

Wiping the slate clean

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This year two new books regarding Shroud history have been published in Italy: *I Templari e la Sindone, storia di un falso* (1)¹ (The Templars and the Shroud, the history of a fake) and *Dal Mandylion di Edessa alla Sindone di Torino, metamorfosi di una leggenda* (2)² (From the Edessa Mandylion to the Turin Shroud, the metamorphosis of a legend). In this book review, for reasons of space, I will comment only on the first of the two volumes, postponing the description of the second to the next issue of the magazine. The author of both the texts, Andrea Nicolotti, is a researcher on a study grant in the History Department of Turin University and this rendered his books very attractive to my eyes, rich in bibliographical notes, because I was sure of finding new elements in them in order to discover more about the “dark years” of the relic; even if the subtitle of the first book, “the history of a fake”, had provoked some perplexity in me.

When I began to read the book on the Templars, in the first lines of the preface³(3) I soon noticed that the author made a mistake that could not be a simple typing error, because it was a number written in full, in words: “Inside the Cathedral of Turin, the baroque reliquary planned by Antonio Bertola to preserve the Holy Shroud has been empty for thirteen years”. But the transfer of the Shroud from the Guarini Chapel, that left Bertola’s altar-reliquary empty, took place on February 24, 1993. I thought: “We’re off to a fine start! If Nicolotti knows modern history like this, what will he be able to say about ancient history?”

Soon after, however, I read a very comforting statement: “This is not the umpteenth book that describes the Shroud. It is not a study that claims to demonstrate its authenticity or its falsity. It is not a devotional book, neither a book of desecration. It wishes only to be a history book, written without prejudice”⁴ (4). I thought: “At last! This is the book I needed!”

My perplexities returned and increased later, when I read: “The preliminary remark that prevails has been clearly expressed by Gian Maria Zaccone, director of the Museum of the Shroud of Turin: «From a strictly documentary point of view, we cannot with any certainty attribute to the Turin Shroud a history previous to the 14th century»”⁵ (5). However, with these preliminary remarks, to write books on the ancient history of the Shroud is completely impossible! “But can it be true - I began to think - that Nicolotti writes without prejudice?” The quotation of Zaccone’s thought, taken from one of his texts of 2000⁶, ends there. Then I was assailed by another doubt: “But is it true that Zaccone in 2000 thought in this way?” Reading one of his books from 2010⁷ (7), praised by Nicolotti as “the best and most updated essay”⁸ (8), it did not seem so!

¹ A. NICOLOTTI, *I Templari e la Sindone, storia di un falso*, Salerno Ed., Roma 2011.

² A. NICOLOTTI, *Dal Mandylion di Edessa alla Sindone di Torino. Metamorfosi di una leggenda*, Ed. dell’Orso, Alessandria 2011.

³ A. NICOLOTTI, *I Templari e la Sindone, storia di un falso*, p. 11.

⁴ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 12.

⁵ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 14.

⁶ G.M. ZACCONE, *Storia e “preistoria” della Sindone*, in G. Ghiberti – U. Casale, *Dossier sulla Sindone*, Queriniana, Brescia 2000, pp. 34-54, on p. 34.

⁷ G.M. ZACCONE, *La Sindone, storia di un’immagine*, Paoline, Milano 2010.

⁸ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 143.

Since I have the same book with Nicolotti's quotation, even though in an edition from 1998, I went to verify. And I have found that Zaccone's thought continues in this way: "However, what the silence of the sources can mean in general terms and in our case deserves special attention, I will try to explain in these pages"⁹ (9). Zaccone devotes 12 of the 19 pages of his text to the argument: "The *prehistory*: the Shroud in the first millennium?" In this text, towards the conclusion, he writes: "As I hope can be deduced from these few pages, surely the historical problem of the Shroud is not solved. However, it is not correct to think consequently that there is no possibility that the Shroud can go back to an age previous to the medieval one, based on a silence of the sources that, then, as we have seen, are not completely silent at all. At the moment the historical studies on the Shroud are in a phase of development, even if until now it can be only asserted that *from the strictly historical point of view definitive elements do not exist either in order to assert a medieval origin or, least of all, in order to exclude a much more ancient origin*"¹⁰ (10) (italics in the original text).

The essay finishes with these words: "What is important is to be able to maintain due respect for all serious research, and a balanced detachment, aware that the great message that this cloth transmits to us has very little to do with the legitimate curiosity of knowing thoroughly its origins and vicissitudes"¹¹ (11).

It seems to me that Zaccone's thought appears in a very different way, reading what there is after the phrase quoted by Nicolotti. Then I wanted to continue, reading again the pages entitled: *The Shroud: materials for an oriental history*, that appear in the 2010 text¹² (12). Also here, towards the end, this specification is found: "As can be deduced from what has been explained so far, we cannot have any certainty as to this first millennium, except the fact – in my opinion, important - that in the Christian world the news of the conservation of Christ's burial equipment circulated very soon, and also of an image of him imprinted on a linen cloth, an image that, as already said in reference to a certain iconography of Edessa, is comparable with that of the Shroud"¹³ (13).

Only his final affirmation, regarding iconographic research, has remained dark to me: "The research is surely interesting, but in my opinion is not definitive in this case either. However, it corroborates the conviction that the Shroud, as I have already said many times over, can rightly be thought to be the highest point of arrival of all the expectations about Christ's representation"¹⁴ (14), a concept that concludes also another of his recent contributions¹⁵ (15).

The thesis of the Shroud as "the point of arrival of all the expectations about Christ's representation" is not sustainable, because the research and the analyses carried out on the relic have excluded with absolute certainty every hypothesis of a fabrication with artistic means¹⁶ (16) and Zaccone knows this because shortly before, he asserts: "The majority of

⁹ G.M. ZACCONE, *Storia e "preistoria" della Sindone*, in G. Ghiberti – U. Casale, *Dossier sulla Sindone*, Queriniana, Brescia 1998, pp. 33-53, a p. 33.

