

Is the Shroud of Turin Really a Medieval Forgery?

A Critical Response to Dan McClellan

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Abstract

Recent public commentary has asserted that the Shroud of Turin can be conclusively identified as a medieval forgery, often appealing to the 1988 radiocarbon dating as decisive and definitive evidence. This paper critically evaluates such claims, with particular attention to those advanced by Dan McClellan, and argues that they frequently overstate the certainty and finality of the available data.

By examining the radiocarbon testing protocol, the representativeness of the sampled material, the unresolved nature of the image formation process, relevant historical considerations, and first century Jewish burial practices, this study demonstrates that the evidentiary landscape surrounding the Shroud remains complex and contested across multiple disciplines. While absolute proof remains beyond the reach of historical inquiry, the cumulative evidence consistently resists the conclusion that the Shroud is *not* a medieval forgery and is best understood as authentic.

This paper argues that responsible analysis requires a cumulative and interdisciplinary approach that weighs all relevant data rather than privileging a single line of evidence. When examined in this broader framework, the case against the Shroud's authenticity is revealed to be far less certain than is often presented in popular discourse.

*“The Shroud image is not the product of an artist. The image is composed of a discoloration of the topmost fibers of the cloth. No pigments, paints, dyes, or stains have been found on the fibrils. The image has unique three dimensional characteristics and does not appear to have been formed by any known artistic or physical process. The mechanism that produced the image remains unknown.”*¹

Introduction

The Shroud of Turin remains one of the most intensively studied and persistently debated artifacts in the modern world. Bearing the faint but striking image of a crucified man, it has drawn sustained investigation from chemists, physicists, historians, textile experts, and theologians alike. Yet despite decades of rigorous inquiry, no single explanatory model, whether naturalistic, artistic, or otherwise, has achieved universal acceptance.

Scientific analysis of the image has only deepened the mystery. Studies conducted by members of the Shroud of Turin Research Project demonstrated that the image is not the result of pigments, dyes, or artistic techniques, and exhibits unique three dimensional encoding of information that correlates with the form of a human body.² At the same time, the mechanism responsible for the image formation remains unknown, placing the Shroud in a category of artifacts that resist simple classification.

In recent years, discussion of the Shroud has increasingly shifted from academic settings to digital platforms, where complex issues are often distilled into confident and simplified conclusions. One prominent voice in this space is Dan McClellan, who regularly emphasizes a

¹ Shroud of Turin Research Project, “Summary of STURP Conclusions,” Shroud of Turin Website, <https://www.shroud.com/78conclu.htm>

² John H. Jackson, Eric J. Jumper, and William R. Ercoline, “Correlation of Image Intensity on the Turin Shroud with the 3 D Structure of a Human Body Shape,” *Applied Optics* 23, no. 14 (1984): 2244 to 2270, <https://opg.optica.org/ao/abstract.cfm?uri=ao-23-14-2244>

methodological commitment to evidence with the refrain, “Okay, let’s see it.” This principle reflects a commendable insistence on evidentiary accountability and aligns with the standards of serious scholarly inquiry.

However, the strength of such a standard lies not merely in its articulation but in its consistent application. In a series of videos addressing the Shroud of Turin and engaging claims made by Dr. Jeremiah Johnston, McClellan presents conclusions that, in several instances, extend beyond what the evidence can firmly establish.³ While it is appropriate to challenge exaggerated or poorly supported defenses of the Shroud, this paper contends that in correcting such overstatements, McClellan at times commits a parallel error by treating disputed interpretations as settled conclusions and minimizing the significance of unresolved or conflicting data.

The most frequently cited basis for dismissing the Shroud as a medieval artifact is the 1988 radiocarbon dating, published in *Nature*, which concluded that the linen dates to the period between A.D. 1260 and 1390.⁴ While this study represents an important contribution to the discussion, it does not exist in isolation. Questions regarding the sampling methodology, the representativeness of the tested material, and the statistical consistency of the results have continued to generate scholarly debate.⁵

This study does not claim absolute proof of authenticity, but evaluates whether the assertion that the Shroud is certainly a medieval forgery is warranted. Such a claim would exceed the limits of the available evidence and fall into the very category of overstatement this paper seeks to

³ Dan McClellan, “This Shroud of Turin Expert Can’t Tell the Truth,” YouTube video, accessed April 12, 2026, <https://youtu.be/FV5qpHIV3KE>; “Debunking the C14 Dating of the Shroud,” YouTube video, accessed April 11, 2026, <https://youtu.be/desnYBi2dDU>.

