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From Vienna to Mentorella. Empress Maria Theresa's Gift to the Sanctuary of Our Lady

DA VIENNA A MENTORELLA. IL DONO DELL'IMPERATRICE MARIA TERESA AL SANTUARIO DI NOSTRA SIGNORA

Summary

The Sanctuary of Our Lady of Graces on Mentorella (Lazio region, about 50 km east of Rome), one of the oldest in Italy and the world, was built on the site of the conversion of St. Eustace. In the first millennium it was taken care of by the Benedictines, who popularized the cult of Mary there and probably in the 12th century placed a wooden statue of Our Lady with the young Jesus inside the temple. The monks' abandonment of the site (presumably in the late 14th century) resulted in the decline of pilgrimage traffic and considerable neglect of the place, which regained its former glory only after 1661, i.e., after the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher "discovered" Mentorella. At that time, a new phase in the history of the church began: the restoration project supported by Emperor Leopold I of Habsburg and the German princes, followed by the Jesuit mission (carried out until the order's suppression), which elevated Mentorella to the rank of an important Marian sanctuary in Europe. The shrine could also count on the support of the Habsburg family in the 18th century – Empress Maria Theresa, known for her devotion to the Mother of God, donated a valuable robe for the statue of the Mentorella Madonna. When the church and monastery were taken over by the Resurrectionist Fathers, during the renovation of the buildings and rearrangement of the temple's interior, the garments were removed from the statue and a chasuble (or chasubles) was sewn from the fabric donated by the Empress. In 2023, an inventory of the furnishings of the church and monastery on Mentorella was made. Among the preserved liturgical vestments, it was possible to select a chasuble composed from the dresses of Empress Maria Theresa's foundation and confirm its provenance after comparing the embroidered fabric with a graphic depicting Our Lady of Mentorella in dresses, made by Giuseppe Mochetti "dal vero" in the 1st half of the 19th century. While it cannot be determined that Empress Maria Theresa made the embroidery herself (she herself designed, embroidered, and decorated with appliqués many of the liturgical paraments she funded),

the artifact is of great artistic and historical value – bearing witness to the sanctuary's strong ties to the Habsburg monarchy.

Keywords: Mentorella; Sanctuary of Our Lady of Mentorella; Empress Maria Theresa; textile design; Mentorella inventory; decorative arts

Sommario

Il Santuario di Nostra Signora delle Grazie della Mentorella (Lazio, circa 50 km a est di Roma), uno dei più antichi d'Italia e del mondo, fu costruito sul sito della conversione di Sant'Eustachio. Nel primo millennio fu curato dai Benedettini, che vi divulgarono il culto di Maria e, probabilmente nel XII secolo, collocarono una statua di legno della Madonna con il giovane Gesù all'interno del tempio. L'abbandono del sito da parte dei monaci (presumibilmente alla fine del XIV secolo) comportò un declino del traffico di pellegrini e un notevole abbandono del luogo, che riacquisì il suo antico splendore solo dopo il 1661, ossia dopo che il gesuita Athanasius Kircher 'scoprì' Mentorella. Da quel momento iniziò una nuova fase nella storia della chiesa: il progetto di restauro sostenuto dall'imperatore Leopoldo I d'Asburgo e dai principi tedeschi, seguito dalla missione dei Gesuiti (portata avanti fino alla soppressione dell'ordine), che elevò Mentorella al rango di importante santuario mariano in Europa. Il santuario poté contare anche sul sostegno della famiglia Asburgo nel XVIII secolo – l'imperatrice Maria Teresa, nota per la sua devozione alla Madre di Dio, donò una preziosa veste per la statua della Madonna della Mentorella. Quando la chiesa e il monastero furono presi in consegna dai Padri Resurrezionisti, durante la ristrutturazione degli edifici e la riorganizzazione degli interni del tempio, gli abiti furono rimossi dalla statua e fu cucita una casula (o casule) dal tessuto donato dall'Imperatrice. Nel 2023, fu realizzato un inventario degli arredi della chiesa e del monastero di Mentorella. Tra i paramenti liturgici conservati, è stato possibile selezionare una casula composta dagli abiti della fondazione dell'Imperatrice Maria Teresa e confermare la sua provenienza dopo aver confrontato il tessuto ricamato con una grafica raffigurante la Madonna della Mentorella in abiti, realizzata da Giuseppe Mochetti 'dal vero' nella prima metà del XIX secolo. Anche se non si può stabilire se l'Imperatrice Maria Teresa abbia realizzato lei stessa il ricamo (lei disegnava, ricamava e decorava con applicazioni molti dei paramenti liturgici che finanziava), il manufatto è di grande valore artistico e storico – testimoniando il forte legame del santuario con la monarchia asburgica.

