

SCRIPTURE

A Study of One Passage

The Linen Cloths at the Empty Tomb

John 20:3–10, and What Peter Is Said to Have Known

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1 The Claim Under Test

There is a thing many Christians believe they know about Easter morning, and it is usually put in one sentence: *St. Peter knew that Jesus had risen because he noticed how the burial cloths had been left*. The cloth that had been over the face was not lying with the rest. It was somewhere else in the tomb, by itself, and something about the way it lay told Peter what had happened.

The sentence is attractive because it is the kind of detail no one invents. It has the texture of a thing seen. And its scriptural warrant looks immediate: John says, of the tomb Peter entered, that there lay “the linen cloths” and also “the napkin that had been about his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but apart, wrapped up into one place” (Jn 20:6–7). Someone noticed where the face-cloth was. Someone thought it worth reporting sixty years later. Whoever wrote that verse was reporting a fact about the disposition of objects in a rock tomb, and reporting it because it mattered.

What the sentence adds to the verse is a name and a conclusion: that the someone was Peter, and that what he drew from what he saw was the Resurrection. Both halves are testable, and the Gospels test them differently. This study takes the sentence as its object. Not the Resurrection—which is not in question here—but this particular claim about who inferred it, and from what, and whether the arrangement of the cloths carries the evidentiary weight that two very different traditions of argument have placed on it.

Three things have to be worked, and they are not equally difficult.

The first is the text itself. John 20:3–10 is eight verses of Greek in which almost every word that matters is doing something a translation flattens. *Othonia* and *soudarion* are not “linen cloths” and “napkin” in any sense a modern reader’s furniture supplies. *Keimena* says the cloths were lying; the participle applied to the face-cloth is not *keimenon* but *entetyligmenon*, and the difference between those two words is the whole of the observation. *Chōris* and *eis hena topon* locate it. The Latin the Church read for fifteen centuries makes some of these decisions differently, and the English most Catholic readers know was made from that Latin. Section 2 sets out the passage in the three languages; section 3 works the vocabulary.

The second is the sentence’s own difficulty, and it is the centre of this study. John does not say that Peter believed. John says that the other disciple believed. Peter goes in first, and sees the most, and the evangelist gives him the fullest description of the arrangement in the whole passage—and then attributes the believing, in the next verse, to somebody else. Luke, telling what is evidently a version of the same episode, has Peter look in, see the linen cloths lying by themselves, and go away *wondering*. Neither evangelist says what the popular sentence says. The question is what they do say, whether the harmonizations offered since antiquity survive inspection, and what remains of the claim afterwards. Sections 4 and 5 take that up.

The third is the question of why the arrangement should matter at all, and here two quite separate explanations are in circulation, of very unequal standing.

One is ancient and genuinely attested. It is an argument against theft: that grave-robbers do not undress a corpse, and that a body glued into its wrappings by a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes is not unwrapped in a hurry by anyone whose object is the body. John Chrysostom makes this argument at length in his eighty-fifth homily on John, and it is not a devotional flourish but a piece of forensic reasoning about what thieves do. Section 6 reads it at its own locus and asks what it establishes.

The other is modern, and it is the reason many readers have met the sentence at all. It holds that a folded napkin was a signal in Jewish domestic custom: that a master rising from table who crumpled his napkin meant that he was finished, while a master who folded it meant *I am coming back*, and that “every Jewish boy” would have known this. On that reading the face-cloth in the tomb is not evidence but a message. Section 8 asks whether any such custom is attested anywhere, and where the claim came from. The finding is reported there in full; it is not what the claim’s circulators suppose.

A word about method, since this study reaches a negative conclusion about a popular reading and a partly negative conclusion about the maintainer’s own framing of the question. Both were reached by reading, not by preference. Every witness named here was read at its own locus: Chrysostom in the printed Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers volume, not in a quotation; Augustine in the same series and in the Latin; the Greek in a registered edition of the Byzantine textform; the Latin in the page images of a Clementine Vulgate printing. Where a search failed to find something, the search is described and its boundaries are stated, because a failed search is a finding only to the extent

that its shape is known. Where the tradition disagrees with itself, the disagreement is left standing. Nothing here is harmonized for tidiness.

Two large subjects are deliberately outside the argument and are set out as a boundary in section 10: the Shroud of Turin and the Sudarium of Oviedo. They are a different question with a different literature, and half-treating them would make this study worse rather than longer.

2 The Passage in Three Languages

2.1 A note on how Greek is printed here

Greek is given throughout in transliteration, in italics, because this document's typesetting does not carry a polytonic Greek face and a half-accented Greek would be worse than none. The transliterations are mechanical (*ē* for eta, *ō* for omega, *ch* for chi, *y* for upsilon except in diphthongs) and are not translations. Where a Greek word is explained, the explanation is labelled a gloss and rests on a named lexical authority or on the word's other occurrences in the same corpus; no translation of Scripture has been composed for this study. English Scripture is quoted from the public-domain Douay–Rheims in the Challoner revision, and Latin from the Clementine Vulgate in Hetzenauer's 1914 printing, both from registered editions identified in the references.

2.2 The English

³ Peter therefore went out, and that other disciple: and they came to the sepulchre. ⁴ And they both ran together: and that other disciple did outrun Peter and came first to the sepulchre. ⁵ And when he stooped down, he saw the linen cloths lying: but yet he went not in. ⁶ Then cometh Simon Peter, following him, and went into the sepulchre: and saw the linen cloths lying, ⁷ And the napkin that had been about his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but apart, wrapped up into one place. ⁸ Then that other disciple also went in, who came first to the sepulchre: and he saw and believed. ⁹ For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. ¹⁰ The disciples therefore departed again to their home. (Jn 20:3–10)

And, from a different Gospel and a different hand:

¹² But Peter rising up, ran to the sepulchre and, stooping down, he saw the linen cloths laid by themselves: and went away wondering in himself at that which was come to pass. (Lk 24:12)

Two features of the English are worth fixing before anything else, because both will be contested later. The Douay's "napkin" at Jn 20:7 is the same word it uses at Jn 11:44 for the cloth bound about the face of Lazarus and at Lk 19:20 for the cloth in which a servant wrapped his master's money. It is a seventeenth-century English word for a wiping-cloth of any kind, and it does not mean a table napkin here. And the Douay's "wrapped up" is not "folded." The distinction will turn out to matter more than anything else in the passage.

