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INTRUSIONS IN ARQUÀ PETRARCA (1630–2003). IN THE NAME OF FRANCESCO PETRARCH

Claudio POVOLO

Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Department of Humanities, Dorsoduro 3484/D, 30123 Venice, Italy
e-mail: povolo@unive.it

Institute IRRIS for Research, Development and Strategies of Society, Culture and Environment, Čentur 1F,
6273 Marezige, Slovenia
e-mail: claudio.povolo@irris.eu

ABSTRACT

This article highlights the cultural and political context of the numerous openings of Francesco Petrarca's ark, located next to the church in the village of Arquà Petrarca. The remains of the great poet were worshiped by numerous Italian and foreign travellers who went to Arquà, as it was considered a necessary stop during the Grand Tour. The ark was repeatedly opened over the centuries and the relics of Francesco Petrarca suffered substantial thefts. The focus on the local setting, which lived in symbiosis with the ancient monument for centuries, aims at tracing the origins of a cult which manifested some original features from the mid-19th century onward.

Keywords: Francesco Petrarca, Arquà Petrarca, literary cult, Grand Tour, relics, funerary practices, popular culture

INTRUSIONI IN ARQUÀ PETRARCA (1630–2003). NEL NOME DI FRANCESCO PETRARCA

SINTESI

Il saggio intende ricostruire il contesto culturale e politico in cui si svolsero le numerose aperture dell'arca di Francesco Petrarca, posta accanto alla chiesa parrocchiale del villaggio di Arquà Petrarca. Le spoglie del grande poeta furono oggetto di culto da parte dei numerosi viaggiatori italiani e stranieri, che fecero di Arquà una tappa quasi obbligata del loro grand tour. Nel corso dei secoli l'arca fu ripetutamente aperta e le reliquie di Francesco Petrarca subirono rilevanti sottrazioni. La ricostruzione del contesto locale, che per secoli aveva vissuto in simbiosi con l'antico monumento, intende risalire alle origini di un culto che a partire dalla metà dell'Ottocento assunse aspetti del tutto inediti.

Parole chiave: Francesco Petrarca, Arquà Petrarca, culto letterario, Grand Tour, reliquie, culto dei morti, cultura popolare

TRADITIONS¹

The image of that friar, who in May 1630 had dared to violate the ark that had held Francesco Petrarca's remains for centuries, resurfaced during the nineteenth century, largely due to the publicity surrounding the great poet.² An image which was immediately stigmatised by Giacomo Filippo Tomasini, in his *Petrarcha redivivus* (Tomasini, 1635)³; and, finally, at the end of the nineteenth century, definitively brought to light by Andrea Moschetti, director of Padua's Civic Museum, with the *discovery* of the judicial dossier prepared in 1630–1631 against the perpetrators of that scandalous profanation (Moschetti, 1898–1899).



Fig. 1: The Arqua Petrarca parish church with the ark housing the remains of Francesco Petrarca. (Photo: C. Povoło).

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- 1 This paper is the result of research carried out in the project “Social functions of fairy tales” (J6-1807), funded by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS) (2019–2022).
 - 2 On the night of the 27th of May 1630 the Dominican friar Tommaso Martinelli, taking advantage of the collaboration and complicity of the village blacksmith and the representative (the “degano”) of the community, had taken possession of some parts of the poet’s right arm, stolen through a large opening made in the west side of the ark. Martinelli, a native of Portogruaro, had come to Arqua to preach during Lent and, following the death of the archpriest, had been taken on pro tempore to run the parish. Shortly after the theft, he vanished with the other two main protagonists of the break-in, who were sentenced to the severe penalty of banishment. In the course of the trial, an examination of the poet’s remains was carried out. The open wedge in the ark was closed by affixing the seal of San Marco and that of the city of Padua (Povoło, 2014).
 - 3 Ample information about the author is available in Vedova, 1836, 334–345; Trebbi, 2017.



Fig. 2: Petrarch's ark. On its western side, the opening made by the Dominican friar Tommaso Martinelli in 1630 is visible. (Photo: C. Povoło).



Fig. 3: Petrarch's Tomb. Image taken from *Petrarcha redivivus* by Giacomo Filippo Tomasini (1635).

The news of this depredation, the extent of which would only become known in 1873, following the inspection of the poet's remains by the anthropologist Giovanni Canestrini,⁴ became regularly taken as a sort of biographical date coinciding with the continuation of the cult at Petrarch's tomb in the small square opposite Arquà Church. The depredation had been defined, unequivocally, as a desecration. The motive, of course, was unknown, but paradoxically the memory of this audacious act resurfaced during the eighteen hundreds, following renewed interest in the great poet, and the places connected to him over the centuries.

4 The report had first been published in the *Atti della Società veneto-trentina di scienze naturali residente in Padova* (Canestrini, 1874a), and was reprinted as a separate booklet on the occasion of the fifth Petrarcan centenary (Canestrini, 1874b). On Giovanni Canestrini, see Corsini, 1975.

The name of Friar Tommaso Martinelli was thus, unsurprisingly, inserted in the vast bibliography published on the fifth and sixth centenaries of Francesco Petrararch's death. The perpetrator of the seventeenth century depredation would have inevitably been included in another *tradition*, which began and became stronger over the decades: the restoration of Petrarch's ark, which in 1843 was financed and commissioned at the behest of Count Carlo Leoni.⁵ An initiative which not only constituted the second opening of the ark, after the fraudulent one by the Dominican friar, but was definitively labelled as an operation repairing the damage of the previous violation and the wear and tear of time.⁶ Furthermore, Leoni himself recalled what had happened in 1630, attaching presumed new information about the episode and the fate of the bones stolen at the time (Leoni, 1843).⁷

At the reopening in 1873, the anthropologist Giovanni Canestrini dedicated ample space to the 1630 violation in his account, using new documents kept at the Frari archive in Venice and kindly passed onto him by the director, Bartolomeo Cecchetti (Canestrini, 1874b, 9–10). These were historical references concerning that distant episode, intended to reconstruct an affair of several centuries earlier and indirectly alleviating the disappointing results of an operation that had proved fruitless.

The 1630 depredation, the 1843 restoration, with the ensuing reopening in 1855 undoubtedly meant to restore what had been removed, and the following inspection in 1873, certainly constituted episodes which, although judged differently, formed part of an account focused essentially on events directly concerned with the ark containing Francesco Petrarch's remains.

Giuseppe Jacopo Ferrazzi in his *Bibliografia petrarchesca* dedicated numerous pages to affairs concerning Francesco Petrarch's tomb ("Vicende della tomba di Francesco Petrarca"; Ferrazzi, 1877, 598–612). There is a detailed account of the "malicious sacrilege" carried out by the Dominican friar. There are also expressions of contempt from many foreign admirers of the poet regarding the author of the depredation, to whom the Dutch intellectual Constantijn Huygens dedicated a Latin composition entitled *Laura Latroni* (Ferrazzi, 1877, 606–608). And, although it is notably imprecise,⁸ it is focused on the successive nineteenth century openings, praising in particular that carried out by Leoni (Ferrazzi, 1877, 610–612).

Three years earlier, on the fifth centenary of Petrarch's death, Giovanni Cittadella, an eminent intellectual from Padua, had aligned the two names of Martinelli and Leoni to praise the admirable enterprise by the latter with "rare munificence". Of course, there was no shortage of misleading news from the Paduan Count on that occasion, which was spread unchallenged by all those who were in any way involved with the poet's ark (Cittadella, 1874, 59–60, 70–71).

5 On the biography of Leoni, see Millocca, 2005 and Belloni, 1983. The term *tradition* is used here in its anthropological dimension (Povolo, 2015, 7–13).

6 A very important statement, not without a controversial note, is the one that N. Tommaseo wrote at the end of his brief speech on Arquà (Tommaseo, 1845, 15–16).

7 About this work: Belloni, 1983.

8 The inaccuracies, as we will see, were due to the misleading information provided by Leoni.



Fig. 4: Francesco Bellucco. View of Arquà (late 18th century). In: Zaborra, G. B. (1797): *Petrarca in Arquà*.

The fifth centenary celebrations, however, took place in a cultural and political climate that had led to the formation of the new Italian state (Bertè, 2004). Included as one of the symbols of the Risorgimento, the memory of Francesco Petrarca was evoked, both in Padua and in Arquà, with celebrations culminating in speeches by Giosuè Carducci and Aleanardo Aleanardi. As suggested, the celebrations reflected firstly the aspirations of a local elite, which in the case of Padua, found its cultural reference points in the old university and the city academies; a localised aspiration, with a clear traditional imprint, aimed at claiming a sort of cultural prerogative from the poet's memory, even though it was in the context of the new national climate.⁹

In fact, the 1874 Petrarch celebrations hid a more subtle and unresolved conflict, which the previous 1843 opening had explicitly brought to light in the following decades, and which was destined to resurface during the celebrations dedicated to the Petrarch centenary. In December 1873 the community of Arquà and some of the neighbouring areas, centred on the ancient *Accademia di Bovolenta*, pre-empted by sponsoring the reopening of the ark and entrusting the anthropologist Giovanni Canestrini the task of inspecting the

⁹ As suggested by H. Hendrix, the Petrarch celebrations, both in France and in Italy, did not take place solely and essentially in the wake of national aspirations, but expressed “many elements that transcend the framework of nation-building and denote links with more traditional cultural practices, inspired by cosmopolitanism on the one hand and local competition on the other” (Hendrix, 2014, 117, 123–124). Conversely, M. Dović and J. Helgason are more inclined to emphasize the cultural impetus linked to nation building, noticeable since the 1840s (Dović & Helgason, 2016, 50).



Fig. 5: Ceremony at Petrarch's tomb. Photograph taken in July 1874, on the fifth centenary of Petrarch's death. (Civic Library of Padua).¹⁰

poet's remains – an initiative clearly sparked by the traditional rivalry between town and countryside, aiming to assert a sort of jurisdiction over the ancient ark.

The 1843 restoration, wanted and paid for by Carlo Leoni, a notable member of the city elite, had in fact been transmuted into a true and proper opening of the ark. An event that had not been viewed favourably by the local community, who considered Francesco Petrarch a sort of a local hero, whose prestige was visibly attested to by the constant stream of foreign visitors.

This reopening, as we shall see, determined a sort of short circuit and a series of tensions which were re-echoed until the following celebrations, even though the account of it channelled through the established cultural city elite gave it a positive gloss, despite it being clear from the outset that it had not been done in an entirely orthodox manner.¹¹

¹⁰ The photographs from the Civic Library of Padua are published by courtesy of the Municipality of Padua.

¹¹ Again in 1923, in his review of 19th century Petrarchan literature, C. Naselli took up the two *traditions* to emphasize forcefully the meritorious action of Leoni (Naselli, 1923, 286–287).

In this series of accounts, the name of Martinelli and the affair of 1630–1631 were constantly represented in a negative light in order to justify the successive 19th century openings. In fact, it is probable that his name, which became the unequivocal symbol of a fearsome deprecation, carried out with the connivance of members of the local community, was not perceived as substantially different from the one behind the 1843 opening and could thus justify the 1873 initiative aimed at reasserting the prerogatives advanced by one who had always been considered a local hero.

Francesco Petrarca's ark became a catalysing symbol for tensions sparked off by claims and aspirations from a number of parties competing to attain the prerogative of celebrating the cult of the great poet: the village of Arquà and surrounding areas endowed with government institutions, the city of Padua and the greater Italian cultural scene, well represented by the national literary community, with its academies and institutions. In the same way, the city of Padua could vaunt the prestige of its university, its intellectuals, who claimed a sort of political supremacy over the final years of the poet's life. Whilst the community of Arquà, with its traditions and, above all the visible presence of the ark, placed in the village churchyard, which had for centuries held the remains of the great poet, could justifiably claim to be the depository of Petrarca's final will.

