

THE LEGEND THAT JESUS' TOMB WAS GUARDED AGAINST BODY-SNATCHERS

The gospels say that a miracle healing man called Jesus Christ lived. They say he died by crucifixion and was buried immediately after and three days later he rose again. The tomb he was placed in was found wide open with the stone that had been across the entrance moved back and the tomb was mysteriously empty. His body was gone. Certain witnesses claimed that Jesus appeared to them as a resurrected being.

As Jesus' body supposedly could not have been removed from his tomb by thieves and as he appeared alive to his followers it is supposed that he rose from the dead. This view cannot be sustained if it was possible for somebody to have robbed the tomb. The Christians contradict that by saying the tomb was securely guarded. They say the body could not have been stolen.

John's gospel says Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead four days after his decease. Lazarus stone was rolled back without the authorities or without anybody knowing for sure that Jesus could raise him. Why did the Jews not guard his tomb if they knew Jesus had supernatural abilities? The story does not fit the alleged legal and cultural taboo about touching tombs.

We know that John's claim that the disciples actually went into the tomb is untrue for Roman law would have crushed them for that. It was a crime scene if the body had vanished. (Unless you want to believe that they had obtained authorisation from Pilate which was why even if they stole the body nobody could do a thing about it for it was technically not stealing. This would explain why we do not hear of anybody being framed and punished for the theft. The Christians like to keep people from thinking that the body could have been legally stolen and all their apologetics centre around the notion that to take Jesus had to be theft.) If there had been no guards the disciples would have been liquidated in hours but if there had been guards and what they were guarding was tampered with and trespassed upon the disciples would have been liquidated faster than a millisecond.

NOBODY BUT JESUS' CLOSEST WOULD HAVE KNOWN LOCATION OF TOMB

Joseph of Arimathea buried Jesus. He was a secret disciple and lived in fear of his Jewish peers. His secretiveness makes it unlikely that Pilate the Roman governor knew where the tomb was. The Jews definitely did not know. So there was no way the guards could have went to the right tomb. Why would anybody want them to know anyway?

THERE WERE NO GUARDS

Only the Matthew Gospel states that Jesus' tomb was protected from body snatchers. It says that the day after Jesus died the Jews implored Pilate to have the tomb guarded lest the disciples of Jesus come and steal the body and claim Jesus had risen from the dead for the Jews remembered Jesus saying he would rise after three days. Pilate thought this was a good idea and seals were applied to the stone and the guard mounted. This guard is supposed to prove that nobody stole Jesus from the tomb and that Jesus did not revive and come out himself.

The Jews did not close tombs properly for the first three days in case the person would revive (page 89, The Turin Shroud is Genuine). They would have done this especially in the case of Jesus if they thought he could raise the dead and heal or perhaps rise himself. The stone for the tomb of Jesus would have been in place well enough to keep animals out but Jesus could have got out.

Or maybe he called out to a passer-by through an opening. The passer-by, knowing that nobody would ever know, helped Jesus out of the tomb after moving the stone and gave him some clothes and maybe nursed him back to health him.

But if everybody was sure there was no hope for Jesus the tomb might have been sealed completely. But then why seal the tomb completely if the women were coming on Sunday morning? The guards, if they existed, had to have spoken to Joseph. Joseph would have known if the women were needed and if they would be coming.

It has been pointed out that if the women went home before the guards came and wondered on Sunday morning how the tomb would be opened for them that they knew nothing about the guards. Or you could say it is more likely there were none for surely they were bound to have known for after all Jesus says in Luke the happenings were the gossip of the city.

What if the women at the tomb on Sunday morning was made up for the Christians could not say the tomb was empty unless somebody discovered it and the women were the safest for they had an alleged innocent reason to be there and saying it was somebody else maybe a disciple would suggest he robbed the body from the tomb? If there were guards maybe the tomb was not robbed and Jesus is still there. Maybe if women went to the tomb the real story is that they were

turned away and made up the resurrection story for spite. The stone being in place would have meant nothing. On Sunday evening you can be sure that there was no sign the tomb was ever opened. The stone would have been rolled into position again.

