

Thomas de Wesselow, *The Sign, The Shroud of Turin and the Secret of the Resurrection*, Viking, 448pp, £20. Can also be purchased as an eBook for £20.



If I were to sum up my reactions in one sentence, this would have to be 'Don't be too hard on this book.' At Easter time agnostic Cambridge art historian Thomas de Wesselow's *The Sign* attracted in the U.K., the U.S. and Australia the kind of media attention to the Shroud that the subject hasn't seen - in the English-speaking world at least - in over a decade. In Australia, for instance, de Wesselow was sympathetically and lengthily interviewed live on Easter morning, via direct link to Cambridge, by one of Australia's big two morning TV shows. Likewise in the US he was on an equivalent programme, CBS Sunday Morning, again on Easter morning. There are already to be translations of his book in Dutch, German and Portuguese (for Brazil), with several more expected.

But has de Wesselow's book been welcomed by the 'Shroudie' world? Certainly not from what I have been able to judge of its pulse so far. And that's not altogether difficult to understand given the flip side of the de Wesselow argument - that while the Shroud genuinely dates back to the time of Jesus, and genuinely wrapped his crucified body, Jesus did not actually rise from the dead, nor was his tomb found empty. According to de Wesselow it was nothing more (though also nothing less) than the sight of the so Shroud's enigmatic body and blood imprints which persuaded the apostles of Jesus' Resurrection.

Yet sometimes a book can come along which although you may remain ultimately unconvinced by its key argument, is so authoritative, so informative, so sincere in its approach and so engagingly written that you can only applaud these qualities and admire it regardless. Hugh J. Schonfield's 1960s bestseller *The Passover Plot*, which very persuasively argued that there was a cunning plan for Jesus to cheat death on the cross, was one such book. And I have no hesitation in acclaiming Thomas de Wesselow's as another. Indeed it is actually rather more original than that of Schonfield, which drew upon D.H.Lawrence and others.

Furthermore there can be no serious quarrel regarding the validity of one key component of de Wesselow's central thesis, that people in antiquity could and did perceive images, human or indeed animal, as being far more 'alive' than we do today. Even in our present-day, so image-bombarded society, we haven't entirely lost the idea, for how many of us hesitate to throw away the portrait of a long-deceased grandmother, superstitiously fearing that the action might somehow be disrespectful to the person herself?

As de Wesselow argues, when Jews of Jesus' time, for whom images were altogether rarer and more magical commodities, were presented with the Shroud they might easily have reacted much as if they had the real life flesh and blood post-crucifixion Jesus before them. He cites one perennially cryptic component in St Paul's 1 Corinthians list of Jesus' Resurrection appearances 'and next he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time' (chapter 15, verse 6), asking very tellingly: why are we not otherwise told of this so extraordinary event? Couldn't it have been an early Shroud exposition? But he is rather less convincing when he claims that Jesus' body did not disappear from the tomb, pleading, as he does, that later editing was responsible for whatever contradictions may appear in the gospel testimonies. As a former agnostic, now practising Christian with a great respect for the fundamental veracity of those testimonies, particularly John's, such a stance certainly strains my credulity. But then, isn't the 'orthodox' Christian interpretation of the Resurrection itself so incredible that who are we to judge when someone else puts an interestingly different slant on it?

Furthermore, whatever the limitations of de Wesselow's more theological arguments (which, after all, are not his academic field), there is one extremely categorical assertion of his, emanating directly from his area of professional expertise, which ought to have every 'Shroudie' positively cheering from the rooftops: 'Technically, conceptually and stylistically the shroud makes no sense as a mediaeval artwork'. For thirty-four years I have waited for an art historian of de Wesselow's calibre and professionalism to come out with such an unequivocal statement of what to me has always been the obvious. As any conscientious art historian should, 40-year-old de Wesselow specially attended the Shroud expositions of 2010 to view the original at first hand, and although he is a self-confessed agnostic the experience clearly affected him emotionally at a very deep level:



Thomas de Wesselow

The effect is mesmeric. Seen horizontally, the figure is eerie and evocative; seen vertically, it is faintly terrifying. The vacant, glaring eyes – two white discs amid a face that is barely there – hold me spellbound. No other image I have ever seen comes close to it – not the frowning visage of Michelangelo's Moses, not the frightful stare of Goya's Saturn. The sense of a veiled presence is inescapable.

