

Urfa, Turkey: A proposal for an archaeological survey of the town that (arguably) was the Shroud's home for nearly a thousand years

by Ian Wilson

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Abstract: If the Shroud genuinely dates to the 1st century AD, only one hypothesis viably accounts for its historical whereabouts prior to the 1350s. That hypothesis is the cloth's identification with the so-called Image of Edessa lost from Constantinople in 1204. Yet if this identification is valid it means that the Shroud spent nearly half its history in Urfa (the former Edessa) in Eastern Turkey, a town that despite once bristling with ancient Christian churches, today has not one of these left standing. To make matters worse, many Christians haven't even heard of Urfa, and despite its having been continuously inhabited back to remotest antiquity (it may well have been the true 'Ur' of Abraham), it has never been properly archaeologically surveyed, let alone excavated. This paper urges the need for such an archaeological survey, particularly in the light of the Turkish local authorities' continuing disregard for ancient remains uncovered on construction sites. It also outlines a plan for implementing this, beginning with a preliminary expedition hopefully during the spring or autumn of 2001.

I think I can fairly say that the majority of us attending this Conference share the belief, rightly or wrongly, that the Turin Shroud is genuinely the sheet that was used to wrap Jesus' dead body nearly 2000 years ago. If we think this, then in all logic the Shroud has to have existed *somewhere* before its so-called 'historical' emergence in Lirey, France, in the 1350s. Explaining where it was kept during this first 1300-odd years has long been a major difficulty, and it remains so. But certainly for me, if we are looking for first millennium AD descriptions of a cloth seemingly miraculously imprinted with Jesus' image that *could* have been our Shroud, then there is only one seriously viable candidate. I refer to the so-called cloth of Edessa, or image of Edessa, also known as the Holy Mandylion. It is more than twenty years since I wrote my book advancing the Shroud's identification with this cloth¹ - indeed twenty-five since my first published article on the subject - and throughout that time there does not seem to have emerged any significantly more satisfactory explanation for the Shroud's early history. Save of course the 1988 carbon dating verdict², which flatly denies any such history. So if you believe the Shroud genuine, you may disagree with me on points of historical detail (and you are more than welcome to do so!). But you are more than a little stuck with at least the bare bones of my interpretation, something that I can feel no pride in, but rather, very considerable responsibility...

For assuming that the Shroud is genuine, also that I am right that it is one and the same as the otherwise lost cloth of Edessa, then it has to have spent up to nine hundred years of its existence – twice as long as its entire time in Turin – in a town that most ordinary members of the public have never ever even heard of, still less can place on a map [slide 1]. All too often,

when I speak of the place, journalists and others think that I must be referring to Odessa in Russia. To further confuse matters, for many centuries Edessa has not even been known by that name. Just as the former 'Constantinople' is today Turkish Istanbul, so 'Edessa' is today Urfa [slide 2], or Sanliurfa, capital of a province of that same name in far south-eastern Turkey, close to Turkey's border with Syria. It is some three hundred miles north of the Holy Land. As a fiercely Muslim town it is way off any normal Christian pilgrimage itineraries. And being on the fringes of Kurdish country, and miles away from the nearest coast, it is not exactly the most sought-after tourist destination even for Turks.

To make matters worse, for any Christian, let alone any card-carrying 'Shroudie', Urfa appears to offer nothing of Christian interest even when you get there. To the best of my knowledge there is not a single Christian church, and certainly not an ancient one, the Moslem minaret being all-pervading. Of obvious ancient remains, the most prominent are two columns [slide 3] on the citadel overlooking the town, that are reliably thought to have belonged to a pagan temple dating from around the time of Christ. As for Shroud associations, nowhere is there even the hint of a sign saying 'the Shroud was kept here', nor a single shop or stall selling Shroud photos or souvenirs. Hardly surprising, since even among the most die-hard 'Shroudies', the number who have ever actually visited the place can be accounted little more than a handful.

Yet if we could turn the clock back just over a thousand years, say to 943 AD, what a different picture of Edessa/Urfa we would find! Despite the city even then having fallen under Moslem control (though Arab rather than Turkish), we would find a full-blooded city, as distinct from a town, almost literally bristling with Christian churches and monasteries [slide 4], numbering more than three hundred, according to one Arab geographer.³ At least three different rival denominations were represented, and the Christian pilgrim and tourist trade was then already at least six centuries old.

