

The True Holy Grail

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For indeed, Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness. But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

~ I Corinthians 1:22-24

The Holy Grail is generally thought of as the chalice that Jesus Christ used at the last supper, and which was also said to be used by Joseph of Arimathea to catch Christ's blood when his side was pierced on the cross. Grail legends and lore have fascinated people since the Middle Ages when the literary concept was first popularized, and the Holy Grail has become one of the most enduring of all symbols. Fascination with the Grail has continued down through the centuries to the present, and includes works such as the 1989 movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, with the ancient Templar Knight who utters the famous lines, "He chose poorly," and, "You have chosen wisely!"

The grail stories and romances were written starting in the twelfth century, more than one thousand years after Christ's death, and were the most popular and compelling stories of their time. Many of them were associated with King Arthur, and virtually all of them were chivalric tales involving knights on some type of quest. However, in these grail stories, the identification of the grail as being the "Cup of Christ" was not always made. In the early stories, the grail was alternatively a serving dish, a stone, or something ethereal or spiritual that defies explanation, and the word "grail" can mean cup, chalice, dish, tureen, bowl, or platter. Following are the most significant grail-related works from the Middle Ages:

- *The Mabinogion (The Red Book of Herges and The White Book of Rhydderch)*. The Mabinogion is a collection of Welch tales that date anywhere from the fifth century BC through the thirteenth century. Part of this collection is the tale of Peredur, another name for Perceval, the grail knight, involving the search for the grail. In this story the grail is a platter which holds the severed head of a man who had been killed by a sorceress, probably an allusion to the death of John the Baptist.¹
- *Historia Regnum Britannie*, by Geoffrey of Monmouth in England, written around 1136. This is supposedly a history of the kings of Britain, beginning with the Trojans of Homer's *Iliad* and ending with the Anglo-Saxon kings of the seventh century. Geoffrey used a number of sources that are now lost to us, as well as perhaps adding his own content and spin. This work was very popular in its time and forms the basis of much English lore written later. Some of the kings mentioned are Brutus, who supposedly founded Britain and named it after himself; Lear, later used by Shakespeare; Old King Cole of the nursery rhyme

fame; King Lud after whom London was supposedly named; the emperor Constantine, who was crowned emperor of Rome in the English city of York; and most notably, King Arthur. Geoffrey also wrote several books about Merlin, and associated him with King Arthur and Stonehenge, and this work is the source of all of the later King Arthur tales.² Geoffrey did not, however, make any mention of the grail. There were several other authors in this period or earlier that wrote about or alluded to King Arthur, such as Nennius in *Historia Britonum*, William of Malmesbury in *Historia Regum Anglorum*, Wace in *Roman de Brut*, and Layamon in *Brut*.³

- *Le Conte du Graal*, by Chrétien de Troyes and others in France, written during the period 1170 through 1240. This is a collection of poems concerning the ideals of chivalry and knighthood. These poems were in turn based on the earlier *Chansons de Geste*, “songs of deeds,” which were anonymous songs and poems sung by troubadours about the days of Charlemagne. These works captivated Europe with their concepts of nobility, virtue, honor, loyalty, devotion, and strong notions of the meaning of masculinity and femininity. The writings of Chrétien were a conscious attempt to reduce the level of conflict that was occurring at the time, and redirect energies into building up society rather than ravaging it. The city of Troyes where Chrétien lived was also the European headquarters for the Knights Templar. European support for the Knights began there in AD 1128 by St. Bernard of Clairvaux. Chrétien’s stories are set in ancient Britain, where the legendary King Arthur rules from his castle at Camelot with his queen Guinevere—albeit they speak French and dressed in the European fashions of the Middle Ages. Chrétien introduces the grail in an associated tale, probably the last one he wrote. It is the story of the knight Perceval, who visits the Fisher King in his grail castle. Perceval sees a dish (the grail) being carried by a beautiful girl, accompanied by a bleeding lance and a silver plate. But he fails to ask the all-important question related to the grail’s secret, and leaves the castle before discovering the grail’s true meaning and significance. Chrétien died before the story could be completed, and therefore his ultimate vision of the grail was never revealed.⁴ Other anonymous writers completed the story after Chrétien’s death, but their identity and the exact publication date is unknown because they ascribed the writing to Chrétien. It is significant that the actual word used by Chrétien was “graal” (a flat serving dish), rather than “grail” (a chalice). The latter description would be applied a few years later by Robert de Boron.
- *Le Roman du Graal (Joseph d’Arimathe, Merlin, and Perceval)*, by Robert de Boron in France, from 1200 to 1210. Robert de Boron is the first to connect most of the personalities and elements of the King Arthur story as we know it, such as Vortigern, Uther Pendragon, Ygerne (Igraine), Tintagel Castle, Arthur, Merlin, the Isle of Avalon, the Sword in the Stone, the Lady of the Lake, the Round Table, and—most significantly—the Holy Grail. He is the first to designate the grail as holy and to indicate that it was the cup or chalice used by Joseph of Arimathea to catch the blood of Christ.⁵ Robert’s poems and stories later became

part of a larger work known as the *Vulgate Cycle*, circa 1245, which was an attempt to collect all of the tales and set them in a meaningful order and sequence.

- *Parzival*, by Wolfram von Eschenbach written in Germany, in the period 1205 though 1216. This is a narrative poem of chivalry and spirituality which tells the story of the last surviving grail knight, Percival, and his quest for the grail. Like Chrétien, Wolfram was also concerned with chivalry and improving the conduct of men-at-arms, but he took a much higher and more spiritual tone and focus. In this poem the grail is defined in mystical, spiritual terms, and is spoken of as being either a dish or a mysterious stone.⁶
- *Le Morte D'Arthur*, by Sir Thomas Malory, written in England around 1469. The stories about King Arthur and the Holy Grail were extremely popular in the Middle Ages, but being written by various authors the narratives were different in style, tone, and content. Malory took all the of plot themes and wrote them into a consistent tale, from the birth of Arthur until his death. Furthermore, he gave the story the tragic and poignant character that we currently associate with King Arthur.⁷ Malory referred to the Holy Grail as the “Sangreal.” This could mean one of two things depending on how the word is split: “San Greal” meaning “Holy Grail,” or “Sang Real” meaning “Royal Blood.”⁸ Malory may have intended this as a play on words, because if these two meanings are merged, we have a holy chalice that contained the royal blood of Christ.

The grail history begins with the death of Christ and the actions of a religious leader named Joseph of Arimathea. The Bible tells us that Joseph was a wealthy man and a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling Jewish religious council in Jerusalem. Joseph asked Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor before whom Jesus was tried, for the dead body of Christ after the crucifixion. Along with the Pharisee Nicodemus, the man to whom Jesus said “you must be born again,” Joseph took the body of Christ, wrapped it in linen burial cloths, and placed it in a new tomb that he owned. There is nothing more in the Bible about Joseph of Arimathea, and no hint whatsoever that he obtained the cup used at the Last Supper, or that he was even at the crucifixion, although he may have been there.

There is also no historical indication that the Last Supper cup was used to catch Christ’s blood—that was a literary concept first stated by Robert de Boron in his grail stories from the thirteenth century, as described above. Furthermore, there is no evidence whatsoever that the actual Last Supper cup—the Holy Grail of popular imagination—survived antiquity. But there was an object which did contain the blood of Christ, and which was said to have survived, namely the linen cloths or shroud that were used to wrap his body in the tomb. There is much historical evidence of the Shroud’s existence to this day, as given below, and it is the author’s contention that the Shroud is the actual object behind the literary tradition and myths of the Holy Grail.

The Shroud of Christ

After the body of Jesus was placed in the tomb, a large stone was rolled in front, the tomb was sealed by the order of Pontius Pilate, and soldiers guarded it. When various people came to the tomb the following day, the soldiers were gone, and the tomb was open and empty, except for the linen cloths, which had been left behind. These cloths, or perhaps a burial shroud, had been provided by Joseph of Arimathea, the same man who had supplied the tomb for the body. Therefore, the cloths may have been given back to him.

There is no known historical record of exactly what became of these cloths. The first historical mention of a “Shroud of Christ” was in the fourth century, as described below. But there are traditions that after Christ’s death it was noticed that there was an image on a shroud, a picture of Jesus’ body presumably burned into it by the power of the resurrection. The image may, however, have been latent and therefore not visible until some time after the event, and it is possible that the cloths were kept rolled up and hidden for a long time before an image on it was ever noticed. Among the Jews, articles associated with the dead were unclean—even stepping on a tomb without realizing it required ritual purification. Burial shrouds, therefore, would not generally be handled or displayed.

