

# Paul's Galatians 3.1: An Allusion to the Turin Shroud – or Not?

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The question of a possible allusion to the Shroud of Turin in verse 3.1 of the Apostle Paul's New Testament letter to the Galatians is a fascinating one. At least several researchers in the Turin Shroud field, and possibly more, have believed that the verse bears such an allusion.<sup>1</sup> So it seems right to address the Galatians question here, carefully and at length, before the Internet takes it up and really runs with it.

The passage in question reads, in one translation from Paul's original Greek: "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified" (English Standard Version; see biblehub.com for several dozen other translations).

Paul was thereby criticizing the Galatians of central Anatolia circa 50 CE for their back-sliding from the true gospel, as he saw it. After the word "crucified" an additional phrase has sometimes been added, "among you," but it is not found in the earliest texts and is rightly left out of most translations today.

I first looked into this question several years ago, having first heard about it in 2014. As one who believes in the authenticity of the Turin Shroud as the burial shroud of Jesus in the 1<sup>st</sup> century and also believes there are several allusions to it in the New Testament (e.g., the angels at the empty tomb), I was hoping to find such an allusion or at least probable allusion in Galatians 3.1 too. Alas, I did not. So, since 2021 I have compiled a lengthy list of objections to the claim, which follow.<sup>2</sup>

## Initial Problems

To begin with, let's consider what Galatians 3.1 does *not* say. It does not mention any cloth, nor a body, nor an image or picture, nor blood, nor any marks, nor even just a face of Jesus. Other cryptic passages in other ancient Christian writings do mention one or more of those things, and some of them therefore have more claim to being possible allusions to the Shroud with its full-body image of Jesus.

The Gal. 3.1-Shroud supporters, in their articles, blog posts, and book chapters have focused their attention very largely on the ancient Greek words used by Paul, especially *proeγράφη* (προεγράφη). And so we read about aorist, imperfect, and perfect tenses

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<sup>1</sup> Most prominent among the supporters of such an allusion have been Fred Bantz (2014), Larry Stalley (2020, 2022), and Jack Markwardt (2021). The latter two have publicly promoted the idea right up through late 2023, and they have followers.

<sup>2</sup> Readers not so familiar with Galatians might wish to read at least the first two chapters before continuing with the rest of this article. They take only about two minutes each. The whole letter is also short at about four pages.

and their fine points or alleged fine points,<sup>3</sup> even though Paul and other ancients did not always use correct verb forms themselves, just as many of us today do not always use correct verb forms and other grammatical items in our own letters. Consider also the fact that classical 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE Greek, often cited to justify a “publicly portrayed” translation of that verb *proeγράφη* in Gal. 3.1, was different from Paul’s common, simplified, Koine Greek, which developed a few hundred years later.

Granted, there are many ambiguous passages in the old texts that naturally make one wonder. However, the reasoning in this case does not persuade me. I recognize the Power of Coincidence and know that it often makes similar things seem identical when they really are not. We are all susceptible to being misled in that way.

Let’s get more specific now, starting with the linguistic evidence and then moving on to the geographical evidence.

Galatians 3.1 basically consists of just three words or phrases that have suggested to some researchers that it refers to the Turin Shroud: first, “before your eyes”; second, “publicly portrayed [or shown, presented]”; and third, “Jesus Christ ... crucified.” The total number of words in Greek is only seven, often translated into English with eight.<sup>4</sup>

### **Jesus Christ Crucified**

Taking the latter phrase first, Paul’s “Jesus Christ ... crucified” is certainly very consistent with the Turin Shroud image of Jesus. However, it, or a variation on it, is also frequently used by Paul. He was heavily focused on the saving power of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, as he understood theological matters, and he often used the word “crucified” or “cross” in his letters, together with “Jesus” or “Christ” or both. The combination with “crucified” even appears three other times in Galatians alone: 2.20, 5.24, 6.14. The 3.1-Shroud believers do not mention this. And none of those other

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<sup>3</sup> See Larry Stalley’s comments on Dan Porter’s shroudstory.com blog under the topic “Galatian Eyes,” July 2022. See also Hugh Farey’s skeptical counterarguments, with which I mostly agree, on that same discussion forum and topic. Farey earlier wrote a blog post, “προεγράφη,” published on September 5, 2020 on his mediavalshroud.com blog, also skeptical of the Gal. 3.1 Shroud identification, also largely linguistic in focus, and also largely correct, in my view. Of course, all Turin Shroud authenticity skeptics such as Farey would doubt any claims of the Shroud’s 1<sup>st</sup> century antiquity, so his Gal. 3.1 skepticism may not persuade many Shroud authenticists.

