

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Holger Kersten & Elmar R. Gruber, *The Jesus Conspiracy: The Turin Shroud & The Truth about the Resurrection*, Element Books, Shaftesbury, Dorset; Rockport, Massachusetts & Brisbane, Queensland, 1994, £16.99, 373 pp. text, inc 32 pp, b & w. illustrations

Rodney Hoare, *The Turin Shroud is Genuine: The Irrefutable Evidence*, Souvenir Press, 1994, £13.99, 182 pp., text, including refs; 16 pp. b & w illustrations

Reviewed by Ian Wilson

There are some very good reasons for these two titles being reviewed together. Both argue that the carbon dating was wrong, and that the Shroud is genuinely that of Christ, dating back to the 1st. century A.D. Both argue that the Shroud shows that Jesus's heart was still beating when he was wrapped in the Shroud, and that this has some profound implications for the future of Christianity. Both are theoretically due for publication end-April/early May, though large piles of copies of *The Jesus Conspiracy* were already on sale at Heathrow bookstalls just before Easter, hence this otherwise premature review.

Rodney Hoare, a retired science teacher, first at Shrewsbury School, and later at Trent Polytechnic, Nottingham, is of course well-known as the current Chairman of the B.S.T.S., and his book will present few surprises for the Society's members His reasons for the carbon dating being wrong are based on the already familiar photographic, medical and art-historical evidence for the Shroud's genuineness, combined with some of the evidence for the fallibility of the carbon dating method highlighted in recent issues of this Newsletter. His well-respected arguments for Jesus having been still alive when taken down from the cross have already been aired in his *The Testimony of the Shroud* published back in 1978. This latest work by him commendably serves to bring up-to-date the case for the Shroud's genuineness, and he presents the evidence for this succinctly and forcefully.

However, likely to attract far more attention and controversy, and for all the wrong reasons, is the Kersten/Gruber tome, the English language translation of the German *Das Jesus Komplott* already mentioned in the last two issues of this Newsletter. This has twice the page length of Rodney Hoare's, reads like a detective novel, and seems to be the result of the most exhaustive research. From the flyleaf we learn that Holger Kersten studied theology and pedagogics at Freiburg University, and that his earlier *Jesus Lived in India*; also published by Element, sold 250,000 copies worldwide. Elmar Gruber 'studied psychology, philosophy and ethnography in Vienna; Freiburg and Los Angeles' and is 'a scientific advisor for German television and radio.' From the authoritative way this duo handle the evidence for the Shroud's early history and castigate the people they interview, particularly the C14 scientists, for their lack of precision over recalling the minutiae of weights and measurements of Shroud samples, we might expect their own standards to be of the highest, particularly in view of the serious allegations they make against certain individuals' honesty.

But all is not what it seems, as when Kersten devotes several pages to an in-depth interview with former BSTS General Secretary Susan Black - except that for some unexplained reason he

consistently misquotes her name as Susan Brown. Susan 'Brown' and myself are also thanked early in the acknowledgements, presumably for having helped with the book. This is curious considering that my own 'help' consisted almost entirely of several times urging Kersten to redirect his line of investigation away from his scientific conspiracy allegations. Susan Black, for her part, who says she does not recognise some of the statements attributed to her, similarly insists that during her brief meeting with Kersten she tried to redirect him likewise. Yet these exhortations go unmentioned.

As for Kersten's co-author Gruber, with whom neither I nor Susan Black have had any contact whatsoever, he devotes nearly a third of the book to a reconstruction of the Shroud's history which might seem commendable for its exhaustiveness, were it not for the fact that it is almost entirely dependent upon my own *The Turin Shroud*. Indeed, some of my own reconstructions have been blithely redrawn without either permission or acknowledgement.

The authors' arguments for Jesus not having died on the cross are of course nothing new. D.H. Lawrence, Hugh J. Schonfield (author of the best-selling *Passover Plot*), former waiter Hans Naber/Kurt Berna/John Reban (memorably interviewed by Kersten on pp.305-9, but not acknowledged as one of his helpers), and our own Rodney Hoare are merely among the better-known of those who have espoused this hypothesis. Regardless of the Shroud, there is a perfectly respectable case to be made for this, but Gruber feels obliged to go further and present Jesus's crucifixion as not only non-fatal, but almost cosy. Purportedly Essene-affiliated Jesus probably trained himself by *yogi* techniques not to feel the pain of the scourging. He also had the luxury of having his cross carried for him 'for a good part of the stretch of about 550 to 650 metres... to the site of execution.' Apparently the vinegar-soaked sponge offered to him on the cross was specially laced with coma-inducing opium to give him the semblance of a quick death. The lance-thrust in the side was little more than 'a light scratch'.

