

*1506 – 2006*

*Guardare la Sindone*

*500 anni di liturgia sindonica*

Five hundred years ago (on 9 May 1506 to be exact), Pope Julius II granted the Shroud its own liturgy. In order to celebrate this event, a Symposium entitled “Guardare la Sindone: 500 anni di liturgia sindonica” was held in Turin from 3 to 6 May. Despite the fact that all the presentations were read in Italian, people were present from Austria, Germany, Switzerland, France, the UK and Spain – most papers were distributed in English thanks to the greatly appreciated efforts of Susie Phillips.

The aim of the congress was not to present new research or scientific papers. As Monsignor Giuseppe Ghiberto said in his introductory remarks, “

The aim of the congress was also summed up very well in one of the first presentations by Roberto Repole, entitled “The Reasons for Looking”. Repole stated that “We cannot too hastily forget, that is (under pain of losing the most profound sense of interest in the Shroud and of the scientific studies carried out on it) that the Shroud is of interest because previously, Christ is of interest; and that if we had not heard the gospel announcement of the Son made man, who has shared our blessed and fragile humanity, who suffered death on the cross for us ... the interest in the Shroud and the scientific studies on it ... would be of quite different and far more modest proportions”.

The Symposium was held at the Banca Popolare di Novara, in the very beautiful Piazza di San Carlo. One of the best aspects of the event (I will have to be forgiven for such a worldly comment) is that it was free to all, as was the (excellent) coffee. It was a

pleasure to meet up and catch up with old friends, among whom were Bruno Barberis, Gian Maria Zaccone, Mark Antonacci, Isabel Piczek and Mechthild Flury-Lemberg. Given the focus of the symposium, the speakers were not the usual ones who explain the Shroud's science and history at other congresses.

After the introduction, Gian Maria Zaccone and Roberto Repole gave a general overview of the Shroud in Christian devotion over the centuries. I had the honour of chairing and introducing the afternoon session on behalf of the BSTS, with Ana Rosa Dordoni, Giuseppe Tuninetti and Renzo Savariano.

The evening session (the two days of the Symposium proper were densely packed with presentations) started with a fascinating talk about "Fastentücher", or Lenten sheets, a way of expressing devotion to the Passion in German-speaking countries. This paper was authored by Volker Dudeck. Finally, Massimo Nosetti and Elisabeth Maier led us on a musical journey through Shroud and Easter-inspired compositions – the novelty was that the presentations were accompanied by musical excerpts.

The second day opened with Giovanni Ferretti and Monica Quirico, speaking respectively about the Face and the Body and Traces of the Absent. The session was chaired by Pier Luigi Baima Bollone. Ferretti's paper was a good example of how liturgy was more important than science and history in this congress – "The body can be observed as the image of a physical ... body to be studied physically or physiologically using all the latest scientific discoveries ... but even more deeply we can feel in that tortured body, in that wounded face, the word telling you: see how I have taken your pain on me".

One of the most interesting presentations was by Enrico Morini, from the University of Bologna. His subject was "Embroidered Shrouds – the Symbolism and Iconology of the liturgical veils of the Byzantine rite". One of the few illustrated talks over the two days,

Morini explained the meaning and use of the different kinds of cloth used to recall the burial of Christ.

The afternoon session on Saturday included presentations about the veneration and study of the Shroud in various different countries – Bruno Barberis introduced the session talking about the synthesis of scientific communication and pastoral aspects. We were then taken through how people see the Shroud in Germany, the USA, France and Eastern Europe. This got me thinking about the UK – and do not forget as I say this that I am British – as a nation we have probably produced more useless Shroud books than any other country, “proving” in the space of a few years that the Shroud shows Jesus did not die on the cross, that it was the work of Leonardo da Vinci, that it is Jacques de Molay etc; luckily, the international impact of these books was negligible, not to say zero. The presence of the Shroud in churches of any denomination is next to nothing – and yet at the same time I am proud to say that the British Society for the Turin Shroud is one of the most respected Shroud organisations in the world, the most frequent Shroud publication (while it lasted) in English was Shroud News, produced by Englishman Rex Morgan, and the work generally considered as the most complete Shroud book ever written was penned by another Englishman, our former editor Ian Wilson.

All in all, the symposium was a great success. Liturgy and devotion are just as much a part of Shroud history as its whereabouts and vicissitudes, and a congress devoted to this part of the Shroud was long overdue. Congratulations to the Centro Internazionale di Sindonologia and the Commissione Diocesana Sindone for organising such a successful event.