

PERCEPTIONS OF AN ANTECESSOR

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The first formalized study of the Wounds of Christ as seen on the Holy Shroud was published in Bologna in 1598 with the title: *Esplicatione del lenzuolo ove fu involto it Signore, & delle Piaghe in esso impresse col suo pretioso sangue confrontate con la Scrittura Profeti e Padri. Con la notitia di molte Piaghe occulte, & numero de' Chiodi. Et con pie meditationi de' dolori della B. Vergine* (Explanation of the Sheet in which the Lord was wrapped and of the Wounds impressed on it with his precious blood, compared with the Scriptures, Prophets and Fathers. With information about many secret Wounds and the number of the Nails. And with pious meditations on the Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin). According to the custom of the times, the book was dedicated to the Pope and a copy was presented to Clement VIII by the Author, Alfonso Paleotto,¹ Archbishop of Bologna.

Paleotto had made a pilgrimage to Turin in 1582 in the company of his cousin, Gabriele Paleotto, Cardinal-Archbishop of Bologna, and the future saint, Charles Borromeo, Cardinal-Archbishop of Milan, to venerate the Holy Shroud and, as the Author writes in his Preface, the sacred Relic so impressed him that he ardently desired to have a copy of the same dimensions so that, by fixing his eyes upon those sacred wounds, they in turn would be impressed upon his mind. And "a short time ago", this wish was granted.

But the decision to write a book on the Wounds of the Passion was not made until 1590; then, Paleotto comments, "I set myself for eight years to study the Prophets and Scripture, the Gospels and the Fathers, and compiled that work for the proclamation of the Holy Shroud...." The result was a truly remarkable treatise which, in the 1599 version, went through five editions and was translated into Latin and German. Presented here is Chapter XVI, dealing with the wound in the hand:²

Chapter XVI, 1598 version

Coming now to the question of the hands; it appears on the Holy Shroud that they are intact on the backs and not perforated by nails; but the wound is seen at the joint between the arm and the hand, the part which Anatomists call the carpus; leaving the backs of the hands without wounds.

This seems a contradiction, not to be passed by without attentive examination, between the Holy Shroud and Zachariah's prophecy

concerning these wounds, saying: *Quid sunt plagae istae in medio manuum tuarum?* What are these wounds in the middle of your hands? (Zach. 13:6). St. Thomas believed the wounds to be in that location, and it is obvious that this is also the interpretation of the Church, which reads this prophecy in the Epistle of the Mass of the Passion of the Lord.

It seems, likewise, that it contradicts David's prediction, *Foderunt manus meas*, They have pierced my hands. These prophecies signify that the wounds are in the middle of the hands; and so it seems that the Holy Shroud not only does not confirm the Prophets (as it does in the other Chapters); but it contradicts Jeremiah and David, who predicted the details of the Passion of Christ in this way. To clarify this difficulty, it can be presupposed that the Romans would nail the hands in a way that they would sustain the body, so the usage was to plant the nail in the middle of the hand toward the part where the bone is strongest, and, without touching the bone, to pierce the hand by pointing the nail near the juncture with the arm: as Plautus, alluding to the usage, said: The arms, and not the hands of the crucified, are to be nailed; and Beda also reported that the arms were wounded when he said, *Brachia Salvatoris crucifixi in medio vulnerata*. Because the muscles and ligaments in the arms of the crucified are injured. Nor did the Romans drive the nail straight through, piercing the hand from one side to the other, but obliquely, so that it passed through the hand in the middle of its length, but, however, toward the arm, where the hand gets thicker and the bone stronger. Thus the point of the nail comes out at that part of the back of the hand amidst the juncture; and that is because the nail [in the palms] would not have sustained the body; but the weight of the body would have torn the hand, according to the experiments made by master painters and sculptors with dead bodies, intended as models to copy for their representations.

