

## **Spanish Centre for Sindonology celebrates 15th anniversary**

The Centro Español de Sindonología was founded in 1988 by Manuela Corsini de Ordeig and since then has gone from strength to strength under the leadership of Jorge Manuel Rodríguez and a devoted team of helpers who give freely of their time and energy to working for the Centre. 2003 is thus the Centre's fifteenth anniversary, marked by a special gathering of members and guests in Valencia at the beginning of May, to spend time together and share results of investigation projects in talks and round tables. The main line of investigation work of the Centre's Investigation Team is the Sudarium of Oviedo, virtually unknown fifteen years ago, but today an internationally known complement to the Shroud of Turin. It is not easy to understand all the details of the cloth without images, and so I thought it would be a good idea to join in the celebrations of our Spanish colleagues with a special section on the Sudarium, a basic introduction with plenty of images so its use can be seen and better understood.

Introduction: The Investigation Team of the Centro Español de Sindonología

The Investigation Team of the Centro Español de Sindonología is precisely that - a team. We work as a team and publish as a team - all the articles and books we write are read and reviewed by other team members, so all our publications are truly joint efforts. The Team consists of specialists in various fields, from history and languages to chemistry, physics and archaeology. Our special field of investigation is the Shroud of Turin and the Sudarium of Oviedo, the latter being the object of the most intensive study for the simple reason that the authorities at the cathedral in Oviedo recognise the efforts we are making and regularly permit direct study of the cloth. Our studies extend to all fields related to the historical Jesus, the final object of any study of the Shroud and

Sudarium, whatever the beliefs of the investigator may be. The team consists mainly of Spanish experts (for obvious reasons) although there are members from the United Kingdom and the United States too.

Following are the conclusions from the first ten years of work by the Investigation Team of the Centro Español de Sindonología. More work is in progress, namely detailed chemical and forensic studies, identification of all the pollen samples found on the cloth, and of course this historical investigation of the cloth, which is not yet finished.

#### Summary of the Investigations on the Oviedo Sudarium

1. The Sudarium of Oviedo is a piece of cloth that has been venerated in the cathedral of Oviedo for a very long time. According to tradition it was brought to the city in an ark or chest along with other objects that had been rescued from Jerusalem just before the Persian invasion in AD 614. The cloth is basically rectangular, although the sides are not perfectly straight. This means that the measurements of the cloth are always approximate - 85.5 cm x 52.6 cm. There is a tear 5.5 cm long on the top left of the cloth as it is normally kept in its frame. There is also a hole (with clear burn marks around its edges) measuring 1.24 cm x 1.96 cm. The Sudarium is made of linen and must have been woven by hand due to the relatively poor quality of the weave. The weave is of a simple taffeta kind. The cloth contains stains formed by human blood of the group AB.

2. The cloth is dirty, creased, torn and burnt in parts, stained and highly contaminated. The contamination includes particles of sand, carbon, fungus, insect remains and pollen grains. The pollen grains (e.g. Quercus, Pistacia Palestina, Tamarix) show that the cloth has always been reasonably close to the Mediterranean and more specifically, has at

some point in time been in Palestine. There is also gunpowder, most probably from the explosion in Oviedo Cathedral in 1934, wax, hair and lipstick (no doubt from the custom of kissing the relic on private showings). Among the most significant foreign particles present on the Sudarium are myrrh and aloes. The Sudarium does not, however, show signs of fraudulent manipulation.

3. It seems to be a funeral cloth that was probably placed over the head of the corpse of an adult male of normal constitution.

4. The man whose face the Sudarium covered had a beard, moustache and long hair, tied up at the nape of his neck into a ponytail.

5. The man's mouth was closed, his nose was squashed and forced to the right by the pressure of holding the cloth to his face. Both these anatomical elements have been clearly identified on the Sudarium of Oviedo.

6. The man was dead. The mechanism that formed the stains is incompatible with any kind of breathing movement.

7. At the bottom of the back of his head, there is a series of wounds produced in life by some sharp objects. These wounds had bled about an hour before the cloth was placed on top of them.

