

EVIDENCE FOR UFOs IN THE ITALIAN PAST

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Today, when mass media start talking about UFOlogy, they usually connect it to the so-called "Ancient Astronaut" theory. As far as I am concerned, in my books and articles I have always warned the public against any indiscriminate connection between this stimulating theory, which is built on some interesting facts, but also on many discrepancies, and the systematic study of historical documents describing apparent UFOs in the past.

As ufologists, we may be interested in this theory. But it is necessary to emphasize that UFO research as such must try to focus, above all, on the nature of UFO sightings and evidence today as well as in the past and not on speculations, legends and archaeological anomalies in the light of an a priori interpretation of history--the idea that extra-terrestrial beings must have visited our planet several times in the past. Of course, this is far from being impossible; nevertheless, the Ancient Astronaut theory, from a scientific point of view, still suffers from a lack of supporting evidence, since no definitive proof of extra-terrestrial intervention is available at present. But, on the contrary, we do have some historical evidence of UFO-like descriptions, also in the past. It is just a question of finding them and trying to interpret them, after having compared them with today's UFO evidence. In Italy our classical heritage makes this neo-humanistic approach possible.

We know that even in Roman times unusual aerial phenomena were reported. The best

anthology of such sightings is Prodigiorum Liber (The Book of Prodigies) by the Roman historian Julius Obsequens, who extracted them from the original works of Cicero, Titus Livius, Seneca and many other well-known Latin authors. Most of these "prodigies" may be explained today with natural or atmospheric phenomena, of course. But some of them still baffle any conventional explanation. Let us mention just two examples from the 1552 edition in our possession:

When C. Marius and L. Valerius were consuls, in Tarquinia, a thing like a flaming torch was seen in different places falling suddenly from the sky. Towards sunset, a circular flying object, similar in its shape to a burning "clypeus" [the round shield used by Roman legionaries], was seen crossing the sky from west to east.

This description of an unknown aerial phenomenon, which occurred in 98 B.C., is too limited to permit us to interpret this event. But what is strange here is the use of the term "clypeus," the round, light Roman war shield with a typical, semi-spherical reinforcement structure at its center: in other words, an ideal representation of a doned "daylight disc" of today. Is this just a coincidence?

In the territory of Spoletum [Umbria], a globe of fire, golden in color, fell to the earth, and ascended into the sky,

where it obscured the disc of the sun with its brilliance. It turned towards the eastern quadrant of the sky.

This event occurred in 89 B.C., and its description cannot be easily explained in terms of known natural phenomena. On the contrary, a UFO landing and takeoff of today would be reported with similar words.

A Roman scientist, Pliny the Elder, tried to classify aerial phenomena. In his Naturalis Historia (Natural History) he mentions flying "facies" (torches), "lampadae" (lamps), and "bolides" (fireballs) as well as "trabes ignitae" (beams of fire). Pliny stated that these flying "beams of fire" used to appear and shine suddenly in the sky (Book 2, XXVI).

In Obsequens' Prodigiorum Liber we find several cases of such "beams of fire." Should we include them in Pliny's classification as natural or astronomical phenomena? This is a very difficult question to answer, as Dr. Marta Luchino Chionetti remarks in her graduation thesis (University of Turin) about Conradus Lycosthenes (whose real name was Karl Wolffhart), the 16th century German humanist who edited Prodigiorum Liber, integrating the lacunas in the original text with quotations from the original Latin sources as well as with descriptions of similar phenomena that occurred in the Middle Ages and even in his own time.

As a matter of fact, no natural explanation seems to account for events of this kind. For instance, Lycosthenes mentions events like the following one (page 527): "In 1520 A.D. in England, at Hereford, a colossal beam of fire was seen in the sky. Approaching the earth, it burned many things with its heat. After this, it ascended into the sky again and was seen to change its

shape into a circle of fire." This description has surely nothing to do with any known natural phenomenon. On the contrary, it sounds like the perfect replica of a UFO near-landing in a typical close encounter of the second kind characterized by thermal effects.

Other historical documents mention similar "beams of fire" in the 16th century. In Benvenuto Cellini's autobiography we may read: "We mounted on horse, and we went quickly towards Rome. At nightfall we had reached the top of a hill, and casting a glance behind our backs we both cried out at the same time: 'My God! What is that huge thing over Florence?' It was just like a gigantic beam of fire, sparkling and shining. . . ." (from Benvenuto Cellini's La Vita, Book 1, Chapter 89). Unfortunately, Cellini does not give us other details.

On October 7, 1571, 410 years ago, a famous historical event determined the destiny of western civilization. Everybody is aware of the decisive naval battle between Christianity and Islam in the waters of Lepanto, in which ships of the Christian League destroyed the Turkish fleet; however, only a few know of an interesting detail, which we may read in the works of Father Alberto Guglielmotti, the official historian of the Roman Pope's Navy.

In his words, "the night before the 21st of September a sign was seen in the sky, and everybody considered it a miracle. The night was quite calm and fair, with a fresh north wind and all the stars clearly visible and bright. Then suddenly," Father Guglielmotti wrote, according to the eyewitness accounts reported by Sereno and Caracciolo, "a huge, flaming shining pillar of fire was seen . . . crossing the night air for a long time, filling all the witnesses with great wonder."

