

## The Quest for Jesus in Shroud research

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According to Msgr. John P. Meier, the world's foremost Jesus of history researcher, there are so many books "about" Jesus that a Buddhist sinner may well be condemned to three reincarnations in order to read all of them. Awarded two papal gold medals when studying Bible and theology in Rome, Meier's enormous erudition cannot be questioned. It is only possible to take his dry humour a bit further and add that if the desired results are not achieved, and the poor sinner is obliged to return to this world of material things to face the same punishment, he will find many more piles awaiting his perusal.

That is what can be said about the number of books "about" Jesus. One of these appeared recently in the Shroud booklist and takes the reader to India, where, according to the author, he lived and died after surviving the crucifixion. Many people know that this is actually an old story, which began around a hundred and fifty years ago, and, depending on the author, can be divided into two parts, pre- and post-crucifixion. As for the source, it is formed by three strands, only the last one being fairly recent.

The first author was Nicholas Notovitch, definitely not known as a scholar, and classified as a spy in the India Records Office, containing documents from 1600 to 1947, the period spanning British rule in India, preserved in the British Library. And what did Notovitch write? He wrote a book claiming he had found manuscripts in the Buddhist monastery in Hemis, India which constituted nothing less than concrete proof of Jesus' journey to India. His find was dismissed as a hoax in the very period in which he made the announcement, raising questions about his very secret agenda that have not been answered to this day.

The second strand came from the peaceful Islamist revival movement founded in India at the end of the nineteenth century by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad by claiming private revelations and announcing that he was the Mahdi, the promised messiah of Islam. It emerged less than a decade after Ahmad bin Abd Allah of Egyptian Sudan had made the same claim with a violent approach, his Mahdist warriors killing General Gordon in the midst of a war that was brought to an end by the victory of General Kitchener in the Battle of Omdurman.

The third and last strand is quite recent and takes the form of a few lines in the *Bhavishya Purana*, Hindu religious texts that are supposedly prophetic and have become the object of an ongoing controversy. The inclusion of these texts as an integral part of the "Jesus in India" story comes as the biggest surprise.

All three strands are woven together to lead to the Rozabal tomb, near Srinagar, in the Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir, where Jesus (as Yuz Asaf) is said to be buried --- next to a Muslim saint. What can one make of all this?

First of all, it is not hard to figure out that Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad resorted to distorting the Gospels as part of his strategy to get Jesus out of the way and make room for himself as the Mahdi **and** Messiah of Islam. What he claimed is in fact a dispute **within Islam**, for which reason Christian theologians have ignored it, but it has emerged in the Shroud media unnecessarily. As for the rest in the box, the piecing together of isolated data leads to many questions that require answers.

These are:

- The Hindus in India cremate their dead and scatter the ashes on large water bodies like a river or sea. How is it that **a tomb** was unnoticed, with absolutely no record, in a region where Muslims

--- who bury their dead --- only began to establish themselves in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, more precisely in the year 1320?

