

SHROUD: A CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY BOOKLET REVIEWED

The Burial Cloths of Christ, written by top Spanish syndologist Mark Guscini, this booklet claiming that the Sudarium and the Turin Shroud are both authentic, was published by London's Catholic Truth Society.

It begins by saying that the Sudarium was referred to in John's gospel. The booklet assumes that the cloth that was around the head that is mentioned there was the Sudarium. This is extremely unlikely because the Sudarium was put around the head of the man on the cross. Why would it be buried? John would have specified what cloth it was had it been that cloth for the Jewish custom was that the dead be buried with the face bare and a cloth over it. When he was not specific he was indicating that Jesus was buried according to this custom.

Page 6 dismisses the carbon dating by saying that the tests do not show that the Turin Shroud was from the 14th century but only that the amount of carbon 14 in the cloth is compatible with a 14th century origin. This is a distortion as you can see from the allegation that the laboratories that stick to the dating don't want to open their eyes – this is bringing in the conspiracy theory that all fundamentalist believers like to use when they seek to obstruct evidence that contradicts their suppositions.

The booklet says the bioplastic coating made the dating come out wrong and the effect of this coating was not known in 1988 so what would the laboratory have to gain by being so unscientific and unprofessional that they would stand by a dubious dating test? There are countless indications that the Shroud is not the winding sheet of Jesus so there is nothing to be frightened of if the cloth does turn out to be first century. The booklet says that if you are being scientific you will not believe one test that says the cloth is forged when other tests indicate authenticity (page 8). But the carbon dating test is the most important test of all for it is the only one with the hope of settling the question once and for all which the others can't do beyond all probable doubt.

Page 14-15 says that Leandro who died about 595 AD mentioned the imprint of the risen Lord on Jesus' burial cloths. But he says this was in the Mozarabic Liturgy which he PROBABLY wrote and then it was only a part if he did. We can dismiss that evidence for it is only speculation. The legend of the Veronica, a cloth with the print of Christ's face on it, would have inspired this legend that there were images on Jesus' burial cloths. There were so many legends that are now dismissed as nonsense from Leandro's time so why should we pay any attention to what he supposedly wrote?

Page 22-23, informs us that Braulio bishop of Zaragoza knew of the Shroud and Sudarium in the seventh century. It establishes that he wrote that we read that the two cloths were found in Jesus' tomb. But we don't read that they were kept. He said he doesn't think they would have been ignored to the extent that the apostles would not have kept them for the future. The word he uses for found indicates being found for the first time or after being lost (page 22). To me, this indicates that it was thought that the burial cloths disappeared from the tomb and strangely reappeared. This means that he is saying the original cloths vanished with Christ and new ones were put in the tomb. This does not sound like an endorsement of anything like the Turin Shroud and the Sudarium at all, rather it's the contrary. Page 22 admits that the passage was written in such an ambiguous way that it can be read as opposing the Shroud as well as read as supporting it. What I have just observed proves that the former view is right. Braulio denied that the Shroud and Sudarium survived and yet he knew of relics such as the alleged pillar splattered with blood that Christ was said to have been whipped at. He believed in it so he was gullible – however as gullible as he was he didn't believe the burial cloths of Jesus still existed.

What the booklet chooses to ignore is that Taius, a top cleric who succeeded Braulio as bishop, believed that relics of Christ's blood were fake because he thought all blood returns to the body at the resurrection. Why listen to Braulio and not Taius who we must remember reflected the rigid fundamentalist consensus that came close to having the resurrection as really just a resuscitation of the corpse? Most people would have agreed with Taius. There was no such thing as anybody verifying the blood relics from ancient sources and coming to a belief like that of Braulio who we must remember made no effort to authenticate the relics he said were real and showed no competence in judging them.

Page 23 goes into desperation when it says that a picture, really a kind of cartoon, from the twelfth century depicting the Mandyllion shows the Emperor trying to kiss the face on the cloth which detaches itself from the cloth as if to meet his face and the cloth is depicted as too big for the face. The booklet concludes that the Mandyllion must have indeed been the Turin Shroud for it was a cloth a body could have been wrapped in. This is rubbish for the image coming from the cloth is only a face and the picture is only symbolic when the face detaches itself from the cloth so we cannot take it as a scientific depiction of the cloth. Its not relevant.