2.3 The Latin

The Clementine text, read from the page images of Hetzenauer's 1914 Pustet printing:

³ Exiit ergo Petrus, et ille alius discipulus, et venerunt ad monumentum. ⁴ Currebant autem duo simul, et ille alius discipulus praecurrat citius Petro, et venit primus ad monumentum. ⁵ Et cum se inclinasset, vidit posita linteamina, non tamen introivit. ⁶ Venit ergo Simon Petrus sequens eum, et introivit in monumentum, et vidit linteamina posita, ⁷ et sudarium, quod fuerat super caput eius, non cum linteaminibus positum, sed separatim involutum in unum locum. ⁸ Tunc ergo introivit et ille discipulus, qui venerat primus ad monumentum: et vidit, et credidit: ⁹ nondum enim sciebant Scripturam, quia oportebat eum a mortuis resurgere. ¹⁰ Abierunt ergo iterum discipuli ad semetipsos.

And at Luke: *Petrus autem surgens cucurrit ad monumentum: et procumbens vidit linteamina sola posita, et abiit secum mirans quod factum fuerat.*

The Latin makes three decisions the reader should see. It renders both Greek participles of lying—the one applied to the cloths and the one implicitly denied of the face-cloth—by the single word *positum*, “placed,” which is flatter than the Greek and slightly more deliberate: *posita* suggests something laid there rather than something simply lying. It renders *chōris* by *separatim*, “separately,” which is exact. And for the crucial participle it uses *involutum*—rolled up, wrapped up—which is the same verb the same Vulgate uses at Lk 23:53 for what Joseph of Arimathea did to the body: *et depositum involvit sindone*, “and taking him down, he wrapped him in fine linen.” The Latin translator, in other words, chose for the face-cloth in the empty tomb the verb he had just used for swathing a corpse. That is a considered reading of the Greek, and it is the right one, as section 3 shows.

The 1914 edition prints an editorial marginal summary against these verses: *Petro et Ioanni id nuntiat, qui ad sepulcrum currunt ac redeunt*—she announces it to Peter and John, who run to the tomb and return. The identification of the other disciple as John is the editor’s, following the common tradition; it is not in the text of the verses. Nothing in this study depends on it, and the beloved disciple is called “the other disciple” throughout, as John calls him.

2.4 The Greek

From the Robinson–Pierpont Byzantine textform, transliterated:

³ *Exēlthen oun ho Petros kai ho allos mathētēs, kai ērchonto eis to mnēmeion.* ⁴ *Etrechon de hoi dyo homou; kai ho allos mathētēs proedramen tachion tou Petrou, kai ēlthen prōtos eis to mnēmeion,* ⁵ *kai parakypsas blepei keimena ta othonia, ou mentoi eisēlthen.* ⁶ *Erchetai oun Simōn Petros akolouthōn autō, kai eisēlthen eis to mnēmeion, kai theōrei ta othonia keimena,* ⁷ *kai to soudarion ho ēn epi tēs kephalēs autou, ou meta tōn othoniōn keimenon, alla chōris entetyligmenon eis hena topon.* ⁸ *Tote oun eisēlthen kai ho allos mathētēs ho elthōn prōtos eis to mnēmeion, kai eiden, kai episteusen;* ⁹ *oudepō gar ēideisan tēn graphēn, hoti dei auton ek nekrōn anastēnai.*

And Lk 24:12: *Ho de Petros anastas edramen epi to mnēmeion, kai parakypsas blepei ta othonia keimena mona; kai apēlthen pros heauton thaumazōn to gegonos.*

Three structural facts about the Greek should be registered before the words are examined individually, because each is easy to lose in translation and each bears on the argument.

First: verses 6 and 7 are one sentence, and its subject is Peter. The verb is *theōrei*, “he beholds”; its two objects are *ta othonia keimena* and *to soudarion*, with everything said about the face-cloth hanging on the second object. The whole description of the arrangement—not lying with the cloths, apart, wrapped up, in one place—is grammatically part of what Peter sees. This is the strongest textual foothold the popular claim has, and it is a real one. The evangelist gives the observation to Peter.

Second: verse 8 does not say what the other disciple saw. It says *eiden kai episteusen*, he saw and believed, with no object. Whatever he saw, the evangelist did not think it necessary to say, having just described in detail what was there to be seen.

Third: verse 9 is plural. *Oudepō gar ēideisan tēn graphēn*—“for as yet *they* knew not the scripture.” Whatever happened in verse 8 happened to a man who did not yet know the scripture that Christ must rise; and the evangelist says so about both of them in the same breath. Any account of verse 8 has to survive verse 9. Augustine’s does not merely survive it: it is built on it.

2.5 One textual question, and its limits

Luke 24:12 is not textually secure in the way the John passage is. Westcott and Hort excluded it from their text as one of a series of what they called Western non-interpolations in Luke 24, and their note on the verse reads:

“xxiv 12 [*Ho de Petros . . . gegonos*] < Western (Gr. Lat.), D a b e rhe Eus.Can; not c ff syr.vt Eus.Mar (distinctly). Omitted likewise at the beginning of one lection (first hand) in syr.hr, and in the harmonistic narrative of fu; but

probably in both cases by accident. Text from Jo xx 3–10 (except *anastas* and *thaumazōn to gegonos*), condensed and simplified, with omission of all that relates to ‘the other disciple’. A Western non-interpolation.”¹

Their judgement was that Luke 24:12 was lifted out of John. Two things must be said about it, and neither is a dismissal.

It is a minority judgement now. The verse stands in the Byzantine textform used here without any recorded divergence at the point that matters; the Robinson–Pierpont apparatus records a Nestle–Aland divergence at this verse only over the participle *keimena*, which means that the modern eclectic text prints the verse rather than bracketing it out.² The Clementine Vulgate prints it, and the Douay translates it.

