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The Robe of Corporeality: Sensual Aspects of Medieval Representations of Crucified Christ in the *Tunica Manicata*

Abstract

This paper explores the iconography of the Volto Santo – a crucifix worshiped at the cathedral of Lucca, Italy, and the reception of this iconographic type in the medieval art. The aim is to investigate the role of robes covering the body of crucified Christ in the scenes of the Passion.

First of all, the origins and meaning of different Christ's garments are discussed in relation to the debates on the nature of Christ and around the Eucharist. Still, as the Volto Santo is usually dated to the 12th century and it presents Christ in the *tunica manicata* with the *cingulum*, which can be identified as a clerical costume, the meaning of Christ's garments in the context of the Gregorian Reform, celibacy, and the concept of the third gender is also presented. Afterwards the practices of dressing the Volto Santo in the ceremonial vestments as a manifestation of its worship are analyzed. These vestments along with the altar, where the Volto Santo was presented to the faithful, are the most important elements of the iconography of the representations of the Volto Santo in the mural paintings. What draws attention in these images is the ambiguous position of Christ nailed to the cross and standing on the altar at the same time. That produces ambivalent sensual experience: the impression of uncourting Christ turns into a recognition of the particular cult object and vice versa. Moreover, the robe covering the body contributes to a fluid gender identity of the figure.

It may be concluded that the robes of the crucified Christ play several roles: they cover the suffered body, they are an attribute of the ruler or priest, but above all, they manifest Christ's corporality. The faithful confronted with these images found his or her somatic identity with Christ.

Keywords: Crucifixion, crucifix, the Volto Santo, colobium, tunica manicata, cingulum, body, human nature, Eucharist, gender

For the last thousand years the iconography of the Crucifixion has been dominated by the image of Jesus Christ in the perizoma. Christ's naked body at the time

of his death is interpreted as a manifestation of the reality of Incarnation and of Christ's truly human nature that embraced also the sensual aspect of his life and death. It also illustrates the Biblical text about Christ's being stripped of his garments (John 19:23–24).

However, between the years 600 and 800 – in the early period when the iconography of the Passion of Christ was being formed – Byzantine, insular, Frankish, and Merovingian art was dominated by images of Christ crucified in his robes. From then on, these images gradually became less popular, yet the tradition of presenting Christ robed was preserved throughout the Middle Ages.¹ This tradition resonated powerfully in Ottonian miniature painting, and subsequently in monumental sculpture of the 12th and 13th century. The most interesting examples of sculpted crucifixes from this period representing a robed Christ come from today's Germany, Catalonia, and Italy. One of the most famous ones is a crucifix conserved at the cathedral of San Martino in Lucca, called the *Volto Santo*. Venerated in the Middle Ages, it inspired pilgrims to visit this Tuscan town. Its fame reached remote parts of Europe, so replicas of this image are now identified in locations spanning from Rome to Rostock. Most often, those are mural paintings dating from the 14th and 15th century. Their iconography and composition suggest an uncommon kind of ambivalent sensual experience of the faithful confronted with this cult image. It is the aim of this paper to discuss the role of robes covering the body of Christ in building this effect.

The starting point for this analysis is to examine the origin and symbolic meaning of the representation of the robed crucified Christ in the early Middle Ages. It is significant to include the study of dress. It is equally relevant to consider the relationship between the robe and Christ's body: Does it serve to cover or to hide his body? Does it work to intensify the viewer's empathy or to form a distance between the viewer and God Incarnate? Answers to this question will bring us closer to understanding the phenomenon of the *Volto Santo* as a figure and relic in one, they will help us better define the iconography of the painted replicas of the *Volto Santo* and to shed new light on the reception of this iconographic type in the culture of the late Middle Ages.

The image of the robed Crucified Christ – origin and iconographical content

The oldest known representation of a robed Christ is a miniature from the *Rabbula Gospels* dated c. 586 (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, f. 13r). It is also one of the oldest known images of the Crucifixion. Jesus is shown here alive, dressed in a purple *colobium* – a simple sleeveless tunic made from a piece of fabric folded in

1 E. Coatsworth, "The 'robed Christ' in pre-Conquest sculptures of the Crucifixion", *Anglo-Saxon England*, 2000, 29, pp. 153–155.

half and sewn together, which loosely covers his torso and legs, and falls in vertical folds. The robe is decorated with golden *clavi* – two vertical stripes. Christ seems to be standing rather than hanging on the cross: his body is straight, and his head is raised. His eyes are open and the wounds in his feet and hands are marked only symbolically.

The Crucifixion type represented in the Rabbula Gospels is defined as the *Christus triumphans* and, according to the scholars, it emphasizes Christ's triumph over death and his divine nature.² Christ's robe plays an important role in constructing the meaning of these images. The *colobium* was a type of garment commonly worn in the Roman Empire. In the early Christian period, it was used as a liturgical vestment and for that reason in the early and middle Byzantine iconography it served as an attribute of priesthood.³ Purple, on the other hand, was considered an imperial colour. Dressed in a purple *colobium*, the crucified Christ is shown as a ruler and the highest priest. Moreover, the robe covering the body pushed the corporeal aspect of Christ's Passion into the background. However, the function of the *colobium* might have been more complex. Kathleen Corrigan may be right in suggesting that this robe could be linked with the Nestorian metaphors that described the Incarnation as Christ "being clothed in the flesh". She also observes that the colour purple had similar connotations, for Incarnation was often compared to "being clothed in royal purple".⁴ The *colobium* symbolises both the nobility of the ruler and Christ's human nature, and works, due to the lack of physical markings of suffering, as an equivalent of the body. This is confirmed by Sinai icon B.36, which Weitzmann dated to 7th century. It shows Christ dressed in the *colobium*, yet his eyes are closed, a crown of thorns sits on his head and streams of blood pour from his wounds – the Crucifixion is not shown here as a triumph over death, but in its human aspect: as an end to physical suffering.⁵ The red *colobium*, construed as the "robe" of corporeality, corresponds with this meaning.⁶

The robed Christ is a recurrent motif on Byzantine pectoral crosses and *staurotheke*s from the 6th to the 12th century.⁷ In these objects, it is sometimes difficult to classify the type of garment with certainty, since the images are intensely stylized and geometrical. In some of the compositions, the body and dress, being intercon-

2 D. Adams, "Crucifix", in: *The Dictionary of Art*, vol. 8, ed. J. Turner, New York, 1996, p. 211.

3 J. Bingham, *Origines Ecclesiasticæ. The Antiquities of the Christian Church. With Two Sermons and Two Letters on the Nature and Necessity of Absolution*, London, 1856, pp. 231–232.

