

Lennox Manton

## **BURIAL CUSTOMS IN FIRST CENTURY PALESTINE AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE TURIN SHROUD**

In many respects the burial customs of the ancient Jews seem to have come down from those of the Egyptians when, after the Exodus followed by the fall of Jericho and the conquest of Canaan, the Israelites took over Palestine. For several reasons Graham Phillips has suggested that the Exodus could date to the time of Amenophis IIIrd or that of his son Akhenaten, the heretic Pharaoh of the Eighteenth Dynasty, and not as originally thought in the time of Ramesses. The earliest evidence for the Israelite presence in Palestine dates to the burning of Hazor at sometime between 1300-1250 B.C.; excavations on site by Dr Yagael Yadin have confirmed this date and shown that in Joshua 11-11 the description of its destruction is accurate in all respects.

There are no records, apart from Biblical references, that relate to the Israelite presence in Egypt, but it could have been of the order of some 450 years and linked with the Hyksos who infiltrated lower Egypt from the region of the Euphrates around 1750 B.C., a result of Babylonian pressure. Having occupied Lower Egypt the Hyksos then set up their Capital at Avaris in the Biblical 'Land of Goshen' a site that is today's Tel-el-Daba where excavations have uncovered a Semitic-Canaanite culture that dates from 1650-1550 B.C. There is thus a possibility that the Israelites could have been affiliated to one of the Hyksos tribes who brought the horse and chariot into Egypt, and in so doing gained the tactical supremacy over Upper Egypt and the Pharaohs who ruled from Thebes. Eventually the Hyksos administration became so powerful that it more than equalled that of Thebes, and with the distinct possibility that it was the Hyksos of Gashen who appointed Joseph their Chief Minister: it is known that an Hyksos of the sixteenth Dynasty had the name 'Yakob-aam:' not so far distant from the Israelite 'Jacob'.

However, in the Tomb of Ahmose in Aswan there is an inscription that records the re-unification of Upper and Lower Egypt by the Theban Pharaoh Ahmosis who drove the Hyksos out of Egypt and back to Canaan around 1550 B.C. The later Tuthmosis IIIrd again defeated the Hyksos at Megiddo in Palestine taking countless prisoners of war, an account of which is engraved on a Pylon in the Temple of Amun Re at Karnak. Frescos in the tomb of Rekmire in Thebes show the unfortunate Hyksos making mud bricks whilst their captors stand over them with rods. Exodus 1., 11, records of the Israelites' so they were made to work in gangs, with officers set over them to break their spirit with heavy labour.' And in Exodus 1, 14, 'they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar and brick.'

Amongst them were those known as 'The Apiru' recorded at times as the 'Habiru or Hapiru', which could well refer to the 'Hebrew.' The Apiru are shown amongst the Hyksos prisoners of Thutmosis IIIrd in the Theban tomb of Antef that dates to 1500 B.C. and in the tomb of Puymere where they are shown as the Apiru working at a wine press in the vineyard of War Hor that was in the Land of Goshen. The inscription is specific 'Straining wine by the Apiru'. The Apiru must have been a tribe of the Hyksos for they are mentioned in a text from the kingdom of Mari by the Euphrates as the 'Habiru,' from whence they were originally driven by the Babylonians.

There seems to be little doubt that the conditions for the Exodus could have been the result of a cataclysmic volcanic eruption. It has been shown that the plagues and related phenomena as described in Exodus 8:2-8,17:21-24, and 10:14-15 could have been the result of such a catastrophe. It

was in the time of the later years of Amenophis IIIrd, or that of Akhenaten, around 1365 B.C. when an unprecedented number of statues were hurriedly put up to placate Sekhmet, the goddess of disaster, whom they thought was seeking vengeance on them for some unexplained reason. Excavations at Ugarit have shown that the town and port were completely destroyed by a massive tidal wave about this time, the possible result of a severe volcanic eruption. A letter from the King of Tyre to Akhenaten in Armana records an eyewitness account of the devastation, one that he saw when on a recent visit to the district.

