

SLEUTHS' CORNER

The Shroud at Nice?

Following BSTS Newsletter No. 44's featuring of a fresco depicting an exposition of the Shroud from a high tower, location unknown, speculation became raised whether this might be a depiction of the historically recorded exposition of the Shroud from the Bellanda Tower, Nice, in March 1537, the only historically-known occasion in which the Shroud is specifically described being exhibited from a tower. BSTS member Hugh Duncan, who lives in southern France, has most kindly done some sleuthing, and sent a large dossier of his delvings into Nice Archives, of which the following forms part.

Hugh Duncan writes:

The fresco of the Turin Shroud shown in BSTS Newsletter No.44 raised the question as to whether the painting was based on the Bellanda Tower in Nice, it being the only tower known from which the Shroud was exposed. I live about an hour's drive from the centre of Nice, so am well placed to see what evidence there is of the Shroud's stay and if the tower in the painting is indeed the Bellanda Tower.

The Nice Archives are found in a quiet backwater, just off the Promenade des Anglais. Either I was very lucky, or it happened to be a quiet day, as there were three curators there to help the two researchers, me being one of them. They were keen to answer questions and directed me to what secondary sources were available on the subject of the Turin Shroud. The curators were also certain that the Shroud had actually been displayed twice in Nice during its stay in the 16th century. Below is a summary of the information I found that afternoon.

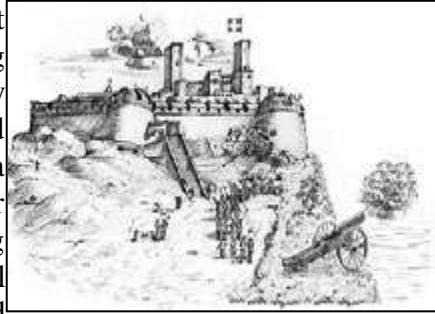
The Bellanda Tower

The original Bellanda Tower was pulled down by King Louis in 1844. When Nice became French in 1860 a new one was built, which is now the home of the naval museum. I did phone the naval museum, but they said they had no documents on the history of the tower.

In the book *La Maison de Savoie à Nice 1388-1860*, Palais Lascaris, were several sketches of Nice from the 16th century. There were also several reproductions of paintings/sketches of Nice from the same time, displayed on the walls and desks of the Archives. In those views, Nice Castle is seen clearly on the hill behind the town, and surrounding the bottom of the hill is a continuous wall, with cylindrical styled towers at the sharp corners. The largest of the towers is the Bellanda Tower, which is found where the hill meets the sea. Old Nice is to the west of the Tower. I did find a sketch of Nice Castle and Bellanda Tower from 1538, which is within a year of the Shroud's exposition there. This picture was not at the archives, but on a web site about the history of Nice. No artist was mentioned, but credit for the photograph was given to A. Quadrubbi, Nice Town Hall. A copy of the picture is shown below. The Bellanda Tower is on the right. It

is now clear that the tower depicted in the Shroud fresco from BSTS No.44 cannot be the Bellanda Tower, it being square based and lacking the hill behind it.

I did make one other observation, though, which might mean that Nice is not completely excluded from being the setting of the BSTS 44 fresco. In the 16th century sketches at the archives, mainly done at roof height and at a distance from Old Nice, there is always shown a dome and a tower next to each other. They look similar to the dome and tower in the fresco (I have the feeling though, that most Italian towns have a domed cathedral and a tower near one another. Turin itself is a good example).



When I pointed this similarity out to the Nice Archives curators, they were adamant that the BSTS 44 fresco was not Nice. The domed cathedral in Old Nice is called Sainte Reparate and it predates the stay of the Shroud in Nice, though it didn't reach its cathedral status until some 50 years after. From a web site called 'Nice France History, beyond the French Riviera' I found a couple of views of Ste Reparate on the Internet, one of which is reproduced here.



The front of Ste Reparate looks very similar to the cathedral in the fresco, but of course, the tower is on the wrong side! Could the copy of the fresco picture have been reversed during printing? And when was the tower built next to it? Could there have been a tower on the other side during the 16th century? I think these questions need to be answered before Nice can be crossed off the suspect list.

So, to round off, have any questions been answered? *Was the Turin Shroud kept in Nice?* Yes. From early 1537. *Was there an exposition in Nice?* Yes. Good Friday 1537. *Was it displayed more than once?* Unclear. *When did it leave Nice?* Unclear. *Does the fresco in BSTS No.44 show the Bellanda Tower?* No. *Could the fresco be of Nice?* Unclear. It might be Turin itself.