Parole chiave: Mentorella; Santuario di Nostra Signora della Mentorella; Imperatrice Maria Teresa; design tessile; inventario Mentorella; arti decorative

Nearly 120 years ago, Polish painter Bronisława Rychter-Janowska published a short novel, being an account of her journey to the sanctuary of Our Lady on Mentorella.¹ Disguised behind the literary heroines Maria and Hanna, she describes her experiences of two trips, which took place in 1904 and 1905 (fig. 1).² The small book, self-published by Janowska in 1905 in Cracow, featured 10 illustrations presenting the landscape of the Tivoli area and the sanctuary of Our Lady of Grace and the antiquities it held. The

1 B. Rychter-Janowska, *Po za Rzymem*, Kraków 1905.

2 Eadem, *Mój dziennik 1912-1950*, ed. J. Różalska, Warszawa 2016, pp. 229-230, 240-243. For both trips Bronisława Rychter-Janowska was accompanied by her friend Maria Bukowska. The first visit lasted 4 days, the following one – already a week. During the second stay, the artist “was engaged in her studies,” while “Marynia was repairing church appliances” (p. 241).

character of the Resurrectionist priest Valentino Lanciotti plays an important role in the novel. At that time he was the rector and superior of the Mentorella monastery, to which he had been connected since his ordination in Montreal in 1877.³ In 1899 he created a guest house for pilgrims at the monastery, and shortly after led to the crowning of the statue of Our Lady of Grace by Bishop Pietro Monti of Tivoli (September 29th, 1901).⁴ Father Valentino passionately and enthusiastically talked about the Mentorella monastery's preserved memorabilia, however, the figure of Our Lady with Jesus was presented to the visitors with the greatest exaltation and devotion (fig. 2). Hanna and Maria became particularly uplifted during the guided tour:

Having arrived at the main altar, situated, as in all basilicas, in the middle of the main nave, he opened the curtain covering it and in front of Maria and Hanka's eyes appeared a beautiful statue of the Mother of God carved in wood. [...] The sweet image of the Madonna inspires devotion and respect. It is a meter high statue in a seated position on a gilded chair. This polychromed sculpture must have gone through hard times. It has blackened, patinated over centuries, but thus became even more appealing to the praying person. On her left shoulder she holds baby Christ, who extends his hand as if he wanted to embrace his mother's neck. The statue does not express artistic beauty, but it has what the greatest masterpieces lack, namely: the soul. There is, in the whole figure, a kind of hidden life; sweetness and divinity flowing over the people.⁵

3 J. Iwicki, *Charyzmat zmartwychwstańców. Historia Zgromadzenia Zmartwychwstania Pańskiego*, vol. 1: 1836-1886, transl. J. Zagórski, Katowice 1990, p. 196.

