



THE APPEALS  
OF OUR LADY  
APPARITIONS  
AND  
MARIAN SHRINES  
IN THE WORLD

# Apparition of the Virgin Mary at BRA



ITALY, 1336

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Each year since 1336, in Bra, Piedmont, a thicket of thorn bushes flowers out of season, during the last days of every month of December. Such an extraordinary flowering renews the memory of a miraculous intervention of the Holy Virgin in defense of the virtue of a Christian wife, who appealed to her because she was threatened by two evildoers. The Virgin Mary herself helped her to give birth. A Shrine was built on the place of the apparition in remembrance of the prodigious event. The uniqueness of this Shrine, located at the gates of the Piedmontese town of Bra, near Cuneo, lies in the fact that it is perhaps the only center of Marian devotion "in which the miracle that led to its establishment, continues to repeat itself and manifests regularly each year, on a fixed date, almost a continuous and permanent promise of protection and assistance that the Virgin ensures to anyone who prays to her". Around 1336 the inhabitants of the area were living a particularly difficult period, they were in fact tormented by the lengthy wars between the local powerful people, who had escaped the control of the imperial authority and that, not being able to have their own militias, they often hired foreign mercenaries, who with their own immorality and violence were the cause of not a few troubles for the people. There were precisely two members of these mercenary troops that the young wife Egidia Mathis, close to becoming a mother, met near a pillar on which an image of the Virgin Mary with Child was coarsely painted. It was the evening of December 29, 1336. The place was isolated, and it was almost nightfall. The woman immediately became aware of the dangerous intentions of the two mercenaries: but she seemed not to have a way out. Feeling helpless in front of the danger that was threatening her, Egidia rapidly flung herself towards the pillar, invoking the assistance and protection of the Virgin Mary. "A great dazzling light came out from the niche of the Marian image; and Egidia Mathis saw the Virgin send away the two troublemakers with a commanding gesture and smile at her with maternal empathy [...]. Meanwhile, emotion and fright had affected the young wife, thus the labor sped up and the Virgin Mary helped her. Egidia, deeply moved noted two events which took place at that time: Her newly born baby who was whimpering from the cold: the blackthorn thicket surrounding the pillar of the Virgin in full bloom with hundreds and thousands of white flowers". As soon as she could reach her house, the woman told her husband about the extraordinary events that she had witnessed. Her husband hurried, together with their relatives and neighbors, to the place of the apparition; to all could observe the miraculous flowering. A confirmation of the story concerning Egidia Mathis lies perhaps, more so than in the historical documents and the tradition, in the fact that still today, more than six hundred years from that 29th of December, every year, during the last days of December, the blackthorn thicket continues to flower, despite every scientific law. The blackthorn thicket of the Shrine of Bra is totally similar to every other plant of *Prunus spinosa linnaeus* (blackthorn). A single characteristic renders this small tree of two-three meters different from the others: it blooms regularly and for centuries twice a year, the first time between December 25 and January 15, only with its flowers, the second time in April - typical flowering period of blackthorns - producing flowers and leaves normally. This astonishing fact has attracted in every age, in addition to the crowds of pilgrims, a large number of chemists, agronomists and botanists, who had attempted without success to give a scientific explanation of the phenomenon. The first conclusion that chemical science can be said to have reached, on the basis of the analyses completed on the flowers of the blackthorn thicket of Bra, is that they, in their composition, are in everything identical to the ones of the other plants of the same kind that bloom only once a year, in April. Moreover, regarding the soil on which the blackthorn thicket grows, it has also resulted identical in everything to the surrounding soil, and no characteristic was encountered that could explain the winter flowering. Furthermore it would be quite difficult to explain why for three times in history the winter flowering had been remarkably extended for months; and always concurring with public expositions of the Holy Shroud of Turin. Thus, the phenomenon that repeats itself for more than six hundred years does not find in science any logical explanation. In 1928 the botanist Alfredo Mazzei, redoing the observations formulated during the previous century by the chemist Professor Giuseppe Lavini, concluded: "I have not found any scientific explanation; I am convinced that the phenomenon transcends all the laws of biology". In 1929 a chemist, Professor Serafino Dezzani of the University of Turin, studying again the plant and the soil, ruled out the hypothesis of electromagnetic currents and declared that the blackthorn thicket of Bra "transcends the physical and biological laws". More recently, in 1974, also Professor Franco Montacchini of the Institute and Botanical Garden of the University of Turin, came to the same conclusions as his earlier colleagues.



Paintings representing the apparition



View of the Shrine

Interior of the Shrine



Statue depicting the Virgin Mary as she appeared



The blackthorn that flowers in December from the time of the apparition and that not even the scientists can explain