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# PEREGRINATIONS

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BOOK REVIEW: *The European Fortune of the Roman Veronica in the Middle Ages*, edited by Amanda Murphy, Herbert L. Kessler, Marco Petoletti, Eamon Duffy & Guido Milanese, with the collaboration of Veronika Tvrznicová, Brno, Masaryk University (Turnhout, Brepols, 2017). 304 p., 5 b/w ill. + 115 color ill

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Once the three most important relics of the basilica of San Pietro were the Veronica (the cloth believed to bear the imprint of the face of Christ), the cross, and the spear of Longinus. According to a 972 chronicle, Pope John VII (r.705-707) had an oratory of Santa Maria called "della Veronica" erected in the ancient basilica: at that time, however, there no mention of any image preserved in it. The earliest documentation of the cloth of Christ called Veronica preserved in Rome, does not date until the 11th-12th century; and only in 1191 does a source specify that the face of Christ was imprinted on a cloth. (There is a late 9<sup>th</sup>-early 10<sup>th</sup> century Greek text which does mention a Veronica kept in Rome, but the information is confused and it is not clear whether this was a reference to a material object of which the author really knew the location).

Still, in 1193, Celestine III had the veil placed in a marble ciborium with a case protected by bars. A few years later, under the pontificate of Innocent III (1198-1216), a real foundation for public worship of Veronica's veil was established. Eventually, though, after the demolition of the Constantinian basilica of St. Peters, the Veronica was transported, in 1606, to a balcony attached to one of the pillars that supported the dome of

the new building. There it is still on view today, although its religious cult has almost disappeared.

In recent years, the study of relics from a historical and artistic point of view has experienced a revival, which this work joins.<sup>1</sup> Volume I presents the results of an interdisciplinary conference that posed questions about the European fame of the Roman Veronica, its origin, its cult, promotion and dissemination in the Middle Ages, bringing together the perspectives of scholars of history, literature, liturgy, and the history of art.

The volume's introduction is entrusted to Herbert Kessler (*The Literary Warp and Artistic Weft of Veronica's Cloth*), who presents the most important themes of the volume, as well as touching some themes not present in the book, but which result from his many years of study on these topics. The initial essay, by Zbigniew Izydorczyk, deals with one of the oldest sources of Veronica's legend, the *Cura sanitatis Tiberii*, which, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Ernst von Dobschütz studied and divided into two recensions. He published only one of them, but according to Izydorczyk, the existing recensions probably numbered three. The work dates from the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, with both Tuscany and the city of Rome being proposed as its area of origin. Its dating and provenance, too, are difficult to establish, since the text is based on previous stories, perhaps even originally composed in Greek. The Dobschütz edition was founded on 36

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<sup>1</sup> The last publication on the subject, published just before this volume, is K. Dietz et alii (ed.), *Das Christusbild. Zu Herkunft und Entwicklung in Ost und West*, Echter Verlag, Würzburg, 2016. I have summarized this publication and criticized some of its aspects in A. Nicolotti, "Nuovi studi sulle immagini di Cristo, fra Oriente e Occidente," *Medioevo greco* 18 (2018), pp. 299-350.

manuscripts, but currently, at least 130 are known. Perhaps the time has come to think of a new edition.

Rémi Gounelle and Céline Urlacher-Becht essay focuses on Veronica within the *Vindicta Salvatoris*. A few years ago, Rémi Gounelle identified the two recensions in the *Vindicta*, an apocryphal account in which an important testimony of Veronica's legend appears. The first (which has not yet been published) is characterized by the absence of the figure of Volusianus, an envoy of the emperor Tiberius. Research carried out at the University of Strasbourg has clarified the temporal anteriority of this first version, which depends on the *De excidio urbis Hierosolymitae*, itself datable not before the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Here the authors examine the different features of the two recensions. It is clear that, over time, the text has been structured to emphasize the importance of the portrait of Christ to the detriment of the figure of Veronica, who, in the oldest recension plays a more important role. This study makes it even more desirable to create a true critical edition of the *Vindicta*, which takes into account all the textual stratifications.

