

Recent Publications

Bible Journal's Shroud-bashing...

'Simply historical ignorance' is U.S. art expert's verdict on sindonologists' arguments for the Shroud's authenticity

*The excellent American Biblical journal Biblical Archaeology Review in its July/August 1998 issue gave what editor **Hershel Shanks** clearly regarded as a fair and balanced summary of the latest state of play on the Shroud controversy. However this prompted two articles (published in the Review's November/December 1998 issue) strongly objecting.*

The first of these was from **Gary Vikan**, director of the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore and adjunct professor of art at Johns Hopkins University (as apparently a regular lecturer on 'Pilgrimage to Graceland: The Cult of St.Elvis', clearly no shrinking violet when looking for a headline-grabbing topic). According to Vikan, for whom the carbon dating enables us to be 'positive' that the Shroud 'could not possibly have come into contact with the historical Jesus', one of the most important points to be understood about the Shroud is that it 'is not and never was a 'work of art' in the conventional sense of that term...'

As Vikan goes on: 'This is the catch-22 that sindonologists fail to appreciate. For the shroud to be the shroud, it more or less *has* to look the way it looks. Furthermore the shroud is in no way unique in appearance among its object type ['at least three dozen [*acheiropoietos*] cloths [that] have been identified as Veronica's Veil, the Holy Shroud and the like'] The single salient quality that these sacred objects share is that very quality that is so striking about the shroud – namely a faint and elusive image seemingly produced by bodily secretions.' For how people of the Middle Ages acquired the knowledge of crucifixion exhibited on the Shroud, Vikan identifies as culprits the mediaeval '*penitentes*' - religious given to extremes of self-mortification, particularly during Holy Week. By way of illustration he used, not a mediaeval example, but an apparently *penitente*-inspired crucifix by Jose Benito Ortega, who died as recently as 1941 (see opposite). On this the anatomical knowledge displayed is puerile to say the least. The second, much shorter article, was from Dr.Walter McCrone simply reiterating the same old arguments that he has used many times before.

As noted by editor Hershel Shanks in the very latest (March/April), issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review*: 'Our articles on the Shroud of Turin and on Masada prompted the greatest outpouring of letters in recent memory'. With his usual fairness Shanks published a good selection of those letters.

Among these, particularly outstanding as a riposte to McCrone was a letter from the archaeological chemist **Giles F. Carter** of South Carolina (mentioned earlier in this Newsletter in the context of the Thaddeus Trenn interview) , who pointed out 'One of McCrone's shroud paintings was tested by a chemist in my presence and several tests proved this to be unlike the Shroud of Turin, thus debunking the debunker.' However, one letter more devoted to the Vikan argument, and which did not get published, was from **Dan Scavone**, recently retired as Professor of History at the University of Southern Indiana, who composed it in partnership with several other signatories. The most salient extract of this follows;

‘In order to support his claim that the Turin Shroud is a man-made icon, Vikan asserts that it is "in no way unique in appearance" and that "three dozen" similar cloths competed with it during the Middle Ages. These, he says, still share its striking faint and elusive image seemingly produced by bodily secretions. Although this seems a bold claim that puts an end to argument, it is provably baseless, and Vikan cannot produce one example because in fact there is none. The claim of forty-two "medieval shrouds" was first announced in 1902 by Francois de Mely, who even named the towns whose inventories "mentioned" them. Most of Mely's "shrouds" were listed by a common formula, *de sudario*, meaning merely "a piece of the *sudarium*/shroud" known and often cited in Constantinople between 944 and 1204. Vikan has facilely repeated Mely's error without looking this up. All Mely's other "claimants" that can be seen today are artists' grotesque copies of the Turin Shroud. None of them presents the realistic and faint image we see on the Turin Shroud today. Don Luigi Fossati has produced photographs of 52 early painted copies of the Turin Shroud (Fossati 1984). [Ed.: A 53rd has turned up only very recently – see *Letters to the Editor*]

Vikan claimed that modern-day ‘*penitentes*’ who practice self-crucifixion therefore understand the physical realities of crucifixion. This is, in fact, disproved by his own illustration of a blue-body crucifix. Those nails in the palms (without supportive ropes) tell us, rather, that they do not understand how to crucify. Seventy years ago, the experiments of Dr. Pierre Barbet who affixed human bodies to crosses proved that nails through the palms would not support the weight of the victim

And, finally, nothing in Vikan's article explains why two head-to-head and totally naked images of Jesus--on a cloth--would appeal to the mindset of the Middle Ages. Rather, Jesus' nakedness would have been repugnant to medieval Christians. With Mely firmly refuted, we can be quite sure that there is and never was anything else like the Turin Shroud in all Gothic art.’

Could Bugs Really have Bugged the Carbon-Dating?