Father Guglielmotti continues:

Today we know we must consider not only willis-o'-the-wisp and St. Elmo's fires, but also fire-balls and beams of fire like this one as electric and pneumatic phenomena of the atmosphere typical and frequent during summer time; nevertheless, all the witnesses considered this of good omen, foreboding a great victory. They thought that the pillar of fire was showing them the way, guiding the Chris-



FLYING "FIERY BEAM" FROM THE RENAISSANCE
EDITION OF PRODIGIORUM LIBER

tian fleet in the sea as in biblical times it guided the people of Israel in the desert. . . .

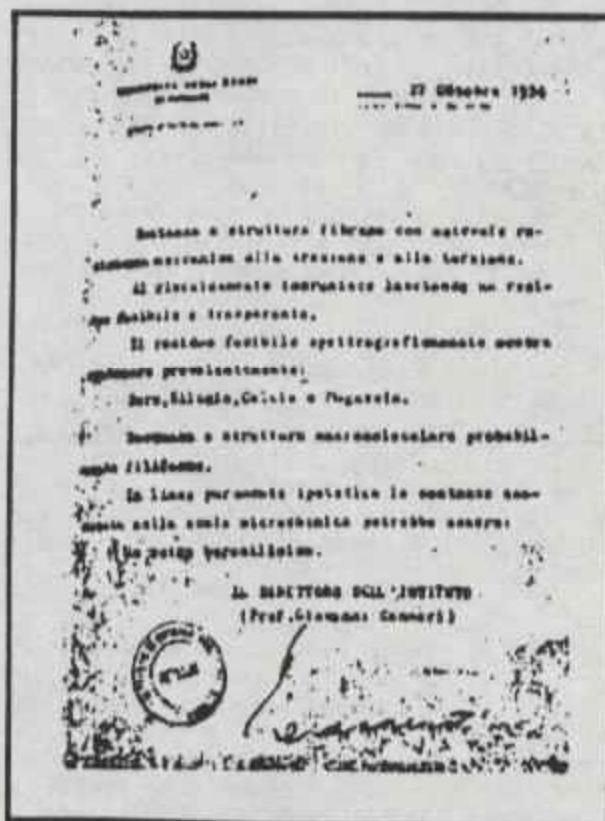
Curiously, Guglielmotti connects this event to the "pillar of fire" of Exodus, anticipating certain ideas of the supporters of the Ancient Astronaut theory. In any case, we are facing only more or less detailed general descriptions of such UFO-like phenomena in the past, and this is not enough. From a scientific point of view, we need more and more convincing evidence.

As we may see by observing the quantitative trend of UFO reports in Italy, our country experienced four big UFO "waves" after the end of the Second World War, in a real crescendo. The peak years were 1950, 1954, 1973 and 1976. In 1977, our UFO study organization, Centro Ufologico Nazionale (CUN), published the results of the first computerized analysis of an Italian "wave," making use of a catalogue of 356 UFO events in 1954. The 1954 Italian wave was parallel to the well-known French one of that year, but its importance was ignored for years abroad, and even now international ufology is not aware of that interesting body of sightings just for language reasons--in other words, because of mere translation problems.

On October 27, 1954, in broad daylight, two flying luminous cigar-shaped objects that were followed by a sort of white and cloudy wake were observed by many inhabitants of Prato (a suburb of Florence) in Tuscany, and in particular by the two landlords of the San Marco Hotel, Gennaro Lucchetti and Pietro Lastrucci. Swiftly, after a 45 degree turn in the sky, the two UFOs headed toward Florence silently, in a coupled flight formation.

Just a few minutes later, in Florence, a football match was interrupted because of UFOs. The football teams of both Florence and Pistoia and the referee on the playing field as well as the public, saw the two saucer-like objects hovering over the stadium. In other parts of town, hundreds of people saw "flying saucers" crossing the sky in pairs. At the same time, as all newspaper accounts reported and emphasized, a strange and woolly white substance, soft and frayed, fell down from the sky while the mysterious objects were maneuvering high. As a 10-year-old pupil at that time, I still remember the roofs of Florence whitened by it.

An engineering student at the University of Florence, Alfredo Jacopozzi, put some pieces of this substance inside a glass container, sealed it, and carried it to the Institute of Analytic Chemistry of the University of Florence. While on the outside, the substance was beginning to volatilize, Jacopozzi asked the Director of the Institute, Prof. Giovanni Canneri, to analyze it. This was the official result of the microscopic and spectrographic analyses made by Prof. Canneri and his assistant, Prof. Danilo Cozzi:



Translated:

It is a substance with a fibrous structure, characterized by a remarkable mechanical resistance to both traction and torsion. Heat makes it brown, originating a fusible and transparent residue. This fusible residue proved to be, from a spectrographic point of view, a combination of boron, silicon, calcium and magnesium. By mere supposition, in the microchemical scale this substance might be a boron-silicon glass. But the absence of any oxygen molecule in its chemical composition does not support this hypothesis.

