

The Enigma of Manoppello Finally Unveiled?

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The Veil of Manoppello is a fascinating cloth which for many years has intrigued those who have studied it. Historical research ¹ has provided an insight into its provenance and the results of recent scientific tests ² have indicated that it is a very fine and unusual watercolour painting. How it was produced and by whom remains a mystery but as this article will show, there is a strong case to be made from the available evidence that the image on this cloth was produced by Albrecht Dürer at the beginning of the 15th century.

1. What do we see on this Veil?

In the Capuchin convent of Manoppello ³, a very fine, light brown fabric, measuring 24 x 17.5 cm ⁴, shows the life-size face of a middle-aged man, with his eyes open, teeth showing in a half-open mouth, fine hair falling over the shoulders, a sparse beard and moustache, and a small strand at the top of the forehead (Fig. 1). The top of the hair is not visible. The eyes have brown irises and white corneas. The cheeks, on which there are brown and red spots, appear asymmetrical, and the axis between the eyes and the mouth is not straight.



Figure 1.

On the front ⁵, a brown stain (which some have interpreted to be blood; likewise the stain on the forehead) is visible on the left side of the nose. The face is also visible on the reverse side of the veil, which is transparent in daylight ⁶. When lit from the front, the image is almost identical on the front and back. But, when lighting the fabric from the opposite side, the image on the front looks a little different and it can even disappear with a slight backlight. (Fig. 2). Longitudinal and transverse lines attest to numerous folds of the fabric, which have caused the colour of the fibres to partially disappear.

The Veil of Manoppello is placed between two panes of glass, in a wooden frame

¹ Made by Karlheinz Dietz [1], and by Roberto Falcinelli [3].

² See articles by Giulio Fanti et al. [4, 5]

³ Located 190 km from Rome, near Chieti, in the province of Pescara

⁴ The frame covers the outer half-centimetre of the painting

⁵ Identified as by the presence of the Passion nails at the top of the frame and by the rooster at the bottom. The back is identified by a crown of thorns at the top of the frame and the flagellation column at the bottom.

⁶ It's possible to see an object and even read a newspaper when placed on the other side.

covered with gilded silver enhanced with precious stones ⁷. Triangles of about 2.5 to 3 cm per side are missing from the upper corners of the fabric, which have been restored using a coarser material. At the bottom, the same material (1 cm wide) reinforces the fraying edges of the veil. Visible at the bottom right of the painting is a small shard of glass which isn't stuck to the fabric.



Figure 2.

2. Is the basic story reliable?

The ‘brief history’ which is available on site for visiting pilgrims is largely based on a document ⁸ produced in the 17th century by the Capuchin friar Donato da Bomba. Karlheinz Dietz ⁹ summarises the main points of this ‘*Relation Historique*’ as follows [I, ch. 6, sect. 2]:

“Around 1506, a pilgrim from Manoppello invited the doctor Giacomo Antonio Leonelli to the church of St Nicholas for a secret meeting; he gave Leonelli an object wrapped in a package. Barely had he displayed it when he was taken aback at seeing the Face of the Lord; he wanted to thank the donor but there was no longer any trace of the pilgrim, who was therefore an angel or a saint from heaven. Leonelli placed the sacred image in his home, in a locked cabinet closed to anyone other than himself and to which he kept the keys. For more than a hundred years this situation continued but in 1608, his heirs fought over the sacred veil. Pancrazio Petrucci, a soldier married to Marzia, one of the heirs, violently seized the relic, and kept it for several years in his own house but had little respect for its care. Eventually Petrucci was imprisoned in Chieti. To pay his ransom, in 1618 his wife sold the sacred veil for four crowns to Doctor Donato-Antonio de Fabritis, who immediately regretted his purchase due to the deplorable state of the painting. He met Father Clemente who was directing the construction of the Manoppello convent; Father Clemente immediately fell in love with the image and used scissors to cut off all the damaged parts around it ¹⁰, reducing it to its current size. Brother Remigio da Rapino fixed it in a walnut wood frame between two crystal discs, and Antonio de Fabritis then kept it in his home; he donated it in 1638 to the Capuchins who displayed the relic for the veneration of the faithful from 1646.”

(Note: the dates mentioned here do not all appear explicitly in the *Relation Historique*, but in associated documents, dating from the same period.)

⁷ This frame is itself encased in a large, solid silver reliquary monstrance.