Despite the very hostile way that some pro-Shroud commentators have reacted to him, de Wesselow is definitely no Dawkins, and from his book, his TV interviews, and an as yet relatively brief email correspondence with him, I have found him very much more sympathetic to at least the spirit of the Easter story than he has been perceived by his critics on both sides of the debate. Accordingly I positively welcome him onto the Shroud scene as an ally rather than any foe, and commend him unreservedly for his intellectual courage when far

too many of his academic colleagues for far too long have either condemned in ignorance, pretended the Shroud doesn't exist, or simply sat on their hands.

This said, for me one undeniable disappointment about de Wesselow's book is that, coming as it does from as a Courtauld-trained art historian who has worked at the National Gallery and has had direct professional experience of evaluating whether centuries-old artworks are genuine or forged, its proportion of actual art history is relatively small. Thankfully he freely acknowledges this and assures me that this will be remedied by a second book he is about to begin researching which will be specially devoted to these kinds of issues. In his own words:

I think it's time to get stuck into the lazy assumption of a medieval fake, and, fortunately, given my background, that's something I can do with a bit of authority. And I think we can explain all the documentation and a load of visual imagery far more cogently than the current orthodoxy, which shuts its eyes to so much.

Given that sort of promise I can easily forgive Thomas de Wesselow a few theological differences, and most heartily recommend you to do the same...

Pierre de Riedmatten, *Le Saint-Suaire*, Editions Fidélité, Namur (Belgium), No.78 in the collection 'Que penser de...', 143 pp. 10 €

A retired engineer, Pierre de Riedmatten is President of Montre-Nous Ton Visage, the French equivalent of the BSTS. His book was necessarily brief, and with only black and white illustrations in order to conform with the format of the 'Que penser' series. However it is mostly very up-to-date in the information that it carries, and is a model of simplicity and succinctness.

For the overall plan of his book Pierre de Riedmatten addresses a series of key questions: (1) what is the Shroud's provenance? (2) how was the image formed? (3) whose body did it wrap? and (4) what is the position of the Church concerning its authenticity? In general, given his book's brevity, he provides a remarkably comprehensive summary of the main scientific and historical data. He ably addresses some of the more prominent opponents of the Shroud's authenticity, such as Nicholas Allen, Emily Craig, Jacques di Costanzo and Luigi Garlaschelli, and is at his best in summarising some of the more complex scientific ideas that laymen such as myself struggle perennially to understand. A notable example of this is the deuterium theory of J.B.Rinaudo (a Catholic priest and teacher of physics whose writings had hitherto largely escaped me), to explain how the Shroud's so substance-less image and the enrichment of its carbon that allegedly



skewed the C14 reading effectively derived from one and the same nuclear process.

However when dealing with historical and art historical matters, which he tackles at somewhat disproportionate length, Pierre de Riedmatten is rather less within his comfort zone, and given his book's constraints of length it is a pity that he chose to include some of the weaker arguments for the Shroud's authenticity, such as the lettering-on-the-Shroud claims of André Marion et Anne-Laure Courage, also the coin inscription claims of Father Francis Filas.

Brice Perrier, *Qui a peur du Saint Suaire?*, Florent Massot, 2011, 19.50 €, 288 pages, some black and white photos included with text.

Brice Perrier is an independent journalist who has talked to an impressive variety of people, both supporters and detractors, concerning the Shroud, and has uncovered some intriguing insights. This, for instance, is the surprising result of his questioning Turin's Monsignor Ghiberti, the most senior churchman below the Cardinal directly responsible for all matters concerning the Shroud:

In Turin, when I questioned Monsignor Ghiberti over the idea that the Shroud might be evidence for the Resurrection he immediately became guarded towards me: 'You are going too far. The Resurrection is the foundation of our faith and I have no hesitation affirming it as a fact. But to say that the Shroud is direct testimony of it, that I wouldn't dare to venture...



