

The Shroud of Turin in Constantinople from 944 AD

Pam Moon and Jo Bywater

The great Shroud scholars Ian Wilson and Mark Guscini, who have both been editors of the BSTS Newsletter, have argued very convincingly that the Shroud of Turin was once known as the Holy Mandylion or the Image of Edessa. We are putting forward several arguments to support their work. We will be examining the clothing, imperial writing and the liturgical practices of Constantine VII and Romanos II, the Byzantine emperors (945-963, after Constantine took the throne as an adult). Following the transfer of the Image of Edessa to Constantinople in 944 there was an outpouring of exceptional Christocentric art, much of it commissioned by Basil Lekapenos, brother-in-law to Constantine VII. We will be looking at that art, making comparisons with the Shroud of Turin.

First of all, the emperors of the Eastern Roman Empire, chose to depict themselves wearing the *loros*, a long cloth which they wound around their body. The *loros* represented the burial shroud or winding sheet of Jesus. As this is such an unusual thing for an emperor to wear, it is highly probable that they had seen, and had in their possession a cloth, which was the burial cloth of Jesus. The *loros* was first used in the 6th century during the rule of Justinian I (527 - 565) and the first known image of the *loros* was found on the coins of Justinian II (668-711; see coin, right). The face of Christ on the coin has Shroud-like similarities. It is significant that the practice of wearing the *loros* started after the Image of Edessa was discovered in 525.



The ivory, left, shows the emperor Constantine VII wearing the *loros* as he is blessed by Jesus at his coronation in 945. Maria Parani wrote: 'By the tenth century, the triumphant imperial symbolism of the *loros* had acquired a mystical dimension. Worn on Easter Sunday by the emperor and twelve dignitaries, the scarf's convolutions, reminiscent of a winding sheet, signified Christ's burial, while its golden trimming was a symbol of the brilliance of His resurrection.'

The primary source for this statement is found in *The Book of Ceremonies*, written by Constantine VII. Describing the liturgical practices on Holy Easter

Sunday in the sanctuary of Hagia Sophia he wrote: 'I shall sketch an outline of it, as I see it, from our concepts of piety. We think of the *magistroi* and patricians putting on *loroi* on the feast day of the Resurrection of Christ our God as representing his laying out for burial, and their being made of gold, for the splendour of this day, as being struck by the rays from the sun at the Resurrection of Christ himself. We think of both the *magistroi* and patricians themselves as representing the Apostles, and the good emperor, insofar as is possible, as being analogous to God.'

We know that Constantine VII believed he had the burial Shroud of Jesus in his possession. Ian Wilson describes how he wrote a letter in the last years of his reign in which he told his troops that he 'was sending them a supply of holy water that had been consecrated by contact with the relics of Christ's Passion held in his palace.' These relics included 'the precious wood [of the cross] ... the sacred spargana (which were the swaddling clothes of the infant Jesus), [and] the *sindon* which God wore...' Constantine references the burial cloth of Jesus but he does not mention the Holy Mandylion at all, which, given its importance, is extraordinary – unless, of course, he knew that the Shroud of Jesus and the Holy Mandylion were the same.

The Book of Ceremonies hints that the Shroud of Jesus was used in the liturgical practices of Holy Easter Sunday in Hagia Sophia. It was probably also used on Good Friday and Holy Easter Saturday. On those days, Constantine VII describes changing the holy altar-cloth. In late antiquity the altar-cloth, which was always made of linen, had a direct association with the burial cloth of Christ. 'As the altar itself was seen to parallel the tomb (sepulchre) of Christ, its cloth covering evoked the memory of Christ's burial shroud, rendering the textile a powerful image (*eikon*) of the divine.'

Constantine VII describes how the emperor changes the altar cloth on Good Friday. He entered the sanctuary of Hagia Sophia and 'Taking a censer, he censens [the altar] from all sides, and after changing the holy altar-cloth he places a purse on it.' He took the altar-cloth to the Chapel of the Holy Casket. Was this altar-cloth the '*sindon*' of Christ, which was in Constantine's possession? It would have been on the altar on Good Friday, which is one of the obvious days to include it in the liturgy. It may have been moved to the Holy Casket at three o'clock in the afternoon, so that the ceremony would correspond with the time of the burial of Christ.

On Holy Easter Saturday, Constantine VII described how he returned the altar-cloth from the Chapel of the Holy Casket to the altar in Hagia Sophia: 'After changing the cloths on the holy altar, he [the emperor] takes 100lbs of gold from the *praipositos* and places it at the holy altar, on the little step on which the emperor stands. When he has changed the holy-altar cloths, he takes another purse from the *praipositos*, it, too,

containing a very large amount of money, and places it at the holy altar.’ The altar-cloth would now be on the altar for Easter Sunday.