This official analysis of a mysterious substance falling from the sky in different areas of Tuscany as UFOs were maneuvering is still unknown abroad, in spite of the fact that it is mentioned by Italian ufologists in their books. Today, after CUN's quantitative computerized analysis, a deeper research shows that during the 1954 Italian UFO wave, we had at least 29 reported events involving the falling of this substance, known in English-speaking countries as "angel's hair" and in France as "fils de la vierge." And 24 of them are associated with the presence of UFOs in the sky above. In the light of this connection, perhaps what we may read about this problem in NICAP's The UFO Evidence, as well as in Allan Hendry's The UFO Handbook, and in Ronald Story's The Encyclopedia of UFOs is far from the last word about this seemingly UFO-related phenomenon. Here we have the catalogue of the "angel's hair" falls during the 1954 Italian UFO wave:

(Let me thank Prof. Solas Boncompagni, Mr. Pier Luigi Sani and all the other authors of UFO in Italia: L'Ondata del 1954 (UFOs in Italy: The 1954 "Wave", the Italian ufologists who pursued further CUN's original computerized analysis in their detailed report from which these verified data were extracted.)

The UFO Evidence lists 43 examples of "angel's hair and/or gossamer falls," with only two Italian cases (both of 1954). Two other well-known events of this kind from Italy not involving the presence of UFOs occurred in the same zone of the Adriatic coast at Porto Garibaldi on November 6, 1960, and at Comacchio on October 18, 1966. In this case, the natural origin of the samples involved was suggested by the results of their analysis at the University of Bologna, quite different from Prof. Canneri's and the Gela Hospital lab's conclusions.

This means that at least 27 important angel's hair cases were ignored by NICAP and in the United States. No wonder there is a generally negative attitude by today's American ufologists facing this problem in UFO research. Let me emphasize again that 24 of the 1954 Italian UFO wave cases were associated with UFO sightings, while only 23 in the 43 listed in The UFO Evidence were characterized by concomitant UFO phenomena.

This means, in my opinion, that a new approach in the study of such cases seems to be necessary in the USA. Surely spider webs are not the only explanation for the so-called angel's hair phenomenon.

On the contrary, facing the problem from a statistical point of view, a comparison of such phenomena from the French and Italian cases seems to indicate that events of this kind are associated with the presence of Saturn-shaped Daylight Discs maneuvering on high along with the presence of at least one big cylindrical UFO.

I think we must remember the classic Oloron sighting of October 17, 1952, which occurred in the southwest of France. At 12:50 p.m., a white flying cylinder emitting a sort of white smoke, followed by a group of other objects shaped like reddish spheres with yellow rings all around, were seen by many citizens. At the same time, we had a classic "angel's hair" fall. A science professor in the local high school, Dr. Poulet, did not succeed in analyzing the fallen substance before it vaporized, but confirmed those fibers burned like cellophane when ignited. The Saturn-shaped objects hovered over the area in pairs with zigzag movements. After 10 days, on October 27, all this appeared over Gaillac (Tarn) followed by another "angel's hair" fall. [C, AND FIGURE 2]

French authorities were very interested in these cases since they could suggest the presence of gigantic carrier-like aircraft flying and maneuvering on high and launching several disc-shaped "flying saucers" in the atmosphere for reconnaissance missions and grouped flights in formation. Exactly two years later, in Italy, the same thing occurred. Once again we had "flying cigars" or cylindrical objects, as well as smaller Saturn-shaped UFOs in formation. Alleged UFO photographs [D] in the Italian press in 1954 seem to confirm all the eyewitness accounts of this kind, as well as a 1966 photographic case.

By mere chance, in 1969 CUN knew that a Bologna bank official had photographed a strange aerial phenomenon in September 1966. He did not like to be intruded upon, but at last he admitted he photographed two luminous objects after sunset along the coast of Gargano, an Adriatic peninsula in southern

