

HISTORICAL NEWS

Those members who attended the last B.S.T.S. meeting, at which the speaker was Noel Currer-Briggs on the Shroud's history between 1204 and the time of the de Charnys, will be aware of the tremendous strides he has achieved in illuminating the Shroud's history during the so-called "missing years". In an ensuing *Newsletter* a summary of his findings will be published, although no summary can in fact do justice to the and scholarly rigour of his arguments.

However, members may be interested in two snippets of historical information which have recently come to light. The first, sent to us from Remi van Haelst of Antwerp, is a little-known Templar seal depicting a disembodied head (as opposite, source *Dossier de l'Histoire*, no. 76):



Although in this instance it seems more likely that it is a depiction of a Templar, rather than the Christ face, the seal is interesting also for the decoration surrounding the face.

The second item is the discovery of a 19th. century transcription, by Franciscan Benedetto d'Acquisto (1790-1867) of a letter purportedly written by Theodore Angelos-Comnenus, nephew of the deposed Byzantine emperor Isaac II, in 1205, just a year after the 1204 sack of Constantinople by the Crusaders. The letter, addressed to the Pope, Innocent III, appears to be an entreaty for the return of the Shroud:

"Theodore Angelos wishes long life for Innocent, Lord and Pope at old Rome ... In April of last year a crusading army, having falsely set out to liberate the Holy Land, instead laid waste the city of Constantine. During the sack, troops of Venice and France looted even the holy sanctuaries. The Venetians partitioned the treasures of gold, silver and ivory while the French did the same with the relics of the saints and the most sacred of all, the linen in which our Lord Jesus Christ was wrapped after his death and before the resurrection. We know that the sacred objects are preserved by their predators in Venice, in France, and in other places, the sacred linen in Athens. So many spoils and sacred objects should not be taken contrary to all human and divine laws; nevertheless in your name and in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, albeit against your will, the barbarians of our own age have done just that. The teaching of Jesus Christ our Saviour does not allow Christians to despoil other Christians of their sacred belongings. Let the thieves have the gold and silver, but let what is sacred be returned to us ... Rome, Kalends of August 1205 AD."

D'Acquisto's copy was from the *Chartularium Culisanense*, the Diplomatic Codex of the Constantinian Primary Order of the Angell, founded in 1290. The original was regrettably destroyed in 1945, but even allowing for the fact that the letter was included in this, serious scholarly scrutiny is needed to determine whether the letter is genuine, as it was not uncommon for letters to be forged in the Middle Ages to suit political purposes.