

A review of the paper “The Beirut Icon and the Shroud” from BSTS, N° 88

Mario Latendresse, 13 June 2019

In a recent paper published by César Barta, Pedro Sabe, and José Manuel Orenge, in the BSTS, N° 88, Winter 2018/2019, titled “The Beirut Icon and the Shroud,” the authors made several major errors, and arguments, against the thesis of the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris¹ and in the identity of the Shroud with the Mandylion. The authors made essential errors related to the inventories of the Sainte-Chapelle and in the overall argument against this identity. This short paper aims to correct these errors and clarify what the inventories of the relics of the Sainte-Chapelle really says about the *holy cloth*, a cloth that arrived from Constantinople and likely disappeared from the Sainte-Chapelle before 1534.

The paper of Barta *et al.* begins with the section “Refutations of Mandylion,” to show that the identity of the Mandylion and the Shroud can be disproved, and in particular that the thesis of the Sainte-Chapelle is wrong. That section begins with: “Since Ian Wilson proposed that the Turin Shroud was the image of Edessa or Mandylion, it was taken as the standard theory for the supposed early history of the Turin cloth.”

It must be strongly emphasized that this identity is not assumed by the thesis of the Sainte-Chapelle, and that the *theory* by Ian Wilson regarding the Mandylion is not taken as correct by the thesis of the Sainte-Chapelle².

¹ Throughout this paper, the term “Sainte-Chapelle” refers to the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris, consecrated in 1248.

² By *theory*, we are referring to the arguments used to support some conclusions, not the conclusions themselves from that theory. In particular, the *theory* proposed by Wilson, for the identity of the Mandylion and the Shroud, use arguments that are likely incorrect, such as its main argument that the Shroud was shown folded in such a way to only show its face of Christ. Such an argument is likely incorrect because: 1) the Mandylion was not seen by the public, even by high dignitaries visiting Constantinople, such as kings, except perhaps to the high priests of Edessa and Constantinople, and some Byzantine emperors; 2) the Mandylion, and its reliquary, were most likely sent to the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris, which left in the official descriptions of its relics and reliquaries the most complete description of the reliquary of the Mandylion, from which we can likely conclude that the Mandylion was hidden to view, and what could be seen by a superficial access to the reliquary

In fact, the thesis of the Sainte-Chapelle shows that the most likely origin of the Shroud is the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris, which supports the identity of the Shroud and the Mandylion. In other words, the identity of the Shroud and the Mandylion is a **corollary** of that thesis, that is, it is not based on any other “theories.” This is an essential aspect of the thesis of the Sainte-Chapelle: it uses documents from the 14th to the 18th centuries to show that some kings of France, most likely had, without their knowledge, a *holy cloth*, that is now known as the Shroud, which was most likely the Mandylion, sent to Saint-Louis in the 13th century by his cousin, the Latin emperor of Constantinople, Baudouin II; and a king (either Philip VI, or less likely John II), ignoring its true nature, gave the Shroud to the knight Geoffroy de Charny. This connection from that cloth at the Sainte-Chapelle to Geoffroy, and from that cloth to the Mandylion in the Pharos chapel in Constantinople, makes a connection from the Shroud to the Mandylion. In particular, the thesis of the Sainte-Chapelle does not depend on the analysis of ancient documents before 1239. Furthermore, as it will be shown, the study of the ancient documents prior to 1239, in particular the information provided by the pilgrims of Constantinople, does not contradict this connection, contrary to the conclusion of Barta *et al.*

Barta *et al.* continues: “However, one of the authors of this article (Barta) participated in the location and analysis of the pieces of relics that St. Louis IX of France sent to his relative Ferdinand III of Spain. These relics’ samples are preserved in the cathedral of Toledo. They came from the collection of the Sainte Chapelle in Paris and these, in turn, from the Imperial Treasury of Constantinople. Upon this research, we learned, for our surprise, that the Mandylion or Image of Edessa was in fact sent to Paris. It contradicted the dominant theory.”