4 K. Corrigan, "Text and Image on an Icon of the Crucifixion at Mount Sinai", in: *The Sacred Image East and West*, eds. R. Ousterhout, L. Brubaker, Chicago, 1995, pp. 53–56.

5 K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine At Mount Sinai, The Icons*, vol. 1, *From the Sixth to the Tenth Century*, New Jersey, 1976, p. 63.

6 On different shades of purple see J. L. Sebesta, "Tunica Ralla, Tunica Spissa: The Colours and Textiles of Roman Costume", in: *The World of Roman Costume*, eds. J. L. Sebesta, L. Bonfante, Madison, 1994, pp. 70–71; B. V. Pantcheva, *The Sensual Icon. Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium*, University Park, PA, 2010, p. 110.

7 For a representative selection see *Kreuz und Kruzifix. Zeichen und Bild*, eds. S. Hahn, C. Roll, P. B. Steiner, Freising, 2005, pp. 172–176.

nected, become impossible to distinguish from each other due to the flatness of the carved decoration. However, most often Christ is shown clothed in the *colobium* in accordance with the accepted canon of the Byzantine iconography of the Crucifixion. Still, there are also images of Christ in a toga or long-sleeved tunic, sometimes with a *pallium*. Elizabeth Coatsworth observes that these vestments feature in Byzantine representations of the living Christ. Therefore, the aforementioned examples should be interpreted as representing the Parousia.⁸ Particularly so, since often Christ's hands show merely holes left by nails, while nails as such are absent, as for instance in a scene on a cross from the Dumbarton Oaks Collection,⁹ where additionally the figure of Christ is placed on a cloud.

Representations on pectoral crosses and other mobile objects that reached Western Europe from the Holy Land brought by the pilgrims could have shaped the earliest iconography of the Crucifixion in insular and Frankish art, since Eastern art constituted the main source of inspiration in this respect.¹⁰ In these images Christ was shown in robes styled according to the local notion of classical dress. In a famous miniature from the Durham Gospels from the end of the 7th century, the robe forms a complex and decorative pattern of folds and covers the body of Christ completely. Every detail of this garment seems carefully planned and linked with the symbolic meaning of the scene. A richly draped chasuble is seen covering an ankle-length simple alba or *colobium*. The use of red and golden-yellow¹¹ colours corresponds with the intent of the scene to, as the inscription suggests,¹² present the resurrected Christ. Hence, Christ is shown alive, standing straight, and the nails are barely visible. His arms are stretched along the body and the forearms placed perpendicularly to the sides, which is uncommon, but an analogy may be found on Palestinian ampullae from the 6th and 7th century from the Cleveland Museum of Art and from Monza (No. 13),¹³ where the scene of the Crucifixion is complemented by the motif of an empty grave.¹⁴ Therefore their meaning is similar to that of the Durham Gospel image: they combine the themes of death and Parousia. It explains the position of arms used sometimes in representations of Christ as a Judge and the robes that were reserved in Byzantine art for scenes from his life. In the Durham Gospels, these robes should be interpreted according to the then functioning exegesis of the Book of Revelation (Revelation 1:13). For instance, the Venerable Bede argued that Christ's long garment confirms his priesthood manifested by his sacrifice

8 E. Coatsworth, op. cit., p. 156.

9 <http://museum.doaks.org/Obj30330?sid=2657&x=25650&port=2620> [accessed 30.03.2018].

10 E. Coatsworth, op. cit., p. 155.

11 R. Gameson, A. Beeby, A. Duckworth, C. Nicholson, "Pigments of the Earliest Northumbrian Manuscripts", *Scriptorium*, 2015, 69, p. 46.

12 J. O'Reilly "Early medieval text and image: the wounded and exalted Christ", *Peritia. Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland*, 1987–88, 7–8, pp. 89–91.

13 <http://www.clevelandart.org/art/1999.46.a> [accessed 15.05.19].

14 G. Schiller, *Ikongraphie der Christlichen Kunst. Band. 2: Die Passion Jesu Christi*, Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn 1968, fig. 325.

on the altar of the cross.¹⁵ A slightly different version of this dress can be found in an image from the St. Gall Gospel Book made half a century later. Christ's shoulders and legs are left uncovered and decorative folds are reminiscent of the shroud that enveloped his body. The purple colour of the fabric corresponds with this form that exposes Christ's corporeality. This iconography finds no analogy in Byzantine art.¹⁶

A model example of Irish iconography of the Crucifixion is a bronze plaque from Dublin,¹⁷ commonly dated to the 8th or 9th century.¹⁸ It shows Christ dressed in a long-sleeved tunic that nearly reaches his feet, decorated on the torso part with six paired spiral shields, an ornate border underneath, and a vertical stripe in the centre. Scholars link the spirals with pagan art where they symbolised solar energy and fertility. For this reason, this Crucifixion should be interpreted as a prediction of Resurrection.¹⁹ Similar iconography, which includes a schematic, simplified body and a long garment with motifs composed of discs and plaits, may be found on the stone slab from the Calf of Man, carved probably in the 8th century (currently in the Manx Museum, Douglas).²⁰