The position of Governor of Lower Egypt fell to Akhenaten as the eldest son of the Pharaoh, and it is then when he appears to have been influenced by the religious code of the Israelites, to the extent that when he became Pharaoh he adopted much of their beliefs into his Monotheistic, and heretical, cult of the Aten. He allowed no Graven Images, apart from the local and sacred cut of the Mnevis Bull, which he transferred to his new city of Armana. But the great significance between the two religions is the similarity between Akhenaten's 'Hymn to the Aten' and Psalm 104.: their content and style are just too close to be mere coincidence. The Israelites and the Hyksos are also depicted in various Tomb paintings of the period that show the entourage of Akhenaten on State occasions.

Having no sons Akhenaten appointed as Governor of Lower Egypt, the Land of Goshen, an individual who could well have been an Israelite. His tomb has been found complete with the contents that give his name as 'Aper El,' together with that of his son 'Huy,' a general in charge of Army recruitment and Chariotry in Lower Egypt. Aper-El translates as 'Servitor of the God El' a ward in the Old Testament that denotes God, and is an abbreviation of the Hebrew 'Elohim' or 'Eloi' meaning 'Lord.' see Mark XV 34, Aper El was buried in the fashion of Egyptians of high rank, and so too was Joseph. Genesis 50,56, records 'So Joseph died and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

The Israelites could also be receptive to some of the customs and beliefs of the Egyptians, such as that of the Mnevis Bull. During the Exodus many of the Israelites reverted to the worship of the Bull. Exodus 32 records Aaron, having lost his patience in waiting for Moses to return from Sinai, reverted to making Cult images of the Golden Calf from jewellery taken from the wives, sons, and daughters of his followers; an act that ended on the return of Moses with the slaughter of some three thousand at the hands of the Tribe of Levi. This though did not end the cult of the Bull for other images have been found throughout the Canaan of the Israelites, not the least being the bronze image that dates to the twelfth century B.C. that was found in the ruins of the once Holy city of Sechem that is North of Nablus in the district of Samaria.

The cult of the Bull lapsed with the unification of the Tribes of Israel under David, but certain modifications of the burial customs of the Egyptians were retained. During the Second Temple period the first act after death was the closure of the eyes by the eldest son or nearest relative, Gen: 46, 4, the mouth then being closed by binding the cheeks. There was no stipulation though that coins had to be placed over the eyes. Death was followed by the family having to ritually tear their clothes whilst the deceased had to be buried as soon as possible without the city boundaries; this to the tune of two musicians with pipes and the wail of paid mourners. To leave the corpse unburied overnight was disrespectful. That of Ananias in Acts: 5, 6-10 describes the ritual.

Where men were concerned the body hair had to be trimmed before it was cleansed with oil and then sponged with water. An anointing with a perfumed oil finally took place.. The death of Tabitha in 9: 36-41, records the procedure. Jewish sources also record that the body was finally wrapped and

bound in shrouds, not just placed in a shroud. The Tractate Semahot states, 'Men may wrap and bind men, but not women, whereas women may wrap and bind both sexes.' Many frescos and ikons that depict the raising of Lazarus show him coming from the tomb bound in the Egyptian manner. Fig 1. 12th cent. In some frescos where Jesus has been shown lying in the tomb He has been depicted bound in the same fashion. Fig 2; and in one that depicts the resurrection the bindings are shown as an empty cocoon. Fig 3. both depictions late fifteenth cent. It seems that the artists responsible for these later depictions were not aware of the true circumstances of the burial, but were illustrating the normal procedure of the period. There is a reference to the burial of Jesus In John 19: 9-40. 'They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it in linen clothes as the manner of the Jews is to bury.' John states in Acts XX. 7. 'the napkin not lying with the linen clothes but wrapped together in a place by itself.' It is clear then that 'Clothes' did not include these other burial cloths but just the Shroud. The Hebrew word for burial garments meant wrapping and binding as indicated in the Tractate Semahot so that 'Clothes' could have meant a binding. Lazarus is generally shown wrapped hand and foot and his face bound with a napkin to the extent that Jesus said in John XI, 44, loose him and let him go. Here it is certain that Lazarus was bound somewhat in the Egyptian manner. The use of spices was not obligatory but, according to Josephus, they were used in the burial of Herod; their use is also recorded in Mark 16, 1. and Luke 24, 1. Nicodemus bought one hundred pound in weight of Myrrh and Aloes for the burial of Jesus, John XIX: 39.

