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IS THE “VOLTO SANTO DI LUCCA” A COPY OF THE TURIN SHROUD? A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE TWO IMAGES MADE BY COMPUTER

Abstract

The “Volto Santo di Lucca” (Holy Face of Lucca) is a wooden tunic-dressed crucifix, internally hollow, which is kept in St Martin's Cathedral of Lucca, Italy. The most apparent characteristic of this statue is the marked difference between the “schematic” aspect of the body and the very “realistic” one of the face, which appears to resemble very much the face of the Man of the Turin Shroud, as it can be seen by naked eye. An analogous resemblance is present in the very elongate hands of the statue. The hagiographic tradition says that the crucifix was carved by Nicodemus, with the aid of angels for the face, and that it came miraculously to Lucca in 782 A. D. There are valid historical testimonies that a similar crucifix has been present in Lucca since the end of the eighth century, although many historians of the fine arts date it between the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Since Nicodemus is, together with Joseph of Arimathaea, the disciple who provided for the burial of Jesus (see John, 19, 38 ff.), such an attribution puts the “Volto Santo di Lucca” in close relation with the Shroud. Some medieval “legend writers” say that Nicodemus carved it, having the Shroud as a model; some of them say that it had been the first “reliquary” of the Shroud in Holy Land, before this relic was transferred to Edessa. The nature of “*eikôn acheiropoiotos*”, of “image not made by (human) hand”, traditionally attributed to the “Volto Santo di Lucca”, together with the similarities before mentioned, leads to think that this crucifix — or the lost original one, if the historians of the fine arts were right — may have been carved as an “authentic copy” of the parts of the image visible on the Shroud, which were permitted to be reproduced in the first centuries of the Christian era, like the better known painted “Holy Faces” and “Veronicae”. The present communication reports a comparison, made by computer, between the images of the face and of the hands visible on the Turin Shroud, and the corresponding parts of the body in the statue named “Volto Santo di Lucca”.