

The "Inscriptions" on the Shroud

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A paper about the supposed inscriptions visible on the Shroud was presented at the CIELT congress in Nice in 1997, by André Marion and his student Anne Laure Courage, from the *Institut d'Optique Théorique et Appliquée d'Orsay*. As they themselves admit, they did not discover the letters on the Shroud, they only processed the images and claim to have cleared the matter up. The first person who claimed to have seen these writings was the Italian Piero Ugolotti in 1979. He consulted a teacher of ancient languages called Aldo Marastoni, and together they published the results of the findings. In 1982, a French priest, Father Dubois, added to the findings.

Marion and Courage began by stating that the inscriptions are not visible to the naked eye. The photographs of the Shroud have to be digitally processed in order to read the letters, which are supposedly present in a curious mixture of Latin, Greek and Hebrew. They are placed round the face in two U shaped boxes, with the part over the top of the head open. According to Marion and Courage, these boxes on the cloth are the imprint of wooden supports which held the head in position. They themselves recognise the weakness of this interpretation by the presence of two such objects when surely one would have been enough. They fail to admit that there is no record of such objects being used in the burial of Christ, and no archaeological parallel that they can adduce to confirm the custom.

Now we will proceed to the individual investigation of each inscription that has been read on the cloth. On the left of the head in the outer wooden box the first inscription consists of Greek letters as follows: ΨΣ KIA. We are then told that this is an abbreviation for ΩΨ ΣKIA, which is supposed to mean "shadow of a face" or "barely visible face". There are several reasons that make this interpretation impossible. First, the group ΨΣ, which is clearly impossible in Greek, as the first of these two letters, Ψ, is phonetically "ps", thus making the second "s" redundant. Marion and Courage realise this, and join the Σ on to the next word, thus forming the word ΣKIA, or "shadow", in spite of the gap between the sigma and the other letters KIA. This leaves the letter Ψ on its own. Marion and Courage explained that this was in fact an abbreviation of the Greek ΩΨ, which means "face". First of all, one final letter can never represent a whole word in Greek. It is true that many abbreviations were used in the copying of long manuscripts, but these were limited to very common words, such as God, Spirit, or Jesus in biblical manuscripts. Even then, the abbreviation normally consisted of the first and last letters of the word - thus "God", ΘΕΟΣ (THEOS) in Greek, would be reduced to ΘΣ - with a line or dash drawn in above the abbreviation. One isolated letter, especially from a word that could not be described as common, cannot be accepted as an abbreviation. For an abbreviation to be

recognisable to the reader, it must be a common word, which is why for example in the New Testament manuscripts such abbreviations are limited to what are known as the *nomina sacra* or holy names, such as God, Spirit, Jesus, Father, or Lord. Even a correct abbreviation, i.e. the first and last letters of a word like *skia*, would not be sufficiently recognisable.

There is another problem with this interpretation too. The word as Marion and Courage give it is nominative, whereas to make the sentence "shadow of a face" the genitive (i.e. the "of" case) would be needed. ΩΨ ΣΚΙΑ simply is not Greek. To make matters even worse, there is no recorded genitive of ΩΨ in Greek - it is what is known as a defective word. It is an old poetic word, found in Homer and Hesiod and hardly likely to crop up in the common Koine Greek of the first century. The genitive case for the word "face" would have to be formed from the related word ΟΨΙΣ and it would be ΟΨΕΩΣ, which is nothing like what Marion and Courage see on the Shroud. Immediately after their presentation in Nice I asked them publicly about this and they answered that they did not in fact know any Greek, this interpretation had been given by a friend who did (although he obviously did not know too much), and was only a hypothesis.

Moving inward, on the "inner" box, there is meant to be the word PEZΩ (rezo), which according to Marion and Courage is "an old word" for "I witness". The expression "old word" (in the original French it is *un mot archaïque*) seems strange, as any Greek from the first century is old, and the word in itself is not old or archaic as Greek goes. It is used in Homer, Euripides and Sophocles among others, and means rather "to accomplish", especially "to accomplish sacrifices". In the first place, the verb as it is in the active voice hardly seems appropriate to Jesus (he would not be made to say "I sacrifice"), and the Romans and/or Jews who did actually sacrifice him could not be speaking either. The relation of the verb to the idea of sacrifice can not be taken for granted anyway, as it stands alone with no direct object, always present when the idea of sacrifice is involved.

On the opposite side of the inner box, the language changes to Latin, reading **IN NECE**, where the two n's are joined together, and part of an m is supposedly visible after the final e. This would then read **IN NECEM IBIS**, "to death you will go", words which we are told were used to communicate the death sentence to a prisoner. To put such an inscription on or near the body of a dead person would seem more like a sick joke than anything else. To the right of this inscription, in the outer box, the letters now form the word NAZAPENOS, Greek for the "Nazarene". There are various problems with this word too as it stands. Both N's are doubled, so if we are to be consistent with the interpretation of **IN NECE** the Greek word here would have to be NNAZAPENNOΣ, which is not possible. Then, if the Greek is correct, the E in the middle would have to be H. The O is hardly visible at all, even on the finished version. There are too many mistakes and too many assumptions for this inscription to be accepted. It just does not read "Nazarene" in Greek.

