

# From The Mandylion To The Shroud

10-Oct-2014  
8:00-8:30 pm

## Authors

[Ivan Polverari](#)

Ivan Polverari will not be able to attend.

Michela Marinelli will present the paper.

Ms. Marinelli is otherwise not associated with this paper.

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## Abstract:

The iconographic analysis of many *Mandylion* icons, of the *Macedonian Renaissance* (IX-X century) and *Komnene* (XII- XIII century) periods, led me to make an observation as a painter, of course, and not as a historian, suggested by the fact that in countless images from that period the Face of Christ appears not just with the only face, as then it is possible to see in later icons, frescoes and mosaics, but also with the neck.

This peculiarity led me to think, what is already known, that the Byzantine painters used a single model, considered the authentic portrait of the Lord that could not be left to their free interpretation.

The question, then, should be moved to another level: why the most ancient icons of the Edessa *Mandylion* possess also the neck? This would mean to the viewer that the "towel - handkerchief" is only the final and most important part of something much longer and folded in such a way as to leave visible only the face. The hypothesis seems plausible.

Another interesting question is the one that shows how the veil has, in all of the icons, the same decorative motif : a kind of diamond pattern golden damascene with a small central motif that goes from the simple circle, with four small dashes, to a design like a chicken foot, as it can be seen in some miniatures and frescoes.

These variations could be explained by the fact that at certain times of the year, the *Mandylion/Shroud* could be covered with a cloth less valuable, we could say daily, a common thing for some very revered images in southern Italy - I mean, in particular, the icon of Our Lady of Ripalta in the province of Foggia - while at holidays this drape could be replaced with a much more precious and refined one. In the pictorial transposition, all these elements have been

faithfully reported to be able to offer to the believers, even the most distant from Constantinople, the same relic/image with the same characteristics.

We must also remember that the icons, in the Byzantine world, are real presences of the Divine Prototype in His own image and this has meant that painters remained faithful to what the Church considered in line with the Apostolic Tradition.

Finally, we can see that the nimbus/halo can be identified with the opening that revealed the face and part of the body (neck) of Christ. In many Cyprian frescoes, the nimbus is decorated with pearls and precious stones, while in other representations the halo is bounded by a simple dark line.

Also in this case, the hypothesis of the double veil, daily/holiday, could be worth, but still painters, those very talented and those that did not have talent, would have faithfully reported in their work what they had personally seen or what they had been told by pilgrims and travelers, in deference to ecclesiastical laws which enacted rules for the liturgical art of the Byzantine world.