

SCIENCE, ART AND THE TURIN SHROUD

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(<http://www.orthodoxchristianbooks.com/>)

Unimaginable beauty and comeliness surpassing nature in beauty are truly visible to them that desire to see them.

Menaion, August 16, Transfer of the Holy Mandylion, Mattins, ode 9.

A recent book on the Turin Shroud, the most detailed and comprehensive yet, raises again the question: how should we, as Orthodox Christians, evaluate and react to this extraordinary object? In the 1970s the ROCOR Deacon (now OCA "Archbishop") Lev Puhalo wrote several articles against it, labelling it a medieval forgery. And in this judgement he has been followed by many people, including many scientists. However, nobody has yet been able to give us even a remotely plausible answer to the question: if it is a forgery, how was it made? And until somebody answers this question, the central question: is it the authentic burial shroud of Christ? must remain open...

This is not simply a scientific matter. For many, including the present writer, the most powerful argument for the Shroud's authenticity is its quite extraordinary beauty, a beauty of an altogether higher nature than that of any merely human artefact. Now many may retort: beauty is in the eye of the beholder, its perception is a purely subjective matter. But this is not true. When the envoys of St. Vladimir came back to Kiev from Constantinople, recommending that their prince adopt the Orthodox Faith on account of the extraordinary beauty of the services, they were not being frivolous or naive.

Beauty – transcendent, spiritual beauty – is an argument, and a powerful one. For we all instinctively understand that truth must be beautiful, otherwise it is not truth. The foremost book of Orthodox spirituality, the Philokalia, means "the love of beauty". True beauty is precisely a vision of truth, of the reality of things in and through created matter. God is discerned in the beauty of holiness.

Of course, there is a sensual, deceptive beauty which leads away from the truth rather than towards it. This is what the Russians call *prelest'*, which may be translated into English as "charm" – a word with connotations of superficiality, cheapness, deceptiveness and even magic... But nobody could describe the extraordinarily peaceful, humble and majestic figure that is imprinted on the Shroud as having that kind of beauty.

And if somebody retorts that this is simply my personal opinion, an aesthetic judgement having no objective scientific basis in fact, but rather the product of my religious faith, I would reply in two ways. First, many people have come to the Shroud with no faith, and even with a strong predisposition to reject it as they rejected any suggestion of the miraculous, and yet have come away with a strong faith – and not a vague kind of "spirituality", but a precise belief that Jesus Christ died on the Cross and was resurrected from the dead. Such a person is Ian Wilson, the author of the book referred to above, an historian and stubborn sceptic who became a Christian on seeing the Shroud in the 1970s and has spent the rest of his life defending its authenticity.

Secondly, anybody who has done serious work in science will know that it is a myth to consider that science is a completely objective form of knowledge. Not only is science radically fallible, consisting in the constant refinement and rejection of one hypothesis after another. Even the most famous of scientists can differ radically and fundamentally when it comes to the most important scientific hypotheses. Thus one scientist will consider it obvious, almost a dogmatic truth, that man derives from the apes and the whole universe from a tiny quantity of superheated matter that exploded fourteen billion years ago. Another scientist, equally intelligent and qualified, will reject this as obvious nonsense, being contradicted by a vast mass of verifiable facts.

The truth is that both science and art depend on faith. It requires faith even to believe that what I am seeing now in front of my eyes is objective reality and not a dream, or that objects continue to exist when I am not looking at them. It takes faith to believe that the sun will rise tomorrow, or that Japan exists, or that life exists on other planets, or that there is such a thing as true love... Faith, or the lack of it, informs our whole approach to reality, material and psychological as well as spiritual. And faith tells us that the truth is beautiful...

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“That is all very well”, says the sceptic, “but the Shroud is a ‘holy’ object owned, not by the Orthodox Church but by the Pope, of which there is no record in the Orthodox East, and which has been proven by carbon-14 to have been created in the fourteenth century. The onus is on you to prove that it is in fact Orthodox in provenance and dates to the first century. Or do you deny that you could be in prelest?”

No, I do not deny that possibility, and therefore accept the challenge, relying mainly on the facts and arguments put forward in Ian Wilson’s excellent book. I shall summarise the points he makes on both the scientific and historical issues. Of course, a summary cannot do justice to the detail and thoroughness of his argumentation, so those who remain unconvinced will need to read his book...