The problem is that it takes a real feat of the historical imagination to appreciate any of this. So from what we know from historical sources, let me try to paint you a picture of just a few of the principal Christian buildings that you would have seen just over a thousand years ago. Also explain why at that time this town was positively no unknown backwater, but very much a 'must' on the itinerary of any first millennium Christian's 'Grand Tour'.

From the north, here (1) was the Church of the Confessors, built in the 4th century to commemorate the martyrdom, a century earlier, of three Edessan Christians, Gurya, Shamona and Habib during a savage crackdown on Christians on the part of the Roman emperor Diocletian. This particular church should remind us that for everyone of a thousand years ago a prime component of Edessa's then fame was that it had become converted to Christianity very early in Christianity's history, the martyrs Gurya, Shamona and Habib having been by no means its earliest evangelists.

A little to the south here (2) was the church of St. Stephen, which a 5th century Edessan bishop converted from what had formerly been a Jewish synagogue. This church may thereby serve to remind us that historically Edessa is known to have had flourishing Jewish community as early as the time of Jesus, also that its inhabitants as a whole spoke a Syriac that differed no more from Jesus' Aramaic than, say, Texan English differs from that spoken in New York's Bronx .

A little further south still, here (3) was what we today would call the Eastern Orthodox church of Mary, Mother of God, there being a second church also dedicated to Mary that belonged to a powerful independent sect, the so-called Monophysite or Jacobite Christians.

A little to the south-west, here (4) was the Church of St. John and St. Addai, one of the most highly revered in Edessa because, as universally believed back in the first millennium, it had been Addai, as one of Jesus' seventy 'outer circle' of disciples, who had brought Christianity to Edessa only very shortly after Jesus' crucifixion, healing Edessa's king of the time, Abgar, and converting him to Christianity. At the end of the 5th century both Addai's remains, and those of Abgar, were reverently exhumed from their tombs outside Edessa's walls and reburied in a special silver shrine within this church, a church later embellished by Crusaders. Because to the early Edessans Addai was essentially their exact equivalent of St. Peter for Rome, many of the city's bishops and other leading lights chose to be buried in this church, as close as possible to their founding predecessor.

Further south still, here (5) by a stream fed from Edessa's long-renowned spring, stood the Basilica of St. Thomas, so named because what was universally supposed to be where the body of the apostle himself was laid after its having been brought from India in the fourth century AD. An abbess of that time, Egeria (or Etheria), travelled all the way from Spain to pray at this shrine as part of her 'Grand Tour', and she wrote a travel diary⁴ which not only describes her visit, but also provides our best description of Edessa as it looked at this early period. One feature that Egeria particularly remarked on then, and which you can still see today, is (6) the so-called *baliklar* or fish pool [slide 5], brimming with carp too sacred for anyone to catch.

Just across the stream from this pool here (7) stood the earlier-mentioned Monophysite or Jacobite church of the Mother of God. Just a short walk eastwards, but demanding a climb up onto the city's citadel here (8) was the Monophysites' Church of St. Theodore, a location in which, according to one Edessan story, the Image of Edessa alias the Shroud was kept for a while in a subterranean chapel between this and the Mary, Mother of God Church.

But the location of major Shroud interest has to have been here (9) where is thought to have stood the Cathedral church of Hagia Sophia, in which the Shroud was certainly kept for much of the time up to 944 AD. Constructed entirely of stone upon the foundations of an earlier, so-called

‘Great Church’ ruined in the flood of 525 AD, this Cathedral was built in the 6th century using funds supplied by the Emperor Justinian - the same Byzantine emperor responsible for the still extant and thereby altogether more famous Hagia Sophia, Constantinople [slide 6] Whatever we may think of the Constantinople Hagia Sophia, in the 9th century the Arab Ibn Khodadhibey reported the Byzantines to regard its Edessan namesake as the most beautiful stone building that had ever been constructed,⁵ and to give us some idea of its size, in the next century it was hailed as the largest building in the entire Moslem empire. According to another Arab, al-Muqddasi, the Edessa cathedral’s mosaic-covered vaults made it one of the three wonders of the world.

