

# The Vision of King Abgar in Eusebius Considered as the Shroud of Turin<sup>1</sup>

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Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea completed his monumental work the *Ecclesiastical History*, or *Church History*, in about the year 325. But he researched it for many years before then. He was born in 260 in Palestine, raised there as a Christian, and early in life became a diligent student of Christianity. By the year 300 he was already forty years old and had a vast knowledge of Christian history. He spent his life in the Eastern Mediterranean, too, most of it in his homeland, Palestine. For these reasons, he may well have heard something about the story of King Abgar and Jesus some decades before his *Church History* was completed, and may have gathered his other information on Edessa early too.<sup>3</sup>

The testimony of Eusebius on the matter of King Abgar is in any case early, preceding that of the Syriac-language work *The Doctrine of Addai* (c. 400 CE), which also relates the King Abgar story, by a hundred years or so.<sup>4</sup>

In Book I, Chapter 13 of his Greek-language work, Eusebius mentions King Abgar and his city of Edessa located “beyond the Euphrates.” Eusebius focuses on Abgar in connection with *Jesus*. His two-part account is short, occupying about three pages, and first relates an alleged exchange of letters (both of them short) between Abgar and Jesus, then, soon thereafter, the healings in Edessa by an apostle of Jesus named Thaddeus (or Thaddaeus), with more said about Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. It ends with the suggestion of a public sermon by Thaddeus to be given the next day.<sup>5</sup>

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In that second part of Eusebius’s account, involving Thaddeus, one short passage relates a *vision* seen by King Abgar – a vision *closely related to Jesus*.

Ian Wilson and Mark Guscini have already mentioned that vision in some of their books on the Turin Shroud or the Image of Edessa.<sup>6</sup> I do not know if anyone in the Shroud field, or outside of it, has analyzed the vision at length, though someone may have done so. Searches of shroud.com and the “Newsletter of the British Society for the Turin Shroud” have turned up extremely little comment so far.

What follows here is not dependent for its plausibility on an early Edessan home of the Turin Shroud, a theory first proposed by Wilson and then largely supported by Guscini and many others (and since known widely as the “Mandyion theory,” though I prefer to call it the Edessa location theory, for clarity). That theory originally envisioned a relocation of the Shroud from Jerusalem to Edessa in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, but has since been modified to include the possibility of such a move occurring in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. If Jack Markwardt’s more recent Antioch location theory is correct, which involves a *brief* Shroud transport to nearby Edessa during the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century and a resultant conversion of King Abgar VIII there, it would also fit the present hypothesis for Abgar’s vision in Eusebius.<sup>7</sup> I am not concerned here with *who* brought Christianity or even the Shroud to Edessa, nor exactly *when*, but with Eusebius’s words about the vision of Abgar.

As for Eusebius, then, his passage on Abgar's vision is brief, only two to three sentences long. In the version given by Prof. J.B. Segal in his landmark 1970 work, *Edessa, 'The Blessed City'* (p. 64), we read:

So Tobais rose up early the next day and taking Thaddaeus came to Abgar. Now as he went up, while the king's grandees were standing present, as soon as he entered a great vision appeared to Abgar on the face of the Apostle Thaddaeus. And when Abgar saw this, he did reverence to Thaddaeus, and wonder held all who were standing by, for they had not seen the vision which appeared only to Abgar (*Ecclesiastical History* I.13.14).<sup>8</sup>

Readers familiar with the Shroud of Turin will recognize certain similarities between its image and this vision seen by Abgar. Both are *visual phenomena*, somewhat *difficult to see*, and rather prominently involve a *face*. The Shroud, traditionally considered the burial shroud of Jesus, bears a remarkable image of him, which is faint, and his face is the most impressive part of it.

Could those similarities be due to a connection between the Shroud and the vision, the Shroud having inspired that reference to a vision and the specific words describing it? That seems to me, at present, a *real possibility*, not just a remote one. After all, a vision *is* an image – an immaterial image. So imagining one as the other would require no great mental leap.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, the similarities could also be pure coincidence. Flukes and ambiguities abound in the Shroud field, as in other fields, misleading many researchers.

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The story of King Abgar V of Osroene (his kingdom, of which Edessa was the capital, today Sanliurfa in southeast Turkey), involving an exchange of letters between him and Jesus, and the conversion of Edessa to Christianity, is legendary, but it may contain some traces of historical truth.

Indeed, Segal's 1970 analysis of the Abgar legend's details – sometimes considered purely fictional – showed that some of them were actually real, describing historical facts, historical events, and historical people, just ones *not* located or occurring in Edessa. Rather, they occurred in the neighboring kingdom of Adiabene and city of Nisibis, among other places (Segal, 1970, pp. 62-73). Many such historical details were then borrowed by the anonymous Edessan storyteller or archivist whose tale Eusebius translated, and by the writer of the next version of the Abgar legend of which we know, *The Doctrine of Addai*. Segal critiques both Eusebius's text and the later *Doctrine* text in this regard.

Several of Segal's proposed parallels are found not in Eusebius's short rendering of the Abgar legend but only in that later Syriac text *The Doctrine of Addai*, which tells the Abgar legend at greater length, of around 14,000 words, some ten times longer than Eusebius's account of around 1,400 words.<sup>10</sup> The *Doctrine*, also known as the *Doctrina Addai* or *The Teaching of Addai* (Addai being a possible Syriac version of the Greek name Thaddaeus, or the other way around; see Scavone, 2002, p. 429),<sup>11</sup> is widely considered to have been composed in its extant form by the early 5<sup>th</sup> century. Certain elements in it are definitely late 4<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> century. But a shorter version of it was surely the document translated, paraphrased, and excerpted by Eusebius. The *Doctrine* also contains the vision passage, and in words almost identical to those used by Eusebius.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, the *Doctrine* contains a passage in which a *painting* of Jesus from life is described, which Eusebius does not relate.<sup>13</sup> The painting is taken to Abgar already before the arrival of Thaddeus in Edessa. If that painting reflects the Shroud, as some believe, how, then, could Abgar's vision, seen only *later* on the face of Thaddeus, reflect the physical Shroud too?<sup>14</sup> I think it could well be a case of different layers entering the story at different stages of its development, years or

decades apart, with the authors not aware of the discrepancy. The *Doctrine* is full of such discrepancies and anachronisms.

Given Segal's attribution of historical reality of many elements in the Abgar legend, however much altered, the account transmitted by Eusebius, of the vision seen by King Abgar, could also be providing us with documentary traces of a certain reality, a "real vision." It could, that is, reflect a viewing of the (facial portion of the) burial shroud of Jesus, which many people including myself consider the Turin Shroud to be.

I should make my positions clear. Personally, I believe in the authenticity of the Shroud, although I have no religious reason to do so, being an agnostic not a Christian (though I once was). Moreover, it took me many years of consideration to reach those positions. They did not come lightly.

Returning to King Abgar, I currently think that Eusebius's account of the vision of Abgar is very possibly an echo or allusion, a veiled or garbled reference to the Turin Shroud with its image of Jesus on it (whenever it may have arrived in Edessa).<sup>15</sup> But if it was an echo or allusion, Eusebius himself may not have been aware of it. It was not his tale. He merely translated the Abgar story, with major cuts and slight modifications. The vision passage itself is virtually the same in both texts, that of Eusebius and that of the extant *Doctrine of Addai*, and there is no reason to think that Eusebius invented it.<sup>16</sup>

This hypothesis, tentatively identifying Abgar's vision as the Shroud, has been suggested by at least a few others in the Shroud field, as will soon be discussed. But, much more often, the vision has been ignored. Instead, the standard comment has been simply, "Eusebius mentions no image."

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At least five points about Abgar's vision as related by Eusebius seem noteworthy, perhaps pointing toward the Shroud as having been the inspiration behind it.

First, the circumstances of the vision are closely connected with an apostle of Jesus, Thaddeus, so there is a personal connection between the *vision and Jesus*.

Second, related mention is made in Eusebius's Abgar story of the events in *Jerusalem* – Jesus' "mission" there, his "abasement," his being "injured" and "crucified," and his being "taken up to the father." Nothing is said about his wisdom, his parables, or his help for the poor. The story is salvation-based, as it were. Shroud-based, I might even venture. This Jesus-Jerusalem-Passion background to the vision seems important. It was not just the case that King Abgar, one fine day, had a religious experience from out of the blue. His vision has a specific background, and one consistent with the background of the Shroud of Turin.