The latest opening of the ark took place on the 18th of November 2003 as an initiative of a team from Padua University, with the aim of reconstructing a computerised image of the poet to celebrate the anniversary of his birth.¹² What occurred on the night of the 27th of May 1630 and in the successive 19th- and 20th-century openings of the ark seemed to belong to a remote past whose memories appeared substantially ephemeral in respect to the extraordinary nature of an event publicised by major national and international media.

But in October of the following year, to general amazement, the coordinator of the team, Professor Vito Terribile Wiel Marin, anatomopathologist of Padua University, publicly announced that the skull deposited inside the ark did not belong to Francesco Petrarca.¹³ A DNA test and carbon dating analysis carried out on some fragments of the skeleton demonstrated beyond doubt that it was a female skull dating from sometime

12 Even this opening was not without controversy, as this intervention by Michele Sartori seems to reflect, with hints of irony and amusement (*L'Unità*, 19. 11. 2003: Briciole di patatine sulle ossa di Petrarca, 13).

13 The British newspaper *The Guardian* summarized: "The bones of what was thought to be Petrarca's venerable head were in fragments when they were removed from his tomb. In 1873, it had been opened by an investigator, Professor Giovanni Canestrini, also at Padua University. 'He claimed Petrarca's skull disintegrated on contact with the air,' said Prof Terribile Wiel Marin. 'Since none of us has ever come across an instance of this happening, we can only conclude he dropped it.' Or might he have made up the whole story, putting back a damaged substitute and keeping for himself the head of a man revered as one of the fathers of the Renaissance?" (*The Guardian*, 6. 4. 2004: Petrarca—The Poet Who Lost His Head). Many Italian newspapers also dealt with what was immediately called a "mystery" (e.g., *La Repubblica*, 12. 10. 2004: Petrarca. Mistero sulla tomba, 28).

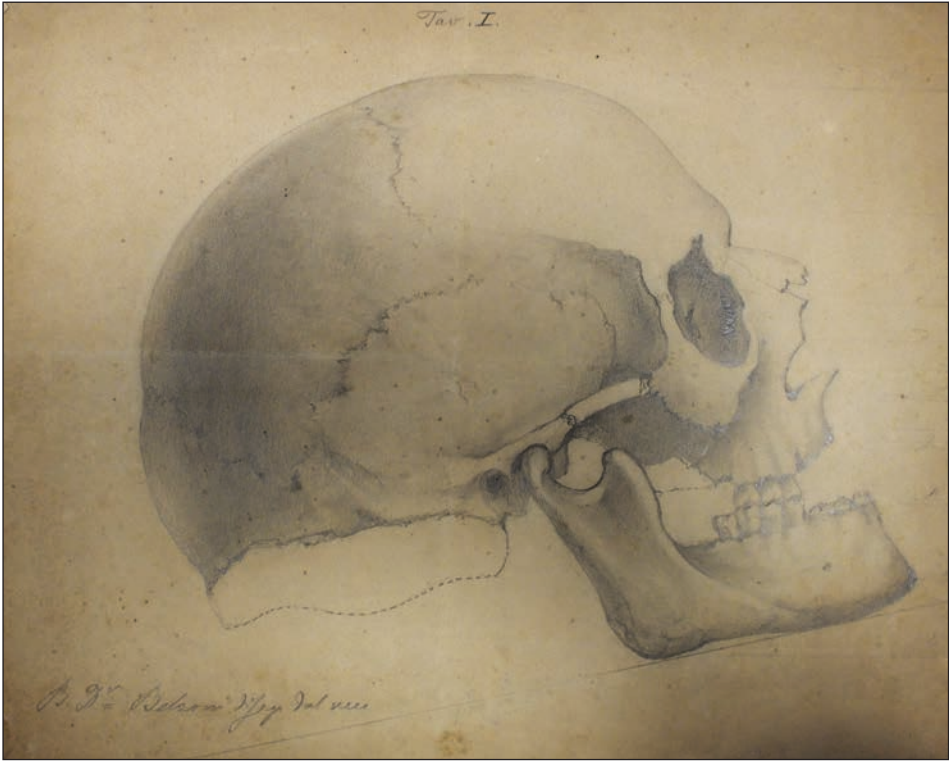


Fig. 6: The skull found in the tomb. Drawing by Bartolomeo Belzoni, produced on the occasion of the ark's reopening in December 1873. (Civic Library of Padua).

between 1134 and 1280.¹⁴ Going back to the past in order to identify the author of the surprising substitution was inevitable. And suspicion was inevitably cast on Giovanni

14 For this reason, the intervention of D. Caramelli, who carried out the analysis of the old DNA (aDNA) on two samples, a tooth and a rib fragment, was fundamental: “Multiplex DNA sex identification indicated that the two bone samples belong to different individuals, the tooth belonged to a female and the rib belonged to a male. This result was in agreement with and supported the morphological analysis [...]. Sex identification of the skeleton bones was well defined by historical morphological data as a male individual. The reassembled skeleton bore evidence of injuries compatible with those mentioned by Petrarch during his lifetime. Skull sex determination is more difficult using anthropometry and anthroposcopy analyses, but possible female origin suggested that the skull and postcranial remains were from two individuals. The aDNA results are consistent with morphological investigations and confirm the importance of using both molecular and morphological approaches in investigating historical remains” (Caramelli et al., 2007, 39). Such observations lead us to believe that it was very unlikely that Canestrini, in 1873, could have realized that he was dealing with a female skull.

Canestrini,¹⁵ as it seemed almost impossible that the skull had disintegrated, as described by the anthropologist himself.¹⁶

Subsequent detailed scientific studies have agreed on a possible substitution of the skull between 1944 and 1946 (Zanchin & Panetto, 2010). Indeed, the ark had been reopened in November 1944 at the behest of the political authorities of the Italian Social Republic, and with the supervision of the *Sovrintendenza ai monumenti*. Moved for security reasons to the Doge's Palace in Venice, the remains of the poet, when the conflict was over, were transferred first to the Institute of Anatomy at Padua University, and then definitively brought back to Arquà on the 26th of June 1946.¹⁷ The verified substitution, however, remained a conundrum contrary to expectations.¹⁸ The skull, it was maintained, had not in its entirety belonged to a woman, inasmuch as two fragments possessed the same characteristics as the rest of the skeleton, unequivocally that of Francesco Petrarca.¹⁹ The authors of *The Recognition of the Remains of Francesco Petrarca* held that the substitution occurred just after the Second World War on the basis of observations (Zanchin & Panetto, 2010, 38) that seemed to completely exclude the possibility that it had taken place during an earlier period.²⁰

-
- 15 Although in a more nuanced manner, the authors of *Historicizing Race* seem to give credit to the idea of Canestrini's responsibility: "The whole tale told by Canestrini in his account may well have been a cover-up to hide the simple truth that, in his irrepressible excitement, to which he readily admitted, he may have dropped the poet's cranium on the ground and then replaced it with another out of embarrassment at his clumsiness" (Turda & Quine, 2018, 89).
- 16 "One cannot, I believe, deny that the opening of the tomb in 1843 and the following one in 1855 have greatly contributed to this final outcome" (Canestrini, 1874b, 16). The engineer Dr. Bartolomeo Belzoni intervened to remedy the sudden disintegration of the external parts of the skull. As his son Guido, present at the opening of 1873 wrote many years later: "Dr. Belzoni, a truly skilled designer, to save the situation, improvised a small device of iron wires able to support the precarious recomposition of the skull and to allow him to make a complete graphic design, as well as later partial ones, and to make the most minute anthropometric measurements with the guidance of Dr. Fanzago, and according to the directives of the professor [Canestrini]" (Belzoni, 1941, 24). On the basis of what emerged in 2003–2004, H. Hendrix, referring to the opening financed by Carlo Leoni, hypothesized that "there are indeed strong indications that he took away the skull that he himself found in excellent condition, substituting it with another one that later research found to be in extremely poor condition already a few years later, at the next opening of the grave in 1874" (Hendrix, 2019, 40). In reality, as we will have occasion to demonstrate, no explicit testimony, between 1843 and 1874, contains elements that could make this hypothesis plausible; and indeed from those years the official tradition that has come down to our times has been consolidated.
- 17 A testimony of that day in Quaretti, 2016, 46–48. A copy of the report, signed by several witnesses is kept in the Museo Petrarcesco Piccolomineo in Trieste.
- 18 I.e., between the (substituted) skull, belonging to a woman, and the remainder of the skeleton, belonging to a man reasonably identifiable as Petrarch (Caramelli et al., 2007, 39).
- 19 The fragments of the cranium belonged to "a spurious female individual, except for the small piece containing the occipital condyle and right hemimandible. All the other bones (including the hyoid bone and ossified thyroid cartilage) are attributed to the male post-cranial skeleton" (Zanchin & Panetto, 2010, 38). However, see the passage by Caramelli reported above.
- 20 "In support of this thesis, the *reddish hair* that had fallen from the occiput in 1855 confirms that the skull then present in the tomb was the same one that had been observed on the 23rd of June 1630, thereby ruling out a possible substitution during that period of time." Doctor Ferdinando Moroni, present in 1855 when the rib was replaced, had found red hair on the back part of the skull. And the same colour had been observed during the investigation carried out in 1630 during the trial against Martinelli: a fact, therefore, which, according to the authors, would exclude the possibility that the substitution had already taken place before 1855. But, in this regard, see what was observed below, where the information emerging during the previous nineteenth-century openings is seen in a different light.

The mystery, emerging unexpectedly after the new opening, obviously spurred research to discover the perpetrator, but above all suggested a search for the truth based inevitably on the tangled web of complex relationships between the scientific and humanistic approach, between disciplines like forensic anthropology and history, jurisprudence and literature. And what really happened, above all in the 19th century, could be ascertained only by penetrating the complex world inhabited by previous protagonists of the ark's opening.

THE DEAD OF ARQUÀ

In 1831 *Una visita ad Arquà*²¹ by Pietro Chevalier (Chevalier, 1831) was published, a work defining, for the first time, the image of the village as the place of pilgrimage celebrating the great poet; without neglecting the scenery and countryside, and great attention paid to the local inhabitants. This little work opened with a chapter dedicated to *Il paese*, the village, and then in the following pages the places which had become symbols of the great poet's memory: *Il lago* (*The Lake*), *La casa* (*The House*), *Il fonte* (*The Fountain*), *La tomba* (*The Tomb*). The final chapter, *Il Pretorio*,²² after a few brief historical digressions, gave the author the spur to describe some of the characteristics of the village and its inhabitants.

Chevalier gave pride of place to the village of Arquà, but focused without hiding his animosity and embedded prejudice on the community he saw there, portrayed in a negative light and stigmatised for some of its ethnic and cultural features, reflected, in the eyes of the author, in the indifference and carelessness shown towards the Petrarch sites.

The observations of an intellectual like Chevalier show a deep dichotomy still existing in those years between town and countryside, and above all the absence of a social stratum able to absorb and understand the political transformations in such

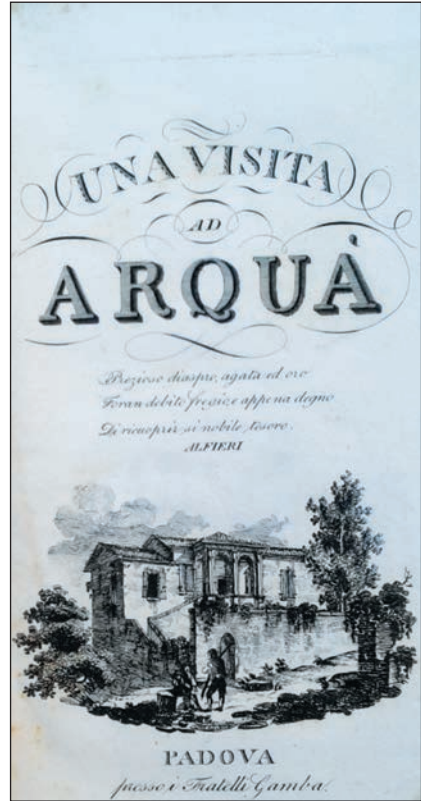


Fig. 7: Title page of *Una visita ad Arquà* by Pietro Chevalier (1831).

