Apparition of the Virgin Mary at Bra

Each year since 1296, 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 revives 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 enemies. 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 gate of the Piedmontese town of Bra, near Cuneo, lies in the fact that it is 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, always 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 in particular difficult periods, they were in fact distressed 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 military, 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 apparently painted. It was the evening of December 29, 1336. The place was isolated, and it was almost night. 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 summoned 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 speed 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 whispering from the cord 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 and all could observe the miraculous flowering. A confirmation of the story concerning Egidia Mathis has perhaps, more 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 Pruno sp. native Italian 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 every age, in addition to the crowds of pilgrims, a large number of chemists, agronomists and botanists, who 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 by 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 occurring 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 Manzi, analyzing the observations formulated during the previous century by the chemist Professor Giuseppe Lercari, 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 Sendino Dasioli of the University of Turin, studying again the plant and the soil, ruled out the hypothesis of climatometric currents and declared that the blackthorn thicket of Bra "transcends the physical and biological laws". More recently, in 1974, also Professor Marco Montecchi of the Institute Botanica Garden of the University of Turin, came to the same conclusions as his earlier colleagues.