Once Upon an Island

AN ATLAS OF ISLANDS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Alice Albinia
illustrated by Helen Cann

MAGIC CAT

In memory of the hopes and dreams, pasts and futures, lost this year in Palestine and beyond — A.A.

For Laura Coleman, who lives on her own small island, with much love — H.C.

The publisher would like to thank every person who graciously shared their stories to help complete this book.

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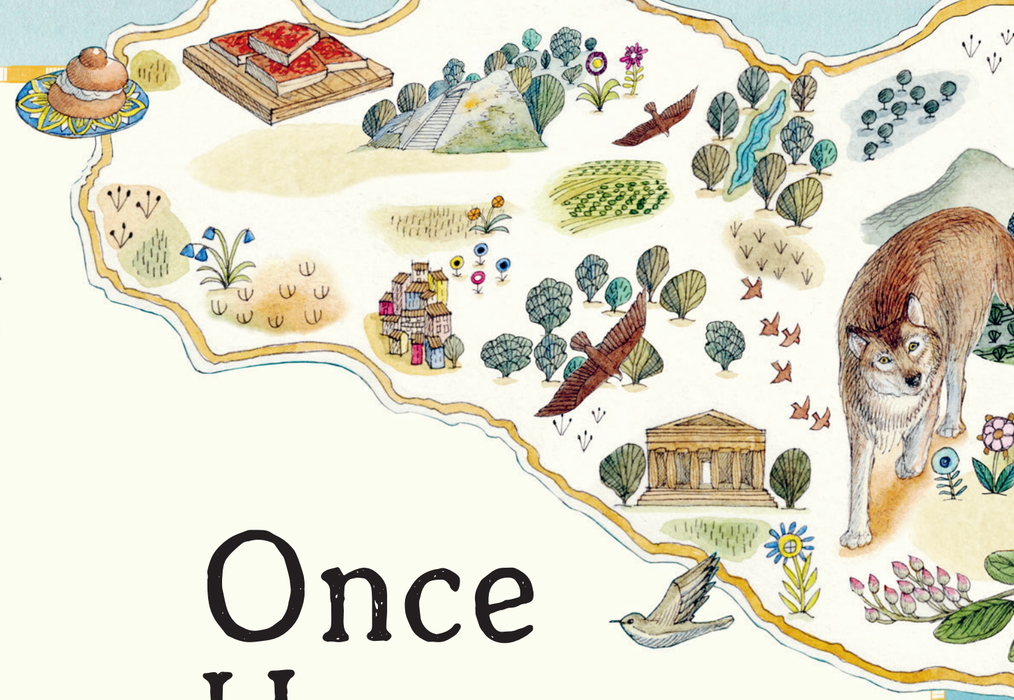
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ONCE UPON AN ISLAND

There's a kind of magic in crossing over the water to an island.

Islands are worlds of their own, defined in their specialness by the water that encircles them. On islands we see things more clearly: the histories of rocks, plants, animals and humans, and what the passage of people, with their languages and loves, does to local ecosystems and species.

While writing about the islands in this book, I discovered that amidst the stories of struggle, these places hold onto stories about women. Stories that might disappear on the mainland cling to islands like thistledown in hair or burrs in a sheep's fleece. Across the world, islands have preserved feminist stories: from Chinese Buddhism to Incan and Mayan mythology, from Japanese and Greek history to Islamic and Christian mysticism. People have met, imagined and celebrated strong island women since the earliest stories were told – from the poet Sappho on Lesvos to Pele, the Hawaiian fire goddess.

This book, then, ends with the voices of women today, sharing their own experiences of island life.

It has been both beautiful and moving to travel the world through stories of islanders. Along the way, the incredible diversity of cultures, landscapes and ways of living shines through, reminding us of the richness that difference brings. I hope that, like me, you will find these voices – speaking of life in its many forms – inspiring: a modern chorus of hope for this fragile, precious planet we call home.

WHAT IS AN ISLAND?

AN ISLAND IS LAND SURROUNDED BY WATER.

Islands are made in different ways. Some come from volcanoes under the sea. Some are built by tiny animals called coral polyps. Others break off from other pieces of land. Rivers can also make islands by dropping mud and sand in one spot.



Some islands are tiny and INHABITED only by wildlife.

Other islands are much larger, supporting entire VILLAGES, TOWNS or CITIES.



HOW ISLANDS FORMED

Millions of years ago, Earth's supercontinents split apart, forming smaller continents and countless islands. New islands continued to appear as volcanoes erupted, glaciers carved the land and rivers and seas shifted. Later, as humans explored the planet, they created islands of their own. Some islands are formed twice-daily by tides moving up and down the land, with the gravitational pull of the Moon and Sun.





TYPES OF ISLANDS

Microcontinental islands broke off from supercontinents hundreds of millions of years ago, becoming isolated in the ocean. Examples include Madagascar and the Seychelles, once part of Gondwanaland.

Continental islands were once connected to a continent but became separated by rising seas or shifting rivers. Examples include Sicily (Italy), Texel (The Netherlands) and the Tiwi Islands (Australia).

Barrier islands are long, narrow strips of land running along coastlines. They play a crucial role in protecting the mainland from waves and storms – like Isla Mujeres (Mexico).

Oceanic islands are created by underwater volcanoes rising from the seafloor. Hawai'i (USA) and Samoa are famous examples.

Volcanic islands form when lava and other geological materials build up where tectonic plates shift. Some, like Vis (Croatia), are made largely from sedimentary rock, formed from ancient shells and sea life. Others form part of larger mountain ranges extending into the sea, like Chiloé (Chile), Lesvos (Greece), Mount Putuo (China), Yonaguni (Japan) and Waiheke (Aotearoa New Zealand).

Glacial islands were shaped by glaciers moving across the island long ago, as is the case with Orkney (Scotland). Glaciers still move and melt today, reshaping places like Baffin (Canada).

River islands form when mud, sand and rocks collect in one spot, allowing plants to grow, as in the Mariuá and Anavilhanas Archipelagos in Brazil's Rio Negro.

Lake islands can form naturally or be made by people, like the ancient crannogs in Orkney.

Coral islands are built by tiny sea creatures called coral polyps over many years, creating places like the reefs of Madagascar, the Seychelles and Samoa.

Human-made islands also exist. The Uros islands in Lake Titicaca (Peru/Bolivia) are woven from reeds. By contrast, Mumbai (India) was once a cluster of islands reclaimed by humans into a single landmass.

Lastly, some **tidal** islands connect to the mainland at low tide and become surrounded by water when the tide rises, like Gugh, which is connected to St Agnes, Isles of Scilly (England).

