

Channel 5 Da Vinci Shroud Theory By Jim Dunning

A recent presentation by Television's Channel 5 gives cause for disquiet by claiming that the Shroud of Turin is a clever fake. The documentary admits quite readily that the Shroud could not have been painted. All past efforts to produce such a result had failed miserably. But viewers were asked to believe that it could still have been produced by human hand, a hand that could well have belonged to the most famous artist of the Middle Ages, Leonardo da Vinci.

We were reminded that radiocarbon dating carried out in 1988, when samples taken from the Shroud were examined by three separate universities, had proved that the cloth involved was made between 1260 and 1390. No mention was made of the fact that subsequent examination indicated that the patch taken from the Shroud could have formed part of an invisible repair undertaken during that period.

The programme theorises that da Vinci's forgery was commissioned (though it doesn't say by whom) to replace an earlier version that was exposed as a poor fake, having been purchased by the powerful Savoy family in 1453, only to disappear for 50 years. When it returned to public view it was hailed as a genuine relic, which so-called experts claim was a convincing replica fashioned by da Vinci himself.

So how did he do it? It is suggested that da Vinci could have scorched his own facial features on to the linen of the Shroud, using a sculpture of his face and a camera obscura – an early photographic device going back to the 4th Century B.C. It involves a dark chamber in which an image of an outside object is projected on to a screen. The programme suggests that the fabric of the Shroud could have been hung over a frame in a blacked-out room and been coated with silver sulphate (a substance readily available in 15th Century Italy), which would have made it light sensitive. When the sun's rays passed through a lens of one of the walls, da Vinci's facial shape would have been projected on to the linen, creating a permanent image. Or so it is alleged.

To support the claim that da Vinci used his own face in the procedure, an American artist named Lillian Schwartz, a graphic consultant at the School of Visual Arts in New York, described how she used computer scans to show that the face on the Shroud has the same dimensions as his own self portrait. 'It matched,' she declares proudly. 'There's no doubt in my mind that the proportions Leonardo wrote about were used in creating the Shroud's face.'

Professor Larisson Tracy of Longwood University in Virginia told the programme makers: 'Da Vinci had the necessary skills. He knew enough about anatomy and about the physical muscular structure of the body to create an image like the Shroud. If anybody had the capacity to work with camera obscura or early photographic technique, it was Leonardo Da Vinci.' The viewer was treated to some suitably gruesome photos of post mortem techniques and reminded that dissecting dead bodies was severely frowned upon during the artist's lifetime, which is why he would have had to obtain his anatomical knowledge in secret.

Art historian, Professor Nicholas Allen, has called for more tests on the Shroud to determine whether it contains the presence of silver sulphate. He said, 'If

you look at the Shroud of Turin as it appears to the naked eye, you see a negative image of a human being, and if you take a photograph of that you produce a positive image of that human being, which means the Shroud is acting as a negative. That in itself is a very good clue that it was made photographically.' One has to ask, how is it that the STURP team did not discover the presence of silver sulphate during their five days of detailed investigation ?

Although it was not mentioned in the documentary, Professor Allen's theory was challenged by Barrie M Schwartz in an article entitled : 'Is the Shroud a Medieval Photograph ? He admits that Allen had used medieval raw materials to create a faint but good quality photographic image on linen cloth, but objects that the image did not match **all** of the physical and chemical properties of the Shroud of Turin.

And da Vinci's motive ? Lynn Picknett, a Shroud researcher and author, told viewers, 'The faker of the Shroud had to be a heretic, someone with no fear of faking Jesus's holy redemptive blood. He had a hunger to leave something for the future to make his mark, not just for the sake of art or science, but for his ego...He had to have at his fingertips a technology which would completely fool everyone until the twentieth century.' Pure speculation.

Significantly, the Channel Five programme omitted many of the counter arguments in favour of the Shroud's authenticity, though it did quote a Professor John Jackson, Director of the Turin Shroud Centre of Colorado, who is convinced that the Shroud dates from the time of Jesus's crucifixion and that the radiocarbon dating was wrong because the sample used had been contaminated.

One is left with the conclusion that opponents of the Shroud's authenticity, having had to accept that the Shroud could not have been painted, dreamed up an entirely new scenario involving the only mediaeval artist clever enough to produce a fake. A scenario that is far from convincing.