Examples discussed above demonstrate that despite the patristic tradition suggesting that Christ was crucified naked,²¹ in the iconography of the 6th up to 8th century his wounded body was not exposed because his agony on the cross was not the central issue of theology of that time. However, it must be noted that this iconography did not controvert Christ's corporeality. The authenticity of his human nature and actual death on the cross is confirmed by the presence of Longinus and Stephaton in the majority of discussed Byzantine and insular works. Still, the tools they carry, a lance and a sponge on a stick, do not serve here as tools of his suffering – instead, they emphasize corporeality as an instrument of victory. This kind of understanding of death on the cross and the attendant cult of the body of Christ are confirmed by a late 8th or early 9th-century poem written by Blathmac:

15 Cf. E. Coatsworth, op. cit., pp. 156–157.

16 However, Weitzmann suggests a link with the Byzantine tradition of presenting Christ in the *colobium*. K. Weitzmann, "Various Aspects of Byzantine Influence on the Latin Countries from the Sixth to the Twelfth Century", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 1966, 20, p. 5.

17 Cf. other Irish plaques and some of the Irish High Crosses. For example: the Clonmacnoise plaque, the Mayo plaques, the Lismore plaque, the Killalon plaque, the Academy plaque, the Tynan plaque, the Anketell plaque, the Kells plaque, the Cross of Muirdeach. In all these works Christ is flanked by Stephaton with the sponge, Longinus with the lance, and two angels. Moreover, in the three first examples Christ "wears a full-length garment and hold his arms straight from his shoulders". G. Murray, "Irish crucifixion plaques: a reassessment", in: *Envisioning Christ on the cross. Ireland and the early medieval West*, eds. J. Mullins, J. Ní Ghrádaigh, R. Hawtree, Dublin, 2013, pp. 295–299; J. Ní Ghrádaigh, "Changing depiction of the Crucifixion on the Irish High Cross", *ibid.*, pp. 262–285.

18 P. Harbison, "The Bronze Plaque said to be from S. John's", *The Journal of Irish Archeology*, 1987, no. 2, pp. 13–16.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

20 Basil R. S. Megaw, "The Calf of Man Crucifixion", *The Journal of the Manx Museum*, 1958, no. 6, p. 57.

21 G. Schiller, op.cit., p. 101.

“His crucified body was his victory; he suffered the shedding of wine-like blood; no corruption or worm came to him at the time of his burial”.²²

In the 9th century an important change occurs in the iconography of the Crucifixion. Images of Christ in the perizoma are now much more common. In the East, this was linked with iconoclastic and Christological debates around the dogma of hypostatic union of two natures in Christ. In the Crucifixion scenes, the perizoma worked as an evidence of the fact of Incarnation and therefore partially justified the production of the images of God. In the West, the new iconography was inspired by the Carolingian debates around the Eucharist. Images of the crucified Christ were now more commonly used during the liturgy. In this context showing the exposed body, and blood pouring from the wounds often straight to a mass chalice, was a way to visualise the dogma of Transubstantiation.²³

This iconography found continuity in Ottonian art. Interestingly, it is the perizoma that dominates in the oldest preserved (usually dated to the 10th century) life-size crucifixes sculpted in the round: from the church of San Michele Maggiore in Padua,²⁴ from Sant’Eusebio in Vercelli,²⁵ and on the most famous Ottonian crucifix from Cologne Cathedral, where Christ is shown in the second basic type of the Crucifixion, that is, the *Christus patiens*.²⁶ In the following centuries, such images became more popular, coinciding with the changing theological interpretation of the Passion of Christ. This change is manifested in full in the writings of St. Anselm. According to him, it is Christ’s suffering and death, effected through the act of Incarnation, that made Salvation possible. Resurrection merely confirmed Christ’s divine nature. This perspective favoured the development of the Passion piety concentrated on Christ’s life that ended with death as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity. Later on, Bernard of Clairvaux initiated a new model of religiosity, recommending personal reflection on the Gospel. However, he still situated it in the liturgical context, and he did not single out the Passion from among other evangelical events. It was St. Francis who subsequently underlined the necessity of a direct relationship with the suffering Christ. Following these principles, St. Bonaventure postulated an active compassion for Christ’s suffering along with an attempt to imitate him.²⁷

22 S. Ryan, “The Arma Christi in Medieval and Early Modern Ireland”, in: *The Arma Christi in Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture*, eds. L. H. Cooper, A. Denny-Brown, Farnham, 2014, p. 244.

23 C. Chazelle, “Crucifixes and the Liturgy in the Ninth-Century Carolingian Church”, in: *Il Volto Santo in Europa. Atti del convegno* (Engelberg 2000), eds. M. C. Ferrari, A. Meyer, Lucca, 2003, pp. 67–93. Cf. eadem, *The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era: Theology and Art of Christ’s Passion*, Cambridge, 2001, passim, esp. pp. 156–159, 209–238.

24 <http://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/opere-arte/schede/20300-00002/> [accessed 20.06.2019].

25 Most recent research outcomes in: S. Lomartire ed., *Il Crocifisso ottoniano di Vercelli: indagini tecnologiche, diagnostica, restauri*, Vercelli, 2016.

26 Cf. D. Adams, op. cit., p. 212.

27 J. J. Kopeć, *Męka Pańska w religijnej kulturze polskiego średniowiecza. Studium nad pasyjnymi motywami i tekstami liturgicznymi*, Warsaw, 1975, pp. 79–82, 88–91, 94–99, 101 ff. (esp. 107); Idem,

The *Tunica manicata* in representations of the crucified Christ

The changes in theology help explain the growing popularity of images that exposed Christ's body in Romanesque art. However, there can also be observed a parallel renewed occurrence of the motif of the crucified Christ whose body is covered by a long garment. Initially, this iconography features in Ottonian miniature painting, and ivory reliefs, where Christ usually is shown alive, but other elements of the scene allude to blood spilled on the cross. Those are: Longinus who pierces Christ's body and a chalice for the blood of Eucharist. However, there are exceptions as well. For instance, the image in the Aachen Gospels shows Christ already passed away.

