

Letters to the Editor

Reconstructing the Crucifixion

The last Newsletter touched on the various controversies surrounding how the man of the Shroud would have hung on the cross, e.g. whether he faced the upright, or (as in traditional crucifixes), whether he had his back to this. This topic raised lively interest, including the following letters:

From Professor Jim Tomlinson of Pennsylvania

I am a professor of Communication at a Bloomsburg University in Pennsylvania USA. I have for almost 20 years given presentations about the Shroud, and have the following observations.

It makes a lot of sense, that the Romans would "top" a tree for the upright part of the cross - but, several months ago, while watching the "History Channel" - there was a program about the Soviet Army during WW II. They were showing footage from the siege of Stalingrad - and several Soviet soldiers were placing large wooden poles into the ground. They had dug holes, stood the poles upright in them, and then used 4 men to hammer the tall poles firmly into the ground. They did this by taking a large log (looked about 3 feet long and a diameter of a foot or more) they nailed one end of each of 4 boards to the log and then, with one man on each board (which looked about 5 feet in length) - were lifting the log high in the air, and using it as a hammer to sink the pole deeper into the ground. It was amazing how effective this was. It seemed plausible to me, that the Romans may have also done something like this.

Secondly - about the nail in the heel of poor Jehohanan. From the time I first read about this discovery, back when I was in college - I had always assumed that this poor man had been nailed to the cross piece by the wrists, and as they lifted him up, he must have put up a terrible struggle - screaming, kicking and fighting. As the Romans tried to secure him to the upright piece, I figured that some legionnaire must have simply grabbed his legs, one at a time and pinned him to the side of the cross while another Roman drove the spike into his heel bone. A man who had not been horribly beaten or scourged, like Jesus was, would still have some strength to struggle with his executioners.

Finally, about which way the victim would face - back or chest towards the upright piece. It seems to me that the graffiti evidence is strange. My own observations of children's art, is that they often include first the major feature, and then add to it. Could it not be that these ancient pictures, which are clearly very rough sketches, could simply be the "artist" first drawing the cross as the guide to the rest of the picture? Also, the head could be turned to the side and thus gives the illusion of facing the cross. Also, if a person was facing the cross, they might be able to use their chin, or even fingers to help keep them "up" on the cross. Finally, since crucifixion was to be a humiliation and a lesson to observers, hanging the victim facing outward would be the more horrifying. It would also be more difficult to break a mans legs if he were "straddling" the cross, because you would be striking from the side of the leg, where the calf has much more "meat" on the bones. However, a victim hanging facing out from the upright piece, would have his shin bones exposed for an easy blow to break them.

From Shirley Wade

It is not clear to me why you appear to feel so strongly that the tubules of wood definitely establish a back to the cross position. My understanding is that they had to carry the cross-bar to the execution site, and surely the obvious way to carry a beam heavy enough to support the weight of a man would be across the shoulders, in which case the back of the head could have picked up the wood at that time.

I find the fact that the body had a tendency to push away from the cross more convincing. Perhaps we should envisage a back to the cross position with the hands taken behind. If the nails were then driven in sideways through the bones of the wrist to come out at the base of the palms that might give some reality to the idea of blood from the palms.

Shirley Wade email: smwade@argonet.co.uk

Forthcoming Events

Year 2000

26 August - 19 September . Shroud Exhibition, with Shroud photographs and 14 exhibition units including display of books. Église du Gesù, 1202 de Bleury, **Montréal, Canada**. For further information contact Karl Schulz, Holy Face Association, 212 L'Espérance, St-Lambert Qué, J4P 1Y2, Canada, tel +1 450 672 0294; fax +1 450 465 9386

12 August - 22 October. Daily Expositions of the Shroud, Turin Cathedral. Several tours are being arranged, among these a 13 night, 14 day one departing 22 September from the USA led by Rev. Kim Dreisbach of the Atlanta Center for Continuing Study of the Shroud of Turin, and Fr. Fred Brinkmann of the Holy Shroud Guild. The itinerary includes Istanbul, Milan, Turin, Venice and Florence, with the option of an extension taking in Rome and Assisi. For further details , e-mail sales@ select-intl.com

27-29 August Worldwide Congress, Sindone 2000, Palazzo del Capitano del Popolo, **Orvieto, Italy**. Further information from the Organizing Secretariat, Prommeeting, Vicolo del Popolo I, 20, 05018 Orvieto, TR, Italy, tel +39 0763 344890; fax +39 0763 344880; e-mail: pro@orvienet.it

Year 2001

2-6 October (provisional) International Shroud Conference, Bathurst, New South Wales, Australia. Further details to be released in due course.