<sup>4</sup> An August 2023 search of shroud.com for “Galatians 3.1” yielded four results, only three of which were relevant (Stalley et al., but not Baltz, though a separate search by title turned up his paper – see footnote 11 here). Recently I found two other mentions hiding in the shroud.com archive: 1) A two-page article by Rex Morgan in his “Shroud News” newsletter of August 1988, No. 48, titled, “A Biblical Reference to the Shroud Image?” (pp. 16-17). The article is exploratory, lightly posing the question after Morgan had heard others including Dan Scavone spontaneously ask it at a recent Turin Shroud conference. Morgan discusses only the words used by Paul, especially *proeγράφη*, no geographical factors; and 2) A follow-up article of three pages in the December 1988 issue of the same newsletter, No. 50, pp. 42-44: “Biblical Reference to the Image?,” which is a comment by Dorothy Crispino on Morgan’s article. Crispino is likewise intrigued by the question and also cautious, criticizing excessive Shroud “sightings” in the New Testament such as in Paul’s letters. Morgan, Scavone, and Crispino are all major names in the field, but they each had many other Shroud matters to pursue. I’m not aware of Morgan or Scavone ever raising the subject again, but I dimly recall another possible reference to Gal. 3.1 by Crispino elsewhere, though perhaps of only a few sentences.

passages conceivably refers to the Shroud. Galatians also has three instances of “cross” together with “Christ”: 5.11, 6.12, and 6.14. In Paul’s longer letter to the Romans, the name and title “Jesus Christ” appear some *thirty* times, very often together with the words “dead,” “death,” “died,” or “crucified.” In Paul’s letter 1 Corinthians, “Jesus Christ” (or “Christ Jesus”) occurs twenty-three times, “crucified” four times, and “cross” twice (see, for example, 1 Cor., 1.23, 2.12, and 2.18).<sup>5</sup>

### **Before Your Eyes**

Then there is that “before your eyes” phrase in Galatians 3.1. (Actually, the Greek version says “before whose eyes,” by which all New Testament scholars have rightly assumed that “your” is meant.) A few English Bible translations from the Greek even render it as “before your very eyes” or “before your own eyes.” Some Shroud researchers who support a Gal. 3.1 identification with the Shroud have repeatedly used that “very” or “own” version, which makes it sound like a much stronger reference to the “eyes.” But those extra words are not in Paul’s original Greek. It’s just an English idiom: “with my very eyes.” One researcher has gone even further with his translation “directly before your own eyes,” thereby adding *two* new words to Paul’s original three. The “eyes” themselves may well be only figurative, not literal, since Paul often wrote in vivid language and had a penchant for alluding to “eyes” or “seeing,” e.g., “in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor., 15.52, King James Version). He was a poetic soul. (See also Gal. 4.15.)

Moreover, in the Bible as a whole, the word “eyes” occurs several hundred times, often not in a literal sense but symbolically for “know,” “perceive,” or “understand,” e.g., “His eyes were opened.” English itself has many idioms using “eyes”.

The full expression “before your eyes” is also very biblical and sometimes only figurative, a stock phrase sprinkled here and there – also as “before your face” or “before his presence,” that is, “in his presence” – dozens of times in the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) or Old Testament. And Paul was very familiar with such scripture.<sup>6</sup>

One major New Testament scholar has written in a related context: “It is essential to realize that where we use abstract ideas the ancient world, particularly in the east, frequently used images or picture language.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. 1.23 “we preach Christ crucified”; 2.12 “Jesus Christ ... crucified”; 2.18 “crucified the Lord.” All are close parallels to that phrase in Galatians 3.1.

