



Sunday—September 7, 2025

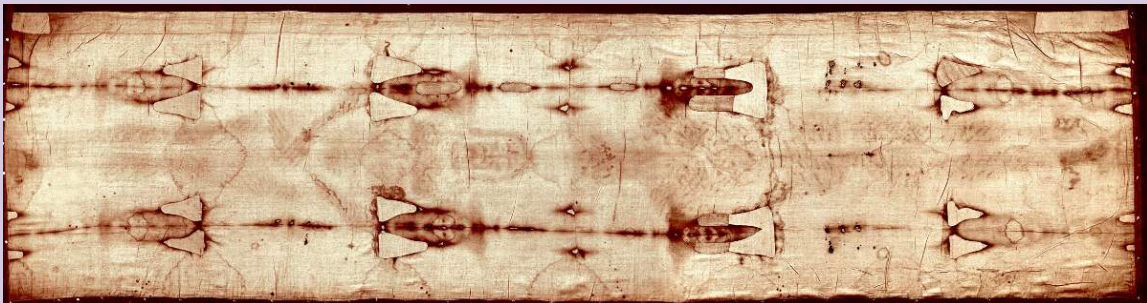
The Miraculous Journey of the Shroud

Greetings!

It boggles the mind to think that the Catholic Church possesses a relic that actually wrapped the human body of Our Lord Jesus Christ at the time of His death. And it's not any random relic. It is the **most direct possible material witness** to His Crucifixion: **the Shroud of Turin**.

The most mind-boggling thing of all, however, is that the Shroud, though just a piece of cloth, **remains with us 20 centuries after** the event, in a time capsule of its own.

It has no equal on this earth. It has been carefully guarded in the **heart of the Church** for the entire *two millennia* of its existence. Let that sink in.



The Journey

You can probably guess that I take the Shroud of Turin to be the authentic burial cloth of Jesus. My purpose is not to debate that point. One either believes it on faith—based on the clear **evidence for its authenticity**—or one doesn't.

I'm also not going to address the details of the exhaustive studies that have been done on the Shroud. Whole libraries have been written on that subject. **Fr. Robert Spitzer's Magis Center** is the single best Shroud of Turin resource for those scientific studies:

[Fr. Spitzer's Website](#)

Here, I propose to talk about how a 14-foot-long piece of first century Middle Eastern woven cloth implausibly **survived for 20 centuries without being destroyed** and the distinct stages of the incredible journey that brought it down to us today. Let's begin with the most basic of all questions.

What happened to the Shroud after the Resurrection?

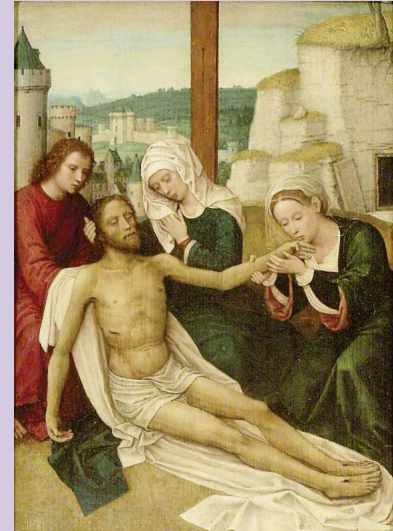
We know of the burial cloth from accounts in all four Gospels (Mt 27; Mk 15; Lk 23; and Jn 19). Mary Magdalen as well as the Apostles Peter and John **saw the burial cloth inside the tomb** with their own eyes on the very day of the Resurrection (Jn 20: 6-7).

We can be reliably assured that the early Church would have preserved the cloth from the start for many reasons, not the least of which was that **the Sanhedrin was trying to stamp out evidence** of the Resurrection (Mt 28:12) and would have destroyed it had they gotten their hands on it.

We depend upon early legends to tell us what *may* have happened from there. One legend says that **Joseph of Arimathea**, logically, was the custodian of the burial cloth that he himself had provided for Our Lord's burial, but there is no historical evidence to back this story up.

Another, more plausible report, indicates that the Shroud was entrusted to a disciple named Addai (possibly Thaddeus) **within 20 years of the Crucifixion** to safeguard it from ongoing persecutions. It is said that he took it to the town of Edessa in Syria which had a fervent Christian community.

Early written accounts attest that when the pagan ruler of Edessa, named Abgar, beheld the Face on the Shroud, he was **immediately cured of a disease** and then converted to Christianity.

