

A Historic 'Scoop'?

CIELT Symposium Speaker's Claim to Have Been Shown the Veronica

by the Editor, with further information supplied by Mark Guscini and others

In a Symposium with comparatively little new to offer, what should have been quite a 'scoop' was British speaker **Ian Dickinson's** claim to have recently been shown the Veronica, the cloth bearing an imprint of Jesus's face that historically was the most memorable highlight of many a mediaeval pilgrim's visit to Rome .

Of considerable interest Shroud-wise as a likely early facsimile of the Shroud's facial area, the Veronica (or whatever purports to be the original), is kept so closely closeted in the Basilica of St. Peter's that there is not even a photograph of it in the public domain. And as this Editor can personally attest, all requests to examine it, even from cardinals, are routinely refused. Surprising indeed, therefore, was this information which Ian Dickinson told the Nice Symposium, as taken from the prepared text of his paper 'New Evidence for the Image on the Shroud':

With the kind assistance of **Presbyter Andrea Spegne MF** and the Archpresbyter of St.Peter's, **Cardinal Archbishop Virgilio Noè**, arrangements were made for me to visit and examine the Veronica. Accompanied by the head of the sampietrini, **Sig. Ricci Leopoldo**, I was led through the security doors to the relic shrine high up in the Veronica pier of the Basilica. The Veronica and relics of the Passion, i.e. the wood of the Cross and the head of a lance, are securely housed in a wall shrine near the entrance to the chamber; at the other end lay the balcony which looks down into the expanse of the Basilica interior. After Sig. Leopoldo had unlocked the numerous locks on the shrine door he, with the assistance of Presbyter Andrea Spegne, withdrew the Veronica protected by its cushion cover.

The most practical way to describe the Veronica is to refer to the replica made by Pietro Strozzi in 1617 [see opposite] The frame is very similar to this; in each corner of the Veronica there is a model bee, the emblem of the Barberini family. The overall dimensions are approx 24.75 x 20.5 inches (63 x 52 cm.). The width of the face at its widest point inside the aperture of the metal plate [that] surrounds it is 5 inches (12.7 cm), and from the top of the painted head to the bottom of the beard 10 inches (25.4 cm.) This means that the portrait itself is life-sized.

The image of the Veronica is obscured because it is protected by two sheets of glass, one reinforced as Georgian wired polished plate, which can protect from fire and smoke for up to thirty minutes. Also, the centuries have darkened the paint, making it difficult to discern details at the moment.

The Veronica icon is probably painted on wood, judging from a patch of missing paint on the forehead; and over the top of the head black paint depicts the hairline. The traces of the face are obscured by a dark brown hue, and this must have

increased since the Strozzi copy, which is much lighter. Eventually what is under the darkened surface may be detected, but obviously it is an attempt to imitate the Edessa image, i.e. the Shroud face. This is why it has been held in such veneration, and with some irony, as the original True Image is now also in the care of the Apostolic See. After [my?] examining the relics of the Passion, they and the Veronica were reverently returned to the ark of the shrine. When I later emerged from the Cardinal's offices, I was greeted by a crowd. It was Sig. Leopoldo and all the sampietrini. Some history had been made.

As **Mark Guscini** noted for the purposes of reporting for this Newsletter, Ian Dickinson produced for the Symposium audience no photographs, and no supporting evidence to corroborate how, when and even more pertinently, why he had been accorded such a remarkable privilege. He also refused to answer any questions. When he was forthrightly challenged by **Isabel Piczek** on the grounds that, to her direct personal knowledge, there is no visible face on the Veronica, he declined to answer.

Accordingly the only way to determine whether Dickinson had, or had not been shown the Veronica was for enquiries to be made directly with **Cardinal Virgilio Noè**, the man undoubtedly directly in charge of the Veronica, and through whose offices Dickinson specifically claimed he had had his special entrée. With the aid of the **Very Reverend John-Peter Pham** of Illinois, who has very close links with the Vatican, and impeccable knowledge of its workings, the question was very discreetly raised with Cardinal Noè, whereupon the following official response, bearing the letterhead of the Vatican City Vicariate, and carrying the protocol reference number Prot.n.V 285/97, was sent by him on 19 August [see reproduction of the original, below right]. Translated from the Italian, this reads:

Very Reverend Sir,

Your letter has reached me, in which you set out certain problems concerning the Veil of Veronica preserved in St.Peter's Basilica.

You refer to a certain Mr. Dickinson, who claims to have examined the relic at my request, and according to what he says, would have enjoyed my office's approval.

I regret to have to tell you that I have never known this Mr.Dickinson. I have never given anyone permission to examine the aforementioned relic. Consequently all that he claims has no truth .

With cordial regards, Virgilio Card. Noè, Archpriest of the Basilica of St.Peter

As **Vatican sources** point out to us, the Cardinal's letter is not a personal one. It has a protocol file number V 285/97 and date, and is therefore an official document which needs to be treated with appropriate seriousness.

In this regard some explanation is needed of the protocol that the Vatican meticulously maintains in respect of all outside visitors and correspondence. Every visit to the Vatican and every letter - even the unimportant ones, let alone a 'big' event such as that claimed - are carefully entered into the Vatican log of the relevant official and given a protocol number for the Vatican archives, with the log initially verified by two Vatican officials. If anyone makes some subsequent enquiry, this is referred to the Secretary of State, **Sodano**, who will request the log to be opened and again officially verified.

For these reasons everyone can be sure that there is absolutely no possibility of Cardinal Noè perhaps simply having 'forgotten' Dickinson's visit and its purpose. It is the official position of the Vatican that Ian Dickinson's claimed privilege of being shown the Veronica simply did not take place.