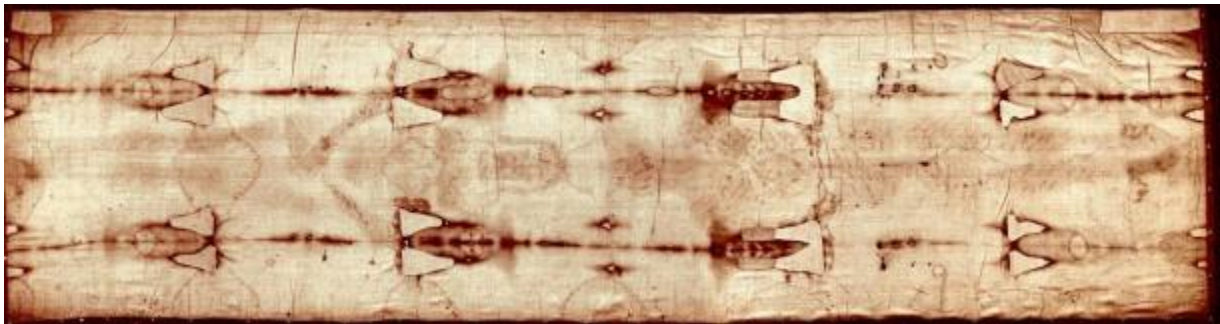


# Scripture and the Shroud of Turin

By Ashby Camp

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By any account, the Shroud of Turin is a fascinating historical artifact. It is a linen cloth about 14' 6" long and 3' 9" wide on which appears the ghostly, front and back images of a man who had been beaten, scourged, crucified, and pierced in the side. The images indicate the cloth was folded over the deceased in the manner of an ancient Jewish burial shroud, so when the cloth is unfolded the feet of the two images are at the opposite ends of the cloth and the heads of the images are close together near the middle (see image below). The cloth, which was privately owned until 1983 when it was bequeathed to the Roman Catholic Church, is believed by many to be the burial shroud of Jesus.



The Shroud of Turin undisputedly dates back to at least A.D. 1349 (<http://www.shroud.com/history.htm>). Many argue from various bits of historical and circumstantial evidence that it is much older and can even be traced back to the time of Christ (see, <http://www.shroudofturin.com/Resources/CRTSUM.pdf>, pp. 7-36, and the following series: <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2013/03/14/The-Shroud-of-Turins-Earlier-History-Part-One-To-Edessa.aspx>, <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2013/03/20/The-Shroud-of-Turins-Earlier-History-Part-Two-To-the-Great-City.aspx>, <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2013/03/28/The-Shroud-of-Turins-Earlier-History-Part-Three-The-Shroud-of-Constantinople.aspx>, and <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2013/09/05/The-Shroud-of-Turins-Earlier-History-Part-4-To-Little-Lirey.aspx>). The radiocarbon dating results announced in 1988 assigning a date to the Shroud of A.D. 1260-1390 have been challenged on various grounds, but that issue is at present unresolved (see <http://www.shroudofturin.com/Resources/CRTSUM.pdf>, pp. 75-82).

Given that the Shroud without question predates the invention of photography, one of its most striking features is that the images are photographic negatives, a fact discovered by accident when the Shroud was photographed in 1898. In other words, the negatives of photographs of the Shroud give a positive image, which is quite striking. Here is a comparison of the face as it appears on the Shroud and as it appears as a negative of that image:



The Shroud of Turin is the most intensely studied religious relic in history, and yet the means by which the images on it were formed remains a mystery. In 1978 the Shroud of Turin Research Project (STURP for short), which consisted of a large interdisciplinary team of American scientists, literally put the Shroud under a microscope and conducted a large battery of tests in an attempt to determine how the images were created. After years of exhaustive study and evaluation of the data they collected, the team issued its final report in 1981 and published this official summary of their conclusions (<http://www.shroud.com/78conclu.htm>):

No pigments, paints, dyes or stains have been found on the fibrils. X-ray, fluorescence and microchemistry on the fibrils preclude the possibility of paint being used as a method for creating the image. Ultra Violet and infrared evaluation confirm these studies. Computer image enhancement and analysis by a device known as a VP-8 image analyzer show that the image has unique, three-dimensional information encoded in it. Microchemical evaluation has indicated no evidence of any spices, oils, or any biochemicals known to be produced by the body in life or in death. It is clear that there has been a direct contact of the Shroud with a body, which explains certain features such as scourge marks, as well as the blood. However, while this type of contact might explain some of the features of the torso, it is totally incapable of explaining the image of the face with the high resolution that has been amply demonstrated by photography.

