

**Deconstructing the "Debunking" of the Shroud =**  
**<https://www.shroud.com/bar.htm#scavone>**

by

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In this (previously unpublished) response to Gary Vikan's article (B.A.R. Nov.-Dec. 1998), the authors do not attempt to prove that the Turin Shroud (TS) is the authentic burial cloth of Jesus Christ or to insist that its image was miraculously formed. Rather, since the TS is obviously an object as important to its active opposition as to its defenders, it is therefore important to point out why the arguments of Gary Vikan, a noted scholar, fall short of refuting it. Surprisingly, Vikan repeated several old fallacies about the TS that have already and often been addressed and dismissed by scholarship, both in the U.S. and abroad. Surprising, too, are the mistakes of fact that are inconsistent with his own high level of scholarship, such as placing the story of Veronica's veil in the 4th-century Acts of Peter. This text does not mention Veronica and is dated to the 2nd c. It is of the highest importance that readers recognize that supporters of the TS are among the most sceptical inquirers into its history and science. Nobody wants to hold positions that are easily disproved, and the way to avoid this is to do the research.

**The Shroud Claimed as a Medieval Work of Art**

To support his claim that the TS is a man-made icon, Vikan asserted that the TS is "in no way unique in appearance" and that "three dozen" similar cloths competed with it during the Middle Ages. These, he said, **still** share its striking faint and elusive image, seemingly produced by bodily secretions. It is a bold claim and seems to put an end to argument. But this claim is provably baseless. Vikan did not produce one example

because, in fact, there is none. The claim of forty-two "medieval shrouds" was first announced in 1902 by François de Mely, who even named the towns whose inventories "mentioned" them. Most of Mely's "shrouds" were listed by a common formula, de sudario, meaning merely "a piece of the sudarium/shroud" known and often cited in Constantinople between 944 and 1204. Vikan has simply repeated Mely's error. All Mely's other "claimants" that can be seen today are artists' grotesque copies of the TS; none of them presents the realistic and faint image seen on the TS today. Don Luigi Fossati has produced photographs of 52 early painted copies of the TS (Fossati 1984).

### **The Penitentes**

Vikan's claim that modern-day Penitentes who practice self-crucifixion and therefore understand the physical realities of crucifixion is, in fact, disproved by his own illustration of a blue-body crucifix. Those nails in the palms (without supportive ropes) tell us, rather, that they do not understand how to crucify. Sixty years ago, the experiments of Dr. Pierre Barbet who affixed human cadavers to crosses proved that nails through the palms would not support the weight of the victim. Seeking the skilled artist of the figure on the TS, Vikan identified certain pious, loving disciples of St. Francis of Assisi (died 1226). We are asked to believe that though devoted to Francis, they nevertheless put the nail wounds in their image's wrists, ignoring their beloved Francis' own stigmata, which manifested itself in his palms. If Vikan is right elsewhere that "the TS was created to deceive" (nothing on the TS indicates intentionality), it was these devout friars who were the deceivers. Those examples of medieval and modern penitentes are non-sequiturs that do not support Vikan's case.

And, finally, nothing in Vikan's article explains why two head-to-head and totally naked images of Jesus--on a cloth--would appeal to the mindset of the Middle Ages. Rather, Jesus' nakedness would have been repugnant to Medieval Christians, and in fact, Mely now refuted, there is and never was anything else like it in all Gothic--or ancient--art.

### **The D'Arcis Memorandum**

Past Sindonoclasts (Shroud opponents), and now Gary Vikan, think they are revealing a historical coup against the TS when they cite this document. If the d'Arcis Memorandum (the Memo) is to be used as evidence, it should be assessed as all historical documents are: in detail and in its historical context. At least eight other documents clarify and even tend to impugn the Memo.

### **Doc. A. The Memorandum of Bishop Pierre D'Arcis of Troyes Addressed to Anti-Pope Clement VII in Avignon (1389)**

D'Arcis states: "About" 1355 the church at Lirey procured a cloth on which, in a subtle manner, was depicted a twofold image which was falsely declared to be the actual burial shroud of Jesus. This was done to procure money from the multitudes attracted to the church. At that time Bishop Henri de Poitiers of Troyes held an inquest at which an

unnamed artist stated it had been manually depicted. This resulted in Henri ordering its removal from the church.

