo are dated to the nineteenth-century; the others, of unknown origin, are late eighteenth-century.

At the end of Via Cavour there is the church of Our Lady of Greca, a building of undoubted charm. This church can be dated to the end of 1400, even if the existence of a more ancient nucleus has been confirmed. It has a basilica set up with a nave and two aisles, with an ogival, ribbed cross vault in the center and flying semibarrel vaults on the sides. The basis of the bundle pilars and of the capitals are a combination of classical and medieval motives. To contrast the late-Gothic taste of the structure there is a great display of Renaissance sculptures (late 1500): the stone polyptych of the high altar, the altar-frontal representing the Deposition of Christ, the St. George group, the statue of the client of the sixteenth-century finding of the church, the statue of Our Lady of Grace and other fragments. Of great importance are the fresco fragment on the right wall, of a Madonna with Infant, belonging to a more

ancient nucleus. On the exterior, the building is completed by the rosette, remade in 1981, and the unique layered roof called a *cummerse*.

On Via Cavour there is also the church of St. Rocco, erected in 1804 on the site of another church dated to 1568, shaped as an apsidal and domed Greek cross. Inside is kept the large canvas of St. Rocco with the plague-stricken people, by Antonio Semeraro, 1854, as well as two smaller canvases of St. Irene and St. Francis of Paola and two eighteenth-century stone statues; St. Rocco wooden statue on the altar was executed in Naples in 1792.

Among the churches built according to the style of the typical local architecture (stone vaults, walling whitewashed with milk of lime and slab roofs) the church of St. Nicholas of Mira deserves a special place. Erected around 1660 thanks to the initiative of the De Aprile family, it is hardly recognizable among the houses and the only visible part is the plain façade, whose bell-gable has unfortunately collapsed. Inside the barrel vault and the small dome are entirely covered with paintings portraying the saint of Mira, the musician-angels, scenes of hermit life, the four Evangelists and God the Father surrounded by cherubs. There is only one altar made of stone, over which there is a broken tympanum niche from the sixteenth-century with a panel depicting St. Nicholas and St. Anthony of Padua in adoration of the Holy Sacrament. On one of the walls there is a small stone relief-picture representing a crucifixion, more ancient than the church itself and of doubtful origin.

Amidst the minor churches we will mention the sixteenth-century chapel of the Holy Spirit, not far from the town hall and leaning against the hospital and the small church of St. Mary of the Martyrs, erected in 1500, whose medieval character has been heavily altered, and which has an interesting fresco in the apsidal bowl-shaped vault.

In the outskirts of the town there is the church of Our Lady of the Chain (1897), formed by an upper part and underground part, containing the remains of a seventeenth-century cave-chapel where a late-sixteenth-century niche of a Madonna with Infant is kept; there is also the church of St. Mark (1687), located in the district with the same name at about 5 Km. from the town.

Suggested Tour inside the old town

Visitors who wish to visit Locorotondo should start their itinerary from the entrance to the old town, exactly at the top of Corso XX Settembre, between Piazza Dante and Villa Comunale. This public garden was named after G. Garibaldi. It was built in 1860 on a small hillside which from ancient times had always remained outside the walls and had been used as garbage dump. In front of it, the “Chiesa **dell’Addolorata**” (the church of Our Lady of Sorrows), built in 1858 ~~on~~ the site of the old castle, destroyed for this new building in 1855. Inside there are some late-eighteenth-century wooden statues (Our Lady of Sorrows, St. Gaetano and Our Lady of the Cross) and two more dated to 1888, respectively of the Redeemer and St. Antony Abbot by the local artist Antonio Semeraro. Even the small stone statue kept in the sacristy, of uncertain origin, portrays St. Antony. Outside, on the façade, there are two stone statues depicting the sybils Delphic and Eritrea, once belonging to the old “Chiesa Madre” (Mother Church). Going on to Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II (formerly Castle square) and through **the old Napoli door** you get into the **old town**. Built in concentric circles, the old town attracts the visitors for the charms and intimacy of its alleys, very well kept by the inhabitants themselves. There are no striking buildings nor sumptuous church façades, however every corner, alley or building is undoubtedly interesting. The sloping roofs, made with stone slabs, are its most unique characteristic: some people have suggested a presumed Northern influence to explain these shapes, but they are also so simply because the underlying stone vaults are also built for similar structural reasons. From Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II, turning right by an ancient carved stone arch (probably the ruins of the old Napoli door), and through Via Papatodero you come to Largo Soccorso which takes its name from the homonymous church. The **Chapel of our Lady of the Succour** was erected in 1630 under the orders of the baron Gian Giacomo Borrassa of Locorotondo. In the interior of the chapel a large canvas of Our Lady of the Succour adorns the altar. There is also a smaller canvas of St. Vito. On the left, along Via Morelli, on the corner of Via Eroi di Dogali, there is the **Old Town Hall**, now Public Library. The construction of this building caused a detour of the ancient Via Maggiore, which divided into two parts the town between the two main doors. The thick turret which can be seen in the line with the façade was erected in 1819 to house the clock taken from the old Mother Church.