What is not stated by the authors is the reference to a paper published by César Barta and Daniel Duque in RILT (Revue Internationale du Linceul de Turin), first in N° 15/16 (1999-2000), and as a revised version in N° 21 (September 2001), describing the analysis of the cloth pieces in the

was a painting of a face of Christ (a ‘Veronica’), not the Mandylion (the cloth) itself. For more details, see “*The Shroud of Turin and the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris*”, BSTS No 87, Summer 2018.

treasury of the cathedral of Toledo, which were cut from a relic at the Sainte-Chapelle. That analysis concluded that these cloth pieces cannot come from the Shroud of Turin, which is not surprising and correct, because the relic it came from has no known connection to the Shroud. However, in the revised version of 2001, the editors of RILT inferred incorrectly that this analysis proved that the thesis of the Sainte-Chapelle is wrong. The error was major and elementary: the thesis of the Sainte-Chapelle is not based on the relic from which pieces are at the cathedral of Toledo but on the *holy cloth* as described in a list of relics in 1247 at the Sainte-Chapelle. It is even very surprising that such an elementary error was made and put into question the intentions of the authors and editors of RILT. Unfortunately, no correction was ever published by Barta and Duque, or the editors of RILT. It would have been an appropriate occasion for the authors to make such a correction in that new paper, but none were made.

Barta *et al.* proceeds: “To keep possible the identity of Shroud and Mandylion, Barta proposed two hypotheses as a conciliatory alternative, that is, the object arriving to Paris was only the Byzantine empty reliquary and that its contents, the cloth, would have been removed earlier, in Constantinople. To be clearer, we express it in the following sentences. 1) The Shroud had to be removed from its reliquary before 1203 when Clari saw it in Blachernae 2) An empty reliquary was sent to Paris. However, these hypotheses had no documentary support. They were only conjecture. Now, it is not possible to support these hypotheses because we learn new data,” and then referring to talks presented at the Valencia congress of 2012 and the Pasco conference of 2017.

The talk of César Barta at the 2012 Valencia Congress, titled “What the Shroud is and what it is not,” argues that the Mandylion cannot be the Shroud, but indeed ends with a possibility that the identity could be based on the two assumptions just mentioned. The first author proposed these “escaping” assumptions because he believed that the Mandylion was at the Sainte-Chapelle when the Shroud appeared in Lirey and Chambéry, which obviously would contradict the identity of the Shroud with the Mandylion. However, the authors of that talk were unaware of the thesis of the Sainte-Chapelle as published by Father André-Marie Dubarle in

1998, because they do not refer to that publication and it is the primary work that has been done about the Shroud and the relics at the Sainte-Chapelle. They were therefore unaware of the argumentation of the thesis of the Sainte-Chapelle. This is probably due to a language barrier, as the book published in 1998 by Father Dubarle is only in French and Italian. If Barta *et al.* had consulted the work of Father Dubarle, they would have seen an alternative: the reliquary of the Mandylion arrived in Paris in 1241 with a cloth in it, but the cloth most likely disappeared before 1534, that is, when the first complete inventory of the relics from Constantinople was done at the Sainte-Chapelle. The observation of this likely disappearance can only be reached by a detailed analysis of the inventories, which are written in French. Unfortunately, none of the publications of the authors appear to have made such an analysis, including that latest paper in BSTS (N° 88).

In the talk by César Barta at the Pasco Conference in 2017, it was claimed that the reliquary of the Mandylion arrived empty at the Sainte-Chapelle. It was not presented as a conjecture. We now learn from that paper of Barta *et al.* that the talk was a conjecture. We have the impression that the authors are too quick to publish new hypotheses without consulting and analyzing the most basic historical documents and detailed published analyses (e.g., the second tome of “Histoire ancienne du Linceul de Turin”, Dubarle).

Barta *et al.* further explains: “1) Byzantines were prevented to take out the Mandylion from its reliquary because of a superstition. It was not removed from its reliquary because the superstition came after an earthquake endured by Constantinople. It is not a hypothesis. It is in a document. 2) The reliquary in Paris was not empty. The content was just a 'Veronica'. It is in documents.”