21 With an admirable series of engravings.

22 I.e., the villa, located in the highest part of the village, which housed the vicars sent periodically from the city of Padua to administer Arquà and the neighbouring villages.



Fig. 8: *La tomba* [The Tomb] from *Una visita ad Arquà* by Pietro Chevalier (1835).

a way as to influence social reality, or at least to become a voice for groups trying to improve the way of life for the lower orders.²³ But his work is particularly interesting because, although attributing to the inhabitants the neglect shown towards Petrarchan sites, he was unable to hide that sort of symbolic symbiosis which had grown up between the village, the great poet, and the cult which had arisen amongst many of the visitors. In the chapter dedicated to Petrarch's ark, Chevalier wrote:

None, though, however much they wanted to penetrate the sad reality of the situation, could ever form an idea of the bad behaviour of those countrymen, shaped by indifference, contempt and even aversion shown towards the monument. Yet it seems they should at least be proud of the devotion they see it being held in; and the passage of pilgrims, often illustrious, who visit their poor village; and of the fame deriving from this (Chevalier, 1841, 45).

23 Despite the heralded intentions, and a few innovative proposals, periodicals such as *Il Giornale Euganeo* or *Il Caffè Pedrocchi*, which appeared in Padua in the 1840s, do not seem to have produced meaningful transformations to the social fabric (Soper, 2013, 27–44).

To get to the painful point, an erudite writer, and certainly with a good knowledge of Petrarchan literature, Pietro Chevalier meant to decidedly debunk what he viewed as a sort of myth, mistakenly created by educated travellers and British poets:

And that honoured haughtiness that inspired British genius, which so loved our soil, and so honoured our achievements, claims them for the ashes of the great; and that simple admiration of a rude mind, which venerates in ignorance and shows silently the sepulchre of the one who lived there, rests there, and for so many years has been cherished by all, and somehow offers such ideas of sweetness, that it pains us to have to say it is a complete illusion (Chevalier, 1841, 45–46).²⁴

In fact, as we have already seen, Chevalier's fierce criticism derived largely from a misapprehension of that world, exacerbated by the fact that in that very period profound cultural and political transformations had assailed a community still deeply immersed in its own traditions. It is significant that he, in order to underline the illusion into which George Byron and other British travellers had fallen, goes back to the distant episode of the deprecation of the poet's tomb by Friar Tommaso Martinelli and some of the villagers,²⁵ whilst stigmatising other more recent profanations:

And how often did they not plant laurel and cypress trees around the tomb! Always that rude genus, or cut off still tender buds, or uprooted the trunks. The four laurels planted by Chevalier Faujas de Sant-Fond were already, thanks to the care of a gentle soul, luxuriant, and spread their ever-living shade across the sacred tumulus. The insidiousness of those people evaded every protection, and, with sacrilegious hands, they destroyed them in a moment, almost as if they were ashamed of the honour rendered to the great one, whom they are unworthy to have amongst their dead (Chevalier, 1831, 47).²⁶

24 The author cited in his notes the famous excerpt from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* by Byron, in which the latter praised the attention lavished on the poet's ashes by the inhabitants of Arquà: "They keep his dust in Arquà, where he died. The mountain-village where his latter days went down the vale of years; and it's their pride – an honest pride – and let it be their praise, to offer to the passing stranger's gaze his mansion and his sepulcher" (Byron, 1819, 298).

25 "This violation, which, if nothing else, should be attributed to the utter neglect by the inhabitants owing to the difficulty of performing it on a summer night, among so many surrounding houses, was followed not much later by another outrage. From an adjoining house, the bronze head above the sepulchre was used as a target for shots from their harquebuses. And thanks to this game, which was imitated all day with stones thrown by the local boys, the head was crushed in various places and one eye pierced" (Chevalier, 1831, 7).

26 In a note, it was recalled how this happened in 1806, then was added "A new plantation of cypresses and laurels was also made and celebrated in 1824" (Chevalier, 1831, 64).



Fig. 8bis: The centre of Arquà Petrarca represented in a Napoleonic land register from 1810. Indicated with capital letters are the church (A), Petrarch's tomb (C) and the square (B). There is no indication of the old cemetery, where some tombs also stood, which George Byron would mention in the following years, when recalling his first visit to Arquà. (State Archives of Venice).

George Gordon Byron visited Arquà three times between 1817 and 1819.²⁷ Despite not being a great admirer of the poet, he was struck by the strong allure of the place and the sense of solitude, which it conferred on the visitor (Byron, 1819, 298–300).²⁸ In his notes commenting on the poem, Byron entered into more detail about the place hosting the poet's remains:

27 I.e., in April and September 1817 and in September 1819, when he was accompanied by his beloved Teresa Guiccioli (Rognoni, 2006, 60–63).

28 “Verses 30–34 of the fourth canto of Childe Harold - stanzas that would have contributed to making Arquà an almost sine qua non of literary pilgrimage - are beautiful by dint of their calmness, and so successful, I think, precisely because dictated by a moderate and almost cautious enthusiasm [...]: ‘if from society we learn to live’, Arquà is a place suitable for the melancholic, where one can feel that Solitude should teach us how to die” (Rognoni, 2006, 61).

Petrarch is laid, for he cannot be said to be buried, in a sarcophagus of red marble, raised on four pilasters on an elevated base, and preserved from an association with meaner tombs. It stands conspicuously alone, but will be soon overshadowed by four lately planted laurels (Byron, 1819, 403–404).

Byron came to Arquà in the years in which the community was undergoing profound changes. The ark of the great poet held sway over the more humble tombs in the churchyard, where for centuries the villagers had been buried.²⁹ The four laurels surrounding the ark, as we are reminded by Pietro Chevalier, had been planted about a decade earlier. A homage giving rise to the separation of the more modest tumuli of the local people from the ark, a process that in a few years would lead to a complete separation with the building of a new cemetery on the outskirts of the village. During his *Visita* the haughty glance of Chevalier was set on a completely changed landscape: Petrarch's ark rose alone outside the church, in a yard that had become a modest square, which he did not fail to depict in one of his famous engravings.

For centuries, Petrarch's body had lain amongst Arquà dead in symbiosis, which the villagers had certainly considered a natural, obvious, *cultural* reality. During their pastoral visitations, the bishops did not fail to register the high-sounding ark in the midst of the cemetery (ADP-V, XLXI, 45r; LXXXIX, 327r³⁰). It concerned a space where religious and secular dimensions had overlapped for centuries, even if the ecclesiastical authorities, with little success, tried to extend their own jurisdiction, imposing a new discipline (Le Bras, 1979, 54–56).³¹ The oldest parish burial register (APAP-LD, I; [1630–1713]) shows that mostly children and youths were buried in the churchyard, whilst a large number of adults were buried in tombs inside the building, built by confraternities or single families.³²

29 As is known, Petrarch had stated in his will, drafted in 1370, that if he died in Arquà, his body should be buried in a chapel, or in the parish church (Mommsen, 1957). As P. Ariès forcefully pointed out, in medieval language the word church indicated both the buildings and the surrounding space, including the bell tower and the cemetery, even if later the latter term came to mean the area outside the church (Ariès, 1998, 19). The poet therefore intended to be buried in a specific chapel inside the church. Since this had not been built, his body was nevertheless placed inside the building until, six years later, his son-in-law Francescuolo da Brossano had the ark erected right in the middle of the village cemetery. Although in an imposing and distinguished position, the body of Petrarch was placed among the most humble graves, in a sort of religious commune, just as Byron would see it many centuries later.

30 Regarding this last visitation (1747): Bellinati, 1969, 122.

31 Although signs of change begin to appear from the end of the seventeenth century, “we must nevertheless admit that for over a millennium people had felt perfectly at ease in this promiscuity between the living and the dead [...]. [The living] were as familiar with the dead as they were with their own death” (Ariès, 1998, 32–33).

32 Several families (Perazzolo, Callegaro, Pinaffo, Molin and others) had their own tombs in the church, although burial at the altars of the brotherhoods (especially those of the *Beata Vergine del Carmine* and of the *Santissimo Sacramento*) were more common. In the modern age, the confraternities played an important role in assisting the funerals of the members of the more modest classes (Ariès, 1998, 106–107). Burial in church was obviously reserved for members of the brotherhoods, thus generally excluding children under fourteen. It should also be added that the particular nature of the soil made burial in the earth difficult: on the 8th of January 1778, the twenty-five-year-old Giovan Maria Biasiolo was buried in the cemetery “and placed underground down to the level of the mountain mud, since it could not go more than four feet under”. Also in subsequent records it was noted that they had dug down to the “moving mud”, most likely because the parish priest wanted to attest that he had adhered as far as possible to the new regulations issued in that period (APAP-LD, III [1762–1796], for the dates).

The situation began to change due to both an increase in population,³³ and to a new sensitivity, which had emerged regarding health and hygiene, which culminated in the edict of Saint-Cloud (1804) (Tomasi, 2002; Selvafolta, 2007).³⁴ The world of the dead had split from that of the living and, above all the new legislation, even though it was imposed gradually, transferred authority over cemeteries to local municipalities, definitively creating a new and different rapport between sacred and profane.³⁵

In the Lombardo-Venetian kingdom a strong series of initiatives aimed at regulating burials, moving them outside inhabited areas, were generated relatively late. A regulation appeared in 1811, but was in fact rarely applied, and only from the 1820s was it forbidden to bury within the church, and the removal of cemeteries to uninhabited areas was imposed. Between 1823 and 1825, the Venetian government set up an enquiry to ascertain which communities in the various provinces were actually respecting the new regulation. Called on by the government, the *Delegato provinciale* (Provincial Delegate) of Padua reported in December 1823 that a number of municipalities had not yet prepared the new cemeteries. In fact:

*Regarding the burial of corpses in churches, local authorities assured the Royal Delegation that the problem had been resolved. Just the district of Battaglia, and particularly the municipality of Arquà still left some doubts, whilst despite the repeated prescriptions and encouragements directed to that Commissario, there had not yet been positive compliance allowing complete tranquillity regarding the absence of a practice unfortunately deeply rooted in those parts.*³⁶ (ASV-GV, 2588, LXVII).

The community of Arquà had shown reluctance, if not hostility, towards the new regulations imposed from the outside. But eventually they had to surrender: a new cemetery was built in 1825 and 1826 (APAP-LD, IV [1796–1832]³⁷). Yet during his pastoral visitation to Arquà in 1825, Bishop Farina noted that inhumations took place in the church:

The cemetery is extremely narrow and closed; but corpses are still buried in the church arches. Grass is burnt. The building of a new cemetery has been correctly put to tender (ADP-V, CXIV, 671v).

33 In the pastoral visitation of 1747, 941 inhabitants were registered. Whereas in 1825, there were 1048 (Bellinati & Fontana, 1988, 18–21): an increase that, in itself, was not enough to justify moving the cemetery.

34 As Ariès argued “a practice that had lasted for almost a millennium without causing any fuss, was no longer tolerated” (Ariès, 1998, 59).

35 “Although the cemetery is not a place of worship, it could be said that it is the place in the village where the most moving worship takes place, perhaps the most frequented [...]. Laicized, the cemetery remains a sacred place” (Le Bras, 1979, 60–61).

36 On the 13th of October of the previous year the *Delegato*, citing the case of Arquà, the only community in the province to persist in the ancient practice of burying in the church, observed, “The ancient cemetery of that place is found to be extremely cramped and unable to host corpses after 1817” (ASV-GV, 2588, LXVII); the dossier contains the correspondence between the Government and the *Delegazione provinciale* (Provincial Delegation) of Padua between September 1823 and April 1824. It is significant that, after only two months, the *Delegato* no longer justified the persistence of the ancient tradition due to the “impossibility” of the cemetery to take new burials.

37 In the summer of 1826, the parish priest began to record the burials in the “new cemetery”. However, with the permission of the *Commissario*, some people were buried in the church even in the following months.