Next to the old Town Hall stands the magnificent **Palazzo Morelli**, with its beautiful baroque portal with the bearings of the family from Catania. In the outside courtyard one immediately notices how spacious the area around the outside staircase is. This was characteristic of noble dwellings. From Via Morelli into Via Dott. Guarnieri and then into Via Dott. Oliva, where half way up on the right you see the admirable **Church of St. Nicholas**. Erected around

1660 thanks to the initiative of the De Aprile family, it is hardly recognizable among the houses. The only visible part is the plain façade, whose bellgabel has unfortunately collapsed. Inside the barrel vault and the small dome are entirely covered with paintings portraying the life of the saint of Mira, the musician-angels, scenes of hermit life, the four Evangelists and God the Father surrounded by cherubs. There is only one altar made of stone, over which there is a broken tympanum niche from the sixteenth-century with a panel depicting St. Nicolas and St. Antony of Padua in adoration of the Holy Sacrament. On one of the walls there is a small stone relief-picture representing a crucifixion, more ancient than the church itself and of doubtful origin. Continuing on your itinerary, turning right at the end of the road, you come to Piazza Fra G. Andrea Rodio, where the massive structure of the **Mother Church** towers above everything; it is a monumental edifice called after St. George martyr and erected between 1790 and 1825 on the same site where once stood two churches, one after the other, which were respectively dated to 1195 and 1500. The neo-sixteenth-century façade, with two rows, has a relief picture of St. George with the dragon in the tympanum, and lower down at the end, the statues of St. Peter and Paul. At the four corners of the church tower, which overlooks the valley, the statues of the Veronica and the three Mary, once part of the previous church, can be seen. The flat arched dome, was once covered with multi coloured enamelled terra-cotta tiles, destroyed by a lightning in 1841. It is shaped like an inscribed Greek cross and its composition is characterized by the simple and clear neoclassical style which blends with the baroque and Renaissance art works survived from the previous church. Inside, on the left, you find the altar of the Holy Sacrament built in Naples in 1764. Very admirable are the 42 stonerelief pictures, with scenes from the Old and New Testament, sculptured between 1591 and 1613, the marble altar built in Naples in 1764, and the canvas of “the Last Supper” painted in 1841 by the Neapolitan painter Gennaro Maldarelli. On the walls of the entrance to the chapel there are a seventeenth-century fresco of St. Donato Bishop and a seventeenth canvas of Resurrected Christ, both by unknown artist. Beside you can see the altar of the “Assumption, enshrouded in a canvas by Maldarelli (1838). The portrait of St. George at the bottom of the apse and the “Fall of the Angels” painted in 1839 on the altar of St. Michael by the door which leads to the staircase of the Soccorpo (crypt) are also by Maldarelli. Of great artistic interest is the marble altar of the Holy Rosary (1764) with a canvas and 15 ovals pictures by the painter Francesco De Mauro of Martina Franca. Beside the entrance you find a Baptistry in polycrome marble by the Neapolitan sculptor Fedele Caggiano, the major altar was sculptured in 1861 by the same artist, and the commemorating monument to the founder by the Neapolitan Pasquale Ricco; both works are of the first half of the nineteenth-century. Beside the Mother Church, there is the seventeenth-century **Church of Our Lady of the Annunciation**, erected on the site of an oratory in 1633. The building englobes in the back part a groundfloor room

survived from the 1560's hospital. Inside the church are kept wooden statues from different periods: the ones of the Mysteries by the painter and sculptor Antonio Semeraro of Locorotondo are dated to the nineteenth-century; the others, of unknown origin, are late eighteenth-century. On the right of the Mother Church, to Via Dura and then to Via Aprile, you are in the oldest part of the town. The alleys are very narrow and the houses are huddled together. **Largo Bellavista** gives you a surprisingly beautiful panoramic view of **the Itria Valley**. Crossing Via Garibaldi you come to Via Porta Nuova and then to Via Camerette and finally to Via Giannone and down to the wide staircase to Via Cavour. On the right the **Church of Our Lady of Greca**, a building of undoubted charm. This church can be dated to the end of 1400, even if the existence of a more ancient nucleus has been confirmed. It has a basilica set up with a nave and two aisles, with an ogival, ribbed cross vault in the center and flying semibarrel vaults on the sides. The basis of the bundle pilars and of the capitals are a combination of classical and medieval motives. To contrast the late-Gothic taste of the structure there is a great display of Renaissance sculptures (late 1500): the stone polyptych of the high altar, the altar-frontal representing the Deposition of Christ, the St. George group, the statue of the client of the sixteenth-century finding of the church, the statue of Our Lady of Grace and other fragments. Of great importance are the fresco fragments on the right wall, of a Madonna with Infant, belonging to a more ancient nucleus. Outside, the building is completed by two statues of the end of the fourteenth-century, the rosette remade in 1981, and the unique layered roof called "a cummerse". Going back along Via Cavour you find the **Church of St. Rocco**, erected in 1804 on the site of another church dated to 1568, shaped as an apsidal and domed Greek cross. It was enlarged in 1872. Inside is kept the large canvas of St. Rocco with the plague-stricken people, by Antonio Semeraro, 1854, as well as two smaller canvases of St. Irene and St. Francis of Paola and two eighteenth-century stone statues; St. Rocco wooden statue on the altar was executed in Naples in 1792. Going along Via Cavour to the crossroad with Via Bonifacio, where you still find the rows of some houses which were part of the eighteenth-century "borgo" (village) outside the walls Further on you come to Corso XX Settembre and A. Moro square, where the new town hall (1952) stands. On the left of the square there is the seventeenth-century **Chapel of the Holy Spirit**. Going down on the right to Marconi square, leaning against the hospital there is the small **Church of St. Mary of the Martyrs**, erected in 1500. In the outskirts of the town there is the **Church of Our Lady of the Chain** (1897), formed by an upper part and underground part, containing the remains of a seventeenth-century cave-chapel where a late-sixteenth-century niche of a Madonna with Infant is kept, once belonging to the old Mother Church. There is also the **Church of St. Mark**, (1687), located at about 5 km from the town.