Historical Evidence of the Shroud from circa 30—544

Joseph of Arimathea was both a follower of Jesus as well as a member of the Jewish religious hierarchy, and therefore was thought of as a traitor by the latter, especially because of the mysterious circumstances surrounding the disappearance of Jesus’ body for which Joseph had provided the tomb. Thus Joseph was a marked man and may have given the cloth to someone else to keep (if he was indeed the original owner), because had the existence of such an object become known, it would probably have been seized and destroyed by the Sanhedrin.

A large number of the disciples and other church members left or fled from Jerusalem in the persecutions that took place during the period AD 37-67, and the destruction of the city by the Romans in 67-70. The destination for many was Antioch, a large city in Turkey on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Antioch is now a pile of rubble, but at the time, it was the third largest city in the Roman Empire and was an early center of Christian influence.

There are a number of connections between Jerusalem and Antioch. Nicolas of Antioch, for example, was one of the first deacons appointed by the Jerusalem church. After Stephen was stoned to death around AD 37 (Acts 6:8-8:3) and the intense persecution of Christians by the Jewish establishment in Jerusalem began, Nicolas and others moved to Antioch. The city was also host to the great missionary efforts of Paul and Barnabas, and one of the first Christian churches was established there. Peter the Apostle also lived in Antioch for a while before he went to Rome, and he was probably the city’s first Bishop. St. Nino, who visited Jerusalem from Antioch in the fourth century, wrote that the burial shroud of Jesus was preserved by Pilate’s wife, given to St. Luke, and then given to the Apostle Peter.

Christians were persecuted first by the Jews and then by the Romans. The emperor Nero, who ruled from AD 54 to 68, killed Christians for sport—he covered them with pitch, set them on fire and used them to light his gardens at night. The apostles Peter

and Paul were both martyred in Rome—the former by crucifixion somewhere in AD 64–67, and the latter supposedly by beheading during the same period. In 115, Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, was taken to Rome and killed in the arena by wild animals. Persecutions continued sporadically for 200 more years, culminating in the reign of the emperor Diocletian (284–305), who called for the complete destruction of Christianity. All religious relics were therefore deeply hidden⁹ until after Constantine’s victory in 323 and his proclamation of the Edict of Milan assuring freedom of worship.

In the early 300s pictures of the face of Jesus, very similar to those on the Shroud, started to appear. The source of these pictures, however, was not revealed. In 525 a great fire destroyed much of Antioch, followed by an earthquake, and then in 540 the Persians invaded. Prior to or during the Persian invasion of Antioch, the Shroud was removed to Edessa, a city in Turkey that is 150 miles east of Antioch, by a man named Thaddeus Jude.

Another possible explanation of how the shroud came to Edessa is that it was brought there during the apostolic era. Joseph of Arimathea was reputed to have connections in Edessa, and may have given the Shroud to either Thaddeus, one of the apostles of Christ, or “Judas who is also called Thomas” who was one of seventy disciples of Jesus. When Joseph fled from Israel or was exiled, one or possibly both of these men also left and moved to Edessa, taking the Shroud with them. Alternatively, the Shroud could have been brought to Edessa by the apostle John or his followers. John is mentioned as seeing the Shroud in the tomb of Jesus after the resurrection (John 20:3-8), and there was a Johannine church in Edessa.

King Abgar was a later ruler of Edessa (177–212), who became a Christian and made a request to the Pope to send religious emissaries. There is pictorial evidence from later centuries, described below, that King Abgar held the Shroud, and this would tend to confirm the Shroud’s existence in Edessa at an early date.

Historical Evidence of the Shroud from 544—944

In 544 a religious object known as the “Mandylicon cloth” was presented to the ruler of Edessa and kept in the city for four hundred years. Stories about the Mandylicon cloth first appeared in Syria during the fourth century, and reappeared at various later times.¹⁰ The cloth was said to be a “holy palladium” with protective properties, and was also said to have protected the city of Edessa from attack by the Persians.¹¹ A tenth-century painting exists showing King Abgar or Abgarus, probably the same Abgar mentioned above, holding the Shroud, which displays the face of Christ.¹² He was reputed to have been healed by touching the Shroud. However, the cloth was kept hidden and was rarely seen, and when it was shown, it was done in an air of mystic secrecy. According to some stories the Shroud was hidden inside one of the city walls of Edessa, perhaps for most of the time of its existence there.

There are several references to the Shroud from the eighth century. In 730, St. John Damascene, in his anti-iconoclastic movement thesis, *On Holy Images*, describes the cloth as a *himation*, which is translated as an oblong cloth or grave cloth.¹³ Pope Stephen II (752—757) described the Shroud as follows: “Christ spread out his entire body on a linen cloth that was white as snow. On this cloth, marvelous as it is to see...

the glorious image of the Lord's face, and the length of his entire and most noble body, has been divinely transferred."¹⁴

Historical Evidence of the Shroud from 944—1204

The Shroud was kept in Edessa until AD 944, when Byzantine troops besieged the city. The general of the Byzantine forces offered the city's Moslem Emir a huge sum of money, the freeing of 200 Moslem captives and the promise of perpetual immunity for just one thing—the "Mandy lion cloth."¹⁵

The Shroud was then brought Constantinople, the capital city of Byzantium, on 15 August 944 for the purpose of "obtaining a new and powerful force of divine protection."¹⁶ The Shroud's arrival was celebrated with processions, and it was placed in the Pharos Chapel, the imperial treasury for relics located in the palace of the emperor. There are several surviving eyewitness accounts of that day—the *Narratio de Imagine Edessena*, the *Teaching of Addai*, and the *Acts of Thaddeus*, which retold the story of King Abgar, and related that the facial image on the Shroud was extremely faint, like a "moist secretion without pigments or the painter's art."¹⁷ Gregory Referendarius, archdeacon of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, was a member of the clerical committee that arranged for the reception of the Shroud, and in a sermon dated 16 August 944, he mentioned that it was a full-length image of Christ and carried his bloodstains.¹⁸ Thereafter the Shroud was regularly shown in the city, as described below.

The emperor Constantine moved the capital of the Roman empire from Rome to the city of Istanbul in AD 330, renaming it Constantinople after himself. Even though the Roman empire declined in the later part of the fourth century, the city retained its prominence as one of the major cities of the world. It was also the capital of Byzantium and the seat of the Greek Orthodox Church. The Shroud thus gained a wide audience, but it was still considered a sacred and secret object, held in great reverence, and viewed only from a distance. It was apparently kept in a case in which it was folded so that only the face was visible, and the ceremonies in which the Shroud was displayed were deliberately performed in an air of mysterious secrecy. The Shroud was also periodically used in a religious rite in which it was gradually revealed throughout the course of a day, starting with the face, until eventually the entire body of Christ with its bloodstains and bruises was finally displayed. This was meant to depict the life of Christ, from his divine birth as a human baby to his eventual suffering and death. During this ritual the cloth was graduated unfolded, hour by hour, until it was fully revealed, which was also meant to convey the events of Christ's passion and the "stations of the cross."

Some authorities on Byzantine art and iconography have contended that during the era following the Shroud's appearance there was a new flowering of Eucharistic symbolism that could be then be combined with a realism of Christ's passion, creating a "new language of Christian art."¹⁹ Religion in Constantinople was very important, and one writer characterized religious discussion there as "the sport of the people—the football and baseball of that era."²⁰ Thus the Shroud had a huge impact on Eastern society and thought, made all the more significant because Constantinople was the largest city and the capital of the empire.

The Shroud was kept in the imperial treasury as one of the most valuable artifacts of the realm. It first appears in the lists of relics held at Constantinople in 1093 as "the

linens found in the tomb after the resurrection,” and in 1147, Louis VII, King of France, visited Constantinople and venerated it. The Shroud was also seen and reported on by various individuals when they visited the city during the crusader period of 1098 to 1204.

Nicholas Mesarites, the overseer of Constantinople’s treasury of relics, described the Shroud in 1201. He wrote that “in this place the naked Lord rises again, and the burial sindons can prove it.” Mesarites’ description is particular compelling because of his indication of the nudity of the Shroud figure, which was never done in artistic renderings of Christ.

