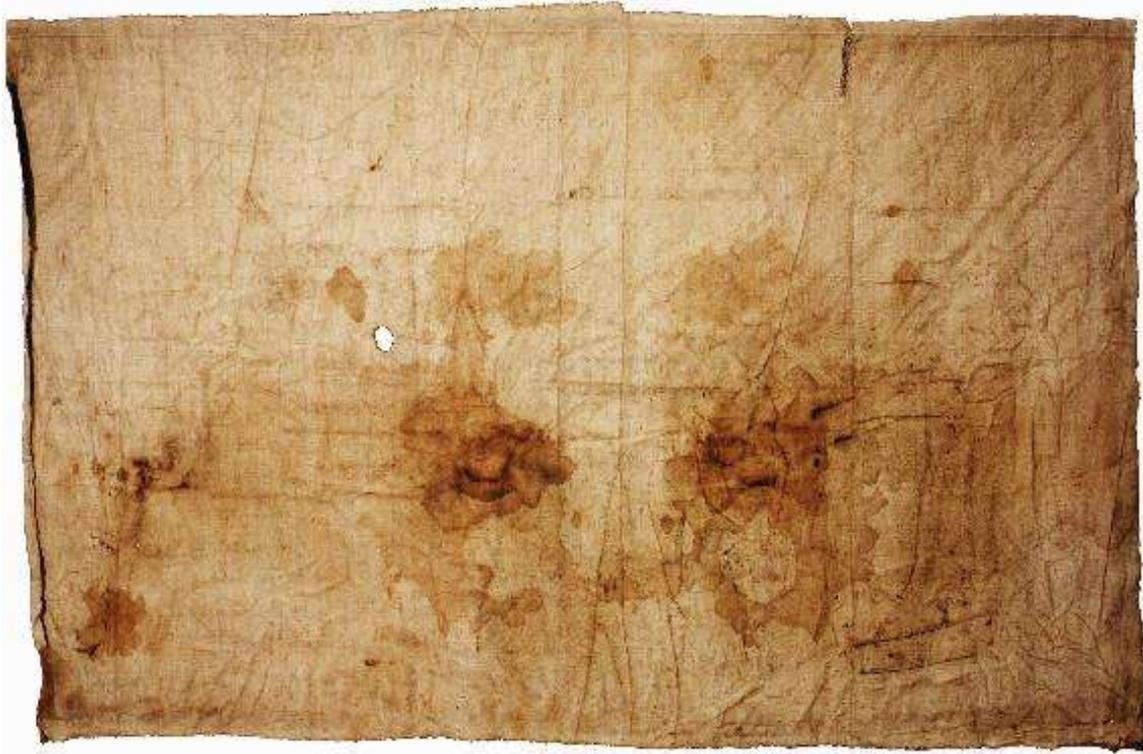


THE SUDARIUM OF OVIEDO

Mark Guscin (BSTS Member)



Often mentioned in Shroud circles as marked with imprints that match those on the Shroud is a little known Spanish relic known as THE OVIEDO SUDARIUM (seen above). Opinions vary as to whether this ancient cloth's enigmatic stains offer a genuine match to the Shroud, or whether it's all just wishful thinking, but here BSTS member Mark Guscin, who has written an as yet unpublished book on the relic, gives his interpretation of the known facts:

This sudarium has been mentioned various times in Shroud society newsletters, but no clear explanation of what it is, and what it represents, has been given in the English language. It is difficult to summarise the detailed study that has been carried out on the sudarium in Spain, but I think that anyone interested in the Shroud should at least have this basic knowledge.

The sudarium is a piece of cloth which has been in Spain since the seventh century. It measures 84 x 53 cm. and contains only bloodstains mixed with serum. There is no image on the cloth. It is claimed that this is the cloth mentioned in John 20:6-7, the cloth that was lying apart from the main linen in the empty tomb.

The history of the cloth is to be found in the Book of Testaments of Oviedo, written by the bishop of Pelayo (Pelagius) in the twelfth century. According to this work, the sudarium was kept in Jerusalem until shortly before the year 614, when the Persian king Chosroes II conquered the city. It was taken first to Alexandria, and from there across the

north of Africa, in constant retreat from the advancing Persians. It was brought into Spain via Cartagena and taken to Seville under the guardianship of San Ildefonso, who took it with him when he was appointed bishop of Toledo. When the Moors invaded and conquered Spain, the chest containing the sudarium and various other relics was taken northward, until it finally came to Oviedo, where a special room was built for it in the cathedral. The key date in the history of the sudarium is 14th March 1075, when the chest was opened in the presence of King Alfonso VI and Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar, better known as El Cid. A list was made of the relics contained therein, a copy of which is still in the cathedral at Oviedo. The sudarium has been kept in Oviedo ever since.

This historical route from Jerusalem through North Africa and into Spain has been confirmed by Max Frei, who found pollen from all these areas, and no others, when he examined the sudarium.

The bloodstains on the cloth show that it was used to cover the dead man's face, and folded over on itself, although not in the middle. The blood soaked all the way through, in a logical order of decreasing intensity. The astonishing thing about the stains is that they coincide exactly with the shape and form of the face of the man on the Shroud. The length of the nose is exactly 8cms. on both cloths, and the identical form of the chin and beard are is remarkable.

The cloth has been studied in great detail by a special investigation team from the Centro Español de Sindonologia, who have observed that this sudarium was in contact with the dead man's face for a limited period of time, because only fresh blood has stained it, not coagulated or clotted blood. This is evident from the fact that the stains are superimposed, and would also explain the absence of the inverted 3-shaped blood stain, as this blood would already have clotted. Dr. Alan Whanger has also suggested that the crown of thorns was still in place when the sudarium was applied to the face. Dr. Whanger applied the Polarized Image Overlay Technique to the sudarium and the Shroud, and concluded that both cloths must have covered the same face.

It is generally accepted that suffocation was the direct cause of death in crucifixion. When this happens, a kind of serum collects in the lungs of the crucified person. This is exactly what is present in the nasal area bloodstains on the sudarium, suggesting that the cause of death was the same as that of the man of the Shroud.

Most of the medical examination on the sudarium has been carried out by Dr. Villalain of the University of Valencia. His studies have shown that the cloth was held to the man's face in the nasal area - there are even traces of the fingerprints of the man who held it there - could these possibly be those of the disciple John? The blood and serum came out through the nose due to the jolting movements of taking the body down from the cross and carrying it to the tomb. Calculating the time lapse between the super imposed stains, Dr. Villalain has concluded that the body must have lain still between being taken down from the cross and carried to the tomb. This time lapse of about one hour could have been the waiting time to receive Pilate's permission to bury the body.

Covering the disfigured face of a dead man was perfectly in keeping with Jewish burial traditions. The cloth would have been discarded on entering the tomb, when the larger linen cloths were wrapped around the body. This is why the sudarium was lying apart.

The well-known sindonologist Dr. Baima Bollone has analysed blood samples from both the sudarium and the Shroud, and found that both belong to the same group, namely AB.

The only possible conclusion from all the investigation is that these two cloths were in contact with the same face. The history of the sudarium is documented from the first century, with no doubts or possible misinterpretations. This is conclusive evidence that the Shroud of Turin must also date from the first century.