



Does the ‘Side Strip’ on the Holy Shroud of Turin Relate to the Width of the Burial Couch in Christ’s Tomb in Jerusalem?

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Introduction

One of the many mysteries of the Holy Shroud of Turin is the presence of the so-called ‘side strip’ - an 8 centimeter wide and approximately 4 meter long strip of linen - carefully sewn onto one of the long sides of the ancient cloth. (Fig. 1).

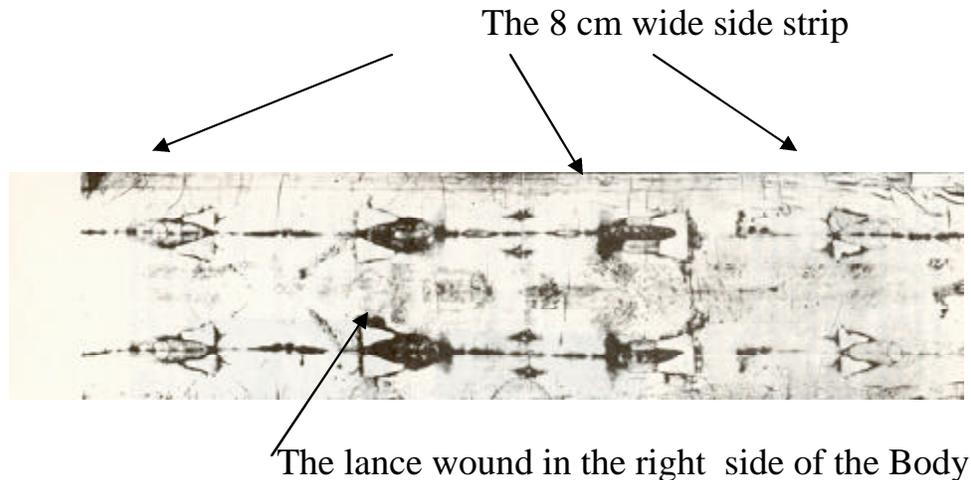


Fig. 1. The Holy Shroud (negative print) showing the ‘side strip’

The side strip is made of the same batch of linen cloth as the rest of the Shroud. Some of the linen weave features match the main cloth to which it is now attached. Thus the Shroud and the attached side strip were apparently originally one piece of cloth, then were cut apart, and now are reattached.

It is generally agreed that the change was made to assure that, with the side strip reattached in the present position, the Shroud's image thereby becomes centred and balanced on the cloth for public display. Without the side strip, the Shroud's image would be about 8 centimeters off- centre on the cloth.

This raises the question: What could be the reason why the image was originally off- centre on the Shroud in the first place?

The present paper gives a possible explanation for this original imbalance of the image, and presents evidence to support it. Essentially, the explanation rests on a discrepancy between the width of the Shroud itself and the width of the stone burial couch in the Tomb on which the Body of Christ was laid and wrapped in the Shroud after his crucifixion [1].

The Width of the Holy Shroud

The Shroud's overall width is 110 centimeters [2].

The Width of the Burial Couch in the Tomb in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre

The actual stone burial couch, hewn out of the rock, is not visible, as it is today covered with a protective cladding of marble after a number of reconstructions made over the centuries [3,4].

The burial Tomb was located in the time of the Emperor Constantine, who erected a church enclosing both it and the nearby Hill of Calvary (Golgotha). The small elaborate stone structure erected inside the church over the Tomb is called the Edicule. It has been reconstructed over the centuries and today is in need of major repair [4].

The following quotations will give an idea of the appearance and dimensions of the stone burial couch in the tomb:

(a) "Oppositeis a smaller door, through which by stooping low, one may enter in a quadrangular chamber about 6 feet wide, 7 feet long and 7 ½ feet high, On the north side, about two feet from the floor and extending the full length, is a marble slab covering the sepulchral couch. Floors, walls and ceiling have also been covered with marble slabs.....Pierotti declares

that when he made his studies of the Sepulchre he succeeded in seeing the native rock in two places. Breydenbach tells us that in the fifth century it was still exposed. And Arculpf, who saw it in the seventh century, described it as red and veined with white and bearing the marks of tools” [3].