Then Barry A. Windeatt examines English sources which discuss Veronica, the oldest of which is a translation of the *Vindicta Salvatoris*, dating back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century. It identifies the veil of Veronica with the dress whose edge Veronica touched to be cured. Starting in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, English travelers who saw the relic in Rome began to record their impressions. Especially interesting are the testimonies of Gervase of Tilbury, who stated that the Veronica consisted of an image of Christ that also included not only his face, but part of the chest, and of Gerald of Wales who provides for the first time the fortunate etymology of Veronica from *vera icon*. There are also different narrative contexts

of the alleged origins of the image: the woman would have pressed a cloth on the face of Christ while he was coming out of the temple, or at the foot of the cross, or while Jesus was preaching. Many English manuscripts illustrated with depictions of the image, constitute the oldest artistic attestations of it, which, in their diversity, reflect the contrasting traditions and understandings of the origin of the relic and its reality.

Also investigating later accounts of the Veronica, is Federico Gallo who draws a preliminary outline of the famous opera *De sacrosanto sudario Veronicae*. Written by Giacomo Grimaldi, a scholar of the history of the Vatican basilica and its chapter between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, only three manuscript copies of this work survive: one in Rome, one in Florence, and one in Milan. The three texts, summarily described here, while not identical, follow the same structure: the first part is dedicated to the legend of Veronica, the second describes the monumental witnesses of the cult of Veronica in Rome, and finally it features a collection of documents taken from the Vatican archives.

As already mentioned, some of the oldest representations of Veronica come from England, dating back to 1240 to 1280, almost all of which are drawings or paintings in manuscripts. Most have been attributed to the chronicler and artist Matthew Paris, who was believed to be responsible for spreading the Veronica cult and its liturgy in England. **(Fig. 1)** Nigel Morgan's essay demonstrates that some of these images are not the work of Matthew, who probably took inspiration for his imagery from an earlier painting; it also demonstrates that the Abbey of St. Albans, where Matthew resided, was not the first place where Veronica appeared on English soil. The most interesting point is that the English portraits did not derive from an observation of the Roman Veronica, but rather from a

painting that depicted Christ as it was visible in the Sancta Sanctorum of the Lateran palace. This painting, inserted in a codex that contained the office of the Holy Face, had come to Westminster. In the appendix the author proposes a reconstruction of the text of the indulgences of the office of the Holy Face according to the English manuscripts of the 13th century.



**Figure 1** Matthew Paris, Veronica, miniatura, *Chronica maiora*, ms 16II, II, f. 53v, c. 1240-1250, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College. PhotoL <https://parker.stanford.edu/parker/catalog/qt808nj0703>

Following this, Aden Kumler deals with how, in medieval and modern times, the reproduction of the Veronica of Rome was spread through various objects: including seals,

communion wafers, and medallions. These facilitated the process of the re-impression of the Holy Face. Already present even before the appearance of the relic in Rome, such re-impressions greatly facilitated the dissemination of the Holy Face cult. This is partly due to the diffusion of the concept of the “impression” of the face of Christ already present at least from the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

The essay by Rebecca Rist is dedicated to the relationship between the cult of Veronica and the figure of Innocent III, under whose pontificate the cult experienced significant development. The author believes that the insistence on the cult of Veronica was a way to carry out a propaganda campaign promoting papal power and the city of Rome, which boasted the presence of the illustrious icon (as Constantinople boasted about the presence of the Mandylion). At the same time, however, the encouragement of this cult was also the consequence of a precise program of religious reform and theological reflection on the Eucharist. Innocent insisted on the relationship between Veronica and Christ himself, and on the possibility of equating the process of the reproduction of the face of Christ onto the fabric to the replication of the body of Christ through the Eucharistic sacrifice.

Guido Milanese also addresses the theological theme underlying the cult of the relic, insisting on the concept of *figure* and comparing it to the meaning that this term assumes within medieval biblical exegesis, which interpreted events of the past, such as those of the Old Testament, through the revelation of Christ. With the exposition of the Veronica, Christ becomes present in a tangible, not just a symbolic way.

Jörg Bölling examines some of the specifics of how the cult was utilized in the ceremonials of the masters of papal ceremonies, reconstructing the use of Veronica during specific feasts in the liturgical year, such as Christmas, Easter, Ascension, and Lent. The author also highlights some occasions where it was brought into play to emphasize the particular relationship between the figure of St. Peter and the Roman pontiff or for particular events, such as pilgrimages or visits by important figures, both political and ecclesiastical.

