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## Special Feature: Toward 'Correct Seeing' on the Shroud, part I:

### Purported "Inscriptions" On the Shroud Claimed by French researchers Marion and Courage:- Are they Really There?

by Mark Guscin

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### Toward 'Correct Seeing' on the Shroud, part II Coin inscriptions, Passion Objects and Flowers - Are They Really There?

By the Editor

*In the Editorial 'Very Like a Whale' in issue number 46 of this Newsletter I drew critical attention to the then recently widely publicised claims of seeing a variety of objects on the Shroud. I argued that reliance on this 'faces in clouds' type of evidence undermined the truly serious evidence in favour of the Shroud's authenticity. While Dr. Alan Whanger was not mentioned by name, the criticism was clearly directed towards press releases that he had issued, provoking a vigorous response from him 'Knowing a Hawk from a Handsaw' (Newsletter no.47), that included a characteristically friendly and fair-minded invitation to me 'to come to Durham [Alan and Mary's home city] and look at our materials and findings' for myself. Underlining my need to resolve this issue was my attendance of the Shroud Congress in Turin in June 1998, at which it was more than a little unsettling to listen to Professor Avinoam Danin, the world's leading expert on the botany of Israel, most authoritatively attesting that he, like Dr. Alan Whanger, could see on the Shroud various plants peculiar to Israel and its environs. (This caused me only semi-jokingly to acknowledge to Alan, immediately following this lecture, that I was in serious danger of having to eat my hat.) Accordingly, I resolved to accept the Whangers' invitation to visit them in Durham, the days immediately following the Richmond conference, held only a relatively short distance away, providing a mutually convenient opportunity.*

With the aid of a most welcome 'lift' from another attendee at the Conference, Dan McPherson of San Diego, on the morning of Monday June 21 my wife Judith and I arrived at the Whangers home. There we and Dan were most cordially greeted by both Alan and Mary Whanger, also by Philip Dayvault, Executive Director of the

Whangers' Council for Study of the Shroud of Turin. As we entered the quips flowed back and forth about the clouds, or lack of them, in that day's North Carolina skies.

But we were there for a serious purpose, and first, by way of demonstrating that as a professional psychiatrist he was well aware of the hazards of seeing 'faces in clouds' and Rorschach blots, Alan showed us a series of slides that are used in psychology to demonstrate such perceptual quirks. Since my wife Judith is a University of Sheffield-trained psychologist, these created little impression, as they were mostly already known to us.

Next discussion turned to the various Passion images that Alan claims to be represented on the Shroud. For this he took us to the life-size black and white prints of the Shroud that he has hanging on his basement wall, pointing out the various background stains that he considers meaningful and how he interprets these. To enumerate just some of the objects that he 'sees', these are: 'two lepton coins of Pontius Pilate, one over each eye; two desecrated Jewish phylacteries (prayer boxes), one of the forehead and the other on the left arm, [and] an amulet of Tiberius Caesar on the chest.' Additionally he sees alongside the Shroud man's body: 'a crucifixion nail; a Roman spear; a crown of thorns; a sponge tied to a reed; a large hammer; a pair of pliers; two Roman scourges of the type used to keep prisoners moving on the way to execution; two sandals; a scoop or large spoon or trowel in a box; two brush brooms; a pair of dice; a coil or rope, several letters on the tile or titulus, and possibly partial images of the cloak, the tunic and two more nails.' [CSST News July 1998]

It felt churlish, but as each time Alan pointed out the shape on the Shroud that he took to be one of these objects, repeatedly Judith and I, while accepting the presence of the shape, could only shake our heads, politely but firmly declining to make the same visual interpretation. In order not to appear too negative-minded, I acknowledged that I was willing to regard the 'coil of rope' as sufficiently distinctive not to dismiss out of hand. But this was a lone exception, and even in that instance I remained far from convinced.

Next it was the turn of the flower images. With regard to these it was rather easier to go along with what Alan was talking about, and both Judith and I, if we let our minds wander adlib, could readily-enough 'see' flowers everywhere, even ones additional to those that Alan pointed out to us. But were these real flowers that had left real imprints? Or were they just random tonal splodges in the Shroud's background that the mind assembled in the shape of a flower, much in the way that we can all see faces in clouds? Despite Alan's support from Professor Danin, our strong inclination still favoured the latter.