<sup>6</sup> See biblehub.com or <https://bible.knowing-jesus.com/phrases/Before-Your-Eyes>. Even Basil S. Davis, in his mainstream scholarly article on Galatians 3.1, not referring to the Turin Shroud but instead arguing for some other very visual referent, perhaps Paul’s own Christ-like bodily scars from persecution, does not mention the frequency of that formulaic phrase in the Old Testament. Nor does Davis mention Paul’s several other uses of “Christ crucified” in Galatians. But he does allow for a combination of explanations, not just one, for Paul’s word *proegráphe*. See his “The Meaning of ΠΡΟΕΓΡΑΦΗ in the Context of Galatians 3.1,” in *New Testament Studies*, Vol. 45, Issue 2, 1999, pp. 194-212, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>7</sup> Marxsen, Willi. *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979, fifth printing, p. 156. The many different usages of the word “mouth” in the Bible also come to mind. See, too, Paul’s Romans 10.15 for some figuratively “beautiful” feet.

Even if those “eyes” in Gal. 3.1 seem to suggest their seeing some visual, physical phenomenon, it was not necessarily or even probably an object, a physical *thing*. Paul could very well have been referring to an act, an event, an experience, a spoken presentation, a vigorous in-person sermon, possibly involving gestures including movements simulating the act of crucifixion. Many preachers have done so over the centuries, making a show of it. In any case, Paul, having preached Christ crucified, not the Law of Jewish religious regulations to the Galatians, would have had a vivid memory of them listening (“hearing”, Gal. 3.2 and 3.5), all eyes also intent on him.

### **Proclaimed / Presented / Portrayed, etc.**

The third relevant vocabulary item in Galatians 3.1 is that verb *proe-graphē*. Bible translations have rendered it there as “clearly portrayed,” “made clear to you,” “proclaimed,” “described,” “pictured,” “openly set forth,” “presented,” etc. (see biblehub.com for more, and scholarly books on Galatians). In general use, it often literally meant a public posting of a physical, written decree. Its Greek root verb, *graphō*, basically means “to write,” and perhaps by extension “to draw,” but the *pro-* prefix changes the verb’s meaning. That same verb occurs in the New Testament a few other times with meanings different from that of Gal. 3.1. Greek *pro-* generally means “before” in the sense of either time or place. In Liddell and Scott’s *Greek-English Lexicon* the whole verb – its entry form is *prographō* – has several meanings.<sup>8</sup> And in real life two thousand years ago it surely had even more nuances.

Consider English and our uses, often referring to speech, not writing or drawing, of such similar graphic verbs as describe, depict, portray, and even paint, e.g., “That’s a pretty picture you paint.” Does that sentence refer to a picture painted physically on tangible material? No, it refers to a spoken expression. And in other languages people do exactly the same thing, using vivid or big words to liven up their speech.

Paul’s verb *proe-graphē* has been translated by one Galatians 3.1-Shroud promoter repeatedly as a *noun* phrase, thus “a clear portrayal.”<sup>9</sup> This would support the case that Paul was referring to an object, the Shroud – but it is not a correct translation.

And so, the hypothesis that Paul was referring to an actual physical image of the crucified body of Jesus such as that on the Turin Shroud is not plausible, in my view.

### **Geographical Problems**

Finally, let’s look at the crucial yet seriously neglected *geographical* objections that can be raised against that Galatians 3.1 passage as alleged evidence of the Turin Shroud’s 1<sup>st</sup> century presence in Galatia.

To begin with, it is not at all certain just where the Shroud was in the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century. Still in Jerusalem? Or slightly north in Pella? Or even Beirut? They have all been

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<sup>8</sup> See <https://archive.org/details/greekenglishlex00lidduoft/page/1276/mode/2up>.

<sup>9</sup> Markwardt, J. *The Hidden History of the Shroud of Turin*, 2021, Chapter 6.