The municipality commission had proposed the Castello area, situated in the higher part of the village, but it turned out not to be fit for purpose.³⁸ And so the new cemetery had to be built on the plain, considerably further from the church and the inhabited area than was required by the new regulations.

A new phase had started. The village church and Petrarch's ark stayed in the space they had shared for centuries, but which henceforth took on a very different complexion. Other protagonists were now entering the village stage, which only a few years earlier George Gordon Byron had seen as still immersed in tradition.

SHORT CIRCUIT

On the 24th of May 1843, a small crowd had gathered outside the parish church of Arquà, around the ark, which for centuries had held Francesco Petrarch's remains. Despite not having been made public, everyone present knew that, at the behest of the young Padua nobleman Carlo Leoni, with the agreement of the village archpriest (parish priest) and representatives of the community, the imposing monument dominating the little village square for centuries was going to be restored.

The events of that late spring morning in 1843 had taken place without any formal permission from the authorities, and as would later become apparent, sparked criticism and suspicion, creating perplexity and opposition from the local notables themselves.³⁹ The suspicion that the operation had been conducted superficially and without due preparation spread fast, creating bad feeling and hostility towards the two main protagonists.

This was probably the reason that a few days later, the archpriest Saltarini troubled himself to inform the *Gazzetta privilegiata di Venezia*, which on the 6th of June 1843 published a brief report, with which the events in the little Euganean village were explicitly and openly brought to the knowledge of the public.⁴⁰

Saltarini began his report, dated the 26th of May, a statement which, above all in the light of what happened next, is important to follow in its major developments, complaining of the lamentable state of the ark, and the need to restore it, which unfortunately the Arquà municipality was unable to satisfy.

Luckily, he added, a wealthy benefactor had intervened, Count Leoni, who had offered to see to the necessary restoration. Now the ark, restored to its original splendour, could be admired by the numerous visitors.

The archpriest then continued by announcing that the ark had had to be opened, offering those present a view of the great poet's remains:

38 As noted by the *Direzione delle pubbliche costruzioni* (Direction of Public Buildings) on the 20th of December 1824, the area "is not suitable for the use it was intended for, given that, beneath a layer of approximately 35 centimetres of mixed earth, live stone is found which leaves no room for excavation" (ASV-GV, 2810, V).

39 How clear it would have appeared in 1848 but also by the judicial investigation itself following the complaint lodged by some people living in Monselice.

40 *Gazzetta privilegiata di Venezia*, 6. 6. 1843: Notizie sul restauro alla tomba del Petrarca, e stato in che si ritrovarono le ceneri di lui, 509–510.

To keep it balanced and to seal the cracks in the urn it was indispensable to raise the lid of the western side. With the stone lifted, we saw the bones of the Great One in this way. At a depth of about two feet, they lay on a naked table of larch, so it was false what some ancient chroniclers said, that they were buried in a double coffin. The skull facing west is very well preserved, somewhat moved from its place and still has twelve teeth: it was in the midst of a large hive of insects, which it was felt opportune to move immediately. The chin bone, about a foot away from the skull had seven teeth. The entire right arm is missing, which we know to have been stolen in 1630; to the violence of that theft must be attributed the shifting of the skull, the chin and almost all the other parts. The bones of the thorax, decomposed and heaped, those of the femur intact and very bleached, and the tibia covered with white linen round it. Almost the whole of the bottom of the table, covered and spread over by a black tunic, which had disintegrated, almost completely disappearing, except for some strips of fabric near the head. Deeper down a blue crust occupied a small space, and could be believed to be the remains of the canonical emblems, with which historians say he was buried.

Curiosity and enthusiasm infected all the onlookers:

Count Leoni removed from those sacred scraps a piece of the tunic mentioned, and gave it straight to the archpriest. This relic, all the more precious (because it showed a number of hairs) to recall the event and the great love jealously conserved in this church hall, will be appropriately protected. At ten thirty on that 24th of May, the urn was opened and then closed a few moments later in the presence of the aforementioned Count Leoni, the sculptor Gradenigo, one of the representatives of the municipality, the undersigned, and not a small number of villagers. The enthusiasm and curiosity of the peasants on seeing the remains was noteworthy, and their veneration, together with requests to be given at least a fragment of the material. But this was not granted. Before closing this brief account, may I be allowed to offer the clearest and most deserved praise and thanks to the uncommon generosity of the illustrious Count Leoni, who with such love wanted to support such a noble and necessary work.

This account by the archpriest Saltarini cleverly dodged the issue of the lack of permission from the appropriate administrative and political authorities and aimed in particular at underlining the advantages gained from restoration of the ancient ark, carried out thanks to the munificence of Count Leoni. The description of the state in which the remains of Francesco Petrarca were found was apparently indispensable, as was the reference to the cleaning of the skull surrounded by a large hive. Saltarini went on by underlining that the ark had been quickly closed again, despite the curiosity shown by the peasants who had rushed to witness the event. And to conclude, it referred, in passing, to Count Leoni entrusting him



Fig. 10: A lithograph by Antonio Dalola depicting the event of the opening of the ark in May 1843 upon Carlo Leoni's initiative. In the background, next to Leoni, Archpriest Saltarini and sculptor Antonio Gradenigo are portrayed. The drawing, probably made at a later time, was perhaps aimed at relieving the Paduan count of responsibility. (Civic Library of Padua).

with a small strip of the tunic conserved on the larch table placed at the bottom of the ark.⁴¹

During the following summer, the archpriest's account was taken up by many newspapers of the time, thus reinforcing an account that should have allayed any suspicion or diffidence regarding what occurred on the 24th of May 1843 (*La Moda*, 10. 06. 1843, 251–252; *La Farfalla*, 14. 06. 1843; *Il Vaglio. Giornale di scienze, lettere, arti*, 1. 7. 1843, 207; *Il Felsineo*, 16. 8. 1843, 86–87).

In fact, criticism had inevitably arisen; and was focused above all on Carlo Leoni, who had evidently played an important role in the opening of the tomb. Already the

41 On the tunic, he added, "a number of hairs" were found. A detail that, as we will see, is not insignificant for the purposes of the hypothesis formulated in these pages, also because it was not the upper part of a tunic, but actually a black hood that had been placed on the poet's head at the time of his burial.

previous year Leoni had publicly manifested his clear interest in the Petrarchan ark (Leoni, 1842, 127–128) and it cannot have been difficult to obtain the collaboration of the sculptor Antonio Gradenigo,⁴² or that of the archpriest Saltarini.

That opening, conducted with some stealth, had elicited a certain surprise and diffidence. A none too veiled criticism arrived on the 25th of June 1843 from an anonymous letter to *La Moda*, which had published Saltarini's account a few days earlier.⁴³ Referring to the "egregious young person" who had sponsored the restoration, the anonymous polemicist insinuated above all how no man of science had taken part (*La Moda*, 25. 6. 1843, 276–277).

But there was more disapproval, which, even if not made publicly, appeared to put into question the entire operation carried out on the 24th of May 1843. Carlo Leoni possessed a noble mansion and an estate in Arquà,⁴⁴ but being a citizen of Padua, having a title and contacts had definitely not been enough to overcome the diffidence, if not hostility of the local elite (Millocca, 2005). The collaboration obtained from the archpriest and probably of some representatives of the community had been insufficient to overcome the criticism towards an operation that had clearly gone beyond its original aims.

In this light, one can understand why a little later there followed the publication of his volume of *Memorie* dedicated to the life of Petrarch, *Vita di Petrarca* (Leoni, 1843). Surprisingly, the literato from Padua did not mention directly the recent restoration of the ark, which he had financed. Instead, he focused at length on the previous violation of the sepulchre, committed by Martinelli in 1630, citing what he claimed was a document he had found himself in the municipal archives of Arquà, stating decisively that the bones removed on that occasion were being kept in Madrid.

Leoni's *Memorie* were, however, followed by an appendix, distinguished by a significant title: *Pochi cenni intorno alla ristaurazione della tomba di Petrarca* (A few details about the restoration of Petrarch's tomb) (Meneghelli, 1843a), written by Antonio Meneghelli, one of the most noted Petrarch scholars of the time (Chiancone, 2009), a text apparently meant to justify and glorify Leoni's undertaking, refuting any criticism of him.

Meneghelli, in his exposition, clearly followed what, several months earlier, the archpriest had revealed about the restoration and the state of the poet's remains. But, then, he inserted several significant variations:

Amongst the operations required for a complete reparation was that of balancing the urn which had bent somewhat, and closing the cracks. It was thus necessary to lift the lid, showing the immortal's bones. It is hard to describe the effects on the

42 Antonio Gradenigo (1806–1884) collaborated with the architect G. Jappelli and was active above all in Veneto as a carver and modeller (Cannarsa, 2002).

43 The anonymous reader, who called himself an associate of the magazine, wrote from Milan on the 20th of June 1843.

44 The current Casa Mentasti, located in the highest part of the village, just above Piazza San Marco (Crispino et al., 2012, 76).

onlookers, quite numerous, seeing that as well as the archpriest, the municipality commission, Leoni and Gradenigo there were over forty people. We are happy to note this circumstance to show that with so many witnesses the sepulchre could not be violated, and that only the desire to poison such admirable works can have given credit to such ridiculous rumours (Meneghelli, 1843a, V).

Contesting its foundation, Antonio Meneghelli therefore clearly acknowledged the suspicion that had immediately arisen of a possible violation of the poet's remains. But, apparently, he could not avoid referring to an episode, which the archpriest had been careful not to mention in his account published in the *Gazzetta*:

Furthermore, we can add that the fervent requests by many who wanted a strip of the almost completely worn out tunic were resisted with the utmost firmness. Perhaps we should have wanted a similar jealousy regarding a rib bone, which, on removing the hive, was found detached from the rest of the skeleton, but it was thought best to place it in a sealed container, make the parish priest the depository, and so have the advantage that those who visit the place may venerate at least a fragment, as it is not allowed to see the entire body (Meneghelli, 1843a, VI–VII).

Most probably, Meneghelli merely acknowledged a fact clearly known to all those present at the opening, but which had been intentionally withheld by the archpriest in his account. In such a way, he aimed to thwart any criticism of Leoni's undertaking, all the more, as has been seen, because the removed rib entrusted to the parish priest could be admired by the visitors who periodically came to admire the poet's ark.

The illustrious Petrarch scholar, however, went much further in his celebratory and defensive action regarding Carlo Leoni's work. In the notes to his *Pochi cenni*, he quoted the account sent to the *Gazzetta Veneta* by the Arquà archpriest the preceding 6th of June, but, significantly, added some passages that were not in it. After the description of the state of the poet's remains, he went on:

On removing the hive, a large rib bone and a piece of the tunic were found in it; all this was immediately given to me and sealed. This relic (made more precious due to the presence of a number of hairs), to recall the event and due to its jealously conserved rarity, will be kept in an appropriate place. A written report of everything above was made on the same day and signed by the named witnesses (Meneghelli, 1843a, X).

Thus Meneghelli introduced into the archpriest's account news of the removal of the rib bone, which seems to have been enclosed in the large hive, which had to be removed to clean the skull. It also omitted that brief passage where the parish priest claimed that the ark had been quickly closed again, significant changes, which seem to be supported by the presumed existence of a written record signed

by witnesses present at the tomb's opening.⁴⁵ The intervention from the illustrious Petrarch scholar should have prevented any literary or journalistic criticism, but above all was meant to stop the dangerous judicial initiative that began after the ark's opening.

THE JUDICIAL TRUTH

On the 7th of June 1843 some persons resident in Monselice made a report to the local magistrate, complaining that on the previous 24th of May Francesco Petrarca's ark had been opened, with the ensuing dispersal of some of the great poet's bones (ASV-GV, 6888, LXXIX).⁴⁶ In their opinion, there had been a *grave trasgressione di polizia* – a serious illegal action – on the basis of violation of the norm of the 20th of October 1838 regarding burials and inhumations.⁴⁷ As the accusation had been levelled the day following the publication of the letter from the archpriest of Arquà in the *Gazzetta Veneta*, it is very probable that both initiatives, whilst having different motivations, were sparked by rumours emerging after the opening of the ark.