Despite its extensive impact, the essence of the Shroud remained elusive. The confusion that people in general had regarding this arcane object is reflected in the many terms used to describe the Shroud, such as *mandylion*, *mantile*, *santa toella*, *imago*, *linteum*, *manutergium*, *ektypoma*, *tetradiplon*, *soudarion*, *spargana*, *panni*, *fasciae*, *othonai*, *syndon*, and *syndoinēs*.²¹

Historical Evidence of the Shroud from 1204—1355

The fourth crusade brought knights from Europe to Constantinople in 1204, after which there were several written testimonies of crusaders who saw the Shroud there. These included the knight Robert de Clari who noted the following:

There was a Church which was called of My Lady Saint Mary of Blachernae, where there was the shroud [syndoinēs] in which Our Lord had been wrapped, which every Friday, raised itself upright so that one could see the form [figure] of Our Lord on it, and no one either Greek or French, ever knew what became of this shroud [syndoinēs] when the city was taken.²²

The city of Constantinople was sacked by the crusaders on 12 April 1204, and the Shroud was then brought to Greece or France, perhaps by one or more members of the Knights Templar. There is an inventory of the items in the Constantinople treasury, supposedly from 1207, which lists the “Shroud of Christ” and indicated that it still “smelled of myrrh.” However, in 1205 Theodore Ducas Anglelos, a crusader legate, wrote in a letter to Pope Innocent III:

The Venetians partitioned the treasure of gold, silver and ivory, while the French did the same with the relics of saints and the most sacred of all, the linen in which our Lord Jesus Christ was wrapped after His death and before the resurrection.”²³

Around the year 1211, the English lawyer and chronicler Gervase of Tilbury wrote his monumental *Otia Imperialia*, remarking in one passage:

The story is passed down from archives of ancient authority that the Lord prostrated himself with his entire body on whitest linen, and so by divine power there was impressed on the linen a most beautiful imprint of not only the face, but the entire body of the Lord.

Even though the Shroud was taken from Constantinople sometime during the period 1204 to 1208, it was still kept hidden, and tantalizing rumors were circulating of a

holy object that contained the blood of Christ. The grail romances, which were written in France during and after this period, became enormously popular, and the mystery surrounding this object made it even more interesting and compelling.

The Knights Templar, one of the most esoteric organizations in history, was possibly associated with the Shroud during this time. The Knights were founded at some point during the period 1113–1118 as a group of initially nine men who dedicated themselves to protect pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem in the aftermath of the first crusade. In 1128 they were proclaimed a religious order answerable only to the Pope. Their rules of life as a monastic military order were written by St. Bernard of Clairvaux and patterned on the same rules used for the Cistercian order of monks. Because of the public's intense interest and devotion to the crusades, many donated land and resources to the Templars and sent their sons for training, with the result that the order became very wealthy and influential.

Their growing wealth and penchant for secrecy and arrogance, however, eventually created powerful enemies. By the 1300s Templars owned huge estates in France, all of which were free from royal taxation. The French King Philip IV le Bel owed the Templars a substantial amount of money, making them ripe for exploitation. Also at the beginning of the fourteenth century, Pope Clement V, fearing attack, moved the papal court from Rome to Avignon in France, beginning the period known as the "Babylonian Captivity" of the Papacy. Clement V was essentially a pawn of the French king, so in 1307 Philip forced him to revoke the papal charter of the Knights Templar and officially disband them. The king then repudiated his debt to them, confiscated all of the Templar assets he could lay his hands on, and had all of the Knights in France arrested and put on trial. Seven years later in 1314, the king had Jacques de Molay, the Grand Master of the order, burned at the stake along with Geoffrey de Charny, the Preceptor of Normandy. There is a story that de Molay cursed both the king and the pope from the flames; both of them died later the same year.

The Templars scattered, some sailing to Scotland, and others fleeing elsewhere. There is also strong evidence that the Knights Templar were the founders of the country of Switzerland, and the source of its background in banking and financial secrecy.²⁴

In 1355, a second Geoffrey de Charny, the nephew of the de Charny who was burned with Jacques de Molay in 1314, revealed the Shroud to the public. Like his uncle, he was possibly a secret member of the Knights Templar, and therefore the Shroud may have been a family heirloom taken from Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade by an ancestor of his family.

It has been alleged that the Knights Templar were, at some point in their history, the keepers of the Shroud and/or the Holy Grail, and given the above evidence, that may very well have been the case. Among the accusations brought against various Knights during their trial was that they worshiped the head or face of a man, which was called "baphomet." One of these paintings on a wooden panel still exists in Templecombe, a Templar preceptory in Somerset England, and bears a striking resemblance to the face on the Shroud, although the picture may not have originated from the Templars.²⁵

Despite these possibilities, the Shroud disappeared from view for a period of 150 years following the sack of Constantinople in 1204, and a number of hypotheses have

been advanced to explain the Shroud's whereabouts during these "missing years."[‡] The

[‡] The explanation with the most documentary evidence is described above, but there are alternative explanations, as follows:

- a) The Shroud could have been in the possession of the de Charny family or close relatives during the entire period. Geoffrey de Charny was a man of honor and great influence in France—a counselor to King Phillip VI and his son, King John II the Good. De Charny was captured by the English after the Battle of Calais in 1349 and ransomed by King John II in 1351. Some have suggested that he had the Shroud with him while he was a prisoner and hid it in the Templecombe preceptory mentioned above during the period of his captivity. It was also suggested that the wooden panel on which the painting was made was originally the cover of a box in which the Shroud was transported. Several years later, de Charny was back in combat for his king, and he was given the highest honor of carrying the *Oriflamme*, the banner of the king, into battle. He died at the Battle of Poitiers in 1356, shielding King John II from the attack of the English, and when he fell, the *Oriflamme* was still in his hands. [Jules Viard, *Les Journaux du Trésor de Philippe VI de Valois . . . 1338-1339*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1899, and Vidier, A., *A Le Trésor de la Sainte-Chapelle—Mémoires de la Société de l'Histoire de Paris et de l'Île-de-France*, vols. 34, 35, 36, 37, H. Champion, Paris, 1907-1910].
- b) The Shroud could have been taken by family members of Jeanne de Toucy, the first wife of Geoffrey de Charny. She was the niece of a churchman in the Cathedral of Reims, and some of her family were said to be friendly with the emperor in Constantinople. She died around 1350, and in 1352-53 Geoffrey de Charny married Jeanne de Vergy.
- c) The Shroud could have been taken from Constantinople by members of the Knights Templar and kept throughout the missing years at one or more Templar Preceptories. The Knights were a secretive military and financial organization that operated outside the bounds of the existing political entities of their day, and after the events of 1307–1314 when the order in France was destroyed, the remaining Templars continued in far greater secrecy. If they had the Shroud in their possession, showing it would have aroused suspicion and envy. As indicated above, a Geoffrey de Charny was the head of the Templar Preceptory in Normandy and was burned at the stake with Jacques de Molay, and it is possible that his nephew of the same name was also a Templar.
- d) The group who took possession of the Shroud may have been the Cathars, or possibly Cathar members of the Knights Templar, who were a Gnostic sect from the French Languedoc. The Cathars had given large tracts of land to the Knights Templar, and a number of Knights had taken up the Cathar religion or became sympathetic to them, which perhaps contributed to the Templar downfall in 1307. But there were also Gnostic religious groups related to the Cathars in Constantinople at the time of the fourth crusade in addition to any Templars with Cathar leanings. The Cathars did not believe in the literal person of Christ, and therefore were opposed to relics and would therefore not have displayed an artifact depicting Christ's humanity and actual death. Nevertheless, like the Edessans and the Byzantines before them, the Cathars may have taken the Shroud from Constantinople as a palladium—a means of protection. Protection was necessary because in 1198, Innocent III became pope in Rome. He was the pope who launched the fourth crusade which resulted in the sack of Constantinople, and he was a fanatical opponent of all groups he considered to be heretical. He did not hesitate to use military means to enforce his will, and after unsuccessful attempts to convert the Cathars, he launched the Albigensian Crusade against them in 1209 in order to eradicate them. Part of the rationale for the destruction of Constantinople had been to "rescue the relics of Christ from the Greeks," and if the Shroud, the most important relic of all, was in Cathar hands, it would have been one more reason to assail them. There is an account of Amaury de Montfort, the Catholic leader of Albigensian Crusade between 1218 and 1244, declining a Cathar invitation to come and see the body of Christ "which had become flesh and blood in the hands of the priest." Over the next several decades the Cathars were repeatedly attacked and driven back, and in 1243–44 the Cathar leadership made a last stand at their mountaintop fortress of Montsegur in the Pyrenees mountains. Throughout the Albigensian Crusade, the fortress of Montsegur was rumored to contain a mystical Cathar treasure that exceeded all material wealth, and which gave the fortress supernatural protection. On 16 March 1244, just preceding the final storming of the fortress by Catholic forces, it was rumored that several Cathar men escaped during the night by descending the steep and sheer western face of Montsegur by rope. According to tradition, they took with them unspecified Cathar treasures which may have included the Shroud. In his story *Parzival*, which was written in the period 1205–1216, Wolfram von Eschenbach indicates that the

