

The Turin Shroud in a 15th century Fresco in St Hippolyte

By Hugh Duncan

A few summer's ago, I visited Lirey and met with the ex mayor. He kindly gave me copies of several Shroud related documents. Of interest to me were any details that had hitherto been overlooked and one piece of information did seem worth following up.

On 6th July 1418, Count Humbert issued a receipt of the Shroud, given to him by the Lirey canons who were fearing possible looting by advancing armies. Humbert stated that included among the items given was one cloth on which was the body or representation of the Shroud of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the cloth being in a chest bearing the Charny arms. It was to be kept in Montfort castle and a promise was made in good faith to return it once the trouble in France was over. The Shroud was moved to Saint Hippolyte and placed in the Buessard Chapel; *on the walls of which was painted a fresco of the shroud*. Each year the Shroud was displayed in a field called 'The Lord's Field' on the banks of the river Doubs. (1)

Before removing the Shroud, Marguerite de Charny wanted the advice of the inhabitants of St Hippolyte. She assembled them a field behind a neighbouring mountain, the area still having the name 'Mauconseil', meaning 'my council' in remembrance of the bad advice given for letting the Shroud go. (1) The Shroud had stayed in St Hippolyte for 34 yrs.

For some there has been doubt that the Shroud actually stayed in St Hippolyte (2) though it is clear that it was in the department of Franche-Comté. The castle of Monfort-en-Auxois, Cote d'Or is about six km from Montbard. While other castles in the area were taken by the English invaders, Montfort escaped attack. The castle seems to have had a Chapel on the ground floor and there was a treasury room underground where the Shroud could have been hidden in safety.

My interest was whether the fresco still existed. If so, it would have been one of the earliest representations of the Shroud, the pilgrim's amulet being the only other one known to predate the fresco. I tried writing to the present parish of St Hippolyte. The task had a few false starts as there are several places called St Hippolyte in the same area and my letters ended up bouncing back and forth all over the place. I finally got a reply from the local historian.

The locals don't know of a 'Chateau Montfort', but it is thought to be the 'Chateau de la Roche' situated near St Hippolyte and destroyed after the French conquest around 1665. The fresco of the Holy Shroud, painted on the wall of the Buessards Chapel was seriously damaged during the French revolution in 1792. Actually a retable is now in front of this wall, placed there in the 19th century. The fresco did exist but has been destroyed or seriously ruined. The field called 'Manconseil' is situated near Pont sur le Doubs on which Abbé Frossard placed a small monument in 1989.' (4)

In the church of St Hippolyte on one side of the chapel is a black marble plaque with the inscription: 'The Holy Shroud of our Lord Jesus Christ, brought to France during the 4th crusade and given to the Count Humbert de la Roche of St Hippolyte by the canons of Lirey was venerated in this chapel for 34 yrs then given to the Duke Louis of Savoy by Margeurite de Charny, widow of count Humbert'. (3)

During the period 1418 to 1452 each year the Shroud was exhibited at the Clos Pascal. The chest in which it was kept was placed in the Buessard chapel, actually called the Chapel of Our lady of Pity, where the stay is recorded by the above mentioned plaque. After the Shroud was taken away, *a panorama of Jerusalem was painted on the wall with an image of the Shroud*. The painting was mutilated during the Revolution and is presently hidden by the retable of the chapel. (3)

It is not stated explicitly, but it must be assumed that the fresco was so badly damaged in the attack that there cannot be anything left that would be recognisable as the Shroud. The final point to note is that the fresco was painted *after* the Shroud left St Hippolyte, hence it was a later than 1452 and not as early as 1418 and I had originally thought. If anyone gets a chance to visit the chapel, it still might be worth while asking to see the remains of the fresco.

NOTES

1. L' Ancienne Collegiale de Lirey' by l' Abbé A Prevost 1900.
2. Shroud Spectrum International No.8 sept 1983 'The castle of Montfort' by Dorothy Crispino.
3. 'Eglise de Saint Hippolyte sur Doubs-Le saint Suaire' Church pamphlet 2001.
- 4 . Private communication Elisabeth Lamy local historian St Hippolyte 9.11.01 and 9.10.02.