

ANTONIO BINI

# HEINRICH PFEIFFER


**The Scholar who recognized the Veronica  
in the Holy Face**

**A Compelling History between the Jubilees of 2000 and 2025**

  
**TEATERNUM**  
EDIZIONI







*"Those who have truly encountered Christ  
cannot keep him to themselves,  
they must proclaim him!"*

---

**John Paul II,**  
Novo Millennio Ineunte,  
Apostolic Letter at the end of the Great  
Jubilee of the Year 2000, Rome, January 6  
2001 Chap. II A face to contemplate

*"Certainly, it is the greatest  
miracle we have!"*

---

This is what **Padre Pio** said  
to Father Domenico da Cese  
speaking of the Holy Face

*"The characteristics of the veil  
pose the problem of the formation  
of the image, which although it appears  
at first glance to be a painting, in reality  
shows various peculiarities largely  
incompatible with this hypothesis!"*

---

**International Workshop on the Scientific  
Approach to the Acheiropoietos Images.**  
ENEA, Frascati, May 4, 2010

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**On the cover:**

image of the Holy Face of Manoppello  
and photo of Heinrich Pfeiffer

Photos and documents belong to the archive of Antonio Bini,  
with the exception of the photos on pages 3, 5, 38, 40, 55, 59,  
taken from the *Rivista del Volto Santo*.

The photos of the coats of arms of the Alarcón,  
from the Museo della Gente del Gran Sasso  
and the Museo della Ceramica di Castelli, are, respectively,  
by Giuliano Di Gaetano and Alessia di Stefano



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*"In a small village in Abruzzo lies hidden one of the greatest treasures in the world. We are in Manoppello. The treasure is here: a piece of the very finest cloth. From the subtlest veil shines a face easily identifiable as the face of the Lord. This piece of fabric holds many secrets"*

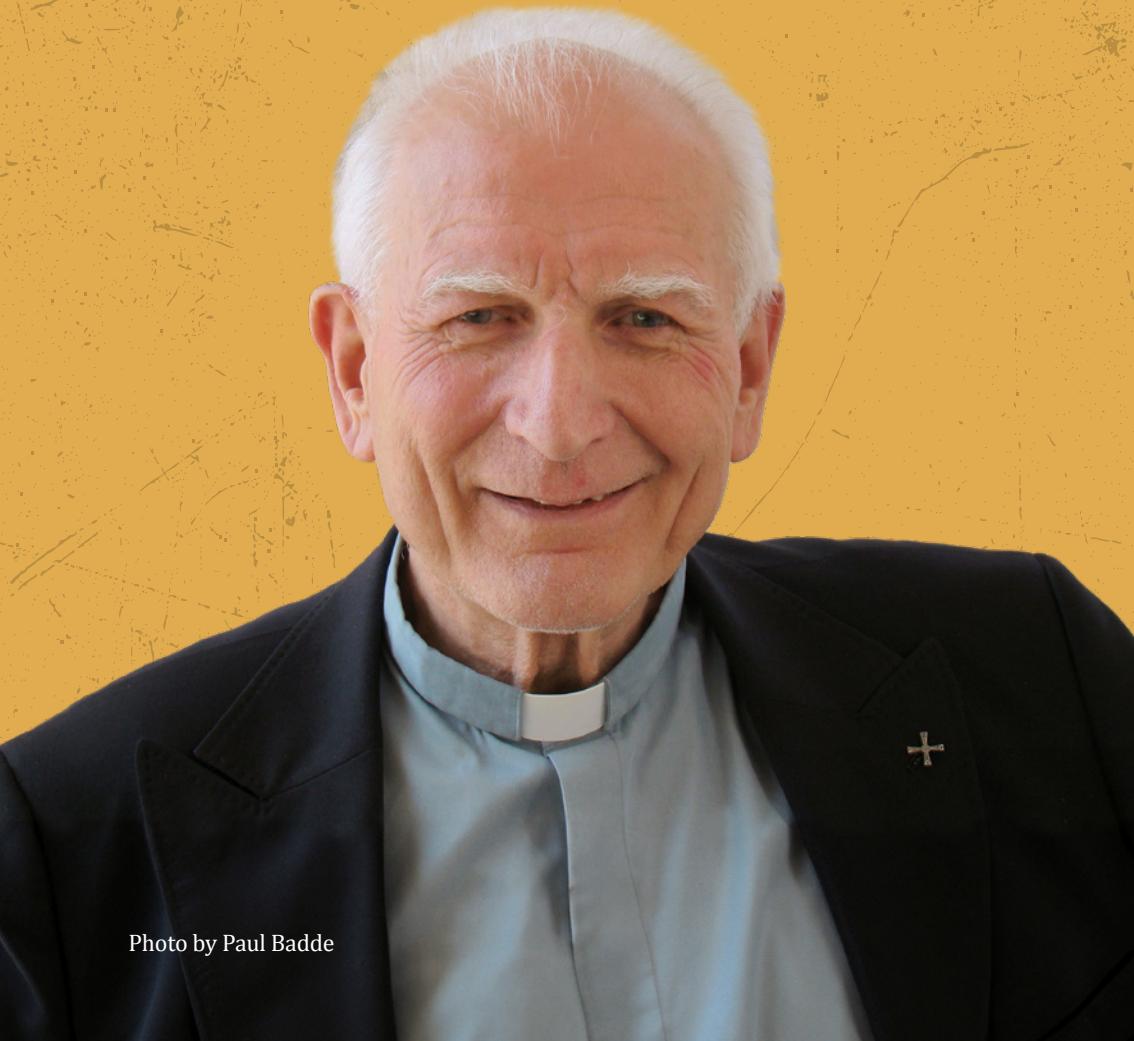


Photo by Paul Badde

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*Ostende nobis Christum et sufficit* San Bernardo of Chiaravalle

## INTRODUCTION

The silence that had enveloped the Holy Face for centuries was broken on May 31, 1999, when during an international press conference held in Rome, Father Heinrich W. Pfeiffer S.J. [22.02.1939 – 26.11.2021], an authoritative scholar of Christian art history, presented the results of the studies that made it possible to recognize the Holy Face of Manoppello (in the province of Pescara) as the legendary Veronica that was believed to have disappeared during the "Sack of Rome", carried out by the "Landsknechts" (German mercenaries) in 1527. But the road to travel was just beginning.

The veil, as the scholar stated, matched the Shroud of Turin, revealing the same features which had influenced iconography over the centuries until the seventeenth century: a suffering face, slightly round and asymmetrical oval face, deep eyes, a small tuft of hair above the forehead, the mouth slightly open.

After so many years, I feel the need to remember those extraordinary days linked to the unforgettable figure of Father Heinrich Pfeiffer, S.J. by recalling what I wrote after his death, which took place in Berlin on November 26, 2021, together with his last article, entitled "The veil of secrets: the enigma of Manoppello", published in the October 2018 issue of the monthly *I Luoghi dell'Infinito*, thanking the journal for authorizing its reproduction.

I have also attempted to compile his bibliography, limiting myself to the theme of the Face of Christ, recalling that one of his areas of study during his many years of research was also the iconography of the Sistine Chapel. His written contributions left to the Capuchins and published in the magazine *Il Volto Santo* are numerous.

*"We are what we remember, storytelling is remembrance and remembrance is living" (Mario Luzi).*

This seemed to me to be an opportunity to put together and recall, even if only briefly, some circumstances, among the many,



often which I experienced in the first person, that preceded and followed that 1999 conference, up to the pilgrimage of September 1, 2006 Pope Benedict XVI to Manoppello, with numerous references in footnotes, hoping that they may be useful to those who are coming to the knowledge and study of the Holy Face.

Finally, from the distance of five centuries, I will reference a number of possible signs that, beginning from the background of those days, could lead to the identification of the person who saved the Veronica from possible destruction during the Sack of Rome, bringing it to safety in Abruzzo.

**Heinrich Pfeiffer - Scholar who Recognized the Veronica  
(True Image) in the Holy Face of Manoppello:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDzE-ODG9mo>



***"For everyone, may it be a living  
and personal encounter with the Lord Jesus,  
the "Door" of salvation"***

---

**Pope Francis**  
**Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee**  
May 9, 2024

## IT ALL BEGAN WITH THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF MAY 31, 1999

On May 31, 1999, the media around the world for the first time discovered the Holy Face and Manoppello, placing, in many cases, the news among the headlines of the main newspapers and television news programs, as can be seen from the review of the foreign press, inevitably partial, which are summarized in this publication. Many considered the research of Fr. Pfeiffer convincing and well documented, also with commentary by historians in addition to the news reports.

Father Germano OFM Cap, superior of the Shrine, wrote enthusiastically in his editorial published in issue 2/1999 of the *Rivista del Volto Santo*: "We never imagined what would happen. At the foreign press conference, an announcement resounded throughout the world: the Roman Veronica has been found... Manoppello was



Press conference of May 31, 1999. From the left Prof. Donato Vittore, University of Bari, Father Heinrich Pfeiffer, Gregorian University, Erik Kusch, journalist, Marco Verticelli, president of the Abruzzo Region, Fr. Germano Di Pietro, superior of the Shrine of the Holy Face.

invaded by journalists and television networks from all over the world, up to CNN<sup>1</sup>, who broke into the quiet life of the Shrine. Also relevant were the reflections on the internet, where the presence of the Holy Face multiplied in just a few months<sup>2</sup>.

Some media reported on the veil of Veronica found in "a remote monastery in the mountains" at the foot of the Maiella, while the news of the Spanish television Antenna 3 emphatically emphasized the "total silence of the Vatican" with respect to the result of the studies announced by Father Pfeiffer.

In the midst of so much silence, one voice, in fact, was picked up. The historian Guglielmo de' Giovanni Centelles, in an article published in the newspaper *Il Tempo*<sup>3</sup>, while referring to the hypotheses of the disappearance following the Sack of Rome, makes his own the testimony obtained from a disgruntled canon of St. Peter's, the Portuguese archbishop Alvim Pereira (1915-2006), who confirmed that: "The Veronica is as always in its place", adding, as if to reproach Father Pfeiffer, "that the major relics are to be venerated and not argued about." There is also some annoyance about the article regarding the Holy Face, just published in the Sunday Times. Without sensing contradictions, the author of the article wrote that "the authenticity of the Vatican Veronica does not weaken the veneration of the icon of Manoppello".

Silence and denial on the part of the Church fueled doubts, opposition, mistrust and criticism of the German Jesuit and his stu-

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<sup>1</sup> I also authored an article entitled "Dal silenzio... alla CNN" (From Silence...to CNN), in *Turismo d'Abruzzo*, bimonthly magazine of the Tourism Sector of the Abruzzo Region, n. 5, December 1999, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> For an initial recognition of the presence of the Holy Face on the web, cf. Antonio and Paolo Bini, "**Il Volto Santo su Internet**", in *Il Volto Santo*, n. 2, 2002, p. 5 et seq.

<sup>3</sup> Guglielmo de' Giovanni Centelles, "Si riapre il dibattito sulle reliquie: la Veronica vaticana sarebbe falsa", (The debate on relics is reopened: the Vatican Veronica would be false), in *Il Tempo*, 1.6.1999.

dies, sometimes with intolerable critical insinuations about the Holy Face itself, sometimes expressed by those who had never even seen the sacred image.

Nevertheless, the fog of oblivion which had formed over the centuries was still destined to progressively dissolve. For example, the English historian Ian Wilson, a member of the British Society for the Shroud of Turin, wondered, as had others, why on the occasion of the Great Jubilee of 2000 "the other cloth bearing the imprint of Jesus, once exposed to millions of believers?" was not displayed?<sup>4</sup>

Not a single line appeared in *L'Osservatore Romano*. Considering that the historic newspaper of the Holy See, founded in 1861, already had digital archives, I sought confirmation on June 15, 1999, resulting in this negative response: in the almost 150 years of its existence, *L'Osservatore Romano* had never found a way to concern itself with the Holy Face.

Even the Catholic weekly *Famiglia Cristiana* ignored the press conference. A devotee of Manoppello who turned to the editor complaining about the silence maintained on the Holy Face, while articles on the Shroud were frequent, received a reply in a letter dated September 21, 1999, that the weekly "did not usually chase after sensational discoveries", evidently questioning the theses of Father Pfeiffer and the research of Prof. Donato Vittore, emphasizing that the problem was that "of not fueling easy sensationalism about events and realities where there is often no certain tradition and where there is no certainty of the miracle, when there is even a lack of approval or authentication on the part of the ecclesiastical authority". The letter concluded, however, leaving the possibility of returning to the question "if studies should emerge or events aimed at accurately clarifying the nature of the sudarium of Manoppello should emerge". And this is what actually happened a few years later.

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<sup>4</sup> Ian Wilson, "La Veronica e la Sindone", in *Il Telo*, rivista di sindonologia, n. 1, 2000, p. 14 ff.

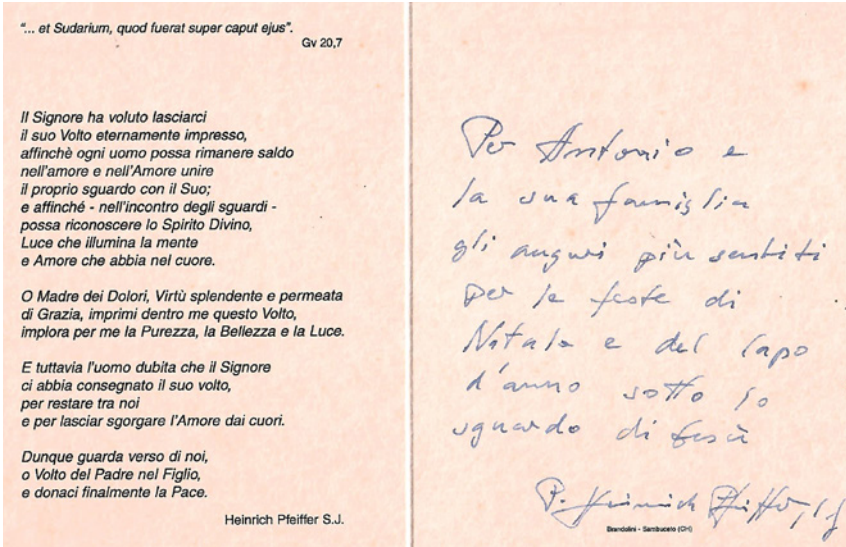


Fig. 1 - The card with the prayer of Father Pfeiffer sent in December 2000

To speak of the Holy Face and even more to claim that it was the Veronica, as Father Pfeiffer courageously affirmed, meant touching on a delicate subject, as the Church had never admitted the disappearance from Rome of what was the most venerated relic of Christianity, capable of attracting crowds of pilgrims, even before the first Jubilee in history, established by Boniface VIII in 1300.

There was no lack of ironic jokes directed at me at that time, but nothing compared to the criticism and hostility shown towards Father Pfeiffer, whose theses created "turmoil", precisely as the Great Jubilee of 2000 approached.

His convictions also emerged in the prayer to the Holy Face that he wrote and had printed, sending it with his best wishes to me and my family in December 2000. The text of the prayer is preceded by the Latin verse taken from the Gospel of John 20:7 "*Et sudarium, quod fuerat super caput ejus*" (The face cloth, which had been on his head), an evident reference to what he considered to be the origin and formation of the Holy Face (Fig. 1).



Very intense years followed, with meetings, visits, contacts, interviews, research, but also contrasts and discussions, which were not only public.

Rose-Marie Borngässer wrote in *Die Welt* of June 2, 1999, in an article entitled "Deutscher Pater findet verschollen Reliquie" (German Father finds the missing relic), in addition to her reflections on Father Pfeiffer's conclusions and the outcome of Prof. Vittore's research on the absence of color, that "*until now science had dealt exclusively with the Shroud of Turin, considered the burial sheet of Christ. The similarity of the somatic features of the Turin relic to those of the now rediscovered sudarium is shocking*".

The reference to what the journalist expressed seems appropriate for a brief mention of the critical position towards the Holy Face expressed by some sindonologists (experts on the Shroud of Turin). I was able to discover that this was unfortunately a question that had been open for some time, which arose when the Holy Face was still almost completely unknown, as the Passionist Father Enrico Sammarco noted in 1972, who believed, with a certain intuition, that "*the two relics of the Passion are not mutually exclusive, but rather, in a certain way complemented each other*", so it would be "*useless any controversy, as some would like, in the defense of the Holy Shroud, excluding at all costs other faces of Jesus imprinted on other sudaria*"<sup>5</sup>. But from Manoppello, a small provincial situation quite different from the Turin capital<sup>6</sup>, I do not know that any polemics have ever been raised against disappro-

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<sup>5</sup> Enrico Sammarco, "*Ricordando il Volto Santo di Manoppello*" (Remembering the Holy Face of Manoppello), Tipografia Porziuncola, Assisi, 1972, p. 82. The author also mentions the meeting with Fr. Domenico da Cese.

<sup>6</sup> Compared to the simple and humble reality of Manoppello, the human and financial resources available for some time to promote the Shroud are significant. For the 2010 exhibition, a budget of about ten million euros was settled on, cf. E. Minucci, "*La Sindone ha trovato lo sponsor*" (The Shroud has found its sponsor), in *La Stampa*, March 13, 2009

ving opinions, let alone doubts expressed about the authenticity of the Shroud of Turin cloth.

From some research it has been possible to detect that such a comparison between the two cloths dates back to the beginning of the last century when the *Tribuna Illustrata* of May 31, 1902 published two separate articles in the same issue, the first on the Shroud and the research begun by two French scholars, only four years after the photographs of Secondo Pia that made the Shroud "legible" for the first time, the second on the Holy Face of Manoppello, taking up a writing by a certain Clemente Rije, in which it was stated that *"the small veil is made of silk of the finest weaving, as large as the silver frame in which it is kept ... The characteristics of the cloth would be surprising because no trace of coloring appears, while the face of Jesus is bright and clear, the hair is long and falling on the shoulders, the features are pale, the eyes glassy, just as Publius Lentulus describes in his letter to Caesar"*. Rije's letter concluded by stating that *"the cloth should be a stimulus for serious studies, all the more so since today the discussions on the Shroud of Turin have rekindled such a legitimate interest. This could therefore be the true icon from which the name of Veronica derives, whom tradition believes to be the pious Jewish woman who wiped the face of Jesus on the way to Calvary"*<sup>7</sup>.

Important hypotheses and questions, but unfortunately we had to wait almost a century for the first studies on the Holy Face.

Coinciding with Easter 2005, *Famiglia Cristiana* published an essay on the Holy Face, edited by Saverio Gaeta, then editor-in-chief of the weekly, with the eloquent title "The Face of the Risen One", including the preface by the archbishop at the head of the diocese of Chieti-Vasto, Mons. Bruno Forte, who arrived in Abruzzo a few months prior. It was the first book circulated nationally

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<sup>7</sup> Antonio Bini, *"105 anni fa scrivevano del Volto Santo e della Sindone"* (105 years ago they were writing about the Holy Face and the Shroud), *Il Volto Santo*, n. 2, 2007, p. 28 et seq.

on the veil of Manoppello, in which the face of the resurrection of Jesus was recognized. It was Mons. Forte to deliver a copy of the book to the then Cardinal Ratzinger.

Until then, publications on the Holy Face had been very rare, certainly because of the fears that the Capuchins had for the fate of the veil, so much so as to induce them to hide the sacred image for decades "in a small cabinet or niche on the right side of the main altar"<sup>8</sup>, which, as a result of papal measures, in particular that of Pope Urban VIII, could have been destroyed if mistaken for a copy of the the Veronica<sup>9</sup>. These fears may also have influenced Father Donato da Bomba, leading him to hypothesize the arrival of the veil in Manoppello as it happened before 1527, when he was commissioned by the Order to draw up the *Relatione* (1640-1646), after the donation of Donato Antonio De Fabritiis to the Capuchins, more than a century after its presumed arrival in the Abruzzo town.

It is also discovered that "*that manuscript, although furnished with due approval, was never published*", as admitted by Father Filippo da Tussio in the preface of his Memoirs, suggesting that the mandate he had received from the superiors constituted precisely that of explaining and finally making known the *Relatione*, which had until then been hidden "*for reasons that need not be remembered*" even to the bishops, as in the case of Mons. Giosué Maria Sagge, archbishop of Chieti (from 1838 to 1852), who had also au-

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Fr. Filippo da Tussio, *Del Volto Santo. Historical memories collected around the prodigious image of the passionate face of Jesus Christ our Lord*, Tipografia Vescovile, L'Aquila, 1875, p. 154.

<sup>9</sup> The first monograph, edited by Father Filippo da Tussio, was published in L'Aquila by the bishop's printing house in 1875, that is, after the Papal States had ceased to exist. The essay is "ordered by the superiors", under the protection of Cardinal Raffaele Monaco La Vallette. Still in 1966, Father Antonio da Serramonacesca published "*The Holy Face of Manoppello and the Shrine*", published by Italica, Pescara, declaring obsequious respect for the papal decrees and especially for Urban VIII.

thorized the dissemination of a novena<sup>10</sup>. For a long time, the *Relazione* had been known only by an exceedingly small number of people, while the *Memoirs* of Fr. Filippo da Tussio would have had an extremely limited diffusion.

The public cult of the Holy Face actually began only in 1703, due to popular pressure following earthquakes that struck the town and Abruzzo. Yet, after only a few years, on April 21, 1718, Clement XI granted the plenary indulgence for seven years, which helped to make the Shrine even more frequented. A surprising circumstance for the unknown Shrine, then isolated and reachable only through footpaths and mule tracks, while until the early sixties there was only an unpaved road. It is not possible to know whether the papal decree has been renewed.

The constant concerns of the Capuchins aimed at defending the Holy Face must have known fluctuating periods over time. In order to shelter the relic, whose importance they knew, the father guardian of the convent, Fr. Francesco da Orsogna, in 1790, "for reasons that it is not useful to recall now"<sup>11</sup>, with the help of the community of Manoppello, even went as far as to request the unusual protection of King Ferdinand IV of Bourbon, which was granted by decree of 27 August 1794. Here too, Fr. Filippo da Tussio, who would have liked to say much more, did not go beyond a nod to make us understand the difficulties experienced by the friars, who in the past were engaged, not without tensions, even with the local clergy who aspired to the custody of the Holy Face.

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For *L'Osservatore Romano* it was not until the year following the publication of Gaeta's essay in *Famiglia Cristiana*, that on September 2, 2006, the newspaper of the Holy See dedicated its entire

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<sup>10</sup> P. Filippo da Tussio, op. cit., p. X.

<sup>11</sup> P. Filippo da Tussio, op. cit., p. 166.

front page to Pope Benedict XVI's pilgrimage to Manoppello which had taken place the day before. It was the pope himself who "approved," indeed who urged the cult of the Holy Face, even more so through his prayer spread exactly one year after his visit.

Even Professor Pierluigi Baima Bollone, an authoritative expression of Italian sindonologists, who, interviewed by TG1 RAI on May 31, 1999, had doubted the veil of Manoppello, affirming it could be one of the copies of the Veronica spread in past centuries, a year later published a new essay in which he recognized that the Holy Face "has an identical general appearance, overlapping dimensions and ten points of congruity with the Shroud"<sup>12</sup>.

Reviewing some of the news programs that aired after the press conference, I was able to note the presence, among the many journalists, of two visibly displeased prelates, identified thanks also to the research of Paul Badde<sup>13</sup>, as two brother archbishops, at the time apostolic nuncios and Vatican diplomats. They were Giovanni De Andrea and Giuseppe De Andrea, of Piedmontese origin, both now deceased, respectively, in 2012 and 2016. This is just one of the many circumstances that can make us understand the difficulties encountered by Father Pfeiffer's theses.

