

- 2 'The Blood and The Shroud, A New Light on the Turin Shroud Mystery' - Ian Wilson.
 3 'The Turin Shroud, the Illustrated Evidence' - Ian Wilson and Barrie Schwartz.
 4 British Society for the Turin Shroud - 'Shroud Newsletter', Winter 2018/19, Issue No. 88 - Ian Wilson article.
 5 The Burial Cloths of Christ - Mark Guscini (CTS).
 6 Belmont Abbey, Hereford, UK.
 7 'Artists, Their Lives and Works' - Dorling Kindersley, Penguin Random House.
 8 'A New History of Italian Renaissance Art' - Stephen J. Campbell & Michael W. Cole (Thames & Hudson).
 9 www.visittuscany.com. 10 Oxford Bibliographies. 11 www.histouring.com. 12 Encyclopaedia Britannica.
 13 Museo Civico Sansepolcro.

Biography: Philippa Foster has been a professional artist for over thirty years - as a Graphic Designer and Technical Illustrator, specializing in Natural History. She is also a retired Funeral Celebrant. For two decades, she has studied what she believes to be the image of the 'Resurrection' created by Divine Light, on The Turin Shroud. With her husband Alan, she has traveled to many Holy Sites around the world - to better understand 'The Shroud of Turin', 'The Sudarium of Oviedo' and 'the Miraculous Appearances of Mother Mary'.

Shroud articles and the Internet

Mark Guscini

The advent of the Internet and new technologies in communication certainly changed the world in endless ways, and Shroud studies is no exception to this. And yet while it is doubtlessly true that we all now have access to much more information; the quality of this information has not been altered as much as some would like to think. Before presentations and articles were available on-line, and before publishing a book was just a question of money (self-publishing has existed for almost as long as the printing press, but has been made infinitely easier by digital printing and print-on-demand), the quality of the much lower amount of information was probably as equally divided as it is today, among excellent, so-so and poor to absolutely terrible.



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Ever since Shroud studies started in earnest after the photographs of 1898, there have been Catholic fanatics publishing books on the Shroud, Protestant fanatics doing the same, along with atheist fanatics and others with a bee in their bonnet (sometimes I think it is a more of a killer hornet) about some particular aspect of the Shroud or some other axe to grind. There have also been some excellent books. The same goes for films and documentaries (among which I could recommend the ones made by our newsletter editor).

It is an essential part of human nature to criticize new technological developments; in the past it was the radio, then the television, then the mobile phone and finally the

Internet. The most common accusation in this latter case is that there is a huge amount of false information that no-one monitors. This is all quite true. My argument is that it was also true before the Internet, just that the amount of useless/good information was not so great. The change has been quantitative, not qualitative.

Just to cite some examples, I remain fully convinced that people who claim the Shroud is a proto-photograph by Leonardo da Vinci are fully aware of the absolute historical worthlessness of their books; their motives are purely to set in motion a controversial argument and sell more copies (of course, all of us who write books want to sell as many as possible, it is just that you have more chance of doing this if you write something polemical and provocative). No doubt they have sold many more books and been on television many more times than people who write solid scientific books about the Shroud. I have no problem with this; even if I did, I would never be able to stop it. I tend to just ignore it; there are only twenty-four hours in a day and I can think of many things I would prefer to do than read their books.

The same is true of religiously fanatical books. We tend to see more of these in Italy and Spain, and more recently in Mexico and France; all Roman Catholic countries, although there are also fanatical books written by Protestants (and atheists too, who are just as combative about their stance). I have for example in my collection various books by a Spanish Jesuit who claimed that the NASA had proved the Resurrection (a huge exaggeration of John Jackson's work on the Shroud, as he had previously been involved with NASA).

Rodney Hoare, an old Chairman of the BSTS, wrote a book claiming the Shroud is genuine, but that it shows that Jesus never really died on the cross, and so the Resurrection is a myth. He was followed in this at a much more academic level by Thomas Wesselow; the ironic thing is that Rodney Hoare kept on going to church, he just remained silent whenever the Resurrection was affirmed. As an American might say, "Go figure".

Talking of America, we have books telling us the Shroud is genuine because "some guys" appeared to us in a vision and told us so, and another one by a couple repeating what they have claimed at numerous Shroud congresses worldwide, namely that anyone with two eyes, a nose and a mouth looks like Christ thanks to their overlay system (it helps if you have a beard too).

As I said, atheists are no different in their zeal. To their mind, as God does not exist, the Shroud has to be false (and then they criticise Christians for claiming that if God exists, the Shroud must be genuine).

At Shroud congresses all over the world (France, Spain, the USA, etc.) I have heard the same range of viewpoints, from religious extremism (I find it annoying that certain people are loath to contradict priests and nuns who talk absolute rot just because of their

status as such) to people who honestly seem to have no idea how to express what they want to say, and end up sending everyone to sleep.