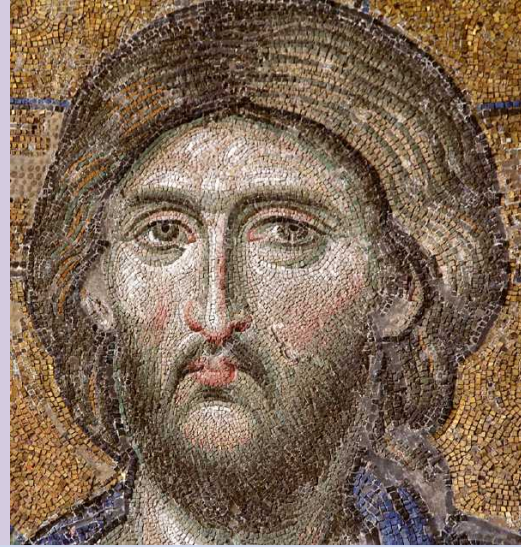
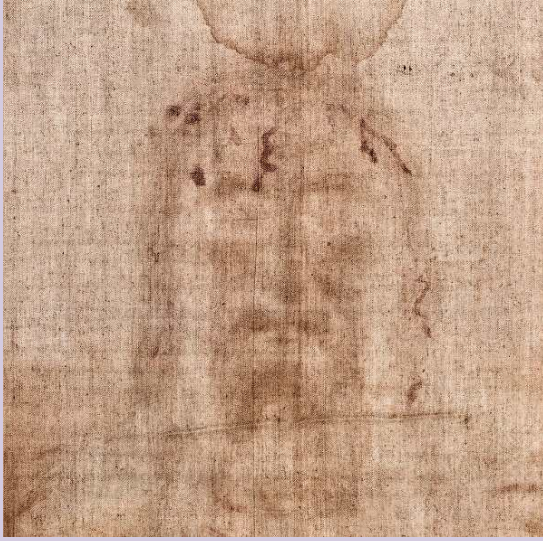


Stage 1: Edessa (50 to 944 AD)

Abgar's son wasn't as favorable to Christianity as his father, so it is believed the holy relic was **hidden in a sealed compartment over the city gate** at that time to keep it from being destroyed by the hostile regime. There it was forgotten for *several centuries* (!) until:

- **525 AD:** A catastrophic flood destroyed the entire city but *left the city's gate intact*, whereupon **the Shroud was rediscovered** and identified as the icon that Agbar saw in the first century.
 - The large cloth was likely folded into a frame so that only the holy Face was showing. After the Shroud's reemergence, **icons begin to appear in Eastern Christianity resembling the Face on the Shroud.**
- **544:** The Shroud is credited with **preserving the City of Edessa** from an attack of the Persians.
- **639:** Muslims take control of the city but tolerate the Christians there and even venerate the Shroud with Christians as a holy relic.
- **700s to mid-800s:** Influenced by the rise of Islam, radical Christians in the East destroyed millions of holy icons (*called iconoclasm*), believing the veneration of images to be idolatry. The **holy Shroud remained unscathed** during this century+ of controversy.





Stage 2: Constantinople (944 to 1204 AD)

A two-year siege of Edessa by the **Byzantine army** led to the Muslim surrender of the city. The Greek general, John Caucuas, negotiated the exchange of the holy Shroud for Muslim prisoners (a very shrewd negotiation if you ask me!)

Caucuas sent Bishop Abraham of Samosata to retrieve the Shroud, but the good bishop **barely escaped with his life** due to a riot of the people who did not want the Shroud to leave their city. (I can't blame them!)



- **944:** The Shroud was brought to Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire, and **venerated by the entire city** in a grand procession. In the following year, the Byzantine Emperor had a gold coin struck with **the image of Christ's Face** resembling the Shroud.
- **1025:** Within a century, icons begin to appear showing **Christ laid out in death on a burial cloth**; previous to this, all images of Christ's burial showed him fully wrapped in cloth bands like a mummy.
 - By this, it is believed that the caretakers **finally removed the Shroud from its frame** and discovered that it was, in fact, the full burial cloth from the tomb. Byzantine imperial records at the time confirm this.

Other notable events of this early stage:

1146: Turkish Muslim invaders **completely destroy the City of Edessa** where the Shroud had been housed for 900 years; *if the Shroud had still been there*, it would also have been destroyed.

