

The Face of Christ on the Holy Shroud  
Positive Photograph

THE FACE OF CHRIST  
IN THE COPIES OF THE HOLY SHROUD

LUIGI FOSSATI

For many years now, I have been gathering documentation on copies of the Holy Shroud produced in the course of the centuries.<sup>1</sup> The so-called *rival copies*,<sup>2</sup> often confused with true copies, have not been considered in my research. Nor has consideration been given to representations of the frontal imprint only, as these derive from the shroud of Besançon.<sup>3</sup>

The copies which have claimed my attention are only those done on cloth and in measure more or less equal to the Original. During the XVI<sup>th</sup>, XVII<sup>th</sup>, and XVIII<sup>th</sup> centuries, the confection of such copies flourished abundantly. Some of these handmade shrouds were copied directly from the Original, as is expressly written on the cloth itself and/or in the documents of authentication;<sup>4</sup> others were made indirectly from models or previous copies.

The principal characteristic of the direct copies, presented as gifts to monasteries, convents, prelates and nobles, as well as relatives of the Savoys, was that each one had been placed in contact with the Holy Shroud;<sup>5</sup> and those persons who received such a copy held it to be as venerable as any other relic.

In this study we will look at faces from some of the Shroud copies and compare them with faces in the art of earlier centuries, and the Byzantine type.

Even having the Original before them, not one of the artists of the XVI<sup>th</sup>, XVII<sup>th</sup>, and XVIII<sup>th</sup> centuries was able to give us a face of Christ that comes anywhere near the majestic and luminous aspect of traditional portraits. It is difficult to imagine what could have gone through the minds of artists with the Shroud before them as inspiration for a portrait of Christ. Artists working in the courtly, sumptuous ambience of Constantinople would certainly have been influenced by classical models, transfusing into them something of the famous so-called, or considered, *acheiropoietos*. They would have been careful not to depart from conventional types, even while following stylistic trends or infusing personal sensitivity. Those, instead, who made copies of the Shroud were concerned to represent as faithfully as they could that image which must have seemed to them almost incomprehensible and inimitable, and to interpret what they saw as best they could. But there is an abysmal dissimilarity between Shroud copies and the "traditional" artistic representations of Christ. How can this be explained?

## Descriptions

Of all those artists who copied the Shroud, not one left a written description of the imprint or how the figure is represented. Claudio Francesco Beaumont (1694-1766), born in Turin of French parents, never copied the Shroud. But as First Painter to Duke Charles Emmanuel III, in 1750 Beaumont was invited by the Duke to prepare a report on the Shroud,<sup>6</sup> composing all that tradition had transmitted concerning it. In deference to the Object considered to be a most precious Relic, Beaumont offered no observations from a painterly point of view.

Descriptions are rare, and those that we have are written in general terms which make no attempt to interpret the nature of the imprints. Leaving aside the well-known Report of the Poor Clare Nuns of Chambéry,<sup>7</sup> we quote briefly a few impressions by eyewitnesses who sought to describe the somatic imprints:

A letter from Francesco Adorno, S.J., contains a description that can be considered critical and objective. When St. Charles Borromeo made his pilgrimage to Turin in 1578 to venerate the Shroud, Adorno was in his company. He wrote:<sup>8</sup>

One sees the frontal and dorsal sides of Christ and, in a really remarkable way, one discerns all the parts of his most holy body, even though one cannot see how the lines of the figure were drawn.

Another friend of St. Charles, Agostino Cusano dei Marchesi di Somma, recalling the Turin celebrations of 1578, described with keen perception what one sees on the Cloth:<sup>9</sup>

The whole figure is rather obscure, like the first sketch of a painting, that now you see it, now you don't; and that arouses more desire and diligence to see it better; now you see it better up close, now farther back.

The saint's biographer, Charles Bascapé, Barnabite, was also with him in the pilgrimages of 1578 and 1582. After the second voyage, he wrote to the novitiates of his order resident in Monza:<sup>10</sup>

Of no use here the master hands of Buonarotti or Titian, for these holy forms, even if they resemble most a first faint sketch than a finished work, are as far above whatever artwork, be it ever so perfect and rare, as death and artificial images are surpassed by truth and life.

As we see, the descriptions are very general and scarcely touch upon how the figure is represented. It was difficult—and still is today—to give an exact evaluation of what is seen, and how it is seen. One can appreciate the difficulty that artist-copyists had in the presence of this image of such unique appearance; and they reproduced it with ways and means that did not quite correspond to the reality before their wondering eyes. Artists who copied directly

from the Shroud did so with the Cloth displayed full-length. No copy exists as a portrait of the face only. The examples we will study here are details from full-length copies.

