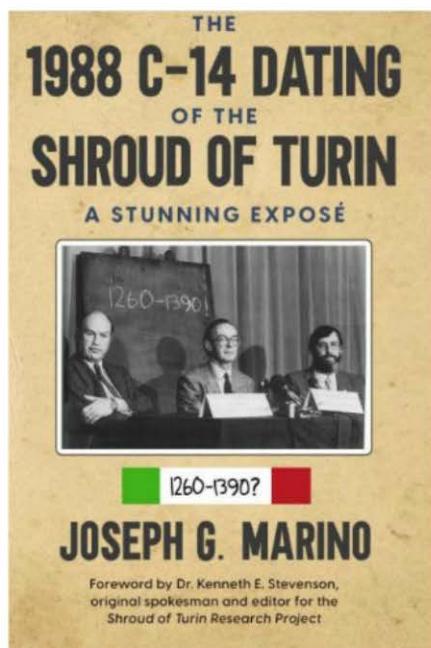


Former BSTS Editor Mark Guscini reviews Joe Marino's new book.



“The humanity of science.”

When our editor first asked me to review Joe Marino's new book, I have to admit I was slightly reticent. Not because of the size (well maybe that too) – the pdf version I was given is almost 900 pages long – but because I didn't particularly enjoy Joe's last personal memoir on the Shroud, as to my mind it is fodder for all the Shroud negationists, providing them with all the material they need to criticize the religious overlay that all too often fills Shroud books.

To say that I was pleasantly surprised by this huge book is something of an understatement. This is everything a good, serious book on the Shroud should

be. It is an account of the carbon dating of the Shroud back in 1988; absolutely everything from the time when the experiment was first discussed, through all the negotiations to the actual dating, followed by the different theories about why the date came out as medieval, which range from the conspiratorial to the scientific and back again.

I think that the overriding idea or sensation I came away with on finishing the book is summed up by the title of this review. There is a very widespread idea that Shroudies are a group of religious fanatics, while “scientists” are a homogenous group of people (in clean white coats and in nice clean laboratories) who are extremely knowledgeable, calm and never moved by such earthly concerns as money, fame or personal ambition. And they all agree with each other, because science is one and true. No matter what you think about the Shroud, this book should shatter that illusion forever. The scientists involved in the carbon dating were as human as you could imagine; fame-seeking, selfish,

money-grabbing and disloyal. They were hopelessly disorganized, seemed to have little idea about what they were dealing with and to care about it even less, they showed an unbelievable lack of respect for anyone who didn't share their own ideas, and that includes other scientists involved in the dating.

This said, in the book there are also signs of religious fanaticism in certain Shroudies; Marino quotes an interview in which Michael Tite was asked if the resurrection could have caused the image and if he believed in the gospels. What on earth did they expect him to answer? The resurrection can never be proved as a historical event, despite all the well-meaning efforts; it is a personal belief. Just because you believe in it does not make it historical. Even if it is a historical event, how could anyone ever know whether it involved a discharge of energy that produced an image on the burial cloth? That is not science or history.

Marino skilfully avoids falling into this trap himself. Just to make it clear, Marino quotes the interview; he does not endorse it. He is even honest enough to admit that the same traits of jealousy and backbiting are also evident within the Catholic Church. As a personal comment, it never ceases to amaze me how little interest there is in the Shroud within the Church; but most members seem to believe more in the institution and to have a lesser interest in the actual person it is (supposedly) based upon.

But well, back to the book. Are there any negative points? One thing that constantly annoyed me as a linguist is the atrocious level of English in some of the Italian congress presentations and books; it is beyond me why they are not obliged to present a text in the English language, not just in English words. The tense system in the two languages is so different that at times you have no idea what the person is saying. This, of course, is no fault of Joe's; he quotes the sources he has and should not correct the text. Mine is a general call for all articles and books to be professionally and correctly translated; otherwise, they cannot be taken seriously. Another point; there are two Wilsons in the book; Ian Wilson, founder and first editor of the BSTS and author, and Sir David Wilson; when the reference in the book is just to "Wilson" it is not always clear which one of them it is.

But these are minor quibbles in what really is an excellent work of scholarship.

Marino quotes what happened on each relevant date, using books, letters (and later emails) and congress presentations as his source, thus guaranteeing that the words are not misunderstood. The source is then detailed, and followed by the author's own comments, which are serious, balanced and difficult to argue with should you wish to.

Even though it is undeniable that the whole affair was a scientific disaster from start to finish, I still think that the laboratories did date samples from the Shroud and that the date they obtained was the one they published. The explanation to my mind lies in Joe Marino's own work, as verified by Ray Rogers; the samples they dated were cut from a part of the Shroud that was chemically different from the main cloth.

This said, once we get past the lunatic theories of anti-Catholic plots in the book, I personally would have appreciated more on Joe's own work concerning the reweave, and on Ray Rogers' reaction and verification thereof. I am aware that this information is all available elsewhere, but I think it would have made an excellent addition and ending to the book; after all, there isn't much difference between 800 pages and 900!

In summary, this is one of the best Shroud books you could ever hope to find. The way it is presented means it cannot be dismissed as wishful thinking. This book is science; it is scholarly and academic. Joe himself says in the Conclusion: *"I believe I have presented irrefutable proof that politics, and not the pursuit of truth, was the main theme of the C-14 dating of the Shroud"*. The book does indeed do this; even if I were to adopt the position of the devil's advocate, which is something I often do, I could not argue against this. On a more personal note, all I can do is congratulate the author on his painstaking work and excellent presentation of the facts.

Joe's book is available from Amazon and all good book shops.