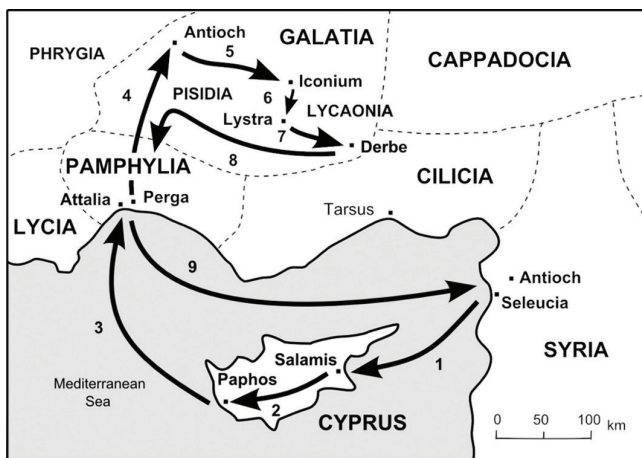


Paul and Barnabas

suggested. Edessa and Antioch (present-day Şanlıurfa and Antakya in southeast Turkey) have also been proposed, and more substantially so, Edessa by Ian Wilson, Antioch by Jack Markwardt. Still other places are certainly possible too. But we simply do not know. If Galatia is also considered, a Roman province in central Anatolia 700 miles north of Jerusalem, its candidacy seems more doubtful already for reasons of sheer distance.

Moreover, if the Shroud's supposed presence in Galatia goes from a stationary one to a *roving* one, the claim gets even more doubtful. It is easy to say that Paul, or Peter, or some other early Christian leader showed the Shroud and its image

of Jesus to the Galatians on a missionary journey. But considering the laborious and dangerous circumstances that such a showing – or more than one showing, since Paul preached to several Galatian communities and still other communities elsewhere in Anatolia – would have entailed, that notion is extremely dubious. Paul was based in Syrian Antioch, and Peter may have resided there for a few years, while Galatia was located in central Anatolia (Asia Minor), some 300 miles (500 km) west of Antioch. Now, Paul or Peter had to travel, when he traveled on land, at a very slow pace, perhaps ten to fifteen miles a day, on those days that he did travel. He presumably traveled on foot, or riding a donkey, or at times riding in a wagon.



Paul's First Missionary Journey. Courtesy of [www.thebiblejourney.org](http://www.thebiblejourney.org) © Chris and Jenifer Taylor

Paul's route to and through Galatia on his first missionary journey there in the late 40s was a roundabout one (see Acts 13 and 14). He first went by ship from Antioch to the island of Cyprus, stopping there and traversing the island preaching for days or weeks before sailing onward to the south coast of Asia Minor. He then went deep into southern Galatia, west to east, and on his way back retraced his route, now east to west. His total mileage from Syrian Antioch to and through Cyprus, then through Galatia and back again to Syrian Antioch, seems to have been well over 1000 miles (more than 1600 km). The journey is estimated to have taken him several months to a year. He founded several tiny Christian communities in Galatia and elsewhere, later writing his letter to the Galatians collectively sometime between the years 48 and 57. A few years after his first journey he returned to and through Galatia on two even longer journeys.

Furthermore, Paul is not known to have traveled with any retinue of guards or servants on his first missionary journey, but merely with Barnabas and, part of the way, John Mark. The latter accompanied the other two only as far as the port of Perga on the Anatolian coast, northwest of Cyprus, not continuing with them into inner Anatolia including Galatia. On his second journey Paul took along only Silas at first (Acts 15.40), then later added one other companion.

Given Paul's near solitary traveling status, the idea of his having taken along the Shroud, presumably hidden or secretly venerated somewhere at least as far away as Antioch over the previous twenty years or so as a most holy relic of Jesus, seems extremely doubtful. He would thereby have put it in danger of storms, high seas (Paul was shipwrecked three times in the course of his four missionary journeys; see 2 Corinthians 11.25), raging rivers, fires, bandits, vandals, thieves, and curious nibbling animals (goats and others), all of which he could have anticipated already before leaving on his journey. Paul was also once threatened with stoning on his first journey (see Acts 14.5), and was later actually stoned and left for dead (Acts 14.19), treatment which he may have half expected before even beginning his journey. He fell seriously ill in Galatia, too (see Gal. 4.13-14), another misfortune that could have resulted in his death, leaving the Shroud in dubious hands if he had had it with him.

Even if Paul himself had wanted to take the Shroud along, other Christian leaders in Antioch would surely not have allowed him to do so. Paul is renowned today for his four epic journeys, his Gentile-friendly theology as a Jew, and his eloquent New Testament letters, but he had not yet accomplished much by around the year 50. He was also contentious by nature and was suspect among many Jewish Christian leaders for his radical theology focusing so strongly on the cross and the atonement.

