

## CAN THE SHROUD OF TURIN IMPROVE THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE SACRED TEXTS?

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### ABSTRACT

*We want to investigate the quantity of aromas brought by Nicodemus to the Sepulcher, also using research results on the Shroud of Turin. In the Gospel of John we read about 100 pounds. Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin and a secret follower of Jesus, would have brought that quantity with the intention of using it. We have investigated the Gospels, the presence of aromas and the one of pollens and we have concluded that the above mixture of aloe and myrrh were absent on the Shroud. There, the present pollens were from Helichrysum, Cistus, Ferula and Pistacea: plants that provided high quality aromatics oils; Gundelia Tournefortii and Zygophyllum Dumosum pollens were absent. We think that Nicodemus wanted to treat the body of the Nazarene like the one of Asa, king of Judah, who had a funeral worthy of a king, even though he had forsaken the Lord. Thus, if an extraordinary funeral was arranged for Asa, it seemed fitting to Nicodemus to organize a more important funeral for the Son of God.*

**Keywords:** *Shroud of Turin; Nicodemus; One Hundred pounds of Myrrh and Aloe; Pollens on the Shroud; King Asa's Funeral;*

### INTRODUCTION

From the moment of their appearance, the Sacred Texts have animated extensive debates, discussions and reflections on all the topics involved. Today, after many centuries, interest in their contents has not diminished. Indeed, we can note that for the Old and New Testament, from Genesis to the Apocalypse of Saint John, people's interest continues as the debate. Recently, we investigated funerary ointments and pollens on the Shroud of Turin (Callipari et al., 2022). Regarding the funeral of Jesus of Nazareth, in scientific-religious literature we have seen that the description of the results obtained by investigating the Shroud of Turin are now in line with that of the Gospels. However, even if the comparison was encouraging, the problem of the quantity of mixture of Aloe and Myrrh brought by Nicodemus (approximately 100 pounds) remains an excessive amount to anoint the body of a single person.

Therefore, it is necessary to investigate this problem. We will do this through the Sacred Texts (New and Hold Testament) and the results obtained from studies on the Shroud of Turin.

*John [19:39], who among the Apostles was the only one present at the death and burial of the Nazarene, writes: Nicodemus, the one who had first come to him at night, also came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes weighing about one hundred pounds. (New American Bible, 2010).*

In his Gospel, *Luke [23:55-56]* writes: *The women who had come Galilee with him followed behind, and when they had seen the tomb and the way in which his body was laid in it, they returned and prepared spices and perfumed oils. Then they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.* (New American Bible, 2010).

## 1. AROMAS USED FOR THE NAZARENE

An authoritative member of the STURP (Shroud of Turin Research Project), Pellicori (1980), highlighted that the thermolability of aromas and burial ointments was such that they would have been quickly destroyed during the 1532 Chambery fire. On that occasion, a few drops of molten silver, which was part of the container, irreparably damaged the fabric. Considering that silver has a melting temperature of 961.8 °C, we understand the total destruction of the organic substances mentioned and therefore in the Nazarene's funerary sheet, after the 1532 fire, there were no aromatic substances present. Furthermore, when the accident occurred, the Shroud was not still supported by the Holland Cloth and any residues of aromatic substances (if there were any) would hardly have been retained. In 1534 the above Cloth was sewn, as a support, along the perimeter of the Shroud, by the Poor Clares of Chambery who also inserted the patches. In 2002 the patches were removed from the Turin Linen and the Holland Cloth was replaced due to the authoritative insistence of a scientist who was already a member of STURP (Adler, 1991). The restoration was carried out by the experts Mechthild Flury-Lemberg and Irene Tomedi (Ghiberti, 2002; Flury-Lemberg, 2003).

Our investigation, on the sudden changes in the Intensity values of the image in the dorsal part, demonstrated that the aromas had left traces of their original presence on the linen. These rapid changes in Intensity manifest themselves at the base of the shoulders and in the area of the buttocks, regions of contact between corpse and burial linen, where the wounds left by the Roman flagrum are visible. Here, the Intensity of the Image should be maximum. On the contrary, it is not! Furthermore, these rapid changes in Intensity interest various linen thread and appear only in a little part of the same thread. With this distribution, it is possible to affirm, with certainty, the presence of aromatic substances on the Shroud of Turin (Curciarello et al., 2012; Fazio et al., 2015). We understood that the force of gravity had allowed small quantities of perfumed oils to slide from the front of the body to the back and to stop in the areas already described.

