

## ORIGINAL ARTICLES (1)

## THE SHROUD'S INTRINSIC VALUE - AUTHENTIC OR NOT

by David Rolfe, film maker, of Shroud Enigma

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For almost 40 years I have watched the arguments for and against the Shroud's authenticity ebb and flow. I have seen good friends fall out over them and many dedicated champions of the subject go to their graves without seeing any fundamental change in the status quo. I would like to see some wider recognition for what the Shroud is before I die. Hopefully, I have a few years to go but I am only two years younger than my father was when he died. This is not necessarily a basis for a forecast and there are no signs of impending doom but it is a salutary fact nevertheless.

I believe it is very likely that the Shroud in Turin wrapped Jesus of Nazareth in the tomb but I understand that most, like this journal's editor, find such a conclusion difficult to accept. I want to argue here that such a difference of opinion does not really matter when it comes to evaluating the potential significance of the Shroud today.

I have had the privilege of meeting many who have studied the subject and also, more recently, come face to face with it intimately when, beyond any reasonable expectation, Turin removed it from its case to allow me to film it. But those two facts pale into relative unimportance compared to another association. For decades I have been able to contemplate its image hanging on my study wall. That is where I believe its value and the most compelling evidence lies. Its "subjective" qualities are equal to if not even greater than its objective ones and they are there for all to see if they wish to.

Even the most rigorous of New Testament and historical scholarship leaves some core certainties: A charismatic rabbinic figure known as Jesus of Nazareth railed against the prevailing corrupt orthodoxy and rejected the myriad archaic rules deemed more important

to live by than anything else. Much of what he preached and did was distinctive enough to be recalled many decades later when the formal written accounts of his ministry first appeared. He pronounced that only two laws were necessary to live by. One upheld the divine and the other an unequivocal care and respect for others. His sacrilegious disdain of the status quo was regarded as seditious by his fellow Jews who persuaded the occupying Roman authority that such sedition might also apply to them. He was duly crucified.

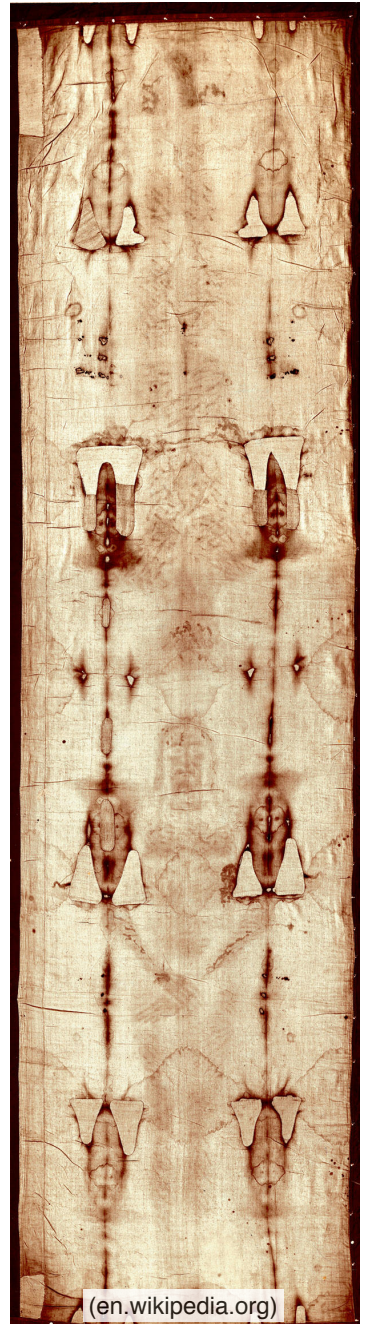
This is enough for me to consider myself a Christian. I am in awe of the conviction that led to his sacrifice on a cross so that the two laws he gave us would come to shape the world I would eventually inherit. I do not discount the possibility that he performed miraculous things and that something very mysterious happened in the tomb but my belief in him as my personal saviour and the divine spark within is sustainable irrespective of the veracity of those accounts. I need no more. Indeed, for me his sacrifice could be seen to be greater if he made it without the certainty of an eternity in one of his Father's many mansions. (John 14.2). What a man!

By whom and however and whenever the Shroud was created it employs sublime genius to bear witness to what we can ever know for certain about Jesus of Nazareth from other sources. Even if it does turn out to be a medieval creation it is, none-the-less, somewhat "miraculous" in achieving this. In saying this I am reminded of Fr. Peter Rinaldi's comment to me when I asked him how he felt about the C14 test he had done so much to enable. I quote: "I believe the Shroud is a miracle. Why does it have to be a 2,000 year old miracle?"

