Pre-1350 Shroud Trajectories: Wilson vs. Markwardt - A Comparative Historical Analysis

Otangelo Grasso, *written with AI assistance,*
email: otangelograsso@gmail.com
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A Philological and Material Evidence Audit

Abstract

This study adjudicates between the two principal historical reconstructions for the Shroud of Turin's provenance before its documented appearance in Lirey, France (c. 1353). Ian Wilson's Edessa–Mandylion hypothesis identifies the Shroud with the *acheiropoietos* Image of Edessa, transferred to Constantinople in 944 CE and displayed in a folded configuration (*tetradiplon*). Jack Markwardt's Antioch hypothesis posits an earlier, separate transfer of the burial cloth (c. 540 CE). Wilson's model achieves superior explanatory coherence by integrating three independent evidentiary strands: the unique *tetradiplon* terminology correlating with physical crease patterns, *himation* vocabulary indicating large-cloth dimensions, and the relic's absence from Iconoclastic debates explained by Edessa's position under Muslim rule (639–944 CE). The model's largest assumption is a dual-register custodial framework—public face-icon veneration with restricted awareness of burial-shroud identity—which extends documented Byzantine hierarchical revelation protocols to this specific case. Applying a rigorous methodological framework that distinguishes route evidence from identity-constraining evidence, Wilson's pathway provides documented transfer attestation where Markwardt's requires hypothetical movement, and offers positive geopolitical explanation for documentary gaps where Markwardt faces anomalous silence. **This verdict remains conditional on pre-1204 origin of the crease regime and resolution of radiocarbon dating uncertainties.** The convergence of material, philological, and geopolitical evidence favors Wilson's pathway as the most coherent historical reconstruction available from current evidence.

1. Methodological Framework: Separating Route from Identity Evidence

The Shroud's first secure appearance in Western documentation (Lirey, 1353) necessitates reconstructive models based on fragmentary evidence. To minimize category errors, this analysis maintains strict separation between three types of evidence.

Route evidence establishes geographic trajectory, transfer dates, and mechanisms of movement. An example would be the 944 CE translation narrative documenting the Image of Edessa's transfer to Constantinople. Route evidence cannot, however, establish object identity or physical characteristics—it tells us something moved, not necessarily what moved.
Identity-constraining evidence establishes physical characteristics and object dimensions or nature. The c. 1200 testimonies describing a full burial cloth exemplify this category. Such evidence cannot establish geographic provenance or transfer routes—it tells us what an object was, not where it came from.
Route-neutral evidence establishes handling practices or physical features without determining when or where such handling began. Crease patterns on the cloth fall into this category—they demonstrate folding occurred, but not when or where the folding regime was established.

Three-category evidential framework distinguishing route evidence (geographic trajectory), identity-constraining evidence (physical characteristics), and route-neutral evidence (handling practices whose temporal origin remains uncertain).

Dubarle's Backward-Search Method: Dubarle proposes a **backward search** from the **1204** baseline, tracing earlier notices in texts and **iconography**; he stresses the difference between **observed facts** and later **interpretations**, and argues that the **convergence** of heterogeneous testimonies can be historically probative even without a single continuous chain. He illustrates this with his **Halley's Comet** analogy: once periodicity is established by modern observation, earlier sightings can be recognized amid fragmentary records.[37]

Scope Disclaimer: Dubarle explicitly **admits the absence of a direct historical 'proof of authenticity'**, while justifying the inquiry by the object's intrinsic features and the need to test whether traces persist in pre-1204 sources.[37]
Cautionary Exclusions: He deliberately **sets aside** debated claims (e.g., coin-on-eyelid readings; pollen trails) to keep the historical argument anchored to **texts and iconography**.[37]
Historiography Sidebar: Dubarle surveys earlier research: **Dobschütz**'s legendary-development model; **Runciman**'s push to anchor Edessa traditions in plausible historical triggers (including the 544 siege); **Vignon**'s iconography track; **Savio**'s document compilations; and **Bulst**'s cautions against the 'argument from silence.' He adopts Wilson's Edessa-to-Shroud identification as a **working hypothesis**, but inverts the presentation order by starting at **1204** and moving backward.[37]
Methodological Note on Derivative Evidence: Derivative copies invert or normalize tones and cannot adjudicate mechanism; primary weight remains with the cloth's own image properties observed since 1898.[35] This principle applies to all claimed iconographic parallels - they may suggest awareness of a full-body cloth tradition, but cannot independently establish the mechanism of image formation or verify identity with a specific artifact.

Evaluation proceeds according to comparative explanatory power: textual coverage, material corroboration, documentary continuity, and parsimony in required assumptions. This framework has applicability beyond Shroud research to any historical reconstruction involving fragmentary sources and competing provenance claims.

2. The Textual Corpus: Lexical Patterns and Interpretive Challenges

The Edessa dossier, spanning from Evagrius Scholasticus (593) to the *Narratio de imagine Edessena* (944), consistently employs face-specific vocabulary and describes a pre-Passion sweat-contact origin, with no funerary terminology appearing in these sources.[1,2] Gregory Referendarius's 944 homily, once interpreted as referencing post-Crucifixion blood, has been corrected through subsequent philological analysis by Guscin and Dubarle to reaffirm the consistent face-icon tradition.[3,20] Wilson's comprehensive survey of Edessa archaeological and cultic evidence reinforces this face-icon tradition while demonstrating that it could have accommodated custodianship of a larger cloth prior to 944.[10,27]

Wilson's Edessa-Constantinople Framework: Wilson prints the *Narratio de imagine Edessena* (944) in full—the Constantinopolitan translation dossier that records the transfer on 16 August 944 and preserves the rare folding term *tetradiplon*.[27] Wilson's Part IV moves from the Edessan 'portrait' to Constantinople, with chapters 'The Cloth Leaves Edessa' and 'The Full-length Figure Comes to Light,' mirroring a trajectory from face-focused veneration to a full-stature burial cloth in imperial custody.[27]

Fanti & Malfi's Historical Synthesis: Modern reconstructions report that by the 4th–8th c. Edessa claimed an *acheiropoietos* image of Christ. A Vossianus Latinus Q 69 note (8th-c. report in a 10th-c. codex) mentions a cloth at Edessa showing 'the whole body.' In 944 the image was solemnly transferred to Constantinople, with processions and placement in imperial custody.[40]

2.1 Treasury Inventory Terminology: Primary Evidence

Twelfth-century Constantinopolitan inventories maintain lexical distinctions between entries for face-towel relics and burial-linen relics. One inventory describes a towel that Christ wiped on his face, retaining the image of his countenance, while another records burial linens in which Christ's body was wrapped.[7] Markwardt interprets this distinction literally as evidence of two physically separate relics.[12,13] Wilson proposes that the same cloth could be cataloged according to different ceremonial functions, with face-towel terminology describing its public display configuration and burial-linen terminology recording its archival classification.[27]

2.2 Documentary Continuity: The Marino Catalogue

Joe Marino's exhaustive 2022 catalogue collects and classifies every known textual mention of Christ's burial linens prior to Lirey (1350s), ranging from apocryphal sources to pilgrim reports and liturgical documents.[26] The study confirms that awareness of burial cloths was continuous through the first millennium, directly countering claims of a total documentary void. Representative continuity markers include: Amaury of Jerusalem's 1171 CE inventory listing linen by which Christ's body was covered at the Imperial Chapel in Constantinople; the 1190 CE Imperial inventory distinguishing the shroud in which Christ's body was wrapped from the towel of Abgar; Nikolaos Mesarites's 1201 CE description of burial linens with myrrh fragrance at Pharos Chapel; and Robert de Clari's 1203–04 CE report of weekly Friday display of a burial cloth with visible figure.[26] Latin notices within the Komnenian and Angelid periods place Passion cloths of the Lord among imperial relics before 1204. Vignon collates an 1150 English pilgrim report referencing *sudarium quod fuit super caput eius* and William of Tyre's 1171 notice of *syndonem*, highlighting fluid vocabulary (*sudarium* → *sindon*) yet consistent Byzantine custody. Vignon also lists earlier literary mentions (e.g., a c. 670 notice distinguishing *sudarium* and *sindon*), extending the horizon that anticipates the later Constantinopolitan references.[35] Contemporary Crusader narratives describe intense Passion-relic devotion after 1099, a climate that helps explain why linen claims multiply across Latin sources.36

Select Western Notices Before 1204

Independent Western notices attest pre-1204 veneration streams for Passion linens, without deciding the identity of the Turin cloth. Compiègne (A.D. 847) reports a blood-stained shroud transferred from Aachen under Charles the Bald;36 Cadouin (A.D. 1098) emerges in the First Crusade orbit (a banded textile without a body image - useful as a contrast case);and Cahors (A.D. 1119) records papal attention to a *sudarium*. Read together, these items show active *sindon*/*sudarium* language in medieval France before 1204, while also illustrating the plurality of claimed Passion cloths. Lanza explicitly explains the multiplicity: plural burial cloths in the Gospel dossier, later divisions, and contact-relic phenomena.36 These references, while not definitively identifying a single object, demonstrate continuous awareness of burial-

cloth relics in Byzantine custody and lower the inferential burden on Wilson's hypothesis by showing persistent rather than sudden emergence of burial-linen traditions.

