

A Personal Report on the 2014 St. Louis Conference

by Barrie Schwartz

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An international conference titled, **Shroud of Turin: The Controversial Intersection of Faith and Science**, was held in St. Louis, Missouri, on October 9-12, 2014, at the **Drury Plaza Inn** in Chesterfield. The event was co-sponsored by the **Resurrection of the Shroud Foundation** and the **Salt River Production Group** and the Chairman of the Organizing Committee was **Joseph Marino**. The event was truly international in scope, with speakers and attendees from around the world representing Australia, Canada, England, France, Hong Kong, Italy, Panama, Spain and the United States. More than 160 attendees sat through full days of presentations on a wide variety of topics and remained attentive and dedicated throughout.

The attendance figures alone are a testimony to the overall success of this conference. A total of 162 attendees (nearly double the number that attended the 2008 Columbus, Ohio conference) sat through very long days (up to 12 or 13 hours) with very short breaks and yet, they were among the most attentive I have ever seen at a Shroud conference.

So was it a *great* conference or only a good one? We do have the 2008 Columbus Conference (the last one held in America) to compare to, and there *were* some problems with this conference that did not occur in 2008. Probably the single biggest complaint by the attendees was the extremely full schedule each day, with 20 papers delivered on Friday and 17 on Saturday. This left virtually no time between presentations for any discussions or questions from the other attendees. In Ohio in 2008, fewer papers were presented and consequently, a Q & A session was scheduled once or twice during each day of the conference. In St. Louis, only one such session was scheduled for the entire event, on Saturday evening, and it did not begin until about 9:00 p.m. Considering that the presentations started that morning at 8:00 a.m. and only one hour each was allocated for lunch and dinner, the audience had already spent about 10 hours in the room that day before the Discussion Session even began! In spite of all that, thanks to the true dedication of the attendees, it was still one of the highlights of the entire conference.

In all fairness, I was not on the organizing committee that reviewed and selected the papers and not party to their decisions, but I am sure they simply wanted to include as many of the papers submitted to them as possible. Unfortunately, that made for some frustrating moments and a rather tiring event, but one that was certainly well worth the effort. To help mitigate the lack of discussion issue and address some of the criticisms that came afterwards, the organizers promptly added an interactive [Discussion Forum](#) page to their website where questions or comments could be posted and discussed with conference authors. Under the circumstances, I believe that was an excellent solution.

Aside from that single issue, the organizers did an otherwise superb job of producing a successful, enjoyable and educational Shroud conference. The presentations covered a wide range of topics in the fields of physics, radiocarbon dating, blood chemistry, history, imaging, theology, art and much more. In the end, the organizers provided the most important ingredient necessary for a successful Shroud conference: a warm atmosphere of friendship, sharing and mutual respect.

Russ Breault opened the event on Thursday evening with one of his passionate, powerful and polished Shroud Encounter presentations. There is little doubt that Russ has emerged as one of the most important and prominent Shroud lecturers here in the U.S. and we are proud to have him on the STERA, Inc. Board of Directors. The rest of that first evening was spent in an informal gathering in the ballroom, where presenters and attendees could mingle and meet. Some of us stayed up late to catch up with old friends and some retired early. The conference was going to begin in earnest at 8:00 a.m. the next morning!

Friday, October 10th marked the first full day of presentations, and a full day it certainly was! A total of twenty papers were presented during the course of the day, which ended sometime after 9:00 p.m. Rather than list all the papers that were presented at the conference in this article, you can now visit the new [St. Louis Conference](#) page of Shroud.com and find the complete daily schedule of the entire event along with links to the papers, abstracts, PowerPoint presentations and photographs of the presenters. I will only mention some of them in this article.



The first papers of the day were by Raymond Schneider and Jeffrey Skurka, both dealing with the radiocarbon dating of the Shroud. The next two presentations were specifically about the radiocarbon dating samples themselves. The first was by our dear friend and colleague, French researcher Dr. Thibault Heimburger (far left in photo), who presented some very important and previously unavailable documentation in his paper, “The origin of Rogers’ Raes and C14 Samples.” The second was by Jon Schoonover of the Los Alamos National Laboratory and

detailed his research on Shroud samples in an article titled, “Spectrographic Analyses of Fibers from the Shroud of Turin - What do they Mean?” which was presented by Robert Villarreal.