1204: A French Crusader, Robert of Clari, describes in a letter that he saw the **Shroud on public display** in a church in Constantinople. Soon after that, the Crusaders **sacked Constantinople and stole the Shroud!**



The dominant theory is that the Knights Templar (a military religious order of the Middle Ages) negotiated, or bought, or **somehow obtained the Shroud** in all the chaos of the Crusader attack on the city.

Stage 3: The Knights Templars (1204 to 1307 AD)

The possession of the Shroud by the Knights Templar explains how the Shroud had mysteriously **disappeared from Constantinople** and eventually ended up in Europe.

- **1204:** The Knights bring the Shroud to their stronghold in Acre, Syria where it is kept until the destruction of that city in 1291. The **Shroud was moved** to other Templar fortresses in Syria and Cyprus.



- **1306:** The Grand Master of the Knights Templars, Jacques de Molay, transfers the **Treasury of the Knights to France**, where the Shroud remains in Templar possession until the next year.
- **1307:** De Molay and other officers are arrested and the Templar Order is obliterated by the **King of France with the complicity of the Pope**. It is believed that the Shroud was smuggled out of Paris at the time to keep it from being stolen or destroyed in the Templar purge.
- **1314:** Knights De Molay and Geoffroi de Charney are **falsely accused of heresy** and witchcraft and subsequently burned at the stake (the same unjust process would ensnare **Joan of Arc** less than a century later).

Stage 4: Private Ownership (1307 to 1453 AD)

With the arrest of the Templars, the Shroud passes into private hands. It is believed to have been **taken and hidden by the family of Geoffroi de Charney** (possibly Charny) during the destruction of the Templar Order.

During this European period, the Shroud's history is extremely complex. I can only offer the barest minimum of details **highlighting the "journey" of the Shroud** to its final resting place in Turin, Italy.

- **1353:** Charney's son (also a knight) **builds the Collegiate Church of Lirey** to house the Shroud.
- **1357:** The Knight's widow, Jeanne de Vergy, holds the first public exposition of the Shroud which draws **HUGE** crowds, triggering **a rebuke from the local bishop**

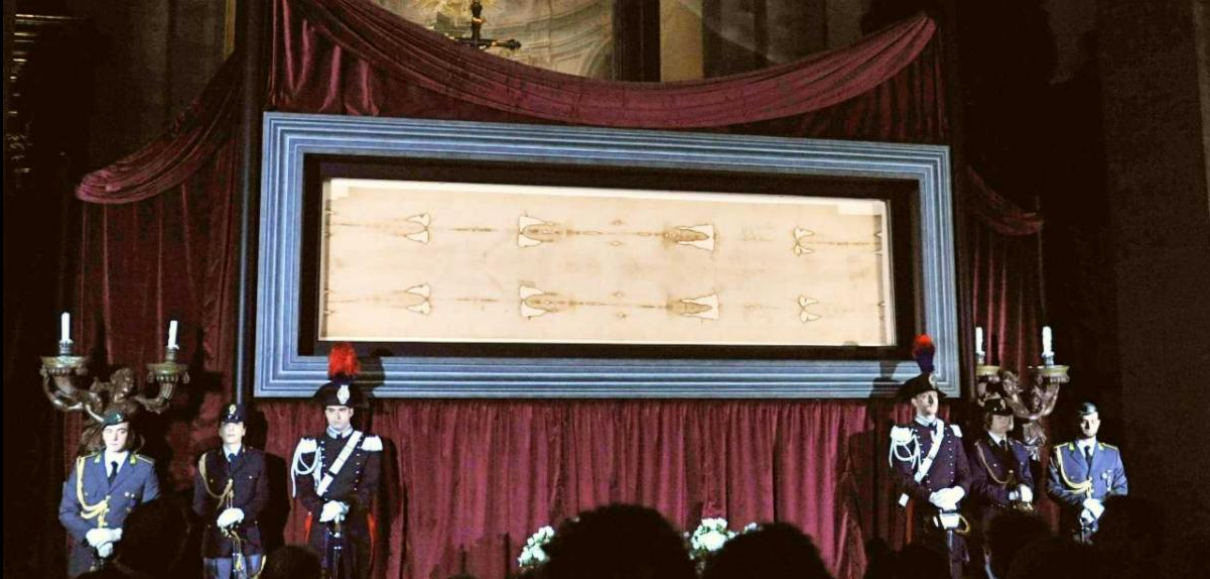
who attacked it as a fake relic and prohibits further exposition (of course a bishop would do that).



