

The concept of “acheiropoietos”, the iconography of the face of Christ and the veil of Manoppello

Heinrich Pfeiffer

Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Piazza della Pilotta, 4, 00187 Roma, Italia.
E-mail: Pfeiffer@unigre.it

Abstract *In the New Testament there is first the concept of “acheiropoietos” meaning not made by human hands. This word is opposed to “cheiropoietos” that means made by human culture. There are especially two objects in the Bible which were always named with this term: the temple and the idols. God cannot live in a handmade temple, and the idols are nothing, specially, not gods, because they are handmade. Not hand made in the New Testament is the transfigured body of Christ. Only centuries later we find the same word used by byzantine writers and now “acheiropoietos” is an icon that was translated in the year 574 from Kamoulia in Cappadocia to Constantinople. The icon disappeared from the capital of the byzantine empire in the year 705 ca. After the iconoclastic quarrels the byzantine army conquered Edessa and translated the other authentic image of Christ, the so called Mandyllion from this town to Constantinople in the year 944 in order to substitute the disappeared Kamoulia image with this relic as banner for the byzantine soldiers. Now it is the question, if we have some traces in the eastern iconography of these two relics, of the Mandyllion and the Kamoulia image. We find there exactly two different authentic icons of Christ with different hair styles: the pantocrator icon and the Mandyllion. The hair style of the pantocrator icon corresponds to the Shroud of Turin, but the Shroud of Turin corresponds also to the Mandyllion. So the confusing title “Mandyllion” should be changed because the different hair style can only fit with another authentic relic of Christ. As the old descriptions of the Kamoulia image by the byzantine writers corresponds with only one other object that is still present, with the veil of Manoppello, and the veil of Manoppello with the hair style of the Mandyllion icons, we have to conclude that the original Kamoulia image should be the veil of Manoppello. Always with one supposition that “acheiropoietos images of Christ are not to be found, than only realized in one exemplar, we can now give the statement, that the Mandyllion is the Shroud of Turin, the Kamoulia “acheiropoietos” the veil of Manoppello. A scientifically recognizable fact is that the technique of the fabrication of the Shroud of Turin is not known until the day; the veil of Manoppello with his changing colors in different lighting, forces us to the same conclusion.*

Keywords: Byzantine writers, icons of Christ, idols, relics as models for the icons

1. THE CONCEPT IN THE BIBLE

The word “acheiropoietos” is first to be found in some few texts of the New Testament and means the opposite of “cheiropoietos”, made by human hands. This item is applied to very few objects in the Old Testament, in first line to the temple and the images of gods, the “eidola”. God cannot live in a hand-made temple and all images of gods are nothing because they are hand-made. So Salomon in his prayer during the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem asks himself, if God can live in the house, that he has built for him [I Kings 8, 27]. King Ezequias prays before the Lord in the peril of the invasion of the Assyrian army, which was destroying all gods of all countries, but this gods are only hand-made and not the real God who creates all things on the earth and in the heaven [II Kings 19, 18]. The same description of the idols we find also in the famous Psalm 115, where we read on the verses 2- 4: “Why do the nations say, «Where is their God?» Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men.”

The idols are images, but they are hand-made, with other words objects of human culture. When we go from the word “cheiropoietos” to the word “acheiropoietos” adjoining the denying element “a”, that will mean that the object is like one of the creation of god, o supernatural one. In this meaning we find this word first only in the New Testament. In the gospel of Mark 14, 58, is said by the false testimonies before the tribunal of Jesus, that he was saying: “I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.”

The false accusation hides a very profound meaning, given by the gospel of John. There we read in the second chapter verse 21: “But the temple he had spoken of was his body.” So, reading the two quoted texts together, the temple, which is not hand-made, is an image: the body of the risen Christ. In the letter to the Hebrews we find in the chapter 9, 11: “When Christ came as high priest...he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say not a part of this creation.” What is this greater and more perfect tabernacle? It could not be the sky, the image of heaven or heaven itself, all created

Proceedings of the International Workshop on the Scientific approach to the Acheiropoietos Images, ENEA Frascati, Italy, 4-6 May 2010

things, visible and not visible. Could it mean the transformed body of the risen Christ? But even this interpretation does not make sense, if there is not an allusion on another object. That will mean, not only through the material cloth, but even through the bloodstains and the traces of the image on it. As this is a problem for exegetic interpretation, I will not go further than insisting that the concept of “acheiropoietos” is typical for different New Testament writers.

