

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

# Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in SANT'ANASTASIA



ITALY, 1450 and 1589

The Shrine preserves the testimony and bequeaths us the warning of harsh penalties against some acts of blasphemy committed by Christians, both at the individual level and the collective level. The first blasphemous episode occurred toward the middle of the 15th century, when on one Easter Monday some youngsters in a small field were playing a game with a ball and a stick (similar to croquet, or bocce with a mallet). At the edge of the little field was a niche in which was painted an image of the Blessed Mother with Baby Jesus, located under the arch of an ancient Roman aqueduct; from these arches derives the name of Madonna of the Arch. During the game, the ball ended up in an old lime tree, the branches of which covered part of the frescoed wall and the player who erred in his stroke then lost the challenge in this way; in a fit of rage he took the ball and, while blaspheming, hurled it violently against the image of the Blessed Mother, striking her on the cheek that suddenly was brought to life and began to bleed. News of the miracle spread throughout the region, arriving as far as the count of Sarno, a nobleman of the town, with the assignment of magistrate, who came saving the youth from the lynching. After a legal hearing the youth was sentenced to a hanging and that was promptly executed. The youth was then hanged on the lime tree near the niche, who however two hours later, still with the body dangling, he shriveled up under the gaze of the bewildered crowd. This miraculous episode created devotion to the Madonna of the Arch, that spread quickly in all of southern Italy; throngs of faithful rushed to the site of the miracle, with whose offerings a chapel was built to protect the holy image from weather conditions.

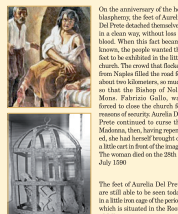
A century later, on the 2nd of April 1589, a second miraculous episode occurred, also this time on a Monday after Easter, at this point now consecrated to the feast of the Madonna of the Arch. A woman from the town of Sant'Anastasia, Aurelia Del Prete, married to Marco Cennamo (still today is preserved their marriage certificate from the 8th of November 1573), goes together with her husband to the little church of the Madonna to fulfill the promise of a religious offering, in fact the husband had been miraculously cured of a disease of the eyes. She brought with her a piglet, tied to a rope, probably to try to sell it at the local market that was held at the time in the neighborhood of the Shrine. In the crowd the piglet slipped out of their hand and, terrified, began to run. The woman began chasing it through the crowd, while blaspheming, and finally ended up in front of the little church, where she encountered her husband with an ex voto wax candle. Taken by fury she grabbed it from his hand and stomped on it, blaspheming and cursing the holy image, whomever painting it, and whomever came to venerate it. The following year, toward the beginning of Lent, Aurelia began to feel pain in her feet and was forced to be bedridden. During the night between Easter Sunday and Monday, her feet detached themselves, in a clean way, without loss of blood: it was the anniversary of her blasphemy. The feet were buried covertly, but the event was common knowledge and the people wanted that she should be exhumed and exhibited in the little church. The crowd that rushed from Naples filled the road for about two kilometers. The Bishop of Nola, Mons. Fabrizio Gallo, ordered the closure of the little church, declaring himself to personally make an inspection. On the 11th of May he instituted the due canonical process, afterward in which he withdrew the ban of venerating the image of the Blessed Mother of the Arch. Aurelia Del Prete continued to blaspheme the Madonna, then, having repented, had herself brought on a little cart in front of the image. She died on the 28th of July 1590. Her feet are still seen today in a little cage of iron of the period, placed in the Room of Offerings. This occurrence upset the conscience of the people and brought about the decision to build a larger shrine. In fact, in 1592, the Pontiff, Pope Clement VIII, sent Saint Giovanni Leonardi of Lucca who prepared the construction of the current Shrine. On the 1st of May 1593 the first stone of the Shrine was placed and already by the following year the priests of the Dominican order took over to manage it. The shrine was raised around the little chapel of the Blessed Mother, which was also restored and embellished with marble, in 1621; after these works, the image was partially covered in marble, because of which for all this time remained visible only the upper part of the fresco, the half bust of the Madonna and Child; very recent efforts have brought the entire image back to the light and to the veneration of the faithful. After the miracle of Aurelia Del Prete, devotion of the Madonna of the Arch spread rapidly in all of the Kingdom of Naples and soon crossed its borders. Numerous were the churches and chapels dedicated to the Virgin of the Arch in Campania, Calabria, Sicily, Puglia, Molise, Abruzzo, Lazio, and Emilia Romagna.



Image that depicts the first miracle. The youngster, having lost the game, picked up the ball and, while blaspheming, threw it violently at the holy image, striking it on the cheek that began to bleed.



After the first miracle, the image of the Blessed Mother of the Arch quickly began to be venerated very much.



The feet of Aurelia Del Prete are still seen in the same today in a little iron cage of the period, which is situated in the Shrine of Offerings.



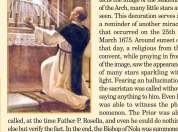
Another miracle equaled the history of this Shrine and maintained the position of the Virgin for her image: the miracle of the stone that cracked in the hands of the architect, on the 10th of February 1621. The Shrine was constructed, and the niche of the Madonna was sealed to be embellished, incorporating it into the current Shrine. It was then that the architect Ferdinando Pacifici covered the image with four marble and reduced the line of view to that of the current time. During these works of restoration, that with one of its orders, arrived under the auspices of the Madonna. Unseen were the attempts to break that rock which was an obstacle and that even could have caused the collapse of the shrine open which the previous image was depicted. Thus at four in the morning, while the Dominican Community was gathered to protect prayer, the architect supplicated the Madonna to remove that obstacle himself. Suddenly it cracked by itself, part of a monument attached to the wall and just fell into the hands of the architect. It weighed about 20 kg (44 lbs).



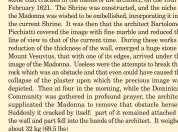
The Shrine of the Madonna of the Arch



Interior of the Shrine



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Ex voto offerings and votive painting in home of the Madonna of the Arch



The disaster



The miraculous image of the Blessed Mother of the Arch was solemnly venerated on the 8th of September 1614, feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Holyman, Don Paolo IX, invited the visit he made to the Shrine, granted that the occasion would be made with a crown of light. The area of niches were placed in memory of another miracle that occurred in 1675 when the Madonna from her painting resuscitated herself surrounded by stars.



Ex voto offerings and votive painting in home of the Madonna of the Arch



Procession with the banners of the Madonna of the Arch