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EXAMINING THE ALLEGED EUCHARISTIC MIRACLE OF LANCIANO WITH THE HELP OF CATHOLIC ANSWERS FORUM

Bread and wine allegedly turned into real flesh (heart muscle) and blood in the eight century at the hands of a priest who has doubts about how holy communion can really be Jesus. This flesh and blood are kept today at Lanciano.

Re: The Eucharistic Miracle of Lanciano

So what follows will be my look into the Eucharistic miracle of Lanciano (hereinafter the "EMOL")....and an explanation as to why I believe that what has been "what is presented as substantiating the miracle is pitiful"

Problem One - disclosure regarding the historical record

The EMOL has been put forward on the internet's court of public opinion as proof of the legitimacy of Catholic claims about its Eucharist. I have described what has been offered by Catholics as "pitiful". My reasons for doing so are varied, but begin with how terribly incomplete the Catholic sites are about what they report. For a blood sample to be admitted in a real Court as evidence for the prosecution (so as to place the accused at the scene), the prosecution would have to show that the sample was obtained from the crime scene and then the integrity of the sample would have to be established from when it was obtained at the crime scene up to and including the testing. With the EMOL, the miracle is said to have happened in the 8th century, but what is typically missing from Catholic presentations about the EMOL is information as to when the EMOL is first mentioned in the historical record. Can we say with any certainty that the samples have been around 1200-1300 years? I have seen claims that the first mention of the EMOL (in the historical record) is from the 17th century. Is that true? Are we dealing with a 800-900 year gap....if so, that is rather problematic. I haven't found a site (in English) that properly described the history of the sampleslet alone one that provided sources for the alleged history. I did find an Italian site that provides the type of detail that one should expect....though I must rely on Google to translate (and I suspect it could be considerably more scholarly in its presentation...but it is way, way better than any English language site that I found).

Now, given the EMOL is supposed to have happened in the 8th century we simply cannot expect that the Catholics would be able to properly prove that a) the Eucharistic samples were in fact obtained from the Church at Lanciano in the 8th Century (as opposed to fabricated in the 13th century) and b) that it is those exact same 8th century samples that were delivered to Dr. Linoli in 1970 for testing. For those of us who are skeptical, we must acknowledge that it would be entirely unreasonable for us to expect compliance with modern evidential standards. Conversely, for those who are Catholic enthusiasts, they must acknowledge that no matter what modern tests reveal, those modern tests can't trace the samples back to the 8th century and then down through the years to the laboratory....and so there will always be a question of: Where did these samples really come from? (I should point out that I believe accurate dating of the samples would be impossible due to contamination of the samples). What bothers me about all of this is that, if the EMOL is being presented (to the English speaking internet audience) as a reason to believe or as a validation of Catholic claims, then the presenter should try to be as scholarly and open as possible and should disclose whatever problems exist in the historical record in tracing the samples all the way back to the 8th Century. Sources (complete with dates for the sources) should be provided for each event in the alleged history of the samples for the EMOL. Instead, all I found were sites that related some anecdotal history wrt the samples with the expectation that these stories should be accepted without question. Now perhaps some Catholic site (in English) does do a good job of disclosing these issues, but if so, then that site wasn't one of the many that I looked at. For such a highly regarded Eucharistic miracle, the English language Catholic internet sites have done an extremely poor job providing a good history of the samples....a history that would track them, as well as sources allow, from the alleged event to Linoli's laboratory

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Problem Two - credentials and safeguards and feedback

As Lyrikal reports, in 1970/71 a study was performed by "Dr. Edoardo(sic) Linoli, a professor of anatomy and pathological histology, and of chemistry and clinical microscopy, and former head of the Laboratory of Pathological Anatomy at the Hospital of Arezzo He was assisted by Dr. Ruggero Bertelli, retired professor of human anatomy at the University of Siena." In a real court, the defence is given the opportunity to check the credentials of the witness that the prosecution hopes to have qualified as an expert. So again, it is MHO that the Catholics sites touting the EMOL should do a proper job of presenting Linoli's curriculum vitae so that his capabilities can be properly assessed. Further, as with the testing of the Shroud of Turin, it shouldn't just be one laboratory that runs the tests, but independent tests should be done (ideally with the

public informed that these are underway so that results will be published notwithstanding what results are obtained). I managed to find one site that provided translations of part of Linoli's paper. Sadly, b/c I couldn't find a Catholic site that made the paper available (let alone translated it), I am left relying on David Simmons (who I am sure is an Atheist and appears to be a graduate student in Molecular Biology) to do the job. Now again, perhaps there is a Catholic site that provides a copy of the paper (original in Italian) and perhaps there is even one out there somewhere that provides a translation of the paper, but in the dozens of Catholic sites that I looked at and that cited the report, none provided the report, let alone a translation of it. It might be paraphrased (largely or partially) on the Italian site that I linked above. (hereinafter the "good Italian site")

