

## Personal Report on the 2017 Annual Jalsa Salana Convention

By Barrie Schwartz

I was once again privileged to attend and speak at the **51st Annual Jalsa Salana Convention** near Guildford in Hampshire, England on July 28-30, 2017, marking my third year at the event. As I have reported previously, the convention is held annually by the **Ahmadiyya Muslim Community** in England and this year's attendance reached around 40,000 people for the three day meeting. For the third successive year, the [Review of Religions](#) magazine, a 115 year old Ahmadiyya publication, sponsored a large marquee (tent) that included **Pam Moon's** beautiful **Shroud Exhibit** along with a superb exhibit of ancient **Korans**, collected and curated by my dear friend and world renowned Islamic calligrapher, **Razwan Baig**. Most exciting this year was the attendance and presentations made by three highly regarded European Shroud scholars including **Bruno Barberis**, Past-President of the **International Center of Sindonology** in Turin, Italy, **Mark Guscini**, noted author, linguist and expert on the **Sudarium of Oviedo** from Spain and **David Rolfe**, award winning filmmaker, Shroud scholar and the new Editor of the [BSTS Newsletter](#) from England. As an added bonus, we were all pleasantly surprised by the attendance of our good friend **Jostein Andreassen** from Norway, who holds the distinction of having written the first book about the Shroud of Turin in the Norwegian language. Although he and I have corresponded for years, it was great to finally meet him in person. In fact, you can view Jostein's report on the Jalsa in his website article (in Norwegian) titled, [Et opplevd eventyr \(An experienced adventure\)](#). You can also read my two previous articles on the Jalsa Salana at these links: [Personal Report on the 2015 Annual Jalsa Salana Convention](#) - and - [Personal Report on the 2016 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Jalsa Salana Convention](#). They include details and many photographs of the events.

The *Review of Religions* team have welcomed Pam Moon and me as official members of their Shroud Exhibit Planning Committee and the exhibit has grown and become more refined over the past two years. This year, in an effort to improve the overall exhibit, the normally translucent tent material was covered and blacked out and each individual part of the exhibit was lit separately using museum style lighting. The effect was more powerful and dramatic and made one feel like you were actually standing in a museum.

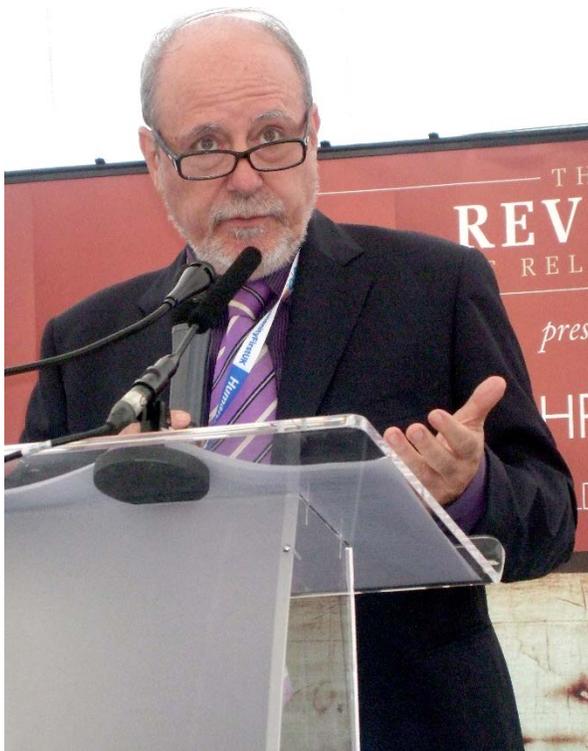


Barrie Schwartz, David Rolfe and Bruno Barberis addressing a group of ladies during a panel discussion at the exhibit - Photo ©2017 Brenda Benton

In past years, speakers would make their presentations in the exhibit area itself, but this year the *Review* team obtained a separate marquee, solely for the presentations of the speakers. This accommodated a larger seated audience in a more comfortable and less distracting setting and was a major improvement over previous years. Of course, the most important part of the event for me this year was the attendance of three prominent European Shroud scholars.



