

NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

U.S.A.: SCIENTIST AT EVANSVILLE CONFERENCE CLAIMS COATING OF FUNGUS FALSIFIED SHROUD CARBON DATING

On Saturday February 12 a special Conference on the Shroud was held at the University of Southern Indiana, Evansville, with among the speakers University historian **Dr. Daniel Scavone** presenting the 'Primary Historical Documentary Evidence for the Authenticity of the Shroud'; Fr. Dr. Faustino Cervantes of Mexico City outlining what is known about the 'Crown of Thorns', and Prof. Giovanni Riggi of Turin discussing his role as the person who cut the Shroud samples for the carbon dating.

However, one contributor whom those attending had particularly come to hear was **Dr. Leoncio A. Garza-Valdes** of San Antonio, Texas whose lecture 'Microscopy and the Shroud' comprised an important further exposition of a theory he had first presented at the Rome Symposium in 1993. According to Dr. Garza-Valdes, examination of Shroud fabric samples and a Shroud 'blood' specimen via an optical microscope has revealed that these are covered with a bio-plastic material formed by the symbiotic activity of a fungus called *Lichenothelia* (one of the Loculoascomycetes genus of fungi), interacting with bacteria. Apparently the result of this activity, which builds up over hundreds of years into a varnish-like layer, is a coating comprising more bio-plastic than linen ...

Crucial to the Shroud carbon dating is the fact, experimentally demonstrated by Dr. Garza-Valdes, that only about 10% of this coating responds to the cleansing solvents used by the carbon dating laboratories in 1988. This means that a high proportion of the Shroud samples as 'tested' in 1988 would have comprised randomly-distributed bio-plastic material that had not 'died', like the flax, in the 1st or 14th century, but had had a continuous existence over time, and remained in part alive and indeed thriving up to and including the present time. Depending upon how much *Lichenothelia* was present, a seriously misleading radiocarbon date would have been arrived at. The Shroud samples studied by Dr. Garza-Valdes came from immediately adjacent to where the samples for carbon dating were removed in 1988. Dr. Garza-Valdes also believes that the Shroud's image was helped in its development by differing thicknesses of *Lichenothelia* forming in relation to the transferred deposits of blood; sweat and other residues.

Among those here in the U.K. who have studied Dr. Garza-Valdes's arguments with care, and have responded to them particularly enthusiastically, are **Fr. Maurus Green**, OSB, of Leyland, Lancashire, already well-known for his pioneering studies on the Shroud's history, and the **Rt. Rev Ambrose Griffiths**, OSB, Catholic Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle. In a recent letter to Fr. Maurus Green, Bishop Ambrose writes:

This new research throws completely new light on the [Shroud] situation and offers a genuine avenue of solution which if confirmed by further research explains why the carbon dating test in this case gave a misleading result ...

The existence of this '[*Lichenothelia*] coating is neither imaginary nor in any way exceptional. Dr. Garza-Valdes has investigated it using eleven different modern

techniques ... and he has demonstrated the existence of this [*Lichenothelia*] coating on six varied ancient artefacts in addition to the Shroud of Turin...

It is clearly early days yet in the research, and it is always unwise to jump to conclusions before research has been thoroughly confirmed, but what has so far been discovered certainly seems to me to offer the promise of both powerfully confirming the authenticity of the Shroud and of explaining quite reasonably how the image was formed in the first place. Thank you so much for sharing this with me.

U.S.A: SHROUD TV DOCUMENTARY REACHES AUDIENCE OF 6.5 MILLION ...

A new Dutch-made television documentary on the Shroud, produced by Roel Oostra of Cresset Communications, Hilversum, and featuring interviews with Professor Michael Tite, pathologist Professor James Cameron, Isabel Piczek, Dr. Alan Whanger, Professor Jerome Lejeune; Professor Gino Zaninotto and others, was broadcast just before Easter on the Learning Channel in the U.S.A., which reaches predominantly the U. S. East Coast. According to viewing figures, this reached an encouragingly high audience of 6.5 million. The documentary is one of the first to be able to show the Shroud in its new home close to the high altar of Turin Cathedral.

