

SOME NOTES ON THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE SHROUD

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It is often said that the Shroud has no documented history before the thirteenth century; while it is true that we are all aware of the immense difficulties of establishing the Shroud's history, the statement as such is somewhat misleading. It is often understood as meaning that there are no references to the Shroud before this date, and this is simply not true. In



fact, there are numerous references to the conservation of the burial shroud of Jesus of Nazareth from the very beginning of the Christian era – the problem comes when we try to equate the shroud mentioned in these documents with the cloth now kept in Turin. This is a very significant point: sceptics often say that there are no references to the Shroud – but there are. Hence in the title of this paper I have deliberately omitted the words “of Turin” after the word “Shroud”.

Figure 1.

Nevertheless, we are going to start this overview with an exception. There is one unmistakable

reference to the Shroud of Turin from before the twelfth century. Well known to all Shroud scholars, its true significance is often overlooked. I am referring of course to Codex Pray, whose name is often misunderstood (at least in the English-speaking world) as a reference to prayer. In fact, the name comes from the Jesuit György Pray, who discovered the manuscript in 1770. It is kept in the National Széchenyi library in Budapest, Hungary. It is the earliest known manuscript with a text in the Hungarian language, and so is an important national treasure. There are some miniature drawings in this codex on folios XXVIIv and XXVIIIr that can only have been inspired by the image on the Turin Shroud. In the first, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus are anointing the dead body of Jesus in preparation for burial. The drawing of the body of Jesus shows several points in common with the Shroud image, points which can only have been inspired by this image. The first is that the body is totally naked, the same as on the Shroud but very differently from the vast majority of Byzantine artistic representations of Christ. The position of the hands is also identical to the Shroud image and different from any other image - the hands are crossed over the genitals, and most interesting of all, the thumbs have been deliberately omitted (see Figure 1, top).

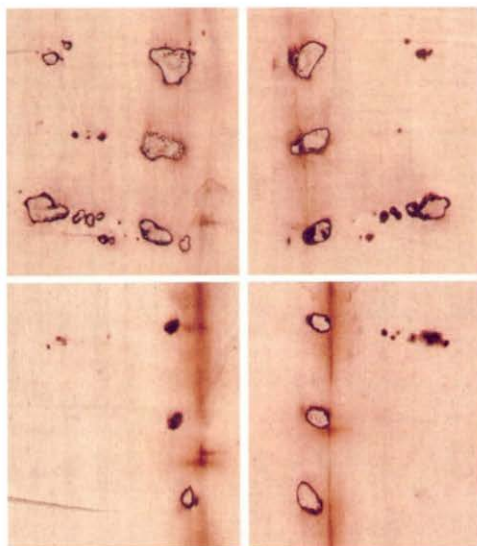


Figure 2

However, the similarities do not stop there. The next miniature shows the women visiting the tomb, only to find the body gone and the burial cloths still there (see Figure 1, bottom). Most interesting of all are the four holes in the cloth in the form of a letter L. (Arrowed.) Whatever the origin of these holes, they are clearly burn marks, accidental or deliberate. They are visible four times on the Shroud, in a logical order of decreasing intensity, showing how the cloth was folded when the holes were made (see Figure 2).

The holes are burn marks, but they were not made as a result of the fire of 1532. This can be shown from a copy of the Shroud made in 1516, kept in Lierre, Belgium, which logically does not reproduce the marks from the 1532 fire, but does include the four sets of L shaped holes (see Figure 3). They clearly predate 1516 then, but apart from Codex Pray, no further approximation can be made as to when they were actually produced.



Figure 3

Another copy of the Shroud, kept in Lisbon, Portugal, presumably dates from before 1532 too as the burn marks from the fire in that year are not represented, but the L shaped holes are, albeit not in a perfect L shape. The holes are also red on this copy, and there is another detail worthy of mention - Jesus is depicted with the crown of thorns on his head, and there is also a red chain across his back (a misinterpretation of the blood stains on the Shroud of Turin) (see Figures 4, 5 and 6).