The basic problem from a scientific point of view is that some explanations which might be tenable from a chemical point of view are precluded by physics. Contrariwise, certain physical explanations which may be attractive are completely precluded by the chemistry. For an adequate explanation for the image of the Shroud, one must have an explanation which is scientifically sound, from a physical, chemical, biological and medical viewpoint. At the present, this type of solution does not appear to be obtainable by the best efforts of the members of the Shroud Team. Furthermore, experiments in physics and chemistry with old linen have failed to reproduce adequately the phenomenon presented by the Shroud of Turin. The scientific consensus is that the image was produced by something which resulted in oxidation, dehydration and conjugation of the polysaccharide

structure of the microfibrils of the linen itself. Such changes can be duplicated in the laboratory by certain chemical and physical processes. A similar type of change in linen can be obtained by sulfuric acid or heat. However, there are no chemical or physical methods known which can account for the totality of the image, nor can any combination of physical, chemical, biological or medical circumstances explain the image adequately.

Thus, the answer to the question of how the image was produced or what produced the image remains, now, as it has in the past, a mystery.

We can conclude for now that the Shroud image is that of a real human form of a scourged, crucified man. It is not the product of an artist. The blood stains are composed of hemoglobin and also give a positive test for serum albumin. The image is an ongoing mystery and until further chemical studies are made, perhaps by this group of scientists, or perhaps by some scientists in the future, the problem remains unsolved.

Rick Lanser, drawing on "The Definitive Shroud of Turin FAQ" (<http://greatshroudofturinafaq.com/Science/>), gives the following summary of some of the Shroud's details (<http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2014/07/24/Some-Ruminations-on-the-Shroud-of-Turin.aspx>):

1. The images on the Shroud were not painted. No pigment is involved in them. As the FAQ states, "The images are clearly and demonstrably the result of a chemical change either to the fibers themselves or to an organic material on the fibers that was there before the images were made."
2. The Shroud displays two life-size negative images, front and back, of an apparently crucified man. The images are head-to-head, suggesting that a man was laid out on the cloth with his feet at one end and that the cloth was brought over the top of his head and draped across his front. The images are unique. There is nothing like them in the world of art. The images:
  - are similar to photographic negatives but are not photographs
  - contain height-field data that can be plotted as 3-D elevations of the body
  - are superficial to the topmost two or three fibers of thread
  - the body is anatomically precise
  - the wounds are medically correct as only a modern pathologist would understand them
  - are unexpected from a medieval point of view
3. The 1988 radiocarbon dating, which supposedly proved the Shroud dated to medieval times, was a failure. Ray Rogers, a Los Alamos National Laboratory chemist, found that "the sample used for carbon dating was not representative of the cloth. It was chemically different." Cotton was used in the repaired area.
4. There is real human blood on the Shroud. It has all of the chemical hallmarks of blood, including hemoglobin and serum albumin.
5. Particles of limestone dust chemically identical with that around Jerusalem have been detected. It has a rather unique mineral makeup.

6. Clear marks of scourging can be seen, with welts that match the shape of a Roman flagrum that was tipped with dumbbell-shaped metal bits.

There are other points that could be made, but there is less unanimity on them; these include the presence of pollen grains unique to the Jerusalem area, possible Roman coins of Jesus' time placed over the eyes, and faint images that look like flowers known to grow near Jerusalem. But these additional facets, though intriguing, add nothing to the solid scientific case presented in the FAQ that there is a real human form on the Shroud of Turin, who was severely beaten and has wounds consistent with those the gospels tell us were suffered by Christ. The close correlation between the biblical data and the wounds clearly depicted on the Shroud image (bruises, "crown" of thorns, scourge marks, hand, foot and side wounds), together with the numbered points above, are sufficient to cause fair-minded people to tie them together.

Those wishing to pursue further the mysteries of the Shroud and the various issues relating to it can consult the multitude of books and articles that have been written. For a free primer, I would recommend *The Shroud: A Critical Summary of Observations, Data and Hypotheses* produced by The Shroud Center of Colorado. It is available online here: <http://www.shroudofturin.com/Resources/CRTSUM.pdf>. A wealth of news, information, and technical articles also is available at The Shroud of Turin Website here: <http://www.shroud.com/menu.htm>.

