

Thinking outside the Square....

A plea for BSTS members to share their skills and energies to help activate promising new developments in the field of Shroud research

Ian Wilson

In this age of ever greater specialisation Michael Kowalski's assumption of the role of Editor of this Newsletter is a development that I warmly welcome. This is not least because Michael brings a particularly valuable skill to the subject of the Shroud: the ability not only to understand complex scientific reports, particularly ones involving statistics, but also to spot where they may have underlying weaknesses and explain these in a very balanced way for the benefit of non-scientific laymen such as myself. There is no better example of this special talent of Michael's than in his YouTube presentation 'The Shroud of Turin 1988 Carbon Dating: Triumph or Travesty?' accessible online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSVMRJ-I1Z0>

As Michael himself is quick to point out, some of the most crucial statistical arguments in this are not new, having been put forward by the Belgian scholar Remi van Haelst over three decades ago. But back then I simply went glassy eyed at the reams of numbers and the terminology that went along with them. All thanks to Michael's clear elucidations I am now confident that certain authors of the scientific report on the 1988 carbon dating, under intense media pressure to release their results, opted to ignore some disturbing anomalies relating to the sample from the Shroud that they worked from. In direct contravention of their responsibilities for truth and scientific objectivity, they falsified a crucial statistic deliberately to avoid the whole testing exercise being declared statistically invalid. Understanding this fatal flaw to the so over-hyped 'conclusiveness' of the carbon dating result not only makes sense of the photographic and medical evidence supportive of the Shroud's authenticity, it is immensely helpful for my current efforts to present a new, significantly revised version of my historical argument that the Shroud genuinely dates back to the first century and was the object that the Byzantine world knew as their 'Image of Edessa'.

Importantly, however, this is not a time for proponents of the Shroud's authenticity to keep churning out the old pro-authenticity arguments, or to dwell overlong on the flaws of the 1988 carbon dating, or to campaign knee-jerk-style for the carbon dating simply to be re-run. This is a time to start 'thinking outside the square': to look to fresh approaches that are properly reflective of the new opportunities that twenty-first century science can offer, and innovative new historical research projects that can take advantage of just what a cornucopia of diverse historical information is now available via the Internet, likewise the remarkable array of international communications facilities that the digital era has generated.



Pl. 1 Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*. Recent work on this at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, provides a copybook example of what could be learnt from something similar applied to the Shroud

Regarding fresh 'outside the square' scientific approaches, there can be no better example of the potential opportunities for these than the achievement of scientists and technicians at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, with their work on Rembrandt's huge masterpiece *The Militia Company of District II under the Command of Captain Frans Banninck Cocq*, more popularly known as *The Night Watch*. Mandatory for everyone with a serious interest in the Shroud should be a look at the Rijksmuseum's website 'Operation Night Watch' as accessible at <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/stories/operation-night-watch/story/ultra-high-resolution-photo>. Use the zoom-in facility easily and effortlessly to study on your home computer even the most minute brush strokes on this painting and consider just what a huge leap forward it could and would be if the same facility could be available for the Shroud.

Painted by Rembrandt in 1642, *The Night Watch* measures 363 x 437 cm. or in old money approximately 12 by 14½ feet [pl. 1]. Much like the Shroud it has suffered historical injuries. These include two knife attacks, one in 1911, a second in 1975, also being sprayed with acid by an escaped psychiatric patient in 1990, every such assault necessitating restoration work. Using a 100-megapixel Hasselblad H6D 400 MS camera the Rijksmuseum team photographed the painting in a grid of 97 rows and 87 columns, creating 8,439 separate photos, each 5.5cm x 4.1 cm. Via artificial intelligence these photos were stitched together to create one positively ginormous 717 gigapixel image with a file size of 5.6 terabytes. As the team summed up the results of their efforts:

We can very clearly see the precise physical state of the painting. Lead soap protrusions, tiny cracks, the shapes of individual paint particles, past retouches and the beautiful details of Rembrandt's painting technique are all extraordinarily clear.

Essentially every tiny detail of the painting can be studied with total ease, entirely free of charge, for as long or short as you wish, in the comfort of your own home. The Rijksmuseum team also used techniques such as Raman spectroscopy, reflectance imaging spectroscopy and X-ray analysis, methodologies that were still in their infancy when STURP pioneeringly used some of them for their 1978 Shroud examination, but which can today provide a precise chemical analysis for every particle present. Applied to the Shroud, the Rijksmuseum team's methods would not only capture and preserve for all time the most exact possible photographic record of the Shroud's present-day appearance (a hugely worthwhile achievement in its own right), they could also determine absolutely definitively whether the Shroud's imagery is or is not by the hand of an artist, thereby rendering any McCrone-type microscopy methods wholly inadequate and obsolete.