Hoare says that the bereaved occasionally employed people to watch the tomb for them in case the “deceased” would come round (page 89, *The Turin Shroud is Genuine*). But the Gospels imply that this was not done with Jesus when Matthew says Roman guards were needed and when he and the rest say the women worried about getting the stone moved. The watchers might have helped Jesus out of the tomb. Perhaps the Romans let them do the close watching while they just pranced about the area. By the way, the watchers would not have stayed inside the tomb to watch for the Jews thought that the tombs were religiously unclean. Ordinary Jews would have watched the tomb. The Romans would not have watched if the Jews did for the Jewish watchers were near enough to the city to summon them at the first sign of trouble. It is possible that if the Jews got a guard, that the guard was never intended to be very near the tomb all the time. This possibility refutes the view that if Matthew is telling the truth about the guards then Jesus could not have been stolen and shows that Matthew failed to be convincing.

The watchers would have probably been friends of Jesus and picked and paid by the filthy-rich Joseph of Arimathea and would have been happy to help Jesus to safety or steal his body and tell the Jews they fell asleep and some disciples stole Jesus.

Christians comment, “Even though the Jesus people were finished it was known that a return from the dead might restore Jesus to favour in the eyes of the people and create a huge revival. The Jews were taking no chances.” Then why did they have him killed before the eyes of the people? If he was privately killed at least they could say he never rose if he did rise for he was never dead. And there is no evidence that the Jews who caused Jesus’ death acknowledged Jesus’ miracle powers. They were convinced that the crucifixion was Jesus’ ultimate and final failure. They told him as much.

Suppose the Jews believed that Jesus had supernatural demonic powers even if he did cheat sometimes. It would seem that the Jews would not have wanted the guards there for if Jesus had been such a great worker of miracles they would have been terrified that the guards would see the resurrection and become converts. That would have been all the more reason why the guards had to be Romans and not Jews for Jews would have been easier to convert. But you may say that the Jews knew that Jesus could show himself to everybody anyway if he rose. They had no reason to think that he would. There would have been no guards and especially no Roman ones. The Jews knew that even if Jesus was stolen and he planned to rise that wouldn’t stop him rising. There might have been guards only if theft was thought to be the only way Jesus could rise from the dead.

Pilate would not have wanted guards there if he broke the law to allow Jesus a proper burial that made Jesus look like an innocent man when the dump was the place for criminals. They would know then what he did and so would the Jews. For the Jews to completely destroy Jesus’ hold over people by making a failure of him which was the alleged reason for their bringing the crucifixion about they had to ensure he had as degrading a burial as a common criminal.

The Womb and the Tomb (page 108) says it is terribly unlikely that the tomb was looked after by Jesus’ enemies and not his friends. Perfectly right. Maybe one independent guard needed to be there to make sure they behaved themselves. If there had been guards they would have been amateurs and we would be told this. We are not so there were no guards.

The places where the bodies of criminals were dumped were always under guard (*Who Moved the Stone?* page 152). But that was out of cruelty to stop them getting a decent burial. Jesus was already in his tomb and had no guards for several hours so no guards were needed.

John says that Jesus was buried in the tomb because it was so near (19:42). Not because it was Joseph of Arimathea’s so it was a stolen tomb. Romans would not protect a tomb to keep a body that did not belong there inside it. Perhaps the real owners pilfered and destroyed the body and were afraid to own up.

The Gospel never says that guards were witnessed at the tomb except by a man in white who was never asked about them. No evidence is given only hearsay.

We don’t know if the women saw the guards. So Matthew is as good as telling us that he is only assuming that there were guards there. What kind of evidence is that? It is rubbish like that that Christianity is dependent on. Matthew just says that the guards saw the angel at the tomb and fainted and then that the angel spoke to the women. The guards could have gone by then. The gospel does not tell us. If there had been guards there Peter and the disciple and the women would not have touched the tomb. The women would have been silenced and maybe even killed for seeing the guards lying comatose around the tomb for the guards would have checked if anybody had seen them or if anybody was talking.

