

The Year 742

A wagon pulled by oxen passes along the simple byways, white with dust and marble fragments, alongside the river Lucido. These roads lead from the lands of Lunae by way of the Garfagnana mountains to the swampy Lucca plain. The carriage, though poor and simple, is very different from those made in these valleys, appearing both modern and primitive, maybe because of its heavy iron-ringed wheels, the work of talented smithies, or for the wooden seat, similar to ebony, covered by iron-studded leather.

It is carrying a precious and ancient load, which seems to have arrived from the East, belonging to a man who was present at the worst crime ever committed. The wooden statue – because this load was in fact a statue – has been travelling for more than seven hundred years, crossing Persia, Antioch, Magna Grecia, the lands of Alba (home of the Slavic gypsies), then France, and from there heading towards the *Caput Mundi*, Rome. It chooses to pause in the bishopric of Lunae, to pay homage to a great ancient civilization.

Some say it has arrived by sea, having crossed the Mediterranean and avoided the pirate attacks and naval flotillas that preside over this closed and shallow sea.

In the nearby and friendly Republic of Lucca, an important autonomous religious and commercial capital, Giovanni, its first Bishop, is alerted about this grandiose occurrence in a dream. So he travels to the Apuane valley to carry out the necessary preparations for this miraculously created icon. The two bishoprics are connected like two stars in heaven: Lun and Luk, moon and light, moon and sun.

It is not purely casual that the crescent shape of Luni's gulf honors the moon and Diana, while the Lucca plain lies in a triangular valley between mountains that, free of any impediment, look toward the sun rising in the East.

The carriage finally leaves Lunae, leaving behind only one of the many reliquaries that it contains. This is simply blood, the blood of the Body, which will then be put into a silver ampule to be venerated and preserved over the centuries.

An identical ampule is in the brocade purse on the seat of the carriage where His Eminence sits. Together with the Crucifix, this will be brought to the church in Lucca named for Frediano, the illuminated saint who was both bishop and engineer, reclaiming the Lucca flood-land and building 28 parish churches.

The carriage now passes through the Roman roads alongside a stream known as *Lucido per non intorbidir mai e che produce squisitissime trote* (because it never gets muddy and produces exquisite trout).

Each town along the banks of this fresh stream has a mill for grinding chestnuts and grain.

Each town in this valley has a fortification, bridges, foundation stones, and churches.

Even though the Roman domination changed their appearance, and the successive conversion to Christianity changed their religion, the Lunae and Apuane peoples have maintained their own culture and tradition, the Lunae and Apuane peoples maintain their own culture and tradition, which Giovanni calls pagan or profane because it celebrates the earth, the water, the mountains, the village heroes, the harvests, and the hunt.

At each village the carriage makes a stop, the wooden statue is exhibited and praised by the Bishop's spokesman in the broad open spaces in front of the humble churches. The people gather, make the sign of the Cross, attempt in vain to touch the statue, and



An imaginary text
inspired by the legend
written by Leobinus
(died 557 d.c.) regarding
the Volto Santo's arrival in Lucca

run to call their friends and family who are at work in the fields and are uninformed about this sensational happening.

Pontremoli, Ceretoli, Dobbiana, Bagnone, Fivizzano, Regnana, Giuncugnano ... each village receives the testimony of the existence of Jesus, carved from cedar by Nicodemus and by the angels who lowered Christ from the cross. According to the Scriptures, Nicodemus and Joseph were the first to receive the body and the blood, the Chalice itself.

Each village is given a reliquary, a piece of cloth, a bit of wood, a miniature of the statue, a symbol of veneration for those who come in the future.

The reliquary is added to or substitutes for the cult objects present in the church: the foundation stones, the vestments, the painted and sculpted representations. These signify that only a single belief or way exists, *esiste un solo corso*.

From the mountain watershed, after leaving the Lunae valley route, the group descends into the Garfagnana and intermediary valleys: Castelnuovo with its fortresses, beautiful and mysterious Barga, Mozzano and its river, Decimo, Ottavo, Sesto, and finally, crossing the Auser river at the Moriano ford, to Holy Lucca itself.

Having passed the amphitheatre, the carriage arrives at the city walls to the West. The citizens and lords coming to the market take the time to approach the carriage bearing the Bishop's escutcheon, paying scarce attention to the less-than-noble vehicle. They are still unaware of the immense treasure that is being brought to them.

Next, the cargo is uncovered and unloaded from the carriage. The statue's enveloping carpets and embroideries are removed, to triumphantly reveal it to the Lucca people, who herald it.

Most of these people are covered only by rags, but they intend to honor the carved Crucifix in their own way, with a gift: freshly-gathered fruit, a woven basket, silk washed in the Fossi.

Others have come with a cup of water, eggs hatched that same morning, or rosary beads, confident that these will be blessed.

The main altar of Frediano Church, quickly cleared of other objects, welcomes the Crucifix. The guardians at the western gate and the faithful who gather here pass the night with mystical gratification, awakening the next morning before dawn. Before going to their fields and farm animals, they want to again see the sculpted Holy Face. They want to enjoy the blessing of their children, their fields, their animals.

In stupor mixed with shock, they find that Christ is no longer in his place. The Bishop, who slept overnight in the canonical apartments, is called by a chief of the guards, who while crying is also trembling for this event, imagining what his punishment will be for the tragic disappearance.

At the same time, a nobleman comes to see the Bishop and is allowed to enter. The Bishop, pale and bathed in sweat, turns to listen to him, understanding only four words: *Crux – est – ecclesia – Giovanni*.

After its disappearance from San Frediano, the Crucifix reappears in front of the Cathedral of San Giovanni and Reparata: the city is saved.

– by *LustrodaLucca* at www.justinlucca.it
(tr. by Grapevine)

See the illustrations by *LustrodaLucca* at Google

(Ed. note: The present-day Cathedral of San Martino had not yet been built. San Giovanni e Reparata Church is the site of concerts held by Puccinielasualucca.)

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