Holy Grail was kept in a mountain fortress in the Pyrenees, and in another poem he named the Lord of the Grail Castle as “Perilla.” At that time, Raymond de Perella was the Lord of Montsegur. The Cathar escapees from Montsegur supposedly carried their treasure to a valley in the Sabarthes region of the Pyrenees south of Montsegur. If this story is true, the Shroud was kept there for the next 100 years by persecuted Cathars who were systematically hunted down and either killed or forced to recant by the Inquisition. Then in 1347 the Black Death swept across Europe. In some communities of southern France, over ninety percent of the people perished, and the Languedoc, already suffering from famine and war, was devastated. Aside from isolated individuals and those who had fled to Spain, the Cathars were wiped out. The Shroud was perhaps discovered among the confiscated and forfeited personal goods of a Languedoc heretical family, and Geoffrey de Charny, who had some degree of authority in that area of France, may have acquired legal title to the relic by right of royal grant. Among the Cathars, title to the Shroud could not have legally passed from one generation to another, because according to the law of that time, heretics, their sympathizers, and their descendants were prohibited from making a will or receiving a legacy. In addition, all personal property of heretics and their descendants was subject to confiscation and forfeiture to the crown. There are records in Paris that in the spring of 1349, de Charny’s royal annuity was modified to include forfeitures that might occur in the Languedoc regions of Toulouse, Beaucaire, and Carcassonne, which were all cities in the Languedoc with Cathar leanings. The Cathar hypothesis would also help to explain de Charny’s silence on how the Shroud had come into his possession. Regardless of his method of obtaining the Shroud—either by inheritance or by forfeiture from a Cathar family—he would have had to obtain papal permission to display it as the Shroud of Christ. There is a letter from de Charny to pope Clement VI in which de Charny reports his intentions to build a church at Lirey to honor the Holy Trinity, who answered his prayers for a miraculous escape while he was a prisoner of the English in 1352, but there is no record of de Charny obtaining papal permission to display the Shroud at the church. If the Shroud *had* been in Cathar hands, however, the possible reasons for papal silence are compelling: once it was understood that the Shroud may have come from a Languedoc forfeiture, it would have been clear that the Cathars and their descendants had been the Shroud’s keepers since the sack of Constantinople. Disclosure of this information would embarrass the Catholic Church, raise questions about the motives for the Albigensian Crusade, create sympathy for the Cathars for preserving Christianity’s most precious relic, interfere with the Church’s ongoing prosecution of heresy, and possibly expose the Shroud to attack as a forgery or idol of heretics. In addition, had it become known that the cloth was only recently discovered among the personal effects of Black Plague victims, it may have aroused fear of contamination and a call for its destruction. Finally, disclosing the Shroud’s history could have generated a demand from the Byzantine Emperor or the Eastern Orthodox Church that it be returned to Constantinople. The pope may therefore have required the perpetual silence of the de Charny family in return for allowing the Shroud to be publicly displayed, as he did later in the case of Bishop D’Arcis, as discussed above. [Jack Markwardt, *Was The Shroud In Languedoc During The Missing Years?*, www.shroud.com/markward.htm, Jack Markwardt, *The Cathar Crucifix: New Evidence of the Shroud's Missing History*, www.shroud.com/pdfs/markwar3.pdf, and www.russianbooks.org/montsegur].

It should also be noted that the “Cathar explanation,” although completely lacking in any historical documentation, provides the basis for much of the current fame of the Cathars. In the twentieth century interest in the Cathar religion was revived by Otto Rahn, the German homosexual mystic and Obersturmführer in the Nazi SS, who wrote two Grail novels that were best sellers in Germany (*Kreuzzug gegen den Gral*—“Crusade Against the Grail” in 1933 and *Luzifers Hofgesinf*—“Lucifer’s Court” in 1937). Rahn spent many years researching the Cathars, and was convinced that von Eschenbach’s *Parzival* was based on the Holy Grail, and was an object that had been kept at Montsegur. Rahn was responsible for developing and popularizing the story of the three Cathar men who supposedly escaped from Montsegur prior to its fall in 1244, and carrying with them the unspecified treasures of the Cathars. Heinrich Himmler, the head of the SS and Rahn’s boss, was fascinated by the occult, and became very interested in Rahn’s work. He apparently informed Hitler, who also became interested in the Grail as a divine source of power. Hitler created Nazi Ahnenerbe SS as a research institute to investigate Montsegur and the Grail. Rahn at first was a darling of Himmler, but apparently had a falling out with the German command—he resigned from the SS in 1939. Later in the same year, under mysterious circumstances, Rahn’s body was found frozen to death in the Tyrolian Alps, and his death was officially ruled a suicide. His life and work was supposedly one of the inspirations of the highly popular 1981 movie *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

best explanation for the Shroud's location—that with the most documentary evidence and which seems to be increasingly accepted by scholars—was that the Shroud was given to Othon de la Roche, a knight from the Burgundy region of France. Othon commanded the district of Blachernae in Constantinople where the Shroud was kept, and after the sack of the city, he was said to have been given the Shroud, as well as the duchy of Athens in Greece for his leading role in the crusade. Othon then became the Duke of Athens and Sparta and took the cloth with him to Greece. The Shroud was seen there according to two eyewitness accounts, by a letter of Theodore of Epirus dated 1 August 1205, and indirectly by Nicholas of Otranto, abbot of the monastery of Casole in 1208.

In 1219 an agent of the Byzantine emperor and ally of Othon went on a mission to Burgundy with a safe conduct pass and an armed guard, and it is possible that he carried the Shroud with him and gave it to Ponce de la Roche, Othon's father. Alternatively, it could have been brought to France by Othon himself when he returned to Burgundy in 1224.

The Shroud was then given to Amedée de Tramelay, the Archbishop of Besançon who was also possibly a member of the Knights Templar (he was related to Bernard de Tramelay, the fourth Grand Master of the Templars). The cloth was placed in the Cathedral of St. Etienne in Besançon, where it was said to have been displayed each year on Easter until 1349. There are, however, no definitive records of this display because in 1349 a fire destroyed the cathedral and all of its records were lost. But before the cathedral was consumed by flames, the Shroud was removed and given to Jeanne de Vergy, the great-great-granddaughter of Othon de la Roche and therefore a legal owner of the Shroud. Some time in 1352-53 Geoffrey de Charny married Jeanne de Vergy, and she brought the cloth with her into his family.

Historical Evidence of the Shroud from 1355—1464

Geoffrey de Charny, the Lord of Savoisy and Lirey, and high counselor to the King of France, thus acquired the Shroud at some point between April 1349 and January 1354. Either he or his wife arranged for it to be shown for the first time in Europe, beginning around 1355. He built a church in his home town of Lirey, a small town near Troyes in France, and named the church "The Annunciation of St. Mary" in praise to God for his rescue from the English. This was the site where the Shroud was first shown to the European public.

De Charny died in battle the following year, and Jeanne de Vergy, his widow, continued the Shroud displays at Lirey for an unknown period of time. As in the case of other relics, a fee was charged to view the Shroud, possibly because Jeanne de Vergy was in financial straits after the death of her husband. Many pilgrims came to see it, but the displays eventually were stopped.

By 1389 Jeanne de Vergy was remarried to Aymon of Geneva, the uncle of the Avignon Pope Clement VII. The family then decided to re-exhibit the Shroud, but this required ecclesiastic approval. Due to Aymon's influence with the Pope, they appealed directly to the papal legate, Cardinal Pierre de Thury, circumventing Pierre d'Arcis, the local Bishop in Troyes. Special souvenir medallions were struck to commemorate the 1389 Shroud exhibition—a surviving specimen can be seen at the Cluny Museum in Paris—and it is at this point that the documented history of the Shroud begins.