The Monselice magistrates entrusted the *Commissario distrettuale*⁴⁸ (District Commissioner) of Battaglia to open an investigation, and on the following 27th of June informed the Governmental authorities of what had happened, whilst requesting that the judicial process should be given to another district. That from the beginning the case was extremely delicate was explicitly recognised by the government authorities themselves, who, on the 2nd of July 1843, applying to the *Delegato provinciale* in Padua to gain more information, recommended extreme caution:

As, furthermore, it concerned a matter attracting public attention due to the sort of veneration which over five centuries civilised people had been rendering to the Petrarchan tomb. (ASV-PG, 1054, I).

The recommendation was accepted by the *Delegato*, who made a detailed summary of the matter. The notion of restoring the ark had already been proposed in the summer of 1842, but the necessary funds had not been found to do so. Therefore:

45 They are also named in the judicial investigation. Very probably, however, these were signatures affixed as a seal, which is also spoken of at the time of the 1855 replacement.

46 The story emerges from the correspondence between the *Presidio di Governo* (Government Presidency), the *Governo* (Government) and the *Delegato* of Padua Antonio Gröller. The complaint and other documentation are summarized in the respective reports. On the administrative organization of the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom: Tonetti, 1997 and, for a more general picture, Meriggi, 1987.

47 Provided for by the second part of the Austrian criminal code (*Codice de' delitti e delle gravi trasgressioni politiche*) of 1815, the serious police transgressions were essentially crimes of lesser gravity, the responsibility of the magistrates and which on appeal were judged by the Government (Codice, 1815, part II, 1–182; Manzatto, 2007).

48 The figure of the *Commissario distrettuale*, at the base of the administrative structure of the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom, also played an important role in terms of social control and in connection with local institutions (Rossetto, 2013).



Fig. 10bis: Detail of the lithograph by Antonio Dalola produced to remember the opening financed by Carlo Leoni in 1843. (Civic Library of Padua).

In the current year the noble Count Leoni, man of letters and lover of fine arts, spending a large part of the year in Arquà, was sorry that for this reason the celebrated monument would be denied the necessary repairs, and had the generous idea of having it done at his own expense, through the work of the well-known sculptor Gradenigo Antonio and with the knowledge and agreement of the municipality commission and the local parish priest (ASV-GV, 6888, LXXIX).

same account, the *Delegato* clarified that, in order to go on with the restoration, the “lid” of the ark had been removed:

Indeed, this was what had already been confirmed by Don Giacomo Saltarini. But then, whilst continuing the

Those functionaries affirmed that during the work, it having become necessary to lift somewhat the lid of the tomb, the onlookers noticed that a large hornets’ nest had formed around the poet’s skull, so it was decided to lift the lid itself, in order to remove those insects, who with their presence were ever more harming the venerable remains. On the same occasion a rib was removed which had become detached from the corpse, along with a piece of tunic, which the archpriest kept with him with the intent to conserve it in order to satisfy, as he says, the desires of the visitors to Arquà (ASV-GV, 6888, LXXIX).

The *Delegato* observed however, that in his judgement, it was not possible to assume a violation of the norms regarding burials and inhumations, inasmuch as there lacked the two requirements necessary for this:

The first is lacking because the tomb is not in a church or oratory, but in the square near the church of Arquà, as has been wisely observed by the Government Presidency. The second is lacking because one cannot call dispersal, as understood by the law, the removal of a rib in order for it to constitute a relic sacred to the history of letters (ASV-GV, 6888, LXXIX).

A good and proper subterfuge this was, also designed to sustain the secular character of the former churchyard, which was now a square. The *Delegato* was of the opinion that illegal action had not taken place. But if, on the one side one had to thank Leoni for his work, on the other it still seemed opportune to “point out the irregularity of the decision taken”. And he concluded that the *Commissario* would be entrusted to check:

*To find out if any other piece of the covering or of the illustrious corpse had been taken, of which the Regia pretura (District Court) of Monselice had shown some suspicions in its report, and then to recuperate it*⁴⁹ (ASV-GV, 6888, LXXIX).

On the 29th of July 1843 the Veneto Government definitively closed the judicial procedure, accepting almost entirely the *Delegato*'s version, but regarding Count Leoni, the *Relatore* (a member of the Government) Francesco Beltrame⁵⁰ observed:

With the intimate satisfaction of having done something praiseworthy and precious for those who appreciate the glory of the famous genius, and the publicly expressed admiration, he obtained a reward which was to him most gratifying. And regarding the criticism of the decision taken, not to he who was present as a member of the public, but to the Municipality and the parish priest who intervened in their role as public officials, the following reprimand, which I propose to issue in the name of the government, is due (ASV-GV, 6888, LXXIX).

The judicial process thus concluded in the wake of the literary, praising the work of Carlo Leoni. The official version was definitively affirmed. There was still, however, the rib bone in the parish sacristy: a relic destined to exacerbate the tensions between Leoni and some of the Arquà notables.⁵¹

In the years following, the Paduan Count tried to move the remains to his own city,⁵² inevitably raising the hostility of the local elite. Tensions reached the surface in 1848, when one of the members of the Municipality, Giovanni Maria Callegari turned to the ministry of education and religion of the provisional government, recalling the *violation* of 1843 (ASV-GPV, 14, 5736). Callegari, a member of an important family that had tenaciously opposed Leoni's undertaking, did not mince words when claiming the community's prerogative, resolutely contesting not only

49 Doubts that apparently emerged from the same complaint presented on the 7th of June 1843.

50 Beltrame was honorary member of the Academy of Fine Arts of Venice and ordinary member of the *Ateneo Veneto* (Almanacco, 1843, 238).

51 The following year Leoni published his *Historical Works*, but in the chapter dedicated to Arquà and Petrarca's tomb, he added nothing to what he had already written in the previous memoirs (Leoni, 1844, 205–207).

52 In 1846, the municipality of Padua ordered a small bronze model, made to scale, of Petrarca's ark, which should have been used as a sort of reliquary to preserve the poet's rib. Ironically, it was instead the small urn that, in 1922, was to be finally deposited among the Petrarchan relics in Arquà.



Fig. 11: Model of the ark built at the initiative of Carlo Leoni to house the poet's rib removed in May 1843, which was to be transferred to Padua. (Civic Library of Padua).

the official version channelled through Meneghelli, but also the judicial process endorsed by the Austrian authorities in the summer of 1843.⁵³

The new social and political climate had therefore made evident that notables, who over the following decades would enter social networks on a larger scale, explicitly claimed the prerogatives of the community, and who, before being socially the most significant, became its authentic spokesmen.

A NEW RESTING PLACE IN 1855

Leoni's repeated attempts to move the Petrarcan relic deposited in the rectory at Arquà to Padua fuelled tensions with some members of the local elite, who, in their turn fought for the rib bone to be replaced in the ark. It was definitely these tensions that pushed the Paduan Count to take a personal position in a matter that

⁵³ The letter is dated the 10th of May 1848.



Fig. 12: The Arqua Petrarca town square with the tomb, in a drawing dating from around the mid-19th century. (Civic Library of Padua).

seemed to become more and more dangerous and embarrassing. In April 1853 an article of his entitled *La tomba del Petrarca in Arquà* (Petrarch's tomb in Arquà),⁵⁴ appeared in *L'educatore*, in which after confronting the distant depredation of 1630, he focused for the first time on the controversial restoration of 1843.

His historical introduction started inevitably with the 1630 depredation, recalling the phantomatic parchment present in the Arquà archives and the false news that the relics had ended up in the royal museum of Madrid, an introduction that Leoni used to confront, perhaps despite himself, the thorny subject of the 1843 restoration and the fear of the rib that had been removed being placed somewhere else. As he recalled, profoundly moved on seeing the relics:

Transported by such worthy emotion, I was unable to stop myself from plucking a piece of the envied relics to the visible comfort of his admirers and as a public remembrance of the event. It was a large rib bone and a piece of tunic, in front of over thirty witnesses, that I consigned to the archpriest G. Saltarini; and a

54 The piece reiterated what had already appeared in 1842 (Leoni, 1842).

*written record having been made, everything was sealed with a triple seal, the parish, the municipality and the Commissario, as it still is today.*⁵⁵

So Carlo Leoni decided to intervene regarding the events of the 24th of May 1843, even though he was unable to avoid the reopening of the ark.⁵⁶ On the 10th of July 1855, the municipality authorities and the *Commissario* of Monselice⁵⁷ proceeded privately to put back the poet's rib bone, kept by the current parish priest, Gaetano Cerchiari (ASV-DPA, 684, 5863).⁵⁸ In such a way, the controversial matter of the opening in May 1843 seemed definitively over, and we may assume that Count Leoni heaved a sigh of relief.⁵⁹

THE STATEMENT OF FERDINANDO MORONI

In *Le ossa di Francesco Petrarca*, Giovanni Canestrini spoke also of earlier openings of the ark, writing an accurate historical account. In particular, the one in 1855 could be reconstructed thanks to the statement of the Monselice doctor, Ferdinando Moroni, present on the occasion with an important role, although the ark had been reopened to replace, more simply, what had been removed in 1843, to be then consigned to the village archpriest.⁶⁰ It is worth examining this statement as it furnishes some important information regarding 1843. From the outset, Moroni immediately recalled the events of thirty years earlier:

-
- 55 Leoni did not yet reveal that he was in possession of the fragments of the hood that, in the autumn of 1873, he decided to donate to representatives of the Italian cultural scene. Neither that he had proudly lifted the poet's skull.
- 56 In October 1854, he wrote, "I have returned to Arquà where I had not been for ten years. I also aimed to induce those discourteous folk to finally accede to my vow and hand over Petrarch's rib to the Municipality of Padua as had been promised at the time of the tomb's restoration, but then repeatedly refused. But I was unable to conclude anything, the *Deputati*, the archpriest and private individuals persisting in their refusal, wanting it to be replaced in the grave, a foolish and strange thing. Here is what I got from doing well. In that restoration I spent over 1000 *svanziche* and endured endless harassment" (Leoni, 1976, 495–496).
- 57 Under whose jurisdiction Arquà fell after the suppression of the *Commissario* of Battaglia following the reorganization of the districts carried out with the *Sovrana Risoluzione* (Emperor's Order) of the 28th of January 1853, followed by the order of the Ministry of the Interior on the 7th of May 1853 (Bollettino delle leggi e degli atti del Governo della Venezia, 1853, allegato al N. 80, VI, I, 96–97).
- 58 The file contains the report of the operation to replace the rib and the report of the *Commissario* of Monselice of the 24th of July 1855 in which the *Delegazione* was informed that in accordance with the decree issued on the 30th of October 1854 and with the consent of the municipal delegation of Arquà, action to restore "the remains of Petrarch removed in 1843" to the tomb had been undertaken privately.
- 59 He recorded the event in his *Cronaca segreta* (Leoni, 1976, 501).
- 60 Moroni observed that he witnessed the opening "not in an official capacity, nor for a scientific purpose, but only to contemplate for the very short time they were visible, those precious remains that still resisted the destructive power of five centuries" (Canestrini, 1874b, 8). As Canestrini pointed out, Moroni, who had collaborated with him at the opening, subsequently sent him a letter, dated the 28th of December 1873, along with the report drawn up on the occasion of the relocation. A letter clearly sought by the anthropologist, enabling him to account for what had happened previously.



Fig. 13: Petrarch's tomb in a watercolour by Filippo Ortolani, produced in 1872. (Civic Library of Padua).

The generous work of Leoni created complaint and criticism, the monument having been opened without any authorisation, official observation or solemnity. And there were indeed profanations: a tooth, a strip of the tunic taken, and the rib bone in question by the archpriest, a certain Saltarini (Canestrini, 1874b, 7–8).