4 Ibidem, p. 196.

5 B. Rychter-Janowska, *Po za Rzymem*, pp. 63-64.

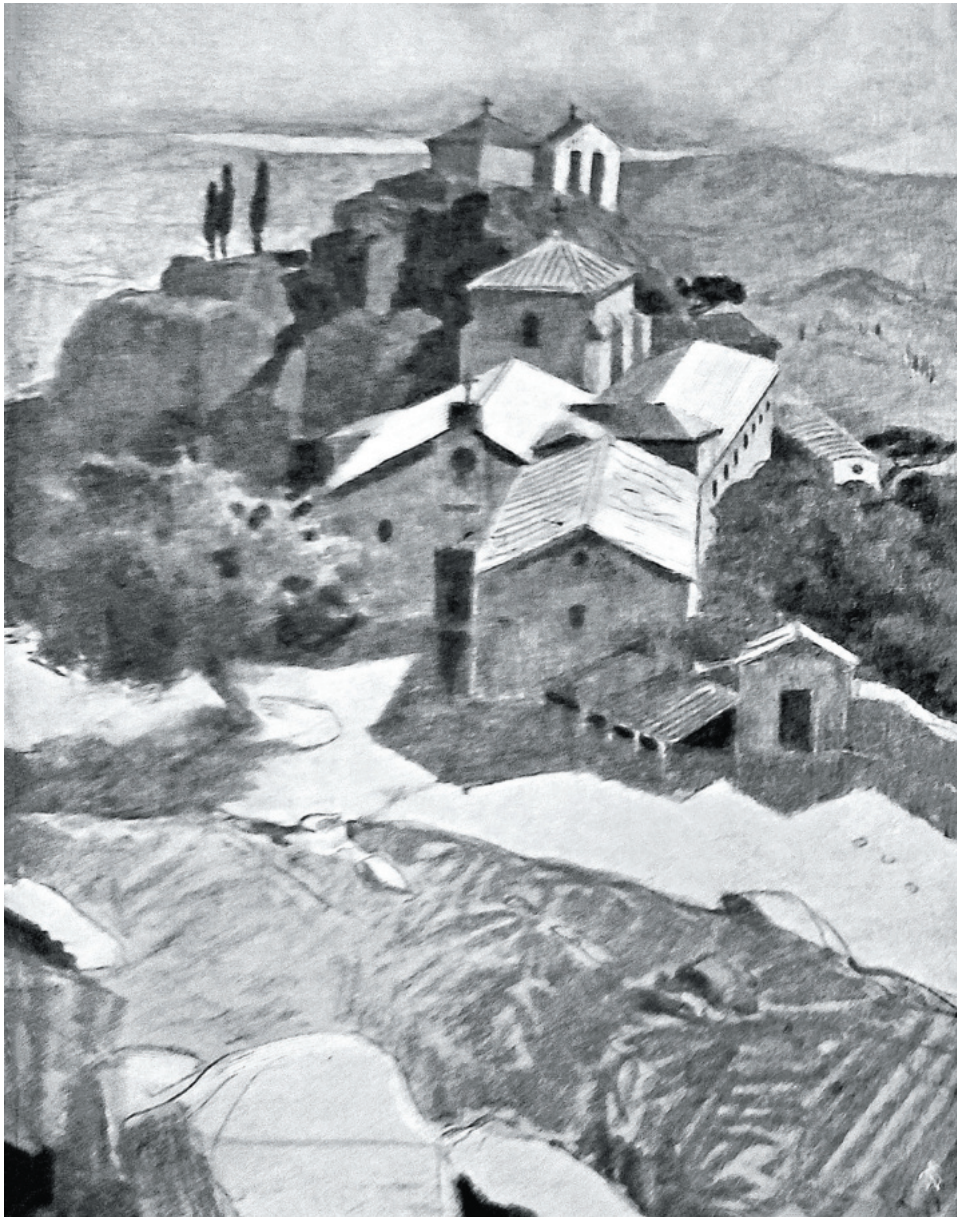


Fig. 1. View of the Sanctuary on Mentorella. Presumably watercolor by Bronisława Rychter-Janowska. Source: B. Rychter-Janowska, *Po za Rzymem*, Kraków 1905.



Fig. 2. Statue of Our Lady of Mentorella. Photograph before 1901.

Source: G. Cascioli, *Memorie storico-critiche del Santuario di Nostra Signora di Mentorella*.

The rector of the sanctuary showed the visitors another heirloom related to the statue of Our Lady:

Father Walenty told us that in the collection of chasubles there is one made of silver lamé, lavishly embroidered with gold, made from Our Lady's robe, and donated by Maria Theresa, which he immediately showed, leading the visitors to the sacristy, where they found beautiful church apparatuses from a distant time, showing signs of age and deterioration.⁶

The wooden statue of the throning Madonna with Jesus on her lap, presumably from the 12th century (or slightly older), was covered at the time with polychromy. When the Resurrectionist father opened the embroidered curtain, Mary appeared to the eyes of pilgrims dressed in a purple tunic and a blue cloak covering her head and flowing down in wide folds to knee height. The edges of the tunic and pallium were embellished with gold tassels and sprinkled with jewel imitations, which were also positioned around the head, on the sleeves and along the Madonna's legs. The tunic of Jesus was kept in green, the dalmatics – vermilion; both garments were also adorned with jewels, while a diadem was placed on the head of the Boy.⁷

We do not have information as to when exactly the wooden statue of the Madonna and Jesus arrived in Mentorella. The sanctuary is much older than the statue itself. The tradition links the hill with the place of conversion of Placid, the tribune and commander of the Roman forces, who experienced an epiphany there at the turn of the second century and, together with his entire family – already under the name of Eustace – converted to Christianity (fig. 3). For this reason, Constantine the Great commissioned a temple dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, which was consecrated by Pope Sylvester I. The memento of the first church may be the two stone columns preserved to this day, dating back to the 4th century. The rock grotto, located beside the church, is related to St. Benedict of Nursia, who resided here for a period of time before settling in Subiaco. Shortly thereafter, Mentorella was handed over to the Benedictines, who expanded the church and built a monastery at the end of the 9th century. They popularized the cult of the Virgin Mary, and probably were the ones who placed the statue in the central location of the temple. During the Benedictine era, Mentorella became renowned as a place of

6 Ibidem, pp. 72-73.

7 A. Rossi, *Santa Maria in Vulturella (Tivoli). Ricerche di Storia e d'Arte*, Roma 1905, p. 38. Currently, the statue is stripped of its polychromy. It was removed during restoration work on the statue, recovered after theft in 30.08.1972. A. Bender, *Polskie ślady w sanktuarium Matki Bożej Łaskawej na Mentorelli*, "Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne", 199 (2022), p. 33.

numerous penitential pilgrimages, with famous pilgrims including St. Francis of Assisi and his companion Blessed Giles and Blessed Margherita Colonna.⁸



Fig. 3. *Conversion of St. Eustace*. Frontispiece of the work by A. Kircher, *Historia Eustachio-Mariana*, Rome 1665, library of the monastery of the Resurrectionist priests.

Repr. P. Jamski.

8 G. Cascioli, *Memorie storico-critiche del Santuario di Nostra Signora di Mentorella*, Roma 1901, pp. 222-228.

We do not know the precise date when the Benedictines left the hill. They certainly maintained custody of the sanctuary until the end of the 14th century. According to the monographer of the sanctuary,⁹ Giuseppe Cascioli, during the reign of Pope Innocent VIII, i.e., in the 1480s and 1490s, the property of the abbey belonged to the secular bishop of Massa, while the monastery's income was retained by the baron of Poli. At the time, the monks were either supported by the owners of neighboring Guadagnolo (alternatively, by alms) or, which is more probable, they were no longer present on Mentorella. Since then, the sanctuary's fame began to fade and the buildings to deteriorate into ruins. The poor state of preservation of the monastery is evidenced by the testimony of Bishop Annibale de Grassi, who, following the order of Pope Gregory XIII, visited the sanctuary in 1581. Back then, he recommended repairing the roof as soon as possible, filling in plaster defects on the walls and placing the floor. He advised assigning – for an appropriate fee – a devoted priest who would take care of the church and celebrate mass at least on holidays.¹⁰

