

# The Shroud of Turin and the Image of Edessa: A Misguided Journey

by Charles Freeman

2012 May 24

## Introduction

When I was researching my book on medieval relics, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust, How Relics Shaped the History of the Medieval World*, Yale University Press, 2011, I decided to leave out the Shroud of Turin. Relic cults come and go and the Turin Shroud is very much a cult of the past fifty years, not a medieval one. The debates over its authenticity have been acrimonious and inconclusive. However, having been sent a copy of Thomas de Wesselow's *The Sign, the Shroud of Turin and the Secret of the Resurrection*, Viking, 2012, I had strong reservations about much of the historical evidence presented to provide an narrative history of the Shroud before 1350. Despite many years of research de Wesselow uncritically accepts much of the work of the veteran Shroud researcher Ian Wilson whose latest volume, *The Shroud, Fresh Light on the 2000-year-old Mystery*, Bantam Books, 2011, is used here. So much has been written about the Shroud that I am unlikely to provide much new material but I hope to clarify some issues by placing the Shroud within the wider context of medieval relics.

## First Century Relics in Medieval Europe

‘Let us begin with Jesus Christ, about whose blood there have been fierce disputations; for many maintained that he had no blood except of a miraculous kind; nevertheless the natural blood is exhibited in more than a hundred places. They show at Rochelle a few drops of it, which, as they say, was collected by Nicodemus in his glove. In some places they have phials full of it, as, for instance, at Mantua and elsewhere; in other parts they have cups filled with it, as in the Church of St Eustache at Rome...

Now let us consider how many relics of the true cross there are in the world. An account of those merely with which I am acquainted would fill a whole volume, for there is not a church, from a cathedral to the most miserable abbey or parish church, that does not contain a piece. Large splinters of it are preserved in various places, as for instance in the Holy Chapel at Paris, whilst at Rome they show a crucifix of considerable size made entirely, they say, from this wood. In short, if we were to collect all these pieces of the true cross exhibited in various parts, they would form a whole ship's cargo.

A third part of the crown [of Thorns] is preserved at the Holy Chapel at Paris, three thorns at the Church of the Holy Cross, and a number of them at St Eustache in the same city; there are a good many of the thorns at Sienna, one at Yicenza, four at Bourges, three at Besangon, three at Port Royal, and I do not know how many at Salvatierra in Spain, two at St James of Compostella, three at Albi, and one at least in the following places: — Toulouse, Macon, Charroux in Poitiers; at Cleri, St Flour, St Maximira in Provence, in the abbey of La Salle at St Martin of Noyon, etc.’ (John Calvin, 1543)

Welcome to the world of medieval relics. The Protestant reformer John Calvin writing in 1543 reminds us just how many relics there were scattered throughout Europe, often in triplicate or more. Some of the grander churches had a sequence that took worshippers through from Abraham and Moses to the apostles

and Paul and early martyrs but there was a special concentration on the Passion and Crucifixion. In a hierarchy of relics, the Cross and the Blood of Christ trumped the others which is why there are so many different churches claiming parts of the originals. The Crown of Thorns was also a special hit. Next come images with the face of Christ said to be painted or imprinted on a cloth while he was alive. The Edessa Image, later known as the Mandylion (a word not known from any other source), was the most important before 1200 when it fades from view (but probably goes to Paris). This was just at the time when another image in Rome, the Veil of Veronica, an imprint of the face of Christ taken as he walked to Calvary, became the most celebrated relic in Rome. Vast crowds gathered to see it when it was exposed and often pilgrims died in the crush.

As one can readily understand, tracing a specific relic over time is a nightmare for historians. Descriptions lack precision, there are endless duplicated examples, everyone is trying to outdo rival shrines through publicizing their own relic and the miracles it effects. On the whole, however, we know when a relic moves from one church to another because there were processions and a traditional ceremony of welcome, the *translatio*, the date of which is usually recorded because the relic was often exposed on each anniversary. When the Mandylion arrived in Constantinople from Edessa in 944, it was a major event, so too with the Crown of Thorns when it arrived in Paris, again from Constantinople, in 1239. These were, of course, first class relics, as were relics of the Virgin Mary, John the Baptist (of whom seven heads are known), St. Peter and Paul, whose heads were exhibited in Rome, and the other apostles. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was especially popular after his body was apparently found completely intact outside Jerusalem in 415. Bits and pieces of him were scattered throughout the Mediterranean. Shrouds, burial cloths, cloths claiming to have covered the head of Jesus in the tomb (as described in John's gospel), were never as prestigious as pieces of the cross, nails or thorns from the Crown and bones or dust from the major figures of the New Testament but it has been calculated that there were about forty on show in the fourteenth century.

Were any of the thousands of 'first century' relics genuine? Almost certainly not. The fact that there were so many duplicates makes the point at once but there are other reasons. Relic collecting is first attested only in the fourth century, especially after 380. Just as the Protestant tradition has little reverence for relics (Protestants burned thousands of the medieval ones during the Reformation) relics were not important for the early Christians. The words of Christ at John 20:29 : "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" seems to have resonated (as we shall see). So there was no reason for early Christians to keep relics, belief in Christ was all the more honoured if it did not need a material object to sustain it, as the Protestant reformers preached later. It was all too easy for a relic became worshipped in itself, not for what it represented. (This certainly appears the case among some Shroud enthusiasts.) There may have been extra reasons, such as Jewish taboos associated with bloodstained burial shrouds, that would have inhibited preservation of specific items. (It goes without saying that Christ's burial was a Jewish not a Christian one.) There were taboos as late as 1000 against representing Christ dead and these certainly influenced early relic collection. These relics did, of course, exist at some point, Christ did die on the Cross and was buried in a linen cloth but wood and linen decay, especially in the damp around Jerusalem, so most relics, never collected in the first place by the early Christians, would have disappeared naturally.

### **The Shroud of Turin and the Sudarium of Oviedo**

If the Shroud of Turin had not been photographed in 1898 and its haunting image revealed, it is unlikely that it would have stood out from the rest. It was never recognized as anything very special until the sixteenth century and was in its own time considered a fake, although such denunciations were often made by shrine guardians who feared their own lucrative relic cults might be threatened by rivals. Calvin probably is aware of it but lists it among many others. The shroud at Compiègne had the most respectable pedigree, the abbey had held it since 877. The shroud at the Abbey at Cadouin on the pilgrimage route to Compostella was probably the most lucrative. The abbey claimed that its shroud had been brought back from the Holy Land after the First Crusade had captured Jerusalem in 1099. Indeed it had been, but we know that, as it still exists, that it is a fine piece of cloth from the Fatimid workshops, as were many other cloths and veils brought back as genuine relics by gullible crusaders.