CATALOGUE OF "ANGEL'S HAIR" FALLS DURING 1954 IN ITALY

DATE	NO.	PLACE	TIME	CONCOMITANT PHENOMENA
Oct. 27, 1954	1	Sesto Fiorentino	1:30 pm	1' OO splits into 3 UFOs
Oct. 27, 1954	2	Giolica Alta (Prato)	2-2:20 pm	1 OO near-landing
Oct. 27, 1954	3	Florence & suburbs	2:20-3:30 pm	Several OO in pairs (football match interrupted; samples analyzed in university lab defined "combination of boron, silicon, calcium and magnesium")
Oct. 27, 1954	4	Siena	2:30 pm	Several OO (grouped)
Oct. 27, 1954	5	Lucca	3:30 pm	None
Oct. 28, 1954	6	Chiusi	daytime	3 OO (grouped)
Oct. 28, 1954	7	Siena	daytime	15 OO in formation
Oct. 28, 1954	8	Consuma (Arezzo)	morning	Skyquake
Oct. 28, 1954	9	Rome	4:00 pm	3 OO (grouped)
Oct. 29, 1954	10	Macciano (Siena)	morning	1 OO
Oct. 29, 1954	11	Citta della Pieve (Perugia)	0.30 pm	2 OO
Oct. 29, 1954	12	Calenzano (Prato)	1:00 pm	Several OO
Oct. 29, 1954	13	S. Mauro a Signa (Florence)	1:00 pm	Several OO
Oct. 29, 1954	14	Scarperia (Florence)	1-2:30 pm	Several OO ("very high")
Oct. 29, 1954	15	S. Pietro Agliana, Montale Agliana, S. Marcello Pistoiese, Lizzano (Pistoia)	afternoon	Several OO ("very high")
Oct. 29, 1954	16	Florence	2:00 pm	None
Oct. 29, 1954	17	Settignano, Campi Bisenzio, Rifredi, Prato (Florence), "Villages in the Pistoia area"	2:00 pm	None
Oct. 30, 1954	18	Cetona (Siena)	daytime	None
Oct. 30, 1954	19	Perugia	11:30 am	1 OO (purple-blue sphere)
Oct. 31, 1954	20	Pietrasanta (Lucca)	7:00 pm	1 OO
Nov. 6, 1954	21	Rome	11:00 am	40 OO (2 V-shaped formations of 20 OO in single X-shaped formation, "very high")
Nov. 6, 1954	22	Civitavecchia (Rome)	11:30 am	1 OO
Nov. 10, 1954	23	Perugia	7:30 am	2 OO
Nov. 11, 1954	24	Lucca	3:00 pm	2 OO
Nov. 12, 1954	25	Rome	1:30 pm	2 OO
Nov. 13, 1954	26	Grosseto	afternoon	2 OO
Nov. 14, 1954	27	Gela (Sicily)	10:45 am	20 OO (samples analyzed in hospital lab defined: "glass-like fibers")
Nov. 14, 1954	28	Casaloldo (Mantua)	afternoon	1 OO splitting into 2 UFOs (local football match interrupted)
Dec. 4, 1954	29	S. Giuliano (Arezzo)	1:00 pm	1 OO

LES SOUCOUPES VOLANTES VUES A OLORON LE 17 OCTOBRE

sont prises au sérieux par les services officiels

Plusieurs habitants de la ville d'Oloron-Sainte-Marie (Basses-Pyrénées) ont avoué, vendredi dernier, à 13 heures, au plus spectaculaire passage de soucoupes et cigares volants enfilés jusqu'ici. Pour la première fois aussi, les apparitions impériennes ont été prises au sérieux, une pluie de fleurs jaunes et un les témoins ont pu leur offrir leurs dévotion. Les autorités scientifiques étudient le témoignage collectif des habitants d'Oloron qu'ils se trouvent être au sérieux. En attendant, France Dimanche rapporte, par le texte et par l'image, leurs extraordinaires constatations.

Les Oloronnais qui ont vu l'étrange phénomène sont au nombre d'une dizaine. Ce sont M. Trés Fréquent, 45 ans, surveillant général du lycée d'Oloron, sa femme, institutrice, leur fils Jean Trés, 16 ans, élève de troisième, ses deux filles, M. Jean Fréquent, 50 ans, le directeur du lycée, sa femme, la professeur de gymnastique, deux élèves et une patiente, Mme Balastrin. Dans une commune voisine, à Giverny, le maire, M. Baudou, et quelques uns de ses administrés racontent aussi les soucoupes.

Il était 12 h. 50 heures. Le spectacle était magnifique, le ciel d'un bleu profond, sans nuage. La famille Fréquent était au milieu à terre, dans son appartement, au premier étage du lycée. Des fenêtres, un observateur en large panorama vers le nord de la ville. Jean Trés était à la fenêtre et on l'appela pour le repas quand il tira : « Oh ! Papa, vous voyez, c'est fantastique, c'est bon, toute la famille lui a le regard ».

Dans le ciel, un cylindre long et fin, semblable à un mât de navire incliné à 45° par rapport au sol, se déplaçait lentement en ligne droite vers le Sud-Ouest, à 2.000 mètres environ d'altitude.



Elles apparaissent, une partie du objet semble s'échapper, une forme obscure.



Les soucoupes se déplacent dans par deux et changent de ligne.



Lorsqu'elles s'éloignent l'une de l'autre, une traînée blanche les suit.



Elles étaient la forme d'une sphère de couleur rouge, entourée d'un anneau blanc.

l'objet avait une couleur blanche, mais pas le même. Son dessin était très net. De son extrémité supérieure s'échappait un panache blanc.