Now thanks to a *sougitha* or Syriac hymn dateable to c.569 AD⁶ we know quite a lot about this same cathedral’s setting and architecture.[slide 7] We are told, for instance, that its site was surrounded by water, and that it had a dome or cupola supported by four great arches, thereby giving it the form of a cube topped by a vaulted sphere, in the thought of the time, symbolising the Universe. (It is worth noting that up to this period such a design was used only for Christian *martyria*, i.e. sites either embodying a Christian martyr’s grave, or bearing some special witness to Jesus’ life and death.) We are also told that three of the cathedral’s sides were identical, with many windows, the fourth being taken up by the apse. We are further told that it was flanked by two porticoes with columns symbolising the twelve tribes of Israel, that it had an *ambo* or pulpit supported by eleven columns, symbolising the eleven disciples who received the Holy Spirit, and that behind this *ambo* stood a single column symbolising the crucifixion. Beyond this stood the main altar, protected by a 10 column *baldachino* reminiscent of the *baldachino* of the altar of St.Peter’s, while behind this, towards the apse’s furthest point, rose nine steps, symbolising the nine orders of angels, leading up to a throne representing the very throne of Christ himself.

As for where the image of Edessa, alias our Shroud, was kept within this edifice, we know that this was in a special *soros* or *martyrium* most likely adjoining this same apse. The *sougitha*, in describing all this architecture, in fact also provides with the earliest-known historical reference to the image of Edessa as an extant contemporary object, a description of the Cathedral’s marble as ‘bearing the impress of the image made without hands’ From a later, 10th century, liturgical text, the so-called Liturgical Tractate⁷, we are further told that there were two days of the week when the Edessan populace and any visiting pilgrims, apparently queued out here in one of the Cathedral’s porticoes, were allowed to look through a grille at just the chest [*theke*] containing the image. Then, on the Sunday before the beginning of Lent, there was held a special procession during which the image alias our Shroud, in its casket, covered with white linen, was brought out of the *soros* and carried down this portico and then up the nave to the throne in a special procession accompanied by twelve incense-bearers, twelve torch-bearers and twelve bearers of *flabella* or liturgical fans. In a custom redolent of that Biblically associated with the Jewish High Priest’s once a year entering of the Jerusalem Temple’s ‘Holy of Holies’, just once a year on

‘the fourth day in the middle week of Lent’, Edessa’s archbishop alone was allowed to enter the image’s shrine and ‘to open up the chest in which it [the Image of Edessa alias our Shroud], lay.’

Of where the Image alias our Shroud was before its time in this cathedral, the best that historical sources can do is tell us where it was found. As conveyed by this much later Russian icon [slide 8], it was walled up above a gate of the city, having apparently been concealed there since the period when Edessa was ruled by kings, that is, no later than the first half of the 3rd century AD. Assuming that this walling up is genuinely historical, then the likeliest of Edessa’s gates for this has to be the West Gate, since (a) the gate’s alternative name (*Kappe*) meant ‘Gate of Arches (or vaults), clearly indicating a structure containing the sort of cavities that might well have been used for immuring purposes; and (b) it was described with some special Christian reverence – even though there is clearly no awareness of what it might contain – by the pilgrim Egeria in the 4th century AD.

Of its time before its immuring in that gate, our knowledge is even hazier. Nonetheless Byzantine tradition associates its coming to Edessa with Edessa’s royal dynasty, a line of petty kings known mostly alternately as Abgar and Maanu, the fifth Abgar, *Ukkama* (the Black), who would have been directly contemporary with Jesus, having been accredited with being cured of a disease directly as a result of this image. Historically we cannot be sure that this particular Abgar became converted to Christianity. But it is again a fact that some of the coins of the eighth Abgar, Abgar the Great (who reigned at the end of the 2nd century and the beginning of the 3rd), show his royal tiara emblazoned with a cross [slide 9]. If this is indeed the Christian cross, then this Abgar was far and away the earliest monarch in all history to display his Christianity in this manner. Equally incontrovertible is that already in this same Abgar’s reign Edessa had an officially tolerated Christian church, as evident from a contemporary chronicle.⁸ Furthermore, a 4th century text, the *Doctrine of Addai*⁹, based on earlier sources, gives a convincingly detailed description of the city as it was around the first century AD. This describes a ‘great pagan altar’ in Edessa’s midst, apparently opposite the office where the city’s archives were compiled and stored, and gives its pre-Christian gods as the ancient pagan deities Nebu and Bel. Planet-worship appears to have been popular, as indeed it long continued to be in Edessa/Urfa’s near-neighbour Harran. If we want to try to picture where the palace of these Edessan monarchs might have been located, then the original one would seem to have been close to the fish-pools and spring, while a later, summer one was built on top of the citadel (10), probably close to that pagan temple with the columns.

