

The Shroud of Turin from the perspective of modern Funerary practices

By Philippa Foster

Over many decades, the Shroud of Turin has undergone extensive scientific analysis, and with the exception of the controversial Carbon Dating on the Shroud, tests have consistently corroborated the wounds, era, location and funerary rites corresponding to the crucifixion of Christ as written in the Gospels. The validity of the Shroud is further supported by the Sudarium of Oviedo, and the hoaxing theories for later eras do not hold up to scrutiny. The image formation process itself has never been successfully replicated by modern scientific processes, although the most convincing hypothesis is that it was caused by a 'milliburst of radiation' emanating from the body (ref: Dr Thomas Philipps, Dr Thomas Lynn, Kevin Moran & Ian Wilson), indicating a high energy burst of light within the funerary wrappings at the moment of the Resurrection. However, the mechanism for this has yet to be discovered and so it defies replication.

However, because the nature of these findings are so far outside of our normal frame of reference, many still search for more mundane explanations for the Shroud image, rather than accept that the cloth truly shows:- a dead body emanating light; and the body ceasing to exist in a corporeal sense (as suggested by Dr John Jackson's 'Collapse Theory', with the cloth passing through empty space where the body had previously lain).

Understandably, it is easier to believe that Jesus was just a normal person, a teacher or rebel leader, rather than something Divine, and some people postulate that he either:- a) survived the terminal horrors which were inflicted upon him in custody and on the Cross and somehow escaped, or b) that he ran away beforehand and left someone else to be executed in his place. However, these theories are hard to reconcile with his acts of compassion and self-sacrifice throughout his lifetime, and they do not fit with the forensic evidence on the Shroud and Sudarium. Whoever left the image on the Shroud had abilities beyond anything currently attainable.

So, to address these issues, I would like to point out certain aspects of the practical considerations of human mortality and how it relates to the Shroud image. Having studied the Human Bio-Energy Field, worked in end-of-life care

with the elderly and cancer patients, and in Funeral Directors - managing every aspect of funeral care including overseeing mortuary duties, liaising with morticians, embalmers, doctors and coroners, and then as an Inter-Faith Funeral Celebrant, I would like to add my own observations based on current day care of the deceased. This is relevant because there are certain aspects of the treatment of the deceased which are necessary practicalities, irrespective of customs and rituals. They transcend time and religious trends, as they relate to the physical requirements and realities of death.

1) Proof of Identity

Then as now, proof of identity would have been vital. As a political prisoner, on trial for his life, and with Jesus' Crucifixion being used as a deterrent to any followers, arresting and detaining the right man would have been paramount.

- Once in custody, he was constantly under armed guard. He underwent public trial, public flogging and carried his Cross through the streets as a humiliation en route to his execution.

- Once on the Cross, he was declared dead, then a lance was thrust into his side, puncturing a lung and releasing blood and accumulated pulmonary oedema fluid.

- Then his removal for burial had to be authorised by Pilate, who ordered guards to be placed at the tomb.

None of the above fits with the 'survival', 'escape' or 'imposter' scenarios.

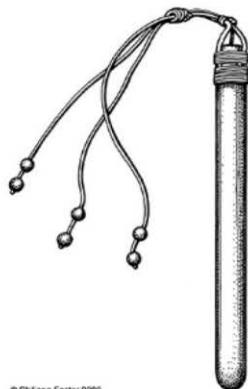
2) Cause of Death

Fluid marks on the Shroud and Sudarium indicate several possible causes, which when put together are likely to have been fatal. Gospel accounts affirm this to be the case.

Blood loss:- from multiple wounds sustained during flogging with a metal tipped flagrum (R), which covered 50% of his body. Large rough-wrought nails (Fig.2) pierced his wrists and feet (insteps or ankles), and the crown of thorns pierced his head. Lance wound to the side.

Exhaustion:- from heat, dehydration and the weight of his body on the nails in his wrists.

Suffocation:- Reports of pulmonary oedema fluid flowing from the pierced lung and also from the nose and mouth as found on the Sudarium of Oviedo, indicate suffocation from drowning.



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Extreme stress and traumatic shock:- as exhibited by the high levels of Bilirubin in his blood.

Testimony:- According to John chp 19 v 33, when the soldiers “found that Jesus was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.”

3) Removal of the body from it’s place of death.

In order to move Jesus’ body from the Cross to the Tomb, it is reasonable to suggest the following course of events, including:-

- Covering the face with a cloth (presumably the Sudarium). This is not only out of respect, but also to prevent ingress of flies and insects in order to delay the onset of decomposition, particularly in a hot climate.

- Removal of the wrists and feet (insteps or ankles) from the rough-wrought metal nails holding him to the cross. During this time it is thought that he was placed face down on the ground, leaving dirt, blood and pulmonary oedema on the Sudarium which wrapped his head.