(b) “The present width of the tomb slab is 0.94 m “[4].

“Maximo’s description (1897) suggest that on top and in front of the burial couch there were two layers of marble cladding. If the outer layer comprised the marble slab still visible today, the inner layer may be the mediaeval cladding, which in that case was simply left in position and covered up by Boniface of Ragusa in 1555 – it is probably still there”[4].

“The benches were probably each about 2 m long and 0.8 m wide.” [4]. [Biddle’s reasoning about the width of the burial bench or couch here seems to be that the burial couch inside the marble cladding must be smaller than the present top slab dimensions. This is true for the length of the couch, but not for the width of the top slab, which could be the same width as the couch it covers by being simply displaced away from the back or north wall of the tomb by the thickness of the marble cladding on the wall. Thus the couch could be the same width as the present top slab covering it, that is to say, 94 cm.].

The Relative Widths of the Linen Shroud and the Burial Couch

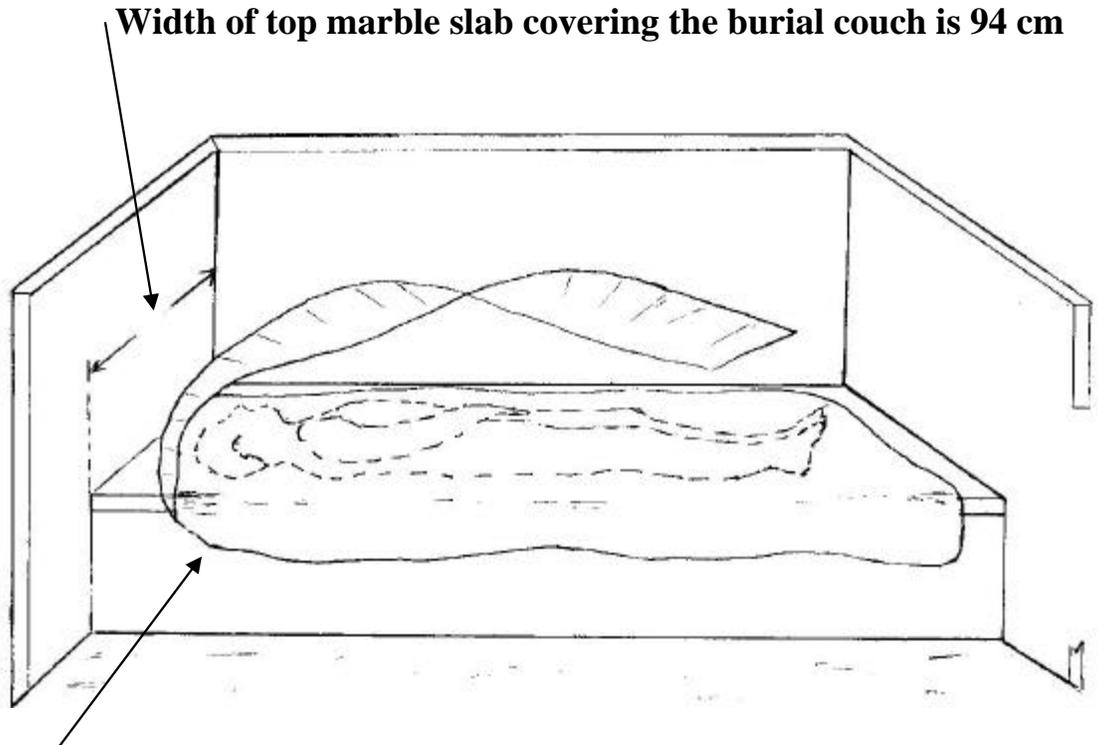
The Shroud’s width, being 110 centimeters, is therefore greater than the width of the burial couch on which it was presumably laid out to receive the dead body of Christ. The extra width is 16 centimeters if the couch is 94 cm wide ($110-94 = 16$).

If now the Shroud is spread out on the burial couch more or less flush against the back wall of the tomb, then the Shroud being wider **will overhang down the side of the couch by about 16 cm (Fig. 2)**. Then, with the body of Christ laid out and centred on the couch, it will necessarily be off-centre on the cloth, and so any image of the body transferred to the Shroud would also be off-centre, as is observed [5].

