

The Shroud Relic in Prague by **Hugh Duncan**

In BSTS 52 Jana Souflova brought to our attention a reliquary K202 kept in the St Vitus' Cathedral in Prague in the Czech Republic which claimed to contain a piece of the burial cloth of Christ. However, at the time no study nor photo had yet been taken of the relic. I got in touch with Milena Bramermanova from the St Vitus art collection department. She managed to arrange an official examination of the cloth on 19th march 2001, which was mentioned in BSTS 53. The report stated the dimensions of the piece of cloth were 6.5 x 4.7 cm of brownish colour, probably red originally, the weave being tabby and of silk, so nothing like the Turin Shroud's linen twill. Nor did the dimensions match any of the missing side pieces of the Shroud.

The examination of K202 had been done while the piece was still behind its glass window in the reliquary, but since then, Milena sent me some photos of the cloth when it was removed for a more detailed study by Mrs Otavksa, plus a picture of the container itself.

The reliquary itself is shown in figure 1 (cover photo). There is no scale on the photograph, but its size can be estimated from the cloth. Milena explained that the reliquary is gothic, possibly from the time of Charles IV of Bohemia (1350s) or a little later. The cedula (latin for small piece of paper) and the arranging of the textile is from 1618, while the 'Veraikon' is from the middle of the 18th century. It is made of silver, while the surround is gilded silver. She quoted the dimensions of the cloth as being 8cm x 5cm, a little larger (and less precise) than the earlier quoted measurements.

Figure 2 shows a close up of the cloth. According to Milena, the binding system is tabby, which means 'coarse silk weave', the warp being silk, Z twist, the colour nowadays being red-brown. The thread density is about 36 threads/cm. The weft is silk with no visible twist, also red-brown, while the density is about 28 threads/cm. This is clearly not the same material as the Turin Shroud (linen, beige, twill 33 and 26 threads/cm warp and weft respectively). Milena states there is no pattern, nor are there any stains, though I feel there is some type of mirror image stain as if the piece had been folded at some time. It is perhaps more clearly seen in Fig 3. One can also see that the cloth is held in place by several nails along its top and bottom and at least one in the middle. One can also see that the two visible corners show roughly quarter circle pieces removed.

Figure 3 shows the entire relic along with the cedula. The missing corners are clearer and appear more elliptical. The left hand section of the cloth is clearly in a very different state to the right hand section. The apparent stain marks can be seen in the right hand section as two almost complete ovals with what looks like four lines each leading diagonally to a corner of this half of the cloth.

In Jana's original article in BSTS, the links of this relic with the appearance of the Shroud in Lirey sounded very promising, in fact promising enough to be plausible. However, this official report shows that the St Vitus relic is not from the Turin Shroud. It is also not from the same material as the piece sent to Louis IX (now kept in Toledo in Spain). Ian Wilson wondered if this piece in the K202 reliquary could be from one of the rival shrouds, such as Cadouin or Compiègne. Ian did also point out that the Turin Shroud was often wrapped in a protective cloth at different times, the commonest material used being red silk. So could this piece in Prague be a cutting from the cloth that once protected the Turin Shroud? Another more fanciful theory, is that the original piece was switched with this present piece of old silk at some moment between the 1350s and 1618 when the cloth was set in the reliquary!

Milena says that the written documents she has access to are so 'foggy' that all she can be sure of is that they say Charles IV received the cloth, it being part of Christ's funeral veil. In the inventory of St Vitus' Cathedral it is written (and in a dedicated list to) that the relic was received by Charles IV from Mohuc

from the abbey Hermann, probably in the year 1355. Before the identity of the K202 material was known, Milena showed an interest in checking the sample for pollen grains using the method Max Frei did for the Shroud. Ian Wilson suggested Uri Baruch as a possible present day expert to consult in this area. However, as we now know this piece is not from the Turin Shroud, would a pollen check serve any purpose?

There is one final avenue to follow. Milena has given me the contact details of Prof Jiri Marejka, the chapter deacon at Metropolitni kapitula u sv. Vita, Praha – Hrad, Bohemia, Czech Republic, who has a more detailed history of the cloth. However, any such communication will have to be in German. Perhaps such further research might shed light on this relic's true origin.

