FROM JERUSALEM TO EDESSA – THE SHROUD AND THE FAMILY OF JESUS

My approach moves from the assumption that the Shroud of Turin and the image of Christ witnessed in year 410, at least, by Jacob of Saug (Illert 2007: 40) are identical (Dietz 1995; 2005). On the day before Jewish Passover in 30 a.d., Jesus was crucified and temporarily buried. How can we draw the journey of Jesus' Shroud from Jerusalem to Edessa? Robert Drews believes that an alleged Shroud arrived in Edessa thanks to the Gnostics (1984: 97-111). According to Irenaeus, around the year 180, the Carpocratians owned icons of Christ that were believed to be authentic (*Adv Haer* I 25.6). Hyppolitus from Rome tells that the model for gnostic representations of Christ corresponded to an image transmitted by Ponzio Pilato (*Ref* VI 32). This is certainly relevant information, yet I intend to offer an alternative journey for the Shroud, opening up a debate. Please notice that what will be said here is a possibility, not certainty.

1.   The extraordinary legend according to Luke and the tradition according to John

Reading Joseph of Arimathea's narration of the burial of Jesus, wrapped in a *sindōn* (Matteo 27,58-61 / Luca 23,50-55 / Marco 15,42-47), it is possible to notice identical positions between Matthew and Luke, different from that of Mark (Ennulat 1994: 403-409). It is evident that Matthew and Luke had known the episode not only from Mark's words, but also from some other tradition. This multiple testimony increases its reliability. Luca 24,12 is part of the extraordinary legend of the Evangelist: «Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen (*ta othonia*) lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened». This verse lacks the Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis of the 5th century and of some manuscripts in ancient Latin. This is probably due to the harmonizing tendency of the text with the symbol D (Metzger 1975: 184). Among the many and significant common features between the extraordinary legend according to Luke and the tradition according to John, one should mention John 20, 5-9. Visiting the empty sepulcher, Peter and «the disciple whom Jesus loved» find «the strips of linen» (*ta othonia*) «as well as the cloth» (*to soudarion*) lying there (John 20, 5-7).

Rudolf Schnackenburg correctly deduced that Luke and John «had evidently greater access to a tradition particularly concentrated in Judea and Jerusalem areas» (1981: 22). The origin of the Jewish-oriented legend according to Luke is even more located: it used to be transmitted within the circles gathered around James the Brother of the Lord and other members of Jesus' great family (Riesner 1993). Also the Gospel according to John is interested in the family of Jesus (John 2,1ss; 7,1ss) and reveals a very special relationship between the Mother of Jesus and «the disciple whom Jesus loved» at the time of the crucifixion (Giovanni 19,25-27). There is a branch in research which does not consider this disciple as a counterfeit persona, but as an eye-witness instead, who could guarantee the tradition according to John (Riesner 2013). That being said,

the Christian group of the origins which seems to be inclined to preserve the cloth of Jesus, begins to be defined. As a matter of fact, it could not have been the Jewish-Christian groups of Galilee and Western Syria, whose traditions are documented by the Gospel according to Matthew. Nor it could have been the Gospel according to Mark, meant for the Roman communities and conceived within the tradition of Peter, which does not take into any account the cloth of Jesus. This contradicts the hypothesis of Werner Bulst, according to which the *sindōn* was taken to Rome by Peter (1987: 103f). The extraordinary legend according to Luke and the tradition according to John, put together, do point the circle of the family of Jesus as possible preservers of the cloths of the sepulchre.

2. The family of the Lord into the original Community in Jerusalem

According to a notion documented by different sources (Clement of Alexandria, "Miscellaneous" (*Stromateis*) VI 43,3 etc), the Twelve left Jerusalem around the year 41/42 (Riesner 1994: 106f). It is very unlikely that one of them had brought the Cloth with him during his missionary journeys. It is much more likely that it had remained within the great family of Jesus, which was resisting into the Holy City under the lead of James the Brother of the Lord. Before Jerusalem was surrounded by the Romans, however, the Community managed to escape to Pella, in Transjordan, around the year 68 (Eusebio, *HE* III 5,3). Possibly, the Shroud might have left the Holy City together with the leader of the Community, Simeon, one of the sons of Cleopa and cousin of Jesus (HE III 11). Probably, in the fourth year of Vespasian's reign (Eutichio, Annales [PL 111,985]), in the year 72/73 a.d., a part of the Community went back to Jerusalem following Simeon (HE III 11). If the Shroud had gone back to Jerusalem with them, one more departure would have been necessary when the Bar Kokhba Revolt broke out (132-135).