The Rijksmuseum team's 'Operation Night Watch' efforts have therefore provided a copybook example of just what could – and surely, should - be done for the Shroud. The key question is: how this can be made to happen, and to the same high standards if not higher? Michael Kowalski, who has been making a thorough study of all the different technologies that are involved, the portability of the equipment that would be required, and much else is already in the process of arranging face-to-face meetings with the Rijksmuseum team in Amsterdam to discuss all the possibilities, whether this might be with the Rijksmuseum's active involvement, or purely in an advisory capacity for others similarly qualified and equipped to carry out a similar exercise. This should happen early next year. In the meantime, any BSTS member who has scientific qualifications touching on the technologies that are being considered, and could be interested in helping with the planning and other preliminaries, is warmly invited to get in touch with Michael at editorial@bstsnewsletter.com. The first stage would be to prepare a fully comprehensive plan, the practicability of which would be checked out in every detail, and only then follow up by preparing a formal proposal for submission

to the requisite clerical authorities, in particular His Holiness Pope Francis as the Shroud's recognised legal owner.

But besides this obviously very specialised scientific initiative there are also opportunities for non-scientific members to become involved in a variety of other projects, particularly historical. The projects are mostly ones which are peripheral in nature rather than of themselves directly likely to achieve some major new historical breakthrough. However as you may gather from my recently published critique of the sceptic Italian historian Andrea Nicolotti's latest book – see <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/858829> - I am slowly but steadily putting together a new two thousand year history for the Shroud significantly revised, and hopefully substantially strengthened, for the 'middle' period from the tenth to the sixteenth centuries. The projects proposed are ones that all need more time and dedicated detective-work than is practical for me to accord to them whilst working on the book proper, yet if only some could be achieved they would be valuable aids to this task, as well as being potentially intriguing exercises in their own right.

The first such historical research project is 'art-detective' in nature. In 1974, when Turkey invaded and annexed northern Cyprus in much the same illegal manner of Russia's current occupation of parts of Ukraine, literally dozens of Greek Cypriot churches were taken over, many of these converted into mosques. Turkish troops were allowed free rein to loot the churches' historic icons and other artworks, these items then being sold to middlemen, who sold them on to theoretically more respectable dealers, who then put them up for auction to wealthy western collectors. Amongst the churches that were thus affected was the Church of the Acheiropoietos [pl. 2], near the village of Karavas west of Kyrenia on Cyprus' north coast.

Long associated with this church is a very garbled 'local history' legend that the original Image of Edessa/Shroud, or at least a piece of it, was once brought there, which is seemingly how it acquired its 'made without hands' name. Very early in the invasion the Turkish army forcibly took over this church and its surrounds for use as a military barracks, strictly prohibiting any public access for the



Pl. 2 The Monastery of the Acheiropoietos, near Karavas, Cyprus. Photo from shortly before the Turkish invasion

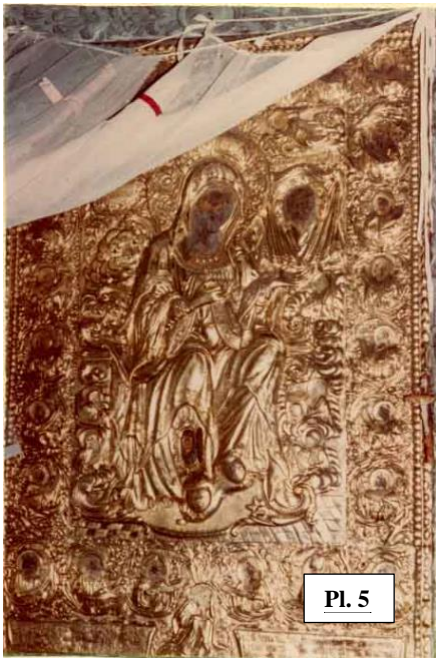
next four decades. It's only recently that some access became possible, revealing just how brutalised it has been in the interim. Thus a photograph of the church's iconostasis, or altar screen, that was taken before the invasion [pl. 3] shows this replete with icons in the traditional Orthodox fashion, whilst in a post-invasion photo this has been stripped bare, its icons all too obviously looted by the Turkish soldiery [pl. 4].