¹⁰ G.M. ZACCONE, op. cit. p. 50.

¹¹ G.M. ZACCONE, op. cit. p. 51.

¹² G.M. ZACCONE, op. cit. pp. 54-64.

¹³ G.M. ZACCONE, op. cit. p. 63.

¹⁴ G.M. ZACCONE, op. cit. p. 64.

¹⁵ G.M. ZACCONE, *Dalle acheropite alla Sindone*, in *Sacre impronte e oggetti «non fatti da mano d'uomo» nelle religioni*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale, Torino 18-20 Maggio 2010, Ed. dell'Orso, Alessandria 2011, pp. 309-323, on p. 323.

¹⁶ J.H. HELLER - A.D ADLER, *A Chemical Investigation of the Shroud of Turin*, in *Canadian Society of Forensic Sciences Journal* 14, 3 (1981), pp. 81-103; E.J. JUMPER et al., *A Comprehensive Examination of the Various*

such studies, even if they do not explain the modalities of formation of the image, appear to exclude the manual origin, if compared with a dating result that would place the fabrication of the cloth in the medieval age”¹⁷ (17). However, according to Zaccone, an ancient history of the Shroud, even if not sure, is possible, differently from what Nicolotti wanted to make him say with the quotation of that isolated phrase.

Proposing again Zaccone’s thought in an incomplete way made me go on with caution and attention in reading the rest of Nicolotti’s volume. Very soon I understood that I was reading a handbook of negationism, than can be summed up mainly in these points:

1. The Picard crusader Robert de Clari¹⁸ in Saint Mary of Blachernae did not see the Shroud, but rather a silk veil, in front of an icon of the Virgin, than every Friday would have risen miraculously. According to Nicolotti, the hypothesis that the Shroud disappeared during the sack of Constantinople of 1204 is “purely gratuitous” (CAP. I, p. 23).
2. The Mandylion is not the Shroud because it was a small object described like a napkin to dry the face, was found in the Pharos Chapel, was purchased by Louis IX and destroyed in Paris during the French revolution; moreover, Jesus’ burial cloths, also in the Pharos, are a different object from the Mandylion. On the possible Mandylion-Shroud identity, Nicolotti asserts: “The theory is both ingenious and incredible, and lacking in comparison”. The ignorance of the possessors with regard to the real dimensions of the Mandylion is “one of the more eccentric conjectures” (CAP. I, pp. 21-23 and CAP. IV, p. 125).
3. In the testimonies of the trials against the Templars there are no references to the Shroud (CAP. II, pp. 28-71 and CAP. IV, pp. 100-104).
4. The Templar seals do not have likenesses with the Shroud face (CAP. III, pp. 75-78).
5. The face on the Templecombe panel has nothing to do with the Shroud face and the panel itself has nothing to do with the Templars (CAP. III, pp. 78-85).
6. Codex Pray has nothing to do with the Shroud (CAP. III, pp. 85-88).
7. The Chronicle of Saint-Denis has nothing to do with the Shroud (CAP. III, pp. 89-95).
8. The Shroud was not in Athens because the *Chartularium culisanense* is false (CAP. IV, pp. 104-113), Nicholas of Otranto sees the bandages, not the Shroud, and he sees them in Constantinople, not elsewhere (CAP. IV, pp. 113-115), it cannot be asserted that Othon de La Roche ever possessed it (CAP. IV, pp. 116-118).
9. It cannot be said that the Shroud was in Ray-sur-Saône and Besançon (CAP. IV, pp. 118-120).
10. There is no relationship between the de La Roche family and Jeanne de Vergy; there is no proof of the Othon de La Roche’s return to France; the measurements of the casket of Ray-sur-Saône have nothing to do with the fold marks on the Shroud, which in any case do not mean anything (CAP. IV, pp. 120-123).
11. There is no relationship between Amaury de La Roche and Othon de La Roche; Amaury de La Roche never possessed the Shroud (CAP. IV, pp. 127-131).

Stains and Images on the Shroud of Turin, in *Archaeological Chemistry III, ACS Advances in Chemistry* 205, 22 (1984), pp. 447-476; L.A.SCHWALBE - R.N. ROGERS, *Physics and Chemistry of the Shroud of Turin, A Summary of the 1978 Investigation*, in *Analytica Chimica Acta* 135 (1982), pp. 3-49.

¹⁷ G.M. ZACCONE, *La Sindone, storia di un’immagine*, quoted, p. 6.

¹⁸ On page 17 Nicolotti writes that Robert de Clari is Flemish instead of Picard, but he corrects this mistake in the book on the Mandylion on page 118. Barbara Frale made the same mistake. Did Nicolotti copy the mistake from Frale’s books?

12. The Templar Geoffroy de Charnay was not a relative of Geoffroy de Charny, the owner of the Shroud (CAP. IV, pp. 131-136).

At this point, since it is obviously impossible to comment on the entire book, page by page, in the short space of a book review, the important point is to understand the method by which the various subjects are undertaken, to be able to draw the relative conclusions on the validity of the affirmations made by the author. I think, therefore, that it will be useful to quote, as an example (and it is not the only one), another distorted quotation case, in order to understand his way of proceeding. It concerns the dating of the Templecombe panel. But first we should see what the panel is.

During the Second World War, an interesting representation was found on an oak wood panel in Templecombe, England. The locality owes its name to the fact that from 1185 till the beginning of the 14th century it was the site of a Templar preceptory¹⁹ (19). On the panel a bearded face appears, with faint contours. There are no doubts that it represents Jesus: it is enough to confront it with the *Santo Rostro*²⁰ (20), a holy face from the 14th century preserved in the Cathedral of Jaén, Spain (fig. 1). And it is unequivocally similar to the Shroud: with the technique of the overlay in polarized light 125 points of congruence between the two images were found²¹ (21).

