

The Role of the Internet in Current Shroud Research

by

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The Shroud of Turin Website

www.shroud.com

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Abstract

In the paper I delivered in Turin last year¹, I discussed the role I believed the Internet could play in the future of Shroud research. I suggested a number of possible applications and cited some examples that were already in place on the Shroud of Turin Website. In the last twelve months, the expansion of the Internet has been explosive, with nearly 70,000 new viewers logging on every day.² That totals over 25,000,000 new viewers in just one year! With the increase in viewers has come amazing advances in both hardware and software. Many of the "future applications" I mentioned last year have already become reality.

In this paper, I will review the role communications played in earlier Shroud research and cite examples of how the Internet and other new technologies have changed the way Shroud studies are being conducted today.

Communications and Shroud Research

My personal observations of Shroud research began in late 1976, when I became the Official Documenting Photographer for the Shroud of Turin Research Project (STURP). As a member of the team, I was directly involved in the two years of planning that culminated in STURP's participation in the 120-hour examination of the Shroud in October 1978.

The STURP team spent over two years planning their experiments and another three years analyzing the data they collected after they returned. During that time, the need for effective communications in Shroud research became quite apparent. This period was often frustrating because the team was comprised of small groups of researchers located in many different cities across the United States. The only available means of communications between the various groups was either telephone or written correspondence.

One of the more obvious problems I observed during this period was the lack of communications that existed, not only within the project, but between our team and researchers from other groups. To a great extent, it was due to the limits of 1970's communications technology. There were no fax machines or e-mail and the researchers

were truly scattered around the world. At a time when *increased* cooperation and communication was an obvious and important necessity, it seemed that just the opposite was occurring.

Throughout this same period, researchers around the world frequently discussed the need for the establishment of an International Center for Shroud study. Although several groups incorporated the word "international" into their names, there was very little actual international activity. It was clear to everyone that there was a need for a truly global organization or center, but concerns over costs, location, language and administration made it nothing more than a distant dream.

In the years following the 1988 carbon dating of the Shroud, I noticed items still appearing in the commercial press and media, but most of these were just attempts to explain how the so-called "forgery" of the Shroud was perpetrated. Many claimed to have "solved the mystery" of the image, although often these were written by people with apparently little first-hand knowledge of the subject matter. Yet the media attention they garnered made them seem credible to the public.

In effect, after the release of the carbon dating results, many serious scientists disengaged from Shroud research, leaving a vacuum that was quickly filled by theorists with little scientific experience or first hand knowledge of the Shroud. This had the unfortunate side effect of clouding the waters even more and blending Shroud fact with fiction. After all the hours of serious, scientific research that had been performed on the Shroud of Turin (making it the most studied artifact in human history), the science wound up hidden away in journals available only from research libraries while the public continued to be misinformed by the popular and tabloid press. It seemed as if no progress had been made at all and that so much effort by so many people had been wasted.

Over the years, a number of journals were published that were dedicated to sindonology. Most notable are "Sindon" and "Collegamento pro Sindone,"³ both published in Italy and "Shroud Spectrum International," published in the United States from 1981 to 1993 by Dorothy Crispino.⁴ These excellent journals gave sindonologists a proper forum for presenting their work, but brought with them their own set of limitations. "Sindon" and "Collegamento pro Sindone" are published only in Italian, limiting access to those who speak the language. "Shroud Spectrum" provided an excellent solution to the problem by reprinting English translations of papers that originally appeared in "Sindon," as well as new papers, but sadly, it ceased publication in 1993.

A Solution Is Found

In the early 1990's, new information about the Shroud started to filter out to the public. My own interest was renewed at this time and I began to consider the best means possible to make my 1978 materials available to a larger segment of the public. I started thinking about the Internet as a possibility and found myself online for the first time in October 1995.

It was immediately obvious that the Internet provided something that no other medium before it could offer: instant global communications. On January 21, 1996, the Shroud of Turin Website went online.⁵

The response was almost immediate. E-mails began arriving from veteran Shroud researchers and from those who were new to sindonology. All were excited at the prospect of a dedicated Shroud website and many allowed their work to be reprinted online. Soon I was corresponding with hundreds of people around the world. The website was fast becoming the long sought after international center for Shroud studies. In addition to dedicated Shroud researchers, many other scientists were viewing the site and writing me to share their ideas or make comments. And the public was visiting as well. Many wrote just to tell me how happy they were to find Shroud science finally available to everyone. It quickly became clear that my original idea of a small website to share some of my Shroud materials had grown into something much larger and more important than I ever imagined. This new technology had provided the mechanism to make Shroud research a truly international effort.