The purpose of this article is not to argue that the Shroud is in fact Christ's burial cloth. It is, rather, to address briefly the narrow question of whether Scripture eliminates that possibility, whether it establishes conclusively that it *cannot be* Christ's burial cloth. If it does, any investigation of the Shroud becomes much less interesting for those who believe Scripture is the inerrant word of God.

Many, especially among Protestants, quickly brush aside any talk of the Shroud for precisely this reason. They claim it cannot be Christ's burial cloth because Scripture specifies that he was buried in cloths, plural, not in a single cloth, and that his head was covered by a separate cloth. Moreover, they note that Scripture says Jesus was buried in accordance with Jewish burial customs, which they assert would require washing of his body. They then insist that the bloody body shown in the Shroud could not have been washed postmortem and thus conclude the Shroud cannot be the burial cloth of the Lord.

The writers of all three Synoptic Gospels declare that Jesus' corpse was wrapped in a large, high-quality cloth (a *sindōn*) and placed in a rock-cut tomb (Mat. 27:59-60; Mk. 15:46; Lk. 23:53), the clear implication being that this cloth was covering him in the tomb. (One need not assume this wrapping was done at the cross or that the *sindōn* was used to transport the Lord to the tomb.) The Shroud of Turin certainly qualifies as a *sindōn*, so at first blush the claim it is the burial cloth of Christ fits neatly with the Gospel record. The sticking point is that John 19:40 says Joseph and Nicodemus bound Jesus' body with cloths (*othonia*), plural, making no mention of a *sindōn*. According to Jn. 20:5-7, when John peered into the tomb after the resurrection, he saw the cloths (*ta othonia*) lying there. Peter entered the tomb and saw not only the cloths (*ta*

*othonia*) but also a small cloth (*soudarion*) that had been on Jesus' head and was now lying rolled or folded up by itself. Again, there is no mention of a *sindōn*. The question is whether these texts make certain that Jesus was *not* wrapped in a *sindōn* when in the tomb and/or that his face was covered by a separate cloth at that time. I do not believe they do.

The word *othonia* is defined in the standard Greek-English lexicon (BDAG, 693) simply as "(linen) cloth, cloth wrapping" without any connotation that it be in the form of a strip or bandage. In fact, the lexicon states, "The applicability of the sense *bandage* [cites omitted] to our literature is questionable." Ceslas Spicq states in his *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (2:564), "The basic meaning is 'linen cloth' of whatever shape or size [citations omitted]; but the emphasis is on its fineness and whiteness." Thus, the plural form (*othonia*) is often translated in the New Testament burial texts simply as "linen cloths" (e.g., KJV [linen clothes], ERV, ASV, RSV, NJB, NAB, NRSV, ESV, CSB).

That *othonia* can serve as a general term for grave clothes that includes the *sindōn* is indicated by Luke's use of the words. He reports in Lk. 23:53 that Jesus' body was wrapped in a *sindōn* and placed in a tomb, and yet when Peter looked into the empty tomb in Lk. 24:12 he saw *ta othonia*. It makes more sense to think Luke is using *othonia* as a collective term encompassing the *sindōn* and whatever other cloth or cloths were used to secure it, than to think he was implying the *sindōn* he previously mentioned had been removed. As a costly garment, the removal of the *sindōn* would raise the possibility of grave robbery, the stealing of the Lord's body from the tomb. It is difficult to believe Luke would suggest the *sindōn* was missing and then ignore the major potential implication of that suggestion or that he would communicate such a significant fact so casually and indirectly.

The fact John in Jn. 11:44 referred to specific items of Lazarus's grave clothes (*keiria* and *soudarion*) instead of referring to the clothes collectively as *othonia* does not mean *othonia* cannot serve as a collective term. If one said, "My son left his pants, shirt, and socks on the floor," it would not mean the word clothes cannot serve as a collective term for those and other items. In 11:44 John, in light of the Lord's command that Lazarus be untied or unbound, may have wanted to specify the items of grave clothes that were tied. That focus was not present in the case of the Lord's resurrection.

The fact Joseph and Nicodemus are reported in Jn. 19:40 to have "bound" (*deō*) Jesus' body with *othonia* does not prove John was there using *othonia* as a synonym for the strips (*keiriai*) that bound Lazarus's feet and hands and that he thus excluded *sindōn* from its meaning. That claim leaves unexplained the switch from *keiriai* in 11:44 to *othonia* in 19:40. Note also that the *keiriai* in 11:44 bound only the *feet and hands* whereas in 19:40 the *othonia* are said to bind Jesus' *body*. This suggests the more encompassing binding that results from the *sindōn* being secured around the body by means of one or more linen strips, hence the statement his body was bound with cloths (*othonia*). See, for example, "How the Shroud wrapped the body (part two)" which presents physicist and STURP member John Jackson's theory of the binding method: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJBQ896xq-k>.