Third, Abgar's remarkable experience when he meets the apostle of Jesus is, as mentioned, a *vision*, that is, a *visual* religious experience. It is not an auditory one, nor a tactile one. Abgar does not hear a divine voice nor feel an angelic hand. He *sees* something.<sup>17</sup> Today it is easy to take that vision passage for granted because we are so familiar with vision claims made in antiquity and the Middle Ages. But if the story of King Abgar's religious experience were purely fictional, it could easily have been described in those other ways. However, it was not.

Fourth, the vision Abgar sees involves a *face*, and in a rather odd way. Specifically, the vision appeared "on the face" of the apostle who came to Abgar. The Greek word used here, *εν*, *en*, can also mean "in" or "at," but that would not really change the meaning, so I will go with the translation Segal used, "on the face," which other translations of Eusebius use as well. (For the record, Phillips, in his 1876 translation of the *Doctrine of Addai*, has "in the face" of Addai, p. 6, and Howard, in his 1981 *Doctrine* translation, p. 13, also has "in the face.")

How strange. I do not know of any other vision similarly seen "on the face" or "in the face" of a person, as if that face were a mere screen for the vision to appear on (see Strong's Bible

Concordance). And the most memorable feature of the Turin Shroud is, of course, its facial image. Moreover, the famous Image of Edessa, an icon of Jesus, considered by some or many today to be an early guise of the Shroud, was, from its earliest times, primarily known as a facial image. (The long Shroud would in that case have been folded up so as to reveal a facial image only, presumably to hide its embarrassing bodily nudity, its many unsightly bloodstains, and its image of an obviously dead Jesus; and even the face alone, while greatly venerated, would only rarely have been seen and then by only a select few.)

Fifth, Eusebius relates that other people, nobles, standing beside Abgar, “had not seen” the vision he saw. That is also consistent with the Turin Shroud and the well-known *faintness* of the image on it. The statement that “only ... Abgar” saw the vision could be a dramatic way, slightly fictionalized and appropriate for a legend, of expressing the fact that anyone who looked at the Shroud image, even its facial image, would have some difficulty recognizing its features due to its *misty* quality. Or it could reflect an historical experience in which only King Abgar was shown the image, it being too precious and sensitive an object to show others.<sup>18</sup>

These five points all seem consistent with the “vision” passage in Eusebius, and in the Syriac language source that he translated from, possibly being a veiled or garbled reference to the Shroud of Turin – if the Shroud is authentic, of course (or goes back to at least the 3<sup>rd</sup> century).

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As previously related, at least two authors of Shroud or Shroud-related books, Ian Wilson and Mark Guscini, have mentioned Eusebius’s Abgar vision passage in their works. They are both renowned experts and are good lights to be led by.

Wilson’s 1978 Shroud book, *The Shroud of Turin*, a milestone in the field, is the only Shroud work I know that actually quotes the full vision passage in Eusebius (p. 109). Wilson does not comment on that passage in Eusebius, though he does comment on the later 10<sup>th</sup> century version of the legend that replaces the vision with an actual cloth bearing Jesus’ image. Wilson’s next book, *The Blood and the Shroud* (1998), again mentions the vision, now in several sentences, first briefly summarizing the *Doctrine*’s version, “Abgar alone sees a ‘wonderful vision’ upon the face of Addai” (p. 164). He then mentions Eusebius’s account of the vision in a few sentences (though using words from the *Doctrine*’s account), and speculates that it might reflect the Shroud (p. 166, 173). In his 2010 book *The Shroud*, Wilson once again mentions the vision of Abgar, quoting the relevant passage in three full sentences (Chapter 9). He quotes here not from Eusebius but from the *Doctrine of Addai*, though suggesting there are close similarities between the two texts. His follow-up remarks in a second paragraph twice mention the “wonderful vision,” as the *Doctrine* terms it, even noting that the “Orthodox tradition identified it with the portrait of Christ known as the Image of Edessa,” and including several sentences referring to its various artistic representations.

That is the latest comment by Ian Wilson on the vision of Abgar that I know of. Clearly he felt intrigued enough by that vision passage to mention it in three separate books. One wonders exactly when the Orthodox tradition first began to identify Abgar’s vision with the Image of Edessa. Was it before, or only after, the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century *Acts of Thaddeus* account? In that work, the earlier Jesus painting scene is changed to relate Jesus himself wiping his face on a cloth and miraculously leaving his image on it, and the earlier *vision* of Abgar then becomes that *cloth* being presented to Abgar in his palace.

Mark Guscini, in his 2009 book *The Image of Edessa*, also briefly mentions Abgar’s vision in Eusebius, though he does not quote the passage, only summarizes it (p. 143). He refers to the “great vision” and the face involved in it, but does not relate that the nobles standing near Abgar in the story did not see the vision. Thus, Guscini notes two of the three most Shroud-relevant aspects of the vision, not all three. But he does openly wonder whether the vision could reflect the Image of

Edessa, getting into a complicated question about the possibility that Eusebius knew of an image of Jesus and what effect such knowledge may have had on his recounting the vision passage, since Eusebius, following Jewish and earliest Christian tradition, was against the use of religious images. Did Eusebius tamper with the text and change anything? Guscini's puzzlement is evident.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the awkward inconclusiveness of the matter led him to avoid mentioning the vision of Abgar in his next and latest book, *The Tradition of the Image of Edessa* (2016), though he does mention Eusebius himself some two dozen times.

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Many others writing in the Shroud of Turin field have not mentioned Eusebius at all, in most cases surely because he did not pertain to their research. Others still, who mention him, do not relate his Abgar vision passage. Those authors have even given their readers a negative impression of the evidence to be found in Eusebius. The standard comment, repeated many times in major books, articles, and presentations on the Shroud, the Image of Edessa, or the "Mandyliion" (a later name for the Image of Edessa) has been that, "Eusebius mentions no image."<sup>20</sup>

Those same authors often briefly tell of the legendary letters exchanged between Abgar and Jesus, and the "early" conversion of Edessa to Christianity, and they may relate some of the names in the Abgar story told by Eusebius. But they do not relate that vision. This omission seems a possible mistake to me, especially because Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* testimony is early, from at least the year 325 and probably a decade earlier, when he may well have collected his information from Edessa. He could thus help to bridge the Shroud history gap back toward the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

Those authors have all been excellent researchers. How can their omission of the vision passage be explained, if the vision is potentially important?

Several understandable factors come to mind. First, many of the authors were writing long books or long articles and had hundreds of other details to focus on. Second, some of the authors were more at home dealing with forensic, scientific matters, and less comfortable writing about history and literary texts (especially Greek ones). Third, some may have been repeating what they had read in other books, without checking Eusebius's account themselves, due to constraints of time in their research projects. Fourth, that vision passage is very brief, occupying only two sentences in the account by Eusebius; it takes only ten seconds to read and is easily passed over. Fifth, the later Edessan accounts relating an actual physical image of Jesus, such as the *Doctrine of Addai* with its painting of him from life, and the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> c. *Acts of Thaddeus* with its *tetradiplon* or folded-up cloth or towel bearing his facial image, are much more picturesque and appealing. They are also more clearly relevant to studies of the Shroud of Turin, and are thus more often mentioned.

So, it does not seem that those many other authors have carefully weighed in their minds the vision of Abgar in Eusebius and decisively rejected its potential evidence as an early literary, figurative version of the Shroud. They probably just overlooked it, or felt unsure about it.

The problem with such oversight, if that is what it was, is that those authors stand in a ratio of at least three to one to the very few Shroud authors who *have* mentioned the vision. That is, for every one Shroud writer who has related the vision of Abgar in Eusebius – Wilson, Guscini, Markwardt (in endnote 10 of his 1998 paper, and on pp. 26-27 of his 2008 paper) – there seem to have been at least three others who, while also mentioning Eusebius, did not, and who instead stated merely that "Eusebius mentions no image." Thus, many *readers* are not fully informed of the potential evidence in Eusebius.

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To complete, more or less, this survey of the Shroud field on the subject of Abgar's vision, let us note Charles Freeman's openly skeptical comment in his 2012 online article, "The Shroud of Turin and the Image of Edessa: A Misguided Journey." The article attempts to refute the authenticity of the Shroud, including the possible vision-Shroud identification suggested by Ian Wilson. But it does this somewhat questionably, I think. "So Addai's face is transformed," which "shows he is miraculous," Freeman writes crisply. Yet the passages in Eusebius and the *Doctrine* do not say that Addai's/Thaddeus's face was "transformed." They mention a "vision" (as a noun), and indeed more than once (twice in Eusebius and *three* times in the *Doctrine*), so there seems no mistake here in word choice by the authors. Even Matthew's version of Jesus' transfiguration, "His face shone like the sun" (NIV 17:2), is not a close match with Abgar's "vision on the face of Thaddeus." A vision implies some content, some meaningful imagery, of shapes, figures, or beings (divine, human, or animal). Every language, including Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac, differentiates mere light from religious visions; the words do not even share the same vocabulary roots.

