

The Third International Dallas Conference On The Shroud Of Turin: Report From An Attendee

By

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In a news release issued before the September 8-11, 2005 Dallas International Shroud of Turin Conference, AMSTAR (American Shroud of Turin Association for Research) stated that “the Turin Catholic Church authorities, who are the papal custodians of the Shroud, will, for the first time attend and participate in an international conference outside of Turin”. They also re-iterated that the Dallas conference was the first ‘open to the general public’. Although my personal interest in the Shroud dates back to the ‘70’s (when my father, a forensic pathologist, brought home a book about it), and I have studied the subject intensely in recent years, I count myself as a member of that ‘general public’. I therefore excitedly made the cross-continent trip to the Adolphus Hotel in Dallas, Texas despite the fact that I hadn’t a clue who would be speaking (I never did receive a programme or schedule prior to the conference); I was eager to attend every lecture about this ancient cloth that I have been drawn towards for most of my life.

The conference began with opening remarks, a reading of Ray Roger’s paper, “*Studies on the Radiocarbon Sample from the Shroud of Turin*” (both of which I unfortunately missed due to a flight delay) and continued with papers from Prof. Dr. Karlheinz Dietz (who spoke about Geoffrey de Charny), Prof. Dr. Pierluigi Baima Bollone (“*A Question of Artistic Anatomy*”) and Diana Fulbright’s interesting lecture titled, “*A Clean Cloth—What Greek Word Usage Tells Us About The Burial Wrappings of Jesus*”. That busy first day concluded with Barrie Schwartz’s moving, half hour interview with Ray Rogers taken several months before Roger’s death. “*In His Own Words*” showed a physically tired, yet passionately expressive Rogers discuss topics such as the 2002 restoration and how it may have impacted the future of Shroud research. Regarding the Benford/Marino ‘reweave’ hypothesis, I was fascinated to hear Rogers say he was initially confident that he could ‘shoot their theory through with holes’ but was subsequently shocked when his own findings showed “they were right”.

Early the next day, New Jersey native, Fr. Stephen Fichter, along with Msgr. Guiseppe Ghiberti, celebrated Mass—as they would the following two mornings—for those wishing to participate. The lecture schedule continued at 9:30 am with Dr. Gilbert Lavoie’s paper outlining the ‘flattening of the cloth’ from a forensic medical perspective. He stated that while blood clots appear to be in the hair on the Shroud they are actually on the temple and cheeks and there is no suggestion that the cloth was removed or straightened. Additionally, the back image of the Shroud does not show the characteristic flattening of the calves and buttocks which one would expect from someone lying down. Lavoie theorized that the man on the Shroud may have been standing upright during image formation.

Dr. Mechthild Flury-Lemburg detailed the reconstruction procedures of 2002, arguably the ‘hot topic’ of the entire conference. She emphasized that the image was only several degrees darker than the background and needed to be preserved for future generations. She said that no ‘re-weave’ was seen although support stitches were noticed and these could have been mistaken for reweaving. She also commented that the C14 sample had been taken from the dirtiest areas of the Shroud and added another interesting point—that herringbone weave stockings exist which date from the 8th to the 4th century B.C—indicating that the finer weave on the Shroud definitely had its roots in the pre-Christian era. Dr. Flury-Lemburg later answered several questions related to the restoration and clarified the fact that only debris around holes in the Shroud was taken and the cloth itself had not been washed, bleached or ironed.

Mary Whanger’s presentation, “*The Impact of the Face Image on the Shroud on Art, Coins and Religions in the Early Centuries*” was of particularly interest to me, a former history student. Her husband, Alan, gave an equally fascinating presentation later in the program on the radiological aspects of the Shroud which included overlay images of skeletal x-rays and the Shroud, producing striking comparisons.

I was happy to meet one other Canadian at the conference, Mario Latendresse, whose work with 3D scans summarizes that the Shroud was not flattened before the images formed and shows no major image distortions. Latendresse admits that while some of his work contradicts other theories, he plans to continue research through his new website, www.sindonology.org.