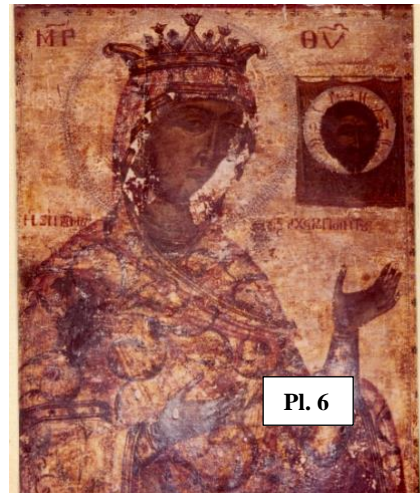
Pl. 3



Pl. 4



Pl. 5



Pl. 6

Pls. 3 & 4 The iconostasis before and after 1974; **Pl. 5** The icon of the Virgin Mary & Image of Edessa concealed by the silver-gilt revetment; **Pl. 6**. The second icon with the same theme

Now from the pre-invasion photo an icon of definite Image of Edessa interest is the one immediately to spectator left of the doorway covered by a white veil. Back in the 1960s the British physician Dr David Willis managed to photograph this with the veil pulled aside [pl. 5], revealing a nineteenth century silver-gilt revetment depicting the Virgin Mary with the Image of Edessa clearly covering a similar scene on the icon beneath. With regrettable lack of foresight the Orthodox clergy did not allow Dr Willis even to view, let alone to photograph, this underlying icon on account of its extreme holiness. Whilst at the church Dr. Willis photographed another icon also depicting the Virgin Mary with the Image of Edessa [pl. 6] not visible on the iconostasis, the two icons with this particular theme being unique in the entire corpus of Byzantine art, and Dr Willis' photographs, limited though these are, the only known record of them.

However a third icon, to be seen at the furthest left in the pre-1974 photo of the iconostasis [detail pl. 7], though ostensibly it depicts just the Virgin and Child, i.e. without the Image of Edessa, could be the most promising of all. Its inscription, which was recorded by Greek scholar Kalliopi Protopapas before the 1974 invasion, dates it only to 1765, its painter describing it as a replacement for a similar painting that had been destroyed by fire back at that time. However, the inscription goes on to say that the painter specially incorporated into it a blank piece of linen that had been saved from the fire, and was believed to have come from the Image of Edessa when this had been brought to Cyprus centuries earlier. This belief was such that the devout would scratch away small slivers of the icon's paint to keep as relics in their own right, the damage from which can be seen in the photo. And in the light of my current revisions of the 'middle' period of the Shroud's history it is very possible that this belief has a basis in historical fact...



Pl. 7 The Virgin & Child icon at furthest left in the pre-1974 photo of the iconostasis (greatly enlarged, hence the poor quality).

The white marks are from where the faithful scratched away small flecks of the paint to keep as relics

All of which inevitably gives rise to the question: where could all three of these intriguing icons be located now? Thanks to the information preserved by Kalliope Protopapas the Church of the Acheiropoiotos

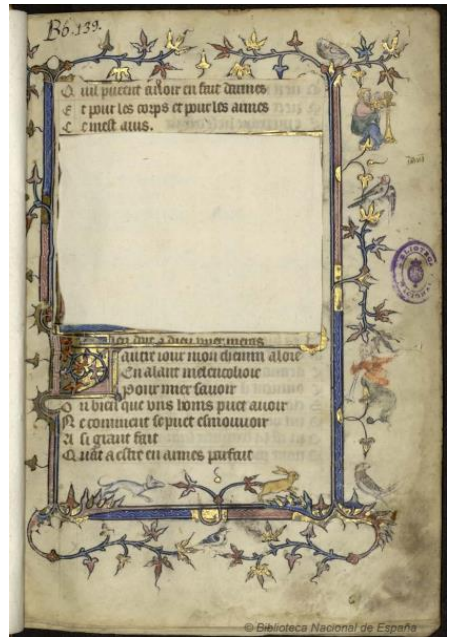
collection is known to have comprised at least thirteen icons, amongst which one small one was intercepted by Interpol in Germany in 2009, and another four are now safely housed in a museum in Kyrenia, none of the Image of Edessa-related trio having been found amongst them. However the very fact that companion icons have been recovered offers every hope that these too are still extant somewhere, more than likely in the private collections of wealthy individuals who acquired them in good faith from reputable-seeming dealers in ignorance of their true origins and potential historical significance.