As for the fact that the Shroud bears bloodstains, this is the proof that Jesus's heart was still beating when he was laid in it - because a dead body cannot bleed (have the authors not come across blood spilling from dead meat?). And the reason why there is an image on the Shroud is because it was specially coated with healing myrrh and aloes to act as a healing cloth. Entertainingly, Kersten even had himself specially smeared with a mixture of this kind in order to replicate the Shroud's image, though curiously he seems to have chosen only to try to create a below-the-neck image of his torso, omitting any attempt to replicate the face. The reader must judge for himself the convincingness of this.

At the core of the Kersten/Gruber book is, however, the charge that the whole Shroud carbon dating was a charade carefully orchestrated by unknown individuals within the Vatican, but below the level of Pope. Apparently these knew that the Shroud was genuine, knew that it 'proved' that Jesus did not die on the Cross, and therefore feared that if the Shroud's genuineness became proven by carbon-dating finding a first century date, the whole two thousand year old foundation of the Christian faith would be destroyed, and with it their livelihoods. Dr. Michael Tite of the British Museum was therefore specially commissioned deftly to switch samples the moment no-one was looking, so that the purported 'Shroud' linen passed to the laboratories was in reality from a cloth made in the 14th century.

Kersten and Gruber claim to have 'conclusively' proved this via some impressive-sounding computer scanning techniques showing that the photographs taken of the 'Shroud' samples before carbon-dating are incompatible with the Shroud itself. Even to this non-scientific layman, the likelihood seems to be that pieces of hand-made linen, stretchable in different directions, and with every run of warp and weft likely to be of different thicknesses, are less than suitable materials for any computer 'matching'. Indeed, by way of homely personal demonstration, the scanner with the computer on which this Newsletter is produced failed to match scans of two sides of the Shroud face, despite the fact that its 'autostitch' facility is specially designed to do this.

However, by far the most disturbing feature of Kersten and Gruber's claims is that on the strength of their pseudo-science they have seen fit to malign the honesty and integrity of Professor Michael Tite, for there is little doubt that their allegations against him constitute the most serious libel, and on an international scale. Adherents of the Shroud's authenticity have simply to choose whether or not to ally themselves with the likes of Kersten and Gruber, but for Professor Tite there is the altogether more daunting Catch 22, dilemma that to take legal action against the two authors is likely to draw the very attention to, and publicity for, *The Jesus Conspiracy* that they and their publishers crave.

Professor Tite's decision on this is not envied, but for this Editor no agonising is needed. Kersten and Gruber can contribute nothing but harm to the *serious* case for carbon dating's fallibility and for the Shroud's authenticity. *The Jesus Conspiracy* is a product utterly unworthy of its central subject, and should be rejected out-of-hand. By contrast, although Rodney Hoare's *The Turin Shroud is Genuine* offers little that is new, and shares with *The Jesus Conspiracy* the thesis of Jesus having been still alive when taken down from the cross, it is an altogether worthier book, and comes highly recommended ...

Julian Litten. *The English Way of Death*, Robert Hale, London, 1991

In the wake of Deirdre O'Sullivan's memorable recent talk on St. Bee's Man, those who became interested in mediaeval shrouds and their dimensions may care to refer to Julian Litten's book, published back in 1991, for some rare data on early burial practices. In chapter 3, Dress'd and Trimm'd: Winding Sheets and Shrouds' Litten reproduces a small mid-15th century manuscript illumination which, in his words:

...provides an insight into how the body was wrapped. A sheet of cloth has been placed on to a stripped bed, the winding sheet has been folded over the left-hand side of the corpse, the remainder drawn over the right, while the arms have been folded across the body in line with the bottom of the rib-cage. Sometimes the winding-sheet was pinned, at other times it was sewn along the centre; the artist of the *c.1435 Heures de Neville*, also in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, shows two corpses with centre-sewn winding sheets in a larger illumination of monks reading in a bone-yard. [op. cit., p.59]

Litten also describes how English memorial brasses that have survived the Reformation are helpful towards gauging the dimensions of mediaeval shrouds. In Litten's words:

It is extremely difficult to gauge accurately the dimensions of

the shroud from these brasses, but a mean average would be twelve inches longer than the length of the body - to allow for a six-inch knot at top and bottom - and three times its width.

Clearly these descriptions match extremely well the actual shrouds found wrapping St. Bee's Man. What they do *not* match is the Turin Shroud. Yet another indication of just how out of kilter the Shroud is with being the product of a mediaeval mind?