2.3 The Dual-Register Hypothesis: Byzantine Precedents and Inferential Costs

Wilson's model proposes that the same cloth could be cataloged in two different ways within Byzantine administrative records. While no identical dual-entry case has yet been identified for the Shroud specifically, this interpretation becomes more plausible when contextualized within documented Byzantine relic-management protocols. Byzantine hierarchical revelation practices, where a relic's "true" nature was disclosed progressively depending on initiatory status, are extensively documented in the scholarly literature on early medieval cult administration.[21,29,30,31] Controlled ambiguity was not aberrant but constitutive of Byzantine relic theology, particularly for objects housed in restricted palace contexts rather than public shrines. Dal Santo (2012, especially Chapter 5, pp. 178-203 on stratified access systems) documents stratified access systems for major relics, where fuller knowledge correlated with proximity to imperial or patriarchal authority.[21] Lidov (2006) analyzes the "hierotopic" construction of sacred spaces in Byzantine practice, demonstrating how architectural and liturgical contexts controlled the progressive revelation of relic significance.[29] Klein (2006) examines the systematic differences between public pilgrimage guides and internal palace inventories, noting that objects could be cataloged by ceremonial function in one register and by material/historical classification in another.[30] The imperial treasury at Pharos operated under protocols distinct from accessible pilgrimage sites. Confidential inventories existed alongside public hagiographic narratives, and different administrative registers could reflect functional rather than ontological categories. Cormack (2018, pp. 156-178) analyzes imperial relic collections, showing how the same object might appear under different descriptive categories depending on administrative context—liturgical use versus archival storage, public veneration versus restricted treasury records.[31]

Context-Dependent Descriptors in Byzantine Treasury Administration

Source	Example	Descriptive Shift	Relevance
Dal Santo (2015)	Stratified access to major relics	Fuller knowledge by proximity to authority	Hierarchical revelation protocols
Lidov (2006)	Hierotopic sacred spaces	Architectural control of relic significance	Progressive disclosure by context
Klein (2006)	Pilgrimage guides vs. palace inventories	Ceremonial function → archival classification	Functional vs. ontological categories
Cormack (2018)	Imperial collections	Liturgical use → treasury storage	Context-dependent descriptive categories

Critical Acknowledgment of Inferential Limitations: The parallels cited establish hierarchical access and context-dependent description, but not dual-type cataloging of a single object. **NO EXTANT BYZANTINE RECORD SHOWS THE SAME OBJECT SIMULTANEOUSLY CATALOGED AS TWO DIFFERENT TYPES; OUR INFERENCE IS FUNCTIONAL, NOT DOCUMENTARY.** The specific practice Wilson's model requires—simultaneous classification of one object as both small face-towel and large burial shroud in coexisting administrative records - lacks documented parallel. This represents a genuine inferential leap from "objects are described differently in different contexts" to "objects are cataloged as different object types simultaneously." While the former is well-attested, the latter remains hypothetical for Byzantine treasury administration. The absence of a perfect parallel for this specific relic remains a genuine inferential cost and represents the most vulnerable element in Wilson's reconstruction. However, the practice Wilson proposes sits within a well-attested environment of stratified revelation systems and restricted-access treasury administration rather than requiring an unprecedented innovation in Byzantine

custodial practice. The dual-register framework is an inference from known Byzantine practices applied to this specific case, not a verified historical fact for this particular relic.

3. Identity Constraints: The c. 1200 Testimonies

Two independent witnesses from the turn of the thirteenth century establish definitive identity constraints for any viable historical model. That is, they tell us what must be explained by any proposed route.

Framing 1204 as Watershed: Framing 1204 as the watershed, Wilson positions 944–1204 as the Constantinopolitan custody era; the subsequent chapter, '1204 to the 1350s - The Missing Years,' sets the stage for Nicholas Mesarites (c. 1201) and Robert de Clari (1203–04) as independent witnesses to a burial *sindon* displaying Christ's figure in the capital.[27]

Dubarle's Pre-1204 Constantinople Witnesses: Following a **1204-backwards** method, Dubarle clusters the **palatine custody** testimony (Mesarites) with **public display** testimony (Robert de Clari), treating them as independent, converging witnesses within the final Byzantine stage.[37]

c. 1200 Testimonies: Comparative Summary

Witness	Language	Location	Display Mode	MS Date	Establishes	Does Not Establish
Mesarites (c.1201)	Greek (*sindones*)	Pharos Chapel	Treasury custody	14th c.	Full burial cloth with myrrh in palace	Route or earlier history
De Clari (1203-04)	Old French (*sydoine*)	Blachernae	Weekly Friday upright showing	14th c.	Visible figure, public display protocol	Route or custodial mechanism

3.1 Nikolaos Mesarites (c. 1201)

The Mesarites account survives in Codex Mosquensis graecus 426 (Moscow, State Historical Museum), a 14th-century manuscript copy. The relevant passage appears in his description of the imperial treasury at the Pharos Chapel during the attempted coup of John Komnenos in 1201.[4] Mesarites describes the burial linens of Christ as linen wrappings filled with myrrh and still fragrant, which wrapped the naked and unburied body after the Passion. The Greek text employs *sindones* (σινδόνες) to denote these burial wrappings (Mesarites, *Epitaphios*, §9; ed. A. Heisenberg [1907], pp. 31–32).[4]

3.2 Robert de Clari (1203–1204)

Summarizing the 1203–1204 testimony, Vignon emphasizes Robert de Clari's report of a Friday upright showing at Blachernae, where the *sydoine* displayed the visible figure of Christ, after which the cloth disappears from the record.[35]



Image source 41

De Clari's chronicle survives in a single manuscript: Bibliothèque royale de Belgique, MS 9492–93 (Copenhagen), dated to the early 14th century. The text is in Old French (Picard dialect) and represents an eyewitness account of the Fourth Crusade.[5] De Clari reports a burial cloth displayed upright each Friday at Blachernae so visitors could "clearly see the figure of Our Lord." The Old French employs *sydoine* to describe this cloth, which stood upright for viewing.[5]

Manuscript Attestation: Both sources survive in single 14th-century manuscript copies, and both rely on internal coherence and contextual corroboration for authentication. For Mesarites, the account coheres with other contemporary palace inventories and exhibits specific knowledge of Byzantine treasury organization. For de Clari, specific topographical details and personal observations support authenticity of the eyewitness core despite late manuscript attestation.[4,5]

Wilson's analysis emphasizes the regular, public character of this showing and the visibility of the figure on the cloth, aligning with an intentional exhibition protocol.[27] These accounts do not specify how the cloth arrived in Constantinople but establish what must be explained: the presence of a full-body burial cloth bearing a visible image. Both sources demonstrate independent attestation from different contexts (Greek palace insider vs. Latin crusader outsider), strengthening their evidential weight. Marino's inventory tables provide additional continuity markers bridging the documentary gap between Edessa and these c. 1200 testimonies.[26] These references, while not definitively identifying the object, demonstrate continuous awareness of burial-cloth relics in Byzantine custody and lower the inferential burden on Wilson's hypothesis.

4. Terminological Analysis: The Himation–Tetradiplon Joint Semantic Argument

Wilson's interpretive framework treats the Edessan face vocabulary as reflecting display configuration rather than object identity. Two Greek terms form the crux of this argument and must be analyzed together. This section evaluates the joint semantic argument through lexical analysis of each term, material correlation with physical evidence, and assessment of alternative explanations.

