From Ian Wilson's Shroud History Notebooks:

The second of a series of short articles on intriguing items with an historical or other association with the Turin Shroud.

II: Nicholas of Verdun: Scene of the Entombment, from the Verdun altar in the monastery of Klosterneuburg, near Vienna

Nearly four decades ago, casually browsing through Ilona Bercovits' newly published *Illuminated Manuscripts in Hungary* in Bristol Central Library, I came across the now famous Pray manuscript drawing of Jesus's Entombment [see below], and immediately recognised its significance for Shroud studies. It was good, therefore, in David Rolfe's recent Shroud documentary, to see Dr. Mechthild Flury-Lemberg pointing out in the lower of its two scenes the tiny holes faintly visible on the shroud and on the herring-bone-decorated lid of the box-like sepulchre, seemingly representing the Turin Shroud's still mysterious pre-1532 burn holes. I had originally missed these holes, and as rightly pointed out by Dr. Flury-Lemberg, their apparent occurrence in the Pray manuscript drawing, firmly dateable back to 1192-5, helps to push the Shroud back significantly earlier than the date ascribed to it by carbon dating.

Above: Entombment scene from Nicholas of Verdun's Klosterneuburg pulpit panel, c.1181. Note the three 'portholes' immediately below Jesus' body;

Right: Entombment scene from the Pray manuscript, c.1192. In the scene in the lower register, tiny holes are faintly visible both on the shroud and on the tomb's herringbone twill-

Yet often overlooked in this context is a very equivalent Entombment scene [see right], on a champlevé panel that forms part of the decoration of a magnificent 12th century pulpit preserved at Klosterneuburg, near Vienna. The entire pulpit, incorporating many similar panels, was completed by the master decorator Nicholas of Verdun no later than 1181 (therefore yet earlier than the Pray manuscript), and on its Entombment panel again we see the so distinctive crossed hands burial pose, also a shroud of double body length proportions.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of all, however, is the depiction of three large round holes in the facing side of the box-like 'sepulchre' into which the body is being laid.

And in this instance there is absolutely no mystery to the depiction of the three holes. During the 12th century three holes were a feature of the actual sepulchre of Jesus, as housed in Constantine the Great's historic Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Following Moslem invasions of the Holy Land, during which the Holy Sepulchre Church had been the target of major attacks, the 10th century Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennitus, who died in 959, had ordered a protective marble facing for what remained of the original tomb slab on which Jesus's body had been laid. Three 'oculi' or portholes were provided in the slab so that visiting pilgrims could peer through these to gain a glimpse of the original rock. A depiction of the Entombment on a stone capital of c.1150 in Chartres Cathedral is one of the earliest depictions of these portholes. However, documentary mention of them occurs even earlier, in the writings of a Russian pilgrim called Daniel who visited the sepulchre in 1106-7:

> And now this holy bench is covered with marble plaques and one has cut in the side three little round windows, and by these windows one sees the holy stone.'

All of which inevitably raises the question of just how much of a coincidence can it be that sometime before 1192 – as evident from the Pray manuscript - the Shroud sustained burn damage specifically in the form of holes in a row of three? Historically, could there have been some kind of connection with the Holy Sepulchre's three port-holes? Might the Shroud's container perhaps similarly have had three portholes, the burn damage being inflicted through these? Or might Constantine have ordered the porthole design for the Sepulchre because he knew that burn damage in this form already existed on the Shroud? Is there some other explanation I have yet to think of? Or should we dismiss it completely as pure coincidence, and nothing more?

The problem is one has puzzled me for well over a decade, and I readily confess to having no clearer idea of the answer now than it first came to me. Among the several ancillary facts which may or may not be relevant are:

1. An emblem used back in the 4th century AD by the first Christian Roman Emperor Constantine the Great on his coins [right] was three round circlets in a row, apparently representative of himself and his two sons. So did his 10th century successor and namesake Constantine Porphyogennitus have this emblem in mind when he ordered the Holy Sepulchre 'oculi'?

2. On Byzantine coins from Constantine Porphyrogennitus' reign onwards the already 'traditional' depiction of the Christ Pantocrator suddenly begins to feature three round circlets on the crossbar of Christ's halo [see right]. Ohio numismatist David Massa pointed out this feature to me many years ago. Could there be some connection?

3. The Sakli depiction of the Image of Edessa, one of the earliest-known depictions of the Image of Edessa as an actual Christ-imprinted piece of cloth [see right], features the face of Jesus flanked by three roundels on one side, four on the other. Again, is there some connection?

The only certainty is that whenever the triple hole damage was inflicted on the Shroud, the Shroud was at that time folded quite differently from the 'doubled in four' arrangement that I have hypothesised for it during at least some of its existence under the guise of the Image of Edessa. If we could only crack the mystery, it could open up a major new advance in our understanding of the Shroud's history. So any informed suggestions or correspondence on this topic will be most warmly welcomed.

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