If guards always watched the graves of criminals – or top criminals like Jesus - then the women would not have been

asking how they were going to get the stone moved. When the women did not know about the guards for they would not have worried about shifting the stone if they had it suggests that there were no guards. It is probable that the women would have heard for they were at the tomb and went to the synagogue where women chatted.

The man or men in white would not have been noseying into the tomb if there had been guards posted. Who Moved the Stone? page 158, even admits that the white man was not supernatural. You don't tamper with the scene of a crime especially when you are a stranger.

Luke wrote a gospel as an apologetic for Christianity (1:1-4) and mentions no guards showing that there were none there. He would not have omitted that unless he knew it was made up especially when he copied lots of stuff from Matthew. When Luke 24 itself is full of interpolations that are missing from some second century manuscripts Heaven knows what was going on with the rest of the gospels. The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus (page 98) says that verses 3, 6, 9, 12, 36, 40, 51 and 52 are of dubious authenticity. Significantly, verse 3 is the one that says the body of Jesus was found missing and verse 6 announces the resurrection and 9 says the women reported this to the apostles. And verse 10 shows this was an interpolation all right for there is no need for verse 9 with it. And verse 12 has Peter running to the tomb and marvelling after verse 11 says the apostles as good as laughed at the women showing 12 was indeed an interpolation. And verse 40 which says the Lord showed the apostles his hands and feet. Verses 51 and 52 describe the ascension but they can be dropped from the narrative without interrupting the flow. When the most magical bits may be interpolations we should drop them entirely for when in doubt we must follow what is non-magical.

There are lies in the story of the guards which shows we can trust no detail in it and question if there were guards there at all. You should believe a person unless they have lied to you in the past especially if there was no need for it. You need evidence from someone or somewhere else to back up anything a liar says. Nobody has the right to command us to believe Matthew about the guards been there. At most we have to be neither sure or unsure.

The guards are so important in Christian apologetics – they are the prime reason that the view that Jesus got out of the tomb alive is rejected - that we can safely say the Christians themselves cannot believe the resurrection without them. John's gospel accepts the rule in the Law of Moses to have two independent and trusted witnesses before you believe anything important including claims of miracles – the rule which God gave to Moses. This forbids the dependence on the soldiers for only Matthew said they were there and gave no witnesses to the event.

ROMANS OR JEWS AT THE TOMB?

The Matthew Gospel asserts that there were guards at the tomb. If there were guards, were they the Temple Guards who were all Jews or Roman soldiers?

When the chief priests and the Pharisees told Pilate they wanted a guard he said, "You have a guard" (Matthew 27:65 AB). Professor Alford said that this can be translated as saying they have got a guard or that they must get a guard (page 211, Evidence that Demands a Verdict). But Mgr. E de Camus says that the word for guards is a Latin word, koustodia. The gospel was written in Greek and Latin was the language of Rome so guards must mean Roman Guards when the Latin word was employed. If Pilate used the present imperative meaning he meant, "Get a guard" this means he meant his own guards (page 73, The Resurrection Factor). He could not just order the Temple guards out for he did not know exactly what they were doing that night and why so it had to be his own guards. He told them to get his own guards.

Frank Morison thinks that if the guards were Roman it would be absurd to think of the Jews saying they were able to save them from the death penalty for sleeping if the Governor got wind of it (page 189, Who Moved the Stone?). That is why he thinks the guard was composed of the Jewish Guard for the Temple and not the Romans. But the gospel says they asked Pilate to set the guard instead of asking him to let them set the guard. Also the gospel never actually mentions the death-penalty – that is just a lie that is sneaked in to bolster up the argument. If Pilate had accepted a Jewish guard and they failed to do their duty they would have been in trouble for it was easy to get on the wrong side of Pilate.