### **The Copies**

With the Shroud Face as our reference, let us review some of these faces to determine what characteristics are common to the faces we find in the art of earlier centuries.

Numerous copies show a wreath-like crown with thorns. Sometimes blood from thorn wounds is painted on the hair, face or forehead, in random drops or thin streams. The distinctive shape of the epsilon bloodflow in the middle of the forehead on the Shroud image is not found on the copies, much less has it been interpreted as a lock of hair.

Often the hair at the sides of the face is far longer and more abundant than it is on the Shroud. It is often difficult to establish how the eyes are depicted. The extremely light impression of the eyeball, surrounded by a lack of imprint from the orbital cavity, was interpreted in various ways; thus we have copies with eyes closed, copies with eyes open, and copies with this specific detail difficult to define.

Never do we find a copy totally negative. This unprecedented characteristic of the Shroud was only revealed in 1898 by the first official photographs of Secondo Pia. The copies, instead, show a mixture of positive and negative in which the positive predominates. In this context, it is well to remember that the bloodstains are positive on the Shroud, and only the somatic imprints are negative. We must also keep in mind that the entire figure, in natural size, cannot be encompassed in one glance, as it can be when photographically reduced to smaller format; and that the image itself, including the face, is extremely tenuous, whereas there is good contrast and sharp definition, also effected by reduction, on a photograph.

Placing these copies alongside photographs of the Shroud, we have to conclude that it is not possible to paint or draw a perfect negative. The results obtained by Reffo and Cussetti,<sup>11</sup> in 1898, demonstrate the difficulty. Nor is it possible to render faithfully in positive that which one sees in negative, even for artists who are familiar with photographic inversion. For all its perfection, the human eye is not able to transpose conceptually the chiaroscuro which it sees, nor can the hand express it graphically.

Not one of the copies shows a face that even approaches the artistic portraits of former centuries. This fact imposes a reformulation of iconographic hypotheses. Even though the iconographic proposal of Paul Vignon<sup>12</sup> has found approval and consent, it should, to some extent, be reviewed and revamped.

What comparison can be established between the copies and the "traditional" type? If the latter displays a certain continuity over

several centuries, especially in coins and icons, a wider interpretive range is noted in works from the three centuries of major production of copies. Some copyists were able to free themselves from the visible reality and thus to offer us admirable replicas, for example, the Lierre copy of 1516.

It seems somewhat excessive to see sindonic traces in every artwork of the past, as if the Original were permanently exposed and as if only the artists of the eastern school were so talented and had such an interpretive understanding that they were capable of transposing that perfect negative into positive values.

Carefully studying the faces of traditional iconography, we find that their creation is a synthesis of several components:

1. Faithfulness to a tradition which had been imposed as the most accredited;
2. Necessity to instill the figures with the spiritual transparency of the divinity of the Crucified;
3. Conformity to a reality known, directly or indirectly, about a Model to which they must remain true;
4. Opportunity to use classical models as inspiration for representations of Christ in his majesty.

### **Pagan Models**

In many of the traditional representations of Christ, one can find details in common with the Shroud. Heinrich Pfeiffer defined such details as "spy elements" because, being characteristics of the Shroud face, they were carried over into art in order to remain faithful to an Original. That classical models served as a source of inspiration is advanced by Pfeiffer:<sup>13</sup>

One cannot deny that the majestic and bearded type of Christ comes close, at least, to the Jovian or Serapic types. But in every case where one finds spy elements on the images, it would be difficult to deny their dependence on the Shroud... The rectangular and majestic face could, however, also derive from pagan iconography... Before the first half of the VI<sup>th</sup> century I would speak only of an indirect influence of the sindonic image, or a copy of it...since images deriving rather from a Jove-type or a Serapis-type are seen to be so similar to the face of Christ that they could also pass as portraits of Christ; or perhaps one should better say that models which show a few of the features of the Shroud face...allowed the artists to use, for example, a Serapis, making a few modifications....

We could therefore hypothesize that two fundamental elements converged in creating the type now called "traditional":

1. The influence of classical models coupled with the desire to give to the face of Christ that ideal beauty and majesty appropriate to the Son of God;
2. The inspiration, direct or indirect, of the *acheiropoietos*, the precious image not-made-by-hand. Though certainly never understood

to be reality inverted, various characteristic details were preserved; the long hair, the bipartite beard, the concave cheek....

The symbolic representations and allegorical figures (the Good Shepherd, the Philosopher, Orpheus, etc.) were succeeded by the realistic Face of Christ, inspired by a Cloth that had been in contact with his person and particularly with his face.