Everything of the Shroud’s early history ought, therefore, to be so very meaningful if only we could put some flesh to even just some of these locations in which some remains might have survived. In practice, however, we have to accept that, at least so far as surface remains are concerned, the vicissitudes of time have served Edessa very badly indeed. Although up until when the Image of Edessa, whether or not it was our Shroud, was taken to Constantinople in 944, the city’s main disasters had been of ‘natural’ origin,

principally several severe floods, in the 11th century, when the city began repeatedly changing hands between Byzantines, Crusaders, and Turkish Moslems, prolonged and wholesale destruction of anything Christian became rife. Even in the time of the relatively enlightened Turkish leader Zangi, when Edessa was given over to looting for just two days, we hear how the coffin of Abgar and Addai as preserved in the Church of St. John and St. Addai was broken open and their bones scattered. We also hear that the church of St. Thomas was made a stable, and that of St. Stephen being used as a granary.

But from 1146 onwards, under Zangi's successor, the notorious Nur-ed-Din, the destruction simply went from bad to worse. All Edessa's ancient Christian treasures were immediately taken over, objects of gold and silver melted down for their metal value, and the rest destroyed. It was from this point on that the city's name effectively became changed to Urfa, something that may well not have been an innovation, so much as a harking back to the city's old Syriac name 'Orhay' or 'Urhay'. With the conquering Turks operating an ethnic cleansing policy whereby the Christian population became reduced to extinction, all those churches not already reduced to ruin were mostly abandoned, and their stone used elsewhere. The beautiful church of St. John and St. Addai, which the Crusaders had embellished but the Turks turned into a wool store, went up in flames in 1183. The stones of the Hagia Sophia cathedral, where the Shroud had been kept, became dismantled for use building reinforcements for the Citadel, some also being transported to nearby Harran for major rebuilding work on that town's mosque. Although we might thereby hope to be able to identify materials from the Edessa cathedral in the Harran mosque, frustratingly it, in its turn, became burnt down during Mongol invasions in the 13th century, and thereafter largely abandoned [slide 10]. Thanks to the same Mongol invasions, Urfa became abandoned likewise, save by a few Turcoman nomad squatters, so that even at the end of the 17th century much of it remained devastated. Under the Ottomans a degree of prosperity returned, during which most of the building of the town's present mosques took place, but even this carried its own setbacks, since the sites of any ancient Christian churches again became indiscriminately rifled and cleared in the process.

Now for me it's a matter of wonder, and a parable in itself, that the Shroud itself should manage to survive so relatively intact, having typically been whisked away before it could come to harm, while so much of the solid physical fabric of the Christian shrines with which it was arguably once associated should have been so thoroughly destroyed. When I say something like this, people often just nod their heads condescendingly. Yet it really is one of those facts. Likewise that, despite all the destruction that I have described, somewhere beneath the surface of present-day Urfa there really must still survive at least something, albeit mostly foundations, of the old Edessa that the Shroud knew a thousand years ago – if only we could get to it.

And it is the feasibility of precisely that – of retrieving whatever may be still extant of Edessa's past from during the years that it was still home to the Shroud– that this paper is all about. This said, needing immediately to be

stressed is that even I hold out effectively nil hope of ever finding beneath present-day Urfa anything that might say, in so many words, 'the Shroud was here'. Nonetheless the finding even of anything from the first millennium AD that might help us understand better just what an extraordinary Christian city Edessa was – perhaps a full statue of an Abgar with a Christian cross on his tiara, or just conceivably an inscription referring to its preservation of the famous Image of Edessa - would be a valuable achievement in itself. No less valuable would be the location and plotting of the foundations of even just some of Edessa's major Christian edifices.

In this regard it must immediately be made clear that Edessa has so far never even begun to be seriously explored archaeologically. The great expert on its history, sadly now deceased, was J.B.Segal of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, author of by far the most definitive work on the subject, *Edessa, the Blessed City*. He visited Urfa on numerous occasions, and besides his book, which unashamedly represented my 'bible' for much of my historical researches, he made some very important deductions.