The renovation of the sanctuary in the late 16th century did not happen. Eighty years after the aforementioned inspection, the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680), while collecting material for his book on Lazio, arrived on the Mentorella Hill (alternatively Vulturella or Vultuilla, as the site was then called), where he found an abandoned, neglected monastery and an open church¹¹ (fig. 4, 5). In his own words:

having entered, I saw a large church with faded paintings showing sacred images, still worshipful, breathing the memory of ancient devotion. In the center of the church may be seen an altar surrounded by iron bars, and above the altar an image of the Virgin Mary with her Son on her shoulder, damaged by aging, covered with dust and spider webs, but also miraculously calling to godliness.¹²

9 Ibidem, pp. 163-164. Giuseppe Cascioli (1854-1934) was a prominent historian from Pola, author of, among other things, historical dissertations on the areas around Pola, Guadagnolo, Tivoli and Rome, and studies on the Conti family.

10 Ibidem, p. 166.

11 C.S. Fiore, *Athanasius Kircher. Natura e antico nella Roma del Seicento*, Roma 2020, s. 66-70.

12 A. Kircher, *Historia Eustachio-Mariana*, Romae 1665, pp. 2-3.



Fig. 4. *View of the rock and church on Mentorella.* Figure in: A. Kircher, *Historia Eustachio-Mariana*, Rome, library of the monastery of the Resurrectionist priests.

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Fig. 5. Interior of the sanctuary. Print in the collection of the sanctuary of Our Lady of Grace on Mentorella.

Photograph P. Jamski, 2023.

As a worshiper of Mary, he decided to rebuild the sanctuary. He involved in this work, among others, Leopold I of Habsburg, since 1658 bearing the title of the Holy Roman Emperor, who donated the sum of 12,000 Roman scudi to rebuild the sanctuary.¹³ The Emperor's generosity was noted by the Bishop of Tivoli in his 1690 visitation of Mentorella:

Eadem Ecclesia fuit consecrata a sancto Silvestri P. ut constat ex lignea tabula affixa a latere sinistro altaris SS. Crucifixi et cum temporum injuriis esset fere delapsa, nuper Leopoldi pietate, R. P. Athanasio S.I. instante, in pristinum splendorum restituta fuit.¹⁴

August II the Younger, Duke of Brunswick and Lüneburg, donated 400 scudi in gold for the initial restoration works, the same sum was sent by Prince Ferdinand Maria, Elector of Bavaria (1636-1679), 100 scudi were donated by Pedro Antonio de Aragón, Viceroy of Naples (1611-1690).¹⁵ A substantial contribution to the restoration of the shrine was made by Archbishop Johann Friedrich Waldstein of Prague (1642-1694). This Bohemian aristocrat and count of the Reich, archbishop of Prague since 1675, had studied at the Jesuits of Prague and probably through them made acquaintance of Athanasius Kircher, who took him on an expedition to the Sabine Mountains and introduced him to the idea of rebuilding the temple.¹⁶ Thanks to Johann Friedrich Waldstein's donation, not only was the church renovated, the so-called "holy staircase" (Scala Sancta) was constructed on Mentorella, and the chapel dedicated to St. Eustace was restored.¹⁷ During that time, the interior of the chapel was covered with frescoes by Johan Paul Schor, in Italy known

13 G. Cascioli, *Memorie storico-critiche del Santuario di Nostra Signora di Mentorella*, p. 199. Kircher's direct contacts with Emperor Leopold are evidenced by a letter sent from Mentorella on 13.10.1670, penned by Kircher "from under the altar of St. Eustace." In the letter, Kircher reports on the works performed in the sanctuary. See: *The Athanasius Kircher Correspondence Project*, www.archimede. imss.fi.it/kircher [access: 5.12.2023].

14 G. Cascioli, *Memorie storico-critiche del Santuario di Nostra Signora di Mentorella*, p. 200.

15 K. Brischar, *P. Athanasius Kircher, Ein Lebensbild*, Würzburg 1877, p. 87.

16 A. Wojtyła, "Cardinale langravio" i "Conte savio" – dygnitarze Rzeszy w barokowym Rzymie, "Quart", 2007, no. 2 (4), p. 35.

17 The accounts of the St. Eustace chapel are unclear. Brischar recalls that both the St. Eustace chapel and the holy staircase were built back then at Waldstein's expense (K. Brischar, *P. Athanasius Kircher. Ein Lebensbild*, p. 87), whereas Cascioli writes about the restoration of the Chapel of St. Eustace using funds provided by the viceroy of Naples (G. Cascioli, *Memorie storico-critiche del Santuario di Nostra Signora di Mentorella*, p. 200). In the illustration provided by Kircher in his *Historia Eustachio-Mariana*, released in 1665, featuring the sanctuary on Mentorella before the restoration, there is a small building on the cliff next to the bell tower, described as the Chapel of St. Eustace. Therefore, the funds acquired by Kircher must have been used to renovate rather than to erect the chapel.

as Giovanni Paolo Tedesco, a Tyrolean associated with the papal court.¹⁸ In appreciation for Waldstein's generosity, Kircher dedicated him the second edition of his work *Ars Magna Lucis et umbrae*.¹⁹

The reason why both the Emperor and the German princes committed so passionately to the restoration of Our Lady's sanctuary in the Sabine Hills is significant. As indicated by Giuseppe Cascioli, it was not merely the German origin of Athanasius Kircher.²⁰ Mentorella, along with Guadagnolo, belonged to the Conti family, the Dukes of Poli, several of whom actually served the House of Austria. Prince Guadagnolo Torquato II Conti (d. 1636) during the Thirty Years' War commanded a corps of Italian volunteers who battled on the side of Ferdinand II, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Torquato's two brothers, Innocent, defending Prague besieged by the Swedes, and Carlo, who was killed in Vienna while serving in the military, had fought in the service of Emperor Ferdinand II as well. The Viennese court had owed much to the dukes of Poli, and the donations to the sanctuary made by both Leopold I and other German princes were a sign of gratitude for their loyalty and allegiance to the Habsburg Empire.

