

The Shroud of Turin as the Burial Cloth of Jesus?

John N. Johnson, Oct. 28, 2016

The Shroud of Turin has been claimed to be the burial cloth of Jesus Christ since at least the 14th Century. I have studied it as an archaeological item for over 30 years. Few people took it seriously until intensive scientific investigations in the 20th century showed it was like a photographic negative not created by painting or scorching, had a herringbone weave linen that could be first Century, had pollen traced to the Mideast, was remarkably similar to paintings of Jesus back to the 5th Century, but strangely not before that. Moreover, the image and blood stains closely correspond to Jewish First Century burial practices, as well as Roman flagellation and crucifixion techniques probably not known to a 14th Century forger.

But in 1988, all this compelling evidence for its being genuine was trumped by Radiocarbon tests that allegedly “proved” that it was made of cloth woven between AD 1260 and 1390 with “95% confidence”. Afterwards, I abandoned my studies, in spite of my hunch that those tests were faulty, since other data shows it could not be a 14th C. forgery. But in 2002, Raymond Rogers showed that those samples were all taken from the same repaired area of the shroud that likely was repaired with invisible reweaving - known to be used then. Also, the too-few samples varied so much that they should have rejected the test, since they failed the significance test - there was less than 5% probability they were consistent much lower than the 3 other control fabrics tested. Later, independent dating tests have show that it is probably far older than the 14th Century. Also, Raymond Rogers found that the image areas have no detectable vanillin (from lignin), but the sampled area does have significant vanillin, and traces of mordant and dye used to match the color of the main cloth.

There are apparent discrepancies with the Bible, which have caused most protestant Bible scholars (from John Calvin to Josh McDowell) to ignore it, claiming: Is it a graven image? Is it just another dubious Catholic relic? Do the gospels contrarily state that Jesus was mummy-wrapped with linen along with spices? But Jewish 1st C. burial practices were to leave a body wrapped loosely with spices on a shelf in a tomb blocked by a stone. Then after a year they would remove the bones to a bone box. They would never wrap it like a mummy –otherwise, Lazarus could not have moved! Instead, they would tie the legs together, cross and tie the arms and tie a small cloth about the chin and pate. A large cloth could be wrapped vertically used to cover the body lengthwise. Also, Jewish law required burial the same day. There was insufficient time for proper burial, since the Sabbath was nigh (Luke 23:54) and the body may not have yet been ceremonially washed, which is why the women were coming to the tomb on Sunday. Jewish law required that the blood from a violent death must remain with the body. The abundant spices in John 19:39 were only loosely bound for the smell, not as a preservative, since they the burial was not yet done. The body was supposed to decompose quickly.

There is other new evidence for its correlation with the Mandylion, the cloth with the faint image of Jesus known from history at Edessa in the 5th Century, then it was taken to Constantinople in the 10th C., where it was looted by the Crusader Knights in 1204.

Significantly, there more evidence from art plates on the Pray Codex, securely dated to 1195 in Hungary, that strongly connects the Shroud of Turin to the Mandylion Shroud in Constantinople. There are many points that relate: te Shroud is twice the length of the man; Herringbone weave pattern; `L'-shaped pattern of holes front and back; Beard and long hair; Body naked; Mark above the right eye corresponding to the reverse `3'-shaped bloodstain on Shroud; Right hand over the left; Long fingers; No thumbs visible; Nail wound on right wrist; and No modesty cloth over genitals.

There are only hints of its location from 1024 to 1355. It seems probable that the secret Knights Templar preserved it for a century. Strangely, it emerged in 1355 in a showing in a Lirey village parish by a nobleman of modest means, Geoffrey de Charny, near Troyes in NE France, then inherited by his widow at his death. Skeptics like Joe Nickell make much of the hearsay “evidence” of the Bishop of Troyes, Pierre D’Arsis’ letter to Pope Clement VII condemning a Shroud exhibition by the widow in 1389, citing that former Bishop Henri “knew the artist”. But neither Bishop saw it!

There are exquisite features of the shroud that show it cannot be the artistic work of human hands in the 14th C.: the image is diffuse, only on the top fibers of a thread of 300 fibers; the image darkness varies only by number of darker fibers, adjacent fibers are colorless; the fibers were not discolored by a heat scorch; forensic pathologists certify the image and bloodstains as anatomically accurate as a crucified victim: the nail through the wrist, not the palm; the Roman flagrum matches the dumbbell marks; the side wound matches the Roman lancea; the bloodstains are human AB type and the serum halo around them fluoresces; there is no pigment associated with the image; the image disappears when illuminated from the rear; there are no directional brush strokes; there is no image under the blood stains; there is a faint image on the reverse of the cloth; there are likely identifiable flowers and 1st C. leptons on the eyes on the shroud. It is ludicrous to claim a forger could have known let alone duplicate them.

In origin, the Shroud can be traced to the Mideast origin by the abundant pollen and flower images on it that only grow there, and the spiked plant of the “crown of thorns” (Shroud shows it was a cap); the dirt on the heels whose spectrum of elements matches the unique limestone near Jerusalem. The Shroud’s fabric of pure linen is an exquisite 3 in 1 herringbone weave that has been known from Egypt since before Christ, but is unlike later European fabrics; and the size of the Shroud (437 cm long by 111 cm wide, about 14’4 x 3’ 7” is almost precisely 2 by 8 Assyrian 1st C. cubits to within a cm. Coincidence?

But the image forming mechanism is still a mystery, since it appears to be a (negative) photograph with real blood stains that show no distortion or separation from the fabric when dried. It appears to be a scorch, but it is not, since it does not fluoresce under UV. Experiments show that a diffuse vapor or draped contact method would be distorted. The image seems appears precisely vertical with the image that has 3-D properties – it is lighter depending on the distance of the body from the cloth. The only proposed mechanism that remains is radiation. Also, the body would need to pass through the cloth to separate from the dried blood stains without distortion, but no natural method would explain either.

In summary, I note that the Shroud of Turin was woven of linen type and style (3-1 herringbone) in the Roman period not Medieval Europe; it had more pollen from Jerusalem and Constantinople than from France and Italy, it had limestone dirt from heel that is unique to Jerusalem area; it was accurate to Roman crucifixion: flagellation: nails in wrist, blood flow; the image has 3-D properties like a photo negative; only the top most fibers are discolored except for a faint image on the opposite and not under the blood stains.

Ironically, I am glad that the Shroud failed the Radiocarbon tests. The Shroud is an artifact of little known origin and should not be “trustingly believed” (Greek *pisteo*). It is too likely to be idolized as it is. The only benefit is if we heed Romans 12:9-10 – “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”