I had met Father Pfeiffer on December 19, 1998, during a conference promoted by Prof. Nicola Costantini, president of the Pro-Lo-co "Volto Santo" of Manoppello, on the theme "Holy Face, future prospects" (Fig. 2). Among those present was also the mayor Giorgio De Luca, still at the helm of the town.

I had been invited as regional tourism manager and head of the "Jubilee Communication Project" of the Abruzzo Region. In reality, mine was a casual presence, as the organizers initially invited the regional councilor who, unable to participate due to other commit-

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<sup>12</sup> Pierluigi Baima Bollone, *Shroud: 101 questions and answers*, San Paolo Edizioni, 2000, p. 34.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Badde, writer, former correspondent of *Die Welt* and professor of history. Author of numerous essays on the Holy Face.



ments, delegated me. Although I live in Pescara, just thirty minutes by car from Manoppello, I must admit that it was the first time I went to visit the Shrine. In fact, although I knew of its existence, I thought it housed a painting and not the legendary Veronica, or in any case a veil with the extraordinary characteristics of the Holy Face. And as a painting it had been presented on the other hand by some rare publications<sup>14</sup>, while, to remain in Abruzzo, there is a monastery of the Silvestrini Benedictine monks dedicated to the Holy Face in Giulianova, and in Tagliacozzo the feast of the Holy Face is celebrated annually, represented by a painting kept by the Benedictine nuns.

On that occasion I was very struck by that first encounter with the Holy Face, especially by that intense, mysterious, alive and profound gaze that was imprinted on me. I immediately had the impression that it was an inexplicable image. I then listened with great interest to Father Pfeiffer's speech during the conference, in which I also spoke about the prospects of the imminent Jubilee for the main shrines of Abruzzo. The Jesuit recounted his first visit to Manoppello, his joy at coming across the Holy Face, which he immediately believed to be the the Veronica, long studied, venerated by huge crowds of pilgrims, including Dante and Petrarch, and considered lost forever. His exhibi-

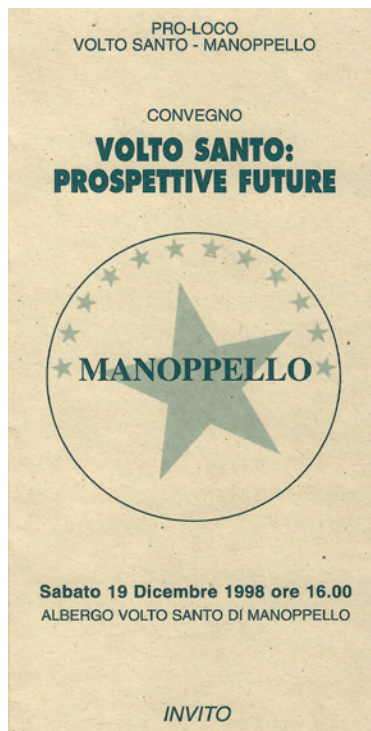


Fig. 2 - Invitation - Program.

<sup>14</sup> Luigi Vittorio Bertarelli, *Abruzzo, Molise, Puglia*, Touring Club Italiano, Milan, 1926, p. 204. Writes of an "image of Christ painted on silk".



Fig. 2 bis - Invitation page two – Program of the Conference “Holy Face, future prospects”, December 19, 1998.

tion was documented by the projection of a series of slides, as was customary at the time.

His was a completely isolated opinion at that time.

Already glimpsing the difficult path that his theses would have to travel in the future, he stated with his usual calmness that “*All art history will have to deal with it, perhaps even long after my death. But that doesn't matter*”.

Taken by a strong curiosity, in the following days I returned to the Shrine to inform myself and to do research on the Veronica<sup>15</sup>,

<sup>15</sup> Antonio Bini, “*La Veronica com'era. L'importanza dell'Opusculum di Ja-*

which until then I thought was only a legend. On that occasion I had the surprise of meeting Father Pietro De Guglielmo OFM Cap, originally like me from Vasto Marina (Chieti), whom I had not seen for a long time was very old and was now difficult to recognize by his copious white beard. Hearing my name, pronounced by Father Germano, he said that he remembered my father and that he was still celebrating Mass with the chalice donated by my family on the occasion of his priestly ordination<sup>16</sup>. Finally I recognized him and it seemed to me a positive circumstance, which made the relationship with the Shrine even more familiar. Like Father Pietro, I had also grown up as a child in the shadow of the Capuchin convent attached to the church of Stella Maris in Vasto Marina, then little more than a village.

Returning to research, in those months, as the Great Jubilee of 2000 approached, the history of that legendary veil was returning to history thanks to conferences, exhibitions and the important editorial push aimed at reconstructing the history of the jubilees that have occurred over the centuries, coinciding with the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Christ. I also met Father Pfeiffer in Rome at the Gregorian University, to try to deepen my knowledge of some aspects of the complex history of the Veronica. I don't know how, but suddenly I had the idea of organizing an international press conference. I proposed to him and to Father Germano Di Pietro, who had been assigned to the convent of Manoppello a few months earlier, to make public the studies on the Holy Face, together with the results of some scientific research conducted a few months earlier by Prof. Donato Vittore of the University of Bari<sup>17</sup>, who had been invited to Manoppello in the

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*copo Grimaldi*" (The Veronica as it was. The importance of the Opusculum of Jacopo Grimaldi) in *Il Volto Santo*, n.1/2002, p. 2 ff. The article was published under the supervision of Father Pfeiffer.

<sup>16</sup> Antonio Bini, *In memory of Father Pietro De Guglielmo*, in *Il Volto Santo*, n. 2, 2022, p. 40 et seq.

<sup>17</sup> Donato Vittore, *Il Volto di Manoppello. A painting? Le ultime indagini*, in

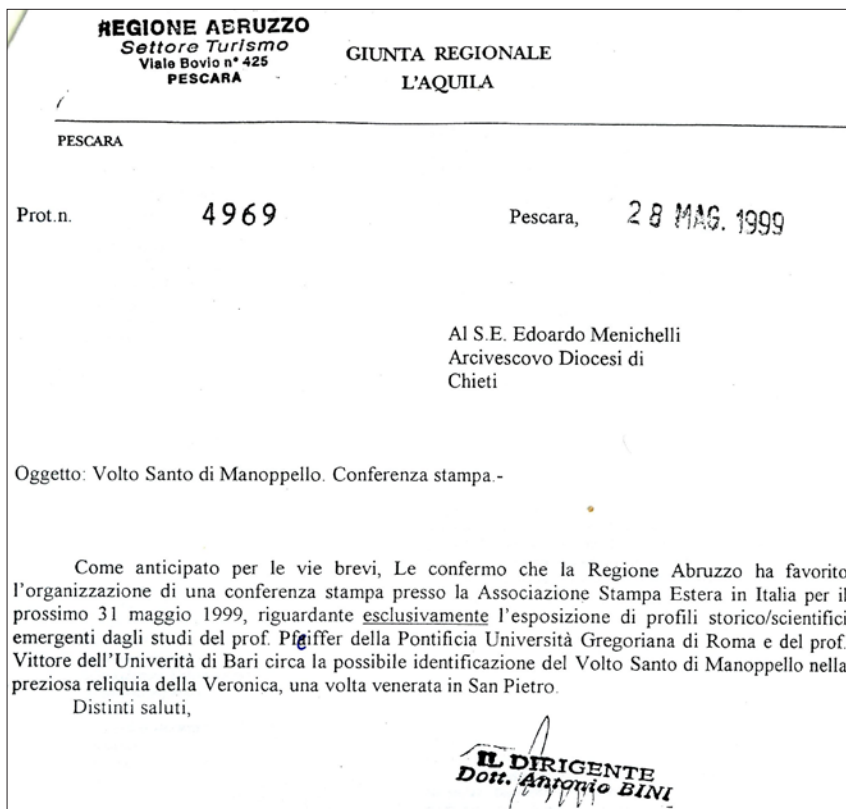


Fig. 3 - Fax sent to the archbishop of Chieti-Vasto mons. Edoardo Menichelli on 28 May 1998.

previous months by the former superior Father Celestino Di Giovanni who sought to do everything in his power to increase devo-

*Il Telo*, rivista di sindonologia, n. 1, 2000, p. 35. Prof. Vittore through a satellite scanner ascertained the absence of color residues. He also stated that it was necessary to avoid opening the windows that would have put the integrity of the very thin veil at risk. A similar assessment was made by Prof. Giulio Fanti, professor of thermal measurements at the Faculty of Engineering of the University of Padua.

PESCARA RECAPITO

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 65124 PESCARA

GIUNTA REGIONALE ABRUZZO  
 SETTORE TURISMO  
 - 3 GIU 1999  
 Prot. n. 5169

RINGRAZIO COMUNICAZIONE RIGUARDANTE CONFERENZA STAMPA STUDI  
 PROFESSORI PFEIFFER E VITTORE SUL VOLTO SANTO DI MANOPPELLO  
 EDOARDO MENICHELLI ARCIVESCOVO CHIETI-VASTO

MITTENTE:  
 MONS. EDOARDO MENICHELLI ARCIVESCOVO  
 PIAZZA VALIGNANI 4  
 66100 CHIETI

01/06 12.16

NNNN

GIUNTA REGIONALE ABRUZZO  
 SETTORE TURISMO  
 - 2 GIU 1999  
 ARRIVO

AGENZIA DI PESCARA  
 - 1.6.39

Fig. 4 - Telegram of thanks from the Archbishop of Chieti-Vasto dated June 1, 1999.

tion to the Holy Face, also through the Peregrinatio del Volto Santo in neighboring countries, which ended up raising heated disputes among the people of Manoppello<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Ricci, *The Holy Face will not come out again. The friars renounce pilgrimages*, *Il Messaggero* (Abruzzo supplement), 23 April 1998. The City Council even met to approve a motion directed at the friars to give up letting the relic



I had never promoted such initiatives before, but I felt the strong conviction develop in me that the Holy Face, “the most important relic of antiquity”<sup>19</sup> - could not remain known by only a few, maturing in me the need for broader horizons that would favor the knowledge of the authentic face of Jesus, going far beyond the prospect of promoting the imminent Jubilee.

The idea immediately convinced both of them. Years later, I remember with gratitude their availability and trust in me, even though they had only known me for a brief time, for an event that could have created problems. The conference was promoted by the Abruzzo Region on May 31, 1999 and was held at the Roman headquarters of the Foreign Press Association in Italy, with the coordination of the German journalist Erik Kusch. On that occasion, extensive documentation was made available to journalists, also concerning the overlapping of the Shroud and the Holy Face, together with the guide “Abruzzo on the way to the Jubilee”, just published in five languages, where I had just had time to have information on the veil of Manoppello inserted. To be fair, I felt the need to inform in advance the archbishop of Chieti Edoardo Menichelli, then president of the Abruzzo-Molise Episcopal Conference and very close to the Holy Face, with a letter dated May 28, 1999, with which I shared my intention of showing the historical-scientific outlines emerging from the studies of Prof. Pfeiffer and Prof. Vittore “about the possible identification of the Holy Face of Manoppello in the precious relic of the Veronica, once venerated in St. Peter's” (Fig. 3).

A formulation that many years later appears simplistic and at the same time naïve with respect to the complex and complicated histo-

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leave the Shrine. Father Celestino was very affected “left the convent to be assigned to Penne. Father Germano Di Pietro arrived in his place. Those facts show what the situation was like just a year before the international press conference

<sup>19</sup> Pope Nicholas IV, in listing the various relics present in St. Peter's, indicated the Veronica in first place, the body of St. Peter in the second, cf. Genoveffa Palumbo, *Jubilee Jubilees*, Rai-Eri, Rome, 1999, p. 250.

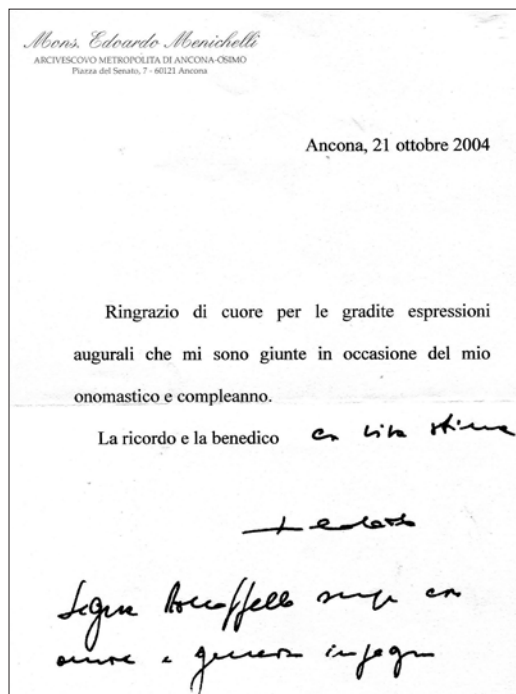


Fig. 5 - Letter from the Archbishop of Ancona dated 21 October 2004.

rical and religious problem linked to the centuries-old oblivion that had accompanied the Veronica until the threshold of the third millennium. Monsignor Menichelli, struck by the exceptional and unexpected flow of communication, sent me a telegram the next day in which he expressed the need to thank me for informing him of the event (Fig. 4), without adding anything else. On leaving Chieti, on 21 October 2004 he replied to my wishes from the new episcopal see of Ancona, thanking me and urging me to "always follow Ma-

noppello with love and generous commitment" (Fig. 5), an invitation that I have always continued to make my own. In 2015 he was created cardinal by Pope Francis.

From June 1999 numerous flows of pilgrims reached the Shrine, which until that time had been concentrated on the two annual feasts of the third Sunday of May and the sixth of August, the feast of the Transfiguration. I remember that Father Germano, then superior, told me that an elderly devotee of the village complained to him stating in dialect: "But couldn't this one stay at home?", alluding to me, expressing, like other people, an almost "possessive" feeling for the Holy Face. When the cult was still local, Fr. Pfeiffer grasped "the love with which the people of Abruzzo surround this relic of theirs

and the extraordinary and miraculous deeds that it has worked in this region"<sup>20</sup>. On the other hand, for centuries it was precisely popular devotion that gave depth to the relic, with heartwarming companies of pilgrims who until the nineteen fifties came on foot to sing and pray in Manoppello, even from distant villages, led by parish priests and accompanied, sometimes, by patron saints. Devotion to the Holy Face has always been nourished by emigrants as well<sup>21</sup>.

In addition to many pilgrims, numerous bishops and cardinals arrived in Manoppello, starting with the then secretary of state, Cardinal Angelo Sodano and Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, as well as scientists and scholars enraptured by interest in the Holy Face, such as Paul Badde, author of important essays translated into various languages, or Andreas Resch, former professor of paranormalology at the Pontifical Lateran University<sup>22</sup>. Many political figures, Italian and foreign, including the former Polish leader Lech Wałęsa. Significant was the testimony given by Giulio Andreotti who said: "Father Pfeiffer's book gave me emotion. Standing in front of the Holy Face, however, is something else: It is impressive, above all the sweetness of his gaze is striking"<sup>23</sup>.

At that time many turned to Father Pfeiffer, especially from abroad. He answered as best he could, he explained, as in the ca-

<sup>20</sup> From the speech given by Father Pfeiffer on 8 December 1999 on the occasion of the conferral of honorary citizenship by the Municipality of Manoppello.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Antonio Bini, *Toronto-Manoppello, Comitato Volto Santo: un legame con l'Abruzzo*, in *Corriere Canadese*, 11 August 2003.

<sup>22</sup> For Prof. Resch it is likely that the Veronica was "rescued by someone" in Manoppello. Cf. Valentina Donatelli, *La paranormalogia incontra il Volto Santo* (Paranormal studies encounter the Holy Face), in *Il Volto Santo*, n. 1, 2000, p. 12 et seq. The singular figure of Father Andreas Resch was outlined by Andrea Missori, in his article *"Miracles, in the warehouse of the inexplicable"*, in the *Corriere della Sera* of April 25, 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Rosalba Ciancaglini, *"It's the most beautiful day of my life I saw Jesus"*, in *Il Messaggero*, Abruzzo supplement, 7 April 2001.

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Santa Fe, 23-8-99.

Dear Fr. Heaver,

Spending only a day in Rome before leaving for Mexico I found Your Fax. I have written a lot on Manoppello and the veil (Veronica = Vera - icona = True likeness) in German and Italian but nothing in English. I can say only briefly: 1) The veil of Manoppello is the same object that was until 1608 in St. Peter's Church in Rome

2) The veil of Manoppello is one of the most important models for the image of Christ in the art since the 4<sup>th</sup> century

3) The face of the veil of Manoppello coincides exactly (1:1) with the face of the Shroud in Turin.

All three points has to be explained more to 1) The veil is transparent and the old reliquary in St. Peter's treasury has two glasses for a transparent object, but the reliquary is broken since the beginning of the seventeenth century.

For the moment I send you my best wishes for the pilgrimage. The 26-9-99 I will be back in Rome

Yours sincerely

Heinrich Pfeiffer, S.J.

Fig. 6 - Letter from Father Pfeiffer dated 23 August 1999.

se of an English gentleman to whom he replied on August 23, 1999 with a fax from Santa Fe, Mexico, where he was for summer university courses. In the following weeks he gave me a copy of the letter in which he summarized his conclusions on the Holy Face (Fig. 6).

Among the many episodes, I remember that of a gentleman who came to Manoppello from outside the region, a few days after the conference, to deliver to Fr. Germano numerous copies of the tenth volume of the mystic Maria Valtorta, of "The Gospel as it was revealed to me", containing the revelation dated February 22, 1944 (637.7), in which she speaks of the veil of the Veronica, with an invitation to compare the Face of the Sudarium with that of the Shroud: *"The one is the Face of a living person, the other that of a dead man. But the length, width, somatic characters, shape, characteristics, are the same. Overlay images. You will see that they match. It's me"*. Without knowing Maria Valtorta's revelations, Sister Blandina Paschalis Schlömer sensed the need to study and compare the two faces since 1979.

In the following years, along with the Holy Face, there re-emerged the extraordinary figures of Father Domenico da Cese<sup>24</sup>, prophetic and tireless popularizer of the sacred image, also in relationship with Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, and of Sister Amalia Di Rella<sup>25</sup>, apostle of the Holy Face. In those years Father Pfeif-

<sup>24</sup> Father Domenico da Cese, born Emidio Petracca, born in Cese di Avezzano on March 27, 1905. He was part of the Capuchin community of the Shrine of the Holy Face, whose divine origins and relationship with the Shroud he intuited. A mystical figure, he had close relations with Padre Pio, even in bilocation. Cf. Antonio Bini, *Padre Pio before the Holy Face*, in *Il Volto Santo*, n. 1/2005, p. 11 ff. He died in Turin, where he had gone for the exposition of the Shroud, on September 23, 1978.

<sup>25</sup> Sister Amalia Di Rella was born in Ruvo di Puglia on May 25, 1934. She found her spiritual guide in Father Domenico da Cese. She spread the Holy Face in Puglia, collaborating in charitable works with Don Tonino Bello, bi-

fer was often in Manoppello, welcomed familiarly by the Capuchins and always respected by the local community. I remember that an elderly friar, Fr. Ignazio Scurti, affectionately called him the "Piper of God", good-naturedly playing with his surname.

Much study is needed to fill the in the blanks during the centuries of silence that have characterized the presence of the Holy Face in Abruzzo, as well as the possible role that, (according to Archbishop Bruno Forte of Chieti-Vasto), Gian Pietro Carafa (1476-1559), former bishop of Chieti and founder of the order of the Theatines, who later became pope with the name of Paul IV in 1555, may have played.

Others must also have known the true nature of the veil. Emblematic is the case of Don Evandro Marcolongo, then parish priest of the Basilica of San Tommaso in Ortona and poet, who published two poems in the magazine of the Holy Face: "To Mary" (May 1909) and "San Francesco" (November 1909), while for the one entitled "Before the Sudarium of the Veronica", recently discovered and containing specific allusions to the sad eyes and the half-open mouth, he had to find space in the periodical "Il Santuario di Maria SS. dei Miracoli di Casalbordino", certainly due to the prudence of the Capuchins, then led by Father Francesco da Collarmele, who in 1906 had courageously founded the publication of the magazine of the Manoppello Shrine (Fig. 7).

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I had arrived by chance in Manoppello and for work reasons, and then remained attached to the Shrine, living intensely the period of the Great Jubilee of 2000, always collaborating with the Capuchins, participating in conferences and presentations, also together with Father Pfeiffer<sup>26</sup>, offering support for the making of documentaries

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shop of the Diocese of Molfetta, despite her precarious health. She became the first Disciple of the Holy Face. She died in Genoa on June 16, 1998. cf. Michele Ippedico, *La Pupazza di Dio*, ed. Youcanprint, Lecce, 2023.

<sup>26</sup> As in a conference on March 4, 2011 promoted by the Diocese of Lucca on the



and television reports, assisting writers and journalists, monitoring international communication around the Holy Face, I was able to continue my research activity and to become myself a witness to many events that I have often recounted and documented in the bi-monthly magazine of the Holy Face, since 1999<sup>27</sup>. Since then my articles have been constantly present in every issue of the magazine<sup>28</sup>. In those months, preparations were underway for the important exhibition on "The

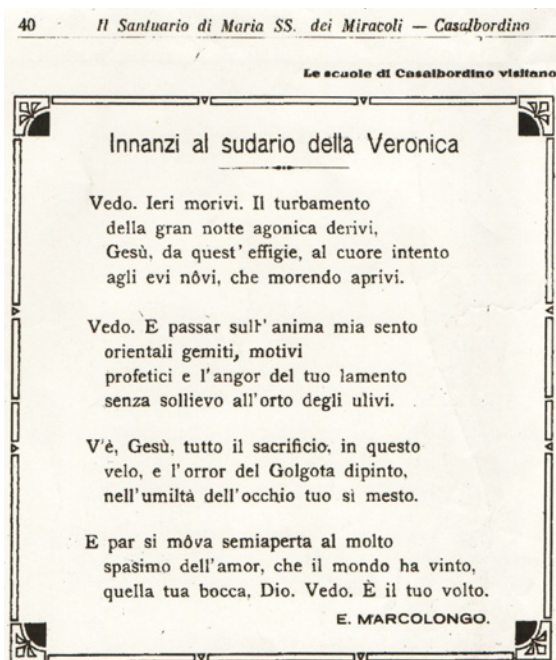


Fig. 7 - In front of the sudarium of the Veronica, poem by Don Evandro Marcolongo published in the magazine of the Shrine of the Madonna dei Miracoli in Casalbordino.

comparison with the crucifix of the Holy Face of Lucca. Cf. Antonio Bini, *The Image of Christ. From the Shroud to the Holy Face. Reflections on the Lucca conference*, in *Il Volto Santo*, n. 1/2011, p. 22 ss.

<sup>27</sup> On issue no. 2/1999 – special issue, published for the first time in color – I published my first article *"On the threshold of 2000 the Holy Face makes news in the world"*, in which I also mentioned the exhibition on the research of Sister Blandina inaugurated on October 23, with the collaboration of the Jubilee Communication Project team.

<sup>28</sup> Numerous articles have been translated into English by Ray Frost of San Francisco and then disseminated in English on the <https://hollyfaceofmanoppello.blogspot.com> and often taken up by sites in various countries.

