Why the Shroud of Turin is NOT a painting.
Pam Moon Jan 17th 2014

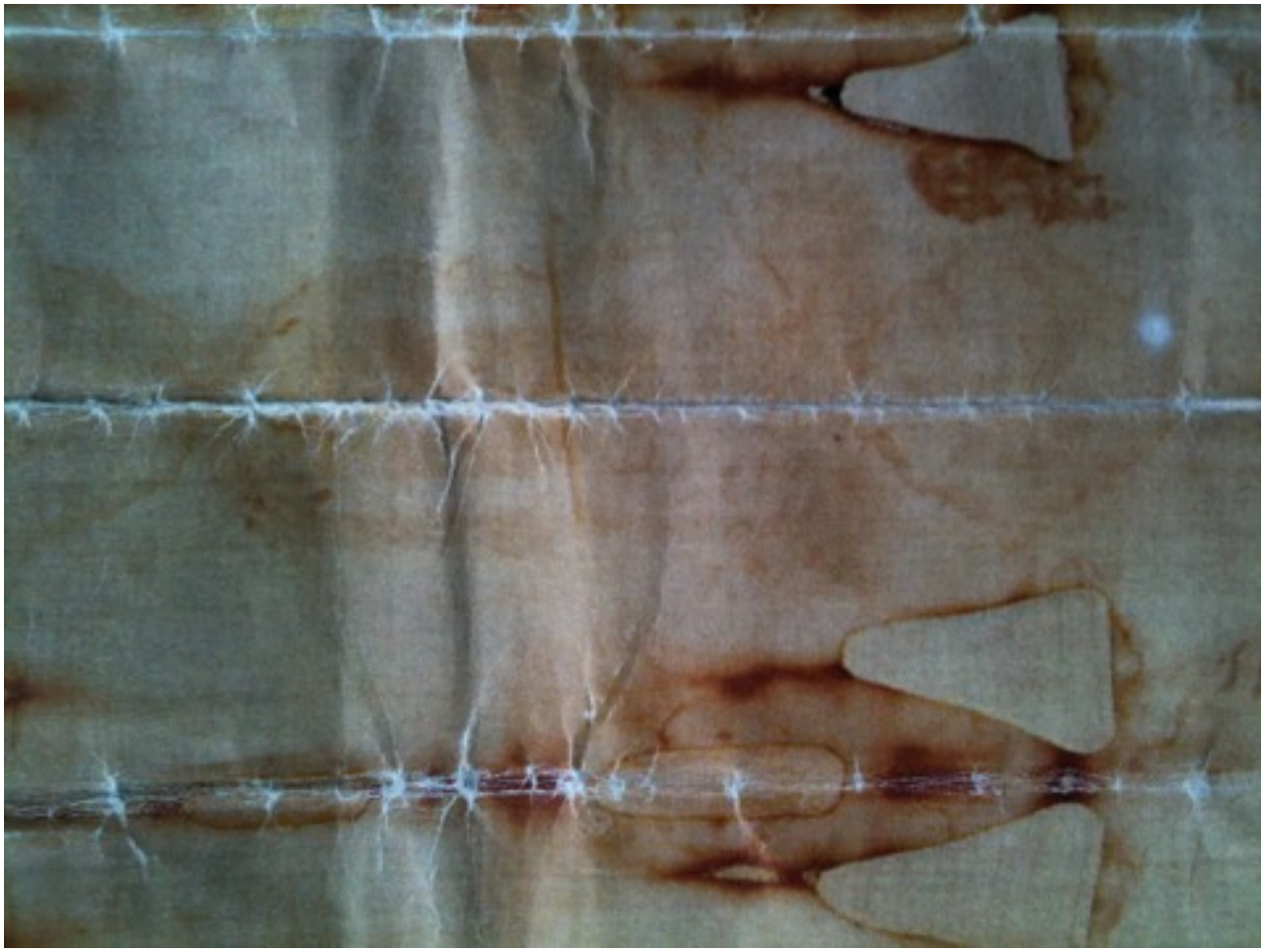
There are currently various theories which suggest the Shroud of Turin is either a painting with a gesso base (Charles Freeman) or a woodcut print (Joseph S. Accetta). I would like to suggest several reasons why this is not credible, to add to the 1978 STURP findings that there is no density of paint on the cloth and the difficulties of drawing in negative without outline.

1. Paintings are not folded.

Unlike paintings or wall hangings the Shroud was not stored open and flat. You can work out the folding patterns used at different times by examining the water stains and the fire damage. If it is a gesso based piece of art then the folds and creases would have broken down the glue. The woodcut print would detach. You would find areas on the Shroud where the image peeled away.

Two years ago, following the comment by BAFTA award winning director David Rolfe that the carbon date is like a 'dead hand' on examination and interest in the Shroud, I made a model to work out the folding patterns and water and fire damage on the cloth. The model was from Barrie Schwortz's photographs which I printed onto paper. The image below is a detail of that model and the damage to the fold line is obvious. This image has two years of folding and unfolding: the Shroud has almost 700 years of folding and unfolding if it is medieval; 2000 if it is the burial cloth of Jesus Christ.

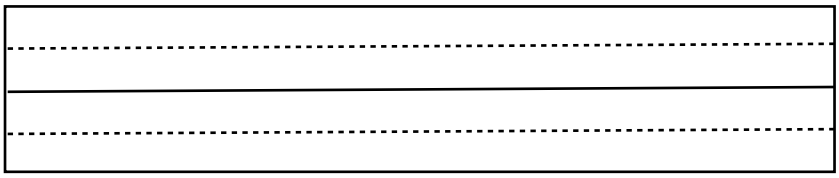
You cannot fold and unfold a painting and then repeatedly store it folded without damaging the image along the fold lines. Imagine what the Mona Lisa might look like if it had been treated like the Shroud. The central image down the body of the Man on the Shroud would be missing in the gesso/paint or woodcut print theories because the central fold line was always predominant in the folds for each type of water/fire damage.

