

PILGRIMAGE TO OVIEDO: A PERSONAL REVIEW OF THE II INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF THE SUDARIUM

by Joanna Emery (Canada)

In many ways, my trip to Oviedo, Spain to attend the II International Congress of the Sudarium was a pilgrimage. I have been interested in the Shroud of Turin for many years but have never seen the actual relic. In 1978, I was only twelve years old and although my father, a forensic pathologist, had already introduced me to the Shroud, a trip to Turin was not in the cards. It was also not possible for me to see the Shroud in 1998 or 2000 because both years I was caring for a newborn (my second and third children) so diapers and baby food were higher financial priorities than an airline ticket to Italy. Life, however, did not dampen my interest in the Shroud and I continued to learn as much as I could. I joined the BSTS and even attended the 2005 Dallas Conference. In late 2006, I heard there would be a Congress on the Sudarium of Oviedo the following April, and even more exciting was the distinct possibility that the Cloth might be brought out. My husband (who has always been so supportive of my interest in the Shroud) offered to stay home and watch our children and so, I decided to go.

It's hard to describe but a peculiar feeling came over me as I came to the realization that I might actual 'see' the blood of Christ even though I had no idea if this would be a private viewing during a Mass, or some other event (I learned a few days before I left for Oviedo that the viewing would occur at a Mass). The Oviedo Cloth (Sudarium), as you know, is thought to be the one which wrapped the head of the crucified Jesus as he was taken down from the cross. Before Jesus was placed in the clean Shroud, this Cloth (which is much smaller than the Shroud) was 'rolled up by itself', and also left in the tomb with Jesus. I had already read as much as I could about the Sudarium and, if you feel the Shroud of Turin is authentic, then the Sudarium is up there too.

I must apologize in advance for a lack of more specific details regarding the presentations. I found the simultaneous translation (Spanish to English) somewhat hard to follow but here is a brief overview of the presenters (and what I think was said!). More detailed proceedings will be released (in Spanish) in the coming months.

The Congress commenced Friday, April 13 and included an official opening by the Archbishop of Oviedo, His Excellency Carlos Osoro Sierra, and the Mayor of Oviedo, Gabino de Lorenzo Ferrera. Jorge Manuel Rodriguez Almenar (president of the Centro Espanol de Sindonologia or CES) spoke about the Sudarium from 1994 - 2007 and spoke of how, in 1965, Giulio Ricci came to see the cloth and 'looked at it as if it were a document'. The Sudarium has ever since been seen as a complementary relic to the Shroud of Turin even though documented worship of this cloth extends back through the centuries. Veneration of the Sudarium, alongside scientific and historical research, will no doubt continue. As a side note, Jorge related that in 2004, he personally spoke with Cardinal Ratzinger about the Sudarium, unaware that he was actually talking to a future Pope. In 1994, the 1st International Congress on the Sudarium of Oviedo (1 Congreso Internacional sobre el Sudario de Oviedo) took place and this second Congress was a natural progression from the first. It was also noted that EDICES (el Equipo de Investigacion del Centro Espanol de Sindonologia) along with the Cathedral of Oviedo have presented many expositions, publications and other activities regarding this Cloth

during the last 12 years. Alfonso Munoz-Cobo Bengoa began with a lecture on Mons. Ricci's studies regarding the Sudarium. Piero Savarino and Bruno Barberis spoke about 'the new system for the conservation of the Holy Shroud' while Socorro Mantilla de los Rios y Rojas detailed the Sudarium's state of conservation (such as keeping it in the dark when not shown, humidity/temperature control etc.). The afternoon lectures included presentations by Felipe Montero Ortego (chemical and microscopic description of the cloth), Jose Iriarte Chiapusso and Cesar Barta Gil (C14 dating of the cloth gave results to around 750 A.D.). Antonio Alonso Alonso and Enrique Monte Vazquez's lectures both concerned DNA studies regarding the Sudarium. As far as I could understand, they did obtain mitochondrial DNA but more tests/samples need to be carried out. Jesus Garcia Iglesias then spoke about archaeological studies and an interesting general panel discussion followed.

