

TURIN SHROUD DEBATE: WOULD THIEVES HAVE LEFT JESUS' BURIAL CLOTHS BEHIND?

The Turin Shroud is the most famous relic in the world. Millions believe that it is the burial cloth of Jesus Christ bearing his crucified and bloodied image. The cloth is kept at Turin in Italy. The cloth is an enigma. Many say it is a miracle.

If Jesus was stolen from the tomb they would have taken the wrappings too. But the New Testament says the cloths were left behind. But it does not say that the clothes were checked to see what was missing. Did the women find the tomb empty and put cloths there to create a mystery to distract from their possible involvement? We are told they went to the tomb to do things that should already been done with the body!

The Gospel of John has Jesus being buried in loads of expensive spices and oils and Christians assume without evidence that a copyist made a mistake and it was less (page 102, The Jesus Inquest). If he had been saturated in such a heap of extravagances, he would have been worth stealing so that the oils and spices could be sold.

The gospel of John alone says Jesus was wrapped in sticky cloths full of oils and spices according to the Jewish custom. But on Sunday morning it was found that these were stripped off and folded neatly. Would thieves strip a body and take it away? It seems not. How do we deal with that?

First it is refuted by the story of Matthew and Mark and Luke that Jesus was not in sticky cloths for the burial had to be completed by the women two days later for they came to anoint the body.

We have three gospels against one so which side should we take? The three gospels of course. And this despite the fact that women would not come to anoint a body that should be smelling already if Jesus really was beaten to a pulp as Christians believe.

The cloths found in the tomb could be explained as replicas of the cloths used for Jesus. If the thieves were seen carrying a body wrapped up and anointed nobody would link them with the missing body for the cloths were in the tomb.

The view that the thieves would have had to hurry instead of taking time to strip Jesus is useless. Nobody knows if they needed to hurry that much.

Jesus could have been wrapped up excessively. If so they could have taken the shrouded Jesus and left the surplus cloths behind. Maybe these cloths fell off. Maybe the cloths were unused and left behind by the buriers and forgotten about.

Perhaps the thieves wanted people to think that Jesus rose and got out of the grave clothes himself. That way they kept within the law. Nobody can call you a thief for taking a body when you say you were not stealing but trying to save the man's life for he was in fact not dead.

Most thieves are not afraid to leave evidence that they struck if they are confident. Accordingly, the tomb of Jesus was left open. They knew nobody would be about until morning until they were well away. Or did they leave the tomb open because they were disturbed or to ensure a resurrection rumour would start?

And they knew that the more exposed a crime scene is, then the harder it is to pin down the criminals.

We conclude that if there were guards, the New Testament says nothing to allay the suspicion that the grave was robbed prior to their arrival. They were not reliable guardians anyway. They could have been bribed to let somebody take the body. Matthew says they took bribes. The tomb was open making it easy for anybody to have taken the body or for Jesus to have crawled out if he was not dead.

THE SEAL

The Resurrection Factor claims that the seal of Rome was put on the tomb (page 77). The gospels never say that. Matthew only says Pilate told them to secure the tomb better and they sealed it meaning this was only part of securing it better. It was not a legal seal. But suppose it was a real legal seal.

Matthew says the Jews put it on in the presence of the Roman soldiers which indicates that it was not the Roman seal. The

Jews had seals of their own and since they demanded the guard it was up to them to put seals on the tomb. Had it been a Roman seal the women who went to the tomb to anoint Jesus on the third day would not have gone there at all for they would not get inside or get permission to get in to anoint for because of the popular beliefs regarding decomposition they could not expect permission. They might be willing to chance breaking a Jewish seal but not a Roman one. Weren't they all very devoted to the law of the land?

Pilate evidently did not care if Jesus was stolen or not when he had to be asked to put guards at the tomb and it seemed at that time that Jesus had no supporters to steal him. Pilate would not have cared enough about the body to let the Roman seal be used for he submitted the body to Jesus' fans who could have done anything with it including cut it up for miracle souvenirs or eat it in response to his prediction that he would be eaten. The Sabbath was believed to have started on Friday night for Jews calculated a day from dark the night before. Some say since the Jews could not do the sealing on the Sabbath the story is fiction or it was a Roman seal applied by Romans. But the fact is that one of them might not have worried about breaking the Sabbath under the circumstances. It is like a Protestant minister having an ecumenical service though his Church frowns upon it.

