



PAUL VIGNON

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**Who was Paul Vignon?**

The brilliancy of a scholar is sometimes eclipsed by his modesty. Born in the 19th century, in the first half of the 20th century Paul Vignon produced many works on philosophy and entymology; works which retain all their value, being cited to this day. Those who admire his contributions and would like to know a bit more about the man, will find in these brief notes some indications concerning his personal qualities and the elements of his principal writings. We thank Prof. Vignon's family, who so kindly communicated this information to me as well as permission to reproduce his photograph.

A glance at this photograph is already revealing. This personage seated simply in an armchair appears settled in an intense consciousness of himself, in the noble and Teilhardian sense of the term; a man endowed with a singular force of character. In his pose and his penetrating eyes, one reads a profound power of reflection combined with a vigorous temperament. While his features are etched by his tireless efforts to acquire science, he yet retains an easy and distinguished manner. When this photo was made, Vignon's career was virtually at its close; his hair is turning white. But the energetic countenance evinces an uncommon strength of will and superior achievements. His glance, frank and scrutinizing, even piercing, betrays the enormous curiosity of a scientist, an intellectual probity, a flawless moral integrity.

In fact, by preference and through studies, Paul Vignon was a researcher. As a biologist enraptured by the enigmas of nature, as a philosopher of very acute sensibility, as a man of deep religious faith, he rejoiced whenever, in his quests, spiritual explanations were revealed. The psychology apparent in this eloquent portrait reflects exactly the man's professorial career.

**Paul Vignon and the Shroud of Christ**

Paul Vignon was born in Lyon on November 11, 1865. His studies and career were oriented toward science, to which he gave himself entirely.

In 1924 he was appointed professor on the Faculty of Philosophy of the Institut Catholique de Paris, where until his death he occupied the chair of "Philosophy of Zoology and Introduction to the Philosophy of Biology". Simultaneously, for several years he was at the Sorbonne as zoology assistant to Prof. Yves Delage (1854-1920), his instructor

and thesis patron.

A strong bond of friendship formed between the Christian and the non-believer, and eventually a group of biologists cooperated with them to formulate the vaporgraph hypothesis as the cause of the corporal image inscribed on the Linen. Their discovery proved to be one of the most decisive demonstrations of the authenticity of the Shroud of Christ.

It was Yves Delage who, on 21 April 1902, startled the Academy of Science with the now-famous report on the Shroud.

And in 1902, after careful study of the first photograph of the Shroud, made by Secondo Pia in 1898, Vignon published his first book: *The Shroud of Christ*. Then he remained silent on this subject for nearly thirty years.

During the Shroud exhibition of 1933, he was one of the few scientists admitted, for one whole night, to minutely examine the relic. This gained for us the great work of 1938: *The Holy Shroud of Turin: Science, Archeology, History, Iconography, Logic*, for which the French Academy awarded him a prize.

In this second work he seeks to supplement the argument for authenticity by archeological data, and essays a connection between the Shroud and the most ancient paintings and mosaics representing Christ; a filiation which no one is obliged to accept, even though so many commentators have taken up the idea from time to time. It would be greatly surprising if the ancient artists, viewing the Shroud's negative image in their total ignorance of photographic inversion, could have produced a positive portrait in which the negative model could be recognized.

In 1932 Vignon became Corresponding Member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. In the same year he organized the International Commission of the Holy Shroud, of which he was Secretary General. Later, the Prince of Piedmont appointed him president of this Commission.

In this capacity he carried on a long correspondence—from 1931 to 1939—with Cardinal Pacelli; and telegrams were exchanged between them when the Cardinal acceded to the papal throne with the name of Pius XII.

His correspondents included the King of Italy, Card. Tisserand, the philosopher Bergson, writers such as Mauriac and Claudel, and many other men of learning.

Although uncertainty still lies over his archeological references relative to the Shroud, and although the chemical process put forth in his vaporgraph theory is due for revision, the fact remains that Paul Vignon was the first true savant to confront the mystery of the Holy Shroud in an attempt to decipher its secrets scientifically. And in a

way he succeeded; today's increasing acceptance of the Shroud's authenticity can be largely attributed to his groundwork.