Ottonian miniatures almost consistently show Christ in a long-sleeved tunic with sleeves reaching the elbows or wrists. Moreover, in contrast to the stiffly hanging *colobium*, the tunic is shown here tied or belted at the waist. Another notable element is the use of multiple, often asymmetrically draped folds. The casual lines of the fabric emphasize the anatomy and expose the natural position of the body, which becomes increasingly common in Ottonian art. Despite the differences in their details, most of these robes can be identified as liturgical vestments. Sometimes it is the chasuble with the alba showing from underneath. Sometimes the liturgical function is suggested by the stole. In most of these miniature paintings, the robes are purple or red with gold accessories. However, this is not the rule: for instance, in Sacramentary of Bishop Abraham (Munich, BSB, CLM. 6421, f. 33v) Christ is shown clothed in white, which can be interpreted as a symbol of an innocent sacrifice made on the altar of the cross of a Lamb Without Blemish.

Images from the Ottonian codices inspired sculptural representations of the crucified Christ in the following centuries. Christ is shown in richly draped asymmetrical robes with long sleeves that resemble priests' dress on an 11th-century crucifix from Uznach, and another 12th-century crucifix from Erp.²⁸

Meanwhile, in the sculpture from Central and Southern Europe spreads an image of Christ in a long-sleeved tunic, simple in shape and tied at the waist with a narrow belt. Among notable examples are those of the 12th and 13th century from Switzerland, Germany, France, Catalonia and Italy e.g. the crucifixes from: Alpnach, Switzerland (currently in the Museum in Engelberg); the cathedral of Braunschweig; the church of St. Martini in Emmerich, North Rhine-Westphalia; the chapel of Saint-Sauve in the cathedral of Amiens; the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona (so called the Majestat Batlló, probably from a church in the comarca of Garrotxa, Catalonia); the church of Sant Cristòfol in Beget, Catalonia; the monastery of Sant Joan les Fonts, Catalonia (currently in the Museu d'Art, Girona);

"Przemiany ideowe w pasyjnej pobożności średniowiecza", in: *Studia z dziejów liturgii*, vol. 2, eds. M. Rechowicz, W. Schenk, Lublin, 1976, pp. 485–498.

28 M. Armandi, "Regnavit a ligno Deus. Il Crocifisso tunicato di proporzioni monumentali", in: *Il Volto Santo di Sansepolcro. Un grande capolavoro medievale rivelato dal restauro*, ed. A. M. Maetzke, Milan, 1994, pp. 154–155.

the church of Sant Boi de Lluçanès, Catalonia (currently Museu Episcopal, Vic); the cathedral of Sansepolcro, Tuscany; the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Sondalo, Lombardy; the monastery of Santa Croce del Corvo in Bocca di Magra, Liguria; the Romanesque Italian crucifix currently in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York and the crucifix in the Museo d'Arte Sacra in San Gimignano, Tuscany.²⁹

These works show Christ alive, with wide open eyes and with no signs of suffering. His body is generally shown very symmetrically: the figure stands straight, the arms are horizontally stretched to the sides, the head is either stiffly bent forward or gently reclined to the right.

The cut, the vertical folds, the lack of draping and a belt at the waist help identify the garment in most of these images as the *tunica manicata*. Much like the *colobium*, the *tunica manicata* has its roots in antiquity and was used by the Christians as a priest's attire – in this function it was most often belted with a narrow *cingulum* with long ends.³⁰ The *cingulum* is almost always highly distinct in the crucifixes: on the level of the navel it forms a decorative knot, while its ends hang freely highlighting the symmetrical pose of the body.

The use of clerical vestments and the image of Christ alive brings associations with the early Byzantine iconography of the Crucifixion with Christ in the *colobium*, yet it seems that the direct inspiration came from Ottonian works and the main goal was to emphasize priesthood rather than the triumph of Christ. The *tunica manicata*, which accentuates the role of Christ as a priest, works to highlight the supremacy of spiritual over secular power. The popularity of this iconography can be linked with the Gregorian Reform, the goal of which was to secure the independence of the church from the state.³¹

However, the aforementioned images of Christ dressed in the *tunica manicata* with a *cingulum* carry a more important meaning, which is suggested by this characteristic belt. Since patristic times, the *cingulum* was considered one of the most important symbols of persistence in the struggle against carnal temptations. For instance, for John Cassian, "the monk's warrior status was symbolized by his clothing, understood as a spiritual armor capable of deflecting sin, the most important component of which was the 'double belt' (*cingulum duplicis*) with which he girded his loins for battle". This belt represented, above all, the wearer's determination to extinguish the burning darts of lust with "the frost of abstinence".³² This tradition

29 E. Panofsky, "Krucyfiks w katedrze w Brunszwiku i 'Volto Santo' w Lukce", in: Idem, *Średniowiecze*, trans. G. Jurkowlaniec, Warsaw, 2001, p. 70; J. Camps i Soria, "The Romanesque Majesty at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum", *Boletín del Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao*, 2012, 6, pp. 15–38; Armandi, op. cit., pp. 148–155; P. Refice, "Riflessioni sul Volto Santo di Sansepolcro", in: *Arte in terra d'Arezzo. Il Medioevo*, eds. M. Collareta, P. Refice, Florence, 2010, pp. 83–89; A. M. Maetzke, "Il Volto Santo di Sansepolcro", in: *Il Volto Santo in Europa...*, pp. 193–207; G. de Francovich, "A Romanesque School of Wood Carvers", *The Art Bulletin*, 1937, 19, no. 1, p. 49.