Figure 4. Dr. Mark Guscini (L)

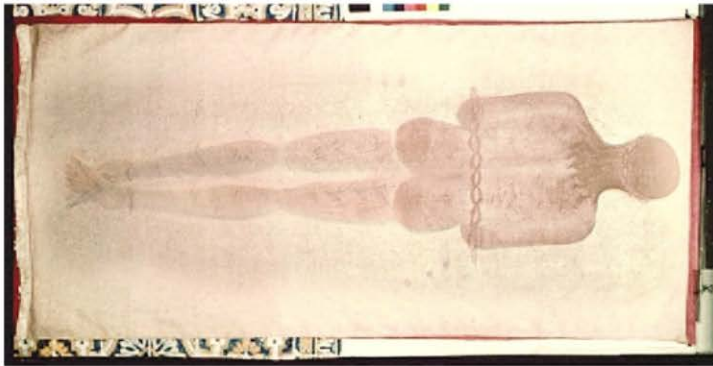


Figure 5



Figure 6

Returning to the Pray manuscript itself, there is a miniature of Christ in glory, with his hands outstretched showing the crucifixion wounds. The nail wound on his right, the viewer's left, is placed in the wrist, exactly like on the Shroud and exactly unlike all traditional representations of the crucifixion, where both nails go through the palms of the hands. The wound in Christ's left hand, however, is definitely in the palm, and there is space enough for it to have been placed in the wrist area. This point then is not a definite point of reference to the Shroud like the other miniatures, but taken together with the previous drawings, the one nail wound through the wrist would seem to reinforce the idea that the artist had

seen the Shroud. Indeed, if the artist of Codex Pray did

not see the Shroud now kept in Turin, he must have seen something with a large amount of the particular characteristics of the Shroud.

Finally, a detail about the miniature of the burial cloth that is often overlooked, even though it is clearly visible on any good quality colour reproduction of the manuscript. There are, towards the left at the bottom, two very clear blood flows on the cloth. It is useless to try and work out exactly where these stains correspond to on the body, as the artist was not painting with such detail in mind. (Figure 7). This is yet further clear



Figure 7

proof that the image in Codex Pray was inspired by the Shroud.

Of course, for all this to have any meaning and Codex Pray to have any significance in the question of the Shroud's existence before the fourteenth century, the manuscript would have to be dated to the thirteenth century or earlier. In fact, it can be confidently dated to the twelfth century. Some have even provided years for the miniatures. For

example, Joseph Török, author of a thesis on the manuscript, dates the drawings to the years 1192 - 1195. Yvonne Bongert and Jean Martin Démezil¹⁶ do not agree with this dating. They decided to date the codex by the musical annotations just below the last miniatures. They conclude that the manuscript was most probably written in the first half of the twelfth century, and absolutely ruled out a date later than the end of that century. The manuscript can definitely be dated to the twelfth century then, two hundred years before the Shroud appeared in Europe. Even if the artist did not see the Shroud itself, he obviously saw something inspired by the Shroud itself, and this is proof of the Shroud's existence in the twelfth century.

A possible origin for the miniatures is the diplomatic visit from Hungary to Constantinople in 1150, when the visitors were shown the relics in the imperial chapel. If this is so, then it would show that the Shroud of Turin was in Constantinople in the twelfth century, lending further weight to the theories that identify it as the Image of Edessa and would place it in the “queen of cities” at this time. This is the most significant aspect of the manuscript.

The Mozarabic Liturgy and Braulio of Zaragoza

This Spanish liturgy, which would be better called the Visigothic, Toledan or Isidorian liturgy, survived the Arabic invasion in 711 only to be finally abolished under Alfonso VI in the eleventh century. There is a passage in the liturgy of Easter Saturday which reads as follows: “Peter ran to the tomb with John and saw the recent imprints of the dead and risen one on the cloths” (see Figure 8). Much has been written about this passage, from viewpoints both positive and negative towards the Shroud.

The context of the passage is clear and cannot be denied - the two disciples are running to the tomb after it has been reported empty and saw something related to Jesus on the burial cloths. Up to here there can be no argument. The only doubtful point comes when we try to analyse exactly what the two disciples saw. The Latin word is *vestigia*. The normal meaning of this word is "footprint" or "track", although it can also

¹⁶ See *Nouveaux Regards sur le Linceul de Turin*, CIELT, 1995, pp. 9 - 10.

