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Shroud History: extraordinary evidence

*Thomas De Wesselow has set himself a mighty task. Recognizing that two hundred years of searching for a plausible skeptical solution to the Easter Enigma has run dry (which is why the likes of Richard Carrier and PZ Myers toss all the evidence in the bonfire and declare Jesus a non-person),*

David, what evidence? There isn't enough evidence in your bonfire ... to roast a marshmallow.

*the art historian thinks he has found the solution that has eluded everyone. That solution, he promises, will involve the Shroud of Turin, the true burial cloth of Jesus, and the origin of this myth called the Resurrection.*

David, that would be the Shroud that was carbon dated to 1,300 years AFTER the death of Christ? That Shroud?

*My interest in his book is three-fold. First, I appreciate the challenge. Wesselow is a clever, informed fellow who has read widely and expresses himself well. The more such challenges the Gospel survives, the more clear its truth becomes.*

David, what challenges are you asserting that the Gospel has survived? The fact that it hasn't survived a single challenge is the reason that its "truth" is about as clear as Dr. Pepper.

*Second, Wesselow shows not only that previous skeptical solutions have failed, but why they have failed.*

David, no skeptical solution is necessary for imaginary events. If you want to claim that an event is real, the burden of proof is on you to prove it. So far, there exists no proof for any supernatural claims found in the Bible.

*His book is therefore loaded with observations, untainted by Christian bias, that support Christian conclusions, if (or when) his own theory fails. Third, as an art historian, he brings special expertise to the table: perhaps not on history, as we have already begun to see, but on Medieval art. When life gives you lemons, make lemonaide.*

David, try using a spellchecker: it doesn't take all that much time.

*Some of the strongest arguments for the truth of Christianity are often quarried from anti-Christian arguments.*

David, there are no strong arguments for the truth of Christianity. Every argument has been refuted.

*This book may prove a gold mine. In this post, I follow Wesselow's preliminary discussion of the Shroud's history, why it cannot be a Medieval fake, and why secularists often seem afraid of this mysterious old cloth.*

David, what you refer to as "seem afraid" is more likely to be wishful thinking on your part. The same can be said for the book proving to be a goldmine.

*Wesselow sketches the history of the Shroud of Turin in chapter 2. He admits that "almost everyone" now considers it a Medieval fake.*

David, science has a nasty habit of exposing hoaxes, including scientific ones like the Piltdown Man. You may fool science for a while, but eventually, the smell of bullshit will always give it away.

*That does not include art historians, however, who he says pretty much universally deny that Medievals could have created this work:*

Well David, I guess that settles it then. How could scientists with proven scientific methods like carbon dating, possibly compete with ... art historians?

*It corresponds to no other image, artificial or natural, currently known.*

David, nor does it correspond to the image you think it does since no one on Earth knows what Jesus looked like. Therefore, you couldn't possibly know if the image was that of Jesus.

*Despite decades of trying, no modern experimenter has yet been able to reproduce it;*

Nice try David:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/10/06/shroud-of-turin-reproduce\_n\_310605.html

Obviously you will reject any evidence that does not agree with your preconceptions. But I just wanted to rub it in your face anyway.

*despite decades of investigation, no scientist has been able to say conclusively how it was created.*

David, then how were those Italian scientists in the Huffington Post article able to reproduce it?

By the way, this story about scientists reproducing the Shroud came out way before you posted this nonsense, so you are not being honest with your readers; which is pretty much par for the course for Christian apologists. "Lying for Jesus" is your only option in lieu of the evidence ... you do not have.

*Art historians should have leaped on the Shroud as one of the most fascinating visual creations of the medieval period . . . Strangely, though, they have remained almost entirely silent.*

Well David, maybe they wanted to avoid the embarrassment that you people always go through every time you claim to have discovered Noah's Ark. That happens about what - every 5 years or so?

*The reason is simple: the negative photo of the cloth is an unmistakable sign that the Shroud's famous image could not have been created by a medieval artist. Technically, conceptually and stylistically the Shroud makes no sense as a medieval artwork.*

David, so your idea of a defense, isn't to produce evidence, but to retreat to "it makes no sense?"