Two things are important to note. First, it is unusual, to say the least, that the powerful emperor is changing altar-cloths! And second, these events described by Constantine VII are probably the origins of Epitaphios processions. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, on Good Friday, a cloth bearing the markings of the Shroud of Jesus is carried to the sepulchre, and on Holy Easter Saturday, at Matins, it is returned. The 13th century Greek Epitaphios cloth, below, shows a remarkable similarity to the burial position of Christ to the Shroud of Turin. The length of the Epitaphios cloth is sufficient to contain a front and back view of Christ.



We know the size of the altar in Hagia Sophia. Robert de Clari wrote in the 13th century: ‘And the high altar of this minster [Hagia Sophia] was so rich that the price thereof could not be reckoned; for the table which lay upon the altar was of gold, and of precious stones all squared and ground, and all fast joined together; which a certain rich emperor caused to be made. And this table was full fourteen feet in length; and about the altar were pillars of silver, which upheld a canopy above the altar, made like to a bell-tower, and all of massive silver. And so rich was it that one could not reckon the price that it was worth.’ Joe Marino wrote, ‘Obviously, it’s no coincidence that the altar is the same size as the Shroud [of Turin] length.’

It is reasonable to assume the Holy Casket chapel had that name because it contained a Holy Casket! Mark Guscini wrote about the storage of the Holy Mandylion in a golden casket: ‘This wonderful linen cloth with the face of the Lord Jesus, marked by direct contact, is kept in greater veneration than the other relics in the palace, and held in such high esteem that it is always kept in a golden case and very carefully locked up. ‘A picture of the Holy Casket, which contained the Holy Mandylion, survives. In the *Madrid Skylitzes* there is an illustration which shows Konstantinos Phagitzes from

Paphlagonia being sent to Dalassenos in 1034. The medium sized chest he carries



contains four different icons: 'The Holy Woods, The Holy Mandylion, Christ's autographed letter to Abgar, and an icon of the Mother of God.'

It is also possible that the reliquary box, now known as the Limburg Staurotheke, in the cathedral treasury of Limburg an der Lahn, may have formed a sliding lid for the Holy Casket. It was created by Constantine VII, Romanos II and Basil Lekapenos. It was certainly a reliquary for the Holy Woods, which were stored in the same golden case as the Holy Mandylion. The Holy Woods could be 'the precious wood [of the cross]' mentioned in Constantine's letter to his troops. The Limburg Staurotheke's dimensions; 48 cm by 35 cm, would allow for the Shroud to be folded lengthways into four, (27 cm), times across its width. and then folded multiple times across its width.



The language of the inscriptions on the Staurotheke matches the language used by Constantine VII in *The Book of Ceremonies*. It juxtaposes the death and resurrection of Jesus with the power of the emperors to rule. Also, like the water blessed by the 'sindon' of Christ, Constantine VII believed that, when he adorned the contents of the Limburg Staurotheke, he overcame the threats of his enemies. Throughout its history the Shroud of Turin has been used as a palladium, to protect against danger. This includes the special exposition on April 11th 2020, during the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic. The first inscription on the Staurotheke is attributed to Constantine VII and Romanos II; the second to Basil Lekapenos:

'On the one hand, God stretched out his hands upon the wood
gushing forth through it the energies of life,
On the other hand, Constantine and Romanos the despots
with the synthesis of radiant stones and pearls
displayed this same thing full of wonder.
And on the one hand, Christ with this formerly
Smashed the gates of Hades giving new life to the dead
On the other hand, the crown-wearers having now adorned this
crush with it the temerities of the barbarians.'

'He did not have beauty, the one suspended on wood,
yet Christ was complete with beauty;
and in dying he did not have form,
but he beautified my appearance deformed by sin.
Although being God, he suffered in mortal nature;
eminently venerating, Basileios the proedros
beautified the theke of wood, on which having been stretched,
he (Christ) rescued all creation.'

The contents of the reliquary '[smash] the gates of Hades giving new life to the dead.' This text references the resurrection and points to something 'full of wonder.' The suggestion in the second inscription that Christ 'did not have form,' may be a description of the faint, ethereal nature of the Shroud image and the sentence Christ 'beautified my appearance deformed by sin,' may be a direct reference to the wearing of the *loros* as a symbol of Christ's Shroud. Wearing the *loros*, beautified the emperor and his officials, and made them resemble Christ and the apostles.

