

Some Misconceptions About the Shroud of Turin

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I have been studying the Shroud an extremely long time and have seen many fallacious objections and misunderstandings about the Shroud. I would like to take this opportunity to try and clear some of them up. In no particular order apart from addressing the C-14 question early on, I will list an assertion and then a rebuttal. If you would like to do more research on any of the topics I mention, I suggest you go to www.shroud.com and put any term you like into the search engine. It will search only in shroud.com and not the whole Internet. Shroud.com is one of oldest and most thorough sites on the Internet for Shroud information and just a fair warning: once you get there you may end up spending hours, days, weeks, months and years there! If you do that, don't forget to check in with your family periodically!

You've been inundated with images and PowerPoint slides the whole conference but I'm going to be doing this presentation as a rarity – that is, with no PowerPoint slides.

Recently, a Shroud researcher wrote me about a pastor who was skeptical about the Shroud and had put some of his thoughts on paper. So we'll start with some of his objections to the Shroud. And then we'll move to other misconceptions and objections in no particular order – just dealing with various things I've heard over the years.

This pastor said there is no mention of the image in the gospels. While that is true, there may be a very good reason for that. The early Church had something called "The Discipline of the

Secret,” meaning some things had to be kept secret from the Romans and the Jews, so they had to be careful of what they said and wrote. One couldn’t be too obvious about who or what was being criticized. For example, in the Book of Revelation, “Babylon” is a code word for “Rome.” If the gospel writers had let on that there was an imaged shroud, the Romans or Jews might have sought out the cloth to destroy it. In addition, it’s possible that the images on the Shroud didn’t appear for many decades after the Resurrection, so maybe there weren’t images to mention at the time the gospel writers penned them.

The pastor said that St. Paul would have mentioned the cloth as evidence of the Resurrection. Well, Paul also would have been aware of the “Discipline of the Secret.” And there is one passage where many scholars believe he is referring to the Shroud, which is Galatians 3:1 in which he wrote, **“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.”** How would the Galatians have seen him crucified? The Greek word for “portrayed” can mean a public posting like on a placard. So this could be a coded reference to the Shroud that Christians understood, which the Romans and Jews may not have.

The pastor said there is no historical record of the Shroud before 1355. Well, I’ve written a fifty-five-page article that mentions documented references to Jesus’ burial linens covering from the 2nd century through the first half of the 14th century. Obviously, not every reference is going to refer to our Shroud, but it’s very possible that some of them could. One of the speakers at this conference, Larry Stalley, has written a book of over six hundred pages looking at biblical passages that possibly might refer to the Shroud. I encourage you to look for his book on Amazon.

The pastor said that in 1389 Bishop Pierre d’Arcis claimed the Shroud was a forgery, stating he knew the artist. The second part of that is completely wrong. D’Arcis had actually said that his predecessor, Bishop Henri de Poitiers had discovered the artist around 1356. However, that Bishop spoke highly in a letter about that knight who owned the Shroud at that time, Geoffrey de Charny. Surely if the claim about Bishop Henri knowing the artist had been true, the letter would not have been so glowing. The pastor asked why d’Arcis would lie about it. D’Arcis was upset that Geoffrey de Charny had gone over his head to request from Pope Clement VII permission to exhibit the Shroud in another church in d’Arcis’ diocese, when d’Arcis’ own church was badly in need of repairs. If de Charny was going to lose the opportunity to get donations for his church, that certainly could have been a reason to fabricate a story about the previous bishop and the supposed artist. The pastor replied to his own question of why d’Arcis would lie by stating, “Some claim jealousy, but relics were big business during this time. A lie would turn tourism away.” Well, if it were a lie, the people of d’Arcis’ day likely wouldn’t even have known, since about thirty-four years had actually passed since Bishop Henri’s day. The pastor’s response here is to a data point he had completely gotten wrong. And by the way, skeptics will often argue that because the fourteenth century had many fake relics, the Shroud is a fake. That is poor logic. Just because there are fake \$20 bills doesn’t mean that every \$20 bill is a fake. A relic should be judged on its own merits, not on the period in which it’s purportedly from. The pastor wrote, “A famous Tuscany artist name Jacopo del Casentino (d. 1380) made a painting of St. John that resembles the head of the Shroud. I’m not saying Casentino was the artist, but that common representations of Christ were similar during the period.” The common representation of Jesus looking like the Shroud basically goes all the way back to about the 6th century. One popular hypothesis is that a cloth known in history as the Image of Edessa, which

some believe to have been the Shroud and which resurfaced after a flood there in about 525, became the model from which many artists based their representations of Jesus. The pastor's knowledge of art history is lacking here.