It was Segal, for instance, who spotted that the Urfan building that was being used in the 1950s and 60s as the town's Electricity Power Station [slide 11] and in the late 1970s as a store for fire-fighting equipment was almost certainly the site of the church of St.John and St.Addai, the one that contained the bones of king Abgar and Edessa's first evangelist Addai, and where many of Edessa's bishops were buried.¹⁰ A superficial survey of this edifice was done by T.A. Sinclair in 1978, during which church-like arches and porticoes were noted¹¹. But nothing more definitive was determined, nor any archaeological probing attempted

It was Segal who also deduced that the Hagia Sophia Cathedral that housed our Shroud would have been to the south of the St.John and St.Addai church, almost certainly around the northern foot of Edessa's citadel in the environs of the present-day Makam Ibrahim mosque [slide 12]¹², though again he never got further than this. However for me, and certainly tentatively supported by Segal when I showed it to him, a tantalising piece of evidence is a postcard photo from the citadel, taken in the 1970s [slide 13]. This shows an area by the present-day Makam Ibrahim mosque that was at that time undergoing clearance for the creation of gardens. Clearly visible, in the manner of aerial photographs that show up buried buildings, are discolorations in the surface of the cleared area that seem to indicate: (a) the curve of a Byzantine-style apse, convincingly oriented eastwards; and (b) the square shape of what would have been the main body of the church linked to this apse. So could we be seeing here the foundations of Edessa's Hagia Sophia Cathedral, arguably the very place where the Shroud was kept for some four centuries? As many of you know from the recent Whanger-Wilson duelling in the BSTS Newsletter, I fight shy of attaching too much significance to mere meaningful-looking shapes. Nonetheless the possibility is certainly there.

Also identified by Segal¹³ was the site of the West Gate in which I believe the Shroud to have been immured between the first century and circa

525 AD. To the west of the aforementioned electricity generating station, and along the line of the Urfa's ancient western walls, Segal found, next to the remains of an Islamic guardroom, the vestiges of a Byzantine arch. This I made a point of viewing and photographing in 1976 [slide 14], and despite its so ruined condition there can be little doubt that it was the Byzantine gate built in the 6th century to replace the earlier one of 'Arches and Vaults' in which the Shroud was found. However as even this later, Byzantine gate was so clearly almost gone in 1976 (and very likely completely so by now), we are obliged to accept that whatever cavity that the Shroud may have lain in during those earliest centuries well and truly disappeared most likely fourteen centuries ago.

Even so, is there anything meaningful still to be learned from any such material, and can we thereby translate it into a viable archaeological project? I believe that there is, and that we can, but first, needing very firmly to be made clear is a strong warning: that Muslim eastern Turkey is not the most sympathetic environment for the carrying-out of archaeology of any kind, let alone for Christian archaeology. During my first visit to Urfa in 1976 I saw construction sites at which the remains of ancient buildings were being blithely opened up only immediately to be reduced to rubble. I was also horrified to see even in the local museum sculptures with which I was familiar from Segal's book seriously eroded from the photos I knew because of their being left unprotected in the open air [slide 15]. Segal when he was exploring Urfa and its environs came across cave-tombs with some absolutely splendid mosaics from the first three centuries AD, richly conveying just how well-to-do Edessan citizens were at this early period [slide 16]. Yet he and his helpers had hardly managed to record the appearance of these mosaics before unknown locals broke into the tombs and wilfully destroyed them.

More recently organised and resourceful pilfering to supply the international antiquities trade has become the vogue.¹⁴ In 1992 at Urfa's near-neighbour Zeugma the central panel of a hitherto perfectly-preserved similar mosaic was brutally hacked out¹⁵ [slide 17], and almost certainly whisked over the border to Syria from which middle-men would ship it onward to dealers in London or New York. When Judith and I revisited Urfa in 1994, we were told by Urfa's then official tourist guide Mustafa Rastgeldi that even until very recently it had been official local government policy to destroy on sight any remains that were obviously of Christian origin.

