

A CLOSE EXAMINATION OF THE MEMORANDUM OF  
PIERRE D'ARCIS AND THE WRITINGS OF CLEMENT VII

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The paper Don Luigi Fossati presented to the Rome symposium is an expanded version of "A Critical Study of the Lirey Documents", published in *Spectrum* #41, December 1992.

In 1961, Fossati published *Nuove Luce su Antichi Documenti* (New Light on Ancient Documents), a title that describes precisely the contents. Two monographs followed: *Fatti e Documenti del secolo XIV sulla Santa Sindone* (1969) and *Le Vicende polemiche di Lirey* (1980). In 1983, *Spectrum* presented "The Lirey Controversy" and finally "A Critical Study", referred to above.

One would think that writers of Shroud "history" would have noticed Fossati's research. That they have preferred to dwell superficially on the "Memorandum" and on Ulysse Chevalier's errant conclusions, raises the suspicion that they are victims of some plurisecular preconceptions against the Shroud.

Forget about Chevalier. Forget about Pierre d'Arcis. For a balanced evaluation of the Lirey affair, prescind the ancient documents of Clement VII, and let them stand in the light of Don Fossati's erudite research.

Don Fossati stresses the importance of the fact that in the brief space of one year Clement VII used two expressions to indicate the Shroud with its imprints: *figura seu representacio* (figure or image) and *pictura seu tabula* (picture or painting).<sup>\*</sup> He used the first expression, *figura seu representacio*, in the Bull of July 28, 1389. This could be the expression used by Geoffroy II de Charny in his petitions to display the Shroud. (It will be remembered that no Charny documents of this period have been found.) In this Bull, indulgences were granted, under the usual conditions, to those who visited the church of Saint Mary in Lirey.

The second expression, *pictura seu tabula*, occurs in the Bull of January 6, 1390, with specific restrictions as to how the Cloth was to be displayed. Exhibition of the Shroud, however, was not prohibited.

Figure 1 shows the copy of Clement VII's Bull of January 6, 1390, conserved in the Bibliotheque Nationale of Paris. The word "copy"

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<sup>\*</sup> In medieval Latin, "figura" stands for figure or form; "seu" is a simple "or", but can also mean "or rather". "Representacio" means an image, likeness, or portrait. "Pictura" can remain as picture, while "tabula" usually designates a panel painting. Ed.











is clearly seen at the top. In this part is written (I translate): "... that the above-mentioned **figure or image** is not the true sudarium of Our Lord Jesus Christ but a kind of **picture or painting** made like a figure or image of the sudarium."

Underneath this is the letter of the same date sent to the three ecclesiastical officials of Autun, Langres, and Chalons-sur-Marne. The relevant passage reads: "... the above-mentioned **figure or image** is not to be exposed as the true sudarium of Our Lord Jesus Christ, but like a **figure or image** of said sudarium."

At the bottom, upside-down, is Clement's letter to Pierre d'Arcis, the same day. Clement used the phrase figure or image and threatens d'Arcis with excommunication if he attempts to impede the expositions.

Four months later, on May 30, this expression, **pictura seu tabula** (picture or painting), was crossed out in the copy for the Vatican Register. Figure 2 shows the continuation of the January 6 document conserved in the Vatican Archives. The correction ordered by Clement VII is clearly written. The lines crossed out are essentially the same as we saw on the Paris copy: "... that the above-mentioned **figura seu representacio** is not the true sudarium of Our Lord Jesus Christ, but a kind of **pictura seu tabula** made like a **figura seu representacio** of the sudarium". Then the correction reads: "... that the **figura seu representacio** is not to be exposed as the true sudarium of Our Lord Jesus Christ but as the **figura seu representacio** of the sudarium of Our Lord Jesus Christ." In the margin, the clerk, Jo. di Neapoli, sets his signature with the date, May 30.

At the bottom, as in the Paris copy, we see Clement VII's letter to the three ecclesiastical officials. This time, Clement's decision was firm, for two days later, June 1, 1390, he issued a new Bull with the original expression, **figura seu representacio**, and with a renewal of indulgences for visitors to the church of St. Mary of Lirey, because the Shroud is there **venerabilitur** conserved.

Figure 3 shows the Bull of June 1, 1390, conserved in the Vatican Archives. The expression "picture or painting" has disappeared.

As Don Fossati points out, the reasons behind Clement's changes are not known. What happened in the interim between January and May 1390? It does not appear that the Bishop or the Pope ever saw the Shroud. Historians today cannot plead this disadvantage; and science affirms that the Figured Document contradicts the written document of Pierre d'Arcis and the judgments of Chevalier and his followers.