8. Just about the entire head, shoulders and at least part of the back of the man were covered in blood before being covered by this cloth. This is known because it is

impossible to reproduce the stains in the hair, on the forehead and on top of the head with blood from a corpse. It can therefore be stated that the man was wounded before death with something that made his scalp bleed and produced wounds on his neck, shoulders and upper part of the back. All the stains have been reproduced by Doctor José Delfín Villalaín, Professor of Forensic Medicine at the University of Valencia, with the aid of a specially created model head and thousands of experimental stains. Reproducing the stains with the model head exactly as they are on the Sudarium also showed how long the dead man had been in each different position.

9. The man suffered a pulmonary oedema as a consequence of the terminal process. The main stain areas consist of one part human blood and six parts pulmonary oedema fluid, from the lungs of the corpse.

10. The cloth was placed over the head starting from the back, held to the hair by sharp objects. From there it went round the left side of the head to the right cheek, where, for apparently unknown reasons it was folded over on itself, ending up folded like an accordion over the left cheek. It is possible that the cloth was placed like this because the head formed an obstacle and so it was folded over on itself. This can be seen from the parallel sets of bloodstains visible on the left and right sides of the cloth. On placing the cloth in this position, two stained areas can be anatomically observed - one over the "ponytail" and the other over the top of the back.

Once the man had died, the corpse stayed in a vertical position for around sixty minutes, and the right arm was raised with the head bent 70 degrees forwards and 20 degrees to the right. It must be asked how can this be reasonably thought of as a "vertical position". The reason is that if the man of the Oviedo Sudarium was hanging

by the right arm only, then the rest of the body, especially the head, would be relatively far from this arm, hanging to the left. This position is incompatible with that of the head that the cloth wrapped. It is therefore easy to deduce that the body was hanging by both arms. But if the body was hanging like this, without support for the feet, the man would have died in 15 or 20 minutes, and there would not have been enough time to generate the amount of liquid necessary to form the stains visible on the cloth. If the body were hanging with both arms above the head, then the head would have been leaning forwards and not to the right. So the only position compatible with the formation of the stains on the Oviedo cloth is both arms outstretched above the head and the feet in such a position as to make breathing very difficult, i.e. a position totally compatible with crucifixion. We can say that the man was wounded first (blood on the head, shoulders and back) and then "crucified". While in this upright position, the central bloodstains were formed over a period of approximately sixty minutes.

11. The body was then placed on the ground on its right side, with the arms in the same position, and the head still bent 20 degrees to the right, and at 115 degrees from the vertical position. The forehead was placed on a hard surface, and the body was left in this position for approximately one more hour. It was while in this position that the stains corresponding to the forehead were formed, with the blood and pulmonary oedema fluid emanating from the nostrils and mouth and slowly flowing down towards the forehead (the forehead being in a slightly lower position than the nose in relation to the ground).

12. The body was then moved, while somebody's left hand in various positions tried to stem the flow of liquid from the nose and mouth, pressing strongly against them. This

movement could have taken about five minutes. The cloth was folded over itself all this time. The cloth was then straightened out and wrapped all round the head, like a hood, held on again by sharp objects and tied in a knot at the top. The creases from tying this know are still clearly visible at the top left of the cloth as seen in its frame. This allowed part of the cloth, folded like a cone, to fall over the back. With the head thus covered, the corpse was held up (partly) by a left fist. The cloth was then moved sideways over the face in this position.

Thus, once the obstacle (which could have been the hair matted with blood or the head bent towards the right) had been moved out of the way, the cloth was wrapped around the entire head and the corpse was moved for the last time, face down over a closed left fist. This movement produced the large triangular stain, on whose surface the finger shaped stains can be seen. Like the previous movement, this one could have taken five minutes at most.

All of this chronological information fits in perfectly with what we know about the crucifixion. The most detailed study of the temporal aspect of the crucifixion was published in 1983 . Various astronomical considerations lead to the conclusion that the crucifixion took place on 3 April AD 33, (14 Nisan in the Jewish calendar). As there was a mistake when the calendar switched to counting years after the birth of Jesus, Jesus was born in 5 or 6 BC (despite the apparent contradiction!), as Herod the Great died in 4 BC and he was definitely still alive when Jesus was born. This would make Jesus about 38 years old when he was crucified.