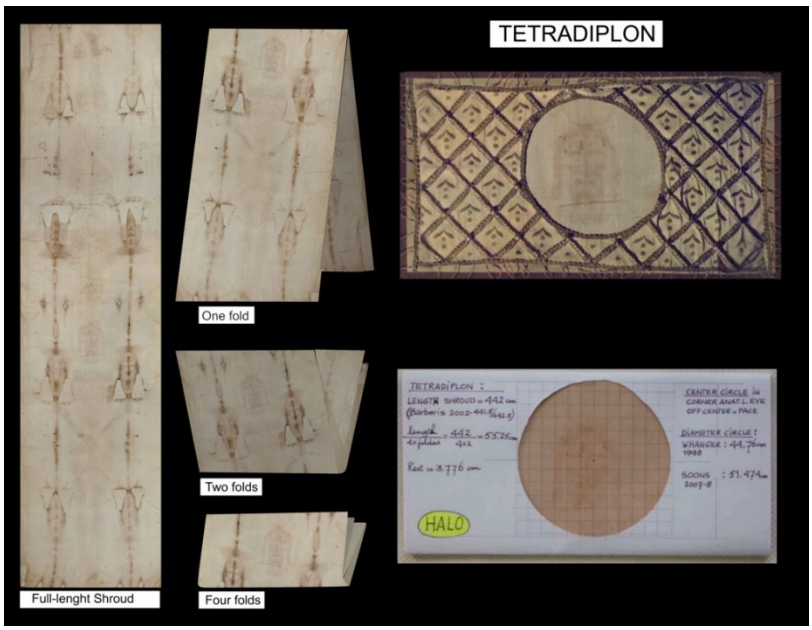
4.1 Lexical Evidence: Corpus Analysis

Byzantine textile terminology from the sixth through tenth centuries reveals systematic size and function distinctions. *Himation* (ἱμάτιον) consistently denotes substantial textiles - outer cloaks, mantles, or large wrapping cloths - in the corpus examined by Guscin (2015) and Wilson (2010).[8,27] *Sindon* (σινδών) refers to burial shrouds and large linen wrappings, as in

Gospel accounts. *Soudarion* (σουδάριον) and *mantile* (μαντήλιον) occupy a smaller size class: face cloths, handkerchiefs, and hand towels. The term *tetradiplon* (τετράδιπλον) appears uniquely in connection with the Edessa image in the 944 translation narrative.[2] No other occurrences have been identified in Byzantine relic descriptions or textile vocabulary. This lexical uniqueness demands explanation.

4.2 Tetradiplon: The Folding Term

The unique Greek term *tetradiplon* (τετράδιπλον, "four-double[d]") appears in the 944 translation narrative describing the Edessa image.[2] The word combines elements for "four" (τετρα-) and "fold over in two" (διπλόω). However, Greek compound formation creates interpretive ambiguity.



Possible interpretations include: folded twice producing four layers total; folded in four producing eight layers (four double-layers via three folds); or folded four times producing sixteen layers.[18]

The term *diplon* (διπλόν) means "folded in two," creating two layers (LSJ s.v. διπλόω). However, there are no parallel numerical terms like *triplon* or *hexaplon* in Byzantine textile vocabulary. A more precise expression for "folded three times" would be *tetrakis diploun* (literally "four times doubled"), yet Byzantine Greek compound formation often employed approximate rather than mathematically precise constructions. The term's absence from all other Byzantine textile vocabulary creates interpretive ambiguity. It could represent technical jargon for a specialized folding protocol that did not survive elsewhere in the literary record, or a descriptor coined for an unusual handling regime specific to this relic. The exclusive use of *tetradiplon* for the Image of Edessa signifies its importance in understanding the cloth's appearance. If the Image was folded multiple times, it couldn't have been imprinted onto a solid surface like wood. The term suggests the cloth was reasonably large, larger than what would be required for just a facial image. Nicolotti's critical analysis accepts this philological caution, noting that *tetradiplon* might simply describe a twice-doubled storage fold without implying any burial context.[28] Yet his reading leaves unexplained why such an unprecedented term would arise for an ordinary face-icon: its very rarity points to an object whose handling demanded technical language, suggesting that the Edessa cloth was physically larger than a framed visage would require.

4.3 Himation: The Size Constraint

John of Damascus's eighth-century description of the Edessa image employs the term *himation* (ιμάτιον) to describe the relic (*De Imaginibus* III.29–30).[19] The semantic range of *himation* typically denotes a large draped outer garment in Byzantine Greek textile

vocabulary (LSJ s.v. ἱμάτιον: "outer garment, cloak, mantle"; consistently applied to substantial textiles in liturgical and hagiographic contexts, e.g., Matt. 9:20–21 for the woman touching Christ's cloak; Acts 12:8 for Peter donning his outer garment). In the corpus of liturgical and hagiographic texts examined by Guscin (2015) and Wilson (2010), *himation* consistently refers to substantial textiles (cloaks, mantles, large wrapping cloths) rather than small devotional objects or handkerchiefs.[8,27] While we cannot entirely exclude metaphorical or irregular usage, the term's application to textiles measuring less than one meter square would be unusual.
If the Edessa image were a small panel or towel, *himation* would be an unexpected lexical choice that requires explanation. If it were a large cloth folded for display, the term becomes immediately intelligible within standard Byzantine textile vocabulary. The combination with *tetradiplon* makes the large-cloth interpretation most coherent.

4.4 The Vossianus Testimony: Full-Body Awareness in the Edessa Tradition

A Latin witness frequently cited in support of full-body awareness within the Edessa tradition is Codex Vossianus Latinus Q 69 (Leiden University Library, 10th century), preserving a Latin translation of an earlier report regarding Abgar's reception of the image. The text states that on the cloth one could see *non tantum faciei figuram sed totius corporis figuram* (not only the figure of the face but the figure of the whole body).[34] The evidential weight of this passage requires careful calibration. The Vossianus text represents a 10th-century Latin rendering of material whose ultimate provenance and transmission history remain uncertain. It does not appear in the earliest Syriac versions of the Abgar legend, and its relationship to the Greek Edessa dossier is unclear.

Transmission Possibilities for Codex Vossianus Latinus Q 69

The passage could represent:

(a) **Preservation of authentic early tradition** about the cloth's full dimensions that was suppressed or obscured in mainstream Greek accounts → *Implication: Strengthens Wilson's dual-register hypothesis as original knowledge*
(b) **Later interpolation or theological elaboration** by a Latin compiler aware of burial-cloth traditions → *Implication: Evidence of 10th-c. harmonization, not continuous awareness*
(c) **Conflation of separate relic traditions** during transmission → *Implication: Minimal support for Edessa-Shroud identification*

What the Vossianus passage demonstrates is that by the 10th century, at least one textual strand associated with the Edessa image contained explicit full-body language - language that coheres with the *himation* vocabulary in John of Damascus and anticipates the burial-cloth descriptions in Mesarites and de Clari two centuries later. **Given transmission uncertainties, the passage is best interpreted as evidence that by the 10th century some textual traditions associated full-body language with Edessa, rather than proof that such awareness existed continuously from the 6th century. It corroborates Wilson's end state (full-body awareness in medieval sources) without necessarily validating the pathway (continuous knowledge from origin).** The passage functions most effectively as corroborative rather than foundational evidence. It strengthens the plausibility of Wilson's dual-register interpretation by demonstrating that full-body awareness existed in at least some documentary contexts associated with Edessa, even if the dominant Greek face-icon tradition suppressed or minimized this dimension. However, it does not independently establish that the Image of Edessa was the Turin Shroud, nor does it resolve the transmission uncertainties inherent in

10th-century Latin translations of earlier Eastern sources. Methodologically, the Vossianus testimony occupies a middle evidential tier: stronger than pure inference but weaker than contemporary Greek sources; suggestive of full-body traditions but not definitive proof of continuous awareness. It adds cumulative weight to the convergent case Wilson constructs from multiple independent strands, but does not constitute smoking-gun documentation.

4.5 The Joint Semantic Argument

The *himation-tetradiplon* pairing forms a mutually reinforcing semantic unit. *Himation* indicates a substantial textile (semantically constraining interpretations toward large-cloth rather than small-towel readings), while *tetradiplon* describes its subjection to a special folding regime (explaining the unprecedented terminology). The Vossianus passage adds a third element: explicit textual attestation of full-body awareness in at least one strand of the Edessa tradition, though with transmission uncertainties that prevent treating it as definitive proof. This three-fold convergence - size vocabulary (*himation*), folding terminology (*tetradiplon*), and full-body language (Vossianus) - provides stronger cumulative support for Wilson's "face-window" interpretation than any single element would bear independently. The semantic constraint imposed by *himation* vocabulary shifts the philological balance toward a large cloth in specialized configuration. Wilson further argues that some first-encounter reactions to the Mandylion in 944 read naturally if the same large cloth was presented in a "face-window" state - a folded configuration masking the rest of the body image, precisely what an eight-panel regime would effect.[27]

Wilson's "Holy Face" Display Logic: Wilson's corpus of 'holy face' copies and treasury sketches (esp. Roman/Byzantine examples) shows how face-focused display conventions could co-exist with a larger textile folded to present only the visage—an antecedent logic for *tetradiplon* readings.[39] What tips the scale toward Wilson's reading is not *tetradiplon* alone, but its convergence with *himation* vocabulary implying a substantial textile, the Vossianus full-body testimony, and pre-1532 crease patterns evidencing a long habit of repeated folding consistent with a face-window display (lexical plus textual plus material convergence). The lexemes by themselves underdetermine identity; the lexemes plus textual strand plus material patterning yield the stronger, integrated inference. The argument's limitation is that Greek offers clearer expressions for "folded thrice" if precision were intended, the Vossianus transmission history creates uncertainty about when full-body awareness entered the tradition, and the eight-fold reading while defensible is not lexically necessary. The argument functions most effectively as part of a convergent case where terminology, textual evidence, physical data, and historical context mutually reinforce each other.