However, there is something about burial cloths and images that attract interest now in a way they did not in the Middle Ages. Many people have heard of the Sudarium of Oviedo (in Spain), a bloodstained cloth purporting, like the Shroud, to come from the tomb of Jesus. It was found in a chest, supposed to have been made by the Apostles to contain their relics, that arrived in Spain in the seventh century but which had a legend attached to it that no good would come to anyone who opened it. Indeed when a bishop attempted to do so in 1030 there was a flash of white light and several people were blinded. What was inside it was not known. It took a more resolute figure, no less than a king, Alfonso VI, to dare to open it in 1075. It was crammed with relics of the Passion of Jesus, including, as was typical of these caches, a piece of the wood of the Cross, his Sacred Blood, bread from the Last Supper, a robe of the Virgin Mary, a stone from the tomb, as well as the Sudarium. Later the chest was given a 'history' that took it back to Jerusalem in 614. So why is the Sudarium still venerated today when the other more prestigious relics found with it are now forgotten? It was beyond the scope of my own researches, which remained within the Middle Ages, to explore why some relics resonate today and others do not. However, the Shroud of Turin, for whatever reason, is the most popular of all but other veils and cloths such as the Sudarium of Oviedo also attract special veneration at a time when so many other surviving medieval relics gather dust in sacristies. Who today notices the 'genuine' relics from Christ's Passion when visiting the Treasury of St. Mark's in Venice?

Those trying to assess the authenticity of the Sudarium of Oviedo have to contend with a radiocarbon-14 dating apparently of c. 700 AD. The blood on it has been analysed and is of the rare AB group. This is the newest blood-group in evolutionary terms and results from the mingling of Caucasian blood-group A and Mongoloid blood-group B. At first such a mutation would have been very rare and is virtually unknown before AD 900. It probably only came more common between 1000 and 1100, an age of migrations in central Europe where the highest percentage of AB blood groups are still found. The AB blood-group still only accounts for five per cent of the human population, many still found in the areas where the mingling took place. A similar AB blood-grouping on the Turin Shroud and an apparent link between the two cloths through their bloodstains suggests a medieval date for both, but, surely, further work needs to be done to confirm the AB result which is the work of only one independent researcher (Baima Ballone) and has not been replicated. (If the Shroud and the bloodstains on it are authentic will we eventually learn something of the DNA of God?)

Before going further it is worth exploring some relic terminology relating to shrouds and burial cloths. The normal (Roman) meaning of sudarium is a face cloth used to wipe sweat off. In relic cults it is used both to describe cloths imprinted with the face of the living Christ as well as those that covered his head when in the tomb, possibly bound round the head to keep the mouth closed. This follows John's gospel that describes very clearly a sudarium remaining in the tomb after the Resurrection. The rest of the body was wrapped in a shroud or wrappings. The gospel writers say that Christ was first wrapped in a sindon, a generic word for a piece of fine cloth, used in this context as a burial cloth. (It is important to remember that sindon can be used of any piece of fine cloth, it does not necessarily refer to a burial shroud – we find it in Catholic terminology being applied to altar cloths.) John and Luke go on to describe the discarded othonia, or grave cloths, found in the tomb after the Resurrection. What seems clear is that the earliest traditions suggest more than one cloth in the tomb. This was confirmed rather dramatically in 2009 when preserved burial cloths from the first century AD, including a sudarium, were found in a tomb in Jerusalem, the only ones known from 1000 excavated tombs. (They had been preserved by being encased in plaster.) Those painting the discarded cloths tended to follow this gospel tradition. An example of an early sixteenth century Byzantine icon of Noli Me Tangere (when Mary Magdalene meets Jesus in the garden) shows a sudarium and wrappings till intact in the tomb. One has to remember that those depicting events from Jesus' life would have used the more prestigious gospel accounts in preference to any relics they happened to see around them.



*Above, this wonderful icon from c. 1500, now in the Museum of Byzantine icons in Venice, shows clearly how the discarded burial cloths were seen in the eastern tradition, based doubtless on the gospel accounts. There is a separate sudarium and the wrappings from which Christ had extricated himself. The cloths found in the Jerusalem tomb in 2009 correlate with this tradition, an interesting example which points to the historical reliability of John's gospel.*

Ian Wilson has been tackling the problem of the Shroud for many decades. The latest of his many works is *The Shroud, Fresh Light on the 2000-year old Mystery* (2011). Wilson accepts the authenticity of the Shroud as the burial shroud of Christ, collected by the disciples, preserved, its linen remaining intact over the centuries. He has to go against gospel tradition, of course, as the Turin Shroud is one long piece of cloth which would have covered Jesus in ways not recorded elsewhere, with the body lying on the cloth which was then brought over its head and presumably fixed at the feet. I have already noted other problems, that of the Shroud being collected as a relic in the first place and survival of cloth over centuries when damp and molesting insects are such a threat. Still Wilson has created a narrative and we need to follow it.

### **The Image of Edessa**

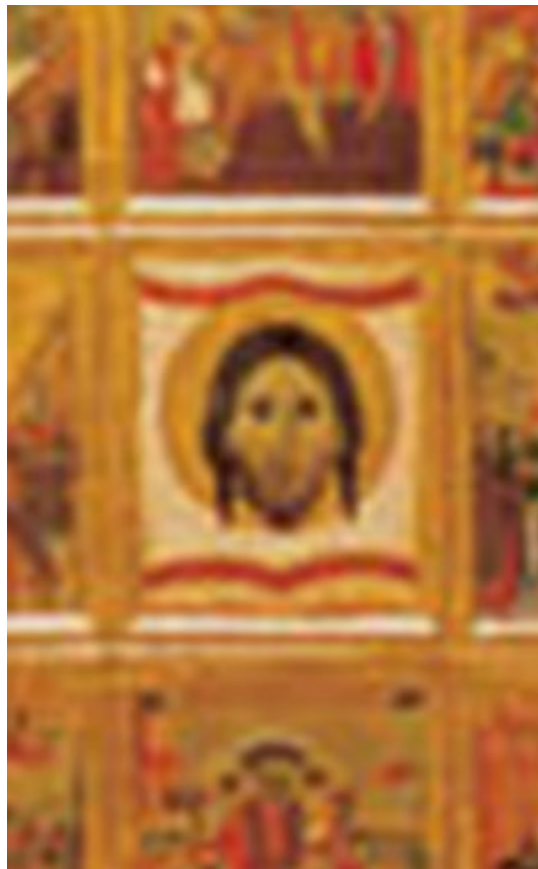
Let us start with Edessa, the modern Sanliurfa in south-eastern Turkey, where a image of Christ was first reported by the historian Evragius Scholasticus in the 590s. Edessa may have been Christian as early as the beginning of the third century but its legends took Christianity back further. (This was quite common. In the fourth and fifth centuries many cities 'discovered' a first century founding bishop, usually one who had

been consecrated as such by one of the apostles.) The Edessa legend told the story of King Abgar who had received a letter from Christ that was preserved within the city. As late as the 540s this was recorded as giving protection to Edessa but by the end of the century a new relic, an image of Christ, took its place as the 'top' protector relic of the city.