mean "trace", "mark", "sign" or "token" - this is much more general. The first meaning can be quickly dismissed as totally inappropriate in the context, which leaves us with some kind of mark or sign of Christ, something clearly related to his death and resurrection. This could seem to suggest that Peter and John saw the blood (death) and the body image (resurrection). There is very little else that could be seen on the burial cloths. Of course, Leandro is incorporating extra-biblical information into the liturgy, as no image on the cloth is mentioned in the gospels. The idea of their seeing the image on the Shroud according to Leandro is not an eccentric idea either - indeed there is no other explanation for the text in the liturgy. Historically, all that is being said here is that a sixth century Spanish bishop believed Peter and John to have seen an image on the burial cloths of Christ. There is nothing controversial about admitting this fact; the importance of the text is that it refers to the burial shroud of Christ as having an image and possibly bloodstains. However, as I said in the introduction, we cannot be absolutely sure that the text refers to the cloth now kept in Turin – but even so, its significance is huge: ***An imaged burial shroud was known as early as the sixth or seventh century.***

Still within the confines of Spain, one of the passages in the letters of Braulio of Zaragoza has often been quoted in Shroud circles as an early reference to either the Shroud or the sudarium. However, the passage as quoted is not clear, and indeed could be used both in favour of the cloth's survival or against it. The reason for this is that the passage in question has been taken completely out of context, one of the verbs in the original Latin has been incorrectly translated, and Braulio has even then been misquoted. The passage reads as follows in Latin: *Sed et illo tempore notuerunt fieri multa quae non habentur conscripta, sicut de linteaminibus, et sudario quo corpus Domini est involutum, legitur quia fuerit repperitum, et non legitur quia fuerit conservatum: nam non puto neglectum esse ut futuris temporibus inde reliquiae ab apostolis non reservarentur, et caetera talia* (see hi-lighted text in Figure 8). This can be translated as follows: "But many things happened in those times that were not written about, like the linen cloths and the shroud in which the body of the Lord was wrapped. We read that it was found, even though we do not read that it had been kept, for I do not think that it would be

ignored so that the apostles would not have kept it as a relic for future times".

The first matter that needs to be cleared up is exactly which cloth Braulio was talking about. He uses the word sudarium, which in John's gospel is not the full-length burial cloth or shroud, but the smaller face cloth, which according to all the evidence is kept today in Oviedo, Spain. However, it is clear that Braulio is the victim of the medieval confusion of sindon/sudarium - he says that the body of the Lord was wrapped in it, and the relative quo is singular, so it must refer back to sudario and not to linteaminibus. Braulio's sudarium is our Shroud, the full-length burial cloth. Furthermore, Braulio does not say at any time that the cloth's whereabouts are not known - he does not even mention where they are or are not kept.

The chronological order in this passage has been thought to be the logical one - first the cloth(s) was (were) found (i.e. in the tomb), but none of the four evangelists wrote that they had been kept. As will be seen below, this order is incorrect when the passage is taken in the context of Braulio's letter as a whole. Before looking into this, some background information about the letter would not be out of place.

The exact years of Braulio's birth and death are not known. He died sometime between the years 646 and 651, having been bishop of Zaragoza for the last twenty years of his life. Along with Isidore of Seville and Ildefonso of Toledo, he was one of the greatest ecclesiastical

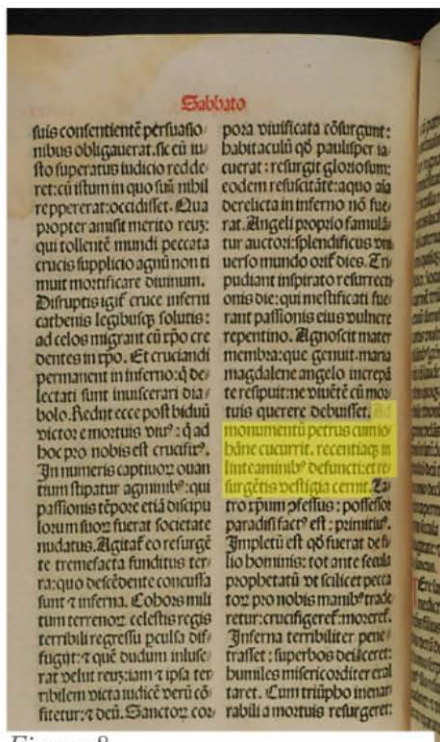


Figure 8

Figure 8 shows a page from a medieval manuscript, likely a letter by Braulio. The page is titled "Sabato" in red ink. The text is written in a Gothic script and is arranged in two columns. The right column is partially obscured by the gutter of the book. The text discusses the resurrection and the shroud.

figures of seventh century Visigothic Spain. His correspondence with Isidore appears in many manuscripts, but the majority of the letters can only be found in one ninth century manuscript, unknown before the eighteenth century. This codex is kept today in León in the north of Spain.

