

A Personal Report on the 2018 Jalsa Salana Shroud Conference in England

By Barrie Schwartz

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2018 Jalsa speakers (l to r) Pam Moon, Jorge Manuel Rodrigues Almenar, Emanuela Marinelli, Bruno Barberis, Barrie Schwartz

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On August 3, 4, 5, 2018, I had the pleasure of attending the annual **Jalsa Salana Convention** of the **Ahmadiyya Muslim Community** in Hampshire, England for the fourth year in a row. For the past four years, the *Review of Religions* magazine, the 113 year old publication of the Ahmadiyya community, has sponsored a Shroud Conference at the Jalsa that has grown in scope and size to become the single largest annual Shroud event anywhere in the world, with nearly 38,000 attendees this year! I think the irony is obvious.



Review of Religions Shroud Conference and Exhibit Marquee

Once again, **Pam Moon** brought her beautiful **Shroud Exhibition** (which typically tours around the U.K. each year), her amazing volunteer associates **Brenda and Stuart Benton** and **Luigi Antoniaz** and set up the exhibit in the very large tent or marquee that the *Review of Religions* provides annually for the Shroud Conference. I might add that this year, the marquee was huge and held not only the exhibition, but a small stage and seating for a substantial audience. Because of the record high temperatures in England this year, the marquee was also fully air conditioned.

Also attending this year's event (for the fourth year in a row) was our good friend, educator and resident skeptic **Hugh Farey**, who respectfully presents the skeptical yet scientific point of view regarding the Shroud.

But perhaps the best part of this year's Jalsa was the illustrious group of international Shroud scholars that made presentations at the event. There for his second Jalsa was **Bruno Barberis**, Past-President of the **International Center of Sindonology in Turin**.



Bruno Barberis



Emanuela Marinelli speaks to the ladies, along with Pam Moon and Brenda Benton

Attending her first Jalsa was world renowned Shroud scholar **Emanuela Marinelli** from Rome. The *Review* organizers were thrilled to have Emanuela present since she could address the women at the event. Much like Orthodox Jews in their synagogues, Muslims typically separate the men from the women at these events, so we presented to each group individually.

Mark Guscini from Spain had originally been scheduled to attend and discuss the Sudarium (as he did for the first time last year). Unfortunately, he had to cancel due to other obligations so Emanuela contacted our dear friend **Jorge Manuel Rodrigues Almenar**, President of the **Centro Español de Sindonología (CES)** or Spanish Center of Sindonology in Valencia, Spain, and he graciously accepted the invitation. It was great to see him again!



Jorge Manuel Rodrigues Almenar



The Press Conference – 3 August 2018
 Emanuela Marinelli, Barrie Schwartz, Amer Safir (Chief Editor, *Review of Religions*),
 Bruno Barberis, Jorge Manuel Rodrigues Almenar - © 2018 *The Independent*

Of course the big news of the day was the non-stop media coverage about (yet another) new scientific study that supposedly proved the Shroud was a "fake." The coverage was referring to a paper published by two Italian skeptics, **Matteo Borrini** and **Luigi Garlaschelli**. The latter's name will be familiar to many of you since he has been an avowed and public Shroud skeptic for at least ten years. Since their work had received major coverage by the world media, the *Review* team decided to start the Shroud conference by scheduling what would become a truly amazing press conference that addressed the issue head on, and by some of the top Shroud scholars in the world.

Before the press conference began, I got to speak with some of the reporters who were there. One of them was from *The Independent*, a British tabloid with a very broad readership. I knew that they had devoted a lot of space to the Garlaschelli claims and I asked him to give us at least equal coverage. He reminded me that it was up to his editor, but by later that night a major story appeared on their website, including a video clip from the press conference. I was surprised to find that they edited together several of my responses for the clip. You can see the article and video at this link:

[Turin Shroud: Believers hit back in almighty row over whether famous piece of cloth really did contain Jesus' body](#) by **Adam Lusher**, *The Independent*, Friday, 3 August 2018

Another story, based on an earlier interview with Emanuela Marinelli, was published in a different media outlet prior to the event:

[Turin shroud ISN'T a fake, insist experts prior to major Islam convention](#) by **Ciaran McGrath**, *The Express*, 2 August 2018

Needless to say, we were all pleased to see some reasonable coverage come out of the press conference. Friday afternoon the Shroud conference itself got underway, starting with **Bruno Barberis**, whose important presentation was titled, “Perspectives for the Future Study of the Shroud.” That was followed **Jorge Manuel Rodrigues Almenar**, whose presentation discussed “The Missing Years of the Shroud.” The rest of the afternoon was spent meeting with the hundreds of visitors that poured into the marquee to see the exhibit and introducing many of them to the Shroud for the first time. The speakers, along with Pam Moon, Brenda, Stuart and Luigi (her very knowledgeable exhibit assistants) spent many hours answering visitor’s questions.

