

## AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. MICHAEL TITE

Dr. Michael Tite, who acted as invigilator of the Shroud radiocarbon dating, has now become Professor, as well as Director of the Oxford University Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art. When he attended the Symposium in Paris, he was interviewed by Chantal Dupont of the Parisian radio station *Radio Courtoisie*, and the text of this, as recently reproduced in *Shroud Spectrum*, is given here for members' interest. Chantal Dupont's first question was to ask Dr. Tite his conclusions concerning the radiocarbon dating. He replied:

Carbon 14 has certainly shown the Shroud to be mediaeval. I am convinced that the Shroud is mediaeval.

*Chantal Dupont.* Why did you give the results as a journalistic scoop?

*Dr. Tite.* There were unfortunate leaks, but the scoop was due to the press, not us [spoken rather crossly].

*Chantal Dupont.* Who put the exclamation mark after the date on the blackboard?

*Dr. Tite.* I can't remember who did that, the press, Hall or me... It reflected the mood of the moment.

*Chantal Dupont.* Were you interested in the Shroud before your participation in the tests?

*Dr. Tite.* I was not interested in the Shroud before, but I am now, and will continue to follow events.

*Chantal Dupont.* Why was the blind test not carried out according to the protocol?

*Dr. Tite.* There were two aspects. We decided in January that we would rather not have a blind test because that could be done only by unravelling the samples, and that makes it much more difficult to clean. The decision to abandon the blind test was made in Turin at the moment of the cutting. As for Ballestrero and I going into a separate room, that was quite unnecessary.

*Chantal Dupont.* Why were the laboratory representatives present?

*Dr. Tite.* The laboratory representatives wanted to be there just for personal reasons, just to be part of the event...

*Chantal Dupont.* You accepted a fourth sample in an envelope. Why did you not stop the meeting?

*Dr. Tite.* A mediaeval sample is very difficult to find. There was none in the British Museum that we were permitted to destroy. I asked Vial, Evin, Wilson and others. When I arrived in Turin I learned that Evin had found some mediaeval threads. We had to make a decision quickly. It would have been impolite to refuse it. People would have been furious. It was done for scientific reasons and good will. [He laughs amiably]

*Chantal Dupont.* Why were the labs informed about the dates of the control samples?

*Dr. Tite.* It would have been better if the labs did not know the dates. If I did it again, in hindsight, I would do it differently. But that it invalidates the result is absolute nonsense.

*Chantal Dupont.* The Shroud is consistent with what we know about Jewish burial in ancient times

*Dr. Tite.* But carbon 14 is the only method that gives a scientific date. Inferences from other information are not hard facts.

*Chantal Dupont.* Do you believe the gospels?

*Dr. Tite.* No, I cannot believe the gospels. Any historical document is full of errors, even today.

*Chantal Dupont.* According to Matthew, something happened. Would the Resurrection have any influence on carbon 14?

*Dr. Tite.* If one accepts that there was some supernatural event... I suppose that if there was a flux of neutrons it could have influenced the date. As yet, no-one has tested neutrons... to see if that changes carbon 14. If there was a supernatural event and a change of neutrons it would be a major coincidence if it came to this precise mediaeval date.

*Chantal Dupont.* In iconography as early as the sixth century we see icons of Christ with characteristics similar to the Shroud face. How do you explain that?

*Dr. Tite.* I don't know, you tell me! [laughs] I personally believe we should leave relics as relics. Let people believe...

*Chantal Dupont.* But in the case of the Shroud there is so much other evidence for a first century date.

*Dr. Tite.* The only specific date is by carbon 14. The cross, the nail, the crown... It is best to leave well alone!

*Chantal Dupont.* What did you feel when you saw the Shroud?

*Dr. Tite.* [long pause] - Ah! - [pause] I mean... it is a remarkable image. I never looked at it the way I look at paintings of Christ; that is just an aesthetic experience rather than religious. I was there to do a specific job. It is different when you are in an art gallery or in churches. I did not see it as an aesthetic experience. It's tied in with my work.

*Chantal Dupont.* Would you be interested in further tests to solve some of the Shroud problems?

*Dr. Tite.* I do not feel the need. If it were a supernatural event... but I don't believe in that. If neutrons did change the carbon content, that could perhaps give an apparently aberrant date on the Shroud.