5. Material Evidence: Crease Pattern Analysis and Structural Features

The physical characteristics of the Shroud itself provide crucial evidence that can be correlated with the textual claims about folding and display. This section presents material evidence that functions as route-neutral data requiring explanation by any historical model.

5.1 Pre-1532 Crease Patterns

Widthwise foldmarks on the Shroud—most diagnostically the continuous "Location C" crease—traverse areas affected by the 1532 Chambéry fire and appear in nineteenth-century photography (Pia 1898), establishing their pre-1532 origin.[16] The creases run perpendicular to

the length of the cloth, traverse both image and non-image areas, and are visible in regions later damaged by the 1532 fire.

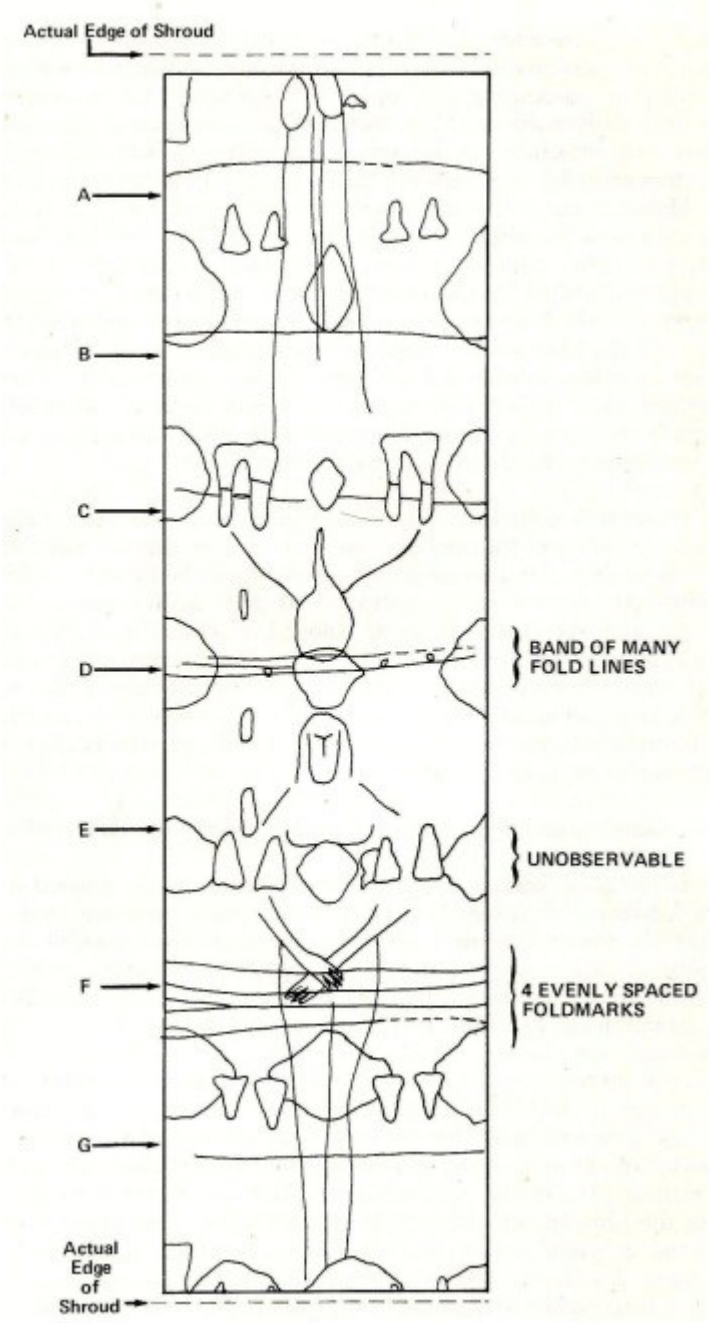


Image source: [16]

Location B appears approximately 28cm from the head-end. Location C is the diagnostic crease - continuous and traversing burn-damaged areas. Location D consists of multiple closely-spaced creases in the dorsal image region. Location F shows a quartet of parallel creases in the leg region. The creases are visible in 1898 Pia photographs, traverse 1532 burn-damaged regions, and display permanent stress-marks indicating sustained folding over extended period.[16] Additional, regularly spaced creases (notably at B, D, and a quartet at F) behave as historical foldlines rather than storage rolls, offering material support for a long-term face-window display on a larger linen. Jackson (1990, Section 3.2, Figures 4-7) provides detailed photographic documentation and crease-mapping analysis.[16]

5.2 Jackson's Critical Summary: Supplementary Physical Evidence

Jackson's comprehensive *Critical Summary of Observations, Data and Hypotheses* (2017) adds substantial technical depth.[25] Four replicated L-shaped burn-hole patterns indicate the cloth was folded in a specific configuration during a pre-1532 burning incident (not the 1532 Chambéry fire), with replication patterns consistent with eighth-fold storage. The geometric distribution of these burn patterns can only be explained if the cloth was folded in a specific repeated configuration during the burning event (§4.1).[25] A distinct side-seam construction shows sewing analogous to textiles from the Masada excavations (first century CE), providing independent dating evidence and demonstrating ancient Mediterranean textile construction techniques. The seam style uses a particular stitching method documented in archaeological contexts from Judea (§2.3).[25] Detailed crease-mapping systematically documents the precise location and orientation of all major fold lines, supporting the hypothesis of repetitive eighth-fold storage over an extended period. The regularity and permanence of these creases indicate sustained handling in the same configuration over decades or centuries

(§4.2–4.5).[25] Analysis of the early photographic record (Pia 1898; Enrie 1931) shows how controlled lighting and viewing conditions can dramatically alter perceived clarity of the figure, cohering with Robert de Clari's report of a clearly seen image during scheduled Friday showings and suggesting intentional exhibition protocols (§7.3).[25] Together, these material features corroborate a long custodial history preceding the 1532 fire and reinforce the interpretation of controlled folding and display consistent with Byzantine ritual protocols. The material evidence demonstrates sustained eighth-fold handling before 1532, sufficient duration to produce permanent creases, compatibility with "face-window" display configuration, and textile construction consistent with ancient Mediterranean techniques. However, it does not establish when or where the folding regime began (could be post-944 in Constantinople), continuous maintenance of this configuration throughout custody, or route-specific provenance (Edessa versus other possible locations). The crease evidence provides strong support for display-mode interpretation and corroborates the *tetradiplon* terminology, but does not independently establish the Edessa-to-Constantinople route. It functions as identity-constraining evidence that any viable historical model must explain. This study ultimately adopts a single-artifact, dual-register reading consistent with Ian Wilson's model: the Mandylion and the Turin Shroud are one long linen. In Edessa, the cloth was presented in a *tetradiplon* "face-window" mode that generated face-focused vocabulary and *acheiropoietos* contact language. After the 944 translation, palace custody in Constantinople maintained two registers of the same relic: a face-display register (ceremonial/public) and a burial-*sindon* register (treasury/exhibition), the latter surfacing in the c. 1200 testimonies (Mesarites; de Clari). Handling evidence (repeated folding without pigment failure) supports a non-pigment mechanism, harmonizing the Edessa rhetoric with the Constantinopolitan identity.

6. Iconographic Corroboration: The Pray Codex

The Hungarian Pray Manuscript (Pray Codex, Budapest, National Széchényi Library, Cod. Lat. 404, c. 1192–1195) displays a distinctive cluster of features in its entombment scene (fol. 28r) that correlate remarkably with characteristics visible on the Shroud of Turin.

6.1 Feature-Cluster Analysis

The entombment scene exhibits five notable features: nude frontal presentation of Christ's body, four-finger hand position with absent or hidden thumb visibility, herringbone textile pattern on the burial cloth, and wound placement consistent with Shroud locations. Joseph Grasso's comprehensive iconographic survey (2024) examined Byzantine and Latin entombment scenes from the tenth through thirteenth centuries, finding that this particular combination of features appears uniquely in the Pray Codex within the examined corpus.[23] The relevant question is not categorical ("Does this prove dependence?") but evidential: What explains this specific feature-cluster? Taken separately, such motifs can be conventional or coincidental. The probative force lies in their conjunction. Each individual element appears sporadically in medieval art, but their simultaneous presence in a single scene from c. 1192–1195 is remarkable.

