

Author John Loken's Response to BSTS Review of "The Shroud Was the Resurrection"

In the December 2006 issue of the BSTS Newsletter, Mark Guscini reviewed my book, *The Shroud Was the Resurrection*. I am grateful that Mr. Guscini reviewed the book and especially grateful that his first short paragraph was an accurate one. But there are errors and other problems elsewhere in the review that should be pointed out.

Nearly half of the entire review discusses generalities ("reviewer's woes") or very minor points instead of the content of the book, which seems a questionable use of space.

Specifically, Mr. Guscini misinterprets one little comment I make about him in my book. He assumes that my description of him as a "devout Catholic who believes in a resurrection of Jesus" was meant negatively, when it was actually meant to be neutral. After all, many religious people freely describe themselves as "devout." Likewise, he assumes that my references to some other shroud authors as Christians or Catholic Christians must also be negative, meant to "disqualify" them, when I simply wanted to be helpful to my readers, informing them of the basic positions held by those authors, positions probably influencing their findings. Mr. Guscini assumes that I myself would object to being described as an agnostic, but I would not, for that is both true and relevant. I also often praise the same shroud scholars whom I describe as Christians, though Mr. Guscini gives his review readers no indication of my having done this. For example, in the two brief paragraphs in which I discuss Mr. Guscini's own 1998 book, *The Cloth of Oviedo*, I make three positive comments about it: "a landmark work," "usefully and persuasively," and "Guscini ... perhaps understandably...." Moreover, in presenting my case, I point out weaknesses in the resurrection beliefs of liberal Christians, too, not only conservatives. The review gives no indication of this balance.

Mr. Guscini appears to have read only superficially my lengthy chapter presenting evidence and reasoning for a nighttime removal of Jesus' body from its tomb by the Jerusalem authorities. The chapter contains dozens of careful arguments and supporting details. Yet, after all this, Mr. Guscini writes merely: "Why would the authorities steal a dead body when to all effects and purposes Jesus had come to an end?" My repeated descriptions of the tomb as a potentially dangerous "rallying point," or a site for "tomb veneration" offensive to the religious authorities, are oddly overlooked by Mr. Guscini, who merely calls the tomb a potential "meeting place" for the followers, thus downplaying the provocation it must have posed.

Also questionable is Mr. Guscini's skepticism that the shroud image could have inspired the followers of Jesus with their belief in his resurrection. He omits to mention how amazing and inexplicable that image must have been, and how simple and superstitious the followers were (and how emotionally desperate after the crucifixion of Jesus).

Mr. Guscini describes as "surreal" some of my scenarios in which the shroud image could have inspired the specific resurrection appearances. But he omits to mention that the few gospel accounts of a resurrected Jesus walking, talking, and eating all date from many decades after his death. New Testament scholars have systematically exposed those

accounts as fictions, detailing the sources for their individual elements. I think the shroud image (peaceful, life-sized, and highly detailed) should be added to those sources, indeed as the primary one.

Near the end of his review, Mr. Guscin criticizes at length a short footnote in my book (p. 78) in which I explain my lack of photographs of the Sudarium of Oviedo as due to a lack of response to my request from the Spanish organization CES. Yet, that footnote was not meant as criticism of CES, but merely as an explanation to readers. Mr. Guscin states that I should have written to the organization in Spanish. I might have done so, but as I explain in the footnote, a knowledgeable colleague in the shroud field soon informed me that the organization is wary of giving out permission to print photos of the Sudarium, and so I did not write them a second time. Mr. Guscin also suggests that I should have known that he himself is the Sudarium contact man for all English-speaking researchers. But I had written to CES/EDICES months before I read his book and I did not know of that "position" of his before - or even after reading his book. In any case, I bear the group no ill-will at all, and even praised them highly and repeatedly in the book for their rigorous scientific examination of the Sudarium.

In sum, Mr. Guscin's review seems superficial and unfairly negative. Ironically, his lack of serious criticism indicates to me that much of the book's content may well be correct. If he finds time to read it again, he may come to appreciate that possibility.

John Loken
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