

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE SHROUD WITH THE IMAGES OF JESUS IN THE BYZANTINE FRESCOES OF CAPPADOCIA

By Lennox Manton

Prior to the discovery of the Mandylion in Edessa in A.D 525 the images of Jesus were at the whim and imagination of the artists concerned. They were then often portrayed in a Hellenistic Format; an example to be seen on a Sarcophagus in the Vatican showing a Hellenistic Jesus astride his donkey when entering Jerusalem. (see fig. 1).

After its discovery the Mandylion remained in Edessa in the church of the Hagia Sophia that was built for the purpose by Justinian. Following its discovery the image of Christ changed, with various slight modifications on the part of the artists concerned, to the format of a full faced image that is now in general acceptance. Subsequent to the successful siege of Moslem Edessa in 943 by the Byzantine Army the Mandylion was taken to Constantinople, to arrive there on August 15th 944 and to be kept in the Chapel of the Pharos. However, the Iconoclastic Period began whilst the Mandylion was still in Edessa; the result of an Edict passed by Leo III in 723, and to remain as such until repealed in 847. During that period church decoration was limited to various linear designs (see fig. 2) and all religious images such as statues and possible icons that had previously been inspired were then subject to a systematic destruction.

Edessa, the Sanli Urfa of today, is situated not far from the Syrian border in South Eastern Turkey; being some considerable distance from Constantinople communications between the two cities would then have been time consuming and difficult. From Istanbul with our more sophisticated transport it still could be a lengthy and somewhat arduous journey. Situated almost half way between Constantinople and Edessa are the remote Cappadocian valleys that, since the days of Paul, have been a home for hermits and anchorites who worshipped daily in their primitive chapels hewn out of a Tufa landscape (see fig. 3). A landscape formed in the past millennia by the local volcano of Mt. Argeus, and one that has been eroded by weather into cones topped with caps of hard rock and towering pinnacles (see figs. 4 and 5).

It was the periodic Arab invasions of the VII and VIII centuries that compelled these anchorites to defend their existence by joining together in fortified monasteries and cells that could be reached by ladder only to an entrance high up in a cone (see fig. 6). In the VIII and IX centuries religious life expanded into many more monasteries and chapels to the extent that by the X century religious fervour in the valleys had become so extreme that whole families were joining these establishments; this to the concern of the then Emperor Nicephorus Phocas. These monasteries and chapels were usually decorated with iconoclastic designs in an ochre that came from the bright red clays of the local Kizil Irmak river; a clay still in use in the local pottery (see fig. 7).

The redecoration of the churches and chapels in the Byzantine tradition began after 842 with that of the earliest dating to the latter half of the ninth century, but it was the local monks, with a differing expertise, who undertook that of their own small chapels. The frescoed decoration of the larger churches of this period depict episodes from the life of Jesus shown in a series of friezes as seen in the Cavuscin Church in Goreme, one that has a possible Armenian influence, and that of the Theodore church (see figs. 8, 9 and 10). However by the eleventh century much of the decoration throughout the valleys was the more sophisticated work of artists from the workshops of Constantinople and done at the behest of local wealthy donors who often portrayed themselves in acts of supplication. There are several churches in the Goreme and Solange valleys to be so attributed such as that of the Apple Church in Goreme where the original iconoclastic designs have been

plastered over to allow their redecoration in the Byzantine tradition (see figs. 11 and 12). The same applies to the nearby Karanlik Church of a once fortified monastery, both of them dating to the middle of the eleventh century.

In all the images of Jesus in these churches when depicted in scenes like that of the denunciation in Karanlik, or as Pantocrator, the Vignon markings 12,13 and 15 are clearly shown (see figs. 13, 14 and 15). Sometimes markings 1 and 2 are also to be seen, as in the Pantocrator of Eski Gumus monastery church (see fig. 16). It would seem then that after its discovery in Edessa the Mandylion became an inspiration for many artists, but it is possible that the Vignon markings were not at that time fully appreciated. Vignon 15 has not been recorded in the sixth century image of Jesus in St Catherine's where, in its isolation in Sinai, it appears to have escaped iconoclastic destruction. Here the hair contour does not depict a forelock and the beard has the rounded appearance that can be seen in other early images of Jesus in Cappadocia (see fig. 17). In later images the beard has a forked appearance. Whilst in Constantinople, until its disappearance in 1204, the Shroud must have been a reference, as well as an inspiration, for many of those of the city ateliers. The Vignon markings 12,13 and especially 15 then became a constant feature in the images of Jesus in the Cappadocian valleys and in the frescoes of the Cypriot churches of a similar date. They are also a feature in the mosaic images of the same period, such as those showing him as Pantocrator in Cefalu and Daphni, also the work of artists from Constantinople. Mark 15 was then a traditional feature of his images to express his Divinity. However, Mark 15 was sometimes used when depicting the images of saints such as in that of the Baptist in St Catherine's, and that of St Simeon in the fourteenth century church of Asinou in Cyprus (see fig. 18). At times too it was extended to others of the church hierarchy to emphasise their spirituality. The extension of the marking to individuals other than that of Jesus in the Cappadocian frescoes is not commonplace, but it does occur on one of the images of the apostles in the Apple Church, in Goreme (see fig. 19).

The question now arises. Having observed and noted the markings that he had seen on the Shroud, was Vignon aware that those of the facial image were, to a large extent, already a feature of the frescoed Cappadocian images of Jesus, and others, of the late ninth to the early thirteenth centuries? By the time of Vignon these Cappadocian Churches had been derelict and forgotten by the world at large for hundreds of years, and with much of their splendid decoration vandalised as a result of a then Islamic culture.