Let us read now what the scientists who carried out the radiocarbon analysis write in *Archaeometry*²² (22): “Two samples taken from the edges of two planks of a door with a Shroud-like image of Christ. The door was found on the site of a former Templar preceptory at Templecombe in Somerset (Wilson 1986) [...] The two sigma (95% confidence) range is AD 1280-1440. The dates are entirely compatible with the wood being cut in the period AD 1280-1310, and thus the painting might be associated with the Knights Templar, perhaps commissioned prior to their suppression in 1307 by King Philip the Fair of France. On the other hand, a later date for the wood of up to around 1440 cannot be ruled out, whilst the painting could of course have been executed much later than the timber on which it appears”. Therefore the utility of the dating is not confirming the Templar attribution of the panel, something it obviously could not do, but not excluding it as the period of fabrication of the plank.

Let us see now what Nicolotti writes: “Fràle assures us that it was dated «to the years 1275-1300», or «to 1280 approximately»”²³ (23), and mentions in a footnote the book by Barbara Fràle²⁴ (24), a historian at the Vatican Secret Archives. In this footnote Nicolotti also specifies that “the date of 1280 appears on the inscription written by Fràle and put beside the panel during its exhibition in the royal palace of *Venaria Reale* from November 28, 2009 to April 11, 2010”²⁵ (25). He continues as follows: “that - at least in a hypothetical way - could be compatible with the presence of the Templars in Templecombe before their arrest in 1308. For Emanuela Marinelli and Orazio Petrosillo, the plank was «dated to between the 12th and

¹⁹ I. WILSON, *The Shroud. Fresh light on the 2000-year-old Mystery...*, Transworld Publishers, London 2010, p. 266.

²⁰ I. WILSON, *Holy Faces, Secret Places*, Doubleday, London 1991, p. 35.

²¹ R. MORGAN, *Testimonianza iconografica della Sindone in Inghilterra*, in *Le icone di Cristo e la Sindone*, edited by L. COPPINI and F. CAVAZZUTI, Ed. San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (MI) 2000, pp. 189-194, on pp. 193-194.

²² R.E.M. HEDGES et al., *Radiocarbon dates of the Oxford AMS system: Archaeometry datelist 6*, in *Archaeometry* 29, 2 (1987), pp. 289-306, on p. 303.

²³ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 81.

²⁴ B. FRALE, *La sindone di Gesù Nazareno*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2009, p. 63.

²⁵ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 157.

the 14th century»²⁶ (26), and in a footnote he mentions the “Marinelli-Petrosillo” book, inverting the names and omitting the subtitle *Storia di un enigma*²⁷ (27). But what is more amazing is the continuation of his footnote: “For the books of Emanuela Marinelli, here is Pier Angelo Gramaglia’s statement: «To the general public, the Catholic publishers prefer to supply pitiful substitutes rather than give space to works of serene and objective criticism»²⁸ (28). Apart from the gratuitous insult, this is surely enlightening on Nicolotti’s ways of expressing himself, it is ridiculous to speak about “Catholic publishers”, after having quoted a publication by Rizzoli, one of the greatest Italian lay publishers.

Nicolotti does not explain who Pier Angelo Gramaglia is: he is a Turinese Catholic patrologist, strongly against the authenticity of the Shroud, who in the past published on the subject, besides two articles in a historical magazine, two booklets (in 1978 and 1981) for the publishing house Claudiana, at that time exclusively Waldensian. The name Claudiana is in homage to the bishop Claudius of Turin (8th – 9th century), considered a “forerunner” of the Waldensians for his fight against the introduction of sacred images in churches and for his activity as a commentator on the Bible.

Gramaglia is highly esteemed by Nicolotti for his affirmations, to which he makes reference many times in his book on the Mandylion; to the readers of the book on the Templars, however, he limits himself to supplying only another footnote quotation to what he himself says of the countess Maria Grazia Siliato’s books: “They are for the most part confusing and patch up stuff that can only be imagined”²⁹ (29). In another footnote he adds: “Pier Angelo Gramaglia has described the content of Ms Siliato’s books, that he defines as «a self-styled Swiss archaeologist», as a «true encyclopaedia of nonsense». The judgment is not very delicate, but the substance is thus”³⁰ (30). I think that all comment is superfluous.

But let us go back to the issue of the Templecombe panel. Nicolotti’s text continues as follows: “By now the reader will be accustomed to such confusion, and perhaps he will not feel further astonishment when he discovers that this information, already conflicting in itself, is all false too”³¹ (31).

After having quoted the corrected date, he comments: “This simply means that the 12th century of Marinelli-Petrosillo does not exist, that the interval 1275-1300 of Frale is completely wrong and all the more so is “1280 approximately” - the latter data was repeated by Baima Bollone³² (32) in his latest book. The sindonologists, in conclusion, keep silent with regard to the 14th and 15th centuries, and not by chance: of the 160 years interval proposed by the radiometric dating, in fact, only the first 27 coincide with the Templar presence in Templecombe, while the central value falls around 1360, when the preceptory had been in the hands of the Hospitallers for thirty years and the Shroud had already been exhibited in France”³³ (33).

²⁶ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 81.

²⁷ O. PETROSILLO – E. MARINELLI, *La Sindone. Storia di un enigma*, Rizzoli, Milano 1998.

²⁸ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 157.

²⁹ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 128.

³⁰ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 168.

³¹ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 81.

³² Nicolotti does not supply information on Pierluigi Baima Bollone, who is a professor of Forensic Medicine at the University of Turin and for many years was the scientific director of the International Center of Sindonology of Turin.

³³ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 81.

In this passionate tirade, Nicolotti does not notice that he accuses sindonologists of keeping silent also about the 14th century, when a few lines previously he reproached Marinelli and Petrosillo for having supplied the date 12th-14th century; however, since I am one of the two accused, I can easily explain from where the “false information” was born. The period shift derives from the source used, a book by historian Ian Wilson³⁴ (34), in which it is read that based on the dating, the panel could go back to 1280. Wilson evidently referred to the opening date of the interval; thinking instead that he had indicated, by that date, the central point of the interval, and being 1280 in the 13th century, I concluded that the panel went back to the 12th - 14th century. That’s all. The accusation of deliberately counterfeiting the date, therefore, is unjustified.

