

Shroud/Mandyllion in 958 letter of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus

Wilson & ‘Shroudies’ vs ‘Academia’ scholars.

The identification of the Mandyllion, brought from Edessa to Constantinople in 944, with the Shroud of Turin, is matter of a heated debate. While widely accepted among the Shroud historians, beginning with 1978 book of Ian Wilson at least, nevertheless it is usually ignored or often contested (if not rejected outright) by many Byzantinists and art/Church historians, on various basis (usually on a statement that it has been not accepted by “serious” authorities in that branch of science—Wilson is not considered one of them).

One of the arguments against, is the widely held view that Mandyllion is distinct object from all the relics of the Christ’s Passion, stored in the famous Pharos Chapel in Boukoleon Palace in Constantinople. This was raised by Yannick Clément on the recent discussion about Mandyllion and Wilson’s ideas on this blog.¹ Here I want to show on example of Emperor Constantine VII letter, that the matter is not so simple, as most members of the infamous narrow-minded ‘Academia’ think.

What is this letter? I think the best way is to quote here a fragment of Daniel Scavone’s paper on sources about presence of the Mandyllion/Shroud in Constantinople:²

DOCUMENT IV. LETTER OF CONSTANTINE VII 958

A letter of the same Constantine VII to encourage his troops campaigning around Tarsus in 958 is the first explicit introduction of the burial shroud icon of Jesus in this context. The letter announced that the Emperor was sending a supply of holy water consecrated by contact with the relics of Christ’s Passion which were then in the capital. No mention is made of the recently acquired Mandyllion: as a relic of Jesus’ ministry it would have been out of place among the relics of the Passion. Reference is made, however, to the precious wood [of the cross], the unstained lance, the precious inscription [probably the titulus attached to the cross], the reed which caused miracles, the life-giving blood from his side, the venerable tunic, the sacred linens (σπάργανα), the sindon which God wore, and other symbols of the immaculate Passion. 20

The term used here for “sacred linens,” spargana, usually means infant’s “swaddling cloths,” but here must mean burial linens, as it does in several other texts. The precise identity of this sindon has been enigmatic, since no mention exists of the arrival in the capital of Jesus’ burial sheet, but it acquires some clarity with Zaninotto’s recovery of Doc. III. Just as in the Gregory Sermon, the words of this text may suggest that the Byzantines could see “blood” from the side of the figure depicted on a cloth.

Document III is strong evidence that the Edessa icon was indeed a larger object, harmonious with the words sindon and tetradiplon of the Acts of Thaddeus, and was seen to be stained red in the correct places. It must thus have been unfolded in Constantinople sometime after its