30 J. Bingham, op. cit., pp. 231–232.

31 M. Burger, *The Shaping of Western Civilization: From Antiquity to the Present*, Toronto, 2013, pp. 191–192.

32 K. A. Smith, *War and the Making of Medieval Monastic Culture*, Woodbridge, 2011, p. 91.

was still much alive in the late Middle Ages. For instance, in his biography of St. Thomas Aquinas, William of Tocco writes that when the saint prayed to God to help him preserve his virtue, he asked for the “belt (*cingulum*) of perpetual virginity”.³³ For this reason, Christ’s robes described above should be linked with the new vision of priesthood defined by celibacy, which developed during the Gregorian Reform. At the time celibacy was legally sanctioned, and life in virtue, that dated back to the beginnings of monastic life, fortified a particular vision of manhood. By some scholars it is interpreted as a sexless “third gender”, by others as “extreme masculinity” that demonstrates the superiority of priests over secular people, and, above all, of men over women.³⁴

The Volto Santo of Lucca

The Volto Santo of Lucca is the most famous image of Christ that shows him dressed in the *tunica manicata* with a *cingulum*. It is a wooden crucifix with a larger than life-sized Christ figure placed on the cross, more than two and a half metres high and wide.³⁵ Christ is shown with his arms stretched wide, in a straight, symmetrical pose with his head slightly turned to the right. The tunic that covers his figure creates rhythmical folds – diagonal on the sleeves, vertical on the torso – emphasising the symmetry of the body. The ends of the *cingulum* that ties the tunic reach almost as low as the bottom edge of the robe that hangs asymmetrically – elongated on the left it offers a compositional correspondence to the head turned to the other side. These slight deviations from the overall symmetrical composition make an impression that the figure is in motion. The feet protruding from the tunic, directed towards the ground, turn freely to the sides. Their arrangement and the lack of a *suppendaneum* are in contradiction to the pose of the body – even though there is no support to the feet, the body does not seem to be hanging. Christ is shown levitating in front of the cross. There are no signs of physical suffering either. Nevertheless, the figure exudes a melancholy sadness. The face is calm, resigned. The wide-open eyes are turned downwards.

Although the Volto Santo epitomises the iconography typical for the 12th and 13th century, there have been controversies around its dating.

Archival materials suggest that already in the third quarter of the 11th century an artefact called the *Crux Vetus* was venerated in the cathedral of Lucca and the

33 R. M. Karras, “Thomas Aquinas’s Chastity Belt: Clerical Masculinity in Medieval Europe”, in: *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, eds. L. M. Bitel, F. Lifshitz, Philadelphia, 2013, p. 62.

34 See M. C. Miller, “Masculinity, Reform, and Clerical Culture: Narratives of Episcopal Holiness in the Gregorian Era”, *Church History*, 2003, 72, no. 1, pp. 27–28; Cf. J. Murray, “One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?”, in: *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, eds. L. M. Bitel, F. Lifshitz, Philadelphia, 2013, pp. 34–51.

35 A. Guerra, *Storia del Volto Santo*, Lucca, 1881, reprinted by Whitefish, 2010, p. 28.

cathedral's inventory of 1109 records an altar *ante Vultum*.³⁶ For this reason, some scholars claim that over the course of the 12th century an older cross was replaced with the present crucifix. It has even been suggested that the original cross was a Syriac crucifix from the 8th century. The hypothesis of the existence of two crucifixes in Lucca was questioned by Clara Baracchini and Antonio Caleca, among others, who based their claims around an earlier dating of the sculpture presently stored in Lucca. For example, Erwin Panofsky dated the present crucifix to early 11th century, indicating the links between its iconography and the Syriac-Palestinian tradition; a similar dating is proposed by Mario Salmi, who linked the artefact with the French workshops influenced by the Byzantine tradition.³⁷

In the light of the contradictory theories that do not cover the entirety of iconographic material, it seems impossible to determine the exact date when the Lucca crucifix was made. With the present state of research, it is also difficult to conclusively identify the place of origin of the sculpture. However, there is no evidence of direct links with the Syriac-Palestinian type traditionally defined as *Christus triumphans in colobium*, nor any evidence supporting the hypotheses on the Byzantine origin of the sculpture since, as was stated above, there are numerous analogies for this type in Ottonian and later art.

Nevertheless, the theses suggesting an Eastern origin of the Lucca crucifix are noteworthy. Among their authors are not only art historians but also medieval hagiographers who claimed that the Volto Santo was a work made by St. Nicodemus – the witness of Christ's Passion and his burial.³⁸ He was assumed to have been inspired by God to carve the crucifix modelled on the imprint on the shroud. According to the legend the sculpture was made from the tree pointed by God and completed by angels.³⁹ Convictions about the crucifix's "Eastern origin" and "miraculous etiology" have shaped the process of sensual perception and the reception

36 R. Silva, "La datazione del Volto Santo di Lucca", in: *La Santa Croce di Lucca. Storia, tradizioni, immagini. Atti del Convegno* (Lucca 2001), ed. M. Zingoni, Empoli, 2003, p. 78.

37 See *ibid.* p. 78; G. de Francovich, "Il Volto Santo di Lucca", *Bollettino Storico Lucchese*, 1936, 8, pp. 3–28; R. Haussherr, "Das Imervardkreuz un der Volto-Santo-Typ", *Zeitschrift für Kunstwissenschaft*, 1962, 16, pp. 129–170; C. Baracchini, A. Caleca, *Il Duomo di Lucca*, Lucca, 1973, pp. 14–15; A. Caleca, "Il Volto Santo, un problema critico", in: *Il Volto Santo storia e culto. Catalogo della mostra* (Lucca 1982), eds. C. Baracchini, M. T. Filieri, Lucca, 1982, pp. 59–75; E. Panofsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 71–75; M. Salmi, *La scultura romanica in Toscana*, Florence, 1928, p. 72.

