

Science and faith: Shroud and fake news, between authenticity and falsehood

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The question of the authenticity of the Shroud is among those most discussed in the context of the comparison between science and faith. A recent article on *The Friday of the Republic* has revived the unproven hypothesis that it is a painting.

On May 4, the liturgical memory of the Shroud was celebrated in Turin, an anniversary desired by Pope Julius II in 1506. Archbishop Cesare Nosiglia of Turin and pontifical custodian of the Shroud officiated the Eucharistic celebration. A celebration broadcast by TV and web but which, due to the pandemic, were unable to be attended by faithful.

A few days before, on April 24, 2020, an article by the art historian Tomaso Montanari appeared on the pages of *The Friday of the Republic*, entitled *La Sindone, that deeply human fake*. Montanari, as can be guessed from the title of the article, re-proposed the hypothesis of the falsity of the *sacred sheet*. That would not be the cloth that wrapped the body of Jesus Christ, but a painting from the Middle Ages. What is more, badly done. Over the pictorial hypothesis as the origin of the Shroud, in reality several scholars and researchers have expressed themselves over time, even with recent experiments. Without, however, arriving at definitive tests, indeed. Also remembering that the authenticity of the Shroud is not a matter of faith - the faithful can consider it an icon, or believe in its authenticity - but of science.

Having exhibited the Shroud in 1898 as part of a review of Christian art would implicitly demonstrate its artistic reality rather than miraculous.

Montanari writes that on May 25, 1898 - the anniversary tomorrow - in the Cathedral of Turin there was a solemn exhibition of the Shroud, coinciding with the Italian General Exposition that took place in the city in those days. Thus, Montanari writes, there was also an artistic one alongside the Industrial and Technological Exhibition. The consequence, however, was that "because of the singular and instructive heterogenesis of the ends, the opposite of what was actually stated was in fact the promoters of the exhibition. That is, according to Montanari, the Shroud would have been shown as "one of the many artifacts exhibited in Turin in those days."

Montanari thus transforms what could have been a conceptual consequence of the area in which the Shroud was exhibited, that is, making it appear as an artistic work, in a hypothetical consequence of value. As if the Shroud were therefore inevitably false: what has not been definitively demonstrated to date, just as it has not been definitively demonstrated even that it is authentic. In fact, the current position of Pope Francis, as of his predecessor, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, is in prudently defining the Shroud as an icon of the face of Jesus. And of his death, passion and resurrection.

The falsity of the Shroud would be an "indisputable scientific truth"

But for Montanari the falsity of the sacred cloth is instead indisputable, and an "indisputable truth" demonstrated by science. That is, "the Shroud is a medieval French artifact." A painting, and also of "modest artistic quality." The documents that speak of it would prove it, of which we have no traces before the fourteenth century. The technique with which the Sacred Cloth was woven. And the radiocarbon dating made in 1988. The only element that can actually be given value today. But that in light of new current methods of analysis, and possible contaminations - even with previous medieval restorations - of the samples used for radiocarbon dating in 1988, is not even indisputable today.

Just as we cannot say with scientific certainty that the Shroud is authentic, so we cannot even say that it is false, contrary to what Montanari claims. Who in the article on *Friday* recognizes at least the meaning not only of faith, but "human of the Shroud?" And therefore he considers the recent solemn ostentation that took place on the web and on social media, in this tremendous pandemic period, as an event of "not only religious, but profoundly human meaning. As if humanity today looked at itself in the mirror: in "its eternal suffering," and in its "eternal capacity to love."

We publish, by way of example, some articles on the issues mentioned in this article, including recent studies in favor of the authenticity of the sacred cloth, and the debate on the attempt by Matteo Borrini and Luigi Garlaschelli to prove that the Shroud is a fake. A debate that continues, between faith and science.

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