

FLOWER IMAGES ON THE SHROUD?

Dr. Alan Whanger, the Duke University psychiatry professor who developed the intriguing polarized overlay method of comparing the Shroud image with early Byzantine icons of the Shroud face, has recently announced findings from a surprising new area of research. He claims that in addition to the Christ body imprint on the Shroud he can discern the images of hundreds of flowers that seem to have been placed in bunches around the body. Of these he sees "reasonably clear" images of 28 different flowers, small bushes and thorns, all of which can be found within a 15 mile radius of Jerusalem, but are mostly not to be found in Europe. To help his identifications Whanger consulted Michael Zohary's 6 volume *Flora Palaestina*, the definitive work on the botany of Israel, and he claims that 25 of the flower and plant varieties he has identified correspond to those of the pollens found by the late Dr. Max Frei.

Whanger also points out that 27 of the 28 flowers identified bloom in March and April, thus corresponding with the time of year of Jesus's crucifixion. Using his polarized overlay technique, he further shows how some of the flower images can be seen in their appropriate location in relation to the Shroud face on certain early Byzantine coins and icons - suggesting that in the earliest centuries the images were more visible than they are today.

This latest finding by Whanger joins several others, such as the "coins over the eyes" of the late Fr. Francis Filas, and "Hebrew letters on the forehead" of certain Italian sindonologists, dogged by the difficulty of anyone being quite sure what the eye does or does not see when confronted with an image as ephemeral as that of the Shroud. For this reason Whanger's research must be approached with due caution, and he himself, although an unashamed enthusiast for the Shroud's authenticity, would not wish it otherwise. But at least in Whanger's favour are the well-established precedents for plants in botanical collections leaving quite unmistakable imprints of themselves on the sheets of paper between which they have been pressed.