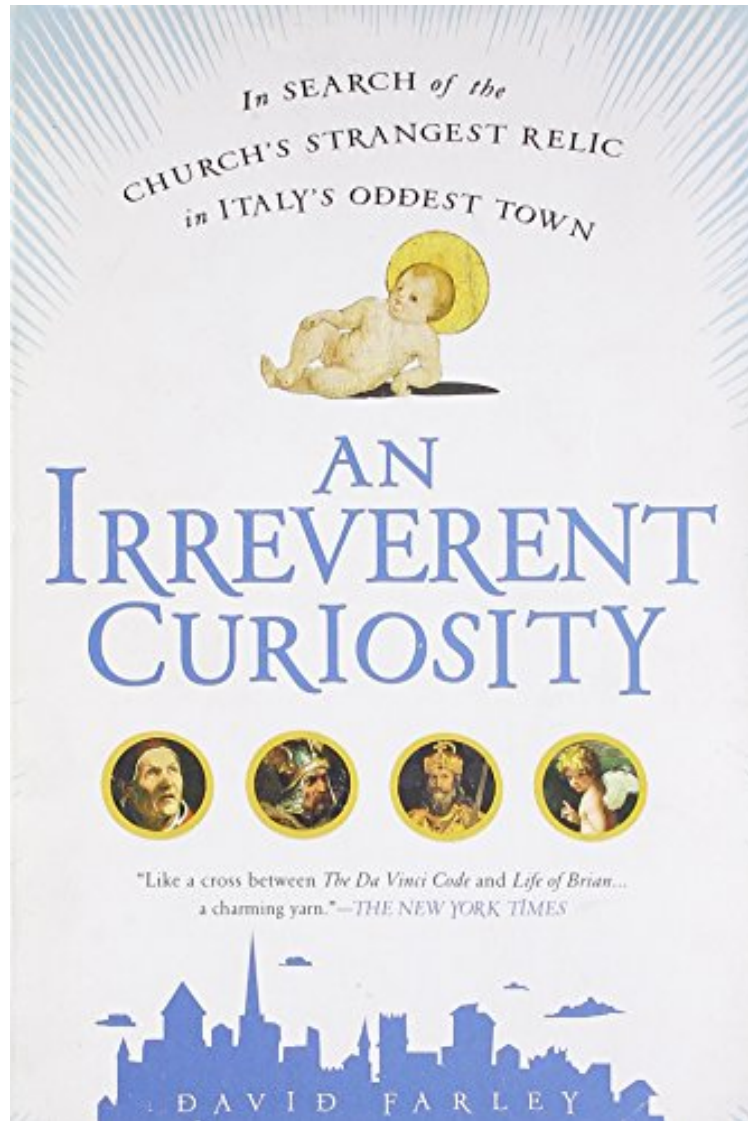


[Library ebook] An Irreverent Curiosity: In Search of the Church's Strangest Relic in Italy's Oddest Town

## An Irreverent Curiosity: In Search of the Church's Strangest Relic in Italy's Oddest Town

David Farley

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**David Farley : An Irreverent Curiosity: In Search of the Church's Strangest Relic in Italy's Oddest Town** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised An Irreverent Curiosity: In Search of the Church's Strangest Relic in Italy's Oddest Town:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Pssst! Wanna ogle a freckle scraped off the Baby Jesus?By Mr. Joe"When Halloween evening arrived, I put (the costume) all together, (including) my homemade cape, on which I

had written SANTO PREPUZIO with a large Superman-style 'SP' underneath. Finally, I put on the brown ski cap, the color of which perfectly matched my brown turtleneck, rolled up the edges of the cap, and affixed a gold circle with the wire over my head." - the author goes to an Italian Halloween party dressed as the Holy Foreskin

