

## **A HITHERTO UNKNOWN SHROUD-RELATED IMAGE**

Fr. Peter Milward, S.J., of the Renaissance Institute, Tokyo has recently kindly brought to our attention a seemingly Shroud-related image he came across a few years ago while in Spain following the route of the famous ancient pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James at Compostela.

On the road between León and Santiago stands the monastic church of Vilar de Donas, and on the wall behind the altar is a fresco of Jesus with his arms crossed in the classic 'Shroud' manner, rising from the tomb, surrounded by relics of the Passion [see right]. Created in the 'Christ of Pity' or 'Man of Sorrows' mould, the painting may be only indirectly related to the Shroud, but inevitably a point of key interest is its date.

Accordingly we asked Mark Guscini, BSTS member in Spain, if he could provide further information. He writes:

I actually visited the church at Vilar de Donas when I drove along the road to Santiago a few years ago, and have been looking up references since I received your letter. Here is what I have come up with.

According to José-Luis Novo Cazón's *El Priorato Santiaguista de Vilar de Donas en la Edad Media*, (published by the P. Sarmiento Institute of Galician Studies in 1986), the church's name suggests that it was originally a convent occupied by nuns, either of the order of St. Bernard or St. Berito. 'Donas' in Gallego, the language spoken in Galicia, means 'women', and it was probably built as a kind of family community, very popular at the time as an attempt to avoid episcopal abuse.

In 1194 the establishment became a priory occupied by monks, and was given over to the order of Santiago (St. James). The church as it stands today dates almost certainly from the period 1230-1260. The wall paintings depict a variety of scenes, from the Visitation, Daniel, & Ss. Peter and Paul, to St. Catherine of Siena and Saint Barbara. The one that most interests us, the Christ of Pity, or Varon de Dolores (Man of Sorrows) in Spanish, shows Christ rising from the tomb wrapped in a shroud. On his right hand side there is a spear, a whip and two nails, and on his left another whip and one nail.

It is generally agreed that the paintings are the work of two, or perhaps three, artists. The first left the following inscription 'No Ano de Mill CCCC XXXIV (Anos) Petrus Nunii (or Muni) de Turis (or Buris) me fecit' [i.e. 'In the year 1434 Peter Nuni de Turis made me'] The date of 1434 is confirmed by two other inscriptions, which also mention the reign of Juan II of Castille, who reigned from 1406-1454. However it should at least be noted that Angel del Castillo in his *Inventario monumental y Artístico de Galicia*, published in 1987, dates the paintings even later, to the end of the 15th or beginning of the 16th century, on account of the costumes depicted, and the Gothic writing of the inscriptions.

Fr. Peter Milward was told that the church had once been owned by the Knights Templar, but this was not borne out by Mark Guscini's enquiries.