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*Over my academic and archaeological career, I've learned to apply the following 5-fold approach to just about everything: Shrink from no question. Ascertain what the facts are. Consider every relevant line of evidence. Go where the facts converge. Ignore no reasonable conclusion. On any given subject, if you've truly done these five things with rigor, honesty, and humility, you can communicate conclusions without concern over what others may think—that is, unless they can provide factual, relevant data that you have yet to consider. Then, you must account for that. Occam's Razor is a particularly valuable tool for all avenues of science and thought: The best theory of anything is the one that accounts for the most data, requiring the least number of secondary and tertiary hypotheses to support it. Simple. Uncluttered. Elegant.*

## The Shroud of Turin: Burial Cloth of Jesus or Unverifiable Curiosity?

I have followed investigations into the nature of the Shroud of Turin (hereafter, ST) since the late 1970s. As a field archaeologist, historian, and biblical scholar, I've investigated the investigators and their methods. I've read every report produced regarding scientific tests performed on the ST, including the very latest ones. For the most part, I've remained as open, objective, and neutral as possible. Actually, I've been much more lenient with Shrouders (those who hold to its authenticity) than I have ever been with others reporting so-called 'archaeological' discoveries purportedly related to the Bible. As a professor of archaeology and biblical history, I teach our graduate and doctoral students that, if one is doing *biblical*

archaeology, then, strictly speaking, one must begin and end with the primary biblical text(s), thoroughly exegeted and accounted for. It is on the cutting edge of this principle that the so-called authenticity of the ST is reduced to ribbons.

For decades, I've written books and taught my students about the resurrection of Jesus. I think the historical evidence confirms, beyond any reasonable doubt, that Jesus did, in fact, physically rise from the dead as the eyewitness accounts included in the primary historical source documents (the New Testament [NT] Gospels and other key NT passages) confirm (see our books *The Defendable Faith* and relevant portions of *The Harvest Handbook of Bible Lands*; there are many other excellent works on the subject). Thus, the historical fact of Jesus' resurrection is not at issue here. What is under scrutiny is the claim that a single, large piece of linen cloth somehow preserves 'evidence' of the wounds Jesus incurred leading up to and through the act of crucifixion.

Although the features of the ST have been studied and argued about for many decades—and remain highly controversial, the claims of Shrouders notwithstanding—none of these 'analyses' is the least bit relevant if the authenticity of the ST itself is disallowed by what the eyewitnesses of Jesus' burial and immediate-post-resurrection tomb-interior have provided to us in writing (= NT Scripture). The eyewitnesses were, indeed, the primary experts on the methods employed for Jesus' burial, as well as what was observed inside the empty tomb little more than moments after Jesus walked out alive and in glowing health. The two principal witnesses of the details of Jesus' burial—Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus—were strict Jewish adherents and leaders of the Pharisaic sect. They carried out the preparation and burial of Jesus' body according to "the burial custom of the Jews." And they *did not* run short of completing this ritualized procedure, as is erroneously claimed by some (details on this below). The two principal witnesses of what was seen *in* the tomb shortly after Jesus' resurrection—the disciples/apostles, Peter and John, of Jesus' inner circle—were of vastly differing personalities. This being so, they were, however, both keenly observant—a trait necessary for being successful fishermen. What they saw is reported in the minutest detail (as we shall see below).

The NT eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection state repeatedly that the written, collective apostolic testimony to our Lord's resurrection constitutes the *only* evidence of the resurrection authorized by the apostles themselves. This is clearly communicated by Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, and Peter. Luke, although not an eyewitness to Jesus' resurrection, did a brilliant job interviewing the eyewitness sources to get the story as straight as humanly possible:

### Luke 1:1-4

"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as

they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.”

Luke follows up on this in the book of Acts:

### Acts 1:1-3

“The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.”

Paul confirms that the eyewitnesses are *the* witness to Jesus’ resurrection:

### 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.”

The apostle John frames the testimony of the first century community of eyewitnesses in Roman legal terms:

### 1 John 1:1-3

“What was from the beginning—what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have closely examined and touched with our hands—concerning the Word of Life...we have seen and testify and declare to you...What we have seen and heard we announce to you...”