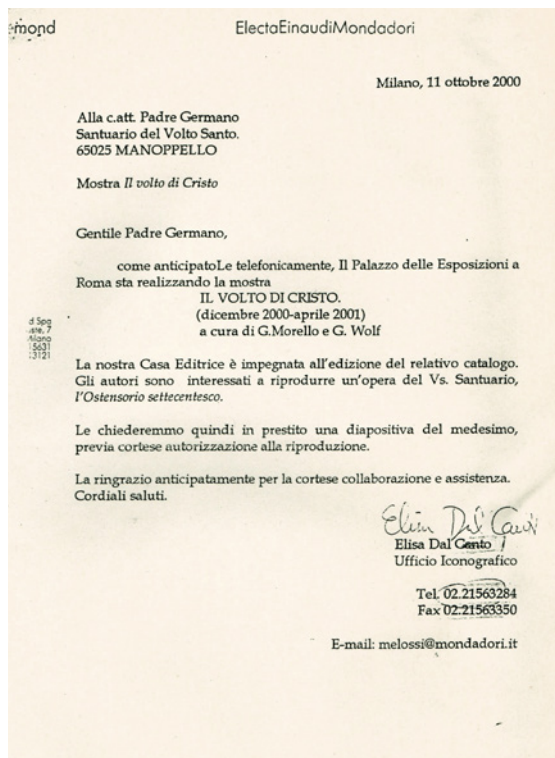


Fig. 8 - Letter from the publisher in charge of editing the catalogue of the exhibition "The Face of Christ".

Face of Christ", which would conclude the Jubilee Year and would be held at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome, starting on December 9, 2000. In the previous months, the Shrine was contacted, on October 11, by the publishing house that was to take care of the creation of the catalog, to request a slide of the eighteenth-century monstrance (Fig. 7).

On this occasion, Father Germano, in consideration of the fact that the exhibition was organized by the Vatican Apo-

stolic Library, in agreement with Father Pfeiffer, proposed the loan of the reliquary, together with the nineteenth-century painting reproducing the Holy Face, by Father Alfonso Maria Taito from Torino di Sangro (1831-1908), a self-taught artist who collaborated in the decorations of San Lorenzo al Verano<sup>29</sup>. For the occasion, the painting was quickly restored. There was also a letter from me in

<sup>29</sup> The painting of the Holy Face painted by Father Alfonso was used until the early sixties for the printing of images and prayers, for the impossibility of photographing the sacred image with the cameras of the past.

support of the operation, but then contacts became less frequent, not without call backs, until it was possible to reach the curator of the exhibition, Prof. Giovanni Morello, then director of the Vatican Library, who with an email dated November 29, 2000, wrote referring to misunderstandings also alluded to the poor quality of the images and the delay with which Prof. Pfeiffer, who was also part of the prestigious scientific committee of the exhibition, would have moved, excluding in any case the possibility of exhibiting the painting or including the reliquary in the catalog due to the imminent opening of the exhibition. I remember Father Pfeiffer's silent bitterness about the affair that he preferred not to comment on, even if a few months later in one of his articles he wrote that in that important exhibition "the veil of Manoppello figured as the great absentee"<sup>30</sup>.

The exhibition displayed the fourteenth-century empty reliquary of the Veronica, part of the Treasury of St. Peter's, which once enclosed the veil between two overlapping broken panes of glass, a clear sign that the image had been visible from both sides, as in Manoppello<sup>31</sup>. Father Pfeiffer's own monograph on the Holy Face, which had just been published, appeared in the bibliography of the exhibition.

The prestigious exhibition displayed a set of extraordinary works, from the Vatican and foreign museums. The Veronica was documented as never before, with a converging series of works between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, also of Vatican provenance, which clearly reproduced it with eyes open.

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<sup>30</sup> Heinrich Pfeiffer, *From the Carpocratians to the Shroud*, in *Il Telo*, magazine of Sindonology, January-April, 2001, p.7. 31

<sup>31</sup> In 1999, some German television stations were denied permission to film the ancient reliquary as part of reports on the Holy Face. Many years later, such filming was made possible on the occasion of the making of the documentary entitled *Oblicze Jezusa* (The Face of Jesus), by Polish director Jarosław Rędziaś, broadcast on Easter Day 2024 by the *Telewizja Republika* television network.



Fig. 9 - The Veronica illustrated and described by Alberto da Castello in 1523. Frontispiece.

Among these works, considered among the most distinguished in St. Peter's, the panel of the Holy Face by Ugo da Carpi, imprinted and not painted, commissioned by Pope Clement VII and made in 1524 to be placed in the ancient basilica of St. Peter, right in the ciborium where the Veronica was kept<sup>32</sup>.

Another illustration from the same period, much less known, that I was able to acquire is significant. This is the image contained in the "Rosary of the most glorious Virgin Mary", edited by Alberto da Castello (or Castellano), a

Venetian Dominican, printed in Venice in 1521 and then re-proposed in a subsequent color edition published in 1523, including

<sup>32</sup> Looking at the work very closely during an exhibition taking place in Carpi from 24 February to 29 June 2024, in the Palazzo dei Pio Museum, I was able to find the presence of slight signs of swelling at the level of the nasal region and the different sizes of the two pupils, which the artist evidently captured in the Veronica. With the exhibition, the city of Carpi remembered the artist in his homeland five centuries after the creation of his most famous work.



on the back the interesting description of the sudarium<sup>33</sup> (Fig. 9).

Like many other works of the period, Alberto da Castello's illustration and Ugo da Carpi's panel show open eyes, unlike what would have happened after the Veronica's disappearance, when copies showed it with eyes closed. In the catalog there were several references to the Holy Face present in the comments of some historians. That exhibition, which was to document the Face of Jesus in history, produced, together with the relative catalogue published by Electa, the implicit effect of proving the disappearance of the Veronica, to which the Argentine cardinal Jorge Maria Mejía, appointed by Pope John Paul II as librarian and archivist of the Holy Roman Church, made a hasty reference in his introductory

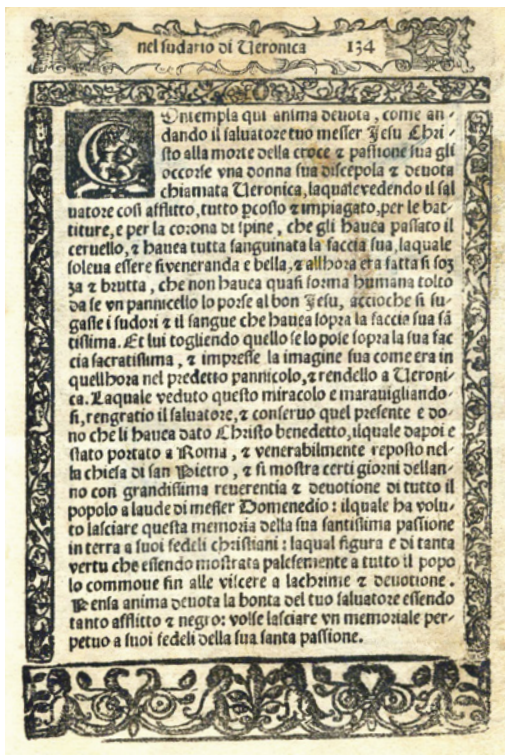


Fig. 9 bis - The Veronica illustrated and described by Alberto da Castello in 1523. Back.

<sup>33</sup> On the back there is the following description: "The sudarium of The Veronica... venerably preserved in the church of St. Peter, it is displayed on certain days of the year with the greatest reverence and devotion of all the people to the praise of the Lord God: which he wished to leave to his faithful Christians as a memory of his most holy passion on earth: **the figure being of such fineness** that, clearly shown to all the people, moves them to tears and devotion".

speech<sup>34</sup>. And yet there was no lack of those who continued to support her presence in St. Peter's, in a very articulated scenario of positions and prejudices, made up of openings and steps backwards, until a communiqué released by the Holy See Press Office on July 14, 2012, coinciding with the presentation of the exhibition "*The Man, the Face, the Mystery*", with works from the Vatican Museums, to be exhibited in San Marino, in addition to confirming the disappearance of the Veronica, made known the circumstances that brought it about: the Sack of Rome in 1527, as some historians had already argued in previous centuries. This admission is owed to the then director of the Vatican Museums, Prof. Antonio Paolucci, recently deceased and former Minister of Cultural Heritage of the Italian Government<sup>35</sup>. The exhibition – open from 20 August to 6 November 2011 – was placed in continuity with Benedict XVI's visit to the Diocese of San Marino-Montefeltro on 19 June 2011.

But copies or alleged reproductions of the Veronica with its eyes closed continued (and continue) to confuse and disorient believers and some scholars, sometimes fueling useless contrasts and gratuitous at times even offensive criticism, especially among those who are poorly informed or blindly rely on falsely authenticated reproductions or are even in bad faith.

Among the initiatives aimed at clarifying history, it is worth mentioning the ambitious Veronica Route project, a work in progress aimed at "reconstructing the lost features of the relic", promoted by the Milanese Association "Il Volto Ritrovato", which aims to collect in an online catalog, which has now become impressive, the artistic and li-

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<sup>34</sup> Jorge Maria Mejía, *Seeing the Face of Christ*, in *Il Volto di Cristo*, ed. Electa, Milan, 2000, p. 15. Even the historian Gerhard Wolf, in affirming the disappearance of the Veronica from Rome, wondered if it was now preserved in Abruzzo, op. cit. cit. p. 20.

<sup>35</sup> The Veronica's disappearance was in fact confirmed in a subsequent interview that Paolucci gave to Letizia Cini in *Il Resto del Carlino* on August 18, 2011, in the article entitled "*In the face of man, the image of God*", close to the inauguration of the exhibition.



6-XI-97

Con viva commozione ho ammirato la venerata immagine  
 del Vulto Santo di Manoppello; il Vulto Santo! che  
 un Servo di Dio, e padre della mia anima, l'Abate Ildebrando  
 Gregori, ha saputo imprimere nella mia vita di sacerdote e vescovo.  
 In questo notissimo santuario affido, insieme alla  
 preghiera filiale, il presente e l'avvenire della nostra  
 cara Chiesa. Congratulandomi al V. R. Beneditto Ruffini del  
 Vulto Santo di Manoppello, al V. R. Vulto Santo, e ripeto  
 la forte volontà di continuare a diffondere la sua  
 devozione dovunque.

Finisco (Card. Angelini)  
 Sua Madre Benedetta Bianucci  
 Sorelle Ruffini del V. R. Vulto Santo N. S. Gesù Cristo  
 Roma.

Fig. 10 - Message from Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini left on the guest register of the Shrine on November 6, 1997.

terary works relating to the Roman Veronica cf. [www.Veronicaroute.it](http://www.Veronicaroute.it). The Association, made up of a group of enthusiasts and scholars from different research disciplines, launched the Project after Benedict XVI's visit to Manoppello, also promoting the creation of a documented traveling exhibition. A noteworthy case, on the positive side, is represented by the gesture by Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini (Rome, 1916-2014), the day after the first international congress on the Face of Christ, when on November 6, 1997, he went to Manoppello, accompanied by Father Pfeiffer and Sister Maria Bianucci, superior general of the Congregation of the Benedictine Sisters of Reparation of the Holy Face. On that occasion, the cardinal inaugurated the guest register of the Shrine by leaving the following message: "With deep emotion I admired the venerated image of the Holy Face of Manoppello; the Holy Face, which a Servant of God and father of my soul, Abbot Ildebrando Gregori, was able to impress on my life as a priest and bishop. In this



Fig. 11 - Veneration of the Holy Face in the headquarters of the General Procuratorate of the Sisters of Reparation of the Holy Face - Rome 18 January 2016. On the wall is a reproduction of the elaboration by G. Brunner (1933).

*well-known Shrine I entrust, together with the Superior General, the present and the future of our beloved Religious Congregation: Benedictine Sisters of the Reparation to the Holy Face of Jesus, to the Lord, the Holy Face, and I repeat my fervent desire to continue to spread his devotion everywhere" (Fig. 10).*

In his message, also signed by the Superior General, the cardinal recalled Abbot Ildebrando Gregori, to whom he had been very close, who was confessor and spiritual father of Sister Pierina De Micheli (Milan, 1890-Centonara, 1945), mystic and seer, to whom Jesus would appear, to whom it was granted in July 1940 to have a medal of the Holy Face minted, taking as a reference a painting in the convent, bearing a well-known photographic reworking of the Shroud face, carried out in 1933 by Giuseppe Bruner, making it more recognizable. When in 1945-46, Father Ildebrando Gregori, founded the

female religious congregation of the *Benedictine Sisters of Reparation of the Holy Face of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, he continued the dissemination of the medal desired by Blessed Pierina De Micheli. But the convinced expressions of Cardinal Angelini, for years guide of the Congregation and spiritual heir of the venerable Fr. Hildebrand<sup>36</sup>, are destined, certainly not to question the medal, but to extend veneration also to the Holy Face of Manoppello, a tangible image of the face of Jesus. Thus, in fact it happened that on the occasion of the first re-enactment of the ancient rite of Omnis Terra, Sister Biancucci, asked to be able to venerate the copy of the Holy Face of Manoppello the night after the exposition in the basilica of Santo Spirito in Sassia in Rome, on January 17, 2016, at the headquarters of the superior general's office in Via della Conciliazione (Fig. 11). The next morning, Mass was concelebrated by Cardinal Beniamino Stella and Fr. Carmine Cucinelli, before returning to Manoppello. In the course of a cordial conversation that followed the Mass, Sister Biancucci, in the presence of Father Carmine Cucinelli, recalled the figure of Cardinal Angelini, his strong bond with the Holy Face and with Father Ildebrando Gregori himself, as well as his esteem for Father Pfeiffer and also his fraternal relationship with Pope John Paul II. She reported that she always accompanied the elderly cardinal, even when he met the Polish pope. On those occasions, John Paul II as soon as he saw him would say smiling "The Holy Face" and they would talk about that.

When on February 10, 2006 the cardinal spoke in Chieti at the international conference promoted by the Shrine on the theme "The Holy Face and the iconography of the image of Christ", sharing the theses on the Veronica proposed by Father Pfeiffer and, hoping for further studies<sup>37</sup> (Fig. 12), affirmed that "the time was ripe for the di-

<sup>36</sup> Fiorenzo Angelini, *L'uomo delle beatitudini*, edizioni Velar, Rome, 2000, p. 175 et seq.

<sup>37</sup> Regarding this charge, it is worth recalling the important research on the substantial reliability of the *Relatione Historica* by Father Donato da Bomba, edited by Emanuele Colombo and Michele Colombo, ed. Marietti, Genoa, 2016.

discoveries on the veil of Manoppello to be shared not only by the local Church, but by the national and universal one", hinting that he was aware of Benedict XVI's intentions to visit the Shrine soon. There was also a veiled reference to the possible influence that his activity, through the International Institute for Research on the Face of Christ which he founded, would have exercised with respect to the convictions that led John Paul II to publish on January 6, 2001, at the end of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, the apostolic letter "*Novo Millennio Ineunte*", containing the pressing invitation for Christians to contemplate the human and divine face of Christ at the beginning of the third millennium and the insistent exhortation: "Those who have truly encountered Christ cannot keep him to themselves. They must announce him"<sup>38</sup>.

Just a few months later, on September 1, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI, who had been informed of the ongoing research for some time, arrived as a pilgrim before the Holy Face. The visit was announced only a few days earlier, as it was opposed to the end by the Curia, as Saverio Gaeta<sup>39</sup> wrote and as admitted a few years later by Mons. Bruno Forte, archbishop of Chieti-Vasto, on the occasion of the presentation of a documentary film<sup>40</sup> – on June 8, 2017 – at the Marrucino Theatre in Chieti.

Father Carmine asked me to be present at the Shrine from the day prior to the Pope's visit, for any helpful collaboration to reckon with the exceptional organizational effort connected to the event and with the management of the press room set up in the San Damiano room, con-

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<sup>38</sup> Fiorenzo Angelini, *I tempi sono maturi* (The times have matured), in *Il Volto Santo di Manoppello*, n. 1, July, 2006, p.2 et seq.

<sup>39</sup> Saverio Gaeta, *Questo è il volto che rivedremo* (This is the face that we will see again), in *Famiglia Cristiana*, n. 37, 2006, p. 57.

<sup>40</sup> *Il Volto Ritrovato di Gesù: viaggio tra i luoghi, la storia e le leggende del Volto Santo di Manoppello* (The Rediscovered Face of Jesus: a journey through the places, history and legends of the Holy Face of Manoppello), documentary film edited by Anna Cavasinni and Fabrizio Franceschelli, produced by Territori Link, 2018.



Fig. 12 - Photo of Card. Fiorenzo Angelini and Fr. Heinrich Pfeiffer during the conference at the University of Chieti on February 10, 2006.

sidering that the access roads were scheduled to be blocked at dawn on September 6. It was an unforgettable day.

The Pope was visibly moved by that image. The visit and his intense prayer dedicated to the Holy Face, which he defined as "the human face of God who entered history to reveal the horizons of eternity", opened up new perspectives, relieving those fears that had characterized the life of the Capuchins for centuries, favoring the further spread of the Veil of Manoppello throughout the world<sup>41</sup>. The pope recalled how fundamental in the Christian faith was the encounter with the figure of Jesus Christ. A reproduction of the Holy Face will accompany him until his death.

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<sup>41</sup> Antonio Bini, *"Viaggio" nel mondo dei media internazionali. Il pellegrinaggio di SS. Benedetto XVI alla Basilica del Volto Santo* ("Journey" into the world of the international media. The pilgrimage of SS. Benedict XVI to the Basilica of the Holy Face of Manoppello), supplement to *Il Volto Santo di Manoppello*, n. 2, December 2006.



## Prayer of Pope Benedict XVI dedicated to the Holy Face



The Pope prays before the Holy Face.

Lord Jesus, show us, we beg you, your ever new face, a mysterious mirror of God's infinite mercy. Let us contemplate him with the eyes of the mind and the heart: the human face of God who entered history to reveal the horizons of eternity. The silent face of the suffering and risen Jesus, who loved and welcomed changes the heart and life. We want to draw from your eyes, which look at us with tenderness and com-

passion, the strength of love and peace that shows us the path of life, and the courage to follow you without fear and compromise, to become witnesses of your Gospel, with concrete gestures of welcome, love and forgiveness. Holy Face of Christ, light that illuminates the darkness of doubt and sadness, life that has defeated forever the power of evil and death, mysterious gaze that never ceases to rest on individuals and peoples, face hidden in the Eucharistic signs and in the gazes of those who live beside us, make us pilgrims of God in this world, thirsting for the infinite and ready for the meeting of the last day, when we will see you, Lord "face to face" (1 Cor 13:12) and we will be able to contemplate you eternally in the glory of Heaven. Amen!

September 1, 2007  
**Benedict XVI**

A few years after the Pope's visit, I interviewed Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle who, after meditating for a long time before the sacred image, spoke to me of the "Face of Truth", later becoming a convinced supporter of the Holy Face<sup>42</sup>.

The commitment of so many religious and lay faithful continues to be relevant, as seen in the spontaneous enthusiastic promoters of the true icon in the world, but also that of scholars in the wake of Father Pfeiffer's studies<sup>43</sup>.

Among these promoters, I cannot fail to mention Daisy Neves (1938-2019) (Fig. 13), an American of Filipino origin, who spent the last years of her life in a generous and tireless commitment, organizing, together with the Shrine, international missions (2014-2016) in the United States, the Philippines and Canada, supporting religious and promoting numerous enthronements of the Holy Face in various countries, as per the attached partial list<sup>44</sup>. I hope that her life as a missionary of the Holy Face, carried forward even during her illness, will continue to be an example of faith for the future and not only for those who had the privilege of knowing her, who moreover continue to perpetuate her memory.

Knowledge of the Holy Face is increasingly widespread, as can also be seen from the airing on the global platform Netflix, from November 2023, of the documentary *Mysteries of the Faith*, made in view of the 2025 Jubilee, with extensive insights dedicated to devotion to the Veil of Manoppello, visible in over 180 countries,

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<sup>42</sup> Antonio Bini, *Il Volto della verità, La testimonianza del cardinale Tagle* (The Face of Truth, The Testimony of Cardinal Tagle), in *Abruzzo nel Mondo*, n. 4, June-July, 2017, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Walter Teti, *Manoppello piange padre Pfeiffer* (Manoppello mourns Father Pfeiffer), *Il Centro*, 28 December 2021. The article expresses the bond between the local population, the Capuchins and the German scholar.

<sup>44</sup> I recounted the international missions in the English-language book *"The Holy Face, from Manoppello to the world"*, supplement to *Il Volto Santo*, n. 1, 2016.



Fig. 13 - Daisy Neves in Manoppello.

while it is increasingly difficult to follow communication and initiatives organized in various parts of the world.

When many years ago I first approached the knowledge of the Holy Face, I could not have imagined, not even remotely, what would be the extraordinary path that would await me over time, what my possible contribution to the cause could be, or the many people I would meet, nor the discoveries or the difficulties, hopes as well as the inevitable setbacks. A journey, also interior, that keeps going, continuing to amaze myself first of all.

## THE SACK OF ROME AND THE ARRIVAL OF THE HOLY FACE IN ABRUZZO

Reference was already made to the communiqué issued on July 14, 2011 by the Holy See Press Office (VIS-Vatican Information Service), in conjunction with the inauguration of an exhibition, in which the disappearance of the Veronica from St. Peter's Basilica on the occasion of the Sack of Rome was admitted. It was a low-profile choice to confirm the theses and historical reconstructions that various scholars had advanced over time about the disappearance of the important relic, once venerated by millions of pilgrims and then accompanied by centuries-old silences, while the expansion of the new basilica of St. Peter's was underway. In this regard, the authoritative thought of Arsenio Frugoni must be considered compelling. In the context of a detailed historical reconstruction in which the absence of the Veronica is argued, Frugoni asserts that there was "a smothering of interest around this image" on the part of the Church<sup>45</sup>.

As was mentioned, the Veronica had been missing for a long time. The copy exhibited at Easter in 1581 appeared to Michael de Montaigne as "a pulpy face, of a somber and dark color"<sup>46</sup>. Il viaggiatore francese in realtà non vide nulla.

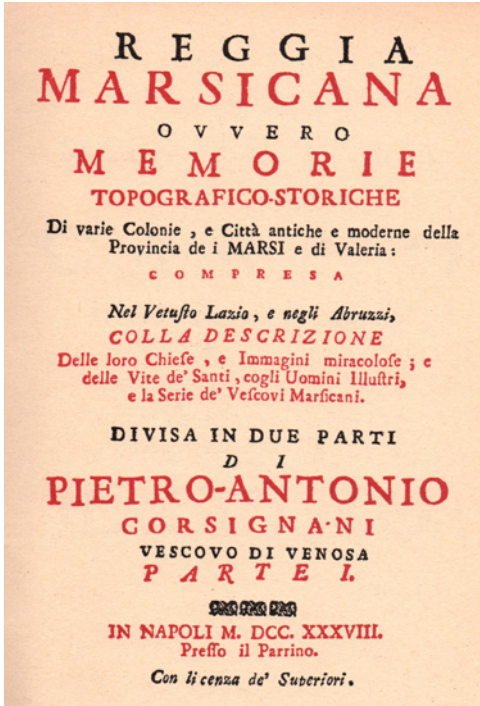
The French traveler actually saw nothing. The True Icon must have appeared quite different before, producing "an impact comparable to that which would have been garnered by Christ in person"<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Arsenio Frugoni, La Veronica nostra (Our Veronica) in *Humanitas*, n. 5, 1950. The article was included in the book *Pellegrini a Roma nel 1300. Cronache del primo giubileo* (Pilgrims to Rome in 1300. Chronicles of the first Jubilee), ed. Piemme, Casale Monferrato, 1999, p. 89.

<sup>46</sup> Montaigne, *Viaggio in Italia*, editori Laterza, Bari, 1972, p. 204.

<sup>47</sup> Desmond O' Grady, *2 Giubilei, Storie e segreti di Roma negli anni santi dal 1300 al 2000* (25 Jubilees, Stories and Secrets of Rome in the Holy Years from 1300 to 2000), ed. Piemme, Casale Monferrato, 1999, p. 94. In his book, published in various countries, the author recalls Father Pfeiffer's thesis on the



The Front Cover of the Marsican Royal Palace, printed in 1738.