The issue of carbon-14 can be dealt with quite quickly. Carbon-14 is a notoriously unreliable method of dating. Its accuracy depends very heavily on the degree to which the sample tested has been contaminated by the environment, and the degree to which that contamination is allowed for in determining the date. That is why archaeologists often come up with obviously wrong, “rogue dates”, which are then quietly dismissed... In 1988, using a new method of carbon-14 testing and without consulting any archaeologist, a team of scientists came up with a date of 1290-1360 for the Shroud. But the dating laboratories carried out only routine pre-treatment procedures to eliminate contamination, taking no account of the contamination that had been forced into the Shroud’s permanent structure, that is, the molecular structure of its flax fibres. This “permanent” contamination could have been quantified only by chemical analysis – but no such analysis was done. Now it is known that even if the Shroud is only 600-700, and not 2000 years old, it has undergone massive contamination from fires, smoke, oil, wax, incense, water, tears, micro-organisms in the atmosphere and on hands and lips, etc. In the opinion of experts, much of this penetrated the molecular structure of the Shroud over time. As one senior Harwell scientist, P.J. Anderson, said: “The history of the Shroud does not encourage one to put a great deal of reliance upon the validity of my carbon-14 dating.”

But even supposing that the 1988 dating procedures were impeccable, and the Shroud a forgery made in the Middle Ages, how was it done?

This question has not yet received an answer because of several facts:-

1. The Shroud image could not have been created by the usual method of medieval forgery, painting. Much excitement was caused by the discovery, in the 1970s, of some traces of pigment on the Shroud. But these traces were randomly distributed and were clearly not used in the formation of the image. It is now generally recognized that the forgery was not created by painting.

2. Attempts to reproduce the image by stretching a linen sheet over a body have produced absurd, macabre results with distortion of perspective, etc.

3. The famous image is not visible to the naked eye, which sees just very faint, yellowish marks similar to a scorch stain such as one might find on an ironing board. The full, astonishingly detailed and beautiful image of the Man on the Shroud is visible only in a photographic negative. The only conclusion must be that the forger, if there was one, not only knew the art of photography at least 500 years before the technology became known in the 1840, but also was able to hide his photograph under the cover of the very faint image that is visible to the naked eye.

4. There is another property of the image which no known forger, ancient or modern, can reproduce: when placed under a VP-8 Image Analyzer, the image is revealed in three dimensions. The Analyzer's inventor, Peter Schumacher, "has recalled his emotions on seeing the Shroud's full-body image on his system's TV monitor for the very first time: 'A true "true three-dimensional image" appeared on the monitor... The nose ramped in relief. The facial features were contoured properly. Body shapes of the arms, legs and chest and the basic human form... I had never heard of the Shroud of Turin before that moment. I had no idea what I was looking at. However, the results are unlike anything I have processed through the VP-8 Analyzer, before or since. Only the Shroud of Turin has [ever] produced these results from a VP-8 Image Analyzer.' With regard to the idea of some unknown medieval artist-forger producing such an image, Schumacher had this to say: 'One must consider how and why an artist would embed three-dimensional information in the "grey" shading of an image [when] no means of viewing this property of the image would be available for at least 650 years after this was done. One would have to ask why is this result not obtained in the analysis of other works?..."

5. "From an art-historical point of view," writes art historian Thomas de Wesselow, "the idea that the Shroud's body-image was painted shortly before 1356, the approximate date of its first display in Lirey, is untenable. The Shroud's image is quite unlike any painting of the period - or, indeed, of any period. In the words of Ernst Kitzinger, 'The Shroud of Turin is unique in art. It doesn't fall into any artistic category.'... The Shroud is inconceivable as a medieval work of art." In any case, the artist would have had to have had extraordinary ability, the ability of a great master. That is why some have suggested that Leonardo da Vinci painted it. But his dates do not fit the carbon-14 results...

6. The forger must have possessed greater anatomical and medical knowledge than was possible for a medieval Catholic. The image's anatomical details and blood marks (the blood has been tested and shown to be real, of the AB group) are completely consistent with it being the image of the incorrupt body of a crucified dead Jew aged between 30 and 35 with a crown of thorns on his head, a spear wound in his side with blood and serum around the wound, and nails through his wrists and ankles. One

telling detail: the nails went through the wrists of the hands, not the palms, which we now know to have been standard practice with the Romans (because otherwise the nails could not have held up the weight of the body), but which was not known to medieval artists, who always portrayed Christ with the nails going through the palms. Another detail indicating expert knowledge: the image of the body shows marks of wounds corresponding in shape exactly to what we would expect to see as the result of scourging by the flagrum, the standard-issue Roman army instrument of torture of the time. In general, there can be little doubt that the image is of a man who was scourged and crucified in the Roman fashion – a practice that was discontinued with the coming of St. Constantine in the fourth century. Stephen Jones writes: “Atheist and Shroud critic Steven Schafersman agrees that because of these many specific matches between the Gospels' account of Jesus' passion and the image on the Shroud, “the odds [are] 1 in 83 million that the man on the shroud is not Jesus” and therefore “If the shroud is authentic” (i.e. not a forgery), “*the image is that of Jesus*” (my emphasis)”.

7. The forger must also have had expert archaeological knowledge. For the Shroud's weave is a complex three-to-one herringbone twill with a type of “invisible seam” for which there are no parallels in the medieval period, but which has been recovered from sites in Israel dating to the first century.