Bishop D’Arcis strenuously objected to this exhibition, and after writing to King Charles II and getting nowhere, he wrote the now-famous *D’Arcis Memorandum*[§] to Pope Clement VII. In his memorandum Bishop D’Arcis referred to the Archbishop Henri de Poitiers, who had supposedly come to the conclusion that the Shroud was a forgery some “thirty-four years or thereabouts” previously (i.e., in 1355) and had supposedly conducted an inquest into the Shroud at that time. This memo was later used to “prove” that the Shroud was a fake because it indicates that an artist had confessed to painting the Shroud. But D’Arcis’ memorandum was a draft and perhaps never actually sent to the Pope, as it came only from the archives in Troyes. Clement VII, who was Pope at the time, never ordered an investigation of the Shroud. Furthermore, the artist was never identified and no claim of authorship was ever made.

D’Arcis also indicated in his memorandum that the Shroud was perhaps involved in some scandal and that the church would somehow be gravely damaged (“the delusion growing to the peril of souls”) if the exhibition were allowed to proceed. It is unclear how souls could be in peril through simply viewing the Shroud, and therefore the scandal may possibly have been related to the Knights Templar, who had been put on trial eighty years previously. One of the charges in their trials was that Templar members had worshipped the devil as well as an idol named “baphomet,” and D’Arcis may thus have been

[§] Here is the text of relevant portions of the D’Arcis Memorandum: “The case, Holy Father, stands thus. Some time since in this diocese of Troyes the Dean of a certain collegiate church, to wit, that of Lirey, falsely and deceitfully, being consumed with the passion of avarice, and not from any motive of devotion but only of gain, procured for his church a certain cloth cunningly painted, upon which by a clever sleight of hand was depicted the twofold image of one man, that is to say, the back and the front, he falsely declaring and pretending that this was the actual shroud in which our Savior Jesus Christ was enfolded in the tomb, and upon which the whole likeness of the Savior had remained thus impressed with the wounds which he bore... The Lord Henry of Poitiers, of pious memory, then Bishop of Troyes, becoming aware of this, and urged by many prudent persons to take action, as indeed was his duty in the exercise of his ordinary jurisdiction, set himself earnestly to work to fathom the truth of this matter. For many theologians and other wise persons declared that this could not be the real shroud of our Lord having the Savior’s likeness thus imprinted upon it, since the holy Gospel made no mention of any such imprint, while, if it had been true, it was quite unlikely that the holy Evangelists would have omitted to record it, or that the fact should have remained hidden until the present time... Eventually, after diligent inquiry and examination, he discovered the fraud and how the said cloth had been cunningly painted, the truth being attested by the artist who had painted it, to wit, that it was a work of human skill and not miraculously wrought or bestowed. Accordingly, after taking mature counsel with wise theologians and men of the law, seeing that he neither ought nor could allow the matter to pass, he began to institute formal proceedings against the said Dean and his accomplices in order to root out this false persuasion... They, seeing their wickedness discovered, hid away the said cloth so that the Ordinary could not find it, and they kept it hidden afterwards for thirty-four years or thereabouts down to the present year. [But it was said by them that the shroud] had previously been much venerated and resorted to in that church, but on account of the war and other causes, by the command of the Ordinary, had been placed for a long time in safer keeping... Accordingly, most Holy Father, perceiving this great scandal renewed amongst the people and the delusion growing to the peril of souls, observing also that the Dean of the said church did not keep within the terms of the Cardinal’s letters, obtained though they were by the suppression of the truth and the suggestion of what is false, as already explained, desiring to meet the danger as well as I could and to root out this false persuasion from the flock committed to me, after consultation with many prudent advisers, I prohibited the said Dean under pain of excommunication, by the very act sufficiently published, from exhibiting this cloth to the people until otherwise might be determined... The scandal is upheld and defended and its supporters cause it to be spread abroad among the people that I am acting through jealousy and cupidity and to obtain possession of the cloth for myself, just as similar reports were circulated before against my predecessor...”

associating the Shroud with the Templar trials, and hinting that it was the source of the baphomet image.

However, D’Arcis’ testimony is suspect from several perspectives. First, he was apparently resentful because Jeanne had gone over his head in seeking approval from the papal legate, and the priests of the Lirey church had apparently not gotten his approval before putting the Shroud on display. Second, D’Arcis may well have wanted the revenue coming to his cathedral in Troyes instead (Lirey is located approximately 20 miles from Troyes). It is also known that the nave of the Troyes Cathedral collapsed in late 1389 at the same time that D’Arcis’ wrote his memorandum. This accident damaged and/or destroyed many of the relics kept there, which was one of the main sources of church fundraising. D’Arcis may therefore have been seeking to recoup and raise funds for reconstruction by forcing the de Charnys to bring the Shroud to his cathedral, or by paying him a portion of the proceeds to keep him quiet. People at the time apparently believed the same thing, as in his memorandum D’Arcis himself alludes to those whose were questioning his motives (“it is spread abroad... that I am acting... to obtain possession of the cloth for myself.”). Furthermore, there are royal records that the bailiff of Troyes was sent to Lirey to seize the Shroud and bring it to Troyes several months before D’Arcis wrote his letter to the pope, indicating that D’Arcis previously may have tried to use secular authority to seize the Shroud for his own purposes.

Even more significant is the only known correspondence from Archbishop Henri de Poitiers, the churchman who supposedly held an inquest on the Shroud in 1355, to Geoffrey de Charny.** This letter makes no mention of the Shroud or any concerns about its being displayed (however, the reference to a “divine cult” is a probable indication that Henri was aware that the Shroud was being shown), and instead it is a letter of congratulations and appreciation to de Charny. D’Arcis’ reference to a Shroud inquest by Henri de Poitiers is therefore cast into doubt.

Alternatively, D’Arcis may have honestly believed the Shroud to be a painting and therefore a fake, as others erroneously believe even today, although it is unclear whether he had personally examined it. Furthermore, there have been many painted copies of the Shroud made throughout history, and D’Arcis may have mistakenly thought the relic at Lirey was one of them. For example, a copy of the Shroud was painted for the Besançon cathedral and displayed in place of the original after the fire of 1349, and it may be to this or to another painted Shroud copy to which D’Arcis’ memo actually refers. The artist of the “Besançon Shroud” is unknown but he may have been known to Bishop D’Arcis, and been the artist that D’Arcis referred to in his Memorandum.

** Here is the text of Henri de Poitier’s letter to Geoffrey de Charny: “Henri, by the grace of God and of the Apostolic See, confirmed bishop elect of Troyes, to all those who will see this letter, eternal salvation in the Lord. You will learn what we ourselves learned on seeing and hearing the letters of the noble knight Geoffrey de Charny, Lord of Savoisy and of Lirey, to which and for which our present letters are enclosed, after scrupulous examination of these letters and more especially of the said knight’s sentiments of devotion, which he has hitherto manifested for the divine cult and which he manifests ever more daily. And ourselves wishing to develop as much as possible a cult of this nature, we praise, ratify and approve the said letters in all their parts—a cult which is declared and reported to have been canonically and ritually prescribed, as we have been informed by legitimate documents. To all these, we give our assent, our authority and our decision, by faith of which we esteem it our duty to affix our seal to this present letter in perpetual memory. Given in our palace of Aix of our diocese in the year of Our Lord 1356, Saturday, the 28th of the month of May.”

In any case, a series of correspondences ensued between Clement VII, the churchmen of Lirey, and the de Charnys. The final result was a papal order to D’Arcis requiring him to be silent and refrain from any further attacks under pain of excommunication, and another to the de Charnys and the Lirey church allowing them to display the Shroud but with the stipulation that it could not be claimed as the true Shroud of Christ. The next year Clement reversed himself and issued a papal order granting new indulgences to those who visited the Lirey church and its relics, thereby signaling that he considered the Shroud to be genuine.

Historical Evidence of the Shroud from 1464—Present

After the death of Jeanne de Vergy and her son Geoffrey II, the Shroud came into the possession of her grand-daughter, Margaret de Charny. She allowed the cloth to be publicly viewed on a number of occasions during the period of 1400–1453. In 1453-54 she sold the Shroud to the Duke Louis I of Savoy and received from him the castle of Varambon and revenues of the estate of Miribel near Lyon for “valuable services” to him.