⁸ “*Historical report on a miraculous image of the face of Christ, our suffering Lord, which is currently in the Capuchin convent of Manoppello....*”; preserved in the Provincial Archives.

⁹ Professor of Ancient History at the University of Würzburg (Germany)

¹⁰ “*everything was frayed, torn, eaten away by moths and worms, completely corrupted, in tatters...*”

The supposed history of this fabric must already have been quite obscure ¹¹, since it took brother Donato da Bomba several years to write his '*Relation Historique*' ¹². He does not cite any source for the initial event, which took place around 1506; and the Dominican Serafino Razzi, who was usually rather verbose, made no mention of it in an account of his journey to Manoppello in 1577.

The final text was read before a notary on April 6, 1646, 140 years after the alleged arrival of the Veil of Manoppello in 1506. This authentication ¹³ contravened both the 1563 decree of the Council of Trent which required the bishop's agreement ¹⁴ and the recent directives of Pope Urban VIII on relics and the cult of images ¹⁵ [1, ch. 6, sect. 3]. The initial manuscript preserved at Manoppello ¹⁶, which contains more than 30 chapters, contains numerous erasures and overprints compared to the final version which was printed in 1738, almost a hundred years later [1, ch. 6, sect. 1];

A detailed analysis of the *Relation Historique* shows that Brother Donato da Bomba had as his only informant Baron Antonio de Fabritis himself, who belonged to one of the notable families of Manoppello, was strongly committed to the Church and was linked in particular to the construction of the new convent. Donato da Bomba also does not cite any testimony from the Leonelli family, even though Marzia was still alive in early 1643; and his account of the donation of the Veil to the Capuchin convent in 1638 was written without consulting living Capuchins who had been in the new convent since 1626 (begun in 1616). On the other hand, he details Antonio de Fabritis' disappointment with the state of the Veil of Manoppello when he purchased it [1, ch. 6, sect. 4; 5]. According to Karlheinz Dietz, this *Relation Historique* includes many contradictions [1, ch. 6, sect. 7; 8]:

* The family quarrels mentioned are only historically attested from 1619, eleven years after the alleged theft of the Veil of Manoppello in 1608;

* Although he committed a robbery at his in-laws' house for which there is no trace of trial or complaint, Petrucci was called 'the magnificent' ¹⁷ in 1616; and, for 10 years (1608-1618), he treated the Veil of Manoppello very badly, even though he had coveted it for a very long time;

* The manuscript mentions that the purchase of the Veil of Manoppello occurred in 1623 and not 1618 and the gold crowns of the kingdom of Naples were in not circulation in the region at that date;

¹¹ According to another document, also available on site, "*in 1608, the Holy Veil was not stolen by Petrucci from his father-in-law's house, but stolen from Rome*" [2].

¹² He arrived at Manoppello in 1641 and made a first partial draft in 1643.

¹³ According to the medieval practice for the authentication of miracles, the '*Relation Historique*' was signed by certain notables of Manoppello, including Antonio De Fabritis who made a copy which is displayed in the convent.

¹⁴ The episcopal see of Chieti was vacant at this time.

¹⁵ The Pope had entrusted his brother, Cardinal Barberin, who was himself a Capuchin, with the destruction, from 1629, of all "unauthorized" copies of the Veronica of Rome.

¹⁶ "*True story, and account of a marvelous painting*"

¹⁷ A term designating people holding important public functions.

* Antonio de Fabritis is said to have taken the Holy Image without seeing or unrolling it, then to have unfolded it with joy, then to have considered it useless and worthless and to have thought of returning it to recover his money;

* Although one of the Capuchin friars then trimmed and cleaned the Veil of Manoppello, Antonio de Fabritis is said to have kept it in his home for 20 years before offering it to the convent in 1638.

3. What caused the growth in devotion to the Veil of Manoppello?

In the religious context of the time, the notion gradually spread that it was a miraculous image, ‘not made by human hands’. However, the Veil of Manoppello, despite having been elevated to divine rank by oath on April 6, 1646, was not even mentioned the next day during the solemn ceremonies marking the return of the relics of St. Stephen the Confessor¹⁸. It was not until 1686 that a first altar in a modest chapel would be built for the Veil of Manoppello and processions did not begin until 1714, more than 200 years after its presumed arrival in 1506 [1, ch. 6, sect 9].