Ferdinando Moroni, just like the son of the engineer Belzoni, who was present on the occasion, was to do considerably later,⁶¹ gave a very different description from the official one given by Antonio Meneghelli. The Monselice doctor recalled the following opening of the 10th of July 1855, at which he had been more than a mere witness. On that occasion, he told how the skeleton was found in the same state as it was to appear later, in 1873, but with some substantial differences:

61 Guido Belzoni recalled many years later that it was “on that occasion that a rib from the skeleton was detached and stolen, it is not known how and by whom, but apparently by some ill-intentioned people who rushed up in the throng of curious onlookers, rather than to see anything, hoping to be able to remove some usable keepsake. And together with the rib, a strip of tunic which had survived the mayhem with other remains was also taken” (Belzoni, 1941, 221).



Fig. 14: Drawing reproducing a watercolour by Bartolomeo Belzoni, depicting the opening of the ark in December 1873. In: Belzoni, G. (1941): *Uno scienziato trentino alla ricognizione della tomba del Petrarca*.

However, the skull had slipped from the larch table, to the western left-hand corner, and the lower cheekbone a good distance, amongst the pelvic bones. I was allowed to adapt it to its articular cavities, and rest the head where we found it. Doing this, I saw some red hairs fall from the occiput and I admired the consistency and completeness of the skull bones, except for a few missing teeth, most of them upper ones [...] The colour of the skull was blackish [...] its conformation regular in every part and notable the extension of the cavity I deduced from the surface of the face. Handling it, I assured myself of its solidity and have no doubt that it would have completely satisfied your sapient research (Canestrini, 1874b, 8–9).⁶²

62 Moroni then continued: “I thought then that the decomposition, more noticeable in the upper half of the skeleton, was derived from a hand or instrument rummaging through with which part of the right arm was removed from the corresponding corner of the tomb, which was reshaped to a pyramidal shape and then put back, as it is today. Perhaps the head, which the thief wanted, escaped by rolling and stopping at the opposite end of that side, and could no longer be grasped or removed. This shape would be difficult to grasp, the width and depth of the sepulchre such that not even a long arm would have been able to reach it, and finally the insufficiency or at least the narrowness of the hole that had been made. The design of the tomb and the various dimensions of it and of the aforesaid hole encourage this hypothesis, which is not, to my mind, improbable, if one considers that the head had to interest more than the arm those who dared to stretch out their hand on that revered tomb, and failing at the first attempt instead resorted to the long bones of the nearest limb” (Canestrini, 1874b, 9–10). An explanation, the latter, that would be repeatedly used, even later, since the trial dossier against Martinelli and his accomplices in 1630–1631 was not yet known. Moroni, unlike Canestrini, does not seem to know the picture made in 1843, in which the skull is placed in the original position.

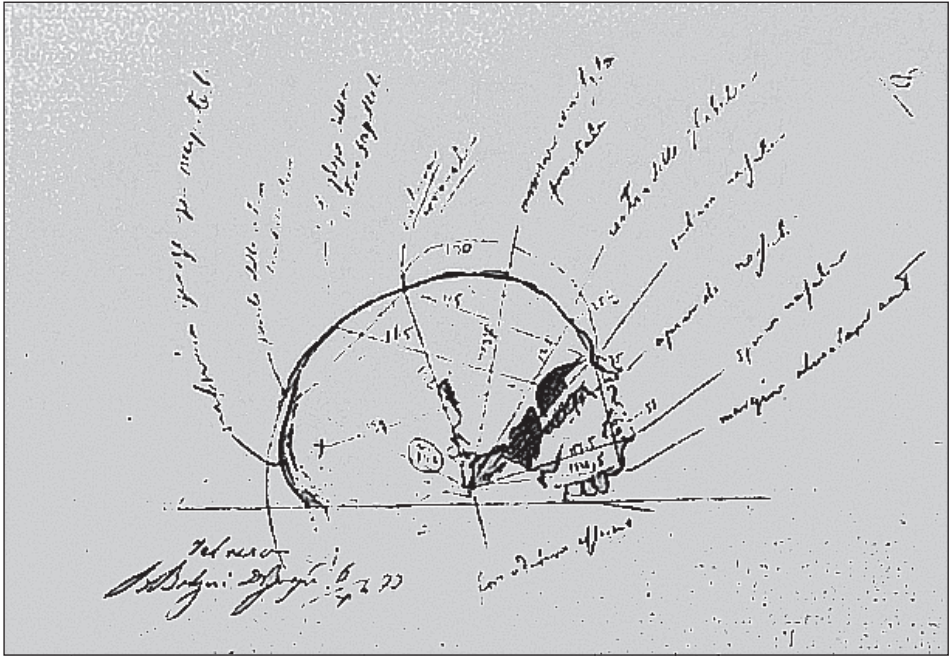


Fig. 15: Drawing of the skull preserved in the ark, produced by Bartolomeo Belzoni in December 1873. In: Belzoni, G. (1941): *Uno scienziato trentino alla ricognizione della tomba del Petrarca*.

It is legitimate to question the skull's solidity, as asserted by Moroni. Considering that the doctor had, in fact, simply grasped it in order to replace it in its exact position, it is probable that such an assertion aimed to confirm the hypothesis of its presumed authenticity, later affirmed by Canestrini (Canestrini, 1874b, 44).⁶³

As has been seen, in his work the anthropologist paid ample attention to the events of 1843, focusing in particular on the account of Meneghelli. Furthermore, he cited part of a letter that Carlo Leoni had sent him on the 9th of December 1873. As we have already seen, Leoni had followed from a distance the execution of an operation that must have aroused strong emotions in him. Also to the Paduan Count the question of the skull seemed decisive, but probably in the light of its subsequent falling apart, he had no hesitation in dealing with the question directly furnishing an account made known only to a few of his intimates:

63 In any case, the anthropologist, in his work, did not hide the doubts that had spread following the opening of 1843: "From the considerations set out in previous chapters we can draw some arguments in favour of the authenticity of the skull that we have studied and illustrated. I have heard some doubts about this authenticity, but I do not believe that such doubts are founded on good reasons" (Canestrini, 1874b, 81).

When on the morning of the 24th of May 1843 the tomb was opened, I alone took and held the exquisite, large skull⁶⁴, and I showed it to the crowd, despite it missing the chin which due to the shaking during the 1630 theft, when the entire right arm was extracted (whilst the chronicles mention only the right shoulder) had fallen to the place shown in the drawing. In the skull I counted 13 teeth, naturally upper ones, not having been able due to the ladder being too distant, to take the chin and count the teeth. The skull was excellently preserved and showed no sign of disintegration, to the extent that having lightly tapped it with the knuckle of my index finger, it echoed as being perfectly intact in all its parts. This I can solemnly and unequivocally attest, with full knowledge and a clear conscience (Canestrini, 1874b, 6).⁶⁵

For the first time in public, Leoni made explicit his interest in the poet's skull, if only to affirm its solidity, forcing Canestrini onto the defensive. In fact, on that occasion, he also added some details, which threw a certain light onto his behaviour and the role he had played during the 1843 opening.

THE DRAWING

Antonio Meneghelli had not just furnished an official account of the events of May 1843. Complementing his *Pochi cenni*, he had also put in a “faithful drawing” obtained from a lithograph of the sculptor Antonio Gradenigo that showed the “State of Francesco Petrarca’s bones on the 24th of May 1843”.⁶⁶

The drawing was supposed to depict clearly what had been seen by the onlookers after the ark's opening. Indeed, one could clearly see the large hive that had occupied the upper part of the skeleton and the sticks inserted in the cracks suffered in the wake of the 1630 depredation.⁶⁷ In his account, the archpriest stated that

64 In 1853, Leoni spoke of a “broad, white skull”. It is possible that that ‘white’ had dropped out, as it was clear that, in the examination carried out on the 6th of December 1873, the colour was very different, and “the skull had a blackish colour, both inside and outside” (Canestrini, 1874b, 44). And Moroni himself, in his letter to Canestrini, had recalled how, in 1855, “the colour of the skull was blackish” (Canestrini, 1874b, 9). Another incongruity comes from the number of teeth, even if the indications are rather generic and Canestrini surprisingly gives no information about this. Saltarini reported, “the skull facing the west is very well preserved, somewhat displaced from its original place and still supplied with twelve teeth”. Moroni, on the other hand, recalled how in 1855 he had been able to admire “the consistency and integrity of the cranial bones, except for some missing teeth, most of them upper ones” (Canestrini, 1874b, 9).

65 The anthropologist responded immediately to Leoni, noting the inaccuracies of the latter regarding the bones taken in 1630.

66 Perhaps Meneghelli noticed some differences from what was attested by the archpriest, and he wrote, “The examination of the state of the entire skeleton was extremely accurate; the most faithful drawing was made, a drawing that Leoni offers to the public with the lithograph by Prosperini. These measures make needless any mention of it, recalling that Horatian sentence that things subjected to the public gaze speak with much more eloquence than do paintings painted with words” (Meneghelli, 1843a, VII). As noted by G. Belloni, not all editions of Leoni's work with Meneghelli's appendix show this drawing (Belloni, 1983, 109).

67 Cracks that, with the restoration, were then definitively closed to prevent the entry of insects.

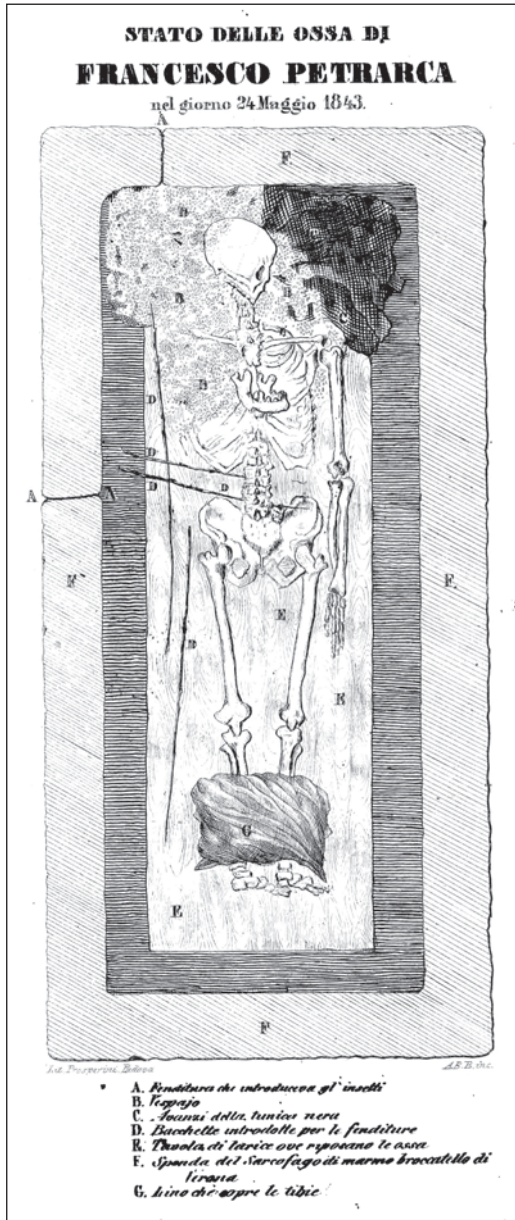


Fig. 16: Drawing of the skeleton of Francesco Petrarca, produced by Antonio Gradenigo and published in the Appendix by Antonio Meneghelli to *Memorie* by Carlo Leoni (1843).