So, Constantine VII was personally involved in the liturgical practices in Hagia Sophia on Good Friday, Holy Easter Saturday and Holy Easter Sunday. The altar cloth

(associated with the burial cloth of Jesus) was moved to the Chapel of the Holy Casket and then returned, just like the ceremonial of the Epitaphios in Easter Orthodox churches today. The *loros* represented the winding cloth or Shroud of Jesus, glorified after Christ's resurrection. The emperor and his retinue wore their *loroi* as they entered the sanctuary of Hagia Sophia on Easter Sunday morning. The altar was 14 feet long, the same length as the Shroud of Turin.

Patterns used repeatedly on the *loros* may be derived from folds visible on the Shroud. This is illustrated in the coin of Constantine VII, which shows a four-fold series of boxes across the *loros*. As the burn and water damage testify, when the Shroud was folded for storage, it was invariably folded in four length ways, and multiple times along the width. The Holy Mandylion was known to be folded along its length into eight. Storage in a golden casket would probably require a similar configuration of folds.



It is very significant that the images of Jesus created in the 10th Century by the Byzantine emperors show Jesus looking very much as on the Shroud of Turin. One of the most spectacular is the ivory of Jesus blessing the marriage of Romanos II (mid-10th century). Romanos II wears a *loros* with the four-fold series of boxes along its length as he marries Bertha-Eudokia. A close up of the image of Christ compared to the face on the Shroud shows the stunning similarities.



While it is often assumed the Holy Mandylion was a face cloth, that is not borne out by the art. In the mid-tenth century, most of the ivories of Jesus show a full body figure. The ivories are often called Romanos ivories, after Romanos II. In the coronation and marriage ivories Christ is standing, but he is often portrayed on a throne, reigning in



glory. The Harbaville Triptych in the Louvre and the cover of the Ottonian lectionary in Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, like the Limburg Staurotheke, have similar thrones and bolster cushions. Christ's feet rest on a dais. It is fascinating that behind these thrones there is usually a trellis pattern. This may be a reference tying these images to the Image of Edessa. Ian Wilson has argued conclusively that when the Holy Mandylion was displayed, it was surrounded by a 'trellis-style embellishment.' This is demonstrated in the Holy Mandylion and Keramion image below. In these mid-tenth century images, the trellis pattern adorns the throne of the full-body Christ.



There is a magnificent mosaic in Hagia Sophia, also with a trellis-pattern throne, which may have been created after the arrival of the Image of Edessa. Many scholars have assumed the emperor, prostrated in an act of penance, is Leo VI, Constantine VII's father. However, the beauty and sophistication of the art surpasses anything which survives from Leo VI's reign, so it is worth considering as a post 944 image. The Narthex mosaic above the Imperial door may actually illustrate the liturgical practices of Good Friday, Holy Easter Saturday and Holy Easter Sunday described in *The Book of Ceremonies*. Constantine VII writes about making 'obeisance' during the services: 'The rulers give thanks to God with triple obeisance with candles and go in, making obeisance before the holy door which is held by the patriarch.' A biblical parallel maybe 'Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at the footstool of his throne' *Psalms 132: 7*.

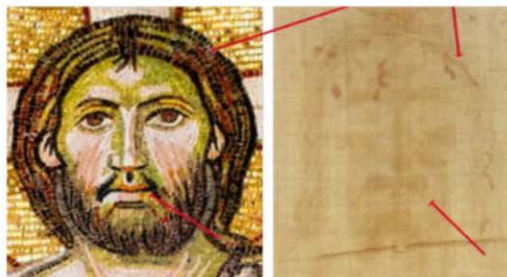


In Eastern Orthodox practice, obeisance ranges from a bow of the head to complete prostration. In the mosaic, the emperor is on his knees before Christ, who, as Dr Cheryl White observes is 'clothed in glory.' The emperor's hands, like the hands of St. Mary, the Theotokos [the Mother of God], are pointing to Christ. Compare the face of the emperor with the face of Constantine VII, who is bowing his head in obeisance to Christ at his coronation. The crown he is wearing is the same. For those of us who love the Shroud of Turin it is easy to recognise the devotion to Christ which is inspired by the Shroud. Whenever the Shroud is displayed in Turin, the Cathedral of St John the Baptist is filled with people on their knees before Christ.