But who brought it to Abruzzo? Who could be the mysterious pilgrim who gave it to Dr. Leonelli? The starting point for the research stems from a reference by Fr. Filippo da Tussio, in his *Memoirs*, in which he stated that the *Relazione Historica* of Father Donato da Bomba, substantially kept secret from the Capuchins, was instead made available to the bishop of Venosa, Pietro Antonio Corsignani (Celano, 1686-1751). Why was that? An answer comes from the voluminous historical work "Reggia Marsicana"<sup>48</sup>, published in two volumes by Corsignani, in which there is a description of previous visits to the Shrine of Manoppello which

na"<sup>48</sup>, published in two volumes by Corsignani, in which there is a description of previous visits to the Shrine of Manoppello which

Holy Face of Manoppello. The Australian vaticanista returned to the theme of the Holy Face, anticipating the Pope's visit, with an extensive article in the Sydney Morning Herald, weekend edition of August 16-27, 2006, with the eloquent title "The Shroud of evidence!". The article also reports a statement by Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini confirming Fr. Heinrich Pfeiffer's hypotheses.

<sup>48</sup> Antonio Pietro Corsignani, *Reggia Marsicana, ovvero Memorie topografico-storiche di varie colonie e città antiche e moderne della provincia de i Marsi e Valeria*, part I. (Reggia Marsicana, namely topographical-historical essays of various settlements and ancient and modern cities of the province of the Marsi and Valeria part I), ed. Il Parrino, Naples, 1738, p. 443 ff.



the author himself points out "although outside the Marsi", recalled that the Colonna family, in addition to being Dukes of the Marsi, **also possessed the County of Manoppello**, "as well as many fiefdoms in the Papal States". In the work, for the first time, some excerpts from the *Relatione Historica* by Fr. Donato da Bomba, were revealed concerning "the famous image of our Redeemer Jesus Christ". Corsignani, evidently linked to the Colonna family, emphasizes "how much caution" is reserved by the Capuchins and that the manuscript that bears the *Relatione* is "in every part true, although it is copious of long digressions...". The historian prudently believes that it is not his "task to speak of the Face of Christ in the Veronica", he states that he visited the Shrine on several occasions, beginning in 1730, attesting, above all, to the attendance by "*bishops, foreigners, princes and knights from various parts, and also Romans with their Great Sovereign knights, from time to time, of the illustrious Casa Colonna, who have all often visited it*".

Fr. Filippo da Tussio in his Memoirs recalls that even an employee of the Colonna, sensing his vocation, decided to become a friar taking the name of Fr. Andrea da Rocca di Botte. He was part of the religious community of the Shrine, dying in Manoppello on March 7, 1651 in the odor of sanctity<sup>49</sup>.

Of particular importance is the circumstance of such a significant involvement of the important Roman family of Colonna, in frequenting a small modest convent - which was distinguished only by its precious image - not easily accessible and hidden, at the time, on the edge of a forest at the foot of the Maiella, the Domus Christi, as it was defined by Petrarch. At that time, only the presence of the Veronica could justify pilgrimages from Rome. This frequentation is to be related to the role that Cardinal Pompeo Colonna played on the occasion of the Sack of Rome. Strongly hostile to Pope Clement VII, whom he had opposed on the occasion of the conclave of 1523 - during which the member of the Medici family

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<sup>49</sup> Filippo da Tussio, op.cit., p. 146.

was elected pope - he supported the invasion of Rome, which he saw above all as an opportunity for the elimination of the pope.

This is not the place to reconstruct the complex historical events and the causes of those very serious events, which caused violence, deaths, the desecration of sacred places and the tombs of the popes, devastation, destruction, robberies of all kinds, with the Pope forced to take refuge in Castel Sant'Angelo, while St. Peter's Basilica was attacked, with the last Swiss Guards who were exterminated at the foot of the central altar. It was argued that "The Sack of Rome was a shameful torment to civilization, art, religion, human dignity, such as the barbarians of the early Middle Ages had not been able to inflict, in their vandalic raids, on the city of the Caesars and the Pontiffs"<sup>50</sup>.

Among the various sources, the account of Jacopo Buonaparte, advisor to Pope Clement VII, of Tuscan origin, who was a witness to the tragic events of 1527, consulted in the edition reproduced in 1844, by the Pirotta printing house in Milan, has been taken into consideration. The author wrote of how "they lifted sacred images from the altars," while St. Peter's Basilica, the pope's chapel and other sacred places were devastated, "already full of so many venerable relics, having become at present horse stables". Among the most important relics, the Veronica disappeared<sup>51</sup>.

Buonaparte describes the meeting between the Pope and Cardinal Pompeo Colonna, at which he was probably present. The cardinal returned to the city after the capture of Rome. Rejoicing at the damage and danger endured by the pope, the cardinal then had to realize the grave consequences for Rome and for the Romans, while the effects of the plague began to be felt, with hun-

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<sup>50</sup> Carlo Castiglioni, *Storia dei Papi*, vol. II, UTET, Turin, 1945, p. 250. So also A.E. Berault-Bercastel, *History of Christianity*, vol. XX, ed. Girolamo Tasso, Venice, 1830, p. 11.

<sup>51</sup> Andrea Frediani, *Il Sacco di Roma*, Giunti Editore, 1997, Florence, p. 43.

dreds of the dead left unburied in the streets. He met the imprisoned pope at Castel Sant'Angelo and, Buonaparte writes, "they wept together with the most vivid tears for the misery of Rome".

At that time, the garrison that watched over Castel Sant'Angelo was commanded by the Spaniard Hernando de Alarcón (in Italian, Ferdinando Alarcon), who distinguished himself in the battle of Pavia in 1525, who had been appointed marquis by Charles V, receiving the entrustment of the Valle Siciliana, in the province of Teramo, on the eastern side of the Gran Sasso, until then assigned to the Orsini and before that to the counts of Paleara or Pagliara. Colonna then committed himself to the Pope's release and did everything in his power, including economic, to free and ransom the prisoners, as well as to negotiate the difficult end of the occupation that lasted until October, with the subsequent escape of the Pope, who took refuge in Orvieto.

The Roman cardinal, together with the members of his powerful family, must have known Alarcon, who later became, together with Prince Philibert of Orange, governor of Rome<sup>52</sup>, and therefore the subsequent fate of the Holy Face. It cannot be ruled out that Pompeo's cousin, Vittoria Colonna, Marquise of Pescara, poet and deeply religious person, widow of Fernando Francesco D'Avalos, an aristocratic family of Spanish origin, also exerted her influence.

A significant testimony came a few years from the travel account of the Dominican preacher Fra Serafino Razzi who on July 24, 1575 arrived in Tossicia, the capital of the Valle Siciliana, "the seat of an ancient civilization"<sup>53</sup>. The friar was invited to the Marquis Palace, even if the descendant of the commander was not at the headquarters, but probably in Naples, his habitual residence from which he used to return in the summer. "This gentleman, as

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<sup>52</sup> Andrea Frediani, op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>53</sup> Gustavo Strafforello, *La Patria. Geografia dell'Italia, Provincie di Aquila, Chieti, Teramo, Campobasso*, Unione Tipografica Editrice, Torino, 1899, p. 280.

they say," Razzi writes, " is very courteous and Catholic, he delights a lot in spiritual things .. he keeps a beautiful library . And because the said Lord delights in the playing and singing of music, we saw a room of almost all sorts of musical instruments". But for the purposes of this publication, the testimony of what the curious Tuscan preacher observes when visiting **the private chapel is fundamental, which he defines as "adorned as much as one can say, full of sacred things, with a rich altar and organ, with royal and papal vestments received by the father of this marquis from Pope Clement VII, after the Sack of Rome and brought with that father in a Christian manner"**<sup>54</sup>, while no trace of the Holy Face appears, hidden or perhaps brought to Manoppello and already in the hands of the Leonelli family. The circumstances described by Razzi were gathered from the conversation that the Tuscan preacher had with the "v. marquis". The next morning, the preacher celebrated Mass in the presence of the deputy marquis and other religious, then continued his journey to Montorio al Vomano.

Two years later, the preacher, while on his way to the Abbey of San Liberatore a Maiella, then a flourishing community of Benedictine monks, noted his transit through Manoppello, perhaps without stopping and in any case without noting anything.

Father Pfeiffer himself, on the occasion of a testimony given during the making of the documentary film "In search of the face of Jesus", characterized by a historical setting and edited by director Luca Trovellesi Cesana (and since 2012 entered international television networks), generically mentioned the possible involvement of Ferdinando Alarcon, based solely on the circumstance related to the role of Spanish commander during the pope's imprisonment in Castel Sant'Angelo, hypothesizing how, in the years following, once the situation had normalized, it could have been very compromising for the marquis to still keep the Veronica. These concerns, he argued, may have led him to get rid of the sacred image.

<sup>54</sup> Serafino Razzi, *Viaggi in Abruzzo*, ed. Japadre Editore, L'Aquila, 1968, p. 98 ff.

The close relationship of the Colonna family with the Shrine and the role of Ferdinando Alarcon during the Sack of Rome are further elements to reconstruct the history of the Veronica, a compelling story of faith, of intrigues and twists, with questions that find answers and others that remain in mystery.



The Marquis' Palace of Tossicia.

The large Marchesale Palace of Tossicia, which houses the Museum of the People of Gran Sasso, suffered damage caused by the earthquakes of 2009 and 2017 and is only partially accessible and the town itself is experiencing the phenomenon of depopulation. From information taken by the director of the Museum, Giuliano Di Gaetano, whom we thank for his collaboration, it has been confirmed that traces of the Chapel described by Serafino Razzi have disappeared, such as sacred furnishings, as over the centuries the historic building has undergone adaptations and transformations inside, having also been used in the past as the municipal headquarters and as a school. In the museum spaces that can be visited, there are few references to the history of the family, with the exception of some coats of arms carved in stone, surrounded by cannons, to underline the military origins of the progenitor of the family, "brave Spanish captain"<sup>55</sup>, born in 1466 in the village of Palomares del Campo, in the region of Castile-La Mancha, and died in Naples,

<sup>55</sup> Thus defined by the historian Vincenzo Balzano, *Abruzzo and Molise*, UTET, Turin, 1927, p.130.





Volta frescoed with the coat of arms of Marquis Ferdinando Alarcon.

on January 17, 1540. A subsequent reconstruction of the marquis palace of Tossicia coat of arms can be found on the frescoed vault of one of the rooms of the Palace. The best preserved coat of arms is found inside the church of the Madonna degli Angeli and bears the motto "Religionis et loci amator" engraved at the base, to highlight the relationship with faith and his Valley by Ferdinando Alarcon, to be considered, almost certainly, as the one who saved the Veronica, bringing her to safety in his marquisate in Abruzzo.

In the Museum of Ceramics of the nearby municipality of Castelli, which was part of the marquisate, together with Isola del Gran Sasso, there is an elegant vase dating back to 1594, with the coat of arms

of the Alarcon y Mendoza family, made on the occasion of the marriage between Francisco Ferdinand, fifth Marquis of the Sicilian Valley, with Lucrezia Coscia<sup>56</sup>.

In the same museum there is also an eighteenth-century ceramic work bearing the adoration of the Veronica, attributed to Berardino Gentile the Younger. There is no shortage of Spanish influences in religious architecture, such as the presence of a large shell, a historic symbol of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, on the altar of the central nave of the church of Santa Sinforosa, patron saint of Tossicia. During the first decades of the Alarcon rule, "Tossicia reached a high level of economic and social development"<sup>57</sup>, but the period still awaits in-depth studies.

"Abruzzo is a great producer of silence", wrote Giorgio Mananelli. And these little-known stories, in particular that of characters such as Alarcon, who found in Tossicia and in his palace the ideal place to hide in silence the traces linked to the Sack of Rome amply deserve this fame.



Vase with the Alarcon coat of arms exhibited at the Ceramics Museum of Castelli.

<sup>56</sup> I thank Dr. Alessia Di Stefano, municipal councilor with responsibility for culture and tourism of the municipality of Castelli, for the report.

<sup>57</sup> Igino Addari, *Tossicia tra storia e mistero*, Comune di Tossicia, 2011, p. 88.

## REMEMBRANCE OF P. HEINRICH PFEIFFER S. J.

**His authoritative studies led to the identification of the Veronica in the Holy Face of Manoppello**

Father Heinrich Wilhelm Pfeiffer, former professor of Christian art history at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and advisor to the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church, under Pope John Paul II, has died in Berlin. He was born in Tübingen in 1939. He was responsible for the studies, begun in the eighties, which led to the identification of the Holy Face of Manoppello in the Veronica, which at one time was venerated in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. His research was inspired by the conclusions reached by Sister Blandina Paschalis Schlömer, who had considered the Holy Face to be completely superimposable over that of the Shroud. As he once told me, his entire life – professional and religious – was dedicated to understanding what, in fact, was the prototype of the image of Christ developed in art over the centuries.

In 1986 he published in Italy the book of essays "The Image of Christ in Art", ed. Città Nuova, underlining how it was "a truly inexhaustible theme", and in fact that much still remained to be written, beginning with the research that would later interest him.

The work had previously been published in Germany and Spain. That very year his first trip to Manoppello took place. In 1991 a first approach to the study of the Holy Face was published in Germany entitled "Das Turiner Grabtuch und das Cristusbild" (The Shroud of Turin and the Image of Christ), ed.



Sister Blandina in her study.



Entrance shows The Rediscovered Face. The unmistakable traits of Christ – Meeting Rimini, August 2013.

Knecht, Frankfurt, written with the German sindonologist Werner Bulst.

His research continued in the years that followed until it was presented at a crowded press conference at the headquarters of the Foreign Press in Italy on May 31, 1999, opening new perspectives for the dissemination of the Holy Face in the world, now in the run up to the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, which had among its objectives also that of demonstrating the historical dimension of the figure of Christ. The extraordinary reflections resulting from this international communication led the Municipality of Manoppello to confer honorary citizenship of the Abruzzo town on the German scholar on December 8, 1999.





P. Pfeiffer speaking at the International Workshop on the Scientific Approach to the Acheiropoietos Images. ENEA. Frascati Research Centre, 6 May 2010.

During the year 2000 his book of essays "The Holy Face of Manoppello" was published, ed. Carsa, Pescara, with the preface by Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini, who described the work as "a publication that contributes decisively to shedding light on the mystery of the Roman Veronica, the destination of the Pilgrims to Rome who in the Middle Ages went on pilgrimage to the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles". Cardinal Angelini was the founder and president of the International Institute for

Research on the Face of Christ (established in Rome on March 25, 1997), whose scientific collaborator was Fr. Pfeiffer. Angelini, at the time the only Roman born cardinal, explained that he had wanted to respond to John Paul II's request to encourage studies on the face of Christ. And John Paul II did not fail to consider what emerged from those studies and from his repeated meetings with Cardinal Angelini, so much so that he devoted ample space, in the apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, released on January 6, 2001, at the conclusion of the Jubilee, to the theme of the Face, of the search for, and contemplation of, the face of Christ as a mission for the third millennium. This topic had been completely ab-



sent in the apostolic letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, released on 10 November 1994 introduce the upcoming Jubilee.

It was not easy at that time for Father Pfeiffer and even less so for Cardinal Angelini to maintain that the Veronica was in Manoppello, first of all because of the long established state of affairs that had led the Vatican to never admit that the legendary image was no longer in Rome, despite the fact that it had almost certainly disappeared following the Sack of Rome. Apart from conferences, the debate also developed in the media, in publishing. I remember how Mons. Dario Rezza, canon of St. Peter's and therefore part of that small number of prelates chosen by the pope who take care of the custody of the relics of St. Peter, wrote, to counter the hypotheses of Fr. Pfeiffer, an article entitled "In St. Peter's Basilica is kept the most famous relic in the world: the '*sudarium of Christ*'", published in the monthly *30Days* n. 3, March 2000, pp. 60-64). In the following May issue no. 5/2000 of the same magazine, Father Pfeiffer firmly denied this thesis by replying with an article with the eloquent title: "But the '*Veronica*' is in Manoppello". No later follow-ups appeared in that magazine, although there was no lack of

subsequent reactions. Among these, I remember how Father Germano Di Pietro, then superior of the Shrine of the Holy Face, in the early 2000s received a visit from two canons of St. Peter's who advised him to avoid references to the Veronica, considering that the very magazine of the Shrine



Cordial meeting of Fr. Heinrich Pfeiffer, S.J. and Pope Benedict XVI with Bruno Forte behind. Manoppello September 1, 2006.



Father Pfeiffer, in the center between Father Carmine Cucinelli and Antonio Bini. Conference on the Holy Face in Lucca. March 4, 2011.

had begun to deal with the legendary veil, in the light of new elements that documented the evident transformation of the representation of the image during the seventeenth century, first with the eyes open and then with eyes closed.

Then there was the other front, that of the sindonologists, who certainly did not look favorably on the rediscovery of another Face of Christ, more evident and visible every day.

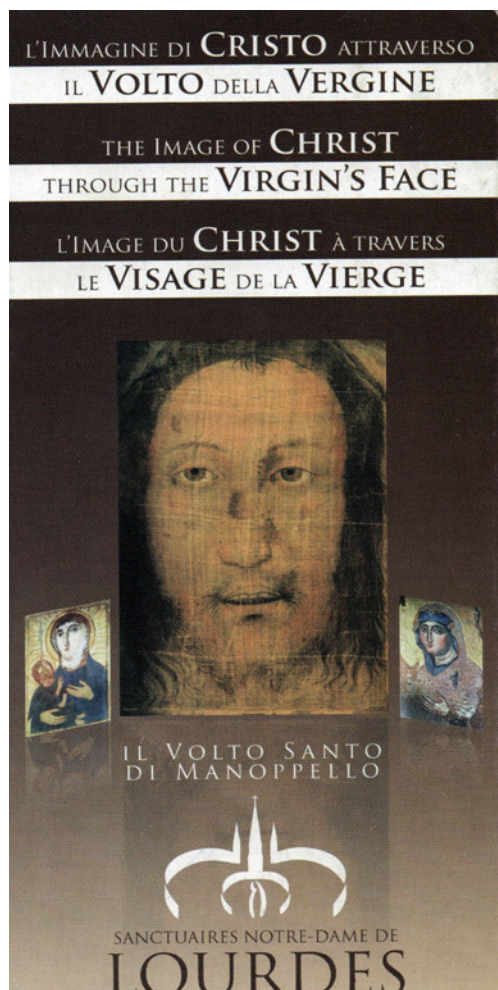
The first annual international conferences were the environments in which the scholar conveyed the results of his research to an audience of theologians and scholars from all over the world. I remember the coldness, if not the hostility, with which he was received at the Third International Congress, held in Rome on October 30 and 31, 1999 at the Lateran University, after the clamor of the press conference five months earlier, where he raised the objection that theology, based exclusively on the sacred scriptures, was poorly prepared to dialogue with the natural sciences. It was Father Pfeiffer himself who had invited me. On this occasion he emphasized how the image of the Holy Face and that of the Shroud came from the same tomb and therefore had been in contact. Even the journalist and writer Paul Badde, in a statement released in Germany post-mortem by the German Catholic Agency CNA, entitled "Fr. Heinrich Pfeiffer on the way to the unveiled face of God", recalled how the scholar in the past had been the object of ridicule for having "dared" to claim that the Veronica had been found in Manoppello and that the Holy Face had been the pro-

tototype for the depictions of Christ in art, until the beginning of the sixteenth century.

Several years earlier, without mincing words, Paul Badde stated in his first book dedicated to the Holy Face, referring to the German Jesuit, *"that the professor told me that there was an even more significant image in the world than the Shroud. Only a madman could sustain such a thing, and as such Father Pfeiffer had been pointed out to me"*. (cf. P. Badde, *Das Muschelseidentuch, Auf der Suche nach dem wahren Antlitz Jesu*, ed. Ullstein, Berlin, 2005).

The scenario of those years was also well described later by Saverio Gaeta: *"it seemed like a challenge of a David against the Goliath of the army of sindonologists, who fail to wonder about the veil of Manoppello, because it disturbs their apparently hardened acquired knowledge regarding the burial cloths of Jesus"* (S. Gaeta, *The enigma of the face of Jesus*, ed. Rizzoli, 2010). The book was an extension of the first edition, which came out as an attachment to the most widely circulated Italian Catholic weekly - *"Famiglia Cristiana"* - published at Easter in 2005. Until that time, the magazine had always ignored the Holy Face.

Father Carmine Cucinelli, on the occasion of Fr. Pfeiffer's Memorial Mass, which took place on December 15, 2021 in the Shrine of Manoppello, also recalled in his homily the "hostility and opposition on the part of many Jesuit colleagues and other religious orders, prelates and scholars from Rome and other cities, which accompanied Father Pfeiffer until his death and which he patiently suffered, being convinced that in the small town of Abruzzo there was the greatest treasure in the world". All this, continued Fr. Carmine, for having argued and documented that "the Veronica, a true icon, or Sudarium, is the face of Jesus imprinted in the veil at the moment of resurrection, and that the Shroud, also imprinted in the tomb of Jesus, portrays Christ suffering after his passion", stating that "on his tomb one could write, paraphrasing the words of St. John the Evangelist on a visit to Jesus' tomb at Easter: "He saw and recognized!"



Poster showing Lourdes.

The Mass, concelebrated by Fr. Carmine Cucinelli, Fr. Giovanni Ferri, Fr. Marian Michniak and Fr. Crispino Valeri, was animated by the songs of the Handmaids of the Most Precious Blood of Manoppello and Sister Blandina. Fr. Pfeiffer was extremely attached to the Holy Face and therefore to Manoppello, where he returned many times, combining study and veneration of the sacred image, staying even for days, when his commitments allowed it, always as a guest of the Capuchins, as well as to participate in the feasts of the Holy Face or to describe the sacred image to cardinals who requested his presence. The last time he took part in the May 2018 festivals,

following the procession mixed in between devotees and pilgrims. He was always welcomed with great friendship and esteem by the Capuchin religious community who periodically hosted him in the convent. I remember the collaboration with Fr. Carmine Cucinelli, then rector of the Shrine, together with Sister Blandina, for the

preparation of the exhibition inaugurated in Lourdes on September 1, 2011 – entitled "*Le Image du Christ a travers le visage de la Vierge*" (The image of Christ through the face of the Virgin), which had been requested by the then bishop of the Diocese of Tarbes-Lourdes, Jacques Perrier, after his pilgrimage to Manoppello.

His precious testimony appeared in a number of issues of the magazine of the Holy Face, as well as in many interviews, documentaries, television appearances in Italy and abroad. He participated in many conferences, including his participation in the "*International Workshop on the Scientific Approach to Acheiropoieta Images*", organized by the ENEA Research Center in Frascati, May 4 to 6, 2010 and limited to a discussion on the Shroud, the Holy Face and the Tilma of Guadalupe. On that occasion, the research institute released a document in support of the acheropite nature of the veil, stating that the Holy Face "*although it appears at first glance to be a painting, in reality it shows various peculiarities largely incompatible with this hypothesis*".

In January 2016, during the year of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, proclaimed by Pope Francis, he participated in the solemn re-enactment of the ancient rite of Omnis Terra, instituted by Innocent III in 1208, leading the procession that went from St. Peter's with the replica of the Holy Face to the nearby Basilica of Santo Spirito in Sassia. After 808 years, the Veronica, which the pope brought in the midst of the poor and sick of the oldest European hospital, was returned to history.



Fr. Domenico together with Prof. Bruno Sammaciccia in front of the Exhibition on the Holy Face - Pescara, September 1977.