For the first statement, the authors refer to the Tarragonensis 55 manuscript. First, these statements are surprising, because at the talk of 2012 in Valencia, the first author, César Barta, mentioned the presence of a Veronica in the reliquary of the Mandylion. That author was therefore aware of the presence of the Veronica many years before the presentation of 2017. Similarly, the Tarragonensis 55 manuscript is already referenced in 2012 by the first author. That author should have

been aware of statement 1. This is not “new data”: the Tarragonensis 55 manuscript has been referenced and analyzed numerous times by a large number of researchers.

In any case, the statement reported by the pilgrim of the Tarragonensis 55 manuscript is mostly irrelevant, because that statement may simply be a rumor repeated by tourist guides common in Constantinople³. After all, this is a statement made by a pilgrim, not a high-ranking official close to the emperor. It was also a statement made more than a century earlier from the events of 1203. The Byzantine emperor of 1203-1204, Alexis IV Angelos, may have decided to show the Mandylyon irrespective of previous decisions made by his predecessors. We would need a much more compelling argument to show that the cloth with a figure of Christ exhibited at Blachernae was certainly not the Mandylyon.

Barta *et al.* continue: “A more detailed analysis of the texts that describe what arrived to Paris leads us to conclude that the reliquary was not empty and the content was only a 'Veronica'. The reliquary had a face **in a cloth** surrounded by a gold plate decorated with a “trellis”. This description matches well with an old representation of the Mandylyon and with the description in the *Narratio*. In the inventories of the collection of Paris, the Mandylyon ended up being named 'Veronica' in the eighteenth century. **It is a canvas** of the face of Christ mounted on wood and surrounded by a gold plate with rhomboid reliefs.” [Emphasis added for clarity.]

In these statements, Barta *et al.* **states that a cloth** (or canvas) is present in the descriptions of the inventories of the relics and reliquaries of the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris from the 16th to the 18th century. However, these inventories **do not say** that a **cloth** (or canvas) was present in the reliquary of the Mandylyon during these centuries. Either the authors did

³ That rumor of not allowing the removal of the Mandylyon from its reliquary due to the danger of an earthquake likely points to a major issue: the Mandylyon was probably not considered showable by the high priests and the emperors. That would not correspond to ‘just a Veronica,’ which creates no such issue. We should also notice that the anonymous pilgrim of Tarragonensis 55 refers to that rumor as a “miracle.” Can such a rumor be taken so seriously by the authors?

not read the descriptions of these inventories or misread the French text, resulting in this false claim regarding these inventories. In other words, the authors are using a circular argument, because they assume a cloth is present in the reliquary to show that the cloth has not left the Sainte-Chapelle even after the Shroud appears in Lirey and Chambéry. Again, it must be emphasized that no cloth, canvas, or textile is ever mentioned being in the reliquary of the Mandylion in all the inventories starting in 1534, the date of the first complete inventory of the relics from Constantinople at the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris; however, a cloth is mentioned present in that reliquary when the reliquary arrived in Paris in 1241 (or 1242).

The documents related to the reception and keeping of the relics at the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris are clear: a *holy cloth* arrived in Paris in 1241 (or 1242), and from the inventory of 1534 to the French Revolution, the *holy cloth* is no longer mentioned. The authors also eschew the most essential elements of the inventories of the Sainte-Chapelle, when the officials in 1534 had great difficulty to find the *holy cloth* that was in the Mandylion reliquary, which points to its disappearance. Indeed, the officials try vainly to find any cloth, and then, in desperation, focus their attention on a peripheral element, a trellis, around the painted face painted inside the reliquary. The inventory also shows the ignorance by the officials of the disappearance of the *holy cloth*, that is, they are not intentionally hiding the disappearance of the *holy cloth* but are trying to find what was supposed to be in the reliquary. In summary, a cloth was present in the reliquary when it arrived in 1241, but it most likely disappeared before 1534, without being officially and explicitly recorded in the inventories. This ignorance appears to be due to the long time period before the officials of the Sainte-Chapelle could fully access the relics and reliquaries from 1248 to 1534, a period that the kings of France had full access to the relics of the Sainte-Chapelle.