One of the more surprising presentations of the first day was the paper by Joseph Accetta, one of the original members of the STURP team, which took a rather skeptical point of view. It was titled, “Speculations on the 14th Century Origins of the Turin Shroud” and the abstract states: “This paper is based on the assumption that the Shroud is of 14th century origins consistent with its radiocarbon date and thus must be explained within the technology and historical context of that era.” Joe also provided two additional commentaries, which are also included on the page.

Another excellent presentation, titled, “Natural, Manufactured or ‘Miracle’?” was made by British researcher Dr. Andrew Silverman, which had many of the attendees talking about it long afterwards. Papers by Petrus Soons and the Rev. Pete Schumacher dealt with specific features found on the Shroud, in this case, a “halo” or lighter area surrounding the facial image. A paper by Australian researcher Tony Fleming suggested that the Shroud image was formed by biophotons. Several rather technical physics papers by Daniel Spicer and Robert Villarreal suggested that charge separation or Alpha particle radiation were responsible for the image.

Our good friend César Barta of the CES (Centro Español de Sindonología) in Spain presented us with, “New Discoveries on the Sudarium of Oviedo.” This was followed by two papers about the Mandylion and the Shroud from researchers Sébastien Cataldo of France and Ivan Polverari of Italy. The day ended with a presentation from Giulio Fanti describing, “A Dozen Years of Shroud Science Group.” That evening, many of the attendees gathered in the Drury Plaza lobby to relax, have a glass of wine and discuss the papers that had been presented thus far. Again, some stayed up very late to continue their conversations, while others (perhaps the smartest ones in the group) retired early, since it all would begin again at 8:00 a.m. the next morning.

Saturday morning started with a fascinating presentation by Italian artist Veronica Piraccini, who shared with us her unique and dramatic painting based on the Shroud, which is only visible under ultraviolet illumination! This was followed by several theological presentations from Russ Breault and David Onysko. Although listed in the schedule, our good friend Rev. Kenneth Stevenson (original STURP team member) was unable to attend so his paper was not presented (although it is now available on Shroud.com). In his place, the organizers allowed Pam Moon, British Shroud researcher, to make a brief, unscheduled presentation detailing her further studies on the radiocarbon samples.

Next up were presentations from Dr. Frederick Baltz, Mark Antonacci and Professor Bruno Barberis, the President of the International Center for the Study of the Shroud in Turin, Italy. This was followed by the Keynote Address from the Most Rev. Michael Sheridan, Bishop of

Colorado Springs, who discussed “Science and the Mysteries of the Shroud.” Then, Bruno Barberis presented his truly important (and much awaited) paper on “The Future of Research on the Shroud.” This was followed by a presentation on another radiation theory from Robert Rucker, in this case, claiming that if neutron radiation was released from Jesus' body during the Resurrection, it would have impacted the radiocarbon dating. Naturally, this was well received by some in the audience, but not by everyone.

Next up was a presentation documenting a really interesting series of experiments regarding the blood markings of the Shroud performed by Art Lind and Mark Antonacci. Art attempted to duplicate the blood markings on different types of linen by stationing himself at a slaughterhouse and using fresh porcine (pig) blood for his tests. Although the final results were somewhat inconclusive, I really appreciated the design of the experiments.

One of my favorite conference papers was the special presentation by Kelly Kearse (see photo at right) titled, “A Critical (Re)evaluation of the Shroud of Turin Blood Data.” After the death of Al Adler in 2000, and for more than a decade, no credible blood or DNA experts remained actively involved in Shroud research. Then, in 2012, Kelly Kearse came on the scene and Shroud.com published the first of his blood papers that year (we have published four more since). Not only has he brought



us his expertise in this critical area of Shroud research, but equally as important is the amazing ability he brings to make these complex issues understandable to everyone. Perhaps it is because he now uses his Ph.D. to teach high school science and has to make the materials interesting and understandable to younger folks. In the end, I guess I liked his paper because I actually *understood* it! I also overheard Mark Borkan tell Kelly at the end of his talk that he had “...learned more about the blood in that 30 minute presentation than in all the personal conversations he had had directly with Al Adler.” Now that is a compliment!

