

## **Book Review: The Rape of the Turin Shroud By William Meacham**

**\*\*\*\*\* This is a "must read", December 11, 2005**

**Reviewers: M. S. Benford "and Joseph Marino (Dublin, OH USA)**

William Meacham, an archaeologist at the University of Hong Kong, is uniquely qualified to critique events surrounding the controversial 1988 carbon dating (C-14) of the Shroud of Turin and subsequent events. He is the author of a book with a somewhat shocking title: "The Rape of the Shroud: How Christianity's most precious relic was wrongly condemned and violated." Meacham obviously speaks his mind, has a fascinating story to tell and does it with passion. His presence at a recent Shroud conference had the organizers so concerned, security was hired to be on hand. But he is far from being a rogue investigator. In 1983, he authored the most comprehensive study of the Shroud ever published in a peer-reviewed academic journal (*Current Anthropology*). In 1986, he was invited by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Archbishop of Turin to advise on the upcoming C-14 dating. At that time, he cautioned that the C-14 sample should be taken from more than one site to insure that it was representative of the main cloth and also warned against too much stock being put in the C-14 results. Both proved to be prophetic as the AD 1260-1390 dates ascribed to the Shroud, at first given a 95% degree of certainty by those who performed the test, have now seriously been called into question by the findings of a scientist who had been given a leftover 1988 sample and who found significant differences with other samples known to be from the main cloth. In 2000, he was invited by the Turin Archdiocese as a delegate to a meeting of a world congress of Shroud experts. In 2002, an invitation from the Turin Archdiocese was extended to him to preview the Shroud after a so-called restoration of the cloth that had been carried out that summer.

Meacham first gives a broad overview of Shroud research and the book contains a condensed version of his superb 1983 *Current Anthropology* article. The next section describes the events that lead up to the 1988 dating and subsequent events. Part 3 deals with the 2002 restoration, which was also very controversial insofar as it had been performed in secret by the Turin authorities without any input from other researchers around the world, including those like Meacham, who had previously been consulted about important Shroud matters. The last section looks at the current situation and new research proposals.

The book's epilogue deals with the 3rd International Shroud conference held in Dallas in September 2005. It was co-sponsored and attended by several important members of the Turin delegation that had carried out the 2002 restoration and controls the Shroud. Meacham mentions that the conference hired an armed guard. He noted, "One can only reflect on the sad state of affairs that Shroud studies had come to, when an armed guard is employed to impose silence on researchers seeking the truth about a relic possibly associated with Jesus." Politics played a huge role in the death of Jesus. Meacham shows in his book how politics is playing another significant role in Jesus' putative burial cloth. This book is a "must-read" for any Shroud researcher and highly recommended for any reader that has even a slight interest in the subject.