⁴ Damon et al., “Radiocarbon Dating of the Shroud of Turin,” *Nature* 337 (1989): 611–615, <https://doi.org/10.1038/337611a0>

⁵ Tristan Casabianca et al., “Radiocarbon Dating of the Turin Shroud: New Evidence from Raw Data,” *Archaeometry* 61, no. 5 (2019): 1223 to 1231, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/arcm.12467>

address. Instead, the purpose here is more focused and methodologically restrained. The goal is to evaluate whether the assertion that the Shroud is certainly a medieval forgery is warranted. To that end, the analysis proceeds across five key areas central to the debate. These include the 1988 radiocarbon dating and its methodological limitations, the representativeness of the sampled material, the still unresolved question of image formation, the historical record and its interpretive challenges, and the Shroud's alignment with first century Jewish burial practices. By examining each of these domains in turn, this paper aims to demonstrate that the evidence, far from closing the case, continues to invite careful, nuanced, and interdisciplinary consideration.

Methodological Considerations

This paper adopts a cumulative case approach. Rather than relying on a single line of evidence, it evaluates the convergence of data drawn from multiple disciplines. Historical questions of this nature are rarely resolved through isolated data points alone. Instead, they require the careful integration of scientific findings, historical analysis, and cultural context.⁶

In keeping with this approach, the study distinguishes between three levels of claim that are often conflated in public discourse:

Data, referring to what has been observed or measured

Interpretation, referring to how that data is understood

Conclusion, referring to the level of certainty assigned to a given interpretation

Maintaining clear distinctions between these categories is essential for responsible analysis. Data may be widely agreed upon while interpretations remain contested, and conclusions may vary significantly depending on the weight assigned to competing explanations.

⁶ See C. Behan McCullagh, *Justifying Historical Descriptions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 18–45, <https://academia.edu/resource/work/83826266>

A central concern of this paper is the tendency, particularly in popular presentations, to move too quickly from data to certainty without adequately accounting for alternative interpretations. Such methodological compression can give the appearance of decisiveness while masking underlying complexities. By contrast, this study proceeds with the recognition that evidentiary ambiguity is not a weakness to be dismissed, but a feature to be carefully examined.

This concern is directly relevant to the approach taken by Dan McClellan. While multiple arguments are presented in support of a medieval origin, including appeals to the 1988 radiocarbon dating, proposed image formation models, and historical testimony such as the d’Arcis memorandum, these lines of evidence are not weighed evenly. The radiocarbon result is often treated as effectively decisive, while unresolved questions in other domains are minimized or treated as secondary. This results in a methodological imbalance in which certainty is assigned disproportionately rather than emerging from a full integration of the available data. A cumulative case approach, by contrast, requires that all relevant evidence be evaluated together before conclusions of this magnitude are drawn.

Radiocarbon Dating — What Was Actually Proven?

The 1988 radiocarbon dating of the Shroud of Turin is frequently presented as decisive evidence that the cloth is a medieval forgery. The study, published in *Nature*, reported a calibrated date range of A.D. 1260 to 1390 based on samples tested by laboratories in Oxford, Zurich, and Arizona.⁷ Because of the prestige of the journal and the apparent agreement among the laboratories, the results have often been treated as conclusive. However, a closer examination of the methodology, sampling procedures, and subsequent analysis reveals that the conclusions drawn from this study may exceed what the data can firmly support.

⁷ Damon et al., “Radiocarbon Dating,” 611–615.

First, the sampling methodology represents a significant limitation. The original proposal for radiocarbon testing envisioned multiple samples taken from different regions of the cloth in order to account for potential heterogeneity.⁸ This approach reflects standard scientific practice when dealing with ancient textiles that may have experienced varying degrees of contamination, repair, or environmental exposure. Yet the final protocol deviated from this design. Only a single sample was taken, and it was extracted from a corner of the Shroud. While the laboratories themselves performed their analyses independently, all relied on material from the same localized region. This raises an immediate methodological concern. If the sampled area is not representative of the cloth as a whole, then the resulting date cannot be assumed to apply universally.

Second, the issue of sample representativeness has been the subject of substantial post-1988 analysis. Raymond Rogers, a chemist who was part of the original Shroud of Turin Research Project, conducted a detailed examination of fibers associated with the radiocarbon sample area. His findings indicated that this region contained cotton fibers interwoven with the linen, as well as dye and mordant materials not found in the main body of the Shroud.⁹ These observations led Rogers to conclude that the sampled material was not representative of the original cloth.

Whether one accepts his interpretation of an “invisible repair” or not, the presence of chemically distinct materials in the tested region introduces a legitimate basis for questioning the reliability of the radiocarbon date as a measure of the Shroud’s age.

