

THE SHROUD: FROM OBJECT OF DEVOTION
TO OBJECT OF DISCUSSION

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When the Holy Shroud was exhibited to the faithful in Lirey, it was shown *with great reverence by two priests vested with alb, stole and maniple, in a prominent place specially constructed, high and easily visible, and illuminated by lighted torches.*¹ Thus wrote Bishop Pierre d'Arcis in his Memorandum addressed to Clement VII, antipope, describing the functions that began shortly after 1353 under his predecessor, Henri de Poitiers. In his Bull of 6 January 1390 prohibiting these displays, Clement VII uses the same expressions: *under no circumstances should the ecclesiastics wear hooded cape, rochet, alb, or cope, nor should they perform other solemnities that are customary when exposing relics for which neither torches, flambeaux nor candles are lighted, nor should any other lamps be used.*²

The earliest documentation of Shroud expositions is represented in the pilgrim badge dredged from the Seine and now conserved in the Cluny Museum of Paris.³ On this tiny (6 cm x 4 cm) lead souvenir, the herringbone Cloth with the frontal and dorsal imprints is held up by two or possibly three priests. Between the two lateral figures, both broken and incomplete, a fragment may indicate a third person. The coats of arms of the proprietors, Geoffroy de Charny and his wife, Jeanne de Vergy, almost certainly date the pilgrim badge to the mid-1300s, a period in which expositions were first initiated in the Lirey church.

The presence of the clergy in liturgical canonicals, the use of candles and torches, the solemnity with which the Shroud was displayed, are all elements that distinguished that Object from a simple *pictura seu tabula* — picture or painting, as Clement VII first expressed it in his Bull of 6 January 1390;⁴ but it was more than an ordinary holy picture for it presented a reality that was in itself proof of authenticity: a relic or prodigious imprint bearing all the signs of the Passion of Christ; scourging, crowning with thorns, suspension on the Cross with nails, wound in the side.

To display the Shroud in that way became traditional. Written and, figurative documentation show that it became the custom for three ecclesiastics, later three bishops, to hold out the Shroud for the crowds to see. Eventually, on solemn occasions, several bishops, assisted by the clergy holding liturgical candles, took their places along the Relic's length.

Removed from the Lirey church in 1390, the Shroud was

conserved privately by the Charny family and rarely exhibited. Then in 1453, Marguerite, the last Charny, widowed and childless, ceded the Shroud to Duke Louis I of Savoy and his wife, Anne of Lusignan.

All of the House of Savoy were profoundly devoted to the Relic, petitioning Rome for privileges for the chapel and indulgences for visitors. In the last decades of the XVth century, the ducal family gave some expositions in Piedmont during the peregrinations they were obliged to make because of the insecurity of their situation in Savoy. The best documented exposition took place at Bourg-en-Bresse, on 14 April 1503.* The event was described by Antoine de Lalaing, secretary to the archduke Philippe le Beau:

The day of the great and holy Friday, the Passion was preached in Monsignor's chapel by his confessor, the duke and duchess attending. Then they went with great devotion to the market halls of the town, where a great number of people heard the Passion preached by a Cordelier. After that, three bishops showed to the public the Holy Shroud of Our Lord Jesus Christ; and after the service it was shown in Monsignor's chapel.

The three prelates were the bishops of Maurienne, Lausanne and Genoa.⁶

Shortly after Carlo III became duke of Savoy (1504), he and his mother, Claudine de Brosse de Bretagne, petitioned Pope Julius II to approve the text of the Office and Mass in honor of the Shroud, compiled by the Dominican Father Antonio Pennet. The Bull of approval is dated 9 May 1506. The *Oremus* in this Mass⁷ was inscribed in the vernacular on an engraving of 1608 conserved in London's British Museum:⁸

Almighty eternal God, in remembrance of the Passion of your only-begotten Son, you have left us the Holy Shroud on which his Image is imprinted that it might be adored on earth; we beseech you to give us the grace that by the power of the same Holy Shroud we may be counted worthy to contemplate your Face in heaven.