And it does not matter to the argument as much as it looks as though it should. The reason is that Westcott and Hort’s own account of the verse, if accepted, makes it a very early reader’s summary of John 20:3–10—and that reader summarized it by giving the whole episode to Peter and dropping the other disciple. If Luke 24:12 is Lucan, it is independent testimony that Peter went away wondering. If it is an interpolation from John, it is the earliest surviving instance of exactly the move this study is testing: the concentration of the tomb episode onto Peter. Either way it belongs in the dossier. The study therefore uses it, states the doubt here, and does not rest any conclusion on the verse alone.

3 What the Words Will Bear

Six words carry the description. Each is examined here against its other occurrences in the same corpus and against a named public-domain lexical authority—Joseph Henry Thayer’s revision of Grimm’s *Clavis Novi Testamenti*, cited by headword and page. Thayer is a nineteenth-century lexicon and is used as an identified working authority, not as a modern critical one; where its judgement is disputable this is said.

3.1 *Othonia*: the linen cloths

Othonion is a diminutive of *othonē*, which in the New Testament means a sheet: the vessel let down from heaven in Peter’s vision at Joppa is “as it were a great linen sheet” (Acts 10:11; 11:5). Thayer glosses the diminutive as “a piece of linen, small linen cloth: plur. strips of linen cloth for swathing the dead,” and lists every New Testament occurrence.³

Those occurrences are worth setting out, because they are few and they are all in one narrative complex: Jn 19:40, of the burial; Jn 20:5, 6, 7, of the empty tomb; and Lk 24:12. Outside these five verses the word does not occur in the New Testament at all. Two things follow.

The first is that the word belongs, in this corpus, to a single scene. It is not a general term for cloth that happens to be used here; it is the word this tradition uses for what Jesus was buried in.

The second is a genuine difficulty that this study does not resolve. The Synoptic burial accounts do not use *othonia*. They use *sindōn*, in the singular: Joseph “wrapped it in a clean linen cloth” (Mt 27:59), “wrapped him in fine linen” (Lk 23:53). John uses a plural of a diminutive. Whether *othonia* names strips, or bandages, or simply linens in general including a large sheet, is a question the New Testament’s own usage cannot settle, because the New Testament’s usage is these five verses. Readers should be told that a good deal of confident writing about the shape of the burial wrappings rests on a lexical base this narrow. Nothing in this study’s argument depends on the answer.

The Vulgate translates *othonia* twice differently in five verses: *linteis* at Jn 19:40 (“ligaverunt illud linteis cum aromatibus”), *linteramina* at Jn 20:5–7 and Lk 24:12. The Greek does not vary there; the Latin does.

3.2 *Soudarion*: the cloth that was over the head

This is the word on which the modern claim stands or falls, and it repays exact treatment.

Soudarion is not a Greek word. It is the Latin *sudarium* taken into Greek, and *sudarium* is formed from *sudor*, sweat. Thayer’s entry is explicit about the derivation and gives the sense as “a handkerchief, i.e. a cloth for wiping the

perspiration from the face and for cleaning the nose,” with a second use: “also used in swathing the head of a corpse [A.V. napkin].”⁴

There are four occurrences in the New Testament, and they should be listed because the list is the argument:

Lk 19:20 — “Lord, behold here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin.” A servant’s cloth, used to wrap and store money.

Jn 11:44 — “And presently he that had been dead came forth, bound feet and hands with winding bands. And his face was bound about with a napkin.” Lazarus. Greek *hē opsis autou soudariō periededeto*, his face had been bound round with a *soudarion*. Latin *facies illius sudario erat ligata*.

Jn 20:7 — the cloth in the empty tomb, “that had been about his head.”

Acts 19:12 — cloths carried from Paul’s body to the sick; the Douay has “handkerchiefs.”

Three of the four are cloths associated with a body—two of them explicitly with the head or face of a corpse. The fourth is a wrapping-cloth for money. Not one of the four is a table napkin, and no New Testament text describes a *soudarion* in use at a meal.

That fact is not decisive by itself, because a word may denote at table what it denotes elsewhere. But it is the first thing a reader should know before being told what “every Jewish boy” understood a folded one to mean; and it is striking that the closest New Testament analogue to a domestic use of a *soudarion*—the servant’s cloth in the parable of the pounds—is a cloth used for wrapping, not for wiping at table. Section 8 takes the question up properly.

Jn 11:44 deserves a further note, because it is the only other place where the Fourth Gospel puts a *soudarion* on the head of a dead man, and the contrast is deliberate. Lazarus comes out of his tomb still wearing his grave-clothes and has to be untied: *lysate auton*, “loose him, and let him go.” In chapter 20 the wrappings are in the tomb and the man is not. The evangelist who wrote both scenes knew what he was doing with the second.

3.3 *Keimena*: lying

Keimena is the present participle of *keimai*, to lie. It is applied to the *othonia* three times—the other disciple “seeth the linen cloths lying” (v. 5), Peter “beholdeth the linen cloths lying” (v. 6), and in Luke Peter “seeth the linen cloths lying alone” (Lk 24:12)—and it is applied to the *soudarion* only in the negative: *ou meta tōn othoniōn keimenon*, “not lying with the linen cloths.”

The contrast in verse 7 is therefore not, as it is often reported, between cloths lying and a cloth folded. It is between cloths lying *there* and a cloth that was not lying *with them*. What the Greek denies of the face-cloth is not the lying but the company.

3.4 *Entetyligmenon*: the crucial word

The participle applied to the face-cloth is *entetyligmenon*, perfect passive of *entylyssō*. Thayer’s entry is short enough to give whole:

“*en-tylyssō*: 1 aor. *enetylixā*; pf. pass. ptcp. *entetyligmenos*; to roll in, wrap in: [with accusative and dative] *sindoni*, Mt. xxvii. 59; Lk. xxiii. 53; Ev. Nicod. c. 11 fin. to roll up, wrap together: pass. Jn. xx. 7. (Arstph. Plut. nub. 987; Athen. 3 p. 106 sq.)”⁵

Two facts about this word govern everything that follows.

It is the burial verb. There are exactly three occurrences in the New Testament. Two of them describe what Joseph of Arimathea did to the body of Jesus on Friday afternoon: *enetylixen auto sindoni*, “he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth” (Mt 27:59), “he wrapped him in fine linen” (Lk 23:53). The third is Jn 20:7. The evangelist chose, for the state of the face-cloth in the empty tomb, the verb his contemporaries used for swathing a corpse. The Latin translator saw this and matched it: *involvit sindone* at Lk 23:53, *involutum* at Jn 20:7, the same verb both times.

