

Claims about the Shroud of Turin.

Israeli archaeologists recently claimed that the shroud that many have revered as Jesus' burial cloth is a crude forgery by someone who was ignorant of Jewish customs. The experts include Joe Zias, an archaeologist at the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem, who is also an expert on ancient methods of crucifixion. They say that Jewish burial customs in the first century AD required that the head should be left uncovered when a body was wrapped in a burial shroud.

Since 1578 the "shroud" has been enshrined in a cathedral at Turin, Italy. It has the faint yellow negative image of the front and back of a man with thorn-marks on the head, lacerations on the back, and bruises on the shoulders.

Zias said that the shadowy image of the shroud suggests that nails were driven through the palms. "It has been known for centuries that you have to nail high on the arms" to keep the body upright on the cross, and that nailing the palms would not have sufficed.

They also found a discrepancy of 15.2 centimetres between the shroud's imprints of the front and the back. They also found that the fingers, which were resting on the pelvis bones, are unnaturally long, and cover the genitalia. Zias said, "Whoever made this thing, for reasons of modesty, elongated the hands greatly."

They also claim that cloth such as the 4.3 metre-long "shroud" could not have survived 2,000 years in the wet Mediterranean climate. Amos Kloner, an archaeologist at the Israeli Antiquities Authority and Bar Ilan University, noted that no textiles from the first century have been found in the Mediterranean region, because the climate is too humid. The only fabrics that have survived from that time come from desert areas.

Both Zias and Kloner pointed to three different radiocarbon tests conducted by separate laboratories, which found that the alleged "shroud" dates from the 14th century. The Roman Catholic Church has never claimed that the cloth is a holy relic. Its legend began in the 14th century when the linen was taken to France by a crusader and transferred to Turin. However, pilgrims to Turin used to get dispensations from the church for praying before the shroud.

Taking something from the 14th century and claiming that it has come from the first century, as a "pious fraud", is one thing. However, regarding a piece of cloth as able to supply spiritual benefits in itself, or praying before it as if it reduced time in purgatory is a delusion, which obscures the saving merits of Jesus. His vicarious obedience to the Law, vicarious suffering for our guilt and punishment, and glorious resurrection, and nothing else, should be the basis of all our confidence.