The pastor stated that during the time the Shroud surfaced in the 1350s, Roger Bacon's work on optics, light, and mirrors became known. The pastor claimed that it led to "early photographic processing." But photography wasn't invented until 1799! And just because there was an advance in knowledge about optics, light and mirrors doesn't automatically mean that's how the Shroud image was formed. The Shroud of Turin Research Project (STURP), which did hands-on study of the cloth in 1978, examined multiple forgery hypotheses over several years, and none of them were able to duplicate all of the characteristics of the linen

The pastor asserted that regarding the C-14 test, which produced a date of AD 1260-1390, "most scientists still stand upon the original testing..." There has been much criticism of the C-14 results, which include multiple peer-reviewed scientific papers. Some of you may know that I've written an 800-page book documenting some rather shoddy scientific work on the dating test; that word "shoddy" was actually used by two different C-14 scientists who actually accepted the C-14 dating results! I've also written a supplement accessible online with over eighty additional entries, and recently I've added several dozen articles about additional inside information related to the testing based on archives obtained by the Shroud of Turin Education and Research Association (STERA), founded by our friend, the late Barrie Schwartz. C-14 isn't infallible by any means, and given the shoddy nature of the Shroud C-14 dating, including the fact that only one sample site was chosen (which means one can't be sure the sample was representative of the whole cloth), the results are not rock-solid as far as proving the Shroud to

be a medieval forgery, especially given all of the other accumulated evidence that the Shroud is ancient.

Let's look at this in a little more detail since it is such an important aspect of the Shroud question. The first point to be kept in mind about the C-14 test is that it, under certain circumstances, can be very unreliable. The method was only developed in the late 1940s, and despite refinements, it still has some limitations. Jacques Evin, a C-14 scientist who would accept the accuracy of the 1988 testing, wrote in a paper before the dating,

It is evident that the samples to be dated should contain carbon. However, the mere presence of this chemical element is not sufficient to produce a valid result. After many years of C-14 dating it has been shown that *numerous results are in error or are erroneously interpreted, often because of lack of knowledge about the value of the material selected for dating* (emphasis added).

It is interesting to note that in one report, "The original radiocarbon age obtained for one artifact ... was in error by almost *26,000 years*. This was reported by a C-14 scientist named D.E. Nelson.

C-14 is used in archaeology as a *confirmatory* test to corroborate a hypothesized date that is arrived at on the basis of *all* the evidence pertaining to the object. In the case of the Shroud, the C-14 dating has to be judged in light of other scientific, medical, historical, and biblical knowledge. As archaeologist William Meacham stated, "it would be one further piece of evidence to be evaluated in the light of the total complex of data about the shroud." W. G. Mook, another C-14 scientist, echoed the need "for relating radiocarbon dates with age obtained by other independent physical dating methods." A specialist in the conservation of medieval paintings, Anna Hulbert of Oxfordshire, England, stated before the official results were released that if the C-14 results indicated a medieval date, they raise more problems for her than if the

cloth was the burial shroud of Jesus. "Carbon dating, according to Hulbert who had a particular interest in the history of medieval art technique,

like X-rays or any other analytical technique, should be regarded as one tool among many. It is chiefly useful in the dating of undisturbed archaeological material. In the case of the Shroud, one should calculate carefully whether any of its known wanderings or adventures, such as the 1532 fire, could give a distorted reading to whatever date the radiocarbon laboratories come up with.

Middle Eastern archaeologist Eugenia Nitowski observed in a Press Release,

In any form of inquiry or scientific discipline, it is the weight of evidence which must be considered conclusive. In archaeology, if there are ten lines of evidence, carbon dating being one of them, and it conflicts with the other nine, there is little hesitation to throw out the carbon date as inaccurate due to unforeseen contamination. The Shroud should not be given less than standard procedure. . . (Press Release of "Environmental Study of the Shroud of Jerusalem" on 15 October 1988).

The problems with the Shroud C-14 dating started long before the current criticisms of the sample, procedure, and results surfaced. Even before the final results were announced, one C-14 scientist believed that no matter what results would occur, there would be grounds for criticisms. In the words of Dr. Garman Harbottle, of the Brookhaven lab in Upton, New York in a personal communication to me in 1988 "no matter what date is obtained, there will be many, skeptics or devout, who will be disappointed. They have already at hand more than sufficient ammunition to attack any date they do not like." In other words, the test was such an overall fiasco that the results could not be trusted no matter what date was obtained.