Freeman again: "I cannot see the connection between Addai's transformed face and a burial shroud with an image of a dead man on it," a statement which ignores the possibility that the Shroud was folded up so as to reveal only the face on it (the eyes seemingly open and "alive"), then perhaps raised up to face level ceremoniously. Freeman soon adds that the Jesus portrait painting episode in the *Doctrine of Addai* "makes quite clear that there is a legend about an image in Edessa that is quite clearly not the burial shroud." Freeman's specific criticisms are somewhat plausible in themselves, but he seems to read sometimes too much, sometimes too little into the texts. He allows for no hints, no veiled language, common though they were in early Christian writings. Freeman's anti-authenticity arguments as a whole have encountered considerable criticism within the Shroud field. Also in the skeptical line stands Andrea Nicolotti, who, like Freeman, uses that "transfigured" interpretation of Abgar's vision in his *From the Mandylion to the Shroud of Turin* (Leiden, Brill, 2014), p. 70. But Shroud authenticists (e.g., E. Marinelli, 2012, "A Small Cloth to be Destroyed," [www.shroud.com](http://www.shroud.com)) have found many flaws in Nicolotti's Shroud books.

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With regard to scholars outside the Shroud field, I have so far found only four who have commented on the vision of Abgar in Eusebius: J.D. Segal (1970), H.J.W. Drijvers (1982), Martin Ilert (2007) and James Corke-Webster (2017).<sup>21</sup> None of their comments have hitherto been cited within the Shroud field, to my knowledge.

Segal, in chapter III of his great work *Edessa, 'The Blessed City,'* apparently tries (his words are ambiguous) to explain Abgar's vision. He first suggests, in a mere sentence, that King Abgar V, known as *Ukkama*, "the Black" (an obscure king about whom very little is known), who lived at the time of Jesus, might have suffered from "blindness, and received his epithet for that reason" (p. 72). In the next sentence Segal summarizes the vision passage, now from the *Doctrine*, not Eusebius, seemingly suggesting that it hints at such blindness: "It will be recalled that Abgar saw a vision on the face of Addai, to the surprise of his courtiers to whom the miracle was not vouchsafed." Segal's entire interpretation of the vision passage occupies just those two sentences and a note, and also seems to me a flawed explanation for it.

The problems with Segal's possible "blind Abgar" explanation for Abgar's vision are at least four in number. First, many other, more probable reasons for Abgar V's nickname "the Black" come to mind. Perhaps his eyes were black, or his hair, or both. Perhaps his skin complexion was notably dark, or he typically wore dark clothing. Or perhaps his demeanor was often dour and "black." Second, labeling a man "the Black" due to his blindness would seem an odd thing to do. Why not simply Abgar "the Blind"? Third, blind rulers have been rare in history and have usually not lasted long, as their rivals take advantage of their blindness to oust them early, but we know that Abgar V

ruled his kingdom for several decades (until 50 CE). Fourth, it seems a real stretch to interpret that vision passage in Eusebius as indicating Abgar's blindness. If anything, the passage seems to be saying that his eyesight was supposed to be *better* than that of the people around him at that moment.

So I think the real reason for Segal's making this suggestion could simply have been that he felt obliged, as a great expert on Edessa, to offer some explanation for that little vision passage within the whole Abgar legend. But it stymied him, and he did not have long to ponder it because he was busy with many other details. So he offered the suggestion involving Abgar being blind as a last resort. In any case, I know of no researcher since Segal who has supported the idea that Abgar V might have been blind, nor supported such an interpretation of Abgar's vision.

Segal's book, researched in the 1960s, was published in 1970. He did not then know of the potential connection between the Shroud of Turin and the Image of Edessa, much less the potential connection between the Shroud and the Abgar legend in Eusebius. Ian Wilson first suggested such a connection to the Image of Edessa in the mid-1970s, and then suggested a Shroud connection specifically to Abgar's vision in a few sentences of his 1978 book, as we have already seen.

Segal did know of the Image of Edessa itself, but he had no strong reason to think that the Image was particularly old and predated the *Doctrine of Addai*, written around 400, since the Image was not mentioned by Eusebius. In any case, the Image was not his area of expertise.

Segal's short 1980 article, "When Did Christianity Come to Edessa?," researched by him in the 1970s, makes no mention of the Turin Shroud. It focuses on his theory of an early, minor, 1<sup>st</sup> century effort to convert Edessa by Jewish-Christians from Nisibis in the east, followed by a second, major, late 2<sup>nd</sup> century effort from Antioch in the west (p. 190). Nor did Segal ever afterward take a public stance on the Shroud question before his death in 2003, as far as I know. Guscini, in his 2016 *Tradition* book, cites Segal several times, but never on the Turin Shroud. Yet, Ian Wilson thanked Segal for his assistance already in his 1978 Shroud book, both in the preface and in the body of the work (p. 261, n. 1), so we can be certain that Segal knew of the Shroud by then and also knew of Wilson's proposed Edessan history for it as the famous Image of Edessa (once folded up).

Another notable interpreter of the Abgar vision scene in Eusebius is James Corke-Webster. Writing very recently, in 2017, after decades of studying Eusebius and related early Christian matters, Corke-Webster, in his excellent article "A Man for the Times: Jesus and the Abgar Correspondence in Eusebius of Caesarea's *Ecclesiastical History*," first states: "Eusebius makes no mention of the image of Christ that would become so important in later versions of the story" (p. 571, n. 35). He suggests the physical image was "most likely a later invention," though he is aware of contrary views that a physical image predated Eusebius. Several pages afterward he offers the following comment related to Abgar's vision:

Where Roman emissaries, generals, and emperors had consistently struggled to secure the loyalty of Edessa and its rulers, in Eusebius's account Christianity's founder is actively sought out by Abgar V and voluntarily offered half of his kingdom. Later in the story, Abgar bows to Jesus's representative, to the amazement of his court: 'Abgar prostrated himself [προσεκύνησεν] before Thaddaeus, and all those standing by were astounded' (*EH* 1.13.14, cf. *Philippians* 2.10). Such prostration in the east sent a potent political message. Jesus achieves easily that with which Rome's representatives had struggled (p. 584)

Corke-Webster thus gives a politico-religious meaning to the Abgar vision scene, or to that portion of it that he relates. The vision is interpreted by him only in terms of Abgar's response to it. The scene is all about respect or submission. In fact, this interpretation of the vision scene omits mention of the vision itself and one notable detail of it, that cryptic "face." Corke-Webster implies that "those standing by were astounded" merely by Abgar's bow to Thaddaeus, while Eusebius's full

passage on the vision actually clarifies, “for they had not seen the vision, which appeared only to Abgar” (Segal’s translation). In Eusebius, their astonishment is caused by their surprise due to their ignorance of the vision. In Corke-Webster, their astonishment is that of being impressed by the humble bow itself. While he may indeed have pinpointed a certain politico-religious tinge to that single detail of Abgar’s bowing, Corke-Webster’s interpretation does not exhaust the possible meanings of Eusebius’s full passage on Abgar’s vision. He almost seems to imply that the whole vision scene was invented simply to provide an occasion for Abgar to show his respect to a representative of Jesus. That, to me, is highly unlikely.

