

LA NUMISMATIQUE BYZANTINE  
ET LE LINCEUL DU CHRIST

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In this study of the coins of the Byzantine Empire, Dr. Maurice Clercq hopes to offer additional support for the presence of the Shroud in Edessa and Constantinople. Tracing the political and religious history of the empire on more than 2,000 coins struck between A.D. 383 and 1428, he interrogates these small pieces for clues as to how their representations of Christ were influenced by the Shroud face after the rediscovery, in 525, of the Shroud/Mandylion in Edessa.

Reading Byzantine history on a thousand-year sequence of coins can be fascinating, especially when we are on the lookout for an answer to Dr. Clercq's query: Does the presence of a bust of Christ, with beard and halo, indicate that there is some rapport with the Mandylion/Shroud history, or simply that the depictions were influenced by the style of the icons?

Having briefed us on denominations issued under successive dynasties, Clercq examines the Christian symbols on coins, noting that under Justinian I, (527-565) the cross and globe appears, attributes of a Christian emperor. Christian symbols persist until, under Justinian II (685-695), for the first time Christ is represented on a coin.

The figure portrays the bust of a young Christ in the Roman manner, i.e., short curled hair, no beard. As a result of the Council of Trullo (or Quinisext) in 692, a bust of Christ appears with face and beard styled in the fashion of the Byzantine emperors. But this was soon followed by a bust of Christ in the manner of Byzantine icons: forked beard, long hair, two little locks on the forehead at the hairline. "We know that this representation derives from direct observation of the Holy Face on the Shroud", the author states confidently.

Wars, heresies, iconoclasm, internal revolutions, assassinations, all are reflected in the coinage. At last Michael III (842-867) reinstates the cult of images and issues a new gold solidus carrying a bust of Christ in the manner of Byzantine icons. Three succeeding emperors issue the solidus bearing the protecting, blessing Christ, "a symbolism independent of the Mandylion".

From 945 to 1204, across the reign of thirteen emperors, the iconic bust continues.

Then Dr. Clercq puts aside his absorbing factual résumé of Byzantine events as reflected in the coinage and begins to fit pieces of his expertise into a make-believe context. Shall we believe that

Theodore Cantacuzene, visiting Charles VI of France in 1390 — the very moment of the Lirey controversy — or Manuel II, from 1400 to 1402 a guest of the French king, maybe even interrupted the gay round of banquets, tournaments, the chase, to go to Lirey? "There is every reason to believe that Theodore Cantacuzene, during his visit in France, recognized [after two centuries] the Lirey relic as the Shroud venerated in Constantinople that had disappeared during the sack [1204] of the city by the crusaders. ... Could he have gone to Lirey?"

Were one to entertain a supposition of this kind for even a moment, one would immediately wonder why the emperor or his uncle did not vociferously claim their "stolen" Relic, or, since they were sojourning in the French court in order to solicit military aid, why at least they did not demand indemnity? of course, Dr. Clercq only asks a question, as we all must do.

But it is not at all certain, though attractive narratives have been raised upon the idea, that the Shroud was "rediscovered" in Edessa in 525 or thereabouts. Does no one remember Justinian's *Mensura Christi*? Documented in Codex III shelf XXV of the Biblioteca Laurenziana, and established by Codex Vat. gr. 973ss, Patr. gr. 302ss, Otto. lat. 169...

Ὁ δε τίμιος σταυρος ὁ ἱστάμενος σήμερον ἐν τῷ σκευοφνλαχείῳ τὸ μέτρον ἐστὶ τῆς ἡλικίας τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ὅς ἀκρῶς ἐμετρήθη παρὰ πιστῶν καὶ ἀξιολογῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ. Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἐνέδυσεν αὐτὸν ἀργυρὸν καὶ λίθους παντοίους καὶ κατεχρυσῶσεν αὐτὸν.

Ὁ δε τίμιος σταυρος ὁ ἱστάμενος εἰς τὸ σκευοφυλαχεῖον ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλὴμ τὸ μέτρον ἐλάβεν ἡλικίας τῆς Χριστοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν.

(Measure of the height of the body of Christ, measured by trustworthy men in Jerusalem. And the emperor Justinian made a cross according to this measure, and decorated it with silver and gold and precious gems, and gilded it. And stood it at the door of the sanctuary, where are all the holy reliquaries and the treasure of the great church, [considering it to be] like all the holy relics.... In St. Sophia ... is set up the Mensural Cross, which indicates the stature of Christ according to the flesh. (See Savio 15, 70, 172174; Ricci 234; Spectrum #21.)

According to this testimony, the Shroud was in Jerusalem at some time during the reign of Justinian I (527-565). Perhaps what was "rediscovered" in Edessa in 525 was — as the documents and icons and legends insist — a Mandyllion?