

SHEETS

The Iron Crown



The Iron Crown - a historic item of exceptional value and, at the same time, a Holy Relic kept in the Chapel of Theodelinda in Monza Cathedral - embodies a large part of the royal history of the City of Monza, which began with the legendary building of the royal palace of the Ostrogoth Theodoric and was consolidated when the Longobard queen Theodelinda built the royal palace and the Basilica (later Cathedral) of St. John the Baptist. The extraordinary significance attributed to the Iron Crown (the origins of which - though investigated with advanced technologies - are still cloaked in legend) is due to the dual nature of the diadem: a symbol of Faith and, at the same time, a symbol of imperial power. Whoever wore the crown linked his authority both to its divine origin (the inner ring of the crown is said to have been made from a Holy Nail from the Crucifixion) and to continuity with the Roman Empire (the diadem and the Nail, assembled together, are said to have adorned the head of Constantine, the first Christian emperor).

CHRISTIAN TRADITION



CONSTANTINE



SAINT HELENA



SAINT AMBROSE



THEODOSIUS

The bond between the Crucifixion and Constantine is backed up by Christian tradition, fuelled by the funeral oration (*de obitu Teodosii*) given by Saint Ambrose in Milan on 27 February 395 in memory of the Emperor



Theodosius.

The words spoken by Ambrose outline the material and symbolic history of the Iron Crown, starting from the journey of Saint Helena, Constantine's mother, to the Holy Land (327-328). Ambrose tells us that, on the site of the Passion, Helena found the True Cross and the Nails of the Crucifixion. Leaving the Cross, Saint Helena took the nails with her to Constantinople. One of them is said to have been made into a horse bit (a divine symbol of the guidance that an emperor must apply to his actions); the other was in some way adapted for the diadem worn by Constantine. After him, as claimed by Saint Ambrose to confirm the continuity of the symbol, "the Holy Nail adorns the head of the Emperors".

According to certain hypotheses - still legendary - the diadem of Constantine with the Holy Nail may have been brought to Italy by Theodosius himself and then taken back to Constantinople. Another tradition suggests that the Ostrogoth Theodoric claimed the diadem as his own. It is interesting to note that a more recent scientific hypothesis suggests that the Iron Crown was made by Ostrogoth goldsmiths. The second Holy Nail also arrived in Italy, where it is kept and is an object of devotion in the Cathedral in Milan, previously the capital of the Western Roman Empire.

RIGHTS OF MONZA CATHEDRAL

In 1354, during the Investiture Controversy, Pope Innocent VI issued an edict claiming Monza's right to bestow the Iron Crown in the Cathedral.

In 1576 Saint Charles Borromeo constituted the cult of the *Holy Nail* to officialize the recognition of the Iron Crown as a Holy Relic and to attribute a similar religious value to the Holy Nail kept in Milan.

In 1717 Pope Clement XI decreed that, even without the certainty of the actual presence of the Nail in the Crown but on the basis of a tradition that was now centuries old, the veneration of the Iron Crown as a Relic was authorized.



MONZA - Theodelinda offering the Iron Crown (Lunette of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist)



THE KINGS CROWNED

Legend and history interweave also in the list of the kings crowned with the Iron Crown. Starting from the Ostrogoth Theodoric and continuing with the Longobard kings, with Charlemagne and with Berengar I, who made a gift of the Crown to Monza Cathedral.

It is interesting to note that the tradition of the triple coronation of the emperor is ascribed to the time of the Holy Roman Empire: the designated emperor was first crowned King of Germany, then King of Italy in Monza or in Milan, and then Emperor (in Rome with the imperial regalia, by the Pope).

The Iron Crown was kept permanently in the cathedral of St. John the Baptist, thus giving the city of Monza an absolute and exclusive royal dignity and, at the same time, particular privileges and tax exemptions.



MONZA - Plaque of the coronation (Cathedral of St. John the Baptist)

Among the most famous kings crowned, history records with certainty: **CONRAD OF LORRAINE** (1093); **CONRAD III OF SWABIA** (1128); **FREDERICK I BARBAROSSA** (1158); **HENRY VI HOHENSTAUFEN** (1186); **CHARLES IV OF LUXEMBOURG** (1355); **CHARLES V OF HABSBURG** (1530); **NAPOLEON BONAPARTE** (1805); **FERDINAND I OF AUSTRIA** (1838).

No member of the royal house of Savoia ever wore the Crown, which was only shown in Rome at the funeral of Victor Emanuel II (1878) - who had founded the Chivalric Order of the Crown of Italy - and of Umberto I (1900).