### **Peter?**

The Apostle Peter for his part would have risked the same threats and ordeals on any long missionary journeys through Galatia and elsewhere in Anatolia around the year 50, if he went on any. Acts of the Apostles says nothing of any Anatolian travels by Peter, only his evangelizing around Palestine in the 30s. And the Catholic Church takes no

position on the question of Peter evangelizing in Anatolia. Also, Peter was not native to Anatolia, as Paul “of Tarsus,” a city in the Roman province of Cilicia, southern Anatolia, was. Moreover, to suggest that Peter not only went on such Anatolian journeys but also was accompanied by several other apostles each time, as a bodyguard of sorts or even a Shroud guard, is without basis in early Christian texts. The only ancient source cited by 3.1-Shroud supporters for Peter travelling to Galatia is a single short and late sentence, of the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century, and apparently only legendary like much else written in those times.<sup>10</sup> The effusive writer imagines Peter in Spain and Gaul too. His Anatolia sentence also curiously half echoes verse 1.1 of the New Testament letter 1 Peter.

That letter opens with a greeting to several Christian communities in Anatolia, specifically in “Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1.1). This might seem to support the reality of a visit by Peter to Galatia and hence a Gal. 3.1-Shroud identification. However, the letter is regarded by many recent New Testament scholars as apocryphal, as the letter 2 Peter is regarded by *most* scholars, written not by Peter himself but by another writer and in the very late 1<sup>st</sup> century, much as the known apocryphal *Gospel of Peter*, *Acts of Peter*, and *Apocalypse of Peter* were written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, capitalizing on Peter’s name and fame. If likewise fictional, 1 Peter may have opened with that greeting in verse 1.1 as a credible reference modeled on Acts 2 where Peter appears soon after a mention of “Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia.”

Even if Peter himself did write 1 Peter (getting help with his Greek), the letter does not refer to any visits by him to those Anatolian communities, nor contain any personal greetings by name to people there, nor express any thanks for their hospitality, nor mention any road companions who traveled with him. Maybe, too, if Peter spent some years in Antioch, the eastern capital of the Roman Empire in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, he heard of common concerns among Christians from some of those Anatolian regions, leading to that 1 Peter reference to them. Moreover, even if Peter actually did visit Galatia, that would not at all imply that he took the burial shroud of Jesus with him there. He did not own the Shroud. It was not his personal property.

Finally here, regarding language again, it has been claimed by a Galatians 3.1-Shroud supporter that the passive voice verb construction “was portrayed” indicates that Paul was referring to another person, hence Peter, as having done the act of portraying (and carrying the Shroud around Anatolia). But that is not true; the passive voice does not necessarily nor even probably imply someone other than the speaker, here Paul.

In sum, the notion that *Peter* carried the Shroud into Galatia, proposed as a substitute for Paul’s doing so, does not help the case that Galatians 3.1 alludes to the Turin Shroud.

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<sup>10</sup> See Glanville Downey, *History of Antioch in Syria*, 1961, Excursus 3, p. 586, and W. Cureton, *Ancient Syriac Documents*, 1864, pp. 33-34. Both works are accessible at Internet Archive. Moreover, Downey’s words “seems likely” and “excursions” on p. 282 are cautious and hardly imply months’ long journeys by Peter on foot from Antioch.

## Conclusion

Surely the sacred burial shroud of Jesus, if it was preserved up to the year 50 or so, was kept in a clean, secure, stable place somewhere in Edessa or Antioch or elsewhere in northern Syria, or even still back in Jerusalem with James the brother of Jesus. Surely it was not taken on a long, lone, dirty, dangerous missionary journey to be shown to potential converts, some of them questionable characters, and some of whom might have stolen it, abused it, or even destroyed it as a product of suspected “black magic.”

Moreover, the Galatians would have had no knowledge or confirmation of its provenance, no written gospels to compare its bloody wounds with and so verify it as the shroud of Jesus in Jerusalem. And it depicted a complete stranger, not someone known to them by sight. They were also in no position to appreciate its microscopic features that we know of today. Its image might have appeared to them as merely man-made. Why, then, bring it so far and show it to them?

