

The Coria tablecloth and the Shroud were made at the same time



John Jackson, author of the discovery, examining Coria's tablecloth. Museum of the Cathedral of Coria

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Under the vaults of a cold room, in the old Renaissance cathedral of Coria (Cáceres), **a team of NASA scientists** deploys an arsenal of ultraviolet and infrared lamps, scanning devices ... One by one they seal the windows. Although it is dark at night, they cover any gaps with cloth so that no ray of light from the street lamps interferes with the tests. At the adjoining table, inside a silver casket, four meters of cloth are waiting to be analyzed which, according to Catholic tradition, served as a tablecloth for Jesus and his apostles at the Last Supper.

A scientist from the North American space agency carefully disposes the tissue under the instruments transported expressly from Denver. **He is Professor John Jackson** (director of the Turin Shroud Center in Colorado), the same one who in 1978 had the privilege of being one of the 30 experts chosen by the Vatican to study the Shroud of Turin. Later he would travel to the cathedral of Coria to examine this enigmatic relic unique in the world and to outline a surprising discovery: the Extremaduran tablecloth and the holy sheet would have both covered, one on top of the other, the table of the Last Supper.

He has not yet closed the date, but this 2014 he will present in Coria the detailed conclusions of his study. **"It was the result of chance,"** says Jackson himself to Chronicle. "We were visiting an archbishop friend here in the US, and in the course of a relaxed conversation he mentioned the existence of a tablecloth related to the Last Supper of Christ that was in Spain. My wife, Rebecca, and I wanted to know more about the canvas and if there would be the possibility of studying it. After some contacts and tests that we asked the bishopric to carry out, we moved to Extremadura for the first time in 2006."

Jackson was the one who discovered that the figure of the Turin Shroud is a three-dimensional image, that is, its imprint on the fabric is proportional to the proximity of the fabric to the body that contained the Shroud. The intuition of the former NASA scientist, even before learning about the existence of the Coria cloth, was that **the Holy Shroud had to be a tablecloth**, due to the precipitation with which Jesus was buried.

The surprise for the team was great when, when measuring Coria's canvas, they found that the dimensions, 4.32 m long by 0.90 m wide, **were almost identical to the one preserved in the Duomo in Turin** (4.40 by 1,10). "For us," says Rebecca Jackson, "the Shroud and the Extremadura tablecloth were used together at the Last Supper. For the Jews, in the great solemnities, and Passover is the greatest of them, it was common to use two tablecloths in a ritual way, to remember the journey through the desert after leaving Egypt. Thus, they say, "a first tablecloth was placed on which the food was deposited and a second cloth was placed on it to prevent sand from falling or being contaminated by insects."

For the architect Ignacio Dols, delegate in Extremadura of the Spanish Society of Sindonology, "Jackson's **intuition may make sense due to the haste to bury Christ**. He died around three in the afternoon on a Friday and was to be buried before approximately six on the same day, at which time the Sabbath began (a holiday for the Jews in which no physical labor could be performed). In just three hours Joseph of Arimathea had to claim the body from Pilate, obtain permission to bury it, transfer it to a tomb, make preparations, shroud it, and seal the tomb. The reasonable thing is that he used whatever elements he had on hand, and such **a tablecloth was perfect for wrapping a body**.

The Colorado team photographed it with the latest technologies and under different types of light. Each image taken was 10 cm², in order to complete a mosaic of the entire tablecloth at very high resolution." **We wanted to compare the existing stains** on the Holy Shroud of Turin with those on the Coria tablecloth, despite the fact that it shows an erosion of its surface due to, we believe, having been washed on various occasions." And it is that the cloth, apart from being exposed in public, has served to cover the altar at masses.

Their conclusions are supported by other previous research. In 2001, the Spanish Center for Sindonology verified that the thread that makes up the weft of the cloth is twisted in a "Z". **"Curiously and coincidentally, the same type of twist as the thread of the Shroud of Turin"**, points out Ignacio Dols. And the CSIC analyzed the blue dye that decorates the tablecloth bands, concluding that it is "natural indigo," a dye commonly used in antiquity, introduced in Europe in the 16th century, 200 years after it was found, relic of Coria. There is also a theory that Coria's tablecloth is the same one that Da Vinci immortalized in The Last Supper, since both are decorated with blue bands.

The journey of this unique piece is full of mysteries and legends. The first documentary reference is from 1404, when Benedict XIII, the so-called Pope Luna, awarded a bull by which he recognizes its authenticity and allows its exhibition and worship every May 3. All the interest aroused does not make us remember the fervor that aroused centuries ago, when that day it was exhibited on the balcony of the Cathedral of Coria. Thousands of people came to contemplate and touch a tablecloth to which **miraculous properties were attributed**.

Such was the fervor that was unleashed that, fearing for the integrity of the tablecloth and of the faithful who struggled to touch it, Bishop Juan Álvarez de Castro banned public displays in the 19th century. In time the relic fell into oblivion. Now recover the fame of the past.