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Let us now turn from science to history. One of the main arguments of the sceptics – especially Orthodox sceptics – is that if the Shroud were genuine, we should expect to have references to it in Orthodox Church literature of the first millennium, or at any rate in other literature of antiquity or the early Middle Ages – that is, before the first certain historical references to the Shroud in the late medieval West. And there are no such references, they say.

But this is not true. Thomas de Wesselow writes: “The Sindon [i.e. the Shroud] is first mentioned... in a letter of encouragement sent by Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennitus to his troops in 958. The emperor says that he is sending them some holy water consecrated by contact with various relics of the Passion in the Pharos Chapel, including the theophoron sindonos – the ‘God-worn linen sheet’...

“Again, the chronicler William of Tyre records the Sindon among various relics shown to King Amaury of Jerusalem and his entourage in 1171.”

Again, Bishop Jacob Barclay of Jerusalem cites “a letter dated 1 August 1205, written by Theodore Angelos aka Theodore Komnenos Doukas, who was cousin of two former Byzantine emperors and second uncle of former emperor Alexios IV Angelos (the one who had enticed the Crusaders to seize Constantinople), and addressed to Pope Innocent III: ‘Theodore Angelus wishes long life for Innocent [III], Lord and Pope at old Rome, in the name of Michael, Lord of Epirus and in his own name. In April of last year a crusading army, having falsely set out to liberate the Holy Land, instead laid waste the city of Constantine. During the sack, troops of Venice and France looted even the holy sanctuaries. The Venetians partitioned the treasures of gold, silver, and ivory while the French did the same with the relics of the saints and the most sacred of all, the linen in which our Lord Jesus Christ was wrapped after his death and before the resurrection. We know that the sacred objects are preserved by their predators

in Venice, in France, and in other places, the sacred linen in Athens . . . Rome, Kalends of August, 1205.”

Athens at this time was controlled by the de la Roche family, which was related by marriage and membership of the Templar order to the de Charny family, which, as we know for certain, came into possession of the Shroud sometime in the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries. Wilson provides extensive further evidence that the Templars possessed the Shroud and kept and venerated it in secret, which we shall not go into here. The important point is that here we have definite evidence, not only that the Shroud existed in pre-1204 Constantinople, but that it was stolen from there by the Crusaders and brought, first to Athens, and then to France.

But this is not the only evidence that the Shroud was venerated in the Orthodox East as the burial sheet of Christ. “In the earliest years of the thirteenth century, we find Nicholas Mesarites, custodian of the Pharos Chapel relic collection, referring to what is undoubtedly Jesus’s burial shroud (whether imprinted or not imprinted). First, he described this as proof of Jesus’s resurrection: ‘In this chapel Christ rises again, and the sindon [the Greek word used in the Synoptic Gospels to describe the burial shroud] with the burial linens is the clear proof.’ Then, in his second reference to this same shroud, he remarked intriguingly, ‘The burial sindon of Christ: this is of linen, of cheap and easily obtainable material, still smelling of myrrh, defying decay, because it wrapped the mysterious, naked dead body after the Passion.’”

A little later, during the siege of Constantinople by the Crusaders, the Shroud was moved to the church of the Mother of God of Blachernae, where regular presentations for the veneration of the whole people were staged every Friday. This is the witness of an ordinary crusader, Robert de Clari: “There was another church which was called My Lady St Mary of Blachernae, where there was the sydoine [old French for sindon] in which our Lord had been wrapped, which every Friday stood upright, so that one could see the figure of our Lord on it.”

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Now let us turn to Wilson’s hypothesis, which was first put forward in his first book on the subject in 1978, and whose evidential basis has now been considerably strengthened. The hypothesis is that the Shroud is identical with the Holy Mandylion, or Image not made with hands, whose feast is celebrated on August 16 in the Orthodox Church, and to which there are many references in ancient and early medieval literature. The Mandylion appears to have disappeared from the historical record at about the time of the sacking of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204; so the hypothesis asserts that it was captured by the Crusaders as part of their very extensive loot and then reappeared some years later as the Shroud...

Let us begin by returning to the witness of the crusader, Robert de Clari: “There was another church which was called My Lady St Mary of Blachernae, where there was the sydoine [old French for sindon] in which our Lord had been wrapped, which every Friday stood upright, so that one could see the figure of our Lord on it.”

This description of the Shroud as “standing upright” immediately raises the question: how could the Shroud, a fourteen-foot long relic with the imprint of the whole body of the Lord, front and back, on it, be confused with the Mandylion, which shows only the head of Christ? In order to answer this question, we have to examine the Holy Mandylion itself. But we are not able to do this, because it disappeared at the same time in the same sack of Constantinople in 1204 – coincidentally, at the same time as the Shroud...

We must turn, then, to the literary tradition concerning the appearance of the Mandylion. According to our earliest source, the fourth-century Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, “[King] Abgar V of Edessa, then suffering from an incurable disease, heard of the miracles Jesus was performing and sent to Jerusalem a messenger bearing a letter addressed to Jesus, asking him to come to his city to heal him. Jesus declined, saying he needed to stay in Jerusalem to await his fate, but he blessed Abgar for his show of faith and promised that after being ‘taken up’ he would send one of his disciples to Edessa to cure him and bring him the Christian message.”

