

HELD AT LAST...

THE TROUBLED NEW YORK SYMPOSIUM - IN THE EVENT, ARGUABLY THE BEST-EVER ENGLISH LANGUAGE CONFERENCE ON THE SHROUD...

There has perhaps been no more strife-torn Shroud event of recent years than the Symposium held at Columbia University, New York the weekend of March 2 and 3. Sponsored by the American Shroud of Turin Association in collaboration with ASSIST and the BSTS, the venture suffered at least two postponements, then the circulation of a mysterious 'Announcement' urging its boycott (some of whose signatories have subsequently disclaimed responsibility), then, only two weeks before, the outbreak of full hostilities in the Gulf War. Even at the very last minute key medical speaker Dr. Joseph Gambescla was rushed into hospital, and proved unable to attend; also, again partly because of ill-health, Dr. Walter McCrone.

Nonetheless ASTA President Charles Parlato's nerve held, and although the actual attendance at Columbia University's spacious and well-appointed Katherine Bache Miller Theatre was very disappointing (and a sad reflection on the event's detractors), the Symposium's actual content was arguably the most informative and well-balanced programme of any English language Shroud conference held so far.

One last-minute speaker was our own Dr. Allan Mills, senior lecturer in Geology and the History of Science at Leicester University, and a BSTS member since its inception. Dr. Mills has recently become intrigued by a phenomenon familiar in the early days of photography, but virtually forgotten in our own time, that of vegetable products such as wood, card, resins, newsprint, etc, producing a 'photographic' image in total darkness if placed for some hours near to (but not necessarily on) something with emulsion-type characteristics. Late 19th century photography manufacturers became irritated by instances of unexposed films becoming imprinted with the grain of the cardboard containers in which they were stored, leading to Royal Society vice-president W.J. Russell investigating the problem, the means for its elimination being found soon after. Because of Russell's involvement, the phenomenon has become known as the Russell effect, and the essence of Dr. Mills' argument (one akin to the time-honoured Vignon 'vaporographic' hypothesis), is that the Shroud image was produced by a similar interaction between vegetable product (the Shroud) and emulsor (a crucified body). Dr. Mills' talk, illustrated with slides, was an early highlight of the New York Symposium, and will be repeated (with additions and updates) for the benefit of BSTS members at the next BSTS public meeting, Wednesday 23 October at the New Cavendish Club (see p.16).

By virtually universal agreement, however, the most spectacular presentation of the Symposium was that of Los Angeles mural artist Isabel Piczek who spoke for an information-packed hour on the topic 'The Shroud from the view of a professional artist'. After showing superb, dazzlingly large-scale examples of her work from as early as the age of fourteen, Isabel Piczek explained the virtual impossibility, from the point of view of paint chemistry, of the Shroud being the work of an artist of any century (here it is a great pity that Dr Walter McCrone, in the event, proved unable to attend). With a plethora of slides she demonstrated the total incompatibility of the Shroud's image with the science and art of the Middle Ages (for her views on the Shroud being the work even of a Leonardo da Vinci, see pp.13-16). She went on to illustrate her own researches, using a live model, attempting to reconstruct the exact attitude of the body of the man of the

Shroud as laid in the cloth. In a novel development of the Vignon iconographic hypothesis she further showed how Shroud features such as a protruding abdomen became repeated in Byzantine art.

Sheila Landi's paper on 'The Ethics of Textile Conservation in Relation to the Shroud' was another tour de force, considerably developed and made more specific to the Shroud in the wake of her recent BSTS lecture. Besides calling for an urgent check on the Shroud's pH value, perhaps the most controversial of her recommendations was that the Shroud would be best moved from the highly polluted atmosphere of industrial Turin. Her concluding remarks were in the form of questions which she posed particularly for the cloth's ecclesiastical custodians:

'First, is the present method of storage the best ' possible? Physically, one can hardly think so... Environmentally is the area sufficiently controlled? ... I doubt it, and improvement in this I would consider to be urgent. ... Third, on the rare occasions of exposition, is it displayed in the safest possible manner? ... Fourth, is the present method of support, that is, the backing stitched on by Poor Clare nuns..., actually helping the original fabric, or is it left in place for reasons of historical association? Are these reasons so strong as to override the probable mechanical and aesthetic gain achieved by replacing it on modern principles?

New York medical examiner Dr. Fred Zugibe, replacing Dr. Joseph Gambescia, spoke forcefully both on the pathology of the Shroud wounds and on his own investigations into the Liverpool mattress cover image. Dr. John Jackson, a most welcome late-comer to the programme, gave a major presentation of his latest thoughts on the physics of the Shroud Image. Further major highlights of the Symposium were talks by archaeological chemist Dr. Giles Carter, historian Professor Dan Scavone, textile chemist Dr. Jeanette Cardamone, also Dr. Alan Whanger and Paul Maloney. Very valuable also were the two in-depth panel discussions, the most controversial of these (because it was the element the Symposium's detractors seem most to have opposed), being on carbon dating, with contributions by Professor Douglas Donahue of the Arizona carbon dating laboratory, Dr. Marian Scott of, Glasgow University, and Hong Kong archaeologist Bill Meacham.

The Symposium was expertly videotaped throughout by Kodak photographic specialist Kevin Moran and others. A programme of edited highlights is being prepared, which should be available shortly, also a printed Proceedings for eventual presentation to the ecclesiastical authorities.