Like Brother Donato da Bomba, many people also ‘knew’ afterwards, without making any examination, that it was a miracle. In 1999, Jesuit Father Heinrich Pfeiffer also “*knew immediately that it was the Veronica of Rome which had disappeared in the sack of 1527 and was finally found in Manoppello*” [1, ch. 8, sect. 1; 2]. But none of the allegedly *acheiropoieta* images in the Middle Ages were transparent.

Devotion (annual processions, etc.) has increased significantly since the visit of Pope Benedict XVI, who was invited in 2006 on the occasion of the 5th centenary of the presumed arrival of the Veil of Manoppello in 1506¹⁹. However, the Pope had made it clear that he was only making a short personal visit, and, although he knelt before the altar²⁰, he made no comments and did not mention the Veil of Manoppello in his speech to the young people. Monsignor Forte, Archbishop of Chieti was initially cautious²¹ but then considered the Veil to be the “*most sacred relic of Christians*” [1, ch. 5 § 21].

4. Is the comparison with the Shroud of Turin relevant?

In 1999, Sister Blandina Paschalis Schlömer, supported by Father Pfeiffer, believed she could show (by superposition) that the image of the Veil of Manoppello was perfectly identical to the Face of the Man from the Shroud of Turin²². From then on, this Veil (which is sometimes confused with the Sudarium), which would have been placed in the tomb above the Shroud, would allow us to see today the Face of the resurrected

¹⁸ Nor is it mentioned at the annual ceremonies for St Pancras.

¹⁹ The Manoppello convent church was then elevated to the rank of a minor basilica.

²⁰ See special bulletin of the convent of Manoppello, December 2006.

²¹ “*A man of study like Benedict XII only speaks out if he has the evidence to do so*” (2).

²² A permanent exhibition comprising twenty-seven paintings was then presented in the convent.

Christ ²³. Sister Blandina even assumed that other fabrics (Holy Coif of Cahors, Sudarium of Oviedo, etc.) were also ‘stacked’ below the Veil of Manoppello ²⁴. But, the image on the Shroud **does not penetrate the fabric** ²⁵. It is therefore completely impossible that the ‘*initial radiation*’ coming from the tortured body, which created the majestic image of a corpse with closed eyes on the Shroud, could have crossed through another layer of fabric (or even several others), to impregnate the face of a living man, with open eyes and with teeth visible in an open mouth.

For some [4, 5], the ‘miraculous’ image could have been imprinted during the ascent to Calvary because of the open eyes, even if it meant mistaking the lock of hair, as depicted in Byzantine iconography, for the *epsilon* bloodstain seen at the brow on the Shroud. However, the oldest image linked to the legend of Veronica ²⁶ shows Christ sitting on a throne ²⁷; and the 17th century image, currently kept in the Pillar of St. Veronica in the Vatican, shows a face with closed eyes and is also not transparent [2].

Finally, unlike the Shroud ²⁸, any apparent three-dimensionality of the Veil of Manoppello does not result from information in the image that relates to the vertical profile but from the interaction between light and the position of the observer [3, 5].

5. What does scientific research say?

The capuchins have always refused to allow any fibres to be removed for examination. There has therefore been no in-depth scientific study: no chemical tests or tests of the alleged blood stains and no radiocarbon dating tests. All examinations, including a textile study, were carried out without removing the protective glass panes, which absorb a large part of the infrared and ultraviolet radiation and therefore affected the test results.

5-1. What is the nature of the fabric?

It has been widely stated that it is made of *byssus* or ‘sea silk’, very fine filaments generated by a type of mussel (*pinna nobilis*), and that the image could not be a painting because, in theory, it would be impossible to paint on byssus. However, after seeing the Veil of Manoppello in 2006, M. Flury-Lemberg, a specialist in ancient fabrics, indicated that it is instead a silk or fine wool fabric “to which the name *byssus* may be appropriate” because this term was “used in Antiquity to designate a very fine fabric” [2]. Karlheinz Dietz states that in the 15th century, a translation error led to *byssus* being used for the filaments of the *pinna nobilis* but that this term initially designated a very fine fabric, such as linen or silk [1, ch. 4, sect. 8].

²³ See. bulletin of the convent of Manoppello - June 2009; this hypothesis has recently been taken up again.

²⁴ See bulletin of the convent of Manoppello - July 2007.

²⁵ It is only on the top 30 microns of the fabric (1 micron = 0.001 millimetre).

²⁶ Which began to take shape in the 14th century

²⁷ Lateran icon, 6th century. See *The Shroud* Ian Wilson (2010)

²⁸ The shade intensity varies as a function of the distance from the body, with the colour being the same everywhere.