Thus the Romans made the nail enter the joint between the arm and the hand, without touching or breaking any bone; a thing which caused the crucified inexpressible pain, since the nails penetrated amongst these extremely sensitive nerves and the joint; and the nails supporting all the weight of the body made that part extremely painful; the weight of the crucified body being all on the nails increased the pain in the nervous tissue fastened and hanging on the Cross.

The nails, therefore (O bitter torment of the Lord), were placed in this part so extremely sensitive; as the Holy Shroud demonstrates, the wound appears only in that part of the juncture of the arm, and all the back of the hand is intact and without injury.

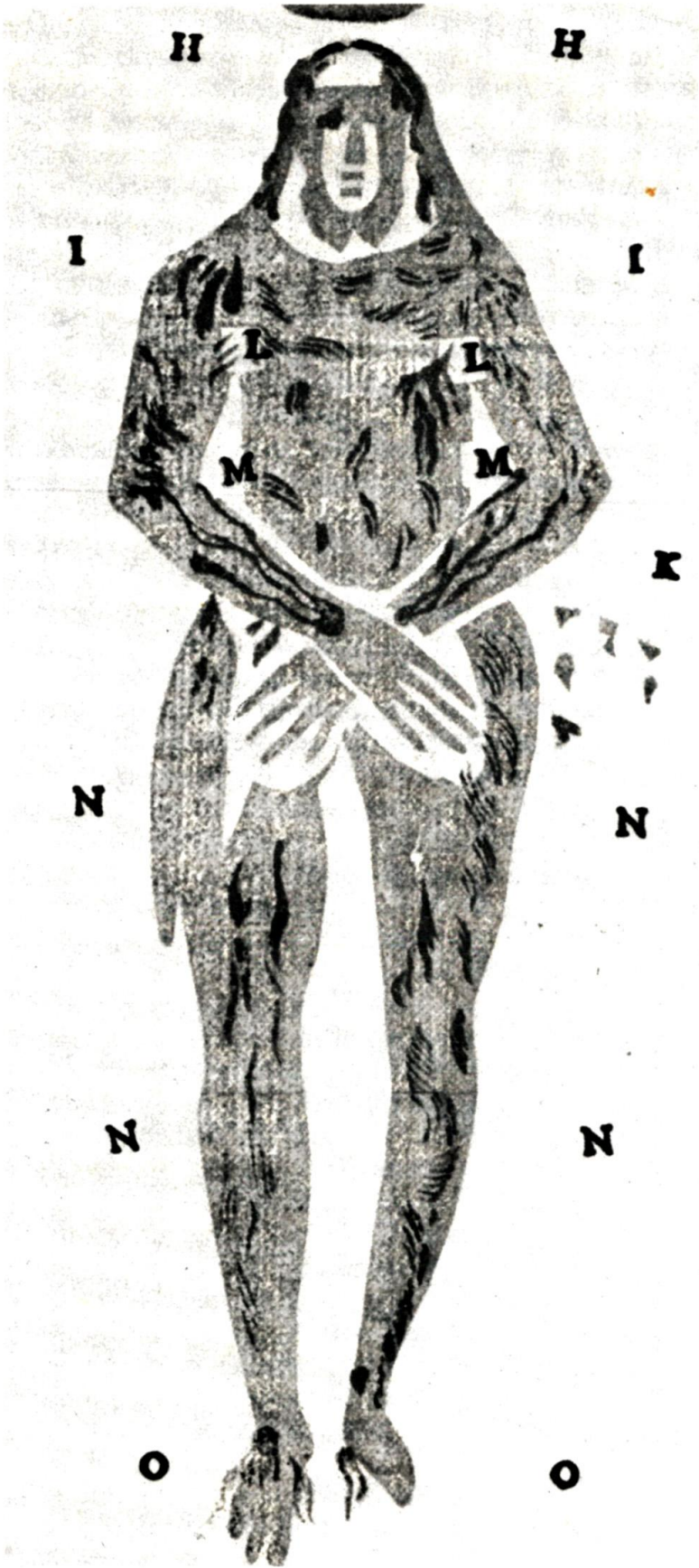
These wounds thus obliquely set in the hands of the Lord were perhaps prefigured in those crooked, oblique windows that Solomon made in the Temple, as we read in the Book of Kings, *Fecit in templo fenestras obliquas* (I Kings 6:4). For also even the body of the