The abrupt changes described above are due to the absorption, by the aromas and/or burial ointments, of thermal energy emitted by the body during the interaction with the linen sheet. This transfer occurs from the first contact between the body and the sheet and continues until thermal equilibrium is reached.

Unfortunately, our investigation, supported only by the observation of the front and back images of the Shroud, did not allow us to discover which aromatic oils had been used to anoint the body of the Nazarene. However, the abrupt changes are visible also in the front part of the image. In fact, there are various linen threads that cross the fabric forming two longitudinal stripes (about 2.5 cm each) that pass to the sides of the face, for the entire length of the Shroud. In this case, it was easy for science to ascertain that they are due to linen of different origin and/or manufacturing (Jumper et al., 1984; Schwalbe and Rogers, 1982). Subsequently, in 2017, an article by Marzia Boi who investigated the pollen present on Turin Shroud, questioned the knowledge already acquired for several decades (Boi, 2017 and 2020). The scientist examined the images of pollen present in scientific literature and observed modern pollen using (OM) optical microscopy, SEM (Scanning Electron Microscope) and her experience in palynology. So, it is demonstrated that the pollen present

on the Shroud come from the families of Asteraceae (*Helichrysum*), Cistaceae (*Cistus*), Apiaceae (*Ferula*) and Anacardiaceae (*Pistacia*). The *Helichrysum* contributes with the highest percentage of pollen.

So, the pollen came from plants whose flowers were used to produce high-quality aromatic oils. Differently, for several decades we believed that, on the Shroud, there were pollens of *Gundelia Tournefortii* and *Zygophyllum Dumosum*, thanks to the investigations of authoritative scientists. Among them we note Danin Avinoam, an authoritative member of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, expert on desert dune plants. However, we encourage the reader to consider a handbook on pollen terminology (Hesse et al., 2009).

These results were a gross error, perpetrated for such a long time, which arises from the desire of several scholars to force theories and/or experiments with the aim of obtaining the desired result even if it was not the correct one. In fact, the result was accepted by many scientists as very useful for confirming the Middle Eastern origin of the Shroud. With regret, we must highlight that forcing of this nature has always occurred because the study of the Shroud triggers a religious conflict. There are scholars who are certain that the image is a miracle, others are convinced that we are faced with a fake and still others think of a natural event (Fazio, 2020).

Now, to return to the pollens, it is necessary to point out to the reader that the typology of the above found on the Shroud (Boi, 2017 and 2020) excludes, if necessary, the action of the medieval forger/artist intent on producing a forgery. Furthermore, the attachment of pollen to different materials depends on the aromas and the nature of the materials (Boi, 2015). In fact, the same scholar, in the magazine of *Areobiologia*, highlighted that adhesion is stronger in tissues. This study is very important because it makes us understand that the pollen, taken from the Shroud to be studied, has always been there. A result that puts aside the suspicions of supporters of the fake pollen inserted into the funerary linen in a fraudulent manner. Here, we invite the reader to consult a recent writing of Marzia Boi (Boi, 2023).

## 2. NICODEMUS' INTENTIONS

Nicodemus, member of the Sanhedrin and teacher in Israel, struck by the signs done by Jesus Christ (both the words and the Miracles), spoke with Him at night and, secretly, became his follower. He defended him before the Sanhedrin as reported in *John [7: 50-51]: Nicodemus, one of their members who had come to him earlier, said to them, "Does our law condemn a person before it first hears him and finds out what he is doing?"* (The New American Bible, 2010).