The modern Rules of Evidence in jurisprudence state that primary (best) evidence is the testimony of an eyewitness who has seen, heard, or touched the subject of interrogation. John’s legal assessment of the eyewitness testimony of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection sounds a lot like this because he consciously constructed his opening statement using the definition of *primary evidence* from Roman law, which is the foundation of all Western law, including our legal system in the USA. This makes the recent claim of Shrouders that the ST “should now be presented as the best evidence for Jesus’ resurrection” beyond ludicrous. If the ST were allowed as evidence at all—a level to which it categorically fails to rise, as we shall see—at best, it could only be classed as *material* or *demonstrative* evidence, which is strictly secondary to

primary evidence, i.e., unimpeachable eyewitness testimony.

I could load you down with many more passages about the superlative nature of the NT resurrection eyewitnesses as *the* evidential foundation for the veracity of the Gospel message but, hopefully, you get the point: 100% of the allowable (Holy Spirit inspired) NT evidence for Jesus’ resurrection consists of the primary eyewitness testimony. Not once is it stated or implied, even in a secondary or tertiary manner, that any physical object connected to Jesus’ resurrection was, or could ever be, presented as evidence of said fact. Now, think. Think! If such an allowance had been made that an artifact could be so treated, what would be the result of that? Logic, please! The result would be the proliferation of resurrection-related items displayed or paraded around as somehow having proof-value. You know where I’m going with this, I hope. If you stick with the Bible, there is no room whatsoever for a physical object to give witness to events in Jesus’ life, death, burial, or resurrection. Period.

I will talk directly about the ST down the line, but right now it’s important to specify what biblical archaeologists must always do without fail. If an archaeologist isn’t pursuing archaeology with a focus on biblical history and/or geography (i.e., biblical archaeology), then what I’m about to say doesn’t apply (I’m particularly attuned to this because, as a field archaeologist, I work in both non-biblical and biblical contexts). But if biblical events and/or places are in focus, then the relevant biblical texts become paramount. This is an inviolable rule, but one that often gets bent even by trained archaeologists who should know better.

In doing biblical archaeology, you must *begin and end with the text*. There are four crucial steps in this process: **1)** going in, you must know what the biblical text says and doesn’t say about a given subject or detail; **2)** given a comprehensive understanding of all the relevant biblical texts in the original languages, you must make a prediction about what the real world would look like if the intended meaning of the text(s) is strictly followed; **3)** you must proceed with the investigation—research, exploration, excavation, scientific analyses—to determine if what actually exists in reality matches the stated details required by the biblical text(s); **4)** finally, you must return to the biblical text(s) to ascertain the level of correspondence between text and ground in affirming a reasonable connection or the lack thereof. In following this procedure, one must never manipulate the text to fit the ‘ground’ or the ‘ground’ to fit the text. If they fit together, so be it. If they don’t fit together, so be it.

But you can always tell when a so-called ‘correspondence’ is being forced when claimants introduce secondary and tertiary ‘explanations’ to prop-up an idea or hypothesis. I’ll get into this vis-à-vis the ST a bit later. For now, let’s take that first step in biblical archaeology and examine the primary biblical texts recounting what the eyewitnesses said about Jesus’ burial and resurrection. (You’ll see later that Shrouders always do the opposite

and start with the ST, offending scientific method). Following are all the NT passages dealing with how Jesus was prepared for burial and what the eyewitnesses saw in the tomb after the resurrection. Terminologically, I've color-coded Greek words and phrases—relevant to the ST issue—to their English meanings so you can follow along in any good translation, if you don't read Koine Greek.

#### John 11:43-44

καὶ ταῦτα εἰπὼν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ ἐκραύγασεν, Λάζαρε, δεῦρο ἔξω. ἐξῆλθεν ὁ τεθνηκὼς **δεδεμένος τοῦς πόδας** καὶ **τὰς χεῖρας κειρίαις**, καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ **σουδαρίῳ περιεδέδετο**. λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, **Λύσατε** αὐτὸν καὶ **ἄφετε αὐτὸν ὑπάγειν**.

