

British archaeologist: Find shows Turin shroud not from Jesus' time

JERUSALEM - Results from studies on the remains of a first-century shroud discovered on the edge of the Old City of Jerusalem prove that the famous Shroud of Turin could not have originated from Jerusalem of Jesus' time, said a prominent archaeologist.

The first-century shroud was discovered in a tomb in the Hinnom Valley in 2000, but the results of tests run on the shroud and other artifacts found with it were only completed in December 2009.

"This is the first shroud from Jesus' time found in Jerusalem and the first shroud found in a type of burial cave similar to that which Jesus would have been buried in and (because of this) it is the first shroud which can be compared to the Turin shroud," said British-born archaeologist Shimon Gibson, basing his conclusion on the full study results, which are scheduled to be published in a scholarly volume within the next year.

There are two clear differences between the current shroud fragments and the Shroud of Turin, Gibson, head of the department of archaeology at the University of the Holy Land in Jerusalem and recently appointed to the Center for Heritage Conservation in Texas A&M University's School of Architecture, told Catholic News Service.

While the Shroud of Turin is formed from one full piece of cloth, studies on the fragments of the shroud discovered in Jerusalem show that two burial cloths were used for the burial - one made of linen, used to wrap the head, and another made of wool, which wrapped the body - in keeping with Jewish tradition of the time, Gibson said. It is likely that Jesus would have been wrapped in a similar manner with two separate pieces of cloth, he said, as described in the Gospel of St. John.

In addition, Gibson said, unlike the complex twill weave of the Shroud of Turin that, according to archaeological finds, was unknown in this area during Jesus' time, the

discovered shroud fragments have a simple two-way weave.

Gibson said he and Boaz Zissu, professor of archaeology at Israel's Bar-Ilan University, co-author of the upcoming monograph, "didn't set out to disprove the Turin shroud."

Partial details of the molecular research were published Dec. 16 in the online journal PloS ONE.

Gibson told CNS that he and Zissu will include discussion of the Shroud of Turin in the upcoming monograph. He noted that the research had been conducted only on the Jerusalem shroud fragments and not in comparison with the Turin shroud.

The first-century excavation site also contained a clump of the shrouded man's hair, which had been ritually cut prior to his burial. The hair and the shroud fragments are unique discoveries because organic remains are hardly ever preserved in the Jerusalem area because of high humidity levels in the ground, said Gibson.

Other shrouds have been found in the arid Dead Sea area and in Egypt, he said.

For decades scientists have debated the authenticity of the Shroud of Turin, the 14-foot by 4-foot linen cloth that tradition holds is the burial shroud of Jesus. The shroud has a full-length photonegative image of a man, front and back, bearing signs of wounds that correspond to the Gospel accounts of the torture Jesus endured in his passion and death. It is kept in the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Turin, Italy, and will be removed from its protective casket for public display this spring, for the first time since 2000.

Its origins are unknown.

In researching the Jerusalem shroud fragments, Gibson and Zissu were joined by an international team of molecular scientists and archaeologists from Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario; the University of New Haven, West Haven, Conn.; University College London; the Israel Antiquities Authority and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

However, Franciscan Father Eugenio Alliata, professor of archaeology at the

Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem, said both shrouds needed to be studied for their own merits, and conclusions about one could not be made based on the other.

“One was found in an archaeological excavation and we have an archaeological context; for the other, the Shroud of Turin, we do not have an archaeological context and its history is murky,” Father Alliata said. “The two objects need to be studied in a different way. You can’t compare one to the other and come up with a conclusion. Maybe the Shroud of Turin is not authentic but the conclusions must be made on studies of the object itself.”

The burial tomb where the Jerusalem shroud was found is part of a first-century cemetery known as Akeldama or Field of Blood, next to the area where Judas Iscariot is said to have committed suicide. The tomb of the shrouded man was located next to the tomb of Annas, the high priest, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest who presided at the trial of Jesus.

Bones found in the same burial niche as the fragments were dated to the years A.D. 1-50 by radiocarbon methods, and DNA tests showed that the man buried in the cave had leprosy and died of tuberculosis. Perhaps because of these illnesses, the researchers believe, this part of the tomb was completely sealed off and the man did not receive the secondary burial that was traditional for Jewish burials of that period.