

Pope confirms visit to Shroud of Turin; new evidence on shroud emerges

VATICAN CITY - Pope Benedict XVI confirmed his intention to visit the Shroud of Turin when it goes on public display in Turin's cathedral April 10-May 23, 2010.

Cardinal Severino Poletto of Turin, papal custodian of the Shroud of Turin, visited the pope July 26 in Les Combes, Italy, where the pope was spending part of his vacation. The Alpine village is about 85 miles from Turin.

The cardinal gave the pope the latest news concerning preparations for next year's public exposition of the shroud and the pope "confirmed his intention to go to Turin for the occasion," said the Vatican spokesman, Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, in a written statement July 27.

The specific date of the papal visit has yet to be determined, the priest added.

The last time the Shroud of Turin was displayed to the public was in 2000 for the jubilee year. The shroud is removed from a specially designed protective case only for very special spiritual occasions, and its removal for study or display to the public must be approved by the pope.

The shroud underwent major cleaning and restoration in 2002.

According to tradition, the 14-foot-by-4-foot linen cloth is the burial shroud of Jesus. The shroud has a full-length photonegative image of a man, front and back, bearing signs of wounds that correspond to the Gospel accounts of the torture Jesus endured

in his passion and death.

The church has never officially ruled on the shroud's authenticity, saying judgments about its age and origin belonged to scientific investigation. Scientists have debated its authenticity for decades, and studies have led to conflicting results.

A recent study by French scientist Thierry Castex has revealed that on the shroud are traces of words in Aramaic spelled with Hebrew letters.

A Vatican researcher, Barbara Frale, told Vatican Radio July 26 that her own studies suggest the letters on the shroud were written more than 1,800 years ago.

She said that in 1978 a Latin professor in Milan noticed Aramaic writing on the shroud and in 1989 scholars discovered Hebrew characters that probably were portions of the phrase "The king of the Jews."

Castex's recent discovery of the word "found" with another word next to it, which still has to be deciphered, "together may mean 'because found' or 'we found,'" she said.

What is interesting, she said, is that it recalls a passage in the Gospel of St. Luke, "We found this man misleading our people," which was what several Jewish leaders told Pontius Pilate when they asked him to condemn Jesus.

She said it would not be unusual for something to be written on a burial cloth in order to indicate the identity of the deceased.

Frale, who is a researcher at the Vatican Secret Archives, has written a new book on the shroud and the Knights Templar, the medieval crusading order which, she says, may have held secret custody of the Shroud of Turin during the 13th and 14th centuries.

She told Vatican Radio that she has studied the writings on the shroud in an effort to find out if the Knights had written them.

“When I analyzed these writings, I saw that they had nothing to do with the Templars because they were written at least 1,000 years before the Order of the Temple was founded” in the 12th century, she said.