Third, the statistical consistency of the radiocarbon data has also been challenged. While the 1988 study reported a combined date range, later analysis of the raw data suggests that the measurements from the three laboratories were not as uniform as originally presented. Tristan Casabianca and his colleagues obtained the original datasets and performed a statistical re-

⁸ Harry E. Gove, *Relic, Icon or Hoax? Carbon Dating the Turin Shroud* (Bristol: Institute of Physics Publishing, 1996), <https://archive.org/details/reliciconorhoaxc0000gove>

⁹ Raymond N. Rogers, “Studies on the Radiocarbon Sample from the Shroud of Turin,” *Thermochimica Acta* 425 (2005): 189–194, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0040603104004745>

evaluation, concluding that the data lacked homogeneity and that the assumption of a single underlying age may not be justified.¹⁰ In practical terms, this means that the results from different portions of the sample did not align as closely as would be expected if the material were uniform. This does not invalidate the radiocarbon method itself, but it does call into question the confidence with which the results can be applied to the entire cloth.

Fourth, the role of contamination and cleaning procedures remains a point of ongoing discussion. The laboratories employed standard pre-treatment methods to remove contaminants before testing. However, the effectiveness of these procedures depends on the nature of the contaminants present. If the sample includes newer material that is structurally integrated into the fabric, such as through repair or reweaving, standard cleaning techniques may not fully eliminate its influence.¹¹ In such cases, the radiocarbon date could reflect a mixture of original and later material, skewing the results toward a more recent age.

Finally, it is important to distinguish between what the radiocarbon study demonstrated and what is often claimed on its basis. The study showed that the specific material tested yielded a medieval date. It did not demonstrate that the entire Shroud is medieval, nor did it eliminate the possibility that the sampled region differed from the rest of the cloth. The strength of the conclusion depends entirely on the assumption that the sample is representative. If that assumption is weakened, then the certainty of the conclusion is likewise reduced.

For these reasons, the 1988 radiocarbon dating should be understood not as a definitive resolution of the Shroud's age, but as one line of evidence within a broader and more complex investigative framework. When considered alongside questions of sampling, chemical

¹⁰ Tristan Casabianca et al., "Radiocarbon Dating of the Turin Shroud: New Evidence from Raw Data," *Archaeometry* 61, no. 5 (2019): 1223–1231. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/arcm.12467>

¹¹ E. T. Hall, "Radiocarbon Dating of the Shroud of Turin," *Archaeometry* 31, no. 1 (1989): 3–8.

composition, and statistical consistency, the case for a conclusively medieval origin becomes significantly less secure than is often asserted.

Sample Representativeness — Was the Tested Material Reliable?

The reliability of the 1988 radiocarbon dating of the Shroud of Turin depends not only on the precision of the testing methods, but on a more fundamental question: whether the material tested was representative of the cloth as a whole. Radiocarbon dating, as a method, is well established and widely trusted. However, its accuracy is contingent upon the integrity of the sample. If the tested material differs in composition or age from the original artifact, then the resulting date reflects the sample itself rather than the object under investigation.

The 1988 testing relied on a single sample taken from a corner of the Shroud.¹² This decision marked a departure from earlier proposals that called for multiple samples from different regions of the cloth. The reduction to a single sampling location introduced a critical assumption into the study, namely, that the selected area was representative of the entire textile. Without independent confirmation of that assumption, the conclusions drawn from the test necessarily remain conditional.

Subsequent analysis has raised substantial questions about this assumption. Raymond Rogers, a chemist involved in the original examination of the Shroud by the Shroud of Turin Research Project, conducted a detailed study of fibers associated with the radiocarbon sample area. His analysis revealed the presence of cotton fibers interwoven with the linen, along with dye and mordant coatings not observed in samples taken from the main body of the cloth.¹³ These findings suggest that the sampled region may have undergone processes not shared by the rest of the Shroud.

¹² Damon et al., “Radiocarbon Dating,” 611–615.

¹³ Rogers, “Studies on the Radiocarbon Sample,” 189–194.

Rogers concluded that the radiocarbon sample was not representative of the original linen and may have been affected by later modifications.¹⁴ This conclusion has been supported by additional research suggesting that the sampled region may reflect a repair or reweaving process capable of introducing newer material into the tested area.¹⁵ While interpretations of these findings vary, the underlying data are not easily dismissed. The presence of chemically distinct materials in the tested region raises a legitimate concern that the radiocarbon date may reflect a composite of original and later substances. In such a case, even precise laboratory measurements could yield a misleading result.

Additional support for this concern comes from the statistical analysis of the radiocarbon data itself. Tristan Casabianca and his colleagues have shown that the measurements from the three laboratories exhibit a lack of homogeneity, indicating that the tested material may not represent a single, uniform age.¹⁶ If the sample itself is internally inconsistent, confidence in its ability to represent the entire cloth is further diminished.