The funds collected by Kircher provided not only the restoration of the sanctuary, but also covered the costs of running the site for the following years. In 1664 Pope Alexander VII granted indulgences to the temple – from that moment on Mentorella became the site of numerous pilgrimages each fall for the feast of St. Michael the Archangel. Kircher allocated an annual sum of 1,400 scudi for travel expenses and the sustenance of confessors assisting the pilgrims. This service was continued by Jesuit priests until 1772, when the order was suppressed. Afterwards, the work of the Jesuits was continued by priests from the Mission House of St. Vincent de Paul in Tivoli, who took over the outpost on September 15th, 1773. They would provide care and ministry on Mentorella over the following years, until the sanctuary of Our Lady of Grace was assigned to the Resurrectionist priests in 1857.

Indications of the strong cult of Our Lady of Grace are evidenced by the numerous votive offerings left at the monastery by pilgrims, as well as the liturgical paraments donated by the monastery's wealthy benefactors. The above-mentioned inspection of the sanctuary in 1581 mentions, among other things, "a silk robe woven of gold to adorn the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary" placed in a chest, and a robe of blue silk covering the statue.²¹ Probably from the 1660s comes a print issued in Rome by Giovanni Jacomo de Rossi

18 J. Iwicki, *Charyzmat zmartwychwstańców*, p. 190; A. Bender, *Polskie ślady w sanktuarium Matki Bożej Łaskawej na Mentorelli*, p. 34.

19 A. Wojtyła, "Cardinale langravio" i "Conte savio" – dygnitarze Rzeszy w barokowym Rzymie, p. 35. In the second edition of the book from 1671, Kircher also added a portrait of Johann Friedrich Waldstein.

20 G. Cascioli, *Memorie storico-critiche del Santuario di Nostra Signora di Mentorella*, p. 204.

21 Ibidem, pp. 145, 217, 244 ("Super altare est imago pulchra gloriosae Virginis, veste serica cerulea induta").

(1627-1691), based on a drawing by Valeriano Regnart, a graphic artist and publisher previously recorded in Rome between 1620 and 1650 (fig. 6), depicting the Madonna of Mentorella amongst the figures of Pope Sylvester, who, according to tradition, consecrated the basilica, and St. Eustace, who underwent his conversion there. The Madonna and Child are clothed with robes made of fabric in a dense floral pattern reminiscent of lush acanthus. It was not the only garment put on the respected sculpture. Jesuit Arthur Vermeersch, in a history of the sanctuary published in 1891, mentions another offering: “previously, the statue was dressed in splendid clothes. For this purpose, Empress Maria Theresa sent rich embroidered fabric. Since then, this custom has been abandoned.”²² The above-quoted Cascioli, in his history of Mentorella, mentions that Empress Maria Theresa donated a robe for the Madonna, which she may have made herself.²³



Fig. 6. Valeriano Regnart (drawing), Giovanni Jacomo de Rossi (drawing), *Image of Our Lady of Mentorella*, 1660's. Print from the collection of the library of the Monastery of the Resurrectionist Fathers in Rome.

Photograph P. Jamski, 2023.

22 A. Vermeersch, *La sanuarie de la Mentorella et le R.P. Kircher S.J.*, Bruxelles 1891, p. 12. The earliest record of Empress Maria Theresa's gifts comes from: A. Cav. Belli, *La festa dell'Archangelo S. Michele sul Monte della Vulturella presso Guadagnolo nel Nuovo Lazio*, Roma 1848, p. 11. The robe for the Madonna of Mentorella is also mentioned in: R. Belaney, *A Brief Notice of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Mentorella*, Rome 1886, p. 9.

23 G. Cascioli, *Memorie storico-critiche del Santuario di Nostra Signora di Mentorella*, p. 202.

The Resurrectionist Fathers started their works on Mentorella by thoroughly renovating the buildings (fig. 7). They also rearranged the main altar with the statue of Our Lady of Grace displayed in it.²⁴ The robe had been removed from the statue of Our Lady at the time, but due to the identity of the foundress, the precious fabric was preserved and used to compose chasubles from its pieces.²⁵



Fig. 7. E.C., *Sanctuary on Mentorella*, 1881, oil on canvas. Painting in the collection of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Grace on Mentorella.

Photograph P. Jamski, 2023.

