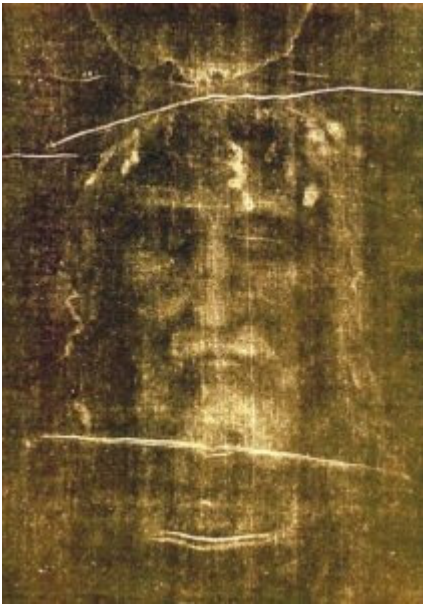


Some facts about the Turin shroud



The face of Christ?

Yesterday, Pope Benedict XVI visited Turin and, among other things, he viewed the Turin shroud. This shroud, of course, is said to be the burial cloth of Jesus Christ, and it depicts an impression of a human body which bears an uncanny resemblance to the traditional depictions of Christ in art.

I am not going to pretend I can make any statements about the authenticity of the shroud. There has been and continues to be much debate about this among people who actually *know* what they are

talking about.

Katholiekederland.nl has two pieces about the shroud on their website: one listing ten misconceptions, and the other with ten arguments in favour of the authenticity of the cloth.

The lists were composed by Fr. Jeroen Smith, parish priest in Leyden. He wrote a book. *De lijkwade van Turijn herzien* (Reconsidering the burial shroud of Turin), about the Turin shroud.

TEN MISCONCEPTIONS

1. The image on the shroud is a painting.

We still don't know how the image was created. Its characteristics are very complex (for example the fact that they only exist on the very outer surface).

2. The C-14 method of dating the shroud definitively showed that the cloth was made some time between 1260 and 1390.

A badly prepared and manipulated test. Applied to a strongly contaminated section. Unreliable. People are working on a new C-14 test with pieces taken from various places. But this is for now only theory.

3. Only believers assume that it is the burial shroud of Jesus.

There is a list of publications by 'unbelievers' who also think that it is the burial shroud of Jesus.

4. The shroud was made by Leonardo da Vinci.

Nonsense. The shroud existed centuries before the birth of Da Vinci and it is not a product of an artist. *Discovery Channel* especially kept broadcasting a documentary that implicated Da Vinci.

5. The shroud is 'not real', a 'forgery', 'fake'.

Confusing words! What is meant is that the shroud is not that of Jesus and was (therefore) made by someone, possibly as a forged 'relic'. But the shroud and the image were not made by 'someone'. 'Fake' is a belittling term, especially when used in a sentence like, "Believers think that the shroud is that of Jesus, scientists know that it is fake." This is an assumption that believers are stupid enough to believe in 'fake things'.

6. Science has proven that the shroud is not that of Jesus.

On the contrary! The argument against authenticity is yet to be found. Scientists who investigated the shroud tend to favour authenticity and there are non-Christians and atheists among them.

7. The shroud has been copied multiple times.

Wrong again. Last year we heard that one Garlaschelli had copied the shroud. But if one takes a close look at his 'reproduction', the differences with the real shroud immediately become clear. This remains a challenge for science in the 21st century: who will copy the shroud with all its characteristics?

