

SHROUD CHAPELS IN NORTH ITALY

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While on a skiing holiday in January 2003 in the north of Italy, I visited the town of Aosta. In the middle of the town there is a church called the Capella di Grato, dating from the 15th century. Opposite on the wall there is a fresco put up in 1978 commemorating the 400th anniversary of the occasion that the Shroud passed through the town on its way from Chambéry to Turin in 1578. Aosta is slightly to the north of Chambéry and not on the most direct route from there to Turin, but this may well have been the best road to take at the time.

Then in the village of Gignod, some 8 kilometres outside Aosta on the road leading to the St Bernard's Pass I discovered a church of the Holy Shroud. There is no explanation on the information panel as to why the church bears this name, although one can hazard a guess that it might be because the Shroud stopped there in 1578 on its way from Chambéry to Turin.

The panel provides the following information, in its own particular style of English - "The year of foundation of the chapel dedicated to the Holy Shroud, which could possibly date back to remote times, is not known. The chapel was rebuilt many times, which probably happened in 1606, as evidenced by the date carved on the entrance door. In 1730, according to a report of a pastoral visit of the bishop of Aosta, Monsignor Jean Grillet, dated 19th May 1730, the chapel was already in very bad repair. Some decades later, on 25th May 1769, procurators and the priest of Gignod Joseph Brunod made a contract with the master builder Jean-Baptiste Fontana, for the widening and restoration of the building, which was solemnly consecrated on 10th December 1771. Other repairs were made in 1860. In 1957, the chapel was separated from the parish of Gignod and annexed to the parish of Saint Bernard of Aosta (Signayes). Later on, with the episcopal decree of 1st October 1986, it was joined again to the parish of Gignod. In 1975 and 1996, the building was an object of important restorations. Inside the chapel there is a valuable painted and gilt wooden altar, datable at the first half of the 17th century, which has a painted canvas representing the Ostension of the Sacred Shroud in the middle. A precious 14th century Madonna with the Infant made of painted carved wood belongs to the chapel".