Nowadays, the sanctuary on Mentorella retains only a few historic liturgical vestments. One of them is exceptionally impressive: it is a chasuble (104×73 cm), made of three types of fabric, maintaining the typical cut of chasubles sewn at the end of the 19th century, yet composed differently: it lacks the traditional division into the main column and sides, typically sewn of different fabrics or at least differentiated with ribbons or lacework (fig. 8, 9). The edges of the chasuble are surrounded by white silk moire, densely interwoven with strips of metal plaque. The back and the middle part of the front of the garment was sewn of yellow silk fabric with a warp grosgrain weave, with an additional weft of silver lamella. The yellow lamé is covered with a floral and ribbon pattern,

24 A. Bender, *Polskie ślady w sanktuarium Matki Bożej Łaskawej na Mentorelli*, p. 36.

25 B. Rychter-Janowska, *Po za Rzymem*, pp. 72-73; J. Iwicki, *Charyzmat zmartwychwstańców*, p. 194. Rychter-Janowska recalls one robe, Iwicki suggests that more than one chasuble was sewn from Maria Theresa's dress.

made using embroidery and appliqué techniques.²⁶ The back of the chasuble is decorated with a symmetrical composition, featuring a clearly marked vertical axis, composed of a large medallion in the shape of a quatrefoil, with a smaller, oval one inserted into it and topped with a similar oval medallion. In the medallions, made of silver lace, were interwoven embroidered stems of thin, bent, green and yellow branches with large peony flowers of shaded brown, beige and silver petals along with blossoms of blue lilies with silver stamens. In the center of the composition was placed a bundle of stylized acanthus leaves, embroidered with green and yellow silk, silver lamella, and silver sequins. In the front of the chasuble, a small piece of embroidered lamé is decorated with an appliqué of silver lace, which forms seemingly a base or pedestal, wrapped with embroidered silver leaves, thin green and yellow foliated branches ending in blue and silver buds and – in the middle – a large salmon-brown rose in side projection. The silk fabric sewn into the top and bottom of the front of the chasuble – yellow, of cannelé weave, with an inserted weft of silver lamella – is decorated with a motif of vertical zigzag white lines marking fields which are alternately narrow, decorated with individual silver stars, and wider, with a pattern of zigzagging white crimped ribbon.



Fig. 8. Chasuble sewn from a dress gifted to the statue of Our Lady of Grace by Empress Maria Theresa (front). Sanctuary of Our Lady of Grace on Mentorella.

Photograph P. Jamski, 2023.



Fig. 9. Chasuble sewn from a dress gifted to the statue of Our Lady of Grace by Empress Maria Theresa (back). Sanctuary of Our Lady of Grace on Mentorella.

Photograph P. Jamski, 2023.

26 Embroidery with colored silk yarn in satin stitch and silver thread in flat stitch on underlay, silver lamella in braid stitch and sequins. Applications of four types of blocking lace made with silver threads on white silk soul, straight and crimp, and silver lamella.

The fabrics and laces that the chasuble was sewn from date back to several different periods. The silver moiré in the trim of the vestment probably comes from the 18th century, while the embroidered yellow lamé was made in the 1760s as the floral motifs are delicate, thinned, and the pattern is noticeably symmetrical. The silver laces applied on the fabric (four types of different widths and patterns) were made around the mid-18th century. Much more recent, dating back to the 19th century, are yellow fabric in a zigzag and star pattern, and yellow and silver galloons with a vine fruit motif.

The imperial origin of the main – embroidered – fabric of the chasuble is indicated not only by its stylistic features, allowing us to date the embroidered lamé to the 1760s, since we have evidence of a print portraying the Madonna of Mentorella, made *dal vero* by Giuseppe Mochetti, a printmaker, illustrator, and publisher working in Rome in the late 18th and the first half of the 19th century. Two versions of his image of Our Lady of Grace have survived. One can be found in the book *A Brief Notice of our Lady of Mentorella*, published in Rome in 1886.²⁷ The other, providing much more detail, is kept in the National Library in Naples (fig. 10).²⁸ It was marked with the signature: “engraved and drawn from nature by G. Mochetti” and also with the caption:

An ancient and miraculous image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which is worshiped in the church on Mentorella, in the territory of Guadagnolo, near the rock of St. Eustace. From the great piety of Teresa Torlonia, née Chigi, Duchess of Poli and Guadagnolo.

27 R. Belancy, *A Brief Notice of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Mentorella*, without pagination.

28 Napoli, Biblioteca Nazionale Vittorio Emanuele III, ref. IT/CCU/0640440; etching, dimensions 250×183 mm.



Fig. 10. Giuseppe Mochetti, *Our Lady of Mentorella*, 1st half of the 19th century.

Print from the collection of Biblioteca Nazionale Vittorio Emanuele III, Napoli, ref. IT/CCU/0640440 (su concessione del Ministero della cultura © Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli).

In the lower left of the picture, Mochetti depicted St. Eustace, to whom a deer appeared with a cross between its antlers. This is a scene replicated after Athanasius Kircher, who portrayed in this exact manner the conversion of the Roman tribune in his book *Historia*

Eustachio-Mariana (see fig. 3).²⁹ The church itself, by contrast, was drawn from nature, with a meticulously depicted humble Gothic rosette in the façade, as well as the sacred staircase leading to the bell tower and the chapel of St. Eustace. The figure of the Mother of God herself with Jesus on her left shoulder, floating on a cloud, which occupies most of the representation, seemingly was sketched from nature as well. The Madonna and Child are robed in fabrics decorated with floral ornaments and lacework; moreover, Mary's head and shoulders are covered with a plain cloak trimmed with wavy lace. Around the necks of the Mother and Jesus hang beads, and on their heads are placed crowns.

