

A link between the Turin Shroud and the Knights Templar? Master Brother Widekind's seals show a Shroud-like Christ face

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In his book *The Shroud: Fresh Light on the 2000-year-old Mystery* English historian Ian Wilson argues persuasively why the Turin Shroud was likely to have been in the possession of the Crusader Order of Knights Templar for some decades. In his words, “With an efficient support structure of clerks and servitors, the Order was able to act as guardians, traders and pawnbrokers for the flourishing trade in relics, genuine and false alike, that ensued after the Fourth Crusade. Thus, the means of acquiring the Image of Edessa/Shroud were in place. Also, the well-distributed and heavily guarded Templar monastery-fortresses provided suitable means for keeping the cloth's whereabouts secret for a considerable period.” (1)

Colour plate no. 28b in the same book has a reproduction of the seal of Templar Master Frederick Wildergrave (Friedrich Wildgraf von Kyrburg) depicting the face of Jesus, which he correctly judged to be similar to the panel painting with the Shroud-like face found in the village of Templecombe, Somerset, England. According to research made available by Dr. Eberhard J. Nikitsch, Friedrich Wildgraf zu Kyrburg und Schmidburg was the youngest son of Wildgraf Emich III. zu Kyrburg and his wife Elisabeth von Montfort and was the Preceptor of the Knights Templar in Germany and Master in the Slavic countries.

There are churches in Germany with sculptures of the face of Jesus, all of them however have the crown of thorns. Some examples are: (*Right*) The rose window with stained glass on the Speyer Cathedral, officially known as the “Imperial Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption and Saint Stephen”, “Kaiserdom zu Speyer”, “The Imperial Cathedral of Speyer” in German, where eight emperors and kings are buried.



*4*Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons.



⁵Courtesy of Wikipedia Commons.

The tomb of the nobleman Konrad von Weinsberg (1340-1396), (*Left*) Archbishop of Mainz, has a similar face. It is said to be the “Veronica”, has no crown of thorns or halo, and is slightly damaged.

A third (*Below*) face is on the tombstone of John Rheingraf, Wild Count of Dhaun, next to the evangelical church in Bad Kreuznach. It is safe to say that Dhaun had no deeper connections to monastic and military orders and did not take part in any crusade, according to Max Grüntgens. The tombstone is said to be a

spolia and has been dated to the seventeenth century.



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These sculptures of the face of Jesus were from the period after the Templar Masters made seals for their official documents. The fact that the Masters used these seals confirms the religious beliefs held by the warrior-monks and also that they abided by the rules written by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. Ian Wilson notes that if the Templars owned the Shroud, “then they like the Byzantines may have presented it mainly in the ‘disembodied’ form it takes when ‘doubled in four’” (2). They appear to have made special copies of the holy face, to be used in the Temples. That was the reason they chanted psalm 67, “God be merciful to us and bless us. And cause his face to shine upon us,” during their special masses.

The Knights Templar also built round churches in medieval Western Europe, using the Rotunda, also called Anastasis, of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem as the model, one example being the Temple Church in London.



7 Photo courtesy of luxurycolumnist.com.

As for the charges of heresy, modern opinion inclines to the idea that the Templars were victims of a highly unjust and opportunistic persecution. Similar charges had been levelled against heretics as well as political opponents for many centuries. The French king Philip IV had many of the knights tortured to secure false, pain-induced confessions to these charges. His treasury was empty and his seneschals conducted a series of raids on Templar properties throughout France. Wanting to gain control of the situation and seeing the need to investigate the Order Pope Clement V issued the bull *Pastoralis praeeminentiae* addressed to all the Christian monarchs, and trials were held in Spain, England, Germany, Cyprus and Italy.

The German Templars were particularly reluctant to accept Clement's bull and seemed to regard what was going on between the pontiff and the monarch as a French internal affair. After all, the Franco-papal rift had begun during the time of Pope Boniface VIII.

When Peter von Aspelt, archbishop of Mainz convened a council to judge the knights Hugo, Count of Grumbach, burst into the building with twenty fully armed knights. The archbishop was taken aback and requested the Count to have his say. He defended the innocence of the order, complaining against the pontiff.

The Dutch scholar Nicholas Gürtler (1654-1711) attributed an oration to Hugo in his *Historia Templariorum observationibus ecclesiasticis aucta*:

So I heard, prelate of Mainz, that you have convened today in order to invoke dire curses upon me and my brothers standing here with me, the Knights of the Holy Temple that was conquered by our blood, defended for a long time and preserved for the Christians, and to remove us from your midst by every kind of punishment. But you should know now and tell your clerics present here that, because our Order, holy and most valuable for Christendom, is being prosecuted more gravely than it deserves, on behalf of myself and my unjustly oppressed brothers, I call for the immediate election of a new Roman Pontiff instead of Clement, the unfair and ruthless tyrant. To that Pontiff and to the entire Christian world we will prove the innocence of our Order. (3)

The archbishop of Mainz absolved the German Templars in 1311. As pointed out by historian Eamon Duffy, the subject became the object of confusion caused when conspiracy theorists and quasi-historians embraced it. It also became clear that the Chinon Parchment discovered by Dr. Barbara Frale, a palaeographer and historian at the Vatican Secret Archives, exonerated the knights of the heresy, demonstrating that the knights were the victims of trumped-up charges. (4) However, the weakness of the papacy in the face of royal pressure led to the dissolution of the Order.