**L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO**

Giornale Quotidiano POLITICO RELIGIOSO

UNICUIQUE SUUM NON PRAEVALEBIT

CITTÀ DEL VATICANO

La visita di Benedetto XVI al Santuario del Volto Santo di Manoppello

## Se resta impressa in voi, pastori del gregge, la santità del Volto di Cristo, anche i fedeli ne saranno contagiati e trasformati

«Cari sacerdoti, se resta impressa in voi, pastori del gregge di Cristo, la santità del suo Volto, non abbiate timore, anche i fedeli affidati alle vostre cure ne saranno contagiati e trasformati. Il voi, sacerdoti, che vi preparate ad essere guide responsabili del popolo cristiano, non lasciatevi attrarre da null'altro che da Gesù e dal desiderio di servirlo in sua Chiesa». È quanto ha raccomandato Benedetto XVI nel corso della visita compiuta venerdì mattina, 1° settembre, al Santuario del Volto Santo di Manoppello, che si trova nel territorio dell'arcidiocesi di Chieti-Vasto. Dietro un altare dove il Sacramentale, il Papa ha invocato il numero del Santuario, il mistero e l'unicità dell'Incarnazione, perché dall'Arcivescovo Mons. Bruno Forte. Nel discorso rivolto ai presbiteri di Manoppello ha ricordato le parole pronunciate dalla comunità dei Padri Cappuccini, che da secoli si prende cura di questo Santuario, fonte di tanti pellegrini. «Chi incontra Gesù, chi si lascia da Lui attraversare ed è disposto a seguirlo sino al sacrificio della vita — ha detto — sperimenta personalmente, come figli, la sua misericordia e amore per l'«altro fratello». Questa è la via di Cristo, la via dell'amore totale che vince la morte che la perviene e «colui la via in questo mondo, la converrà per la sua essenza». Vale a dire che la via è questa terra, attraverso la trasformazione del fedele nel suo volto». «Ci mettete a concludere — la Madre del Creatore a ripetere anche la nostra grande tema di Dio che non possiamo guardare guardando le stupide montagne che ci circondano. Questo dono, però, è sempre più esposto a seri rischi di degrado ambientale e va pertanto difeso e tutelato».



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L'Osservatore Romano, September 2, 2006.

In a statement dated November 27, 2021, the archbishop of the diocese of Chieti-Vasto, Mons. Bruno Forte, recalled that "*Father Heinrich Pfeiffer S.J. was a witness of Christ through research, knowledge and teaching of Church history. He made a great contribution to the study of the Holy Face of Manoppello.*

*My thanks and the gratitude of the Church of Chieti-Vasto goes to him*", underlining how through his study of the Holy Shroud and the Face of Manoppello and initiating important research on this precious relic, "which led to the recognition of it as the 'Roman Veronica', he favored the pilgrimage of Pope Benedict XVI to the Shrine of the Holy Face on September 1, 2006".

That visit, so opposed in Vatican circles that it was announced only ten days before September 1, was an event of extraordinary importance in the history of the Holy Face, of the Shrine and also in the life of Fr. Pfeiffer, who saw implicitly recognized the validity of his years of research. The photo that portrays the Jesuit together with Benedict XVI reveals the cordiality of that meeting, perhaps even ple-

asure and gratitude on the part of the German pope. The Jesuit wrote that many years earlier he had hoped for a visit to Manoppello by John Paul II and that he had in any case given the then Cardinal Ratzinger a memorandum on the Holy Face.

We recall that visit through his own words published in the magazine of the Volto Santo n. 2, December 2006, p. 30 ff.: "It is of enormous and beneficial significance that the current Pope has seen and contemplated with his own eyes for a long time this image of Christ which has been venerated over the centuries as the most important relic of Christianity.

**Perhaps this precious object would never have been known to the general public if the late Father Domenico da Cese, a Capuchin of the Convent to whom the Holy Face was entrusted many centuries ago, had not wanted to show it during the National Eucharistic Congress of 1977, held in Pescara.** Perhaps a Pope would never have gone to visit the Abruzzo Shrine, if news of this exhibition had not reached as far as to a cell of a Trappist nun named Blandina Paschalis Schlömer at the convent of Maria Frieden in Dahlem in the Eifel in Germany and perhaps no scholar would ever have dealt with this extraordinary find if Sister had not sent a package containing her research to the Sindonologist Father Werner Bulst of the Society of Jesus, and if the undersigned, a confrere of the late, great German scholar, had not been present at the time of the arrival of that packa-

CHE COSA E' IL VOLTO SANTO  
DI MANOPPELLO?

Secondo i criteri e le esposizioni dei fedeli, che sono migliaia in tutto il mondo, e secondo esperti, dotti, studiosi e uomini di grande intelletto, secondo anche alti Ecclesiastici e molti religiosi, questo Santo Volto è precisamente quel lino sudario che fu posto sulla faccia di Gesù Cristo quando venne rinchiuso nel sepolcro. La prima Testimonianza ci venne data dall'esistenza del lino sudario, fu quella della Maddalena, la prima donna che andò al sepolcro e, disse: ho visto la tomba di Cristo vivente, la gloria di Cristo risorto, gli Angeli Suoi testimoni e il sudario che fu posto sulla faccia di Gesù Cristo.

P. DOMENICO CAPPUCCINO

*Santuario del Volto Santo* - ☎ 857218

65024 MANOPPELLO (PE)

Holy Card created by Fr. Domenico - "What is the Holy Face".

ge. With her study contained in that package, the Trappist nun wanted to demonstrate nothing less than the perfect overlapping of the Holy Face of Manoppello with the head that can be seen on the cloth of the Shroud of Turin. And I too was able to see the accuracy of her experiments and the irrefutable result. So, I made, together with some fellow experts on the Holy Shroud from Rome, the first trip to Manoppello. An extraordinary vision and a new conviction offered itself to me at that moment: I had found the Roman Veronica, considered lost by all scholars. It was a moment of great emotion".

A few slight explanations are necessary to understand the sequence of the circumstances briefly recalled by Fr. Pfeiffer, who alludes to an exhibition on the Holy Face that Fr. Domenico da Cese, of the convent of Manoppello, organized in Pescara during the week of September 1977 in which the National Eucharistic Congress took place in the Adriatic city, which saw the final presence of Pope Paul VI, on September 17, 1977.

Father Domenico organized a small exhibition, in rooms available to the Capuchins, to fill a gap left by the organizers who had completely ignored the Holy Face. A few months later some information about that exhibition reached the journalist and writer Renzo Allegri, a well-known biographer of Padre Pio. Allegri arrived in Manoppello the following year, publishing his article on the Holy Face in the weekly *Gente* of September 30, 1978, a few days after the death of Fr. Domenico. The same article was translated and published the following month in the German-language Swiss Catholic magazine *Das Zeichen Mariens*, which arrived in the German convent where Sr. Blandina who, being dedicated to the Shroud, began to study it also in relation to that Face of which prior to that time she had not even known of its existence. Another fortuitous circumstance was the presence of Fr. Pfeiffer in Germany, in the study room of the Jesuit Werner Bulst (1913-1995), considered at that time the most authoritative German sindonologist.

On that occasion, the elderly Fr. Bulst gave Fr. Pfeiffer the documentation sent by the nun telling him "You are in Rome, and therefo-

re you can take care of it". And Fr. Pfeiffer gave years of study and research to understand the mysterious image and to bring it back into the history of Christianity.

By studying the Holy Face, the German Jesuit became aware of the key figure of Fr. Domenico da Cese. The Capuchin himself, endowed with supernatural powers, according to many testimonies, had arrived in an empirical way, in the early seventies, at the same conclusions as Fr. Pfeiffer, supporting the thesis that the cloths of the Shroud and of the Holy Face came from the tomb of Jesus. Fr. Domenico wrote his reflections not in essays and magazines but on simple holy cards that he distributed to make the Holy Face known and venerated (as per the attached holy card). Fr. Pfeiffer also knew about the friendship between Fr. Domenico and Padre Pio, as I was able to see from some conversations I had with him over the years, during which he was led to reflect on the destiny of the Capuchin, who died in Turin, where he had gone for the exposition of the Shroud. Fr. Pfeiffer, on various occasions, told people close to him that he had noticed a friar, with a powerful build, among the crowd visiting the Shroud in the Cathedral of Turin on September 12, 1978, where the scholar was to participate in a conference on the Shroud. On the evening of that same day, Fr. Domenico was hit by a car, dying five days later in hospital, due to his serious injuries. Years later, Fr. Pfeiffer would have recognized that friar while studying the Holy Face in Manoppello. Regarding Fr. Domenico, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints granted the *Nihil Obstat* to the beatification process (2015), which has yet to be started, despite the generous work of gathering testimonies conducted by Br. Vincenzo d'Elpidio, now deceased, who was his friend and for many years a reference point for thousands of Fr. Domenico's devotees and spiritual children.

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"Manoppello mourns Father Pfeiffer," read the headline in *Il Centro*, the most widely circulated regional newspaper. The article by Walter Teti, who had also had the opportunity to know him personally, presented reactions to the news of the German Jesuit's death,

recalling the long relationship between the German scholar and the Abruzzo town. A feeling of gratitude expressed by the mayor himself, Giorgio De Luca, who announced his desire to dedicate a street to him, possibly, right on the Colle dei Cappuccini, to which Fr. Pfeiffer had certainly shown the way to millions of people. Fr. Pfeiffer himself would have liked to have remained buried forever in Manoppello. A desire that was also affirmed by Sister Blandina.

Known, respected and loved by all, as could also be seen from the messages that appeared on the Facebook page of the Shrine and on other pages, starting with that of his historic University, which in a message of condolence underlined how Fr. Pfeiffer "enriched the Pontifical Gregorian University with his academic dedication and his passion for Christian art for over 40 years", recalling how "his studies on the Sistine Chapel and the Holy Face of Manoppello were famous", concluding with the hope: "may he contemplate the Infinite Beauty".

He was for me a very dear person. I had met him in December 1998 on the occasion of a conference on the Holy Face that was held in the hall of the then Casa del Pellegrino – to which I had been invited, being at that time the director for tourism and responsible for a project to



Pfeiffer celebrant with the canons of St. Peter's Mons. Edmond H. Farhat and Mons. Americo Ciani, in Santo Spirito in Sassia, Rome, 17 January 2016.

promote the Great Jubilee of 2000. In front of a small audience, he showed and described many slides, as was the custom at the time, explaining the Holy Face and its history through the oldest images of Jesus, even before the Veronica (true icon) arrived in Rome. From then on, we saw each other frequently over



the years. I met him several times at the Gregorian University several times also where I always took advantage of his willingness to offer enlightenment, conferring together with him on various issues.

Unfortunately, a few years ago he had experienced health problems while teaching summer classes at the University of Puebla, Mexico, from which he had slowly recovered. Two years ago, the decision was made for him to stay at the residence of the elderly Jesuits near Berlin. On December 1, 2019, his last short email in which he updated me on his arrival at the Jesuit residence in Kladow, near Berlin, writing to me: "*Dearest Antonio, I don't know if you might have an opportunity to come to Berlin. I am always waiting for you and greet you and yours with inclusive blessings. Your Fr. Heinrich Pfeiffer.*" A last unforgettable testimony of humility and affection for me and my family, having shared with him a path that was not easy – especially during the early years – of spreading the knowledge of the Holy Face. In the following months there was no response to my emails with which I updated him on the main news.

I would like to recall how in the summer of 2018 he was invited by Giovanni Gazzaneo, head of the magazine "*Luoghi dell'Infinito*", the monthly magazine of the newspaper *Avvenire*, to draft an article on the Holy Face for a special issue for the month of October, in conjunction with the "Week of Beauty: Your face I seek", which would be held in Grosseto from October 19 to 28. where a copy of the veil of Manoppello, enclosed in a silver reliquary from 1902, would have been exhibited. The article, "The veil of secrets: the enigma of Manoppello", was probably his last published writing, in which one can read an effective summary of his long path of research, with several parallel readings on the historical level that began by stating that "in a small town in Abruzzo lies hidden one of the greatest treasures in the world", with the concluding reference, to the visit of Benedict XVI and even more to what was said by the Prefect of the Papal Household, Archbishop Georg Gänswein, in Santo Spirito in Sassia, at the end of the procession that on January 16, 2016 reenacted the rite of Omnis Terra: "*It is a copy of that ancient original*



Orthodox Divine Liturgy celebrated in Manoppello on 18 September 2016, presided over by Archbishop Job Getcha, Patriarchate of Constantinople. Present were Cardinals Kurt Koch, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches.

and troubled events. *"But every search is always indebted only to one thing: the truth"*, wrote the unforgettable Fr. Pfeiffer.

*that Pope Innocent VIII showed to pilgrims and that for four hundred years has been kept in Abruzzo, on the Adriatic, in a peripheral area of Italy, from where today for the first time it has been brought back to the place where its public worship began".* Fr. Pfeiffer was among the concelebrants, together with Fr. Carmine Cucinelli and other religious, including two authoritative canons of St. Peter's, the Lebanese archbishop Edmond H. Farhat and the mons. Americo Ciani. The Veronica had reappeared in the history of the Church, after long

\*Article published in the *Rivista del Volto Santo*, n. 1, June, 2022, p. 31 ff.

## THE VEIL OF SECRETS: THE ENIGMA OF MANOPPELLO

Could the precious cloth preserved in the Abruzzo Shrine be the Veronica which disappeared from Rome? A concrete hypothesis between history and science

**Heinrich Pfeiffer\***

In a small town in Abruzzo lies hidden one of the greatest treasures in the world. We are in Manoppello, not far from the ancient bishopric of Chieti, in a valley that leads south, towards the slopes of the Maiella massif. Behind the town, in 1621, the Capuchins built a convent. The treasure is here: a piece of exceptionally fine cloth, probably byssus. The white fabric, measuring 24 by 17 centimeters, is contained in a monstrance-shaped reliquary. From the very thin veil shines a face easily identifiable with the face of the Lord. This piece of cloth holds many secrets. One of its mysteries lies in the fact that the image almost completely vanishes when held against any light source. Another extraordinary fact is the color of the face, iridescent from gray to brown while sometimes, depending on the position of the observer, light red spots appear. There are also variations depending on the intensity and angle of the light on the fabric. Other details consist of the many folds and a piece of chipped glass or crystal. The first document to deal with the veil is a manuscript by the Capuchin friar Donato di Bomba, written before 1646.

This work of fifty-four pages is entitled *Vera et breve Relatione historica d'una miracolosa figura over imagine del volto di Christo Signor nostro passionato et tormentato; qual al presente si ritrova nel Convento de' Padri Capuccini di Manoppello, Terra in Abbruzzo Citra, Provintia del Regno di Napoli*. In this work it is said that in 1506 an unknown person brought the veil to Manoppello and gave it to a certain Giacomo Antonio Leonelli, disappearing immediately after the delivery without leaving a trace of himself.

A descendant, Martia Leonelli, would have had the veil as a dowry for her wedding to the soldier Pancrazio Petrucci. But since her brother did not want to give her the object, her husband would have violently removed the veil from his brother-in-law's house. Petrucci was finally imprisoned in Chieti and to free him his wife, in 1618 or – according to another version of the manuscript – in 1620, sold the veil for four scudi to Dr. Donato Antonio de Fabritis, who delivered it into the hands of the Capuchins.

The Capuchins could not have been able to research the provenance of the object before 1621, the year of their arrival in Manoppello, which is why the only source of reference could only be the narration of Martia Leonelli. It is unlikely that this woman remembered so precisely a date as 1506, now more than a century having passed. Furthermore, beyond and prior to the *Relatione historica* no trace of the presence of the precious veil in the town of Manoppello has ever been found. De Fabritiis donated the relic to the Capuchin fathers in 1638. At that time Father Donato di Bomba wrote the *Relatione* which was read in public in the town hall of Manoppello on April 7, 1646, followed by a notarial deed in which the text was defined as "*historia seu legenda*" (history or legend).

The thing that makes us curious is the fact that such an object had existed in Rome: the famous relic of the Veronica. Once kept in St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, it then disappeared on the occasion of the Sack of Rome, in 1527. Those were the words used by then director of the Vatican Museums, Professor Antonio Paolucci, in an interview in 2011 to coincide with the presentation of the exhibition "The man, the face, the mystery".

Are there any reasons that prevent us from identifying the veil of Manoppello with that of the Veronica?

Up to now no argument has been found that contradicts this thesis. On the contrary, there are many reasons that lead us to accept it.

The first consists in the fact that all the ancient representations and copies of the Veronica executed up to the beginning of the seventeenth century correspond to the features of the Holy Face of

Manoppello, but not to those made later, after 1616, and passed off as authentic copies of the Roman Veronica.

In this context we note strange measures taken by the popes. Paul V forbade any reproduction of the relic as early as 1616 and, when he was asked for a copy by the imperial court in Vienna, he had it executed by a canon of St. Peter's. This "copy", of no artistic value, is still preserved today in the Weltliche Schatzkammer (Imperial Treasury) of the Vienna Hofburg Palace and shows, for the first time, the Face of Christ with his eyes closed.

Also the few versions made during the three years of Gregory XV's reign show the same features as the Viennese copy. Pope Urban VIII had all the ancient and authentic copies of the Roman relic destroyed.

All these strange measures taken by the popes find an explanation in the theft of the original Veronica: a thesis that finds its confirmation in the fact that the Vatican archivist Giacomo Grimaldi in 1618 recorded that the glass of the ancient reliquary of the Veil, dated 1350, was broken. The same archivist, in the same year (but one could also think of a falsification of the original date: MDCXVI with the manipulated addition of two strokes to obtain MDCXVIII), drew the Face of Christ together with its reliquary, portraying the identical features of the Holy Face of Manoppello.

These unusual acts of the popes could not have remained unknown to the Capuchins of the Abruzzo town. In fact, in that period the religious tried to protect the relic itself, which had probably been rescued and then hidden in Abruzzo. The *Relatione historica* was written to inform the Minister General of the Order in Rome, Father Innocentio di Caltagirone, about the events that took place in Manoppello.

Did the fathers suspect that their veil was actually the Roman Veronica? We don't know. We have only clues that can be interpreted in this sense: the fathers waited until 1686 to dedicate a chapel to the relic of the Holy Face and until 1718 to ask Pope Clement XI to grant a plenary indulgence for pilgrims visiting the Shrine.



There are many arguments to assert that the veil of Manoppello is identifiable in the Veronica. First of all, it is certain that there is no object in the entire world that so perfectly reflects, in every stroke and detail, the Roman relic and that corresponds so faithfully to everything that is known about it. Only the image of Manoppello can give us a concrete vision of how it presented itself to pilgrims and artists, especially in the period from the beginning of the fourteenth century to the end of the sixteenth century.

The Veronica was a veil that was sometimes represented as transparent fabric and sometimes also with the obvious signs of many folds. The recognizable Face on it had its eyes open, the same wavy hair, and the beard divided into two parts of the Holy Face. It is enough to arrange the countless images that we find in Western art in parallel to realize this.

On the other hand, the Holy Face of Manoppello cannot be a copy of a presumed lost original. For two reasons. First, the image on the veil is reproduced with an unknown technique. Anyone making copies would have had to adopt some known method of making them. Secondly, the veil of Manoppello is the portrait most rich in details among those which are well known whether in the East or in the West.

The rules of philology dictate that in a relationship of dependence between a model and its imitation, the object with the greatest number of details is to be considered the original, while copies never report all the details existing in the progenitor image. Other research conducted on the Holy Face of Manoppello by a German nun, Sister Blandina Paschalis Schlömer, has proved to be of extreme interest. The nun compared the Face of the Veil and the features of the Holy Shroud of Turin using a very simple but effective method: the overlapping of the two images on a scale of 1:1. The result is that, with the exception of traces of blood - or at least that they seem to be blood - there is a perfect coincidence of all the details so that a single image is formed between the two faces, without creating any disturbance or interference.

There seems to be only one explanation: the image of Manoppello could only have been formed when the two fabrics were superimposed.

And if this first superimposition of the two fabrics took place in the tomb of Jesus in Jerusalem, then the story of the Holy Face would begin in the tomb of Jesus in Jerusalem, just like that of the Shroud of Turin.

If we admit, at least hypothetically, this possibility, we can try to write the history of the veil of Manoppello. The identity of the relic with another Face of Christ on cloth of which we have historical information thus seems likely: the image of Camulia, in Cappadocia. As the Byzantine historian Georg Cedreno writes, in 574 the *acheropita*, the image of Christ not made by human hands, arrived from Camulia to Constantinople. This image in the capital filled the disappearance of the *labarum*, the flag of the Roman troops created by Constantine whose traces had been lost since the time of the empire of Julian the Apostate. In its place, the holy image was carried in front of the troops during battles.

The victories were celebrated by poets who emphasized the role played by the *acheropite*, taking care to report some descriptions.

The poet Theophylact Simocatta, for example, wrote on the occasion of the battle near the Arzamon River in 586 that the image had been made by divine hands, so it was neither woven nor painted. If one observes the veil of Manoppello carefully, together with its image, one can perfectly realize that this Face is neither painted on cloth nor is it a woven image. There is no trace of pigment on the canvas, while the image is perfectly visible from both sides, as if it were one with the threads of the fabric. Not even weaving can explain it, because each weft thread does not show itself to be a single color in its length but divided into different shades that change from one to the other almost indistinctly.

The image of Camulia remained in Constantinople until about 705, when the second period of Justinian II's rule began. In the *interregnum* the *acheropite* image must have been lost.

Only in 753, on the occasion of the Lombard siege of Aistulf, was there news of an "Acheropsita" (sic): an icon of Christ in the chapel of the Sancta Sanctorum of the Lateran Palace in Rome. The upper part of this icon was covered by a veil with the Face of Christ depicted.

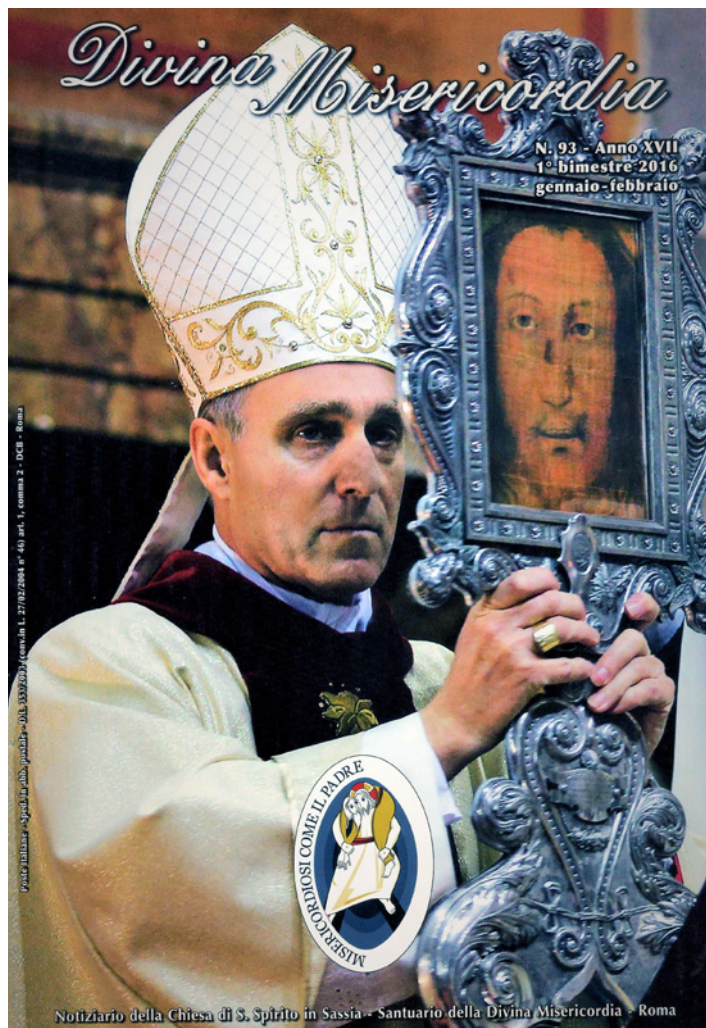
Was the first veil superimposed on the icon the same image of Camulia, later replaced by a veil with a painted face when the Lateran "Acheropsita" was secretly transported to St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, where it took on the new name of the Veronica? This hypothesis could fill the gap between the loss of the image of Camulia, in Constantinople, in about 705, and the appearance of the Veronica in St. Peter's towards the end of the twelfth century.

