

Ian Wilson's response to Latendresse and Dietz

Over forty years ago the British Society for the Turin Shroud was founded specifically as a forum for differing opinions on the Shroud. So when David Rolfe showed me this long article with its obviously strong criticisms of myself and Mark Guscin, I told him that I could not object to its publication. To its credit, the article is well referenced, and written to a high standard, reflecting Karlheinz Dietz's status as a professor of ancient history at the University of Würzburg. Nevertheless, it is seriously misguided, also because its authors are understandably unaware of certain as yet unpublished historical information, its explanatory scenario is fundamentally flawed. To avoid unnecessary reader confusion, an immediate response has therefore seemed needed from me.

First, Mario Latendresse has long pressed me to respond to his ideas on the Sainte Chapelle *sanctam toellam* and its reliquary, and I readily confess to my having dragged my feet on this, simply because of being in the process of developing my own markedly different opinion on why the reliquary should have been found empty of its *toellam* in 1534. The plain fact is that I actually concur with his and Karlheinz Dietz's support for Hilda Leynen's argument that this long-lost reliquary had once contained the Shroud in its guise as the Image of Edessa.

However the very different (and very difficult), opinion I have formed is that when King Louis IX acquired the Constantinopolitan imperial relic collection c.1247 this reliquary was already empty of the Image, only the metal plates that had been the Image's surround having been left behind. The nub of the argument is that this removal had happened very, very secretly some three quarters of a century earlier, as a result of which all that the Fourth Crusade acquired of it in 1204 was its locked, empty casket, the all-important Image/Shroud being still very secretly kept elsewhere. The new scenario satisfactorily explains why there should have been such a lack of interest in the Image when Latendresse and Dietz suppose it to have arrived in Paris along with other relics acquired from Constantinople. It also explains why throughout the entire period of the Charny ownership it was never kept in a proper permanent reliquary, only in a simple wooden box bearing the family's heraldry.

Now this new, yet to be published understanding represents a very major shift to how I have previously reconstructed the Shroud's immediately pre-fourteenth century history, and it is inappropriate and still too early for me to detail this change of thinking in this rejoinder to Latendresse and Dietz. I have already gone part way towards an explanation of it for an article contributed to an academic book on the Image of Edessa currently being edited by Mark Guscin. Nevertheless, nothing less than a very full new historical book is needed, and now that my Charny book has been published, further developing and writing that book will be my next major task.

On the rest of Latendresse and Dietz's article I will be brief. For instance, it is seriously misleading of them to assert that the west was unfamiliar with the story of King Abgar

and the Image. Academic authors such as Evgeniy Gurinov in his article ‘Abgar and the Abgar legend in the Age of the Crusades’, have shown a perfectly reasonable level of awareness of the story amongst educated westerners. Hence if the Image of Edessa/Shroud truly had been amongst the Constantinopolitan relics received by King Louis IX c.1247 there can be little doubt that it would have received plenty of attention, just as Rome’s ‘Veronica’ would receive during the ensuing century and longer. In this same context Latendresse and Dietz’s idea that Charny received the Shroud by ‘accident’ in the form of a gift following the Company of the Star’s inaugural feast, with King Jean purportedly being unaware of it bearing such an extraordinary image, carries scant credence. As is so evident from his *Livre* poem, Charny was a thoroughly honest, decent individual, one whom shrewd contemporary authors such as the abbot-chronicler Gilles le Muisit lauded for his integrity. Had he discovered that such a stupendous relic had been given to him by accident I have not the slightest doubt that he would have informed the king of this and returned it forthwith. Even if it is supposed that he did decide to keep it, why did he say not a word about it or its security, when he founded the Lirey church the following year? Why did his successors not save themselves much hassle from the bishops of Troyes by explaining that it had originated as a legitimate royal gift? The true circumstances of how the Shroud came into Charny hands simply have to be something fundamentally deeper and more serious than merely some human error or ‘accident’.

As for Latendresse and Dietz’s assertion that ex-Dauphin Humbert II had been ‘the most important guest’ at the Company of the Star’s inaugural feast on 6 January 1352, they simply have not looked closely enough at the people and events behind the Company’s brief existence. Yet to be published original documents preserved in the archives of the Département of the Gard at Nîmes, kindly photographed for me by Hugh Duncan, show that Charny and Humbert had actually been relatively long acquainted, Charny having sworn fealty to him when the two were in Paris in 1335. They also reveal that early in the 1340s Charny had performed an unspecified valuable service for Humbert, for which the chronically bankrupt Humbert proved unable to pay, despite repeated and strenuous efforts by Charny to obtain the moneys due.

Then, according to quite different sources, in 1344 Charny took part in a successful crusading venture to Smyrna, though not, as too often supposed, the dismal failure of a crusade led by Humbert the following year. Shortly after his return from this latter Humbert was so penniless that he had no option but to surrender his entire Dauphiné territories to the French crown, resulting in France’s crown prince becoming titled the ‘Dauphin’ thereafter. By the time of the Company of the Star’s feast Humbert had become a Dominican monk, temporarily relinquishing his cloister to attend the feast, almost certainly because of his lifelong enthusiasm for chivalry. No actual guest list survives for the feast, nevertheless all the royal princes are known to have been present, so any suggestion that Humbert was regarded as so important a guest that he was presented with a major Sainte Chapelle relic lacks the slightest credibility.

Even if, as Latendresse and Dietz suggest, the Image/Shroud then somehow became passed to Charny, why was neither Humbert nor he given it in a proper reliquary? Why did the Charny family keep it in a simple wooden box of their own throughout the next century? I fully respect Mario Latendresse that he very sincerely believes the Shroud somehow to have been a royal gift to Charny. Arguing for this has been a mission of his for some while. However even his ever so tentatively invoking the 'To Know the Truth' document as first published by the late Dorothy Crispino in *Shroud Spectrum* back in 1988 provides no help to his cause. As Dorothy Crispino herself rightly remarked of that sixteenth century document, there is barely a word of truth in it. Forgive my bluntness, but Latendresse and Dietz really are trying to flog a very dead horse...

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This edition of the newsletter includes an article titled 'Shroud of Turin Exhibition' in which our Exhibition Manager Pam Moon outlines some of the many venues which have hosted her travelling exhibition of life-sized replicas of the Shroud. With COVID related restrictions now being eased, Pam is once again on the lookout for new venues such as churches, cathedrals or large halls, which may be able to host similar exhibitions in future. If you know a suitable venue which could be made available for such an event, please contact Pam Moon by sending an email to:

familyofmoon@aol.com