If the present marble top slab in the Tomb is the same width as the original burial couch it covers, then the amount of the overhang would at the burial

have been approximately 16 cm, since the width of the Shroud, 110 cm, minus the width of the slab, 94 cm, equals 16 centimeters.

To centre the image, it then would only be necessary to cut off 8 cm from the one side (i.e. one half of the 16 cm overhang) and sew it back onto the other edge and so to form the side strip which is observed on the Shroud..



Shroud overhang of 16 cm on stone burial couch which is 16 cm narrower

(Shroud width 110 cm – 94cm = 16 cm)

Fig. 2. Position of the Body and the enveloping Shroud which would account for the off-centre image on the Shroud

References and Notes

1. The fact that the body of Jesus, after his death by crucifixion in Jerusalem, was wrapped in a shroud and laid in a tomb is recounted in all four gospels of the New Testament, with the account by John being the most detailed [*The Jerusalem Bible*. Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, N.Y. 1966]:

Matthew 27: 57-61 “ *So Joseph of Arimathaea took the body, wrapped it in a clean shroud and put it in his own tomb*”.

Mark 15: 45-47: “ *.....then came Joseph of Arimathaea, ..who bought a shroud, took Jesus down from the cross, wrapped him in the shroud and laid him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock*”.

Luke 23: 50-56: “ *...Joseph asked for the body of Jesus. He then took it down, wrapped it in a shroud and put it in a tomb which was hewn in stone.*”

John 19: 40-42; 20:3-10: “ *They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths following the Jewish burial custom. At the place... a new tomb...They laid Jesus there.*”

“ *So Peter set out with the other disciple (John) to go to the tomb. They ran together but the other disciple running faster than Peter reached the tomb first; he bent down and saw the linen cloths lying on the ground, but did not go in. Simon Peter who was following now came up, went right into the tomb, saw the linen cloths on the ground, and also the cloth that had been over his head, this was not with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in; he saw and he believed. Till this moment they had failed to understand the teaching of Scripture that he must rise from the dead.*”

2. The Shroud's width of 110 cm is the accepted value over the past century. In 2002, repairs to the Shroud were made and the linen cloth was deliberately stretched, so that its dimensions are now slightly larger.

3. A.L. McMahon. “The Holy Sepulchre”. *Catholic Encyclopedia*. Encyclopedia Press, N.Y. Vol. VII p 426, 1913.

4. *The Tomb of Christ*, Martin Biddle, Sutton Publishing, Gloucestershire, U.K., 1999.

5. After a century of study, fraud theories for the origin of the Shroud have one by one been examined and discarded, while the overwhelming mass of evidence for authenticity from dozens of scholarly and scientific disciplines has accumulated. Today, fraud is no longer an acceptable proposal. [See [Main Page](#)].

One may therefore, in the case of the side strip, ask: Why would any forger who wanted to be believed go ahead and deliberately create an ‘off-centre’ image ? The answer is obvious.

6. A little reflection will make it clear that, with the lance wound being on the right side of the body [Fig.1), then the new theory presented here also requires that the Body of Christ must have been placed in the tomb with the head away from the entrance door in the Tomb’s east wall (Fig. 3).

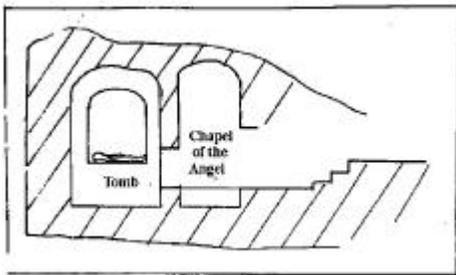
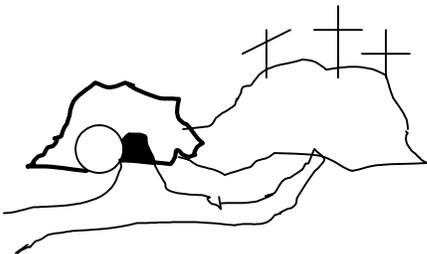


Fig. 3. Entrance door is on east side of the Tomb: the Body of Christ lay on the stone burial couch along north wall of Tomb.



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