

As part of my English GCSE coursework, I was asked to write a persuasive speech that had to be about five minutes long. My grandfather had recently given me a book written by Stevenson and Habermas, two scientists, on the subject of the Shroud of Turin. I had read this book and took much interest on the subject of the Shroud of Turin. I therefore decided to write my speech about it. After writing the speech I performed it in front of my class and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Habermas's book helped me greatly whilst writing my speech. My Grandfather's inspiration was essential

Today I am going to put forward an argument to help support my belief that the Shroud of Turin is authentic. First of all it is necessary to inform you about the phenomenon of the shroud.

The Shroud of Turin has been an object of awe and controversy for many centuries. Throughout the ages many people have travelled far and wide to pray before this cloth, bearing an image of a crucified man believed by many to be Jesus of Nazareth. In 1978 the shroud was scientifically examined. Ten years later when scientists using radiocarbon dating announced that the shroud had a medieval origin, as opposed to first century many people saw this decision as conclusive evidence, which proved that the shroud was fake. However many scientific studies point to the cloths authenticity. These have been conducted by experts in medicine, optical physics, radiography, chemistry, photography and many other scientific disciplines and so the debate over the shroud's authenticity continues. Moreover several inaccuracies of the 1978 test and the fact that carbon dating can often be inaccurate severely weaken this hard evidence for its medieval origin.

The shroud of Turin can be traced back to the year 1357 from which it is often talked about and documented by medieval scholars. Before this year, its known whereabouts are not certain. In 1357 the De Charney family, the owners of the shroud, gave the shroud to their close relations, the Savoy family. Eventually this powerful, aristocratic family became the rulers of Italy. The current owner of the shroud is the king of Italy who lives in exile in Portugal. What then are the reasons for the shrouds authenticity?

The most important point to be scientifically examined was whether the shroud could be a forgery. How did the image appear on the cloth? The scientists tested several theories of image formation including painting, pigments and dye, scorch marks and natural processes. The theory most likely seemed to be that the Shroud was painted. This may be almost instantly dismissed as a possibility though, because if the image were painted, then it would show directional lines where the artist had applied his brush. No traces of paint or Dye were discovered either. Also the image is formed only on the topmost fibrils of the cloth; paint would have penetrated much further than this.

Before I spend hours discussing other theories of how the image came to be, there are two exceedingly strong pieces of evidence to rule all methods of image formation out except for one. This evidence is that the shroud's image is 3-D. Using space age technology; the scientists discovered that the density of the image varies according to the distance between the cloth and the body which could have lain underneath it. This is incredibly unique for a cloth which is at least 651 years old. How could a medieval artist have thought of such attention to detail?

The second piece of evidence is that the image on the shroud is a negative. When a photograph of it is taken and developed, the image changes drastically, becomes clearer and more detailed. This evidence rules out theories that the image was created by natural processes and unless the forger was a complete genius, clever enough to completely bamboozle modern day scientists, medieval forgery. Only one theory that the shroud was a scorch mark stands head and shoulders above the rest. Could this high temperature scorch have been made from Jesus as he rose from the dead? It is almost certain that a medieval forger could never have produced such a high temperature scorch as the scorch would only need to touch the cloth for a tiny fraction of a second hardly long enough to be achieved using medieval tools and technology. Furthermore, a medieval forger could hardly have had knowledge of the medical consistencies between the Shroud and the gospel. Examination by medical scientists has shown the shroud to be exactly medically correct, corresponding to what the gospels say and what we know, of how the Romans crucified people, in particular Jesus. Can the Gospels be trusted? The fact is that the gospels have an archaeological reliability. They are thoroughly consistent with archaeological finds. Medical consistencies between the shroud and the gospels include: The man of the shroud and Jesus were crucified in exactly the same way. The man of the shroud had been whipped “then Pilate took Jesus and had him scourged” (John 19:1).

“Plaiting a crown of thorns, they put it on his head” (John 19:2). The man of the shroud has puncture marks all over his scalp which relate directly to a crown of thorns having been placed there. Bruises on the shoulders indicate that the man of the shroud carried a heavy object. This must have occurred *after* the scourging because the shoulder bruising has distorted the wounds underneath. “So they took Jesus away bearing his own cross” (John 19:17).

Not only these medical consistencies but several others show Jesus to have died in exactly the same way that the man in the shroud did. The legs of the man aren't broken (Romans usually broke the legs of crucified victims before they had died so that they couldn't hold themselves up to breathe. Jesus had died before the Romans could break his legs.) The side of the man in the shroud has been punctured by a Roman “Lancia” and the man is a Jew. The fact that he is a Jew has been certified by chief Rabbis today as the Shroud man is buried with coins over his eyes (dating from 22 AD) and with his hair in a pigtail down his back. Additionally the position of the man's body is placed in keeping with Jewish burial custom. Jesus died in a unique way and therefore the odds that the man in the shroud isn't him (or meant to be him if a forgery) are 1 in 282 billion, almost certainly identifying the man as Jesus.

If carbon dating is unreliable in dating the cloth, then there are other ways. An illustration of the shroud, dating from 1125 in Constantinople, pushes back its date from the carbon dating by more than one hundred years. Also the Herringbone weave pattern of the cloth is typical of first century weaving, making the shroud a thousand years older than the carbon dating suggests (although *this* can not be conclusive evidence on its own). Carbon Monoxide in the upper atmosphere could have mixed with the carbon 14 particles, distorting their true age. How can the carbon dating be trusted when pieces of evidence like this crop up? Not directly linked to the carbon 14 tests but still a piece of biological evidence was the discovery of pollen grains on the shroud, pollen grains which may be found in the world only in and around Jerusalem. This means that at some point in its history, the shroud was exposed to the open air around Jerusalem. Certainly a medieval forger would not have gone to such extremes

as to procure a cloth from Jerusalem or Palestine seeing as the cloth was probably “forged” in France many miles from such places.

Would a medieval forger have included on the Shroud such fine medical detail as can be seen on it today? The weight of a body on the cross can only be supported if the nails are nailed through “the space of destot” on the wrists. This would sever the median nerve, causing the thumb to cling tightly to the hand. This fact was unknown in medieval times but is seen clearly on the shroud. A medieval forger would probably have shown the nails to pass through the hands of the victim – a common misconception at the time.

Before concluding I deem it prudent to raise the question “are miracles such as being raised from the dead, possible”? Certainly they are according to many religious beliefs but many people (especially cynical people) simply can’t believe it. Mans nature judges that miraculous events that “violate the laws of nature don’t occur - there must always be a natural explanation. However by asking the question “does God exist” we find an explanation for the possibility of miracles. By combining a number of more or less traditional theistic arguments a strong case can be made for his existence. The individual arguments that have been put forward over the years are sufficient in themselves to show that God probably does exist. Combined, they make conclusion that he does exist, even stronger. In short the combination of several arguments reveals that God’s existence is the best explanation for all the facts – especially where the Shroud of Turin is concerned.

To conclude. I have put forward an argument to you which has explained the Shroud of Turin. I have talked about medical reasons and image formation, why the shroud isn’t likely to be forged. And have discussed why the man on the shroud is most likely Jesus. Faced with the facts it is clear to me that the shroud is most likely the authentic burial shroud of Jesus Christ. I hope that I have helped you to take a balanced view on the shrouds authenticity but that I have demonstrated my argument clearly.