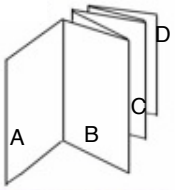


The Central Fold line in observable water staining and fire damage during storage.

a Diamond water damage

First fold lengthways down the centre. Second fold lengthways; doubling up the original fold.





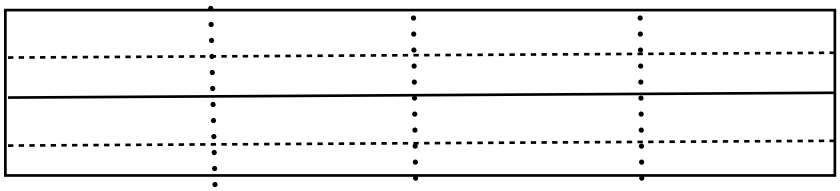
Finally into a concertina. The cloth was suspended **vertically** into the water, with the water coming from the bottom. This damage occurred prior to the douse water damage because there is a douce water ring which sits on top of the diamond pattern. Vertical storage is a Middle Eastern not European form of storing cloth. As there is no evidence that the Shroud travelled out of Europe after 1355 how did this damage happen?

b Poker or incense holes

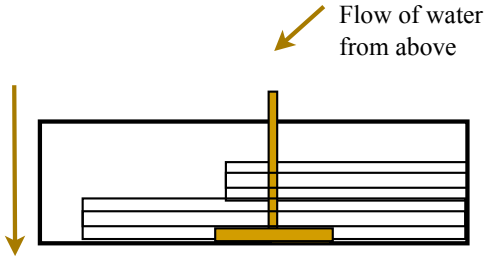
First fold lengthways down the centre, second fold transverse.

c Fire/Douce water damage

As **a** with two lengthways folds. This was followed by transverse folds and horizontal storage in a casket/chest in the typical European medieval fashion.

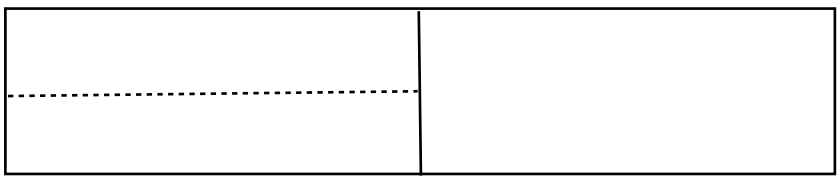


1532 fire damage



d After the fire/ Missing corners / Bacterial damage

Primary fold is transverse and then lengthways



Display rather than storage

The folding scenarios above do include the folding patterns for display purposes for example the Holy Mandylion pattern suggested by Ian Wilson. Nor does it include the folding pattern seen in the raking light hypothesis of John Jackson, which may be the source of the Man of Sorrows images from Constantinople.

2. The Glue in Gesso

Gesso from the Encyclopaedia Britannica: 'gesso, (Italian: "gypsum" or "chalk") fluid white coating, composed of plaster of paris, chalk, gypsum, or other whiting mixed with **glue**, applied to smooth surfaces such as wood panels, plaster, stone, or canvas.' From wikipedia the glue is a 'traditional mix of an animal glue binder' (usually rabbit-skin glue).' Rabbit skin glue is 'considered to be a major cause of cracking in oil paintings by most modern conservators. Because the glue is hygroscopic, it continually absorbs moisture from the atmosphere, causing the glue to swell and shrink.' As an adhesive, Rabbit-skin glue is used in the production of the bellows of concertinas, and in other smaller, light instruments—prominently in violins. Its supreme advantages are very fast bonding; and easy debonding with hot water if an instrument must be disassembled for internal repairs.' (wikipedia).

So the glue traditionally used in gesso, cracks, absorbs moisture and debonds with hot water. The Shroud of Turin was soaked in water on two occasions and the douse water would have been heated by the fire in 1532. Linen absorbs water from the atmosphere and so does Rabbit-skin glue. How would the 'painting' stay in place with the water, fire and humidity of Chambéry?

3. Who is the artist?

I keep six honest serving men
by Rudyard Kipling

I keep six honest serving men
(They taught me all I knew)
Their names are What and Why and When
and How and Where and **Who**.

In this simple poem Rudyard Kipling expounds the important questions of knowledge. **Who** paints a piece of work matters. It is not enough to say the Shroud is a medieval painting or woodcut print without establishing the name of the artist. Given the amount of actual evidence we have for them the medieval creator of the Shroud of Turin is much closer to imaginary than real.

4. Why might there be calcium carbonate on the Shroud of Turin?

Perhaps it is because the tomb of Christ was newly carved from limestone. We know from Matthew and John the it was a 'new' tomb (Matthew 27:60; John 19:41). They used the same word. The tomb was ‘one in which no one had yet been laid’ (Luke 23: 53 and John 19:41) and had been ‘cut (hewn) out of rock.’ (Matthew 27:60; Mark 15:46 and Luke 23:53). We do not know when the workmen finished but maybe John, as the person who buried Jesus, was using the word ‘new’ to suggest there was still chalk dust on the surfaces and in the air. So it would be surprising if there was not calcium carbonate present on the cloth.