The origins of the liturgical office of Rome's Veronica are traced by Uwe Michael Lang, who identifies its oldest example found so far in an office from the Benedictine abbey of St. Martial in Limoges, around 1210. It was followed by the English liturgical offices whose diffusion is ascribed to Matthew Paris around 1240. The final outcome of this history is the missals printed in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The author examines the various liturgical texts, psalms, prayers, and readings, investigating their literary forms, biblical motivations, and theological content.

After 1208 the church of Santa Maria in Sassia became one of the stages of the Roman stationary liturgy, welcoming the Veronica that came in procession from the Basilica of San Pietro. Gisela Drossbach here studies the hospital attached to this church, the Roman hospital of Santo Spirito. With the commitment of the religious order to the Holy Spirit, it became a center popularizing the cult of Veronica in the city of Rome. The Rule of this order, written in an illuminated manuscript which dates to 1340-1350, contains depictions of Veronica, distancing themselves from the coeval tradition. In particular, the

*Liber regulae* contains a very famous miniature representing the enthroned Pope Innocent III showing Veronica.

In the next essay, Kathryn M. Rudy investigates the relationship between Veronica and Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy. In 1376, his grandfather, Philip the Bold, commissioned a huge prayer book, which was later adopted by Philip the Good who had it taken apart and enriched with new pages, including six images of the face of Christ done different styles and origins. The duke venerated these images, kissing and touching them, to the point of scraping away some of the color, ingesting it as if it were a spiritual food and a remedy for his own ailments. This custom, practiced by many, explains why a large number of images of Veronica are ruined and why some of them were created with a very thick dye that could be easily scratched and consumed.

Étienne Doublier then explores the Veronica and indulgences in the 13<sup>th</sup> and early-14<sup>th</sup> centuries. At the time, the Veronica was the most popular relic in Rome, partly because it had so many indulgences attached to it. Starting from 1208, the first type of indulgence was linked to the liturgical station at the church of Santo Spirito in Sassia; the second was mainly linked to visiting the basilica of San Pietro; and the third indulgence was obtainable through a simple prayer before an image of Veronica, even outside Rome. It reflected a process of progressive association between the indulgent praxis and the cult of the image, even through reproductions.

Marc Sureda i Jubany writes of the popularity of the Veronica of Christ and of Mary at the time of the crown of Aragon (1300-1550). The Veronica of Mary was a very popular image in Spain that represented the face of the Madonna. Although the literary sources

concerning the history of Veronica (and of the Edessa Mandylion) were already widespread around the 1300s, they did not stimulate the creation of paintings or the collection of relics. Therefore, artistic representations of Veronica, except for physiological exceptions, were not widespread in that territory. On the other hand, the Veronica of Mary proving to be even more popular, was reproduced according to strictly codified models, which, from a certain point onward, was represented together with the Veronica of Christ. In the late 15th century, with the arrival of Flemish and Italian models in Spain, images of the Veronica with characteristics developed outside of Spain gain acceptance within Spain.

Chiara Di Fruscia then investigates the special correlation between the figure of the pontiff and the veil of Veronica, even when the pontiff resided in Avignon: the popes continued to maintain strong control over the relic. They kept in close contact with the clergy of Rome and authorized private expositions, even more than in the past, despite their absence. The number of private expositions reached its maximum during the pontificate of Clement VI. The consequences were a greater privatization of the Veronica cult, which was shown mainly to private visitors, and a growing importance of the canons of St. Peter who served as intermediaries in the management of the relic.

Hanneke van Asperen deals with the manuscripts used for the personal devotion of the laity in which images of Veronica are contained. While many were produced in Rome, others were created elsewhere to satisfy the needs of those who could not go to the city. The author focuses on the dukes of Burgundy who had many added to their own manuscripts. She analyzes the styles of materials used by Veronica painters and by those

