



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

Apparition of the Virgin Mary in FUERTEVENTURA

CANARY ISLANDS, 1443

The miraculous little statue of Our Lady of the Rock, which still today is the object of great devotion on behalf of the inhabitants of the Canary Islands, is able to be venerated at the Romeria Shrine in Vega del Río Palmas (Fuerteventura). The little statue is made of alabaster and represents the Virgin Mary seated with Baby Jesus in her lap. It is 23 centimeters high, according to the norms of the French Gothic period of the 15th century, and is located in the center of the altar piece of the high altar of the very frequented sanctuary of Vega del Río Palmas. It is thought to have been brought from France by Jean de Béthencourt (1360-1425), who received the title of *King of the Canaries*. This event occurred around 1405 and the Virgin began to be venerated in the primitive sanctuary which the conqueror from Normandy built in Vega del Río Palmas. The presence of the Marian image was always linked to the Franco-Norman conquest of Fuerteventura and of Lanzarote that occurred at the beginning of the 1400s. The image would have been utilized as an effigy of the battle and as an icon for evangelization of the natives, a common strategy with other actions of the same kind which took place in the process of expansion of the Atlantic societies. Manuel Barroso, historian originating from Fuerteventura, spent a quarter of a century consulting ancient texts and treaties and found references both in the Diocesan Archive of the Canaries and in Le Canarien, an incunabulum found in the British Museum and of which many editions are printed in facsimile. It is a work that narrates the chronicles of the conquest by the French, guided by Béthencourt, whose cohorts wrote the story of this personage and of how he left his proprietary mark on the island in 1402. In this written account, the author informs that the conqueror went to Seville where he sought to obtain the favors of the king to return to "Betancuria" and conquer Maxorata. It is narrated how, among the abandoned tools, there was this image of the Virgin, called at the time Our Lady of Malpaso, because it was found in this location. The book was entitled *La Virgen de La Peña de Fuerteventura. Su Historia. Sus coplas.* (The Virgin of the Rock of Fuerteventura. Her history. Her verses.) An arduous and difficult labor since documents relative to the story of the Patroness of Fuerteventura did not exist previously. After the battle, the Virgin was abandoned, covered by stones, and forgotten until 40 years later, in 1443, it was discovered by two Franciscan nuns. Probably after the French had abandoned the island in 1405, the image was missing for a while, because attacks by pirates led the faithful to protect it from danger so that it would not become profaned or stolen. Afterward it was found thanks to a miraculous apparition which occurred in the pooled water of the dam of Malpaso, in the presence of Saint Diego de Alcalá and Brother Juan de Santorcaz, Franciscan monks who were considered saintly and who lived near in the monastery of Saint Bonaventure in Betancuria. This is the traditional report of the history of the Patroness of Fuerteventura, the Virgin of the Rock: "Brother Diego, guardian of the monastery of Betancuria, one day was aware of the absence of Brother Juan de Santorcaz; noticing his tardiness, he asked the shepherds of the area if they had seen him since he knew that the zeal of Brother Juan frequently motivated him to go to inaccessible places that were difficult to evangelize. The shepherds said only that they had seen some lights and flashes in the ravine of the Río Palmas. Brother Diego then descended down the ravine with the shepherds and some other religious. There they saw Brother Juan's hat floating on the water of the dam and in the deep end saw him kneeling in a position of prayer. One of the shepherds approached the water and made him get out. The brother was in ecstasy and his clothes were dry. Brother Juan then recounted that, while he was passing by those parts, he had slipped and in the moment in which he was falling into the dam he entrusted himself to the Virgin Mary who had saved him, appeared to him. This site was called Buen Paso y Mal Paso. Seeing the glares of light coming from the rock, Brother Diego decided, because of divine inspiration, to open it. Once the rock was opened, the white sculpture appeared of the Virgin with Baby Jesus that since that time has been called the Virgin of the Rock."



Apparition of the Virgin of the Rock, depiction of the 18th century, Museum of Sacred Art in Betancuria



In the Basilica of Our Lady of the Peña, Patroness of the Canary Islands, in the city of Teror, there is still treasured a colorful depiction of the statue of the Apparition of Fuerteventura. In this representation, the Virgin and the Child Jesus, are both crowned and wrapped in a great red mantle of brocade with tones of gold with the Latin inscription that says: *Virgo Effigies, Virginitas De Rapte*. It means that this is a faithful representation of the original image. It was donated by Diego Alvarez, the purchaser of the Cathedral of Las Palmas. It dates back to 1711 and is an oil-painting on canvas by an anonymous artist of the Canary Islands. Others are found in unknown places, for example a painting from 1789, that was sent to the Hospital of San Martin



Jean de Béthencourt (1360-1425), received the title of King of the Canaries and contributed in a particular way to the evangelization of the Canary Islands



Church of Our Lady of the Rock, Vega del Río Palmas (Fuerteventura)



Interior of the Church of Our Lady of the Rock



The miraculous little statue

This image, of great beauty, shows many evident mutilations. Dating back from 1600, in documents relative to the reconstruction, these defects were made to be noticed. Currently several parts are damaged: the left hand and the head of the Virgin, some parts of the pedestal base and the right arm and left leg of the Baby Jesus. It is recounted that the Machos (the aborigines of the island) clashed with the French and destroyed the fortress of Risco Roque and also of Puerto de los Jardines. History narrates that it was on that occasion that the Baby Jesus lost the head and part of the limbs

