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## The Real Face of Jesus?

### The Shroud of Turin

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The Shroud of Turin, a 14-foot cloth in which many believe Jesus Christ was buried, may be the most studied artifact in history—and the most controversial. For centuries, scientists and historians have pored over this bloodstained piece of linen that bears the faint outline of a crucified man, hoping to uncover what the image represents and how it was created.

The first documented reference to the shroud dates back to the 14th century. Historical records suggest it changed hands many times until 1578, when it wound up in its current home—the Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist in Turin, Italy. The Catholic Church has never taken an official position on the cloth's authenticity, but the Vatican has made statements attesting to its value and arranged for public viewings.

The advent of photography in the late 19th century forever altered the course of the shroud's history. In 1898, a lawyer named Secondo Pia took the first known photograph of the cloth, and his negative revealed new details—including strikingly clear facial features—that could not be observed with the naked eye. Scientific interest in the relic immediately picked up. In 1902, the French anatomist Yves Delage, an agnostic, inspected the photographs and pronounced that the figure on the shroud was indeed Jesus Christ.

The first direct examinations of the cloth were conducted in the 1970s, most famously by the Shroud of Turin Research Project (STURP), a team of scientists led by physicist John P. Jackson of the University of Colorado. The group found that the markings on the cloth were consistent with a crucified body and that the stains were real human blood; they also suggested that the image's shading patterns contained three-dimensional information. They could not explain how the imprint ended up on the fabric in the first place.

In 1988, scientists removed a swatch of the shroud for radiocarbon testing. Three independent laboratories concluded that the material originated between 1260 and 1390, leading some to deem it inauthentic. Since then, however, further studies have cast doubt on those results, suggesting that the shroud may indeed date back to the time of Jesus Christ's life and death.

In March 2010, researchers unveiled a revolutionary radiocarbon dating method that could allow scientists to safely establish accurate ages for precious artifacts like the Shroud of Turin. Unlike traditional carbon dating, the new process does not require samples; instead, the entire object is exposed to an electrically charged gas that gently oxidizes its surface without causing damage. This means that, someday soon, the world may have a more precise estimate of the Shroud of Turin's real age.

In the spring of 2010, the Shroud of Turin will be available for its first public viewing in 10 years, scheduled from April 10 to May 23.

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