**The Italian cult of the Unknown Soldier**

After the WWI, the nations that take part at the conflict wanted to honor the sacrifice of the community with the ceremonial of the Unknown Soldier. In the main capitals of the world, a lot of monuments born to commemorate the hero. the particularly important rites are those of France, England and Belgium.

In Italy, the colonel Giulio Douhet introduced the cult of the Unknown soldier to honor with a big manifestation the 650,000 and more fallen of the WWI. The colonel wrote about his idea in an article of the 1920 on the periodic called “Il Dovere”. The proposal was brought into parliament by Cesare Maria De Vecchi, and became law on August 4, 1921.

The Minister of War, Luigi Gasparotto, ordered to find eleven corpses of soldiers and to choose one to be buried in Rome. For this purpose, it was named a committee of six soldiers, chosen so that all the army hierarchy were represented: a general, a colonel, a lieutenant, a sergeant mutilated decorated with a gold medal, a corporal and a soldier decorated with a silver medal.

For the search of the corpses, the commission came in the most important battlefields, ie: Roveto, the Dolomites, the highlands, the Monte Grappa, Montello, the Lower Piave, Cadore, Gorizia, the Isonzo Low, Mount San Michele and Castagnevizza Karst. The collection of bodies took place in military cemeteries made during or immediately after the war and battle sites in correspondence of crosses or symbols that indicated a probable burial. At the commission was asked the bodies chosen did not show any sign of recognition, except to have belonged to Italian soldiers. Each body was placed inside a wooden coffin, in such a way it was impossible to distinguish one from another. On October 27, they reached all eleven the Basilica of Aquileia, where a state funeral and the ceremony of choice were celebrated. As a maximum guarantee impartiality, the remains were exchanged just before the place would chose.

The choice was made by Mrs. Maria Bergamas, a Trieste woman of Gradisca d'Isonzo, mother of the deceased Antonio Bergama. The son was a volunteer who defected to the Austro-Hungarian army to join the Italian one. He died in battle without his body was never found. Maria would have had to pose a white flower on one of 11 coffins. Contrary to the ceremony, she picked up her black veil and placed on the second coffin, in this way proclaiming his choice.

At the same time, the other ten corpses were buried in the cemetery next to the Basilica of Aquileia, where years later he was also buried the same Maria Bergamas, symbol of all the mothers who had lost their children because of the war. On the evening of October 28, the chosen coffin was placed on a gun carriage cannon and, accompanied by decorated veterans to the value, it was placed in a hearse drawn by architect Cirilli.

The journey to Rome began on October 29, 1921. The train, driven by a steam engine, passed with very moderate speed for the stations of Udine, Treviso, Venice, Padua, Rovigo, Ferrara, Bologna, Pistoia, Prato, Florence, Arezzo, Chiusi and Orvieto, to allow people to honor the body of the soldier. He arrived in Rome on November 2 and was exposed in the Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli until the 4th morning, when it was carried in procession to the Altare della Patria, where it was buried in the presence of King Vittorio Emanuele III in the inner crypt of the altar, where it is now. The crypt walls were built using stones from conflict areas in the First World War, like Monte Grappa.

In his article Douhet suggested as a burial place the Pantheon, but the proposal was not accepted. When the Chamber of Deputies voted the law on "Burial of the remains of an unknown soldier" instead he chose the Victorian, handing the monument (much criticized for its pompous size) a new solemn and respected role.

Subsequently, the gold medal was awarded to the Unknown Soldier after the proposal of Mr G. Giuriati.

The tomb of the Unknown Soldier is constantly guarded by armed soldiers. In its first decade, the honor guard touched the weapon of the Royal Carabinieri; the service for the second decade was reserved to the infantry; and so on, ten in ten years, various weapons take place in this symbolic rite.

People often talk of the Unknown Soldier as an infantryman, for two reasons. First, for reasons of probability: 400.000 of the 600.000 soldiers who died in World War they were infantrymen. The other reason is symbolic: in fact, the son of Mary Bergamas was a knave.

**Differences with the English cult**

The main differences with the British cult are two.

First, in the Italian cult, the promoter of the celebration was not a churchman as the Railton Cardinal, but a general; consequently, the objectives of the cult were different. If the first one had the idea of the worship to celebrate the death of his sons, the second proposed the celebration in order to transform the sadness and anger in a patriotic feeling.

The second difference between the two cults is the person who has the task of choosing which body that would become the Unknown Soldier. If in the English ritual the choice was made by the brigadier general L.J. Wyatt, an army man, in the Italian one the task was assigned to a mother whose son died during WWI. In this way, that woman will become a synecdoche that is for all the mothers, and the chosen dead body became the body on which all the mothers could cry.