M. Fréquent, qui a servi dans la marine, prit des jumelles. Il n'y avait rien de particulier sur les flancs de l'objet.

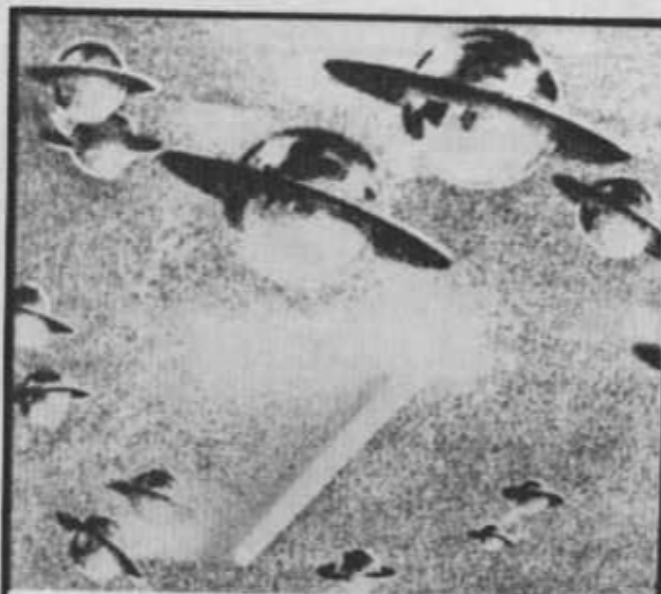
Plus tard, apparurent, avec lui, de l'objet en avant, et derrière, dans sa trajectoire, une véritable queue d'autre objet, représentant ce que l'un a décrit ailleurs comme des « soucoupes volantes ». Ces soucoupes avaient l'air d'une boule informe, comme un flacon de larmes. A la première apparition, une sphère centrale de couleur rouge et tout autour une sorte d'anneau blanc. Ces anneaux, incliné étroitement vers le sol, décrivaient la partie supérieure de la sphère et se touchaient presque toute la partie inférieure. Les soucoupes se déplaçaient deux par deux, conservant entre elles la même distance. Elles s'arrangeaient par un ligne droite, mais avec un très rapide et très court mouvement de zigzag. Quand elles s'écartaient, une traînée blanche se produisait entre elles, comme un arc électrique.

Les « soucoupes » d'Oloron laissaient une traînée blanche sur leur passage, comme des avions d'essai, qui tombaient lentement au sol, en se désagrégeant. Les témoins qui nous avons cités ont pu en recueillir. Ces fils, qui ressemblaient à de la laine ou du nylon, devenaient rapidement gélatineux, pour fondre et disparaître complètement. Il se resta des paquets pendant quelques heures, après les fils téléphoniques et un paratonnerre.

Le même jour, un étrange phénomène atmosphérique a été observé à la tour de l'observatoire de Mont de Marsan, à 150 kilomètres d'Oloron.

Une étrange nuit 1918 produisit plus ou moins le même phénomène de M. Fréquent.

FIGURE 2. FROM "FRANCE DIMANCHE" NO. 322 (OCT. 26, 1952)



C. THE FLYING DISCS AND CIGAR SEEN OVER
OLORON AND GAILLAC, FRANCE IN 1952

Italy. He was not interested in what he had photographed, but did want to protect his privacy, so we promised not to reveal his name in order to obtain this color slide. It was examined and analyzed by a professional photographer, in whose opinion no forgery seems technically possible. Besides, a hoax seems psychologically illogical in a person quite unwilling to be mentioned.

In any case, a professional enlargement of what Mr. Gerardo Bagnulo photographed (today, after his death, we of CUN can mention his name) reveals an unexpected chromatic difference between the two luminous objects, just a point and a segment of whitish light in the original color slide. [E] They proved to be a cylindrical blue-green-greyish structure and a circular body with a reddish-orange nucleus and a yellow ring all around. And this is just the way one of the Oloron case witnesses, Yves Prigent, described the Saturn-shaped UFOs he saw through his binoculars. A very remarkable coincidence, indeed!

This perfect replica of the 1952 French "soucoupes volantes" and of the 1954 Italian "dischi volanti" could be compared also with the well-known photographs of a Daylight Disc over Trindade Island, snapped from the

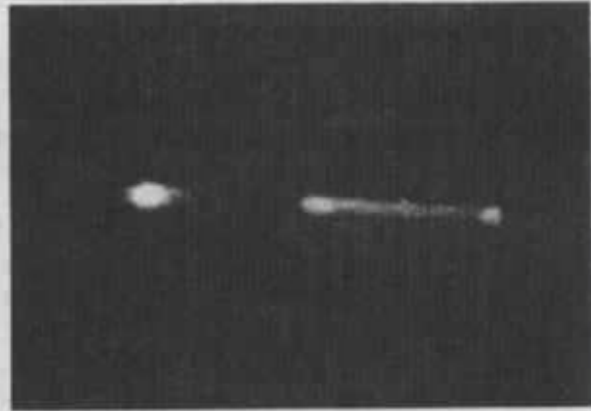
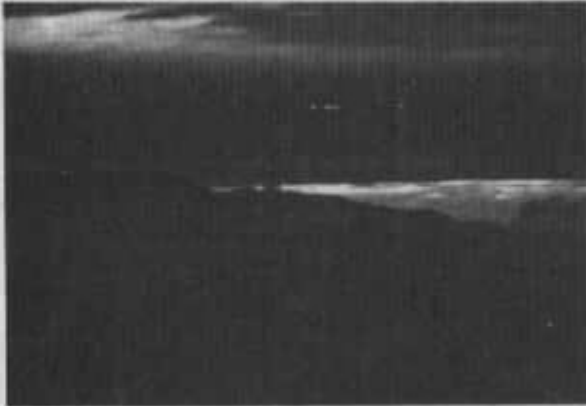


D. A "FLYING SAUCER" PHOTOGRAPHED OVER
SIENA ON OCTOBER 28th, 1954.

Brazilian Navy's ship "Almirante Saldanha" on January 16, 1958, and later authenticated by Brazilian authorities. But neither the Trindade DO nor the Gargano UFOs could be associated with "angel's hair" falls.



