

RECENTLY PUBLISHED

PIERLUIGI BAIMA BOLLONE: *L'Impronta di Dio; cilia ricerca delle reliquie di Cristo*. Mondadori, Milan 1985. 190 pp, 31 color plates on 16 pp in center of book. Notes & Sources. No Index. 20.000 Italian Lire.

Pierluigi Baima Bollone is internationally recognized in his profession of forensic medicine, and in this capacity he has made major contributions to sindonology, particularly in the identifications of the blood (*Spectrum* #6, #11) and of aloes and myrrh (*Spectrum* #13), corroborating the demonstrations of Dr. Sebastiano Rodante and others that these elements could be determinants in image formation. Dr. Baima's scientific papers are relentlessly impersonal: his experiments stand stripped of every superfluous word; they speak for themselves.

In this book, we see the man outside his laboratory. The long bibliographies at the end of each chapter witness his curiosity about the world in which Jesus lived and died, and the material objects which, according to tradition, have been preserved from his Passion. The Author delves into history, legend, archeology, topography, architecture, iconography ... every circumstance needed to recreate the ambient and the background of events each object represents—for each relic is heavy with a history of its own. Surely these many texts represent what must be years of reading and note-taking.

The skepticism regarding relics has diminished by reason of recent archeological discoveries and excavations, exegetical studies and historical research as well as a cooler appraisal of the apocrypha. Traces from many independent sources indicate that relics traditionally held to be from the time of Christ cannot be rejected en bloc. Dr. Baima has set out to evaluate the evidence behind the traditions and he presents this "panorama" as a preliminary inquiry, a stimulus to further study.

The first chapter lays the foundation by establishing the "historical Jesus". Ancient documents and modern astronomy give us the dates of his birth and his death at age 40. Chapter Two searches the location of the sepulchre and leads, in the following chapter, to a description of the city of Jerusalem and finally the confirmation of the present site of the Holy Sepulchre. From Jerusalem we go to Rome to inquire into the Scala Sancta and the column of flagellation. In Constantinople, called by Mesarites "Another Jerusalem", we hear again about the Sack of 1204 and the dispersion of relics. Three more chapters bring us to Turin and the Holy Shroud. Dr. Baima is now on his own ground. Five chapters cover most of the recent research published about this Relic of relics.

Every chapter is illustrated with topographical maps, architectural projections, diagrams and sketches—even of the Holy Face icons, even of the Shroud itself, for there are no black-&-white photo reproductions. There is a color reproduction of the Shroud and Tamburelli elaborations of the Face.

Over the centuries, legends and theories and duplicate relics—not necessarily fraudulently intended—have tangled thickly around elements originally true. The overgrowth must be eliminated, and Baima investigates even where something has previously and unanimously been rejected. For example, it has been many years since "Gordon's Tomb" was shown to be far off the mark, indeed the English General's name all but forgotten. To see and judge for himself, the Author visits the place, studies the literature, then, after a lengthy description concludes, "The theories of Gordon are not acceptable".

The Author's method is valid: a fairly thorough investigation of all the evidence relevant to each item clearly shows which ones cannot be genuine; for example, the marble of the Scala Sancta, by mineralogical analysis, turns out to be a type from Greece, common in Rome. Another example is the shroud of Cadouin, long accounted genuine, but which carries an arabic inscription in Kufic characters of the VII century. Some of the relics cannot be traced back to their source: two columns of flagellation are described, measured, sketched; each has its history. The authenticity of both, for the present, remains in doubt. Some, like the sudarium of Oviedo, are still in process of investigation; it is really too soon to make sensational claims.

Having identified the spurious and the doubtful, we see that some relics, such as the Tunic of Argenteuil and the Title of the Cross, seem to have inherent guarantees.

It seems to me that the Professor's excellent method is not sustained to the end of his discussion of the Cup of the Last Supper, the Chalice, the Holy Grail. This single instance so disconcerted me that I must present it here in some detail; readers might, or might not, share my perplexity.

By way of premise, the Author states that despite its religious character, the matter of the Cup has never been taken into consideration by the Catholic Church and "practically no Catholic writer has dealt with the subject" (p 78). Nevertheless, the matter must be investigated. After a résumé of medieval legends concerning this holy Cup, there is an inspection of the Upper Room, where the Last Supper took place and where the Cup enters religious history. The location of the Cenaculum is established by architectural excavations; diagrams illustrate the groundplans of the two floors.