The expression "image to be adored on earth" may strike one with surprise; the Latin original has *effigie venerandam in terris*. Here one speaks only of effigy, or representation, without further specification.

In the last decade of the XVIth century, an unknown author composed another prayer that was well-received, as witnessed by several engravings on which is recorded the names of the person who requested approbation and who conceded it. The prayer is preceded by a brief introduction in Italian, followed by the Latin text:

* At that time, Bresse belonged to Savoy; it was ceded to France in 1601. ED.

Very devout prayer of the Most Holy Shroud, by which a soul in Purgatory is released every time it is said, conceded by Pope Clement VIII at the supplication of the Most Serene Infanta, Catherine of Austria, Duchess of Savoy.⁹

O God, who in the Holy Shroud, in which Joseph wrapped your most sacred Body taken down from the Cross, you have left the vestiges of your Passion: grant that by the power of your death and burial we might merit the glory of the Resurrection.¹⁰

The concept of "relic" is made evident in a very explicit way, a fact which did not appear in the previous prayer.¹¹ It is significant that the new *Oremus*, with the new liturgical texts in the Mass, eventually substituted the former one, as witnessed in an illuminated Missal of the first decades of the XVIIth century, probably the work of the studio of the Della Rovere family, who specialized in reproductions of the Shroud. This priceless work, conserved in Turin's Biblioteca Reale, reports on the frontispiece:

Mass and Office of the Most Holy Shroud, in which was wrapped the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ taken down from the Cross and laid in the tomb.¹²

Almost the same frontispiece in an official publication printed at Saluzzo in 1692, adds the approval given by the Holy See:

Mass of the Holy Shroud in which was wrapped the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ taken down from the Cross and laid in the Sepulchre. Conceded by the Holy Apostolic See to the Most Serene Carlo Emanuele, Duke of Savoy.

The official approval of the new text that was forming, with various modifications in the course of several years, came in the Brief of 21 January 1673. It is curious that in the Mass of 1506 the Gospel was from John 19:38-42, where the Shroud is not mentioned even though Joseph of Arimathea is; while in the second draft, the Gospel is from Matthew 27:57-60, which speaks expressly of the purchase of the Shroud and the wrapping of the body in it. The Vatican II Council modified the prayer to read thus:

O Father, who glorified your Son, Jesus Christ, in his blessed Passion and established him Lord in his Resurrection from the dead, grant to us who venerate his Image represented in the Holy Shroud, the grace to contemplate his glorious Face. He is God, and lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever.

After the beautiful and theologically perfect invocation to the Father, the expression of the first prayer returns: *image represented in the Holy Shroud*. The difference between the three prayers is evident. The text approved by Julius II in 1506 was rather general. And that is understandable. It was better to avoid saying too much about an Object that, even though publicly venerated, lacked serious guarantees about its provenience and formal authentications.

The second prayer, the one approved by Clement VIII after the lapse of nearly a century, contains very clear expressions about the origin of these imprints: imprints left by the Body of Christ deposited from the Cross and wrapped in that Sheet. The third prayer, the one of the renewed liturgy of Vatican II, echoes the expression of the first: *image represented in the Holy Shroud*. Thus, the way is left open for two conclusions:

1. The origin of the imprints is completely natural, formed by contact with the body of Christ; therefore a relic, even if in the wider sense.

But how can one attest that that tortured corpse is really that of Christ? The conclusion becomes evident and morally certain in the light of five details plainly manifest on the Person represented. St. John, eye-witness to the events, records these five details in his Gospel as clearly as if he were describing what we see on the Shroud: Jesus was scourged (Jn 19:1); crowned with thorns (Jn 19:2); nailed to the Cross (Jn 20:27); lanced in the side (Jn 20:27); wrapped in a sheet (Jn 19:40). The agnostic Yves Delage, during the heated polemics that came fast upon the photographic revelation of the negativity of the somatic imprint, proposed a calculation of probability to demonstrate that these imprints could not be anyone but Christ.*

2. The formation of the image is prodigious in the event that science will not be able to explain it; and/or if it can be confirmed that the age of the Object does not correspond to the first century, in which case it would no longer be a relic but a realistic representation of non-natural origin, conforming to a reality that occurred in another time and documented in the Gospels, with which it is in perfect concordance.

