

Comments On Shroud Research

by

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The following is a recreation, with some embellishments, of extemporaneous comments made at the Meeting of American Sindonology held in Dallas, Texas on November 6 – 8, 1998.

Thank you for asking me to say a few words, but I really came to listen and not to speak. Having basically retired from scientific endeavors, I find that my role has evolved from an active researcher to more of a very interested spectator. I try to stay abreast of new developments as best I can by staying in touch with Barrie Schwartz and his wonderful Shroud website, and by reading regular Shroud publications, but I am definitely in a passive mode.

I also had a very selfish reason for wanting to attend this conference, and that is to see old friends like Bob Bucklin, Kim Dreisbach, Al Adler and Mike Minor whom I haven't seen for some time. So any comments I make today are definitely "off the cuff" and I apologize for any omissions or misconceptions.

It is very strange to stand up here and think of myself as one of the "old timers" in Shroud research, when almost twenty-five years ago, I was one of the new faces who was bringing new technology, in the form of digital image processing, to the investigation of the Shroud of Turin. Now, I am very pleased to see so many new faces at this conference and to hear new ideas and new areas of research and education that are being proposed and explored.

Thanks to the work of Al Adler and others, we believe we know the mechanism by which the frontal and dorsal body images are recorded on the Shroud. The next obvious unknown is the image transport mechanism. Many theories have been proposed, but none have been demonstrated to satisfy all of the characteristics of the images on the Shroud. In this area, I am especially excited by the radiographic work done by Gus Accetta. He has produced images which more closely resemble the images on the Shroud than any I have seen so far. And I especially admire his willingness to be the guinea pig in this investigation. Gus, I don't know how far you are going with this, but I think you are definitely on the right track.

I am also impressed with the work done by Dan Scavone and Kim and others in the pursuit of the history and provenance of the Shroud. I am totally amazed that you people

can dig through ancient writings in unintelligible (to me) languages and find obscure references that may pertain to the history of the Shroud. This gap in the provenance of the Shroud is definitely a question which must be pursued in order to determine whether the Shroud of Turin is truly the burial cloth of Jesus Christ. So I heartily encourage you to continue to dig into these areas where I am completely lost.

Thank you Barrie for getting Dr. (Warren) Grundfest interested in applying his multispectral imaging system to the Shroud. He can do in minutes what we could only partially do in many hours during the 1978 investigation. This technology can be especially useful in quantifying chemical changes in the Shroud over time – a critical question in the matter of conservation. These data would also be useful in analyzing spatial and temporal variations in the images and the background cloth as they relate to the image transport and recording mechanisms.

I am also pleased to see that there is great interest in investigating the correlation between stains and particulate matter on the Shroud and that on other artifacts which are believed to have been involved in the passion and death of Jesus. I don't know whether valid DNA comparisons or other microbiological correlations can be accomplished, but there is much to be gained if the evidence on the Shroud can be correlated with that on artifacts which have provenance back hundreds of years prior to the thirteenth century.

Lastly, but definitely not least, work must continue on understanding the 1988 Carbon 14 test results. We can complain all we want about how the actual tests deviated from the original protocols, or how the statistical analyses of the data were in error, but the fact is that these results were obtained by reputable scientists using internationally accepted techniques. The theories of Garza-Valdes and Kouznetsov have promise, but it must be shown why the age-dating techniques used on the Shroud samples gave results that indicated a thirteenth century origin.

Although, with what we know now, we can never “prove” that the man whose picture is on the Shroud is Jesus Christ, in order for the Shroud of Turin to be the authentic burial cloth of Christ, all of the circumstantial evidence must be consistent with that hypothesis.

Before I sit down and shut up, I want to commend the work being done by Barrie and others on greatly enhancing our ability to communicate information, and to facilitate feedback and interaction between researchers and other interested parties like myself.

Also, as I said in the beginning, I am thrilled to see new faces bringing new energy and new ideas to this investigation. I believe that there is much more information that can be gleaned from the Shroud of Turin, and it can only be obtained by using new ideas and new perspectives.

I can speak from experience when I say you will personally get far more out of this experience than you put into it. It can literally change your life, and it will if you let it.

Thank you very much.