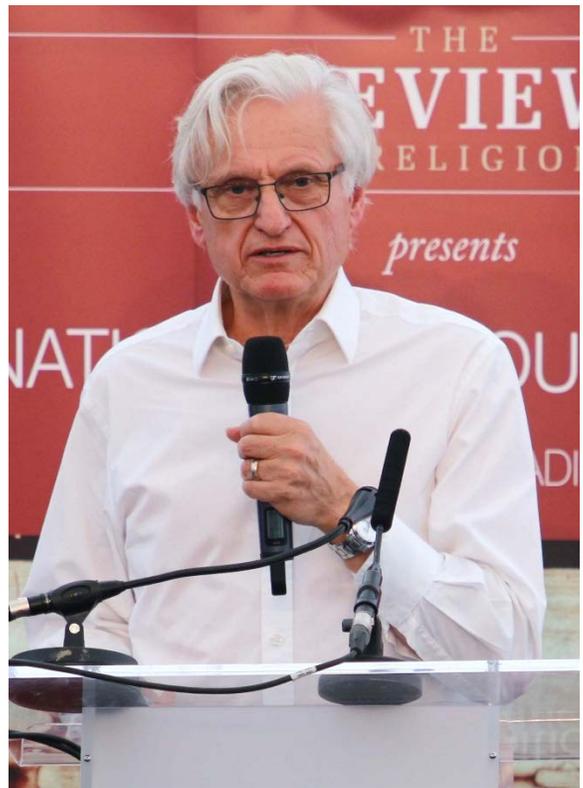
David Rolfe makes a presentation to a full house. Photo ©2017 Review of Religions



The first to speak was **Bruno Barberis**, Past-President of the **International Center of Sindonology** in Turin, Italy, who presented the beautifully made short film that typically is shown to visitors when the actual Shroud is on public display in Turin, and which serves as an excellent introduction to the Shroud itself. Then Bruno made his important general presentation of studies and research on the Shroud and discussed the issue of further studies and the future of Shroud research. The audience was thrilled to have such an important representative from Turin attend their event. Bruno mentioned to me at the end of the first day that he was “amazed at the interest in the Shroud by the Ahmadiyya Community” and I am sure he reported this to Turin when he returned. I told him that was why I suggested he be invited, so he could “see this for himself!”

Bruno Barberis  
Photo ©2017 STERA, Inc.

Next to make his presentation was **David Rolfe**, the BAFTA award winning British filmmaker who produced the first documentary ever made about the Shroud of Turin (**The Silent Witness**) in 1978. David is also a world renowned Shroud scholar and the new Editor of the **BSTS Newsletter**. David made a very powerful presentation that discussed the problems with the 1988 radiocarbon dating of the Shroud and did so in dramatic and graphic terms using segments from his most recent film, **A Grave Injustice**, which deals specifically with the dating of the Shroud. The audience was truly captivated by his presentation and showed their appreciation and interest in the questions and comments that followed.



David Rolfe  
Photo ©2017 Review of Religions



The next speaker was my old friend **Mark Guscini**, British Shroud scholar, member of the Centro Español de Sindonologia in Spain, former Editor of the BSTS Newsletter, professional linguist and an expert on the **Sudarium of Oviedo**. Mark was invited specifically to discuss the connection between the Shroud of Turin and the Sudarium since it had only been mentioned in passing at the past two previous Jalsa events and the Review team decided it was time to bring more about it to the Ahmadiyya Community.

Mark Guscini  
Photo ©2017 Jostein Andreassen

As part of his visual presentation, Mark demonstrated (on me, no less!) how the Sudarium would have been wrapped around the head of the man to deposit the blood and fluid stains that are found on the cloth, kindly assisted by Bruno Barberis. Frankly, I hope Mark gets the replica cloth washed pretty soon. I don't know how many times he has used it in the past, but it certainly had a rather stale odor!

Mark Guscini and Bruno Barberis  
Photo ©2017 Jostein Andreassen



I gave my standard presentation, “35 Years of Shroud Science: A Personal Perspective,” which reviews the STURP research and conclusions and takes you behind the scenes of our 1978 scientific examination. As always, the Ahmadiyya audience was extremely attentive and asked some excellent questions at the end. On a side note, I recently came to the realization that next year I am going to have to change it to “40 Years of Shroud Science...” since 2018 marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the STURP examination.

Barrie Schwartz  
Photo ©2017 Review of Religions

As we have done at the past two events, several of us once again appeared in a 30 minute live program on the Ahmadiyya Community's MTA Television Network, which goes out to 150 million viewers! This time, Bruno Barberis, David Rolfe and I shared the stage with **Amer Safir**, the Editor of *The Review of Religions*. We were interviewed by the same host that we first met last year and it is amazing how quickly 30 minutes passes when you are in front of the camera. As of this writing, we do not have the links to videos of the program but will include them in a future website update.