- Harsha Vardhana (AD 590 – 647), the last king of Northern India, whose kingdom extended to Kashmir, was known as a patron of arts and literature and took a deep interest in religion, making a blend of Buddhism and Hinduism for his own use. Why is it that the copper inscriptions and literature produced during his reign make no mention of Jesus? This is strange considering that it has been asserted that Jesus came into contact with both Buddhists and Hindus and made some impact
- Surely some information about Yuz Asaf --- probably a Sufi mystic --- must have been available to the people who buried Syed Naseeruddin next to him? To deny this is like saying they took it for granted that Asaf was Muslim and acted against their own beliefs.
- Why do the “carved footprints with crucifixion wounds” preserved in the Rozabal tomb look similar to the Buddhapada, or Buddha’s footprints with the Dharmachakra wheel, found in several places in India and neighbouring regions? The toes of the right foot are of the same length, as seen in both feet in the Buddhapadas, while the left foot looks more “normal”.
- The carved footprints are said to have been discovered only in 1958, after the wax residue on the floor was removed. Nobody noticed them for one thousand and nine hundred and fifty years?
- Why is it that only Holger Kersten and Kurt Berna (Hans Naber), well-known names in the story, are cited in connection with the carved footprints and no experts were consulted for a real judicious assessment?
- It is claimed that the “crucifixion wounds” seen in the footprints preserved in the tomb are similar to the wounds in the feet in the Shroud image. Is there scientific study that can demonstrate this?
- The manuscripts referring to Jesus that Notovitch claimed to have seen are an essential part of the Holy Scripture of the “Jesus in India” story. Why are they not available for examination?
- Why is there no mention that Notovitch changed his story in the preface of his second edition by reducing the size of the manuscripts --- from two volumes to a couple of pages scattered in other books without titles --- when the Orientalist Max Müller challenged him?
- Why is nothing being said about the resoundingly negative analysis *Strange New Gospels* by the Baptist biblical scholar Edgar J. Goodspeed published by the University of Chicago Press? Writing in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* Quentin Quesnell used his methodology to expose another hoax --- the one perpetrated by Morton Smith.
- How much did Notovitch understand about religion? He wrote in his book that “Jesus sojourned six years among the Buddhists where he found the principle of monotheism still pure.” How can there be monotheism in a non-theistic system, where there is no deity? Buddha was the first atheist to have founded a religion successfully.
- Where all those inscriptions about Jesus in India and why have they not been photographed and made available? Conclusions must be drawn from existing data; otherwise they are open to the charge that they are supplied by means of imagination.
- How old are the copies of the *Bhavishya Purana*? Are there any prior to the period of British administration of India to prove that it is not mainly a nineteenth-century redaction? If Jesus is mentioned, so are Moses and Queen Victoria it seems, and judging from the views of scholars

such as R.K. Ramanujan and Moriz Winternitz, it is evidently a composite text or “open system,” some sort of Wikipedia, the difference being that there was interpolation instead of editing.

- Why is it not mentioned that Swami Abhedananda never saw the manuscripts Notovitch claimed to have discovered? The original was said to have been in Pali and he was shown “an exact translation” in Tibetan, which he could not read, and had it translated.
- Why is Jesus referred to with two different names in the “Jesus in India” story? In the *Bhavishya Purana* he is called “Isa Putra”, while he is “Yuz Asaf” in the Rozabal tomb. “Isa” is definitely Jesus in Arabic and his name in Islam, so how did it appear in an ancient **Hindu** document, centuries before the advent of Islam in India? The Hindus have always called Jesus **Yeshu**.
- It is the Hindu wandering monk Swami Vivekananda --- profoundly influenced by Jesus, like Mahatma Gandhi, both of whom considered Jesus as *avatar*; God incarnate --- and not Abhedanda who is a **towering figure** in Hinduism and has a beautiful Hindu temple named after him in India. He dismissed Notovitch’s claims, stressing that as the Jagannath Temple in Puri, India was originally Buddhist, Jesus could not have learnt from Brahmin priests there. So why have his views been swept under the rug in the propaganda --- including some with clearly political ends --- that is being made about Jesus in India and the Rozabal tomb?
- Why are the Nasranis, an ancient originally Jewish-Christian community in the south of India, not mentioned?

How Swami Vivekananda, who lived during the same period as Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, would have reacted to the recent propaganda is not hard to guess. Unsatisfied with the impersonal, all-pervasive Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, he sought a personal God and found in Jesus --- firmly rooted in history --- a good example of the incarnation of the personal God on earth and welcome in his Vedanta Hinduism. But, whatever he may have thought, the questions raised above do need answers in an issue that has developed with an American researcher demanding DNA analysis of the tomb while claiming to be a descendant of Jesus after she “traced her family genealogy” in a museum in Demarest, NJ.

As far as the Shroud media is concerned, and in view of the fact that the usual academic process has been circumvented, it would have been better to obtain easily available information and refrain from establishing **links** with the Jesus in India story and the Rozabal tomb, particularly that **one** where **dangerous** comments about Jesus have been made while pitting one religious tradition against another. It is almost daily news that the blood of innocent people is being shed in the Eastern part of the world. Such is the situation there that it has prompted **statements** by Pope Benedict XVI and Dr. Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the most senior bishop of the Church of England.