Dr. Garza-Valdes’s long-awaited book hits bookstalls....

Dr. Leoncio A. Garza-Valdes The DNA of God? The true story of the scientist who re-established the case for the authenticity of the Shroud of Turin and discovered its incredible secrets, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1998, £9.99; 100 pages of text, 108 pages of appendices and addenda; 8 pages black & white illustrations.; also Doubleday, New York, 1999, \$21.95

Controversially-titled and long-awaited, this is the first-hand story of how San Antonio paediatrician **Dr. Leoncio Garza-Valdes** - a Mexican-born physician with a life-long passion for microbiology - discovered what may well be *the* reason for the Shroud radiocarbon-dating having been in error.

Never a ‘Shroudie’, Garza-Valdes’s chief hobby was ancient Mayan jades. And it was his discovery of a natural plastic coating on two specimens in his collection, a coating formed by millions of tiny micro-organisms that had interfered with a carbon-dating reading, that led to

his speculating whether such a coating might exist on the Shroud, and might similarly have skewed its dating reading. In *The DNA of God?* he tells us how he specially travelled to Turin, initially to be turned away by Cardinal Saldarini's secretary, then to be befriended by **Giovanni Riggi**, the Turin microanalyst responsible for cutting the carbon dating samples back in 1988. Riggi had apparently been allowed by **Cardinal Ballestrero** to keep back some snippets, and when Garza-Valdes studied these under the microscope he recognized a very similar clear plastic coating to that which he had seen on his jades. The discovery readily accounted for significant discrepancies in the datings of other ancient linens, most notably the instances in which the wrappings of mummies have been dated more than a thousand years 'younger' than the body, as in the case of Manchester Museum's Mummy 1770. Although Garza-Valdes's explanations of the dating have been by no means universally accepted in 'Shroudie' circles, the fact that his Shroud research has been in association with individuals of the calibre of the Manchester Museum's **Dr. Rosalie David**, also by **Professor Harry Gove**, principal architect of the AMS method used for radiocarbon dating the Shroud, is a measure that his argument needs to be taken very seriously indeed.

An important though inevitably high controversial element to Garza-Valdes's book is his strong assertion that the Adler/STURP 'cellulose-degradation' hypothesis for the formation of the Shroud's image is wrong. As he points out, even before he had even begun his research STURP member **Dr. Robert Dinagar** had noted the presence of precisely this coating on Shroud samples, but had been quite disgracefully told to 'shut up' about it when he raised this issue at a STURP meeting. Garza-Valdes leaves to speculation the exact identity of the individual who silenced Dinagar (though many will guess), and clearly the STURP group's concern was that acknowledgement of the existence of any kind of coating would play into the hands of **Dr. Walter McCrone**.

However as Garza-Valdes points out, McCrone, in his interpretation of this same feature, was similarly wrong. The sorts of micro-organisms that Garza-Valdes has identified can themselves create iron and thereby iron oxide specifically of the very pure kind acknowledged to be on the Shroud. He suggests that the image formation process may have derived from similar microbiological action, that it may have taken some long while for this to become visible, and that the images that pressed plants sometimes create of themselves may derive from similar processes.

The other highly important new element to Garza-Valdes's book, one that was raised for the first time at last year's conference in Turin, is his discovery that mixed among the blood from the occipital or back-of-the-head bloodstains on the Shroud are fragmented tubules of wood which he identifies as of an as yet undetermined species of oak. This finding is more than a 'hot potato in itself, given that many of the alleged pieces of the 'true cross' scattered in churches and cathedrals around the world are of pine.

However its interest from the Shroud point of view is that it now undermines an argument that I (Ian Wilson) tentatively toyed with in chapter 3 of *The Blood and the Shroud*. That is, that from the undisturbed appearance of the bloodflows at the man of the Shroud's wrists, he may have been crucified facing his cross. For if Garza-Valdes's findings are valid (as I have no reason to doubt), the man of the Shroud can only have had his back to the cross, hence the crucifixion mode cannot have been as envisaged by me in figure 4 of my book (see overleaf) This does not of course discount that the man of the Shroud's wrists may have been nailed to the back rather than to the front of the crossbeam. However, as noted by US medical examiner **Dr. Frederick Zugibe** during experiments with volunteer models he conducted during the 1980s, an individual suspended in crucifixion mode had a natural tendency to push away from the cross, specifically using the back of the head, so that it was largely only this region that had significant contact with the cross. This might well have been the reason for the bloodstains at the wrists indicating so little chafing. Whatever, another variant to the mode of

crucifixion now needs to be envisaged, one that still can be reconciled both with archaeological evidence and with Roman graffiti

In what is a commendably forthright, honest and open book, Dr. Garza-Valdes does not try to hide that **Cardinal Saldarini** has refused to recognize the validity of his samples on the grounds that the correct protocols had not been followed for obtaining them. He even acknowledges that, replying to the Cardinal's questioning of the authority under which he worked, his tossing back of a routine letter of blessing from the Pope, was less than diplomatic.