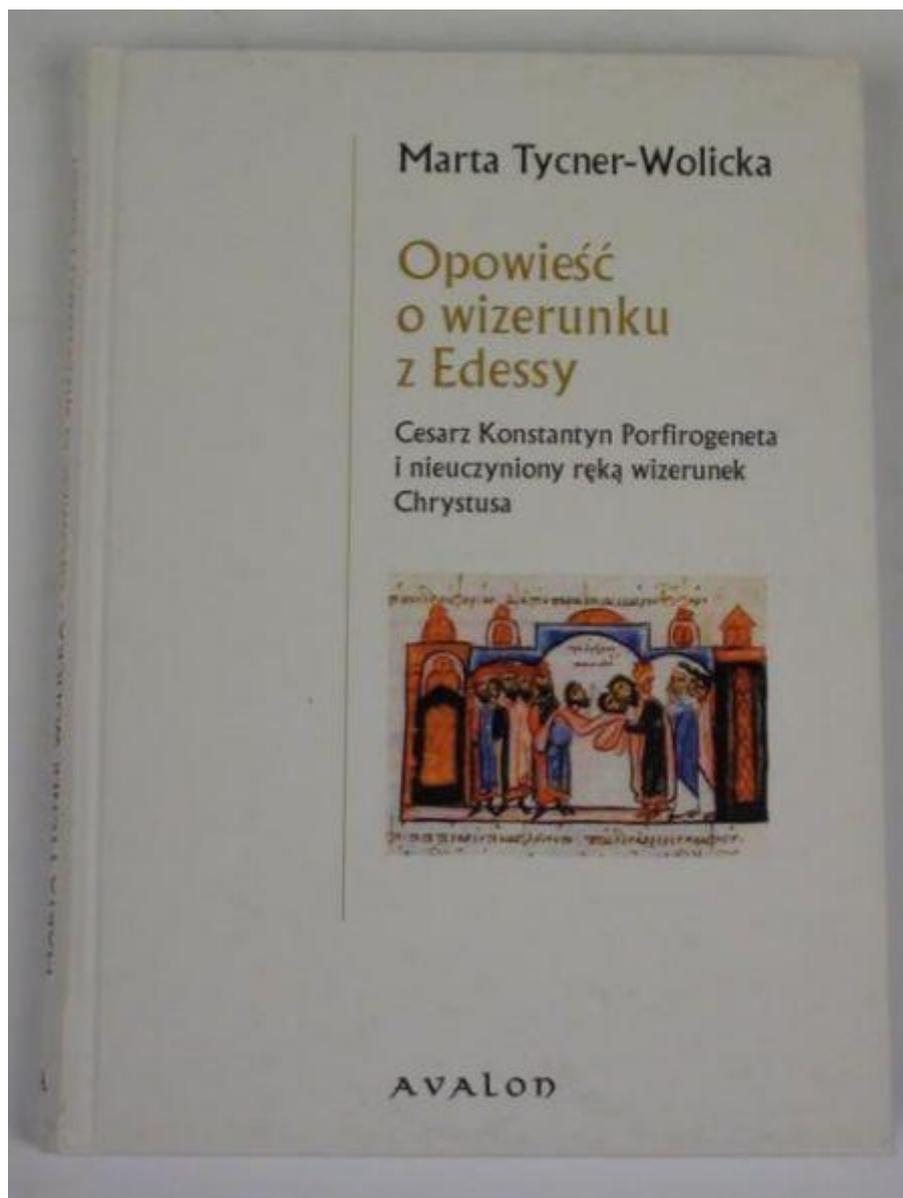
arrival in 944. A possible unfolding is evidenced by the imperial letter of 958 (Doc. IV), where suddenly, without fanfare, Jesus' sindon is first announced. At the time of its arrival in 944, the status of the Edessa icon must, it seems, be understood as follows: Still enframed or encased as described earlier and as seen by artists, and still generally considered to be the towel of the Abgar narratives, and in the treasury of the Byzantine emperors it was inaccessible to the public (as it had been in Edessa). Its size (larger and folded in eight layers) and nature were not fully known and not often pondered. Certainly its possible identity as Jesus' bloody burial wrapping was not immediately recognized or, if it was, then by only a few intimates and not generally broadcast. The Byzantines were too much under the spell of the Abgar cycle to have considered the implications of the side-wound. The evidence for this last point is the absence of any hint of a shroud in Gregory's sermon (Doc. III), though his words hint strongly that he was looking at the entire body on the Edessan cloth. With the Mandylion folded in eight so as to expose only a facial panel, the chest-with-side wound section might have been available to the view of Gregory, upside-down on the opposite side, without requiring a complete unfolding with consequent recognition. 21

Footnotes:

20 See A. M. Dubarle, *Histoire Ancienne du linceul de Turin jusqu' au XIII siècle* (Paris: O.E.I.L. 1985) 55f. See too Carlo Maria Mazzucchi "La testimonianza piú antica dell' esistenza di una Sindone a Costantinopoli," *Aevum*, 57 (1983) 227-231, which provides the original Greek of the salient portions of the letter of 958. Though the burial cloths emerge quietly and without fanfare or ceremony in the capital from 958 with no mention of an image, the large or main shroud is described with image in the texts of Mesarites and Clari (Documents XI and XII). 21 See above, n. 10. The manner of displaying the Edessa cloth, in a frame wider than it is tall may have been the result of folding the actual burial wrapping in half three times and sealing it in a frame to remove from view the blood and nakedness of the body. In this form it came to Constantinople where only gradually did the Byzantines become aware that a far greater relic was present, one which derived from the actual (Biblical) burial of Jesus, and not from the Abgar story, a mere apochryphal and anachronistic aetiological legend. Indeed, the fact that the arrival in the capital of the burial wrappings, so prominent in the relic collection, was not heralded by the usual great processions and viewings, seems to support a rather unorthodox discovery.

In opinion of Scavone, the cloth mentioned in the document τῆς θεοφόρου σινδόνοϋ (*tis theofórou sindónos*) is nothing else than the burial shroud, moreover it is the Shroud of Turin, in contrast to the other burial cloths, (σπαργάνων, *sparganon*) stored in Constantinople. Scavone claims that *No mention is made of the recently acquired Mandylion: as a relic of Jesus' ministry it would have been out of place among the relics of the Passion*, and further discusses Wilson's ideas how Mandylion after the transfer to Constantinople in 944 became the Shroud. We will not be discussing this, instead mentioning only that Scavone didn't say us the most interesting thing, we will go to the opinion of another scholar.