Lord, according to the Evangelist, is likened to the temple when he says, *Hoc autem dicebat de templo corporis sui* (Jo 2:21). And again, Ezechiel, describing that mystical temple, said that in the vestibules and in the Temple itself there were oblique windows; and such windows as these are declared by the Holy Doctors to be those windows which outside are very narrow but inside they are quite a bit wider,³ and for this reason admit a great abundance of light. In the same way, these wounds, so crooked, have given both light and life to the world, and are called by the Holy Fathers oblique and crooked windows; thus St. Jerome, and St. Gregory, and the Abbot Rupert and Nicholas of Lira.

On these matters there is a revelation made to St. Bridget (whose revelations were confirmed by a Bull of Boniface IX) registered in the book of St. Bridget, to whom the Holy Virgin spoke. At one time the Virgin said; The hands of my Son were pierced in that part where the bone is more solid. These are her words: *Perforatae fuerunt Filio meo manus in ea parte, in qua os solidius erat*. By that declaration it appears that the Holy Shroud does not diverge from the prophecies of Zachariah and David; because since it was the custom to nail the hands in that manner, putting the point of the nail in the joint, it is very true that the nails made wounds in the middle of the Lord's hands, and thus the saying of Zachariah is verified, that those sacred wounds were in the middle of the hand; but instead of piercing the hand from one side to the other, the wound, which was made in the middle of the hand, came out (as explained above) with the point of the nail at the juncture of the arm. From this it results that the Prophet did not say, They have nailed my hands; but, They have pierced my hands; because the hands were not affixed to the Cross but the nail was driven into the Cross at the juncture of the arm. The truth of this is clearly demonstrated by the Holy Shroud, in which the upper part of the hand is intact, without a nail wound; but the inner part, which does not show on the imprint of the Shroud, was not that way. In fact, the inner part, by necessity, was bloody; bleeding inside, and a quantity of blood between the fingers. From which one understands the saying of the Canticles (5:14); *Manus illius tornatiles aureae et plenae hyacinthis*, that is, His hands are of gold made on the turning-wheel, and full of hyacinth, naming "hyacinth" the precious droplets which were of such worth that they could redeem human nature. Hyacinths are flowers of sky-blue color; because celestial graces, opening Heaven, spill from the power of the blood of these hands, and from their radiant splendor flows endlessly the sign both of the triumph of the Lord and of our redemption.

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FACING PAGE: The frontal image of Paleotto's drawing. This fold-out illustration was appended to the 1598 and subsequent editions, including the anastatic copy of the Bottega d'Erasmus. The nail wound is clearly shown to be in the wrist.



TORCVLAR CALCAVI SOLVS
ISAI. LXIII.

With one more brief allusion to the Canticles and a meditation on the Sorrows of the Blessed Mother, Mons. Paleotto concludes his study on the hands in the first edition of his book, published in 1598. An original, indeed daring, exposition, presented by one whose clarity of conviction surpasses his means of expression.

Aside from his criticism of Paleotto's theory of how the nail went through the carpus, Pierre Barbet found the account a "valuable testimony". In his own chapter about the wound in the hand, Barbet remarks: "Mons. Paleotto ...produced a detailed description of [the Shroud], perhaps the first to appear (Bologna, 1598). A very detailed copy of the Shroud is appended, showing the blood images *with their colors*. It is the only reasonably valid copy that I know of.

