

Book Review

THE SHROUD

Ian Wilson, Bantam 2010

Ian Wilson needs no introduction for anyone with an interest in the Shroud world - apart from editing the BSTS newsletter for over 20 years, he is now the author of three major books on the topic along with many other related books and countless articles – a truly essential contribution to the world of Sindonology.

Ian's latest publication, written to coincide with the current public showing of the Shroud, is much more than that. It is the definitive reference book on the Shroud in all its aspects, with special emphasis on the history of the cloth (both beyond dispute and the more theoretical earlier history). As this latter corresponds with my own area of research, all I can say is that Ian has managed to say everything in such a way that everyone will understand it, from top academics to people with just a passing interest in the cloth and its historical vicissitudes.

The book takes readers on a tour of the Shroud, the image and what we know about it, its properties and all the (failed) attempts to reproduce it. The chapter on the carbon dating is probably the best account anywhere so far of everything and everyone involved, and reasons why the experiment came up with the dates it did. All this said, the main part of the book is devoted to the history of the Shroud, both recent and early. The story of the Image of Edessa and how it is probably linked to the Shroud is explained in all detail, with some of the conclusions from the research trip Ian and I made to Turkey in general and Edessa (now known as Sanliurfa) in May 2009. The appendix with the detailed chronology is an excellent reference document.

Just as interesting is the more recent history of the cloth and its public showings from its appearance in Europe all the way down to the "Ostensione" in 2010. Strangely enough, the book is not on sale in Turin at the book shop forming part of the Shroud exhibition – in fact (apart from David Rolfe's new film) the only English language publications available in Turin are translations of Italian books – this is something the Turinese authorities should have rectified from the start, as there are plenty of good books written in other languages as well as Italian.

All in all, this is the best all round book on the Shroud available at present, one that should not be missing in any collection.