The late sixth century saw the emergence of many such images and they have been studied in detail by Hans Belting in his authoritative *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, Chicago, 1994. This period was one when the first intimations of iconoclasm were being heard. Could Christ be represented in images? The response was the appearance of a number of paintings that were said to be *acheiropoieton*, 'not made by human hands'. Most, but not all, were images left by the living Christ on a cloth, though there were others such as the traces left by Christ's body on the pillar against which he was scourged. So Christ had apparently shown, during his own lifetime, that he could be represented and so the iconoclasts could be resisted. Yet the emergence of these images came over five hundred years after the life of Christ! Each *acheiropite* or image therefore had to develop a story, telling how had it been created and where had it been in the intervening five hundred years. In the case of the Image of Edessa there were two or three stories, that it had been painted by the court painter of king Abgar or, more usually, that Christ himself had wiped his face with a cloth and the image had been imprinted.

Varying legends were common, just as many Greek myths have several versions. The Abgar legends then went on to claim that the image had come to Edessa in the first century where it had been hidden in the city wall before its 'reappearance' in the sixth century. Similar legends tell of images or other relics from the first century being buried (and often revealed in a dream) or stolen by Jews in the early days after the Crucifixion. Veronica's Veil was supposed to have been brought to Rome by Veronica after she had wiped Christ's face with it and then presented it to the emperor Tiberius. (In fact, Veronica is simply a corruption of *vera icona*, 'the true likeness'.) There is also a set of icons of the Virgin Mary that appear at this time said to have been painted by the evangelist Luke. Again the attribution is in order to give them status. What is important is that these images are not known before the sixth century and the stories of their origins must be treated as legendary.

The Image of Edessa shows the face of a bearded and, of course, living, Christ set in the middle of a square cloth. It is known from many copies. There is no body shown under the face and the cloth is often shown with a border. A good example is one of the panels of the Santa Chiara triptych (c. 1330-50) in the Sartario Museum in Trieste where red tassels surround the borders. It is illustrated below – apologies for quality of the enlargement but it shows the head of Christ, his halo, the red borders of the cloth and the lack of any body. One instantly knows that this is the Image/ Mandyllion precisely because only the face is shown and the whole cloth is shown delineated. An excellent early example of a copy of the Mandyllion, from the Vatican, was to be seen in the British Museum Treasures of Heaven exhibition of 2011 (catalogue entry no.113). There is an excellent discussion of the Mandyllion with illustrations in Chapter 11 of Hans Belting's *Likeness and Presence*, pp. 208-224.



*A copy, one of many of the Image of Edessa, the Mandylion. Shown as one panel on a large triptych. Venetian/Byzantine art, c, 1330-50. Note how the border of the cloth is clearly shown.*

After it was ‘revealed’ in its walled-up enclosure (miraculously surviving centuries of damp!) the Image of Edessa became open to intense veneration. In 787 Leo, Reader of Constantinople, reported that he had seen in Edessa ‘the holy image that was “not made by human hands”, held in honour and venerated by the faithful’. Hans Belting quotes (p.211) a report that the faithful actually sprinkled its eyes with water. For reasons that completely escape me, Wilson claims that the Image of Edessa is none other than the Shroud of Turin.

There are two reasons why this could not be the Shroud of Turin (quite apart from the lack of water damage on the eyes of the Shroud!). The first is that no one knowing the legend that gave the image its authenticity, as a cloth wiped by Christ himself on his face while he was alive, would have stared at the face we see the Turin Shroud and have believed that this was an image of a *living* man. We can assume that the image, if extant, in the sixth century, would have been brighter than it is now. It might have been possible to fold the Turin Shroud up to conceal the image of a naked lifeless body but this could hardly have been kept secret for long. The Turin Shroud is of a dead man, the Edessa image is, like all the other images of this time, a living Christ. They cannot be one and the same.

There is another important reason why this is not the Turin Shroud. There was a taboo in the Byzantine world about showing Christ, no less than God, of course, dead. Of course, most images avoided the problem by showing Christ while alive as the Edessa image surely did. What about the Crucifixion? There is a fascinating wood panel of the Crucifixion from about AD 420 on the door of Santa Sabina in Rome. It shows Christ and the two thieves. Christ has his arms outstretched but they are in the orans or praying form and he is standing as if alive. There is simply no cross behind him. So Christ can be shown ‘on the cross’ while still being alive. This was one way of getting around the theological problem of showing Christ dead. Even if the Turin Shroud did show the face of the real dead Christ, it could not have been displayed without causing immense controversy. None is recorded among the accounts of the veneration of the Edessa image.



The earliest known representation of Christ dead on the Cross comes from an eighth century icon of the Crucifixion in St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai. Christ's eyes are closed although the blood is still flowing from his hands, feet and side, with a separate stream of water from his side. This icon is also notable as it is the very first to show the Crown of Thorns. (See the entry/illustration of the icon in the catalogue of the Byzantium and Islam exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum, New York, 2012, catalogue entry 27, page 55.) This is another representation clearly based on the gospel accounts. The earliest example known in the west is the Gero Crucifix of c. 970 from Cologne Cathedral. Christ's suffering then becomes a major element of medieval thinking, which is why many would believe that only in the Middle Ages would a relic such as the Turin Shroud with its emphasis on suffering be created. If it were created earlier, it would not have been venerated. The theological counter-attack would have been overwhelming.

What arguments can Wilson provide for his attribution? I will look at those from before the sixth century later but here let us take just two. He has tracked down one of the legendary accounts of the origins of the Image of Edessa in a sixth century text, the *Acts of Thaddeus* (or *Jude*). This gives a standard account of the image having been made by Christ himself and this in itself just provides further evidence against Wilson's thesis! However, the *Acts* go on to describe the image as *tetradiplon* which seems to imply some form of doubling (*diplon*) taking place four (*tetra*) times. This is not difficult to explain. All cloth needs to be folded and stored against the damp and other molesters, and this is usually done in a wooden box or chest. This would be as necessary for the Image of Edessa as it would be for the Turin Shroud whenever the latter was made. Now how to store the Image of Edessa? It would clearly have been sacrilegious to have folded the sacred face of Christ and one would expect that the face would be fully visible when the protective box was opened. Now let us suppose the Image was four foot by four foot. Lay it on the ground, draw a horizontal fold across the cloth one foot down from the top and fold the resulting rectangle *underneath* the cloth. This is the *first* doubling. Repeat with the lower part of the cloth and then the two sides, so as to make *four* doublings, and you have a folded cloth, with the face, now in a two foot by two foot square, ready for storing in a much smaller box. As the Image of Edessa was never the Shroud of Turin in the first place, we do not need Ian Wilson's elaborate explanation (p.190 ff.) of how the Shroud, as we know it today, could be folded into four!

