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At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

The Holy Shroud's message of hope for our world in crisis

Interview with Emanuela Marinelli, author of the book "Nuova luce sulla Sindone", (New Light in the Shroud, published by Ares Editions in Italian)



What is new in your book about the Holy Shroud of Turin, what "new light" does it offer into its mystery?

In recent years the mystery surrounding the Shroud has sparked new in-depth investigations, which have resulted in interesting discoveries which are presented for the first time in this volume.

In order to understand this particular relic, we have to follow two routes, historical and scientific, which are amply developed in the first part of this text.

The Shroud (from the Greek *sindon*, sheet) is a long linen cloth (442 cm by 113 cm) which certainly covered the corpse of a man who was beaten, whipped, crowned with thorns, crucified with nails and pierced by a spear in the side. The negative imprint of the body that was wrapped in it is visible on it, in addition to the stains of blood, which turned out to be real human blood of the AB group, which oozed from the wounds of the corpse in a lapse of time estimated at around 36-40 hours. Ancient tradition considers it to be the burial shroud of Jesus Christ.

The history of the relic is retraced in the first three chapters of the volume, while the fourth chapter analyses the interpretations that associate the liturgical linens used in rites to the linen used in Christ's burial, through the analysis of the three terms that describe them in liturgical commentaries, according to the lexicon transmitted by Jerome's Vulgate: *sindon*, *linteamina*, *sudarium*. The term *sindon* reveals the most interesting change from the end of the 11th century to the definite and incisive allegories of the 13th century. The allegorical reading of the liturgy, in fact, rediscovers and explicitly strengthens the bond between the linens used for the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sepulchral linens that wrapped the body of Christ.

These first four chapters therefore illuminate the darkness of the first centuries, when the Shroud was hidden and venerated in different ways. On the other hand, the following three essays develop the aspect of the scientific research conducted on the Shroud

The fifth chapter lists the reasons for confirming the authenticity of the relic: the preciousness and rarity of the fabric; the great abundance of Middle Eastern pollen and aloe and myrrh; the presence of aragonite similar to that found in the caves of Jerusalem; a side seam identical to those existing on 1st century Jewish fabrics; conspicuous traces of Middle Eastern and Indian DNA, confirming the possible origin of the sheet; the traces of blood from a body that has suffered precisely the torments described in the Gospels; the short time lapse of the corpse in the shroud; the mysterious image, due to dehydration and oxidation of the superficial fibrils of the linen, which appears projected by a photo radiant effect, an indication of an inexplicable phenomenon probably connected to the resurrection. Furthermore, two chemical dating methods, based on vibrational spectroscopy, and a mechanical dating method place the origin of the Shroud in the time of Jesus.

The peculiar characteristics of the blood form the subject of the sixth chapter. The blood existing on the Shroud has a redder than normal colour due to the presence of bilirubin and it has been shown by scientific experiments that this is due to an irradiation of ultraviolet light. Furthermore, methaemoglobin, a product of the degradation of highly oxidized and aged haemoglobin, is present on the Shroud confirming that it is ancient blood. The theory of an artful realization of the bloodstains by a medieval forger is also disproved, with valid arguments that have been confirmed by experiments presented in the next chapter. In the seventh chapter we discuss the probable dislocation of a shoulder that can be inferred from the Shroud imprint. But the most sensational news comes from a statistical study that nullifies the validity of the radiocarbon dating of the Shroud.

The historical and scientific investigations presented in the first part of this text therefore definitively dispel all doubts about the authenticity of the Shroud. At this point we enter the second part of the volume, which presents five chapters of spiritual meditation on the Shroud, read as a fifth Gospel of Christ's passion, death and resurrection.

The contributions collected in this volume therefore help the reader to make a journey of discovery on these complex issues, which are dealt with in a clear and comprehensive way, with the possibility of further exploring the topic thanks to rich bibliographic notes. It is a journey through history, science and faith which sheds new light on the mystery contained in the Shroud.

Some years ago the Carbon 14 dating method discredited the authenticity of the Shroud and now many people believe that it is a fake, fabricated in the Middle Ages ... Why is this thesis now considered scientifically outdated?

The methods of the sampling operation, the sampling area and the reliability of the method for fabrics that have undergone vicissitudes such as those of the Shroud were considered unsatisfactory by a significant number of scholars. The choice of the area from which the samples were taken was wrong: from a very polluted corner, which had also been mended. On the other hand, a sheet of fabric has a total area of contact with the environment, it is impossible to select an area that has not come into contact with external environments. Therefore, any investigations on the Shroud will necessarily be multidisciplinary by nature, precisely because of the complexity of this object. The lack of multidisciplinary approach was one of the reasons for the failure of the radiocarbon dating conducted on the Shroud in 1988.