Exploring the Shroud's fifteenth century history, Perrier interestingly suggests that although we know Duke Louis I of Savoy to have been the first of his line to own the Shroud, acquiring it in 1453, the member of the Savoy dynasty most responsible for securing its bequest from Margaret de Charny may actually have been Duke Amadeus VIII, 'the Solomon of his time' according to some historians, who had died two years earlier. The first of his line to be elevated to the title of Duke, Duke Amadeus was a genuinely saintly individual who became anti-pope (under the name Felix V), between 1439 and 1449, thereafter to retire and live out the last two years of his life as a hermit on the shores of Lake Geneva. At that time Margaret de Charny was living not far away at St Hippolyte sur Doubs, very close to the Savoy border, and we know from the key historical document concerning the Shroud's handover that this was signed at Geneva, then part of the

Savoy domains. Perrier quotes from the historian Bernard Demotz: 'It is a strong possibility that this hand-over was the result of a process initiated by Amadeus'. Reportedly, Amadeus was in the habit of conducting long negotiations, and he knew how to be patient. In Perrier's words, he was a man who 'dreamed to envelop the Shroud with a hitherto unparalleled aura of legitimacy even after his death.'

Although Perrier's book is clearly intended for the general reader rather than the specialist, I feel bound to comment that its omission of either bibliography or notes and references is very regrettable given the otherwise serious and conscientious way that Perrier has conducted his researches. As yet I have somewhat dipped into the book rather than reading it from cover to cover, but greatly look forward to exploring it further.

Anne Walters Robertson 'The Man with the Pale Face, the Shroud, and Du Fay's *Missa Se la face ay pale*'. *The Journal of Musicology*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Fall 2010), pp. 377-434

Having been born tone-deaf, and always a complete dunce on the subject of music, I never even remotely dreamed that musicology might ever be included on the list of specialist academic disciplines touching on the Shroud. However, this highly scholarly, informative and historically deeply significant article proves that when dealing with the subject of the Shroud you should always expect the unexpected.



Professor Anne Walters
Robertson

Yale University-educated Professor Anne Walters Robertson is Claire Dux Swift Distinguished Service Professor of the Department of Music at the University of Chicago, and currently President of the American Musicological Society. She is a specialist in the vernacular polyphony of the later Middle Ages, and has a particular interest in the works of the 15th century French (albeit more accurately Belgian-born) composer Guillaume Du Fay.

For us of immediate interest-value about Du Fay is that he had two main periods of employment with the Savoy, first as master of chapel with Duke Amadeus VIII during the 1430s, when he composed a secular ballade 'Se la face ay pale', then in 1452, when he became a kind of composer-in-residence to Amadeus' successor Duke Louis I of Savoy. It was at much this same time that Louis took over ownership of the Shroud from Margaret de Charny, and Professor Robertson's special contribution to Shroud



Guillaume Du Fay (seen at left)

studies has been to show very convincingly that the Mass that Du Fay composed at that period, the *Missa Se la face ay pale'*, which he directly based on his earlier secular ballad, was specifically composed in honour of the Shroud. This is despite the fact that the association with the Shroud is far from obvious from any superficial reading of the text, not least because this refers principally to the 'pale face' of Jesus rather than to anything that we might more directly identify with the Shroud. For a relatively modest fee Professor Robertson's highly recommended article can be accessed online via <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.1525/jm.2010.27.4.377>. You can also listen to extracts from the choir of All Souls, Oxford singing the *Missa* via the link: <http://www.hyperion-records.co.uk/al.asp?al=CDA67715>.

Of great interest is that at this very same period Guillaume Du Fay composed for Duke Louis two laments on the fall of Constantinople, which of course happened in the very same year of 1453. Which can only make you wonder whether Duke Louis knew rather more about the Shroud's earlier Constantinopolitan provenance than has yet come to light...