The Shroud C-14 test was not rigorously done. During an International Symposium, held in Rome in 1993, statistician Philippe Bourcier de Carbon listed fifteen points of failure in the radiocarbon history of the Shroud, which are a damning indictment of the test:

1. absence of a formal report of the sampling;
2. absence of a video archive on the final steps of the samples packaging;

3. in the official reports, contradictions about the cutting and the weight of the samples by people in charge of sampling;
4. breaches of the protocols initially planned for the operation of dating; (there
5. rejection of the usual procedure of double-blind test; (*double-blind test means they wouldn't know which was the Shroud sample and which were control samples*)
6. refusal of the interdisciplinary documentation, which is usual in the procedures for radiocarbon dating;
7. exclusion of acknowledged specialists in the Shroud, particularly American scientists who participated in previous works of STURP;
8. communication to the laboratories, most unusual, of the dates of the control samples prior to testing;
9. intercommunication of results among the three laboratories during the job;
10. disclosure to the media of the first results before the delivering of the findings;
11. refusal to publish raw results of the measurements
*[this was finally released after a 2017
Freedom of Information Request by Frenchman Tristan Casabianca, who
is with us at the conference. Bravo Tristan]*
12. non-explanation of the unique isolation of the confidence interval of the measures performed by the Oxford laboratory compared to those made by other laboratories;
13. unacceptable value of 6.4 published in the journal *Nature* for the chi-squared statistical test on the results of the radiocarbon dosage on the Shroud;
14. rejection of any cross-debate on the statistical measures performed;
15. rejection, absolutely uncommon, of the publication of the statistical expertise of this operation, officially entrusted to Professor Bray of "G. Colonnetti" Institute of Turin.

The aforementioned pastor called the Shroud “an art masterpiece,” but since no one knows how the image was formed, one can’t assume it is art, at least if one allows for a world in which supernatural events can happen.

Let’s move on to other objections and misconceptions I’ve heard over the years.

*Some skeptics say that because the Gospel of John (in their English translation) mentions “linen strips,” the Shroud is a fake. The Greek word “**othonia**” is a generic plural term that can include strips and other burial cloths.) First, the strips referred to were likely to bind the hands and the feet. And most, if not all bring up the Gospel of John without even referring to the other three Gospels? Are those not Scripture as well? That is just being intellectually dishonest. For most of these skeptics, there is no need for biblical exegetes or biblical commentaries or the opinion of a Jewish rabbi. All one has to do is read your English translation and put your personal twenty-first-century interpretation on it.

*I’ve never heard a skeptic who believes that the gospel of John alone disproves the Shroud mention that while Luke mentions that Joseph of Arimathea had purchased fine linen to wrap Jesus in (= “**sindon**”), in 24:12 when he describes Peter and John going to the tomb, he uses the word “**othonia**,” which John had used in his gospel.

*Some skeptics say that the Shroud can’t be authentic because the Gospel of John mentions a head cloth and the Shroud is only one piece. They don’t consider the possibility that the head cloth and the Shroud could have been separated over almost 2,000 years. In fact, it was probably inevitable that they would have gotten separated over such a long period of time. The head cloth is believed to be what is known as the “Sudarium of Ovideo,” for which there is historical documentation going back to the early 7th century. Like the Shroud, it has been intensely studied by scientists and researchers.

*Some skeptics say that because 1 Cor 11:14 says that it’s shameful if men have long hair, the Shroud can’t be Jesus because the man in the Shroud has long hair. Similar to the controversy about “linen strips” in the gospel of John, the objection made is based on a simplistic interpretation of the verse. It is likely referring to the practice of men adorning their hair like women’s. According to the late Rev. Albert Dreisbach, there is evidence in biblical history that at least some Jewish males had long hair.

*Some skeptics claim that the man in the Shroud can’t be Jesus because he has a beard and Jesus’ beard was plucked out. Well, the whole beard wouldn’t have been plucked out and the image on the Shroud does show a gap in the beard where some hairs could have been plucked.

