

Sindone Shroud Suaire Grabtuch Sabana

DVD produced by the Archdiocese of Turin, in association with Nova-T Images without frontiers and Art EXE, with the Museum of the Shroud, Turin, supported by Euphon & Telesubalpina. With contributions by Nello Balossino, Bruno Barberis, Mechthild Flury-Lemberg, Timoty Verdon & Gian Maria Zaccone – www.dvdsindone.it

Review by Ian Wilson

Just as in 1898 use of the relatively new invention of photography opened up a new era for Shroud study, so the development of digital imaging is about to do the same for the subject during this 21st century. Late last year the Turin archdiocese released its much awaited DVD making available on one disc all the latest data and images on the Shroud. And what a technological and artistic triumph this is. Open up the Sindone DVD, and you are immediately invited to choose the language in which you wish to hear the soundtrack, with choices in Italian, English, French, German and Spanish. To an Englishman, at least, the English language narrator could not have been better chosen, with a beautifully modulated voice, setting just the right tone of hushed reverence in the presence of a sacred mystery. Although the DVD is unlikely to satisfy those who were so vocal in disapproving Turin's initiative authorising the 2003 conservation work, to me the DVD is a visual feast and a superb presentation of why the conservation work was necessary, also the fresh data that are already being gleaned from it

The DVD is in a series of sections, and the first of these, absolutely stunning for its presentation of the places in which the Shroud has been in the course of its history is 'The Man of Pain'. This is the oldest component of the presentation, having been produced for the 1998 exposition, using high definition images of the Shroud filmed displayed in a Turin church in the immediate aftermath of the 1997. The photography is also high definition in respect of the historical locations, which include street scenes in Jerusalem; the Pool of Abraham in Urfa (the former Edessa), Harran in Eastern Turkey, interior views of St. Catherine's monastery, Sinai, including its icons; Istanbul, including interior views of Hagia Sophia; some lyrically misty images of Lirey; St.Hippolyte-sur-Doubs with its (relatively modern) stained glass window; the interior of the Sainte Chapelle at Chambéry, the Alps (representative of the Shroud's journey across these to Turin in 1578), and of course, Turin itself, including its excellent Shroud museum. Throughout it was Italian cinematography at its best, with several beautifully acted and lightly conveyed dramatisations of key moments in the Shroud's history.

For me it was a particular delight to find the theory of the identification of the Shroud with the image of Edessa presented in a thoughtful way which still allowed a measure of doubt. Likewise the issue of the carbon dating was conveyed in a very intelligent way, with some interesting video clips of the sample cutting. The commentary rightly stressed the considerable contamination that the cloth has been subjected to even from the known events of its history. The introduction of Isaiah's prophecies of the Suffering Servant hit just the right note. For Anglo-Saxon tastes the closing images of an Italian language lament by an aged Virgin Mary were so out of key compared to all that had gone before that they might have been best omitted. However this is a matter of individual taste, and this in no way detracted from what overall was a visual masterpiece.

The DVD also includes excellent individual presentations by key personnel such as Don Giuseppe Ghiberti; Mechthild Flury Lemberg, Bruno Barberis and Nello Balossino. Their words again are conveyed in a good English language translation, and the filming of Mechthild Flury-Lemberg and her assistant Irene Tomedi carrying out the removal of the 1534 Holland cloth and patches is another visual feast. Yet another section allows comparison of sections of the Shroud with the 1532 fire patches in place, compared to the same sections with the patches removed. From these it is quite apparent that considerable areas of original Shroud have been revealed where previously these were covered by soot-filled 16th century patches. From careful study of these, I still cannot perceive the Flury-Lembeg and Tomedi conservation work as anything but beneficial, both for the Shroud's long-term preservation, and for the opening up of fresh data.

In short, this DVD represents an absolute 'must' for every serious 'Shroudie', and it comes with my highest possible recommendation. Now next on my wish list is a CD or DVD on which it is possible to zoom in and out of individual areas of the Shroud and view them at the very highest possible magnification....