Yet another worthy mainstream academic scholar, H.J.W. Drijvers, wrote of Abgar’s vision passage in his penetrating article “Facts and Problems in Early Syriac-Speaking Christianity” (1982). His comment deserves our more extensive attention. However, his interpretation of Abgar’s vision is actually even shorter than Corke-Webster’s three sentences or Segal’s two sentences. Drijvers writes merely three words: “Paul at Damascus!” (p. 163, n. 26; his exclamation mark seems to indicate that Drijvers sensed here not only a similarity but also a source for the Abgar scene). These three words follow a quotation of the vision passage in a footnote on the apostles’ healing powers. Drijvers apparently saw a certain religious homage at work there, a borrowing from the New Testament book Acts of the Apostles, whereby Abgar in a sense becomes Paul.<sup>22</sup>

There are indeed some striking similarities between Abgar’s vision scene as related by Eusebius and Paul’s miraculous conversion scene as related by Luke in Acts 9:3-8. In both cases, the men are depicted as experiencing something supernatural. In both cases, they move downward after their experience – Paul falling to the ground (Greek *peson epi ten gen*) and Abgar bowing or prostrating himself. In Acts, those accompanying Paul “did not see” anyone, and in Abgar’s case, the nobles with him “had not seen” the vision. In addition, Paul, a few verses later, in Acts 9:12, is described as experiencing a “vision,” using the Greek word *horama*, which is later used by Eusebius of Abgar’s vision (EHI.13.14). Acts 9:10 mentions another “vision,” experienced by a follower of Jesus named Ananias, who befriends Paul, while Eusebius’s account of the Abgar story mentions a certain Ananias as the messenger of Abgar to Jesus. The Ananias in Acts soon lays hands on Paul to cure his resultant blindness, and Thaddaeus lays hands on Abgar to cure his terrible disease. How many of these similarities Drijvers had in mind when he wrote his three short words suggesting a parallel, “Paul at Damascus!,” I do not know. (Also of relevance, perhaps: *The Doctrine of Addai* later twice makes momentary reference to the “Acts of the Apostles” among other books of scripture; see Phillips, 1876, pp. 33, 44).

However, there are *even more differences* between the two scenes, which Drijvers likewise does not mention. In Acts, Paul (or Saul as he was still named in chapter 9) is an *enemy* of Christianity up to that moment, while King Abgar is not, but indeed is a friend of the faith. One therefore wonders why Saul/Paul would have been chosen as a model for Abgar’s experience or behavior. Also, in Acts, the phenomenon is initially described as a “light from heaven,” while the content of Abgar’s vision is not described at all, but only stated to be a “vision.” In Acts, too, Paul hears a *voice*, indeed the voice of Jesus, speaking vivid words, while Abgar hears nothing in his experience. In Acts, no reference is made to any face, while Abgar’s vision does involve a “face.” In Acts, the men with Paul also hear the voice of Jesus, while in Abgar’s case the nobles with him do not share his experience of seeing a vision. In Acts, Paul falls to the ground, but in Eusebius Abgar is said to *προσεκύνησεν, prosekunesen* – from *proskyneō*, sometimes translated as “prostrate [oneself],” but a word that has a wide range of possible meanings: kiss formally, nod, bow at the hip, kneel, kneel with hands and head to the ground, lie flat, as well as just “worship” in general (Phillips’s *Doctrine*, 1876, has: Abgar “fell down and worshipped Addai,” which is both like and unlike Paul’s simpler “falling to the ground”). Then, too, in Acts, Paul “saw no one” or nothing, while Abgar is said to see the vision. In Acts, Paul goes temporarily blind from his experience, while Abgar suffers no such effect (Paul’s blindness, actually stated in the text of Acts, bears no relation to the purely

hypothetical blindness suggested by Segal for Abgar, which, as we have seen, is not at all convincing). In Acts, too, the disciple named Ananias is a stranger to Paul, then befriends him under divine guidance, while the Ananias in Eusebius' Abgar story is a messenger of Abgar's and does not play any role in Abgar's vision scene; moreover, Ananias was a very common name, and in Acts alone three separate men bear that name. Finally in Acts, Paul's experience on the road to Damascus leads directly to his conversion, but in the Abgar legend, Abgar is already essentially converted at the time that he writes his letter to Jesus, well before his vision: "I have concluded ... either you are God ... or ... you ... are the Son of God" (*EH* I.13.7). (Abgar's formal conversion comes almost as an afterthought much later in the *Doctrine*.)

All in all, then, I find the differences greatly outweighing the similarities between these two experiences. The similarities may be mere coincidence. Falling down in awe, or bowing in reverence, is hardly unique to Paul or Abgar, but a stock-in-trade reaction in miracle stories, as is also an immediate healing after a laying-on of hands. So I do not find Drijvers's derivation of Abgar's vision from Paul's conversion experience convincing, though I would certainly not rule it out. It seems not a probability, yet still a real possibility as an explanation for the vision, as I wrote earlier of my Shroud-based hypothesis for it.

In that same "Facts and Problems" article, Drijvers also suggests that many passages in the larger Abgar legend in Edessa were modeled on the actual missionary methods of the Manichaeans, semi-Christian dualists active in Persia and Mesopotamia in the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century, in order to combat those Manichaeans, to "steal their thunder" we might say (pp. 160-164).<sup>23</sup> Thus, Addai/Thaddeus in the Christian legend is to King Abgar what the religious figure Mani was in reality to the Persian King Shapur I (reigned 241-272). Mani even had a disciple named Adda or Addai (but see Scavone, 2002, p. 428-29). Mani was known for his healings and letters, and even wrote a letter to followers in Edessa (p. 162). (One naturally wonders here if the Abgar-Jesus letter text fragments analyzed by Peppermüller in 1970 dated from earlier or later than the year 240; see note 16.) But if such borrowings took place, why, one might ask, would the composer of the original Abgar legend have reached so far outside of Manichaeism to pluck tiny details from Paul's conversion scene in *Acts* and turn them into Abgar's vision experience? That seems a discrepancy in Drijvers's interpretation of the vision, which adds to the doubtfulness of it.

Similarly, there does not seem to have been any particular incident or scene in the Manichaean period, either in actual doings or writings, between the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century and early 4<sup>th</sup> century, which closely parallels the Abgar vision scene; otherwise Drijvers, an expert on Manichaeism already in the 1970s, would surely have known of it and probably related it in his article (but see Mirkovic, *Prelude*, 2002 version, p. 196: When Mani first came into Shapur's "presence" the latter saw what resembled "two lamps of light" on "his shoulders" and therefore "exalted" him; this tantalizing passage may only first date, however, from the 10<sup>th</sup> century). Finally, Corke-Webster, who cites Drijvers's 1982 article more than once on other matters in his own 2017 Eusebius article, does not mention Drijvers's "Paul at Damascus!" interpretation of Abgar's vision, so he may not have found it persuasive or memorable.

The fourth mainstream scholar I have found who refers to Abgar's vision is Martin Ilert. In his 2007 book *Die Abgarlegende* (p. 137), Ilert outdoes, or "underdoes," Drijvers in the minimalism of his comment: "(vgl. Apg 9,7)." This means, in German, "vergleich Apostelgeschichte 9,7," or, in English, "compare/see Acts of the Apostles 9:7." Whether Ilert's mini-comment was based on Drijvers's earlier, 1982 reference to Paul in Acts, or was independent of it, I cannot say.<sup>24</sup> But Ilert cites Drijvers's writings several times in his book.

None of the above four mainstream scholars probably ever seriously considered the possibility that Abgar's vision, or the Image of Edessa, could have been based on, or indeed was, a faint image of Jesus on his burial shroud, a real and precious object.

The account of Abgar's vision was either just a dreamed-up vision or a reflection of something else. Its oddities suggest the latter to me. And *if* something else, a material image, a *picture* of some sort, seems very possible. But the Turin Shroud, or a copy of it, both involving Jesus, is not the only option for such a material image. For example, some researchers might think the vision was inspired by a painting of Mani in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century, since displaying portraits of Mani played a role in his disciples' missionary efforts. I have not found time to research Mani and Manichaeism much in that regard, but from what I know, it may be that Drijvers was too quick to draw his Paul parallel as an explanation for Abgar's vision, overlooking sources closer to his expertise in Manichaeism itself. Indeed, Drijvers claims that Mani's portrait was the inspiration for the Image of Edessa itself (1982, pp. 165-66). In addition, Mani is said to have performed miracles (e.g., levitation) at the *royal court* in Persia. He and his disciples were also known for their *visions*, though mostly of heaven and hell.<sup>25</sup> So, these *general* aspects of Manichaeism could have influenced the Abgar vision scene. Yet, the earliest known dates for such claims are uncertain, and Mani never converted King Shapur. Moreover, none of Mani's portraits, as far as I know, was *faint* and hard to see, as seems suggested of Abgar's vision (see also Scavone, 2002, p. 427). And none, that I am aware of, seems to have had "sweat" stains on it, or indeed to have been "made of sweat," as was the case with the actual, physical Image of Edessa (see August 944 "Sermon of Gregory Referendarius," paragraph 22). That description is very, and perhaps uniquely, reminiscent of the brownish image stains on the Shroud of Turin.