The analysis of Mochetti's print makes it possible to connect the figure's robe portrayed therein with a chasuble kept at the Mentorella monastery. There is no doubt that the Madonna's robe was used to sew the back of the chasuble. This is suggested by the large peony flower in a side projection, displayed in the lower part of both the chasuble and the Madonna's robe, as well as the bunch of stylized acanthus leaves, out of which grow two thin, pliable branches carried symmetrically to the sides, ending in a pair of lily flowers with distinctive long stamens. The variations in running the lace ribbon may be the result of modifications that were made during the sewing of the chasuble but may also represent the invention of the illustrator – the faces of Mary and Jesus also deviate from the original, being clearly idealized or "corrected." In an analogous way (with some alterations from the original) have been rendered in Mochetti's graphics the crowns resting on the temples of the Madonna and Jesus. They still are kept in the sanctuary on Mentorella and were probably taken off the figures prior to their coronation with papal crowns in 1901 (fig. 11).



Fig. 11. Crown for the statue of Our Lady. Sanctuary of Our Lady of Grace on Mentorella. Photograph P. Jamski, 2023.

29 A. Kircher, *Historia Eustachio-Mariana*, p. 1.

The sections of the yellow embroidered fabric from which the chasuble was sewn must have been just a part of the robe applied to the statue of Our Lady and Child. To cover the statue, which was about 1.5 meters high, at least 1.5-2 m² of textile was needed. Unfortunately, no other liturgical garments preserved in the sanctuary bear any resemblance to those discussed above. Therefore, it seems that the precious heirloom – a gift from Empress Maria Theresa – has survived to this day in only one chasuble.

The interest of the Austrian Empress in the sanctuary on Mentorella, which was followed by the donation of a valuable robe to the statue of the Mother of God, had several reasons. It is known that Maria Theresa, being a person of profound piety and religious fervor, frequently gifted churches and monasteries with liturgical equipment and paraments, most preferably – vestments (whole sets or individual pieces).³⁰ The tradition of offering garments to churches at that time was very old, dating back to the Carolingian era. Chasubles, capes, dalmatics would be donated on the occasion of important events, such as christenings or weddings, but also miraculous healings. It should be emphasized that these gifts came primarily from women and were often handmade by them. Particularly valuable liturgical vestment sets were commissioned from professional embroiderers, but many chasubles or dalmatics and minor liturgical paraments (stoles, maniples, veils, palls and bursas) were made from gowns, such as wedding gowns, and in the Republic, for instance, from kontush sashes.³¹ The Empress herself considered her most valuable gift to be vestments made of brocade fabric from the favorite robe of her husband, Emperor Francis Stephen, who died in 1765. Such a chasuble was sent to the convent for noble ladies (Adelige Damenstift Innsbruck), which she founded in Innsbruck to commemorate the emperor's death that same year. Moreover, the Innsbruck monastery received five other chasubles from the Empress on different occasions, stored today in the Hofkirche. The Empress gifted sets or individual vestments to, among others, the Institution for Noble Ladies founded by her in 1755 in Prague, the Eger Cathedral (a set tailored from her coronation vestments), St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, the Augustinian Church in Bratislava, the Ursulines in Sibiu, St. Pölten Cathedral and many others.³² As an example of the robes donated by Maria Theresa, can be seen the vestments for

30 D. Köhler, *Die Paramentenstiftungen der Kaiserin Maria Theresa von Österreich*, Münster 1998.

31 Ibidem, pp. 165-173; A. Bender, *Szaty liturgiczne z polskich pasów kontuszowych i tkanin naśladowujących pasy kontuszowe. Stan i perspektywy badań*, in: *Architektura znaczeń: studia ofiarowane prof. Zbigniewowi Bani w 65. rocznicę urodzin i w 40-lecie pracy dydaktycznej*, ed. A.S. Czyż, J. Nowiński, M. Wiraszka, Warszawa 2011, pp. 454-463.

32 D. Köhler, *Die Paramentenstiftungen der Kaiserin Maria Theresia von Österreich*, passim. The author successfully compiled a catalog of 49 objects (sets or individual garments) donated by Maria Theresa. It is not comprehensive since many objects were scattered after the suppression of the monasteries in the late 18th and 19th centuries.

the Infant Jesus of Prague, to which she had a deep devotion and which she personally visited several times.³³

However, Maria Theresa was particularly devoted to her patroness, the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Empress aimed to promote Marian piety in her surroundings – it was no coincidence that she named all her eight daughters after Mary. She encouraged people to embark on pilgrimages to Marian sanctuaries and set an example of such piety herself. Fixed points in the life of the Empress and her family were pilgrimages to Altötting and Mariazell (the latter was gifted with a chasuble on the occasion of her visit in 1757).³⁴ In 1776, one of the most renowned Marian sanctuaries in Bohemia – Svatá Hora near Příbram – received from Empress Maria Theresa a robe for the Gothic statue of the Virgin and Child. The garment is made of yellow grosgrain silk enhanced with gold thread, embroidered with colorful silk and sequins, marked with an embroidered coat of arms and a signature testifying that the dress was hand sewn by the Archduchess Maria Anna of Austria (1738-1789), the daughter of the Empress.³⁵ Another Gothic statue of Our Lady and Child, kept in a church in Dvůr Králové nad Labem in eastern Bohemia, also received a dress from the Empress in 1743.³⁶

Mentorella, protected by Emperor Leopold I almost a century earlier, must have been a place of importance to the Empress for this reason alone, cherishing the memory of her ancestors and seeking to consolidate Habsburg's influence in Europe. Additionally, Maria Theresa's special devotion to the Mother of God probably influenced her decision to donate to the remote sanctuary, where the Marian devotion had been tirelessly promoted by the Jesuits for a century.