"This study shows a marvelous intuition in places, considering the Author's flagrant ignorance of anatomy.... Carpus is certainly exact.... "4

Was Paleotto's uncanny accuracy guided by intuition, as Barbet suggests? In his *Autobiography*,⁵ the Author candidly declares that

the secrets of many wounds were made known to him by revelations granted by the Blessed Virgin to Paleotto's constant companion, whom he calls the "Seer", (*Vidente*, He who sees).

Intuition or revelation, his descriptions could hardly be by observation alone, for Paleotto saw the Shroud but once, probably only for a moment and possibly from a distance. And the copy he received "a short time ago"? A glance at the artists' copies made directly from the Shroud 6 would dispel any idea that Paleotto's copy was so faithful to the Original that his observations were based on that. Not a one would show the wound frankly in the wrist, with the back of the hand completely intact, as we see the Author has done on the drawing made for his book.

Such an abrupt break with artistic tradition was ill-timed. Movements away from the treasury of traditions and orthodoxy had riddled the Roman Catholic Church all through the sixteenth century; it was, therefore, deemed imprudent to ask the faithful to accept this novelty of nails through the wrists instead of the "hands", that is, the palms, as iconography had always taught.

Clement VIII required a rewrite of Chapter XVI and some others, and an adjustment in the title: *Esplicatione del sacro Lenzuolo ove fu involto it Signore. Et delle Piaghe in esso impresse col suo pretioso sangue confrontate con la Scrittura Sacra, Profeti, e Padri. Con pie meditationi de' dolori della Beata Vergine*. Two small but significant changes are found: 1) the word *sacro* now enhances *Lenzuolo*; 2) the original reference to the "many secret wounds and number of the nails" has been deleted.

The version of 1599 included the *Privilegium* of Clement VIII, dated 17 March 1599. It was this version that was anastatically reprinted by Turin's Bottega d'Erasmus in 1978.

Chapter XVI of the 1599 version begins:

Coming now to the question of the hands: Visible on the Holy Shroud are long and very beautiful hands, and the left hand placed over the right to form a Cross, as can be seen in the drawing at the place marked with the letter K; and in the left hand one sees a wound, big and round, which spurted a great abundance of blood, for which it seems to be true that on the Cross Our Lord was nailed with big nails in the hands, as was the usage of the Romans....

Avoiding any reference to the carpus but equally careful not to compromise his own convictions, in this as in other chapters where the Pope required revision, Paleotto finds the inspiration to present his readers with a description and explanation of each wound, how each one had been foretold in Scripture, fulfilled and recorded on the Shroud; and all obediently expounded in conformity to accepted tradition.

But he knew that, one day, his observations would be verified. He wrote in his Autobiography: "But the Lord said that, when the time came, He would make it known in his Church how the wounds of the hands were in the joint of the arm; and that the large wound of the loins, and those of the feet with the four nails, are the true wounds that he suffered; and in the same way [He would make known also] the location and the size, as it is explained in the first book that I had printed in 1598; and that they are impressed in the same places and the same ways on the original of the Shroud, as is clearly seen on that Shroud."

NOTES

1. Italian writers prefer the form Paleotti. On the title page and frontispiece, and in the preface and dedication, the Author himself writes Paleotto. In the preface he writes Paleotti in the context of the "family of the Paleotti" (plural form); and the dedication is signed Alfonso Paleotti.
2. A photocopy of this chapter from the 1598 edition was kindly sent to me by Don Luigi Fossati.
3. The "oblique windows" are the arrow loops, or meurtrières, of medieval castle-fortresses.
4. Translated from *La Passion de Jésus-Christ selon le chirurgien*, p. 148. See also *A Doctor at Calvary*, Doubleday Image Book, p. 111.
5. An extensive extract from the *Autobiography* is given by Mario Fanti in "Genesi e vicende del libro di Alfonso Paleotti sulla Sindone", *La Sindone, Scienza e Fede*, Acts of the Bologna Congress (1983), pp. 369-379.
6. See Fossati: "Copies of the Holy Shroud", *Spectrum* 12 & 13 (1984).