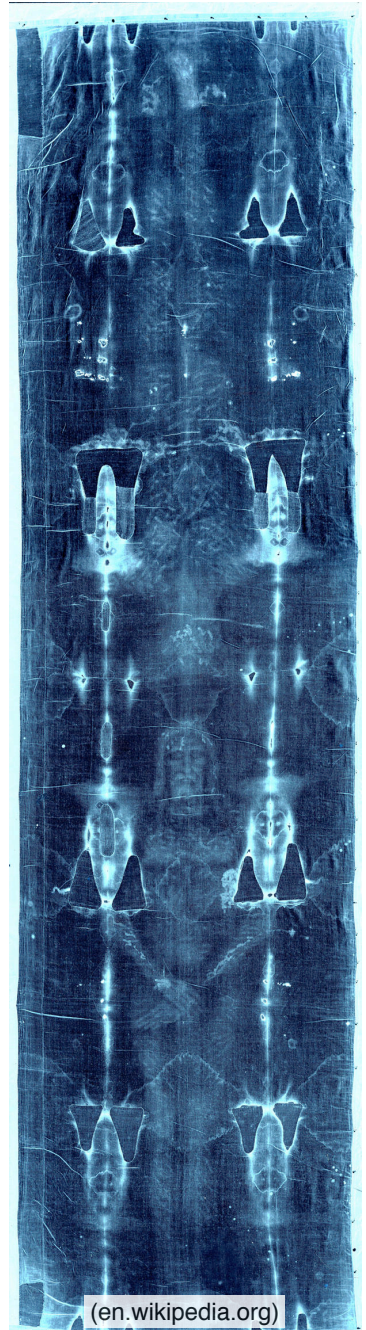
Now you must take a leap of the imagination if not a leap of faith. You are a great artist of the calibre of Da Vinci, Michelangelo or perhaps one of the school of Hellenic masters that sculpted the Elgin Marbles. It doesn't matter. You are living centuries ago. A patron approaches you with a very specific brief. They recount the bare bones story of Jesus's life and death as related above.

You are to create a work that captures its essence and convince viewers both contemporary and beyond that they are in the presence of a most precious relic. However you go about it, and we may never know, we can see what you created. We can look upon it as it lies within these pages centuries after you created it. Does it fulfil the brief? Does it speak out as a great work should? Let us make an objective assessment of its observable subjective qualities and its simple facts. What do we see?

- Your choice of an image left on a Shroud is a perfect encapsulation of the mystery that surrounds him. After all, it is the reporting of his death by crucifixion that is the principal independent corroboration that Jesus lived at all. Congratulations.
- Here lies a man that died in the most vile and cruel way yet devised by mankind. The awful details reveal it was what we now know to be a Roman crucifixion. This is uncanny because when you were commissioned you had no knowledge of these details. Congratulations.
- Your depiction makes real the one description we have of the man's death in that it bears the minute forensic details that makes sense of what is written. Congratulations.



- You have echoed the bare facts we have about the man's life by making it ethereal but perceptible enough for it to be recognised for what it is by crowds at a distance on a glaring hot day when thousands flock to see it held aloft in the open air. Congratulations.
- By restricting yourself to a monotone you have emphasised the singularity involved in the event of this man's life and death. Indeed, the image is its own singularity as it has no comparison or equal. Congratulations.
- This tone, so sparsely applied, has, centuries after your work was completed, yielded to the new science of photography an image of even greater perceptibility just when the world had almost forgotten it. Congratulations.
- You have maintained such evenness of hand of the single tone along its entire length and breadth that stellar science has been able to translate your pains into a homogenous lifelike representation of the man in death. Congratulations.
- Somehow, although making sense as a two dimensional depiction, you have applied the blood and arranged the position of the limbs to enable it to make sense when wrapped around a corpse even to the soles of the feet. Congratulations.



- By applying the blood first and leaving no image beneath you have confounded further anyone who might seek to imitate you. Congratulations.
- You have been faithful by depicting him unmistakably in the likeness as the Jew he was. Congratulations.
- Your canvas has been a linen cloth of a dimensions used at the time and woven on a loom that worked under the laws that governed the man's world. Congratulations.
- The cloth is nothing like the rough linen grave clothes discovered in the excavated tombs in the hills of Jerusalem. Its quality matches the esteem in which those who followed held the man it must have wrapped. Congratulations.
- Despite our preference you have been brave enough to leave him naked and kept him devoid of any artifact that would allow one group above another to claim him for themselves. Yet, you have kept his dignity and repose. Congratulations.
- Indeed you have excelled even this. This savagely tortured man in death is at peace with himself and with us. Indeed, he appears, somehow, to have transcended his fate and cheated death. Congratulations.

**David Rolfe. Christmas 2014**