Most discriminating motifs in feature-cluster (reducing chance coincidence):

- **Four-finger/hidden thumb pairing**: Anatomically unusual hand position matching Shroud image
- **Herringbone pattern**: Specific textile weave documented on Turin Shroud

- **Combined with nude frontal + wound placement**: Multi-element convergence

Grasso's analysis suggests the complete cluster is anomalous within the comparative material, raising the probability that the artist had access to information about a burial cloth matching the Shroud's characteristics—whether through direct viewing, mediated description, or intermediate artistic transmission.[23]

6.2 Documentary Context

Joe Marino's consolidated catalogue includes the Pray Codex among the earliest documented Western depictions consistent with knowledge of the Shroud image, listing it alongside other twelfth-century notices such as Codex Vaticanus Lat. 5118 and the Constantinopolitan inventories referring to burial cloths in imperial custody.[26] These references, while route-neutral, confirm that knowledge of a patterned burial cloth was circulating in the same timeframe (late 12th century), reinforcing the visual continuity between Byzantine custodianship and Latin awareness. The Pray Codex thus functions as circumstantial corroborative evidence: it doesn't prove the Edessa-Constantinople route, but it demonstrates that by c. 1195, someone in Hungary had access to detailed information about a burial cloth matching the Shroud's unique characteristics—exactly when and where Wilson's model predicts such knowledge would be emerging from Constantinople.

7. Historical Context: The Iconoclasm Shield and Geopolitical Explanation

One of the most compelling elements of Wilson's reconstruction is how it explains a significant historical puzzle: Why does the Shroud not appear in Byzantine Iconoclastic controversies? Byzantium experienced two major periods of Iconoclasm, theological movements that opposed the veneration of religious images, from 726 to 787 CE and again from 814 to 843 CE.[22] During these periods, both iconoclasts (image-opponents) and iconodules (image-defenders) engaged in intense theological debates and deployed every available argument and relic to support their positions. *Acheiropoietos* images ("not made by hands") were particularly valued by iconodules as proof of the legitimacy of sacred images.

7.1 Wilson's Geopolitical Shield

Wilson's reconstruction provides a parsimonious solution to this puzzle. From 639 to 944 CE, Edessa existed predominantly under Muslim rule, functionally insulating the local cult from Byzantine theological conflicts.[27]

The chronological sequence is revealing:

- Muslim conquest placed Edessa outside Byzantine territory in 639 CE
- The Iconoclastic period (726–843 CE) occurred entirely while Edessa was under Muslim rule (with brief Byzantine military presence 942-944)
- Restoration of image veneration in Byzantium occurred in 843 CE
- The transfer of the Edessa image to Constantinople happened in 944 CE

The relic's absence from Iconoclastic polemics is therefore expected under Wilson's model - the cloth was geographically isolated from the empire during the period of intense image-theological combat. The 944 transfer occurred after image veneration had been dogmatically rehabilitated (843), explaining the relic's subsequent emergence without controversy or

theological challenge. Wilson further traces iconographic and textual traces across the transfer horizon, reading the Edessa to Constantinople arc as a single custodial continuum in which the face-icon register and a larger burial cloth can co-exist without contradiction under imperial stewardship.[27]

7.2 Addressing the Counter-Objection

A potential objection asks: Why didn't iconodules during Iconoclasm invoke the *tradition* of Edessa's image (even while geographically inaccessible) as evidence of eventual vindication? This requires addressing the silence not just about the physical object but about the tradition itself in iconodule theological writings. Edessa's fame appears to have peaked after the 944 imperial translation. Earlier reputation may have been primarily local and regional rather than empire-wide. The image's prominence in Byzantine consciousness increased dramatically after it entered the imperial treasury. Invoking inaccessible relics under Muslim control might have seemed strategically weak in theological debate; iconodules focused on relics within Byzantine territory for practical theological deployment. Additionally, iconodule treatises that referenced Edessa's tradition may not have survived, particularly given Iconoclast destruction of pro-image literature during periods of ascendancy.[22] The silence regarding the *tradition*, while requiring explanation, is less historically anomalous than silence about a physically present relic would be. Geographically distant traditions not yet integrated into imperial cult would not typically feature in Constantinople-centered theological polemics.

7.3 Markwardt's Iconoclasm Problem

Markwardt's positioning of the Shroud in Constantinople throughout the Iconoclastic period renders the same silence historically problematic.[12,13] An *acheiropoietos*, full-body image would have provided iconodules with compelling polemical capital during intense theological debates. Iconodules could have cited it as miraculous proof of image legitimacy. Iconoclasts would have attacked it as idolatrous. Theological treatises would have referenced it in arguments about Christ's human nature. The contrast with other relics is instructive: The True Cross was frequently invoked during Iconoclasm despite being a contact relic rather than an image. If a full-body burial cloth with visible image had been available in the imperial treasury during the eighth and early ninth centuries, its absence from both iconodule and iconoclast arsenals becomes historically improbable. Wilson's "Edessa shield" logic provides a positive, parsimonious explanation for documentary silence during a well-documented historical period. The cloth's absence from Iconoclastic debates correlates precisely with its posited geographic isolation under Muslim rule.

7.4 The 843-944 Gap: From Obscurity to Imperial Acquisition

A potential tension exists in Wilson's model: if Edessa's tradition was obscure enough to be ignored during Iconoclasm (726-843), what elevated it to acquisition-worthy status by 944? The gap is only 101 years, requiring explanation for how the relic transitioned from "too obscure to mention" to "must acquire for imperial collection." Several factors likely contributed to this transformation. Byzantine military reconquest of the Edessa region (942-944) created opportunity that was previously unavailable - the relic became accessible to imperial acquisition for the first time in centuries.[27] Post-Iconoclasm relic-acquisition programs under the Macedonian dynasty actively sought prestigious sacred objects to legitimize the restored image cult, favoring "newly accessible" relics that could be presented as validating the iconodule victory.[22] Additionally, local reputation may have always been high within Edessa

and surrounding regions, but empire-wide fame required physical presence in Constantinople and integration into imperial ceremonial. The 944 translation narrative itself functioned as propaganda, mnufacturing widespread recognition for an object whose significance had been primarily regional. The translation created fame as much as it responded to pre-existing reputation.

Alternative consideration: The relic's fame in 944 may have been **manufactured by the translation narrative itself** rather than reflecting pre-existing regional prestige. If so, the "Edessa shield" argument weakens—the relic may have been obscure (or non-existent as full burial cloth) both during and after Iconoclasm, with Wilson reading imperial propaganda as historical fact. This possibility deserves critical examination in future research. The most historically plausible explanation combines military opportunity with post-Iconoclasm imperial policy: the relic became simultaneously accessible (through reconquest) and desirable (through new ideological programs emphasizing image-bearing relics as validation of iconodule theology). This addresses the timeline gap without requiring the relic to have had empire-wide fame during its Edessan period.

7.5 Constantinople Display Context and Numismatic Evidence

Constantinople Setting: Set within the palatine-treasury and liturgical environment that Wilson assembles from visual and documentary cues, Constantinople provides the pre-1204 context in which a burial *sindon* could be seen in public modes yet secured in treasuries.[39]

Fanti & Malfi on Display Modes: In Constantinople the cloth was reportedly opened and folded in ways that revealed more than a face (e.g., chest), which aligns with the later *Imago Pietatis* half-length devotional type.40

Pre-1204 Numismatic Backdrop: A Byzantine coinage dossier (10th–12th c.) is often read as reflecting acquaintance with a Shroud-like face model, with renewed Shroud-like features noted after 944 and mixed fidelity in later mints. Examples cited include Constantine VII/Romanos issues (c. 945), Basil II & Constantine VIII (976–1025), Nicephorus III (1078–1081), and Western/Crusader-sphere echoes (Ruggero II in Sicily; Joscelin I of Edessa). Interpretations vary, but as contextual evidence these notices illustrate how face-image conventions circulated before 1204.40 Fanti & Malfi suggest that after 1204 the degradation of Christ portraits in some coin series may reflect loss of direct access to the model once kept in Constantinople.40

8. Quantifying Markwardt's Silence Problem: Comparative Archival Analysis

Markwardt's Antioch hypothesis faces a severe documentation gap. If the Shroud resided in Antioch from the first century (or from any early date) until c. 540, we confront a significant absence in the literary record—no pilgrim accounts, no homiletic references, no hagiographic notices, no epistolary mentions from visiting bishops or theologians that can be definitively linked to the Shroud specifically in Antioch.[12,13]

8.1 Acknowledging Archival Catastrophes

To assess this silence fairly, we must account for Antioch's catastrophic archival losses. The city suffered devastating sacks: 540 CE Persian conquest by Khosrow I; 969 CE Byzantine

reconquest; and 1085 CE Seljuk conquest. Each of these events brought manuscript destruction and institutional disruption. Survival rates for Antiochene ecclesiastical literature are indeed poor compared to Constantinople or Rome. This contextual reality must be acknowledged.