3. The Gospel of the Jewish

One possible track can be found in mid-2nd century thanks to a fragment from a Jewish-Christian Gospel (Dubarle 1985: 121). In his *De viris illustribus,* Saint Girolamo mentioned it as «evangelium secundum Hebreos" (*Vir Ill* 2) ». Contrary to what majority says (Frey 2012: 560-654), those researchers whose calculations are not based on three, but on two Jewish-Christian Gospels, should be right. The Gospels here mentioned are one Greek Gospel of the heretic Ebionites and one in semitic language of the orthodox christologic Nazari (Mimouni 1998: 207-222). At that point, the fragment taken into examination should come from the Gospel of Nazari, because Saint Girolamo himself claimed to have it translated into Greek and Latin. The relevant Latin text with its significant Greek translation is the following: «Dominus autem cum dedissset sindonem (*sindōna*) seruo sacerdotis (*tō doulō tou hiereōs*), iit ad Iacobum et apparuit ei…» (Klijn 1992: 79).

Then the apparition to James is described. As far as content is concerned, the fragment could be ascribed to the Gospel of Nazari, since nothing in the text is specifically heretic. About the ascesis of James, there is also a narration by Hegesippus (Eusebio, *HE* II 23,5), which calls him the "Right" (*HE* II 23,4.7). There are hints of a quite ancient tradition, such as the term "Son of the Man" to refer to Jesus. Besides from the Gospels, this word can be found in early literature only in Saint Stephen Martyr (Atti 7,56) and, according to Hegesippus, in James during his martyrdom (Eusebio, *HE* II 23,13). Apostle Paul had already heard about an apparition of the Risen to James (1 Corinzi 15,7). Why then did not Nazari, which were (according to Gerolamo - *Adv Pelag* III) interested in the traditions of the family of Jesus, have not to insert a semi legendary narration into their expanded version of the Gospel according to Matthew? The pioneer of the *Formgeschichte* (historical-morphological exegetic method) Martin Albertz had already presumed that this passage belonged to the family environment (1947: 118s). It is remarkable here that the Shroud of Jesus is mentioned within a context directly connected with James the Brother of the Lord.

4. The Evangelization of Edessa

Controversial theories have been put forward about how Christianity arrived to Edessa. A Jewish-Christian mission from Palestine in Aramaic language has been considered (Vööbus 1958: 6s; Kretschmar 1964). The works of Han J. W. Drijvers (1985; 1992) supported the idea of a Mission in Greek language which had left from Antiochia (Maraval 2003: 561-564). For several reasons it is difficult to understand the position having the anti-Jewish polemic of Doctrina Addai leaving out its Jewish-Chrsitian origins (Illert 2007: 34). According to Sebastian P. Brock (1979), most of the Jewish tradition had already merged into Syrian Christianity before the end of the 4th century. The research about liturgical history carried out by Gerard Rouwhorst (1997) actually supports an original Jewish-Christian imprint. From the geographical point of view, Ebionites and Jewish-Christian Nazari connected Palestine and Western Syria thorugh Batanea and the Damascus area. (Eusebio, *Onomastikon* [Klostermann 172]; Epiphanio, *Panarion* 29,7; 30,20; 40,1). Nazari colonies named Kochaba were probably founded by the Family Members of the Lord. The Odes of Solomon represent one literary connection. These hymns of Syrian and Greek origins mention both the Essenian Dead Sea Scrolls found in Qumran, and the tradition according to John. They are typically dated back to the 2nd century. Yet, James Charlesworth (1990) believe that they had already been created before, between the 1st and the 2nd century. The commentator of the hymns Marie-Joseph Pierre states that they belong to the ascetic Jewish-Christians circles connected with the members of the great family of Jesus (1994: 37-55).