2. THE KAMOULIA IMAGE

Only centuries later the expression “acheiropoietos” appears in the writings of byzantine poets [1] and specially in a text of a byzantine historiographer of the 12th century, named Kedrenos. He informs us that in the year 574 were translated two important objects to Constantinople: parts of the true cross from Apameia in Syria and the “acheiropoietos” image of Christ from Kamoulia in Cappadocia [2]. The second object served as the banner of the byzantine army, and when the campaigns were victorious, the victory was not attributed to the Generals but to this marvelous image. In this occasions poems were formulated and the icon described. For instance after the battle on the river Arzamon in the year 587 Theophylaktos Simokatta described the image as made by divine art, not wowed as a textile and not painted [3].

Georgios Pisides writes on the war of the emperor Heraclius (610-640) against the Persians and the role of this image during the battles. He says that the emperor has taken the “divine figure and venerable image of the not written scripture, that was not designed by human hands, but made by the art of the Logos who was begotten without human seed, made by the Logos who forms the whole universe...”. Than the writer follows saying that the emperor “in trust on this archetype, that God has designed, began the battles” [4]. The same writer has done a poem in the image. Here we find the expression: “as not having a beginning, it was not produced by art, as not to say, it was paint without pencil.” [5]. The famous textile with his image of Christ disappeared from Constantinople even before the beginning of the iconoclastic disorders, exactly between the two periods of the reign of Justinian II, in the year 705 ca [6].

3. THE TWO ICONS OF CHRIST IN THE EASTERN ICONOGRAPHY

Which are the traces that left the “acheiropoietos” of the town Kamoulia, a small place in Cappadocia, in the iconography of the byzantine artists? That is not a trivial question, because another relic with traces of the face of Christ appeared already in the year 544 in Edessa and remained there until the year 943; the date of the beginning of his translation to the capital of the byzantine empire [7]. This other image on a textile is called Mandyllion or image

of the King Abgar. Now we have in the orthodox church, until the day, two principal representations of Christ, the pantocrator type and the icon of the Mandyllion. The pantocrator type is already present on an icon of the St. Catherine convent in the Sinai (see fig. 1) [8].

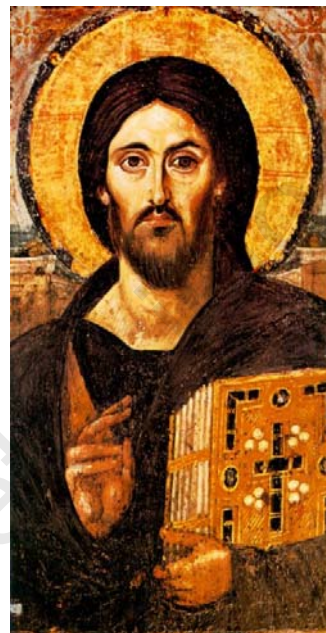


Figure 1. Jesus pantocrator 6th century St. Catherine Conv. Sinai (from Weitzmann).

Specially the division of the hairs in two different directions, one part laying on one shoulder, the other behind the neck, is characteristic for this type. It is used also on clear representations of the material cloth called Mandyllion in order to represent the head of the Lord on all first representations of the Mandyllion that are related in some way with the translation of the relic from Edessa to Constantinople during the years 943 and 944 (see fig. 2).

Only centuries later, beginning with an example of the 12th century, appears a icon of Christ, now always called Mandyllion, with a totally different hair style. The two parts of the long hairs are symmetrically disposed and divided at least in four branches. This type is represented by different Russian icons of the face of Christ from the 12th century onwards, always paint on a cloth. The first examples are in the Tretjakow Museum of Moscow (see fig. 3).

Now we ask ourself, if this other and second type of the true likeness of Christ could not better reflect elder disappeared icons of the Kamoulia veil, of the first textile, that was called “acheiropoietos”? We must never forget that the Mandyllion had to substitute the disappeared Kamoulia image in his role as the banner of the byzantine army.