*Skeptics claim that STURP was nothing but a group of pseudo-scientific religious fanatics out to prove the Resurrection. While there were a few devout Catholics and evangelicals on the team, the religious affiliations of most of the team’s members weren’t even known by Barrie Schwartz, publisher and editor of the premier site: www.shroud.com. Regarding their scientific

expertise, most of the members of the team worked in the U.S.' space and nuclear programs. How long does one think it would take for several dozen scientists of that caliber to discover that there was paint on the cloth, a common assertion made by many skeptics? Skeptics who would never dream to advise these scientists on how to build nuclear bombs or putting crafts into space feel quite comfortable saying these scientists are incompetent when they are examining a linen cloth.

*Skeptics claim the Shroud is a forgery, even though dozens of prominent doctors and surgeons believe that the images depict a real human being who had been crucified. Two deceased pathologists who each spent about fifty years studying the Shroud, Dr. Robert Bucklin and Dr. Fred Zugibe performed about a combined 50,000 autopsies. What are the chances that a medieval forger would have been clever enough to fool just these two men? (It's also worth mentioning that the co-founder of STURP, Dr. John Jackson, a theoretical physicist who also believes the Shroud is authentic, has personally spent over 50,000 hours researching the Shroud.)

*Skeptics often accuse Christian scientists or Christian researchers of being biased if they believe the Shroud is authentic. But why are agnostics or atheists who believe the Shroud to be a forgery any less biased than a Christian researcher who believes it is real?

*Only a few skeptics from 1973 and 1978 examined the Shroud directly. Many who make authoritative statements about their views but have not directly studied it, believe their assertions carry more weight than the researchers who studied it directly and believe the cloth could be or is authentic. Perhaps a medical analogy will be helpful. Suppose I go to a doctor for an issue. They examine me directly, do tests, and write up their conclusions. Then there's another doctor who hears about my case. They don't examine me directly but just read about the findings of the first doctor. The second doctor comes up with a completely different diagnosis than the first. How many people in that situation would accept the conclusions of the second doctor over the findings of the first? The answer is obvious: not many would.

*Some skeptics claim they can reproduce a convincing (apparently only to themselves and perhaps a few others) reproduction of the Shroud using materials available in the 13th-14th centuries. Well, the materials to build an airplane existed in that period, but that doesn't mean one was built. There wasn't the scientific know-how at the time to create one. It also appears that the scientific know-how to be able to make the Shroud image didn't exist at the time. If a forger was trying to make an image to fool the largest number of people, why would he have made it so difficult to see with the naked eye? No one has been accurately able to duplicate the Shroud, reproduce all of its characteristics, and get the physics and chemistry correct.

Skeptics claim that since God had commanded no graven images, the Shroud should be discounted. The answer to this is simple. The Shroud of Turin Research Project had concluded in 1981 that the images were not the product of an artist. So, if it's miraculous and not made by the hand of man, it cannot be a graven image.

*Some Christian skeptics say that the Shroud is a distraction that takes people away from the core Gospel message. But if the Shroud helps bring people to the Gospel message, why should

anyone complain? Christianity is a historic religion. Jesus was wrapped in a Shroud. It's not unlikely that the Christian community would have preserved it. It's not unlikely that God could use it to draw people to him and has providentially preserved it down to our day. The apostle Thomas needed more than the testimony of his fellow apostles to believe that Jesus had risen. When Thomas finally saw him for himself, Jesus didn't banish him from the Twelve because he had not believed. And for those who get hung up on the fact that the image is not mentioned in the Gospels, which we've already addressed, don't forget the final verse of the Gospel of John: "There are still many other things that Jesus did, yet if they were written about in detail, I doubt there would be room enough in the entire world to hold the books to record them." Might not leaving an imaged Shroud be one of those things?

*Skeptics claim that the fingers and arms are too long. Some scientists say the image has some qualities of an X-ray so what we could be seeing in the hands are the finger bones, which would make the fingers appear longer than they actually were. The right shoulder seems to have been dislocated, which would make that arm appear to be longer than what it actually was.

*Skeptics claim that the blood is too red. Old blood always turns brown or black. But it's been discovered that if someone is tortured severely, the liver produces an enzyme called "bilirubin," which keeps the blood red.

*Some skeptics say "even if the Shroud wrapped a real man, how do we know it's Jesus and not some other victim? First of all, how many fully intact burial shrouds are you aware of? Secondly, how many crucified victims in history are you aware of that had a cap of thorns, was severely scourged, had a lance wound in the side, and did not have his legs broken? There is only one and that is Jesus. And when you add to the fact that many believe, based on scientific evidence, that the image was possibly made at the moment of the Resurrection, one gets added confirmation that the image would have been Jesus and no one else.