Very persuasive David, very persuasive.

*Wesselow notes the bigotry and fear with which secular scholars have often treated the Shroud,*

David, instead of "bigotry and fear," I think a more accurate description would be "ridicule."

*precisely because it threatens to drag them beyond secular dogmas about the world:*

David, that might be true - if they could only prove it wasn't a fake.

*Although Delage made it clear that he did not regard Jesus as the resurrected Son of God, his paper upset the atheist members of the Academy, including its secretary, Marcellin Berthelot, who prevented its full publication in the Academy's bulletin.*

David, maybe Berthelot just wanted to save the Academy from humiliation?

*The suggestion that the Shroud evinced "some sort of energy generated during the Resurrection" was regarded with "horror by secularists."*

David, now I *know* Berthelot was trying to save the Academy from humiliation.

*In fact, the secular academy seemed at times to recoil from this concrete piece of physical evidence, as if in fear of its implications:*

David, I agree that it is a concrete piece of physical evidence: it is a concrete piece of physical evidence of the state of technology in the early 14th century.

*It is as if a spell has been cast over the Shroud, a spell consisting of the words: 'if the Shroud is real, then so is the Resurrection.'*

David, so since science has proved the Shroud to be a fake, by your own reasoning, the Resurrection must also have been imaginary.

Now we're getting somewhere David. I mean, you're getting somewhere - I'm already there.

*This is the unspoken thought that prevents most people from taking the cloth seriously.*

Actually David, it was the dating experiments that convinced most people not to take the cloth seriously. Unfortunately, there are still those who will resist reality to cling to their ancient superstitions. That should sound very familiar to you David.

*The way to break the spell is not the find out ever more about the Shroud scientifically, it is to rethink the Resurrection.*

David, we've already found out everything we need to know about the Shroud scientifically. You can rethink the Resurrection all you want. For rational people the Shroud is a dead issue.

*But shouldn't such a reaction in itself be a warning sign to anyone seriously seeking truth?*

David, how would that apply to you? Ghost Worshippers don't seek the truth; they believe that ancient desert goat herders already provided it.

*Why should so many people be afraid to consider a piece of physical evidence?*

David, when you can explain why you dismiss the 3 separate dating experiments which all agreed on the age, then you might begin to see that your question is a projection of your own inability to consider evidence.

*And is Wesselow seriously suggesting that the right response is not to examine our motives, then approach ultimate questions with an open mind and perhaps with new perspectives, but to double down and find a new way of pandering to the prejudices of our era?*

David, there are no more closed minds on the planet than those of Ghost Worshippers. As long as you are being threatened with eternal torture (should you lose your faith), you will be forever enslaved, and destined to a life of denial and blindness.

*A little soul-searching might seem in place, first.*

Ain't gonna happen David. Pascal's Wager has you firmly in its grip. You will never risk eternal torture by daring to doubt.

*At the end of the chapter, Wesselow even uses a word beloved of the skeptical community: "extraordinary." The usual soundbite is, "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence." Wesselow notes that two great mysteries seem to touch at this one small patch of time and space: what happened to Jesus after he died, and where this mysterious shroud came from:*

David, if Jesus was an actual man, then we know what happened to Him after He died. If He was a fictitious character then the question is irrelevant.

The second question about where the Shroud came from, has already been answered ... by science.

*How could two such grand enigmas resulting from the very same burial be unconnected? Surely, an extraordinary imprint on Jesus' burial cloth would imply something extraordinary having happened to his body.*

David, what was extraordinary about the imprint? And why would that imprint necessarily imply an extraordinary event?

There is nothing extraordinary about fraud David, nor ... gullibility.

*As a skeptical art historian, apparently an atheist, Wesselow points at that hotly-contested ground and renders the point emphatic and explicit: The Shroud is extraordinary evidence.*

That's true David, it is extraordinary evidence of fraud in the early 14th century.

*The stories about Jesus' resurrection are equally extraordinary.*

David, that's not the word I would have used.

*Jesus' words, recorded in the Gospels Wesselow derides, are also extraordinary.*

David, in what way?

*"No one ever spoke as this man."*

David, the same could be said for millions of people.