Later, attendees were invited to a tour of the Cathedral, Camara Santa, and Museum. One can understand in part how the Sudarium has survived so many centuries—protected by the stone walls of the Camara Santa, located inside the Cathedral. I also enjoyed the welcome reception where guests were able to sample local Asturian delicacies and the famous 'sidre' (cider). There, I met David Rolfe and his wife—David produced the well-known Shroud documentary, "Silent Witness." I also spoke with some of the younger attendees, many from Barcelona or Valencia and involved with the C.E.S, as well as Congress attendees who were Oviedo citizens (or from surrounding areas) with a deep interest in the city's relic.

The next day's presentations focussed on interpretation of the information obtained from studies on the Sudarium. These included lectures by Guillermo Heras Moreno, Jaime Izquierdo Gomex, Jose Delfin Villalain Blanco, and a demonstration of how the cloth was wound around the head, with a live model. Later, the history of the Sudarium with was covered with lectures by Mark Guscini, Fidel Gonzalez Fernandez and Enrique Lopez Fernandez and Juan Uria Maqua. Comparisons between the Shroud and Sudarium were also discussed. Cesar Barta Gil spoke as did Nello Balossino, on the 'Turin Shroud and Oviedo Sudarium: analysis and comparison by computer science methods'. Another highlight was the lecture by Keith Propp and John Jackson, 'Preliminary Comparisons of Scientific data collected from both the Shroud of Turin and the Sudarium of Oviedo'. This talk was in English and here are the conclusions (quickly written from one of the slides): the Shroud & Sudarium are similar in UV fluorescence & their C14 date is younger than 1st century; both are not similar in blood reflectance spectra; Shroud face appears to have possible blood residues consistent with the Sudarium; new studies are need to resolve the above problem; and conservation studies of the Sudarium should take into account scientific information preservation in addition to preservation of the cloth as a textile object. There was a concert by the Choir of the Principal of Asturias Foundation, which was followed by a Mass and Benediction of the Sudarium, held at the Cathedral for all attendees and the general public. Mark Guscini later told me that this was history in the making because special permission was received from the Vatican to hold the Mass of the Sudarium for the first time in four centuries.

I stood near the front and watched the Sudarium brought out, hidden under a red cloth. It was then taken to the altar, the red cloth was pulled over the frame, and the Sudarium held up high, facing the front, left, right, and back to the front again. People rushed to get as near to the altar as they could (maybe twenty feet away) while

photographers (and the public) snapped up photographs (I was a bit stunned and didn't think to take a photo). I noticed many around me either kneeling in prayer or standing, most straining to get a closer look. It was all rather surreal and the entire viewing only lasted a couple of minutes. That evening, I attended the official banquet dinner and the next morning the conference concluded with several more presentations by Florentino Diez Fernandez, Jacinto Nunez Salvador, Pedro Rodriguez Panizo, and an especially memorable lecture on theological implications by Manuel Carreira.

I left the lovely city of Oviedo the following day and, as I flew back to Toronto, I thought about my experience. What had I learned from the conference and from 'seeing' the Sudarium, if only for a few seconds? As a Catholic, my belief is that we come face to face with the body and blood of Christ each time we celebrate the Eucharist. Perhaps it is not so much what we see with our own eyes as what we experience in our hearts. I don't know if I will have the opportunity to see the Sudarium again but I will try to see the Shroud one day; it is next scheduled to be displayed in 2025. There is still so much to learn about both the Sudarium and the Shroud. Their histories will undoubtedly continue to unfold. I also feel that some of the most fascinating aspects of such pilgrimages are the individuals that you encounter. Everyone has a unique story on how and why he or she came to Oviedo. As it was once famously said (and mentioned again during one of the conference lectures), there are as many paths to God as there are people in the world. Along with my brief glimpse of the Cloth in Oviedo, I hope to always treasure the memories of the many special people I met along the way.