It is a perfect, and the perfect is a state. *Entetyligmenon* does not report an action performed that morning. It reports a condition obtaining at the moment of observation: the cloth had been wrapped, and was wrapped still.

Nothing in the participle indicates who did the wrapping or when, and the natural reference of a perfect in a burial narrative is to the burial.

The English word “folded” does not occur in any of this. It is not in the Greek, which says wrapped or rolled. It is not in the Latin, which says *involutum*. It is not in the Douay, which says “wrapped up.” It is not in the Authorized Version, which says “wrapped together.” It entered English devotional writing about this verse by other routes—one of them, ironically, a Victorian translation of a Father: the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers rendering of Augustine’s Latin *Tractates* prints the Vulgate lemma at this verse as “folded up in one place by itself.” A reader who meets “folded” in an English text about John 20:7 is meeting a translator, not the evangelist.

The point is not pedantry, and it is worth marking that it is conceded from the other side. Henry Latham, whose 1901 book is the origin of most modern English writing on the disposition of the cloths and who wanted the arrangement to mean a great deal, wrote of this same participle:

“Now the word used for ‘rolled up’ (*entetyligmenon*) is employed (Matthew xxvii. 59, and Luke xxiii. 53) to express the wrapping of the Lord’s body in the linen cloths, and it implies here that the napkin had been wrapped round the head and partially retained the annular form thus given it; I take it to mean that it was *not* folded so as to lie flat like the cloths.”⁶

And a few pages later, dismissing the notion that angels tidied the tomb: “The Greek word, however, which is used about the napkin, does not imply a folding up for neatness’ sake.”⁷

3.5 *Chōris* and *eis hena topon*: where it was

Chōris is an adverb meaning apart, separately, by itself. The Vulgate renders it *separatim*, the Douay “apart.” It is exact and uncontested.

Eis hena topon is not. Literally it is “into one place”—a preposition of motion governing an accusative, attached to a description of something at rest. Three readings are current, and the Greek does not adjudicate between them. It may be the ordinary Koine slackening in which *eis* does duty for *en*, so that the sense is “in one place.” It may be emphatic: not scattered, but all gathered into a single spot. *Heis* may be functioning indefinitely, giving the Authorized Version’s “in a place by itself.”

The versions preserve the difficulty rather than solving it. The Vulgate keeps the accusative—*in unum locum*—and so does the Douay, “into one place.” Westcott, printing “rolled up in a place by itself” in his English column, footnoted it “lit. apart in one place.”⁸

What the phrase will not bear is a claim about the shape of the cloth. It locates; it does not describe. Everything about the cloth’s condition is carried by *entetyligmenon*, and that word says wrapped.

3.6 What the description amounts to

Assembling the six words, the sentence Peter is said to have seen reports the following and no more:

The linen cloths were lying there. The head-cloth was not lying there with them. It was separate, and it was in a wrapped-up condition, and it was in one place.

That is a strange thing to find, and it is a strange thing to write down sixty years later. It is not, on the face of it, a description of tidiness. It is a description of two things in different states in different parts of a small chamber—and one of them still in the shape it had been given when it was wound round a head. Whether that fact will support the weight two traditions have put on it is the business of the sections that follow.

4 Who Believed

4.1 The difficulty stated exactly

The claim under test says that Peter knew Jesus had risen because he noticed how the cloths were left. The Fourth Gospel, which is the only text that mentions the face-cloth at all, says this:

“Then cometh Simon Peter, following him, and went into the sepulchre: and saw the linen cloths lying, and the napkin that had been about his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but apart, wrapped up into one place. Then that other disciple also went in, who came first to the sepulchre: and he saw and believed.” (Jn 20:6–8)

Peter enters. Peter sees everything. And then the sentence about believing has a different subject.

This is not a subtlety recoverable only from the Greek. It is the plain sense of the Douay, of the Vulgate, and of every translation. The evangelist had the option of writing “and they saw and believed”; he had the option of writing nothing about who believed; and what he wrote was *tote oun eisēlthen kai ho allos mathētēs . . . kai eiden, kai episteusen*—then therefore the other disciple also went in . . . and he saw, and he believed. The verbs are singular. The subject is named, and it is not Peter.

Set beside this the only other canonical narrative of Peter at the tomb:

“But Peter rising up, ran to the sepulchre and, stooping down, he saw the linen cloths laid by themselves: and went away wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.” (Lk 24:12)

Luke’s Peter sees substantially what John’s Peter sees—the linen cloths, and in Luke’s phrasing that they were lying *alone, mona*, which is the whole of the surprise—and Luke tells us what state he left in. *Apēlthen pros heauton thaumazōn to gegonos*: he went away to himself wondering at what had happened.

Two evangelists therefore address the question of Peter’s state of mind at the tomb, and neither says he believed. One assigns the believing to somebody else. The other says Peter wondered.

4.2 What *thaumazōn* concedes and what it does not

It would be too quick to treat Luke’s “wondering” as a simple negative. *Thaumazō* in Luke is not a word for indifference; it is his standard marker for the reaction of someone confronted with something that exceeds explanation, and it attaches to genuinely religious moments—the people wondering at Zachary’s delay, the hearers wondering at the words of grace, the disciples wondering that the winds obey him.

But Luke also uses it, in this same chapter, in a construction that settles its value for the present question. On Easter evening, when the risen Christ is standing in the room and has shown them his hands and feet, Luke writes: *eti de apistountōn autōn apo tēs charas kai thaumazontōn*—“but while they yet believed not and wondered for joy” (Lk 24:41). Wondering and not-yet-believing are, for Luke, compatible states, and he says so with the risen Christ in the room. Whatever *thaumazōn* means at Lk 24:12, it cannot mean that Peter had arrived at faith in the Resurrection, because Luke uses the same participle twenty-nine verses later of men who explicitly had not.

4.3 The strongest case for the claim, stated at full strength

The claim is not baseless, and it has a genuine textual foothold that deserves to be put as strongly as it can be put before it is weighed.