Critics, including Dan McClellan, have argued that no clear evidence of repair or alteration exists in the sampled region and that claims of an “invisible repair” are speculative. However, this objection overlooks the nature of the evidence in question. Rogers’ findings are not based on visual inspection alone but on chemical analysis. The identification of cotton fibers and dye coatings where they are otherwise absent is itself evidence of anomaly, regardless of whether one adopts a specific explanation such as reweaving. The issue is not whether a particular theory of repair can be definitively proven, but whether the tested material can be confidently assumed to be original and homogeneous.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ BENFORD, M. Sue and MARINO, Joseph G. - Discrepancies in the radiocarbon dating area of the Turin shroud - Chemistry Today, vol 26 n 4.

¹⁶ Casabianca et al., “Radiocarbon Dating,” 1223–1231.

The question of sample representativeness therefore remains central to the interpretation of the 1988 radiocarbon results. If the sampled region differs materially from the rest of the Shroud, then the resulting date cannot be uncritically applied to the entire cloth. Under such conditions, the radiocarbon test does not provide a definitive answer but rather a data point whose relevance depends on assumptions that are themselves open to challenge.

Image Formation — The Problem of a Medieval Mechanism

Any claim that the Shroud of Turin is a medieval forgery must do more than question the radiocarbon dating. It must also provide a plausible account of how the image itself was produced. This requirement is often overlooked in popular discussions. While it is relatively easy to assert that an object is not authentic, it is considerably more difficult to explain, in concrete terms, the process by which it came into being. In the case of the Shroud, this challenge remains unresolved.

Dan McClellan frequently emphasizes the importance of evidence and calls for demonstrable support for claims. This standard is appropriate. However, when applied consistently, it raises a significant question for the medieval forgery hypothesis: where is the evidence for a mechanism capable of producing the Shroud image?

The findings of the Shroud of Turin Research Project established several key characteristics of the image that complicate any artistic explanation. The image is not composed of pigments, paints, or dyes, and no evidence of brushwork or directionality consistent with artistic application has been identified.¹⁷ Instead, the image resides on the outermost fibrils of the linen,

¹⁷ Shroud of Turin Research Project, “Summary of STURP Conclusions,” accessed via Shroud of Turin Website, <https://www.shroud.com/78conclu.htm>

affecting only a very thin surface layer.¹⁸ This superficiality is difficult to reconcile with known medieval techniques, which typically involve penetration of pigment or medium into the fibers. In addition to its superficial nature, the image encodes three dimensional information. When analyzed using image processing techniques, the intensity of the image correlates with distance from the body, producing a coherent three dimensional representation.¹⁹ This property is not found in conventional paintings or rubbings and suggests a process that varies in intensity according to spatial proximity rather than manual application.

Equally significant is the absence of distortion expected from direct contact methods. If the image were produced by pressing a cloth against a human form or a bas relief, one would expect lateral distortion consistent with wrapping. Instead, the image maintains proportional accuracy, indicating that it was not formed through simple contact or transfer.²⁰

Despite decades of investigation, no consensus has emerged regarding a mechanism that can account for all of these features simultaneously. Various hypotheses have been proposed, including painting, scorching, chemical reactions, and photographic techniques. Each has been shown to reproduce certain aspects of the image under controlled conditions, but none has successfully replicated the full range of observed characteristics.²¹

McClellan's critique does not offer a positive mechanism for image formation, nor does it engage in detail with the specific features identified by STURP and subsequent researchers. Instead, the argument often proceeds by focusing on the radiocarbon date as sufficient grounds for dismissal. Yet this approach leaves a critical explanatory gap. If the Shroud is a medieval artifact, then the

¹⁸ Rogers, "Studies on the Radiocarbon Sample," 189–194.

¹⁹ Jackson, Jumper, and Ercoline, "Correlation of Image Intensity," 2244–2270.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Rogers, "Studies on the Radiocarbon Sample," 189–194.

method of its creation should be demonstrable in principle and at least partially reproducible in practice. At present, no such method has been established.

This does not prove that the image is supernatural or that the Shroud is authentic. It does, however, demonstrate that the medieval forgery hypothesis is incomplete as an explanation. A conclusion that the Shroud is certainly medieval requires not only a date, but a mechanism. Until such a mechanism is identified and shown to account for the image's unique properties, claims of certainty remain premature.

Statistical Integrity — What the Data Actually Shows

The confidence often placed in the 1988 radiocarbon dating of the Shroud of Turin rests not only on the reported date range, but on the assumption that the underlying data are statistically consistent and representative of a single, uniform sample. This assumption is critical.

Radiocarbon dating does not simply produce a date. It produces a set of measurements that must be internally coherent in order to justify a unified conclusion. If that coherence is lacking, the resulting date becomes less secure as a definitive statement about the age of the object.

Dan McClellan frequently presents the 1988 results as decisive, treating the medieval date as effectively settled. However, this level of confidence depends on the integrity of the dataset itself. If the measurements obtained by the three laboratories are not statistically consistent with one another, then the conclusion that they represent a single chronological origin must be reconsidered.