Her name is Marta Tycner-Wolicka. In 2009, while she was making her Ph.D. in the Institute of History at University of Warsaw, she wrote a book titled 'Opowieść o wizerunku z Edessy':



It is a literary exegesis of *The Narratio De Imagine Edessena*, written by (or on behalf) of the Emperor Constantine VII, after arrival of the Mandylion in Constantinople in 944 (it was included as Appendix C in Wilson's 1978 *The Shroud of Turin*). While Tycner-Wolicka's academic dissertation is not actually about the Shroud, it is indirectly related to that issue, and in fact useful in many ways. While Tycner-Wolicka may be called part of the 'Academia', she obviously has to express negative views towards Wilson in her book, even though she does not dismiss them outright, and claims that she is not interested what the Image of Edessa actually was. Nevertheless, let's quote her views about Wilson (she mentions him, his title, or the Shroud maybe 3 times through the whole book):

On pg. 15, about the translations of the *Narratio*:

„Jako pierwsze powstało tłumaczenie na język angielski, załączone jako aneks do, niezwykle skądinąd balamutnej, książki Iana Wilsona o całunie turyńskim, której autor najwyraźniej nie wiedział o istnieniu lepszego wydania.” (w przypisie: „Książka, do której załączony został

przekład zawiera wiele do tego stopnia kontrowersyjnych tez, że większość badaczy odmawia jej statusu pozycji naukowej. Tłumaczenie jest jednak osobną całością i jest całkowicie wiarygodne”)

Translation: „*The first translation was the English one, included as an Appendix in, otherwise extremely confused/misleading/delusory, Ian Wilson’s book about the shroud of turin, the author of which seemingly was unaware about existence of better edition” (and in footnote: “The book to which that translation is included, contains many theses controversial to such a degree, that most scholars deny it a status of scientific book. The [polish] translation however is a separate whole, and is completely reliable”)*

On pg. 47-48 in footnote:

“Teza Wilsona zdobyła licznych zwolenników wśród osób zajmujących się „tajemnicą całunu” (por. zwłaszcza artykuły D. Scavone na łamach internetowego czasopisma Collegamento pro Sindone) i nielicznych zwolenników wśród naukowców:”

“Wilson’s thesis has gained many supporters among people dealing with “mystery of the shroud” (cf. especially D. Scavone’s articles published in the pages of online magazine Collegamento pro Sindone) and few supporters among scientists:” and next she mentions three of those supporters (A-M. Dubarle, D. Freedberg, J. M. Fiey), and interestingly, no opponents. At least we know she is familiar with Scavone’s ideas (and that ‘scientists’ and ‘the people dealing with “mystery of the shroud”’ are two different groups). And why Wilson is bad? Because he is bad, obviously, and no explanation needed!

Those are the last words Tycner-Wolicka has to say about the Shroud in her book. Or... maybe not. While making her exegesis, she mentions 958 letter of Constantine VII, and the list of relics included in it. She analyzes the meaning of terms *σπαργάνων/sparganon*, and *τῆς θεοφόρου σινδόνας/tis theofórou sindónos*. While she concludes that the first term refers to the burial cloths (just as Scavone does), the identification of the second item may surprise, after all what was told about her supposed attitude towards Wilson’s ideas. The first thing is the meaning of the words *tis theofórou sindónos*. While Scavone translates them as *the sindon which God wore*, Tycner-Wolicka translates it in a much more inspiring way: *bogonośna chusta – God-carrying cloth*. And she writes further on pg. 172:

*Skoro zatem pierwsze z badanych określić to chusty grobowe, to czym jest owa „bogonośna chusta”? **Nie ma chyba większych wątpliwości, że musi chodzić o nasz mandylion**. Trudno zresztą wyobrazić sobie, żeby podobny zestaw relikwii, sporządzony w imieniu Konstantyna Porfirogenety (czy też przez niego) pomijał tak ważny dlań przedmiot. [...] Ciekawy jest i sam zestaw relikwii, świadczący o tym które z nich uznawane były za pomocne w walce: są to relikwie męki pańskiej. [...] I tu zaskoczenie –**mandylion został potraktowany jako relikwia, w dodatku relikwia pasji**. Jest to zestawienie bardzo ciekawe, które pozwala inaczej spojrzeć na fragment Opowieści mówiący o powstaniu wizerunku w Ogrójcu. [przypis: interpretacja, że jest to jeszcze jedna z chust grobowych, np. ta która okrywał twarz Chrystusa (przedmiot ten bywa, choć rzadko, wspominany jako osobna relikwia) nie wydaje się być uzasadniony. Nie wiadomo bowiem wówczas, co miałby znaczyć przymiotnik „bogonośny”.]*