Quoting *Archaeometry*, however, Nicolotti, who wants to deny the possibility that the panel represents the Shroud face and belonged to the Templars, avoids saying that in the article it is admitted that the image of the panel resembles the Shroud, that the panel was found on the site of a Templar preceptory and that the painting can be associated to the Templars. Moreover, he emphasizes that the panel could originally have been “a shutter, a door, a fence, a cover” and adds that “someone could have re-used it to paint, for any reason, in a successive moment. If he made it in Templecombe or elsewhere, it is impossible to know”³⁵ (35).

Another example of quotation instrumentally used by Nicolotti concerns a phrase of his as a comment on the quarrel between Frale, who in the description of the worship of the mysterious idol by a Templar reads *signum fustanium* (cotton burlap)³⁶ (36), and himself, who instead reads *signum fusteum* (wooden image)³⁷ (37). I shall not enter into this issue, I only note that Nicolotti immediately afterwards writes: “The reading is not difficult, and it is shared by all those who have seen the manuscript”. In a footnote to this affirmation³⁸ (38), Nicolotti attributes to Simonetta Cerrini an article that in fact is by the journalist Bernadette Arnaud³⁹ (39), in which Cerrini is only interviewed; and on the issue of the *signum fusteum* he thus attributes to Cerrini what is not in inverted commas, and therefore was written by Arnaud.

It is likely that Arnaud refers to the thought of Cerrini, but the quotation as it is is not correct. This footnote is the only reference to Cerrini in Nicolotti’s book, who does not say that the scholar of the Templars is a historian who graduated at the Sorbonne in Paris; and he does not even say that in this interview she admits the hypothesis that the Templars could have venerated the Shroud.

After trying, by all means, to eliminate a placing, inconvenient for him, of the Templecombe panel in space and the time, Nicolotti proceeds with the attempt to destroy the iconographic argument, defined as “the last and weakest”, mocking sindonologists: “They swear that the panel represents the face of Christ, and what’s more in a form that, as Emanuela Marinelli and Ilaria Ramelli⁴⁰ assure, is «unequivocally» similar to the Shroud”⁴¹

³⁴ I. WILSON, *The Blood and the Shroud*, The Free Press, New York, USA 1998, p. 136.

³⁵ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 82.

³⁶ B. FRALE, *I Templari e la sindone di Cristo*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2009, p. 81.

³⁷ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 60.

³⁸ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 152.

³⁹ B. ARNAUD Bernadette, *Le Temple adorait-il le saint suaire?*, Sciences et Avenir n. 761, Juillet 2010, p. 58, box in her article *Les derniers jours des Templiers*, pp. 48-61,

⁴⁰ Nicolotti does not supply any information on me. But he does not even say that Ilaria Ramelli holds a doctorate in Philology and Literature of the classical world.

(41). The irony of Nicolotti is moved then on Alan Whanger, «a psychiatrist» who works with his wife, who “has took part in the making of a documentary on the Shroud published by an American creationist association” and “examining some photographs of the Shroud, thought he could identify on it the trace of various instruments of Christ’s passion”⁴² (42). And he lists them.

Nicolotti should be glad at the fact that Whanger is a psychiatrist and works with his wife, since in his book on the Mandylion he speaks in favour of Gaetano Ciccone, an Italian psychiatrist, and of his wife: “I thank them for the gift of their book, for some suggestions and the shipment of bibliographical material”⁴³ (43). However, in order to complete the information that Nicolotti does not supply, Whanger taught at the Duke University Medical Center in Durham (North Carolina, USA) and is also specialized in surgery, geriatrics and tropical medicine. From 1961 to 1965 Whanger and his wife, who belong to the Methodist Church, were missionaries in Zimbabwe.

This thoroughness of information is necessary, if we want to give an idea of a person’s value, and it seems to me that Nicolotti is lacking also in this. It would be as if I, who praise him for the immense size of the work he has carried out, instead of saying that he is a historian from the University of Turin, simply mocked him because he has written that the man of the Shroud “has a large moustache under the nose and immediately under the lower lip”⁴⁴ (44) and that the “purple cloak that Jesus carried to the Golgotha”⁴⁵ is acknowledged also on some Templar seals, while in Matthew 27:31 and in Mark 15:20 we can read that they put Jesus’ clothes on him to lead him away to Calvary.

Personally the identification of the imprints of the objects, that the Whangers think they can see, does not convince me, but this has nothing to do with the technique of the overlay in polarized light, published in *Applied Optics*⁴⁶ (46). Nicolotti asks these questions: “Really 125 points, on a single face? Identified with which criteria?”⁴⁷ (47). It astonishes me that a bloodhound like him, who succeeds in re-examining ancient manuscripts, has not read the article in *Applied Optics*. However, he could have at least read the article published by the Whangers in Italian in a book on icons⁴⁸ (48).

“Without taking advantage of who knows which technique - Nicolotti continues - I perceive there many meaningful divergences”. And he lists them. But his objections regarding the differences between the face on the Shroud and that of Templecombe, with open mouth and eyes, do not take into account the observation of the Shroud as it is, where in effect it could seem to show an open mouth and eyes; it is the photographic negative that reveals that they are closed. The lack of the blood and the lesions are not meaningful either: many other holy faces of Jesus exist, inspired by the Shroud, that are amended from the signs of the suffering. It is enough to think of the icon of the *Holy Mandylion* (14th century) of the Tretyakov Gallery of Moscow (fig. 2).

⁴¹ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 82.

⁴² A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. pp. 82-83.

⁴³ A. NICOLOTTI, *Dal Mandylion di Edessa alla Sindone di Torino. Metamorfosi di una leggenda*, quoted, p. 4.