Thus as but one example, I can readily enough see the peduncle or 'stalk' topped by three berry-like shapes, to the right of the top of the man of the Shroud's head, that Alan and Avinoam identify as *Pistacia lentiscus*. Avinoam Danin has authoritatively stated that he viewed this 'plant image' through binoculars direct on the Shroud itself during the two minutes he was permitted as a visitor to last year's Expositions in Turin, and I have no difficulty accepting that this set of marks genuinely is evident enough, and is discernible every time that the Shroud is photographed. But is it really *Pistacia*? To me, if this particular set of marks is carefully studied on a close-up colour photograph, as distinct from the black and whites mostly used by the

Whangers, the line of the 'stalk' looks suspiciously similar to what can only be a crease-line an inch below it. As for the 'fruits', the marks denoting these seem much darker than the general run of background stains interpreted as flowers. Although I would hesitate to identify exactly what they could be, random spark marks seem as good an explanation as any. Certainly, positively identifying them as a plant image, particularly given the apparent crease-line, seems unsupportable with anything like Danin and the Whangers' confidence.

In another instance a significant part of what Whanger and Danin have identified as a *Zygophyllum dumosum* inflorescence laid on the man of the Shroud's shoulder consists of image elements that ultraviolet fluorescence photography by the STURP team twenty years ago identified, rather more credibly, as marks from the lash of the scourging falling over the shoulders. To me 'plant image' evidence of such an 'iffy' kind again simply cannot carry anything like the sort of credibility capable of swaying a sceptic, and for this reason I continue to regard it as having no truly serious part in Shroud studies.

But one final area of enquiry remaining to be explored - in this instance quite independent of any 'faces in clouds' considerations - was the collection of sticky tapes which Dr. Max Frei applied to the Shroud's surface during the 1970s, via which he captured numerous pollens, some of which he was able to identify as deriving from plants of Israel. Through a complicated chain of circumstances this collection had been acquired by the Whangers, who keep it in a special safe in their basement, alongside a most impressive computer-linked microscope that is specially tailored for their studying the pollens.

Although I knew Max Frei well, I had never before seen his actual tapes, and so it was a great delight and privilege when the Whangers brought out an album of these for my inspection. Each tape specimen could be seen to have been housed within a microscope slide having its own individual slot of the album, and by way of demonstration Alan Whanger and Philip Dayvault kindly set one of these slides under the microscope so that I could experience the task of hunting its pollen grains for myself. Upon my commencing this - and my experience of looking through microscopes is pretty limited - the immediate surprise was to find just what a universe of minute debris can exist on one insignificant-looking piece of sticky-tape. It was possible to travel across the tape for what seemed miles, viewing this both through the microscope and on the linked computer-screen, in the course of which the occasional little red fragment would come into view, undoubtedly from the red silk traditionally used as one of the Shroud's coverings. Then - to my enormous satisfaction - there appeared a circular-shaped pollen grain, quite unmistakable as such, and large as pollen grains go.

As immediately revealed by cross-comparison with images of pollen grains stored in the Whanger computer, this particular specimen was *Gundelia Tournefortii*, a variety that Max Frei had already identified as present on the Shroud, and which Alan Whanger and Philip Dayvault specifically predicted that I might find on this particular tape, since they knew it to contain several. Most intriguingly, numerically 91 specimens of *Gundelia* have so far been found on the Shroud, nearly one third of the 314 pollens discovered so far, and 44%, or nearly half, of those that it has been possible to identify. Also this particular pollen is notably insect-borne rather than

wind-borne. So unless a huge swarm of insects had just happened to fly direct from *Gundelia* plants onto the Shroud (yes, highly unlikely!), for the Shroud to bear so many pollens from this plant can, in all logic, derive only from actual inflorescences of *Gundelia* having been directly laid on it - a point on which I can unqualifiedly (and most thankfully!) agree with Danin and the Whangers.

Avinoam Danin and his colleague Uri Baruch's work on the Frei tapes further reveals that in respect of other flora of Israel represented pollen-wise on the Shroud, some of this pollen likewise insect-borne, their proportions are similarly unusually large when viewed in relation to the long centuries of the Shroud's known historical preservation outside Israel. (For more on this see *Flora of the Shroud of Turin* reviewed later in this Newsletter) The implication which I am bound to accept therefore, is that again, actual plants must have been directly laid on the Shroud while it was in Israel in order for such pollens to be present as they are.

