

Bloodstains

It was found that blood flowed out of at least twenty-eight wounds while the man was in the tomb. Most of the blood came out of the side wound, yet a considerable amount of blood also flowed out of the nail wounds in the hands and feet, as well as the thorn wounds on the back of the head. Precisely this picture is to be expected if the body were still alive. If this blood flow had not occurred, it would be a certain indication that a corpse must have lain upon the Shroud. But could it also be possible that so much blood flowed out of a corpse?

Of course, corpses can also “bleed” out of large wounds on the lower part of the body due to gravity. Also during transport of a corpse, the emission of blood is possible if pressure occurs in areas containing blood.

Looking very carefully at the individual bloodstains on the Shroud, one must differentiate the possible from the impossible. The late Prof. Wolfgang Bonte, former head of the Forensic Medicine Institute at the University of Dusseldorf and president of the International Organization of Forensic Scientists (IAFS) attempted to answer this question in the 1990s.¹

First consider the bleeding from the wound on the side (the lance thrust wound). The lower back must have lain in a puddle of blood because bloodstains spread right and left six to eight inches beyond the area covered by the image of the body.

Karl Herbst, a retired Catholic priest, wrote Professor Bonte with this information without revealing to him that the Turin Shroud was involved, in order that Bonte’s judgment would not be prejudiced. Bonte wrote back to Herbst that, according to this description, the opening of the wound on the right front chest wall was placed rather precisely on the highest point on the body, and he, Bonte, considered a spontaneous post-mortem blood flow unthinkable because the blood level in the wound would have to have been lower than the opening of the wound. In such a case, no blood can flow out of a corpse.

*On the contrary, a blood flow in the proportions described by you, including the direction of the flow, would agree with the idea that the individual involved was still alive at this time . . . this applies especially then, when larger arterial vessels are opened and when the blood pressure produces the necessary pressure against gravity for the blood to leave the body.*²

Herbst then revealed to Bonte that the matter involved was the Shroud of Turin and provided photographs and specialist literature for him in which the blood flows on the Shroud had been described in connection with a corpse. Above all, Herbst made Bonte aware of the argumentation of the Italian medical examiner Prof. Bollone, who had declared that “*the cause [of the exit of blood on the shroud] is to be sought in the manipulation of the corpse during the burial procedures.*” Professor Bonte, however, maintained his opinion and wrote back to Herbst: *I will not repeat my earlier arguments. In my opinion, everything speaks to the fact that the blood circulation activity had not yet ended. Obviously I agree with Prof. Bollone that in the course of the transport of a corpse blood can flow almost passively out of such a stab wound to the chest. Yet one has to pose the question of whether the burial shroud was wrapped around the corpse already at the beginning of the transport. I believe that in this case no so-called statically stain-pattern would have been formed, which without exception permitted a direct, topographical assignment to a lying body. I would then far more have expected numerous traces of smears, whose locations would have been strewn more coincidental and irregularly. The pattern that is in fact recognizable indicates, in my opinion, that the person involved was only wrapped in the shroud during the placement in his grave, and indeed very probably in the form that at first the body was bedded on the shroud and the shroud’s other half was then drawn over the body. I cannot imagine that during this placement a considerable quantity of blood could have flowed out passively.*³

As further evidence for a dead body, it is often said that serum areas would indicate post-mortem blood. To this claim, Professor Bonte wrote: *In my opinion, a great deal of unqualified comments has been said about another phenomenon. I mean the differentiation between the actual bloodstains and the serum areas that surround them, and which are seen as proof of corpse blood. In general one can say that corpse blood does not differ from the blood of a living person at least in the first phase after death. In earlier times corpse blood was used for purposes of transfusion in great quantities. But if one cannot be differentiated from the other, it can not be concluded from any results that the one or the other type of blood is involved. It is correct that with bleeding in the chest cavity a reduction of blood corpuscles can result, and quasi serum can develop. If such an emulsion is brought to flow out by a passive movement of the body, it is possible that indeed serum can escape first. This blood corpuscle lowering can begin, depending on the circumstances, already during life. Having only the end result it can not be concluded whether the individual involved was already dead or still alive. I am therefore of the conviction that nothing at all can be determined from this particular evidence, that is, neither that it must have been corpse blood nor that it was the blood of a still living person.*⁴

1 Described in detail including the expert opinion of Prof. Bonte in Karl Herbst, *Kriminalfall Golgatha*, p. 97ff. and also Kuhnke, p. 75ff.

2 Herbst, p. 98.

3 Herbst, p. 99. own translation

4 Herbst, p. 100.