The combination of certifiable facts permitted the Sovereign Pontiff Pius XI to publicly proclaim, in 1936, that the internal critique of the Shroud showed, without any doubt, that it had belonged to the Crucified Victim of Golgotha.

A long time before this, Paul Vignon had appealed to radiology, hoping for information regarding the nature of the aromatics and of the vestiges of blood. Though he did not live to see it, his desire was fulfilled when Turin's Prof. Baima Bollone identified human blood on the Shroud. The examinations conducted in Turin after the 1978 Congress, the very sophisticated American research and the continuing work in Europe, all seem to be a prolongation of the studies of Paul Vignon, whose faith in the verity of the Holy Shroud was total and definite from the first encounter.

### **Paul Vignon, Biologist**

Paul Vignon's patient analyses of the Linen and the contribution to its identity would suffice to establish his fame as a scholar and a Christian. But the variety of the spheres of his scientific research, as well as the minute precision with which he pursued his studies, arouse our admiration.

His principal and great work in philosophy of biology appeared in 1930, illustrated with 24 plates and 890 figures, almost all of which were drawn by himself: *Introduction to Experimental Biology; Living Organisms, Activities, Instincts, Structures*.

From 1901 to 1943, when only death arrested his labors, numerous articles and communications were published in reviews dedicated to nature, to science, philosophy, apologetics ... His fame in scientific circles was established, not only in France but abroad as well.

His posthumous work, *At the Breath of the Creator-Spirit*, introduced by a very beautiful preface by Paul Claudel, appeared in 1943. The title alone shows to what summits he had arrived and what wide scope he had given to scientific studies. The scientist, the philosopher and the man of faith are here fulfilled in a magnificent synthesis.

In Vignon's character, the most note-worthy trait is his modesty. Throughout so much devotion to science, so much work, so many beneficial observations advancing our knowledge of nature, the modesty of the savant never once deserted him. Indeed it seemed to increase with every conquest. Never was he concerned about his personal renown. Never the slightest word of self-praise, never the least step to advance his career. Titles, distinctions, correspondence with world celebrities, did not draw him out of his reserve.

Working for science, the Christian Paul Vignon worked simultaneously

for God. One might say that while new scientific discoveries permitted him to extricate facts and laws which disclosed the most surprising secrets of biology, an immeasurably vaster domain was also unveiled, in which his spirit was captive of its own littleness and impotence.

Like the mountain climber who believes he has reached the summit only to see greater heights rise before him as he scales the slopes, so Vignon, in his impassioned approach toward what he called the "Impenetrable Fortress", saw his goal receding ever farther, ever loftier before him. His scientific research endued him with an acute sense of the transcendent and the inaccessibility of the Other, who, forever behind the curtain of appearances, still lets Himself be sought. More and more, the "Impenetrable Fortress" transmuted before his eyes into the Divine Name, who alone is Creator-Spirit.

On the 17th of October, 1943, at the family chateau of Herbeys in the Isere, death gently gathered Paul Vignon. He was nearly 78 years old.

Researchers of the end of the 20th century are often unaware that they are the inheritors of this good laborer, beneficiaries of his tenacity, love and loyalty. But looking back to this too rare, too little known exemplar of scientific study, this accomplished model of modesty animated by faith, they will salute the Master who traced the first furrows for their continuing attainments.

#### PRINCIPAL WORKS OF PAUL VIGNON

*Le Linceul du Christ*, Ed. Masson, 1902 (out of print)

*Le Problème du Saint-Suaire: Faits établies, Données nouvelles*, Revue de Paris, 1936

Vignon and Rev. Edward Wuenschel, C.S.S.R.: *The Problem of the Holy Shroud*, Scientific American, 1937

*Le Saint-Suaire de Turin devant la Science, l'Archéologie, l'Histoire, l'Iconographie, la Logique*, Ed. Masson, 1938. Translated into Latin, German, English, Spanish, Italian (out of print)

Second edition of the above, 1939 (out of print)

*Le Saint-Suaire de Turin et la Science*, Bulletin of the International Medical Asso. of Notre-Dame de Lourdes, 1938

*La Santa Sindone logicamente autentica*, Osservatore Romano, 1940

*Introduction à la Biologie Expérimentale*, Ed. Lechevalier, 1930

*Au Souffle de l'Esprit Créateur*, Ed. Beauchesne, 1943