An alternative proposal has briefly envisioned that a few new Christian converts from Galatia journeyed to Syrian Antioch itself, where the Shroud, according to the same theory, was kept in the 40s and 50s, and where they saw it, thus accounting in a much more limited way for Paul’s Gal. 3.1 “before your eyes” phrase.<sup>11</sup> But realistically, the Galatian Christians were mostly poor folk, and Antioch lay 300 miles away, that distance doubled by any return, the whole journey both time-consuming and expensive. Moreover, is it likely that so soon after being converted or half converted in Galatia by a leader of the new faith they almost immediately, within a year or two, felt compelled to visit distant Antioch? The great majority of Christians in Europe today have never been to Rome or Jerusalem, easy and quick enough though such a trip would now be. And would any such new and therefore uncertain Christians have been trusted with the sensitive knowledge of the precious image on the Shroud?

Many more points could be added against a Galatians 3.1 Turin Shroud identification (and other far-flung “Touring Shroud” scenarios), but space here is limited and the points above may suffice for most readers.<sup>12</sup>

## Paul

However, the mystery of Paul and the Shroud remains. Did he know of it? If so, how and when? Might it have been kept secret even from him, a Christian leader but a latecomer

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<sup>11</sup> Baltz, Frederick W. “A Galatian Sojourn of the Shroud of Turin?” Presentation at the St. Louis Shroud Conference, October 11, 2014, pp. 4, 6; see [shroud.com](http://shroud.com). He says Antioch is “not far” from Galatia. Not far? 300 miles by foot or donkey in all weathers and back again? Also, Baltz cites the “Anatolian” pollens found on the Shroud by Max Frei in the 1970s as evidence for its transport to Galatia. Unfortunately, Anatolia is a vast region, also encompassing the area near Constantinople (Istanbul) and the Edessa-Antioch area too. Moreover, the pollens found have not been dated to any century. And their usefulness as geographical evidence has been disputed on other grounds. Finally, both the Image of Edessa and the Image of God Incarnate, two ancient candidates for actually being the Shroud of Turin, were indeed transported across central Anatolia to Constantinople in later centuries, and may have acquired some pollen along the way.

<sup>12</sup> For more information on this and related subjects, see the December 2023 episode “John Loken – Galatians 3.1 & Eusebius Updates” on Dale Glover’s *Real Seekers* podcast.

to the faith and a former enemy of it? Was he merely told of the Shroud, nothing more? If so, by whom? Or did he actually see it? If he saw it, when and where? How much did he know about it or see of it? Did he learn of its image of Jesus, or merely know of it as his burial shroud, or even see it but only folded up, its image not visible? Was he told its image was a detailed one, a full likeness, or merely faint, just some marks? The answers to all these questions may forever be elusive.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Some speculative connections between Paul and the Shroud are found in Thomas de Wesselow's intriguing 2012 book *The Sign*. But even there, Galatians 3.1 is not mentioned.

### **Addendum**

After the publication of my skeptical Galatians 3.1 article in the Summer 2024 issue of the BSTS Newsletter, I learned that one of the Turin Shroud researchers I had corrected therein, Larry Stalley, was still planning to publish, in 2025, a grand book proposing a Gal. 3.1 allusion and many other New Testament allusions to the Shroud.

I therefore soon wrote another lengthy and skeptical article about some of Stalley's other historical/literary/geographical claims I was familiar with, an article which Hugh Farey kindly allowed as a "Guest Post" on his [medievalshroud.com](http://medievalshroud.com) blog on December 10, 2024. (Hugh and I have long agreed on some Turin Shroud questions and long disagreed on others.) That post generated some useful discussion in its Comments section. The post is titled "A First-Century Touring Shroud of Turin Show?" It focuses a skeptical eye on Stalley's alleged Shroud sightings in I Corinthians verse 13.12, II Timothy 4.13, Hebrews 9.11-12, and Eusebius' *Church History*, Book 2, Chapter 14.

Anyone interested in such historical questions about the Turin Shroud might like to read that article and the related comments on [medievalshroud.com](http://medievalshroud.com). And to repeat, I do tend to believe that the Shroud is authentic, that it once wrapped the body of Jesus.

Stalley's book is now out, published in April 2025. In his Amazon description of it, he modestly calls it "monumental" in its "significance." I have not yet read it, but have read almost all of his articles on which it is based, which I found extremely flimsy, and so am very skeptical of his book. A careful review of it may follow at some later time, somewhere or other.

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