

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

In a letter of December, 1986, a reader asks:

Q. Could you tell me more about the Latin word *brandeum*? I have been unable to find it in any Latin dictionaries.

A. Nor can I find the word in any of my Latin dictionaries. Paul de Gail, S.J. (*Histoire Religieuse du Linceul du Christ*, p. 62), explains the word, giving as his source the *Dictionnaire d'archeologie chretienne et de liturgie*, of dom Cabrol. Mons. Adolfo Barberis, in "Le Altre Sindoni" (*Sindon* 3, Aug. 1960), gives this information: "From the earliest centuries, Christians honored the bodies of martyrs, giving to these the name 'relics'. They also honored objects which had been in contact with martyrs, before or after their death, and such an object was called *brandeum* or *sanctuarium*. These gave origin to buildings for worship, which were thereby called sanctuaries; the deposition of the *brandeum* was called the 'tomb of the saint.' By the IV<sup>th</sup> century, any object which had been touched to a *brandeum* was in turn honored as a *brandeum*, in spite of the protests of Pope St. Gregory the Great."

Mons. Amato Pietro Frutaz, an authority in Christian antiquities, gives the same explanation: "The Romans...used to distribute objects related to the martyr or had been in contact with a martyr's tomb, etc. All these were considered relics, which the sources call *brandea*, *pignora*, *memoria*, *merita*..."

So we see that any small object—a cross, medal, prayer beads, a ribbon, a handkerchief or other bit of cloth—put in contact with a relic came to be considered a *brandeum*. In the catacombs of Rome, pieces of cloth were touched to the graves of martyrs, or a corner of the cloth dipped lightly into the phials of oil or perfume imbedded in the marble slab closing the *loculus*.

One must not confuse *brandeum* with copies of the Shroud. As we learn from Don Luigi Fossati ("Copies of the Holy Shroud", *Spectrum* 12 & 13), copies painted directly from the Shroud and put in contact with it, became a "True Copy", or even a "True Shroud". It happened that copies of a direct copy were sometimes touched to the direct copy and, although abusively, were also called "True Copies".

About the IV<sup>th</sup> century, when the first persecutions ceased, the Christians would visit the graves of the martyrs to celebrate the day of their "birth", i.e., the day they died for the Faith. "Trophys" were often raised over the graves and eventually, over



Detail of the marble slab over the burial place of St. Paul. One round and two square holes can be seen; through these, the faithful could insert small objects. The stone was visible until the IX<sup>th</sup> century, when it was covered over and only re-discovered in the last century.

Photo by Officine grafiche, Bologna.

the more important martyrs, basilicas were erected; by the V<sup>th</sup> century the presence of a saint's body, or "relic", was essential to the dedication of a church. The flood of relics brought to Europe by crusaders not only added prestige to existing churches, cathedrals and monasteries, but also occasioned the erection of new churches, new chapels. For example, the seigneurs of Mont-Saint-John, from whom the Charny branch descended, built a chapel after they returned from the First Crusade at the close of the XI<sup>th</sup> century, bringing the bodies of St. Julien and St. Pelagia. Transformed to a parish church in 1453, the small edifice still stands but is no longer used except for special ceremonies.

In many churches of Rome we can still see ancient altars in which relics were enclosed. There is a *fenestella*, little window, protected by a grating through which the faithful could pass their small objects to take on the saint's power for healing, protection, intercession, etc; remembering, no doubt the words of the woman with the hemorrhage, *If I can but touch the hem of his garment, I will be healed.*

Under the altar of St. Paul's Outside the Walls, there are two *fenestellae* with iron gratings protecting a great marble slab with the inscription: PAULO APOSTOLO MART(yri). The stone dates from the time of Constantine (IV<sup>th</sup> c.) and has never been removed. Three holes in the marble come together into a small shaft which cuts through the masonry to the tomb below, so that pilgrims could insert some small object to the tomb below and draw it up again—now a *brandeum*. In the Roman catacombs, many a marble slab closing the tomb of a martyr has a hole drilled in it, for the same purpose. One example is shown on the cover of this issue.

Perhaps the word *brandeum* early fell into disuse; the term *sanctuarium* persisted, through the Middle Ages, to designate what we now call a relic. *Sanctuarium* is the word in the document of 6 July 1418, consigning the treasures of St. Mary of the Annunciation, the little wooden church founded by Geoffroy de Charny in 1349 ("Why Did Geoffroy Change His Mind?", *Spectrum* #1, Dec. 1981) to Humbert de Villersexel, Count of La Roche, and his wife, Marguerite de Charny. The document lists the *sanctuarium* given to Humbert and Marguerite for safekeeping during perilous times in France:

- A cloth on which is the figure and representation of the Shroud of Our Lord Jesus Christ (the conciliatory formula prescribed by Clement VII);
- A Cross like the trunk of a tree... (This style, now known as a Branch Cross, appears as early as the VI<sup>th</sup> century on flat crosses, but in the XII<sup>th</sup> century it gained wide popularity in the realistic form of a tree trunk with the stumps of lopped branches. It symbolized the Tree of Life.);

- Gold-plated silver angel holding a reliquary containing one hair of the Virgin;
- A Virgin and Child; gold-plated silver images of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist;
- Objects pertaining to the celebration of the Mass;
- And a phial containing "some oil of Blessed Mary of Sardonnay". (Dogged delving has failed to turn up any information, even the whereabouts of Sardonnay.)

Outside of the Shroud, the treasures of the Lirey church were neither numerous nor impressive. All except the Shroud were returned to the canons of the church. When and where these *sanctuarium*, including the Shroud, were acquired, is not known; what became of them, except for the Shroud, is not recorded.

D.C.