- **1400:** The knight's granddaughter, Margaret de Charny, inherits the Shroud and places the Shroud in the castle of La Roche to **protect it from roving bands of marauders** that were ravaging the French countryside during the **Hundred Years War**.
- **1443-47:** The priests of the Collegiate Church of Lirey sue Margaret (of course they do) and claim that the Shroud belonged to them. **Almost a century after** the original church was built, they want their relic back!
- **1440s and 1450s:** Margaret retains possession but has no heir, so she travels Europe displaying the Shroud publicly and **seeking to donate it** to a noble family who would become the new caretakers.

Stage 5: House of Savoy (1453 AD to the Present)

- **1453:** Margaret visits the **Duke of Savoy** in northern Italy and bestows the Shroud upon the royal House of Savoy.
- **1457:** The priests of the Collegiate Church of Lirey **excommunicate Margaret** (of course they do) for giving the Shroud to the Savoy family.
- **1460:** After Margaret's death that year, negotiations are made by the Savoy to **"remunerate" the Collegiate Church** for its historical loss. [That's the Medieval version of an out-of-court settlement. Works every time.]
- **During the 1500s:** The Shroud undertakes amazing journeys throughout Europe at the request of churchmen and royalty (various cities in France, Flanders, Belgium, Switzerland, and N. Italy) and settled for a time at the **Savoy's Chambery Castle** (in the French Alps):
 - **1532:** There, the Shroud becomes the victim of a catastrophic fire that **burned three holes in the cloth** without damaging the actual image imprinted on the cloth.
- **1578:** The Shroud finds its modern and permanent home in the city of Turin in northern Italy, and in **1694 The Royal Chapel is built** within the Cathedral of Turin to house the relic, where pilgrims can visit it today.
- **1939-46: World War II:** The only time that the Shroud has departed from Turin since 1578 was a seven year span during the Second World War. The caretakers transferred it to the **Benedictine Abbey of Monte Vergine** in the Province of Avellino, hundreds of miles south of Turin, to guard it from potential destruction.



Exposition of the Shroud in the Cathedral of Turin in 2015

The Earthly Journey

There's really nothing like this story, is there? The history of the Shroud is as miraculous as the cloth, and it is **a sacred window** into God's gift of salvation to any and all who will accept it.

The Lord said to Thomas, "Blessed are those who do not see yet believe" (Jn 20:29), but He also knew that **seeing a holy material witness like this** can sometimes be the cause of deep faith, as many conversions over the centuries seem to attest.

The British author, **Ian Wilson**, who wrote an early, authoritative work on the Shroud, offered this beautiful summary observation:

"[T]he Shroud has survived first century persecution of Christians, repeated Edessan floods, an Edessan earthquake, Byzantine iconoclasm, Moslem invasion, Crusader looting, the destruction of the Knights Templar, not to mention the burning incident that caused the triple holes, the 1532 fire, and a serious arson attempt made in 1972 [NOTE: there was a second arson attempt in 1997]. It is ironic that **every edifice in which the Shroud was supposedly housed** before the 15th century has long since vanished through the hazards of time, yet this frail piece of linen has come through almost unscathed." (Wilson, *Shroud*, 1978, 211.)

Our Journey to Heaven

But, of course, the Shroud is intimately **bound up with the Church's history** too, so let us finish with three wondrous truths:

- The Shroud could only have been preserved by **an apostolic Church** that was *founded at Calvary* with a promise of endurance to the end of time.
- Given the **astonishing variety of caretakers** and places it passed through in all those centuries, the Shroud could only have been preserved by a Church that has a *universal character*. And,
- The holiest icon in salvation history could only have been preserved by a Church with a claim to *spiritual authority* that would **safeguard the Shroud's holiness** for 20 centuries.

The Shroud is a mystery, but its caretaker is not: the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, to the glory of God and the exaltation of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

[The Shroud chronology was taken from Ian Wilson, *The Shroud of Turin*, NY: Doubleday, 1978.]

God bless you and your family!

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Peter Darcy

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CONTACT US:

Email: peterdarcy@sacredwindows.com

Author's Website: <https://peterdarcywriting.com>

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Peter Darcy / Sacred Windows | PO Box 346 | Port Salerno, FL 34992 US

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