Next on the schedule was an in-depth study of the Roman Flagrum by two Italian researchers, Flavia Mansevergi and Enrico Morini in a paper titled, “The Hypotheses about the Roman Flagrum - Some Clarifications.” That was followed by noted Shroud scholar and archaeologist, Paul Maloney and his excellent paper on the research done by Dr. Joseph Gambescia on the position of the feet on the Shroud. Then, our old friend Colorado artist Roger Bassett made a visual presentation based on his many years of exploration of the Shroud’s facial image. At that

point, the presentation part of the day came to an end and, after a short break, the only scheduled Open Discussion of the event took place.

Although it didn't begin until well after 9:00 p.m. on Saturday evening, the Open Discussion on Future Shroud Research was certainly a highlight of the event for many of the attendees. It was their first opportunity to ask some questions of the presenters and voice their opinions on some of the presentations. The open discussion was moderated by STURP co-founder John Jackson, who started with a thirty minute general presentation on the current state of his work on the Shroud. John then invited several presenters to join him on the stage, including Bruno Barberis and John's colleague, Daniel Siefker, and the floor was opened to questions.

The questions that followed and the discussions that ensued were often passionate, personal and emotional. I am hopeful that Russ Breault, who was videotaping during much of the event, was able to capture at least some of the flavor of the discussions on tape. I certainly cannot do them justice here in this article. However, I can tell you that the most quotable quote that evening (in my opinion) came from Bruno Barberis, when he was questioned as to when the next scientific testing of the Shroud will be permitted. His answer: "I am not the Pope, and I doubt that I will be the next Pope!" Bruno's brilliant statement of the obvious certainly brought a sense of honesty and humor to the moment. Beyond that, the discussion continued on until well past midnight and was one of those "you-had-to-be-there" events. The only problem was the 8:15 a.m. start time scheduled for the next morning!

I was trying to wake up during breakfast on Sunday morning after only five hours of sleep, when I overheard the following remark from a nearby table: "I am suffering from an overdose of neutron radiation!" I actually laughed out loud and immediately wrote it down so I could remember it and share it here with you! This was obviously a tongue-in-cheek commentary on the large number of radiation related papers that had been presented at the conference over the previous two days. I thought it was a brilliant remark (or at least it *seemed* brilliant at 7:30 a.m.)!

The final day of the conference was scheduled to end at noon and started with an extended, two part paper on Shroud history from historian Jack Markwardt, followed by a beautiful presentation from Emanuela Marinelli on, "The Shroud and the Iconography of Christ." That was followed by historian Dan Scavone's in-depth presentation on the Shroud in Edessa and my own short presentation titled, "Remembering Ray Rogers." The final paper of the event was delivered by Robert Siefker and was titled, "The Shroud: A Critical Summary of Observations, Data and Hypotheses Version 2.0." This was followed promptly by closing remarks from organizer Joe Marino and the conference was suddenly over. It was already 12:30 p.m. and sadly, many of us had to leave for the airport immediately to catch our flights home, so there was not much time for any real "goodbyes."

In the end, I am certain that everyone who attended had a truly great experience and I am sure that all the attendees appreciated the extraordinary efforts of the organizers, sponsors and participants in making the event such a great success. I certainly did!

Author's Note: My thanks to those of you that sent me some photos from the event. It is truly appreciated and I have included a few of them in this article.

Photo credits:

Page 2 - (L to R) Thibault Heimburger, Barrie Schwartz and Sébastien Cataldo ©2014 T. Heimburger

Page 4 - Kelly Kearse and Barrie Schwartz - ©2014 Kelly Kearse