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Guardia Sanframondi is a town and *comune* in the Province of Benevento, Campania region, Italy. It is best known for the penitential rite held every seven years.

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Castle above Guardia.

Geography

The town is dominated by a medieval castle. Most of the old section of town is accessible only by foot along stepped streets. Much of the old town is vacant, as citizens prefer the new homes and shops that ring the old town, because they are accessible by automobile. Some houses in the old town are being purchased and rehabilitated by Neapolitans as weekend retreats. The town is the center of the Titerno "Local Action Group". Below the town is one of the largest coöperative wineries in Europe; it produces both Guardiolo and Sannio wines.

Penitential rite

Guardia hosts a *riti settennali di penitenza* or penitential rite every seven years. The rite honors the discovery of a Madonna and Child statue found in a field hundreds of years ago. The rite consists of a series of processions the week following the Assumption. Until

Guardia Sanframondi	
— <i>Comune</i> —	
<div><div>Comune di Guardia Sanframondi</div><div><div><div><div></div><div>Guardia Sanframondi</div></div></div></div></div>	
Location of Guardia Sanframondi in Italy <div>Coordinates: 41°15′N 14°36′E</div>	
Country	Italy
Region	Campania
Province	Benevento (BN)
<i>Frazioni</i>	Santa Lucia, Sapenzie
Area <div> - Total</div>	21 km ² (8.1 sq mi)

recently, the rite was only known locally, but as residents moved elsewhere in Italy and abroad, word of the rite has spread. It has become something of a homecoming event. There are four components of the rite:



Mystery of Saint Lawrence.

about one hundred mysteries in all. During the week each quarter of town has a separate procession through its own neighborhood. On Sunday all the quarters form a grand procession. The participants hold a pose depicting a particular moment of the mystery as they walk through town—they do not act out events. The committees informally compete with each other to put on the finest mysteries.

Choirs

Each quarter also forms a choir that joins the processions. Traditionally the choirs were formed of unmarried girls, but recently married women, and occasionally men, have joined in. The women wear white clothing, a symbolic crowns of thorns, and braided cords around their shoulders.



Beater with "sponge."

	21 km ² (8.1 sq mi)
Elevation	428 m (1,404 ft)
Population (2005)	
 - Total	5,472
 - Density	260.6/km ² (674.9/sq mi)
Demonym	Guardiesi
Time zone	CET (UTC+1)
 - Summer (DST)	CEST (UTC+2)
Postal code	82034
Dialing code	0824
Patron saint	San Filippo Neri
Saint day	26 May
Website	Official website (http://www.comune.guardiasanframondi.bn.it/)

Mysteries

The four quarters of town each form committees to organize a parade of "mysteries" (religious scenes), with volunteers in period costumes from the Old Testament, New Testament, and Lives of Saints. The neighboring towns of San Lorenzo Maggiore and San Lupo join with the committees to stage a few of the mysteries. In 2003 there were

Penitents

During the neighborhood processions, several *flagellanti* ("flagellants") join in. They gently strike their backs with a metal scourge. On Sunday, the procession is joined by several hundred *battenti* ("beaters") who strike their chests with a *spugna* (literally "sponge," it is really a disk of cork holding dozens of pins). Designated helpers pour white wine on the sponges during the procession, supposedly to ward off infection. There are a few dozen *flagellanti* during the Sunday procession, who also provide crowd control. The *flagellanti* and *battenti* are anonymous. They wear white hoods and are not even supposed to tell family members they are participating. Scourges and sponges are not carried openly or displayed in homes after the rite. The *battenti* are all men, although a few of the *flagellanti* are women.

Additionally there are a few dozen symbolic child *flagellanti*. They wear black

robes and caps, and very gently swing a small scourge over their shoulders.

Statue

The rite ends with the procession of the Madonna and Child statue through the town. After the mysteries start, the statue is removed from the church, at which point a cannon sounds to announce the event. The procession stops and everyone kneels for a minute. When the statue makes its way to the town center, the *battenti* walk in front of it on their knees. When the procession continues, the crowds follow the statue, or walk backwards in front of it. The procession ends as the statue is returned to the church. All-night vigils in the church continue for several days.



Madonna and Child procession.

Notes and references

External links

- Guardia Sanframondi (Italian) (<http://www.guardiasanframondi.galtiterno.it/>)
- Fremondoweb (<http://www.fremondoweb.com/>)
- Pro Loco di Guardia Sanframondi (<http://www.prolocoguardia.it/>)
- La Guardiense winery (<http://www.laguardiense.com/>)

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Categories: Cities and towns in Campania | Communes of the Province of Benevento | Catholic penitential practices

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