Now, little more than three years later, with over 331,000 visitors from 137 countries, the website has grown into the largest Shroud site on the Internet (over 21 MB and growing fast). It has succeeded because of the cooperation of so many others in the world involved directly or indirectly with the Shroud research. And it now links together a network of more than 35 Shroud websites⁶ covering every aspect of Shroud science, history and theology on both sides of the authenticity issue. More than that, it demonstrates that the Internet has become one of the most important tools available to enhance the knowledge and goals of sindonologists everywhere.

The Internet at Work

The Internet has provided an ideal solution by presenting many articles in multiple languages and permitting the viewer to select the language of his choice.⁷ And the elimination of printing and postage costs makes publishing such an electronic journal far more economically practical. Another advantage of the Internet is the simplicity of making corrections, additions and updates to an article when necessary, a virtual impossibility with conventional printed journals. In addition, with such increased international cooperation, a multidisciplinary panel of experts could eventually be established to serve as a peer review board for future papers submitted for publication.

Over the past three years, in cooperation with the Collegamento pro Sindone, a number of articles previously available only in one language have been translated into multiple languages and reprinted on the respective websites.^{8 9} In addition, through the efforts of the Centro Español de Sindonología, a Spanish language website has been online for over a year.¹⁰ And, I am pleased to report, websites in French¹¹ and Russian are also now online.

Non-reviewed articles have also been reprinted for the benefit of researchers and the lay public alike. The "Scientific Papers & Articles" page of the website already includes many of these.

One of the greatest challenges to modern Shroud research is finding and accessing previously published work. Even with access to a sophisticated research library, many references are very hard to find. Through the cooperation of all of the world's largest Shroud collections, a massive bibliography of books and articles has been compiled and is found on the "Shroud Booklist" page of the Shroud of Turin Website,¹² and the Scientific Articles page of the Collegamento pro Sindone Website.¹³ Finally, easily accessible, centrally located bibliographies are available to everyone.

Along these same lines, even when a reference is determined, it is often impossible to find the actual paper or journal. Many important references are out of print and more than twenty years old. Over the last three years, rights have been obtained to reprint a number of these on the website and more are being added constantly. This will be continued and in time, the network of Shroud websites will become the central repositories and primary resources of Shroud data for sindonologists worldwide.

Without question, the Shroud of Turin stimulates heated debates. These often take the form of responses to articles and personal correspondence between individual researchers. The website has already been host to a number of such debates through the good graces of all the participants who have made their materials available for publication.¹⁴ This feature will be expanded and grow to provide a true open international forum for continued discussion that allows other interested parties to enter the debate.

Conferences such as this one have also benefited from using the Internet. I regularly checked the Richmond Center Website for the up-to-date schedule of the speakers planned for this event and to see the amount of available seating that remained.¹⁵ And of course, the final papers presented here will eventually be published on the Internet to supplement the production of a written acts or printed proceedings.

Already in place on the Shroud of Turin Website is the "Research Registry" page,¹⁶ where many researchers have already "advertised" for materials they needed. These have included blood and linen samples, rare books or articles and access to special facilities. And in some cases, organizations or individuals with resources to offer for Shroud research have posted them on the site to make them available to those who might need them.

With the continued worldwide interest in the Shroud, many researchers are often called upon by lay and professional groups to make presentations and give lectures. An international Shroud Speakers Directory has recently been added to the website.¹⁷ This provides organizations looking for such speakers a central source of qualified experts to select from. Listings include biographies, topics and geographic availability of each speaker.

Another useful function of the website is the gathering of statistical information and data. Some researchers have designed a questionnaire that website viewers fill out and send in.¹⁸ The researchers will receive the information via e-mail and can integrate the responses directly into their analyses.

The increased use of the Internet for research by students and scientists necessitated the development of a standardized notation for citing references taken from the web. This has been researched and a number of suggested formats are now included on key pages of the website (Shroud Library, Scientific Papers & Articles, Religion & Philosophy pages). Also, the growth in other, specialized Shroud websites, particularly those geared towards students,¹⁹ has provided added resources for the next generation of Shroud researchers.