According to art critics, the Shroud face possesses the measure and proportions established by classical art to depict ideal beauty. In the face of Christ as revealed by photography, the theoretical canons of beauty found a perfect realization. Every artist felt the need to imbue the face of Christ with ideal beauty and spiritual transparency, at the same time preserving certain details that had been transmitted by the knowledge, direct or indirect, of an original source of inspiration, i.e., the Shroud. It is therefore understandable that the affinity of artistic representations with the face of the Shroud derives—not so much from a complete comprehension of the negative image, as from the tradition which had been formulated and transmitted as the way to represent the Savior.

### **Conclusion**

From the comparison of traditional iconography with the faces depicted on copies of the Shroud, one can draw two conclusions:

1. The copyists, even of recent times, tried to reproduce the tenuous negative imprints, without succeeding. Their results speak for themselves and need no comment.
2. The artists of earlier centuries sought to express an ideal beauty in a harmony of form and proportion.

It is therefore logical that their works, even without depending directly from the Original, could resemble the supreme beauty of the human Face of Christ united with the divinity of the Word, revealed for us on the negative photograph of the Shroud, but not legible in the negative quality of the imprint. And these two conclusions combine to guarantee the genuineness of that unicum which is the Shroud; enigmatic and inimitable in the negative aspect of the image, but at the same time the prototype of representations of Christ because, not having been made by hands, it is identical with reality.



## PAGAN MODELS



Zeus; excavated near Terni; Vatican Museum



Head of Christ; from Gerasa; dated btwn. A.D. 200-500



Christ Pantocrator; Byzantine, IX<sup>th</sup> c.

This type continues in the several Beaux Dieux of France and the Burgundian School of Claus Sluter, both XIV<sup>th</sup> c.

## BYZANTINE TYPE



Christ wearing a dalmatique; Macedonia; XI<sup>th</sup> or XII<sup>th</sup> c.



Christ Savior of Souls; icon produced in Constantinople, XII<sup>th</sup> c.



Young Moses, Dura-Europas Synagogue, III<sup>rd</sup> c.



Christ crowning King Roger; Palermo, XII<sup>th</sup> c.



King Roger being crowned (face is reversed).



Christ in Limbo, St. Mark's, Venice; ca. XII<sup>th</sup> c.

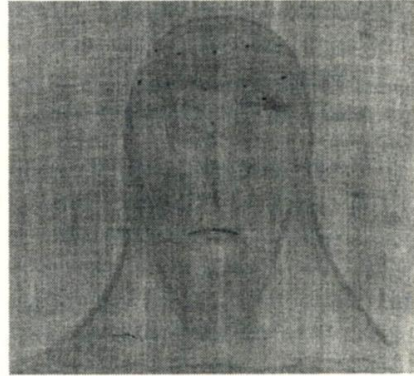
The excellent photo of the face on the Summit copy was made by Paul Maloney; it is copyright and reproduced here with his permission. Credits for the other copies are given in *Spectrum* #12 and #13. Art reproductions are taken from various sources.



COPIES



Lierre, Belgium, 1516



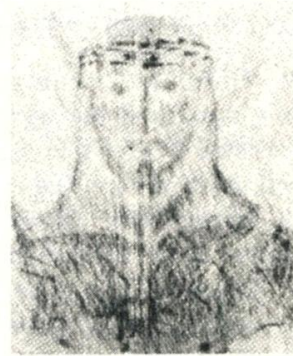
Summit, New Jersey, 1624



Chambéry, France, XVII<sup>th</sup> c.



Moncalieri, Turin, 1634



Acireale, Italy, 1644



Imperia, Italy, 1678



Alcoy, Valencia, 1571



Bologna, Italy, mid-XVII<sup>th</sup> c.



Reffo copy, Turin, 1898



Shroud



Cussetti copy, Turin, 1889



## NOTES

1. Some results of this research were published in *Studi Cattolici* 260, Oct. 1982, pp. 602-611, "Le copie della Sindone"; and 262, Dec. 1982, pp. 800-809, "Repliche sindoniche": and in *Spectrum* #12, Sept. 1984 & #13, Dec. 1984, "Copies of the Holy Shroud".

2. Some of these can be classified as True Copies [A True Copy is one that is more or less the same size as the Turin Shroud and has been touched to it. ED.] Most of them, however, are not, and few authors ever bothered to investigate the question. F. de Mély made a list of these copies at the beginning of this century, in the heat of the polemics for and against the Shroud's authenticity. But his list included the names of several localities which boast of burial relics (shrouds, face-cloths, ties and bands) and the shrouds of Cadouin, Cahors, Compiègne, Besançon, etc.

3. The shroud of Besançon was destroyed in 1794 after an examination by the Committee of Public Welfare. For a discussion of this shroud, see *Spectrum* #14, Mar. 1985, "Doubts Along the Doubts".