A textbook example of exactly such a circumstance concerns the singer Boy George, who in 1985 purchased an icon from a seemingly reputable London art dealer which hung on the walls of his home for a quarter of a century until he happened to give a television interview with the icon visible behind him. A member of Britain's Greek Orthodox community who watched the interview immediately recognised the icon as one that the Turks had looted from the church of St Charalambos, in the village of Neo Chorio, near Kythrea, northern Cyprus, back in 1974. Boy George was duly contacted, and the very happy outcome was that in 2011 the singer entirely voluntarily arranged for the icon's 'repatriation' to an appropriate and grateful Greek Orthodox community in north London.

So is there an Internet-savvy BSTS member who might be interested to mastermind a global search to try to track down the current whereabouts of the three lost icons of Cyprus's Church of the Acheiropoietos? Somewhere around the world – and the likeliest countries are the USA and Germany, both having some seriously wealthy icon collectors - someone must surely remember having seen one or more of the icons displayed on someone's wall, or a dealer remember onward selling one or both at auction. Needle-in-a-haystack assignment though it might seem, some adroit deployment of social media and search-engines might just succeed in tracking them down. Anyone who could be interested to help should therefore contact me via email using the [BSTS editorial@bstsnewsletter.com](mailto:BSTS_editorial@bstsnewsletter.com) address, setting out in their email how they propose to tackle the task. I will be happy to provide them with every assistance, including a full file of the known data on the Church of the Acheiropoietos, and the best available photographs.

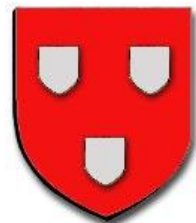
The second historical research project is one that should appeal to someone with a knowledge of, or at least potential interest in, the history of scrapbooking. In the Summer 2021 edition of this Newsletter I brought to members' attention the fourteenth century manuscript Madrid MS 9270, housed in the National Library of Spain, which can be freely accessed online at <http://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?lang=en&id=0000139688&page=1>. The manuscript begins with

the text of a poem written by the Geoffroi de Charny in whose family's care the Shroud appears so mysteriously in the mid-fourteenth century. For anyone who views this manuscript online, immediately evident from frame 5 onward [pl. 8], is that Charny's poem was once illustrated with more than two dozen panel illuminations which someone has crudely cut out as if collecting them for pasting into a scrapbook. As can be gauged from the accompanying text-matter the lost illuminations will have depicted Geoffroi de Charny variously engaged in activities such as out horse-riding, at prayer, jousting at a tournament, in action on a Hundred Years' War battlefield and onboard a sailing ship taking him on crusade. From the gold, silver and costly artists' pigments that were used for the manuscript's surviving decorations the illuminations will have been superb works of art in their own right, created by one of France's most talented artists, Jean le Noir. The poem makes no mention of the Shroud, so even if the illuminations can be tracked down they are unlikely to include any depiction of this. Nevertheless they would be invaluable for their glimpses into Charny's life, particularly because Jean le Noir seems to have known Charny personally and is therefore likely to have conferred with him to ensure each scene's optimum veracity.



Pl. 8 The opening page of Charny's poem in the Madrid manuscript, showing where one of more than twenty illuminations have been hacked out and lost

For anyone trying to make a positive identification of the lost illuminations in some promising-looking old scrapbook the key element to be looked for is a knight in chainmail on horseback, wearing a bright red surcoat emblazoned with the Charny heraldry of three silver shields [pl. 9], his horse being caparisoned with the same distinctive heraldry. The knight may be wearing a helmet with horns (Charny's crest), or be having such a helmet handed to him. Any old scrapbook containing illuminations cut out from a medieval manuscript could be of interest, but the likeliest candidate will be from the very earliest days of scrapbooking, the seventeenth or eighteenth century.



Pl. 9 The Charny coat-of-arms

Because the manuscript is in French, and from 1455 through to the mid-nineteenth century it is known to have been in the library of the counts of Haro, in northern Spain, the excision of its panel illuminations most likely happened during the Haro period of ownership. Clearly whoever carried out this vandalism had no interest in Charny's text, because whole chunks of the poem were lost in the process, consistent with haughty Spanish aristocracy positively despising the language of the neighbour country with whom they were all too frequently engaged in some kind of war. Early Spanish scrapbooks therefore represent a prime objective for anyone fancying carrying out a detective style search for the lost illuminations, though if the scrapbook in question became a collector's item, it could of course now be located anywhere in the world.