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To return now to Abgar's vision itself. Even the apparent *inconsistencies* between it and the Shroud of Turin are explicable if the vision was based on the Shroud. The vision in Eusebius is not called a physical image on a cloth, perhaps because the story was a *naturally vague* account of the Shroud. That vision of Abgar could have been either a *garbled memory* of the image on the cloth or a *deliberate disguise* for the Shroud in order to protect it from confiscation and destruction. There was a strong tradition against images in Judaism and thus early Christianity too. Eusebius himself was against religious images and is known to have confiscated some. Jesus, likewise, in the famous Doubting Thomas scene in the Gospel of John, chapter 20, is represented as saying, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (KJV, 20:29).

As we near the end of this investigation, let us explore the description of Abgar's vision in even more detail. He is said by Eusebius to see a "great vision." That word "great" is ambiguous. In the Greek, the word is *mega*, its original meaning physical: "big" or "large." If we take that word *mega* so, it could be a dim memory of the *large or long* Turin Shroud. But *mega* can also refer figuratively to the *quality* of an object or phenomenon, thus, a great, fabulous vision. That would again fit the remarkable image on the Turin Shroud (which, to repeat, the *Doctrine of Addai* describes as "a wonderful vision," whereby "wonderful" is probably best understood as "miraculous").

Next, there is oddly *no content* to that vision, no detail. What does it consist of? Normally one reads of visions in phrases like "he saw a vision of" something. Or one reads that a certain religious figure or divine being "appeared in a vision." There again the content is clear. But all such content is absent in Abgar's vision as related by Eusebius. That is strange. A vision without content. It suggests to me that *discretion* may have motivated the original writer in his wording of that passage, due to a need for secrecy.

Then, too, the reference to "the face" involved in the vision suggests a couple of other meanings. The vision is not represented as being seen in the sky, nor the clouds, as has been claimed for many other religious visions over the ages (think Constantine's vision of a cross above the sun, with the words "In this, conquer" by it). Often, visions in legends are not localized at all, not spatially pinpointed. Here, however, the vision appears spatially at head level, and seemingly as about head-

sized, “on the face” of the apostle Thaddeus. Its location is relatively mundane. This description fits the Shroud of Turin in its possible guise, folded up, as the Image of Edessa, the Face of Jesus. Held in two hands and raised up for dramatic effect, an understandable gesture, it would indeed appear “on the face” of whomever held it.

Another interpretation of that phrase “on the face” would also support a Shroud inspiration for it. By simply changing one word, the result would be a “vision of the face” (*horama tou prosopou*). And by also simply changing the name of the person involved, one would then get a “vision of the face of *Jesus*.” Perhaps the original experience was related in just those words, which later, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, were changed for the sake of safety and secrecy to the words that Eusebius obtained from the archives of Edessa. Similarly, classicists are familiar with the problem of ancient scribal errors in transcribing documents, often involving just single letters or single words and changing the meaning of sentences.

Yet another element of the vision with potential Shroud relevance is that phrase stating that the others “had not seen the vision,” only King Abgar. This is somewhat odd, since some or many claims of visions in religious history have involved group sightings. Not all, but some (e.g., the Medjugorje apparition in the 1980s). Here, however, only Abgar sees the vision. This again could point to the Turin Shroud. As mentioned before, its faint, misty image of Jesus is famously difficult to perceive.

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By the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the Shroud may already have been present in Edessa for decades, even a century or more, as Ian Wilson has proposed. Or, if the Antioch location theory of Jack Markwardt is correct (see especially his 2008 and 2014 papers), the Shroud may only briefly have been taken to Edessa, on a somewhat secret papal mission in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century, led by Bishop Avircius (Abercius) Marcellus of Hieropolis, in accordance with a request from King Abgar VIII to receive baptism, before it was returned to Antioch. Markwardt writes that the Shroud then inspired, in a veiled way, both the portrait painting scene in the *Doctrine of Addai* and Abgar’s vision in Eusebius and the *Doctrine* (2008, p. 27).

Markwardt also develops a line of evidence to explain the specifically physical Image of Edessa as a possibly later creation. His 2014 account of the route of the burial shroud of Jesus takes it from Antioch (and briefly Edessa) on to Constantinople, where, by the 6<sup>th</sup> century, a copy of it is made in the form of a military banner. The banner is then brought to Edessa in a campaign that same century, and it either becomes the Image of Edessa or it inspires another copy by the local religious authorities, which itself becomes the Image of Edessa.<sup>26</sup>

A more direct connection also seems possible to me. If Markwardt’s proposal of Antioch as the early home for the Shroud is correct, including its brief visit to Edessa c. 190, we might wonder whether, already during or soon after such an Edessa “loan,” a copy of the Shroud image could have been made, and whether *such a copy* then became the Image of Edessa, remaining there for several centuries.<sup>27</sup> After all, the mere transitory presence of famous people or objects has often been parlayed into lucrative legends (“... Slept Here”). Of course, if some such process lay at the origin of the Image of Edessa, that origin may have remained unspoken for centuries, and the Image itself obscure for those centuries.

In any case, there is apparently no clear mention of the Image being in Edessa until the late 6<sup>th</sup> c., perhaps partly also because it was known by a few to reveal a *dead* Jesus – very different from the standard icons of the time.

But I leave the whole location question open. I am not as concerned here with the early home of the Turin Shroud as with determining whether or not plausible literary traces of the Shroud can really be found in the *words of Eusebius*.

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Perhaps the vision of Abgar, at its core, relates the emotional impact made by the burial shroud of Jesus when it arrived in Edessa, whenever and however that may have occurred (if it did). The Shroud image could easily have made vivid impressions on certain individuals when they first beheld it – an experience *like a vision*, involving a *memorable face* (the rest of it folded up and hidden), with its features *not easy to distinguish*, reminding onlookers of Jesus’ *suffering in Jerusalem*, and, finally, expressing a *healing process*, a serene *conquest of death*, a *resurrection*.

Then, some years or decades later, a local Christian storyteller, having heard the original, whispered, eyewitness accounts of those first impressions that the Shroud had made in Edessa among a small group of Christian leaders, could have elaborated on those first impressions. If it was not actually King Abgar VIII, “the Great” (reigned 177-212), who received the Shroud there, in or about the year 190, nor Abgar VI or Abgar VII before him, the storyteller could have added such a worthy royal recipient, as an extra, fictional character, in order to create an immortal legend around the burial shroud of Jesus, now disguised as a vision (and, due to its potency, also a painting). A natural choice for that royal recipient would have been the king who actually reigned in Edessa at the time of Jesus, and that king was Abgar V. This historical fact could be the reason why we have the famous “Abgar legend” today instead of some other name for it, and with all the many details of the story later woven into it (the letters, etc.).

On the other hand, those several similar details between the Shroud image and the vision of Abgar may all be pure coincidence. Stranger coincidences have occurred in the Shroud field. But the results of this adventurous investigation seem to show that it is at least quite possible that Eusebius’s passage on Abgar’s vision is a reflection of the Turin Shroud. That is my tentative conclusion at this moment, until or unless further evidence and argumentation indicate otherwise. I hope my readers will ponder this information and maybe even add to it.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This paper grew out of a 20-minute talk of the same title I gave at the Ancaster, Ontario Shroud of Turin Conference in August 2019. No slide show accompanies it, as I have no forensic or art history evidence to present. I first pondered the question of Abgar’s vision in 2005 when writing *The Shroud Was the Resurrection* (2006), and drafted a few separate pages on it at that time (similar to pp. 3-4 here), but was only able to return to the subject in 2019.

<sup>2</sup> My thanks go to Marin Perusek for her excellent proofreading of drafts of this work, and to Mary Hines and Jack Markwardt, longtime Shroud researchers both, for their insightful and supportive comments on the content of those drafts. To Jack I am especially grateful for his in-depth advice in late 2019, involving a dozen or more emails on this and related subjects.

<sup>3</sup> Corke-Webster, 2017, p. 568: “current consensus argues that [the *Ecclesiastical History*] was produced in a series of four editions between 313 and 325 CE, and largely written between 311 and 315/6.” Mirkovic, *Prelude*, 2002 version, p. 126, dates Eusebius’s knowledge of the Abgar story to some years earlier still.

<sup>4</sup> *The Doctrine of Addai* is regarded by scholars as having attained its finished, extant form around the year 400 or very soon thereafter. Sidney Griffith, 2003, section 45, suggests by 435; Brock, 1992, suggests 410-420. A manuscript of it exists in St. Petersburg from about the year 500, the only known complete one.

