A tantalizing photograph of some Oxford samples

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Until today only unofficial photographs of the THREE Shroud samples, taken by the laboratories of Oxford, Arizona and Zurich were published, by Frère Bruno Bonnet-Eymard in *La Contre-Réforme Catholique* and Dr. Eberhard Lindner in "Proceedings C.I.E.L.T. Symposium Nice 1997". The shapes of these samples are in contradiction with the shapes of the samples as given in Nature (P.E. Damon et al., Radiocarbon Dating of the Shroud of Turin, in *Nature*, Vol. 337, No. 6208, pp.611-615, 16th February, 1989): from a strip of approx. 10 mm x 70 mm were prepared 3 samples, each approx. 50 mg in weight.

According to the French textile expert, Gabriel Vial, who witnessed the sample cutting, all samples on the balance were about square. This leads to three samples each about 10 mm x 23.3 mm, weighing about 53.5 mg. The same data are given in the *Osservatore Romano* and the *ETH 1988 Yearbook*. About a year later these data were corrected TWO times, in writing, by Prof. Giovanni Riggi and Prof. Franco Testore. Both final reports give DIFFERENT readings for the Arizona sample in TWO parts: Riggi 50.1 + 3.6 mg; Testore 39.6 + 14.1 mg. According to Prof. Testore, the confusion was caused by a too hasty translation of his report.

According to Dr. Tite the *Nature* report had been written from memory, without verifying the Riggi-Testore reports.

A strange fact is reported by J. M. McDonell in *Shroud News* (No. 84, 1994, page 9). I quote: "Meanwhile Dr. Tite acquired from the Victoria and Albert Museum a strip of cloth of 10 x 70 mm from a 14th century cloth, which he had cut in three equal pieces..." Such a sample is not noted in *Nature*.

According to the laboratory photographs of the Shroud samples, which are in harmony with the "reviewed" final report by Prof. Testore, the estimated shapes and dimensions of the samples are:

Arizona: A sample in 2 parts: 11 x 16 mm and 4 x 16 mm (irregularly shaped)

Oxford: A right-angled trapezium of 16 x 12.2 mm and 16 x 15.2 mm

Zurich: A more or less rectangular sample 16 x 14 mm

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By coincidence I was reading an article about the Shroud by Dr. S. Bottema, of the University of Groningen, in the Dutch scientific magazine *Natuur en Techniek* (Herkomst en ouderdom van de Lijkwade, in *Natuur en Techniek*, No. 10, October 1992, pp. 778-779). On page 778 I saw the almost unknown photograph shown below.

On the original small photograph one sees a container, marked 03, the red seal of Mgr. Ballestrero and THREE samples, packed in plastic bags. TWO samples, in a plastic bag, can clearly be seen, as well as, at the left, a part of another plastic bag. On top a dark shape can be seen, which I believed to be another sample, not yet packed. At first sight, judging by the naked eye, the lowest sample shows most probably the **backside** of the Oxford Shroud sample, as represented on the photo published by Frère Bruno and Dr. Lindner. For years I never doubted to see there the Oxford Shroud sample.

Recently, when looking through a magnifying glass I was surprised to discover some markings on the assumed Shroud samples. Using a photocopying machine I was able to magnify the photo 3 times. On one bad copy - it was too dark - the text became readable.

To my surprise on the lowest bag I made out the code *P 2574* (mirrored). According to Table 1 in the *Nature* article this is NOT the Shroud sample but the Nubian control sample, according to *Nature* historically dated 11-12th century.

On the other bag I found the code *P 2576*, which was, according to Table 1 in *Nature*, the Egyptian control sample, radiocarbon dated before 2010 ± 80 yr (BM 2558).

The dark shape at the top is most probably the shade of an unevenness in the cloth or foil. And we do not know for certain the code, nor the shape of the invisible content of the third bag. But is not the end of the confusion.

The caption in Dutch under the photograph reads in English: "According to the most recent dating in Oxford, the cloth (of the Shroud) dates from the Middle Ages and was manufactured between 1132-1262 AD". (A mean calendar age of 1200 AD). On page 779 the author states: "In 1990 a radiocarbon dating in Oxford resulted in an age for the Shroud of 795 $\pm$ 65 radiocarbon years before present (rcybp), and a calendar age of about 1150 AD".

Note:

The Oxford radiocarbon age 795 ± 65 rcybp and a calendar age of 1150 AD are not mutually comparable. Probably the calendar age of 1150 AD is an error, for the calibration curve of Stuiver and Pearson gives for 795 rcybp a calendar age of 1260 AD. A calendar age of 1150 AD corresponds to a radiocarbon age of about 920 rcybp.

Because the dates given by Dr. Bottema are clearly in contradiction with the dates given in table 2 of *Nature*, where Oxford = 750 ± 30 rcybp, corresponding to a calendar age of 1270 AD, I made in vain some inquiries.

Dr. Bottema assumed that his source was probably the French scientist Prof. J. Evin. Like Dr. Tite (ex British Museum, now Oxford) and Dr. Hedges (Oxford) he did not answer further questions. If the statements by J. M. McDonell and Dr. Bottema are correct, the whole radiocarbon dating of the Shroud of Turin may be questioned. The best Oxford and the British Museum can do, in my opinion, is to finally open the files and allow a scientific examination of the radiocarbon dating of the Shroud of Turin.