This issue has been examined in detail by Tristan Casabianca and his colleagues, who obtained access to the original radiocarbon data and conducted a comprehensive statistical re-evaluation. Their analysis revealed that the measurements from the Oxford, Zurich, and Arizona laboratories do not exhibit the level of homogeneity required to support the assumption of a single, uniform

age.²² In statistical terms, the data fail tests that would normally be expected to confirm consistency within a single sample population.

More specifically, the variation in measurements across different subsamples suggests that the material tested may not have been uniform. If different portions of the sample yield systematically different dates, this indicates that the tested material could include components of differing ages. Such a result is consistent with the possibility that the sampled region contained a mixture of original and later material, rather than a single, homogeneous textile.

Importantly, this critique does not challenge the validity of radiocarbon dating as a method. The technique itself remains one of the most reliable tools available for dating organic material. The issue in this case is not the method, but its application. Radiocarbon dating assumes that the sample being tested is representative and internally consistent. When those assumptions are called into question, the certainty of the resulting date is correspondingly reduced.

McClellan's treatment of the radiocarbon evidence does not engage with this statistical critique. By presenting the 1988 results as definitive, the argument moves from data to conclusion without adequately addressing the underlying assumptions required to justify that conclusion. A more cautious interpretation would recognize that the radiocarbon date reflects the specific material tested and that questions regarding the composition and consistency of that material remain unresolved.

The implications of this are significant. If the dataset itself does not support a single, uniform age with high confidence, then the claim that the Shroud has been conclusively dated to the medieval period cannot be sustained at the level of certainty often asserted. At most, the radiocarbon results provide evidence that is contingent upon assumptions that are themselves subject to ongoing debate.

²² Tristan Casabianca et al., "Radiocarbon Dating of the Turin Shroud: New Evidence from Raw Data," *Archaeometry* 61, no. 5 (2019): 1223–1231.

In this light, the radiocarbon dating of the Shroud should be understood not as a final determination, but as one component within a broader evidentiary framework. When evaluated alongside concerns about sample representativeness and material heterogeneity, the statistical integrity of the data further reinforces the need for a cautious and interdisciplinary approach.

The VP-8 Image Analyzer — Artifact or Anomaly?

One of the most frequently cited arguments against the uniqueness of the Shroud image involves the use of the VP-8 image analyzer, a device capable of converting variations in light and dark intensity into vertical relief. Dan McClellan argues that the three-dimensional appearance of the Shroud image is not extraordinary, but rather the predictable result of a cloth being placed over a low-relief or bas-relief surface and treated with pigment.²³ According to this view, the VP-8 output does not reveal a unique property of the Shroud, but merely reflects the method by which the image was artificially created.

This argument, however, fails to account for a critical distinction between ordinary photographic or artistic images and the Shroud image. While it is true that the VP-8 image analyzer converts light and dark values into vertical relief, this description alone does not account for the behavior observed in the Shroud image. In typical photographs or paintings, brightness corresponds to lighting conditions rather than spatial distance, and when processed through the VP-8, such images produce distorted and incoherent relief patterns. By contrast, the Shroud image generates a coherent and anatomically consistent three-dimensional representation, indicating that the intensity of the image correlates with spatial structure rather than reflected light alone.²⁴ The significance of the Shroud lies precisely in this difference. When processed through the VP-8

²³ Dan McClellan, “This Shroud of Turin Expert Can’t Tell the Truth,” YouTube video, accessed April 12, 2026, <https://youtu.be/FV5qpHIV3KE>

²⁴ John H. Jackson, *The Shroud of Turin: A Critical Summary of Observations, Data, and Hypotheses*, accessed via Shroud of Turin Website, <https://www.shroudofturin.com/Resources/CRTSUM.pdf>

analyzer, the image produces a consistent and proportionally accurate three-dimensional representation of a human form.²⁵ This indicates that the intensity of the image correlates with distance from the body rather than simply reflecting light and shadow. In other words, the image encodes spatial information in a way that is fundamentally different from conventional artistic or photographic images.

McClellan's proposed explanation, that the image was created using a bas-relief model, introduces further difficulties. If a cloth were draped over a three-dimensional surface and pigment applied through contact, one would expect not only the presence of pigment within the fibers, but also distortions consistent with the wrapping of a flexible medium over a solid form. As noted earlier, such distortions are not observed in the Shroud image. Instead, the image maintains proportional accuracy without the lateral deformation expected from contact-based methods.