A highlight of the conference was the art display of Dame Isabel Piczek which included one-third scale sculptures of the figure on the Shroud. In her paper, she spoke of the artistic bas-relief effect on the Shroud which proves that the image is three-dimensional and that, somehow, gravity had no role in the 'event horizon' at the point of image formation. This remarkable lady, who received her masters in fine art and in science at the age of 14, stated that the bas-relief effect forces us to 'open the door to the future' and concluded with the poignant words that 'the image of the Shroud cannot be solved by the science of the past'.

Msgr. Giuseppe Ghiberti, the key note speaker at Saturday's banquet, first presented a paper describing the connections between the 'story of the Gospels' and the 'story of the image on the Shroud'. Dr. August Accetta followed with his talk, "*Nuclear Radiation and the Shroud: Head Image*", in which he discussed evidence showing that only the first three dozen millimeters or so, rather than the whole body, emitted radiation to form the Shroud image.

A few papers, whose authors were not present, were read by conference co-organizer, Thomas D'Muhala, including one by Dr. William Wolkowski who said that the future research in the Shroud will take us to new 'quantum leaps', similar to those of the 1898 photos. Other papers included one by Prof. Bruno Barberis (on the modern conservation of the Shroud) and a presentation by Dr. José Luis Fernández which dealt with an ontological analysis of the Shroud image formation—a specialized study of how the physical interacts with the conceptual.

Sue Benford and Joe Marino gave a special presentation on new possibilities as to what may have happened surrounding the missing corners of the Shroud and why a portion may have been 'rewoven'. Their paper is currently under review and could not be part of the official schedule at the conference, but the large audience which gathered for their talk was obviously very interested and their theory will undoubtedly generate future discussions.

Kevin Moran's lecture featured the 3-D dimensionality of the Shroud as proven by a VP8 image analyzer. Photographs of a normal face, because they are reflecting light, show up distorted but the Shroud has no distortion, because, as Moran states, it 'is a unique radiation image'.

Emanuela Marinelli spoke on sindonology worldwide and how it was important to get knowledge about the Shroud out to the public through books and the Internet. She concluded by stressing that “we are carrying out a service to the truth”.

Whether or not the first photographic revelation of the Shroud was an accidental discovery or divine providence was discussed by Stephen Bollettieri. Throughout his talk, Bollettieri spoke of the miraculous experiences of Sr. Maria Pierina, Sts. Therese, the Little Flower and Don Bosco regarding the Holy Face.

Roberto Falcinelli then summarized the history of the veil of Veronica and his studies on the veil of Manoppello, which he suggested may have been the work of the famed artist, Raphael. This was followed by Prof. Giulio Fanti’s detailed lecture on a hypothesis based on corona discharge. Much later that evening, Fanti gave a presentation by 24 co-authors—titled “*Evidences for Test Hypotheses about the Body Image Formation of the Turin Shroud*”—to a enraptured group that had informally gathered in a spectacular penthouse suite of the Adolphus Hotel.

One of the highlights of the conference was Aldo Guerreschi’s Powerpoint presentation featuring the Shroud’s watermarks and scorches. Following his theory that the cloth was folded in an ancient earthenware jar, Guerreschi demonstrated how water stain damage on the Shroud must have pre-dated the 1532 fire.

Before Dr. Pierluigi Baima Bollone’s closing address, Rev. Albert Dreisbach spoke on key motifs in the 4th gospel and how it “cleverly revealed the survival and significance of both the Shroud and the Oviedo Cloth while ‘secretly’ maintaining their respective messages”. The evening then ended with a banquet and speeches by Michael Minor and Msgr. Giuseppe Ghiberti, both of whom remarked on how increased interest in the Shroud, including that of the new Pope Benedict XVI, is an encouraging sign for future research and co-operation.

Almost all the conference attendees I spoke with enjoyed the lectures and agreed that the weekend had re-ignited their own passion and studies regarding the Shroud. Granted, some papers were highly technical and I did my best to follow along, but I, too, was glad to have attended the conference. Meeting such renowned and dedicated speakers, as well as fellow ‘Shroudies’, was, without doubt, an invaluable experience.