Perhaps the still existing two relics with a mysterious image of Christ on a textile, the shroud of Turin and the veil of Manoppello can shed more light to this difficult and intricate problem.



Figure 2. Sakli Kilise, fresco, 10th century (photo Marinelli).



Figure 3. Mandylion, 12th century, Moscow Tretjakow Museum (Photo from Volto dei Volti Cristo I).

First of all there is to show the dependence of the hairstyle of the pantocrator type from the shroud of Turin. There is a bloodstain on the hair that enhances and creates for the observer the impression that one part of the hair of Christ is conducted behind the neck (see fig. 4). Always we can say, that all details, which are casual on the shroud, and also are to be found on works of art, especially in the iconography of Christ, determine a relation between the two. Only the casual and natural forms of details on the shroud can be first and the artwork second. With our observation and this principal we can say that all pantocrator icons depend on the shroud. It is only the question, if the Kamoulia image or the Mandylion is to identify with the Turin shroud. We have to find out which of the two materials was once described as painted with blood, and this is only the case of the Mandylion.

Indeed the Codex Vat. Graec. 511 of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana says that Gregory a official of the great church Sancta Sophia gave a speech in the presence of the holy relic when he arrived in Constantinople in the eve of the feast of the Assumption of Mary in the year 944 [9]. He relates that the image on the material is not painted with the usual colors of an icon, but with sweat and blood. Now it does not exist in the whole world an object that fits so well with the description done by Gregory as the Turin shroud. So we can conclude that a bloodstain on the shroud caused nothing more than the hair style of the pantocrator type, and so the first iconographic reading and artistic interpretation

of the head of the person who we can see on the Shroud. This means that the first and most important Christ type was the result of such a reading, and this was only possible with the Mandylion in Edessa.



Figure 4. The face of the shroud of Turin (photo Enrie).

4. THE VEIL OF MANOPPELLO

What we can say on the Kamoulia type? All descriptions of this textile and his image on it, which we quoted above, correspond with the veil of Manoppello. The human face on it appears in a first moment like a painting, but if You study with detailed observations this very strange object, You cannot determine its fabrication with every known technique. You are forced to say like the old byzantine descriptions of the Kamoulia Veil, it is not painted and not weaved. Only the men of our times have difficulty with the conclusion of the byzantine writers and poets: "made by divine art". Scientifically we can only say, that we don't know the technique of the image fabrication on the veil of Manoppello.

Let us give at least one, but possibly definitive reason, why byzantine writers and even the scientific researcher of our days have to confirm that the nearly totally transparent image on the veil of Manoppello is made by a still unknown technique. That is the strange fact that the colors are changing in different light.

The whole image can appear in a grey tone without special illumination. If we put a light on the veil or we have sunshine on it, there comes out a yellow brownish color, and the lips and blood on the tempers will appear in a clear red tone (see figs. 5 and 7). These different appearances of colors in different light were never to produce with some technique before our times, and were only present in the nature: for instance fishes in the tropical sea can change their color in the same way, often from gray to blue. Now we remind that one sense of acheiropoietos was exactly identical as made by nature. In Manoppello we have a very interesting and curious fact: the inversion of the sequence. In general we have first nature, for instance threads from plants or animals, and then a cultural object like a textile,

Proceedings of the International Workshop on the Scientific approach to the Acheiropietos Images, ENEA Frascati, Italy, 4-6 May 2010

but now we find a textile with an image on it that has newly properties as the nature, that is the change of the colors in different forms of light.



Figure 5. Manoppello, Santuario del Volto Santo, the veil with the image of Christ (photo Pallin).

The second oriental type of Christ, called even Mandylion, has the hairs symmetrically divided at least in four parts corresponds clearly with another Christ type (see fig. 3). Was his model the Kamoulia image? It is probable, but we cannot be sure. Here helps us the veil of Manoppello. Its hair style corresponds with the second version of the Christ icons in such a way, that we can call it the model of all these other Christ icons which are always called Mandylion (see figures. 5 - 7). It is unlike that once existed two acheiropietos images of the same shape, but in each case, only the Manoppello veil can give us the right impression as the Kamoulia image was a like.