⁴⁴ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 82.

⁴⁵ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 76.

⁴⁶ A.D. WHANGER - M. WHANGER, *Polarized image overlay technique: a new image comparison method and its applications*, in *Applied Optics* 24, 6, (1985), pp. 766-772.

⁴⁷ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 82.

⁴⁸ A.D. WHANGER, *Icone e Sindone. Confronto mediante tecnica di polarizzazione di immagine sovrapposta (Polarized Image Overlay Technique: PIOT)*, in *Le icone di Cristo e la Sindone*, cit., pp. 145-151.

Nicolotti's tirade then increases the tone: "Where are, then, these 125 points of coincidence? The tip of the nose of the first portrait fits together with the tip of the nose of the second?"⁴⁹ (49). And he attacks Whanger, "who is accustomed to identifying astonishing amounts of congruence points between the Shroud and several objects (he marked 145 and 188 with two Roman coins, and even 250 with the icon of the Pantocrator of St. Catherine on the Sinai)"⁵⁰ (50). Apart from the fact that the coins were not Roman but Byzantine⁵¹ (51), the critics of other scholars' works would have written in a different tone. But we will return to this argument when we comment on the other book, on the Mandyllion.

Concerning the Templecombe face, Nicolotti assumes that it could also represent the head of Saint John the Baptist and concludes: "It cannot be excluded that it is one of the several typologies of the Veronica portrait, or a face of whatever, painted as an exercise by whatever painter on the first disused panel that came to his hand"⁵² (52). In conclusion, it can be anything, except a face that resembles the Shroud.

Regarding the testimonies drawn from the confessions of the Templars, personally I think that it is very difficult to deduce anything sure from them, as they were extorted under torture; however, some it is worth trying to search for interesting indications, provided that, obviously, the examination of what is asserted is done in the proper way.

In his attack against Frale, accused of text manipulation, Nicolotti writes: "This way of dealing with the confessions, rejecting what is thought as false and maintaining what is considered credible, is based on an arbitrary prejudice that does not find, inside the same depositions, any reason. In this way we can make a source say what it is desired, without any control, by means of the removal of the disliked or conflicting aspects"⁵³ (53).

Then, the public notary of the process of Arnaut Sabbatier hears *lignum* and writes *lineum* "because of simple assonance between the two words"⁵⁴ (54), and the same Sabbatier instead of kissing the feet of the idol, kisses those of the support on which it rests⁵⁵ (55). Nicolotti had already written "it is not said that the feet belong to the idol"⁵⁶ (56). Well, the public notary was a bit deaf, but why must the Templar kiss the pedestal instead of the idol? Jean d'Anisy was right to complain that there was not enough light⁵⁷ (57).

Then Nicolotti reports a passage drawn from the Chronicle of Saint-Denis: "In fact, soon after, they started to adore a false idol, and certainly this idol was an old skin as if all embalmed and like smooth burlap, and in this the Templar certainly placed his most miserable faith and believes, and believed very firmly"⁵⁸ (58). Criticizing Frale, who translates "this idol was made of a very ancient human skin, that appeared embalmed, or in the form of pure burlap"⁵⁹ (59), and therefore makes you think that there are two different idols, Nicolotti writes: "It is therefore the same object: a head of embalmed human skin (or spread with balsams or ointments) that appeared like a smooth burlap (or glossy, because of the presence

⁴⁹ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 82.

⁵⁰ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 83.

⁵¹ Afterwards Nicolotti must have noticed the mistake and in the book on the Mandyllion, pp. 164-167, speaks about Byzantine coins.

⁵² A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 85.

⁵³ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 48.

⁵⁴ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 56.

⁵⁵ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 58.

⁵⁶ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 52.

⁵⁷ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 38.

⁵⁸ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 90.

⁵⁹ B. FRALE, *I Templari e la sindone di Cristo*, quoted, p. 84.

of the balsams)⁶⁰ (60). If it had been Frale who introduced the word “head” in a description where it was not present, Nicolotti would have been infuriated. But evidently he can do it, while others cannot.

We then see the case of the *Chartularium culisanense*, a diplomatic code destroyed during the Second World War. In 1980⁶¹ (61) it was found again in Naples, in the church of S. Catherine in Formiello, a nineteenth-century transcription of some sheets of the *Chartularium* and a paper was presented about it by the discoverer, Pasquale Rinaldi, in the conference that was held in Bologna the next year⁶² (62). The interest lies in the fact that on one of these sheets there is a letter attributed to Theodore Angelus Comnenus, who in 1205⁶³ (63) wrote to Pope Innocent III in order to complain, among other things, that “the Sheet in which our Lord Jesus Christ was wrapped, after the death and before the Resurrection” had been taken from Constantinople to Athens.

Nicolotti criticizes Daniel Scavone, a historian from the University of Southern Indiana, who thinks the letter of the *Chartularium* is credible: “Daniel Scavone, in order to defend the credibility of the letter, points out that a modern history handbook of the crusades designates Theodore as «Angelus Comnenus»; moreover, he thinks it possible that Theodore intentionally wrote to the Pope signing «Angelus» because «that name could have been received more favourably» than Ducas, and «was decidedly more popular in the West» because of the good relationships he enjoyed with Alexius IV Angelus. The first explanation is completely lacking in historical value, the second simply imaginative⁶⁴ (64). Scavone’s hypothesis that the Shroud was brought to France by Pons de Chaponay is branded by Nicolotti as “the fruit of imaginative inductions” that “do not even have proof to support them”⁶⁵ (65).

Since the *Chartularium* is controversial, Nicolotti passes from the doubt to the certainty of its falsity, citing the opinion of two authoritative Byzantinists, Luca Pieralli and Otto Kresten, who have communicated this to him in private correspondence with these words: “It is a late counterfeiting and of low level, surely put in the center of the scientific discussion on the Shroud by the enthusiasm of some churchman in good faith”⁶⁶ (66). But even admitting it is a fake, in any case the question would remain: why does the counterfeiter mention just Athens? I think that it would be interesting to look closer at this point, but Nicolotti thinks differently and limits himself to adding that Zaccone, like Karlheinz Dietz and Emmanuel Poulle, “did not seem too persuaded by its authenticity”⁶⁷ (67).