An even more bizarre explanation comes when Wilson tackles Byzantine art. Seventy years ago a Frenchman, Paul Vignon, noted that the bearded face on the Turin Shroud has some of the characteristics of Byzantine art. All kinds of measuring was done and some enthusiasts found as many as sixty resemblances. This is all interesting but Wilson goes on to make the absurd suggestion that this was because Byzantine art was born from the Image of Edessa, also known to Wilson as the Turin Shroud! Wilson makes some vague points about a new period in art at this time and finds a reference to two wandering Georgian monks with contacts with Edessa in the 530s who may have painted images. His key argument is the appearance in iconography of Christ with a beard happens just at this time. Yet, even if Wilson claims, against Belting who prefers a date fifty years later, that the Image of Edessa was known from the 540s, Byzantine art was well under way by then. So we have the earliest bearded Christ in the catacomb of Commodilla in Rome in about 390 and then a fine central image of a bearded Christ in the church of San Pudenziana of c. 405 (below). Even a brief glance at a standard history of early Christian art would have shown Wilson the emergence of these fully fronted bearded portraits in the fifth century.



*Christ Enthroned, San Pudenziana, Rome. c.405.*

A particularly impressive example comes from the Church of San Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna which is securely dated to 500 (illustrated below). So Byzantine images of a fully frontal bearded Christ are known from long before the date Wilson gives for his copying of the image of the Turin Shroud. So if the face on the Turin Shroud does have so many resemblances to Byzantine art then, it seems to me, that it may well be an excellent example of . . . Byzantine art!



*San Apollinare Nuovo was originally dedicated by the Ostrogoth Theodoric to Christ the Redeemer in 504. This is one of the original mosaics--the Arian Ostrogoths always depicted the mature Christ with a beard in contrast to the younger Christ without one.*

If all this was not absurd enough, Wilson now has the Image of Edessa traveling--back to its legendary birthplace, Jerusalem. There was apparently an earthquake in Edessa in 679 and Wilson reports the account of Bishop Arculf of Perigueux from the 680s of his journey to Jerusalem where there was apparently a *sudarium* of Christ, recently brought to the city. Wilson's theory is that this is the Image, the Turin Shroud



no less, brought back to Jerusalem while the earthquake damage was being repaired. Now, we are immediately alerted by the use of the word *sudarium*, face cloth. This could be the Image of Edessa but, by no stretch of the imagination, could it be the Turin Shroud. However, things get very much worse for Wilson. Arculf's account, *De Locis Sanctis*, is easily found in an online translation and presents a very different story. Arculf arrived as a pilgrim in Jerusalem, now under Muslim rule. He first visited the tomb of Christ 'in which the body of the Lord, when buried, rested, rolled in the linen cloths: the length of which [the tomb] Arculf measured with his own hand and found to be seven feet'. So here we have a shroud still in the tomb. This is clearly a traditional Jewish burial shroud that covered just the body.

Arculf goes on to tell us about the *sudarium*, in the quoted version of his tale: 'As to the sacred napkin [*sudarium*] which was placed upon the head of the Lord in the Sepulchre, we learn from the narrative of the sainted Arculf, who inspected it with his own eyes. A certain trustworthy believing Jew, immediately after the Resurrection of the Lord, stole from His Sepulchre the sacred linen cloth and hid it in his house for many days; but, by the favour of the Lord Himself, it was found after the lapse of many years, and was brought to the notice of the whole people about three years before Arculf was told these things'. There is then a dramatic display when the *sudarium* is contested between Jews and Christians, is tested by fire, floats up from the fire and drifts towards the Christians thus showing its authenticity! This is what Arculf relates. The *sudarium* is described as eight feet long, too short for the Shroud, but, of course, Wilson gets round this one, by saying that it is the Shroud of Turin folded double! Wilson's story is a fabrication and he has the cheek to quote from the very document that confirms this. No wonder he is not taken seriously by any respected historian.

The Image of Edessa aka the Shroud of Turin, back home after its mythical (this seems the best way to describe even if the myth is a very recent Wilsonian one!) travels to Jerusalem, was captured in 944 by Byzantine forces (Edessa was under Muslim control) and transferred to Constantinople where it was given a magnificent welcome. First it was brought ashore at the waterside Chapel of the Virgin at Blachernae, at the north-western end of the city, from where it was processed through the streets, probably along the ancient imperial processional highway, to Hagia Sophia, the great church of Justinian. It was eventually transferred to the Pharos Chapel inside the imperial palace where it joined a vast array of other relics from the life of Christ. (See here *Sacred Relics and Imperial Ceremonies at the Great Palace of Constantinople* by Holger A. Klein, available online- the Byzantine emperors specialized in relics of the Passion and Crucifixion.) In 1201 it was still there listed alongside other relics. One of these, recorded in the list of 1201, was no less than the 'funerary sheets (*sindones*, in the plural) of Christ, they are of cheap and easy-to find material' and 'still smell of myrrh'. So these cloths are clearly *not* the Turin Shroud, a single cloth with its fine herring-bone weave. (N.B. One of the points Calvin makes in his *Treatise on Relics* is that medieval relics were often made of far finer materials than would have been the case in the original first century Jewish setting- this may be relevant here as the Shroud of Turin is unusually fine for a burial cloth.) Meanwhile the Mandylion, as the Image is now usually called, had a special casket that was locked and, according to a document of 1090, only the emperor was allowed to open it to see it.

Then what? The Sack of Constantinople in the Fourth Crusade takes place in 1204. To the Catholic crusaders, the Greeks are schismatics and unworthy owners of their relics (of which there were an estimated 3,600 in the city), so there is a free-for-all. We have documented lists of many of the hundreds of relics that were brought to Europe at this time. Luckily the Pharos Chapel, inside the palace, survives intact and comes under the care of the Latin emperor Baldwin. There is a good account of the distribution of the relics in Michael Angold's *The Fourth Crusade* (2003) (which Wilson does not list in his Bibliography). The Latin emperors soon realized that they had a superb collection of relics claiming to be from the first century in their hands and these were available to gain themselves prestige and, as it turned out, cash. Baldwin I, the crusader who was elevated to emperor, felt he had to honour his overlord Philip Augustus of France. So he sent him a foot-long piece of the Cross, a thorn from the Crown of Thorns, the scarlet robe worn by Jesus when he was being mocked and some 'fragments' of a cloth claiming to be the winding cloth of Jesus (so clearly these 'fragments' were not the intact Turin Shroud but presumably the 'cheap material' mentioned earlier).

The later Latin emperors (Greek emperors were restored in 1261) were more mercenary. The Crown of Thorns itself passed to Louis IX of France at enormous expense (half of his annual income) and Louis then brought in or was given many other relics of the Passion including the Holy Lance and the Holy Sponge and a sudarium, or face cloth, although we are not told whether it had on it an image of Christ and if so whether dead or alive. Angold quotes, p. 244, a recent work on the Sainte-Chapelle, J. Durand (ed.) *Le Trésor de la Sainte-Chapelle* (Paris 2001, pp. 70-71), which says that the Mandyllion was included with other relics from the Pharos Chapel in a gift to Louis in 1247. I haven't seen Durand's book but this makes sense. I assume that this may be the same relic referred to as a *toella* or 'towel', passed to Louis in 1247, as this was, of course, exactly what the legend tells just the Mandyllion was, a cloth or towel used to wipe Christ's face. There is one version of the Edessa legend that specifically says it was used in the Garden of Gethsemane to do just this. *Toella* seems appropriate. We have an engraving of 1790 of the Chasse, or main altar, of the Chapel with a list of the relics (illustrated at the end of the article). No. 18 is referred to as *Une Sainte Face*, 'A Holy Face'. This is shown as a casket on the altar beneath the reliquary that contained the Holy Lance and next to the chapel's star relic, the outrageously expensive Crown of Thorns. As we know from the Pharos records that the Mandyllion was kept locked in a casket, rather than openly displayed, this seems to make the link. As the Mandyllion is not recorded anywhere else after the 1200s, this must be, overwhelmingly, its most likely destination. The relics remained here until the French Revolution when they were dispersed.