The conviction that the Shroud was a relic, so clearly expressed in the prayer approved by Clement VIII and always attested by its owners from the time it first emerged into documented history, was echoed by the papal legates to Savoy in their reports to Rome on the solemn celebrations of May 4, the Feast of the Holy Shroud. Mons. Pietro Savio¹⁴ quoted 102 of these letters, and almost every one refers to the Shroud as *Santissima Sindone*, *Santissimo Sudario*, *Santissima Reliquia*.... In his letter of 5 May 1624, the legate writes of the "most signal relic, the Holy Shroud".

The personal veneration of many popes, in particular those who have seen the Shroud or the photographs, is abundantly documented. Pius VII stopped in Turin on 13 November 1804, a virtual prisoner on his way to Paris at the command of Napoleon who

* Don Fossati mentions also del Fino and Sanno Solaro, to whom we could add Barberis, de Gail, and Zeuli, whose calculations were published in *Spectrum* #10, March 1984. ED.

would be crowned by no other than the pope; and there he venerated the Shroud in privacy.¹⁵ Then on 21 May 1815, he himself displayed the sacred relic from the balcony of Palazzo Madama in a public exposition.

The present Pope has also twice paid homage, as he reminded the crowds on 13 April 1980, on the occasion of his pastoral visit to Turin:

...at the beginning of September, 1978, I came to Turin eager to venerate the Holy Shroud, extraordinary relic related to the mystery of our Redemption ... unique witness, if we accept the arguments of so many scientists, of Easter; of the Passion, the Death and the Resurrection. Silent witness, but at the same time, surprisingly eloquent.

In 1978, this pilgrim from Poland, Karol Cardinal Wojtyla, Archbishop of Krakow, knelt unnoticed in the throngs of three millions. Less than two years later, returning as Pope John Paul II, he was granted a private showing, with the Shroud laid out upon a long table. After intently studying the sacred figure, he too, like Pius VII, kissed the margin of the Cloth.¹⁶ On 28 April 1989, during his flight to Madagascar, responding to the question of a journalist, Pope John Paul remarked:

It is a relic, certainly.... If it were not a relic, how could we understand the manifestations of faith that surround it, demonstrations even stronger than the proofs, shall we say, the scientific counter-proofs? In this sense, a relic is always an object of faith. An icon can be an object of faith, and it often is, but it is primarily an object of culture, of art, sacred art. The problem of [the Shroud's] authenticity must always remain open to science.¹⁷

One is reminded of the words of Paul VI, inaugurating the Shroud's first television appearance on 23 November 1973:

Whatever the historical and scientific judgment that distinguished scholars will give concerning this amazing and mysterious relic, we cannot refrain from earnestly desiring that it will lead visitors not only to a sensitive, absorbing discernment of the mortal lineaments of the marvelous figure of the Savior, but might also introduce them into a more penetrating vision of his profound and fascinating mystery.¹⁸

It is not possible to develop the vast accumulation of devotional material. However, one aspect that must not be overlooked is the custom that spread widely, particularly in the XVIth to XVIIIth centuries, of artistically reproducing the Shroud on cloth, in natural dimensions with the full figure, frontal and dorsal, represented. The devotional value of these copies is evident, even if they are sometimes artistically mediocre. Their value as historical documents is inestimable, as they reflect the various circumstances in which they were produced. There must have been a great number of these copies, but with the passing of time the trace of many has been lost.¹⁹



Engraving of the 1608 Exposition of

[Editor's Note: This image spanned the gutter of the original printed issue. To keep the page count accurate, we had to divide it between two pages. However, you can download the entire 3MB image in Jpeg format at this link: <http://www.shroud.com/images/Dec90p14-15.jpg>]



the Shroud (The British Museum)