During the Second Temple Period considerable sums of money were spent on funeral feasts and rituals: The Talmud records that funeral expenses had become by then a very considerable burden on the families concerned, Apart from the mourners and the expense of a eulogist to praise the dead wine was generally drunk in great quantities; served to wealthy guests in white glasses whilst those of a lesser status had to be content with coloured glass. However, at a later date all were served in coloured glass so that no one should feel affronted. Prayers were said as a matter of course for the bereaved but nothing for the salvation of the departed soul. In this respect the Egyptians were more compassionate for they did inscribe spells on tomb walls to help the soul through the rigours of the underworld. It was Rabbi Akiba who recommended the sons of a departed father to say the Kaddish in an effort to spare his soul from Gehenna, and It was Rabbi Gamaliel who helped to break these expensive traditions by ordaining he be buried in a Shroud of a simple linen.

Burial in caves or sepulchres dug into the sides of a cliff or hewn into the sides of old quarries could also be rooted in Egyptian tradition; the more elaborate having areas branching from a central hall somewhat reminiscent of the tombs of the Pharaohs. A mishna lays down the suggested plans and dimensions of such and they were in areas that formed a Necropolis outside and to the East of the city boundaries to avoid any prevailing winds from the West. The body was interred with unbent limbs and the sepulchre closed with a stone boulder. A recommendation in the eighth chapter of the Semahot states that 'the tomb should be visited within three days to check the dead body;' on past occasions the corpse had unexpectedly revived. Could this explain 'the Raising of Lazarus'? Personal possessions were not ritually buried with the deceased.

Obviously the burial of Jesus did not follow the established custom. Had it not been for Joseph of Arimathea the body would have been destined for an unmarked grave. Descriptions of the burial and subsequent events do not tally in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, describe the body being wrapped in linen, but differ in other details. The one feature in common is the fact that the stone had already been rolled back when the women reached the sepulchre on the

morning of the third day. It is only Matthew in XXVII: 59- 66 who records the possibility of Pilate having placed guards on the tomb at the behest of the priests; obviously to have departed by the time the women, following Jewish ritual, came to the tomb on the morning of the third day to check that death was final and to complete the burial rites; though treated with oils the body had not been ritually washed before the onset of the Sabbath. Was their intention then to bind the body, like Lazarus; Women may bind men but men may not bind women, only to find that the resurrection had already taken place.

Markings noted on the Shroud could indicate the possibility of relics of the Crucifixion having been interred with the body. Professor Danin, of an impeccable reputation, has also shown that some recovered samples of pollen are in such concentrations that they could not have been wind blown, but to have come from local plants indigenous only to Judaea. They could have been hastily gathered before being placed by the body. Little is known of the Shroud's history prior to its appearance at the Court of Abgar in Edessa, and it is only after its discovery in the ruins of the Edessa gatehouse in A.D. 525 that the image of Jesus changed dramatically. It is here where the frescos that date from the late ninth to the twelfth centuries in the cave churches of Cappadocia are important. They all show Vignon markings in the images of Christ in Glory and in the later Pantocrators, but It is in the frescos that date from the late tenth to the eleventh centuries that the Vignon markings appear in images of Jesus other than those of Pantocrator, as is evident in the 'Betrayal in Gethsemane' in Karanlik church and in that of the Christ child in the Kilicar Church Figs4-5. The later images show the beard being forked and not rounded as in the earlier depictions; in the case of the Apple and Karanlik churches the similarity of the iconography is such that it could be the work of artists from a specific studio in Constantinople.