However, for Wilson, the Image of Edessa, aka the Shroud of Turin, cannot be allowed to escape quite so easily to Paris. Oddly enough he mentions the 1790 engraving from the Sainte-Chapelle but he is naturally reluctant to make the connection. (It does need a very careful eye to pick out the casket as it appears at first to be part of the base of the Holy Lance reliquary – see the illustration.) However, as so often with medieval relics, there is another burial shroud around in Constantinople. This is recorded in 1203 in the famous chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary at Blachernae at the north-western corner of Constantinople. This shroud was raised up and exposed every Friday and actually had an image of Christ on it. Wilson has the bizarre suggestion, p. 246-7, that this shroud may actually be the Mandyllion, transferred to the Blachernae Chapel, but this is impossible- there is no record of such a transfer or any reason to move a precious relic to such a vulnerable spot. He can only find a reference to the Image/Mandyllion being paraded in the 1030s in the hope, successful as it turned out, in bringing a drought to an end. Such processions were common (specifically in Constantinople they often involved a sacred image of the Virgin Mary or the relic of the cross from the Pharos Chapel (see Holger Klein's article)) but the relic always returned to its home church. Even so this was the Mandyllion, which, I cannot repeat too often, is not the Turin Shroud, so the point is not relevant in any case.

However, the Blachernae cloth is the closest we have to anything resembling the Turin Shroud. There is an alternative history to be researched here. Jerusalem was part of the Byzantine empire until 638 when it was captured by the Arabs. Before this there had been a brief period of occupation by the Persians from 614 to 629. From the time of Constantine's conversion to Christianity (AD 312) Jerusalem had been, of course, a sacred city in a way it had never been to the pagan Romans and relics had been brought from there back to Constantinople at the foundation of the city in 330. Constantine's mother, Helena, gave him two relics of the Cross and in the famous statue of Constantine in the city centre (the battered column of which still stands) nails from the Crucifixion were fixed in his diadem. Pulcheria, the sister of a later emperor, Theodosius II, (ruled 408-50), founded the Blachernae relics collection with a robe of the Virgin Mary and she also brought back an arm of St. Stephen from Jerusalem in 419. The most famous of the relics obtained by Pulcheria was the Virgin Mary in the pose of *Hodegetria*, literally 'She who shows The Way', by pointing to the infant Christ on her lap, an image painted by Luke and transferred from Jerusalem to Constantinople by Theodosius' wife, Eudocia. This came to live in the Blachernae Chapel (and was exposed in an open procession every Tuesday). There are many accounts in fourth and fifth century ecclesiastical histories (I stress 'histories', these are not legends) of the arrival of relics in Constantinople from the Holy Land and it might well be researching further to see if there is any mention of a burial shroud coming from Jerusalem to Constantinople in this period as one of the other relics that we know were transferred. It is a pity that Wilson is so obsessed with his 'Image of Edessa is the Shroud of Turin' theory that he missed this possibility of other relics coming directly to the city from Jerusalem in the fourth and

fifth centuries.



*The arrival of the arm of St. Stephen, the first martyr, in Constantinople from Jerusalem in 419. The arrival is pictured in an intricately-carved ivory bas relief that shows the special chapel being built for it in the lower right of the carving. Emperor Theodosius II's sister Pulcheria waits to welcome it. It is worth researching to see whether there is any evidence of a shroud coming from Jerusalem in this period and staying in Pulcheria's Blachernae Chapel where it was seen in 1208.*

It is not known what happened to the Blachernae Shroud. The Chapel was very vulnerable as it was exposed on the shoreline. The *Hodegetria* was saved from the rapacious crusaders but the shroud seems to have disappeared. There is a hint in one source that it may have gone to Athens and some argue that it was the shroud found at Besancon which is first recorded in 1205, a year after the Crusade. Most accounts suggest that this was then lost in a fire in 1350.

However, Wilson assumes that the Mandylion did not go to Paris and is the same shroud that was looted from the Blachernae Chapel! All the evidence and common sense is against this but it leaves Wilson with some 150 years to fill in before the Shroud is first recorded in Lirey in the ownership of Geoffrey de Charny in 1355. But he has no historical records to work from (not surprisingly if the Mandylion is in Paris!). Wilson is not daunted by this and proves himself a man of imagination. As he tells us (p. 258): 'If the cloth survived it seems necessarily to have gone 'underground' under some rather unusual and devious circumstances, which actually helps us to develop a working 'suspect profile' of the unknown keeper or keepers.' You have guessed it. Whenever confronted by a medieval mystery you call in . . . the Knights Templar! They kept the Edessa Image aka Turin Shroud intact for the next 150 years, Ian Wilson tells us.

Hardly surprisingly, even the imaginative Wilson needs some help for this thesis and he is lucky to have an expert on the Templars, Dr. Barbara Frale from the Vatican Archives, to help him. There must be a word for someone who is able to look at ancient cloths or artifacts and see words on them that no one else can. Frale is a real star here. In 2009, she announced that the following text actually could be seen on the Turin Shroud in a mixture of Aramaic, Latin and Greek. "In the year 16 of the reign of the Emperor Tiberius Jesus the Nazarene, taken down in the early evening after having been condemned to death by a Roman judge because he was found guilty by a Hebrew authority, is hereby sent for burial with the obligation of being consigned to his family only after one full year."

The trouble was that no one else could see this elaborate text on the Shroud although there have been some

brave attempts to decipher what are apparently Hebrew letters that some are able to see after hours looking with special glasses. (If you don't believe me, see Stephen E. Jones' Shroud of Turin blog for November 2008 on Hebrew letters on the Shroud.) However, Dr. Frale is still hard at work and she has now found a Templar document recording the initiation ceremony of a Frenchman, Arnaut Sabbatier. As part of the ceremony Sabbatier was 'shown a linen cloth on which was imprinted the figure of a man and instructed to venerate the image by kissing its feet three times.' Wilson tells us: 'As immediately recognized by Dr. Frale, this description, brief though it is, can hardly be interpreted as anything other than the cloth we know as the Turin Shroud'.

Once again Ian Wilson is making the elementary mistake of assuming that any mention of an image of a man must refer to the double image of a dead man on the Shroud of Turin. The image is of a man but there is no indication that he has any special significance or was the double image of the Shroud. Sabbatier was hardly likely to have recorded that the image was simply of 'a man' if it had indeed been the Shroud. Someone would have surely told him that this was the apparent burial cloth of Jesus. As we have recorded images of the living Christ on cloths and a host of other medieval images of painted cloths, there is absolutely nothing to link this account to the Shroud of Turin. Once again we are victims of Ian Wilson's wishful thinking.