4. There are 29 copies on which the year is written on the cloth. Twenty-five are described in *Spectrum* #12, in Part I of Don Fossati's "Copies of the Holy Shroud" (see n. 1). Since then, three more have come to light: Summit, Dominican nuns, 1624, *Spectrum* #20, INSINGER, "A True Copy of the Shroud in Summit, New Jersey"; Rome, Augustinian nuns, 1626; Quebec, Ursuline nuns, 1646. Information on these is being gathered.

There are 23 copies not bearing a year but which can be dated by documents of authentication. See Part II, "Copies of the Holy Shroud", *Spectrum* #13, (n. 1 above). A third category would include copies mentioned in documents of the past, but which are now lost or destroyed.

5. On some copies (Guadalupe, Navarette, Torres de la Alameda) an inscription on the cloth carries the information that the copy was laid upon the Shroud. In some cases, later documents and writings declare that the copy was exactly like the Original or that the copy was produced miraculously; affirmations which, of course, do not correspond to reality.

6. This is the report as given by the Count Luigi Cibrario in *Storia di Torino*, vol. II, 1846, pp. 400-401:

"First, one cannot definitely identify of what material the holy Shroud is woven, but it is commonly judged to be *bombace* [a twilled fabric usually of silk or fine linen. ED.]. The contours of all the body, the posterior part as well as the front, are very clearly distinguished; particularly the legs and the soles of the feet are marvelously represented. One observes, on the posterior part close to the sacrum, the form of three links of a chain, of the color of blood, as also the contours of the crown of thorns. The hands show a streak of blood which comes from the middle of the hand as far as the body, passing directly over the semicarpus, and all the [height] of the body is seen to be 42 *oncie* of our measure, and the marks of the figure have interruptions. However, what is not seen at all is the trace of the cloth that wrapped around the loins. Lastly, the face is more distinct than all the rest, a little bit swollen, bloody; and with the beard and the hair disheveled. Nevertheless, it corresponds to the holy face in St. Peters in Rome, and the one that is kept in the House of Savelli in the same city. Seen in the month of June 1750 by me, Cavaliere Claudio Francesco Beaumont, first painter to His Majesty."

The original document is preserved in the archives of the Carmelite church of Turin.

7. See "The Report of the Poor Clare Nuns; Chambéry, 1534", in *Spectrum* #2, Mar. 1982: republished from *Sindon* #19 (April 1974): "Validità ed Attualità di Due Antiche Descrizioni della Santa Sindone", by R. Gervasio. Prof. Gervasio's article compares the Report of the nuns with that of Beaumont.
8. Ff. 160v-161 of the manuscript in the Vatican Archives. See SAVIO: "Il pellegrinaggio di San Carlo Borromeo alla Sindone in Torino", *Aevum*, VII, fasc. 4, 1933, pp. 423-454.
9. "Una celebre ostensione della Santa Sindone nelle memorie di un archivio bolognese", *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, 2 May 1931. This text is conserved in the archives of the family of the Counts Isolani of Bologna. Also, FOSSATI: "Alcuni inediti sulla Sindone di Ulisse Aldrovandi" *Sindon* #18, Oct. 1973. The letter is with other manuscripts regarding the Shroud collected by Aldrovandi and preserved at the University of Bologna.
10. "A' reverendi fratelli in Cristo diletteissimi i Novizi" of the College of S. Maria di Monza. In the Biblioteca Reale, Turin, Varia, 324, t. 115. [see review, FOSSATI-GIACCARIA on p.28]
11. The Cussetti copy is in the sacristy of the Holy Shroud Chapel in the Turin Cathedral; the Reffo copy, a small aquarelle, in the Istituto degli Artigianelli in Turin. Both are in negative, copied directly from the Shroud during the exposition of 1898 [hence, before the photographic revelation. ED.].
12. P. VIGNON: *Le Saint Suaire de Turin devant la Science, l'Archéologie, l'Histoire, l'Iconographie, la Logique*, Paris, 1938, pp. 115-192. See also WILSON: *The Mysterious Shroud*, New York, 1986, pp. 103-124.
13. H. PFEIFFER: "La Sindone di Torino e il volto di Cristo nell'arte paleocristiana bizantina e medioevale occidentale", *Emmaus* 2, (undated). Reprinted in *Spectrum* #9, Dec. 1983 & #10, Mar. 1984. See also by Pfeiffer, *L'immagine di Cristo nell'arte*, Rome, 1986 and "L'immagine della Sindone e quella della Veronica", in *La Sindone*, Leini, 1986, pp. 41-51.

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**Why should I go any further in examining and passing  
judgment about images? Let all men know what is divine;  
let them know, that is all... only let them know,  
let them love, let them remember.**

**Maximus of Tyre (II<sup>nd</sup> cent.)**