In the paper we find Linoli referring to the samples as "the Miraculous tissue" and "the Miraculous heart fragment". Although he performed no test validating the age of the samples, he described them as 1200 years old. Such fawning terminology and unquestioning acceptance of the age of the samples is less than professional and leaves Linoli's work suspect. In any event, IMHO if Catholics want to tout the EMOL as proof, then they should arrange for proper testing to be conducted. As with the Shroud of Turin, publicize the event, get the best laboratories involved and make the findings available for critical review. With that being done various experts could weigh in on the matter to review methodology, ensure the validity of results and evaluate conclusions. Some Catholic sites report that in 1973 the World Health Organization (WHO) conducted 500 tests on the samples and verified Linoli's findings.....but again, the report from the WHO is hard, if not impossible, to locate. I haven't found it and the good Italian site, doesn't even mention the WHO tests. . It strikes me as odd that 500 tests were run. That is a lot of tests to verify Linoli's findings.....suspiciously high. It would sure be nice if the WHO report was made readily available. Again, the Catholic internet sites (in English) have done a extremely poor job of providing information (the scientific papers) in particular), but want their readers to swallow their presentations on the EMOL hook, line and sinker. One Italian site (not the good one) summarized the WHO report as stating (regarding the samples): Their preservation after almost twelve centuries, relics of glass and in the absence of preservatives, antiseptics, and antifermmentatives mummificanti, not scientifically explainable: for the vessels that contain these relics do not prevent access of air and light or the 'Order of entry of plant or animal parasites, ordinary atmospheric air vehicles. As the nature of the piece of meat, the commission declares without hesitation that it is a living tissue that responds quickly to all clinical reactions of living beings. If that accurately summarized what the WHO report stated, then the WHO report was also an unprofessional effort. It appears that the age of the samples was accepted at 12 centuries w/o question. There is no way for them to have verified that the samples were preserved for 12 centuries. The "living tissue" comment is also odd in that Linoli described the heart sample as deteriorated - dried out, shrunken, marred with nail holes, infested with microorganisms/fungi. (see Simmons' translation for the details). It appears that neither Linoli nor the WHO performed a proper unbiased investigation. Proper, unbiased testing needs to be performed. It does appear as if a biased expert (Linoli) was sought out and employed to make the case for the miracle look as good as possible...and the (missing in action) WHO report just smells fishy.

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Problem Three - overstating the findings in Linoli's paper

As indicated, I could only gain access to Linoli's paper through D Simmons' blog b/c I didn't find a Catholic site that made the paper available. If you go to the summary page of the paper (the one page in English) you will note that of all the stuff that Lyrikal claimed, only the stuff that I have highlighted in green above is actually advanced in the summary of the paper. Simmons provides a translation of portions of Linoli's paper at his blog . Here again are the "findings" that Lyrikal listed (and that are often repeated on Catholic sites) including the ones that weren't in the paper... with my remarks in bold:

- The Flesh is real Flesh. The Blood is real Blood.
- The Flesh and the Blood belong to the human species.
- The Flesh consists of the muscular tissue of the heart. This I don't challenge. Linoli's work, however, does not and could not possibly determine whether the samples were the result of a miracle or whether they were the produced by a fraudster acquiring and planting human heart tissue and blood centuries earlier.
- In the Flesh we see present in section: the myocardium, the endocardium, the vagus nerve and also the left ventricle of the heart for the large thickness of the myocardium. this may or may not be in the report. Is there enough of the heart left to justify such an observation?
- The Flesh is a "HEART" complete in its essential structure. This is just nonsense....the paper described a mummified slice of a bit of a human heart....anything but complete....where are the valves, the atriums, the right ventricle?
- The Flesh and the Blood have the same blood-type: AB (Blood-type identical to that which Prof. Baima Bollone uncovered in the Holy Shroud of Turin). In tracking this matter down I came across the claim that as samples deteriorate

they all start to produce AB type readings: Al Adler, a blood specialist from Western Connecticut State University, and another Shroud scientist, pointed out that all old blood tended to test AB because the compounds that generated the test response were also in the cell walls and if the walls degraded the blood started to test AB. But it was possible, he felt, to discern false AB positive readings from real AB type readings. Source ...and I saw that claim often enough that I believe it to be valid. Further, it is no longer certain that the Shroud contains AB blood. This is where peer review would be very useful. As it stands, this finding IMHO is suspect in regard to the blood type of the heart tissue, of the blood pellets and as to matching the Shroud's blood type.

- In the Blood there were found proteins in the same normal proportions (percentage-wise) as are found in the sero-proteic make-up of the fresh normal blood. and?...the paper makes it clear that the blood isn't fresh blood...it has deteriorated substantially

- In the Blood there were also found these minerals: chlorides, phosphorus, magnesium, potassium, sodium and calcium yes, they varied from what would be found in fresh blood because of deterioration. The calcium was much higher and everything else was lower

- The preservation of the Flesh and of the Blood, which were left in their natural state for twelve centuries and exposed to the action of atmospheric and biological agents, remains an extraordinary phenomenon. Linoli stated that the proteins that he found in the samples agreed with what is found in Egyptian mummies...in other words, it is not unique at all.

