

BUT IS THE SHROUD MEDIAEVAL?

We have squarely to face the fact that for the majority of the general public, and some BSTS members, the Shroud has been "proved" to be a fake. Professor Hall, in a recent lecture to the British Museum Society, has yet more forcefully repeated his opinion that anyone still clinging to the Shroud's authenticity should be considered a Flat-Earther, and for all we know he may be right. By its very constitution this Society has no corporate view for or against the Shroud's authenticity, and we should not shy of the forgery hypothesis if that is the way *all* the evidence points. The Cardinal of Turin had the courage (though not necessarily the wisdom) to accept the scientific verdict the moment the dating results were announced.

But the problem remains that on their own, even if they are correct, the radiocarbon datings explain nothing and prove nothing. Of all the evidence, medical, photographic, chemical, palinological, historical and radiocarbon, what should we accept and what should we reject? Have the pathologists been deceived by some clever artist? In this context a disquieting feature has been the disputing of Professor J. Malcolm Cameron's evidence in both the famous Dingo Baby case and, very recently, the autopsy on Rudolf Hess.

Alternatively, was the Shroud created by the body of a genuine crucifixion victim - but one crucified in the thirteenth or fourteenth century, perhaps by Saracens during the Crusades? To demonstrate this Society's open-mindedness, our next public meeting, on Thursday April 13 (see back page) will feature Catholic physician Dr. Michael Straiton arguing for this very point of view.

Alternatively again, is there some way in which a false carbon dating reading was obtained? A German writer, Holger Kersten, has been investigating whether the area the samples were taken from is a piece added to the Shroud perhaps centuries later. And the contamination and "radiation theory" arguments continue.

The Biblical archaeologist Dr. Eugenia Nitowski (now Carmelite nun Sister Damien of the Cross), has corroborated John Tyrer by pointing out that the pre-treatment may well have been inadequate to cope with any peculiar circumstances associated with the Shroud's image formation: "Pre-treatment of fibres before carbon-dating will only affect contaminating substances which have coated fibres. It cannot affect a process which has changed the cellulose itself." As she continued:

In any form of inquiry or scientific discipline, it is the weight of evidence which must be considered conclusive. In archaeology, if there are ten lines of evidence, carbon dating being one of them, and it conflicts with the other nine, there is little hesitation to throw out the carbon date as inaccurate due to unforeseen contamination.

Adding to this viewpoint has been the Egyptologist Rosalie David of the Manchester Museum, in a letter sent to John Tyrer on 1 November:

I have followed the recent developments with the Turin Shroud with interest. In the case of Mummy 1770, which we unwrapped here in 1975, the carbon dating provided different dates for the bones and the bandages of the mummy (the bones were approx. 800-1000 years 'older' than the bandages), which led us to speculate that the Mummy had been rewrapped 600-1000 years after death. An alternative, of course, is that the resins and unguents used in mummification may affect the bandages and bones in

ways which affect the carbon dates. This is one of the problems which we shall have to face in Egyptology in the near future. From our experience, carbon dating of mummified remains and their associated bandages has produced some unexpected and controversial results.

On the same issue of possible contamination Ross Spencer, BSTS Shroud researcher on the Isle of Wight, has been conducting experiments to determine the location of the Shroud sample taken for carbon dating in relation to how the Shroud was folded at the time of the 1532 fire. As she has shown, anyone can reconstruct this for themselves. Using a tracing of the shroud marked up with burn and water marks and with the frontal image on your left hand side, (1) fold from the bottom to the top; (2) fold from the bottom to the top again; (3) fold the left side end over the right side end; (4) fold the left over the right again; (5) fold the left over the right again. Via the tracing paper it should be possible to see the consistent alignment of both the burn marks and watermarks. The location of the carbon dating sample's removal (see *Newsletter* no. 20, p.24) can be determined as 21 layers down in the 48 layer, six fold bundle. The carbon dating sample would not therefore have been directly hit by the water used to douse the fire, although it was merely a handbreadth away from holes created by the molten silver.