

The Pilgrim's Medallion / Amulet of Lirey by Alan Foster

Following Mark Guscini's request for BSTS Members to write in to the 'Journal' for the June 2012 issue with their memories and nostalgia, and inspired by Ian Wilson, Barrie Schwartz and others' exemplary research on Shroud related subjects, I would like to share the following recollection:

On Thursday 19th May 2011, I went to the Museum de Cluny in Paris (Musee de Moyen Age – Museum of the Medieval Age), to view the Pilgrim's Medallion from the Exposition of the Shroud in Lirey, France, from about 1355 AD., (Enseigne de Pelerinage: Saint Suaire – Pilgrim's Medallion of the Holy Shroud).

I was initially told that the Medallion was not on display and that I would therefore be unable to see it. However, this actually proved beneficial in the end, because having spoken to Alain Decouche, one of the staff at the museum, he said he was aware of the Medallion, and that it was in storage in the building. He said he had actually travelled with the Medallion to Turin in 1998 for it to be displayed during the Exposition of the Shroud marking the 100th Anniversary of Secondo Pia's photographs. Alain said he would speak to one of the Chief Curators, and see if it was possible for me to view the Medallion directly. After speaking to Sophie Lagabrielle, I was granted permission to view the Medallion, and it was brought out of storage, and placed with cotton gloves under a viewing lamp for me to study, and also to photograph. (photo #1, #2).

What is obvious when looking at the Medallion / Amulet closely is that the Artisan who created the original design for the mould for the lead / pewter souvenirs to be made, must have seen and studied the full length Shroud minutely, to be able to portray so much information in such exquisite detail in an object only about 6cm. by 4cm. in its current form.

The Medallion's representation of the Shroud has the fine quality herringbone weave clearly depicted. It is also being held up by two Church clerics, in the same manner as many other illustrations have shown at Expositions of the Shroud in the 16th and 17th Centuries in Turin (although the heads and shoulders of these figures have since broken off). Once again it shows that the handling and contamination of the Shroud, particularly at the corners, has been going on for centuries.

The front and rear body images are shown naked, as it is on the Shroud. On the left, the body has the hands crossed as they are on the Shroud eg: left on top of right, and even the face is depicted. On the right, the rear body image shows very clearly the rivulets of blood at the base of the back from the lance wound in the side, also the foot visibly bent inwards, as it is on the Shroud, with two smaller rivulets of blood from the ankle area too (photo # 3). (The only inaccuracy is that it shows the wrong foot on top, when compared to the Shroud, but it is an understandable mistake to make). Below, on the left, by the Coat of Arms of Geoffrey I de Charny with the three shields, is a depiction of the lance, and the pincers for removing the nails after the Crucifixion. On the right, by the Coat of Arms of Jeanne de Vergy with the three flowers, is the depiction of the column that Jesus was tied against for the flogging, and

the Roman flagrum with the double leather thongs, used for the actual flogging. In the middle, is the representation of the Tomb, the Cross, and the Crown of Thorns.

The detail on the Medallion is exquisite, and it is even more incredible when you think that the Artisan who carved the mould to make the Pilgrim's Medallion, had to carve it in reverse, so that it showed the detail correctly when viewed normally. Even with the minor error of the feet placement, this is still an exemplary work of Art. Alain showed me a stone mould from a similar period in history (1300's) as an example of this type of carving, which had an image of Mother Mary and baby Jesus, and writing in reverse, and the grooves for the surplus molten lead / pewter to drain from the mould (photo # 4).

It is incredible that the Medallion was found at all. It is only when the River Seine was being dredged that hundreds of assorted Pilgrim's Medallions were found in the mud in 1855. They were all found next to the 'Pont au Change' bridge, which is on the north of the Ile de la Cite, where the Cathedral of Notre Dame is situated. The museum staff were not sure why they were all found in that specific location only. Perhaps it was like a 'wishing well', a known place in the mid 1300's that pilgrims, after completing their journeys to various holy sites, wished for luck or holy guidance at that specific spot.

One of the most persistent hoaxing theories against the Turin Shroud's authenticity, is that it was created by Leonardo Da Vinci (1452 – 1519). This is another reason why the Medallion's discovery is so important, because its verifiable dating of the 1350's, undeniably places it 100 years earlier even than the birth of Da Vinci.

What is also profound about the Medallion is the opportunity to see an image of the full-length Shroud, front and back, without the 'clutter' of the 1532 burn-marks. This is rare indeed, and creates a source of contemplation, as one imagines how the Apostles and Pilgrims throughout history, must have felt as they studied the Shroud in its 'pure form'.

My thanks go to the staff at the Museum de Cluny for allowing me to see the Pilgrim's Medallion, and to be inspired by its exquisite craftsmanship, and ultimately what it represents.

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