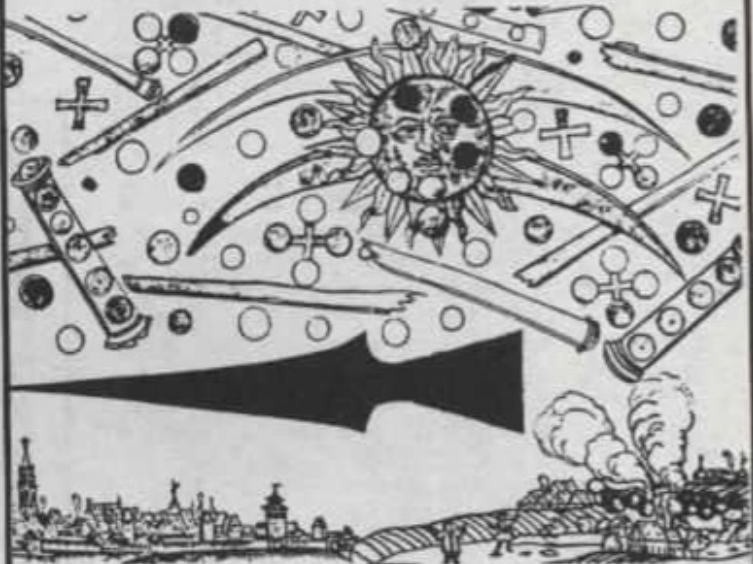
THE TRINDADE ISLAND DAYLIGHT DISC
(JANUARY 16TH, 1958)



E. PHOTO OF AERIAL PHENOMENON AND ENLARGEMENT TAKEN IN SEPTEMBER, 1966 OVER THE GARGANO PENINSULA IN SOUTHERN ITALY.



G. DAYLIGHT DISC PHOTOGRAPHED OVER NAMUR, BELGIUM ON JUNE 5, 1955



AERIAL PHENOMENA SEEN IN NUREMBURG ON APRIL 14, 1945 mentioned by C. G. JUNG IN HIS BOOK FLYING SAUCERS (Collection Wickiana, Zurich Central Library)

As far as we know, one of the latest mass sightings involving the same objects seen in 1952 and 1954 in France and Italy occurred over the town of Talissay (Philippine Islands) on April 19, 1979. People saw "a 'mother ship' emitting several smaller discs in a V-shaped formation." Their reported landings in the Carapale Valley caused an official military inquiry.

In history, a visual representation of a recorded event must be considered partial evidence of it, from a scientific point of view. For example, we could say that the world-famous Bayeux Tapestry is a typical visual side-evidence of the Battle of Hastings. And in ufology, of course, visual evidence is very important. As we have seen, there are many recorded descriptions of UFO-like aerial phenomena of the past in the works of several historians. But, unfortunately, they are just descriptions and nothing more, without any visual representation providing more convincing evidence. And as a visual event, an ideal UFO sighting of the past ought to be supported not only by historical tradition, but also by a representation of it as we know it along with its effects, if any.

Maybe we may find all this in the painting of Masolino da Panicale named "Il Miracolo della Neve" ("The Miraculous Snowfall"). In it we have the visual representation of a very strange event involving Pope Liberius (352-366 A.D.). According to this historical tradition, in a dream the Pope was ordered by angels to build a new church in Rome, right in the place where a miraculous snowfall would manifest itself. On the next day, a strange snow-like substance fell from the sky, contrary to normal weather during a hot August day. The phenomenon was limited to only the area of Rome in which the Santa Maria Maggiore basilica was later built. In Masolino's representation, we see the Roman Pope indicating the perimeter of the future basilica in the area whitened by the miraculous snow, still falling from strange clouds. Christ and the Virgin are observing everything from heaven above, of course. [F]

What was the cause of this "impossible" snowfall? Masolino da Panicale, in his painting, represents a detailed scene of the event, with the snow falling from a big and elongated "cloud," greyish and cigar-shaped,

under which smaller clouds are visible. A close look at these clouds, moreover, shows that they are not ordinary clouds. They are all clearly outlined and not vaporous, and are represented two-by-two and identically, with only their upper part lightened, like most domed DOs.

The event occurred in August, so spider webs ought to be excluded as a possible explanation of this phenomenon. As a matter of fact, Allan Hendry emphasizes in his The UFO Handbook that spider webs usually appear especially during October. On the contrary, if we compare the strange clouds of Masolino's painting with a Daylight Disc photograph from a newspaper allegedly snapped over Siena as "angel's hair" fell on that town in 1954, we must admit that so striking a resemblance seems far from casual. [G] Another evident comparison may be suggested with the three well-known photographs of a typical Daylight Disc moving in the clouds over Namur, Belgium, on June 5, 1955, snapped by a Belgian postman. [G]

Can all this be mere coincidence? Does Masolino da Panicale's detailed painting represent a "sign from Heaven," as Catholic tradition says, or the UFO-related phenomenon known today as "angel's hair"? In any case, this painting of the 15th century might have been inspired by a personal experience of its author and not only by a detailed tradition, after all. We shall never know this, of course.