First: the observation is Peter’s, and the evangelist says so. Verses 6 and 7 are a single sentence whose subject is Simon Peter and whose verb is *theōrei*. Every element of the description—the cloths lying, the face-cloth not lying with them, the separateness, the wrapped condition, the one place—is grammatically inside what Peter beholds. The other disciple, in verse 5, saw only *keimena ta othonia*, the linen cloths lying, from outside; the evangelist is explicit that he did not go in. The face-cloth is never said to have been seen by anyone but Peter.

That is a real and often-missed point, and it means the popular sentence is not simply an error. The person to whom Scripture attributes the noticing is exactly the person the claim names.

Second: verse 8 does not say what the other disciple saw. It says he saw. The evangelist has just spent two verses describing what was there to be seen, and then uses the bare verb. A reader may reasonably infer that what he saw was what was just described—which would mean the arrangement functioning as the ground of somebody’s faith, even if not Peter’s.

Third: some readers have taken the sequence of verbs as deliberate. The other disciple *blepei* from outside (v. 5); Peter *theōrei* within (v. 6); the other disciple *eiden* and believed (v. 8). Westcott built on this, distinguishing “the simple sight” from “the intent regard (*theōrei*) of St. Peter when he entered the sepulchre,” and observing that the change of tense at verse 6 “marks a break in the progress of the thought. The entrance is courageously made: then follows the experience. The word *theōrei* . . . expresses the earnest intent gaze of the apostle as his eye passes from point to point.”⁹ On this reading Peter is not a bystander to the evidence; he is the one who examines it. Chrysostom had said the same thing fifteen centuries earlier and more plainly: the evangelist “witnesses to the exactness of Peter’s search . . . that fervent one passing farther in, looked at everything carefully, and saw somewhat more.”

Fourth: an ancient and undisputed authority read verse 8 collectively. This is the strongest support the claim has, and it is treated in section 5.

4.4 The check the claim cannot get past: verse 9

Whatever verse 8 means, the evangelist immediately constrains it: *oudepō gar ēideisan tēn graphēn, hoti dei auton ek nekrōn anastēnai*—“For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.”

The verb is plural and the tense is a pluperfect of state: as of that moment, they did not know. And the sentence is joined to verse 8 by *gar*, a causal or explanatory particle, which means the evangelist thought verse 9 explained something about verse 8 rather than qualifying it out of existence.

This is where the Fourth Gospel’s own habits become relevant. Twice before, John has told his readers that the disciples did not understand something at the time and understood it afterwards. At the cleansing of the temple: “When therefore he was risen again from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this: and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had said” (Jn 2:22). At the entry into Jerusalem: “These things his disciples did not know at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered” (Jn 12:16). The evangelist is a careful reporter of the gap between what was seen and what was understood, and he places a marker of exactly that kind immediately after the one sentence in the chapter that reports somebody believing.

4.5 Augustine reads verse 8 as far down as it will go

The most rigorous ancient treatment of this verse belongs to Augustine, and it is the reason the harmonizations in the next section have to be taken seriously rather than assumed. Preaching on John 20 in the hundred and twentieth of his *Tractates*, Augustine reaches “and he saw, and believed” and stops:

“Here some, by not giving due attention, suppose that John believed that Jesus had risen again; but there is no indication of this from the words that follow. For what does he mean by immediately adding, ‘For as yet they knew not the scripture, that He must rise again from the dead’? He could not then have believed that He had risen again, when he did not know that it behoved Him to rise again. What then did he see? what was it that he believed? What but this, that he saw the sepulchre empty, and believed what the woman had said, that He had been taken away from the tomb?”¹⁰

Three features of this passage should be registered, because they are easy to underestimate.

It is not a passing remark. Augustine identifies a reading current among his hearers (*nonnulli*, “some”), names its fault (*parum attendentes*, not attending closely enough), and refutes it from the next verse. He is doing exegesis under objection.

It is not evasive about the cloths. Two sections earlier Augustine had quoted the description of the linen cloths and the face-cloth in full and said: “Do we suppose these things have no meaning? I can suppose no such thing.” He

believed the detail signified; he simply declined to spend the time, saying that inquiry into such details “is, indeed, a subject of holy delight, but only for those who have leisure, which is not the case with us.” What he will not do is convert a description into a conclusion.

And it is the strongest possible form of the answer to the popular claim. If Augustine is right, then not only did Peter not infer the Resurrection from the cloths—nobody did. The one man to whom Scripture attributes belief at the tomb believed something much smaller: that the body had been removed, exactly as Mary had reported.

4.6 Where this leaves the question

Three positions are now on the table, all of them ancient or defensible:

- (a) The other disciple came to resurrection faith at the tomb, and Peter did not. This is the plain reading of Jn 20:8 taken with Lk 24:12, and it is the majority reading of the verse today.
- (b) Nobody came to resurrection faith at the tomb; the other disciple believed Mary’s report of a removal. This is Augustine’s reading, and it takes Jn 20:9 with maximum seriousness.
- (c) Both disciples came to belief, verse 8 speaking representatively of the pair. This is Chrysostom’s reading, and it is the only ancient position that supports the claim under test.

The claim under test requires (c), or something like it, and requires in addition that the ground of the belief was the arrangement of the cloths. The next section weighs the harmonizations that have been proposed to get there.

5 The Harmonizations, Weighed

Six moves have been made, at various dates, to close the gap between what the evangelists say and what the popular sentence says. They are of unequal quality and they are not all attempts at the same thing. Each is stated here in its strongest form and then assessed.

5.1 The collective reading: verse 8 speaks for both

This is the oldest and by far the most serious. Chrysostom, preaching through John at Antioch or Constantinople in the last decade of the fourth century, reads the tomb scene as a single evidentiary episode with a single outcome for both men. Having described the arrangement of the cloths and argued at length that it excludes theft, he concludes: “From this they believed in the Resurrection. On this account Christ afterwards appeared to them, when they were convinced by what they had seen.”¹¹ He is not being careless: in the next homily he says of the two disciples, in contrast with Mary Magdalene weeping outside, that “they having seen the linen clothes and believed, departed to their own homes in astonishment,” and that “the mind of the woman was not sufficiently elevated to accept the Resurrection from the proof of the napkins.”¹² One homily later he generalizes it into a doctrine of Easter faith: the disciples “sought nothing of the kind, but from the proof of the napkins, they straightway received the word concerning the Resurrection, and before they saw the body, exhibited all faith.”¹³

Chrysostom, in other words, holds precisely the position the maintainer’s sentence holds, minus the name. He thinks the arrangement of the cloths was evidence, that the evidence was conclusive, and that the disciples—both of them, Peter included—accepted it.