The reader should note that this document alone, of those relating to the Lirey Shroud, cites this inquest. D'Arcis, who has never seen the Lirey cloth, goes on (paraphrased): Now I hear it has been replaced in the church to raise money. Its owner, Geoffroy II de Charny, claims it had been removed to safety by order of Henri because of the (Hundred Years) war then raging. Now it is spread about that I want the cloth myself. Geoffroy II has obtained from your Holiness a Brief (**Doc. C**) confirming permission to display the cloth, while I, as I hear, am ordered to perpetual silence.

### **The Other Documents**

**Doc. B. Bishop Henri's only letter** addressed to Geoffroy I de Charny, original owner of the TS--dated 28 May 1356--mentions no inquest. In it Henri praises Geoffroy's piety and "... as we have been informed by legal documents, we praise, ratify, and approve a divine cult of this sort." The TS is not mentioned, and Henri has not gone to Lirey, but has "been informed." This letter denies the claims of d'Arcis. D'Arcis, a lawyer, who elsewhere carefully cites documents, cites no dated official documents in his Memorandum, saying only that the inquest had been held "about" 1355.

**Doc C. Anti-Pope Clement VII's Brief to Geoffroy II, dated 28 July 1389** (about five months before the Memorandum of Bishop d'Arcis). Clement acknowledges the Charnys' religious motives for showing the cloth and agrees that it had been removed from the church and brought to safety because of war and pestilence. He permits the showing of the cloth publicly, but calling it a "figure or representation," and on Bishop d'Arcis, Clement imposes "perpetual silence." The Brief mentions no inquest, artist, or scandal.

**Doc. D. Letter from King of France Charles VI to the Bailly of Troyes, dated 4 August 1389.** "The Bishop of Troyes has stated before our Curia that the church in Lirey is displaying a certain handmade and artificially depicted cloth as if it were the true Sudarium Christi." The king commands the Bailly "to get the cloth and bring it to me so that I might relocate it in another church in Troyes."

An observant attorney might ask why, just months before the drafting of his Memo, d'Arcis, a canon lawyer, did not cite the damning evidence of Henri's inquest or the name of the artist? Had he done so, it would surely have been recited in the King's letter. Instead, the King mentions only d'Arcis' charge, not Henri's charge, that the image on the cloth was handmade. Fr. Herbert Thurston, first English translator of the Memorandum and a sindonoclast himself, noted this, adding that d'Arcis feared that the King would be able to verify its truth (Thurston, p. 26).

**Doc. E. Report of the Bailly of Troyes, dated 15 August 1389,** says, in essence: We went to the church at Lirey but the Dean would not hand it over to us, and we did not proceed further in the matter.

**Doc. F. Letter from the First Sergeant of the King to the Bailly of Troyes, dated 5 September 1389:** The writer says he officially announced to the Dean and to Geoffroy II that the cloth was verbally made the property of the King. Nothing, in the end, came of this.

**Doc. G. Clement's letter to Bishop d'Arcis, dated 6 January 1390:** Written after the Memo but not referring to it, as was customary, this letter says that the cloth was replaced in the church with Clement's permission, despite the Bishop's prohibition, and any opposing action would be visited with excommunication.

**Doc. H. Papal Bull of Clement VII, dated 6 January 1390,** admits he has changed his mind. First he repeats the words of his letter to Geoffroy II of 28 July 1389. He again orders d'Arcis to perpetual silence. Then follow the modifications: To remove every chance of error or idolatry in the display of the cloth, we ordain that whenever said figure or representation is displayed, one should announce loud and clear that it is not the true Sudarium of the Lord, but a picture or copy only.

**Doc. I. Papal Bull also dated 1 June 1390.** Six months later Clement again changed his mind. He again supports the Lirey shroud, making no mention of idolatry. Here is the gist: Since we have heard that crowds go to Lirey out of devotion to the cloth, we, desiring to encourage this pilgrimage, enlarge the indulgence for the faithful who visit said church annually at Christmas, etc. And we strictly prohibit anyone, of whatever rank, from appropriating or usurping the offerings of the faithful.

In summary, not one of these primary documents from 1356 to 1390, aside from the Memorandum, refers to an inquest or artist in 1355. Rather, Henri's letter praised Geoffroy I (**Doc. B**). Anti-Pope Clement VII in the end granted more indulgences than ever to visitors to Lirey (**Doc. I**). The documents also force us to conclude that neither Henri nor d'Arcis nor Clement ever saw the cloth in Lirey.