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<sup>5</sup> The year given in Eusebius's version of the events is stated by Guscini to be equivalent to 30 CE (2009, p. 143), whereas the year in the *Doctrine* is 31-32 CE (Howard, 1981, p. 109). Eusebius probably did not go to Edessa in person. He reports nothing of the city itself. He may well have sent an assistant, or merely *been sent* a transcript of the source document/s he used. He writes of "the epistles ... which we have taken from the archives and have literally translated from the Syriac language" (*EH* I.13.5, McGiffert translation, 1890). And later: "To these epistles there was added the following account in the Syriac language" (*EH* I.13.10.). This suggests two or three separate documents, while the *Doctrine of Addai* is only one. As for differences between Eusebius and the *Doctrine*, Eusebius seems to emphasize a *handwritten* aspect to the letter of Jesus in order to make Jesus appear more literate and cultured. The *Doctrine* merely has Jesus speak his reply to a court official of Abgar named Hannan, who writes it down (see Corke-Webster, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Ian Wilson, *The Shroud of Turin: The Burial Cloth of Jesus Christ?* (Garden City, NY, Doubleday, 1978); idem, *The Blood and the Shroud* (New York, The Free Press, 1998); and idem, *The Shroud: The 2000-year-old Mystery Solved* (London, Bantam/Transworld, 2010); Mark Guscini, *The Image of Edessa* (Leiden, Brill, 2009); idem, *The Tradition of the Image of Edessa* (Leiden, Brill, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Jack Markwardt's theories of the Turin Shroud's location in its early centuries have developed over time as his research has deepened. It is therefore best to read (or watch) his Shroud conference papers in chronological order: "Antioch and the Shroud," 1998/99, Richmond, VA conference, <https://shroud.com>; "Ancient Edessa and the Shroud: History Concealed by the Discipline of the Secret," 2008, Columbus, OH conference, <https://www.shroud.com/ohioconf.htm>; "The Full-Length History of the Turin Shroud," 2014, St. Louis, MO conference, <https://www.shroud.com/stlouis.htm>; and "Modern Scholarship and the History of the Turin Shroud," also 2014, St. Louis, MO, <https://www.shroud.com/stlouis.htm>. He is currently preparing a book on the Shroud based on these and other papers. I do not necessarily accept all of his proposals, but do find them very plausible and backed by much insight and evidence.

<sup>8</sup> J.B. Segal, *Edessa, 'The Blessed City'* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 64.

<sup>9</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century Greek work *Acts of Thaddeus* (Andrew Palmer dates it to probably 627-29 or soon after) changes Abgar's earlier vision into a *presentation* to him of a cloth which Jesus wiped his face with and which miraculously retains his image. Another work containing that change is the famous 945 account *Narratio de Imagine Edessena*, "Story of the Image of Edessa," written in Constantinople after the 944 transfer of the Image of Edessa to Constantinople. But the change in the story cannot simply be assumed to reflect some original historical reality such as might better fit the Turin Shroud. Both authors could have read too much into the centuries older Abgar vision passages in Eusebius and the *Doctrine* (see Guscini, 2009, p. 143). They offer no evidence or argumentation for the change. Hence the necessity of this present study.

<sup>10</sup> George Phillips, *The Doctrine of Addai, the Apostle* (London, Trübner, 1876). George Howard, *The Teaching of Addai* (Chico, CA, Scholars Press, 1981). The Syriac document that Eusebius translated from surely dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Its existence and most of its wording have been determined from the *core* section of the *Doctrine of Addai* as compared with Eusebius's version. Sebastian Brock has provided and analyzed a dual-column comparison of the texts of Eusebius and the *Doctrine* demonstrating that core (Brock, "Eusebius and Syriac Christianity," in *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism*, ed. H.W. Attridge and G. Hata, 1998, pp. 212-34). That core or original text was then greatly expanded by another writer in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century, with additions that made it ten times longer than the Abgar text in Eusebius. But Eusebius had already pared down the original in his version, especially the beginning and the ending, so we do not know how long it was. Clearly it was somewhere in the mid-range between Eusebius's very short version and the *Doctrine*'s very long version. Exactly how long the "proto-*Doctrine*" (if I may call it that) was, the source used by both Eusebius and the later author-editor of the extant *Doctrine of Addai*, seems impossible to say, but probably less than half as long as the extant *Doctrine*, and perhaps much less. That work was only first discovered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as opposed to Eusebius's version of the Abgar story that has been widely known ever since its early 4<sup>th</sup> century publication. The full *Doctrine*'s first translation, by Phillips in 1876, was fifty pages long. The next and latest (English) translation was that of Howard in 1981. Eusebius was probably wise to shorten his source in a book of history such as his. In any case, the enthusiastic c. 400 *Doctrine* text contains many historical inaccuracies. Its author stresses a longstanding Rome-Edessa connection, Church hierarchy, idolatrous adversaries, orthodox Christology, and moral imperatives (see Griffith, 2003). The brief Abgar vision passage really gets lost in that long text.

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<sup>11</sup> Daniel C. Scavone, “A Review of Recent Scholarly Literature on the Historical Documents Pertaining to the Turin Shroud and the Edessa Icon,” *Sindone 2000*, ed. Emanuela Marinelli et al. (San Severo, Gerni, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> In Phillips’s 1876 translation of the *Doctrine* the vision passage reads: “And when Addai came up and went to Abgar, his nobles standing with him, and in going towards him, a wonderful vision was seen by Abgar in the face of Addai. At the moment that Abgar saw the vision, he fell down and worshipped Addai. Great astonishment seized all those who were standing before him, for they saw not the vision which was seen by Abgar” (p. 6). These three sentences have just a few more words than the corresponding sentences in Eusebius. Examples include “and,” “at the moment,” and a third mention of “the vision.” They do not seem significant for us here.

<sup>13</sup> Eusebius’s Abgar story does not contain a Jesus *painting* scene, but the *Doctrine of Addai* does. If the Abgar legend source document used by Eusebius, and later also by the anonymous author-editor of the *Doctrine*, contained that *Jesus picture-painting scene*, that would date the scene back to at least the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Most scholars believe that was the case (H.J.W. Drijvers changed his mind, first thinking the scene 3<sup>rd</sup> c. (1982, “Facts,” p. 162) and then a 5<sup>th</sup> c. insertion (1998, “Image,” p. 26). Ian Wilson for his part thought it early 5<sup>th</sup> c. In any case, losing Eusebius as the *first potential witness* to the Turin Shroud in Edessa, with his mysterious Abgar vision passage, could or would involve winning an *earlier and certain reference* to at least a *painted* image or “likeness” (Phillips; Howard has “portrait”) of Jesus in Edessa. That might be a welcome trade-off to some extent. But we simply do not know whether that earlier source document contained the painting scene. Eusebius remains the earliest definite and datable (potential Turin Shroud) witness, and he does not mention the painting. Eusebius is often thought to have deleted the painting passage because it implied an icon of Jesus, and he, Eusebius, was an iconoclast. That is certainly very possible. But, by his own admission, he deleted many introductory sentences, presumably motivated by a wish to get quickly to the heart of the Abgar story, that is, the exchange of letters between Abgar and Jesus. The painting scene, if it was there, may have been deleted along with them partly for the same reason.

<sup>14</sup> In the *Doctrine*, the Jesus painting scene occurs shortly before the vision scene and occupies just two sentences. The act of painting takes place in Jerusalem. The passage begins: “Hannan [the Ananias of Eusebius’s account] ... being the king’s painter ... took and painted a likeness of Jesus with choice paints, and brought [it] with him to Abgar the king, his master...” (1876 Phillips translation, p. 5). The next sentence tells of Abgar placing the painting prominently in his palace. The whole passage is intriguing and seems to me consistent with the Turin Shroud in at least four ways. The painting is said to be of the *real* Jesus (not done from later memory of him), whom Hannan was observing carefully; to have been painted in *Jerusalem* (not Galilee, the Jordan Valley, or elsewhere); to have been done very shortly before his crucifixion (Hannan “entered Jerusalem on the twelfth of Nisan,” that is, on the Wednesday just before the crucifixion on Friday); and to have been done with “choice paints,” whereby the key word, it seems to me and many others, is “choice,” meaning something *rare or special* about the actual physical substance used to make the picture – which agrees with the mysteriously discolored fibers of the Turin Shroud. Howard’s 1981 translation has “choice pigments” here, whereby, as with Phillips’s “paints,” an oily *substance* seems meant. Some other recent translations of the phrase have “choice colors” (e.g., Ilert, 2007), which Shroud skeptics like to quote because the Shroud image is merely monotone, not multi-colored. And yet, if correct, “colors” would still fit the Shroud with its white background, red blood, and golden-brown image, “colors” enough. (George Kiraz, Syriac specialist and Senior Research Associate at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, writes, “The word refers to the actual paint material.” But it could be somewhat ambiguous. Personal communication, December 6, 2019.) Shroud researchers skeptical of the Shroud’s authenticity also stress that the painting is only described as a painting, nothing more. Yet it seems to me rather odd to claim, in a supposedly true story, that a unique portrait of Jesus was brought to Edessa if there was nothing physically available in Edessa to support that claim, no actual picture or image. The first thing one asks after reading that sentence is: “Where is the painting now?” However, taking the vision and the painting together, one might ask if they are not mutually exclusive as possible allusions to the Turin Shroud. That is, if one of them *was* such an allusion, what would be the point of including the other, if it meant or symbolized the same thing? Would it not be redundant? But perhaps the scenes were envisioned at different dates, and added to the Abgar story many years apart, each one accepted for its own special charm. As possible allusions to the Shroud, they can actually be seen as mutually reinforcing.

