

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Noel Curren Briggs *The Shroud Mafia: The Creation of a Relic?*, The Book Guild Ltd., 248 pp. £16.50.

reviewed by Dr. Michael Clift

Noel Curren-Briggs is well-known as a genealogist and scholar of repute, and in this well-researched book he has given us a useful, almost an indispensable addition to Shroud literature. He begins by assuming that the 1988 radiocarbon dating is an accurate assessment of the linen's date and investigates a possible reason for the Shroud's creation some seven centuries ago. From there he entertains us with a fascinating and detailed account of a conspiracy to produce a copy of an earlier Shroud and of the historical families involved - the Mafia of the title.

Although I am still of the opinion that the Turin Shroud could still be the original of the Gospels, Noel's argument is often tempting and can never be lightly dismissed. Unfortunately he is now somewhat out of date in his belief in the 1988 experiment, for subsequent findings have provided a growing mound of evidence that the carbon dating result is unreliable.

It was also disappointing to find several inaccuracies, mostly over dates, making us wonder what other ones are not immediately obvious to the non-expert. For example, the last exposition was in 1978, not 1973. The first exposition of modern times was almost certainly in 1357 after the battle of Poitiers, but here we are told several times that it was in 1353, i.e. when De Charny was still alive. The Mandylion reached Constantinople in 944 on August 15th., not the 5th. If the Shroud image is that of Our Lord after death the unclenched fingers are what one would expect - not as on page 175.

More serious are the claims (1) that McCrone found paint, when in fact he found ferric oxide (the two are not synonymous), and (2) that the blood areas have blurred outlines. This simply is not true, as the most cursory examination of the image will show. I am puzzled too by the omission of any reference to the work of Ian Dickinson who not only was the first to notice the cubit measurements in both width and length of the Shroud, but gave us the most satisfactory explanation of the side-strip to date, and further most eloquent evidence of a first century origin.

One of the chapters is headed 'How was the Shroud Made and How was it Saved?' In fact, no suggestion is given as to the process of manufacture except a passing reference to the unconvincing theory of the Prince brothers. We know that the body image is formed by nothing more than loss of water from the topmost fibrils of the flax; it is in fact a very light scorch. What we want to know is how this could be brought about in any century, no matter how old or how young or how inauthentic the Shroud really is. With this book we are a little further forward to that destination, but at least the scenery on the way is picturesque. I can recommend it as a good read and a serious addition to Shroud knowledge.