

A FRENCH ACCUSATION AGAINST DR. TITE

On March 26 the Italian newspaper *Il Messaggero* carried a full page article highlighting an ostensibly sensational claim by French Catholic monk Frère Bruno Bonnet-Eymard that the Shroud carbon dating was, in effect, 'rigged'. Bonnet-Eymard accused the British Museum's Dr. Michael Tite of having specially asked for and obtained a sample of 13th. century French linen of similar colour and weave to the Shroud, apparently in order to switch this with the Shroud sample when dividing the portions up in the privacy of the side-room.

According to Bonnet-Eymard, Tite asked Jacques Evin of the Lyon carbon dating laboratory to find for him a 13th/14th. century sample as close to the Shroud fabric as possible. Evin found an appropriate sample, of the correct herring-bone weave and yellowish colour, from the cope of St. Louis d'Anjou who died in 1297. Tite wanted the sample sent by post, but fearing postal strikes, Evin delivered it via Lyon textile specialist Gabriel Vial, who had been invited to Turin to witness the taking of the Shroud sample on 21 April last year. Inexplicably, Vial produced the sample when everything was over and Cardinal Ballestrero had left. Riggi resented the intrusion and Tite initially refused to accept it, not least because there were no more special containers of the kind provided for the other samples. Eventually it was decided to cut up the sample and provide it to the laboratories in separate envelopes. While the official report on the carbon dating mentioned the cope, it spoke only of threads from it, and Bonnet Eymard's suspicions were aroused by the great similarity between the dating of the supposed Shroud samples and those from the cope. Bonnet-Eymard's suggestion is accordingly that there was a clandestine switch.

Thankfully, there appears to be absolutely no serious foundation for Bonnet-Eymard's claim. Despite Bonnet-Eymard's well-intended espousal of the Shroud's authenticity, it would have been surprising and not a little disturbing if the St. Louis d'Anjou cope was indeed of near identical weave and colour to the Shroud. But enquiries made directly to the Lyon textile specialist Gabriel Vial, and correspondence with P re Dubarle, who had also been in touch with Vial, reveal that the only herring-bone to the cope was that of an overlying gold embroidery. The linen itself was plain.

Furthermore, descriptions by Professor Hall and others of the debris found on the 'Shroud' samples make it quite clear that these were genuinely from the Shroud. And Dr. Tite's request for samples similar to the Shroud was a perfectly innocent and legitimate one: he even made the same to this Society several weeks before his journey to Turin. All this is quite aside from the suggestion of underhand behaviour on Dr. Tite's part, which is quite unthinkable to anyone acquainted with him.

The lesson is that however much some of us may disagree with the carbon dating result, and the too sweeping media acceptance of this as 'proof' of the Shroud's authenticity, such unfounded accusations of 'rigging' of the dating merely diminish our case. Regrettably, as was evident at the Bologna conference, Bonnet-Eymard's claims have received wide acceptance in Europe, even among some of the most well-respected scholars.

P.S. The mystery of the 'certificate' accompanying the Shroud samples, as featured in *Newsletter* no. 20 (p.7) has now been solved. From a telephone conversation with Professor Gonella it emerged that he [i.e. Gonella] drew up the certificates and supplied them for Dr. Tite and Cardinal Ballestrero's signature. This would explain Dr. Tite's otherwise puzzling reaction when questioned on this point at the BSTS carbon dating forum last November. It of course still means that the laboratories all along knew the dates of their 'controls'. Gonella seems to have regarded the controls as intended merely for the laboratories' calibration purposes, rather than for any independent check of the laboratories' results.