How is it possible to identify four different objects (the images of Camulia, the Lateran, St. Peter's and Manoppello) in the same object? The fundamental reason lies only in the fact that it is always an image on cloth, but above all in the mysterious character of the Holy Face itself. It is difficult to admit that there were several images with the same inexplicable properties.

Finally, we remember two events of particular importance. The visit to Manoppello of Pope Benedict XVI on September 1, 2006, to whom we owe the elevation of the modest Shrine to a minor basilica.

The re-enactment, during the Jubilee of Mercy, of the ancient procession of the Holy Face from St. Peter's to the nearby basilica of Santo Spirito in Sassia, established by Pope Innocent III in 1208. For the occasion, a copy of the Holy Face was brought by the Capuchins from Manoppello to Rome and was exhibited on January 16 and 17, 2016 in the basilica of Santo Spirito.

During the solemn Eucharistic celebration, the Prefect of the Papal Household, Georg Gänswein, stated: "It is a copy of that ancient original that Pope Innocent III shown to pilgrims and that for four hundred years has been kept in Abruzzo on the Adriatic, in a peripheral area of Italy, from where today for the first time it has been brought back to the place where its public worship began".



Cover of the magazine "Divine Mercy" with Mons. Georg Gänswein and the Holy Face

\*The question in the subtitle of the article was inserted by the editorial staff of the magazine "I Luoghi dell'Infinito", October 2018, p. 32 ff. We thank the editors of the magazine for authorizing the reproduction. (A.B.)

## VERONICA IN UGO DA CARPI'S ALTARPIECE. SIMILARITIES TO THE HOLY FACE



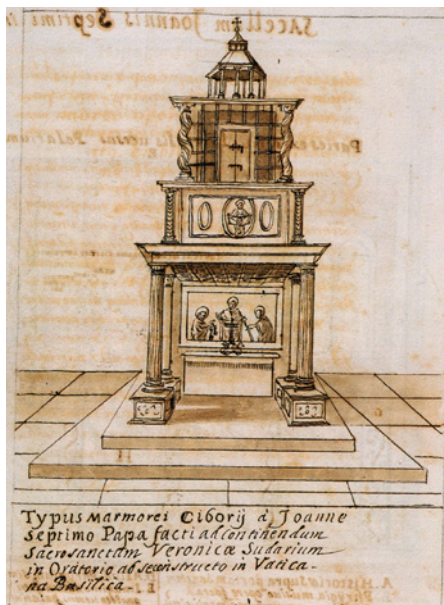
A work of art can hold many surprises even after centuries. This is the case of the Altarpiece of the Sudarium of the Holy Face by Ugo dei Conti di Panico, known as Ugo da Carpi, commissioned by Pope Clement VII for the Jubilee of 1525, which shows Veronica unfurling the veil of the Holy Face between the apostles Peter and Paul.

The work was intended for the altar of the Holy Face, located in the lower part of the ciborium (freestanding edifice) of the ancient basilica, which in the upper part housed the Veronica, closed in a special chest, with a number of bolt locks controlled by the canons of St. Peter's, while the final key was in the hands of the pope. The ciborium is comprehensible in the illustration, shown below, by Jacopo Grimaldi, canon of St. Peter's, along with a map of the old basilica showing the location of the ciborium close to the Holy Door.

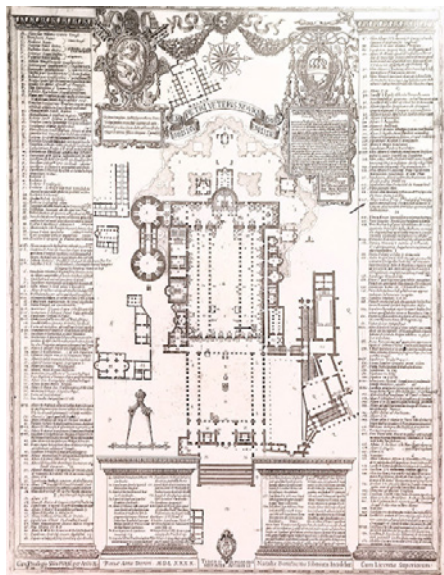
Da Carpi's work appears destined to arouse new interest thanks to recent diagnostic analyses that have revealed the uniqueness of the work, confirming that it is not a painting, as noted in the margin by the author himself who wrote "per Ugo da Carpi intaiatore fata senza penello", (by Ugo da Carpi engraver made without a paintbrush) but a masterpiece of engraving produced through multi-layered printing.

The work was at the center of an anecdote told by Giorgio Vasari, who refers to the conversation he had with Michelangelo:



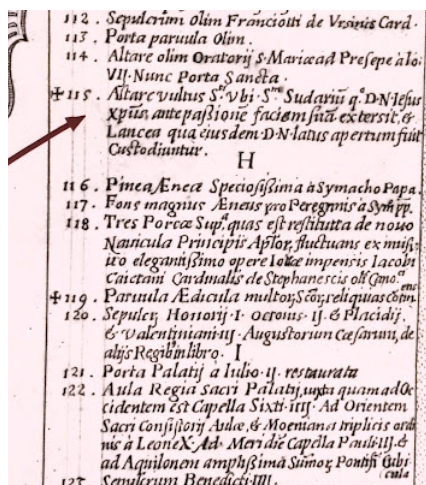


*“Ugo da Carpi, though a mediocre painter, was nevertheless, in other fancies, of the most acute genius. And since, as I have said, he was a painter, I will not be silent that he painted in oil without using a paintbrush, but with his fingers, and partly with his quirky instruments, an altarpiece that is in Rome at the altar of the Holy Face; which altarpiece, as I was one morning with Michelangelo to hear Mass at the said altar and seeing written upon it that Ugo da Carpi had made it without a paintbrush, I laughingly showed this inscription to Michelangelo, who also laughingly replied “It would have been better if he had used the paintbrush and done it in a better manner” (Giorgio Vasari, The Lives of the Most Excellent Architects, Italian painters and sculptors).*



Arrow points to the location of the Ciborium.

Both Vasari and Michelangelo expressed their critical judgment by dwelling on the artistic value of the work, not understanding the meaning of the artist’s messa-



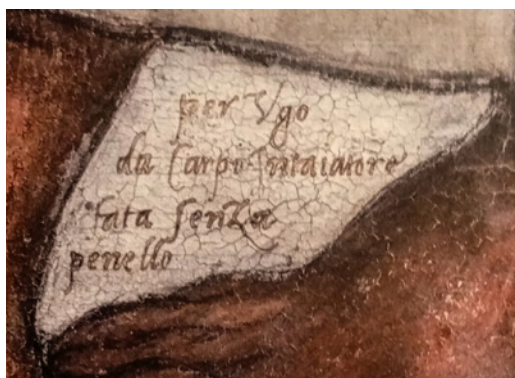
Arrow points to the description of the Ciborium as the altar of the Holy Face and Sudarium.

en put forward by Giovanni Morello, even before recent scientific examinations, on the occasion of the display of the work in the exhibition *The Face of Christ*, inaugurated on December 9, 2000 at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome, which concluded the Great Jubilee of 2000. For that exhibition Morello wrote that “the realization cannot be connected to the mere whim or extravagance of the artist, but rather to the very nature of the work, which was to reproduce the Veronica, an acheropite image, that is, not made by human hands” (cf. *Il Volto di Cristo*, Electa, Milan, 2000, p. 111). And Morello, at the time director of the Va-

ge, who evidently wanted to experiment with a mode of reproduction that would allow him to respect, in some way, the acheropite nature of the Holy Face, which Ugo da Carpi had certainly been able to see.

Vasari also speaks of the “Holy Face” and the episode he describes highlights the importance of that altar at the time, where only the work of Ugo da Carpi was visible.

This hypothesis regarding Ugo da Carpi’s intention to respect the acheropite nature of the Holy Face had already be-





tican museums, wrote with full knowledge of the facts.

The altarpiece was exhibited in Turin from June 16 to August 22, 2022, at the Medieval Court of Palazzo Madama and was exhibited again in Carpi, five hundred years after its creation, in Ugo's hometown.

The work, which has lost its original brightly colored quality, is considered by Pietro Zander, head of the Artistic Heritage section of the Fabbrica of St. Peter's

Basilica and curator of the two exhibitions, to be one of the most important works in St. Peter's.

I was able to visit the exhibition in Carpi and see the work up close on display in the Museums of Palazzo dei Pio from February 24 to June 29, 2024. In the exhibition, several panels illustrate in detail the note written by Ugo da Carpi, to emphasize how the work was executed "without a paintbrush".

Fr. Heinrich Pfeiffer opined that Ugo da Carpi was inspired rather by the Mandilion, which at that time was preserved in the Church of San Silvestro, rather than by the Veronica (Holy Face), as it would have been *"easier for him to imitate an icon than the image on the Veil which varies continuously and which presents it-*





*self with a different appearance according to the illumination and angle of the observer” (Il Volto Santo, ed. Carsa, Pescara, 2000, p. 23).*

These are certainly well-founded hypotheses, even if some details closely related to the face, examined a few centimeters from the Panel, such as the eyes, open, but with pupils of different sizes and the nose, which is swollen, suggest that the artist was inspired by the Holy Face.

## THE “HOLY FACE” OF CHRIST UNITES

### **History and Devotion in the Twinning Between Chiusa Sclafani (Sicily) and Manoppello (Abruzzo)**

An unprecedented twinning took place between the Holy Face kept in the church of San Nicola di Chiusa Sclafani and that of the Holy Face of Manoppello, after a journey that developed during 2024, which began with a visit to Manoppello by a group of members of the Confraternity of the Holy Face, during the rite of *Omnis Terra*, celebrated on January 28. This was followed by the participation of the rector of the Shrine, Fr. Antonio Gentili, invited in connection with the feast of the Holy Face, which is celebrated annually in the Sicilian town on the first Sunday of May. On that occasion, the twinning charter was signed by Mons. Gualtiero Isacchi, archbishop of Monreale, by the archpriest of the church of San Nicola di Bari don Bernardo Giglio, by the aforementioned Fr. Antonio Gentili and by Manuele Ruvolo, president of the Confraternity of the Holy Face of Chiusa Sclafani. The act was later also signed by Mons. Bruno Forte, archbishop of the Diocese of Chieti-Vasto.

The document summarizes the historical origins of the Holy Face venerated in the Sicilian town, which is located halfway between Palermo and Agrigento, then manifests “the desire to strengthen the root of reparation expressing the desire to look upon the Holy Face of Manoppello” or veil of Veronica. On August 6, on the occasion of the feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus, celebrated in Manoppello, numerous faithful arrived belonging to the Confraternity of the Holy Face of Chiusa Sclafani, founded in 1900 and led by the active and passionate work of President Manuele Ruvolo.

At sunset, after the celebration of the afternoon Mass, presided over by Fr. Simone Calvarese, provincial minister of the Capuchins of Abruzzo, Lazio and Umbria, the short procession took place,





from the Basilica to Fonte Leone, preceded by Fr. Bernardo Giglio who carried in his arms the Holy Face of Chiusa Sclafani, followed by the large banner of the Confraternity and the numerous members, arranged in two rows, who all wore the characteristic habit (or scapular).

It was a devout and at the same time

joyful participation of people who had traveled over a thousand kilometers to reach Abruzzo as well as an engaging testimony of a twinning deeply felt by the Sicilian community, which mingled among the many local faithful and those also from abroad to attend the solemn rite. Faith is certainly something personal, but at the same time communal. Also present was Father Anatoly Grytskiv, representing the Orthodox Church.

The procession is a cause for reflection, with aspects that go far beyond the religious event.

It is appropriate to briefly explain the presence of the Holy Face in the Sicilian town, which is due to the venerable friar Innocenzo Caldarera (1557-1631). The friar had received the image as a gift in 1623 from Gregory XV of whom he was a trusted advisor. The pope, out of gratitude, in the final phase of his life, proposed to Brother Innocent that he choose for himself one of the objects in his apartment. The friar turned his attention to the copy of the Holy Face, which in turn he donated to the convent of the refor-

med Friars Minor of the convent of San Vito in Chiusa Sclafani, his hometown, with a notarial deed dated September 21, 1623. The copy was made by Canon Pietro Strozzi in the year 1617 and bears the Latin inscription “the holiness of Our Lord Paul V pronounced anathema against those who dared, without the permission to be granted by himself or his successors, to make a copy from this image”, and portrays the face of the dead Christ. The work, which corresponds to the copy made by Strozzi himself in 1616 and intended for Constance, Queen of Poland, reveals the evident transformation of the iconography of Veronica (True Icon), which previously appeared with its eyes open.

The presence of the Holy Face immediately generated local devotion and also in the neighboring villages.

Of particular historical interest is the documentation that came after the papal brief of Urban VIII of 29 May 1628 which, in reiterating the prohibition of reproduction of the image of Veronica, already ordered by Paul V, ordered the return of existing copies, under penalty of excommunication. The provision, as was explained by the pope himself, did not concern the reproduction of any image of Christ - which would have paradoxical effects for the Church - but only those that “portray the true Holy Image of the Holy Face that is beheld here in St. Peter’s Basilica with stains and bruises of blood, sweat and blows.”

The collection of these documents, patiently transcribed, constitutes the appendix to the work by Antonio Giuseppe Marchese, “Christ in Chiusa Sclafani”, a privately published edition of 2009, distributed by the Confraternity of the Holy Face of Chiusa Sclafani. It can be seen that on July 11, 1628, Mons. Francesco Traina, bishop of Girgenti (Agrigento), in whose diocese Chiusa Sclafani was then included, ordered the guardian of the Friars Minor to deliver the copy of the Holy Face within eight days, with the threat of papal excommunication. On July 13, Lorenzo Gioeni Gardona, Marquis of Giuliana and Count of Chiusa, intervened in defense of keeping the icon in the village, pointing out that the copy

was kept in the church under papal authority and not by private individuals, referring to the donation of Gregory XV.

In the meantime, Fra Innocenzo Caldarera was informed in Rome so that he could act accordingly, in support of Chiusa's reasons. The good friar evidently succeeded as evidenced by a letter sent from Rome on August 23, 1628, signed by Cardinal Mellini, addressed to the Count of Chiusa, in which he recalls his gratitude to Fr. Innocent, finally clarifying that the obligation to surrender "does not include the prohibition of those images that have been obtained with the authority of this Holy See." The copy could therefore remain in Chiusa Sclafani. But it must evidently have been an interpretation that departed from the order imposed by Urban VIII, so much so that in the same note the cardinal recommends "that the image be kept secret as much as possible, so that other use of this example would not be the cause of the enactment of some new order to cast any doubt upon the grace already obtained, because His Holiness is very strict in this matter." In essence, the return of the Holy Face and its destruction is avoided, but on the other hand the secrecy of the image and silence regarding it is imposed.

The logic of these provisions seems incomprehensible, especially since in these years the trace of the "*pictores veronicarum*", which since the Middle Ages had reproduced the face of Christ at the request of pilgrims, had been erased.

The Vatican attitude helps to understand the fears of the Capuchins of Manoppello to protect the Holy Face. It is no coincidence that they had avoided any form of worship and dissemination of the sacred image, which had remained walled up for a long time. A well-preserved silence, considering that no intimation is present in the archives of the Convent.

With the death of Urban VIII, which took place on July 29, 1644, his long pontificate, which lasted 21 years, came to an end, and the grip on copies of the Veronica began to loosen, even if his provisions would not be annulled. Although during his pontificate he

did not fail to grant a Sicilian nobleman, coinciding with the Jubilee of 1625, a copy of the Veronica (“true image of the Holy Sudarium”), painted on a copper plate, which is venerated in the church of San Nicolò in Venetico Superiore, in the province of Messina. The work, also executed by Strozzi, with the usual prohibition of reproduction, differs from the copy of Chiusa Scalfani, but in any case having its eyes closed.

A complex and very tangled story, with contradictory attitudes and with many mysterious aspects, in a tormented period that put Veronica itself at risk.

When, during the Great Jubilee of 2000, John Paul II – who knew the evolution of studies on the Holy Face of Manoppello due to his frequent interactions with Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini (president of the International Institute for Research on the Face of Christ) – asked forgiveness for the sins of the Church in a striking act, arguing: “we cannot fail to recognize the infidelity to the Gospel in-



At the left, Mons. Cataldo Naro, with Fr. Heinrich Pfeiffer at the right (photo courtesy of Manuele Ruvolo).

to which some of our brothers and sisters have fallen, especially during the second millennium” (point 4 – homily delivered in St. Peter’s on 12 March 2000)\*, he almost certainly also referred to the silence perpetrated by his predecessors regarding Veronica, regarding which only in 2011, during the papacy of Benedict XVI, was its disappearance during the Sack of Rome in 1527 admitted.

It is worth mentioning that a reflection on the artistic and historical level was expounded by Fr. Heinrich Pfeiffer, at the invitation of then archbishop of Monreale, Mons. Cataldo Naro, to participate in a conference organized in Chiusa Sclafani on November 6, 2004, with inevitable comparisons to Veronica (a true icon), studied for many years.

Fr. Pfeiffer articulated at the event an in-depth analysis of the Face of Chiusa, published in the Ecclesiastical Bulletin of the Archdiocese of Monreale, July-December 2004. By extension also the person of Fr. Pfeiffer is to be considered part of the twinning process, recalling that the cardinals of Palermo, Salvatore Pappalardo and Salvatore De Giorgi in recent years, at different times, were among the first pilgrims to Manoppello, as soon as the German Jesuit’s studies on Veronica were disseminated.

In the prayer written by Benedict XVI a year after his visit to Manoppello, the pope spoke of “the human face of God who entered history to reveal the horizons of eternity.” And on these horizons the paths of faith move freely and spontaneously, converging on the person of Christ and his face.

\* 12 March 2000, Day of Forgiveness | John Paul II ([vatican.va](http://vatican.va)).



## THE HOLY FACE ALSO TO SHINE IN SAN FRANCISCO

**In the basilica of Manoppello, the blessing of a precious reliquary destined for the Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Assumption in San Francisco.**

A precious reliquary bearing the image of the Holy Face, visible from both sides, and which will soon be enthroned in the Cathedral in San Francisco, was the focus of a solemn ritual held on September 13, 2024 at the Basilica of the Holy Face in Manoppello.

The celebration was presided over by Fr. Antonio Gentili, rector of the Shrine, together with Fr. Carmine Cucinelli, Deacon Christoph Sandoval of the Cathedral of San Francisco, Fr. Bonifacio (Ted) Lopez (Diocese of Rome), Fr. Arturo Alcantara Arcos, several other priests and Fr. Anatoliy Grytskiv, a representative of the Orthodox Church of Abruzzo-Molise. During the celebration there was the blessing of the new reliquary which was made by the historic Palermo workshop directed by the master goldsmith Antonino Amato, represented by his daughter Angela with her husband Alessandro Staiano, both goldsmiths. The silver monstrance, with precious stones and the frame around the image encased in 24-carat gold, was inspired by the original reliquary of Manoppello, with respect to which it bears religious symbolic references typical of the California metropolis, in particular with the presence of the coat of arms of the archdiocese, the medallions of St. Patrick and St. Joseph, as well as the figure of St. Francis, patron saint of the California city.

At the beginning of the celebration, Fr. Antonio Gentili, in front of the many present, in a highly symbolic act, placed the reliquary in contact with the Holy Face, as if to establish its continuity. During the homily, preceded by the reading of the Gospel of John (chapter 20), which recalls the burial cloths and the sudarium present in the tomb of Christ, Fr. Antonio greeted the delegation from



Dr. Michael Tran (at the left partially hidden), Augustine Pham, Sr. Petra-Maria Steiner, Deacon Sandoval, Sr. Blandina Paschalis.

San Francisco, emphasizing the connection of their city to the poor man of Assisi and to Manoppello, recalling that the Shrine of the Holy Face is Franciscan. He also pointed out that the reliquary destined for the American metropolis is not a simple object but is the message of the resurrection of Christ, the Veronica.

During the celebration, Deacon Christoph Sandoval thanked the rector of the Shrine, to whom he presented a commemorative medal of John Paul II's visit to the Cathedral of San Francisco on September 17, 1987. He also thanked Sister Blandina Paschalis, Sister Petra-Maria Steiner, Mrs. Augustine Pham, and the Knights of Saint Francis.

A special thanks, also coming from Fr. Antonio, was addressed to Angelo Rytz, from Switzerland, who performed an excellent role as the organizational liaison between San Francisco, Manoppello and the Sicilian goldsmith's workshop. A generous commitment manifested in memory of his wife Agatha, originally from Hong Kong and very devoted to the Holy Face.

A large number of people attended the ceremony, including many pilgrims from abroad, who participated with emotion and amazement in the event, which was interspersed by several bursts of applause.

During the lunch that followed at the Casa del Pellegrino adjoining the shrine, Fr. Carmine was asked to share his memories of the American mission of 2014, where he was able to speak for the first time about the Holy Face in the church of St. Ignatius in San Francisco. Fr. Carmine pointed out that in that year a program had been planned, proposed by the unforgettable Daisy Neves, a great supporter of the Holy Face, for two stops in the United States, in Las Vegas and Bellevue, Washington together with a wider itinerary in the Philippines.

At that time, recalled Fr. Carmine, then rector of the Shrine, Mrs. Augustine Pham, an American of Vietnamese origin, arrived on pilgrimage in Manoppello, who having learned the news of an imminent trip to the USA, asked Fr. Carmine that San Francisco also be included in the program. Fr. Carmine facilitated the contacts with Daisy Neves and Raymond Frost of San Francisco, who had already been editing a blog dedicated to the Holy Face for years. So two conferences were organized, one in St. Ignatius Church in San Francisco and another in St. Francis of Assisi Church in nearby East Palo Alto (Silicon Valley).

In January 2019, the Archbishop of San Francisco, Salvatore Joseph Cordileone, arrived in Manoppello, to participate in the rite of *Omnis Terra*, together with Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Müller and the Archbishop of Chieti-Vasto Bruno Forte. Fr. Carmine recalled how Archbishop Cordileone, a guest of the Capuchins, was very impressed by the encounter with the Holy Face, asking to pray and meditate in solitude before the sacred image, once the church was closed.

The archbishop said on that occasion: "I encourage all those who profess faith in Jesus Christ and love for Him to cultivate devotion to this holy Image that He has left us as a gift, the image of the first moment of the Resurrection."

Fr. Carmine concluded by stating, "this reliquary is now here. May it attract the attention of many people and arouse more faith, more devotion, greater desire for union with Jesus. May the

Lord grant blessings and graces in abundance to you and your families.”

I recall that in the Archdiocese of San Francisco a copy of the Holy Face was enthroned in the Church of St. Francis of Assisi in East Palo Alto on November 11, 2017.

Fr. Bonifacio (Ted) Lopez, who accompanied Fr. Carmine in the second international mission of the Holy Face, also recalled, with his customary congeniality, a number of enthronements which were carried out in the following years in Canada and the Philippines, including one where he participated in the enthronement of the Holy Face in the church of Our Mother of Perpetual Help in Bacoor City, in the presence of Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle.