I start with the raising of Lazarus because it's a window into 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish burial practices. Note that the **feet** and **hands** had been **wrapped** with **linen strips** (plural) separately from the body, and that there was a separate **linen cloth** (singular) **wound around** the face. Jesus told those standing nearby to **unbind** him and **let him go**. Later, Jesus' body was wrapped in linen strips (plural) in precisely the same manner.

#### Matthew 27:59-60

καὶ λαβὼν **τὸ σῶμα** ὁ Ἰωσήφ ἐνετύλιξεν αὐτὸ [ἐν] **σινδόνι καθαρῇ**, καὶ ἔθηκεν αὐτὸ ἐν **τῷ καινῷ** αὐτοῦ **μνημείῳ** ὃ ἐλατόμησεν ἐν τῇ πέτρᾳ, καὶ προσκυλίσας **λίθον μέγαν** τῇ θύρᾳ τοῦ μνημείου ἀπέκλεισεν.

When Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus' **body** off the cross, he wrapped it in a **clean linen cloth** (singular). He placed the body in a **new tomb**, recently carved out, and rolled a **large stone** across the entryway. The clean linen cloth that Joseph used was for the purpose of transporting Jesus' body from the crucifixion site to the tomb in a modest and respectful fashion. The body would have been covered with sweat, saliva, blood, urine, feces, and dirt. Thus, this cloth would not have been a part of the body's preparation according to Jewish burial custom. It would have been cast aside in favor of new, clean linen wrappings. More on this shortly.

#### Mark 15:46

καὶ ἀγοράσας **σινδόνα** καθελὼν αὐτὸν ἐνείλησεν **τῇ σινδόνι** καὶ ἔθηκεν αὐτὸν ἐν μνημείῳ ᾧ ἦν λελατομημένον ἐκ πέτρας, καὶ προσέκυλισεν **λίθον** ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν τοῦ μνημείου.

Mark also only speaks of the **linen cloth** (singular) used to transport Jesus' body from the cross to the tomb. As I've already stated, this piece of linen was not used in Jesus' burial preparation, which was accomplished using an entirely new set of linen cloths after the body was thoroughly washed and dried. More on this coming.

#### Luke 23:53

καὶ καθελὼν **ἐνετύλιξεν** αὐτὸ **σινδόνι**, καὶ ἔθηκεν αὐτὸν ἐν μνήματι λαξευτῷ οὗ οὐκ ἦν οὐδεὶς οὕτως κείμενος.

Luke is also brief in his description, mentioning only the **linen cloth** (singular) used to move the body from Golgotha to the waiting tomb. It's in the Gospel of John that the details of Jesus burial take on much higher resolution.

#### John 19:39-40

ἦλθεν δὲ καὶ Νικόδημος, ὁ ἐλθὼν πρὸς αὐτὸν νυκτὸς τὸ πρῶτον, φέρων **μίγμα σμύρνης καὶ ἀλός ὡς λίτρας ἑκατόν**. ἔλαβον οὖν **τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ** καὶ **ἔδωκαν** αὐτὸ **ὀθονίοις μετὰ τῶν ἀρωμάτων**, καθὼς **ἔθος ἐστὶν τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ἐνταφιάζειν**.

Joseph transferred Jesus' body from the execution site to the newly-hewn tomb using a new piece of linen cloth large enough to envelope the body for the sake of modesty. (He may also have used a cart and donkey, but we simply don't know. Neither do any of the relevant texts say anything about someone helping Joseph move the body.) That cloth was cast aside (it was ritually unclean by Jewish law and was probably burned). Nicodemus met Joseph at the tomb carrying fresh **linen cloths/strips** (plural) and between **75 and 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes**. The two men did a thorough, ritual cleaning of the body—carefully washed and dried—a strict **Jewish requirement for burial**. They then **wrapped/bound Jesus' body, layering the spices** against the skin and between the multiple **linen strips**. The hands and arms, feet and legs, were wrapped in linen separately from the body (as had been done to Jesus' friend Lazarus). The final binding was done to the head/face with a separate piece of linen, as we shall see shortly (as was also done to Lazarus).