“the cranium facing west is very well preserved, having moved somewhat from its original place”, whilst “the chinbone about a foot away from the skull has seven teeth”. The mandible is, in fact, clearly visible in the position indicated by Saltarini, even if the skull, facing west, seems to be in its original position and in part seems to be surrounded by the hive. That this did not represent an imprecision by Gradenigo would be indirectly affirmed later by Carlo Leoni himself, who would recall how he had picked up the poet’s skull to show it to the crowd that had gathered, finally replacing it in its original position.⁶⁸

In the same year, 1843, the *Museo scientifico, letterario ed artistico* reviewed⁶⁹ Leoni’s *Memorie* (*Museo scientifico, letterario ed artistico*, 5, 36, 287–288). The same edition of the magazine again featured Meneghelli’s intervention with the higher sounding title *Intorno al ristauo della tomba di Petrarca* (Regarding the restoration of Petrarch’s tomb). Gradenigo’s drawing was shown again, probably with a new lithograph, but without referring to the archpriest’s account, and with some significant differences.⁷⁰

As we shall see, that picture hid a truth that the subsequent closure of the ark seemed to have deprived to future generations. Along with Meneghelli’s official version, it, firstly, was meant to show what had been done in the remote 1630, supposedly by Friar Tommaso Martinelli; but Gradenigo had actually reproduced what he had seen in the moment he had been able to see the inside of the ark, immediately after Leoni, at the height of his enthusiasm and excitement, had raised the skull in order to show it to the onlookers gathered in front of the church.

THE POET’S CHIN

Carlo Leoni referred to the picture by Gradenigo, inserted by Meneghelli in his *Pochi cenni*. Canestrini had examined the picture, but with his scientific approach had given a merely generic description of it.⁷¹ In fact, if he had examined some of the details more carefully, he could have seen that the picture differed both from the description given by the archpriest Saltarini, and the account of Ferdinando Moroni himself.

The priest, indeed, had written that the skull had “moved somewhat from its original place”, whilst the “chinbone was about a foot away from the skull”. But if, in Gradenigo’s picture, the mandible is placed above the ribcage, in fact the skull, despite reclining, is

68 An episode that would be taken up again.

69 Review attributed to “a learned and impartial writer”.

70 Meneghelli writes about the already published *Memorie* of Leoni. Gradenigo’s picture appears sharper and, in general, faithful to the first version. He modified, however, the previous comment, writing only: “The examination of the state of the whole skeleton was very accurate and the following picture was made of it” (Meneghelli, 1843b, 241–242); he omitted, significantly that *faithful* used previously, as well as the next sentence; this new intervention was published on the 5th of August 1843 and, later, with a slightly different title, also in the widely disseminated magazine *Poliorama pittoresco* (Meneghelli, 1844).

71 “Count Leoni had a picture of Petrarch’s bones done in 1843 by Gradenigo, a picture he calls very precise. However, I must point out that the picture itself is such that it can offer a precise *general idea* of the state of the bones at that time, but leaves much to be desired in *the details*” (Canestrini, 1874b, 7).

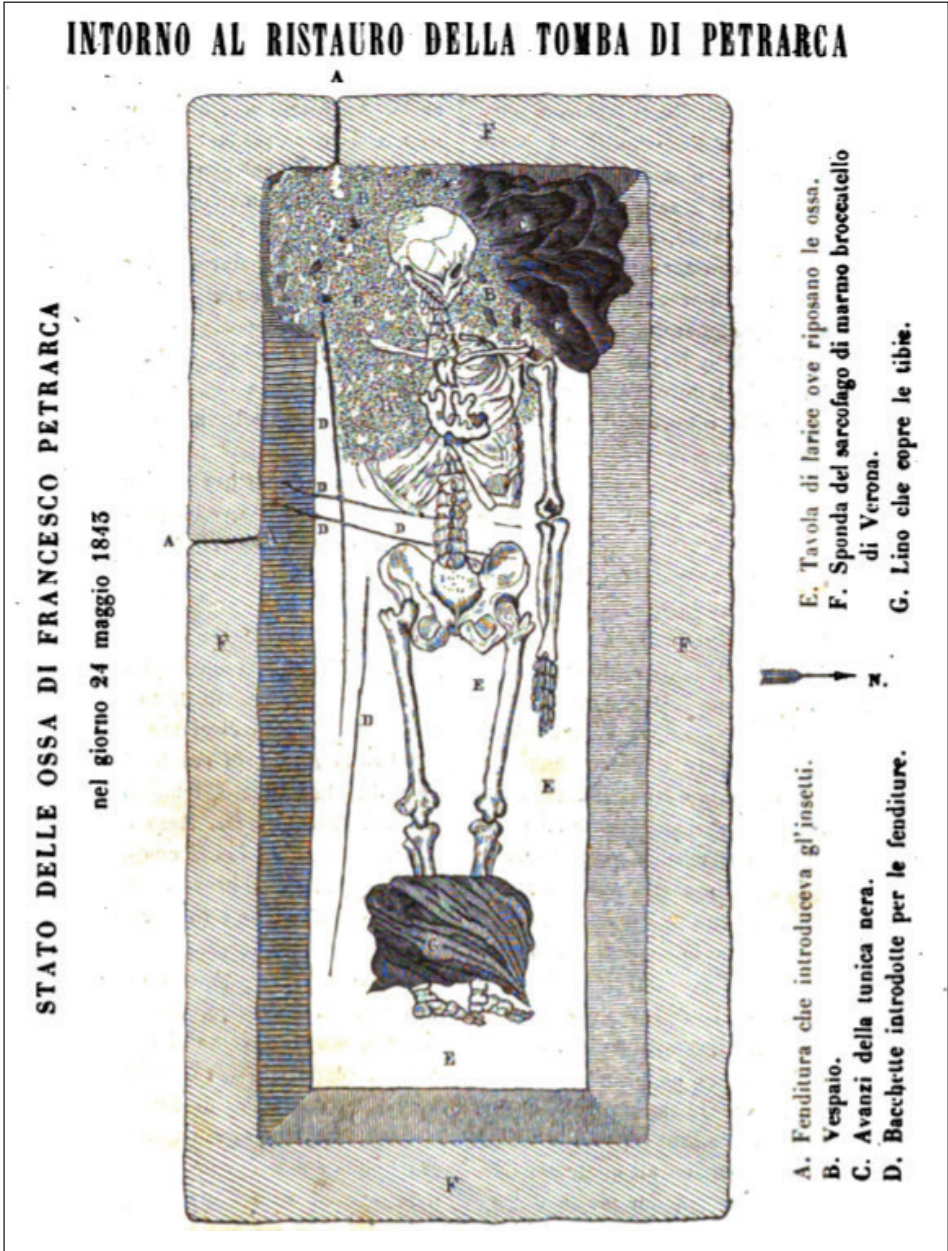


Fig. 17: Drawing of the skeleton of Francesco Petrarca, produced by Antonio Gradenigo and published by Antonio Meneghelli in the journal *Museo scientifico, letterario e artistico* (1843).

in its original position. As already seen, this was not a mistake by the painter, as can be deduced by some of the statements by Carlo Leoni himself many years later, even though Canestrini might not have known:

My heart shook as I mounted the steps; but what was my joy when I actually saw the glorious bones and the full, white skull which seemed to await a charitable hand to put it back in place; the predatory impact of 1630 had broken up all the upper part of the skeleton, as shown by the lithograph I had made. On seeing the venerated relics, I shuddered, and I seemed to see before me 14th century Italy with all its glories and misadventures. An aroma of the past intoxicated me [...] it seemed I was talking to them [...] trembling I brought my hand to the glorious skull, I raised it so all could see saying here is Petrarch's skull, and with that sacred terror derived from touching venerated things I contemplated it, then I put it back in its original place at the centre of the western side, where it will be for ever and ever, until it wakes to the sound of the angelic trumpet. Oh friend, that was the crowning moment of my life.⁷²

Thus, Petrarch's skull had been restored to its original position by Leoni himself, shortly after the opening of the ark and his resounding show of excitement; and, in this position, it was evidently drawn by Gradenigo. The fact that in his letter to Canestrini, he referred to holding the poet's skull, whilst the inaccessible mandible had remained in position, as described by the archpriest, probably suggests that he was aware of a possible objection in respect to the description of the picture. But in his reply to the letter written by Leoni on the 9th of December 1873, as we have already seen, the anthropologist from Trent was unable or unwilling to point out to his correspondent how, regarding the position of the skull and the jaw, there existed clear discrepancies between the picture and what had been related by Ferdinando Moroni in 1855.

The Monselice doctor had indeed testified, "the skull had slipped from the larch table, to the western left-hand corner, and the lower cheekbone to a good distance amongst the pelvic bones". In fact, as already seen, Gradenigo's picture showed the skull in its exact position. The mandible, conversely, in 1855 was placed amongst the pelvic bones, in a very different position from the one described by the archpriest, and shown in the picture.

What is likely to have happened, then, in 1843? In light of the statements and contradictions emerging between 1843 and 1873, it is more than likely that someone, during the restoration sponsored by Leoni and before the ark was definitively closed, had gained possession of the poet's skull and replaced it with another, throwing the mandible, probably in great haste, into the ark.⁷³

Moroni's description, and also what emerged in May 1843, may be better understood if we go back to the far off depredation in 1630, which was to be amply

72 The letter, dated the 20th of June 1867 and addressed to a friend, Prof. G. L., was cited by G. Guerzoni in his Preface to *Epigrafi e prose edite ed inedite* by Leoni (Guerzoni, 1879, LVIII–LIX).

73 This is also attested by the different colour of the skull as found in 1855 and 1873.

documented at the end of the 19th century, thanks to the recovery of the trial by Andrea Moschetti (Moschetti, 1898–1899, 231–247).

Carlo Leoni, like all the other 19th century commentators attributed the moving of the cranium to the clumsy intrusion of an instrument by the Dominican friar Tommaso Martinelli, who had supposedly tried to snatch the prize he longed for. In fact, as we have seen, the author of the depredation had used a billhook to reach, with difficulty, the bones of the poet's right arm. And obviously none of those commentators knew that in order to discover the extent of the theft, the judge assigned to the trial had ordered the entire skeleton be moved from the ark. As they also did not know that the extraction and subsequent replacement was done by introducing a small boy into the ark, through the wide hole made by the authors of the depredation of the 27th of May 1630.⁷⁴

It is likely that the moving of the cranium and detachment of the mandible, uncovered in 1843, happened unexpectedly whilst being put back in place, very probably by the lad as he was coming out of the ark.

The findings of 1630 provide other interesting details. The meticulous description of the judge focused on the poet's skull. It is worth citing this piece:

The head of the deceased was seen to have hairs attached in the form of a mop of honest length, thin, red and curly, seeming from their beauty those of a living creature, there having also been found a small black hood round the head and a quantity of white skin, believed to be the amice⁷⁵ and a piece of white material (ASP-M, P454X, 13, 4rv).

Francesco Petrarca's head was therefore covered by a small black hood, which is almost certainly the *tunic* erroneously referred to in the subsequent statements in the 19th century.⁷⁶ And, as shown by Gradenigo's picture, this small hood had been moved, along with the cranium, to the left of the skeleton. A not insignificant detail, because, as the archpriest Saltarini noted, the red hairs were attached to the *tunic*, as noted also by Moroni in 1855, on

74 A detail already mentioned, in his *Petrarcha redivivus*, by Tomasini, who, having apparently been able to consult the trial wrote in this regard: "However, there being no certainty that nothing was missing, a boy, who had been introduced into the tomb with the help of the court official, pulled out the table on which the bones were placed. After placing the latter on a blanket to inspect them, it was observed that the humerus and scapula were missing; a precise calculation of the number of smaller bones was not possible. After doing this, everything was restored to its original place by the court official" (Tomasini, 1635, 189).

75 The term *amice* is used to designate a lined hood combined with a small cape, used in choral functions by the clergy of cathedrals or collegiate churches, as a sign of their ecclesiastical rank (Boerio, 1829, 730; Battaglia, 1961, 344; Piccolo Paci, 2008, 334). Petrarca was, from 1350, canon of the cathedral of Padua (Dondi-Orologio, 1805, 148–149).