Two other seals used by another German Templar Master, images of which are not



reproduced but mentioned in Ian Wilson's book, are the ones that were made by Templar Master Brother Friedrich Widekind. A description of one seal is found in the book by Beatrice Marnette-Kuehl, (Left) *Mittelalterliche Siegel der Urkundenfonds Marienberg und*

Mariental (Quellen und Forschungen zur braunschweigischen Landesgeschichte, 42), Braunschweig, 2006.



The two seals that belonged to Templar Preceptor Friedrich Widekind are preserved. The first one: Seal of Templar Master Brother Friedrich Widekind depicting the face of Christ, (Left) no.61, on a charter issued in 1279, belonging to the collection Zisterzienserkloster Mariental.

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The second one is clearer:

Seal of Templar Master Brother Friedrich Widekind depicting the face of Christ, no. 157, appended to a charter dated 1 April, 1271, belonging to the collection Benediktinerkloster St. Ludgeri vor Helmstedt.

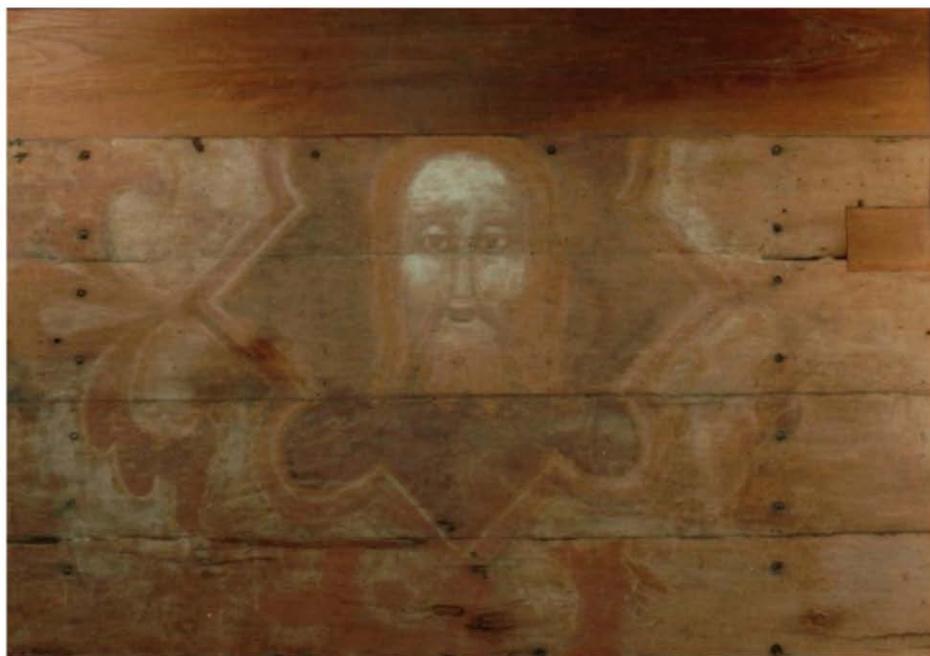
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Friedrich Widekind is described as: *Widekind Domum militie Templi in Alemania et Slauija preceptor Magister domorum militie Templi per Alemaniam et Poloniam 1261, 1268, 1271, 1279.*

The records of the Templars in Germany did not draw the attention of the annals and chronicles in their country. It is clear, nonetheless, that they were not involved in any heresy. It is possible that the French Templar Masters did not make any seals with the

face of Christ in order to not raise suspicion about their possession of the Shroud. The situation was different in England, where the knights generally did not clash with the monarchy, and so copies of the face of Jesus, such as the one found at Templecombe, (Below) could have been made without problems. When Pope Clement V told Henry II, who knew Grand Master Jacques de Molay and had supported the crusades, to arrest the Templars in England, the king wrote to him, “The aforesaid Master and Brothers have been constant in the purity of the Catholic faith and have been commended many times by all of our realm both for their way of life and for their customs. We cannot believe suspicions of this sort until we are given more evidence of them.”



References:

- 1) Ian Wilson, *The Shroud. Fresh light on the 2000-year-old mystery*, London, Random House, 2011
- 2) *Ibid.*, p. 261
- 3) *Historia Templariorum observationibus ecclesiasticis aucta*, Amsterdam, Henricus Wetstenius, 1691
- 4) https://www.academia.edu/7447446/Was_there_a_link_between_the_Knights_Templar_and_the_Turin_Shroud_An_interview_with_Dr._Barbara_Frale