The equally irrelevant Hungarian Codex gets a mention later.

Copies of the Shroud were painted with the poker holes shown as red bloodstains! This was because there is blood in the area where the holes are (page 26) in the actual shroud. This is all so strange for the holes were made by a poker being thrust through the Shroud when it was folded. It is a strange coincidence that the poker holes should have the redness of blood and may suggest forgery because it is just too convenient. It is as if heat was used to put the "blood" on the cloth.

Page 78 says that there is some paint on the Shroud but that it probably came from painted copies being laid on the cloth. But would any artist have been allowed to place an image on the cloth that could dirty it? Isn't the usual practice among Catholics just to touch a part of cloth against a relic? It is grotesque and mistaken to imagine that the people looking after the cloth were going to spread it out and it being so fragile so that a copy could be laid out on it. And none of the copies were marketed as relics which is significant. The paint on the Shroud indicates that somebody was trying to paint on it.

Page 32 admits that the miracle of the 3-D aspect of the Shroud comes from a photo of it and not the actual cloth! It says the blood was put on before the image for there is no image behind the blood. Yet after this the booklet goes on to defend the insane Collapse Theory which argues that the image was formed because Jesus' body slowly dematerialised in the cloth and the cloth sank down slowly through it leaving a print. If the theory were true there would be an image behind the blood. Also the neck would show up. The image would not have the shadows it has had it been created this way. And when all is said and done, the theory exaggerates the blood stains being in the wrong place. In fact they are still too accurate to have been really caused by a body. For example, the head blood stains should be wider of the head. Try this at home with hair dye, if you wrap a towel around your hair shroud style the mark will be much wider than your head because the cloth has to go around and pick up the stains. The theory is really just an excuse for explaining how the image doesn't distort.

The booklet argues then that the image was made by a miracle. If true then the Shroud is proof that very strong psychokinesis is possible. Psychokinesis, a form of PSI, is the alleged power of thought to change matter at a distance. A growing number of Catholic theologians and investigators of miracles are saying that PSI is what causes many miracles. They want to get away from the idea that a miracle must be proven to be against nature to be true and they want to move to the idea that since God causes all things and if we do a miracle by mind-power and the miracle is good for us and comforting and spiritually healthy then it should be recognised as a sign from God. The trouble with this view is that it makes miracles signs for a benevolence in humanity, there would be no need to bring God into it at all. If psychokinesis exists then even if the Turin Shroud is a miracle then there is still no reason to believe it is the burial cloth of Christ. Maybe the apostles made it by mind-power. It would seem to be the case that if Jesus was dead then his psychokinesis was not involved but somebody else's. If you want to read about miracles and the link with PSI then please read Apparitions, Healings and Weeping Madonnas, by Lisa Schwebel, Paulist Press, New Jersey, 2004. Christians will answer that no instance of psychokinesis ever was shown to create images. But how do they know? They tell us not to say all miracle stories are based on errors and lies for we cannot know. But what about the assumptions they make?

PSI, if it exists, does some strange miracles like making images. There are images that are even harder to explain than the Turin Shroud like images of faces appearing on the floors of houses and the image of Guadalupe which contradicts the divine origin of the Bible by calling on men to make a goddess of Mary. Its all confusion and contradiction. By no means should the Turin Shroud be taken as proof for Jesus even if it is a miracle. In fact, all the attention it gets is unjust and quite vulgar when you realise that.

Incredibly and absurdly the booklet tells us that the Sudarium with its bloodstains and dirt was used as a headdress during early Church ceremonies! And nobody is disturbed that the blood on the Sudarium is brown and black while that on the Shroud is red! Or by the fact that the thorn wounds on the cloth as depicted in the booklet (page 47) only run for a few inches when they should make a big circle! And Jesus was buried in a hurry so what would they bother with a Sudarium for?

The booklet is written as if the author thinks Europe is stupid.