*So if the first from analyzed terms refer to the burial cloths, then what is that “God-carrying cloth”. There are no greater doubts **that it must be our mandylion**. It is hard to imagine that similar set of relics, written on behalf of Constantine Porphyrogenitus (or by himself) omitted an item so important for him. [...] The set itself is an interesting one, testifying which were considered as helpful in combat: the relics of the Lord’s Passion.[...] **And here, surprise –the mandylion has been treated as a relic, in addition a relic of the Passion**. This is a very interesting statement that allows for a different look at a fragment of Narratio talking about the creation of the image in the Garden of Gethsemane. [footnote: interpretation that it is another burial cloth, for example the one covering Christ’s face (this item is, although rarely, sometimes mentioned as a separate relic) seems not to be justified. It is unknown what the term “God-carrying” might have referred to then.]*

Reading those words written by a scholar who is sceptical to the Wilson’s ideas – **PRICELESS**. Because she was one step from the same conclusion as Wilson –and had she only been able to recognize what the term “God-carrying” might have referred to... It is obvious for any ‘Shroudie’ on this planet –**the image on the Shroud of Turin**. A relic of the Passion. The burial Shroud of Christ. And the Mandylion itself!

At the end of this article it is worthy to mention some other text. In *Narratio* we have following fragment:

When Christ was about to go voluntarily to death . . . sweat dripped from him like drops of blood. Then they say he took this piece of cloth which we see now from one of the disciples and wiped off the drops of sweat on it

This fairy-tale about creation of the Mandylion in the Gethsemane is a proof that there was a blood on the Mandylion, which everyone could see. We should notice, however that the presence of the blood itself is not directly mentioned –and this is deliberate, as the *Narratio* gives two accounts of the story creation of Mandylion, traditional one (before the Passion events), and a new one, connected with blood-sweating in Gethsemane, without actually giving a preference to any of them (thus there couldn’t be a direct mention of the presence of blood, because it would give a clear answer to a reader which version is the correct one).

In another text the sermon of Gregory Referendarius delivered on the day of the arrival of Mandylion in Constantinople (16 August 944), we read:³

This reflection, however–let everyone be inspired with the explanation–has been imprinted only by the sweat from the face of the originator of life, falling like drops of blood, and by the finger of God. For these are the beauties that have made up the true imprint of Christ, since after the drops fell, it was embellished by drops from his own side.

The above is the original Guscini’s translation, following Dubarle, however he later revised his opinion, writing: *The thrust of the text is that the sweat of agony (like drops of blood) adorned the Image, just like blood from its side adorned the body from which the sweat had dripped, i.e. two different events at two different times.*⁴

Anyway, although the text is confusing (again, **deliberately!**), it gives an allusion of the presence of the side wound on the Mandyllion (perhaps suggesting to the audience, that the blood from the side wound had been later, perhaps in miraculous way, transferred on that cloth). Just like the story in Narratio, and the description in the Constantine's letter, **this is definitely not accidental!** The Emperor and the top hierarchs of the Byzantine Church (theological disputes and conspiracies for power were daily bread for Byzantines) knew perfectly the meaning of the words, and how to choose them. Thus those allusions say for themselves. It is clear what the Mandyllion was. **There is virtually no room for any conclusion other than that the Shroud of Turin and the Mandyllion transferred to Constantinople in 944 are one and the same object.**

There is no other viable explanation of those coincidences. For the 'Academia' pseudoscholars - blinded, prejudiced, immersed in their dogmas, lacking any imagination - no chance, I think. But as always, I can be mistaken, and someone may come with some brilliant and unexpected solution...

Footnotes:

¹ See thread: *Yannick Clément on the Letters Between Jesus and King Abgar*
<http://shroudstory.com/2014/01/06/yannick-clment-on-the-letters-between-jesus-and-king-abgar/> and the comments below.

² Daniel C. Scavone, *Acheiropoietos: Jesus Images in Constantinople: the Documentary Evidence* <http://shroudstory.wordpress.com/about/acheiropoietos-jesus-images-in-constantinople-the-documentary-evidence/>

³ Mark Guscini, *THE SERMON OF GREGORY REFERENDARIUS*
<http://www.shroud.com/pdfs/guscini3.pdf>

⁴ *ADDENDUM TO TRANSLATION OF SERMON BY GREGORY REFERENDARIUS*
<http://www.shroud.com/pdfs/guscini3a.pdf>