38 The notion about Nicodemus's authorship was a typical element of medieval legends about venerated crucifixes especially in Spain, see C. Schleif, "Nicodemus and Sculpotors: Self-Reflexivity in Works by Adam Kraft and Tilman Riemenschneider", *The Art Bulletin*, 1993, 75, no. 4, p. 610. For example, Nicodemus was mentioned as an author of the crucifix in the Cathedral of Burgos. "Burgos and Its Cathedral", *The Illustrated Magazine of Art*, 1853, 1, no. 5, p. 270. The same was said about the Santa Majestat de Caldes de Montbui and the Santa Majestat de la Pabla de Lillet. Jordi Camps i Soria, "The Romansque Majesty at the Bilbao Fine Art Museum", *Buletina: Bilboko Arte Eder Museoa*, 2012, no. 6, p. 9.

39 J.-C. Schmitt, "Les images d'une image. La figuration du Volto Santo de Lucca dans les manuscrits enluminés du moyen âge", in: *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, eds. H. L. Kessler, G. Wolf, Bologna, 1998, pp. 210–12; C. Schleif, "Nicodemus and Sculptors: Self-

of the work throughout its history and have contributed to the veneration of the Volto Santo, which continues to this day.⁴⁰

The moment of most intensive expansion of the cult of the Volto Santo in Italy, as well as in Central and Northern Europe, was observed in the 14th and 15th centuries. Scenes of the Crucifixion had already been dominated by this time by the *Christus patiens* in perizoma type. The Lucca Christ, evoking tranquillity and peace, dressed in a simple robe, was certainly an exception among other crucifixes produced in central Italy and was identified by its contemporary viewers as archaic and exotic, which fired their imaginations and supported the legends of its Eastern origin. These legends, together with the late-medieval demand for miraculous images whose cult was gradually replacing the cult of relics, contributed to the growing popularity of the Volto Santo. This is confirmed by numerous preserved manuscripts⁴¹ that describe the legendary history of the Volto Santo and the miracles performed by the crucifix, and by representations of the Volto Santo in mural painting.

The belief in the exceptional nature of the Volto Santo found its expression in the decoration of the figure and the cross with additional applications, some of which have been preserved to this day in the cathedral treasury; while the appearance of others and their arrangement can be deduced on the basis of numerous iconographic sources from the period such as: pilgrim signs produced in Lucca, local coins and medals, and documents from the municipal archives.

The most characteristic element of this set is a metal rim in the shape of an incomplete circle. Until today it works as a kind of frame for the figure of the Crucified: it envelops the arms of the cross and the top part of the vertical wooden beam, while its two ends, directed towards Christ's feet, are decorated with the *fleur-de-lis* motif. Probably the oldest representation documenting the presence of the rim comes from a parchment stored at the Archivio Arcivescovile in Lucca titled *Capitoli della compagnia del Volto Santo* from 1306.⁴² This drawing shows that the crucifix was exhibited on the altar, which is also confirmed by other manuscripts. Moreover, documents from the 12th and 13th century suggest that the altar was placed in a separate chapel built in the Lucca cathedral for the venerated image.⁴³

The figure of Christ itself was also adorned. Notably, the entire sculpted tunic was covered with the textile robe. As evidenced by a drawing from 1306 and the abovementioned murals and miniatures, this was possibly a dark, long-sleeved gar-

Reflexivity in Works by Adam Kraft and Tilman Riemenschneider", *The Art Bulletin*, 1993, 75, no. 4, pp. 608–609; J. Ross, N. Erichsen, *The Story of Lucca*, London, 1912, p. 6.

40 Cf. J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Obraz osobliwy. Hermeneutyczna lektura źródeł ikonograficznych*, vol. 1, *Wielkie opowieści*, Cracow, 2000, pp. 303–314.

41 For a discussion of selected images see J.-C. Schmitt, op. cit., pp. 218–227; H. Madocks, "The Rapondi, The Volto Santo di Lucca, and Manuscript Illumination in Paris ca. 1400", in: *Patrons, Authors And Workshops: Books And Book Production in Paris Around 1400*, eds. G. Croenen, P. F. Ainsworth, Leuven, 2006, pp. 109–110.

42 I. Sabbatini, "ARVO: Digital Archive of the Volto Santo. An ancient archive in the digital age", *Almatourism. Special Issue*, 2018, 8, p. 207, fig. 6.

43 A. Guerra, op. cit., p. 83.

ment with a simple cut decorated with golden ornaments at the edges of sleeves, at the waist, along the vertical axis under the waist, and along the bottom edge. Golden applications are preserved to this day and are dated to the 14th century. This attire was completed with a crown and golden or silver shoes. The crown on Christ's head is shown on coins issued in Lucca in the 13th century and the shoes are documented in the above-discussed iconographic sources from the 14th century.⁴⁴

Decorative applications on the Lucca crucifix represent a typical way of distinguishing cult images. Most often, contrary to common belief, these are not extraordinary works, hence the need to individualize their appearance. Covered with precious robes, embellished with gold and decorated, they seemed more attractive to the faithful. Moreover, the figure dressed in an actual robe gains the status of a living body and facilitates the identification of the image with the prototype in the cult practice. As David Freedberg writes: "People do not garland, wash, or crown images just out of habit; they do so because all such acts are symptoms of a relationship between image and respondent that is clearly predicated on the attribution of powers which transcend the purely material aspect of the object".⁴⁵

A similar process is at work in case of the Volto Santo. As shown above, in Southern and Central Europe, crucifixes of this type were not uncommon. Moreover, the late medieval religious communities might have viewed the simple sculptural form and the modest dress of the Volto Santo as primitive, even though these features substantiated their belief in the work's origin in the East. This is why the figure was dressed and decorated with sumptuous accessories. This way, the original vestment and iconography that inspired the legend of St. Nicodemus ceased to be visible. This is confirmed by painted replicas – they do not document such important elements as the *tunica manicata* with the *cingulum*, the bare feet, or the melancholy sadness emanating from the delicately carved face. Instead, they show Christ dressed in a robe with golden applications, with a crown and shoes.

