

**REVIEWS - 1: (BOOKS)****TEST THE SHROUD  
AT THE ATOMIC AND MOLECULAR LEVELS  
Mark Antonacci**

I'm sorry to say that after eagerly awaiting the arrival of this much-touted publication in the UK, I was not a little disappointed. Mark Antonacci has some interesting ideas regarding the future testing of the Shroud, but far too much of this book consists of a restatement of his earlier "The Resurrection of the Shroud" and an uncritical review of old research, all of which has been presented and discussed, much more comprehensively, by other authors, especially Ian Wilson. Like the book itself, which at first seems impressive in size and appearance, but whose illustrations are uniformly too small and poorly rendered and whose text is riddled with proof-reading errors, Antonacci's apparently scrupulous study is little more than a bald restatement of the findings of previous scholars, with little attempt to address any of the controversy they aroused, liberally slathered with assumptions of infallibility and including some grotesque and very obvious falsehoods.

As a practising lawyer, Antonacci is well able to argue a case, and in the 'trial' of the Shroud he is unashamedly arguing the case for authenticity, using all the skills of a barrister, including selective presentation of the evidence, appeals to emotion and authority, arguments from incredulity, and ad hominem attacks. As one half of a closely argued discussion, this might be acceptable; as a stand-alone work purporting to present an impartial account, it is a travesty.

A handful of illustrations will show exactly what I mean. The second paragraph of Chapter 1 begins: "Shrouds are long, cloth garments that were used to bury people in ancient times and are still used throughout the Middle East today. Jesus was buried in such a shroud." This is wholly unsubstantiated, and almost certainly untrue. Extraordinarily, a description of how people were placed in shrouds -

“laid lengthwise on the lower part of the cloth, while the rest of the cloth is then folded over to cover and wrap the individual” - is accompanied by a photo of the victims of a modern terrorist attack showing something quite different (an ordinary sheet with the body laid on one side and the other side folded over). In a subsequent chapter devoted to archaeological evidence, including a list of several ancient twill cloths, Antonacci carefully relegates to an endnote a very brief mention of the very few shrouds associated with 1st century Jewish burials, none of which corroborate the details above. As regards the unique 3/1 herringbone twill weave, not a single one of his nine ancient examples truly support his contention that such a weave for such a cloth was possible in the 1st century, and it is all too apparent that he has relied on heavily biased secondary sources to obtain his ‘evidence’ rather than looking for original research.

Another section of the same chapter is entitled “Limestone Flower and Pollen Analyses Confirm Jerusalem Origin.” As usual, Max Frei’s credentials are overhyped, and significant procedural faults overlooked, such as his very partial collection of reference material and his failure to recognise the importance of the way a flower is pollinated, but also the follow-up work of Alan Whanger, Max Baruch and Avinoam Danin, all of which conflicts quite seriously with Frei’s findings, is treated as if there was perfect agreement between them, which is not so.

From time to time, Antonacci takes some trouble to denigrate the researches of fellow authenticists (there are some accounts of the work of non-authenticists in the Appendices), mostly on the grounds that their ‘science’ wouldn’t work. As his own ‘historically consistent hypothesis’ relies principally on miraculous physics far more speculative than anything Raymond Rogers, Giulio Fanti or Paolo di Lazzaro have worked on, it seems ungenerous to dismiss their ideas so cursorily. His rejection of the possibility of some kind of medieval interpolation at the radiocarbon corner includes the statement that the area was both lightly scorched from the 1532 fire and covered by a water-stain, neither of which is true.

The essence of the book is of course the need for more testing, in order to verify a very detailed hypothesis concerning what might have happened had the resurrecting body of Jesus emitted neutrons and protons. Neutrons would have converted existing nitrogen into carbon, thus accounting for the medieval radiocarbon date, and at the same time enriched the calcium and chlorine content of the Shroud as well, confirmation of which would also confirm the hypothesis. Protons, whose energy is far less penetrating, account for the image, and especially its superficiality. So far, so good, and Antonacci’s call for a complete spectral analysis of the whole Shroud, which can be wholly non-destructive, completed in quite a short time, and relatively inexpensive, should be supported. Sadly, however, Antonacci (and in an Appendix, nuclear scientist Robert Rucker) then goes on to create a meticulously constructed fantasy, attempting to determine the precise physics of the Resurrection entirely from the evidence that might possibly be found if such an examination were conducted, and wherever they find that it fails, inventing whole fields of unknown science and extra dimensions to account for the discrepancy. As a flight of para-scientific fancy, it is carefully worked out, but it is as rooted in reality as the engineers who determined the precise construction parameters of the canals on Mars in the early twentieth century.

All in all I think a major new investigation into the Shroud of Turin, even if it removes any supernatural implications, which I think likely, and conclusively solves its forensic uncertainties, would be a worthwhile project. But, although no individual can be free of personal opinion, it must be carried out as impartially as possible, without the huge dangling crucifixes of the STuRP team, or the strident atheism of some of its detractors. I’m afraid that “Test The Shroud”, with its unabashed conviction of authenticity coupled to a passionate enthusiasm for the physics of miracles to the denial of any other image-forming process, is not the masthead any such investigator is likely to want to sail under.