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Based on the 52 copies located and catalogued, a few points should be emphasized:²⁰

1. Twenty-seven have the date written on the cloth.
2. All 52 show the frontal and dorsal imprints and are approximately the same dimensions as the Original.
3. The principal motive was to have a relic like the Original and for this reason the copy was laid in contact with the Shroud.
4. Some accompanying documents declare that the copy is "exactly equal" to the Original.
5. The copies do not show the characteristics of a true negative, proof that the artists did not understand negativity, even though it is often claimed that Byzantine iconographers were able to interpret the negative image. The copies confirm that the Shroud is an *unicum inimitabile*, a proof, even though indirect, of its authenticity.
6. A comparison of these copies with the Original eloquently refutes a manual production of the Shroud; not one copy comes anywhere near a resemblance.

The desire to have a faithful copy of the Shroud has been satisfied by photography, not only because it reproduces with maximum fidelity but also because development of the film negative reveals an image in perfect positive. We find ourselves before a Person in the fullness of his corporeal perfection, who presents himself to us no longer in incomprehensible imprints but in the luminosity of a positive and sculptural reality. The Face that is discovered has no paragon in art. Even with the eyes closed, or half-closed, it exerts an inescapable fascination. The bloodstains and the wounds, signs of pain and suffering, do not mar that Face serenely composed in death; rather they are the more precious because of the profound significance they evoke of a reality never fully comprehended: they are the visible testimony of One who died for the salvation of humanity.

Ever since the Shroud first appeared in Europe, a multitude of discussions has surrounded it. The polemics that arose at the beginning of this century, after the photographic discovery of the negative character of the imprints, have not yet completely subsided. But the heated discussions following the 1988 radiocarbon dating surpassed all expectations.

Quite different was the laconic report in the *Osservatore Romano* (19 September 1990) the day after the Vatican press conference announcing the transfer "of the position as Pontifical Custodian for the conservation and cult of the Holy Shroud to His Excellency Monsignor Giovanni Saldarini, Archbishop of Turin". The new custodian's responsibilities are expressly stated: conservation and cult. In both areas, there will be very difficult decisions ahead.

It is incomprehensible that an object belonging to the Church continues to be housed in premises of state property. Even though in the past the State could advance rights and pretensions of

control*, as it did in the recognition of 1969, now it has nothing more to say since the last owner, Humbert II of Savoy, bequeathed the relic to the Church. It is a simple question of good sense, something that does not always excel in bureaucratic discussions. Besides this incongruence, the Holy Shroud Chapel is not open to the public — who knows for how long — for necessary reinforcement repairs on the cupola. A decorous arrangement could be found, even in the cathedral choir, to allow easier access for conservation control as well as convenience for celebrations of the cult, in accordance with the directives of the Vatican communiqué. Thus to invert the words of the title — from Object of discussion, the Shroud should again become Object of devotion.

* When the King of Italy, Humbert II, was exiled, the Italian State confiscated all Savoy property. The Shroud was then, and still is, preserved in a chapel of the royal palace built above the cathedral and overlooking the nave. ED.

NOTES

1. ...*duobus sacerdotibus albis indutis cum stolis et manipulis, quamplurimum reverenter, accensis torchiis in loco eminenti et alto ad hoc solum et specialiter fabricato.* Memorandum of Pierre d'Arcis, reported in FOSSATI; *La Santa Sindone: Nuova luce su antichi documenti*, Turin 1961, p. 215.

2. ... *cappis, superpelliciis, albis, pluvialibus nullatenus propterea induantur nec alias solemnitates faciant quae fieri solent in reliquiis ostendentes, quodque propterea torticia, faculae seu candelae minime accendantur nec luminaria quaecumque ibidem adhibeantur.* FOSSATI, op. cit., p. 207.

3. The illustration was first published by WILSON: *The Turin Shroud*. See also *Spectrum* #25, Dec. 1987, "The Pilgrim Badge of Lirey".