The letter in question is addressed to Taurus, who eventually succeeded Braulio as bishop of Zaragoza. (Figure 9) Taurus had been to Rome some time between the years 646 and 649 looking for unknown works of Gregory the Great, and while there was impressed with the great number of relics of the blood of Christ that he saw. He started to wonder about these relics, and whether or not all the blood shed in life returns to the body at the physical resurrection. If the blood does return to the body, then logically all these relics would have to be false as all Christ's blood would have returned to his body at the resurrection.

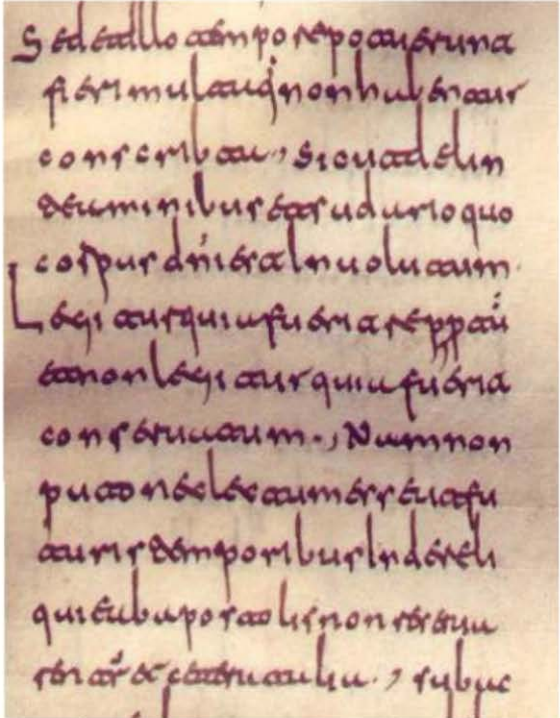


Figure 9

This was the subject of a letter he wrote to Braulio, and the reply from the bishop is the letter we are now dealing with. The letter belongs to the end of Braulio's life as at the beginning he complains about his failing eyesight and other physical ailments. The immediate answer is that the relics are not necessarily false. Not all the blood shed in life returns to the body at the physical resurrection.

This leads the bishop on to talk about another relic - the column which Jesus was tied to while being flogged (whether or not this column was real or false does not affect the argument - for Braulio it was real, and he argued from this standpoint). According to Braulio, Jerome had seen this column impregnated with the blood of Christ, and nothing is written in the gospels about its being

kept. Through all of Braulio's letters, the importance he places on the written word is evident, although as here, he admits things that are not written.

The order of events here is crucial to understanding what Braulio says immediately afterwards about the Shroud. First, Jerome saw the column, second, nothing had been written about it in the gospels. The later event is mentioned before the earlier one. Straight away Braulio introduces the example of the Shroud. First, the later event - it was found. Second, the earlier event - the gospels do not record that it was kept. In the context of the whole letter, what Braulio is saying is that the fact that it was not written in the gospels is not necessarily an argument against its being authentic.

This interpretation is further supported by two points of Latin grammar and translation. First, the verb "repperitum fuerit" - this is the passive of the verb "reperio", meaning to find something that had been lost, or to discover something that was not known beforehand. This nuance is especially evident when the verb is used in the passive voice as here. There are many classical examples of the verb used with this meaning. It is hardly a meaning that can be applied to the disciples' seeing the cloths in the tomb, as they were neither hidden nor unknown. They were right there for anyone to see. Secondly, the word "nam" - this means "for" or "as" and placed where it is in the sentence can only be taken as an explanation for how the Shroud had survived and been found.

Once again, the importance of this passage is that it unequivocally refers to the discovery of the burial shroud of Jesus after it had been lost for long time. There is no silence in the ancient sources – there most definitely was a shroud. Once again, though, the difficulty lies in showing that the shroud in Turin is one and the same as the one referred to by Braulio.

The Gospel of the Hebrews

The four canonical gospels do not say anything about what happened to the burial cloths after the resurrection. The first reference can be found in the Gospel of the Hebrews, an apocryphal work that is only known from quotations in other writers - the original is lost. Jerome says it was originally written in Hebrew, but he also affirms that only the letters were Hebrew, while the language was Chaldean or Syriac (i.e. a variant of Aramaic). Eusebius and Saint Epiphanius say the same. As for its age, it is possible that Ignatius, who died in 107, cites a passage about the resurrection that he might have taken from a

Greek translation of the gospel. Quotations from Papias and Hegesippus (in Eusebius), Clement of Alexandria and Origen prove that the gospel definitely existed in the middle of the second century, and it is quite possible that it is earlier¹⁷.

