

An Editorial and Review of the very last Shroud documentary I will ever appear in!
by Barrie Schwartz

When I was first asked to appear in a Shroud documentary around 35 years ago, I remember calling Joe Marino (when he was still a Benedictine monk) and asking him if he thought I should participate. His response was simple, “If you don’t do it, they’ll just get someone else who knows less.”

That seemed reasonable, so over the next 35 years I appeared in more than twenty Shroud documentaries on every major cable network. However, time and time again, once the programs were broadcast, I found myself frustrated and disappointed. They frequently omitted or glossed over pertinent facts in favor of overly dramatic claims often made by so-called experts in white lab coats, many of whom had never even seen the Shroud!

It got so frustrating that I wrote a number of editorials and reviews criticizing several specific Shroud documentaries. I even wrote one article that took the reader behind the scenes and provided some insight on how one of these programs was actually produced: [Behind the Scenes of a New Smithsonian Channel Shroud Documentary](#). This was originally broadcast in May 2013 as a one hour program (around 43 minutes of actual program time after commercials). Then, after seven years, on March 23, 2020, a re-edited, renamed and cut down 30 minute version (23 minutes of actual program time) was broadcast again, just in time for Easter. Of course, to create this shorter version, they edited out all of the evidence I presented in the original program that challenged the conclusions of the featured Shroud skeptics, Nicholas Allen and Luigi Garlaschelli!

In a [special March 5, 2015 website update](#), I also wrote and published an article titled, [A Brief Review of the Recent CNN Documentary and Further Comments on the Medieval Photograph Theory](#), in which I reviewed a then new (and very disappointing) documentary that originally aired on March 1, 2015.

Rather than continuing down this frustrating path, two years ago I decided I would not participate in any more Shroud documentaries. After all those years, I could only recommend two or three when people frequently asked me which ones were the “good” ones. Of course, having spent all of my professional career and most of my life *behind* the camera, I never really had any aspirations to appear *in front* of the camera in the first place. I was feeling very overexposed and I knew it was time to stop.

Then, in June of 2019, I was contacted by Like a Shot Entertainment in London, England. They informed me that they were producing a program about the Shroud for the Forbidden History series on the Discovery Science Channel. After a rather lengthy exchange of e-mails and several WhatsApp telephone calls over the next few weeks, they ultimately invited to fly me to Turin to participate in their program.

What they didn’t know however...

...was that I was already scheduled to be in Turin as a guest of Fr. Peter Mangum and Dr. Cheryl White at a meeting I helped arrange for them with Nello Ballosino, the Curator of the Shroud Museum in Turin. Dr. White is the Curator of the Museum of the Holy Shroud at the Cathedral of St. John Berchmans in Shreveport, Louisiana, where Fr. Peter is the parish priest and Museum Director. Their museum houses the extensive Shroud collection of Richard Orareo, who spent five decades assembling what is now the third largest Shroud art collection in the world. We reported on the meeting in an article titled, [Museum Curators Meet in Turin](#), in our November 2019 update.

Before saying anything to the production company, I called Dr. White to discuss this with her in detail. I explained that I really wasn't enthusiastic about participating, and it was then that I heard an old, familiar phrase, "If you don't do it, they'll just get someone else who knows less!" Dr. White is a professor of history at Louisiana State University (LSU) in Shreveport and a member of the STERA, Inc. Board of Directors, and I value her opinion highly, so I relented and notified the production company that I would participate, and strongly urged them to interview Dr. White as well. A few days later they agreed to interview both of us and we set the date for when Dr. White and I would already be in Turin (thus saving the production company the cost of my airline tickets and hotel rooms).

On the appointed date, Dr. White and I met with the film crew at 8:00am and we spent the entire day shooting at various locations around Turin. The director told us he was modifying the script to include the meeting between the two museum curators and much of the footage we shot that day was obviously for that purpose. I was interviewed sitting at an outdoor café and the director asked me all the appropriate questions that allowed me to describe my involvement with the Shroud and address in detail the theories of Lynn Picknett and Luigi Garlaschelli, the two skeptics featured prominently in the program.