On August 5 of last year, a conference was held in South San Francisco, in the Church of Mater Dolorosa, with the participation of Sister Petra-Maria Steiner, a scholar of the Holy Face, Deacon Christoph Sandoval himself and Raymond Frost. The conference was attended by several hundred people, from all over the San

Francisco Bay Area, which has over seven million inhabitants. On that occasion, the archbishop expressed the hope that a copy of the Holy Face would also be in San Francisco to be venerated and carried in procession. Hence the mobilization of the devotees, starting with Mrs. Augustine Pham. She is keen to point out, in the presence of Deacon Sandoval, that the dona-



tion was anonymous, as confirmed by a plaque placed at the base of the reliquary.

Today this desire has come true. The reliquary will be donated to the archbishop on October 4, coinciding with the feast of St. Francis.

Deacon Sandoval, a pilgrim to Manoppello in 2006, appeared enthusiastic, also stating that he intends to encourage the establishment of an Association that promotes knowledge and devotion to the Holy Face in California, also inviting the writer to participate in a conference to be held in San Francisco. A very cordial meeting in which he declared that he has come to know my articles posted on the blog [holyfaceofmanoppello.blogspot.com](http://holyfaceofmanoppello.blogspot.com)

The event was attended by a representation of the Knights of St. Francis of San Francisco, a volunteer organization that assists the poor and homeless in the Californian metropolis, also known for having created the so-called Porziuncola Nuova, which reproduces the original of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Assisi. A remarkable work, created thanks to artists and artisans from Umbria, from which also comes most of the materials. Present among the Knights was their founder Angela Alioto, a descendant of Sicilian emigrants and daughter of the former mayor of San Francisco Joseph Alioto and being herself a former President of the Board of Supervisors of San Francisco. Alioto spoke of the ceremony as incredible. She told me that she had heard about the Holy Face for some time, but that it was only a year ago that her knowledge deepened. A clear reflection of last year's conference, promoted by Deacon Sandoval, chaplain of the Knights of St. Francis.

Present at the event were some members of the United States Navy stationed at Naples, including the organist and two singers, together with Don Arturo Alcantara Arcos, a Mexican priest, who collaborates with the chaplain of the naval base. Fr. Arturo is also the author of an essay entitled "Saint Junipero Serra, apostle of Mexico," an opportunity to remember how San Francisco also takes its name from a Spanish Franciscan mission, founded in 1776,





Knights of St. Francis with Sr. Blandina, Fr. Carmine, Fr. Antonio Gentili, Angelo, Francesca Esposito, and Giuseppe Di Francescantonio (historic associate of the shrine).

under the supervision of Fr. Junipero Serra, when California still belonged to Mexico, and Christianity was spreading in those territories. Fr. Junipero Serra, proclaimed a saint in 2015, promoted the establishment of numerous missions in California, including that of San Juan Capistrano, inspired by the saint from Abruzzo.

The growing phenomenon of the enthronement of the Holy Face, which found its moment of origin in the church of Purgatory in Ruvo di Puglia (Ba), when in 1979 the devotees of the Apulian city wished to remember Fr. Domenico da Cese, a few months after his death. Enthronements of the Holy Face are now widespread in various cities around the world, presented in different ways, from the simplest reproductions on fabric, glass or pexiglass, which are now technically possible, based on the great progress of digital



The presentation delegation of the Friends of the Archbishop Salvatore J. Cordileone included Augustine Pham, promoter of the Devotion of the Holy Face, Rev. Jerald Geronimo, associate pastor and parochial vicar of the Cathedral of San Francisco; Rev. M. R. Christoph Sandoval, Deacon and Pastoral Associate and chair of the Committee of Friends and donors, and Raymond Frost, holy face historian and blogger.

photography, to the most artistic and precious. Moreover, these initiatives are not always known to the Shrine.

It can certainly be argued that the long and not always easy path followed for the reliquary destined for the cathedral of San Francisco is exemplary, and that it has been manifestly solemn, in the spiritual participation shared between the religious community of San Francisco and the Shrine of the Holy Face, even in the creation of the reliquary itself, respectful of the centuries-old Italian goldsmith tradition. An enthronement that will not fail to bring with it positive effects as the Holy Year of 2025 approaches.

## "THANK YOU, LORD, FOR GIVING US PADRE DOMENICO"

**The apostle of the Holy Face commemorated in Cese 120 years after his birth. His special relationship with Padre Pio was remembered.**



With these heartfelt words, Padre Guglielmo Alimonti, a disciple of Padre Pio, concluded to applause the solemn Mass celebrated in Cese in memory of Padre Domenico, 120 years after his birth, taking up the message of St. John Paul II who in concluding his speech on

the occasion of the canonization of Padre Pio, exclaimed: "Thank you Lord for giving us Padre Pio and for having given him to us in this generation." And there was certainly no lack of further parallels between Padre Pio and Padre Domenico, whose memory is always alive, seeming to reach ever younger generations, as these gatherings help us to discover

Before the celebration, many people spontaneously gathered in the small cemetery, at the gates of the town, to visit the tomb of Padre Domenico.

The town, a hamlet of the municipality of Avezzano, has about 600 inhabitants. For the occasion, the town square and the side streets were taken over by cars from a number of parts of Italy.

The greetings of the city of Avezzano was expressed in the church by the Councilor Iride Cosimati, wearing the tricolor sa-

sh of her office, who recalled that she had always been impressed by the figure of Padre Domenico, whom she had known as a child, thanking the Capuchin fathers and those who came to Cese for his commemoration.

The Mass was preceded by a meeting with several Capuchin Fathers gathered in Cese for the occasion, welcomed by Padre Lorenzo Macerola and Padre Frederick Alorbu.

Among the Capuchins, seated in front of the altar, Father Domenico was remembered by Padre Guglielmo Alimonti and Padre Luciano Antonelli, both very close to Padre Domenico. Their testimonies were important and profound. Padre Guglielmo Alimonti is a well-known figure among the devotees of the Saint of Pietrelcina, and in particular among the Prayer Groups (he founded over five hundred in Italy and other European countries). At the age of 95 he is still very active in carrying on the memory of Padre Pio and there are many priests who turn to him from various parts of the world. His speech was followed by that of Padre Luciano Antonelli. Both knew Padre Domenico since they were young students. The former, In the years following the death of Padre Pio, turned to him as a confessor, while the latter was his superior at the Shrine of Manoppello when Padre Domenico died on September 17, 1978.



People waiting to enter the chapel where Padre Domenico is buried.





Capuchins in front of the altar meet the devotees of padre Domenico.

“It is good for us to meet together as friends and devotees of Padre Domenico”, thus Padre Amedeo warmly addressed those present, highlighting: “We too are here as confreres of Padre Domenico, we are here as people called by Padre Domenico himself to breathe for a moment the fragrance of his simplicity, his poverty, his seraphic charity, a true son of St. Francis.” With these words the meeting opened. We will combine his testimony together with that expressed during his homily, constituting, in fact, a single picture of the human and religious profile of the Capuchin, reporting some significant passages in the complete text and others summarized briefly.

“Telling the lives of the saints means creating a mirror of the very life of Christ,” said Padre Guglielmo, continuing: “Father Domenico often told us - because we urged him - “But when you were a child didn’t you end up under the rubble of the earthquake?”. That was the first extraordinary sign that the Lord performed to save the life of this future chosen one of his, as servant, and as holy priest. And it was said that he and his father had really come



out of the rubble alive by a miracle. It was therefore a first sign, a ray of light on the life of this young boy." The friar was alluding to the catastrophic earthquake that devastated Marsica on January 13, 1915, causing the death of over 30 thousand people.

"I confessed to him as often as I could," continues Padre Guilielmo. "I was in Pescara not far from the Holy Face. He waited for me, met me, smiled at me, listened to me, caressed me, smiled at me and gave me signs of his holiness and also of his charisms", and then Padre Domenico's relationship with Padre Pio: "Padre Domenico had a special friendship with Padre Pio and I had been with Padre Pio for years. The confreres knew that Padre Domenico went as a military chaplain to San Giovanni Rotondo (in 1940). It is known that Padre Dominic went to see Padre Pio several times. There are a number of testimonies that Padre Domenico was seen following the coffin with the body of Padre Pio during the procession that was conducted throughout the town. And they also said to him: "Padre Domenico but weren't you there?" and he never answered explicitly, leaving it understood, as always happens when you want to "extract something" from the saints - and Padre Dominic was this way in his soul, in his heart, in his vocation, in his life - keeping his secrets. The saints prefer to leave them secret."

The friar is keen to point out that "the celebration we are holding today is not only a historical commemoration of the 120 years of Father Domenico, but it is a memory of graces, consolation, conversion", once again associating the memory of the friar with that of Padre Pio.

And again "Father Domenico showed that he was a man of God, because he was attracted by God, by Christ he was truly enlightened, consoled, strengthened. In him there was this boundless charity. Padre Domenico for many years, a bit like Padre Pio, welcomed people who came wherever he was, people ran everywhere, so much so that the superiors, almost disturbed by this phenomenon, sent him to smaller, more remote convents, so people did not

get there. And it did not happy this way. People go where there is a saint. This was his mission until the end". In fact, Padre Domenico underwent many transfers in the course of his religious life and we know that even in Manoppello, where the flow of devotees had become increasingly remarkable, there was though of yet another, last transfer, opposed by many of his admirers.

Finally, Padre Guglielmo did not fail to highlight as "the last stage" of his earthly life, Padre Domenico's death that took place in Turin where he had gone for the exposition of the Shroud, which he does not refer to, defining the moment as "a luminous piece in the life of Father Domenico", who also there revealed himself to be a man of charity, consoling and encouraging the young man who had caused the accident. "He who acted as a guide to all the pilgrims who went to Manoppello, showing and explaining the face of Jesus, had said in confidence that he would not die in Manoppello, but would die after seeing the face of Jesus. We understood later the meaning of this statement".

Padre Luciano Antonelli also spoke recalling how in September 1977 he was transferred from Chieti to Manoppello, the place where Father Domenico, died a year later, on September 17, 1978, after having been present there for some time.

"It was a fabulous year," he says, "one of the best years of my religious life because, I don't know, maybe there was also our youthfulness, that we were young. At that time there were four of us in the convent, but it seemed as if we were a caravan on the way. There was an atmosphere of mutual and beautiful love. And I attribute this precisely to the presence of Padre Domenico. The convent was filled with him. With his presence, his power, his voice and his prayers he filled both the convent and the shrine. It was a beautiful year."

Padre Luciano also related his memory of an episode of exemplary obedience by Padre Domenico, whom he visited when he was a young student during a summer period spent in the convent of Campi, which for reasons of brevity we will leave out.

Padre Luciano recalled the flow of devotees who then came to the Holy Face, because of Padre Domenico: “they came from Puglia, from Ruvo di Puglia and Andria, together with Sister Amalia, from Pescara, from the parts of Ascoli. Buses came from Germany to stay sometimes for days, to go to confession, to meet, to talk with Father Domenico and I tell you that people returned home in a different way from how they had come, all full of joy, of a spirit of prayer”. And again: “I must tell you that I saw the holiness of Father Domenico from him, always present very early in the morning, he who opened the church, he knelt there, in the choir. Together we prayed. But he was the first. Prayer was truly his central focus and that of all those who came to him. Padre Dominic was loved, Padre Dominic converted, because he prayed. He was ready to give, to give himself, ready to answer the phone, answer letters. We cannot fail to remember Brother Vincenzo D’Elpidio (1932-2020), who collected many letters from Father Domenico, some of which have been published.” Brother Vincenzo tirelessly continued his work of collecting testimonies, but also of organizing meetings and maintaining relationships with many devotees, until his death on December 15, 2020.

Father Domenico’s holiness, together with his relationship with the Holy Face and St. Padre Pio, constantly resurfaced in a recurring and profound way throughout the afternoon. An opportunity not only to remember the birth of the friar, but also to



Brother Vincenzo D’Elpidio.

maintain his memory and therefore to continue to support the reasons that justify unblocking the process for his beatification and canonization, resuming its journey, inexplicably stopped ten years after the granting of the *Nihil Obstat* (nihil osta), expressed by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints on March 3, 2015.

But Father Domenico's holiness, recalled by his confreres, was already widespread and recognized during his lifetime by many of his devotees, who continue to remember and venerate him.

The organization of the event was an initiative of the "Association in honor of the Holy Face of Manoppello", established in 2022 in Tagliacozzo, also in the name of Padre Domenico, whose image, together with that of the Holy Face, recurs in the banner made by the expert hands of Marie Antoinette Rubeo.

And it was precisely to the president of the Association, Rita Tabacco, that the provincial of the Capuchins of Central Italy, Padre Simone Calvarese, addressed his message of greeting given to those present, read by deacon Antonio Masci:

"I learn with joy of the happy event that you have decided to celebrate because of the 120th anniversary of the birth of Father Domenico da Cese. I hope in God and I pray that the celebratory moment that you will be called to live will be such as to awaken in those present, and not only, that genuine yearning that impels consciences to seek the profound meaning of the truth. For us Christians, truth has a face and a name, Jesus Christ. Father Domenico da Cese, through devotion to the Holy Face of Manoppello, transmitted to the faithful the importance of seeing, in every needy human being, Christ who said: "Whatever you did to one of my smallest garments, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). May God therefore also grant you. the gift of being able to love him only everything and love our neighbor as Christ loved us."

The event was animated by the Padre Pio Prayer Group of Pescara. Present were devotees of the Volto Santo Association of Ruvo di Puglia and the Volto Santo Association of Andria, together with Sister Maria Matera, disciple of the Holy Face and sister of Si-

ster Amalia Di Rella, from Ruvo di Puglia, who was the spiritual daughter of Father Domenico. We recall that it was in the church of the Purgatory of Ruvo that the first enthronement of the Holy Face took place, in memory of Padre Domenico, in 1979, a few months after his death. The Handmaids of the Holy Blood, Polish nuns present in Manoppello since 2011, also participated in the event.

Finally, being in the Church of Santa Maria di Cese, I cannot help but remember how it was destroyed by the earthquake of 1915, where many people perished, including two little sisters of Padre Domenico who, on the other hand, was saved by a young man who pulled him out of the rubble, whose face he recognized many years later, arriving in Manoppello, where with surprise he identified it with that of the Holy Face. A circumstance that he told some close people, as per the testimonies collected. Well, in this church we notice some reproductions of the image in the vision of Sister Faustina Kowalska and not also that of the Holy Face, which we can find, instead, in distant places of the world. It is to be hoped that in the not too distant future, in this church, as in others in the world, there will be an image of him. It would be a significant way to remember Father Domenico himself, who was a pioneer in the dissemination of the Holy Face, whose divine nature he had perceived.



Padre Guglielmo talks with Sr. Maria Matera.



## SR. BLANDINA PASCALIS SCHLÖMER: IN THE JUBILEE YEAR, THE FIRST BOOK IN ITALIAN BY THE SCHOLAR OF THE HOLY FACE



Sr. Blandina Paschalis Schlömer.

As Fr. Carmine Cucinelli, long-time rector of the Shrine of Manoppello, states in the introduction, the book is the first published in Italian by Sr. Blandina Pascalis Schlömer and follows previous publications on the Holy Face published in recent years in German, English, French and Polish.

It is, however, a completely new book, apart from some brief initial references to testimonies expressed in 1999 by Fr. Heinrich Pfeiffer, who recognized that the research

of Sr. Blandina constituted “a sure foundation” for subsequent investigations on the Holy Face, and by Fr. Andrea Resch, the first scholar to favor the publication of her studies.

An eagerly awaited book, of 354 pages, with a complex layout, especially for the vast iconographic store consisting of 126 illustrations, twenty tables and an appendix of images on transparent slides of the Shroud, the Holy Face and the bloody Sudarium of Oviedo which, in superimposition, allow the evocative personal experience of seeing a single face. A further slide guides the reader to the points of congruence.

The work is composed of various sections, characterized by frequent biographical references, in which the scholar traces her relationship with the Holy Face which began progressively, after an initial refusal, in the years 1979-1980, once she became aware of the existence of another face, in addition to the Shroud, which she had previously studied.

The Trappist nun, a graduate in pharmacy and scholar of Christian iconography, sensed that the face of the Shroud and that of the Holy Face, representations of the death and resurrection of Christ, although apparently distant from each other, could be superimposed, with increasingly detailed research, leading to the conclusion that it must be a single face.

A unique circumstance as confirmed by the archbishop of the diocese of Chieti-Vasto, the theologian Bruno Forte, in one of his contributions in the book.

However, these results have not always been accepted in past years, as they challenged established beliefs.

Sr. Blandina admits that even in her convent “a growing misunderstanding” emerged. A situation that led her to ask to be assigned to the monastery of Helfta, then in the process of being re-founded, a highly symbolic place, as that convent is linked to the lives of St. Gertrude and St. Matilda of Hackeborn, united by their special veneration of the Holy Face. In 2003 she had the opportunity to return to Italy, to Manoppello, where various circumstances convinced her to stay forever.

At first it was not easy, she recalls, including due to her lack of knowledge of the Italian language, but she remembers how she was spontaneously helped by some people from the village, who found her accommodation in an isolated farmhouse, in the hills, near the Shrine. I remember that a stable with two pigs continued to operate, and was later transformed into a small chapel, a place of prayer and meditation. Today, thanks also to the support of a German patron devoted to the Holy Face, the area has been expanded, with a larger chapel and meeting places, becoming an

oasis of spirituality in the greenery , which is also the headquarters of the Association of Our Lady of the Holy Face, which supported the publication. From the window of her study, surrounded by numerous images of the Holy Face, her gaze is constantly turned towards the Shrine.

There are many individuals and groups who, arriving at the Shrine of Manoppello, also go to the hermitage to meet Sr. Blandina, well known among Italian and foreign scholars, especially after the historic visit of Benedict XVI.

A section of the book contains the exposition of various considerations expressed by physicians. A first “consultation” was promoted by Sr. Blandina, which in 2011 involved some Austrian and German doctors with different specializations: Elisabeth Koch (Austria), Harald and Maria Keller (Germany), Bertha Vera Wahrmann (Germany), Rudolf Tielsch (Austria), Cornelia Wehr (Austria), Ute Stass (Germany).

During 2012 a group of doctors from Chieti, encouraged by Mons. Bruno Forte, archbishop of Chieti-Vasto, met several times in Manoppello, deepening the mystery of the Holy Face. These are their names: Lucia Marcone, Luciano Paolo Marchionno, Piero Scipione, Francesco Galluppi, Pasquale Capone, Marina Di Cesare. On this occasion, Fr. Ceslao Gadacz, then a member of the friary of the Shrine, participated wholeheartedly in the work, taking care of the creation of several videos in which images of the meetings and reflections expressed by the doctors were collected. Their consultation is facilitated with access via QR-code reported in the book.

In the final elaboration of the contents, Sr. Blandina involved Dr. Francesca Esposito for an updated recognition of the scientific interpretations collected in past years.

Foto 19 - Photo taken at a recent gathering of the Italian doctors who collaborated with

The German scholar explains that the delay with which these studies are made public is due to her only recently acquired ma-

stery of the Italian language, which has allowed her to finally consider the relevance of the doctors' theses, long kept in a drawer.

There is no shortage of references to other important research, such as those carried out by Prof. Pietro Baraldi in 2007, using Raman 2 laser technology, never previously disclosed, or regarding her intuition of marine byssus, which she shared and developed with the writer Paul Badde, confirmed by Chiara Vigo, the last expert master of the so-called sea silk, who lives on the island of Sant'Antioco. Also worth mentioning are various historical-artistic references to Veronica, which lead back to the Holy Face. Among these, the case of the altarpiece of the Holy Face-Veronica by Ugo da Carpi, examined very closely during the exhibition in the artist's hometown in 2024, five centuries after its creation, commissioned by Pope Clement VII for the Jubilee of 1525.

Finally, it is necessary to refer to the title of the book, with which the author recalls the words of Pope St. Gregory the Great "he rose above the sunset because by rising again he trampled on the death he had endured", an image that exhorts us to recognize Jesus in his resurrection, a perspective that constitutes the perennial horizon of Sister Blandina's mission, in continuity with what was the prophetic thought expressed by Fr. Domenico da Cese, a charismatic Capuchin, whose beatification she hopes to be able to attend, who affirmed with conviction of the Holy Face: "This is the face of the Risen One".

The important work constitutes, in the hopes of the author herself, who has dedicated her life to the Holy Face, an opportunity for scholars and devotees eager to delve into the complex material and spiritual reality of the veil of Manoppello. Knowing her, we can say that even at 82 years of age her research certainly does not end with this book.

The Holy Face was the basic reference of the conference, as it was considered “the source and the root of the representations contained in tradition and an element of intellectual and of Christian art”, as explained in his introduction by Prof. Lukasz Murzyn, dean of the Faculty of Art and head of the Art and Metaphysics Study Group which promoted the conference on May 2 and 3, 2025 in Manoppello.

[illegible]



The speakers were welcomed in the conference room of the Casa del Pellegrino by the rector of the Shrine Fr. Antonio Gentili and by the mayor of Manoppello Giorgio De Luca.

The Conference sought to respond to the question of what remains today of those Christian roots, of how they are understood and what the metaphysics of the image can reveal today.

Historical-religious themes were also developed, with the talk given by Father Ceslao Gedacz OfmCap, who recalled some important figures in the history of the Holy Face belonging to the order of the Capuchins, such as Fr. Donato da Bomba, who had the task of drafting the *Relatione Historica* (1640), following the donation of the veil to the Capuchins, Fr. Filippo da Tussio, author of the first book on the Holy Face, published in 1875, and then Fr. Domenico da Cese, the first to promote the divine nature of the sacred image. There was no shortage of references to a number of scientific studies and the results of two commissions of doctors conducted at the Shrine in 2011 and 2012, the first commission composed of Germans and Austrians, the second of Italians. Fr. Ceslaus himself was present during these commissions, being part of the community of religious of the Shrine at that time.

Their research was recently published in the book by Sr. Blandina Paschalis Schlömer, entitled “Sali’ sul Tramonto” (He rose above the sunset) her first book published in Italian after several books published in Austria, Germany, Poland and France. The German iconographer was also present at the conference.

Sr. Monika Gutowska, of the Handmaids of the Most Holy Blood in Manoppello, summarized her experience of welcoming and contacting a great number of pilgrims, describing various cases, even of non believers, of people who have seen their lives transformed, as well as the desire of many devotees to return to the Shrine several times a year, from Italy and abroad, from a profound need to keep in regular contact with that Face, whose reproductions are present in many Polish homes.

Among those in attendance was Fr. Carmine Cucinelli, former rector of the Shrine, who has been involved in recent years in a number of enthronements of the Holy Face in Poland, including in the Krakow shrine dedicated to John Paul II. As part of the conference, the documentary “The Face of Jesus” (Oblicze Jezusa) directed by Jarosław Rędziaś, with references to the Shroud of Turin and the painting of Merciful Jesus promoted by St. Faustina Kowalska, with extensive insights into the Holy Face thanks to the significant testimonies of the writer and journalist Paul Badde, as well as that of Sr. Petra-Maria Steiner, Sr. Blandina Paschalis Schlömer and Prof. Zbigniew Treppa of the University of Gdansk.

In addition to the aforementioned Prof. Łukasz Murzyn, the following also spoke: Sebastian Stankiewicz, Rafał Solewski, Kazimierz Piotrowski, Bernadeta Stano, Anna Grąbczewska, Agnieszka Dąca, Jacek Pasieczny and Stanisław Wójcicki of the Study Group of the Uken University in Krakow.