5. More ancient traditions of the Doctrina Addai?

At the beginning of the 5th century, the *Doctrina Addai* states that, following the Ascent of Jesus, the apostle Addai preached the Faith in Edessa, under the reign of Abgar V Ukkama (Howard 1981: 8-21). The time of the traditions described into the *Doctrina* is controversial (Wasmuth 2012: 225s). The origins of the legend of Abgar can be dated back at least to the end of the 3rd century/beginning of the 4th (Illert 2007: 35s). I do agree with those researchers that recognize a reference to Abgar the Great's kingdom (tolerating to Christianity) into the narration about the founding of the Community of Edessa (Chaumont 1988: 16; Palmer 2002: 69; Ramelli 2009: 62). The ascetic environments proposed themselves as bearers of the legend of Abgar. They are called "Sons and Daughters of the Alliance" by the *Doctrina* (Howard 1981: 100s). The *benej qa'jama'* (*Demonstratio* 7,18-25) and their life style, described by Afraate, remind of the Scroll of the War of Qumran (*1QM*). This encouraged Christopher Garland to think that this group came "from Jewish circles which include the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls" (1998: 268). In the meanwhile, it is possible to trace a connection between Christianity in Eastern Syria and Jewish-Christians in Palestine, influenced by Essenism (Riesner 1998: 107s). This aspect reinforces the thesis about early Jewish-Christian influences.

Semitic name Addai, abbreviation for Adonija, does not derive from a person of the New Testament. It is necessary to wait until Eusebius - secondary source compared to the *Doctrina* (Illert 2007: 20) – to identify him with Thaddeus, one of the twelve Disciples (Matteo 10,3 / Marco 3,18) (*HE* I 12,3). According to the *Doctrina,* Addai came from "Panea, at the springs of Jordan River" (Howard 1981: 42s). The position against the conjecture that this is a reference to the Gospels is supported by the different name used in the Bible. As a matter of facts, it mentions the place as Caesarea Philippi (Marco 8,27 / Matteo 16,13). Because of this detail, Theodor Zahn's position is still convincing. He presumes that «since it is totally impartial, this should be considered as a trustworthy tradition through the first, or one of the first, preachers of Christian faith in Edessa» (1881: 369). A significant role into the *Doctrina* is played by James the Brother of the Lord (Howard 1981: 22-25. 34s).

Yet there is a pre-existent source connecting James with Addai. According to the First Apocalypse of James, the Brother of the Lord had instructed Addai. The Gnostic apocryphal text in Coptic language brought to us, that we know also from the recently (re)published Codix Tchacos, contains Jewish-Christian translations and can be dated back to the 3rd century (Brankaer/Bethge 2007: 114-117; 84s). Richard Bauckham assumes that there had been a mission of the Family Members of the Lord towards East (1990: 66-70) and that Addai, before the year 70, had relations withJerusalem. Richard Bauckham also gives the Apocalypse of James for sure (2008: 265). Also M. L. Chaumont considers the Mission of Addai a verified historical fact (1988: 14-16), but, like Adolf von Harnack (1924: 681), he places it in a later period of time, around the year 100.

    6. Sextus Julius Africanus and the Family Members of the Lord

One should mention also a possible connection between the Family Members of the Lord and Edessa. Abgar VIII the Great was the patron of the scholar Sextus Julius Africanus (Tact 29; Segal 1970: 32). Africanus collected information about the family of Jesus, whose fragments were preserved, thanks to Eusebius (*HE* I 7,14). Christoph Markschies supposes that Africanus had even had direct contact with the Family Members of the Lord (1997: 280). This contact might have happened in Emmaus-Nicopolis (Riesner 2003: 203-207), or in the Damascus area (Pixner 1996: 163). At this point, Africanus could have mediated between the last Family Members of Jesus and the royal house of Edessa. In the first half of the 3rd century, traces of the *desposynoi* are lost. The last Family Member of the Lord of whom we have verified documentation is Saint Conon. He was a grocer who died as a martyr during the persecutions of Emperor Decius in Pamphilia in 250 (Bauckham 1990: 121-125). In the 9th century, Armenian historiographer Moses of Chorene quotes among his sources for Abgar the fifth book of the chronography of Julius Sextus Africanus, unfortunately only partially preserved (Illert 2007: 19s).

1. Abstract

The theory according to which the *sindōn* was initially kept by the great family of Jesus, in my opinion, should be taken into consideration. There are also hints of connections between the Family Members of the Lord and the capital city of Abgar the Great. Because of the state of the art of the available sources, we must consider the journey of the Cloth from Jerusalem to Edessa as speculative. Yet the "possibility" is, at least, not some "impossibility" to exclude.

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