That disciple was Addai, or Thaddeus in the Greco-Roman form of the name. According to the tenth-century Story of the Image of Edessa, Addai went to the king shortly after the Resurrection of Christ, bringing with him a cloth on which the Lord had imprinted an image of His face. Addai “placed the Image on his own forehead and went in thus to Abgar. The king... seemed to see a light shining out of his face, too bright to look at, sent forth by the Image that was covering him.” The king was healed and became a Christian, and Edessa became perhaps the first Christian city in the world...

The Story goes on to explain how the king “ordered the image of a pagan god that had been over his city’s gate to be taken down and replaced by the Image of Jesus. After his death, when Abgar’s second son reverted to paganism, the son ordered the pagan image to be restored, and that of Christ destroyed. However, Edessa’s bishop of that time managed to pre-empt this. In the words of the tenth-century writer, ‘Given that the place where the Image was kept was shaped like a cylindrical semi-circle, he [the bishop] showed great foresight and lit a lamp in front of the Image and put a tile on top of it. He then sealed the surface off with gypsum and baked bricks, finishing the wall off on the same level.’”

Nothing further is known about the Image for a long time, until 544. In that year the Parthian King Chosroes appeared before the walls of Edessa. He brought a huge timber mound up to the walls and seemed about to conquer the city. But then, according to the tenth-century Story, someone appeared in a vision to Bishop Eulalios, informed him where the Image was stored (the bishop did not know that it even existed any longer), and told him to parade it in a procession. Eulalios found the Image with the lamp in front of it still burning, and then processed around the walls holding it in his arms. As the contemporary sixth-century writer Evagrius described it, the Edessans “brought the divinely created Image, which human hands had not made [acheiropoietos], the one that Christ God sent to Abgar when he yearned to see him. Then, when they brought the all-holy Image into the channel they had created and sprinkled it with water, they applied some to the pyre and the timbers. And at once the divine power made a visitation to the faith of those who had done this, and accomplished what had previously been impossible for them: for at once the timbers caught fire and, being reduced to ashes quicker than word, they imparted it to what was above as the fire took over everywhere.”

Two intriguing things happened after the rediscovery of the Image that support the idea that it is closely linked with the Shroud. First, the iconography of Christ undergoes a sudden and dramatic change throughout the Orthodox world. “Until at least the end of the fifth century,” writes Wilson, “the

portrayals of Jesus lacked any authority, most representations depicting him as beardless. As evidenced by St. Augustine's remarks, there was a general lack of any awareness of what he looked like. But in the art of the sixth century there occurred a remarkable transformation in the way Jesus was depicted." He was now depicted in a very similar way to the face on the Shroud "before any discovery of the hidden photographic negative": "the same frontality, the same long hair, long nose, beard, etc." A series of such icons of Christ, of the "Pantocrator" type, appear in various parts of the Orthodox world, from Rome to Syria to Georgia, in the sixth and seventh centuries.

Of particular interest is one such icon from St. Catherine's monastery in Sinai, which "features one highly important extra detail: on the forehead between the eyebrows there is a starkly geometrical shape resembling a topless square. Artistically it does not seem to make much sense. If it was intended to be a furrowed brow, it is depicted most unnaturally in comparison with the rest of the face. But if we look at the equivalent point on the Shroud face we find exactly the same feature, equally as geometric and equally as unnatural, probably just a flaw in the weave. The only possible deduction is that fourteen centuries ago an artist saw this feature on the cloth that he knew as the Image of Edessa and applied it to his Christ Pantocrator portrait of Jesus. In so doing he provided a tell-tale clue that the likeness of Jesus from which he was working was that on the cloth we today know as the Shroud.

"Seven decades ago Frenchman Paul Vignon identified another fourteen such oddities frequently occurring in Byzantine Christ portraits, likewise seemingly deriving from the Shroud. Among these is a distinctive triangle immediately below the topless square. But like a Man Friday footprint of the Shroud's existence six centuries before the date given to it by carbon dating, the topless square alone is enough..."

A second intriguing fact about the Image that emerges after its rediscovery is that it was much larger than the simple rectangular head-and-shoulders image that we are familiar with from countless iconographic reproductions. Thus the Acts of Thaddaeus, dating either to the sixth or early seventh century, describes "the cloth on which the Image was imprinted as tetradiplon – 'doubled in four'. It is a very unusual word, in all Byzantine literature pertaining only to the Image of Edessa, and therefore coming to indicate some unusual way in which the Edessa cloth was folded.

