

# The Mystery of Veronica's Veil

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**A ZENIT DAILY DISPATCH**

Interview With Author Saverio Gaeta (original in Spanish)

By Jesús Colina

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A fascinating mystery envelops "Veronica's veil," the relic that shows the image of Christ. It is not a second shroud, almost in competition with the Shroud of Turin, but the cloth with which, according to tradition, a woman wiped the Master's face during the Passion.

According to journalist Saverio Gaeta, the veil presently kept in the Italian shrine of Manoppello, has an interesting history linked with the iconography of Christ.

Gaeta, editor-in-chief of Famiglia Cristiana and author of numerous religious essays (including the recent biography of John Paul II "Perche e Santo"), reflects further on this fascinating topic in the book "L'Enigma del Volto di Gesu" (The Enigma of Jesus' Face), published contemporaneously with the ongoing exposition of the Shroud of Turin.

ZENIT spoke with the author about his study of the veil.

**ZENIT: According to your reconstruction, how did these two relics exist in the Middle East in the first Christian centuries?**

Gaeta: In the mid-first millennium, the present Shroud was known as Mandylion and was in Edessa (today Urfa, in Turkey), whereas the Holy Face was kept in Camulia (in the present

Turkish city of Kayseri). Their nearness is demonstrated by the sequence of coins in Constantinople. In 692 Byzantine emperor Justinian II had the face of Christ engraved in a "Semitic" type, as that of Manoppello. In 705, after the veil had been taken to Rome by Patriarch Callinicus, blinded and exiled, the new face was again similar to the image of the gods of the "Hellenistic" tradition.

In 869, after the end of the iconoclast struggles, the representation of the Man of the Shroud prevailed on coins, as Basil I's golden solidus shows. This is demonstrated by the feet that protrude from the mantle, the left stretched forward and the right rotated 90 degrees: precisely the impression the Shroud gives, where one leg seems shorter than the other because of the cadaverous rigidity that fixed the superimposed left foot over the right foot.

**ZENIT: Is the Shroud and the Holy Face linked with the iconography of Jesus?**

Gaeta: Certainly. In fact these two images were at the origin of Christian iconography. This has been demonstrated by Father Heinrich Pfeiffer, professor of Christian art history at the Pontifical Gregorian University, who has documented how the face of the Shroud emphasizes more the bony structure, whereas that of the Manoppello seems more round. Thus, all the mosaics of Christ Pantocrator in Constantinople, in Greece and in Sicily represent the type that reveals primarily the Shroud as model. The images of Christ in Flemish art of the 15th century are, instead, more in relation with the Holy Face of Manoppello.

**ZENIT: The cover of your book shows a superimposition between the face of the Shroud and the Holy Face. What does this mean?**

Gaeta: It is the discovery made by Trappist Blandine Schlomer, who found numerous

"points of congruence" between the face of the Shroud and that of Manoppello, after pointing out some precise criteria as a common denominator of the ancient icons that represent Jesus: the asymmetric face, the beard cut with a double point, the asymmetric sides of the nose, the ocular orbit visible under the iris, the tuft of hair at the center of the part of the hair. Subsequently, Father Andreas Resch, working with a computer, refined the superimposition even more, delineating several areas that represent the useful "points of reference" also to compare the two images with the ancient artistic representations. Bequeathed thus is a perfect level of superimposition, which shows a true and proper fusion between the two faces.

**ZENIT: According to your reconstruction, the Holy Face arrived in Rome in the 8th century and then began to be exhibited in St. Peter's in the 13th century. What happened afterward?**

Gaeta: In the collective imagination, the Holy Face has always had great importance. It was thus above all beginning in 1300, when the first Jubilee of Christian history was proclaimed, which had one of its most outstanding aspects in the frequent exposition of "Veronica's veil." On May 6, 1527, the so-called sacking took place in Rome, during which very many precious objects were stolen even from St. Peter's: among them, certainly, was the Holy Face. However, the Vatican never admitted this disappearance, as the construction of the new St. Peter's Basilica was under way, and it was convenient for the flow of pilgrims to continue — people who arrived to see the Holy Face, and whose alms were indispensable to provide for the very expensive work.

**ZENIT: And, meanwhile, the veil arrived in the Abruzzi?**

Gaeta: Yes, after some ups and downs, the true image of Christ arrived in Manoppello in 1618, with a purchase by Dr. Donato Antonio De Fabritiis, who in 1638 donated it to the Capuchins. It was exhibited for the first time for the public veneration of the faithful on April 6, 1646. On Sept. 1, 2006, during his visit to the shrine, Benedict XVI was the first Pope to be able to see again and venerate the relic, half a millennium after its disappearance from the Basilica of St. Peter.

**ZENIT: Are there also scientific tests that confirm the extraordinary characteristics of the fabric?**

Gaeta: In fact, several studies have been made on the veil. Professor Donato Vittore demonstrated that in the space between the thread of the warp and of the woof there are no colored residues. Professor Giulio Fanti of the University of Padua revealed that the image on the two sides of the veil is not identical. For example, the tuft of hair in the middle of the forehead is one of the particularities in favor of the theory of an image not made by the hand of man. It cannot be explained how an artist was able to paint a sign on the face of this very subtle veil, and a different sign on the opposite face. Research with Wood's lamp enable one to affirm that on the fabric there are no natural organic substances such as oils, grease and wax, traditionally pictorial agglutinates, whereas the Raman spectroscopy has manifested that the nature of the fiber is of the protean type — as sea silk — and not vegetable — as, instead, linen would be.

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