

SOME RECENT BRITISH MEDIA INTEREST...

Among indications that the media tide on the Shroud is on the turn was a hearteningly well-balanced article 'Image on Turin Shroud "did come from man's body"' written by the London Times archaeology correspondent Norman Hammond, published in The Times on August 7 of this year.

After somewhat curiously describing the Shroud as having historically been 'kept at Annecy and later Turin' (an email enquiry as to whether The Times possesses information on the Shroud's history that no-one else has come across produced a nil response), the article provided an excellent and sympathetic appraisal of BSTS member Dr. Allan Mills's 'reactive oxygen intermediates hypothesis' (see BSTS Newsletter no.43, pp.14-16). As concluded by Norman Hammond 'Dr. Mills's thesis... explains how the Turin Shroud could have acquired its striking portrayal of a tormented body, and corroborates studies which suggest that the image was not produced by any known artistic technique. What it does not do is to indicate whose body it was, where he came from, or when he was briefly wrapped in the cloth; while another layer of mystery may have been peeled away from the shroud, a cloud of unknowing remains.'

Norman Hammond also very even-handedly mentioned the latest variant on the 'coins-over-the-eyes' hypothesis, following an earlier report on this published in The Times on July 8. The substance of this hypothesis is that the Italian pathologist Professor Luigi Baima Bollone and computer-enhancement specialist Professor Nello Balossino together claim to have identified the image of a Roman lepton coin over the man of the Shroud's left eye. This follows on from the late Rev. Francis Filas's claim more than ten years ago of having discovered the lettering U CAI [from TIBERIOU CAISAROS] on a lepton coin placed over the right eye.

According to Rome's glossy English- language journal Inside the Vatican, which expands on the information given in The Times, Bollone and Balossino have been able to determine that the coin they see [see example, right] was one minted in the sixteenth year of the reign of Roman Emperor Tiberius [14-37 AD]. a date which corresponds to 29 AD in our system of dating. For Bollone and Balossino this represents 'a true breakthrough in solving the mystery of the Shroud of Turin', and would of course indeed be so if one could trust the Shroud to reveal such fine detail. However, given the irregularities of the Shroud's weave, which can throw up all sorts of lettering-like shapes, reminiscent of the faces that we can think we 'see' in patterned carpets, the utmost caution must be expressed concerning trusting anything of this order.

The other major U.K. press article, considerably longer and better informed, has been 'Not made by hands', by Egyptologist and BSTS member John Ray of Selwyn College, Cambridge University published in The Times Literary Supplement of October 19. After outlining the 'hand of a painter' claims of Bishop D'Arcis's memorandum of 1389, John Ray remarks:

'The problem with this account is that there does not seem to be any way of translating the Latin *depingere* so as to explain the object which is now in the cathedral in Turin...The bravest attempt to declare the Shroud a painting was made by Walter

McCrone, a respected art investigator. McCrone detected red particles on some of the fibres containing the image, and argued that the image was a simple product of red ochre or vermilion and an adhesive. He hired a painter from Chicago, who produced a plausible likeness of the facial area using this means.

This explanation is superficially attractive, but it fails to account for some important details. The suggested adhesive has not been identified on the Shroud, and the particles, which certainly exist, appear to cling to most of the surface of the cloth, rather than to be closely associated with the image. High-resolution magnification suggests that, however the image was produced, it was not done this way...

Another problem is that McCrone's artist, who was highly competent, nevertheless produced a work which looks like a painting. He did this working from excellent, full-scale photographs of the Shroud. What was the original mediaeval artist working from? All he (and we are surely justified in thinking this was the artist's gender?) could have seen as he worked is the faint positive image visible to the eye. Within a distance less than ten feet or so from the cloth, the image disappears, so he would have needed to stand well back from his work to see it. How did our shifty depicter in Lirey produce a negative image, which he could not control, and whose anatomical accuracy appears to be faultless, without once giving away the fact that he was painting?'

After describing the radiocarbon testing as 'professional and well-controlled' John Ray remarks from his own professional field of expertise that 'linen... tends to be an unstable field for forensic analysis, as is shown by some results from Egyptian samples'.

Reviewing the possibility of the image not being of Jesus but of a Crusader 'captured by the Saracens and crucified in a blasphemous parody of his religion' he remarks: 'This accounts well for the wounds but we still need to explain how this stray Crusader managed to photograph himself onto the cloth and why the result was kept by his tormentors.'

Overall, John Ray concludes 'the question of the Shroud is open, and is likely to remain so in the absence of new testing or techniques.' He points out that even if the radiocarbon dating verdict one day became proved beyond all question:

...something remains. An unknown artist managed at some date to create an artifact which is both baffling and awe-inspiring. He seems to have done it not knowing how good he was, since all he would have seen is the faint and uninspiring positive on the surface of the cloth. He may have done it out of piety, or for quick profit, or even out of mischief. But he created a masterpiece; and if the resemblances to the Christ of the gospels are deliberate, he created a religious masterpiece. If artists can be divinely guided, who is to say that he was not?'