"So what happens if we try doubling the Shroud in four? If we take a full-length photographic print of the Shroud, double it, then double it twice again, we find the Shroud in eight (or two times four) segments, an arrangement seeming to correspond to what is intended by the sixth-century description. And the quite startling finding from folding the Shroud in this way is that its face appears disembodied on a landscape-aspect cloth exactly corresponding to the later 'direct' copies of the Image of Edessa.

"In the Story of the Image of Edessa, the Image is specifically described as mounted on a board. So a folding for presentation purposes in this 'doubled in four' way actually makes a great deal of sense. It reduces the Shroud's extremely awkward fourteen-foot length into a manageable and presentable twenty-one inches by forty-five inches, and displays by far the most meaningful section of the cloth, the face. And if we think of the face as seen in this way in the dim lighting conditions of a church interior – conditions in which, as we know from surgeon Dr. Pierre Barbet, the different colour of the bloodstains does not show up – it is easy to understand how the face might have been supposed to be of a watery origination, exactly as envisaged in the sixth-century Acts of Thaddaeus account [which explains the creation of the Image as by Jesus washing himself]."

But “if the Shroud and the Image of Edessa are identical, why”, the sceptic will ask, “did that not become obvious to its owners and to the Orthodox world in general? It seems implausible to suppose that the Image was never taken out of its container and opened up to reveal that it was in fact a fourteen-foot burial shroud.”

However, there is evidence that the secret of the hidden Shroud did in fact become known, if not to everyone (for reasons we will discuss shortly), at any rate to some. Thus in the *Life of St. Columba* by St. Adamnan of Iona, we read that in the 680s Bishop Arculf of Perigueux was shipwrecked off the Scottish island of Iona and told the abbot, St. Adomnan, that while on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem he had seen “the sudarium of our Lord which was placed over his head in the tomb”. He said that the relic had just come to Jerusalem, which is quite possible, since in 679 there had been an earthquake in Edessa that damaged the cathedral of Hagia Sophia in which the Image was stored, which may have necessitated its temporary removal during rebuilding. Although Bishop Arculf does not seem to have seen the sudarium (another word for the Shroud, used in St. John’s Gospel) unfolded, he was evidently told a different story about its origins by the Image’s keepers – not that it was formed through Christ washing His face in it, but that it was the Burial Shroud of Christ that was placed over His head in the tomb...

That is not all. On August 16, 944, during the reign of Emperor Romanos Lecapenus, the Holy Mandylion was transferred from Edessa to Constantinople and placed in the Pharos chapel amidst great ceremonial. This event is the origin of the feast of the Holy Mandylion that is in the Orthodox Menaion for August 16. “Amid so much ceremony and self-evident excitement it is difficult to determine when and where, if at any point at all, anyone meaningfully saw the Image removed from its casket in a way that could enable proper study. Nevertheless, that this actually happened is confirmed by an independent contemporary account, not part of the Story of the Image of Edessa. According to this, ‘A few days beforehand, when they [the imperial party] were all looking at the marvellous features of the Son of God on the holy imprint, the Emperor’s sons [i.e. Stephen and Constantine] declared that they could see only the face, while Constantine his son-in-law said he could see the eyes and the ears.

“Given the extraordinary efforts that had been made to obtain the Image, several historians have expressed puzzlement that it should have appeared so indistinct to the few who were allowed to view it directly. As the eminent Cambridge historian Sir Steven Runciman remarked, ‘It is possible that the young Lecapeni [i.e. Emperor Romanos’s two sons Stephen and Constantine] were drunk, though in that case it is curious that Constantine [i.e. the rightful emperor], who was notoriously fond of stimulants, should have missed the opportunity for drinking too.’

“If the Image of Edessa was genuinely one and the same object as today’s Shroud of Turin, no such explanation is of course necessary. The Shroud’s watery-looking impression and its uncertainty of detail would readily explain Romanos’s sons’ perception difficulties. Although we might question how Constantine Porphyrogenetos, even with his strong artistic interests, saw ‘eyes’ on the imprint, this perception corresponded to the then universal idea that the Image had been created by Jesus in life. The idea was notably shared by several of the artist copyists of the Shroud during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, despite their full awareness – almost certainly not yet shared by Constantine – that they were looking at the imprint of a dead body. It is almost entirely thanks to the discovery of the photographic negative that we know the eyes to have been closed in death.”

Constantine Porphyrogenetos succeeded to the throne of Byzantium, and immediately proceeded to produce a new series of gold solidus coins that exhibit a remarkable change from their predecessors:

“nothing other than what appears to have been a deliberate attempt to reproduce in the Christ face features quite uncannily close to the exact imprint that appears on the Turin Shroud.

“This characteristic, which first occurred less than a year after the Image of Edessa’s arrival in Constantinople, was actually noted over twenty years ago by a Hungarian-born Oxford scholar with a very strong interest in Byzantine coins, Dr Eugene Csocsán de Várallja. As Csocsán de Várallja remarked of Constantine Porphyrogenetos’s coin issues, ‘Just following the arrival of the Edessa [Image in]... 944... a completely new image of Christ appeared on the bezants. On these coins Christ’s nose became as elongated as on the Shroud, the angle of his eyebrows changed to match the Shroud eyebrows, and the slightly differing angle of each moustache seems to mirror that on the Shroud. In addition the Christ image took on just as impressionistic a character as on the Shroud.’