<sup>15</sup> A skeptic of the Turin Shroud’s authenticity might wish to suggest that it was only the brief reference to Abgar’s (immaterial) vision by Eusebius which then inspired another writer, sometime after Eusebius, to add a scene to the Abgar story involving a *real picture* of Jesus, a *painting*, just as we find in the *Doctrine of Addai*. Eventually, then,

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that Jesus painting scene in the story would have led someone else to *forge* such a picture itself in reality, which thus, as a physical object, and once given a false pedigree tracing it back to Jesus' time, became the historical Image or Portrait of Edessa, soon known far and wide. This hypothesis, or a similar one, seems to be that favored by some scholars, who believe that an Image of Edessa only first existed physically from the 6<sup>th</sup> or even 8<sup>th</sup> century onward. Such a scenario, however, seems questionable to me. For one thing, the Image of Edessa, widely known as a facial image, was apparently known to some privileged few as a full-body image, as implied by the *tetradiplon* description (literally "four-fold" or "four-double," indicating it was considerably folded up) of the cloth with a Jesus facial image on it in *Acts of Thaddeus*. Such a strange, chameleon-like picture seems unlikely to have developed without any basis in reality from those few fragmentary words of Eusebius about a vision "on the face" of the apostle, or from the *Doctrine's* simple description of a painting ("likeness" is closer to the original Syriac meaning, writes Dr. George Kiraz).

<sup>16</sup> Fragments of another very early Greek version of the letters between Abgar and Jesus were analyzed by Rolf Peppermüller ("Griechische Papyrusfragmente der *Doctrina Addai*," *Vigiliae Christianae*, 25, 1971, pp. 289-301). The papyrus fragments from the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century preserved older wording that differed enough from the Abgar and Jesus letters in Eusebius and the *Doctrine* to have probably come, Peppermüller concluded, from an independent Greek translation of the legend, *predating* the Syriac source for Eusebius (p. 299; see also Scavone, 2002, p. 429; and Drijvers, 1982, p. 160, who suggests "second half of the third century" for the fragments, though Peppermüller himself made no such specific estimate of their date or time-frame, only "relatively early"). The text fragments consist of about seventy-five words or word fragments and are reprinted in Guscini, *Tradition*, 2016, p. 30 (varying there slightly from Peppermüller's version). The big question is: *by how long* did they precede that other source used by Eusebius? By a decade? By a few decades? By more? We do not know. And the next question would be: Did any other such text precede the one which those fragments represent? Mirkovic among others has also suggested that an Abgar-Jesus legend may have existed as an oral tradition even before it was first written down. As far as I know, prior to Eusebius, c. 325, the only other related reference to anything in the Abgar legend is a brief mention by Clement in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> c. to Thaddeus being buried in the "Britio Edessenorum" – the citadel of Edessa.

<sup>17</sup> According to Strong's Bible Concordance, the word "vision" occurs more than a hundred times in the Bible. It almost always refers to a visual phenomenon, though occasionally to a spoken divine message (e.g., Gen. 15.1, 46.2, Jer 23.16). In Abgar's case, the vision "appeared" to him, and no voice is mentioned, so it is clearly to be understood as a visual phenomenon.

<sup>18</sup> Rarely in the Bible or elsewhere is a vision mentioned that is explicitly seen by only one person and not others nearby, so Abgar's case is unusual (see biblehub.com, an online concordance, and search for "vision"). Daniel 10:7, one such rare exception, says, "I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; those who were with me did not see it" (NIV). Moreover, if the vision that appeared to Abgar alone were so described in order to single out King Abgar as a royal witness, that is, as the only one worthy to see it, why was the *content* of the vision not also related? That seems anti-climactic: Abgar depicted as privileged to see a great religious vision of – nothing? What could be the point? Another and possibly better explanation for the missing content of his vision is that it resulted from something *sensitive* about the vision itself that was deliberately left out of the story at an earlier stage, decades before Eusebius, or was perhaps even forgotten.

<sup>19</sup> That the vision was indeed only a vision in the source document used by Eusebius, and not a real image of Jesus, seems to me evident from the fact that the *Doctrine of Addai* also describes it as a vision, and the whole scene itself in almost the same words as in Eusebius, and from the probability that if Eusebius had found it related as an actual physical image, he would have deleted the passage entirely, being the iconoclast he was.

<sup>20</sup> Some Shroud book authors claim *too much* for Eusebius in regard to the Shroud. Mary and Alan Whanger, in their 1998 book *The Shroud of Turin: An Adventure in Discovery* (Providence House Publishers, Franklin, TN), write: "Eusebius ... reported ... that an object, presumably a cloth with an image, was taken to King Abgar by one of Jesus' disciples in A.D. 30..." (p. 5). But that statement is incorrect. Eusebius does not mention any object, apart from the alleged letter from Jesus. The Whangers seem to have conflated the account in Eusebius with that in the *Doctrine of Addai*, which does indeed mention a *painting* of Jesus being taken to Abgar. In any case, they do not mention the vision. Most other Shroud field writers who mention Eusebius likewise omit, or barely mention, Abgar's vision. They generally just say, "Eusebius mentions no image." Some brief examples: Mark Antonacci, *The Resurrection of the Shroud*, 2000, p. 138; Mark Guscini, *The Image of Edessa*, 2009, p. 143, "nothing of any

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image,” but he does soon discuss the vision as perhaps based on the image; Thomas de Wesselow, *The Sign*, 2012, p. 326; Emanuela Marinelli, “A Small Cloth to be Destroyed,” June 2012 “Shroud Newsletter” of the British Society for the Turin Shroud, point 2 and later; Mark Guscin, *The Tradition of the Image of Edessa*, 2016, pp. 14, 17, 226; Mario LaTendresse, “Who Saw the Mandyion and What Was its Size?,” Pasco Shroud conference talk, 2017, YouTube, from minute 9:30 onward. Still others could be cited. With regard to researchers writing in other languages, I do not know the situation vis-à-vis Eusebius among them, but imagine it might be similar.