But a photograph of that transcription of the letter still is exposed in Turin at the Museum of the Shroud, of which Zaccone is director. Moreover, since he recommends Zaccone’s book

⁶⁰ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 91.

⁶¹ On page 106 of his book, *I Templari e la Sindone, storia di un falso*, quoted, due to a mistake, Nicolotti writes that the nineteenth-century copies were found in 1982.

⁶² P. RINALDI, *Un documento probante sulla localizzazione in Atene della santa Sindone dopo il saccheggio di Costantinopoli*, in: *La Sindone, scienza e fede*, Atti del II Convegno Nazionale di Sindonologia, Bologna, 27-29 novembre 1981, CLUEB, Bologna 1983, pp. 109-113.

⁶³ On page 116 of his book, *I Templari e la Sindone, storia di un falso*, quoted, due to a typing mistake, Nicolotti writes 1025 instead of 1205.

⁶⁴ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 163.

⁶⁵ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 119.

⁶⁶ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 111.

⁶⁷ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 109. Nicolotti writes of Poulle (recently deceased) that he is a medieval historian on page 170, while he does not supply information on Dietz, who is professor of Ancient History at the University of Würzburg (Germany).

as “the best and most updated essay”, he could also quote what the author writes: “Such a source would be surely interesting, even if it introduces dark implications and shadows that are not easy to dissipate. I refer in particular to its tradition - nineteenth-century transcription - but also to its nature. In fact, in origin it was part of a cartulary, on whose typology the doctrine expresses very discordant judgments. It is sure, however, that the impossibility of the examination of the extrinsic characters of the document is objectively a limit. I think, however, that there could be some interpolations in it. Among other things, it seems to me, as an example, that the *intitulatio*, in which the author Theodore Comneno Ducas defines himself «Theodore Angelus», does not correspond to the title used by the family in that period, while, on the contrary, it is completely correct that the title of Despot of Epirus is not attributed to his brother, as it would be anachronistic for that age. Regarding the historical content of the document, it seems to me that it can be asserted that it becomes partly harmonic in the context of the reactions to the excesses of the Crusaders in Constantinople, that just in that arc of time also provoked the intervention of Innocent III”⁶⁸ (68). Therefore, it could be worthwhile trying to obtain a deeper analysis of the origin of the *Chartularium*.

Naturally, then, since for Nicolotti it is sure that Otho de La Roche never possessed the Shroud⁶⁹ (69), there is no proof of his return to France⁷⁰ (70) and the Shroud of Besançon is “quite a late fake”⁷¹ (71), he then ridicules the “arranged theories, that are contrived in order to save this and that”. And he continues: “According to Alessandro Piana⁷² (72), for example, Otho would have taken the true Shroud (of Turin) to France and from it he would have drawn a copy to give to the archbishop (of Besançon). As usual, the documents are lacking: it was enough for Piana to find a painted Shroud in the castle of Ray-sur-Saône in order to imagine that the family that inhabited it was also in charge of the fabrication of the Besançon Shroud”⁷³ (73).

In fact Piana did not state anything as a certainty, he spoke about “a new clue” in support of the “most probable hypothesis”⁷⁴ (74). Nicolotti, after having specified that the folds argument is “pseudo-reasoning”⁷⁵ (75), maintains that Piana wishes to push by force the Shroud refolded into 48 layers into a casket that is too small: “It is enough to imagine that the refolded sheet has been a bit pressed within the box and forced to enter in it, Piana says”⁷⁶ (76).

We read Piana’s text for comparison: “The dimensions of the casket are too small for the Shroud refolded into 48, it is therefore probable that the Cloth was positioned inside likely

⁶⁸ G.M. ZACCONE, *La Sindone, storia di un’immagine*, quoted, pp. 62-63.

⁶⁹ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 118.

⁷⁰ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 121.

⁷¹ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 118.

⁷² Nicolotti does not supply information on Alessandro Piana, who is a biologist, author of historical publications. See *Shroud Newsletter* 65, June 2007, pp. 6-7 and *Shroud Newsletter* 66, December 2007, pp. 9-31; A. PIANA “Missing years” of the Holy Shroud, in *Proceedings of the International Workshop on the Scientific approach to the Acheiropoietos Images*, Frascati 4-6 May 2010, a cura di P. DI LAZZARO, Ed. ENEA, Frascati (Roma) 2010, pp. 95-102.

⁷³ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 119.

⁷⁴ A. PIANA, *Sindone, gli anni perduti. Da Constantinople a Lirey: nuove prove*, Sugarco Edizioni, Milano 2007, p. 65.

⁷⁵ A. NICOLOTTI, *I Templari e la Sindone, storia di un falso*, quoted, p. 122. Nicolotti quotes the invitation of the textile expert Mechthild Flury-Lemberg “not to give an inadequate weight to the presence of these folds” and in footnote p. 167 he reminds us that the Shroud remained rolled up for centuries on a cylinder until “1993”, which should be 1998. In the book on the Mandylion on p. 47 he indicates 1998 correctly.

⁷⁶ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 123.

practicing a light distortion regarding the folding obtained”⁷⁷ (77). Forced, here, there is only Nicolotti’s thought, who on the several proposed theories to explain the arrival of the Shroud in France, comments: “In the absence of serious historical proof, the sindonologists have heaped up non-verified hypotheses, gratuitous deductions and apodictic affirmations often based on material and also rough errors”⁷⁸ (78).

Another enlightening example of the way Nicolotti argues is his description of a representation, often cited by the sindonologists, and his reasons for asserting that it has nothing to do with the Shroud. This is the miniature in *Codex Pray* in the National Library of Budapest (fig. 3 on the right) that goes back to 1192-1195⁷⁹ (79) and can be compared with an analogous miniature in the contemporary *Psalter of Ingeborg* (fig. 3 on the left).