So what can be done? One of the reasons why so little has been done so far is that so much of ancient Urfa lies directly beneath the present-day town. Elsewhere, in locations like Jerusalem, where much the same situation pertains, there is good cooperation between developers, the Israel government and archaeologists such that archaeological surveying is done and where necessary some kind of rescue archaeology put in hand. In eastern Turkey, however, no such system pertains – as yet. The one very encouraging feature, however, is that at last Turkey's central government at Ankara is waking up to the problem. Now, thanks largely to the energetic Engin Özgen, Turkey's Director General of Monuments and Museums, there is vigorous policing of the theft of Turkish antiquities, pursued even at an international

level. In recent years both American and Australian archaeological teams have successfully undertaken archaeological projects in different parts of the country. At last, therefore, the climate is right for diplomatic initiatives for the setting up of an architectural and archaeological survey project focused specifically on Urfa – and not before time.

The point of this paper is therefore to try to launch, beginning with this very meeting here in Richmond, a project of precisely this kind. As most of you know, some most excellent survey work was recently carried out by the archaeologically-trained Christopher Morgan, in association with father Rex, in the Orpheus Cubiculum of the Domitilla Catacomb, Rome.¹⁶ It is with great pleasure that I can tell you that Rex and Christopher have already expressed their willingness to bring some of this same expertise to bear on the archaeology of Urfa. Giving all the more impetus to such a project are Professor Dan Scavone's recent and still far from fully developed insights concerning the Edessa citadel.¹⁷ As Dan Scavone has most cogently argued, the citadel's ancient Syriac name '*birtha*' when it became translated into Latin as *Britio*, became responsible for the huge misunderstanding of king Arthur's 'Britain' becoming mixed up with the Grail legend. Like the Morgans, Dan Scavone has expressed his interest in becoming involved in whatever archaeological survey work can be done in Urfa. Additionally, Britain's Lennox Manton, well-known in Turkish circles for his work documenting the frescoes of the churches of Cappadocia, has kindly offered whatever guidance he can for forming the necessary diplomatic links.

In the event of Syriac inscriptions being discovered, we also have available on call a Cambridge University Syriac specialist, Erika Hunter, of the Cambridge University Library, who happens to be Australian.¹⁸ As for local liaison in Urfa itself I am delighted to be able to let you know that Mustafa Rastgeldi, who was Urfa's tourist guide when Judith and I revisited in 1994, has offered every assistance. Although one downside is that he has now changed employment to running his own mobile phones business, his very genuine enthusiasm for Urfa's past – he too is a devotee of Segal's book – apparently remains undiminished. And such is the march of progress that he is now even contactable on e-mail.

From this Richmond meeting it is therefore hoped to bring into being, probably in the year 2001, a joint British/American/Australian and Turkish Expedition to Urfa, led by Christopher Morgan, in succession to his successful Orpheus one. At this stage only the most summary objectives are possible, but these would hopefully include:

- (1) An on-site exploration of Urfa's 'power station' building, or whatever is currently at this same location, for whatever 'church of St. John and Addai' remains may still survive.
- (2) A survey of the last vestiges of the West Gate
- (3) An exploratory probe, possibly aided by echo-sounding equipment, to determine whether the foundations of the Hagia Sophia cathedral may lie below the gardens adjoining the Makam Ibrahim mosque. If this proves negative in this particular location, an attempt would be made to find these same foundations.

(4) Exploration and survey of the citadel to determine wherever materials from the same Hagia Sophia cathedral might have been re-used, and might still be visible

(5) An excursion to nearby Harran to investigate whether, again, materials from Edessa's Hagia Sophia might still be identifiable amongst the ruins of the Great Mosque

(6) A test dig on the citadel, to the south of the pillars, to determine whatever remains may still exist of the original ancient pagan temple which these pillars would have fronted.

(7) A test dig, again on the citadel, to determine the site and extent of the winter palace of the later Abgars, also to locate the foundations of the church of St.Theodore, and any other edifices of similar historical interest.

(8) A general tour of those parts of the present town overlying ancient Edessa with a view to looking out construction sites where ancient remains may be being uncovered only to be thoughtlessly destroyed.

