

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

From **Professor Dan Scavone**, of the Department of History at the University of Southern Indiana, U.S.A. in response to letters by Professor Harry Gove and Leonardo da Vinci theorists Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince in the last Newsletter.

Well, needless to say, receipt of BSTS Newsletter no. 40 was not the most fun I can remember, so I would like to venture a response to all my adoring fans!

First, to **Dr. Walter McCrone**. That which he has been calling red paint for fifteen years has reacted just like denatured blood to the DNA testing that has been done in San Antonio, Texas. He needs to address this, and not just laugh it off. He has already conceded a possible blood touch-up, so I imagine he has covered his steps. He also needs to acknowledge what leading microbiologists have accepted, that **Dr. Garza-Valdes** has identified an organic plastic coating on the samples brought him by Prof Riggi that can be removed only with a harsh acid that would cause jade to pit, and would have destroyed the entire Shroud fabric. The presence on Shroud fibres of thriving *natronococcus* bacteria demands the erstwhile presence of natron, a substance used in the ancient Near East to preserve corpses. He acts as though his microscope is the only thing he knows ...

Then to **Ms. Picknett and Mr. Prince**. For years opponents of the Shroud's authenticity have been proclaiming that the image was a painting (Mccrone) or a rubbing (Joe Nickell). The argument of this book depends upon the notion that the image is that of a human body. This concession is a great victory for Sindonophiles. But does it take a genius to read into our use of the carbon dating (1260-1390) the unspoken sense that 'even by the most favourable dating possible for their case, their case is weak'? I say this as one ready to argue that the Shroud is older. Surely Picknett and Prince know this, and their potshot at me is a nit-picking distractor, and does not at all respond to the main lines of my critique of their position. Also their response in the *Newsletter* seems to be saying 'we love being criticised because it sells books and never mind that the criticisms make manifest the weaknesses at the very heart and fundament of our book.' By the way, I got my copy free.

It seems to me that the weaknesses that make their thesis intellectually unacceptable are as follows:

(1) They argue that because Leonardo was genius enough to have made a primitive camera, ergo he did do it. He then created the Shroud, but he could not say he had done it for certain undocumented reasons. Thus the reasons had to be contrived by the authors. Producing correspondent 'Giovanni' does not suffice as academically acceptable documentation. It is an unsteady position to take.

(2) The argument that history's proto-photo was a fourteen foot photo (!) on cloth (!) that was a composite (!) double corpse with daubed-on blood and, in separate processes, Leonardo's own head front and back is *a priori* farfetched. Think about it: the premise is more demanding of faith than is the authenticity of the Shroud. I am led to ask why Leonardo has left us his famous self-portrait in red chalk and not his photo, and why he would use another body when Vasari notes that his own physique was near perfect, and everybody knows his exorbitant vanity. (**Dr. Alan**

**Whanger** has demonstrated that the Shroud man's face also bears strong likeness to 6th century icons and 7th century coins, by which the Leonardo likeness is much compromised).

(3) Looking at the Turin Shroud, they say this absolute genius stupidly daubed a still flowing bloodstain on the hand of a supposed corpse and allowed for other anatomical inconsistencies very unlikely for his IQ. Again why would this genius think he required a crucified corpse, knowing full well that he was going to supply actual bloodstains afterwards, and that his own body would do.

(4) They use D'Arcis for all that he is worth to them, and forget that his memo acknowledges the presence of a strange 'painting' in Lirey in 1389; and they play down the Seine medallion which describes the head-to-head arrangement already in Lirey fifty years before Leonardo was born. This seems to turn their complaint of inconsistency back on themselves. I think their idea is exciting and would make a great novel (I may even write it!). But in its present form it cannot be taken seriously either as science or as a novel.

(5) As an historian I must note the authors' superficial treatment of Shroud history. They say what may be read anywhere, but historical documentation of the Shroud goes miles beyond where Joe Nickell stopped. I note their ignorance about the details that refute the d'Arcis memorandum. Among these, in 1389 his Troyes cathedral's roof caved in and it had to be closed. Expenses demanded a draw to bring in the pilgrims and their donations. People accused him of 'wanting it for himself, as his own memo states. It is not an outrageous notion.

I note also their ignorance about the Byzantine historians' texts that make the lie of Villehardouin's remarks about the imperial treasuries not being looted; about the uniqueness they ascribe to Robert de Clari's evidence (the references are, in fact numerous); about the mass of evidence indicating the Mandylion was full-length (now including the Gregory referendarius document of 944), and about the evidence of the Pray MS, placing a cloth with that repeated grouping of four Shroud-like burn-marks as early as 1192. These data together have revolutionised the study of the history of the Turin Shroud and placed it on an academically reputable plane much higher than was possible even twenty years ago. The authors do not seem to have known or cared about these data, creating a presumption of carelessness in presenting their other material, as also in their failure to footnote references for crucial statements.

Allow me to notice a more general and more destructive weakness of the entire composite of explanations for the Shroud image. It cannot be explained simultaneously as 'a paint layer made up of red ochre or vermilion and collagen tempera' (McCrone), a jeweller's rouge powder rubbing (Joe Nickell), a carbon powder rubbing (Emily A. Craig and Randall R. Bresee 'Image Formation and the Shroud of Turin', in *Journal of Imaging Science and Technology*, vol. 38, no. 1, Jan/Feb 1994, pp. 59-67), an aloes and myrrh powder rubbing (Kersten and Gruber, *Das Jesu Komplott*), and a photo. Besides, have *BSTS Newsletter* readers looked at the results obtained by these 'finally-the-truth-about-the-Shroud' methods? They are, one and all, pretty poor...

Finally, to Dr. Harry Gove. I cannot take issue with his personal feelings about the chronological value of Dr. Garza-Valdes's bio-coating. In the session at St. Mary's University, the morning after he and Dr. Garza-Valdes had microscopically inspected the latter's Shroud material, in a convivial and informal give-and-take presentation, Dr. Gove did assert that he calculated the

'halo' around a Shroud fibre to comprise about 57% of the total halo, plus cellulose. In good nature Dr. Garza-Valdes interjected that this agreed with his previous day's figure of 60%. Dr. Gove then laughingly altered his figure to 'O.K., 60%. My (mis)understanding was to assume that such large accretions of more recent and (according to Dr. G-V) impervious organic coating had real meaning and could 'rejuvenate' the C 14 date of a first century fibre by a thousand years or more. Otherwise, I thought, why spend hours calculating the percentages? And the 60% seemed close enough to the 70% organic accretion required to alter a date from 1st to 13th century. It is a pardonable assumption for an excited non-scientist, and I hope Dr. Gove has forgiven me. I have since written this to Dr. Gove.

I think I am a much better historian than scientist. I can tell the logical from the spurious, for the most part. But I am extremely sorry if I have caused you and the BSTS any discomfiture because of my representation of Dr. Gove's meaning.

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