76 There is no trace, in the 1630 findings, of the presence of the tunic. Saltarini, on the other hand, reported that "almost the entire bottom of the table was covered and plastered with a black tunic, which was almost reduced to dust and had practically disappeared except for some strips near the head". And also in the captions of Gradenigo's picture a tunic is mentioned, but referring to the upper part corresponding to the hood. The findings seem to attest irrefutably that it was a black hood, which probably was not an integral part of the poet's tunic, of which, after centuries, only meagre traces remained.

the poet's head.⁷⁷ A number of these hairs must, presumably, have been attached to the new skull, substituted in 1843, after being hurriedly thrown onto the presumed *tunic*.⁷⁸

BEYOND ANY REASONABLE DOUBT

Beyond any reasonable doubt the substitution of the poet's cranium, therefore, took place in May 1843, during the restoration sponsored and financed by Carlo Leoni. An operation that, as future statements attested, escaped any control, or more probably was conducted according to the unexpressed motivations of the protagonists. It is also plausible that the ark stayed open well beyond the morning of the 24th of May, in order to deal adequately with the cleaning of the skeleton and the closure of the cracks. Due to the complete opening of the ark, the skeleton lying on the larch plank could be easily examined by the onlookers, but it also enabled the manoeuvring and substitutions encountered subsequently.⁷⁹

The following question is inevitable: who carried out the substitution of the cranium? Clearly, it is impossible to provide a definitive answer. The official truth, immediately and authoritatively proposed by Antonio Meneghelli and the judicial enquiry, was accepted by the literati and avoided the doubts and perplexity at a local level being spread openly, and any questioning of an undertaking sanctioned by the village archpriest. Doubts and perplexity that were certainly not attenuated in the following decades, to the point of being accepted by Canestrini himself at the 1873 opening.⁸⁰

And, unless one is willing to consider an anonymous, altogether improbable, culprit of the theft, who, using the confusion, took possession of the skull, substituting it with another one appositely prepared,⁸¹ the choice is inevitably limited to the

77 Also Andrea Moschetti relied on the 1630 findings, without being able to prove that Petrarca's hair was of that colour (Moschetti, 1898–1899, 241–245). The red hair was also noticed by Moroni, but Canestrini remarked: "I believe that the reddish hairs that Moroni saw on the occiput were white at the time of the poet's death, and had then taken on the reddish colour by absorbing the colouring substances of the larch table on which the occiput rested" (Canestrini, 1874b, 74).

78 A not insignificant detail, if we consider that the presence of red hair in 1855 led us to exclude that the skull had been replaced during the nineteenth century openings of the ark.

79 In particular, from Moroni, who pointed out the different position in which the jaw was found, probably thrown there from the western side of the ark. As noted by the *Delegato* of Padua in 1843, the ark, initially lifted in order to see inside, was then opened completely to be able to proceed adequately with the restoration.

80 Emblematic was the text written in 1869 by P. Selvatico, "Foreigners used to come from many parts of Europe and the world to visit the house and tomb of Laura's lover, but in the meantime no one thought to save it from the heavy damage inflicted by time and neglect. Except that my dear friend Count Carlo Leoni in 1843, with that affection which is equal to his fervent genius, himself provided for the tomb to be worthily restored; and if he received (the usual reward for those who do good) a deal of resentment, he obtained, in return, the praise of anyone who honours in the great achievements of the past an eternal inheritance of glory for the present" (Selvatico, 1869, 435).

81 The "ill-intentioned person" recalled by Belzoni; but if the hypothesis of theft may also be plausible, it is, however, difficult to maintain that the thief could have replaced the skull.

two main protagonists of the opening: Count Leoni and the archpriest Saltarini. The latter had possession of the poet's rib and pieces of the small hood, which following his account would be definitively referred to as a *tunic*. In fact, with his account, which bounced from one newspaper to another, the archpriest aimed to underline the restoration of the ark and the decisive intervention by Leoni to finance an operation that none else would have been able to undertake. An intervention agreed, most likely with Leoni himself, and meant to stifle any criticism, particularly from the local area.

The most plausible author of the theft remains, therefore, Carlo Leoni who, by financing restoration of the old monument, had wanted above all to achieve an essentially more personal ambition, of a literary nature, to be underlined at the end of his life by the donation of pieces of the *tunic*, undersigned by a notarial note, and sent to important members of Italy's cultural and literary community.⁸²

And there are other suggestive clues that point towards Leoni: the personal reference to documents and news which, over the years remained uncorroborated or were clearly shown to be insubstantial; his significant silence regarding the controversial intervention, and his reluctance to engage personally regarding the operation he had financed; his prolonged absence from Arquà after the opening and restoration of the ark; his repeated attempts to oppose subsequent openings and the replacing of the poet's rib; and, at the end, his sharp criticism of the local notables and Giovanni Canestrini himself.

Finally, there is the picture, a picture which inevitably could not fail to ignore the description furnished by Don Giacomo Saltarini of the poet's remains, and neither the fact that Leoni, after proudly showing the observers Petrarch's cranium, had set it back in its original place. And, as has been shown, the picture shows unequivocally that the theft occurred during the 1843 opening. But when was it done? Probably Gradenigo made a sketch immediately after the ark's opening, but the picture, reproduced through lithography, was completed in the days following and after the ark had been closed.

It is plausible that at a later moment, before the ark was closed, that the mandible, rediscovered in the position shown in the picture, had been reattached to the skull itself, from which it had become detached.⁸³ But there are no statements attesting this. Certainly, Ferdinando Moroni rediscovered the mandible placed differently, but evidently, as we came to know at the beginning of this century, it belonged to a

82 A fragment of the tunic came to G. D'Annunzio, who kept it at the *Vittoriale*, framed and under glass. It is accompanied by an attestation by Leoni and by the authentication of the Venetian notary Gabriele Fantoni, written on the 11th of November 1873, "a greenish strip from Francesco Petrarca's tunic taken from the urn on the 24th of May 1843 by myself, C. Leoni" (D'Annunzio, 1935, 43). Similar relics were also donated to E. De Amicis, with whom Leoni had corresponded (Brambilla, 2011, 193–210), and to the director of the State Archives of Venice B. Cecchetti (Cecchetti, 1881, 32). Note that Leoni donated the fragments in November 1873, when the reopening of the ark was announced and imminent.

83 Indirect proof of this hypothesis comes from the fact that in 1855 the mandible was found in a different position from that indicated by the archpriest and also from that documented in Gradenigo's picture.

different cranium, which surprisingly had returned to the position described by the archpriest Saltarini.

And who, if not Carlo Leoni, could have carried out such a substitution? Most likely in a hurry, or by mistake, or perhaps more realistically because he had not yet examined Gradenigo's picture,⁸⁴ he put the skull in the position where it was rediscovered, above the little hood, chucking the mandible towards the lower part of the skeleton.⁸⁵ It would have been difficult for another person to carry out such an operation. Furthermore, we can plausibly suppose that the Paduan Count believed that the ark would not be reopened and none would have been able to notice the substitution, or at least the different position of the poet's remains.

This evidence is clearly not conclusive, but is certainly sufficient to suggest Leoni was the most likely person to have made the substitution. And amongst the onlookers, who would have had a sufficient motive to possess a similar prize, one which obviously could not be exhibited, but which would have gratified his intimate poetic and literary aspirations? The oft discussed reopening of the ark aroused anxiety and fear in the Paduan noble. The picture showed that something had gone wrong in May 1843.

Even the opening and inspection carried out in 1873 under the supervision of Giovanni Canestrini could not explain the contradictions of preceding accounts. In fact, the considerations of the illustrious scientist, who, as it is known, was among the first to spread Darwin's theories in Italy, were heavily coloured by a scientific framework deeply influenced by phrenology and the concept of race which during the 19th century was particularly popular (Drusini & Rippa Bonati, 2006, 329–330).⁸⁶ His anxiety to trace the presumed racial typology to attribute to Petrarch's skull probably prevented him from accepting the *historical truth* suggested by the data he had himself collected.

His heartfelt assertions about the authenticity of Petrarch's cranium derived most probably from the unexpressed desire to reach, through his investigation, a positive result, which would have silenced criticism sparked after the unexpected incident; but also from the unshaking faith in a scientific paradigm based on seemingly unchallengeable assertions and presuppositions.⁸⁷

84 As will be recalled, the drawing was reproduced using lithography.

85 It is significant that Leoni, in the days following the 1873 opening, writing to Canestrini, did not claim to have placed the skull (without mandible) in its original position, emphasizing rather that he was unable to grasp it due to his position on the ladder.

86 As has been correctly stated, "Canestrini's claims about the power of science to reveal significant truths about human beings capture the deep faith which formed a backbone to anthropology during the nineteenth century. Canestrini and others of his generation across Europe and USA invested in their science's objectivity, efficacy, and exactness, a commitment which may seem very naïve today" (Turda & Quine, 2018, 90). Similar considerations in: Hendrix, 2019, 43–44.

87 As has been observed by M. Turda and M.S. Quine, "whatever the truth may ultimately be, this story demonstrates one thing clearly: that nineteenth-century tomb raiders, despite their claims to the contrary, were not strictly ruled by the noble dictates of conscience and science. The quest for knowledge clouded their judgement and made them prone to fantasy, delusion, and deception" (Turda & Quine, 2018, 89).

Therefore, it was, over the following decades, that the 1843 opening was brought back to light in the version given by Antonio Meneghelli: an operation considered worthy of merit and which, despite some mishaps, had restored the ancient splendour of the poet's ark. Cultured tradition was affirmed, imposing a version in stark contradiction to what had actually happened.

Certainly, what had happened in May 1843 was done without approval from the community, clearly disdaining those values that, in the presence of the poet's remains, it had always considered its exclusive prerogative, distinguishing the village's prestige and honour, prestige and honour that in 1817 had been superbly penned by George Gordon Byron's introspective scrutiny and passed onto future generations through his splendid poetry.

VDORI V ARQUÀ PETRARCI (1630–2003).
V IMENU FRANCESCA PETRARCE

Claudio POVOLO

Univerza Ca' Foscari v Benetkah, Oddelek za humanistiko, Dorsoduro 3484/D, 30123 Benetke, Italija

e-mail: povolo@unive.it

Inštitut IRRIS za raziskave, razvoj in strategije družbe, kulture in okolja, Čentur 1f, 6273 Marezige, Slovenija

e-mail: claudio.povolo@irris.eu

POVZETEK

Več stoletij so posmrtni ostanki Francesca Petrarce počivali v sarkofagu, ki se je na visokem podstavku dvigal iznad bližnjih skromnih grobov domačinov v vasi Arquà. Tuji popotniki so se s strahospoštovanjem ustavljali pred starim spomenikom. Ta je namreč za mlade aristokrate, ki so na ‚veliki turneji‘ potovali po Evropi v spoznavanju njenih civilizacijskih in kulturnih dosežkov, pomenil znamenitost, ki si jo je bilo malodane nujno ogledati. Na Georgea Byrona sta leta 1817 vtis naredila občutek osamelosti, ki ga vzbujal kraj, in ponos, s katerim je veliki pesnik navdajal domačine. Preoblikovanje pokopališča v cerkveno dvorišče se je ujemalo z novo simbolno dimenzijo, ki so jo od sredine 19. stoletja dalje kultu Petrarce pripisovale občinske institucije in nastajajoča italijanska država. Ko je leta 1843 padovski grof Carlo Leoni začel z obnovo sarkofaga, je med lokalnimi veljaki izzval nasprotovanje in nezaupljivost. Toda literarni krogi tistega časa so restavratorsko delo hvalili in ga primerjali z vlomom v grob, ki ga je leta 1630 zagrešil Tommaso Martinelli. Grob so ponovno odprli še v letih 1855, 1873 in 2003. Zadnji pregled je razkril, da je bil v preteklosti sarkofag močno izropan. Prispevek se osredotoča na kulturni in politični okvir, v katerem je prišlo do odprtja sarkofaga, ter na napetosti, ki jih je to povzročilo v vasi, ki je stoletja dolgo hranila posmrtne ostanke velikega pesnika.

Ključne besede: Francesco Petrarca, Arquà Petrarca, literarni kult, ‚velika turneja‘, posmrtni ostanki, pogrebne prakse, popularna kultura

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