Figure 3.

According to analyses carried out by Giulio Fanti²⁹ using an optical microscope and polarised light [1, ch. 5 § 3; 5] the fibres exhibit birefringence. This is true for linen, jute and hemp, but not for sea-silk/byssus. The presence of a type of mite known as *Tyroborus lini*, which feeds on flax seeds and starch³⁰ was detected (Fig. 3) and the fibres are ‘cemented’ by a substance identified as a starch, which strengthens the structure and makes the thread translucent when visible light passes through³¹.

It is therefore a very fine linen fabric (only 26 to 27 weft threads and approximately 33 warp threads/cm) and the weave, Z-twisted, orthogonal and carried out on a single-heddle loom, is very irregular. The thread diameter (0.12 mm on average) can vary by more than 50% from one area to another and the space between the threads is approximately 0.25 mm, resulting in a void of approximately 42% of the surface, which explains the exceptional transparency of the fabric (Fig. 4).

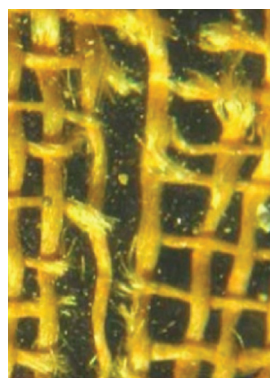


Figure 4.

By varying the angular incidence of the lighting³², the image appears different depending on whether the light is simply reflected (source in front of the veil), or refracted by the veil (source on the other side). Certain details can even disappear or be amplified in raking light [1, ch. 5 sect. 5].

The facial asymmetries that can be seen come from the deformation of the Veil of Manoppello fabric over time³³ as a result of its fragile structure: the distortion of the fibres and the free spaces (Fig. 4) result in the unusual optical behaviour above.

5-2. What is the nature of the image?

According to Donato da Bomba (*see Relation Historique*), “there are no colours or dyes, no brush has touched them” [1, ch. 5, sect. 1]. Also, in 1999, Dr. Vittore, an Italian orthopaedist, concluded that it could not have been painted: using a small high-resolution scanner, he did not see any residual traces of burrs between the wires [2].

²⁹ Professor of Mechanical and Thermal Measurements at the University of Padua.

³⁰ Marine byssus, soaked in salt, is indigestible for insects.

³¹ Starch glue was widely used in water-based painting on linen as early as the 1400s. Cellulose and starch have the same density (1.5 g/cm³) and almost the same refractive index.

³² See experiments by Zbigniew Treppa in 2009-2010, with lighting varying from 55 to 305° around the veil, which is placed in front of a camera

³³ Digital processing carried out by G. Fanti et al, on a photo, restored the initial profile [5].

However, as early as the 1870s, the Capuchin Salvatore Tito, a recognized painter³⁴, had already “*noted that it is a watercolour... of which the type does not exist in Italy*” [1, ch. 7, sect. 1]. And M. Flury-Lemberg had no doubt: the image of the Manoppello veil “*is a painting*”.

Studies by G. Fanti et al. showed³⁵ the probable presence of pigments, mainly red and brown, which do not fill the entire fabric and are only visible at a certain angle or against a screen [3, 4, 5]. The application of fine brushstrokes is evident in the delicate moustache and beard hairs; as well as in the intensity of the hair colour, which increases from brown to red-brown towards the bottom of the head [3, 5]. Certain areas also seemed to be the subject of subsequent retouching, such as the hair, lips, or eyes (probably blue at the start but before turning green over time³⁶ and retouched in brown) [4].

The absence of ultraviolet fluorescence negates the presence of oils, greases and waxes, which excludes the presence of oil paint. Raman spectroscopy carried out in 2007, with a red laser passing through the glass (at a wavelength of 633nm), concluded that there were no organic (carbon-containing) compounds³⁷. It is the air therefore non-colour which determines the colour visible to the observer depending on the incidence and intensity of the light.

Overall, despite being hampered by having to examine the Veil of Manoppello through its glass cover, it can be confirmed that it is a very fine watercolour painting, “*made in an unknown brilliant way*”, according to Bruno Sammaciccia³⁸. The painting of transparent images only became common from the end of the 18th century.

6. What do we know about Dürer's missing self-portrait?

Like most of the great painters of his time, Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) produced self-portraits³⁹. But the master of Nuremberg, whose very deep spirituality pushed him to *imitatio Christi*⁴⁰, was the first, it seems, to dare to represent himself with Christ-like features, for example in his ‘*Self-Portrait in a Fur-Collared Robe*’⁴¹ (Fig. 5), or on a *Veronica* with a head crowned with thorns⁴² (Fig. 6).