Joseph of Arimathea brought a very soft and fine linen sheet and the women brought high quality aromatic oils. Evidently, both knew the Man who was to be buried. So, the mixture of Myrrh and Aloe might not have been used. If this was the case, we ask ourselves: why did Nicodemus, an authoritative Doctor of the Law and secret follower of Jesus Christ that he considered to be the Son of God, bring a large quantity of Myrrh and Aloe? Certainly, he also knew Who was to be buried! Therefore, he brought the appropriate quantity of aromas to use according to his purposes. We are convinced that, if he could, he would have used the entire mixture. The Apostles, *John [19:42]: So they laid Jesus there because of the Jewish preparation day, for the tomb was close by.* and *Luke [23:44]: It was now about noon and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.* remind us that the time available for the rite of anointing was very limited (The New American Bible, 2010). Everything happened quickly because the Sabbath was already coming and it

was necessary to observe rest according to the commandment. In his Gospel, *Mark [16:1]* wrote: *When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James and Solome bought spices so that they might go and anoint him.* The same content appears in *Luke [23:56]*: Verse already quoted above.

At the tomb of Jesus, there were aromatic oils along with the mixture of Aloe and Myrrh. To act quickly they used the ointments brought by the women. For this we believe that the Nicodemus' mixture was absent on the Shroud, while the scents that come from the plants already mentioned were present (Boi, 2017 and 2020).

We understood Nicodemus' intentions when we thought that, with about 100 pounds of aromatic mixture, a body could even be covered by aromatic substances. Thus, the research leads us to the Old Testament for reading the Books of Chronicles, written between 350 and 250 BC, which tell of events left out of the previous Books of Kings. In fact, in the second Book of Chronicles, *2Ch [16:13-14]*: is described the end of the reign of Asa, king of Judah: *Asa rested with his ancestors; he died in the forty-first year of his reign. They buried him in the tomb he had kewn for himself in the city of David, having laid him upon a couch which was filled with spices and various kinds of aromatics compounded into an ointment. They also burned a very great funeral pyre for him.* (The New American Bible, 2010).

Now, we understand why Nicodemus brought such a large quantity of aromas and the use that he would have made of it. We do not think to an error in the Gospel of John, as well as we do not think of distributing the mixture on the floor of the Sepulcher, after what we ascertained in our investigation. That of Asa is an event, which took place close to the I Century, where it is told of the funeral of a king whose anointing took place by placing his body in a bed full of aromas and perfumes followed by the burn of a large quantity of aromatic substances and perfumes.

Let us now read the verse *2Ch [16: 12]* which precedes those above cited: *In the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa contracted a serious disease in his feet. But even in his sickness he did not seek the Lord, but only the physicians.* (The New American Bible, 2010). It appears evident that the king of Judah was far from the Lord. In reality, Asa began his reign by respecting and obeying the Laws of the Lord and making the people of Judah respect them. In the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign, Baasha the king of Israel marched against Judah. Asa did not seek the Lord's help as he once did; he took part of the treasures of the temple (Silver and Gold) and sent them to Ben-hadad, king of Aram, asking for an alliance against the king of Israel. Ben-Adad accepted and sent his armed forces to attack Israel. Asa also persecuted the people of Judah who believed in closeness to the Lord.

So, Asa definitively distanced himself from the Lord and after having committed other mistakes, being seriously ill, he rejected Him and sought treatment from doctors. Therefore, for Nicodemus, a secret follower of Christ, son of God, a more noble and worthy funeral than that of a king was necessary.

## CONCLUSIONS

At the Sepulcher of Jesus Christ there were Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, the Apostle John and the women with the funerary linen brought by Joseph and the perfumed oils brought by the women who came from Galilee.

The remaining time became decisive for the funeral. Very little to anoint the Nazarene, since it was the preparation for the Jews and the lights of the Sabbath could already be perceived. They had to hurry. Necessity dictated that aromatic oils were used on the Burial Linen and on the body of the Nazarene. Therefore, we believe that Myrrh and

Aloe, the aromatic substances brought by Nicodemus were not used. However, the Man wrapped in the Shroud had a Jewish funeral made up of funerary rites with all honors, respecting the Torah (Pacifici and Mieli, 1980).

In conclusion, we believe that Nicodemus' behavior was perfect, given the immense consideration he had for Jesus Christ, the Nazarene. He was a Doctor of the Law, a member of the Sanhedrin and one of the most authoritative minds in Israel. Therefore, the presence of such a quantity of Aloe and Myrrh can only be explained by the fact that everything was already in Nicodemus' mind.

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