An important article, written by myself together with researcher Tristan Casabianca, data analyst Dr. Giuseppe Pernagallo, and Prof. Benedetto Torrisi, professor of statistics at the University of Catania, appeared in *Archaeometry* in 2019. This work examines the raw data of the radio carbonic analysis of 1988 from a statistical point of view, that is, the data derived from individual measurements. The laboratories refused, for almost thirty years, to disclose the raw data. Only in 2017 was Casabianca granted access after he took legal action. Statistical analysis shows that the samples were not homogeneous, therefore they could not be considered representative of the entire sheet. The result of that test, therefore, does not allow us to consider the Shroud as a medieval product, as it was stated in 1988. It is remarkable that the publication of this new article took place precisely in *Archaeometry*, a University of Oxford magazine, home to one of the three laboratories that dated the Shroud in 1988.

Could you briefly retrace the history of the relic and tell us how it miraculously reached us?

Since 1578 the Shroud has been custodied in Turin. It was in the possession of the [Royal Italian] Savoy family from 1453 until 1983, when Umberto II gifted it to the Pope.

The first certain historical records of the existence of this relic date back to the mid-fourteenth century, when Crusader knight, Geoffroy de Charny, delivered the Shroud to the canons of Lirey, near Troyes, in France. Her wife, Jeanne de Vergy, was a great-granddaughter of Othon de la Roche, a Crusader knight who most likely removed it from Constantinople during the sacking of the Fourth Crusade (1204).

The ancient history of the Shroud is one of the most fascinating mysteries of this precious linen. An ancient tradition attributes the transport from Jerusalem to Edessa (now Urfa, in south-eastern Turkey) of the miraculous likeness of Christ to Saint Jude Thaddeus the Apostle, where it healed the king of the city, Abgar, of his infirmities. It is precisely from these initial moments of the relic's existence that the first historical and iconographic investigation contained in the volume begins: a research that demonstrates how the relationship between the numerous literary testimonies and the figure of Judas Thaddeus is possible. Even the pictorial analysis of an ancient icon, preserved in the Monastery of St Catherine on Mount Sinai, tends to justify this hypothesis.

The existence of a cloth with the likeness of Jesus imprinted on in Edessa reported in numerous Arab sources, both Christian and Muslim ones, is the subject of the second chapter in the volume. These texts always speak of a *mandil*, a small handkerchief, on which only the face of Christ is visible. Yet this is not an obstacle to identifying this cloth as the Shroud, as other sources, the subject of the third chapter, report that the cloth referred to as *Mandyllion* by the Byzantines, was *tetradiplon* (folded four times). It is therefore legitimate to believe that this mysterious cloth was the Shroud, folded so as to show only the face. Traces of ancient folds have also been identified on the linen preserved in Turin, making this identification plausible. The *Mandyllion* that arrived in Constantinople on August 16, 944 from Edessa could therefore probably be the Shroud. This is confirmed by the iconographic investigation: the copies of the *Mandyllion*, and in general all the representations of Christ from the 4th century onwards, are inspired by the venerated relic.

The casket that contained the *Mandyllion* may have been opened during the long permanence in Constantinople from 944 to 1204. Thus, it would have been possible to see not only the face of Jesus, but his whole body with the signs of the passion. This could justify the appearance, in the course of the 12th century, of a new iconographic type, called *Imago pietatis* in the West. This new typology depicts the dead Christ in an upright position. In the East this iconographic type is known by the denominations of *Akrà tapinosis* (the Great Humiliation) and of *E apocathelosis* (the Deposition). Another iconographic novelty of this period is the representation of the dead crucified Christ with his

head reclined. Another representation that emerges is of Christ taken down from the Cross, lying on the funeral shroud, called *Epitaphios*, especially embroidered on liturgical veils. At the same time, many frescoes appear in Byzantine churches depicting Christ lying on a cloth, with his arms crossed, in the scene of the deposition. The particularity of these representations makes the hypothesis of a progressive unveiling of the *Mandyllion* plausible.

If I am not mistaken, Jews in the time of Christ were not allowed to keep bloodstained linens, so how was it possible for the Virgin Mary and the first Christians to preserve the burial cloth?