³⁴ He notably decorated the Basilica of Saint Lawrence Outside the Walls in Rome.

³⁵ The study used optical microscope, infrared and ultraviolet spectrometry. Roberto Falcinelli, a member of the Centre of Sindonology in Rome, used cameras and a portable microscope.

³⁶ Which also causes the yellowing of the fabric, which preferentially absorbs the blue color.

³⁷ Many organic dyes do not give Raman spectra at this wavelength.

³⁸ Writer, theologian and psychiatrist (1926-2003).

³⁹ Several are well known, such as the so-called self-portrait “with gloves” (1498) Madrid/Prado.

⁴⁰ To attempt to live and act as Jesus Christ

⁴¹ On this painting from 1500, which is in the Pinacoteca of Munich, we can indeed notice the shape of the hands and the lock of hair at the top of the forehead, as we see it in all Byzantine iconography of Christ.

⁴² Pen drawing from 1513 from the Albertina in Vienna.



Figure 5.



Figure 6.



Figure 7.



Figure 8.

Dürer, who depicted the face of Christ more often than any other artist, considered his painting to be in the service of the Church and the suffering of Christ. He even depicted himself as a “*Man of Sorrows*” (Fig. 7) ⁴³, the detail of which shows the upper teeth in a half-open mouth, as in the Veil of Manoppello. His physiognomy is also known to us from other paintings, such as that of figure 8 ⁴⁴.

6.1. Creation of an “unimaginable” self-portrait – Route to Mantua

Several authors, like Vasari ⁴⁵, mentioned a self-portrait by Dürer which had an exceptional character that captivated not only his contemporaries, but also all later observers:

“Albrecht Dürer... sent as a tribute to Raphael, a self-portrait limited to the head, which he had executed in watercolour on a byssus sheet, the two sides of which showed equally and without lead white the transparent lights, while everything else was tinted and stained with watercolour” ⁴⁶; *...he used the white of the canvas and its extremely fine threads for the beard hairs, which was something impossible to imagine and achieve. And in the light it was translucent on both sides”* ⁴⁷;

“Albrecht Dürer sent Raphael his portrait inked by himself on a canvas without white, with recessed lights. This seemed very strange to Raphael...” ⁴⁸

“Dürer sent Raphael his Imitation on an inked sheet without white...” ⁴⁹

“He sent Raphael his self- portrait on canvas... Raphael looked with admiration at this strange work” ⁵⁰.

⁴³ Pencil drawing from 1522 from the Kunsthalle, Bremen.

⁴⁴ Painting by Joachim von Sandrart published in 1675 in the *Teutsche Akademie*.

⁴⁵ Giorgio Vasari d'Arezzo (1511-1574), painter of the Medici court in Florence and considered to be the “*father of the history of art, inventor of the Renaissance*” notably wrote ‘*Vitae*’ on the lives of great artists known since the 1300s

⁴⁶ Vasari ‘*Life*’ of Raphaël - Ed. *Torrentiniana* (1550).

⁴⁷ Vasari ‘*Life*’ of Raphaël - Ed. *Giuntina* (1568)

⁴⁸ Karel van Mander (1604)

⁴⁹ Joachim von Sandrart

⁵⁰ Isaac Bullart (1599-1672), historian. Manuscript of 1666 published in 1682 and in 1740

So this work appeared to be rare, “*magnificent, wonderful, even miraculous, closer to a divine work than a human work*”, something that could neither be *made nor even imagined*.

It was made on a very fine, wide-mesh linen canvas, made in Reims: “... *there was on a canvas from Reims the natural portrait of Albrecht Dürer, by his own hand*”⁵¹. The *Toile de Reims*, also known as *Rensa*, *Renso* or even *Rens*, was well used in Flanders⁵² and was marketed in Northern Italy from the end of the 15th century. Italian painters, who were already familiar with translucent veils and Flemish watercolour techniques, were surprised by Dürer’s original techniques⁵³, but even more so in this very particular case: the use of particularly fine threads (*sottilissime*) with fairly wide spacing⁵⁴; no use of lead white⁵⁵ with those enhancements (light tones) being produced solely by the action of light on the spaced threads; extremely fine colours for the *unimaginable* intertwining of the beard hairs and hairs around the mouth [1, ch. 4].