The symbolical meaning of ceremonial, richly decorated robes is twofold. On the one hand, it is a reference to the vision from the Book of Revelation: "I saw [...] someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest" (Revelation 1:12–13), on the other hand, it accentuates Christ's humanity because the ritual of dressing the figure is a confirmation of his sensual corporeality. However, both the dress that covers the figure of Christ and the robes put on the sculpture make not effort to emphasize the anatomy of the Crucified. Therefore, the senses of the faithful-pilgrim-viewer are subjected to contradictory stimuli – they stand in front of a figure whose dress affords it the status of a genuine body, yet it also emphasizes its status as an artefact. This effect culminates with decorative applications and the placing of the crucifix on the altar, which stresses the sculpture as an object. This dualism is concurrent with the

44 C. Barachini, A. Caleca, op. cit., pp. 143–145; M. Seidel, R. Silva, *The Power of Images, the Images of Power. Lucca as an Imperial City: Political Iconography*, Berlin, 2007, pp. 251–255.

45 D. Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago, 1989, p. 91.

etiological legend whose essence is the enduring relationship of the image with both the body and the medium that represents it. This allows the viewer to emphatically identify with Christ and, at the same time, builds a distance towards the sculpture-relic made by Nicodemus himself.

These contradictory sensations experienced by the faithful produce a particular kind of ambivalence which is well illustrated by mural paintings that show the Lucca crucifix. In these images Christ's robe is usually highly geometrical, to emphasize the stiffness and majesty of the figure and therefore its presence as a "statue" rather than its "reality". This stands in contrast with the other elements resulting in the lively appearance of Christ's facial expression: the wide-open eyes and the gaze of Christ directed towards the adoring figure represented usually at his feet. In the other examples Christ looks straight at the viewer, what even more enhances the impression of him being alive.

Painted replicas of the Volto Santo

To this day nearly seventy mural paintings or fragments have been preserved that are identified as representations of the Volto Santo of Lucca. They were produced from the third quarter of the 14th century until the end of the 15th century.⁴⁶ A large number of examples allows us to distinguish these paintings as a separate iconographic type – a Volto Santo type of Crucifixion. What distinguishes them are the rim around the arms of the cross and Christ's ceremonial dress. Most commonly, the latter is a dark long-sleeved tunic of simple cut that falls either stiffly or in vertical folds onto Christ's feet. It has a wide golden belt at the waist. A similar stripe goes from the waist vertically down towards the bottom edge decorated with a golden border. The cuffs and the collar are also decorated. Recurrent are also a sumptuous necklace on Christ's chest, and a crown on his head. Shoes are among the most important attributes. They can be linked with a 12th-century legend about a poor minstrel who offered the miraculous image his music instead of a votive. Christ rewarded him by taking off his precious shoe⁴⁷. This became an element of the iconography of the Volto Santo. Among other recurrent attributes are the chalice commonly placed under Christ's foot and the setting: an altar on which the crucifix was presented and a fabric hanging behind it – usually a red curtain decorated with golden circles, stars, dots, lilies or foliate ornaments. Occasionally, the composition would also include a chapel or elements of architecture such as balustrades, arcades or columns, which was to allude to the way the crucifix was displayed in Lucca.

What all the images in the Volto Santo type share is the way the figure of Christ is presented. He is always shown alive, with open eyes, he makes direct eye contact

46 For a complete catalogue of works see S. Martinelli, *L'immagine del Volto Santo di Lucca: il successo europeo di un'iconografia medievale*, Pisa, 2016, pp. 145–184.

47 G. Schnürer, J. M. Ritz, *St. Kümmeris und Volto Santo*, Düsseldorf, 1934, pp. 159–178; V. Bertolucci Pizzorusso, *La Vergine e il Volto Santo. Il miracolo del Giulare*, Lucca, 2009, pp. 23–25.

with the viewer or the figure kneeling at the foot of the crucifix – the legendary minstrel, an anonymous pilgrim or a donor – who works as the figuration of the viewer inside the pictorial space. Moreover, the painted replicas fully express the ambiguity of the position of Christ on the cross. Although his arms are nailed to the horizontal beam, nothing indicates that he is hanging on it. His body seems to stand stable and straight. This impression is emphasized by the position of the feet that seem to be supported by the altar. Curiously, most images do not show the bottom part of the vertical beam of the cross. This way Christ is almost standing on the altar stone. This intensifies the effect of liveliness of the figure and lends it the status of an image of a person rather than of sculpture. Nevertheless, although shown alive, Christ is disembodied: there are no signs of physical suffering, and the wounds in his feet and hands are barely visible, the robe – always rendered flatly and synthetically – deprives the figure of any sensual aspect.

At the same time, elements that reconstruct the setting of the Lucca crucifix – the rim and the fabric in the background, as well as occasionally elements of architecture that suggest the chapel – emphasize the relationship of the image with the sculpture-relic from Lucca. When the viewer's attention is directed at these details of the image, the impression of encountering a living Christ turns into a recognition of a particular cult object. The moment of transformation is elusive, while the status of the image is intentionally fluid. The power of painting reveals itself here, offering the possibility of ambiguous spatial relations and the forming of contradictory sensations.