Moreover, experimental attempts to reproduce the Shroud image using bas-relief techniques have consistently failed to replicate its full set of characteristics. While certain features, such as superficial coloration or general shape, can be approximated, these methods do not account for the absence of directional brush strokes, the uniformity of image intensity across varying surfaces, or the precise correlation between image density and spatial depth.²⁶

The VP-8 data therefore do not support the conclusion that the Shroud was produced by a bas-relief technique. On the contrary, they reinforce the observation that the image encodes information in a manner not readily explained by known artistic or mechanical processes. The argument that the Shroud's three-dimensional properties are an artifact of its manufacture presupposes a method that has not been demonstrated to reproduce those properties in a comprehensive and controlled way.

²⁵ Jackson, Jumper, and Ercoline, "Correlation of Image Intensity," 2244–2270.

²⁶ Rogers, "Studies on the Radiocarbon Sample," 189–194.

This does not establish the origin of the image, but it does clarify the limits of current explanations. The VP-8 analysis remains one of the most compelling indicators that the Shroud image is not a conventional product of artistic creation. Any claim that it is must provide not only a theoretical model, but a reproducible mechanism capable of accounting for all observed features. At present, no such mechanism has been demonstrated.

The VP-8 analysis therefore does not diminish the uniqueness of the Shroud image but rather highlights it, shifting the question from whether the image can be explained to what process could account for the presence of such spatially coherent information.

Blood Evidence and Clotting — The Work of Dr. Kelly Kearse

In addition to questions surrounding image formation, the Shroud of Turin presents a second category of physical evidence that must be addressed: the presence and characteristics of bloodstains on the cloth. This issue is particularly significant in light of claims that the Shroud is a medieval fabrication, as any proposed mechanism must account not only for the image, but also for the biological features associated with it.

Dan McClellan references the work of Dr. Kelly Kearse in support of a naturalistic explanation for the Shroud's features. However, this appeal is incomplete. While Kearse's research explores possible mechanisms for blood transfer and challenges certain traditional assumptions, it also includes findings that complicate a simple forgery hypothesis.

Kearse's 2025 study specifically reexamines the "washing hypothesis," which proposes that a body was cleansed prior to burial and that blood was transferred to the cloth through later post-mortem processes. His experimental results demonstrate that when coagulation is inhibited, blood does not produce the serum borders or halos observed on the Shroud.²⁷ This finding is

²⁷ Kelly Kearse, "Blood Transfer to the Shroud of Turin: The Washing Hypothesis Revisited," *International Journal of Archaeology* 13, no. 2 (2025), <https://www.sciencepublishinggroup.com/article/10.11648/j.ija.20251302.12>

significant because such serum halos are a documented feature of many of the Shroud's bloodstains.

The implication is direct. The presence of serum halos indicates that clotted blood was transferred to the cloth, not fluid blood from a washed or non-coagulating source. As Kears's study concludes, the observed blood patterns are incompatible with scenarios in which the body was washed and blood was transferred later under conditions that prevent clotting.²⁸

These findings align with earlier work by Alan Adler and John Heller, who identified hemoglobin and serum albumin in the stains, supporting the conclusion that the Shroud contains real blood rather than pigment.²⁹ The convergence of chemical and experimental evidence suggests that the bloodstains are consistent with physiological processes associated with a recently deceased and wounded individual.

This creates a substantial challenge for the bas-relief and pigment-based models referenced by McClellan. Such models rely on the application of coloring agents or artificial transfer methods, but they do not adequately account for bloodstains that exhibit characteristics of coagulation, serum separation, and timed transfer consistent with contact between a wounded body and a burial cloth.

McClellan's use of Kears's work does not engage with these conclusions. By emphasizing aspects of the research that support a naturalistic framework while omitting findings related to clotting and serum halo formation, the argument presents an incomplete picture of the evidence. A full accounting of Kears's results introduces constraints that any proposed explanation must satisfy.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ John H. Heller and Alan D. Adler, "Blood on the Shroud of Turin," *Applied Optics* 19, no. 16 (1980): 2742–2744.

This does not establish the origin of the Shroud, but it does narrow the range of plausible explanations. The presence of blood with characteristics consistent with clotting prior to transfer introduces a biological dimension that must be integrated into any comprehensive theory. As with the image itself, these features remain insufficiently explained by current models of medieval fabrication.

Historical Testimony — The d’Arcis Memorandum

In addition to scientific arguments, claims that the Shroud of Turin is a medieval forgery are often supported by reference to a late fourteenth-century document known as the d’Arcis memorandum. Written by Bishop Pierre d’Arcis to Pope Clement VII, the memorandum asserts that the Shroud was a painted artifact and further claims that the artist responsible had confessed to its creation.³⁰ This document is frequently presented as early and decisive evidence that the Shroud was known to be a forgery shortly after its emergence in France.

