

DATING THE SHROUD - A PERSONAL VIEW

by Noel Curren Briggs (professional genealogist and former consultant to Debrett's and Burke's peerage).

Although I have always been sceptical about the Shroud's authenticity as the actual burial cloth of Christ, my personal view is that the dating to between 1260 and 1390 must be questioned on the following grounds:

1. In 1532 the Shroud was subjected to temperatures high enough to melt silver. It is not known for certain what effect this may have had on the dating process. Until two samples of cloth of known antiquity, one of which is submitted to such temperature, and the other not, are tested to see whether both show the same age, the present dating of the Shroud must remain a matter of doubt.

2. I regard the date 1260 with some scepticism as there exist three unequivocal references to the cloth prior to this date, viz:

- (a) The letter dated the Kalends of August 1205 from Theodore Ducas Angelos to Pope Innocent III complaining that the Franks had taken "the linen in which our Lord Jesus Christ was wrapped" to Athens
- (b) Robert de Clari's account of the cloth he saw in St. Mary of Blachernae in 1203
- (c) The inscription on the Sainte Face de Laon, firmly dated to the end of the 12th. century, which states *Obraz Gospodin na Ubrusje* - "The face of the Lord on the cloth"

In addition there is the less reliable reference to the arrival of the cloth in Constantinople in 944. These early references are not inconsistent with the dating evidence if one takes the outer limits of 1000 to 1500 AD. However, we must ask ourselves when, for whom, and by whom was the image made.

I entirely reject the theory that the image was made by wrapping it round a statue, The evidence of the recent Liverpool mattress cover points firmly to the possibility of cloth being 'impregnated' by a human body. We cannot rule out possibility that the creator of the Turin image knew about this phenomenon even if we don't understand it today, and he used it to mark the linen and create an apparently miraculous image on it.

As to when this might have been done, two of several possibilities are that (a) it was made during the 11th. or 12th. century in Constantinople, or (b) it was fabricated by the Templars in or about 1260. If the former, we must assume that it was done by someone possessing considerable medical and archaeological knowledge, for how else can we explain the accurate blood flows, the wrist wounds and above all the presence of a lepton over one of the eyes? But it is stretching our credulity almost to breaking point to believe that they possessed such detailed archaeological knowledge as this.

If the Templars, I have calculated elsewhere that the Shroud first came into the order's possession after the battle of Pelagonia (1259). This is remarkably close to the earliest carbon dating (1260). The Templars undoubtedly had the initiative, and perhaps even the motive, to manufacture relics. Having seen the cloths in Constantinople it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that they decided to manufacture a shroud of their own, similar to the painted one at Besançon, for instance, in such a way as made it seem to be miraculous.

We are still left with many unanswered questions which the dating 1260-1390 does nothing to answer. For example, how are we to explain the existence in Constantinople and elsewhere of acheiropoietic images of Christ - images "not made by human hand"? These have an undoubted historical existence at least as early as the 10th. century.

Overall I keep an entirely open mind as to how the image was formed, except that I firmly reject the hot statue theory, and await more scientific research into the Liverpool mattress image and its like.

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