You could say there were no guards for story is inconsistent or that we have no reason to believe there were.

If you are trying to influence a difficult sergeant or a politician you take a number of people with you to increase the chance of getting listened to. The gospel says that the chief priests and the Pharisees came before Pilate to ask him to get the tomb guarded. This suggests that it was not the Jewish Guard for one man could have successfully got Pilate to let the Jews' own guards be used. Also, the rule was that Roman soldiers guard tombs and graves where theft was feared. The Jewish Guard were not for upholding Roman law for Rome only trusted Gentiles. Rome banned grave-robbery so the Roman soldiers had to take care of it.

Matthew would tell us if it was the Jewish Guard for they were trusted more by his Jewish readers than by the Romans. He wants them to be witnesses to the supernatural at the tomb for us. Jewish soldiers would not have taken on the job in case

they would have to take the body from the thieves and become unclean and unfit to work in the Temple through it for a while.

Some surmise that the guards were Jewish for there was no chance that Jewish guards would have been punished for sleeping on duty and only they would be able to say they slept on duty which the Gospel of Matthew says they said for Roman soldiers would have been punished - and if they were not punished nobody would believe they that they were truthful (Evidence that Demands a Verdict Vol 1, page 212). But any guards would have been punished for Pilate commanded that the tomb be made secure. He was not going to let the Jews have a guard that could get away with sleeping. Any guards deciding to tell such a lie is ridiculous and simply would not be done.

The Jewish Temple Guard had to watch the Temple to prevent desecration and people from going to forbidden territory. They had a religious function. The Romans did not care what happened to the Temple as long as it was nothing illegal in their law. The Temple Guards were relieved in the daytime but not at night-time (page 214, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, Vol 1). This means it was unlikely for the Jewish Guard to be sent to the tomb on Saturday evening. Pilate had desecrated the Temple and they would have been afraid to make do with fewer men.

The Jews would not have needed Pilate's permission to place their own guards at the tomb. And how could Jewish guards work over the Sabbath? Could it be possible that Pilate had commanded that nobody would know where Jesus was buried and the high confidentiality was the reason guards could not be posted without his consent? The Jews could have asked Pilate to have the tomb guarded without knowing where the tomb was. This would tell us that the apostles and the women lied about knowing where the tomb was in order to create the resurrection hoax.

The Temple Guards were always checked up on by the captain to make sure they were not asleep. They got beaten up and their clothes burnt off if they were caught sleeping. The Jews would have been especially anxious to make sure a Jewish Guard at the tomb did not sleep. And they would have been paranoid about the Romans doing the right things for when Pilate had to be asked to place guards at the tomb it gave the probably inaccurate impression that the Romans could not care less what happened to Jesus.

The Temple had a tremendous influx of visitors because of the feast. It is impossible it believe that any guards would have been sent from the Temple to the tomb of a Jesus who was popular and the Jews feared what the people might do if anything bizarre happened to him like we are told in the Gospel. The priests could have been attacked.

It is important to establish that the guards were Roman because that helps to reveal the story of what Matthew says they did as rubbish.

Perhaps the guards were telling the truth and they did sleep on duty. Matthew gives absolutely no evidence that they were lying. That is the foundation of the empty tomb miracle or mystery – gossip.

FINALLY

The material about the guards is very unsatisfactory. The story tells us nothing about their reliability and indicates that they were scoundrels. In fact it would take extreme unreliability not to mention insanity for them to take a bribe to slander Jesus' disciples as body snatchers after all the terrifying miracles they witnessed such as earthquakes and a scary angel. It is dishonest how desperate Christians try to use the guards as evidence that Jesus could not have been stolen. As Jesus could have been stolen and still have risen again, one wonders why Matthew might have lied about the guards. Was it just to make the Jews look bad? There were no guards. They were made up to stop gossips saying that Jesus was stolen by his disciples which would have meant that they could have invented the resurrection visions for they were bent on tricking the people.