After all, it is not fresh news that the caretakers of the Muslim Rozabal tomb are aware of much supposition going under the guise of fact and are recorded to have stated that “Yuz Asaf and Syed Naseeruddin are buried here and both are Muslims.” The other incidents that took place in the area are also available for anyone to see in older news items, among which is the BBC saying that it is all an “eclectic continuation of New Age Christians, unorthodox Muslims and fans of the Da Vinci Code.”

Also, contrary to what was also asserted in the agenda-driven propaganda, the Rozabal tomb is not needed to “expand” Jesus’ role in history. That role was defined more than a century ago by the ex-seminarian Renan. As an historian, and not as “a priest in the guts”, as Nietzsche, whose interpretation of history differed from that of Heidegger, portrayed him to pursue his own ends.

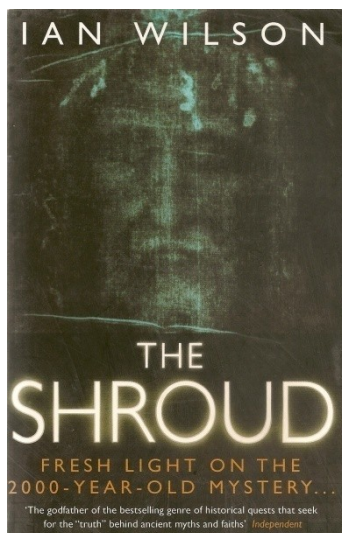
Of course, the main reason to reject the Rozabal tomb --- like the “Jesus family tomb” that came under the scathing assessment of Dr. Amos Kloner, former District Archaeologist of Jerusalem --- is that there is significant historical evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, making sceptical theories more complicated

and thus improbable. The literature on this part of the Christ-event is vast. Suffice it to say here that the parties responsible for Jesus' execution must have had agents around to make sure he was dead before being taken to the tomb. Roman centurions certainly knew how to deliver a fatal thrust with a lance, which was not even necessary in the case of Jesus, but they had to make sure he was dead in order to tell Pontius Pilate, who was afraid of losing his post as prefect of Judaea, that the mission was accomplished. There is no reason to doubt that the same mob involved in demanding his crucifixion was also present in Golgotha and, had something gone wrong, would rush to tell Caiaphas, who in turn, would have news for Tiberius. It would have been an excellent opportunity to have Pilate sent back to Rome. He antagonized the Jews and was known to have massacred some Pharisees.

What the Gospels say is that some of the religious authorities spread the rumour that Jesus' body was stolen, **not that he survived the crucifixion**. Gamaliel, Josephus and Paul were the leading Jewish minds of the period in Roman-occupied Palestine and knew what they were talking about. For a Jew resurrection meant bodily resurrection (Daniel 12:2) and not Greek philosophy and that was what the apostle Paul, the self-identified Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, was referring to.

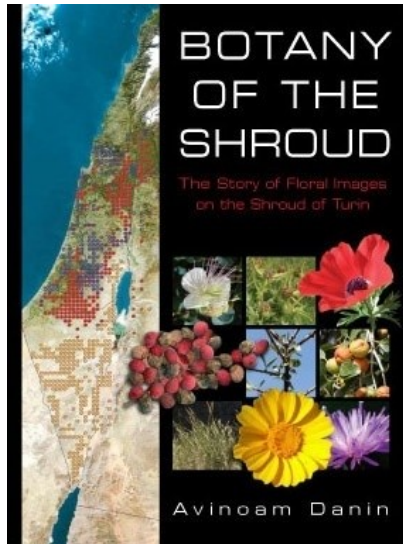
Which is why it is necessary to point out that to embellish or distort biblical events with imagined details not consonant with the truth is something quite easy. That is what the Israel Antiquities Authority appears to have felt in relation to the "Jesus family tomb," with a number of qualified experts on both sides of the story. So when it comes to one dissident group seeking support in what is apparently a mediaeval tomb with no hard documentary and archaeological evidence to present but only a string of problematic and unsubstantiated claims, the case becomes extremely unconvincing, in fact highly suspect.