By way of footnote I should share with you another reason for doing any 'pilot' test excavations that may be permissible in Urfa. This arises from the fact that although Urfa is sometimes said to have been founded by Alexander the Great's general Seleucus in the 3rd century BC, as yet no-one knows how long the site has been occupied. It is more than likely that such a prime and obvious location for settlement is considerably older. Certainly my personal hunch, albeit tentative and quite independent of any Shroud considerations, is that it was the true Ur of Abraham, the 'Ur of the Chaldees' appellation deriving from a mistake by a later editor of Genesis. For if we look at Abraham's antecedents, as given in the book of Genesis chapter 11, their names –Nahor, Serug, etc - are all places specifically in the environs of Urfa, likewise nearby Haran, which Biblically is undoubtedly where Abraham's father settled with his family (Genesis 11: 31). Supporting this is the Urfans' own local tradition, which is rich in associations with Abraham, hence no less than two major mosques dedicated to him. So if our Urfa expedition should happen to find remains not only of the first millennium AD, but also ones stretching back to the 2nd and 3rd millennia BC, i.e. the time Biblically accredited to Abraham, then that would be a very rich bonus indeed. It might also at last begin to put the place seriously back on the world map....

If diplomatic negotiations with the Turin ecclesiastical authorities have traditionally had their difficulties, those with the Turkish antiquities authorities to gain the necessary permissions for an archaeological survey to be carried out in Urfa are not expected to be problem free. Nonetheless, plenty of time has been allowed, in order for such negotiations to be carried out without pressure. The draft preliminary objectives as listed above have been couched to err on the side of the conservative, since they are not invasive of buildings sacred to the Moslems, or otherwise in daily use. The test digs proposed have been reserved specifically for those areas currently lying neglected. Such objectives have also been carefully calculated to be achievable even by an expedition of limited resources, it being anticipated, for the present at least, that those taking part would essentially fund

themselves - though as the project grows a certain amount of grant or fund-raising, wherever possible, may become desirable.

Whatever, beginning with this meeting here in Richmond, hopefully some positive action can now proceed with what we may perhaps call Project Urfa. It has certainly been long overdue. And who knows what news we may have to report to a Shroud meeting of 2002 - wherever *that* may be held....?

¹ Ian Wilson *The Shroud of Turin* Doubleday, 1978

² P.E.Damon et al., 'Radiocarbon dating of the shroud of Turin' *Nature* vol. 337, no.6208, 16 February 1989, pp.611-15

³ J.B.Segal, *Edessa: The Blessed City*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1970, after the Arab geographer Al-Istakhri

⁴ Revd.John Wilkinson (ed.), *Egeria's Travels*, London, SPCK, 1972

⁵ J.B.Segal, op.cit., p.213

⁶ A.Dupont-Sommer 'Une Hymne Syriacque sur la Cathédrale d'Édesse', *Cahiers archéologiques*, ii, 1957, p.29ff

⁷ The so called 'Liturgical Tractate'. This the great German scholar Ernst von Dobschütz found appended to two codices of the Byzantine official history of the image of Edessa, '*De Imagine Edessena*'. See E. von Dobschütz *Christusbilder* Beilage II C, pp.110**-114**.

⁸ B.H.Cowper 'The Chronicle of Edessa - Selections from the Syriac', *Journal of Sacred Literature*, vol V, 1864-6, pp.28-45

⁹ G.Phillips, *The Doctrine of Addai the Apostle*, translated from a manuscript in the Imperial Library, St.Petersburg, 1876

¹⁰ Segal, op.cit, p.249, footnote 1

¹¹ T.A. Sinclair *Eastern Turkey, An Architectural and Archaeological Survey* vol. IV, p.24

¹² Segal, op.cit., pp.26 & 181

¹³ Segal, op.cit., p.249, footnote 1

¹⁴ Mark Rose and Özgen Acar 'Turkey's War on the Illicit Antiquities Trade', *Archaeology* March 1995, p.45ff.

¹⁵ David Kennedy, Rifat Ergec & Philip Freeman 'Mining the Mosaics of Roman Zeugma', *Archaeology* March 1995, pp.54-5

¹⁶ Christopher Morgan *The Orpheus Expedition, Rome, May 1996, A Site Report*, private publication, Christopher and Rex Morgan, 1996

¹⁷ Daniel Scavone 'The Influence of the Edessa icon on the legend of the Holy Grail' *Actes due IIIème Symposium Scientifique International du CIELT*, Nice, 1997. pp.141-146

¹⁸ I am most grateful to John Ray, Egyptologist, of Selwyn College, Cambridge, for this particular contact