

DID LEONARDO DA VINCI FAKE THE SHROUD? TALK BY LYNN PICKNETT.

Review by Clive Prince

On 9 April London writer and broadcaster Lynn Picknett put forward a controversial new version of a pre-existent theory of the Shroud's origin at a talk given to the London Earth Mysteries Circle. According to Lynn Picknett's argument, the present Shroud was the work of Leonardo da Vinci, who created the image using an early photographic technique. Allegedly Leonardo's version was only the latest in a series of similar cloths which were part of a secret gnostic tradition.

Lynn Picknett began by summarising the major facets of the mystery presented by the image and the Shroud: the anatomical accuracy of the wounds, the fact that it can only be appreciated in photographic negative, the lack of plausible explanation for the process or technique by which it was created, and, particularly, anomalies connected with the relationship between the image's head and body. The results of the carbon-dating tests, indicating a medieval origin for the cloth, were also discussed. She then went on to show how an understanding- of the characteristics, interests and activities of Leonardo da Vinci sheds new lights on these problems.

Leonardo's genius is of course, universally acknowledged, the phrase 'ahead of his time' being commonly used of him. If the Shroud image is the work of any human: being, he is certainly, a highly credible candidate. He possessed the required anatomical knowledge and, through his anatomical researches, the opportunity to experiment. In his scientific studies he had access to methods for imprinting an image on cloth, and his genius would have provided the insight needed to formulate the technique. As for motive, he is known to have held unorthodox beliefs, a point which Lynn Picknett illustrated with a number of examples of 'heretical' statements in Leonardo's religious paintings. According to her, he had associations with various heretical and esoteric schools and bodies, particularly the secretive Priory of Sion, of which, she claimed; he was Grand Master for the last nine years of his life.

Lynn Picknett's sources are controversial. Allegedly the story was revealed to her by a high ranking member of the Priory of Sion, who stated that the Shroud was 'faked' by Leonardo in 1492 using an essentially photographic process (and therefore adding yet another achievement to his list of credits, as the inventor of photography). Purportedly a newly crucified body was used for the main image, and for the final touch Leonardo substituted his own face.

In support of all this, Lynn Picknett pointed out how such an explanation covers the major anomalies associated with the Shroud. Her most compelling piece of evidence was the striking resemblance between the face of the man on the Shroud and contemporary portraits of Leonardo. And her mystery informant added one other piece of information. The Shroud was apparently commissioned by the then Pope, who was so disappointed with the result that Leonardo, was never paid for his work...

[Editor's Note: Clive Prince, who is associated with Lynn Picknett, has recently joined the BSTS and has suggested that she should be invited to give her talk to the Society. It is in the tradition of the BSTS to welcome speakers offering any serious contribution to Shroud studies, irrespective of whether the argument is for or against authenticity. And

any evidentially based argument that Leonardo faked the Shroud certainly deserves to be taken seriously.

But while Lynn Picknett appears a well-informed speaker her evidence is heavily dependent upon the notorious *Holy Blood and Holy Grail* and a long, uncorroborated statement from an unidentified (and apparently unidentifiable) .high-ranking "member of the Priory of Sion whom, she claims, singled her out to impart the Leonardo theory to the world. In this regard she omitted to disclose during her talk that it is her practice to receive mediumistic 'automatic writing' communications from Leonardo da Vinci. There are indications in the 'Priory of Sion' statement of a similar mediumistic origin. Since the evaluation of such material pertains more to the Society for Psychical Research than to the BSTS, the giving of a platform to it would be a serious departure from normal BSTS policy. Members may like to express an opinion on this issue, but meanwhile the following article by artist Isabel Piczek offers a highly relevant alternative perspective, totally non-dependent on the arcane].