In the upper scene of the folio 28r of *Codex Pray* we can see the unction of Christ laid out after the crucifixion on a sheet. The inspiration from the Shroud is obvious (fig. 4): the body is completely naked and the hands cross to cover the lower abdomen. The thumbs are not visible. On the forehead there is a sign that recalls the analogous trickle of blood that is observed on the Shroud.

To Nicolotti “the attempts at transforming that drawing into a representation of the Shroud are inconceivable”⁸⁰ (80). His objections are that: “The sheet is unrolled in the sense of the width”; “the man of the Shroud crosses the hands, not the forearms”; “it is enough then to turn the page in order to see the resurrected Christ with all the fingers”; the sign on the forehead “appears like an indistinct spot”; “and it does not even surprise the sindonologists that on the body of Jesus and on the sheet the wounds from the nails, the flagellum and the lance are lacking, that on the Shroud are rendered so obvious by the bloodstains”. The interpretations of the sindonologists, to Nicolotti, are “exercises in fantasy”⁸¹ (81).

Clearly the artist has represented, in a stylized way, the details that struck him; neither can it be expected that, in representing the resurrected Christ, he had to continue to keep him holding the bent thumbs. In the *Psalter of Ingeborg* the sign on the forehead is replaced by a tuft, as it is observed in many icons; and the sheet is so long that it falls back on the shoulders of the two men at the head and the feet of Jesus. In *Codex Pray* Nicolotti also sees that “part of the cloth falls back on the shoulders of Joseph”⁸² (82), but this observation is also mistaken, because in this case he is confusing the Shroud with the dresses of the two personages.

In the lower scene we see the arrival of the pious women at the sepulchre, and the angel showing them the empty shroud. According to Nicolotti, instead, “the angel indicates with the hand a sarcophagus whose cover has been removed and overlapped in diagonal, with a burial cloth over it”⁸³ (83). If this were so, under it we could notice the cavity of the empty sepulchre like in the *Psalter of Ingeborg*; but Nicolotti thinks that the sarcophagus of *Codex Pray* has “two stones”⁸⁴ (84). I have never seen a sarcophagus with two covers.

Still in the lower scene of *Codex Pray*, the upper part of the empty sheet has a drawing that imitates the fishbone weaves structure of the Shroud, while small red crosses cover the lower

⁷⁷ A. PIANA, op. cit. p. 69.

⁷⁸ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 127.

⁷⁹ A.M. DUBARLE, *L'icona del “Manoscritto Pray”*, in *Le icone di Cristo e la Sindone*, pp. 181-188.

⁸⁰ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 86.

⁸¹ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. pp. 87-88.

⁸² A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 86.

⁸³ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 87.

⁸⁴ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 88.

part. Under the foot of the angel two winding red traces are noticed, that represent two bloodstains. In both parts of the cloth some small rings are noticed, positioned in the same sequence as a group of four burn holes that is repeated four times on the Shroud⁸⁵ (85). This damage to the relic is without doubt prior to the fire of 1532: as these signs are represented on a copy dated 1516, preserved in the collegiate of S. Gommaire in Lierre, Belgium⁸⁶ (86). No need to say that Nicolotti refuses this interpretation⁸⁷ (87).

Another example of Nicolotti's deductions: he accepts that in 1201 Nicholas Mesarites, custodian of the Pharos Chapel, when listing the present relics mentions the "burial shrouds of Christ" and the image "imprinted on a towel"⁸⁸ (88). Nicolotti thinks that "after the crusade all the treasure of the imperial chapel remained where it was, available for the new emperor Baldwin"⁸⁹ (89). Nicolotti writes also that the relics of the Pharos "were soon acquired by Louis IX of France and translated to Paris"⁹⁰ (90). In another publication, Nicolotti asserts that Baldwin, due to economic problems, "some years later was forced to give up all the relics of the Pharos Chapel to Louis IX"⁹¹ (91).

In the same article Nicolotti asserts: "We are in a position to know with precision which were the relics yielded to the French monarch because the text of a declaration, dated June 1247, that lists them one by one, has come down to us". In this list there is "the holy cloth inserted into a board" and "part of the sudarium with which his body was wrapped in the sepulchre"⁹² (92). Nicolotti concludes that the holy cloth is the Mandylion and notes that "there are instead no shrouds, but only «a part of the sudarium with which his body was wrapped in the sepulchre»"⁹³ (93). It should have therefore to be asserted, following Nicolotti, that the burial sheet of Christ remained in the Pharos and Baldwin tried to be clever, giving Louis IX only a little bit and keeping the rest, or that it had disappeared from the Pharos - it is unknown neither how nor when!

On the legitimacy of the other scholars' hypotheses, Nicolotti is not too democratic. Let us see an example. In his book he quotes the text of Nicholas of Otranto, Abbot of Casole, who was in Constantinople during 1206. The abbot says three things: firstly, that the crusaders entered into the skevophylakion (the place in which the treasure was preserved) in the imperial palace, where some relics of the Passion were kept; secondly, that the bandages of Jesus were among these relics; thirdly, he adds "and the bandages, that later on we saw with our eyes"⁹⁴ (94). On the first point, Nicolotti deduces that the crusaders did not carry away the relics. Scavone deduces that they took the bandages. The abbot does not say this and all the deductions are legitimate if given as a hypothesis.

On the second point, the bandages, Nicolotti thinks that the Abbot cannot refer to the Shroud because the word bandages "reminds us of the action of wrapping". But the Shroud

⁸⁵ A.M. DUBARLE, *L'icona del "Manoscritto Pray"*, pp. 186-187.

⁸⁶ L. FOSSATI, *The Documentary Value of the Lier Shroud*, in *Acheiropoietos, "non fait de main d'homme"* *Acheiropoietos, "non fait de main d'homme"*, Actes du III Symposium Scientifique International du CIELT, Nice 12-13 Mai 1997, Éditions du CIELT, Paris 1998, pp. 195-196.