Assessment. This is a real patristic witness and it must not be dismissed. It is also, on inspection, a reading of John made without Luke in view. Chrysostom is expounding the Fourth Gospel continuously; his “they believed” is drawn from the plural of Jn 20:10 (“the disciples therefore departed again to their home”) read back into the singular of 20:8. He does not raise Lk 24:12 at this point, and he does not address the wondering. Nor does he engage Jn 20:9, which Augustine treats as decisive; where Augustine reads verse 9 as a check on verse 8, Chrysostom passes it without comment in this homily.

There is a further internal strain. If both disciples reached resurrection faith at the tomb on the strength of the cloths, then the appearance to Peter attested by the oldest formula in the New Testament—“he was seen by Cephas” (1 Cor 15:5), and Luke’s “the Lord is risen indeed and hath appeared to Simon” (Lk 24:34)—is confirming an existing

conviction rather than creating one, and Luke's whole Emmaus sequence, in which two disciples walk seven miles in despondency on that same afternoon, becomes harder to place. Chrysostom's reading is coherent within John. It does not obviously survive contact with Luke.

Chrysostom is not alone, and the claim's case is stronger than one Father. Cyril of Alexandria, expounding the same verses, says of both disciples that they "infer His Resurrection from the bundle of linen clothes, and henceforth believed that He had burst asunder the bonds of death"; and Ambrose, in Latin, holds that "Peter could not have doubted." Section 7 sets out both at their own loci, with the qualifications each carries. Three Fathers of the first rank therefore hold, in some form, that Peter's faith did not wait for the appearance.

The honest verdict is that (c) is an ancient reading held by major Fathers in both Greek and Latin, that it is nevertheless a minority reading against Augustine, Gregory, and Theophylact, and that the popular claim can appeal to it—but that appealing to it means preferring one evangelist's construal to another's, not reporting what Scripture says.

5.2 The chronological reading: Peter believed, only later

A second move concedes the tomb and rescues the sentence by moving the moment. Peter did not believe at the tomb; he believed when the risen Christ appeared to him, and the cloths were part of what prepared him.

Assessment. This is almost certainly true and it is almost entirely beside the point. That Peter came to resurrection faith is not in dispute; the oldest text in the New Testament about Easter names him first among the witnesses. What the claim under test asserts is a specific epistemic route: that Peter knew *because* he noticed the cloths. Relocating the belief to a later appearance concedes exactly the thing that was to be shown. It is a harmonization that saves the man and abandons the claim.

5.3 The minimizing reading: "believed" means believed Mary

Augustine's reading, set out in the previous section, is a harmonization in its own right: it removes the tension between Jn 20:8 and Lk 24:12 by lowering the content of the believing until both disciples are in the same state. Neither believed in the Resurrection; one accepted that the body had been removed and the other wondered.

Assessment. It has the great merit of taking verse 9 seriously, and it is argued rather than asserted. It has two costs. The first is that *episteusen* is used absolutely, without an object, which in the Fourth Gospel is normally a weighty usage—this is the Gospel that ends by saying it was written "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ"—and Augustine's reading requires the verb's weakest possible sense at the one place in the resurrection narrative where it stands alone. Westcott put the objection well: "It is not likely that it means simply 'believed that the body had been removed as Mary Magdalene reported.' Such a conclusion was rather a matter of natural and immediate inference from what he saw."¹⁴ A man who has just run to the tomb because he was told the body was gone does not need to enter it in order to believe that the body is gone.

The second cost is that Augustine's reading makes the description in verses 6 and 7 evidentially inert. If nothing was concluded from the arrangement, the evangelist recorded it for no reason he was willing to state—and Augustine, to his credit, admits as much, saying the details must mean something and that he lacks the leisure to say what.

The reading is defensible and it is held by an authority of the first rank. It is not the only defensible reading, and this study does not adopt it outright; see the synthesis.

5.4 The textual reading: Luke 24:12 need not be answered

A fourth move disposes of Peter's wondering by disposing of the verse. Westcott and Hort excluded Lk 24:12 as a Western non-interpolation, judging its text "from Jo xx 3–10 ... condensed and simplified, with omission of all that relates to 'the other disciple'"

Assessment. This move is unavailable to anyone who wants the popular claim, and it is worth seeing why. If Lk 24:12 is not Lucan, then it is an early reader's compression of John 20:3–10—and what that reader did was precisely to drop the other disciple and give the episode to Peter alone. Deleting the verse therefore removes one witness

against the claim and supplies another: the earliest datable instance of the very concentration on Peter that the claim performs. And the compression still ends with Peter *wondering*, which the compressor had no Johannine source for and must have supplied. On either account of its origin, the verse tells against the sentence.

Independently, the exclusion is a minority position today. The verse stands in the Byzantine text, in the Clementine Vulgate, and in the Douay, and the apparatus of the registered Greek edition used here records a Nestle–Aland divergence within the verse rather than an omission of it.

5.5 The authorial reading: John is being modest about Peter

The Fourth Gospel is famously reticent about the beloved disciple’s identity, and the tomb scene has often been read as an exercise in that reticence. Both Chrysostom and Augustine notice the pattern. Chrysostom: “Observe too here again the absence of boastfulness in the Evangelist, how he witnesses to the exactness of Peter’s search.” Augustine, on verse 7: the evangelist “shows that, by outrunning his companion, there came first to the sepulchre that other disciple, by whom he means himself, while he relates all as if speaking of another.”

A modern version of the move runs the other way: that the Fourth Gospel is elevating the beloved disciple at Peter’s expense, and that verse 8 is a polemical assignment rather than a report.

Assessment. Both versions prove too much, and they prove opposite things, which is a sign that neither is being derived from the text. What is observable is a consistent pattern in which the beloved disciple is quicker and Peter goes first—at the tomb, and again at the lakeside in chapter 21, where the beloved disciple recognizes the Lord and Peter jumps into the water. The pattern is too even to be a polemic and too pointed to be an accident. It does not, however, license reassigning the verb in verse 8 to the other man. A narrator who wished to honour Peter and reports that he entered first, saw most, and is not said to have believed, has told us something he could easily have avoided telling us.

