

Book Review

Matt Ryan, Brother John's Holiday,

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Reviewed by Mark Guscini

It is no easy task to write a good novel and include in it the Shroud of Turin without falling into historical inaccuracy in order to make the book seem somehow more adventurous or polemical. And yet that is just what Matt Ryan manages to do in his novel Brother John's Holiday.

Brother John is an ex-policeman who is now a Carmelite monk. Planning on taking a short holiday in Rome, he finds himself involved in the search for a missing Italian aristocrat, Count del Sotto, who in turn is mixed up in the sale of a priceless Byzantine relic, the Image of Edessa, or the Mandylion. The action swings from Europe to the United States, aboard a luxury yacht called the Mount Athos. A Cardinal in the Vatican is convinced that the Image of Edessa is in fact the Shroud of Turin, and immediately travels to the north of Italy and requests a private viewing of the cloth to make sure that nobody has stolen it and is in fact offering the Shroud for sale.

The Shroud is safely in its place, although other people are convinced that the Mandylion up for sale is in fact the original miraculous Image of Edessa. After a breathtaking ocean chase in American waters, the image finally ends up at the Vatican, where after inspecting it, the powers-that-be decide that maybe it should not be subject to scientific testing after all

The only negative thing to report about the book is the somewhat annoying carelessness to punctuation - full stops are often omitted at the ends of paragraphs, and at other times no spaces are left between sentences.

However, this does not detract from highly readable story, in which for once in the field of historical novels (although all the action is set in today's world) history is treated precisely as that - history, and no unhistorical details or personal theories are presented as actually having happened. All in all, a thoroughly recommended book, well worth the read.