Survival Expectation Analysis: Why Antioch's Silence is Informative

Documentary genres with HIGH survival rates (external sources):

- Correspondence networks between major sees (survived in recipient archives)
- Theological treatises composed elsewhere, citing Eastern sources (preserved in Western/Constantinopolitan libraries)
- Pilgrimage itineraries compiled in Egypt, Rome, Constantinople (multiple manuscript traditions)
- Hagiographic literature celebrating major saints (wide geographical distribution)

Documentary genres with LOW survival rates (internal records):

- Local liturgical books and ceremonial guides
- Palace administrative inventories
- Internal ecclesiastical registers

Critical distinction: Antioch's catastrophic losses explain absence of *local* documentation, but **cannot explain absence from external sources with high survival rates**. Other Antiochene relics (Ignatius relics, Chalice of Last Supper, Chair of Peter) left traces in external correspondence, pilgrim accounts, and theological writings precisely because significant relics generated documentation beyond their home cities.

However, the evidential standard applied here differs from manuscript survival issues addressed in Section 3. When fragmentary positive evidence exists (such as late manuscript copies of Mesarites and de Clari), internal coherence and contextual corroboration can support authenticity despite late attestation. When evidence is entirely absent, archival loss explains why we lack local documentation but does not eliminate the historical anomaly. Other Antiochene relics left traces in external sources precisely because significant relics generated documentation beyond their home cities—correspondence networks, pilgrimage accounts, theological treatises composed elsewhere. The critical question is not "did Antiochene archives survive?" but "why did this relic leave no trace in external sources that did survive?" Catastrophic local losses cannot explain absence from Constantinopolitan inventories, Egyptian pilgrimage itineraries, or theological correspondence composed in other cities and preserved in other archives.

8.2 Comparative Relic Documentation

However, comparative evidence renders the silence more notable when we examine how other relics of comparable or lesser significance left documentary traces. Despite the same catastrophic losses affecting all Antiochene relics, several left traces in external sources—pilgrimage itineraries, letters from visiting bishops, and references in Constantinopolitan inventories. The relics of Ignatius, the Chalice of the Last Supper, and the Chair of Peter all generated multiple external attestations despite Antioch's archival disruptions. These relics, while prestigious, would not obviously surpass a full-body image-bearing burial cloth in theological or devotional significance. Yet they left documentary traces precisely because

information about them circulated beyond their home cities. Despite comparable archival fragility and multiple periods of conquest, Jerusalem's various burial-cloth traditions left documentary traces in the *Breviarius de Hierosolyma*, multiple pilgrim accounts, and references in correspondence networks. Jerusalem faced similar or worse disruptions (Persian conquest 614, Muslim conquest 638, Crusader conquest 1099, Ayyubid reconquest 1187), yet burial-cloth traditions there generated surviving references. Antioch's literary productivity and ecclesiastical prominence during the patristic period should have generated comparable or superior documentation for a relic of this magnitude.

8.3 The Christological Controversy Problem

This is the most damaging objection to Markwardt's reconstruction. Antioch was a focal point for Christological controversies during the fifth and early sixth centuries. Under Markwardt's model, the Shroud would have been present throughout this entire period of maximum theological utility, remaining in Antioch until its proposed c. 540 transfer to Constantinople - thus available for deployment in the Nestorian controversy (430s-450s) regarding debates about Christ's dual natures and the relationship between his divine and human persons, Monophysite challenges concerning arguments about whether Christ had one nature or two, and the Chalcedonian settlement (451 CE) and its aftermath.[12] A full-body image-bearing burial cloth would have been theologically explosive in these debates, providing material evidence relevant to disputes about Christ's true humanity, the relationship between his divine and human natures, the legitimacy of sacred images, and the nature of resurrection. **Its absence from polemical deployment by any theological faction is the documentary equivalent of a smoking gun against the Antioch hypothesis.** The critical difference from the Edessan case is geographic and participatory. Edessa under Muslim rule (639-944) was outside the Byzantine Empire and excluded from participation in Iconoclastic debates—physical isolation explains documentary absence. Antioch remained within Byzantine ecclesiastical jurisdiction throughout the Christological controversies and was an active participant in these debates, with Antiochene bishops and theologians directly engaged in Nestorian and Monophysite disputes. Local preservation without deployment becomes implausible when the preserving institution is actively participating in precisely the debates where such a relic would be decisively relevant. A relic need not be empire-wide famous to be deployed locally by participants in empire-wide controversies.

The contrast with other relics used in Christological debates is stark - yet the Shroud appears in none of these well-documented controversies. Marino's century-by-century references fill intermediate space in the broader historical record, demonstrating that burial-cloth awareness persisted across the first millennium.[26] His catalogue shows that even amid regional crises, relic traditions associated with Christ's burial cloth or grave linens continued to surface sporadically in both East and West. The inclusion of Antioch-related sources in Marino's compilation, though fragmentary, demonstrates awareness of burial-cloth traditions more broadly. While no source explicitly identifies the Shroud in Antioch, the continuous thread of burial-cloth references elsewhere suggests that such a significant relic would likely have left some trace if present in a major ecclesiastical center during periods of intense theological controversy.

8.4 The Concealment Hypothesis

Markwardt's later interpretation, articulated in a 2023 interview with Creevy, reframes this absence as strategic concealment—a protective withdrawal of the relic during doctrinal conflict.[24] The argument proposes that custodians deliberately hid the cloth to protect it from theological controversy and potential destruction. While this thesis is theologically appealing and provides a narrative explanation for silence, it remains empirically untestable—it cannot be verified or falsified through historical evidence. The concealment hypothesis represents a historiographically costly approach. It requires assuming precisely what needs to be explained (deliberate concealment for which no evidence exists), lacks comparative parallels (other major relics were not withdrawn from theological deployment during controversies), and functions as an explanation invoked specifically to explain away the evidentiary gap. The methodological distinction is not that Wilson's dual-register hypothesis is directly verifiable while concealment is not—both are inferences from incomplete evidence. The difference is that dual-register extrapolates from documented Byzantine practices (hierarchical revelation, context-dependent cataloging) to this specific case, while multi-century protective concealment lacks comparative parallels in relic custody. Both involve inferential leaps, but one extends attested patterns while the other proposes unprecedented practice. While the concealment thesis is not impossible, it remains an inference made to accommodate absence of evidence rather than emerging from positive documentation.

8.5 Dubarle's Edessa Reception Note

Dubarle highlights a **Constantinople family-court examination** of the Edessa image shortly after its arrival, a detail missed by earlier syntheses and preserved under **Pseudo-Symeon** (PG 109, 812). He treats such notices as reception data that cohere with the 944 transfer narratives.[37]

8.6 Reframing the Silence Argument

The actual situation appears to be this: burial-cloth traditions were referenced throughout the first millennium (as Marino demonstrates), but none can be definitively linked to a specific object or location until the c. 1200 Constantinopolitan testimonies.[26] Markwardt's hypothesis requires explaining why, if the Shroud resided in Antioch for five centuries, no surviving source explicitly identifies it there - despite Antioch's prominence and literary productivity. This silence is anomalous but not unprecedented: the same could be said of Edessa before 944. The difference is that Wilson's model explains Edessan silence through geographic isolation during Iconoclasm, while Markwardt requires silence during a period when Antioch was both accessible and embroiled in precisely the theological controversies where such a relic would be polemically valuable. Absence of evidence is not conclusive evidence of absence, but evidential weight depends on survival expectations. Internal palace administrative records have low survival rates—their absence is uninformative. External references in correspondence, pilgrimage literature, and theological treatises have substantially higher survival rates—absence from these sources is historically informative. The Antiochene silence is anomalous not because local archives were lost, but because no external sources reference it despite good survival of external documentary types. Even granting catastrophic losses and acknowledging that absence of evidence is not conclusive evidence of absence, a relic of this magnitude would be expected to leave some external attestation in surviving sources from other cities, in correspondence networks, in theological treatises, or in pilgrimage accounts. The extended silence, while not impossible, shifts the burden of proof significantly onto Markwardt's

reconstruction. By contrast, Wilson's model requires no Antiochene documentation because the cloth was never there—a simpler explanation with lower inferential costs.

9. Comparative Analysis: Wilson vs. Markwardt

This section presents a systematic comparison of the two models across multiple evaluative criteria.