*This is one reason, as we will see, that his dismissal of the Gospels later on in the book is highly unreasonable.*

David, still think his book is a goldmine?

*Prophecies of the Messiah also stick to Jesus as to no one else, that I know of.*

David, how about Jesus' prophecy that He would return while some of His disciples were still alive?

I'd say He missed that one by quite a lot.

*Attempts to find Mohammed in the Bible, for instance, are forlorn by comparison.*

David, Mohammed (peace be upon him) isn't in the Bible because Islam came 600 years later. But I do wonder why your God never mentioned Islam even once. In fact, there is nothing in the Bible that refers to anything that came along after the first century. Even the prophecies in Revelation only foresaw swords. If your God inspired it you might think that He would have foreseen planes, bombs, and guns.

*The works described of Jesus in the Gospels are also extraordinary, even when compared to other alleged wonder-working sages, like Apollonius.*

Once again David, extraordinary is not the word I would have chosen, but, it's your essay.

*The effect of Jesus' life on history is also extraordinary, as Wesselow concedes -- whether or not he knows the whole story. So now we meet not one, not two, but at least six extraordinary sets of data, cohering on this one point, out of all of history and across continents.*

David, I wasn't aware of any continents outside of the Middle East being mentioned in the Bible. I got the distinct impression that God had no idea that Chinese people and American Indians even existed. Maybe invisible eyeballs can't see as far as you thought?

*A good hypothesis needs to explain all outstanding evidence. Wesselow is on the right track, fixing on two extraordinary clues. But he overlooks others, the great error of most partial pictures of Jesus. He seems to be announcing that he only intends to ride the subway just to the next 7-11, not all the way home.*

David, perhaps he figured out that there was no point in continuing to ride on a subway ... going nowhere.

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

GECKO FEET INSPIRE AMAZING GLUE THAT CAN HOLD 700 POUNDS ON A SMOOTH WALL

For years, biologists have been amazed by the power of gecko feet, which let these 5-ounce lizards produce an adhesive force roughly equivalent to carrying nine pounds up a wall without slipping. Now, scientists have discovered exactly how the gecko does it, leading them to invent "Geckskin," a device that can hold 700 pounds on a smooth wall. Geckos are equally at home on vertical, slanted, even backward-tilting surfaces.

Amazingly, gecko feet can be applied and disengaged with ease, and with no sticky residue remaining on the surface. These properties, high-capacity, reversibility and dry adhesion offer a tantalizing possibility for synthetic materials that can easily attach and detach heavy everyday objects such as televisions or computers to walls, as well as medical and industrial applications, among others.

This combination of properties at these scales has never been achieved before. The Geckskin device is about 16 inches square, about the size of an index card, and can hold a maximum force of about 700 pounds while adhering to a smooth surface such as glass.

Beyond its impressive sticking ability, the device can be released with negligible effort and reused many times with no loss of effectiveness. For example, it can be used to stick a 42-inch television to a wall, released with a gentle tug and restuck to another surface as many times as needed, leaving no residue.

Previous efforts to synthesize the tremendous adhesive power of gecko feet and pads were based on the qualities of microscopic hairs on their toes called setae, but efforts to translate them to larger scales were unsuccessful, in part because the complexity of the entire gecko foot was not taken into account. A gecko's foot has several interacting elements, including tendons, bones and skin, that work together to produce easily reversible adhesion.

Now researchers have unlocked the simple yet elegant secret of how it's done, to create a device that can handle excessively large weights. Geckskin and its supporting theory demonstrate that setae are not required for gecko-like performance.

The key innovation was to create an integrated adhesive with a soft pad woven into a stiff fabric, which allows the pad to "drape" over a surface to maximize contact. Further, as in natural gecko feet, the skin is woven into a synthetic "tendon," yielding a design that plays a key role in maintaining stiffness and rotational freedom.

Researchers are continuing to improve their Geckskin design by drawing on lessons from the evolution of gecko feet, which show remarkable variation in anatomy.

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FAMOUS QUOTES

Gregory House (fictional TV doctor)

"Rational arguments don’t usually work on religious people.

Otherwise there would be no religious people."