The Manoppello veil clearly shows the division of the moved hairs in more than only two parts and appears so as the model for the later type of the Mandylion icons (see fig. 6).

It is always valid the sentence that all what appears in a more natural or casual way in relation to similar elements in art objects has to be first and considered as the model for the same or similar detail in a work of art. In these latter we find the subdivision of the hairs always in a more formal and artificial way than the same more living details on the veil of Manoppello. As this veil reveals itself as first model of all later Mandylion icons, and even as the unique object that corresponds to the old description of the Kamoulia image, we can say now that the Mandylion icons should be called with very much reason Kamoulia icons.

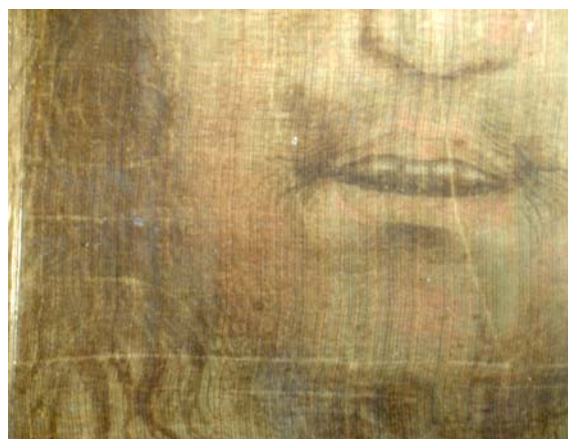


Figure 6. The veil of Manoppello. Detail of the hairs (Photo Pallin).



Figure 7. The veil of Manoppello seen without special illumination (photo Pallin).

We remind that the Mandylion had to substitute the lost Kamoulia image from 944 onwards.

Now, we have to distinguish between the first version of Mandylion representations (see fig. 2), which show always the pantocrator type that depends, as we have seen, on a reading of the shroud and the later Mandylion icons (see fig. 3), falsely called with this title, because they depend on the Kamoulia image or on some copy of it, that should have been present in Constantinople at least until the 12th century when a Russian artist made a copy of it.

Proceedings of the International Workshop on the Scientific approach to the Acheiropoietos Images, ENEA Frascati, Italy, 4-6 May 2010

5. CONCLUSIONS

1) The shroud of Turin or his model, was really once the Mandylion in Edessa, and it was the archetype for all pantocrator icons of the orthodox churches in the east.

2) This special and first reading of the features, which are to be seen on the shroud, was so important that it determined the iconography of Christ for centuries.

3) The Mandylion icon is in reality a Kamoulia icon.

4) The Kamoulia image is still present in the Manoppello veil.

5) The Manoppello veil as acheiropoietos is the model for all later Mandylion icons.

REFERENCES

1. All these texts are to be found in Eduard von Dobschütz, *Christusbilder Untersuchungen zur christlichen Legende*, Leipzig 1899 (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, Neue Folge 3) [= Dobschütz].

2. See Dobschütz, 125*. Cfr. Werner Bulst and Heinrich Pfeiffer, *Das Turiner Grabtuch und das Christusbild II, Das echte Christusbild* (with an appendix of Gino Zaninotto on the Vat. Graec. 511 in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana), Frankfurt am Main 1991 [=Bulst and Pfeiffer] 22; Heinrich Pfeiffer (ed.), *Il Volto Santo di Manoppello*. Text of Heinrich Pfeiffer, Blandina Pascalis Schlömer, Adriano Ghisetti Giavarina, Pescara 2000 [= Pfeiffer] p. 17.

3. See Dobschütz, 51f., 127*.

4. See Dobschütz, 53, 129*. The english transl. is mine.

5. See Dobschütz, 54, 129*.

6. Cfr. Pfeiffer, 18.

7. See Pfeiffer, 18f.

8. See Kurt Weitzmann, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai The Icons I*, Princeton 1976, 12-15, Cat. N°BI, plate 1f., 39f. Cfr. Bulst and Pfeiffer 29, 95f.; Pfeiffer, 36.

9. See Gino Zaninotto in *Bulst and Pfeiffer*, 127-152. Cfr. Pfeiffer, 69.

www.acheiropoietos.info