Yes, the Jews of the time of Christ considered a blood-stained linen to be impure, but not all the norms respected by the Jews passed to Christians: just think of circumcision. Then the case of Jesus was very particular: a sheet that had touched a corpse was considered impure, but that corpse was no longer such, the resurrection had introduced an unpredictable novelty. The Shroud was the only precious witness of that extraordinary moment and certainly had to be preserved.

What message does the Holy Shroud transmit to humanity today?

In March 2020 I was on lockdown at home, like many others, and I was correcting the drafts of my new book "New light on the Shroud" when an unexpected news filled me with joy: Holy Saturday, April 11, the Archbishop of Turin, Msgr. Cesare Nosiglia, would lead prayer liturgy broadcast live worldwide via TV and social networks in front of the venerated relic. Announcing the liturgy Mons. Nosiglia said that "this time of contemplation will allow everyone, throughout the world, to meditate upon the image of the Sacred Cloth, which reminds us of the passion and death of the Lord, but which also opens our hearts to faith in his Resurrection."

It was an extraordinary Holy Saturday: about a billion people worldwide were able to follow those moving moments of invocation to the Lord, in front of the Shroud that shows us his tortured body. I felt part of a vast choral presence meditating on the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. The eyes of the world focused on a single image that speaks of him in the silence.

We all need to be reached by the light of the resurrection that heals our wounds, be they physical or spiritual. The Shroud helps us find something solid to hold onto, like a sail in a stormy sea. Like the cloak of Jesus, which the sick woman wanted to touch to be healed. The hands of all humanity were represented by the hand of the Archbishop of Turin, who gently touched the glass that protects the relic.

In the Shroud we see all the stations of the Way of the Cross in one single image: the traces of the scourging, the crowning with thorns and the beatings that prelude the death sentence; the dirt left in the wounds of the knees, caused by the falls; the traces on the shoulders of the *patibulum*, the crossbar of the cross. We can imagine the torment of his Mother and the emotions of the pious women in seeing the atrocious torture to which Jesus was subjected. We can understand the tradition that hands down the delicate gesture of a woman, Veronica, who wipes the face of Jesus: precisely the Shroud, the unexplained image on a cloth inspired this episode. And again we see the reopening of the wounds of the scourging, when Jesus' tunic is removed; the nail holes in the wrists and feet, an evident trace of the crucifixion; the sign of death, in the great wound on the side from which blood and serum flow. Finally, the deposition and burial in the white sheet procured by Joseph of Arimathea.

We need the physicality of those wounds, which make Jesus so close to us and ignite the hope - which becomes certainty - that death is not the end. "Love is stronger," said Mons. Nosiglia. It was the motto of this exhibition. And he continued: "This is the Easter proclamation that the Shroud leads us to relive and fills our hearts with gratitude and faith." "Faith in his Resurrection," these are the comforting words of the Archbishop of Turin.

On the Shroud we not only see the wounds of the Lord. We see the image of his body, composed and solemn in death, but imprinted in a mysterious way by a phenomenon that has yellowed the linen as the light does. The remaining crusts of blood, partially dissolved, testify to a time of contact estimated at about 36-40 hours. The hours of the evening of Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter dawn. No longer. That body did not remain in the tomb, there are no signs of putrefaction.

At a time when we felt the fear of death stronger, in the lingering risk of a contagion that snatched so many loved ones from our affection, the Shroud enveloped us with the warmth of the love of the One who gave his life for us.

Msgr. Nosiglia reminded us strongly: "Yes, the love with which Jesus gave us his life and which we celebrate during Holy Week is stronger than any suffering, any disease, any contagion, any trial and discouragement. Nothing and no one can ever separate us from this love, because it is faithful forever and unites us to him with an indissoluble bond. Yes, the Shroud always repeats it to our hearts: love is stronger."

The vision of the Shroud on Holy Saturday comforted our hearts that were experiencing abstinence from the Eucharist. When we returned to receive it, we did it with a new awareness, after the suffering of being far from the Body of the Lord. That Body that our eyes see imprinted on the Shroud, dripping with the blood of his wounds, for which we are all responsible. But the closed eyes of the Face, serene amidst so many torments, speak to us of the mercy of God, who does not want to look at our sins.

"The love that the Shroud reveals to us sustains us in believing that in the end light will overcome the darkness of discouragement and fears," said Msgr. Nosiglia, "and life will conquer death and every other evil that haunts humanity."

Before the Shroud, on an unforgettable Holy Saturday, contemplating that body, that blood, that Face, we could feel the great comfort of this certainty: Love is stronger. This is the message of hope of the Holy Shroud.

Interview by François Vayne