Directing attention now to the productive side of Shroud research, which is try to know if the Man of the Shroud is Jesus, a number of peer-reviewed and other papers point to the fact that the matter is highly complex. The widely-reported results produced by Paolo di Lazzaro and the ENEA team **may** help in understanding the energy involved in the production of the Shroud image. Former FBI Special Agent and Shroud researcher Philip E. Dayvault's discovery of the Sanliurfa mosaic, called the ISA tile, vividly depicts how the Image of Edessa and the Shroud are historically linked. His important discovery and the significance of this historical object are revealed in the article "FACE of the God-man," available for download at the website [www.Keramion502.com](http://www.Keramion502.com). The mosaic is also referenced in Shroud historian Ian Wilson's book **The Shroud. Fresh light on the 2000-year-old mystery** (Bantam Books) which also demonstrates the connection between the Edessa cloth and the Shroud.



That at least **some** plants and flowers from the Jerusalem region are clearly visible on the relic is evident in the beautifully illustrated book **The Botany of the Shroud** by Avinoam Danin, Emeritus Professor of Botany at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who is also inclined to believe that the Man of the Shroud

is Jesus. It is of course likely that with his trained eye he sees a lot more than a layman. Unfortunately palynology is not Danin's field and a more complete study of the pollen grains on the Shroud remains at a standstill till the collection that once belonged to Dr. Max Frei-Sulzer is available for examination by a qualified expert. Still, it is possible to judge from what has been written that Frei, a criminologist, did a good job on the whole, better than what Uri Baruch and Prof. T. Litt did --- put together.



The fact that images of plants and flowers from the Jerusalem can be seen on the Shroud lends credence to this author's contention that the relic has nothing to do with what can be seen on the Jospice Mattress Imprint, probably the result of the parapsychological phenomenon known as telergy. Any Spiritualist connotations can therefore be ruled out, for genuine parapsychological phenomena are spontaneous and have to be distinguished from religion. Additional support for this point of view also comes from an unpublished paper by Prof. Giulio Fanti, at the University of Padua, who has discovered some Kirlian characteristics in the Imprint. Fanti has been working hard on some five different areas of Shroud research and so we can shortly hope to see what has been described as pieces of a big mosaic that tend to show the authenticity of the Shroud.

As for the various hypotheses about how the 1988 carbon dating test may have been skewed nothing can be said with certainty as long as there is no second direct examination of the relic, and, given the current state of affairs, it does not seem advisable to demand the destruction of another piece of the relic for another test. Such an assertion is bound to raise eyebrows, but then, as Professor Christopher Ramsey of the Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit advises, one has to make sure that all of the hypotheses to be tested are clearly laid out so that the relevant tests can be undertaken. The rationale behind this is clear and convincing. What is to be avoided is another set of measurements and have this followed by new hypotheses that require further tests. The problem is: how is that to be done if there is no consensus?

A professing Christian who understands Christianity very well, Ramsey keeps his religion and science apart and told the BBC that the Shroud issue has nothing to do with science against religion but with finding out what the right answer is. For that reason he has shown his willingness to open the doors of the Oxford laboratory for another round of carbon dating, confident that the 1988 test rests unchallenged.

That is exactly where the battle begins. There is an abundance of literature that has been produced by Shroud scientists and scholars, and scientists with no links to Shroud studies as well, where the accuracy of carbon dating, even in general, has been called into question. But since a description of what has been written in this context is not within the scope of this article the best source to learn what the controversy is all about is Ian Wilson's book. He mentions Lindow Man, initially dated by the British Museum to 300

BC, Oxford to AD 100, and Harwell to AD 300. The museum now says that he died between 2 BC and AD 119, the dating having been obtained on a range of samples in the late 1980s.



**Lindow Man. Photograph by the author.**

This is of course a case where the dating is on water-logged tissue, which is problematic, but so is the linen cloth of the Shroud. It has already been pointed out that vicissitudes it has gone through may, in the end, pave the way to the conclusion that it really is **unsuitable** for carbon dating. Such a possibility makes historical research, which will depend largely on new findings, even more important and scientific studies may also bring fresh news about the image-formation process.

These are things that will be discussed for a long time, so meanwhile, going back to the area of biblical studies, we see J. P. Meier writing about “the true Jesus who had died rose in the fullness of his humanity into the full presence of God.” That is a reasonable explanation without the need to go into details. But Pope Benedict XVI goes further when he states that the Resurrection does not stand outside or above history. It points beyond history but has left footprints in history. Whether the Turin Shroud is **one** of those footprints remains to be seen.