The Shroud world is perhaps no different from any other (I am thinking of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Gnostic gospels) in that the vitriolic poison cast at anyone who doesn't hold the same point of view is surprising, to say the least, to outsiders. I lived this on several occasions as the BSTS newsletter editor. And yet surprisingly enough, the anti-authenticity people, who each have their own outlandish idea (none of which stand up to even a simple scientific analysis) never criticise each other, despite the fact that all their theories are non-compatible, they all contradict each other. This to my mind just proves that they are not really in search of any kind of truth at all, just controversy. I understand the frustration of someone like Andrea Nicolotti at the religious atmosphere in Turin when the Shroud is on show, and share it at the appalling level of so many popular Italian books on the subject; but in the end his own work is no different, even if it is more academic; it's just the flip side of the same coin, fanatic atheism (or at least anti-Catholicism) and a blinding desire to prove the Shroud a fake.

Oh, and every now and then, some papers, some books and some documentaries are really excellent. And that doesn't mean I agree with them in all details. To begin with, our own Ian Wilson's work is consistently excellent, balanced, respectful and enjoyable. The same goes for Barrie Schwartz (I will never forget something he said in Dallas back in 2001, "I remember when the Shroud was science") – but maybe it's time to confess something to both of them. When they wrote a book together some years ago now, and advised us all NOT to buy it because of the quality of the photographs in print, none of us paid any attention to them and we bought it anyway. Sorry Barrie and Ian!

I remember Kim Dreisbach's work with great fondness, and Dan Scavone's too. The aforementioned book by Wesselow is excellent scholarship and an excellent read, no matter what you might think about his conclusions. There is a really fantastic little book just called *The Shroud of Turin* by C. Bernard Ruffin, not a well-known name in Shroud circles, but the book is highly recommended. Pierre de Radmatten's work in France is also serious and reliable. Some of the Spanish Shroud Centre's work is very good too, when people remain in their own respective fields (i.e. when they do not think they are historians just because they have read a couple of history books – something that is all too common the world over) and when they are not being too fanatical (a qualified forensic scientist from the group once deleted me from a WhatsApp group for questioning his affirmation that in the sixteenth-century Our Lady froze the sea over so the good Catholic Spaniards could surprise the naughty Dutch Protestants and mercilessly slaughter them in the name of God – a university education is no guarantee against blind fanaticism). I have had the pleasure to coincide on many occasions with Bruno Barberis from Turin and have great respect for his own work and the way he presents it.

My purpose in this somewhat lengthy introduction is just to show that whatever Internet gives us in Shroud studies, we already had it, just not in such great quantities. It is now available to anyone, not just to those who buy all the books and attend congresses.

And so, to the website known as Academia. When writing these words, on 25 November 2019, there were no less than 3,954 full papers related to the Shroud. I don't know if anyone has the time to read all of them, or even to skim them and see if there is anything of worth in them. Just a quick look at the authors of the papers shows us that there are well-known names arguing (as always) in favour of divine miracles and interventions, and Andrea Nicolotti (as always) arguing against everyone who dares to suggest that the image on the Shroud cannot be explained and that it just might not be medieval after all.

Some of the titles are only to be expected; Carbon 14 enjoys a healthy proportion of the articles. One article title caught my attention; The Physics of Morphogenetic Planetary Resurrection. "What on earth could the Shroud have to do with whatever that is?" I thought. So, I downloaded the paper and searched for the reference; it read as follows: *"Because his own Merkabah frequency perfectly could [sic] match both the matter frequency f_{ss} and the spirit vibration f_{bs} , his soul had nowhere to go except reconfigure his own previously conceived and environmentally constructed and fed body form. This is the story behind the physics of the Shroud of Turin and the nature of the holographic universe"*. Well of course!!! It didn't exactly make me want to plough through the almost 4,000 papers on the website.

Actually, the name of the website is somewhat misleading. The word Academia brings to mind universities, and peer-reading; a filter to stop the unlearned and the plain nutters from getting through and publishing. This is what makes an academic journal academic, and is clearly not the case with this website. It is a mercantile operation – you have to pay an annual fee to be able to download papers and read them. This is not meant to be a criticism; it is just the same as subscribing to an online newspaper, and then you get whatever they publish. It's just that the name made me think it was something else. Anyone can upload a paper, regardless of their academic expertise and knowledge.

Just like with the publishing world before the advent of Internet, there are no doubt some jewels among the 4,000-odd papers. It's just that I don't have time to filter them. So, like I said at the beginning, all the Internet has done in this case is make the outlandish theories and the anti-Shroud crusade papers more available to anyone with time on their hands. The occasional jewels are also there, available to everyone with time to find them.

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