An important caveat is that it can be no more than conjectural that there ever was a scrapbook into which the lost illuminations were pasted, compounding which the chances of such a scrapbook surviving the turbulent centuries must be accounted considerably slimmer than the chances of tracking down the two Cypriote icons lost from the Church of the Acheiropietos. Nevertheless it seems worth giving the quest at least a determined try, and certainly any member who happens already to have a strong interest in scrapbooking, can be assured of every possible encouragement and support from me. Spain's equivalent of the BSTS, the Centro Español de Sindonología – website <http://www.linteum.com> - should similarly prove a very valuable ally assisting in, if not positively spearheading, this same quest.

Besides such 'historical detective work' projects (and there are more of this kind), any members with skills in languages both ancient and modern, and who are willing to volunteer these skills, are warmly encouraged to make themselves known to Michael Kowalski at editorial@bstsnewsletter.com. Hugh Duncan, who is no stranger to readers of this Newsletter, has quite unprompted taken it upon himself to translate into English the French scholar Paul Vignon's magnum opus *Le Saint Suaire de Turin devant la Science, l'Archéologie, l'Histoire, l'Iconographie, la Logique* ('The Holy Shroud of Turin according to Science, Archaeology, History, Iconography and Logic'). Large format, profusely illustrated, and with a wealth of diverse information in its 256 extensively referenced pages, this book's great misfortune was to have been published in 1939, within weeks of the outbreak of World War II. Expensive even at the time of its publication, extant copies are correspondingly rare, because of which it has for far too long been undeservedly overlooked, particularly in English language circles. The actuality is that Vignon pioneered approaches to and insights on the Shroud that remain impressive to this day. Hugh Duncan's herculean and still ongoing labours therefore promise to provide a valuable new resource for English-speaking researchers. Because Hugh still has some way to go to complete the translation, anyone reasonably fluent in French who is willing to give him some help would I am sure be welcomed by him.

This is, however, just one example of some very definitive foreign language works touching on the subject-matter of the Shroud (even though some may be wider in their

scope), for which the availability of an English language translation would be beneficial. The polymath German theologian Ernst von Dobschutz's *Christusbilder : Untersuchungen zur christlichen Legende* (Images of Christ: Studies in Christian Legend) published in 1899 is another case in point. The original German text is now available digitally at <https://archive.org/details/ChristusbilderDobschutz/> and online automatic translation tools such as Adobe Acrobat Pro should facilitate the task of translating into English certain Shroud-related sections of this to a standard that would not have been possible a few years ago. But this does not obviate the need for someone who is well versed in using such online translation tools, and who has a good working knowledge of German actually to carry out the task and improve the computer-speak translation wherever necessary. Again this is but one example of a work needing translation; there are many more.

Accordingly it could be a wonderful advance – and excellent use of talent as yet untapped amongst BSTS members – if members who have modern language skills and who may be willing to help with translation tasks could just let Michael know any relevant foreign languages in which they are conversant, and a rough estimate of their level of skill in this. Similarly anyone with at least a reasonable working knowledge of Latin, Greek and early forms of French should make themselves known. Already I have assembled a considerable-size digital archive of parallel translations of documents pertinent to the Shroud's history. Before I get too much older than I am already I would like to make this available online as a part of the BSTS website providing a master reference resource for the use of members and others interested in the original documentation behind the Shroud's history back through the centuries. As yet, however, too many of the documents need introductions, or have their translations unfinished, or still to be attempted, and because currently my overriding priority is writing up the 'new history' progress assembling the archive is spasmodic at best. So anyone with the right skills who is willing to help deal with the gaps and could even perhaps take over steering the project through to its becoming accessible on the BSTS website will be warmly welcomed by me.

In short, I am very optimistic that Michael Kowalski's taking over the reins as this Newsletter's Editor can herald a whole new, much more broad-reaching approach to Shroud studies, enabling anyone seriously interested in the subject to become actively involved in some very productive and outward-looking ways. After decades of the subject wallowing in the doldrums, especially due to the act of deception perpetrated by the 1988 carbon dating, hopefully a much more promising future awaits....