The great problem about Garza-Valdes is that he seems insufficiently to recognize that while he personally feels that he has already proven his bioplastic coating hypothesis beyond all reasonable doubt, this is not the way that the scientific community at large sees it. In order properly to establish his findings he does need the co-operation of the Shroud's custodian in the person of Cardinal Saldarini,. And for him to call his book *The DNA of God*, particularly when this is in no way its central theme, is very, very far from the best way to go about getting this co-operation. Such continuing insouciance is a source of tragedy for all who look to the Garza-Valdes findings as *the* explanation for how the carbon dating verdict of 1988 was wrong, and it can only be hoped that the right combination of magnanimity and humility on *both* sides will ultimately prevail.

In this same regard, a worrying remark of Garza-Valdes's is that if the Shroud is kept in the wrong kind of artificial atmosphere, this might destroy the ecological balance of its colonies of bacteria. Some might be killed-off by insufficient oxygen, allowing others, such as *Leobacillus rubrus*, which thrive in such conditions, to gain a disproportionately strong hold. In his words 'Let us pray that this will not happen, or we shall be sorry for the rest of our lives.'

To Clone or not to Clone.?

Fuelled by the now world-famous 'Dolly the sheep' cloning, also by 100% serious plans to bring the Tasmanian tiger back from extinction by using DNA from a specimen of a six month old tiger cub bottled in alcohol back in 1866 (Times Article May 14, 1999), the idea of cloning from the Shroud continues to gather ever increasing momentum – in fiction circles at least.

Although the idea dates as far back as 1988, when BSTS member **Ray Leonard** of Manchester produced a novel on this theme, during the last year **David Rolfe**, producer of the award-winning Shroud documentary *The Silent Witness*, has been travelling the world trying to gain backing for a movie thriller on the same topic, provisionally entitled *Clone*. He is convinced that such a fictional presentation can do far more to improve public perception of the Shroud than any number of factual documentaries. The script of the thriller by which David hopes to achieve this has so far met a very mixed reception, and whether he succeeds in bringing his plan to fruition remains to be seen.

But meanwhile any number of variants of the idea of cloning from the Shroud are beginning to appear, e.g.:

James Beauseigneur *The Christ Clone Trilogy: Book One: In His Image* (366 pages); *Book Two: Birth of an Age* (241 pages); *Book Three: Acts of God* (433 pages), Maryland (USA), Rockville House, soft-back 1987-8

Author **James Beauseigneur's** background is that of a political speechwriter at the highest level. He managed several campaigns for US Congressional and Senatorial candidates, and in 1980 ran for US Congress against **Al Gore**, now US Vice President. Familiar also with military intelligence, having spent two and a half years with the US National Security Agency, he has injected all this background experience, combined with a lot of imagination, into a trilogy of three novels based on the theme of cloning Jesus using cells taken from the Shroud.

The first two chapters of Book One, featuring partly real events that happened in 1978, include as 'cast' some real-life members of the now famous STURP team: Dr. John Jackson, **Dr. Eric Jumper, Tom D'Muhala, Don Devan, Dr. Ray Rogers, Roger and Marty Gilbert, and Dr. Alan Adler**, also the late **Dr. John Heller** and **Father Peter Rinaldi**. But as the story unfolds it rapidly moves both into the future, and into the sort of science fiction that is so beloved of the devotees of this genre. Fictional scientist Professor Harold Goodman discovers that a cluster of dermal cells on the Shroud are still alive after two thousand years, and sets out to prove that the man of the Shroud was actually a member of an alien race, four billion years advanced on life on earth. To do this he produces a clone of Jesus, Christopher Goodman, who grows up at a time of two massive nuclear holocausts, one in 2003, destroying much of Russia, the second in 2019, wiping out most of the populations of India and China.

But a still more horrifying fate for planet earth is about to happen, and only the cloned man of the Shroud, alias Christopher Goodman, can save mankind.... As yet I haven't managed to do more than skim the narrative, but it is written grippingly, it has clearly been intelligently researched, and comes with some 'rave' accolades from US reviewers.

Also expected to be published within the next year is **Robert G.Pielke's** *Bones of the Shroud*. As the synopsis runs, Hal, a Jewish cynic who has abandoned all his goals, meets Ann, a black activist with more goals than she can handle, while vacationing in the Middle East – where the fragile peace between Israel and the new Palestinian Republic is deteriorating. Together, they "accidentally" discover the creator of the Shroud of Turin, Azmi Al-Hasan, a Palestinian who turns out to be, literally, Jesus back for his "Second Coming," the long overdue Jewish Messiah," and the equally fervently expected Muslim "Mahdi." He has Big Plans, but there's one nagging obstacle he has to overcome (with Hal and Ann's help of course) - his "Old Man."