On Saturday, the second day of the Jalsa, the presentations were scheduled specifically for the ladies at the event. I started off with my presentation, “Carbon Dating the Shroud.” That was followed by **Emanuela Marinelli**, whose presentation was titled, “The Role of Women in the Studies of the Turin Shroud.” As you can imagine, this topic was very well received. That day’s events were concluded with an “All Woman Panel Discussion” hosted by **Pam Moon, Emanuela Marinelli** and **Navida Sayed** (*Review of Religions* Christianity Editor). Throughout the day many thousands of visitors filed through the exhibit, including reporters from different media outlets and dignitaries from around the world with their respective entourages.



Pam Moon and Barrie Schwartz introduce His Royal Highness, Apollo Sansakabuamblia Kamuswaga (King of Kooki Kingdom Uganda) to the Shroud of Turin
© 2018 Brenda Benton

The third and final day of the Jalsa was reserved for an open and informal Discussion Session with all of the Shroud scholars present. We all took turns answering questions and a steady stream of visitors kept everyone busy all day. Throughout the day we also appeared on a number of MTA Network channels (MTA is the official television network of the Ahmadiyya Community). Bruno, **Arif Khan** (*Review of Religions* Deputy Christianity Editor) and I appeared on **MTA-1**, which is

a 24/7 satellite network that goes out to the entire global Ahmadiyya Community, reaching around 80 million viewers in 200 countries around the world. I also appeared on **MTA Africa** for the fourth year in a row and for the first time, on **MTA Arabia** (an Arabic language network). I can legitimately state that we literally introduced millions of people to the Shroud!



(L to R) Barrie Schwartz, Bruno Barberis, Luigi Antoniaz, Brenda Benton, Stuart Benton, Bishop Malkhaz Songulashvili of the Evangelical Baptist Church of the Republic of Georgia, Pam Moon, Emanuela Marinelli - © 2018 Navida Sayed

One of the most interesting attendees at the Shroud Conference was Bishop Malkhaz Songulashvili from the Republic of Georgia. I only had a few minutes to speak with him but was impressed with his interest in the Shroud (and his perfect English)! If you would like to know a bit more about him and his unique approach to faith, here are links to a brief interview and feature about him:

[The Christian Bishop Who Prays With Muslims](#) – YouTube Video (2:15)

[The Bishop Who Prays With Muslims](#) – YouTube Video (1:51)

I think all of us who participated in this year's Jalsa Salana Shroud Conference felt that the three days went by too quickly and that the event had been a rousing success. Of course, all good things come to an end, but in the case of this year's event, it ended on a very high note indeed. At the conclusion of each Jalsa, the Spiritual Leader of the Ahmadiyya Community, **His Holiness Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad**, takes the time to meet personally with hundreds of invited guests, honored speakers and other dignitaries in attendance. Once again, the group of us involved with the *Review of Religions* Shroud Conference was given the honor to spend over fifteen minutes

with His Holiness in private conversation. Not only that, but ours was the first group he met with! There were literally hundreds of others waiting in a rather long queue to meet with him so we felt truly honored to be given such a privilege. As they have done consistently for the last four years, the Ahmadiyya Community lived up to their creed, “Love for All, Hatred for None,” in every way. I know we all felt the loving spirit of the Ahmadiyya community and that sentiment was echoed by Bruno and Emanuela and Jorge and Pam. Frankly, I am already looking forward to attending my fifth Jalsa Salana in 2019!

Editor’s Note: You can find my personal reports on the previous years’ Jalsa Salana Conventions at the following links:

[A Personal Report on the 2015 Jalsa Salana Convention](#)

[A Personal Report on the 2016 50th Annual Jalsa Salana Convention](#)

[A Personal Report on the 2017 Annual Jalsa Salana Convention](#)