The lock of hair, at least suggested, is almost a trademark of Dürer’s self-portraits and the fact that the teeth are visible is a characteristic of the Renaissance⁵⁶. The Protestant theologian Martin Karrer has stated that the open mouth on the Veil of Manoppello is a decisive criterion for dating it to the 16th century.

We know the provenance of this unique painting quite well [1, ch. 2 and 3]:

- Dürer produced it in 1506 in Venice, during his second stay in Italy (1505-1507): on September 23, 1506, in the euphoria of completing the “*Feast of the Rosary*” in five days, he wrote to W. Pirckheimer⁵⁷: “*My painting (‘Christ among the scribes’) is finished, as well as another painting (quar)*”⁵⁸ *of which I have never done the same thing*” [3];
- Around 1512, Raphael, whose reputation had grown rapidly⁵⁹, sent Dürer engravings by Raimondi⁶⁰; Dürer thanked Raphael by sending him “*among many other sheets*,

⁵¹ Vasari, ‘Life’ of Romano - Ed. *Giuntina* (1568). In the ‘Life’ of Raphael, 1550, he uses the word ‘byssus’ (see above).

⁵² This very expensive canvas of Reims was then internationally renowned; linen was always “white as snow” and translucent, woven with very fine threads.

⁵³ Through his own chemical experiments, he took water-based painting on canvas to a new level: priming the fabric with pharmaceutical starch: pigments reduced to dust (transparent) and married to the canvas (with a refractive index close to that of the wires) which allows a double refraction of light, on the surface and in depth...

⁵⁴ For larger canvases produced by Dürer (preserved in Dresden and Berlin), the thickness of the threads is between 0.25 and 0.3 mm.

⁵⁵ Unlike his other canvases, such as those kept in the Louvre.

⁵⁶ Except for saints and important people.

⁵⁷ A famous German jurist and humanist, friend of Erasmus and Dürer.

⁵⁸ Denotes use of a quadrangular canvas

⁵⁹ He had decorated the Vatican in 1508.

⁶⁰ Marcantonio Raimondi (1480-1534), later called the Dürer of the southern Alps.

his portrait”⁶¹; and, in 1515, Raphael sent to Nuremberg numerous sheets drawn by his hand, which Dürer appreciated enormously⁶²;

- In 1524 Giulio Romano⁶³, a student and heir of Raphael, took the painting to his house in Mantua (*la Casa Pippi*), where Vasari saw it in 1541 and 1546: “*This portrait, which for Giulio was extremely precious, he showed it to me himself as a marvel when I came to Mantua during his lifetime*”⁶⁴.
- In 1573, a notarised inventory of *Casa Pippi* mentions (with a subject error) the only painting “*by the hand of Albrecht Dürer*” owned by Giulio Romano; his collections were dispersed by his heirs who notably had links to the court of Mantua;
- In 1596, in Colorno, near Parma, in the collection of Countess Barbara Sanseverino (who was closely linked to the court of Mantua), there was “*a head of Albrecht Dürer, the best of all his works... made with a great finesse and unique beauty*”.
- Between 1597 and 1612⁶⁵, the Duke of Mantua, Vincenzo I Gonzaga, bought it from the Countess Sanseverino, for his *Cabinet of Curiosities*: “*It was then placed in the Chamber of Arts of Mantua, among the objects which had belonged to Giulio Romano*”⁶⁶; “*It was preserved and displayed for a long time in the Mantua Chamber of Arts, like a strange artistic piece*”⁶⁷.

This unique art cabinet, described as a *Celestial Gallery*, which contained watercolour paintings by famous painters, was one of 500 rooms in the Ducal Palace of Mantua, the cultural centre of the Italian Renaissance, where 1,200 people lived alongside this immense artistic treasure⁶⁸.

There are no reproductions of this extraordinary work, which disappeared mysteriously according to almost all major articles devoted to Dürer⁶⁹, and which had not been sold before the sack of the city of Mantua⁷⁰. For Wolfram Prinz (1929 -2011)⁷¹, “*The importance that Dürer attached to self-portraits as an expression of his own personality is also proven by the numerous testimonies about the portrait which disappeared*”.

⁶¹ Vasari, ‘Life’ of Raphael - Ed. *Giuntina* of 1568

⁶² As above

⁶³ Giulio di Pietro, called Giulio Pippi, then Giulio Romano (1492-1546).

