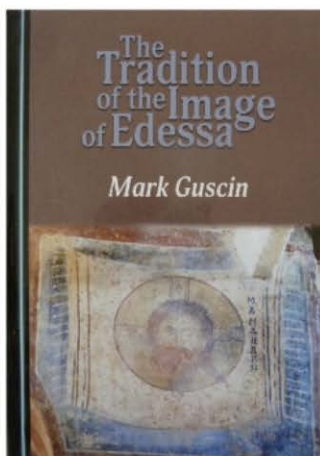


A Review



This remarkable book is the first comprehensive review of all the historic literature there is concerning the Image of Edessa, an image of Christ which seems to have been extremely important to the inhabitants of Edessa for several hundred years until it was taken to Constantinople, whereupon it all but disappeared from significance, leaving only its legend to spread across Europe and the Byzantine church. In view of the story's current liturgical eminence it is perhaps surprising this book has taken so long to arrive, as it is surely as complete a collection of primary sources as it is possible to assemble, in their original Greek and Latin as well as translated into English.

In view of the multiplicity of conflicting accounts, the title of this book is aptly chosen. It is not about the Image of Edessa as such, of which remarkably little can be said, but of the tradition surrounding it, the stories of its origin and its adventures in Turkey, mostly as a military talisman. This is rich soil for the exploration of the development of legend, and Guscini leaves no fragment unexamined. In a particularly interesting chapter he investigates various versions of the Life of Saint Alexis, in which the Image of Edessa plays a small but significant part, and in which there is a more explicit connection between the Image and the passion of Christ than appears in most of the stories of King Abgar and the miraculously imprinted face.

Of course the Image of Edessa is of particular interest to sindonologists because of its putative identification with the Shroud of Turin. In this, although I get the impression that he is broadly in favour, Guscini remains almost impartial. The overwhelming tradition of the Image is that of a relatively small cloth, carrying only the full-colour image of Christ's face, alive and undamaged. However there are a few tantalising descriptions that may be interpreted as describing a large cloth, or a full-length image, or bloodstains, and Guscini gives them full weight. The words *tetradiplon* and *mandylion*, which seem to have been specifically coined to describe the Image of Edessa, are analysed, as well as *sindon*,

soudarion, ikon and several others. However a brief mention of the contentious idea that the Image of Edessa was the foundation of an alleged conventional likeness of Christ is insufficient to be convincing.

Whether the actual Image of Edessa survived the sack of Constantinople, turned up in Paris or Lirey, or can be identified with any of the various Veronicas/Mandylions still extant, the object itself became completely divorced from its legend, which grew and spread in popular culture, appearing in amulets, icons, military banners, and more recently on stamps, coins and banknotes. Guscin's exploration of the use of the Abgar legend as a magic charm is fascinating.

Apart from a few minor points of contention, this is a truly scholarly work and an essential addition to the library of those who want to study the possible antecedents of the Shroud in detail and from primary sources. It is not a polemic, and will be disappointing to anyone hoping to 'prove' the authenticity or not of the Shroud. It is not an adventure story, and does not excitingly describe "one man's search for truth". It is a historian's book for historians, and all the better for it.

Hugh Farey

Editor's Note:

Mark Guscin, like his reviewer, Hugh, is a former editor of this Newsletter. He is not only a linguist and scholar but also runs a very successful translation agency. www.markguscin.com. His other publications can be seen here: shorturl.at/pzBY9. They include the definitive study of the Sudarium of Oviedo and a very popular novel.



“HITLER'S NOTEBOOKS” and MAX FREI-SULZER

by Pierre de Riedmatten

Certain authors have sought to impugn the reputation of Max Frei-Sulzer, and consequently his work on the pollens of the Shroud of Turin, because he