4. The expression *pictura seu tabula* was cancelled on the copy of the Vatican Register on 30 May 1390, before the publication of another Bull, dated 1 May 1390, containing other indulgences; because in the church was "venerably" (*venerabiliter*) conserved that Object presented as the true Shroud in which the body of Christ was wrapped. See the reproduction of the documents in FOSSATI: op. cit. The historical question concerning the origin of these documents is discussed in *Studi Cattolici*, #287, Jan. 1985: "I più antichi documenti sulla Sindone; Le vicende polemiche di Lirey", pp. 23-31.

5. See *Collection des voyages des Souverains des Pays-Bas*, Brussels, 1876, vol. i, p. 286, in CHEVALIER: *Étude critique...*, Paris, 1900.

6. A. PERRET, in "Essai sur l'histoire du Saint Suaire du XIV^e au XVI^e siècle", *Mémoires de l'Académie des Sciences, Belles-Lettres et Arts de Savoie* (1960), cites GREYFIÉ DE BELLECOMBE; *Philiberte de Savoie, duchesse de Nemours* for the names of the bishops.

7. *Omnipotens sempiterne Deus, qui, in memoriam passionis Unigeniti tui, Sanctam eius Syndonem, cum expressa ipsius effigie, venerandam reliquisti in terris, tribue, quaesumus nobis, ut per virtutem eiusdem Sanctae Syndonis faciem tuam contemplari mereamur in caelis.*

8. FOSSATI: "La Stampa Ricordo della Ostensione del 1608", *Collegamento pro Sindone*, Sept. /Oct. 1987.

9. The request and the approbation fell somewhere within a five-year span: the Infanta Catherine of Austria, wife of Carlo Emanuele I, died in 1597, and Clement VIII (Ippolito Aldobrandini) was elected to the papacy in 1592.

10. *Deus qui nobis in Sancta Sindone, qua corpus tuum sacratissimum e cruce depositum, a Ioseph involutum fuit, passionis tuae vestigia reliquisti: concede propitius, ut per mortem et sepulturam tuam ad resurrectionis gloriam perducamur, qui vivis....*

11. Etymologically in the strict sense, "relic" refers to something which remains from a human corpse or a part of it. In a wider sense, one calls "relics" those objects which had been in contact with a person because these have absorbed that person's exceptional power. *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, vol. X, col. 749-61.

12. *Missa et Officium Sacratissimae Sindonis qua Corpus Domini Nostri Iesu Christi e cruce depositum involutum fuit et in monumento positum.*

13. *Missa Sacrae Sindonis qua corpus Dom. Nostri Iesu Christi e Cruce in Sepulcro positum involutum fuit. A Sancta Sede Apostolica — Serenissimo Carob Emanueli Duci Sabaudie concessa.*

14. P. SAVIO: *Ricerche storiche sulla Santa Sindone*, Turin 1957, p. 307ff.

15. SANNA SOLARO (*La Santa Sindone*, Turin 1901), records this detail: "... the Pope knelt down to venerate it, then examined it in every part, kissing it with tender devotion." Seven cardinals, eight bishops and many other personalities were present.

16. Reported in *Gazzetta del popolo*, 17 Oct. 1978; *Avvenire*, same date. For his 1980 visit as Pope, see *Torino vivi in pace*.

17. *La Stampa*, 29 April 1989.

18. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 25 Nov. 1973.

19. FOSSATI: "Copies of the Holy Shroud, Part I", *Spectrum* #12, Sept. 1984; "Copies of the Holy Shroud, Parts II & III", *Spectrum* #13, Dec. 1984. See also *Studi Cattolici*, #260-62, Oct.–Dec. 1982. A global survey was presented to the Paris International Symposium, 7 & 8 Sept. 1989: FOSSATI: "Copies of the Shroud compared with the Original, and their documentary value".

20. In this list, cloths with only the frontal imprint are not considered, such as the shroud of Besançon, destroyed in 1794 by order of the French Convention.