⁶⁴ Vasari, ‘Life’ of Raphael - Ed. *Giuntina* of 1568

⁶⁵ Dishonour and execution of Countess Sanseverino

⁶⁶ Mander, 1604 - Sandrart, 1675 - Bullart, 1682.

⁶⁷ Georg Wolfgang Knorr, *Divertissement historique des artistes* - 1738.

⁶⁸ Since 1491, countless works had been acquired, ranging from books, paintings, tapestries, silks, gems, marbles, vases, precious metals... to very diverse objects such as a hippopotamus, a mummy and all sorts of petrified things... Many artists (Mantegna, Romano, Rubens...) worked in this Renaissance cultural center, which reached its peak at the beginning of the 17th century.

⁶⁹ See *Conversations-Lexique pour les arts plastiques* – F. Faber (1846)

⁷⁰ In 1627, the Duke of Mantua did not include it amongst the art treasures sold to King Charles I of England.

⁷¹ Professor of Art History in Frankfurt, author of *Dürer*, (1998).

6.2. Disappearance of the painting during the sack of Mantua

The financial difficulties of the later dukes and disputes over the line of succession (1626-1630) led the very rapid decline of this stronghold of the Holy Roman Empire, which was at the heart of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). In the autumn of 1629, the Lutherans and Calvinists of the Habsburg army, who brought with them plague and terror, made a first siege of Mantua. By May 1630, the city was dying following the epidemic ⁷² and the flight of its starving population.

On July 18, 1630, the total pillage of the city and its immense cultural riches took place over three days at the hands of “*des aventuriers au service de l'empereur*” (mercenaries who had been recruited from all nations) who surpassed the regular troops in their greed and violence. The troops had not completely departed from Mantua until September 1631, when nothing remained of the ducal palace but an empty shell. Stolen goods, which were cut up when they couldn't be taken whole, were resold almost everywhere, especially in Northern Italy [1, ch. 1].

From 1630, Dürer's “*miraculous painting*” wasn't mentioned in the inventories of what still remained in Mantua, nor elsewhere. Like most paintings, it appeared to have fallen into the hands of a looter who did not really appreciate its value.

7. Could Dürer's self-portrait be the Veil of Manoppello? If so, how did it come to be in Manoppello?

In 1988, Father Pfeiffer drew the attention of his colleague Werner Bulst to Dürer's painting who called this analogy “very important.” But, sure of his own ‘discovery’, he didn't pursue this further.

Like the Veil of Manoppello, the self-portrait showed only the face of a bearded man with hairs of an unimaginable fineness, visible from both sides on a wide mesh linen fabric and of a much finer quality than those of watercolours common to the 17th century [1, ch. 9]. Another similarity is that self-portrait also fascinated observers to the point that it was considered to be impossible to reproduce, “*closer to a divine work than to a human work.*” No other paintings with a comparable technique have been found to date.

After the sack of Mantua, the authorities of the major cities publicly proclaimed that no person of any rank should purchase the stolen items. According to Karlheinz Dietz [1, ch. 6, sect. 8], the Veil of Manoppello could have been sold very discreetly in 1638 to a distinguished person from Manoppello: The thief could perhaps have been the soldier Pancrazio Petrucci who had been a prisoner in Chieti but who had an honourable military career ⁷³ and would have enlisted as a mercenary in the service of the Habsburgs

⁷² There were 11,000 deaths in January alone.

⁷³ According to Donato da Bomba's Relation Historique, ‘*This man-at-arms kept his sword and armor spotless to use in wars with his lord.*’

during the Thirty Years' War ⁷⁴. During the looting of 1630, he would have recovered the painting, taken it out of its frame and roughly folded it to make it easier to hide. After fleeing the plague which raged in the north of Italy, he would have brought it back a little later to Manoppello.

In one of the upper corners of the painting, Dürer was able to inscribe, as he often did, his famous monogram 'AD' ⁷⁵, and put the date of 1506, which is undoubtedly not due to chance in the *Relation Historique* on the Veil of Manoppello. These two identifying marks could have been obscured (perhaps deliberately) by the patches in the corners of the Veil of Manoppello. Giulio Fanti's infrared examination (in 2007) did not detect a signature [1, ch. 5, sect. 5]; but the *Relation Historique* states that the Veil of Manoppello, was originally square and reformed into a rectangle, and that its poor condition (frayed) required large parts of it to be trimmed, even to the top of the head ⁷⁶. This is obviously consistent with it having been torn from its frame and clumsily folded for transportation.