***Misconception:** The Shroud image was likely painted on. As mentioned in the STURP summary, scientists found NO paint on the Shroud. A transmitted light was placed behind the Shroud and while the blood showed up, the image did not, which tells you that there was no paint, or for that matter any foreign substance to cause the image.

***Misconception:** Iron oxide was used for the blood. Heller and Adler of STURP performed 12 different tests that showed there was real blood on the Shroud. As Adler used to like to say: **"It's blood – BLUD – blood!"**

***Misconception:** There are several here. The VP-8 Image Analyzer that showed the Shroud contained spatial encoding is often said to be used for mapping 3-dimensional images, which is not true. It is usually claimed to have been invented by NASA. This drove the late Barrie Schwartz crazy as it was wrong but repeated by so many. It was manufactured by Interpretation Systems, Inc. of Lawrence, Kansas. It was not invented by Pete Shumacher as many have claimed; he was just the product engineer. NASA did use the device to obtain information about Earth from space, but they didn't invent it and they didn't use to map the moon or planets.

***Misconception:** The Shroud shows the wounds in the wrists and not in the palms of the hand, so it can't be authentic. In Greek, it's the same word for hand and wrist. And experiments have shown that if a nail is placed in the palms instead of the wrists, that the nail wouldn't sustain the weight of the body—it would just tear through, so the wounds are in the correct place physiologically.

***Misconception:** Because the man in the Shroud had his nose broken, that contradicts the Messianic prophecy that “not a bone shall be broken.” Simply, the nose is cartilage, not bone.

***Misconception:** The Shroud can't be authentic because a shroud from that period couldn't last that long. That's nonsense. There are cloths in museums that date back thousands of years. I attended a Shroud lecture in the 1980s and the presenter brought a small piece of an Egyptian linen that dated to 2,000 B.C.

***Misconception:** Regarding the invisible reweave theory put forth by myself and my late wife, most will say that the Poor Clare Nuns, who had sewn in patches in 1534 after the 1532 fire, performed the invisible reweave. Sue and I believed that the nuns would not have been proficient enough to execute the reweave, but Margaret of Austria, who owned the Shroud at the time, had the services of French weavers who could have been talented enough to do the reweave.

***Misconception:** The late Dr. Walter McCrone, who believed the Shroud was a painting, was a member of the Shroud of Turin Research Project (STURP) and was “kicked off” the team. Although STURP consulted with McCrone and he signed a non-disclosure agreement, he was never an official member of the team and thus couldn't have been “kicked off.”

Some questions I would like to ask skeptics:

1) For those who say the Shroud doesn't match to the Bible, how would a Christian in 200 A.D., before the New Testament was compiled, have determined if the Shroud was authentic? There was no official Bible at that point in time.

2) Have you read the New Testament in the original Koine Greek language, or have you relied only on English translations?

3) How much reading have you done in the area of biblical exegesis? Did you know that many Protestant and Catholic clergy, with years of seminary training and with various degrees, believe the Shroud could be authentic?

4) Are you aware of the Sudarium of Oviedo, which has been in Spain since 614 A.D. and is believed by many scholars to be the napkin mentioned in John 20:6-7? Did you know that by the 1st century, even the Egyptians had stopped wrapping their dead mummy-style?

- 5) Have you ever thought to question Jewish rabbis about known Jewish burial customs of the 1st century or read a book about them? Are you aware of a book, for example, by the late Jewish archaeologist Rachel Hachlili titled “Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices, and Rites in the Second Temple Period,” which is about 600 pages?
- 6) Have you ever done any research into art history, which suggests that paintings of Jesus that have come down to us may well have derived from the existence of the Shroud?
- 7) Are you aware of the dozens of medical doctors and surgeons who believe that the Shroud images and blood are correct anatomically and physiologically?
- 8) How many books or peer-reviewed papers on the Shroud of Turin have you read? How familiar are you with the numerous peer-reviewed journals in which papers on the Shroud have been published?
- 9) Are you aware that the Shroud of Turin is likely the most intensely-studied artifact in human history and that no one knows how the image got on the cloth?
- 10) How much expertise do you have in all the disciplines needed to create such an image?

Finally, I think it's worth listening to STURP's final conclusion in 1981 (it's just a few relatively short paragraphs). This summary basically still stands almost 45 years later. It should be noted that a few STURP members at various points weren't convinced that it couldn't have been a forgery but this statement was published as a STURP conclusion:

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.