But we know that similar aerial phenomena were reported in Italy during the 15th century, also. For instance, let me quote Leone Cobelli, an Italian historian of Forli:

In that same year [1487], one day in June, a beam of fire coming from Mount Poggiolo was seen in the sky during the night and it came towards Forli off the walls of Ravaldino castle. . . . Then, next morning, another of these beams of fire appeared. It came from Mount Puzolo and reached the sky just over the central square in Forli. And all the inhabitants of the town saw it. . . .

In that same year, one day in August, a huge star appeared in the sky two hours before dawn, coming from the mountains [Apennines] and moving towards Ravenna. It floated in the air just like a butterfly, and I saw it, too, with many other



F. IL MIRACOLO DELLE NEVE (THE MIRACULOUS SNOW FALL)
BY MASOLINO DA PANICALE

inhabitants of Forlì. I must say that it seemed a cart wheel flying in the sky, and its appearance lasted some minutes, more or less the time during which a miserere prayer may be said. Some people said they had seen it more than half an hour before, over the mountains. . . .

Interpret all this as "signs from Heaven," as he wrote, or not, these are the eyewitness accounts of Leone Cobelli as they are reported in his Cronache Forlivesi (The Forlì Chronicle).

Such a detailed description of a star-like, luminous flying object approaching the ground and hovering over the town of Forlì and the nearby mountains for more than half an hour not only involves multiple sightings in the same region over a long period of time; the object observed is also described as a disc-shaped body, seemingly rotating (like a "cart wheel") and flying erratically ("just like a butterfly"). Besides, two "beams of fire" or cylindrical luminous objects had been previously reported by night as well as in broad daylight. Surely Cobelli's accurate words as a witness do not fit any known or anomalous phenomenon, except the UFO phenomenon, and are not different from what we may read in today's UFO reports.

In any case, a 15th century artist would not be able to hand down to posterity such a direct experience, since at that time painters were allowed only to produce sacred and not profane subjects. An artist's only possibility to do this would have been, then, to insert a representation of such an event in a sacred art subject. An ideal place indeed for "signs from Heaven"!

In our opinion, this is exactly what happened in another 15th century painting, "The Madonna and Baby St. John," a nativity scene attributed to the school of Filippo Lippi, a 15th century Florentine painter. This painting was noticed by chance during a visit to Palazzo Vecchio at Florence, in the Saturn Salon, by a young Italian architect, Mr. Daniele Bedini. Looking at it, in its upper right portion, he could clearly notice the presence of a lead-colored, egg-shaped flying object in the sky, apparently in motion. As Mr. Bedini underlines, "It is possible to imagine the motion by the presence of bright rays. The color of the rays is bright yellow, like gold, all around the object, and

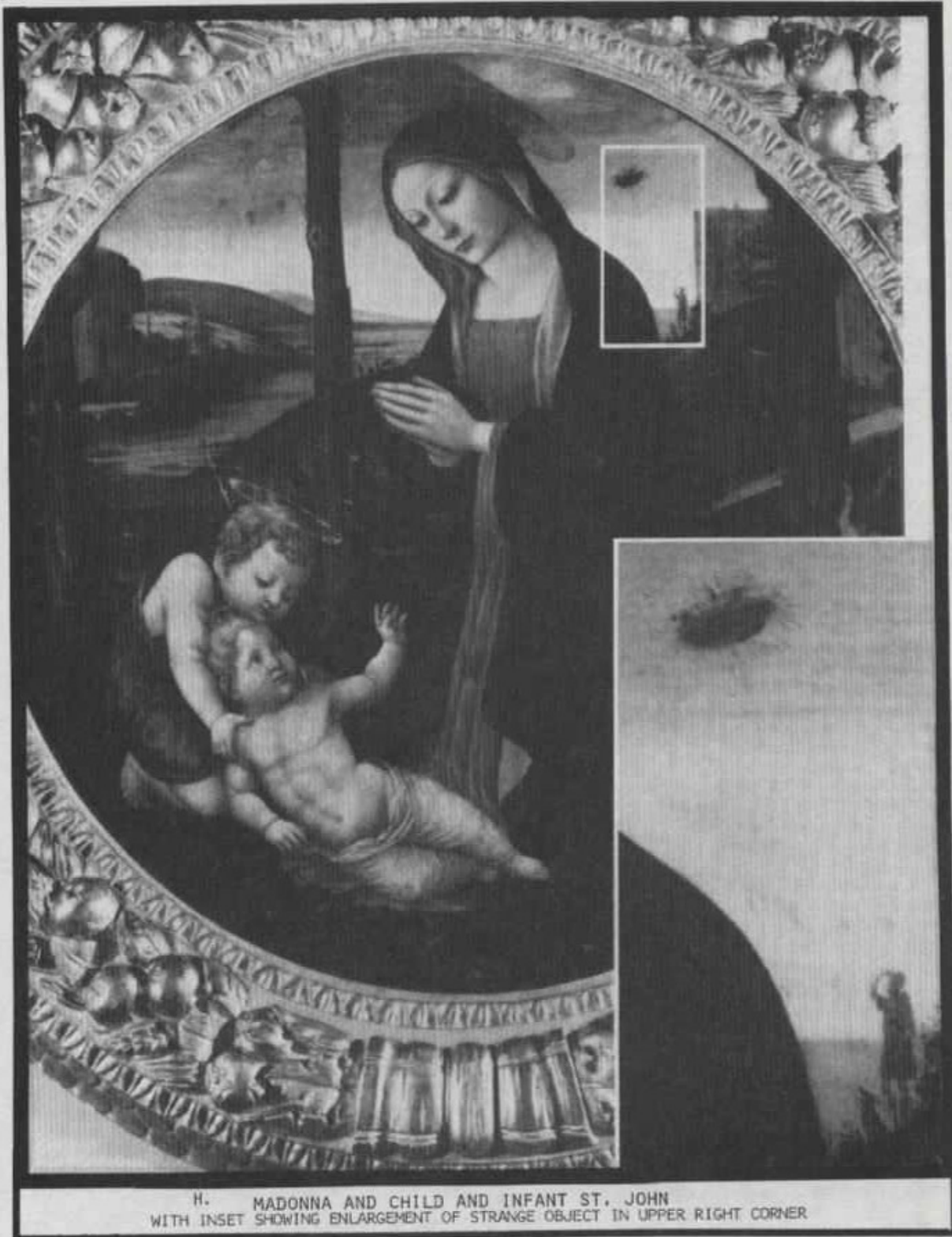
they almost suggest the direction of motion. These factors are in contrast with the complete steadiness of the rest of the painting." [H]