We ended up at the Shroud Museum around 3:00pm for the filming of Dr. White's meeting with curator Nello Ballosino and her on camera interview. Afterwards, I felt satisfied that we all had stated the facts as clearly as possible. However, my previous experiences with Shroud documentaries (and that little voice in the back of my head) left me feeling a bit uneasy about the whole thing. I think that feeling is reflected in the short article I wrote about our participation in the program titled, [New Shroud Documentary Currently in Production](#), which we published in our November 2019 update.

That brings me to the program itself, which premiered on the Discovery Science Channel here in the United States on April 12, 2020, Easter Sunday (no surprise). I won't go into great detail in describing the program since it was filled with mistruths and errors, focused almost exclusively on anti-authenticity theories and totally ignored all the published science that proved those theories were wrong. I guess it wasn't much of a hit with the Easter Sunday audience either, because Discovery Science quickly made the entire program available on their website, something rarely done in the past. (I'm sure they'll blame the pandemic).

In the first part of the program, I was happy to see a brief appearance by noted Shroud scholar Prof. Bruno Barberis, although several of the other "experts" they presented had obviously never studied or even seen the Shroud. I kept waiting to see Dr. White present her expert historical perspective on the Shroud, but she never appeared in the program at all! My first clue that this was going to be disappointing was in the brief segment they aired of me near the beginning in which I stated I was convinced of the Shroud's authenticity. The only problem was that they edited out my statement that "it took seventeen years and the peer reviewed science to convince me."

As the program wore on (and it became more and more difficult to watch), there was nothing about the Shroud Museum and why Dr. White and I were in Turin. They also failed to include any of the rebuttals I had presented that challenged the theories of Picknett and Garlaschelli, which clearly dominated the program. Apparently, they had no intention of including any of the footage we shot in Turin, aside from my single statement. In essence, they lied to us to gain our participation.

I was somewhat surprised to see that they included Dr. Steve Mattingly presenting his now pro-authenticity theory that bacteria created the image (he was originally a skeptic). The director never told me that Steve would be appearing in the program or I would have mentioned that I photographed and evaluated his results more than 15 years ago and determined that his resulting images were dramatically different than the image on the Shroud. His image formation mechanism works only by direct contact between cloth and body and results in an image with sharply defined edges, yet the imaging mechanism of the Shroud worked at up to 4 cm distance and simply fades away at the edges as the distance increases. There was no correlation of image density to cloth-body distance in his results (because bacteria can't fly) and no spatial (3-D) or topographic data was encoded in his images which yields the natural relief of a human form on the Shroud. So the only pro-authenticity theory they presented had been proven wrong long ago. (Sorry Steve).

For the sake of transparency, the production company paid STERA, Inc. a modest licensing fee for the use of some of our photographs in their brief segment on the STURP team. However, they never once referenced any of the published STURP science that proved all the skeptical theories they presented in this program were wrong. (Not surprised).

Of course, ALL of the skeptical theories they focused on couldn't be correct! So they just used a shotgun approach and presented multiple theories, all of which only demonstrated that it was possible to make something that looked like the Shroud. That's not a surprise considering all the reference photographs that are now readily available online. But not once did they do an honest comparison with the published, documented image characteristics that were based on direct examination of the cloth. Had they done so, the differences would have been blatantly obvious.

In the end, I believe that the full day we spent with the production company in Turin was simply to obtain a few minutes of footage of another well-known, pro-authenticity scholar (me), so they could claim they included "both sides" of the argument. The finished program clearly demonstrates that they had no intention of making a fair comparison and only intended to present a strong, anti-authenticity message. In that respect, they succeeded. As I have reminded everyone in the past, do not use television documentaries to study the Shroud because they rarely get it right. In this case, they focused on making a "dramatic" but rather dishonest program and got it all wrong! Of course, if you ask them, they'll tell you "that's entertainment!"

One final thought. I honestly do not intend to ever appear again in another Shroud documentary, so consider this the last review and editorial I will ever have to write about a program that I appeared in. And please don't tell me that, "If you don't do it, they'll just get someone else who knows less." This program proved that documentary producers are absolutely willing to get someone who "knows less." Sadly, it is the public who loses when the true facts are obscured. Don't waste your valuable time on this one.

Barrie Schwartz
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