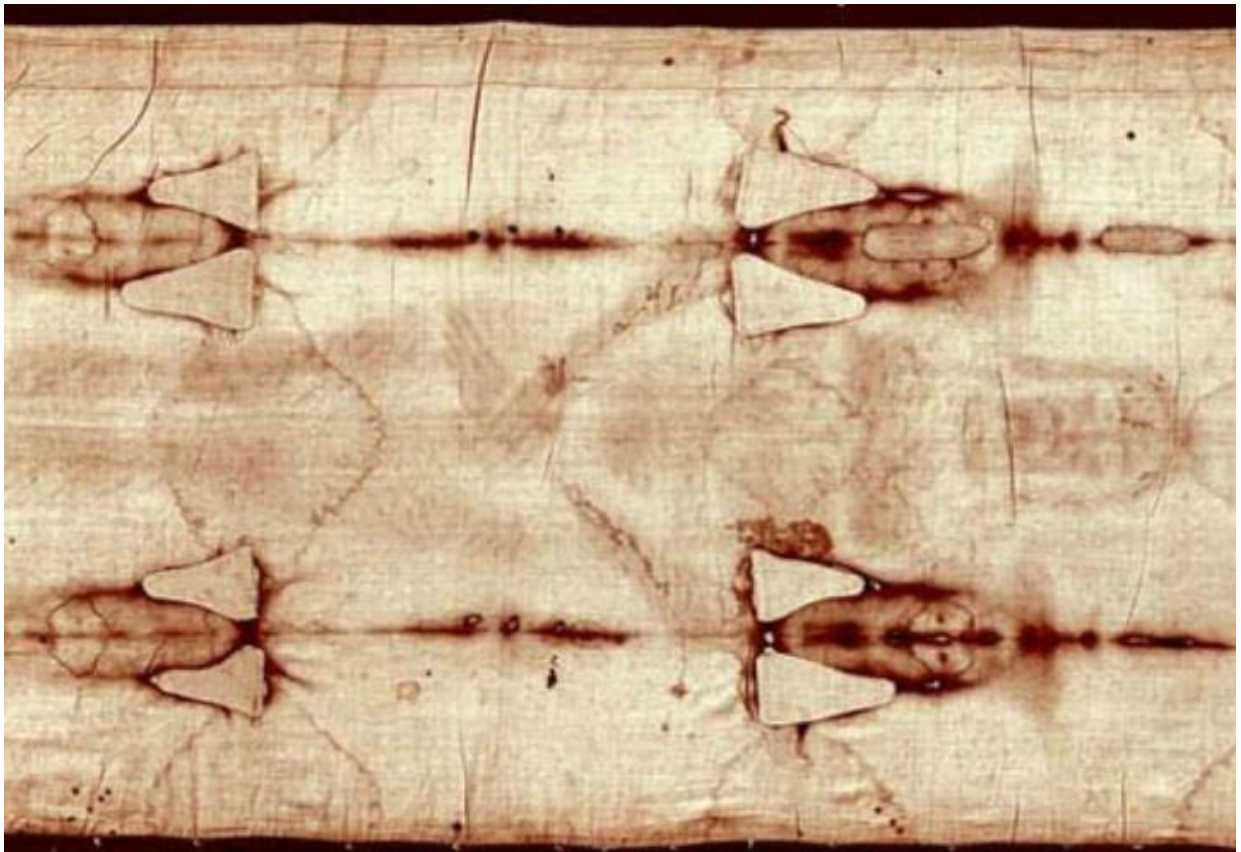


# That Face overlooking the Gospel: Claudel in front of the Shroud

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**The search for the face of God pervades all art. And the Shroud represents the perfect acheiropoietos, that is, the effigy not created by the artist but by divine intervention**



The Holy Shroud

"There he is! And he. It's his face! That face that many saints and prophets have worn out from the desire to contemplate, according to the word of the psalm 'my face has sought you: Lord, I will seek your face' ".

Thus the French poet Paul Claudel expressed all the wonder of being in front of the image of the face of the [Man of the Shroud](#) . A face that can never leave anyone indifferent. Because in that image a search seems to be summarized that is as old as man in his "deep hunger for happiness" (to quote Claudel himself), the deepest search for God, who has torn the veil of history and has come in world with a well-known face and body.

