

# The Turin Shroud

Sir, — John Ray (October 18) is entirely correct that one of the great weaknesses of studies of the Turin Shroud has been in examining the details of its iconography, particularly in relation to other contemporary works of art, although Ian Wilson did raise some of these issues in his book. In many ways, the Shroud appears to be almost canonical, having almost every pictorial detail which eventually came to dominate in most representations of the Crucifixion. But such portrayals were not always the case. To take one detail, which I looked at in my PhD thesis (Cambridge, 1979), most Renaissance portrayals of the Crucifixion show a spear wound in Christ's right side. However, pre-thirteenth-century representations often do not show the spear wound. What therefore happened around that time which "fixed" this detail and made it standard? Why the spear wound should be in the right side is also unexplained, although there is a rich symbolism connected with left-right, north-south, good-bad, Old-New Testament, etc. It is also the case that almost all Renaissance (but not medieval) Crucifixions show Christ's head turned to the right, and therefore showing his left cheek, and that the Shroud seems to suggest a severe wound to the right side of the face. There are occasional rare exceptions where the wound is on the left, as in Carpaccio's "I diecimila crocifissi del Monte Ararat" in the Accademia in Venice (where it is not, of course, Christ who is being crucified), or in Rubens's "Descent from the Cross" in Antwerp. Outside the Western tradition, there are two left-sided spear wounds in the cathedral in Cochin in Kerala, India, which are particularly intriguing since the cathedral is dedicated to its possible founder, St Thomas, who, it could be argued, had better knowledge than most, his doubts having

led him to thrust his fingers into the wound.

Detailed studies of the precise iconographical features of the Shroud and other works of art might be able to clarify whether the Shroud simply copied other pictorial conventions or was itself in part responsible for the creation of those conventions. They, of course, do not say anything about the Shroud's mode of creation, although they may help confirm or refute possible dates for its image.

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## Shakespearean assertions

Sir, — Eric Sams's response (Letters, November 15) to my request for evidence offers "authoritative instruction" for his Shakespearean assertions (Commentary, October 18). Such "authoritative instruction", however, raises issues of scholarly consensus and scholarly proof:

- (1) Regarding his assertion that *Edward III* is "now generally assigned to Shakespeare by specialists in the subject", his evidence for "generally assigned" is two recent writers, and his own books.
- (2) For his assertion that Shakespeare's father was a "Catholic recusant", he cites as proof another modern writer.
- (3) For his assertion that Shakespeare's son was named "Hamlet", or "little Hamlet", he cites as proof a reference in Shakespeare's will to Hamlett Sadler. (Yet among the witnesses to what Sams calls "the world-famous will" is Hamnet Sadler. Shakespeare named his twins, Hamnet and Judith, after his long-term friends, Hamnet and Judith Sadler.)

Of more evidential pertinence, however, is the