
E62 A Mysterious Case of a Serial Killer in Italy: “The Monster of Florence”—Is the Case Really Solved?

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will know of a famous cold case about an Italian serial killer.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community through a historical reconstruction of the event and by analyzing the criminological profile of the killer.

Serial murders are rare events. Scientific studies show that the most common reason that leads a serial killer to commit murder is the extrinsic gratification of the act. Psychopathic personality and experiences of child sexual abuse are common traits. The cases of various serial murders that occurred in Italy are reported. A survey was conducted about the proceedings of the trial, the analysis of Italian newspapers, and historical video recordings concerning the trial of the serial killer named “The Monster of Florence” who was responsible for 16 murders that occurred between 1968 and 1985, all in the Tuscan countryside near Florence, Italy. The target was always the same: young couples who were secluded for intimacy. The investigations revealed a constant ritual: the first aggression was always directed toward the man, and only later was the woman killed. All the crimes were carried out by using the same weapon: a Beretta .22 caliber also with Winchester® H series bullets. The murders that took place after 1974 were characterized by a further macabre element: the abuse of the corpses of female victims; in fact, the killer carried out a removal of the pubis and parts of the breast. This last element, given the surgical precision of the executing hand, suggested that the killer should be a person able to perform precise cuts, with the hypothesis that he would be a surgeon.

At the time of the facts, there was no standardized method in crime scene analysis, and the scene was not crystallized. Usually the first people who arrived at the crime scene were journalists. This resulted in a serious compromise of the scene, with the loss of important evidence for the purposes of investigations and with years of delay in identifying the real killer. The analysis of the judicial processes has highlighted several people convicted only according to circumstantial evidence and subsequently released because the monster continued to kill other couples during their imprisonment. After numerous investigations, the Court of Florence definitively condemned the so-called “Compagni di Merende” (Buddies of Snacks) Mario Vanni (deceased in 2009) and Gianluca Lotti (deceased in 2002), while Pietro Pacciani, first acquitted in the appeal process, died in 1998, before of the end of the trial.

The psychopathological profile of the “Buddies of Snacks” was very similar. The three had low socio-cultural backgrounds and were all indigent and chronic alcoholics with sexual perversions. In particular, Pacciani presented a story of sexual violence toward his daughters, victims of years of abuse, and a previous murder committed when he was young. Surely the three could be the material executors of the crimes for a series of clues evaluated in the process, but the presence of a mandate is assumed. Investigators found large sums of money in Pacciani’s home. No element attributable to symbolism, ritualism, or an obsessive pathology was found in the homes of the condemned. Then who is The Monster of Florence? The most accredited theory of the investigators is that there were one or more principals who manipulated the “Buddies of Snacks” who were weak men, easily controllable, and susceptible to blackmail through easy mental manipulation. The “monster” in fact has always adopted a rigid executive method: the murders always took place over the weekend; no gun or knife was found; there was never a rape of the victims; there were no traces of spermatic fluid; and the psychological element was focused on the certainty of killing the victims. The three dead convicts, for their psychological and behavioral background, would never have perpetrated their homicides in such a precise and constant manner, repeating these murders in a maniacally precise manner. Is the Monster of Florence really a solved case? It is believed not.

Forensic Science, Cold Case, Serial