However, the evidentiary value of the d’Arcis memorandum is more limited than is often assumed. The document does not survive in its original form but is preserved as a later copy within the Vatican archives.³¹ More significantly, the alleged confession of the artist is not independently documented. No name is provided, no testimony survives, and no corroborating record has been identified. As a result, the claim rests entirely on the authority of d’Arcis himself rather than on verifiable evidence.

The historical context in which the memorandum was written further complicates its interpretation. The dispute surrounding the Shroud occurred within a broader conflict between ecclesiastical authorities concerning its display and the influx of pilgrims it attracted.³² Such

³⁰ Pierre d’Arcis, “Memorandum to Pope Clement VII,” c. 1389.

³¹ Ian Wilson, *The Shroud of Turin* (London: Bantam, 1978), 59–62.

³² *Ibid.*

circumstances introduce the possibility that the memorandum reflects institutional concerns or jurisdictional tensions rather than a neutral historical investigation.

Even if the memorandum is accepted as a sincere statement of belief, it remains precisely that, a claim. It asserts that the Shroud was painted, but it provides no description of the method used, nor does it engage with the physical characteristics of the image itself. This absence is particularly significant in light of the findings of the Shroud of Turin Research Project, which found no evidence of pigments, paints, or dyes on the fibers.³³ The historical assertion and the physical evidence therefore stand in unresolved tension.

Dan McClellan appeals to the d’Arcis memorandum as part of a broader argument for the Shroud’s medieval origin. However, this appeal assumes that the document constitutes definitive historical evidence rather than a contested report. A responsible historical method requires distinguishing between contemporaneous accusation and demonstrable proof. The presence of an early skeptical claim does not, by itself, establish the accuracy of that claim.

For these reasons, the d’Arcis memorandum cannot be regarded as conclusive evidence that the Shroud is a medieval forgery. At most, it represents an early interpretation—one that must be evaluated alongside both the scientific data and the broader historical context. When considered in this cumulative framework, the memorandum contributes to the discussion but does not resolve it.

Jewish Burial Practices — Cultural and Historical Context

Any evaluation of the Shroud of Turin must consider whether its features align with known burial practices of the first century. Historical, textual, and archaeological evidence from the

³³ Shroud of Turin Research Project, “Summary of STURP Conclusions,” available at Shroud of Turin Website, <https://www.shroud.com/78conclu.htm>

Second Temple period provides a well-established framework for understanding how Jewish bodies were prepared and interred, particularly in Judea during the time of Jesus.

The Gospel accounts describe Jesus as being wrapped in a linen shroud and buried in haste prior to the onset of the Sabbath.³⁴ This detail is consistent with Jewish burial customs, which required prompt interment, often within the same day, especially in cases involving execution.³⁵ The body was typically wrapped in linen cloths, sometimes accompanied by additional bindings and a separate cloth for the head or face.³⁶ These elements correspond closely to the descriptions found in the New Testament, including the reference to a face cloth in John 20:7.

In cases of violent death, Jewish burial practice placed particular emphasis on preserving the integrity of the body, including the retention of blood. Later rabbinic sources reflect the principle that blood shed in death was to be buried with the individual, as it was considered part of the person.³⁷ This custom is significant in light of the Shroud's bloodstains, which appear consistent with wounds inflicted prior to burial and show no evidence of having been washed away. The presence of both blood and serum separation patterns further suggests that the body was wrapped relatively soon after death, in accordance with Jewish practice.

Archaeological discoveries from the first century provide additional context. Excavations in and around Jerusalem, as well as sites such as Qumran, indicate that burial in linen shrouds was common, with bodies placed in tombs and later subject to secondary burial practices involving ossuaries.³⁸ The use of shrouds, the positioning of the body, and the presence of burial spices all

³⁴ Matthew 27:59; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53; John 19:40.

³⁵ Deuteronomy 21:22–23; John 19:31.

³⁶ John 20:7.

³⁷ Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 364:4.

³⁸ Rachel Hachlili, "Burial Practices at Qumran," *Revue de Qumran* 16 (1994): 247–264.

align with the cultural and religious framework of the period. These practices reflect broader theological concerns related to purity, dignity, and the expectation of bodily resurrection.

The Shroud's characteristics correspond closely with this context. This alignment has been explored in greater detail in prior research examining the convergence of the Shroud's features with first-century Jewish burial practices.³⁹ The linen composition, the apparent positioning of the body, and the presence of blood consistent with crucifixion wounds all fit within the known parameters of Second Temple burial customs. While such correspondence does not establish authenticity, it does demonstrate that the Shroud is culturally and historically coherent in a way that would require specific and detailed knowledge to reproduce.

This point is particularly relevant in response to Dan McClellan's broader argument. If the Shroud is a medieval creation, then its maker would need not only to produce an image by means that remain unexplained, but also to accurately reflect burial practices that were not widely understood in the medieval period. The convergence of these factors introduces an additional layer of complexity to the forgery hypothesis.