TURIN: THE SHROUD'S NEW DISPLAY CASE

In the latest and most welcome issue of *Shroud Spectrum* (no. 42), Editor **Dorothy Crispino** gives a particularly moving description of the fine new display case in which the Shroud is being kept in Turin Cathedral (still inside its silver reliquary, of course), during repairs to the Royal Chapel.

Dorothy Crispino writes:

A penumbral darkness subdues the surroundings so that only the jewel-studded silver chest, in which the Holy Shroud lies rolled, is perceptible to the eye and mind. The chest is visible on every side, as if it were floating in mid-air, just above eye-level, in a transparent yet inviolable box. If you have ever wondered at the dazzling beauty of the planet Venus, radiant in the night's velvet empery, you have some idea of the effect.

The construction is a marvel of contemporary architecture and technology. Three walls of plate glass, eleven feet long and six and a half feet high stand parallel to each other about a handspan apart. Each wall weighs over 1500 pounds. The entire assemblage comes to about three tons. There is no metal in the structure.

The three glass walls are mounted on a bronze-plated socle [plinth] slanting down and outward - 'to keep visitors at a respectful distance'. In the base are mechanisms to separate the walls, to release jets of water in the case of fire, and other safety devices. Amazingly sensitive, the fire bombs would go off at the puff of a cigarette, but the incense used during the liturgy will not actuate the extinguishers. The monument is under

continuous surveillance by video cameras and sound sensors. There is no light except the irradiation from six overhead optical fibres, giving the glass walls an eerie impression of self-Illumination.

Andrea Bruno was the architect; the glass was from Saint-Gobain, in France; the same company that provided the crystal protecting the Shroud during the 1978 exposition. A special feature of this glass is its property to shield against ultraviolet rays. Saint-Gobain, a town near Laon, has manufactured glass since 1685. The Shroud, rolled up in its silver reliquary, was transferred from the Royal Chapel (property of the Italian State) down the black marble stairway into the Cathedral (property of the Church), on 24 February, 1993, Ash Wednesday...

ROME: SHROUD BOOK PRESENTED TO THE POPE ...

On 9 February the new Polish edition of Orazio Petrosillo and **Professor Emanuela Marinelli's** book on the Shroud, as published by the Marienow Fathers, was presented to Pope Paul II at the Vatican. Besides the authors; those present at the ceremony were General Supervisor Fr. Adenio Boniecki, and Fr. Jan M. Rokosz, Provincial for Poland. The book is available from Fr. Kazimierz Pek, M.I.C., Wydawnictwo Ksiezy Marianow; ul. Sw. Bonifacego 9, 02-754 Warszawa, Poland. So far, sadly, there has been no English language edition.

ENGLAND: NEW EMBARRASSMENT FOR OXFORD LABORATORY

On 18th March a verdict by the Oxford Research Laboratory, which carbon-dated the Shroud, that a dealer's collection of purported 18th century Staffordshire pottery consisted of modern fakes was overturned by a London Crown Court. According to a report in the *Sunday Telegraph*, kindly drawn to our attention by BSTS member **Audrey Dymock-Herdsman** of Templecombe, 'the not-guilty verdict has thrown into confusion the status of the Staffordshire pieces, declared fakes by the Oxford Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art, which dated the Turin Shroud as being from the mediaeval period.' Ian Macdonald, QC, defence counsel, said the verdict seriously undermined the authority of the Oxford tests: 'If you can get a date within 2,000 years you are not doing badly.' The chances of accurately dating something which was 250 years old were remote.' It should be noted that the tests involved were not radiocarbon dating, which is unsuitable for pottery, but thermoluminescence dating, which involves taking samples by drilling holes, then heating them to 500 degrees C to analyse the 'glow curves' produced.