

A HITHERTO UNKNOWN BYZANTINE REPRESENTATION OF THE SHROUD?

On touring in 1986 some of the more remote parts of eastern Turkey, Dermot and Jacynth Hope Simpson of the Sherborne Historical Society explored the "ghost town" of Ani, once a thriving metropolis with literally hundreds of churches, but now virtually deserted.

One of the churches the Hope Simpsons came across was that of St. Gregory of Tigran Honentz, dated c.1215. Just above eye level on the liturgical north wall they noted what would seem to be an iconographically unique mural, featuring, according to their own description: "a shroud being removed from the body of Jesus and then being displayed with the face and clothing, full length, marked on it"

Unfortunately Ani is literally on Turkey's frontier with Russia, and at the time of the Hope Simpsons' visit they were not allowed cameras, binoculars, or even a notebook. Furthermore they only noticed the painting shortly before their military escort asked them to move on. However they immediately recognized the possible significance of the painting in relation to the Shroud (a significance heightened by Ani's relative geographical proximity to Urfa/Edessa), and kindly supplied the sketches (overleaf) of the painting's salient features as they remember them.

This promises to be the earliest known depiction of an image-bearing shroud, and, with its trellis pattern, could be a crucial iconographic "missing link" between the Mandylion/Image of Edessa and the Shroud of Turin. Enquiries made to the Courtauld Institute of Art have so far revealed no independent photographs of the fresco. However it is hoped that Lennox Manton of Guildford, who has made a speciality of photographing early churches in eastern Turkey, and has good relations with the Turkish government, may be able to obtain special permission to photograph the fresco on his next visit to the area, probably sometime during 1987.