In a few lines, Claudel provides a lucid and clear analysis of the feelings that the Shroud face provokes in the viewer. Particularly striking is the statement "We feel we have an original in front of which all the artistic interpretations have only the undoubtedly sincere, but always partial and clumsy value of second-hand works. Leonardo's Christ, that of Dürer and Rembrandt accords with certain parts of the Gospel, but this accords with all. Indeed, it dominates them. "

Here the meaning of the Shroud is really understood as an image that synthesizes in itself the concept of "not made by human hands", which has very ancient origins: in fact there is a term, of Greek origin, used to identify a series of effigies that would not be were created by an artist, but whose existence would be directly attributable to a divine intervention: the *acheiropoietos*.

The Christian religious tradition, primarily oriental, recognizes in a series of images of Christ the fate of authentic "portraits", which came into existence miraculously in various periods of history.

One of the best known is the Mandylion of Edessa, a cloth on which, according to a legend characterized by many variations, Jesus would have imprinted his effigy to make it a gift to the Syriac king Abgar. The image was later transferred to Constantinople in 944.

According to tradition, another image of miraculous origin is the so-called Camuliana, which takes its name from a city in Cappadocia, where a woman named Hypatia would have placed the fact of seeing Jesus as a condition for her conversion to Christianity. Miraculously, the image of the Savior's face would appear on a cloth found by the woman inside a well.

Traces of this effigy, which would have been transported to Constantinople, were then lost, and its tradition gradually became confused with that of the Mandylion.

Devotion to images "not made by human hand" spread also in the West, where the best known example is the effigy of Christ kept in the Sancta Sanctorum of San Giovanni in Laterano.

Another well-known image in the western tradition is that of Veronica, which - even in the context of a variety of different traditions - would bear the effigy of the face of Christ tormented by the sufferings of the Passion. Always the western tradition refers to the so-called "Holy Face of Lucca", even if in this case it is not an image on fabric, but a wooden crucifix.

Many other images considered of supernatural origin are present in the history of Christian worship and devotion. Their existence testifies to the particular spiritual and theological approach, by Christians, to the figure of Christ, aimed at making understandable the great revolution that the Incarnation has brought about in human history.

And so, from the first symbolic representations (the fish, the anchor, the Good Shepherd), it passed to that of a cross of glory and then, progressively, to that of the face of Christ, which had to be identified in the form in which it was appeared to the disciples and people of the time.

In the East as in the West, an iconography of the Savior characterized by common elements, which remained unchanged throughout the succession of history, up to the present day, spread quickly - starting from the sixth century.

It is a representation of the face of Jesus with long hair, bipartite beard, thin and elongated nose. These images, however, in almost all cases, also appear to be characterized by particular elements: the face of Christ almost always appears asymmetrical, with one of the cheeks more prominent than the other; his nose appears crooked, as if to recall the beatings indicated in the Gospels; the eyebrows are different in shape from each other. Even in the representation of the glory of the Risen One, therefore, there always seems to be the will to recall His Passion.

An image that carries within itself all the characteristics of these effigies is the Shroud of Turin: on the Shroud face the signs of the Passion are clearly visible, those same signs that the artists seem to have wanted to reproduce with fidelity over the centuries.

At the basis of these images so far apart in time and especially in space, there seems to have been a model, considered to be the only one worthy of being taken as an archetype to represent the face of Christ.

What if the Shroud were the archetype? What if the Shroud was really nothing other than one of the images considered *acheiropoietos* of which so many traditions speak, albeit characterized by legendary characters?

We cannot give a certain answer to this question. In fact, we cannot, to date, trace back to the Shroud with historical certainty any of the testimonies relating to *acheiropoietos* images.

However, what we can say without any doubt is that the Shroud is the perfect synthesis of all *acheiropoietos*. It is the point of arrival of the search for the face of God. It is that image - unique in the world - which cannot fail to lead us to affirm, in the heart of anyone who approaches it sincerely, as Paul Claudel had done: "Here it is! And he. It's his face! "