<sup>21</sup> J.B. Segal, *Edessa, ‘The Blessed City’* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970), especially pp. 64, 72; H.J.W. Drijvers, “Facts and Problems in Early Syriac-Speaking Christianity” (*The Second Century: A Journal of Early Christian Studies* Vol. 2, No. 3, Fall 1982), pp. 157-175; Martin Ilert, *Die Abgarlegende: das Christusbild von Edessa* (Turnhout, Brepols, 2007); James Corke-Webster, “A Man for the Times: Jesus and the Abgar Correspondence in Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Ecclesiastical History*” (*Harvard Theological Review*, 110: 4, 2017), pp. 563-587. There may well be others who have commented on Abgar’s vision in Eusebius or in the *Doctrine of Addai*, but these four are surely representative. Alexander Mirkovic’s 2002 Ph.D. dissertation *Prelude to Constantine: The Invented Tradition of King Abgar of Edessa* (Nashville, Vanderbilt University; [https://www.academia.edu/2028649/Prelude\\_to\\_Constantine\\_Dissertation](https://www.academia.edu/2028649/Prelude_to_Constantine_Dissertation)) does quote the vision passages but only within much longer quotations from Eusebius and the *Doctrine* (p. 16), and his brief later allusion to “the miracles accomplished [at the court of Abgar]” is unclear as a hint of the vision (p. 51). Various English translations of Eusebius’s *Ecclesiastical History* offer no footnote of explanation for the Abgar vision passage. As Corke-Webster writes of the Abgar legend as recounted by Eusebius, “the presence of such an obviously apocryphal tale ... has been something of an embarrassment, and it has thus merited little attention in studies of Eusebius or his *Ecclesiastical History*” (2017, p. 566). Even studies of the *Doctrine of Addai* seldom mention the vision. George Phillips’s 1876 translation carries no note on it, and his Preface does not mention it. George Howard’s 1981 translation *The Teaching of Addai* likewise bears no note on the vision, nor mention of it in his Introduction. Nor does Walter Bauer mention it in his 1934 classic, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Fortress Press, London, 1971 reprint), which examines the Abgar legend at some length. Alain Desreumaux’s *Histoire du Roi Abgar et de Jésus* (Belgium, Brepols, 1993) bears no mention of the vision, either. Sidney Griffith does not mention the vision in his twenty-page article, “The *Doctrina Addai* as a Paradigm of Christian Thought in Edessa in the Fifth Century,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 6.2, 2003; also online at <https://hugoye.bethmardutho.org/article/hv6n2griffith>). Nor does Emran El-Badawi in his twenty-page article “Tales of King Abgar: A Basis to Investigate Earliest Syrian Christian Syncretism,” *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies*, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> I have not managed to read all of Drijvers’s many related works, but have at least read two more of his articles and have done Hathi Trust online digital word searches of two of his books. His book *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa* (Leiden, Brill, 1980), does not mention Abgar’s vision at all (nor Turin or Ian Wilson). His *East of Antioch* (London, Variorum, 1984), a collection of sixteen of his previous articles, does mention the vision once in passing, p. 163, note 26, but this is the same “Paul” reference as in his 1982 article, and indeed the same “Facts and Problems” article itself, reprinted. His article “The Image of Edessa in the Syriac Tradition” in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation* (ed. Herbert L. Kessler et al., Bologna, Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1998, pp. 13-31) does not mention the vision (nor, oddly, the rare word *tetradiplon* used of the cloth bearing Jesus’ facial image in *Acts of Thaddaeus*, though it does mention that text in a full paragraph). His 1991 article “The Abgar Legend” does add, however, in note 10, on the vision, “Cf. Acts 9:3-7.”

<sup>23</sup> Drijvers’s anti-Manichaean interpretation of the Abgar legend as a whole would place the origin of the Abgar legend in the mid- to late 3<sup>rd</sup> century, because Mani was born in Persia in 216 CE, was active from about 240 onward, and his followers continued their efforts after his death c. 276. But if the Shroud were already present in Edessa before 240, for however short or long a time, its effect would or could have predated Mani’s effect there (see Scavone, 2002, p. 428; neither of Guscin’s two Image of Edessa books mentions Mani or Manichaeism). There is clear evidence that Christianity, if not the Turin Shroud, had reached Edessa already by around the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century. For example: Tatian’s Syriac *Diatessaron*, combining the four gospels into one, dates from about 150; the famous gnostic Christian poet-philosopher Bardaisan (154-222) was born in Edessa and lived there and in the area for decades; a (Christian?) cross is visible on the crown of King Abgar VIII on some late 2<sup>nd</sup> century Edessan coins (see e.g., Wilson, 2010, Markwardt 2008); Abgar VIII himself was described (discreetly?) as a “wise man” by the Christian writer Julius Africanus, who knew him (Wilson, 2010); a Christian church in Edessa, documented as destroyed by a flood in 201, must have been built sometime before that year and perhaps many years before it; and the symbolic Christian text “The Hymn of the Pearl,” dating from 224 at the latest, by Bardaisan or his circle,

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apparently alludes to the Turin Shroud (Markwardt, 2008). These and other examples are not inconsistent with some sort of Shroud presence in 2<sup>nd</sup> c. Edessa (or nearby Antioch?) too. That would not exclude a Manichaean influence (nor the other influences Segal noted) on the whole Abgar legend, but would make it *secondary*, however many details were involved. After all, most legends are patchworks of elements derived from multiple sources (see, e.g., Daniel Scavone's "Joseph of Arimathea, the Holy Grail and the Turin Shroud," 1996, shroud.com). The Abgar legend was clearly pieced together, too, and the original piece may have been an experience involving the burial shroud of Jesus.

<sup>24</sup> I can even conceive the possibility that Abgar's vision itself is a miniature patchwork, made by multi-sourcing, in which the Turin Shroud formed its original basis, with other influences also at work. If so, perhaps elements of Paul's conversion experience as related in Acts were then grafted onto it in a code-like way, to secretly convey to knowing Christian readers, in an age of their deadly persecution, the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, that Abgar VIII had personally experienced Jesus via the Shroud c. 190, much as Paul had personally experienced Jesus on the Road to Damascus (I owe this code thought to Jack Markwardt, personal talk August 2019; and see his 2008 conference paper, "Ancient Edessa and the Discipline of the Secret").

<sup>25</sup> Iain Gardner et al., *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings* (Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2015), e.g., pp. 212-16.

<sup>26</sup> Markwardt's theory (2008, 2014) that the Turin Shroud in its early centuries remained mostly in Antioch and then Constantinople, with a copy of its face being brought to, or made in, 6<sup>th</sup> c. Edessa, could also fit the revealing "sweat-made" description of Gregory Referendarius's August 944 sermon on the Image of Edessa (sections 9, 21, 22), consistent with the brownish image coloring of the Shroud. The original Shroud, or a close copy of its face, was surely seen by Gregory and a few others during its 944 transfer from Edessa to Constantinople. Markwardt's theory envisions such a copy as having faded by the year 944 (personal communication, December 2019).

<sup>27</sup> Already by the year 944, dozens of copies or idealized versions had demonstrably been made of the Image of Edessa itself, at least in the form of Byzantine church paintings and mosaics (see Wilson, 2010, and Guscin, 2016), though few were based on the artists' actually witnessing the very secretly kept Image.

#### Postscript:

With just days to go before the deadline for submitting this paper for inclusion in the shroud.com "Update" of January 2020, I discovered some potentially important information. Richard Lipsius, in his scholarly 1880 work *Die Edessenische Abgar-Sage: Kritisch Untersucht* (Braunschweig, Schwetschke und Sohn), or "The Edessa Abgar-Saga: Critically Examined," rare in book form but currently available online via the Hathi Trust, renders Abgar's vision as "eine grosse Erscheinung (einen wunderbaren Lichtschein)" (p. 25). In English, this is "a great apparition (a miraculous shining light)" (my translation). "Lichtschein" can also be translated as "glow" or "gleam of light" (see Collins German-English Dictionary or Google Translator). I then consulted Ernst von Dobschütz's massive 1899 work *Christusbilder: Untersuchungen zur Christlichen Legende* (Leipzig, J.C. Hinrichs, vol. 3; [www.archive.org/details/ChristusbilderDobschutz/n7](http://www.archive.org/details/ChristusbilderDobschutz/n7)), likewise rare in book form, again via the Hathi Trust. It uses a word very similar to that of Lipsius in place of Abgar's "vision," namely, "Glanz" (pp. 130, 133), meaning "gleam," "glitter," or "radiance" (Collins again). As far as I know, those renderings by Lipsius and von Dobschütz have not been repeated in the literature of the past 120 years, or at least not in recent decades, not even in Martin Illert's 2007 *Die Abgarlegende*, which uses "eine Vision" instead. The numerous other books and articles I had read in my research all used the word "vision." Even the Shroud authenticity skeptic Nicolotti, in his *Mandyllion*, 2014, p. 70, uses "vision," borrowing from Eusebius. If "Lichtschein" or "Glanz" were more correct translations, expressing a meaning involving light, etymologically closer to the original Syriac word than is "vision," that might weaken a few of my passages interpreting the particular word "vision," so often used by others (perhaps leaning on Phillips) about Abgar's experience. But it would not seem to affect my interpretation of several elements surrounding that "vision." In any case, I then consulted Michail Kitsos, a Syriac expert and Ph.D. candidate at the University of Michigan, Dept. of Middle Eastern Studies. He writes (without knowing the details of my research) that the original Syriac word in the *Doctrine* so often translated as "vision," *Hezwo*, could mean "form," "figure," "apparition" "appearance," or also "vision" in this context (personal communication, January 19, 2020). It does not mean light in any case. Lipsius with his parenthetical "Lichtschein" was adding his own interpretation of the more correct "Erscheinung" (apparition), and von Dobschütz may well have followed him with the similar word "Glanz."