Also, an efficient manner of reprinting technical scientific papers was needed that kept the resident symbols, scientific notation, graphs, charts, illustrations and photographs intact. Over the last three years, Adobe's Acrobat .pdf format has grown to become an international standard for document handling and management. In part, this is because it provides excellent tools for viewing documents (in or out of your browser window) and in part because Adobe gives away the program for free (you can download it from their website). It has now been adopted for use on the Shroud of Turin website and constitutes the format of choice for nearly 75% of all new papers added to the site. All a researcher needs to do is submit the proofread article electronically using Microsoft Word .doc format and it is easily converted to .pdf format for publication. It even allows the use of multiple languages without the viewer having the font installed on his computer. And it is platform independent. The same Acrobat file can be used on Macs, PC's, Unix and IBM OS2 computers.

New technologies for viewing images on the Internet are rapidly becoming available and several are destined to become standards. These are being carefully tracked to determine their future value for website viewers. One such format, Live Picture, allows viewers to zoom in and out or pan across large, high resolution images using a plug-in to their internet browser software. We hope to add this powerful feature soon and allow viewers to examine the subtlest details of the Shroud of Turin at their leisure.

Finally, a search capability will be added in the near future that will allow website viewers to enter key words and quickly search through the entire website to find information specific to their needs. This will be particularly useful as the quantity of materials on the site increases.

Conclusions

Interaction and communication between Shroud researchers worldwide was historically limited by the state of available communication technologies and the physical inability of researchers to cooperate with each other and openly share their data. The value of a globally accessible international center for Shroud studies has long been accepted.

Recent developments in communication technology have provided us with powerful new tools for instant global communications. With the advent of these new technologies, the obstacles to creating an international Shroud center have been eliminated and the center is already open for business. But in this case, the center resides in cyberspace rather than in a physical location. And instead of a single website, the center is actually a growing network of Shroud related websites around the world, linked together and cooperating to create an exciting and fertile environment for sharing Shroud information and presenting ideas from every point of view. The role of the Internet in Shroud research is no longer a thing of the future. It is today's reality.

References

Note: I have chosen to include my references as Internet addresses rather than in the conventional form since they all can be found on or via the Shroud of Turin Website. (If you are reading this paper on the Internet, just click on the reference and you will go directly to the specific page. If you are reading this in a printed proceedings, just open your Internet browser, select the File Menu, Open Location, type in the address and hit the Enter key).

¹ The Role of the Internet in the Future of Shroud Research - The 1998 Turin Symposium
<http://www.shroud.com/schwartz.htm>

² Intel

³ Collegamento pro Sindone Gateway Page - <http://www.shroud.com/collegam.htm>

⁴ Index to Shroud Spectrum International- <http://www.shroud.com/spectrum.htm>

⁵ The Shroud of Turin Website Home Page - <http://www.shroud.com/>

⁶ Links To More Information Page - <http://www.shroud.com/infolink.htm>

⁷ Scientific Papers & Articles Page - <http://www.shroud.com/papers.htm>

⁸ Il Ruolo Di Internet Nel Futuro Della Ricerca Sulla Sindone -
<http://space.tin.it/scienza/bachm/RUOLO.htm>

⁹ The Collegamento pro Sindone Website - <http://space.tin.it/scienza/bachm>

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- ¹⁰ Centro Español de Sindonologia Website - <http://www.ctv.es/USERS/linteum>
- ¹¹ Montre-Nous Ton Visage Website - <http://www.asso.itbs.fr/mntv>
- ¹² Shroud of Turin Booklist - <http://www.shroud.com/booklist.htm>
- ¹³ Bibliography of Articles - <http://space.tin.it/scienza/bachm/ARTICLES.HTM>
- ¹⁴ Biblical Archaeology Review Article/Responses - <http://www.shroud.com/bar.htm>
- ¹⁵ Richmond Center Website - <http://members.aol.com/turin99/shroud.htm>
- ¹⁶ Research Registry Page - <http://www.shroud.com/registry.htm>
- ¹⁷ Speakers Directory Page - <http://www.shroud.com/speakers.htm>
- ¹⁸ "A probabilistic model to quantify the results of the research on the Turin Shroud" - The 1998 Turin Symposium - <http://www.shroud.com/fanti2en.pdf> (also available in Italian)
- ¹⁹ The Shroud of Turin Education Project - <http://www.shroud2000.com>