Now since from quite independent studies, such as the Volckringer plant images, I recognize that in certain circumstances plants can and do create images of themselves when pressed between sheets of paper (paper being a cellulose-based commodity closely related to linen), it would be quite illogical for me to uphold that plants of Israel which I recognize were laid directly on the Shroud could not have left imprints of themselves on this. My position is therefore tightrope-walking, though very far from hat-eating. I accept that images of the plants that Whanger and Danin see on the Shroud quite possibly *could* be there. But I continue to uphold, and with some vehemence, that visually I still simply cannot go along with seeing them as they do.

Such a position, as I am the first to recognize, is hardly a comfortable or securely founded one. Given Alan and Mary Whanger's unwavering dedication and sincerity, their many kindnesses towards me, also Avinoam Danin's botanical eminence, my preference would be to be able wholeheartedly to go along with what they see, rather than to be source of the slightest continuing division, or thorn in the flesh to them. Yet my stance as stated really is the only one that I can uphold as true to my own perceptions, and I can therefore only hope that Alan and Mary can accept and respect this as I unhesitatingly accept and respect theirs.

Overall my guess is that new insights potentially obtainable from the Max Frei pollen collection are far from exhausted. As just one example, the exact reason for why there should be so disproportionately large a presence of *Gundelia* on the Shroud remains yet to be satisfactorily explained. Obvious from photographs is that the plant's prickliness makes it an unlikely choice for any floral tribute, even had such tributes been a Jewish custom, which Jewish experts such as Joseph Zias firmly reject. So could stalks of *Gundelia*, as the Whangers suggest, have been used for the crown of thorns, this blood-soaked object then legitimately having been interred with the body? My aspiration is to look to a future firmly focused on co-operatively researching such issues, rather than squabbling over any perceptual differences continuing between us.

*The photo of Gundelia tournefortii, shown below, has been reproduced by kind permission of Professor Avinoam Danin and the Missouri Botanical Garden Press*



## The Shroud in Arthurian Legend

by Audrey Dymock Herdsman

At Templecombe in Somerset, the painting of Jesus which hangs on the wall of the Church of St Mary's, is thought to have been copied directly from the Shroud. Its resemblance is in size and proportion and is not, of course, to the photographic image of the Shroud, but the earlier one known from the imprint on the cloth itself. The panel has been carbon dated to the 13th Century. Only a few miles from the village the hill at South Cadbury dominates the landscape. Known also as Camelot, it has long been thought to be the home of the Arthurian legends. How far the stories are based on truth is uncertain, but the hold they have held on the imagination of the western world is not.

The surrounding area includes the Blackmore Vale, which was once a dark forest, and in forests the Knights were said to ride out in search of adventure and seek religious inspiration as well as damsels in distress. One of these damsels, the sister of Percival, is chosen as the one person to have seen and held the Shroud itself. I quote from "The High History of the Holy Grail" translated from Old French

In a chapel, "small and ancient," deep in the forest, "She seeth above the altar the most holy cloth for which she was come hither, that was right ancient and a smell came thereof that was so sweet and glorious that no sweetness of the world might equal it." The damsel cometh forward toward the altar thinking to take the cloth, but it giveth up into the air as if the wind had lifted it and was so high that she might not reach it above an ancient crucifix that was there within. So she prayed, begging to be allowed to touch and keep a part of the cloth, saying to Joseph of Abavimacie (Arimathea):

"Better loved he to take down your Body than all the gold and all the fee that Pilate might give him. Lord, good right of very truth had he so to do, for he took you in his arms beside the rood, and laid your Body in the holy Sepulchre, wherein you were covered of the Sovran cloth for which I have come in hither.

"Lord, grant it be your pleasure that I may have it, for love of the Knight by whom it was set in this chapel.

"Forthwith the cloth came down above the altar, and she straightway found taken away therefrom as much as it pleased Our Lord she should have. Josephus tells us of a truth, that never did none enter into the chapel that might touch the cloth save only this one damsel."

There are other episodes in this story, one of which I quoted in an article of 1991: 'The Templars' Journey to Somerset.' Many things point to the Templars' possession of the Shroud for some years. The Templecombe panel painting being one of the most significant. Could the story of the holy cloth and the sister of Percival have originated with them? The Templars may have wanted to tell the Christian world that they held the Shroud in England, but dare not except in parable for fear of hostile forces wishing to take it from them.

*Editor's Note: Audrey Dymock Herdsman, author of this article, has lived in Templecombe for many years, and knew Mollie Drew, the original discoverer of the panel painting, who died earlier this year. She is a member of the BSTS.*