“Two decades on there is one further feature that can be added to these observations: the very distinctive mark running down from the hairline to immediately above Christ’s (spectator’s) right eyebrow, just to the right of the nose. It appears too deliberate to be some random blemish, and is in fact repeated on later coins. On the Shroud, in this identical location is the reverse ‘3’-shaped blood flow that runs from hairline to eyebrow.”

The official story of how the Image came into being, the Story of the Image of Edessa, does not change after its transfer to Constantinople. However, the Story’s author, considering that “it would not be at all strange if confusion has arisen in the story over such a long time”, puts forward two versions of the story. The first is that Christ, in response to King Abgar’s request, washed His face in the cloth. The second version is that during His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Christ “took this piece of cloth, which can still be seen, from one of His disciples, and wiped off the streams of sweat on it”. Nevertheless, in spite of this uncertainty about how and when the Image was formed, in both versions it is said that Christ’s face was imprinted on the cloth, with no mention of the whole body, as we see on the Shroud.

“Yet not very long after 945,” continues Wilson, “some subtle hints begin to emerge that all about the Image may not have been quite as plain and above-board as many had assumed. As noted by Marc Guscini during his extensive browsing among the early manuscripts preserved in the monasteries at Mount Athos, in several of the Synaxarion manuscripts, at the very beginning of the entry for 16 August – that is, the celebration of the Feast of the Image of Edessa – there occurs the following verse:

In life you exuded your likeness on to a sindon.

In death you entered the final sindon.

“Although this did not exactly seem much to go on, Guscini also noticed in some of these same Mount Athos manuscripts a change in the request of King Abgar. He was represented as instructing his messenger to bring back to him details not only of Jesus’s face and hair, but also of his ‘whole bodily appearance’. As further noticed by Guscini, a late tenth- or eleventh-century manuscript of the sixth-century Acts of Thaddaeus, one of only two of this composition to have arrived to our time, differs from its partner in precisely this same piece of information, merely using different Greek words for this purpose.

“Supplementing and expanding on this, back in the early 1990s Rome-based scholar Gino Zaninotto had brought to attention a manuscript preserved at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands, the

Codex Vossianus, in which Jesus, in his letter to Abgar, was represented as saying, quite illogically but reflecting a changed understanding that the image was of the full body, not just the face, 'If you really want to see what my face looks like, I am sending you this linen cloth, on which you will be able to see not only the form of my face but the divinely transformed state of my whole body [my italics]. When you have seen it you will be able to soothe your burning desire. May you fare well for all time in the wisdom of my Father.'

"Because of its Carolingian-style handwriting, the Vossianus manuscript cannot date much later than the end of the tenth century. Furthermore, little more than a century later it finds support from another Latin source, the History of the Church written by English monk Ordericus Vitalis in 1130, in which Ordericus recorded that 'Abgar the ruler reigned at Edessa, the Lord Jesus sent him a sacred letter and a beautiful linen cloth he had wiped the sweat from his face with. The image of the Saviour was miraculously imprinted on to it and shines out, *displaying the form and size of the Lord's body* [my italics] to all who look on it."

We know from the words of a visitor to Constantinople in about 1090 that "when all the other palace relics are shown to the faithful at certain times, this linen cloth on which the face of our redeemer is depicted is not shown to anyone and is not opened up for anyone except the emperor of Constantinople" and visiting royal dignitaries. Could it be that this measure was elicited, not only by the exceptional holiness of the relic, but also because the palace wished to conceal something about it – that it was not all that it seemed to be, but was in fact a full-length Image of the whole of Christ's body in death, back and front? Perhaps revealing the full truth might have caused scandal in the highly conservative society of Byzantium...

Be that as it may, Professor Kurt Weizmann has shown that "from the eleventh century on what had been a mummy-style mode of depicting Jesus's entombment gradually gave way to a new concept of how Jesus was buried. The Byzantine Greeks called this new mode the Threnos, or Lamentation, its main feature being that Jesus is wrapped in a large cloth readily comparable with today's Turin Shroud." These representations often contain other details consistent with very close copying of the Image on the Shroud: the double body length cloth, the hands crossed over the loins with only four fingers and no thumb visible, and the reverse '3'-shaped stain of the forehead of Christ.

But then something unexpected happens. In 1125 an English pilgrim reports the presence in Constantinople of both the Image of Edessa ("the holy handcloth") and the Shroud ("the linen cloth and sudarium of the entombment"). And this duality of relics is again reported by an Icelandic abbot, Nicholas Soemundarson, in 1157.