If Wilson's thesis that this linen cloth was the Mandylion was not already in enough trouble, he still has a major issue to tackle, the history of the Shroud from AD 30 to the second half of the sixth century when the Edessa Image aka to Wilson the Turin Shroud is first recorded in Edessa. It is a long period, much more challenging than filling in a mere 150 years. 560 years from today would take us back to the Middle Ages! Of course, Wilson is up to the challenge. He has dug up a document called *The Doctrine of Addai*. This may date from the early fifth century and is one of hundreds of legendary accounts that develop the early history of Christianity. Addai is a disciple of Jesus who has miraculous healing powers. After Christ's death he visits Abgar in Edessa and Wilson quotes from the *Doctrine* as follows:

'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.'

So Addai's face is transformed but no one but Abgar can see it. Addai shows he is miraculous (he is after all a disciple of Christ), Abgar that he has some special status so that he alone can see the transfigured face. A fairly typical feature of such texts. So what has this to do with the Shroud of Turin? Well, according to Wilson, the transformed face of Addai IS the Shroud of Turin! Wilson lost me here because I cannot see the connection between Addai's transformed face and a burial shroud with an image of a dead man on it. Wilson tries to improve his case by going on a further five hundred years, to the tenth century, and then finds a document that reports the legend as it had been embellished to show that a wonderful vision was sent out by an image that was 'covering' Addai. These are legends, not historical narratives and they cannot be taken as such. There is nothing to suggest that this is a burial shroud especially when the word 'covering' would equally apply to the living Christ on the Image of Edessa cloth. It is surely a later *addition* to the legend of Addai so as to include the Image itself which is not, of course, and never had been anything to do with a burial shroud.

Sadly, there is more to say about *The Doctrine of Addai*. It can be found online in an 1876 translation and takes about an hour to read. Just above the 'face of Abgar' story there is the following account of Abgar sending an emissary to Christ.

'When Jesus received the letter at the house of the chief priest of the Jews, He said to Hannan, the keeper of the [Abgar's] archives: "Go and say to thy lord, who hath sent thee to Me, 'Blessed art thou, who, although thou hast not seen Me, believest in Me, for it is written of Me, Those who see Me will not believe in Me, and those

who see Me not, will believe in me. . . . I am going up to my Father, who sent me, and when I have gone up to Him, I will send to thee one of my disciples [Addai], who will cure the disease which thou hast, and restore thee to health; and all who are with thee he will convert to everlasting life. Thy city shall be blessed, and no enemy shall again become master of it for ever."

When Hannan, the keeper of the archives, saw that Jesus spake thus to him, by virtue of being the king's painter, he took and painted a likeness of Jesus with choice paints, and brought with him to Abgar the king, his master. And when Abgar the king saw the likeness, he received it with great joy, and placed it with great honour in one of his palatial houses.'

So here, omitted by Wilson, we have Jesus' words that would imply that those who did not see any relic and believed would be favoured over those who did need relics (i.e. the Shroud) to believe. We also have a story of how the image of Christ, in this version of the legend, painted by Hannan, might have come to Edessa. We don't need Addai's transformed face to fill the gap. Wilson presumably cannot tell us about this passage because it makes quite clear that there is a legend about an image in Edessa that is quite clearly *not* the burial shroud.

We are not finished with *The Doctrine of Addai* yet. Addai also relates the story of Queen Protonice, apparently the wife of the Roman emperor Claudius (ruled 41-54), although she seems to be entirely legendary. So we are talking about a legend set in the 40s or 50s AD. Protonice has been so impressed by meeting Simon Peter in Rome that she comes with her children to visit Jerusalem and here encounters James, the leader of the Jerusalem church.

He also showed her cures and mighty works as did Simon, and she said to him: "Show me Golgotha, on which Christ was crucified, and the wood of His cross on which He was suspended by the Jews, and the grave in which He was placed." James said to her: "These three things which thy Majesty wishes to see are under the control of the Jews. They possess them, and permit us not to go to pray there before Golgotha and the grave, and neither the wood of His cross will they give us. And not only this, but they also severely persecute us, that we may not publish and preach in the name of Christ, and many times also they bind us in prison." When she heard these things, the queen immediately commanded, and they brought before her Onias, the son of Hannan the priest, and Gedalia, son of Caiaphas, and Judah the son of Ebed Shalom, chiefs and rulers of the Jews. And she said to them: "Deliver up Golgotha, and the grave, and the wood of the cross, to James, and those who agree with him". Afterwards she entered the grave, and found in the grave three crosses, one of our Lord, and two of those robbers, who were crucified with Him, on His right hand and on His left.

So here we have a legend of the tomb being closed off to the Christians (cf. Arculf's Jew stealing the *sudarium*). But Protonice pulls rank and gets into the tomb where the three crosses from the crucifixion are stored (no mention of any burial cloths). One of her daughters falls down dead but is miraculously revived when the 'real' one of the Three Crosses is applied to her. Protonice then arranges for the True Cross to be given to James. This is a typical story of the fifth century when relics were first being collected, a similar account to that of Helena and the finding of the Cross that is first reported in the 390s. Of course, it is legendary but it shows that there were stories going around of the tomb being out of bounds to Christians and the key relic being seen, not surprisingly, as the Cross, not the Shroud.

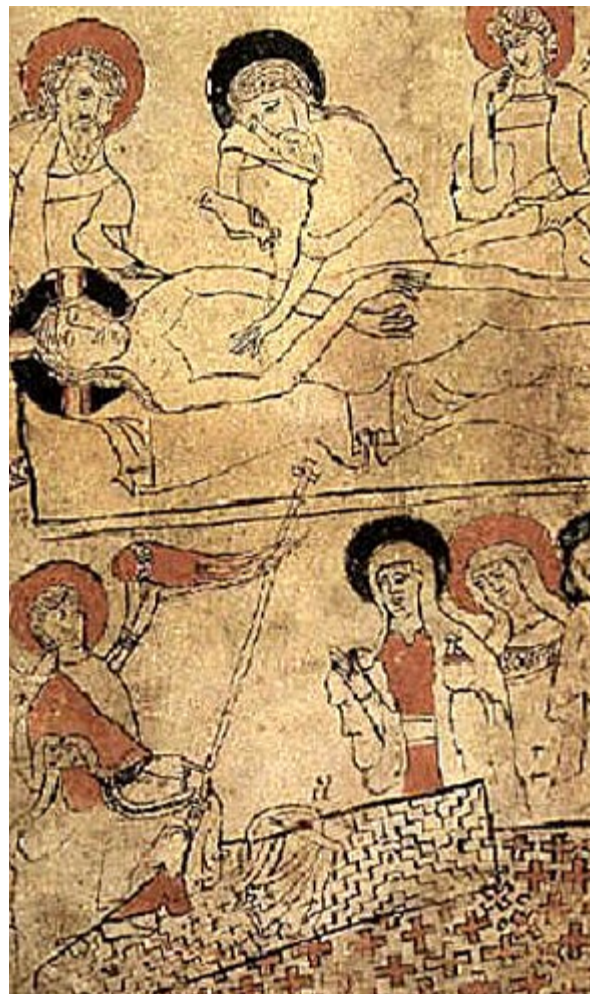
The Protonice story makes my point that there were thousands of relics around and hundreds of legends about early Christianity. There are many fourth and fifth century accounts of relics being discovered. But none, so far as I know, mentions a shroud and certainly it ranked nowhere in status alongside the other relics that were being uncovered. (In fact, there are hardly any references to burial shrouds before 1100,



those in Constantinople are among the first and there is Arculf's, but there may well be references earlier in western monastic relic lists. My suspicion is this is because of the taboo of representing Christ as dead before 1000. It is significant that the Sudarium of Oviedo is only recorded as physically revealed for the first time in 1075. )