Meanwhile, it is not certain that the gowns for the Madonna were hand-made by the Empress, as suggested by Giuseppe Cascioli,³⁷ although it is known that to accentuate the value of the gift she would often design or sew the garments herself, as she repeatedly mentioned. For instance, in a letter from Countess Enzenberg-Schack dated May 25th, 1786, she wrote: "You will not be satisfied with the chasuble. It is not beautiful, but I have no other made with my own hands [...]. For two years – since I returned from Innsbruck – I have not sewn colorful robes."³⁸ She was eager to fund brightly colored robes, specifically white or yellow. She had a particular predilection for two fabric decoration

33 A.M. Krupová, *Maria-teresianische Stiftungen von liturgischen Textilien in den böhmischen Ländern*, in: *Kirche-Kloster-Kaiserin. Maria Theresia und das sakrale Österreich*, ed. Ch. Huber, Klosterenburg 2017, p. 44.

34 D. Köhler, *Die Paramentenstiftungen der Kaiserin Maria Theresia von Österreich*, p. 181.

35 A.M. Krupová, *Maria-teresianische Stiftungen von liturgischen Textilien in den böhmischen Ländern*, p. 43. Nowadays, the monastery houses as many as 140 different robes for the miraculous statue of Madonna with Child.

36 Ibidem, p. 44.

37 See footnote 22.

38 D. Köhler, *Die Paramentenstiftungen der Kaiserin Maria Theresia von Österreich*, p. 187.

techniques: appliqués made of grosgrain ribbon, from which she created intricate floral compositions, and appliqués made of tied cords. She sewed, tied strings, and created appliqués from colorful ribbons³⁹ herself, and encouraged both the court ladies and her daughters to do the same. Supposedly she used to say that “whoever embroiders, does not sin.”⁴⁰ In the 17th and 18th centuries, this was not an extraordinary occupation for noble-born women. On the contrary, Lady Mary Montagu, an English aristocrat, poet and feminist (sic!), in 1753 concluded this custom quite strongly: “It is a scandal when a woman does not know how to use a needle, similarly – if a man does not know how to use a sword.”⁴¹ Hence, for Jean-Étienne Liotard, “the painter of truth” as he was referred to, portraying the imperial family in 1762, it was only natural to depict the two daughters of Empress Maria Theresa – Marie Antoinette and Marie Amalia – at their daily activities: embroidering and tying cords.⁴²

Maria Theresa’s commitment to embroidery and other tailoring work does not mean, of course, that all the garments she donated to religious sites were handmade by her. On the contrary, many were commissioned from monasteries or specialized embroidery workshops. Similarly, the laces so frequently used to decorate liturgical vestments, including the dresses for the statue of Our Lady of Mentorella, were ordered by the meter from haberdashery workshops. Maria Theresa primarily insisted that the vestments would be made in domestic Austrian factories. She attached a special role to the development of the silk industry in the empire: she promoted women’s labor, contributing to the competitiveness of Austrian weaving, introduced bans on the import of silk (1764), moire (1765) and any silk ribbons (1756), and recruited Italian and French immigrants – silk masters passing on their expertise to the local weavers.⁴³

While it is known that some of the vestments donated by Empress Maria Theresa were marked with the donor’s coat of arms and embroidered signature, the majority had no signs, and the foundation’s confirmation can only be found in church documents (such as visitations or letters). This is also the case with the robe of Our Lady of Mentorella: it was neither labeled with the signature of the donor, nor the fragment with the empress’s coat of arms has survived – in fact, today we can only see a small part of the robe. This does not change the fact that the golden chasuble, which fortunately has been preserved

39 The Empress was particularly fond of these two types of fabric decoration. The range of applications made of grosgrain ribbon and tied cord was limited to the areas of Bavaria and the surroundings of Vienna. *Ibidem*, p. 12.

40 *Ibidem*, p. 54.

41 *Ibidem*, p. 57.

42 Geneva, Musée d’Art et d’Histoire, Jean-Étienne Liotard, *Portrait of Princess Maria Amalia*, 1762, inv. no. 1947-0037; Jean-Étienne Liotard, *Portrait of Princess Marie Antoinette*, inv. no. 1947-0042.

43 D. Köhler, *Die Paramentenstiftungen der Kaiserin Maria Theresia von Österreich*, pp. 13-19.

to this day in the sanctuary, is a valuable memento of an incredibly important period in the history of Mentorella and its relationship with the Habsburg monarchy. Therefore, it is even more important to provide proper care, including conservation, to the discussed artifact.

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