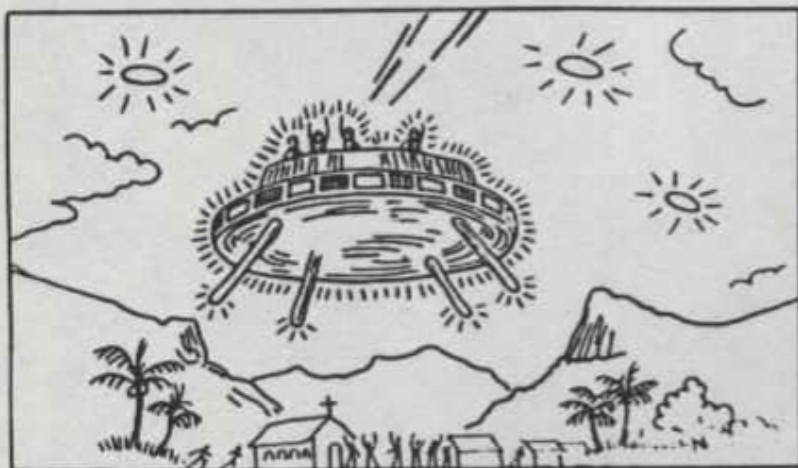
What could this object be? Since this is a nativity scene involving the Virgin Mary with both the baby Jesus and St. John (the Baptist), could it be identified with the Star of Bethlehem? The answer is surely negative, because the miraculous star, as a definite source of light, would have been represented in quite a different way: as a comet-like bright body, and not as an opaque one as in this case. As far as the sun is concerned, we may observe it in the upper left portion with small rays of sunlight below it, clearly in a mystical meaning for God and the Holy Trinity. But no atmospheric, symbolic, mythological or mystical explanation seems possible for the strange lead-colored object surrounded by bright rays hovering over the country in the landscape in the upper right portion of this painting.

"The object," Mr. Bedini comments, "is being watched by a shepherd at the right of the Madonna, drawn by the painter with his right hand above his eyes looking at the object with all his attention. Besides, it is being watched by the shepherd's dog that is clearly barking, as happens in many cases of UFO sighting reports."

As a matter of fact, the mysterious object is affecting both human and animal reactions in the background scene and no conventional explanation seems possible for it. It is a real enigma still to be solved. It is evident, however, that it has nothing to do with the subject of this painting. And since Filippo Lippi is to be considered an expressive but not compositive painter, his unknown disciple's intention could be just to communicate to the masses through his own work a special personal experience: Was it the sighting of the same unknown phenomenon we call today "unidentified flying objects"?

Today, all this shows that history, tradition and even history of art are beginning to support more and more what yesterday was just a suspicion, and are revealing UFO-like phenomena also in the past. This neo-humanistic comparative approach, if developed successfully, may only confirm the inexplicable nature of UFOs in space and time along with the evidence of their unearthly origin.





A DRAWING OF THE OBJECT SEEN AT A MISSION AT BOINAI, IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA BY FATHER GILL AND OTHERS OF THE MISSION ON JUNE 27^m 1959. THE UFO INVOLVED SEEMS VERY SIMILAR TO THE STRANGE OBJECT IN THE XVTH CENTURY PAINTING OF "THE MADONNA AND CHILD AND INFANT ST. JOHN. A MERE COINCIDENCE?

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