

The New York Times

March 29, 2013

Turin Shroud Going on TV, With Video From Pope

By ELISABETTA POVOLEDO

ROME — The Shroud of Turin, which since medieval times has been revered by many Christians as the burial cloth of Jesus, is about to make its debut on modern media platforms.

On Holy Saturday, the linen cloth imprinted with the faint brownish image of what appears to be a man's body — and that skeptics dismiss as ancient forgery — will be shown live on the Italian state broadcaster RAI, 40 years after its first and only televised “ostentation,” as a public exposure of the shroud is known.

Pope Francis is providing a video message for the event, which will be broadcast from 5:10 p.m. to 6:40 p.m. local time and streamed live on RAI's Web site and on www.sindone.org.

On Good Friday, a Piedmont company, Haltadefinizione, introduced a new app, [Shroud 2.0](#), which features images of the cloth along with scientific and theological interpretations prepared with the Diocese of Turin and the [International Center of Sindonology](#). Sindonology is the scientific study of the shroud.

The app “is a kind of digital ostension,” said the Rev. Roberto Gottardo, vice president of the diocese commission that handles shroud-related matters. Turin has been home to the shroud since it was brought there by the Savoy family in 1578. It is kept in a specially made container in a chapel in the Turin Cathedral.

The [Vatican](#) has not officially recognized the shroud, which measures 14.3 feet by 3.7 feet, as a relic of Jesus, but neither has it discouraged popular devotion.

The artifact is arguably the most tested religious object in history, analyzed over the years by scores of scientists, their findings providing endless fodder for countless sindonologists.

Skeptics say plenty of evidence corroborates a medieval dating, including carbon-14 tests done in 1988 by three independent laboratories. They dated the cloth between 1260 and 1390.

But others dispute that. Using infrared light, multiparametric mechanical tests and spectroscopy to analyze tiny fibers of material from the cloth, Giulio Fanti, a professor at the University of Padua, found they were compatible with fibers dating from around the time of

Christ.

“Crossing the data from the various tests, we arrived at an average date” to the time of Christ’s death, plus or minus 250 years, said Mr. Fanti, whose findings were published this month in the book “Il Mistero della Sindone” (“The Mystery of the Shroud”), which he co-wrote.

Scientists have struggled to explain the image of the man on the cloth, which has markings compatible with the wounds of someone who was crucified. Mr. Fanti said he thought the image could have been created by a “very intense burst of energy,” which could have mutated the percentage of carbon-14 in the linen, leading some scientists to wrongly date it to the 13th century.

Sustained interest in the shroud has led to some unorthodox theories, including one that posits it was created by Leonardo da Vinci in the 15th century.

The Turin Diocese provided assistance to the makers of Shroud 2.0 “because we were sure it would not be one of those strange, sensationalistic products” that are all too common, said Father Gottardo.

The free version of the app offers an introduction to the cloth and its significance. For \$3.99, users have access to a high-definition image of the shroud that can be magnified to show details invisible to the naked eye.

The shroud’s live television debut was in November 1973, under the auspices of Pope Paul VI, and it has been shown on television many times. But “this is only the second time there’s been a televised, live, devotional moment,” Father Gottardo said.

The pope emeritus, Benedict XVI, who traveled to Turin to view the shroud when it was last shown in public in 2010, described it then as an “icon for Holy Saturday,” so this weekend’s broadcast “seemed appropriate,” Father Gottardo said. Since this is the [Year of Faith](#) for Catholics, he said, “We thought it was significant to do something around this image that speaks of Christ.”



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