Meanwhile the Lirey churchmen, missing the revenue that had been generated by the Shroud, were attempting to get it returned to them, so in 1464 Duke Louis I of Savoy agreed to pay them an annual rent, to be drawn from the revenues of the castle of Gaillard, near Geneva, as compensation for their loss of Shroud revenues. This agreement was drawn up in Paris and is the first known document indicating that the Shroud had become the property of the Savoys. The agreement specifically notes that the Shroud had been given to the church of Lirey by Geoffrey de Charny, Lord of Savoisy and Lirey, and that it had then been transferred to Duke Louis I by Margaret de Charny. Twenty years later a history of the Savoy family recorded that Louis’ acquisition of the Shroud was his greatest achievement. Later generations of the Savoys periodically displayed the Shroud, built churches to house it, and often took the Shroud with them when they traveled. It was shown in public many times in various places, and was finally moved to Turin, Italy in 1578.

In 1694 the Shroud was placed in the Guarini Chapel in Turin where it remains to this day.²⁶

In 1983 Umberto II, the ex-king of Italy and legal owner of the Shroud, died. In his will he bequeathed it to the Pope and his successors, with the stipulation that the relic must remain in Turin. The Catholic Church currently provides for public viewing of the Shroud at twenty-five-year intervals. The last Shroud exhibition was held in 2000, and therefore the next public viewing is scheduled for 2025.

Summary of Evidence that the Holy Grail is the Shroud of Christ

The Holy Grail as the Last Supper cup is entirely a literary invention. The actual cup did not survive antiquity, and therefore its use as the Grail object is either fictional, or is based on another object.

The grail stories first started to appear in twelfth century, after the Shroud was brought to Constantinople and displayed there. As mentioned above, the major grail-related works were those of Chrétien de Troyes (circa 1190), Robert de Boron (circa 1205), and Wolfram von Eschenbach (circa 1210).

Just as in the case of the mysterious and ethereal Holy Grail, relatively few people were actually aware of the Shroud's true nature, and that the cloth contained a full body imprint of Christ including bloodstains. Therefore, it would be easy to confuse the objects, to call them by different names as indicated above, and to associate them with a variety of both pagan and Christian symbolism.

The first true grail story was written by Chrétien de Troyes between 1190 and 1200. It was also Chrétien's last story, which he never finished, and it was about the knight Perceval and his quest for the grail. The date of Chrétien's death is unknown, so he may have lived to hear the stories about the Shroud, perhaps brought back by some who had traveled to Constantinople prior to the fourth crusade. Other anonymous writers continued his work, and in the *First Continuation*, written around 1200, a story of Nicodemus is told in which he attempts to carve a statue of Christ as he had appeared on the cross. But Nicodemus could not complete it because the carving "could not be made by human hands." According to the story, God Himself had to shape this work of art, which is a possible reference to the Shroud.

Wolfram von Eschenbach, the author of *Parzival*, was a knight and a German troubadour (minnesinger), who had contact with the people involved in the fourth crusade. Therefore, his inspiration for *Parzival* was very likely drawn from the grail/shroud stories told to him by returning crusaders.

The most influential grail storyteller of them all was Robert de Boron, a poet and/or cleric employed by Gautier de Montbeliard, the Lord of Montfaucon, who joined the fourth crusade. De Boron wrote his above-mentioned poems in the years 1205 and following, after the crusaders returned to France. It was de Boron who first wrote that Joseph of Arimathea used the Last Supper cup to catch the blood of Christ on the cross, thus creating the literary heritage of the Holy Grail as being the Last Supper cup. In this tale Joseph is thrown in prison by the emperor Vespasian and languishes there for years, but at the end of the story Joseph is released after Vespasian is healed of leprosy, not by a chalice, but by a cloth containing the image and blood of Christ—another clear literary allusion to the Shroud. De Boron made the leap from the pagan Celtic cauldrons and platters holding the head of John the Baptist in tales such as the *Mabinogion*, and transliterated them into the Holy Grail by infusing his stories with Christian communion concepts, overlaid with Shroud imagery.

Early church leaders had often used the Last Supper cup as an analogy for Jesus' death—the actual chalice representing the body of Christ and the wine representing his blood, giving an ethereal significance to the cup. Byzantine iconography would often picture the wounded Christ along with a chalice representing the "cup of sorrows" that Jesus "drank" on the cross. The church had also promulgated the doctrine of *transubstantiation*, the belief that the wafer and wine administered to the communicant were a literal means of God's grace and "became the body and blood of Christ" to that person. The "container" of Christ's blood would therefore be the chalice used in the Eucharistic rites. Given these powerful religious metaphors of a literal chalice becoming a source of divine grace, it is easy to understand how a communion chalice was transformed into the Holy Grail of legend, and how the grail came to be viewed as a cup, despite the fact that the origin of the grail stories was probably the Shroud.

Given the above history and evidence, it is therefore my reasoned conclusion that the object knowingly or unknowingly alluded to as the Holy Grail throughout literary

history—the object behind the myth—was actually the burial cloth of Christ known today as the Shroud of Turin.

The Shroud of Turin

The Shroud of Turin is a piece of ancient linen, approximately fourteen feet long and four feet wide, imprinted with an image of a naked, tortured, and crucified man.²⁷ It contains both dorsal and ventral images; in other words, the man was placed on one end of the cloth, and it was folded over the top, and therefore there are images of both his front and back sides. There are blood stains on his scalp, feet, wrists, and right side, and lacerations over the entire body, particularly on his back.²⁸

Scientific scrutiny of the Shroud image began in 1900 at the Sorbonne. Under the direction of Yves Delage, professor of comparative anatomy, a study was undertaken of the physiology and pathology of the apparent body imprint and of the possible manner of its formation. The image was found to be anatomically flawless down to minor details: the characteristic features of rigor mortis, wounds, and blood flows provided conclusive evidence to the anatomists that the image was formed by direct or indirect contact with a corpse... On this point all medical opinion since the time of Delage has been unanimous.

Of greatest interest and importance are the wounds. As with the general anatomy of the image, the wounds, blood flows, and the stains themselves appear to forensic pathologists flawless and unfakeable. “Each of the different wounds acted in a characteristic fashion. Each bled in a manner which corresponded to the nature of the injury. The blood followed gravity in every instance” (Bucklin 1961:5). The bloodstains are perfect, bordered pictures of blood clots, with a concentration of red corpuscles around the edge of the clot and a tiny area of serum inside. Also discernible are a number of facial wounds, listed by Willis (cited in Wilson 1978:23) as swelling of both eyebrows, torn right eyelid, large swelling below right eye, swollen nose, bruise on right cheek, swelling in left cheek and left side of chin.

The body is peppered with marks of a severe flogging estimated at between 60 and 120 lashes of a whip with two or three studs at the thong end. Each contusion is about 3.7 cm long, and these are found on both sides of the body from the shoulders to the calves, with only the arms spared. Superimposed on the marks of flogging on the right shoulder and left scapular region are two broad excoriated areas, generally considered to have resulted from friction or pressure from a flat surface, as from carrying the crossbar or writhing on the cross. There are also contusions on both knees and cuts on the left kneecap, as from repeated falls.

The wounds of the crucifixion itself are seen in the blood flows from the wrists and feet. One of the most interesting features of the Shroud is that the nail wounds are in the wrists, not in the palm as traditionally depicted in art. Experimenting with cadavers and amputated arms, Barbet (1953:102-20) demonstrated that nailing at the point indicated on the Shroud image, the so-called space of Destot between the bones of the wrist, allowed the body weight to be supported, whereas the palm would tear away from the nail under a fraction of the body weight. Sava (1957:440) holds that the wrist bones and tendons would be severely damaged by nailing and that the Shroud figure was nailed through the wrist end of the forearm, but most medical opinion concurs in siting the nailing at

the wrist. Barbet also observed that the median nerve was invariably injured by the nail, causing the thumb to retract into the palm. Neither thumb is visible on the Shroud, their position in the palm presumably being retained by rigor mortis.

