

# THE MUSEUM OF THE SHROUD

by BRUNO BARBERIS

At Via San Domenico 28 in Turin there has been a museum for almost 70 years, a museum that is unique in all the world, well-known in particular after the two last public expositions of the Shroud - the *Museum of the Shroud*. In order to fully understand its meaning and importance it is necessary to go backwards in time.

September 15<sup>th</sup> 1578 - the Shroud, after a voyage lasting some days, arrived in Turin from Chambéry, transferred by the Duke Emanuele Filiberto of Savoy. Since then, the history of the Shroud would be closely linked to the history of Turin, because it has always been kept in the city, except for two brief and temporary moments in 1706 and 1939.

Twenty years after the arrival of the Shroud in Turin, on May 25<sup>th</sup> 1598, an archiepiscopal decree founded the *Confraternity of the Holy Shroud*. At that time in several European countries the founding of Confraternities was quite common, i.e. lay associations characterised by a religious spirit and devoted to charity activities. Among its many enterprises, the Confraternity of the Holy Shroud was the founder in 1728 of one of the first psychiatric hospitals in Italy, called *Spedale de' Pazzerelli*.

From 1734 to 1736 the Confraternity built the *Church of the Holy Shroud*, a beautiful church in pure Piedmontese baroque style; its front (built in 1765) is very similar to the one of the «Sainte Chapelle» of Chambéry where the Shroud was kept before its moving to Turin. For fifty years now in the presbytery of the Church of the Holy Shroud it has been possible to admire the precious gold-plated wooden frame used for the Shroud expositions of 1931 and 1933, in which there is now the official life-size photograph of the Shroud taken after the 2002 conservation work.

In 1937, inside the Confraternity, a group of scholars founded an institution called «*Cultores Sanctae Sindonis*». On December 18<sup>th</sup> 1959 at the place where this group of scholars met, the Archbishop of Turin, Card. Maurilio Fossati, founded the *International Centre of Sindonology*, an institution responsible for promoting, co-ordinating and developing studies and enterprises relating to the Shroud both in Italy and abroad.

Since its birth the Confraternity has taken care of collecting objects and documents concerning the Shroud, its history and the researches carried out on it, but it was only at the beginning of the last century that the Confraternity began to order and catalogue them.

On June 5<sup>th</sup> 1936 the Confraternity of the Holy Shroud founded the *Museum of the Shroud*; at the beginning it was only a little permanent exhibition showing some of the most significant objects collected by the Confraternity over several centuries. In 1971 in a little building near the church the first official premises of the Museum were opened, but over the following years there was never enough space to display the growing collections of the Museum.

In the nineties the Confraternity and the Centre decided to build new premises for the Museum in the ample and evocative eighteenth century crypt of the Church of the Holy Shroud. On April 15<sup>th</sup> 1998, three days before the beginning of the public exposition of the Shroud, the new premises were opened in the presence of the main civil and religious town authorities.

The Museum is made up of four rooms, interlinked through an inner courtyard and without architectural barriers. The first room is the Multimedial Room used for lectures and projections, where in the near future there will be interactive computers and multimedia systems for visitors to use. At the moment visitors can watch a presentation of the Shroud projected in five languages (Italian, English, Spanish, French and German). Moreover in the room there is a life-size metal bas-relief of the frontal image, realized in order to enable blind visitors to understand the Shroud image.

Afterwards it is possible to visit the Church of the Holy Shroud and see the most recent life-size photograph of the Shroud shown in the ancient frame of 1931. The second room of the Museum shows, through an evocative scenography, the history of all the modern reproductions of the Shroud, from the original plates of the first photograph taken by Secondo Pia in 1898 to the photographs and scanner images from 2002. The third room is the main one, which is situated in the underground crypt of the Church. With a didactic and evocative walk, the visitor is enabled to deepen his knowledge of the Shroud from several points of view: historical, scientific, artistic, spiritual, etc.

Several of the objects on show marked the most important stages of the history of the Shroud, e.g. the small wooden box formerly covered with precious mother-of-pearl used to transport the Shroud from Chambéry to Turin in 1578; the wooden casket covered with strips of silver and decorated with precious stones and enamels where the Shroud was kept from the end of the sixteenth century until 1998 together with the wooden cylinder around which the Shroud was wrapped with other cloths and metal strips used when it was placed in the above casket; a life-sized painted copy of the Shroud dated 1625, which was placed on the original to give it a greater religious significance; some strips of paper or fabric of the XVII and XVIII century

which were placed on the Shroud to indicate the size of the man of the Shroud, some fragments of the various pieces of cloth which were used in the past to protect the Shroud in the casket where it was kept.

Other objects include a large collection of books, documents, engravings, paintings, medals, coins, devotional objects related to the Shroud and its history from the 16<sup>th</sup> century until today, in particular several original engravings showing the most important expositions of the Shroud of the past centuries, the large camera which the lawyer Secondo Pia used in May 1898 to take the first photograph of the Shroud.

A large set of scientific objects and instruments related to the most important and significative experimental researches made on the Shroud as, for example, a collection of original clothes obtained during experiments made from 1902 to the present day in order to study the formation process of the Shroud image, a specimen of the Roman coin the traces of which have been found on the right eyelid of the Man of the Shroud, etc.

A terracotta statue produced in 1998 by the sculptor Luigi Mattei, which faithfully reproduces the body whose imprint is visible on the front part of the Shroud; the body's size has been calculated on the basis of the results of scientific investigations conducted on the Shroud.

The original posters of all the more recent expositions from 1898 till 2000. The last room of the Museum is a large bookshop exclusively on the Shroud: books, journals, video and audiocassettes, CD-ROM's and DVD's, original photographs, prints, slides, etc.

The Museum is provided with a modern audioguide headsets in five languages (Italian, English, Spanish, French and German) which allow visitors to have at their disposal a full and detailed explanation about every object shown at the Museum, with the possibility of scheduling a personalized visit.

Connected to the Museum, but visitable only by scholars and students with a previous booking, there are also the library and the historical archives of the Confraternity of the Holy Shroud and of the International Centre of Sindonology which retain thousands of books on the Shroud from the XVI century till today written in several languages, journals, proceedings of congresses, a large newspaper library with thousands of articles, a large numbers of letters and various documents. Since the opening of the new premises in 1998 the Museum has been visited by more than 90,000 visitors coming from all over the world, and so it has become one of the most visited museums of the city of Turin. The Museum is open daily 9-12 a.m. and 3-7 p.m.. For further information – Tel +39114365832; fax +39114319275; e-mail: [sindone@tin.it](mailto:sindone@tin.it); internet site: [www.sindone.it](http://www.sindone.it).