

IS A PHYLACTERY INDICATED ON THE SHROUD? LATEST CLAIM BY DR. ALAN WHANGER ...

It is more than five years since Fr. Filas claimed to be able to see coins over the eyes of the man of the Shroud. Now Duke University psychiatrist Dr. Alan Whanger has made a yet more problematic claim - that visible on the Shroud are indications of two phylacteries that remained on the body for the burial.

A phylactery, in Hebrew *tefillah*, is a small leather box or pouch worn by orthodox Jewish men at times of prayer. It contains small parchments with scriptural passages, and can be worn on both the arm and the forehead, fastened by leather straps. Whanger sees evidence of both head and, arm phylacteries on the Shroud. The forehead version corresponds to three Vignon markings - the triangle between the eyes, the topless square, and the streak across the forehead (according to Whanger the triangle indicates the phylactery was cut open and thereby desecrated). For Whanger the arm phylactery is indicated by the apparent interruptions to the bloodflows on the left arm, which he interprets as due to the phylactery having been wound round the arm the customary seven times. He also sees a further length of the strap running down the side of the body.

One problem for Whanger is that there is no evidence that Jews were ever buried wearing their phylacteries. As countered by Whanger "... it was not the custom to crucify people with them on either. This was obviously a highly unusual crucifixion and burial."

But the root issue is the extent to which Whanger may or may not be over-interpreting incidental markings on the Shroud which may have no significance whatsoever. Here only the eye of the beholder can be the judge, and in fairness Whanger has furnished himself with the most impressive collection of life-size Shroud photographs from which to pursue his researches. Additionally, Whanger has found unexpected support for his ideas from Germany. West German physicist Oswald Scheuermann together with Dr. Igor Bensen, a research engineer from Raleigh, North Carolina, have been conducting some remarkable experiments trying to reconstruct how the Shroud image may have been formed, and both have been highly impressed by Whanger's work.

So whatever one's immediate reaction to Whanger's claims, it may be prudent at least temporarily to reserve judgment.