- Carrying the body to a more suitable, preferably cool location, to clean and stabilise the body for later burial. The Gospels indicate that it was Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus who carried him to the tomb. It is easier to carry a wrapped body, so he may have been wrapped in a cloak to act as a stretcher, although this is only conjecture. He cannot have been put in the Shroud at this stage or there would be more dirt, blood and bodily fluids present, which would have been smudged in transit, not crisply defined as shown on the Shroud.

4) Initial care of the deceased. The most likely scenario once he was taken to the tomb:-

- Removal of soiled wrappings. John chp 20 v 7 indicates the Sudarium was the cloth covering his face/head and was folded and set aside and later discovered near the Shroud.

- Cleaning of the body to remove bodily fluids and dirt.

- Rewrap body in clean burial cloth / shroud. In Jesus’ time the burial cloth was a long narrow length of cloth, with half laid under the body and then the other half brought over the head to cover the front of the body. Now funeral staff use a modesty cloth and a squarer shroud, like a bed sheet, laid centrally under the

deceased and wrapped across the body from both sides. Then the top and bottom edges are tucked-in at the head and feet. This protects and affords dignity and allows for further medical examination before the final preparations for viewing and burial are made. In Jesus' case, the cloth sits unevenly at the feet, which were still dirty, as if he was hastily cleaned and wrapped with the intention of returning the following day to complete the funerary rites.

5) Final preparation of the deceased for viewing by loved ones and for final laying to rest.

This stage was not performed on the man of the Shroud, as his body had already disappeared from the tomb and left the empty Shroud, before his loved ones could return to complete the burial procedures.

The question of post-mortem blood.

Another point frequently raised in support of the 'survival' hypothesis, is the amount of blood on the Shroud.

With this in mind, I would like to point out certain features on the Shroud which are consistent with the realities of human physiology after death. Sadly, funeral staff see shrouds over a period of days, weeks, and in the case of disinterments, after months and years, wrapping people who have died from natural and unnatural causes, accident, disease and trauma, before and after post mortem, and I can confirm that some unembalmed bodies do continue to leak small amounts of fluids, including blood and plasma, for more than a day after death. The human body is largely composed of water, so if punctured it will leak. Bodily fluids can escape from orifices when the muscles relax at death, and although rigor mortis tightens muscle tissue and stiffens the joints, it has no effect on fluids. If a body has sustained open wounds before or after death, it will still leak blood and plasma from these wounds due to gravity and internal pressure. A man with as many wounds as Jesus had sustained, would still leak blood and plasma from those wounds, as well as from the nose and mouth for a while after transfer into a clean shroud, until the body settled and attained equilibrium. So blood on the Shroud is not proof that Jesus survived the crucifixion, but is testimony to the appalling injuries he sustained prior to death. When on the Cross, blood may have pooled in his legs from the arms and upper body. Then when carried and laid flat, this would have redistributed and leaked from open gashes and lacerations throughout his body. In a way, the Shroud is a Holy Grail of sorts, as it captured Christ's blood from the Crucifixion.

The facial expression on the man of the Shroud.

Another final observation I would like to make, is that no matter how traumatic the death a person experiences, once the eyes and mouth are closed and the head is supported in a natural position, the face of the deceased can take-on an extremely peaceful and even serene expression. All signs of past trauma slip away. This is a blessing for relatives, who may have seen their loved one suffer terribly before their passing, so to see them again with a peaceful expression and to know that they are no longer suffering is a comfort. People often commented to me that their loved one looked as if they were just sleeping, as if a part of them still lived on, even though the physical body would never again be animated. This is the same serenity that I see on the face of the man of the Shroud, but with one major difference, the forensic evidence left on the Shroud and Sudarium indicate that this was not the end for Jesus, and that he somehow transcended the death of his body - not as a physical, mortal man, but in a higher state of being, his matter transformed into energy in a way never seen before or since, except possibly at his Transfiguration (Matthew chp 17 v 2).

Although 'Resurrection' is a very difficult concept to accept, examinations of the Shroud have already lead scientists through cutting edge techniques to profound truths beyond third dimensional concepts, and will no doubt continue to do so for as long as individuals are compelled to search for understanding. I suspect it will take bold steps into the additional fields of Bio-Energy and Consciousness, to begin to understand the mechanism which created the image on the Shroud, but accepting it as a possibility allows science to follow leads which may otherwise be missed. We may never be able to emulate the actual process which created it, but understanding how it formed would take us a little closer to grasping bigger universal truths regarding sentience, mortality and the boundaries between matter and energy. I believe these are the questions that the Shroud could potentially answer, beyond just the identity of its occupant.

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