Jerome quotes this gospel more than anyone else. In his *De Viris Illustribus* 2, he quotes the following passage from the gospel of the Hebrews, "The gospel called *According to the Hebrews*, which I recently translated into Greek and into Latin, and which Origen uses frequently, recounts this after the resurrection - *But the Lord, after giving the shroud to the priest's servant, went to James and appeared to him*"¹⁸.

The reference to the priest's servant is without doubt curious, but the text is stable and there are no other variants to compare. It makes grammatical sense, even though the interpretation of the text might cause problems. There is no reason to change it without manuscript support. C.H Dodd¹⁹ suggests that the original text had "Peter" instead of "servant" (*Petro* instead of *puero* in Latin). As far as trying to prove Peter's relation with the cloths is concerned, this is a very attractive suggestion, but unfortunately it is a suggestion that cannot be upheld taking the manuscript evidence into account. The only justification Dodds can find for the change is the same mistake in the short ending of the gospel of Mark²⁰ in a Latin manuscript (Codex Bobbiensis). Faced with this change, and the senseless expression "the servant", a later copyist then added the detail about the priest, probably from the priest's servant mentioned in Mark 14:47. Dodds concludes "It is more likely that the original did state that Jesus gave the Shroud to Peter, because Paul among the appearances of the risen Christ mentions the appearance to James but states he was first seen of Cephas". It is indeed likely that the Shroud (and the sudarium) was given to Peter, but this cannot be shown from the gospel in question.

¹⁷ See *Los Evangelios Apócrifos*, edited by Aurelio de Santos Otero, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos 148, Madrid 1956.

¹⁸ *Evangelium quoque, quod appellatur secundum Hebraeos, et a me nuper in Graecum Latinumque sermonem translatum est, quo et Origenes saepe utitur, post resurrectionem Salvatoris refert: Dominus autem cum dedisset sindonem servo sacerdotis, ivit ad Iacobum et apparuit ei.*

¹⁹ See *The Ampleforth Journal*, Fall 1969, p.328, footnote 8.

²⁰ The gospel of Mark most probably ends rather brusquely at 16:8. Verses 9 - 20 do not appear in the best manuscripts and the style does not correspond to that of the rest of the gospel. The short ending is just one verse, replacing 9 - 20 in some manuscripts.

There are various reasons why this conjecture is impossible, or at least highly unlikely. Firstly, both texts in question are translations - Mark's gospel was written in Greek, and the gospel according to the Hebrews, according to Jerome, in Hebrew or Aramaic, and in both cases, it is a Latin translation under discussion. Second, even though this mistake does occur in one manuscript of Mark's gospel, this does not mean that every time we see the word "servant" it could or should be a mistake for "Peter". In the case of Mark's gospel, there are many other manuscripts that confirm the original reading was indeed "Peter", but we only have one quotation of this sentence from the gospel of the Hebrews - there is nothing else to compare it to. Third, a text that makes sense, especially a quotation that has no context from the original work, should not be changed just to make it fit in with a theory. If we seek to establish the relationship between Peter and the cloths, this would be perfect, but it is not the correct way to treat a historical document.

Alfred O'Rahilly does not believe that this text (*servo sacerdotis*) is original either²¹, but at least he tries to argue this from a Hebrew point of view. The majority of Hebrew manuscripts were only written with consonants, while the vowels were understood. In later manuscripts, the vowels were added as dots and lines above and below the consonants. O'Rahilly suggests that the Hebrew consonants for "servant" and "priest" (*ebed* and *cohen* respectively in Hebrew) would not be very different from those of "Peter" and "John" (*kepha* and *yochanan* in Hebrew). In this case the original text would have said that Jesus gave the cloths to Peter and John. This is very ingenious, but the Hebrew consonants in question are not so similar, and it seems once more like wishful thinking instead of strict historical analysis.

Once again, we are faced with a very early reference to the survival and importance of the burial shroud. This text is fundamental in showing that this supposed silence is an invention by sceptics. And once again, the problem, and the challenge, lies with identifying this mysterious shroud with the one now kept in Turin. But by way of conclusion, when people state that the Shroud has no history before the thirteenth century, they are mistaken; ***it most definitely was.***

²¹ See *The Burial of Christ, Peter and John at the Tomb*, in *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, Vol LIX (1942) pp.150-171.