Comparative Scoring Matrix: Wilson vs. Markwardt

Dimension	Wilson Score	Markwardt Score	Rationale
Route Attestation	2	0	944 transfer documented (Narratio, homilies, inventories) vs. hypothetical c.540 transfer
Lexical Fit	2	1	Himation+tetradiplon joint constraint vs. literal face-vocabulary reading
Material Correlates	2	1	Pre-1532 creases predicted by tetradiplon vs. post-hoc accommodation
Iconographic Corroboration	1	1	Pray Codex (c.1195) route-neutral; compatible with either model
Geopolitical Fit	2	0	Positive explanation (Muslim isolation 639-944) vs. anomalous Iconoclasm silence
Documentary Continuity	1	0	Marino catalogue demonstrates c.1200 convergence vs. 5-century Antioch gap
Inferential Cost (inverse)	1	0	Dual-register lacks perfect parallel vs. multi-century concealment unprecedented
TOTAL	**11/14**	**3/14**	Wilson achieves convergent explanation across independent evidence types

Scoring: 0 = weak/absent; 1 = moderate; 2 = strong. Inferential Cost inverted (lower cost = higher score).

9.1 Textual Interpretation

Wilson reinterprets Edessan face-vocabulary as describing the relic's display configuration rather than its intrinsic identity.[27] The face-specific terminology reflects how the cloth was shown (folded to display only the facial region) rather than what it was (a full-body burial cloth). Markwardt accepts the plain sense of the sources—face vocabulary means face-only relic, maintaining strict object-type distinctions based on lexical boundaries in treasury inventories.[12,13] Wilson's reading gains substantial force from the *himation-tetradiplon* semantic pairing reinforced by the Vossianus full-body testimony. When combined with pre-1532 crease patterns and twelfth-century iconography, this produces a cohesive Byzantine custodial continuum that integrates philological, physical, and iconographic data into a unified explanation. Marino's documentary findings strengthen this continuum by showing that references to burial linens persisted steadily across centuries, supporting the plausibility of Wilson's unfolding custodial chain.[26] Markwardt has the advantage on methodological conservatism (accepting literal readings), but Wilson's interpretation achieves superior explanatory integration when all evidence types are considered together. The semantic constraints imposed by *himation* particularly strengthen Wilson's case by excluding small-towel alternatives.

9.2 Material Evidence Integration

The *tetradiplon* terminology in Wilson's model aligns precisely with physical crease patterns documented on the cloth itself.[16,25] Jackson's Critical Summary outlines repeating L-shaped burn-hole sets consistent with eighth-fold storage, seam structure matching ancient Mediterranean construction, and fold sequencing empirically validating Wilson's hypothesized eight-panel configuration.[25] Markwardt acknowledges these material indicators but attributes them to later ritual storage—an adjustment made after observing the physical evidence rather than predicted by the historical model. No documentation supports a later adoption of eighth-fold storage protocols. The physical evidence provides independent corroboration of the textual interpretation, giving Wilson a significant advantage.

9.3 Route Documentation

Wilson's route from Edessa to Constantinople is extensively attested through the 944 translation narrative, imperial homilies, treasury lists and inventories, and multiple independent sources documenting the same transfer.[2,3,27] Markwardt's route from Antioch to Constantinople (c. 540) appears in no surviving document. The transfer is entirely hypothetical, inferred from the presumed need to explain the cloth's later Constantinople presence.[12] Marino's century-by-century references provide route-neutral continuity even when specific identity remains unconfirmed, lowering the inferential cost of Wilson's dual-register hypothesis by demonstrating that awareness of burial-cloth relics was continuous rather than emerging suddenly in the 12th century.[26] This represents the single strongest point in Wilson's favor—his route is attested, Markwardt's is hypothetical.

9.4 Geopolitical Context

Edessa's position under Muslim rule (639–944) in Wilson's model provides a parsimonious, positive explanation for the relic's absence from Byzantine Iconoclasm debates.[27] The cloth was geographically isolated from the theological controversies—not because it was hidden, but because it was outside Byzantine territory. Markwardt's model requires explaining why a Constantinopolitan presence from c. 540 onward produced silence from all theological factions during Iconoclasm.[12,13] No iconodule cited it; no iconoclast attacked it; no theological treatise referenced it. This silence occurs during one of the best-documented periods of Byzantine history. Geographic isolation provides a positive explanation for documentary gaps; Markwardt requires silence in a well-documented context where such silence is historically anomalous.

9.5 Required Silences

Wilson's model requires no Antiochene documentation because the cloth was never there. Markwardt must explain extended Antiochene near-invisibility for a theologically significant relic, even accounting for catastrophic archival losses and despite comparative evidence that other major Antiochene relics left external traces in correspondence, pilgrimage accounts, and theological writings. Requiring no silence is simpler than explaining anomalous multi-century silence, particularly when comparable relics generated documentation despite the same archival losses.

9.6 Inferential Costs

Wilson requires acceptance of dual-register custodial culture (public face-icon veneration with restricted awareness of burial-shroud identity) and functional cataloging practices in Byzantine treasury administration. Both inferences occur in contexts where documentary silence is characteristic: restricted palace treasuries, hierarchical revelation protocols, and confidential custodial records that either did not survive or were never intended for external circulation.[21,,30,31] Markwardt requires an undocumented imperial acquisition c. 540 during a period of reasonable Constantinopolitan record-keeping, five centuries of Antiochene invisibility for a theologically significant relic, and three centuries of Iconoclastic silence in the well-documented capital where such a relic would have been polemically invaluable.[12,13] These required silences occur in well-documented historical contexts where their absence is difficult to explain. Wilson's required inferences occur precisely where documentary silence is expected (restricted palace administration) versus where silence is

anomalous (public theological debates, extensive pilgrimage literature, Christological controversies).

9.7 Convergent Explanation

Wilson's framework unifies philology (*himation-tetradiplon* plus Vossianus testimony), physical data (crease patterns, L-holes, seam construction), iconographic evidence (Pray Codex), and political context (Iconoclasm shield) into one continuous, integrated trajectory.[27] The model achieves convergent explanation—multiple independent lines of evidence (lexical, textual, crease geometry, L-holes, iconography, geopolitical) pointing to the same historical reconstruction.

Markwardt contributes rich early-century narrative (apostolic custody, Justinianic re-veneration, protective concealment during doctrinal conflict) but lacks corroborating external anchors.[12,13,24] The model provides theological and psychological depth but depends on inferences that cannot be independently verified. Wilson has the advantage for integrated explanatory power.

9.8 Composite Synthesis and the Face-Icon Problem

A composite synthesis remains conceptually viable: Antioch as the relic's early refuge (apostolic through 5th century), with Edessa–Constantinople representing its phase of public revelation and imperial stewardship (944 onward). This would preserve Markwardt's insights about early custody while accepting Wilson's documented route for the medieval period. However, such a synthesis would still require explaining the Antioch-to-Edessa transfer (undocumented), the five-century Antiochene silence, and why the cloth emerges in Edessa precisely as a face-icon rather than as a known burial shroud. The composite model thus inherits some inferential costs from both reconstructions while gaining the advantage of accounting for possible apostolic-era custody traditions.

The Face-Icon Emergence Problem: Composite synthesis raises a crucial question that any model must address: Why does a full burial shroud emerge in Edessa specifically as a face-icon? This puzzle applies to Wilson's model as well, not just composite synthesis. Several possibilities merit consideration:

Folding innovation: Edessan custodians adopted the eight-fold configuration to make the large cloth manageable for display in a small shrine context, perhaps responding to practical constraints of the available sacred space or liturgical requirements.

Continuity of practice: The folding predates Edessa, and Edessan reception inherited an existing handling regime from earlier custodians (potentially Antiochene or from another location), maintaining established protocols rather than innovating new ones.

Theological strategy: Face-icon framing avoided Jewish/early Christian concerns about corpse impurity while preserving the relic, allowing veneration without triggering taboos associated with burial cloths and death contamination that persisted in some Christian communities.

Dual awareness from the start: Custodians always knew its full nature but publicly emphasized the face for catechetical, liturgical, or protective reasons, maintaining esoteric knowledge among initiates while presenting exoteric teaching to the broader faithful.

Wilson's model implicitly assumes one of these explanations (most likely the first or fourth) but doesn't explicitly defend which mechanism best accounts for the face-icon presentation.[27] Composite synthesis doesn't uniquely face this problem—it's a challenge for any reconstruction that posits the Shroud's existence as a full burial cloth prior to its Edessan face-icon phase. The question deserves more systematic attention in future research. The strongest version of a composite model would need to identify mechanisms for the Antioch-to-Edessa transfer, explain why Edessan reception involved face-icon framing specifically, and provide evidence that composite synthesis better explains features neither pure model addresses. Absent such evidence, Wilson's model remains preferable on grounds of parsimony, but composite synthesis deserves consideration as new archaeological or textual evidence emerges.

10. Objections and Rejoinders

This section addresses the most significant challenges to Wilson's reconstruction and evaluates their force.