In mural painting, the *Volto Santo* type displays relative unity. However, its iconography is so complex that there are no identical images. The robe, although usually dark, can be in red, blue or even white, the applications along the edges, the cuffs and the collar always differ in some details; the belt at the waist comes in various shapes, with one or three crosses placed above it. The rim around the upper arms of the cross commonly replicates the form of an incomplete circle, but it can also be found as a part of a curve, a semicircle, an oval, a closed circle or an elaborate polyfoil shape. Still, its two ends are consistently adorned with a *fleur-de-lis* or a similar flower. Notably, the rim itself was relatively often eliminated from the image. Apparently, it was not as important for identification as the ceremonial dress. The latter played a significant role in the reception of the replicas of the *Volto Santo* in religious centres remote from Lucca.

The robed body on the cross

As mentioned above, the late medieval art was dominated by the scenes of the Passion showing a tortured Christ covered only with the perizoma. Those express most fully the late medieval mentality and religiosity. At the same time, it is a period when corporeality was primarily considered a source of sin. In this context, Christ's body stands as corporeality *à rebours* – on the cross it loses its sinful aspect and becomes the medium of salvation. Such images were particularly useful for the

ascetic practices of *compassio* that referred to the instructions of the Church Fathers, e.g. the story about the hermit who “took off his clothes, and put a girdle about his loins and stretched out his hands and said ‘Thus ought the monk to be: stripped naked of everything worldly and crucify himself against temptation and the world’s struggles’”.⁴⁸

When compared to these images, the “robed” body of the Crucified might have been perceived as a hidden body – a body that is subject to desire and inspires it. In the late Middle Ages, a woman’s body was seen as such.⁴⁹ This is why the 15th-century representations of the Volto Santo have been linked to the cult of a legendary bearded woman saint, venerated in the Netherlands and the German-speaking countries, who died as a martyr on the cross.⁵⁰ The connection between the two cults in the North of Europe is suggested by murals from St. Nicholas’ church in Rostock, among others. A 1450 cycle that covers the walls of this church presents the scenes from the legend of the Volto Santo and, placed in the vicinity, an image of a crucified bearded woman. She is identified with an inscription as Ontkommer, which in Flemish means the saviour of the unfortunates.⁵¹ The saint was also named Wilgefortis, which was originally a male name. In German she was called Kümmeris – a name that connoted concern or worry.⁵² In a print from 1507 (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Inv.-Nr. VII/19q), which presents the legend of her martyrdom, this name is used in the masculine form: Sankt Kümernuß.⁵³ It is illustrated by a woodcut by Hans Burgkmair which shows, as the inscription informs, “Die Bildnus zu Luca”. This juxtaposition of the legend about the crucified bearded woman and the image of the Volto Santo confirms the connection between the two cults. Moreover, the bearded female saint was often referred to as the Hülfe, Hülpe, Hulpe, Hölpe, Gehülfe.⁵⁴ These names point to the images of Christ the Helper (*Christus adiutor*), whose name in the late medieval German functioned as Sankt Hulpe, helige Helper, Helfer, Gehilfe. It seems that the same name was used to refer to the replicas of the Volto Santo or other Romanesque crucifixes that showed a robed Christ. Those were different from the images of *Christus patiens* and were believed to exert a strong power in comforting the miserable. It is also worth adding that the cult of Christ the Helper was sporadically combined with the cult

48 M. R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing. Female, Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West*, Wellwood, 1989, p. 63.

49 Ibidem, pp. 81–82.

50 Cf. J. Zänker, *Crucifixae. Frauen am Kreuz*, Berlin, 1998, pp. 46–48.

51 D. A. King, “The Cult of St. Wilgefortis in Flanders, Holland, England and France”, in: *Am Kreuz – eine Frau: Anfänge – Abhängigkeiten – Aktualisierungen*, eds. S. Glockzin-Bever, M. Kraatz, Münster, 2003, p. 57.

52 Ibidem, pp. 78–79; G. Schnürer, J.M. Ritz, op. cit., pp. 34–35, 54–76.

53 Ibidem, pp. 34–35.

54 S. Tomkowicz, “Legendaria św. Wilgefortis albo Frasnoblwa i obraz na Zwierzyńcu w Krakowie”, *Rocznik Krakowski*, 1913, 15, p. 4; G. Schnürer, J. M. Ritz, op. cit., p. 77 and following, esp. 108; J. Zänker, op. cit., p. 46.

of the legendary Saint Hulpe, sometimes identified with Saint Ulpian, one of the 48 martyrs of Lyon.⁵⁵

These circumstances contributed to the fluid identity of the Volto Santo figure which can be seen as an expression of the belief in the union of all mankind possible by the Incarnation and Redemption. It is concurrent with St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, whose teachings were influential for late medieval theology⁵⁶: "For all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:27–28). Particularly significant in this text seems the idea of gender equality built upon the doctrine of the Incarnation.

In this context, it is paramount to verify the interpretation of Christ's robes in late medieval scenes of the Crucifixion. It seems that the tunic is not merely an attribute of the ruler and priest, but above all, it plays the function similar to that of the *colobium* in early medieval representations, namely that of manifesting Christ's human nature. It was not only in the physical suffering but also in corporeality as a potential source of sin that the faithful found his or her somatic identity with God the Saviour. The act of overcoming sexuality, symbolised by the robe and the belt, "took human beings [viewers] back to the prelapsarian one flesh that was created in God's image".⁵⁷

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55 G. Schnürer, J. M. Ritz, *St. Kummernis...*, pp. 78–79, 99–102, 108.

56 C. C. Anderson, "St. Paul and Reform Rhetoric in the High Middle Ages", in: *A Companion to St. Paul in the Middle Ages*, ed. S. Cartwright, Leiden, Boston, 2012, p. 334.

57 Cf. J. Murray, op. cit., p. 50.

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