But someone may say that if the *othonia* of 19:40 include the *sindōn*, and the *othonia* are thought collectively to bind Jesus' body, then John considers the *sindōn* to be a binding cloth. In



that case, why would he not include the *sindōn* in the identification in 11:44 of the specific cloths to be untied or unbound? Does that not suggest that he did *not* regard the *sindōn* as a binding cloth? Not necessarily. That assumes Lazarus was buried in a *sindōn* instead of in his clothes, which may not have been the case, and it ignores the possibility the *keiriai* and *soudarion* were seen as the primary binding cloths (assuming the *soudarion* was used as a chin-band as thought by many), those that actually were tied. The *sindōn* would only bind the body derivatively, when secured by the *keiriai*. So given the Lord's command, John still could focus on the *keiriai* and *soudarion* as the items to be untied even if Lazarus was wrapped in a *sindōn*.

The *soudarion* that had been on (*ho ēn epi*) Jesus' head that Peter in Jn. 20:7 saw lying rolled or folded up by itself in the tomb may have been placed on his head when he was taken from the cross and removed and set aside in the tomb prior to his being wrapped in the *sindōn*. Silence about the matter in such abbreviated accounts is not sufficient to exclude the possibility. It is also possible the *soudarion* had been rolled up and tied around Jesus' face to serve as a chin-band to hold his mouth closed in death. That is how many understand the *soudarion* in Jn. 11:44. Though Jn. 20:7 speaks of the *soudarion* having been *on Jesus' head* rather than *tied around his face* as described in Jn. 11:44, it seems a chin-band could be described both ways. Either of these scenarios – a previously placed *soudarion* that was removed at entombment or a *soudarion* functioning as a chin-band – would leave room for the Shroud being the Lord's burial cloth.

Even if one rejects the claim that *othonia* is used in John 19 and 20 as a general term for grave clothes that includes the *sindōn* and insists it functions in those texts as a synonym for the strips (*keiria*) of John 11:44, the case against the Shroud being the Lord's burial cloth is not beyond dispute. That view certainly makes the failure to mention the *sindōn* in 20:5-7 puzzling, even if one assumes the Lord wore it upon his exit from the tomb (in which case one would expect some recognition of the potential grave-robbery implication of its absence), but the alternative of claiming the synoptic accounts do not imply the *sindōn* was covering the Lord in the tomb, that it merely covered him during transport to the tomb where he was then bound by the strips, may be an even harder sell. The Synoptics give no hint of such a thing. Moreover, the Lord would not have been laid to rest unclothed, and the Jews did not cover the bodies of their dead in wrapped strips like mummies (note that Lazarus's strips bound only his feet and hands). So this view leaves its own mystery of how the Lord's body was covered in the tomb.

The claim that Jewish burial custom would have demanded that Jesus' body be washed prior to burial is questionable. That was the custom for normal deaths (e.g., Acts 9:37), but there appears to have been an exception in cases of violent deaths in which blood was shed. As Bonnie Lavoie et al. conclude in their study "In Accordance with Jewish Burial Custom, the Body of Jesus Was Not Washed" in *Sindon* 30 (Dec. 1981) (<http://www.shroud.com/pdfs/ssi03part4.pdf>): "If a man dies a violent death and blood is shed, the blood is not washed from the body. He is simply buried in a white linen sheet with his clothes not removed for fear of losing blood that has flowed from the man at the time of death. This blood flowing at death is considered life-blood." See also Gilbert R. Lavoie, *Unlocking the Secrets of the Shroud* (Indianapolis, IN: Dog Ear Publishing, 2015), 65-75.

Others, most notably the forensic pathologist Frederick Zugibe (<http://www.crucifixion-shroud.com/Washed.htm>), claim the evidence suggests the man in the Shroud had indeed been

washed, arguing that his blood flow had been insufficient to qualify for the exception identified by Lavoie et al. The point is that the blood stains on the Shroud are not the silver bullet they sometimes are claimed to be. They do not establish conclusively that the Shroud is not the Lord's burial cloth.

Rather than insist the Shroud cannot be the burial cloth of Christ, it seems wiser to leave the possibility open and to use its intriguing elements to help stir interest in the Gospel story. One need not commit to the Shroud's authenticity to acknowledge and utilize its mysteries.