5.6 The oldest harmonization of all: Bede reconciles the seeing

One further move should be recorded, because it is the earliest attempt located here to reconcile Luke and John at this exact point, and because of what it does not try to do.

Bede, commenting on Luke 24:12, notices that Luke has Peter stoop and look while John has the other disciple stoop and look and Peter go in. His solution is a sequence: “Peter first stooped down and saw what Luke records and John passes over; and afterwards entered, so as to examine the interior more carefully—entered, however, before John entered.”

Assessment. As a reconciliation of the observations this is neat and may well be right. What matters here is its silence. Bede has just established that Peter looked in from outside *and* went in and examined the interior more carefully than his companion; he is one sentence away from the claim under test; and he says nothing about what Peter concluded. Luke’s “wondering” stands in his lemma, unglossed. A harmonizer who solves the seeing and leaves the believing alone is telling us, by his silence, that he did not think the two were the same problem.

5.7 Summary of the weighing

Harmonization	What it would deliver	Verdict
Collective reading (Chrysostom)	Peter believed at the tomb, on the evidence of the cloths	Ancient, serious, minority; achieved by reading John without Luke and without weight on Jn 20:9
Chronological (belief came later)	Peter’s faith, at a later moment	True but concedes the claim’s substance
Minimizing (Augustine)	Nobody believed in the Resurrection at the tomb	Defensible; strains the absolute use of <i>episteusen</i> and leaves vv. 6–7 evidentially idle

Harmonization	What it would deliver	Verdict
Textual (delete Lk 24:12)	Removal of the “wondering”	Self-defeating: the deleted verse becomes the earliest witness to the concentration on Peter, and still ends in wonder
Authorial (Johannine modesty or polemic)	A reason to discount v. 8’s subject	Proves opposite things in its two versions; explains the pattern, not the verb
Sequential (Bede)	Reconciliation of Luke’s and John’s accounts of the seeing	Probably right, and silent on the believing—which is the point at issue

None of the five delivers the claim as stated. One of them—Chrysostom’s— delivers something close to it at the cost of a reading of John that Luke does not corroborate and that Augustine explicitly refuted. That is the state of the evidence, and section 9 draws the conclusion from it.

6 The Ancient Argument: Thieves Do Not Undress a Corpse

6.1 Why the question arises inside Scripture

The suggestion that the body was stolen is not a later sceptical invention that the Fathers went out of their way to refute. It is in the Gospels. Matthew reports that the chief priests asked Pilate for a guard because “lest perhaps his disciples come and steal him away and say to the people: He is risen from the dead” (Mt 27:64), and that after the event they paid the soldiers to say “His disciples came by night and stole him away when we were asleep” (Mt 28:13), adding that “this word was spread abroad among the Jews even unto this day” (Mt 28:15). Whatever one makes of Matthew’s account of the guard, the evangelist is telling his readers that a theft explanation was in circulation when he wrote.

An argument from the state of the burial cloths is therefore an argument against a named and contemporary rival explanation, not a devotional embellishment. That is how Chrysostom uses it.

6.2 Chrysostom’s argument, read at its own locus

The eighty-fifth homily on John covers the crucifixion, the burial, and the first ten verses of chapter 20. Having reached the burial, Chrysostom notes the providential reasons for a nearby, new, sealed and guarded tomb, and closes that catena of reasons with a sentence that sets up everything after it: “Nor was it for these reasons only that He was laid near, but also that the story about the stealing might be proved false.” The argument proper comes a page later:

“When then she came and said these things, they hearing them, draw near with great eagerness to the sepulchre, and see the linen clothes lying, which was a sign of the Resurrection. For neither, if any persons had removed the body, would they before doing so have stripped it; nor if any had stolen it, would they have taken the trouble to remove the napkin, and roll it up, and lay it in a place by itself; but how? they would have taken the body as it was. On this account John tells us by anticipation that it was buried with much myrrh, which glues linen to the body not less firmly than lead; in order that when thou hearest that the napkins lay apart, thou mayest not endure those who say that He was stolen. For a thief would not have been so foolish as to spend so much trouble on a superfluous matter. For why should he undo the clothes? and how could he have escaped detection if he had done so? since he would probably have spent much time in so doing, and be found out by delaying and loitering. But why do the clothes lie apart, while the napkin was wrapped together by itself? That thou mayest learn that it was not the action of men in confusion or haste, the placing some in one place, some in another, and the wrapping them together. From this they believed in the Resurrection.”¹⁵

This is worth taking apart, because it is a better argument than its reputation.

It has three distinct steps, not one. The first is about motive: a thief wants the body, and stripping it is work that does not serve his object. The second is about physical difficulty, and it is the step usually dropped in retellings—Chrysostom appeals to Jn 19:39–40, the hundred pounds’ weight of myrrh and aloes bound into the wrappings, and argues that this glues linen to flesh “not less firmly than lead.” Unwrapping such a body is not a matter of lifting a sheet. The third is about time and exposure: a man doing unnecessary work in a guarded tomb increases his risk with every minute.

It is an argument from the cost of an action, not from tidiness. Chrysostom does not say the tomb was neat. He says the cloths were in two different states in two different places—“the placing some in one place, some in another”—and that this pattern is inconsistent with men working in confusion or haste. The inference is about the absence of hurry, and hurry is what a thief in a sealed tomb must have.

It is an argument from a state, not from a message. Nothing in Chrysostom suggests that the arrangement was a signal, a sign left deliberately, or a communication of any kind. He is reasoning from physical evidence to the behaviour that could and could not have produced it. This distinction matters when the modern claim is examined in section 8, because the modern claim is of an entirely different kind.

6.3 What the argument establishes, and what it does not

Taken at its own level, Chrysostom’s argument is sound in structure and modest in conclusion. It does not attempt to prove the Resurrection. It attempts to eliminate one alternative account of an empty tomb, and it does so by asking what a thief’s behaviour would have looked like.

Three limits should be stated plainly.