As such, this paper that is referenced over and over again by Catholic sites, does little more than establish that the samples consist of deteriorated human blood and deteriorated human heart tissue...nothing at all that would require (or even suggest) the miraculous. Regarding aged blood all tending to test positive for AB type, it is likely that that tendency was not known in 1971 when Linoli did his tests. The tests should be redone and done properly.

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Problem Four - exaggerated claims such as scientists being baffled etc.

After looking at this, I expect that Catholic enthusiasts think that one or more of the following five matters (some from the red highlighted stuff above) must be baffling:

A. The blood, as we have it today, is now dry blood and it is now blood clot. There are actually 5 balls of blood clots. They are all different sizes and yet they all weigh the same. Not only that, but if you weigh one blood clot, it weighs the same as if you put all 5 blood clots on a scale.

Response: This would be baffling if it were true, but it is false. In 1574 Archbishop Rodriguez made this claim, but in 1886, the weight of the five clots was found to be: 8, 2.45, 2.85, 2.05 and 1.15 grams respectively. The five clots continue to each have a different weight and in all likelihood Archbishop Rodriguez lied or was grossly incompetent. Source

B. In regard to the blood, the scientist emphasized that "the blood group is the same as that of the man of the holy Shroud of Turin, and it is particular because it has the characteristics of a man who was born and lived in the Middle East regions."

"The AB blood group of the inhabitants of the area in fact has a percentage that extends from 0.5% to 1%, while in Palestine and the regions of the Middle East it is 14-15%," Linoli said.

Response: This isn't remarkable until the consensus in the scientific community is that: a) the Shroud of Turin has AB type blood on it and that any positive result for AB type blood was not the result of the degradation of the cell walls; and b) that the samples from the EMOL are actually type AB blood and that any positive result for AB type blood was not the result of the degradation of the cell walls (Please note that the cell walls in the Lanciano samples had, in fact broken down). It should also be noted that the percentages provided for regional inhabitants are the modern percentages and not the percentages of the first century, or the 8th century. I have even found claims that the AB blood type did not exist in the first century....originating sometime around 700 AD or later. I have no idea as to whether there is any substance to that claim of late origin for the AB type.

C. I have seen where some sites have expressed amazement at the preservation of the samples....suggesting that was something stated in the WHO report

Response: The preservation of these sorts of samples for 12 centuries is remarkable, but far from miraculous. Now, if this is a forgery from 1300, then the preservation of these sorts of samples for 7 centuries is considerably less remarkable. In any event, I sure didn't notice a gathering of baffled scientists wrt the matter of preservation....it is simply not that amazing.

D. Some sites claim that Linoli concluded that the heart sample of the EMOL heart sample was not a medieval forgery, b/c "even if the heart was taken from a corpse, it must be concluded that only an expert hand of anatomical dissection could have, and not without serious difficulties, get a hollow viscous, a "slice" uniform and continuous, taking into account that the first human dissections were had back in 1300." It is hard to tell, what exactly Linoli said w/o having access to good translations...

Response: This doesn't seem baffling and if Linoli made that conclusion, then it was a pile of subjective speculation! Linoli's area of expertise does not extend to medieval butchering skills. Please note, it isn't that the sample doesn't nicely match a piece of the heart produced by slicing it, but it is claimed that the slice is too good to be produced by the average Joe.. What, they didn't have sharp knives back then? It seems more than reasonable to me that if a Medieval forger was going to plant some heart tissue for the devoted, he would take a fresh heart, slice it a number of times and then pick the best piece...not one that was poorly sliced. It seems that the sample is consistent with that expectation..

E. It seems that Linoli concluded that the heart sample of the EMOL must have been living flesh when it appeared. This is how the good Italian site puts it with the help of Google's translation: "Brownish in colour, has a large irregular opening in the centre, for feedback to the outside, and marginally thicker, circular folds for lifting devices . In this area you can see 14 small holes left by the nails used to take the Host expanse - some meat on the tablet in order to counteract the curling due to rigor mortis, or stiffness following a succession shortly after the death from physical and chemical changes . This suggests that, at the time of the miracle, the Host appeared meat and had been living in the Heart." Simmons' translation agrees.

Response: The idea that nail holes on the edge of a sample suggest that the heart sample was alive is ridiculous. If one followed that logic, the beef sate that I get from the Thai restaurant must have been living flesh when it went on the skewers, b/c there are skewer holes in the beef....all it suggests is that someone tried to keep the sample from curling up while it was still somewhat fresh.

To repeat, if Catholics want to use this "miracle" as proof of the legitimacy of Catholic claims about their Eucharist, then:

- a) they should report the matter thoroughly and accurately and in a scholarly manner;
- b) test the samples properly (independently, with safeguards) to see if there is indeed anything baffling about them.
- c) subject any claims of a miraculous finding or of a baffling phenomenon to expert critical evaluation.

...in other words, do the job right.