Our explanation of this duality is as follows. By the twelfth century, rumours of the existence of the full-body-length Shroud had leaked out and could no longer be denied – as we have seen, it is openly admitted by Nicholas Mesarites, keeper of the Pharos chapel, just before the Fourth Crusade. But that this was the same object as the Image of Edessa could not be admitted: it would confuse and scandalize the faithful. So it was said that there were two objects, one of which, the Image, disappeared after 1204, leaving only the Shroud...

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Whether or not we finally accept Wilson's hypothesis, the facts he assembles do seem to put paid to the theory that the Shroud is a late medieval fake, an idea that was in any case incredible. At a minimum the Shroud must be six hundred years older than the carbon-14 dating, as is indicated by several facts: that the lignin of the Shroud has lost almost all its vanillin, which is inconsistent with a medieval date ; that the weave appears to date from the first century; that the image must have imprinted in some way from the real corpse of a crucified man, although crucifixion was not practised in the Mediterranean world after the fourth century.

Mark Guscini, in his work on the Oviato sudarium, another relic dating to the seventh century which has been believed to have had contact with the face of Christ, has reduced the forgery hypothesis to absurdity, writing: "Let us suppose for a while that the results obtained from the carbon dating of both the sudarium and the Shroud are accurate, and neither cloth ever touched the body of Jesus. In that case, the following story would have to be true. Sometime in the seventh century, in Palestine, after reading the Gospel of John, a well-known forger of religious relics saw the opportunity of putting a new product on the market - a cloth that had been over the face of the dead body of Jesus.

"This forger was also an expert in medicine, who knew that a crucified person died from asphyxiation, and that when this happened, special liquids fill the lungs of the dead body, and can come out through the nose if the body is moved.

"The only way he could get this effect on the cloth was by re-enacting the process, so this is exactly what he did. He crucified a volunteer, eliminating those candidates who did not fulfil the right conditions - swollen nose and cheeks, forked beard to stain the cloth, etc. When the body was taken down from the cross, he shook it around a bit with the help of a few friends, holding the folded cloth to the dead volunteer's nose so that future generations would be able to see the outline of his fingers.

"He even stuck a few thorns in the back of the dead man's neck, knowing that relic hunters would be looking for the bloodstains from the crown of thorns.

"Being an eloquent man, he convinced people that this otherwise worthless piece of cloth was stained with nothing less than the blood and pleural liquid of Christ, and so it was guarded in Jerusalem with other relics, and considered so genuine and spiritually valuable that it was worth saving first from the invading Persians and later from the Arabs.

"A few hundred years later, some time between 1260 and 1390, another professional forger, a specialist in religious relics too, decided that the time was ripe for something new, something really convincing. There were numerous relics from various saints in circulation all round Europe, bones, skulls, capes, but no, he wanted something really original. Various possibilities ran through his mind, the crown of thorns, the nails from the crucifixion, the table cloth from the last supper, and then suddenly he had it - the funeral shroud of Jesus! And not only that, but he would also put an image on the Shroud, the image of the man whom the Shroud had wrapped!

"The first step was difficult. Being an expert in textile weaves, (one of his many specialities, the others being pollen, Middle East blood groups, numismatics of the years of Tiberius, photography, Roman whips, and electronic microscopes) he needed linen of a special kind, typical of the Middle East in the first century.

“Once this had been specially ordered and made, he folded it up before starting his work, as a neighbour had suggested that such a cloth would have been folded up and hidden in a wall in Edessa for a few hundred years, so the image would be discontinuous on some of the fold marks.

“Leaving the cloth folded up, he travelled to Oviedo in the north of Spain, where he knew that a forerunner in his trade had left a cloth with Jesus' blood stains.

“On obtaining permission to analyse the sudarium, he first checked the blood group - AB of course, common in the Middle East and relatively scarce in Europe - then made an exact plan of the blood stains (carefully omitting those which would have already clotted when the sudarium was used) so that his stains would coincide exactly.

“After his trip to Oviedo, he went on a tour of what is now Turkey, forming a composite portrait of Jesus from all the icons, coins and images he could find. After all, he needed people to think that his Shroud had been around for over a thousand years, and that artists had used it as their inspiration for painting Christ. He didn't really understand what some of the marks were, the square box between the eyes, the line across the throat, but he thought he'd better put them on anyway. He didn't want to be accused of negligence, because he was an internationally famous forger and had a reputation to maintain.

“Once he was back home, he somehow obtained some blood (AB, naturally) and decided to begin his work of art with the blood stains, before even making the body image.

“Unfortunately, he miscalculated the proportions, and the nail stains appeared on the wrist instead of on the palms of the hands, where everyone in the fourteenth century knew that they had been. ‘Well’, he thought, ‘it's just a question of a few inches, nobody will notice.’

“Now, even the omniscient author is forbidden to enter in the secret room where the forger ‘paints’ the image of Christ, a perfect three dimensional negative, without paint or direction. His method was so secret that it went to the tomb with him.