The robes of Christ, the throne, dais and bolster cushion and the trellis pattern of the Narthex mosaic finds parallels in the exquisite work of the tenth century. The facial similarities between the mosaic and the Shroud of Turin closely follow the markings identified by art historian Paul Vignon. The nose is long and the

eyes are large. There is a swelling on the left cheek (the right as you look at the image). The hair is longer on the left side. The beard and moustache are similar, as is the line of the mouth. There are wisps of hair on the forehead and a "v" shape on the bridge of the nose. The throat appears to have a swelling. On the Shroud of Turin, there is image between the cheeks and the hair but it is just much fainter and not easily visible. This explains the differences in the width of the face. The face is exceptionally well-crafted and creates a real sense of three-dimensionality, which reflects the three-dimensional discoveries about the Shroud of Turin by Dr John Jackson and Dr Eric Jumper. The red



colouring in the hair and beard is of great interest because it mirrors the blood flow through the hair and beard in the Shroud of Turin, particularly in the area marked. There is also a pool of orangey/red on the top lip and in the bottom right corner of the mouth, as you look at the image, which corresponds with a pool of blood in a similar pattern on the Shroud. It is too much of a co-

incidence for the images not to be related.

It is not just the face that resembles the Shroud of Turin. The fingers on the hands (rotated to compare), are similar to the Shroud of Turin. The thumb touching the fourth finger in benediction makes the thumb retract into the palm. There are no thumbs visible on the Shroud of Turin. Since the fire damage to the Shroud in 1532 we can no longer see the feet on the Shroud, but the Lier Shroud, painted in 1516, shows the toes were long.



One further strand deserves consideration. Writing at the time of the Arab-Byzantine wars, Constantine VII describes wearing the *loros* in the presence of Saracens: At ‘the feast of the splendid Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ, the feast was conducted according to the format prescribed for it, closely followed from ancient times except that, for the Saracen guests, the emperors wore *loroi* and carried crosses and *akakiai*.’ In the transfiguration, Jesus’s ‘face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light’ (Matthew 7:2). This resonates with Constantine’s descriptions of the wearing of the *loroi* on Easter Sunday and ‘being struck by the rays from the sun at the Resurrection of Christ himself.’

The association of the *loros* with transfiguration and light finds a modern parallel in the study of the Shroud of Turin by nuclear physicist Dr Paulo Di Lazzaro. He, and a team at ENEA in Italy (New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development), experimented with lasers to try to replicate the surface phenomenon of the Shroud of Turin: “the colour’s penetration into the fabric is extremely thin, less than 0.7 micrometers (0.000028 inches), one-thirtieth the diameter of an individual fibre in a single 200-fibre linen thread.” The conclusion of the experiments suggest the Shroud image was created by “a flash of light.” The ultraviolet light necessary to reproduce the image of the crucified man “exceeds the maximum power released by all ultraviolet light sources available today.” The flash would require “pulses having durations shorter than one forty-billionth of a second, and intensities on the order of several billion watts.”

Here, a scientist in the 21st century, is reflecting a concept which may have been grasped by a ruler of Constantinople a thousand years earlier.

To conclude, the emperors of the Eastern Roman Empire chose to depict themselves wearing the loros, a long cloth which they wound around their body. The loros represented the burial shroud or winding sheet of Jesus. We have explored the possibility that the emperors venerated and protected the Shroud of Turin itself. The religious and political ceremonial in Constantinople, which Constantine documented in a detailed and extensive manner, including the possible early use of the Eпитaphios, points to a Shroud of Jesus. We conclude that the emperors did have the Shroud of Turin in their possession: they wore a replica of it around their shoulders as a symbol of their temporal and spiritual authority to rule.

We also looked at the Christocentric art specifically attributed to Constantine VII, Romanos II and Basil Lekapenos. The artwork included ivories and enamel work and may also include the enigmatic Narthex mosaic. The paper argues that artwork, created after 945, was influenced by the arrival of the Image of Edessa in Constantinople in 944. It is logical to assume the art reveals, in detail, the nature of the Image of Edessa. As all the artwork contains full body images of Jesus, and Constantine VII referred to the 'sindon' of Christ which he had in his possession, we have argued the Image of Edessa was not a face-only image. The similarity of the facial imagery of the art to the Shroud of Turin is marked, so it is possible that the artists who created these stunning, three-dimensional masterpieces of Christ, had access to the burial cloth of Jesus, now known as the Shroud of Turin. This outpouring of exceptional art from the mid 10th century in Constantinople, in all its beautiful forms, may be a useful vehicle to trace part of the history of the Holy Shroud.

To read fuller versions of this work, containing references to all the sources, please see <http://bitly.ws/axPC> and <http://bitly.ws/axPC>

A very big “Thank You” to all those subscribers who were kind enough to spread the word about our Newsletter and our mission. A good way to do this is to send a link to the Home Page (www.bstsnewsletter.com) where they will find two videos which, in quite different ways, reveal the way the C14 test “inflicted” on the Shroud fell woefully short of the scientific protocols designed to ensure its reliability.

Thank you. David Rolfe, Editor.