

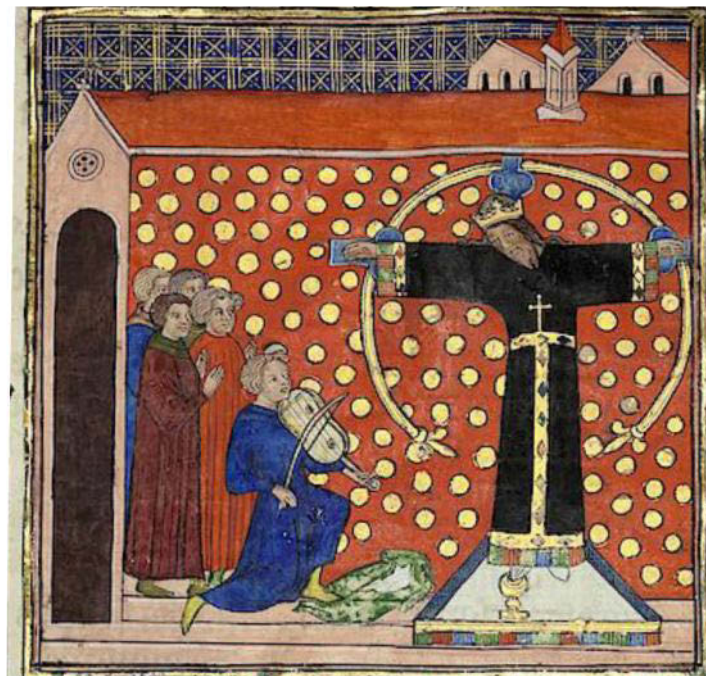
The Volto Santo, the Minstrel and the Cleaver

The legend of the Volto Santo, the Holy Face, is characterized by miracles from its very start. Think of how Nicodemus, who was carving the wood to produce a life-sized Christ on the cross, was troubled by the difficult task of creating Christ's face, but then he fell asleep and awoke to find it miraculously completed by angels. Think of how Bishop Gualfredo, inspired by a dream, found the sculpture on a visit to the Holy Land and loaded it onto a boat which miraculously reached Luni without sails or crew. Think of how the crucifix was brought to the Church of San Frediano, in Lucca, on a cart driven by untamed oxen, and during the night it transported itself from San Frediano to the Duomo. That was just the beginning! And the procession held every year on the evening of 13 September is a partial re-enactment of the miraculous event.

The *Codex Pal. lat. 1988* (beginning of XV c.- Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana) is entirely dedicated to the Volto Santo. It contains a French translation of Deacon Leobino's famous version of the legend, which includes an appendix dedicated to the miracles. Known as *codex Rapondi* because it was commissioned by the Rapondis, a rich family of Lucchese merchants who were connected with Paris and Flanders, the manuscript also contains the widest known cycle of illustrations concerning the Volto Santo's story and miracles. Many of his miracles included healing or freeing from demons. Some of these miracles involved foreigners, and so the legend of the Holy Cross, with reports of these miracles, spread rapidly throughout France, Flanders, Germany, London and all the countries visited by the merchants of Lucca.

Here are two of the most famous miracles of the Volto Santo:

One of them involves a poor minstrel who comes from France as a pilgrim and can only offer the Volto Santo his artistry. He humbly starts playing his lute. When his performance is complete, the Volto Santo, to show his appreciation, lets one of his silver slippers fall in front of him. The minstrel accepts the gift but is accused of theft. Miraculously, though, he escapes condemnation.



The miracle of the silver slipper

Source: <http://www.archiviovoltosanto.org/it/iconografia/codice-rapondi-citta-del-vaticano-biblioteca-apostolica-vaticana-pal-lat-1988>

According to another famous legend, in 1334 Giovanni Arras, a French merchant on his way home from Naples, stopped to help a wounded man he found along the road. The man eventually died and Arras was accused of murder and sentenced to death by beheading. The night before the execution he made a vow to the Volto Santo, promising to go on a pilgrimage to Lucca and to renounce his wealth if his life was spared. The Volto Santo appeared in his dreams and told him not to worry. The next day, after pleading innocent in front of the mob, Arras was struck by the headsman, but three times the headsman failed, because the Volto Santo, using his right foot, deviated and deformed the cleaver. The miracle proved the man's innocence and so he was immediately set free. The famous cleaver *che non offendé un innocente* (that didn't hurt an innocent) is traditionally preserved in the Cathedral of San Martino in Lucca, on a column in front of the Volto Santo's chapel.

– by Chiara Calabrese

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Santa Croce

The Festival of the Holy Cross, called by the Lucchese the *Festa* of the *Volto Santo*, celebrates the miraculous arrival of the statue in Lucca, on a cart pulled by oxen. This event is both sacred and secular, the center of numerous events throughout the month: fairs and markets, concerts, conferences, and the annual meeting of the Lucchese nel Mondo, many of whom return for this event.

On September 13, the night before the day of Santa Croce, a solemn candle-lit procession known as the *Luminara* winds its way through the streets, beginning at San Frediano Church (at approximately 8 pm) and ending at the Cathedral of San Martino several hours later. The participants are representatives of parishes and dioceses, religious, civil, political and military authorities, and costumed historical figures. There are thousands of wax candles, which put the town's architecture in its best light. After this, fireworks are enjoyed from the town ramparts. A solemn mass is then held on the day of Santa Croce. A fair and animal market also attract people from throughout the province.

It's a beautiful time for the faithful, and even for non-believers.