Between the fifth and sixth ribs on the right side is an oval puncture about 4.4 X 1.1 cm. Blood has flowed down from this wound and also onto the lower back, indicating a second outflow when the body was moved to a horizontal position. All authorities agree that this wound was inflicted after death, judging from the small quantity of blood issued, the separation of clot and serum, the lack of swelling, and the deeper color and more viscous consistency of the blood. Stains of a body fluid are intermingled with the blood, and numerous theories have been offered as to its origin: pericardial fluid (Judica, Barbet), fluid from the pleural sac (Moedder), or serous fluid from settled blood in the pleural cavity (Saval, Bucklin).

So convincing was the realism of these wounds and their association with the biblical accounts that Delage, an agnostic, declared them “a bundle of imposing probabilities” and concluded that the Shroud figure was indeed Christ. His assistant, Vignon (1937), declared the Shroud’s identification to be “as sure as a photograph or set of fingerprints.”²⁹

There is another very old piece of bloodstained cloth which is alleged to have been the cloth used to cover the face of Christ after his crucifixion. It is known as the “Sudarium of Oviedo”; it was brought to Spain in the seventh century and has been kept in the Spanish town of Oviedo since the eighth century. The Sudarium was studied in 1999, and the team studying it concluded that the Sudarium and the Shroud both covered the same injured head.³⁰ The Sudarium may have been the “napkin” or the cloth covering Christ’s head/face that was mentioned in the Gospel of John account, in John 20:3-7.

Problems with the Authenticity of the Shroud of Turin

The Shroud of Turin is purported to be the literal burial shroud of Jesus Christ. Its authenticity has thus aroused intense debate and sometimes hostile rhetoric between those who believe that the Shroud is authentic—or at least believe that it is the actual burial shroud of a crucified man who may or may not have been Jesus—and those who do not. Many attempts have been made by skeptics to challenge its authenticity on various grounds, as well as to develop alternative theories to explain how the images on the Shroud could have been faked or generated by a variety of mechanisms. For example, some have alleged that the Shroud is a painting by Leonardo DaVinci or another artist.³¹ But despite periodic claims, no theory capable of explaining all of the characteristics of the Shroud image has yet been developed that can satisfactorily explain how the Shroud could have been a forgery. The Shroud of Turin is therefore the most highly studied relic in the history of the world.

Considering the shady history of religious artifacts and the many fraudulent attempts to make money at the expense of credulous and naïve worshippers, it is therefore very appropriate that the Shroud of Turin be approached with an attitude of skepticism. François de Mely claimed in 1902 that there were forty-two medieval shrouds of Christ, and he even named the towns whose inventories mentioned them. But these were either simply pieces of cloth or artistic copies of the Shroud of Turin, and a number of these copies still exist.³² Nevertheless, the evidence for the authenticity of the Shroud

is so comprehensive and compelling that if it were an object with no religious overtones, there would be little serious doubt as to its authenticity. But being the purported burial cloth of Jesus Christ and a possible witness to his resurrection, hence to Christ's deity and the truth of Christianity, the Shroud raises powerful passions in both those who believe and those who disbelieve. Accepting and especially rejecting the authenticity of the Shroud is therefore often an issue of faith and religious, or anti-religious, conviction. However, those who seriously seek to study the Shroud must approach it with an open mind and lay aside their religious persuasions as they examine the evidence. There are still questions for which no answer has yet been provided, as follows:

- There is a complete lack of any known documentary evidence for the Shroud's existence in Biblical times. The first known record of the Shroud's possible existence was in the fourth century, as indicated above.
- The Shroud is one long piece of cloth, which is at variance with the burial cloths typically used by first century Jews, and seemingly also in disagreement with some of the details in the Biblical accounts of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.
- The Bible indicates that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus buried the body of Jesus with a significant amount of myrrh and aloes, but neither of these substances could be detected on the Shroud, although at least one eyewitness historical account indicated that the cloth "smelled of myrrh." It has been alleged that the Shroud has at various times been washed and/or dipped in oil or other substances, which could have washed out any myrrh or aloes residues.
- Objections have been raised regarding the height of the man—between 5'11" and 6'1"—as most men of the time were much shorter.
- Concern has been expressed about formation of the image in regard to the way that the body was wrapped in the cloth, for example, the lack of creases in various parts of the Shroud image. Also, there is no image on the sides of the cloth where it was presumably wrapped around the shoulders, arms, and legs of the dead body. This would seem to negate the possibility of the image being formed by some type of radiation from the corpse that possibly occurred during Christ's resurrection. Assuming that some type of radiation was responsible for producing the image, this radiation would presumably have been emitted in all directions. Therefore, images from the sides and shoulders should also be apparent, and not merely from the top and bottom of the body, as is the case in the Shroud image.
- Many have wondered how a piece of linen could have survived intact through so many centuries, and still bearing a visible image.

However, these are arguments from silence and are not substantive enough to cause serious doubts about the Shroud's veracity. As one Shroud researcher indicated,

It has been my contention that, while the lack of historical documentation is a difficulty, the evidence from the medical studies must be treated as empirical data of a higher order. The dead body always represents a cold, hard fact, regardless of a lack of witnesses or a freely offered confession of murder. With anatomists and forensic pathologists of the highest caliber in Europe and America (many of whom are also well versed in the history of art) of one mind for 80 years about the image as a body imprint, one is on firm ground in characterizing the Shroud as the real shroud of a real corpse. The direct testing of the last 20 years goes farther in demonstrating that the relic is a genuine grave cloth from antiquity rather than the result of a medieval forger's attempt to imprint the cloth with a smeared corpse. Fleming (1978:64) concurs, with the conclusion that "it is the medical evidence that we are certainly looking at a gruesome document of crucifixion which satisfies me that the Shroud is not medieval in origin."³³

One of the long-standing beliefs of skeptics was that the Shroud was a painting done by a medieval artist. The strongest proponent of this hypothesis was Dr. Walter McCrone, now deceased, who was a member of the original Shroud investigatory team in 1978. However, his painting hypothesis was not based on examination of the Shroud itself, as he never examined it, but only on his analysis of sticky tapes, which were used to take samples of surface materials from the cloth. McCrone's conclusions have been thoroughly discredited by a wealth of subsequent investigation.

Much publicity has been generated by the assertions of McCrone (1980), a former STURP consultant, that the image is a painting, judging from the microscopic identification of traces of iron oxide and a protein (i.e., possible pigment and binder) in image areas. The STURP analysis of the Shroud's surface yielded much particulate matter of possible artists' pigments such as alizarin, charcoal, and ultramarine, as well as iron, calcium, strontium (possibly from the soaking process for early linen), tiny bits of wire, insect remains, wax droplets, a thread of lady's panty hose, etc. (Wilson 1981). However, this matter was distributed randomly or inconsistently over the cloth and had no relationship to the image, which was found to be substanceless, according to the combined results of photomicroscopy, X-radiography, electron microscopy, chemical analyses, and mass spectrometry. McCrone's claims have been convincingly refuted in several STURP technical reports (Pellicori and Evans 1980:42; Pellicori 1980:1918; Heller and Adler 1981:91-94; Schwalbe and Rogers 1982:11-24). The results of previous work by the Italian commission also run totally counter to those claims (Filogamo and Zina 1976:35-37; Brandone and Borroni 1978:205-14; Frei 1982:5). Undaunted, McCrone... continues to stake his reputation on the interpretation of the Shroud image as a painting.³⁴

McCrone's conclusions are largely based on his examination of material obtained from the Shroud on Mylar sticky tapes by the STURP group in 1978. There are, indeed, linen fibers with paint pigments on them on these tapes, but it has apparently eluded McCrone that these are fibers which translocated to the Shroud from the some fifty-five medieval painted "true copies" which were laid by the artist directly on top of the Shroud as a "brandum." These pigmented fibers have nothing to do with the images on the Shroud other than their proximity to some of the body images, which one would expect considering their origin.³⁵

The carbon dating tests done on the Shroud in 1988 indicated a date in the Middle Ages (1269 to 1390), which is the main reason why many think that the Shroud is not genuine. When the dating results were published, secularists breathed a sigh of relief, and concluded that the Shroud was a fake and could be safely ignored. However, the dating procedures used were questioned even before the results were announced. A definitive answer to the dating controversy came from a study released on January 20, 2005, in which Raymond Rogers, a scientist from the Los Alamos National Laboratory and one of the original members of the Shroud research team, conclusively demonstrated that the samples used for the original radiocarbon tests were taken from a rewoven area of the Shroud, and therefore did not represent the original fabric. The 1988 Shroud dating tests and results have thus been discredited.³⁶

In 1986, a group of about twenty experts in various aspects of carbon dating met in Turin for the sole purpose of setting up the protocol for the procedure, knowing that this would be the most complicated and controversial carbon dating ever done. Among the group's recommendations were the taking of seven samples from seven different places, the use of seven laboratories and two techniques, the careful analysis of the samples to determine their characteristics and contents before the carbon dating itself, the use of careful controls, and the collating and tabulation of the test results before releasing the information to the public.