The Jews counted the hours of the day from 6 o'clock in the morning, so that our 9 o'clock would be the third hour, 12 noon the sixth hour and so on. What do the gospels tell us about the time Jesus was crucified at? According to Mark's gospel, Jesus was crucified at the third hour (9 am), and died at the ninth hour (3 p.m.), after six

hours' torment on the cross. Matthew and Luke agree that Jesus died at the ninth hour, and seem to imply that Jesus had suffered six hours on the cross too. The only time the gospel of John mentions the time of day is when Pilate agrees to have Jesus crucified, when we are told it was about the sixth hour. This does not agree with what the three synoptic gospels tell us. John does not state at what time Jesus died, but if it was the ninth hour, the crucifixion lasted less than three hours, as three hours before the ninth hour, Jesus was still in Jerusalem.

Assuming then that Jesus died at three o'clock in the afternoon, the body was left on the cross with the Sudarium wrapped round its head until approximately four o'clock. The body was then taken down and laid on the ground for another hour, which brings us up to five o'clock. The body was then moved to the tomb, which according to the information contained in the Sudarium, took no longer than ten minutes. This also coincides with the gospels when they say that the tomb was near the place of crucifixion.

Giving time for the body to be wrapped up in the Shroud and hastily prepared for burial with the spices that had been brought, we can assume that the disciples left the tomb closed at six o'clock at the latest. On 3 April AD 33, the moon rose at approximately twenty past six, and at that time there was a partial eclipse of the moon (i.e. part of the moon's surface appeared red), which could very well be what Peter was referring to in Acts 2:20, when echoing the words of the prophet Joel he says, "The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood".

13. Finally, on reaching the destination, the body was placed face up and for unknown reasons, the cloth was taken off the head. Myrrh and aloes were then sprinkled over the cloth, possible as a Jewish religious act to conserve the blood.

There are many points of coincidence between all these points and the Shroud of Turin - the blood group, the way the corpse was tortured and died, and the macroscopic overlay of the stains on each cloth. This is especially notable in that the blood on the sudarium shed in life, as opposed to post mortem, corresponds exactly in blood group, blood type and surface area to those stains on the Shroud on the nape of the neck. If it is clear that the two cloths must have covered the same corpse, and this conclusion is inevitable from all the studies carried out up to date, and if the history of the sudarium can be trustworthily extended back beyond the fourteenth century, which is often referred to as the Shroud's first documented historical appearance, then this would take the Shroud back to at least the earliest dates of the sudarium's known history. The ark of relics and the sudarium have without any doubt at all been in Spain since the beginning of the seventh century, and the history recorded in various manuscripts from various times and geographical areas take it all the way back to Jerusalem in the first century. The importance of this for Shroud history cannot be overstressed.

## THE HISTORY OF THE OVIEDO SUDARIUM

### 1. The Gospels

Only John's gospel uses the Greek term *soudarion* in relation to the burial of Jesus. The Greek word is actually a loan word from the Latin *sudarium*, which is a very difficult word to translate into English. The various versions of the Bible have used such terms as "napkin", "face cloth" and just "cloth". None of these words accurately portrays to a twentieth century mind exactly what the Latin word did to a first century mind. A study of the word in classical sources (Catullus, Petronius, Suetonius, and Martial) gives



the idea of a cloth somewhat larger than a modern handkerchief, that could be put to various uses. It was normally carried round the neck or tied to the wrist, and its etymology, closely linked to the Latin sudor (sweat), strongly suggests it was used to wipe sweat from and clean the face in general. The difficulty of finding an exact equivalent in other languages is shown by the fact that the Latin word was transliterated into Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic.

John does not state that the sudarium was used as a burial cloth, but rather that it had been over Jesus' head before the burial. This fits in with what has been discovered from the Oviedo cloth, as does the fact that it was found separate from the other linen cloth (or cloths) in the tomb. John uses the term *ta othonia* for the other linen cloths - this must have been the Shroud or included the Shroud, as Luke uses *othonia* and *sindon* as synonyms. Despite many attempts to suggest different meanings for John's text, to the effect that the sudarium was not actually separate from the other cloth, John says it was three times - "not with the other cloths", "separately" and "in a place by itself" - this is clearly what he wanted us to understand. This too fits in with what has been discovered from the Oviedo cloth, which had been over Jesus' face and head, and must have been discarded before the body was wrapped in the Shroud, otherwise it would have been between the face and Shroud when the image was formed on the latter.