It should also be noted that during the French Revolution, the last inventory of 1793 of the Grande Châsse at the Sainte-Chapelle, lists all its reliquaries without their relics. Yet, the reliquary of the Mandylion was still described with a face (a Veronica) inside and at the bottom of the reliquary. It appears that the Veronica could not easily be removed

from the reliquary, otherwise it would have been removed as for all other relics. One can only conclude that the face painted in the reliquary was independent of the cloth, and that the cloth, the true relics of that reliquary, had been removed before the French Revolution. The presence of a painted face (a Veronica) inside the reliquary can easily be explained: it was on a panel that served as an indication of what was truly the relic, a cloth with an imprinted image, with the panel most probably on top of the cloth to keep it well tucked in the reliquary. The description of the reliquary says that there was a small sliding cover on top of the reliquary. A probable setup: the painted face was on a movable board inside the reliquary, which served as a double bottom; when the sliding cover was moved, the painted face was easily visible, but with the cloth underneath the board, that is, hidden away from such a superficial access to the reliquary.

We have not commented on the (yet another) hypothesis proposed by the authors: the Beirut icon would be the Shroud. It is very hard to believe that such a hypothesis could get closer to the true origin of the Shroud than the thesis of the Sainte-Chapelle. Among serious objections against such a hypothesis is the lack of any explanation on how this “icon” would have reached Geoffroy de Charny; whereas the thesis of the Sainte-Chapelle has a natural route supported by historical documents such as the notice *Pour Sçavoir la Vérité*, which says that King Philip VI gave the Shroud to Geoffroy de Charny.

Based on conversation with the first author in Pasco and by email, it appears that the true reason for not accepting that the origin of the Shroud is a king of France, where the most likely relic is the *holy cloth* of the Sainte-Chapelle, is not based on such analysis as presented in that paper of Barta *et al.*, but rather on the belief that a king of France could not give such a precious relic to a low-ranking knight as Geoffroy de Charny. We would like to remind that the true nature of the relic was likely unknown by the kings of France and that Geoffroy de Charny had attempted to regain the city of Calais, an objective that was essential for Philip VI, which is the reason to have given the relic according to *Pour Sçavoir la Vérité*.

Moreover, we quote a very relevant excerpt from *Le Songe du Vergier*⁴, a most important document rarely used in the history of the Shroud, where it is stated about the relics of the Sainte-Chapelle: “The King of France is the master and guard of our saint reliquaries, from which reliquaries we give generously to whom we please [...]”⁵.” Considering such a statement by a king of France, any researcher claiming that a king of France could not have given the *holy cloth* to Geoffroy de Charny under any circumstances, needs to have an appropriate argumentation.

In summary, the paper by Barta *et al.* presents incorrect information about the description of the reliquary of the Mandylion at the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris, in particular, claiming that these inventories mention a cloth in the reliquary of the Mandylion on and after 1534, which is not the case. The conclusion of the authors that only a Veronica is present, with a cloth, is therefore unproven. The author also did not present an analysis of inventory 1534 where the *holy cloth* likely disappeared from the Sainte-Chapelle, a key element that supports the declaration from the dean of the chapel of Lirey stating that king Philip VI gave the Shroud to Geoffroy de Charny.

⁴ *Le Songe du Vergier*, Tome I, Marion Schnerb-Lièvre, 1982, p. 327. *Le Songe du Vergier* was written around 1378 under the supervision of King Charles V. A long section of that document is related to the relics of the Sainte-Chapelle.

⁵ The English text was translated from the following French text: *Le roi de France est « maistre et garde de noz sains escrins, dezquelx **escrins nous donnons** et eslargissons a ceulx a qui il nous plait [...]»*.