It has been suggested that fringes and forelocks thought fashionable by males of the Greek and Roman period (see fig. 20) could have had, in certain circumstances, a religious significance. However, they are, in various styles from a deep fringe to forelocks of all descriptions, a commonplace amongst the male population of today, and have been repeatedly fashionable over the centuries, except when wigs were in vogue. Eminent individuals in history who have favoured such a coiffure could well have set a trend for it to be adopted by their contemporaries; this is still a prevalent phenomenon. In certain cases where they feature on early Greek portrait busts, such as that of famous philosophers, they could have little significance apart from conveying their image from the past to the present. Some portrait busts of past emperors in the Capitol Museum of Rome have coiffures that can include a forelock: that of Severus in North Africa shows a forelock whilst that of the notorious Elagabalus sports a fashionable fringe that surely cannot have been inspired by any religious tendency (see figs. 21 and 22).

That all forelocks and fringes depicted on saintly images and others of the Byzantine period must in themselves indicate a religious connotation is a moot point. In the Cappadocian and other images of Jesus the use of mark 15, denoted by two or more downward strokes is specific, and echoes that described by Vignon. Forelocks and fringes of all descriptions are commonplace in depictions of the

laity in the Cypriot and Cappadocian frescoes, as can be seen in that of the denunciation in the Cypriot church of the Palaeochorio (see fig. 23), and in that of Karanlik (see fig. 24). In the Church of St Paraskev there is also a fifteenth century fresco of St Paul dictating to a scribe where the scribe has been shown with a similar substantially fringed forelock (see fig. 25). Apart from Vignon 15 the one coiffure that has a definitive spiritual connotation is that of the monk's tonsure.

At the fall of Constantinople in 1204 the Image of Edessa disappeared, ostensibly into the hands of the Templars, not to be seen again till its exhibition to the public as the Shroud in 1357. That is after some 150 years. It is significant that the images of Christ that date to the years subsequent to 1204 gradually lose the Vignon markings, though the now accepted image of Christ remains more or less a constant. This is apparent in the later images in Istanbul as to be seen in the Chora Camii (see fig. 26) and in the Cypriot churches (see fig. 27). In the Romanesque churches of the same period in France the Vignon markings are totally absent (see figs. 28 and 29). During this period of some 150 years the Shroud was thus not acting as a reference for contemporary artists and the detail of the Vignon markings in its image is largely forgotten. They could thus not be appreciated or represented in their work.

If the Turin Shroud is a forgery, we have to ask how it is that its perpetrator was so aware of the Vignon markings as to include them in his work. By this time the Christian community in Cappadocia had ceased to exist, the chapels and churches having fallen derelict under the subsequent Mamelukes and Ottomans.

In brief it would seem then that after the discovery of the Shroud in 525 the image of Jesus was to change from an often Hellenistic concept to that more or less of today. That after the 'Edict of the Restitution of Images' Vignon markings 13,12 and 15 were recorded in all the Cappadocian Images of Jesus with on occasion 1 and 2. From 944 till 1204 the Image of Edessa in Constantinople became an inspiration for artists of the city ateliers, and marking 15 became an essential feature in their images of Jesus in frescoes, mosaics or icons to express his divinity world wide. Marking 15 was also sometimes extended to others of the church hierarchy to express their spirituality. After the fall of Constantinople in 1204 the Image was lost as an inspiration for contemporary artists in that the Vignon markings gradually ceased to be a feature in later images. Finally it would appear that Vignon was unaware, when he listed the markings he had observed on the Shroud image, that some had already been recorded in the Cappadocian frescoes, and others, of the late tenth to the early thirteenth centuries.

(Editor's Note: The original article included 29 illustrations which are not included here. I am listing them for your information but you must see a copy of Issue 63 of the BSTS Newsletter to view them).

ILLUSTRATIONS.

- 1 Sarcophagus in the Vatican Museum.
- 2 Iconoclastic decoration in the Barbara Church in Goremy.
- 3 Chapel of the monk St Simeon Stylites in Goremy,
- 4 & 5 Cappadocian Countryside.

6. Entering the Pidgeon House Church in Urgup.
7. The local Pottery in Avanos. Urgup.
8. The Cavuscin Church in Goremy.
9. Fresco detail of the dream of Zachariah in the Cavuscin Church.
10. Detail of the Annunciation in the Theodore Church, Goremy
- 11 & 12. Frescoed decoration in the Apple Church, mid 11th century.
13. The Denunciation in Gethsemane. Karanlik Church, Goremy.
14. The Pantocrator in Karanlik Church.
15. The Christ child in the Virgin's arms. The Kilicar Church Urgup.
16. The Pantocrator in the Eski Gumus Monastery Church.
17. Christ in Glory in the Pidgeon Church. Giving the Eastern Blessing.
18. The Presentation before St Simeon. Church of Asinou, Cyprus 14th Cent:
19. Detail of an Apostle in the Apple Church, Goremy.
20. Head of a young man from Ephesus.
21. Head of Septimius Severus in North Africa.
22. Head of Elagabalus, Capoitoline Museum, Rome.
23. Church of the Palaeochorio in Cyprus. 16th cent:
24. The Karanlik Church, Goremy.
25. St Paul and Scribe, Church of St Paraskev Cyprus. 15th Cent.
26. Head of Jesus Chora Camii Isranbul.
27. Church of the Palaeochorio Cyprus.
28. Head of Jesus, Church of St Gillies in the Loir Valley.
29. Christ in Glory, Pontigne Village Church in the Loir Valley.