#### Reconstruction of the Sudarium's History

The following reconstruction is based on historical sources and fits in with what is known from other sources that have nothing to do with the ark (in which the sudarium travelled from Jerusalem) or the other relics it contained. It is not therefore tradition, it is history and should be accepted as such by any serious investigator, whatever his religious beliefs may be. On the other hand, this history cannot be used to justify any

belief, Catholic, protestant or whatever. Even though the history of the sudarium is inextricably linked up with Jesus and consequently with religious belief, the history per se of the relic has nothing to do with anything except history. The documents in question proceed from various countries at different times, and they coincide in the most important details. What follows can, therefore, be considered as genuine history.

The medical and forensic studies carried out on the cloth have shown how the sudarium was used on a body that had been crucified. The coincidences with the Shroud of Turin are highly significant, especially the blood group and the stains of blood shed in life and that shed after death, which are perfectly compatible between the two cloths. This suggests very strongly that the body in question was that of Jesus of Nazareth.

The gospel of John, which apart from being a document of faith is also one of history, tells us that the sudarium was found in the bodyless tomb, not with the other cloths but apart from them. Both the Life of Saint Nino of Georgia and the comments of Ishodad of Merv tell us that it was the apostle Peter who took charge of the sudarium, whereas the details about what happened to the Shroud are more confused. The sudarium stayed in the city of Jerusalem after Peter had gone elsewhere, and the cave where it was kept at the end of the sixth century was visited by a group of pilgrims from Piacenza in Italy around the year 570. They did not actually see the cloth, but they were told it was there, possibly already inside the ark, as this had been built at some time in the first century.

The sudarium was in Jerusalem for six centuries, but when the king of the Persians, Chosroes II, invaded and conquered the city in 614, some Christians fled with the ark and some relics. This flight is attested in Pelayo (both in the Book of Testaments and in the corpus pelagianum), Lucas of Tuy, Codex Valenciennes 99, and

the group of manuscripts formed by Valenciennes 30, Cambrai B 804, and Brussels II 2544 (old Cheltenham 299). The flight was justifiable, as amongst other things Chosroes was searching for relics, in full knowledge of the importance they had for the Christians.

The ark left Jerusalem by sea, with a possible stop in a city on the north coast of Africa. The city is only named in the group formed by Valenciennes 30, Cambrai B 804, and Brussels II 2544 (old Cheltenham 299) - and the name given is Carthage. This is not possible as the Persians conquered whichever city it was where the ark stopped, and Carthage was not conquered by the Persians. If there was a stop in an African city, it was most probably Alexandria, which was in fact conquered by Chosroes in 616, two years after the invasion of Jerusalem.

Did the ark enter Spain via Cartagena or was it taken directly to Seville? Cartagena seems a logical point to enter, as it was a very important city at the time, and this would explain the confusion of Valenciennes 30, Cambrai B 804, and Brussels II 2544, which mention Carthage. Both Carthage and Cartagena have the same name in Latin, as Cartagena was in fact New Carthage. If the ark stopped in Africa, the entry into Spain would have been in 616, if there was not, it probably entered the peninsula in the same year it left Jerusalem, 614.

If it ~~did~~ enter via Cartagena, it went from there to Seville, according to almost all the sources and the laguna in Pelayo. It was there during the most prosperous years for the city, under the bishop Isidoro. When he died in 636, Toledo became the most important ecclesiastical city in Spain, with three significant archbishops, the two Eugenius and Ildefonso. The ark stayed in Toledo for 75 years, until the invasion of the peninsula by Tariq in 711. The Arabs destroyed the forces of the last Gothic king Rodrigo and went immediately to Toledo, provoking the mass exodus of Christians to

the safer north of the country. The ark was then hidden for approximately half a century in the mountains of Asturias, not in one place all the time, but moving from one to another.

The ark has most probably been in Oviedo since the first founding of the city in 761, in which case it must have been hidden again in the mountains during the Arab invasion of Asturias in 794, and from where it went back it has been in Oviedo right up to today, in the cathedral of San Salvador. Alternatively, it could have been in the mountains around Oviedo up till the year 794, when the Arabs were definitively thrown out of the city. It was probably closed from 614 up to the official opening in 1075, although there might have been some previous attempts to open it.

One very important point that should be mentioned at this stage is the pollen analysis of the sudarium. Dr Max Frei took samples from the cloth and analysed them, and after he died his findings were confirmed by Spanish palynologists. There are present on the cloth species typical of Palestine, North Africa, the Mediterranean area in general, and of course Asturias, and nothing to link the sudarium to either Constantinople or any other area. These findings support the historical stages of the cloth's travels as expressed above.