The fresco of the Mandyion in Sakli church could date to the first half of the twelfth century. A distinct Crusader influence pervades the overall decoration and the images of Cosmos and Damanian, the medical Saints martyred in Edessa are prominent. Figs 6-7-8. When the First Crusade passed through Constantinople in 1097 to reach Edessa in 1098 the Shroud must have been seen by Baldwin of Boulogne, who founded the Dynasty of the Counts of Edessa, to be later displaced by Zengi of Aleppo in 1144. On the death of Zengi around 1148 Edessa came under the control of Saladin before passing under Mamluke control. It is possible then that Sakli could have been decorated between 1098 and 1144.

The loss of the Shroud from Constantinople in 1204 was such that it could no longer act as a reference for contemporary artists, culminating in the disappearance of the markings from the later images of Christ. This is evident in the later Byzantine churches of Cyprus, and in the frescos of the Romanesque Churches in the valley of the Loir from Vendome to Nantes, such as in those in the villages of Pontigne and St Gillies Figs 9. 10. It is also evident in the later mosaics of the fourteenth century in the Kariye Cami and the Hagia Sophia of Istanbul, the quiff of hair disappears and the hairline becomes more rounded. Figs 11. 12.

If the Shroud is a forgery of the mid fourteenth century it is very strange for the markings to be so closely in context with the Cappadocian images, especially when they are no longer to be found in much later church frescos and images. It could be argued that the forger might have been aware of their existence; not a likely surmise in view of the remoteness and inaccessibility of the valleys at that time. By 1335 the whole region was occupied by the Moslems to then pass under the control of Beyazit in 1397. After the battle of Ankara in 1402 the Karamanids took over the district from the Ottomans for it to finally pass to the Mamlukes in 1498. This would have been a very inhospitable climate for the

dedicated Christian communities then living in the valleys, and to the extent that it eventually brought about the dereliction and decay of their monasteries, chapels and churches to the state in which we see them today.

The accumulated evidence that we now have is supportive of the Shroud being an artefact of the first century, and it goes a long way to discount the evidence of a dubious carbon dating. As yet there has not been any definitive explanation as to how the image was formed, let alone by the hand of any medieval forger who would then very doubtfully have been aware of the existence of the Vignon markings that are characteristic of the Shroud that we have today.

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. The Raising of Lazarus. Detail from the Iconostasis beam in the Monastery of St Catherine's Sinai. Latter half of the twelfth century.
2. The Entombment. The Tretyahov Gallery. Moscow. Late Fifteenth Century.
3. The Empty Tomb. Church of St Mamas, Louvaras, Cyprus. Circa 1495.
4. Betrayal in Gethsemane. Karanlik Church. Goreme Valley Cappadocia. Late tenth--Early eleventh Century.
5. Detail of Christ Child before St Simeon in the Temple. Kilicar Church. Goreme Valley, Cappadocia. Early to mid Eleventh Century.
6. Fresco of the Mandylion in Sakli Church, Goreme Valley, Cappadocia. Circa 1098-1144.
7. Detail of the Mandylion Fresco.
8. Head of Christ showing the eyes closed.
9. Christ in Glory. Romanesque Parish Church of Pontigne. Loir Valley France. Fourteenth century.
10. Face of Christ. Romanesque Church of St Gillies, Loir Valley France. Fourteenth Century.
11. Mosaic in the Kariye Cami, Istanbul, C. 1335.
12. Mosaic in the Hagia Sophia, Istanbul. Fourteenth Century.



Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.



Figure 4.



Figure 5.



Figure 6.



Figure 7.



Figure 8.



Figure 9.



Figure 10.



Figure 11.



Figure 12.