In short, Wilson has failed to provide any significant evidence from this mass of material to back his narrative. It seems to fail at every point. He provides no evidence that the Shroud existed in Jerusalem, no evidence that a burial shroud arrived in Edessa. The Edessa image of a living Christ cannot be the same as the shroud of a dead Christ. The Mandylion almost certainly goes to Paris and stays there. The evidence for the link with the Templars is extraordinarily weak. (There is a hilarious Da Vinci Code moment, p. 266, when a woman's ceiling falls in in Somerset, UK, and lo! an image of Christ appears which Wilson is convinced is taken from the Shroud.) The Doctrine of Addai is used completely inappropriately as Wilson fails to tell his readers that it contains relevant material which might undermine his case, weak though it already is. I could not see why he felt he had to introduce his Arculf story when anyone bothering (yes historians sometimes do bother!) to go back to the source he quotes finds that his story of the Edessa Image being returned to Jerusalem is clearly a fabrication.

One of the arguments Wilson and others use in support of an early date for the Turin Shroud is the Pray Codex of c. 1192-1195, produced in Hungary and perhaps the earliest manuscript known in Hungarian. It shows two scenes, one of the anointing of Christ before burial and one of the visit of the Two Marys to the empty tomb.



*The anointing of Christ before burial and (below) the visit of the Two Marys to the empty tomb. Pray Codex of c. 1192-1195, produced in Hungary.*

These scenes are supposed to show that the illustrator knew of the Turin Shroud. However, let us start with what would be obvious to anyone who had seen the Shroud, the size of the cloth and the two images. So to turn to the Pray Codex, it shows Christ being laid onto a shroud, which, in traditional Jewish style, as recorded in John's gospel, reaches only to his shoulders. There does seem to be some sort of fold under the buttocks but hardly enough to make up the size of the Turin Shroud. Surely anyone knowing the Turin Shroud would have shown it with the top half of the Shroud above his head ready to be folded back over the body and fixed at the feet. Then the Turin Shroud shows a bearded Christ, this illustration does not, unless it is a very light beard.

Crucially, it is assumed all too easily that because the arms of the dead Christ are crossed over his genitals the model must have been the Shroud but such practices were common in Christian burials in early modern Europe. Below I reproduce an example found only last year in an Anglo-Saxon burial ground on the east coast of England (Barber's Point on the River Alde). A more famous example is that of the Frankish queen Arnegunde discovered at the abbey of St. Denis outside Paris in 1959. The queen died between 580 and 590 and the burial is famous because a few fragments of rich cloth were found preserved in the stone sarcophagus. Her hands were placed over her genitals. This was the universal practice among the Lombards of northern Italy, certainly from the seventh century. Examples of how their bodies were positioned in burials around Cividale dei Friuli, in north-eastern Italy in the seventh century can be found in the Archaeological Museum there. (A new burial ground with some thirty graves has just been discovered.)

On my last visit there, I was able to confirm with a professor who was lecturing on the tombs that this was the practice. There are also other illustrations showing the burial of Christ in this fashion. Is there any evidence that this positioning of the body with hands crossed over the genitals was a Jewish custom? When did it first appear in Christian burials and how long did it continue? What we can certainly say is that the illustrator of the Pray Codex did not need the Turin Shroud to give him his model. And it is of course possible that a later creator of the Turin Shroud illustrated Jesus being buried in the burial customs of the creator's day not those of the first century AD. This seems an important area in which to do further research.



Saxon Burial

*Anglo- Saxon burial from Barber's Point, Snape, Suffolk, c.AD 650-700. The hands are clearly shown to have been positioned over the genitals. I doubt even the capacious imagination of Ian Wilson can extend to claiming that this remote burial in a relatively poor community was the result of seeing the Turin Shroud!*

When one looks at the lower image of the Codex, the discarded burial cloths are there but if the illustrator had seen the Shroud he would have surely shown the image of Christ on them. As it is they are jumbled up and hardly seem anything like the size of the Turin Shroud. The most important point of all is that a blown-up image shows that the sudarium is depicted as a separate piece of cloth and so the source seems, once again, to be the account in John's gospel where the sudarium is reported as lying separately. This cannot be the Turin Shroud! The usual practice of taking the gospel accounts as an inspiration seems to have been followed here.





*No one who had seen the Turin Shroud and been impressed with it would have illustrated the discarded burial cloths of Jesus as actually done on the Pray Codex, with, in the conventional gospel representation from John, of the sudarium being shown separately as it clear from a blow-up of this part of the manuscript. There is not a single hint that there is anything to do with the Turin Shroud here!*

On the stone coffin lid on which the cloths rest, see illustration above, there is a pattern of a stepped pyramid. These decorations are known in other representations of the tomb after the Resurrection- it was customary to give it the status of marble or finely decorated stone. (Again there is a pattern on the Santa Chiara tryptych in the Sartorio Museum in Trieste.) The argument that this is a representation of the the cross-weaving, with rectangles, of the Turin Shroud fails at once. Why should the weaving pattern on the Shroud be venerated in any case? By now, the 1190s, European weaving is beginning to become sophisticated and the cloth of the Shroud would not stand out as unusual. How would an observer get close up enough to see the weave, especially if this was a Catholic depiction and the Shroud was held in the private chapel of the schismatic (since 1054) Greek Byzantine emperors? Simply because some holes on the lid roughly relate to similar burn marks on the Shroud does not overturn the obvious reasons why the Pray Codex has nothing to do with the Turin Shroud. The Pray Codex needs to be placed within the context of other similar illustrations of the burial and Resurrection of Christ in this period, not isolated from them as here to suggest that it was unique.

