

27. THE CONVENT OF SANT'ARCANGELO AT BAIANO

The Church of Sant'Arcangelo at Baiano was one of the first structures the Angevins wanted built to consecrate their victory over the Swabians. It was built on the site of a pre-existing religious building dedicated to San Michele Arcangelo, this in turn being erected on a previous pagan shrine. The addition “**at Baiano**” comes from the old name given to the area because a colony of citizens from Baia lived there.

The convent was built in the **Forcella** area, in the square of the same name, Sant'Arcangelo a Baiano. The structure is now abandoned, and, it is said, infested by ghosts and wandering spirits, but it was once the scene of bloody, licentious and sacrilegious acts.

Around 1540, under the Viceroy Don Pedro de Toledo, **Laura Baiano** was the head of the convent when a group of young noblewomen (Agata Arcamone, Chiara Frezza, Laura Sanfelice and Giulia Caracciolo) were “sacrificed” by their parents and **forced to take the vows**. The young women had already taken part in society life and dreamt of freedom and of love. The convent lifestyle, therefore, did not embody their greatest ideals in life; the monotony, the silence and the repression of desires created only anger and indignation in their hearts. So, with the passing of time, the nuns became rivals, malign and disrespectful, and it was then that the convent started to be tainted by the most brutal happenings.

Agata Arcamone, the youngest and prettiest nun, together with Giulia Caracciolo and Livia Pignatelli received a correctional penance from the bishop for having **love affairs** with young noblemen within the convent. Some of these young noblemen, including Pier Antonio Terracina and Giacomo Crispo, were later victims of a vendetta and were killed in the most atrocious ways at the hands of henchmen. In addition, the Abbess and two nuns were poisoned. An “inspector” was appointed to investigate the ever more insistent rumours of orgies of nuns and of brutal crimes taking place inside the convent building. The result was the **suppression of the convent in 1577**.

In 1829 a libellous book, *Cronache del Convento di Sant'Arcangelo a Baiano*, which revealed the presumed vile and immoral sexual acts of the nuns, appeared in France. The book was then translated into Italian and reprinted in Naples in 1860.

Today it is said that the ruins of the convent are still haunted by **the ghost of Agata Arcamone**, who, after the decision to close the convent, escaped from Naples leaving no trace.