We summarize the reports presented, whose simultaneous translation was edited by Agnieszka Kledzik, from the University of Warsaw. These same reports may be the subject of more in-dep-



Professors of the UKEN University of Krakow during a break in Manoppello.

th analysis at the time of publication of the proceedings, which will be edited by Sebastian Stankiewicz, with the title “Beautiful God. The veil of Manoppello and the iconography of the Incarnation”, with reference to a



The conference Hall.

theological reflection on the “Beautiful God” present in the Middle Ages, expressed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, during a conference held at the Urbaniana Pontifical University in Rome, a theme to which he returned after becoming Pope Benedict XVI.

The Group’s commitment has also led to the creation of the portal <https://diafanitas.uken.krakow.pl> that collects experiences and initiatives on the study of the transparency of bodies intersected by light from a Christian dimension. Various interpretative readings of the Holy Face have been developed, with the assumption that “he who comes into contact with the Veil of Manoppello attests to its uniqueness and mystery.”

For representatives of the disciplines of the arts, many questions remain open: the origin of the image and its history, the relationship between relic and image, the role of the veil of Manoppello in the creation of iconographic models in Christian art and in the evolution of the ways of depiction in Western culture, the role of the veil among other depictions considered acheropite or the formal similarities with the images of Christ depicted in the art of the ancient masters, e.g., Dirk Bouts, Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer, among others, and in the tradition of the East.

For contemporary art scholars, philosophers, theologians and anthropologists, the encounter with the Holy Face raises que-

tions such as the relationship between sensual beauty and transcendent beauty, the idea of transparency and lights, the Christian sources of the idea and concept of the person, the meaning of the gaze and of the encounter, the presence and contemporary reception of religious themes in art and in sacred art or the importance of metaphysical references in contemporary art.

In my speech, I recalled the studies of Fr. Heinrich Pfeiffer (1939-2021), former professor of history at the Gregorian University in Rome, who identified the Holy Face with Veronica (vera ikon) on the occasion of the International Conference of the Institute for Research on the Face of Christ, presided over by Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini, and then during a press conference held in Rome on May 21, 1999, in the time just prior to the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, which spread knowledge of the Abruzzo Shrine throughout the world.

Some sequences of that press conference, with interviews of the German scholar on Italian and foreign television have been reproduced in a video which the organizers wanted to have screened at the opening of the works. The thesis of Fr. Pfeiffer was then an isolated position, opposed for a long time, more or less openly. But his thesis was later shared by Benedict XVI, who visited the Shrine on September 1 2006, composing a prayer that he dedicated to the “human face of God who entered history through unveiling the horizons of eternity”.

**Also under the pontificate of Benedict XVI, in a statement from the Holy See on July 11 2011 it was reported that “Veronica had disappeared from St. Peter’s following the Sack of Rome in 1527”. This circumstance was confirmed by the then director of the Vatican Museums, Prof. Antonio Paolucci (former Minister of Culture of the Italian Government), in an interview with the newspaper Il Resto del Carlino of August 11, 2011.**

The admission put an end to almost five centuries of silence that fueled for so long a time doubts and uncertainties, also through disinformation works carried out also through changes made to

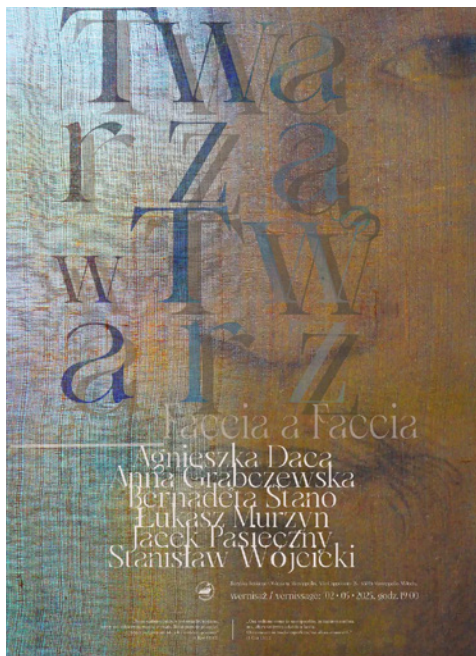
the original image, through the reproductions that presented the “Veronica” with eyes closed. In this regard, the Veronica Route Project, launched in recent years by a group of Milanese scholars, has led to a collaborative research, still in progress, of 6200 ancient depictions, collected in a multimedia catalog, of the true icon of Christ (Veroniche) with his eyes open.

Despite this, on April 6, an article appeared on the Vatican News website that the presence of the

of the Veronica in St. Peter’s (or, rather, a copy of it, on a black background in which one does not perceive images), while the Holy Face is indicated as a “sudarium”, reiterating, moreover, its acheropite nature. Evidently the writer was ignorant of the painful path that had led to the 2011 admissions. Fr. Pfeiffer would still be committed to making his case.

Finally, as part of the conference, an exhibition of artists-teachers and students with the title “Face to Face”, entered the space of the Shrine in a respectful way, offering a forum unique for interdisciplinary dialogue.

“At the basis of the concept of the exhibition,” said curator Prof. Stanislaw Wojcicki, “there is the face-to-face encounter with the image of the Veil, treated by scholars as a prototype for other representations of Christ. We would like our works to be conside-



Poster Exhibition.



red a' votive offering, something we leave here to express gratitude for the fact that we were able to find ourselves in this place which is particularly important to us."

At the end of the conference we asked Fr. Arturo Alcántara Arcos, professor of spiritual theology and associate of the Soumaya Museum in Mexico City, also in Manoppello for the occasion, for an overall judgment who said: "It is particularly interesting to consider multidisciplinary points of view from a secular university. Here you can appreciate the different

areas in which theology can be present, both directly and indirect. The Uken of Krakow, inspired by the National Commission for Education established in eighteenth century by the Polish king Poniatowski, opens the doors for a new dialogue between theology and the different artistic and aesthetic disciplines of our day in the contemplation of the Face of the Lord."

From what emerged during the conference and on the basis of the same conclusions of Prof. Lukasz Murzyn, the conviction that the Holy Face can still represent the reference to the contemporaneity of Christ for art. A perspective of analysis that the professors of the University of Krakow – the first to organize a similar event in Manoppello - intended to offer to the art world.



Jacek Pasieczny, "Not matter but image" – work exhibited in the basilica as part of the exhibition "Face to Face" described by the author as follows: They are reflections of light, with the author, who used a glass with a particular color reminiscent of golden byssus and specifies that it is not a copy of the original, but an attempt to paint a picture with the light.

## THE PONTIFICAL GREGORIAN UNIVERSITY ROME REMEMBERS FATHER HEINRICH PFEIFFER (FROM LIBER ANNUALIS 2022)

On November 26, Fr. Heinrich Wilhelm Pfeiffer died in Berlin, S.J. Fr. Pfeiffer was born in Tübingen (Germany) on February 22, 1939. He entered the Society of Jesus on April 22, 1963, and was ordained a priest on July 13, 1969. After his high school studies and following his entry into the Society, Fr. Pfeiffer followed the two-year philosophical course at the College of St. John Berchmans in Pullach, and in 1968 he obtained a Baccalaureate and then, in 1970, a Licentiate in Theology at the Gregorian. Back in his home province, he dedicated himself to the study of humanities and art history (classical archaeology, prehistory, Romance languages) enrolling at the University of Basel. In 1971 he began teaching at the Gregorian University as a professor of Christian Art History, in the Faculty of Ecclesiastical History, and in 1973 he obtained a doctorate in Art History, at the University of Basel, with a dissertation entitled: *Zur Ikonographie von Raffaels Disputa. Egidio da Viterbo und die christlich-platonische Konzeption der Stanza della Segnatura*, published in 1975 in the series "Miscellanea Historiae Pontificiae" (volume 37). After moving permanently to the Gregorian, he taught in the Faculty of Ecclesiastical History, which later became the Faculty of History and Cultural Heritage of the Church, until 2014. From 1996 to 2004 he was also Director of the Advanced Course for the Cultural Heritage of the Church. In 1998 he was appointed a member of the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church for five years. He was a member of the editorial board or of the Scientific Committee of several journals, including *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae* and the cultural magazine of the Focolare Movement, *Nuova Umanità*.

Thanks to his profound expertise in the field of the History of Christian Art, he was invited by many institutions in various parts of the

world to offer courses and seminars: from Spain to Mexico, from Austria and Germany to Italy and France. In Rome, he also taught some courses at the Regina Mundi Institute and at the Pontifical Lateran University. He was often asked to serve as a consultant, to direct seminars, and to offer conferences as an expert in the field of Art History, Christian Iconography, Sindonology (he was a member of the scientific committee of the International Congress on the Shroud held in Turin in June 1998). Also famous is his study on the Holy Face of Manoppello, for which he received honorary citizenship in 2001 from the Mayor of the Abruzzo town. Among the countless articles and the depth of his scientific texts – some of which we can list: *Gottes Wort im Bild: Christusdarstellungen in der Kunst* (München, 1986) and with Werner Bulst, S.J., *Das Turiner Grabtuch und das Christusbild* (Frankfurt a.Main, 1987) – one of his last publications stands out: *The Sistine Chapel Unveiled: Iconography of a Masterpiece*, where in the systematic analysis of each fresco, its philosophical-theological program is explained. He became Professor Emeritus in 2009, and after more than forty years Fr. Pfeiffer left the Gregorian in 2014, moving to Palermo at the Casa Professa, Residence of the Most Holy Name of Jesus. Since 2019, he had been living in Germany, in the Jesuit Community of St. Peter Favre in Berlin.

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Capuchin Convent of Manoppello: from left. Fr. Paolo Palombardini, Luca Trovellesi Cesana (director), Fr. Carmine Cucinelli, Fr. Carmine Ranieri (Provincial pro-tempore) and Antonio Bini.

# INTERNATIONAL PRESS REVIEW CONFERENCE ROME MAY 31, 1999 (PARTIAL)



The Sunday Times, 30 May 1999

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Desmond O'Grady, **25 Giubilei: storia e segreti di Roma negli anni santi dal 1300 al 2000** (25 Jubilees: history and secrets of Rome in the holy years from 1300 to 2000), Piemme, Casale Monferrato, 1999. The book was published simultaneously in Germany (ed. Herder), France (ed. Cerf), Spagna (San Pablo), United States and Canada (ed. Continuum);

AA.VV., **Il Volto Santo di Manoppello**, edited by Germano Di Pietro, Tipografia Brandolini, 2000;

Saverio Gaeta, **Il Volto del Risorto**, ed. San Paolo, Special Edition for Famiglia Cristiana, 2005;

Paul Badde, **Das Muschelseidentuch: auf der Suche nach dem wahren Antlitz Jesu**, ed. Ullstein, Berlin, 2005;

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Aleksandra Zapotoczny, **Stygmatyk z Manoppello**, ed. Wydawnictwo, Krakow, 2023.

## ENTHRONEMENTS OF THE HOLY FACE IN THE WORLD

### Updated Overview in chronological order

(there are many churches where the Holy Face is present. The following lists those of which we are aware, with entronements that took place in conjunction with solemn celebrations)



**DIOCESAN SHRINE OF THE  
HOLY FACE OF JESUS  
IMMACULATE CONCEPTION PARISH**

South Central Poblacion, Nampicuan, Nueva Ecija 3116 Philippines  
09171147235 | voltosanto2014@gmail.com

**Mass Schedules:**  
Monday - 6:00 am  
Tuesday - to Friday 5:00 pm  
Saturday - 5:00 pm (Anticipated Mass)

Sunday: 7:00 am  
9:00 am  
5:00 pm

► **Ruvo di Puglia, Bari (Italy)** - *Chiesa del Purgatorio* – 1979 – The first known entronement is linked to the memory of Fr. Domenico da Cese who conducted an intense pastoral activity in the Apulian city, together with his spiritual daughter Sr. Amalia Di Rella. Both promoted the establishment of the Association of the Holy Face in Ruvo di Puglia

► **Richmond Hill, Toronto (Canada)** *Chiesa Our Lady Queen of the world* – 1986. Initiative promoted by emigrants from Val Pescara who set up a Volto Santo Committee

► **Bari (Italy)**, *Chiesa del Santissimo Sacramento*, parish priest Don Vincenzo Fiore – 1986

► **Nampicuan (Filippine)** *Immaculate Conception - Parish Church* – 16 September 2014. Enthronement in the presence of Bishop Roberto Malari and Fr. Carmine Cucinelli. The church has become a diocesan Shrine

- ▶ **Roma** (Italy), *Sant'Ignazio d'Antiochia* – November 4, 2014
- ▶ **Delta**, British Columbia (Canada), *Immaculate Conception Catholic Church* – September 4, 2015
- ▶ **Vancouver**, British Columbia (Canada), *St. Patrick's Church 2881 Main St.* – September 5, 2015
- ▶ **Taguig** (Philippines), *Sagrada Familia Parish* – September 14, 2015
- ▶ **Katowice** (Poland), *Immaculate Conception Church* – 18 December 2015
- ▶ **San Martin**, de Porres (Philippines), *Mission Church Orphanage Bustos*, Bulacan – 12 September 2015
- ▶ **Bethlehem House of Bread** (Philippines), *Mission Chapel Little Baguio*, Baliuag, Bulacan – 12 September 2015
- ▶ **Buguias, Benquet** (Philippines), *Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church Abatan*
- ▶ **Los Angeles** (USA), La Canada, Flintridge (USA), *Saint Bede Catholic Church* – 13 April 2016
- ▶ **Lolombay Bocaue Bulacan** (Philippines), *Holy Cross and Andrew Kim Taegon Parish*. Parish priest Rev. Father Vicente A. Robles – July 17, 2016
- ▶ **Las Vegas** (USA), *St Sharbel Maronite Catholic*, Msgr. Josef A. Pepe, parish priest Fr. Nadim Abou Zeid – 10 September 2016
- ▶ **Catbalogan City** (Philippines), *Church of St. Bartholomew the Apostle* - Diocese of Calbayog – October 2016
- ▶ **Malolos** (Philippines), *St Francis of Assisi*, Meycauayan – 13 November 2016
- ▶ **Baguio** (Philippines), *Cathedral Our Lady of the Atonement* – 30 November 2016
- ▶ *Convent of the Blessed Sacrament* (Philippines), The Pink Sisters Brent Road, **Baguio City** – November 2016

- ▶ **Samar** (Philippines), *St. Bartholomew Church* by Mons. Niceas Botsoy Abejuela, Jr – December 15, 2016
- ▶ *Malolos Cathedral* of **Bulacan Luzon** (Philippines), Fr. Domingo Salonga Aka, Fr. Memeng – April 16, 2017
- ▶ **East Palo Alto**, California (USA), *St Francis of Assisi Church* – November 11, 2017
- ▶ **Friend**, Nebraska (USA), *Chiesa di St Joseph*. Rev Fr Larry Stoley, parish priest – February 2018
- ▶ **Beirut**, Blat Byblos (Lebanon), *Church of St. Elijah*, Father Nadim, Maronite priest – May 2017
- ▶ **Padang** (Indonesia), *Sisters of Charity of our Lady Mother of Mercy* – 14 June 2018 in the presence of Fr. Christian Magdalas (former parish priest of Namplicuan, Philippines)
- ▶ **Tagliacozzo**, L'Aquila (Italy), *Santuario della Madonna dell'Oriente*, rector Vasile Retegan, of the Order of Carmelite Friars – 8 July 2018
- ▶ **Antipolo** (Philippines), *Cathedral*, Bishop Francisco Mendoza De Leon – 6 August 2018
- ▶ **Rome** (Italy), *Chiesa SS. Elisabetta e Zaccaria*, parish priest Bonifacio (Ted) Lopes – 14 October 2018
- ▶ **Manila** (Philippines), *Chapel of St. Joseph the Worker*, Bangko Sentral (BSP) – 14 November 2018
- ▶ **Bellevue**, Washinton (USA), *St. Madeleine Sophie Church*, parish priest Fr. Don Pereia – 24 March 2019
- ▶ **Lopez**, Quezon (Philippines), *Church of the Most Holy Rosary* – 12 May 2019, Bishop Victor Ocampo
- ▶ **San Severo**, Foggia (Italy), *Chiesa Maria Santissima delle Grazie*, parish priest Fr. Raffaele Mangiacotti – May 26, 2019
- ▶ **Toronto** (Canada), *St. Alphonsus Church*, parish priest Fr. Philip Smith and Christian Magdalas (former parish priest of Namplicuan)

► **Ashland**, Illinois (USA) – *St. Augustine Parish*, parish priest Fr. Darren Zehnle – April 9, 2023 (Easter)

► **Ligao**, Luzon region (Philippines), *St. Stephen Protomartyr Church* – guest Fr. Bonifacio Lopez (Diocese of Rome) – April 16, 2023

► **Tarlac**, Central Luzon region (Philippines), *Our Lady of Lourdes and St. Vincent Church*, host Fr. Bonifacio Lopez (Diocese of Rome) – April 16, 2023

► **Bacoar City**, *Our Mother of Perpetual Help Church* (Philippines) – 13 January 2024 – The solemn enthronement was presided over by Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle and Msgr. Reynaldo G. Evangelista, bishop of Imus and other priests of the diocese

► **Redwood Valley, California (USA)**, *Holy Transfiguration Monastery* - Monks of Mont Tabor, part of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Father Damian Higgins – April 9, 2024

► **Barto, Pennsylvania (USA)**, *National Centre for Padre Pio*, Bishop Alfred Schlert, Diocese Allentown and fr. Antonio Gentili - 15 July 2025

► At the time of writing, the enthronement of the Holy Face in the *Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption* of **San Francisco** (USA) is announced, desired by Archbishop Salvatore J. Cordileone and promoted by a group of faithful from the California city



The Archbishop of San Francisco, Salvatore J. Cordileone, in the Basilica of the Holy Face.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work is dedicated to the memory of Fr. Heinrich Pfeiffer and intends to also remember for their closeness to me people who recently passed away, such as Br. Vincenzo D'Elpidio, a humble, wise and generous friar, who helped me to deepen my knowledge of the figure of Fr. Domenico da Cese, his relationship with the Holy Face and with St. Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, and Daisy Neves, whose tireless commitment as an apostle of the Holy Face continues to be carried on by many people. To her we owe the new impetus for the enthronements in churches of various countries, in a perspective of global devotion to the Holy Face. I thank Fr. Germano Di Pietro, Fr. Carmine Cucinelli and Fr. Antonio Gentili, superiors who took turns at the helm of the Capuchin Convent of the Holy Face of Manoppello in the period 1998-2024, for always welcoming me with friendship, together with their confreres, allowing me to collaborate and share proposals and initiatives. I thank Sister Blandina Paschalis Schlömer, Paul and Ellen Badde, Sister Petra-Maria Steiner, Ray Frost and Angelo Rytz for their friendship, collaboration and the many constructive discussions of these years, together with Walter Teti, journalist of *Il Centro*, for years an attentive and passionate observer of the life of the Shrine and Stefano Falco, director and documentary filmmaker, ever since the conference to the foreign press on May 31, 1999.



Fr. Germano Di Pietro with Fr. Antonio Gentili.

I thank my wife Francesca for the patience with which she has borne my commitments, often following me in these years of activity, study and dissemination of the Holy Face, and my brother Sergio, always close with his wise advice. I thank the company Grapho of Rome for the organizational support of the conference of May 31, 1999.

For the extraordinary human and professional commitment made in those years, I remember with gratitude the officials of the Tourism Development Service of the Abruzzo Region, in which the temporary team of the Jubilee 2000 Communication Project, composed of Cristiana Bonanni, Valentina Donatelli and Giovanna Ruscitti, young professionals who enthusiastically entered the enterprise, worked.

The Jubilee Communication Project was among the winners of the national award FORUM P.A. – Regionando 2001 with the following reason: *"For its character of innovation and professionalism, for the ability to conceive a marketing communication strategy, in order to better seize the promotional opportunities offered by religious and cultural tourism in Abruzzo"* – cfr. Progetto sul Giubileo la Regione fa prima (Project on the Jubilee: the Region takes first place – Il Messaggero (Abruzzo), 10 May 2001. The dossier with the main actions undertaken during the period was published in Regione Flash no. 22 of 7 June 2001.

### ► ESSENTIAL WEBSITES

**[www.voltosanto.it](http://www.voltosanto.it)** official website of the Shrine of the Holy Face

**[www.holyfaceofmanoppello.blogspot.com](http://www.holyfaceofmanoppello.blogspot.com)**

**[www.nostrasignoravoltosanto.org](http://www.nostrasignoravoltosanto.org)**

**[www.lluminadomine.com](http://www.lluminadomine.com)**

**[www.sudariumchristi.com](http://www.sudariumchristi.com)**

**[www.veronicaroute.com](http://www.veronicaroute.com)**

**[www.ilvoloritrovato.org](http://www.ilvoloritrovato.org)**

**[www.associazionevoltosantoruvo.it](http://www.associazionevoltosantoruvo.it)**

**[www.manoppello.eu](http://www.manoppello.eu)**

**[www.sanguedicristo.eu](http://www.sanguedicristo.eu)**

**[www.padredomenico.org](http://www.padredomenico.org)**

**[www.lacasadelpellegrinomanoppello.it](http://www.lacasadelpellegrinomanoppello.it)** – Casa del Pellegrino

**[www.souvenirvoltosanto.com](http://www.souvenirvoltosanto.com)** – Souvenir Shop of the Shrine



Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, Archbishop of Manila, in procession with the Holy Face, as he reaches the Church of St. Nicholas, May 20, 2017.

On this occasion I interviewed the cardinal who wished to address a greeting in English to Mrs. Daisy Neves and to those who are committed to spreading the Holy Face in the world (cf. *Il Volto Santo* n. 1/2017 – you tube "Cardinal Tagle Message from Manoppello to friends of the Holy Face 2017"). This is the text:

*"Thank you, thank you also to your families for spreading this devotion to the Holy Face of Jesus. We hope that through you many people will discover that Jesus is real, that Jesus is not just the product of people's imaginations, that our faith is real because God took human beings seriously, so seriously that God came to us as one of us, with a face like ours. So we can see, not only the face of God, but our own face as human beings in Jesus Christ. Please, continue to spread this devotion from Manoppello".*

**Cardinale Louis Antonio Tagle**



Fr. Pfeiffer in front of the Holy Face as the procession leaves the basilica.







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de lla  
STAMPA srl

arte della stampa pescara  
artedellastampa@gmail.com  
Via Mascagni 22 I Sambuceto  
66020 San Giovanni Teatino (CH)

**August 2025**



In the run up to the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, the Italian and foreign media announced the discovery of the Veronica (true icon), recognized by Father Heinrich Pfeiffer, an authoritative historian of Christian art, in the Holy Face kept by the Capuchins in the Shrine of Manoppello, later visited by Benedict XVI in 2006. Five years after his visit the Holy See confirmed the disappearance of the Veronica during the Sack of Rome in 1527. From that time, the most venerated image of Jesus had remained enveloped in silence. The book recalls the figure of the German scholar, who passed away on November 26, 2021 and introduces the character of Ferdinando Alarcon, the Spanish commander who would have saved the Holy Face, bringing it to safety in Abruzzo. Complex events, reconstructed by the author like a detective story, between news and history.



Antonio Bini (Vasto, 1951), since 1999 he has been part of the editorial staff of the magazine *Il Volto Santo di Manoppello*, in which he has published over a hundred articles. He is editorial director of the bimonthly magazine *Abruzzo nel Mondo*. Former director of the Ministry of Education and the Abruzzo Region. He was in charge of the Jubilee 2000 Communication Project. Author of publications and articles concerning the enhancement of cultural heritage. He lives in Pescara. E-mail: [unosemper@libero.it](mailto:unosemper@libero.it)

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