For reasons that remain very unclear but are suspicious to many of us, shortly before the taking of the sample in 1988, the protocol was completely discarded by the then scientific advisor to the then Cardinal, the Archbishop of Turin, who is custodian of the Shroud. The advisor allowed only one sample to be taken, he (instead of the recommended textile expert) determined where the sample would be removed, he used only three of the laboratories and only one of the test methods. Many objected to this violation of the protocol but were told basically to get lost if they didn't like it.

When we heard where the single specimen was taken from, we were appalled, as he chose the worst possible site on the Shroud, even though he had been advised to stay away from such areas. The specimen was taken from the lower edge of the Shroud on the side that has the seam running its full length (the anterior aspect), next to the missing corner. This is visibly the dirtiest area on the Shroud (having been handled by this corner on numerous occasions over the centuries), and it is also at the edge of burn marks and a water stain from 1532. The sample taken included the seam which was added at an unknown date probably to help reinforce the Shroud fabric. The seam and some extraneous fibers were trimmed from the specimen. Contrary to the common idea that three different specimens were tested, three pieces were cut from the one specimen, one piece being given to each of the three laboratories so that the single specimen was tested three times, and only by a single technique (AMS).

Subsequent testing of a piece of the single specimen showed bacteria and fungi growing inside the linen fibers and a biogenic varnish on some of the threads, none of which would have been removed by the usual cleaning techniques. The specimen was also shown to be chemically radically different from the fibers in the rest of the Shroud. The effects of the fire of 1532 on the carbon 14 content of the fabric are also not clear.

We do not argue that the three laboratories did not precisely measure the carbon 14 in the samples they were given, but anyone with even a faint understanding of archaeology knows that a specimen contaminated with additional carbon 14 from any source will give an incorrect date younger than the actual date of the specimen. With only one specimen tested, especially with its known multiple problems of contamination, no valid statement about such a complex object as the Shroud can be made.³⁷

Evidence for the Authenticity of the Shroud of Turin

Even admitting any questions of radioactive dating, the amazing image on the Shroud must still be explained. In the words of the Shroud researcher John Walsh, “The Shroud of Turin is either the most awesome and instructive relic of Jesus Christ in existence... or it is one of the most ingenious, most unbelievably clever products of the human mind and hand on record. It is one or the other; there is no middle ground.”³⁸ See the Shroud of Turin website (www.shroud.com) for much more detailed information; there are many other shroud-related internet resources as well. Following are additional characteristics of the Shroud, which argue for its authenticity:

- The first recorded showing of the Shroud was in 1353-1357, and it was publicly displayed many times after that, so if it were a painting or other type of forgery, it must have been done prior to that period with the technology available in that era. Leonardo DaVinci, who has sometimes alleged to have been the artist, was born in 1452.³⁹
- The picture on the Shroud is actually a negative image, and must be photographically inverted to see the positive image. Concepts of negative images were certainly known in the past; for example, the mold that is used to cast a statue is a “negative image.” But no true negative images were seen until the invention of photography around 1826. In fact, this aspect of the Shroud was only noticed when the Shroud was first photographed in 1898.⁴⁰
- The Shroud is linen, and raw unprepared linen repels water and is difficult to paint. Furthermore, there is no artistic “style” to the image, no pigments and no brushstrokes. It is “photographic” in nature rather than “artistic.”⁴¹ Furthermore, the image lacks the sharp outline and color of a painting, as it is a fairly uniform sepia-yellow in color. The “lines” making up the image are approximately 1/100 the width of a human hair, making it impossible for the image to be painted by an artist. Only one researcher (Dr. Walter McCrone) has claimed that the image was produced by paint⁴², but others have demonstrated conclusively that the actual Shroud image is not created from pigment.⁴³ The Shroud was apparently used as a template for medieval painters, and thus there are traces of pigment and iron oxide on the surface, as described in the quote above.
- The Shroud figure is naked, which would have been repugnant and unacceptable for a medieval artist in depicting Christ.

- The plethora of artistic depictions of Jesus from the first through the sixteenth centuries showed him as being nailed to the cross through the hands, whereas in the Shroud image he is nailed through the wrists. As indicated above, nailing through the hands would not have supported a man's weight, and the purported artist would have had to have known this fact and gone against all artistic precedent.
- The image has three-dimensional qualities, as the strength of the image is proportional to the distance from the associated body part. For example, the nose area is shown very strongly, but the eyes less so.⁴⁴ Therefore, a three-dimensional "map" can be created showing the face and other parts of the body in bas-relief.
- The man's head and knees are slightly bent, and therefore the image has foreshortening in it. The concept of foreshortening was first discovered and used by the Renaissance painters some time after the Shroud was first shown.⁴⁵
- The three-dimensional aspect of the image also explains why it cannot be a block print. Complex carved wood block printing had been done for some time, but only on a flat sheet of paper or canvas. A three-dimensional block print would distort the image as well as producing smears.⁴⁶
- The "light source" seems to come from within or behind the image rather than from an external point, as would be the case with photographs, which are created by light reflected from the surface of an object. The edges of the image seem to "melt away" and are not sharp as they would be in the case of an actual photograph. In addition, there are no shadows in the image as would occur in a photograph, nor have any silver or silver-related compounds been detected on the Shroud.⁴⁷
- A number of researchers have demonstrated the presence of blood on the Shroud and some have done testing on the DNA in the blood. One scientist claimed that there is no blood whatsoever on the Shroud, but he was Walter McCrone, the same researcher who claimed that Shroud image was painted. Dr. McCrone's results are quoted by skeptics, but this assertion has also been discredited by other Shroud researchers.⁴⁸
- A recently advanced hypothesis is that the Shroud is a medieval photograph done by Leonardo DaVinci and taken with a *camera obscura* using an actual cadaver.⁴⁹ According to this hypothesis, the Lirey Shroud of the 1350s was a painted and counterfeit relic; after the Savoy family acquired it in 1464 they supposedly discovered that they had purchased a fake and then commissioned Leonardo DaVinci to create what would presumably be an even more realistic fake by the photographic method stated above. This effort, which has no historical support whatsoever, supposedly produced the Shroud we have today. However, the optical characteristics of the Shroud as stated in the paragraph above on

photography, as well as other physical and historic factors, makes this hypothesis untenable.⁵⁰

- Another image-formation method proposed was the exposure in sunlight of a piece of cloth soaked in bleach placed under a large piece of glass, over which a painted version of the Shroud is laid.⁵¹ This method supposedly produces an image similar to the Shroud, but has at least two fatal flaws: 1) it requires a large flat piece of glass, at least 6' x 3', which did not exist in the Middle Ages; and 2) the chemistry of the Shroud image is completely different than one that would be produced by such a method, because it has been demonstrated that in the real Shroud the image is deposited only on the surface of the fibers.⁵² The depth of the image is therefore very thin.⁵³
- Several years ago the Shroud was cleaned and the backing material was removed. Another faint facial image was then discovered on the back side of the cloth matching the main facial image, making it virtually impossible for the Shroud to be a fake.⁵⁴ This was not previously detected because of the backing material that had been sewn on the Shroud at some point during the Middle Ages.
- No theory of image formation has as yet been advanced that successfully explains how the Shroud could have been a forgery.⁵⁵ To date, the most reasonable conclusion on the source of the Shroud image is that it was made by a chemical reaction from an interaction between the cloth and the body fluids and/or vapors from the corpse.⁵⁶ Supporting this theory is that the strongest portion of the image is around the nose, mouth, and beard.

Conclusion

The Holy Grail is a literary concept that was developed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but the Shroud was the source of this literature and the object upon which the grail stories were based. Regardless of whether the Shroud of Turin is truly the image of Jesus Christ and contains his literal blood, people throughout history have believed that it was so. The Shroud of Turin is thus the “San Greal” and contains the “Sang Real.” It is the true Holy Grail.

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