A cumulative assessment must therefore take into account not only isolated features, but the degree to which those features cohere within a historical framework. In the case of the Shroud, the alignment with first-century Jewish burial practices does not prove authenticity, but it significantly narrows the range of plausible explanations and strengthens the case for continued investigation rather than premature dismissal.

Scholarly Consensus and Relevant Expertise

³⁹ Tom Dallis, *Sacred Threads: The Shroud of Turin in Scriptural and Jewish Context* (2025), <https://tomstheology.blog/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/sacred-threads-6.pdf>

Dan McClellan asserts that “most scholars” regard the Shroud of Turin as a medieval forgery. While appeals to scholarly consensus can carry weight, they are meaningful only when that consensus arises from those working within the relevant fields of study.

The Shroud is not primarily a question of New Testament scholarship or general historical opinion. Its evaluation depends on specialized disciplines such as textile analysis, chemistry, image formation, and forensic blood analysis. A scholar may be highly trained in one field and yet not possess expertise in these areas. In such cases, their conclusions reflect informed opinion, but not direct engagement with the primary physical evidence.

When attention is focused on those who have studied the Shroud directly, the picture is notably different. The only comprehensive, hands-on scientific examination of the cloth was conducted by the Shroud of Turin Research Project in 1978. This team included scientists from a wide range of backgrounds and institutions, including Los Alamos National Laboratory, the U.S. Air Force Academy, and NASA-related research environments. Its members represented diverse religious and philosophical perspectives, including agnostic, atheist, Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, and Latter-day Saint participants. They approached the Shroud as a scientific problem, not as a devotional object, and many did not expect the image to withstand critical analysis.

Their conclusions are therefore particularly significant. The team determined that the image is not the product of an artist, not composed of pigments or dyes, and not the result of painting, rubbing, or bas-relief techniques. These findings directly challenge the claim that the Shroud can be explained as a conventional medieval fabrication. While the STURP team did not assert a definitive origin, their results establish that the image cannot be accounted for by known artistic methods.

For this reason, the claim that “most scholars” regard the Shroud as a forgery does not resolve the question. A meaningful assessment must be grounded not in generalized opinion, but in the

careful evaluation of the evidence by those equipped to analyze it. When this is done, the level of certainty often associated with the medieval forgery claim becomes significantly less secure. A more detailed probabilistic analysis of what a medieval forger would need to know and reproduce is explored elsewhere, where the cumulative requirements render such a scenario cumulatively implausible to the point of practical impossibility when considered as an integrated model.⁴⁰

Conclusion: Reassessing Certainty

The purpose of this study has been to evaluate whether the claim that the Shroud of Turin is certainly a medieval forgery can be sustained. Based on the cumulative evidence examined, that claim cannot be justified.

The radiocarbon dating, while important, rests on a sample whose representativeness has been credibly challenged. The statistical inconsistencies in the raw data further weaken the confidence often placed in a single, uniform medieval date. The image itself remains unexplained by any known artistic or mechanical process, exhibiting properties such as extreme superficiality, absence of pigments, and coherent three dimensional encoding. The VP-8 analysis reinforces that this is not a conventional image. The blood evidence, particularly the presence of serum halos and clotting patterns, aligns with real physiological processes and resists reduction to artificial models. Historical arguments, such as the d’Arcis memorandum, provide assertions but not demonstrable proof. Finally, the Shroud’s alignment with first century Jewish burial practices is not incidental but deeply coherent, requiring knowledge that far exceeds what would reasonably

⁴⁰ Tom Dallis, *Sacred Threads: The Shroud of Turin in Scriptural and Jewish Context* (2025), <https://tomstheology.blog/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/sacred-threads-6.pdf>. See especially the analysis of five areas of scholarly agreement, each with consensus levels at or above 90 percent, and the identification of thirty distinct features a medieval forger would need to anticipate. Considered cumulatively, these factors produce a probability approaching impossibility.

be expected of a medieval forger. Taken together, these lines of evidence do not merely leave the question open. They point in a consistent direction.

While absolute proof remains beyond the reach of historical inquiry, the cumulative case strongly favors the conclusion that the Shroud is not a medieval creation. The burden of explanation now rests not with those who take the Shroud seriously, but with those who claim it is a forgery. Any such claim must account for the totality of the evidence, not selectively appeal to a single line of data while leaving the rest unexplained.

The question is no longer whether isolated data points can be cited against the Shroud, but whether any single hypothesis can account for the full scope of the evidence. At present, no such hypothesis exists within the medieval forgery framework. Until it does, claims of certainty are not only premature, they are methodologically indefensible.

The Shroud does not demand blind belief. It demands an explanation. And at present, the explanation that it is simply a medieval forgery is the least adequate of those available.