“After a few hours, he opened the door, and called his wife, who was busy preparing dinner in the kitchen. ‘What do you think?’ ‘Not bad. But you've forgotten the thumbs.’ ‘No, I haven't. Don't you know that if a nail destroys the nerves in the wrist, the thumbs bend in towards the palm of the hand, so you wouldn't be able to see them?’

“‘But didn't the nails go through the palms?’ ‘Well, yes, but I put the blood on first, and didn't quite get the distance right’

“‘Oh, in that case ... and what about the pollen?’ ‘What pollen?’ ‘Well, if this Shroud has been in Palestine, Edessa, and let's suppose it's been in Constantinople too, it's going to need pollen from all those places.’ Our forger loved the idea, got the pollen from all the places his wife had indicated, and delicately put it all over his Shroud.

“And then, the final touch. Two coins from the time of Christ, minted under the emperor Tiberius, to put over the man's eyes. Our man had a sense of humour too - he decided that the coins would be included in the image in such a way that they would only be visible under an electronic microscope.

“Such a story, even without the embellishments, is more incredible than the Shroud's authenticity.”

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Perhaps no object in history has been the subject of such intense scientific examination, aesthetic wonder and religious awe as the Shroud of Turin. As such, if it is indeed the authentic burial shroud of Christ, as we believe, it is also important as demonstrating the essential unity of all knowledge, scientific, artistic and religious in the Person of Jesus Christ, crucified, buried and risen from the dead. Although truth and beauty are instinctively felt to be at one with goodness, this holy trinity of values has tended to be blown apart by unbelieving science and meretricious art, enabling the latter to be used by the devil against the only good, which is God. Thus the Shroud restores the original unity of the world! Through it, that is, "through the flesh, as in a glass, [God] has shone upon the world, descending even unto hell" , that is, the blind hearts of unbelieving scientists who cannot see beyond the ends of their noses (or microscopes). Through it He has "changed the beauty of created things" , making sensual aesthetes ascend from carnal charms to the eternal Beauty not subject to change or corruption. The Shroud of Turin is the Image not-made-by-hands, by which that other image not-made-by-hands, mankind, can see beyond the Humanity of the Image to the Divinity of the Archetype, the Lord Jesus Christ.

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- [1] Ian Wilson, *The Shroud: the 2000-Year-Old Mystery Solved*, London: Bantam Press, 2010.
- [2] Anderson, in Wilson, op. cit., p. 92.
- [3] Schumacher, in Wilson, op. cit., pp. 21-22.
- [4] De Wesselow, *The Sign*, London: Viking, 2012, pp. 135, 167.
- [5] Jones, "The Shroud of Turin is the Burial sheet of Jesus!", <http://theshroudofturin.blogspot.co.uk/2009/12/shroud-of-turin-is-burial-sheet-of.html>.
- [6] De Wesselow, op. cit., p. 177. Perhaps "God-bearing" would be a better translation of *theophoron*.
- [7] Barclay, personal communication, May, 2012. Part of this letter is also quoted by Wilson, op. cit., p. 211. It is considered genuine by Vatican archivist and specialist on the Templars, Dr. Barbara Frale. See her book, *The Templars: The Secret History Revealed*, Dunboyne: Maverick, 2009, p. 116.
- [8] Wilson, op. cit., p. 185.
- [9] De Clari, in Wilson, op. cit., p. 186.
- [10] Wilson, op. cit., p. 116.
- [11] Wilson, op. cit., p. 117.
- [12] Wilson, op. cit., pp. 129-130.
- [13] Wilson, op. cit., pp. 128-129.
- [14] Wilson, op. cit., pp. 133, 135. A document discovered in 1975 has revealed that "icon-evangelist-artists", including a monk called Theodosius who was "keeper of the Image of Edessa", went out from Edessa to bring knowledge of the likeness of Christ to Georgia in particular.
- [15] Wilson, op. cit., p. 142.
- [16] Wilson, op. cit., pp. 140-141.
- [17] Wilson, op. cit., pp. 165-166.
- [18] Wilson, op. cit., p. 168.
- [19] Wilson, op. cit., p. 175.
- [20] Wilson, op. cit., pp. 176-177.
- [21] Wilson, op. cit., p. 181.
- [22] Wilson, op. cit., p. 182.
- [23] Wilson, op. cit., pp. 182-184.
- [24] Wilson, op. cit., pp. 184.

[25] De Wesselow, op. cit., pp. 111-112.

[26] In the 1970s a Swiss botanist discovered traces of pollen on the Shroud which could only have come from the Middle East, including Israel. (V.M.)

[27] X rays of the Shroud revealed the presence of two coins dating from the time of Tiberius on the eyes of the Lord. (V.M.)

[28] Guscini, M., [*The Oviedo Cloth*](#), Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1998, pp.84-88.

[29] *Octoechos*, Tone 5, Saturday Vespers, "Lord, I have cried", troparion.

[30] *Octoechos*, Tone 2, Saturday Vespers, Apostikha, troparion.