Meanwhile, back at the Shroud Exhibit marquee, Pam Moon's wonderful team of **Brenda and Stuart Benton** and **Luigi Antoniaz** along with our good friend **Hugh Farey**, past Editor of the *BSTS Newsletter*, were staying busy full time meeting with the thousands of visitors that came through the exhibit during the three day event. Because the lectures were being held in a different marquee, far more visitors were able to see the exhibit and spend more time asking questions and learning about the Shroud.



Pam Moon



Brenda Benton



Stuart Benton



Luigi Antoniaz



Hugh Farey

Above photos ©2017 Review of Religions

Another interesting thing I noticed about this year’s Jalsa Salana event was the minimal amount of media coverage it received. There were only a few reporters visible throughout the event and the request for interviews, which are typically quite extensive, were far fewer this year. Interestingly, one of the few interview requests I received was from the *Jewish Chronicle* in London. That may well be the first time I was ever interviewed by a Jewish media outlet and I wasn’t really sure what to expect. I actually thought the first question might be, “What are you doing here?” But I was wrong. I was interviewed by a young Jewish writer named **Rina Wolfson**, who had taken some time to look over the event before the interview began. Instead of questioning my participation, she was so overwhelmed by the spirit of the event she asked the same question I did, “Where is the media coverage?” In fact, she wrote a beautiful article that appeared on the *Jewish Chronicle* website on August 3, 2017 titled, [Humbled by a Muslim Gathering](#). Read it for yourself and you’ll see exactly what I mean. Rina’s sensitivity to the subject matter, her respect for our hosts and her wisdom in realizing that good news rarely ever makes the news, shows a depth and consideration rarely found in today’s mainstream press.



Barrie & Rina Wolfson - Photo ©2017 Brenda Benton



Pam Moon, Barrie Schwartz, His Holiness Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, Bruno Barberis, Luigi Antoniaz and Jostein Andreassen – Photo ©2017 Review of Religions

Without doubt however, the highlight of the event for those of us involved in the Shroud Exhibit was the private meeting we had with **His Holiness, Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad**, the Spiritual Leader of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. At his invitation, we were ushered into a smaller marquee where he sat behind a small table as we sat in a row of chairs before him. For the next fifteen minutes we had a wonderful exchange, talking about the Shroud Exhibit and the Jalsa itself. Also with us was Amer Safir, the Editor of the *Review of Religions*, and His Holiness graciously suggested that next year, Pam Moon and I should be made permanent members of the *Review* team! I considered that our invitation to return next year for the 52<sup>nd</sup> Annual Jalsa Salana and am already looking forward to it.

This article would not be complete without thanking at least some of the important people that made our participation in this year's event such a great success. (I hope I haven't missed anyone). Of course, at the top of the list are our sponsors at the *Review of Religions*, **Amer Safir**, Chief Editor, **Shahzad Ahmad**, Editor of Islam and Contemporary Issues and **Arif Khan**, Deputy Editor for the Christianity section and the entire *Review* team. A special word of thanks is due to Arif's wonderful family, who have graciously made me feel like I am a blood relative every year I have come to the Jalsa! My deepest thanks and appreciation to **Bruno Barberis**, **Mark Guscini** and **David Rolfe** for accepting the invitation to come and speak at the event and making it such a rewarding experience for everyone who attended. I also want to thank my friend **Razwan Baig** and his entire family for their company and for graciously inviting me into their home and feeding me a spectacular meal. Of course, my sincerest thanks to **Pam Moon** for bringing her wonderful Exhibit and team, **Brenda and Stuart Benton** and **Luigi Antoniaz** and to **Hugh Farey**, who all tirelessly answered countless questions from thousands of exhibit visitors. And finally, to **His Holiness**, for his generosity and love in making us all feel so welcome, appreciated and a part of the Ahmadiyya family. I hope to see you all again next year, Inshallah!

Here is one more photograph of the “team” from our good friend, noted Islamic photographer **Nassem Hayat**:



Luigi Antoniaz, Barrie Schwartz, Stuart Benton, Brenda Benton, Pam Moon, Mark Guscini, Jostein Andreassen and Hugh Farey – Photo ©2017 Nassem Hayat