Growing up Catholic, I was peripherally aware of the existence of holy relics though I never got too worked up about it. And certainly not to the obsessive degree admitted to by the author of AN IRREVERENT CURIOSITY, David Farley. To make a long story short, Farley's narrative is an account of his extended stay in the medieval hill town of Calcata, 29 miles north of Rome, in which the Holy Foreskin, ostensibly circumcised from the infant Christ, made its appearance in 1527 and was subsequently venerated as a precious relic until its disappearance in 1983. David's self-imposed mission was to track the lost artifact down. A hobby is a good thing. Most fascinating to me was Farley's history and description of the type of relics available for veneration by the pious in the Middle Ages subsequent to the death of Charlemagne in 814. Countless slivers of and nails from the True Cross, the breast milk, hair, comb, handkerchief and wedding ring of the Virgin Mary, St. Joseph's hammer and one of his carpentered carts that Jesus helped build, the Redeemer's tears, barbs from the Crown of Thorns, a preserved fish and stale bread from the miraculously enlarged picnic lunch used by Jesus to feed thousands, the very finger that Doubting Thomas stuck in the risen Christ's side, shards of marble from the pillar on which God's son was flogged, the sponge used to quench his thirst on the Cross, a chunk of the Last Supper's table, and JC's own sandals. And, of course, the Holy Foreskin. Several, in fact. The list is endless when one includes the alleged bits and pieces of the saints and martyrs left behind. One can only imagine the hand-rubbing glee felt by the Levantine flimflammers as they watched the suckers debarking from the long ships arrived from the ports of Western Europe. The subtitle of AN IRREVERENT CURIOSITY is IN SEARCH OF THE CHURCH'S STRANGEST RELIC IN ITALY'S ODDEST TOWN. The town is, obviously, Calcata, and its history and inhabitants absorb much of the author's narrative; so much so that the main thread of the book - the hunt for the sacred relic - is sometimes obscured by all the textual padding. Of course, it's to be expected that the recorded experiences of a resident in foreign climes become focused on the eccentricities of the locals. One only need read the books of such expats as Peter Mayle (A Year in Provence), Annie Hawes (Extra Virgin: A Young Woman Discovers the Italian Riviera, Where Every Month Is Enchanted), and Victoria Tweed (Chickens, Mules and Two Old Fools: Tuck into a slice of Andalusian Life); that's part of the fun. And what degree of success did Farley have in his quest for the Holy Foreskin? Well, that would be telling, wouldn't it? Let it suffice to say that AN IRREVERENT CURIOSITY reminds me more than a little of Miracle Ball: My Hunt for the Shot Heard 'Round the World, in which author Brian Biegel recounts his search for the missing home run ball - a contemporary holy relic to some - socked into the bleachers by New York Giant Bobby Thomson to beat the Dodgers in the 1951 National League playoffs. Indeed, I'm tempted to award a similar number of stars - three. However, the interesting history lesson that David provides and his congeniality is such that I'll gladly ratchet the award up to four. I'm left bemused, however, why Farley would sneak his 10-pound miniature pinscher/Chihuahua mix of a dog, Abraham Lincoln, into the Vatican's Sancta Sanctorum hidden in a shoulder bag. Is that ridiculous or what? Remind me to smuggle my favorite cat, Amanda, into Westminster Abbey next time I visit to examine tomb inscriptions.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A very enjoyable read... By Michael J. Meehan First of all, I have to confess that, like the author, I am fascinated by the idea and history of relics - so that may bias me a little. Basically this book recounts the author's search for the "lost" relic of the Holy Foreskin - the little piece of flesh cut of Christ's penis during his circumcision and venerated in many places in Europe up until the 20th century. Thus, one can see why the book was called "An Irreverent Curiosity". However, I did not find the book irreverent at all. In all honesty, the author treated the topic with more maturity than I would have been able to do. However, while the main focus of the book was on the Holy Foreskin, this book was much more. It was also an account of everyday life in a small town of Italy filled with a variety of interesting characters who the author described in a way which made the reader feel like he was getting to know them (in person) as well. I think I found that aspect of the book - the study of the people and their relationships in this small town - very enjoyable. Overall, I would definitely recommend this to individuals with an interest in relics (unless you are a "fundamentalist" when it comes to that topic) and to individuals who enjoy character studies of real people. I think this author would be a fun guy to sit down and talk with in person over a cup of coffee or glass of wine ... which is essentially how you have to approach this book - as a conversation with an interesting fellow who is telling a great story about his experiences in a small town in Italy.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Religion, relics, Italy By MarilynLA This is an interesting, inconclusive search for a nebulous relic, at best. The quirky characters of Calcata, the history of the Catholic Church, and the picture of this tiny Italian village made it an entertaining read.

Read David Farley's posts on the Penguin Blog. A tour through the centuries and through a bizarre Italian town in search of an unbelievable relic: the foreskin of Jesus Christ. In December 1983, a priest in the Italian hill town of Calcata shared shocking news with his congregation: the pride of their town, the foreskin of Jesus, had been stolen. Some postulated that it had been stolen by Satanists. Some said the priest himself was to blame. Some even pointed their fingers at the Vatican. In 2006, travel writer David Farley moved to Calcata, determined to find the missing foreskin, or at least find out the truth behind its disappearance. Farley recounts how the relic passed from Charlemagne

to the papacy to a marauding sixteenth-century German soldier before finally ending up in Calcata, where miracles occurred that made the sleepy town a major pilgrimage destination. Blending history, travel, and perhaps the oddest story in Christian lore, *An Irreverent Curiosity* is a weird and wonderful tale of conspiracy and misadventure.

From Publishers Weekly Until one mysterious day in 1983, the foreskin of Jesus once one of the Catholic Church's holiest of relics lay nestled in a box in a small church in Calcata, a village in the hills of northern Italy. On that fateful day in December, however, priest Don Dario announced to his tiny congregation that the foreskin had disappeared. What happened to this holy relic? Who could have taken this piece of the divine that medieval saint Catherine of Siena was purported to have worn as a ring around her finger and about which writers as diverse as Joyce, Stendhal and José Saramago have written? In this humorous narrative, journalist Farley sets off to solve the mystery of the missing foreskin. Part travelogue, part mystery story and part religious history, Farley's tale involves local winemakers, actors and priests, many of whom are tight-lipped about the relic's disappearance. In 1900, the Vatican decreed that anyone who talked about the holy foreskin would face excommunication, and thereby cut off its status as a holy relic. Farley discovers that no one really knows whether this piece of holy skin ever existed in the first place, and that no one knows its whereabouts now. Although Farley's often repetitious tale might have been sufficient as a magazine article, his fast-paced storytelling and winning humor raise thoughtful questions about the nature of faith. (July) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. About the Author David Farley's travel writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Slate*, and many other publications. He teaches writing at New York University and lives in New York.