

## The Shroud, a theme of faith or science?

**Tomaso Montanari suffering from syndonophobia: it is clearly seen, the result of the last test, that of his response to the readers of 'The Friday of the Republic' of May 15 who tried to make him think, like the dozen historians and scientists there had tried from the columns of 'Aboutartonline'**

by [Emanuela Marinelli](#) on May 18, 2020 7:00 am

**The surprise release of Tomaso Montanari on 'The Friday of the Republic' of April 24, on p. 79, on the Shroud theme, raised a [fuss of reactions](#), in a desperate attempt to bring the art critic to more reasonable positions. It was a 'mission impossible,' and the test took place on May 15, when 'On Friday', on p. 16, in the section 'Letters to the editorial staff,' published the text of two readers, the first longer, the second shorter, and Montanari's reply.**

The short message shows the words of **a religious teacher** who claims to believe the veracity of the Shroud without imposing it on anyone. The teacher **only tries to raise questions from his pupils**; something that does not receive any comment from Montanari. On the other hand, one cannot think that the great Baroque expert cares that an obscure religion teacher tries to make unknown pupils of who knows where think with his brain.

The longest letter gracefully displays **scientific and historical arguments in order to defend the authenticity of the Shroud**: the photographic negative, the human blood, the absence of pigments, the nails in the wrists, the sign of the 'patibulum', the horizontal beam of the cross. On carbon 14 the careful reader points out that the results may have been affected by external agents. As I read, I was amazed that this letter had been published, because mine, more documented, with bibliographical references, had been ignored. Among other things, in my letter I also referred to the [article of 'La Repubblica' which announced the denial of the validity of the radiocarbon test](#) conducted on the Shroud.

But perhaps - I said to myself - this letter was preferred precisely because of its simplicity. But no. It must have been privileged because the author of the text makes a final slip: he writes that the authenticity of the Shroud "is fortunate that it is not an evidence, it is a theme of faith to be accepted in its paradox [...] and the faith would have no value if scientifically proven."

In reality, **faith has nothing to do with the authenticity of the Shroud, because Jesus Christ existed as a historical figure and the conservation of his funeral sheet is also admitted by non-believing scientists.**

**Famous among these is the agnostic biologist [Yves Delage](#), who in 1902 was refused the publication of his scientific work in the proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of Paris, because he **had dared to affirm that the image impressed on the sheet was that of the body of Christ and this it had bothered someone.** Delage himself complained about it in a [long letter](#) in which, among other things, he writes: "We have provided reasons which are at least the beginning of the tests. It is up to the opponents to refute them. If they have not been accepted by certain people as they deserve, it is only because a religious question has been improperly inserted, in this scientific question that has warmed the spirits and distorted the right reason. **If, instead of Christ, it had been a Sargon, an Achilles or any Pharaoh, nobody would have found anything to complain about**".**

The French scientist continues: "I was faithful to the true scientific spirit in dealing with this question, attentive only to the truth, without worrying whether or not it would have done the interests of this or that other religious party. It is those who have been influenced by this concern who have betrayed the scientific method. I have not done clerical work, because clericalism and anticlericalism have nothing to do with this matter. **I consider Christ as a historical figure and I don't see why we should be scandalized that there is a material trace of his existence.**"

Delage is right, **the Shroud is not a theme of faith, it is a theme of science**, although many do not like this.

Let us return, however, to our diligent reader, who concludes, with an evident vein of humility, asking Montanari "to grant the Shroud at least the benefit of the doubt." **No chance: the confusion that has moved the Shroud in the field of faith is the gluttonous opportunity for the art historian to engage, who renews his thumb towards stating that "faith is not compatible with the defense of false relics"** and adding that "philology and historical criticism [...] today show that the Shroud is the work of a man of the Middle Ages."

Montanari does not answer on the scientific questions raised by the reader, he glossed over everything. Nor does it enter into the merits of how philology and historical criticism can pronounce on the manufacture of an object: it **refers to the reading of a book by the historian Andrea Nicolotti whom he defines "very serious and highly documented."** Of this [I did a review](#), recognizing the symptoms in the author of **the volume of a new psychological disorder, the sindonofobia.** I did not consider it a transmissible pathology, however in this age of strange contagions **Montanari is also affected.** I can only hope for a spontaneous recovery, but I see it as doubtful.