10.1 The Radiocarbon Dating Challenge

The 1988 radiocarbon dating (1260–1390 CE, Nature 337:611-615) has been claimed to provide evidence for medieval dating. Three independent laboratories using accelerator mass spectrometry converged on this date range with high statistical confidence. Subsequent technical critiques have raised methodological concerns about sample location, potential contamination, and statistical interpretation. Rogers (2005, Thermochimica Acta) identified chemical differences between the sample area and main cloth body, suggesting possible medieval repair.[32] Casabianca et al. (2019, Archaeometry) reanalyzed the original raw data and questioned homogeneity assumptions.[33] Jackson's Critical Summary (2017) notes the theoretical possibility of carbon enrichment through fire exposure and handling.[25] However, none of these critiques have resulted in peer-reviewed publications definitively overturning the 1988 result. The historical reconstruction presented here is conditional upon material dating outcomes. If the 1260–1390 date is confirmed through future testing with improved sampling protocols, the Byzantine documentary pattern still requires historical explanation as a medieval phenomenon - though this would fundamentally alter interpretation from ancient relic custody to sophisticated medieval forgery tradition. If the cloth proves ancient through alternative dating methods, the historical reconstruction presented here evaluates which pathway best explains the documented evidence. The present analysis evaluates competing historical models on historiographical grounds - documentary coverage, explanatory integration, and parsimony - criteria that apply to provenance reconstruction regardless of ultimate material dating, though the implications differ profoundly depending on whether the object is ancient or medieval.

10.2 The Theological Consistency Objection

Critics ask why a burial shroud would be venerated as an *acheiropoietos* face-icon if its funerary origin and full-body extent were known to custodians, claiming this theological inconsistency undermines the dual-register hypothesis.

The dual-register model posits stratified knowledge rather than universal ignorance or deliberate deception. At the public level, veneration cohered with accessible face-icon theology, emphasizing the dominant *acheiropoietos* tradition of miraculous image formation during Christ's earthly life. At the custodial level, senior palace officials and patriarchal advisors preserved awareness of the cloth's fuller extent and burial context. This fuller knowledge did not disrupt the public cult's theological framework; rather, it represented privileged information shared among initiates. This stratified disclosure aligns with documented Byzantine practice. Hierarchical revelation was standard for major relics, where fuller knowledge correlated with proximity to imperial or patriarchal authority.[21,29] Different levels of understanding for different audiences was not considered deceptive but appropriate—esoteric knowledge preserved for the initiated while exoteric teaching served the broader faithful. The theological category of *acheiropoietos* need not exclude post-mortem contact. The emphasis falls on divine rather than human agency in image-formation, whether that formation occurred during life (sweat imprint) or at death (burial contact). Both mechanisms attribute the image to miraculous divine action rather than human artistry, satisfying the core theological claim. The *acheiropoietos* designation concerns how the image formed (divinely, not by human hands), not when it formed.

10.3 Markwardt's Concealment Thesis

Markwardt's "protective concealment" thesis, articulated in his 2023 Creevy interview, reinterprets the archival gap as intentional secrecy—custodians deliberately concealing the relic during theological controversies to protect it.[24]
Protective concealment has historical precedents in crisis situations. Relics were hidden during Persian invasions (the True Cross in 614 CE) and during Iconoclasm. Sacred objects were routinely removed from immediate danger zones during military threats. Short-term concealment spanning decades has clear parallels in Byzantine practice. However, Markwardt's hypothesis requires explaining not decades but five centuries of silence—a duration for which no clear parallels exist in relic custody. The theological rationale is coherent and provides psychological motivation, but the empirical verification remains elusive. While not impossible, century-scale concealment lacks comparative examples and shifts the burden of explanation from positive evidence to unfalsifiable speculation. Wilson's model requires no such special pleading because it provides a documented route (944 translation narrative) that naturally explains the same phenomena through geographic isolation during the critical Iconoclastic period.[27]

11. Conclusion: Integrative Coherence and Historical Assessment

This comparative synthesis integrates all available textual, material, and geopolitical data, reinforced by the extensive documentary corpus of Marino (2022), the structural observations compiled in Jackson's Critical Summary (2017), Dubarle's methodological framework (1989), and the comprehensive Byzantine context provided in Wilson's 2010 synthesis and 1991 iconographic study.[25,26,,38] Both Wilson and Markwardt reconstruct an unbroken preservation process marked by integrated complexity—a goal-directed continuity of custodianship rather than random artifact survival. Both models take seriously the theological and devotional context of relic preservation in the early Christian and Byzantine worlds. Markwardt's Antiochene phase provides valuable psychological and theological depth to our understanding of possible early custody through apostolic custody traditions, doctrinal concealment during theological conflicts, and possible Justinianic re-emergence and ceremonial recognition.[12,13,24] These elements enrich our understanding of how early Christian

communities might have preserved and protected controversial relics. Markwardt's work has permanent value in highlighting the theological stakes of relic custody during Christological controversies.

However, Wilson's Edessa–Constantinople trajectory is uniquely anchored in attested documents (the 944 translation narrative and supporting sources), distinctive Greek terminology (*himation* + *tetradiplon* reinforced by Vossianus full-body testimony forming a joint semantic argument), and physical evidence (folds, seams, and L-holes observable on the relic itself).[27] These three independent evidentiary domains converge on the same historical reconstruction, providing explanatory integration that exceeds the sum of individual arguments. By the criteria of parsimony, attestation, and interdisciplinary coherence applied in standard historiographical methodology, Wilson requires fewer unverifiable assumptions, his route is documented while Markwardt's is hypothetical, and Wilson achieves convergent explanation across independent evidence types. The Edessa to Constantinople pathway remains the most historically sustainable reconstruction based on current evidence. Wilson's model is not without inferential costs. The dual-register custodial hypothesis remains its most vulnerable element. No perfect parallel case has been identified where Byzantine administrators cataloged the same physical object under contradictory type-categories in coexisting records, the functional cataloging interpretation while plausible is not definitively proven, and documentary silence in palace treasury records could reflect either restricted practices or simple absence. These represent genuine limitations that warrant acknowledgment. Based on current evidence and applying standard historiographical criteria of explanatory breadth, material corroboration, and parsimony in required assumptions, Wilson's Edessa-to-Constantinople trajectory represents the most coherent historical reconstruction. Its strength derives from convergent explanation across three independent evidentiary domains (philological with Vossianus reinforcement, material, and geopolitical), documented route rather than hypothetical transfer, positive geopolitical explanation for documentary gaps rather than unexplained anomalies, and material-textual correlation between terminology and physical evidence. The analysis demonstrates that while neither reconstruction can claim definitive verification—historical inquiry into fragmentary ancient evidence rarely achieves apodictic certainty—the balance of evidence and explanatory coherence favors Wilson's pathway as the best-available historical account given the fragmentary nature of the surviving record. The convergence of philological analysis (including the Vossianus full-body testimony), physical crease patterns, iconographic parallels, geopolitical context, and documentary attestation produces a reconstruction that, while requiring some inferential leaps (particularly the dual-register hypothesis), achieves superior integration of all available evidence types compared to alternative models.

Glossary of Key Terms

Acheiropoietos (ἀχειροποίητος): "Not made by hands"; designating images believed to be of miraculous rather than human origin.
Himation (ἱμάτιον): A large draped outer garment or substantial textile in Byzantine Greek vocabulary.
Mandylion: The Byzantine name for the Image of Edessa after its transfer to Constantinople.
Sindones (σινδόνες): Burial linens or shrouds; linen wrappings used for entombment.
Tetradiplon (τετράδιπλον): "Four-doubled"; unique Greek term describing the folding configuration of the Edessa image.

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clustering palatine custody testimony (Mesarites) with public display testimony (Robert de Clari) as independent converging witnesses, and Constantinople family-court examination of Edessa image shortly after arrival preserved in Pseudo-Symeon (PG 109, 812) treated as reception data cohering with 944 transfer narratives.)

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Author's Note on Methodology

This study employs standard historiographical methods: source criticism, comparative analysis, and inference to best explanation. Historical reconstruction of fragmentary ancient evidence necessarily involves probabilistic reasoning rather than deductive certainty. The convergence of independent evidence types (philological including the Vossianus testimony

and Dubarle's methodological framework, material including Jackson's technical analysis, geopolitical including Wilson's Iconoclasm shield) provides stronger support than any single line of argument. The analysis addresses the radiocarbon dating debate explicitly to engage honestly with the single most significant challenge to pre-1350 reconstructions. Whether the cloth proves ancient or medieval, the Byzantine documentary pattern requires explanation. The present work adjudicates between competing explanations on grounds of parsimony, attestation, and explanatory integration.

Abbreviations

PG = Patrologia Graeca (Migne edition)
De Ceremoniis = Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De Ceremoniis Aulae Byzantinae*