In 1988, a radiocarbon-14 test of a divided sample of the Shroud was conducted by three different laboratories using the latest dating techniques. The results suggested a date for the Shroud of 1260-1390. Newer techniques, twenty-five years on, might produce a more precise date. The testing has been widely contested but so far no one has found any reason to suggest a new testing would result in a first century AD date. It is ludicrous to claim, as some have, that a fourteenth century sample was substituted by the British Museum's Dr. Tite in collaboration with a cardinal in a half-hour when the sampling procedure was not being filmed. The theory that this was an added-on piece of fourteenth century cloth, mistakenly selected at the session in which the sample was removed in front of many experts (see the Nature report on the 1988 testing), was comprehensively dismissed by Mechthild Flury-Lemberg, a leading expert on ancient textiles, who carried out an exhaustive examination of their Shroud in 2002 (controversial in the extent of the cleaning perhaps, but there is no reason to doubt her observations). Then there was the possibility of a contaminant affecting the result although the sample was cleaned in each of the three laboratories before testing. Even the nature of the contaminant is disputed. Soot said Flury-Lemberg, human sweat says Ian Wilson, carbon monoxide says the Shroud researcher, John Jackson. Testing by the Oxford radiocarbon

laboratory showed that carbon monoxide had no effect on dating and no other contaminant has been found in sufficient quantities to push back the date over a thousand years, from 1160 at the earliest to the first century. So the presumption (let's be cautious) must be that the carbon-14 dating remains medieval.

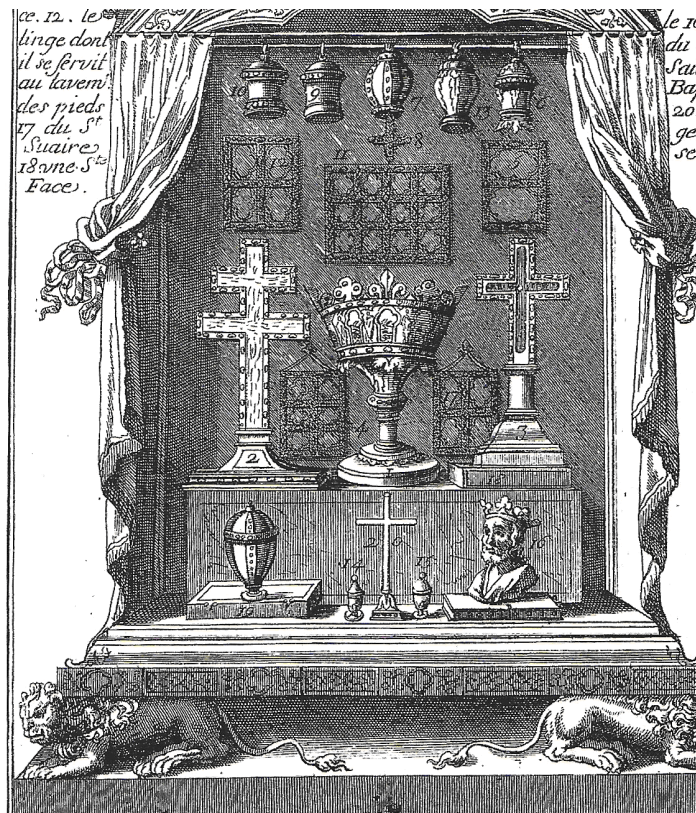
I don't know how the Shroud was made. It is a fascinating challenge for scientists and art historians to explain how it was done. I have never understood the argument that because the making of the image is hard to understand, this makes the Shroud more likely to be authentic, unless, of course, one sees it as a supernatural creation. Otherwise what artistic process *not* known in medieval times *was* known in the first century? Sadly medieval man could be as cruel as the Romans so some form of ritual sacrifice based on the gospel accounts of the crucifixion is not impossible (but I am definitely NOT going down that route without some supporting evidence, too Da Vinci code for me!) Unfortunately the Shroud has been so mauled about by 'researchers' especially those allowed to examine it before the Vatican inherited it in 1983, that there is some reluctance by the Vatican authorities to allow any more examination of it. Of course, it should have been examined from the start in a conservation laboratory, which specialized in ancient textiles, and all substances, samples or pigments removed from it scrupulously kept under laboratory conditions. The ludicrous way in which numbers of researchers have been allowed to remove samples and then pass them around among themselves is one of the more bizarre aspects of the Shroud story, worth a book in itself.

To this day it seems possible for favoured researchers, many of them with no expertise in ancient textiles, to obtain sample material to work on. (How did the industrial chemist Raymond Rogers get hold of threads from the 1988 radiocarbon-14 dating from the Vatican representative Luigi Gonella, present at the selection of the sample but with no authority to remove any of it, fifteen years after the event? How can one be sure that the threads had not suffered damage in these years and why were they not preserved for laboratory examination rather than transferred to the 'home laboratory' (Rogers' words) of a pro-authenticity Shroud enthusiast?) No wonder there has been so much acrimony among researchers that continues to this day – very few have a comprehensive enough selection of substances and pigments from the Shroud to make any authoritative statements about how it was made. For myself, as a historian of medieval relics, however, the Shroud fits well within the thousands of other purportedly first century relics that crammed the churches of medieval Europe. I think it is unlikely to be the very first of these thousands to be proved to be genuine and the onus is on those who claim a first century origin to provide the evidence for this.

I am writing this in the hope that those who read Ian Wilson's immensely enjoyable but essentially fictional account of the history of the Turin Shroud accept it as such, fiction not history. He has too little understanding of the wider world of medieval relics, in which the Shroud is one of thousands associated with the Crucifixion and tomb alone. He quotes selectively and ignores too many obvious objections to his narrative. His focus on the Shroud to the exclusion of many other much prestigious relics leads him to confuse the different shroud relics not only with each other but with images that show Christ alive. If the Shroud has a history that extends beyond the fourteenth century he certainly has not found it. I don't think he has found a single clear reference prior to that date to the cloth we know as the Turin Shroud. I was enormously surprised to find that the apparently 'brilliant' (according to his publisher's blurb) art historian Thomas de Wesselow swallowed Wilson's account with hardly a critical murmur against its inadequacies. What Wilson has done is to follow in the steps of medieval chroniclers and create a legendary account of the origins of a relic cult that happens to have become enormously popular over the past fifty years. Once this is recognized his account can be enjoyed for what it is.

So where did the Mandylion end up? I would suggest that it lies, folded *tetradiplon*, in the casket below.





*The Mandylion in Paris. The casket containing the Mandylion, La Sainte Face (no.18 in the accompanying caption), lies on the Sainte-Chapelle altar beneath the cross reliquary, on the right side of the etching, that contains the Lance which pierced Jesus' side. The casket fits well with descriptions of the Mandylion in the Pharos Chapel and the Mandylion was presumably placed in the casket for protection against damp and handling. It only needed to be folded tetradiplon for the image to be exposed at the top. Note too, no. 17, the St. Suaire, i.e. the Holy Shroud. Was this the other cloth mentioned as being in the Pharos chapel in addition to the Mandylion? Note the chapel's most prestigious relic, the Crown of Thorns, in the centre. From an engraving of the altar of 1790. Click on the image for a full-size version.*

Charles Freeman is the author of *Holy Bones, Holy Dust, How Relics Shaped the History of the Medieval World*, Yale University Press, 2011. He is grateful for some suggestions from Robert Dutra that improve this essay.

---

Charles Freeman  
 The Skeptical Shroud of Turin Website, [freeinquiry@gmail.com](mailto:freeinquiry@gmail.com)  
 Last updated: 2012 October 23