Most damning to those who would base their case against the TS on the Memorandum of Bishop d'Arcis are the following facts. First, all extant copies of the Memo are unsigned, undated drafts with words marked for deletion with the Latin "vacat" in the margin. All other documents discussed here are duly dated. No properly sealed copy of the Memo has ever been discovered in Avignon or Vatican archives. No document of Clement refers to it, suggesting it was never received. Most significantly, the heading of the copy in the Bibliotheque Nationale de Paris (Champagne 154, fol. 137) describes it as a letter d'Arcis "intends to write."

Clement's Bull (**Doc. I**) warns against anyone usurping gifts to the Lirey church. In his Memo, Bishop d'Arcis had shrugged off the notion that he coveted the cloth for his own gain, and he alludes often to greed. These money concerns were not for nothing. The construction of Troyes Cathedral (ca. 1200-1400) had suffered from the effects of The Hundred Years War and the plague, both events of d'Arcis' time. Then around Christmas 1389, precisely when the Memo was drafted (!), the nave of the unfinished Cathedral collapsed, and in 1390 a large rose window fell out. The shoddy work that led to these mishaps may be blamed on d'Arcis himself and caused him guilt, since "symptoms of structural distress had already been observed in the 1380s" (Murray, p. 54).

Is this sufficient evidence to cast a shroud of doubt on d'Arcis' words? Let us hope the d'Arcis Memorandum will be seen for what it really was, a claim by a good but needy bishop under pressure to remedy his own poor judgment in the procuring of building materials for his cathedral, one who was ready to scheme to acquire a relic to attract pilgrims' donations and then was found out and warned against pursuing that plan.

### **The Pray Codex and Other Relevant Documents**

Several documents not mentioned by Vikan must be discussed briefly, as they speak to the question of the TS's antiquity. First is the Hungarian Pray manuscript, dated by its editor to 1192-1195, a time when a full-length shroud image was well documented in Constantinople (as it was until 1204). One of its naively-drawn illustrations shows Jesus lying on the sepulchral slab, which the artist has depicted with a sort of herring-bone weave and with the 4-hole "burn" pattern identical to that on the TS. This pattern also appears on the Lierre copy dated 1516, i.e., before the fire of 1532 which caused all the other fire damage. It is a visual feature so unique and precise as not to be refuted. Also, Jesus' hands are folded and the thumbs are absent, as on the TS today. It is clear that the artist who produced the illustrations of the shroud in the Pray codex had seen the TS. If this is, as it seems, proof of the existence of the TS in 1192, then it cannot be true that the Lirey/Turin Shroud was recently painted in Lirey ca.1355, as Bishop d'Arcis claimed in his draft Memo.

A sindon (New Testament word for "burial wrap") fitting the description of the TS was seen by crusader Robert de Clari in Constantinople in 1203, just before it was lost sight of. When this image-on-cloth arrived in Constantinople (15 August 944), it had immediately been remarked as extremely faint with bloodstains on its face and side ("Narration on the Edessa Image" and "Sermon of Gregory Referendarius"). These and other primary sources reported that it had come from Edessa, where a cloth-borne image of Jesus' face "made with special paints" was known in the 4th c. In the 6th c. Acts of Thaddaeus it was cited as a strange and miraculous (acheiropoietos) image on a sindon. These are documents a historian may not dismiss out of hand as he inquires into how

and why the very idea of this unique twin image of a crucified man on a cloth should ever have been conceived.

It cannot be proved beyond doubt that the TS is the burial wrapping of the body of Jesus, but the arguments so often repeated by sindonoclasts (the most common being that of the alleged numerous Medieval shrouds and the d'Arcis Memorandum) have not proved otherwise. As this cloth continues to be studied into the Millennium, it is important that we, the jury who sit in its judgment, keep an open mind.

### **Afterword**

Dr. Walter McCrone: "I used standard forensic tests to check for blood. I found none. There is no blood on the shroud." With regard to Dr. Walter McCrone's sidebar, it must be noted that Dr. Victor Tryon, also of the University of Texas-San Antonio, whose expertise is DNA research, has found that the substance called red paint by McCrone contains human DNA, i.e., it is blood. Others have insisted with equal certainty that the shroud image is a Medieval "proto-photo" or a rubbing or a real Medieval crucified body. If the research of those who wish to debunk the TS is accepted, its conclusion must be that the TS is a painting and a photo and a rubbing and a human body transfer.

### **Works**

### **Consulted**

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