

During this month of May, we continue our look into different Marian devotions, shrines, and sites of apparition around the world, and the unique stories and miracles associated with them. Last week we looked at Vietnam, China and the Philippines. This week we travel to Malta, Sri Lanka and Egypt to gain insight into some of their incredible stories.

## Our Lady of Ta'Pinu

Gozo is Malta's sister island, and there began a devotion beloved of the Maltese and Gozitans alike. The story is, in some ways, a quiet and humble one: Unlike the stories we have heard so far – involving great battles and dramatic rescues – this involves a miracle that went unnoticed at first (at least by the tale's heroine).

On 22 June 1883, Karmni Grima was a peasant girl from the village known as Gharb. While on her way home, passing the Ta'Pinu chapel, she heard a feminine voice calling to her three times in Maltese: 'Come! Come! Come!'

This chapel was already a special one: In 1575, it was going to be torn down because it was in such a state of disrepair; tradition has it, however, that when a workman struck the first blow, he broke his arm. This was treated as a sign to preserve the chapel. In 1611, a man name Pinu Gauci donated funds in order to restore the chapel properly, and hence it received its new name: Ta'Pinu ("of Philip").

In this chapel sits the famous altarpiece of the Assumption of Our Lady by Amadeo Perugino.



The Madonna of Ta'Pinu (Public Domain)

When Karmni entered the chapel, she heard the voice speak to her again: 'Recite three Hail Marys in remembrance of the three days my body lay in the tomb.' Karmni did so, suddenly caught in a profound rapture.

The young girl did not speak to anyone about this experience at first. For two years she kept quiet, before divulging the secret to a friend, Frangisk Portelli. When Portelli heard this, he could hardly contain his joy. At about the same time, Portelli had also heard a voice, asking him to pray in honour of Christ's hidden shoulder wound, caused by the weight of the cross.

Not long after this conversation, Portelli's mother was healed of a serious illness after they invoked the intercession of the Virgin of Ta'Pinu.

That little chapel became a popular pilgrimage site after this event. Wherever the Maltese and Gozitans emigrated, Our Lady of Ta'Pinu emigrated with them, and so there are Ta'Pinu shrines spread internationally.

Victoria has its own Ta'Pinu shrine in Bacchus Marsh, at which a new statue of Pope John Paul II was recently unveiled.

## Our Lady of Madhu

Our Lady of Madhu, in Sri Lanka, has a long history. The statue itself is believed to be as old as the Franciscan evangelisation of Sri Lanka (which dates back to 1543).

It was originally located in the Sanctuary of Mantai, but during the Dutch invasion and persecution of Catholicism, it was hidden in the jungles east of Mantai and came to rest in Madhu, a village 185 miles from the capital of Colombo.

The origins of the statue seem to be unclear, although it is an icon of powerful significance for Sri Lankans, regardless of their religious affiliation. Our Lady of Madhu draws veneration from segments of the Buddhist, Hindu and even Protestant populations. Catholics represent only about 7 per cent of the Sri Lankan people, and after the violent civil war between the Tamil Tigers and the Sinhalese government (which ended in 2009), the shrine of Madhu became a point of unity between warring peoples.

She also draws a wide variety of people because of her reputation as the 'Queen of Snakes'. In Madhu there are around 30 different species of snake, and it is said that Our Lady protects pilgrims from the dangers of their deadly poison.

On 2 July 1924, Our Lady of Madhu was given the honour of an official crowning.



Our Lady of Madhu (Public Domain)

## Our Lady of Zeitoun

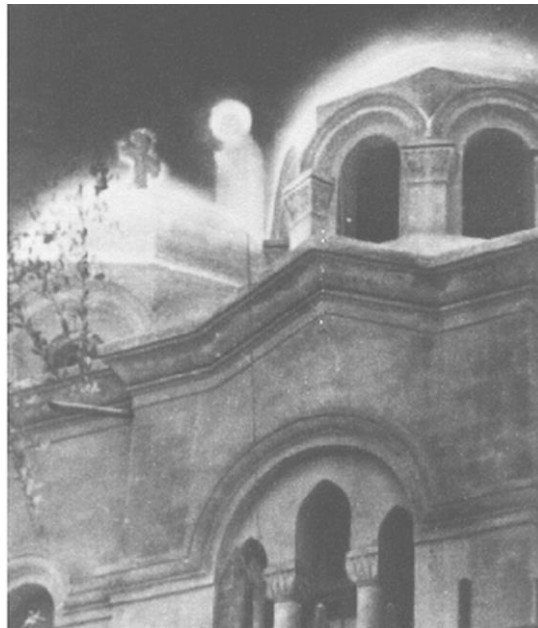
Zeitoun, a suburb in Cairo, Egypt, is believed to be one of the places where the Holy Family stayed during their flight to Egypt.

In 1968, a Muslim bus mechanic saw a silhouette of light appearing atop St Mary's Coptic Church, one that appeared to resemble a woman. At first he thought it was somebody about to commit suicide but realised that it might be an apparition of the Virgin Mary. Subsequently, an enormous crowd gathered to see it before the apparition ended.

Until 1971, however, this same woman clothed in light appeared atop the church two or three times a week. Throughout this time, at least one million people witnessed the apparitions. There were many reports of Our Lady holding an olive branch, and some of her bowing down before the cross. Her appearance triggered a massive religious revival in Egypt, even though she came bearing no messages. She was simply a presence, a shining point of light at a dark time.

Although Western reporters explained away the phenomenon, the Coptic Church and even secular Egyptian authorities investigated the apparitions thoroughly. Neither the government nor the police were able to find anything capable of pulling off such a hoax within a fifteen mile radius. Alongside the incredible number of people who witnessed the apparitions, there have been numerous images and video footage captured of the event.

Sadly, in 2016, ISIS bombed St Mary's, causing considerable damage to what is Cairo's largest cathedral.



A photograph of the apparition at Zeitoun (Public Domain)

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