A third novel, one reportedly being considered for a movie, is *the2nd-coming.com*, which as Internet users will recognize, has to be a web-site address, as indeed it is, those clicking on it being entertained by a 16 page synopsis of the story-line. In this the secret cloning of one Kriss from the Shroud takes place on Good Friday, April 10, 1998 at 3:00 pm., but remains unknown until 2018 when many humorous and miraculous happenings associated with this young man begin to come to light. The Internet thereupon provides Kriss with a medium by which to reach the world.

There is even a novel for children:

Frank C.Tribbe *Denny and the Mysterious Shroud: A Trip to Turin* 112 pages, with 17 illustrations, Runciman Press, Australia (Runciman Press PO Box 86, Manly 1655, NSW, Australia; Available by post to UK purchasers £7, plus £2 for post & p; USA \$10 plus \$5

Denny is described as a 'a thorough, solidly science-based novel which tells the story of a boy named Denny who travels to Turin and sees the Shroud. Author Frank Tribbe, who is now retired and living at Penn Laird in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, worked in Washington for 40 years as an attorney in the service of the US federal government. His previous work on

the Shroud *Portrait of Jesus: The Illustrated Story of the Shroud of Turin*, was published by Stein & Day of New York in 1983.

Athanasios Dimitriadis, *Anaphora sti Sindoni tou Torinou: Proupirxe san Agio Mandilio* (in Greek: 'Report on the Shroud of Turin: Was it the Holy Mandyllion?'), Ekdoseis 'Tinos', Athens, 1998, soft-back 132 pages, including 32 pp. Illustrations in colour and black 7 white

Athanasios Dimitriadis is a dentist in Greece who has been interested in the Shroud for many years. He is the only Greek member of the BSTS, his letter 'New Light on the Mandyllion-Shroud connection?' having been published in Newsletter no.46, pp.48-9. His new book above is a considerably updated edition of one that he first wrote more than ten years ago, and although your Editor's classical Greek of 40 years ago is no match to the task of reading it properly, it has excellent illustrations indicative of exhaustive research. One of these reproduces Geoffrey Ashe's experiment of the 1960s heating a horse-brass, arguably the first ever experiment to suggest that the cause of the Shroud's image is some form of radiant energy. Athanasios Dimitriadis strongly supports the argument that the Shroud was one and the same as the Holy Mandyllion of the Eastern Orthodox church.

Mariano Tomatis *La Sindone di Torino e il Santo Graal: Dalle Teorie di Noel Curren-Briggs alle Ultime Scoperte di D.Scavone*, private publication (C.so Martin Luther King 25, 10095 Grugliasco (TO) Italy – e-mail: marianotomatis@geocities.com), 94 page booklet

This takes further the arguments of Noel Curren-Briggs and Professor Daniel Scavone concerning the association of the Shroud with the 'Holy Grail' of mediaeval literature. Unlike some of the sensation-seeking approaches with which the subject of the Grail has too often been riddled, this one looks intelligent and serious. Even for anyone with little Spanish it is possible to see that the author has amassed some very pertinent quotes from Robert de Boron's *Joseph of Arimathea*, Chrétien de Troyes, *Conte du Graal*, the interrogations of the Knights Templar, and much else.

Il Telo. Giornale Italiano di Sindonologia

In the last Newsletter the Italian Shroud journal *Il Telo* came in for much praise, but as was mentioned, the information concerning subscriptions was confusing to say the least. The journal's editor **Alberto di Giglio** has now kindly clarified matters. The subscription rates are £50 sterling or \$70 US dollars, for three 48 page, full colour issues per year. Payment should be made by international postal order. The postal address and account number details are: Il Telo Giornale Italiano di Sindonologia, Via del Collegio Romano, 300186 Roma, Italy, account number 96073002 . Il Telo can be contacted via e-mail at telo@pelagus.it.

*Please note that the photograph of **Pope John Paul II** before the Shroud, as reproduced on the cover of Newsletter 48, after its reproduction in Il Telo, originated with the Vatican official newspaper *Osservatore Romano*.*

**A Book to Look out for:
Martin Biddle The Tomb of Christ**

For the last ten years **Martin Biddle**, of Hertford College, Oxford, has been patiently studying the Edicule inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem, housing what remains of what is reputed to be the original tomb in which Jesus was laid. This has been the first proper investigation of the site since 1849, and has involved the use of high-tech equipment enabling the structure of the tomb to be revealed as never before. Reportedly, Dr. Biddle fully discusses the issue of whether this is the authentic site. It promises to be a most authoritative work on this so Shroud-related subject. The publishers are Sutton.