Then we look at the imitation relics; one of onyx, described by a VI century pilgrim to Jerusalem; in the VII c., Arculf sees a cup and it is of silver. In Genoa there is a bowl, once believed to be emerald; it is of green glass, of First Century Roman manufacture. Then there is the Chalice of Antioch (now in the New York Metropolitan Museum)

which is dated V-VI c. These we can set aside; they are not the Cup of the Last Supper.

But in the Cathedral of Valencia, Spain, is an object of "maximum interest": a chalice in three independent and separable parts; a simple bowl-shaped cup of chalcedony supported on a stem with two handles which fits over another cup turned upside-down to serve as a base. For six pages we examine this work minutely, aided by diagrams and measurements of each of its parts. The cup and the base are more ancient than the stem, which is medieval. The base is of the same stone and same color as the cup, but on the base is an arabic inscription in Kufic characters. The stem is decorated with seven pearls, two emeralds and two beryls. (A diagram of the base presumably shows which pearls are mounted vertically and which horizontally. On this and on the full-page color plate of the object, we can count 27 pearls and a place for one more which is missing. Obviously, a *venti* was lost by the typesetter.)

Have we found the Holy Grail? Baima is perfectly satisfied that the supported cup is indeed the one we seek (p 189 and the blurb on dust jacket). He remarks, "We can be sure that, in the eyes of whoever commissioned this work, the cup must have had an extraordinary affective significance. Certainly [the very fine workmanship and rich decoration] would not have been different if it had been made for what was thought to be a sacred vessel and even—yes, even the Chalice of the Last Supper" (p 88). His supporting argument is that there are traces of the Chalice in the most ancient Christian liturgies. He explains that, at the beginnings of Christianity, the Roman Mass was celebrated only by the pontiff and in the canon of the Mass is the phrase, *Accipiens hunc praeclarum calicem*, "exactly as if this was not just any ritual chalice but the True Chalice, that is, precisely that of the Last Supper" (p 89).

One might have expected the use of the superlative, *praeclarissimus*, if indeed the pontiff in Rome at the beginnings of Christianity had held in his hands the True Chalice. Since those times, of course, millions of priests all over the world have pronounced the same identical words over all sorts of chalices: *Accipiens hunc praeclarum calicem....* A document of 1134 "seems to confirm" how it arrived to Spain from Third Century Rome.

We have been conditioned to ask for "scientific" assurances of authenticity. I don't know if there is any scientific way to date a piece of chalcedony; we could at least ask the opinions of archeologists, mineralogists.... Baima does not suggest any sort of test, although he does call for an analysis of the metal of the Nails said to be holy.

It would seem too, that he might suggest a chemical analysis of a sample of the "writing" which Ugolotti and Marastoni see on the Shroud Image. If there really is paint in these places, its identification would be very simple and far more conclusive than the scientific examinations he advocates for the various Holy Face icons.

There are numerous typographical errors, some of which are quite distressing. The worst, perhaps, is the date given for the burning at the stake of the Templar, Geoffrey de Charny: 1507, two centuries after the fact. To mention only one more: note 12, p 135, cites *Sindon* 22:3-6, 1970 for an article, written by Dr. Baima himself, in memory of Dr. Giovanni Judica Cordiglia. Judica Cordiglia survived another decade and Baima's eulogium appeared in *Sindon* 30:3-6, 1980.

Thus the "panorama" unrolls for our inspection. Impossible, in this review, to point out every landmark, or even the blank areas where we expected to see the Holy Lance, the Crown of Thorns, or maybe just one single Holy Thorn.

The general public, to whom this book is destined, will find the text informative, interesting, well-structured and carefully composed by the Author, though a few corners have been cut in production (no Index, no black-&-white photo reproductions, no references in the text to color plates, totally inadequate cutlines ... little things like that). Aside from the Author's over-confidence about the Chalice, the book reflects, on the whole, present knowledge and current theories.

We share Dr. Baima's hope that his study will invite experts in various fields to amplify this research. The resurgence of interest in relics, certainly aroused by the light from the Holy Shroud, should be implemented, not in pietistic terms, but, as Dr. Baima has done, by scholarly methods buttressed, wherever possible, by scientific tests.

D.C.