THE TURIN SHROUD AND THE MYSTERY OF FAITH

Andrew Willie

Canon Andrew Willie was vicar of St Mark’s, Newport, for many years, and is currently a senior Anglican priest in the diocese of Monmouth; and this book is a series of linked contemplative sermons on the Shroud, each chapter concluding with a theme for discussion or meditation, a prayer and a suggestion for an appropriate accompanying hymn. The pages are interspersed by a series of inspirational charcoal drawings of aspects of the passion of Christ by Nigel Robert Pugh.

The announcement of the medieval radiocarbon date, feels Rev. Willie, caused “enormous hurt” to Christians, particularly in its cursory dismissal by Oxford Professor Edward Hall with “Someone just got a piece of cloth, faked it up and flogged it,” and this book is designed to restore not only the Shroud’s credibility, but more importantly, its dignity, and its meaning as a theological and devotional inspiration. In this, I feel, Canon Willie has succeeded admirably.

The chapter headings reflect a “Pilgrimage to Turin” (Ch. 1.), and the way of the cross, from the “Upper Room” (Ch. 4) to the “Empty Tomb” (Ch. 8). Although each one contains a fairly uncritical review and unashamed acceptance of the authenticist evidence regarding a particular field of sindonological studies, the tone is not strident, and the point is not to trumpet scientific authority but to use the investigation of the cloth to help understand the character and message of the person it depicts, and his relevance and value to people today. As such I found it a valuable and inspiring book, even while disagreeing with most of the evidence used to open each exploration.



**LIGHT FROM THE SEPULCHRE****INQUIRY ABOUT THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE SHROUD AND THE GOSPELS****Emanuela Marinelli & Marco Fasol**

Really there are two books in one here, Marinelli exploring the Shroud and Fasol the Gospels, with the single aim of demonstrating that their authenticity speaks to the authenticity of their common subject, Jesus Christ, and the truth of the Resurrection. As such, its aim is to strike a middle course between the two other books reviewed above, and I did find it an interesting read, although I have to say that for me, Marco Fasol's contribution was more worthwhile than Emanuela Marinelli's.

Once again, the same old evidence is presented as unchallenged, and the fundamental basis for belief in authenticity expressed in the same old way: "Even with the most sophisticated laboratories around the world, no one has ever managed to reproduce the Shroud's formation entirely in its specific macroscopic and microscopic characteristics, definitively proving that the medieval forger's hypothesis formulated irresponsibly after the 1988 radiocarbon test is unfounded." Here are the same pollens, the same soil particles, and the same experts noticing discrepant weave patterns, to instance just three, without any acknowledgement that the pollen findings have been largely discredited (not least by the very people claimed to support them), that no soil was found on the nose, and that the discrepant weave patterns cannot relate to interpolated threads. Marinelli is happy simply to repeat the accepted authenticist wisdom of the last century, including conventional references to sources which, when actually referred to, do not support the information alleged to have been derived from them.

Nevertheless, there is value in Marinelli's half of the book, in that it is vary rare for anglophones to read a comprehensive review of non-English studies of the Shroud and Marinelli devotes a generous proportion of her account into enumerating them at length. Sadly, most are not available in English, but some are published on the internet, and I look forward to looking them up and evaluating them for myself.

Furthermore, in spite of the outdated approach to the science of the Shroud, both halves of this book together do present a compelling case for the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, which is, after all, what the authors set out to achieve.



REVIEWS - 2: (PAPERS)

SCANNING ELECTRON MICROSCOPIC CHARACTERISATION AND ELEMENTAL ANALYSIS ON ONE HAIR LOCATED ON THE FACE OF THE TURIN SHROUD

Gérard Lucotte & Thierry Thomasset (Archaeological Discovery, 2017, 5, 1-21)

This is the latest in Prof. Lucotte’s trawl through the thousands of particles to be found on his tiny triangle of tape (see his paper above), and one of the most interesting. It focusses on a single speck, which Lucotte identifies as a tiny length of hair, about 14µm long and 9µm wide. Zooming in further with his electron microscope, he measures the distance between successive scales as about 2µm, which indicates quite rapid growth. By visual inspection it appears a reddish-brown colour, an observation strengthened by the relative abundance of different types of melanosomes; about two to one type MS2 (phaeomelanin: red) to type MS1 (eumelanin: dark). A hair so thin cannot be from a normal scalp, eyebrow or beard hair, so Lucotte identifies it as ‘down’. By chemical analysis, he finds a concentration of copper at both ends, which may indicate the use of a bronze razor, leading to the overall conclusion that the fragment is “probably some sort of down hair, regularly shaven, located between the two eyebrows.” I hope I will not excite too much ire in saying that I find the idea of the long haired, long bearded, thick moustached Jesus regularly shaving the space between his eyebrows faintly ludicrous. Far more likely, in my opinion, is that this hair is from a forearm, regularly shaved to facilitate blood-letting.