#### John: 20:3-7

Ἐξῆλθεν οὖν ὁ Πέτρος καὶ ὁ ἄλλος μαθητής, καὶ ἤρχοντο εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον. ἔτρεχον δὲ οἱ δύο ὁμοῦ· καὶ ὁ ἄλλος μαθητής προέδραμεν τάχιον τοῦ Πέτρου καὶ ἦλθεν πρῶτος εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον, καὶ παρακύψας βλέπει **κείμενα τὰ ὀθόνια**, οὐ μέντοι εἰσῆλθεν. ἔρχεται οὖν καὶ Σίμων Πέτρος ἀκολουθῶν αὐτῷ, καὶ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον· καὶ θεωρεῖ **τὰ ὀθόνια κείμενα**, καὶ **τὸ σουδᾶριον**, ὃ ἦν **ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ**, οὐ μετὰ τῶν ὀθονίων κείμενον **ἀλλὰ χωρὶς ἐντετυλιγμένον εἰς ἓνα τόπον**.

Now that we've seen the NT eyewitness accounts including important details of Jesus' burial according to 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish tradition, let's compare those with what we learn from post-resurrection observations made within the tomb itself as provided by John 20:3-7. It's most remarkable that what Peter and John saw in the tomb precisely matches the description of Joseph's and Nicodemus' preparation of Jesus' body according to Jewish burial conventions. First, from the mouth of the tomb, John saw a pile of **linen strips** (plural—folded or still wound as around the body, feet, and hands?) lying on the stone bench where the linen-and-spice-wrapped body had been. In his typical manner, Peter blew past John and went straight into the tomb. There he saw the pile of **linen strips** (plural) that John saw from the entrance, but also noticed the **linen cloth** (singular) that had been **wrapped around Jesus' head**. That separate **piece of linen** was



folded by itself apart from the other linen wrappings (plural). All this is *entirely* consistent with everything stated previously about how Jesus' body was prepared for burial.

And so, we have the testimony of the eyewitnesses. This testimony (of Scripture) is in diametric opposition to a single, large shroud into which Jesus was allegedly inserted "like a cell-phone in a pita bread," as one TS proponent erroneously claims. In fact, in the NT accounts, there is *no large, single piece of cloth* in Jesus' burial procedure. And such was *not* a component of 1<sup>st</sup> century AD Jewish burial practices. There were, in fact, many linen strips wrapping the body, arms/hands, legs/feet—all with layered spices—and an entirely separate linen cloth wrapped around the head/face to keep the jaw closed.

All this adds up to one conclusion: the ST was, in no way, connected to the burial of Jesus. Besides the fact that the ST fits nowhere into the NT eyewitness accounts, several things about it are also inconsistent with what we know of 1<sup>st</sup> century AD Jewish burial customs and similar practices seen in thousands of preserved 'mummies' from Ptolemaic/Roman Egypt. For one thing, the ST cloth is a complicated, herringbone weave, which was an expensive, thick fabric. All the archaeological examples of preserved linen fragments (Jewish) and fully-preserved, linen-wrapped 'mummies' (Egypt) show that burials used simple, loosely-woven, warp/weft linen—and for a specific reason: not only was it inexpensive, it also allowed maximum desiccation because of the cloth's 'breathability'.

Another fact, especially in Jewish burial ritual, is that the body would be thoroughly washed before it was linen-and-spice wrapped. Oddly, the ST exhibits everything that would have been washed off during this first step of body preparation: blood from all manner of 'wounds', body fluids, etc. For the ST to exist as it is, the alleged body would have to have been placed in an *unwashed state* into the cloth 'taco shell' (another analogy given by Shrouders), and the cloth carefully pressed against every curve and fold in the body, for the wound-blood/fluids to be transferred to the linen. This is simply *not* how an ancient Jewish burial was done. The NT eyewitness accounts—with their many strips of fresh, new linen, and spices, and a separate linen head/face covering—are precisely commensurate with Jewish burial traditions of the Roman Era.