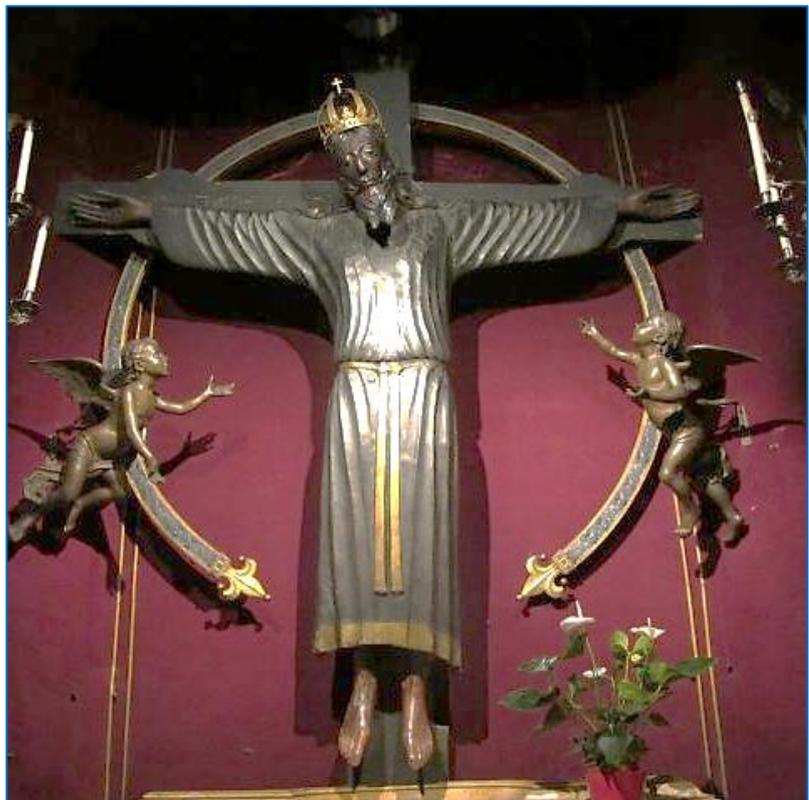
who imitated their style as well as the use of the books that contained these representations.

The essay by Marco Petoletti is dedicated to the "Veronica" of Boniface of Verona, a Latin poetic composition of the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (of which only one manuscript survives) where the history of the image of Christ on fabric is reconstructed. It is interesting that the author confuses the history of the Roman Veronica with the story of the Mandylion of Edessa, seeing Veronica as the wife of King Abgar of Edessa, telling the adventurous arrival of the precious relic in Rome, up to the hands of Emperor Tiberius. An edition of this text by the author is in preparation.

Stefano Candiani follows this by examining the iconography of Veronica in the region of Lombardy during the 13<sup>th</sup> century, both on paper and in frescos, where the iconography universally consisted of the woman holding the holy relic.

**Figure 2** Holy Face of Lucca, Italy. Photo: Wikipedia

Raffaele Savigni then highlights the many similarities between the cult of Veronica and the Holy Face of Lucca, **(Fig. 2)** a wooden crucifix that, according to legend, was sculpted by Nicodemus based



on an image taken from a cloth placed on the body of Christ which is sometimes identified with Veronica. The cult in Lucca dates back to the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. It has been hypothesized that in Lucca, besides the crucifix, there existed a pre-existing cult of an image on fabric similar to Veronica. Savigni tries to reconstruct the symmetries between the two legends.

The last essay, edited by Raffaella Zardoni, Emanuela Bossi, and Amanda C. Murphy, shows the results of a project called *Veronica Route* that built a freely accessible database that contains almost 4000 images of Veronica from different places and eras, classified according to different criteria. The experiment follows on the work published in 1887 by Karl Pearson. Pearson examined some recurring iconographic elements: the link with the typology of the representation of the Mandyllion of Edessa, the color of the face, light or dark, and the expression of the face. He hypothesized that the different iconography could be the result of a sudden change. The current investigation confirms that until the 15<sup>th</sup> century the Roman Veronica had a shape resembling that of the Vatican Mandyllion, and that before the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there are no known representations of Veronica with a suffering face. Some depictions of Veronica assume a face impressed on a transparent fabric. The cross-use of collected data will certainly allow new study perspectives.

The volume is full of interesting and innovative interventions, and is accompanied by a truly rich iconographic apparatus of excellent quality. Unfortunately, it could not take into account some publications that came out at the same time that would have been able

to effectively add to the dialogue. It is to be hoped that research on this subject can continue in the same direction as has been undertaken up to now. 🐼