

Book Review

The Challenge of the Shroud

Mark Oxley, Author House 2010

Another very complete book about the Shroud has recently been published by BSTS member Mark Oxley, resident in Zimbabwe. This book is also an excellent exposé of the state of Shroud studies and theories at the time of the 2010 exposition of the cloth. The author is very well read on the subject and includes summaries and comments on just about everything that has been written and presented on the Shroud in the last fifteen years.

The book is divided into three main parts – a review of the cloth's history, both known and speculated, a study of crucifixion and its relationship to the image on the Shroud, and a review of recent Shroud literature and image formation hypotheses. The book also includes a complete chapter on the Sudarium of Oviedo and how its known age is further proof of the Shroud's own antiquity.

A good example of the book's objectivity is the treatment of the supposed lepta (coins) which some people have claimed to see and distinguish over the eyes of the man on the Shroud. Mark Oxley explains both points of view, explaining with equal justice the arguments for and against their presence, concluding that, "Undisputed evidence of Pontius Pilate coins on the Shroud would be very significant in dating it to first-century Jerusalem. However, it can be argued that, all too frequently, people see what they want to see. The best that can be said at present about the theory of the Pontius Pilate lepta on the eyes of the man on the Shroud is that it remains Not Proven".

Mark Oxley also broken new ground in some aspects, such as finding a motive for Bishop d'Arcis' efforts to discredit the Shroud and have it removed from Lirey. He claims the Memorandum was probably never sent to Avignon and shows how it was altered at the start of the 20th century, both being important aspects of this particular story.

Among all the books being published on the Shroud this year, this is without doubt one that is worth having and reading.