But, one might say, "What about all the torture and crucifixion details on the ST and the scientific tests done on it? How is it possible for all these details to be on the ST if it isn't authentic?" Actually, none of these things matter in the least. Nothing remotely resembling the ST is permitted by the eyewitness accounts. The relevant texts disallow it. Period. Remember, *begin* with the text and *end* with the text!

In archaeology, we have a "red flag" warning to which we're always very sensitive: if it sounds too good to be true, it may very well be. The ST has warning flags all over it! These cannot be ignored because the ST: **1)** has

no *confirmable* origin; **2)** has no *in situ* provenance; **3)** has no *traceable* chain of custody; and thus, **4)** does not, in any way, fall under the purview of archaeology. The ST may be a curiosity that investigators want to test and speculate about, but none of this has anything to do with the discipline of scientific archaeology. And the ST feature that it allegedly constitutes a physical catalog of every wound inflicted on Jesus' body is perhaps the biggest "red flag" of all. Rather than signaling a normal, real-life scenario, it looks more like someone followed a checklist to make sure they didn't leave out any action that would conceivably leave a bleeding wound on the body—and with no real knowledge of ancient Jewish burial customs.

The ST is clearly *not* authentic based on the biblical eyewitnesses. Pushing the ST as authentic requires thumbing one's nose at the eyewitnesses. Whatever manner of analysis is done with the ST has nothing at all to do with Jesus' resurrection, other than perhaps someone may have attempted to create a facsimile of his crucifixion—but for what purpose? Many have claimed, "The surface-fiber image on the ST can't be explained by anything less than the surge of 'energy' emitted by Jesus' resurrecting body." Seriously? In science, archaeology included, just because we can't currently duplicate or explain the existence of an observed phenomenon doesn't mean that it's 'miraculous' or 'aliens' or 'mystic juju'. The ST has no demonstrable provenance prior to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Nothing about any of the tests done on it demands an origin or date prior to that.

At best, the ST is a curious object. And if you like to study curious objects, enjoy! But it doesn't belong to archaeology, and it doesn't belong alongside the NT eyewitness accounts of Jesus' burial and resurrection. The NT witness to Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection makes no room for anything like the ST. So, why would anyone rush to force its authenticity? The NT allows it zero chance of being authentic. Is it a curious work of art? Maybe. Is it an attempted hoax? Perhaps. Whatever it is, it appears to be someone's attempt to represent a dead man who'd been crucified. But wait. It's claimed by many that the base body-image was generated by some kind of resurrection energy. Hmmm....? Odd, given that the 'image' is perfectly stiff and static; indeed, that of a dead man. If a burst of resurrection 'energy' produced the 'image', then why isn't the image blurred, as if by the motion of Jesus coming to life? Why is this supposed 'snapshot' of Jesus that of a dead man, and not that of a dynamic, rising Savior?

There are presently exhibits traveling across the USA and the globe claiming authenticity for the ST, in spite of the fact that the analytical procedures done on it continue to be controversial. Some, even evangelicals, are touting it as "scientific evidence" even greater than the NT eyewitness accounts themselves. As I see it, there are only three possibilities for those claiming that the ST is authentically the burial cloth of Jesus: **1)** they are ignorant of the relevant facts and why those facts are relevant; **2)** they do not have the expertise or acumen necessary to

discriminate between relevant data and irrelevant data; **3)** they are aware of the relevant facts but choose to ignore them or cherry-pick from among them for their own purposes. The first scenario leads to gullibility. The second scenario leads to pseudo-science. The third scenario leads to charlatanism. Bad, worse, worst. These are the options for so-called ST research.

On the basis of proper historiographical methodology, the resurrection of Jesus remains one of the best-attested events in ancient history. Introducing the ST into any discussion about Jesus' resurrection inserts messy and unnecessary doubts into what is already an open-and-shut case.

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