⁸⁷ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 88.

⁸⁸ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 22.

⁸⁹ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 114.

⁹⁰ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 22.

⁹¹ A. NICOLOTTI, *Forme e vicende del Mandilio di Edessa secondo alcune moderne interpretazioni*, in *Sacre impronte e oggetti «non fatti da mano d'uomo» nelle religioni*, pp. 279-307 and illustrations 23-31, pp. 302-303.

⁹² A. NICOLOTTI, *Forme e vicende del Mandilio di Edessa secondo alcune moderne interpretazioni*, p. 303.

⁹³ A. NICOLOTTI, *Forme e vicende del Mandilio di Edessa secondo alcune moderne interpretazioni*, p. 304.

⁹⁴ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 114.

did wrap the body, so why is the action of winding a problem? On the third point, if the bandages were still in Constantinople or not, according to Nicolotti the text does not authorize Scavone to think that the bandages are not in Constantinople any more when the abbot writes. Nicolotti does not say that Scavone's translation is wrong, but that "it is difficult". Scavone assumes that the abbot, when he says that he saw bandages "later on", saw them elsewhere, more specifically in Athens during a stage of his journey; Nicolotti thinks that the abbot saw the bandages in Constantinople. But Scavone⁹⁵ (95) formulates a hypothesis, Nicolotti speaks of certainties.

At this point it is evident that Nicolotti does not start from a neutral position and this, in the course of his surveying, is harmful to his interpretation of the text and the validity of his conclusions. A necessary reflection prevails: if "we cannot have any certainty relative to this first millennium", as Zaccone, a scholar thought reliable by Nicolotti, warned, then how can the same Nicolotti have these total negationist certainties, given as unquestionable? How can he silence those sources that, according to Zaccone, "are not completely silent"? Here, Nicolotti's method is thus: if a document is controversial, then it is false. If a document is authentic, then what it is written in it is false. If what is written is true, it cannot refer to the Shroud that is now in Turin.

In the end Nicolotti, convinced that he has swept away all and everybody, asserts: "The result of the historical analysis, on the whole, is extremely disappointing: of all the inferring castle of the publications that have been taken under investigation, not a stone has resisted the sieve of critical examination. Approximations, errors, anachronisms, false sources, misleading demonstrations and «adventurous deductions» are accompanied by real counterfeit texts". Shortly afterwards he writes: "This book, consequently, has assumed the features of a resolute wiping the slate clean with a sponge". Moreover he adds that "the Catholic Church, with precaution, has officially chosen not to call the Shroud a «relic» anymore"⁹⁶ (96), while on the contrary Pope Benedict XVI defines it as a relic in his recent book "Jesus of Nazareth", part two⁹⁷ (97).

Nicolotti continues complaining about "dilettantish, inaccurate and partisan studies, which mutually feed themselves and support themselves". And again: "The winning din of the pseudoinvestigators comes out on top, imitating the language of historians without knowing or sharing their methodology, and they do not hesitate to resort to any type of contrived argument in order to support their own theses". And so on with the "pseudoscientific drift", the "propagandistic, ideological, political or trade operation", the "resistant culture, diffuse and shared, founded on the unreliable"⁹⁸ (98).

Among the evils of the "last times", Nicolotti stigmatizes these: "Unbridled freedom of conjecture, confusion between hypothesis and certainty, abandonment of the logical criteria of the proof, neglect in the use of sources and incautious resource to literature of second or third

⁹⁵ D. SCAVONE, *Documenting the Shroud's missing years*, in *Proceedings of the International Workshop on the Scientific approach to the Acheiropoietos Images*, pp. 87-94; D. SCAVONE, *The Shroud of Turin in Constantinople, the documentary evidence*, *Sindon Nuova Serie, Quaderno n. 1*, Giugno 1989, pp. 113-128. *Besançon and other hypotheses for the missing years*, in: *The Shroud of Turin, Perspectives on a Multifaceted Enigma*, Proceedings of the 2008 Columbus International Conference, August 14-17, 2008, Edizioni Libreria Progetto, Padova 2009, pp. 408-433.

⁹⁶ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 137.

⁹⁷ J. RATZINGER - BENEDETTO XVI, *Gesù di Nazaret - seconda parte. Dall'ingresso in Gerusalemme fino alla risurrezione*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2011, p. 254.

⁹⁸ A. NICOLOTTI, op. cit. p. 138.

hand”. Therefore he invokes the historians as “professionals of the refutation”⁹⁹ (99). And here is the final appeal: “The control, the punctilious verification, the insistence on the method and the sensitization with regard to the topic of the corrected spreading are binding and sometimes frustrating efforts, but certainly necessary and in some manner also foreboding of satisfactions. Otherwise, the more and more real risk is that sooner or later the rigor of the historical method must be forced irremediably to give way to - and not only outside of the *turrus eburnea* of the Academy - the arrogant strut of a made-up fake”¹⁰⁰ (100).

It is a real pity that a scholar, so rigorous in the research of the sources, is then so unbalanced in an overcritical way in their interpretation. The reading of his works has revealed them to me like the sum of extreme negationism: Nicolotti is against any possibility that there could be any minimal historical indication that the Shroud existed before the 14th century and this conviction of his is not proposed as an alternative hypothesis to others, but as absolute certainty. This is in evident contrast with the sources recalled by Zaccone, that “are not completely silent”.

But the Shroud has suffered much more in its history, and its authenticity cannot be wiped away by a sponge that tries to eliminate the traces of its records. Even if it is a sponge soaked in vinegar.

⁹⁹ A. NICOLOTTI, *I Templari e la Sindone, storia di un falso*, quoted, p. 138.

¹⁰⁰ A. NICOLOTTI, *I Templari e la Sindone, storia di un falso*, quoted, pp. 138-139.