Very near the incorrect E of the word Nazarene, Marion and Courage read two letters in Latin - **SB**. They see no other letters on this line, and as this group of letters is very rare in Latin, they assume it means *Signum Baldinii*, the seal of Baldwin. They then

relate this to Baldwin de Courtenay, the king of Jerusalem in 1247 who sent various relics to Louis IX of France, also known as Saint Louis. As one of these relics is known to have been a shroud, or part of a shroud, we must assume that Marion and Courage think the Turin Shroud was one of the relics sent by Baldwin to Louis IX. This has recently been shown to be impossible, by the exhaustive research of two members of the Centro Español de Sindonología, Daniel Duque and César Barta. They set out to investigate these relics, many of which were sent by Louis to Toledo in Spain, and are still there to this day. The report is an excellent piece of investigation and should be read by anybody interested in the Shroud, especially in its Byzantine history. One of the most interesting conclusions was that there must have been at least two shrouds in Constantinople before the fourth Crusade, one in the Pharos collection of relics and the other (in all probability the Mandylion, the cloth that is now kept in Turin) at Blachernae. Baldwin probably gave or sold the Pharos collection to Louis, as the list of relics in this collection coincides to a very high degree with the list of relics Louis sent to Toledo. In 1247, the Blachernae cloth was no longer in Constantinople.

Daniel Duque and César Barta obtained permission to open the boxes where these relics are kept in the cathedral at Toledo, in 1997. The relic they were most interested in was the one labelled *de sindone domini*, which did indeed contain a piece of cloth. It was dark brown, a triangular piece, measuring approximately 3 x 3 x 3 cm. The weave and texture were totally incompatible with the Shroud of Turin. The cloth that Baldwin and Louis IX were involved with was not the Shroud of Turin, which was not in Constantinople anyway in the year 1247. The two letters that Marion and Courage see on the cloth have nothing to do with Baldwin or Louis, and thus lose the little sense they might have had even if they were really there.

Another impossible inscription is the one above the AZ of NAZAPENOS, that supposedly reads AΔAμ, a strange mixture of three capital letters and one lower case μ which if it were consistent would have to be M to read AΔAM. Marion and Courage state here that Adam is in fact Jesus, because in one of Paul's epistles Jesus is referred to as the "new Adam". The Pauline reference is true, but a simple word "Adam" cannot be a reference to this. The phrase "new Adam" would be necessary - one word by itself makes no sense, and the fact that there is a curious mixture of capitals and one lower case letter makes the whole inscription seem impossible. This inscription would also have been written quite a few years before any of Paul's epistles, so the reference to these makes no sense. Another reason to doubt these last two inscriptions (**SB** and AΔAμ) is that they are not even present in either of the two supposed wooden boxes - this would then have to mean, according to Marion and Courage's theory of the origin of the inscriptions, that there were in fact not two but three boxes. This then becomes even more difficult to believe than before.

This then brings us to the area directly under the chin of the face on the Shroud. The first inscription "visible" on the inner box is nothing more than yet another double N, which could be either Latin or Greek. A double N by itself has absolutely no meaning at all, surely if it were part of a word something else would be visible. This leads one to believe that there is in fact nothing there.

On the right hand side of the forehead of the facial image on the Shroud, two letters are meant to be visible - IC. Marion and Courage claim these are the initials of Jesus Christ in Latin, although the normal way of writing these initials, even in Latin, would have been with the Greek letters **IX, IESUS XRISTUS** (or **XRISTOS**). **X** in Greek is CH. These letters would also be outside either of the two wooden frames. There are apparently more letters on the forehead though, discovered by Ugolotti and Marastoni in 1979, reading IBER, which is meant to be part of the emperor's name, TIBERIUS CAESAR. It would be very strange for anyone to have written such a thing, from a religious point of view impossible and from a historical point of view very unlikely. For the Romans Jesus was just another common Jewish criminal and there would be no need to record under which emperor he had been executed. To the left of IBER there are meant to be four Hebrew letters, which according to Ugolotti are part of the name "Ieschoua" (Jesus), although only one of the letters supposedly seen would actually be found in the Hebrew word. It is very strange that only parts of words are visible, and all of them with some spelling or grammatical mistake.

The only inscription which would make any kind of sense and is almost complete and correct would be the one at the bottom of the outer set. This is where Marion and Courage can see the Greek letters ΗΣΟΥ, where only two more letters would be needed to form the name Jesus: ΙΗΣΟΥΣ. Even in this case though, one has to ask why the first letter is not visible, and if the last letter is not present then we are left with either the genitive case ("of Jesus") or the dative ("to Jesus"), in which case the word would have to be part of a larger inscription.

So none of the inscriptions which some claim to be able to see make enough grammatical or historical sense. This in itself is enough to doubt their very existence on the cloth, but the clinching point was evident in the presentation of the work in the symposium at Nice. The slides that Marion and Courage used showed the areas of the cloth where they could see the inscriptions, and then the various optical treatment they had subjected it to, and finally the inscriptions written in over where they were meant to be. They were only visible on these last slides. There was absolutely nothing visible on any of the other slides. If the inscriptions made any kind of sense then maybe a more sympathetic attitude would be called for, but as it is I think the whole affair is yet another example of things being seen on the Shroud in an attempt to come up with something new.