8. Conclusions

The Veil of Manoppello is a very unusual watercolour, painted on particularly fine linen, but it is by no means a miraculous image, not made by the hand of man. It shows the face of a living man, with open eyes and visible teeth, which cannot be compared to the face of the Shroud of Turin (eyes and mouth closed). This veil cannot show the features of Christ, neither during his ascent to Calvary (legend of Veronica), nor during the Resurrection, as some studies have suggested [4, 5].

It is very highly probable that it is the unique, marvellous self-portrait made by Albrecht Dürer in 1506 which disappeared during the sack of Mantua in 1630. We should acknowledge here the research of Roberto Falcinelli [3], who seems to have been the first to have had this insight, as well as that of the German historian Karlheinz Dietz [1]. However, the scientific analysis is currently incomplete and additional direct examinations (ultraviolet, infrared, Raman, etc.) of the fabric without its protective panes of glass are necessary to increase our understanding.

⁷⁴ The imperial armies were in great need of recruits, which brought glory and wealth to the Italian nobility. The Petruccis were then part of the regimental noble families.

⁷⁵ Known from 1498 throughout Europe, by the publication of his Apocalypse according to St John.

⁷⁶ Between 2 and 7 cm were removed from the top and bottom, and between 9 and 16 cm on the right and left.

References:

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- [1] Karlheinz Dietz: *Von Dürer an Raffael, von Mantua nach Manoppello*, Ed. Schnell/Steiner (2021)
 - [2] Pierre de Riedmatten: 1) *Le Voile de Manoppello* Cahier MNTV no. 35, (2006); 2) *Des jeux ouverts aux jeux fermés - Le développement de la Dévotion à la Sainte Face*, Cahier MNTV no. 47 (2013).
 - [3] Roberto Falcinelli: "*Le Voile de Manoppello: travail artistique ou relique authentique?*" (2005).
 - [4] Giulio Fanti, Liberato De Caro and Emilio Matricciani: *Yellowing of Ancient Linen and Its Effects on the Colors of the Holy Face of Manoppello*, Revue Heritage (2019).

[5] Giulio Fanti, Liberato De Caro and Emilio Matricciani, *Imaging Analysis and Digital Restoration of the Holy Face of Manoppello*, Part I and II - Revue Heritage (2018); *A Comparison between the Face of the Veil of Manoppello and the Face of the Shroud of Turin*, Revue Heritage (2019).

Footnote:

One might wonder how an artist as talented as Albrecht Dürer could represent himself in a form as unattractive as shown on the Veil of Manoppello. According to Pierre de Riedmatten, “*This self-portrait is similar to that of the Man of Sorrows (Fig. 7) which is not particularly beautiful. And 8 years passed (according to Karlheinz Dietz’s hypothesis) between the looting of Mantua and the possible arrival of the veil in Manoppello, during which time the fabric remained “greatly folded” and was kept in very bad condition.*”



The Shroud at Sea

David Rolfe

As part of the publicity for my recent film *Who Can he Be?* I received an invitation to be interviewed on both Talk Radio and Talk TV by one of its hosts, presenter Howard Hughes. Listening in to the radio interview was a director of Marella Cruises who thought that I would be a suitable addition to an upcoming voyage with all talks themed around “*The Unexplained*” which is the title of both Hugh’s TV and Radio shows. Readers of this newsletter will readily appreciate that the Shroud must be a most suitable item for such a cruise.

I jumped at the invitation. Not just for the pleasure of a cruise which I had never experienced but the thought of having a semi-captive audience to listen to information about this subject which most of us – as readers of the BSTS Newsletter - hold so dear. It would also be an ideal opportunity to take along the full-size replica I keep but which rarely sees the light of day.

We were flown to Florida to board the Marella Discovery which would travel the length of the East coast of the USA and Canada to Halifax in the far North. The voyage would last two weeks. The outgoing flight was a full day and we arrived for our sailing at the port of Melbourne near Miami.

My fellow speakers included an expert in UFOs and The Loch Ness Monster, a former policewoman who had become a “Spirit Medium” and assisted people whose house had become “haunted”. She also read Tarot cards¹. Somewhat incongruously in this company was a former science reporter for the BBC, David Whitehouse, who had followed the space race very closely and who had created a spectacular visual presentation about our planetary system and the long term prospects for the Earth.

¹ While I did not give much credence to the ability of the cards to reveal anything insightful in themselves, I did see that, in the right hands, it could be a very useful therapeutic tool.