8. The Catholic Church does not accept the scientific conclusions and blocks study.

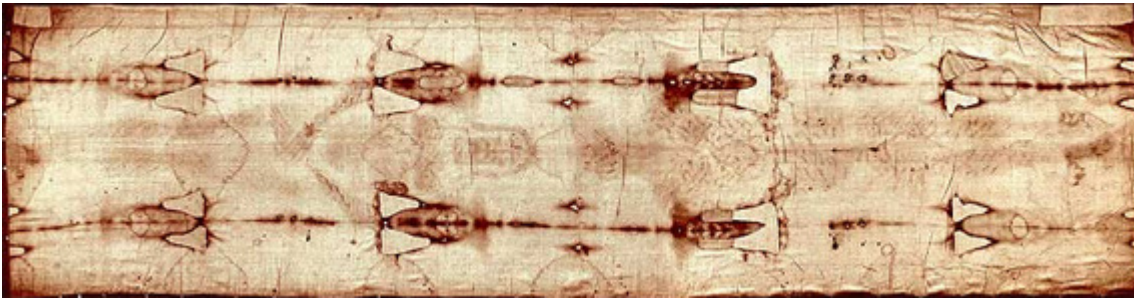
The Church authorised the studies of 1978 and 2002. And she is willing to accommodate further investigation, as long as the shroud is not damaged. High definition photographs were made in 2008, and these allow anyone to do their own investigation.

9. Like all relics of Christ, the shroud is not real.

There are indeed 'relics' which turn out not be genuine, like Jesus' foreskin. But the shroud and its image belongs in an exceptional category. At the moment the shroud is the best studied archeological artefact in the world.

10. If the shroud is indeed dated back to the first century, there is still no reason to assume that it belonged to Jesus. Countless men were crucified in that time.

Certainly not countless. And certainly not with the same abuse (crown of thorns, spear wound in the side). According to probability calculations there is a chance of 1 in 200,000,000,000 that this is NOT the shroud of Jesus.



TEN ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR

1. Textile

The method of weaving, sewing together and the kind of fabric are very specific and match cloth from Massada (Israel, first century; Massada was destroyed in 70 AD). Excavations there uncovered pieces of linen cloth that resemble the shroud.

2. Pollen

In and on the linen pollen from plants have been, belonging to specific plants from Italy, France, Turkey and Israel. Many are pollen that belong to plants that grow or used to grow in the area of Jerusalem.

3. Gravel

On the images of the feet and knees a unique kind of stone gravel has been found in the traces of blood. This can still be found today in the Jerusalem soil.

4. Size

The size of the cloth (4.36 by 1.11 meters) fits the Jewish measurement unity, the Anoti: 8 by 2 Jewish cubits. A cubit was 54.35 centimeters.

5. Icons of Christ

From the fifth century onward the face that is visible on the shroud was copied as the Face of Christ, as iconography developed as an art form. Some ancient icons even fit the face of the shroud exactly. The image shows that we are dealing with a Jewish man (facial features, mustache, beard and hair), aged between 30 and 40, about 1.78 meters tall and weighing some 80 kilos.

6. Remarkable passion

The passion of Christ was remarkable. Even though more than one man was crucified (although the numbers were not that great), we only know of Jesus that he was tortured, whipped, was given a

crown of thorns and was stabbed in His side after His death. The Gospels are in complete agreement with the image on the shroud.

7. Sabbath

Jesus' body was buried in a shroud with haste, because it was the eve of the sabbath. On this day one could not bury bodies. It was a temporary burial and a definitive one was intended to be held after the sabbath. This fits the Turin shroud.

8. Impossible to copy

The image was created at a time that the shroud was stretched. And the shroud shows nowhere that the linen was removed from the body. An image was created that is still inexplicable and which can't be copied. Could this be related to the moment of Resurrection?

9. Not a crucial test

In all the studies there is not a single issue which undermines all other facts. The C-14 method appeared to do that. From the 1989 study it was concluded that the cloth dated from the period between 1260 and 1390. The media consider this definitive. But the conclusion caused more problems than solutions, because it is absolutely certain the shroud existed in the 7th century. So the question was now: what went wrong: what went wrong with the C-14 test? Probably this: the piece of cloth used for the test was highly contaminated because it came from a part (a corner) where the cloth was held at expositions during the centuries.

10. Minority

Only a very small minority of scientists who worked with the shroud excludes the possibility that it is the shroud of Jesus. A large percentage does not. Some believe that it is really the burial shroud of Jesus.