It depends on the accuracy of the description in Jn 20:6–7, which no other Gospel corroborates in its crucial detail. Luke’s Peter sees cloths lying alone; no Synoptic mentions the face-cloth.

It depends on the myrrh, and on a particular understanding of how the spices were used. Jn 19:40 says the body was bound in the linen cloths “with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury”; how a hundred pounds’ weight of myrrh and aloes was distributed is not stated, and Chrysostom’s “glues linen to the body not less firmly than lead” is a vivid inference rather than a reported fact.

And it eliminates one explanation, not all of them. Removal of the body by friends, by the tomb’s owner, or by the authorities is not touched by the motive argument in the same way, since such removal need not be hurried or covert. Westcott, arguing from the same verse, felt the difference and wrote that the deserted tomb “bore the marks of perfect calm,” concluding: “It was clear, therefore, that the body had not been stolen by enemies; it was scarcely less clear that it had not been taken away by friends.”¹⁶ The hedge in “scarcely less clear” is where the argument’s real strength ends.

6.4 Westcott, Latham, and the modern form of the argument

The nineteenth century produced a stronger version of the argument, and because it is the ancestor of most modern English writing on the subject its origins should be stated.

Its author was not a famous man. Henry Latham, Master of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, published *The Risen Master* in 1901 and credited the central idea to a pamphlet by the Rev. Arthur Beard of St John’s College. The proposal is that the cloths were not merely undisturbed but *collapsed*:

“In this recess, on the lower part of the ledge, lay the grave-clothes. They were in no disorder, they were just as they were when Joseph and others had wrapped them round the body of the Lord, only they were lying flat, fold over fold, for the body was gone. On the raised part of the ledge at the far end, all by itself, was the napkin that had gone round the head; this was not lying flat, but was standing up a little, retaining the twirled form which had been given it when it had been twined round the head of the Lord.”¹⁷

Bishop Westcott, whose commentary on John was published posthumously in 1908, came to accept the substance of this. His son and editor prints two of his father’s marginal notes and a private letter, in which Westcott wrote that the explanation of Jn 20:8 as the body’s having “passed through the heavy wrappings as He later passed through doors”

was “substantially correct” but added that he “did not agree with his [Latham’s] interpretation of *entetyligmenon*”; and, in a further marginal note: “The undisturbed grave-cloths show that the Lord had risen through and out of them. The face cloth carefully rolled up, the action of the living Lord.”¹⁸

Three observations, offered as this study’s own assessment rather than as anyone’s finding.

The collapsed-cloths reading is an inference from silence about what the disciples saw, dressed as a description. The text says the cloths were lying and the face-cloth was apart and wrapped. It does not say the cloths retained a body’s outline, that they were flat, that they were undisturbed, or that no spice had spilled. Latham is explicit that the absence of any mention of spices is “a significant feature in my case”—which is to say that his strongest evidence is a thing the Gospels do not mention.

It is nevertheless not arbitrary, and it is the only reading that gives a reason for the one contrast the verse actually draws. If the face-cloth retained the shape a head had given it, then the reason it was not lying with the linen cloths is that it had never been in the same place as the linen cloths: it was where the head had been, and they were where the body had been. On this reading *eis hena topon* is doing real work, and the perfect participle is doing exactly what perfects do.

And Latham himself—this is the point that matters most for section 8—insisted that the participle rules out neat folding. He wrote it twice.

6.5 The reception: how widely was this argument made?

Chrysostom’s is the fullest ancient statement of the anti-theft argument from the cloths that this study located. The reception is treated in the next section, including the material negative results: Fathers and medieval commentators who had the occasion to make this argument and did not.

7 The Reception: Who Made the Argument, and Who Did Not

Chrysostom’s is the fullest ancient statement of the argument from the arrangement. It is not the only one, and—more instructively—several of the commentators best placed to make it did not. This section reports what each witness actually does at its own locus, including the material negatives, which are the more useful result.

7.1 Cyril of Alexandria: both disciples, and the Resurrection

Cyril’s *Commentary on John* does cover this passage; the famous lacuna in the work falls at books seven and eight, not at book twelve. He prints Jn 20:1–9 as a single lemma and then comments:

“When these men (I mean Peter, and John the writer of this book, for he gives himself the name of the other disciple) heard these tidings from the woman’s mouth, they ran with all the speed they could, and came to the sepulchre in haste, and saw the marvel with their own eyes, being in themselves competent to testify to the event, for they were two in number, as the Law enjoined. As yet they did not meet Christ risen from the dead, but infer His Resurrection from the bundle of linen clothes, and henceforth believed that He had burst asunder the bonds of death, as Holy Writ had long ago proclaimed that He would do.”¹⁹

And at the next lemma: “The wise disciples, after having gathered sufficiently satisfactory evidence of the Resurrection of our Saviour . . . went back home.”

This is the single strongest patristic support the claim under test has, and it is stronger than Chrysostom’s, because Cyril is explicit about the inference, explicit that the evidence was the linen clothes, and explicit that the two disciples are witnesses in the legal sense—“two in number, as the Law enjoined.” Peter is named first.

Two qualifications keep it from being decisive. Cyril does not mention the face-cloth; his phrase is “the bundle of linen clothes,” which is the *othonia*, and the peculiarity of the *soudarion* plays no part in his argument. And Cyril, like Chrysostom, does not engage Jn 20:9—he passes straight from the inference to the prophecies, treating the disciples as reading the events “in the light of the prophecies,” which is close to the opposite of what verse 9 says.

Cyril also does not make the anti-theft argument. He mentions theft once, and attributes the suspicion to Mary: “calling to mind the ceaseless hatred of the Jews, she thought that Jesus had been carried away.”

7.2 Ambrose: Peter believed, but not from the cloths

Ambrose’s commentary on Luke is the place to look for a Latin treatment of Peter at the tomb, and the result is a double negative that is worth stating precisely.

Book X of the *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* has no lemma on Luke 24:12 at all. Its verse headings run through 23:49, 23:50, 23:53, 23:55, and then jump to 24:25. Across the whole book the word-stems *linteam-*, *sudari-*, and *cucurr-* do not occur once.²⁰ Ambrose, expounding Luke’s passion and resurrection at length, walks past Peter’s visit to the tomb without a word.

Yet he does address the question of Peter’s faith, at section 179, under a lemma on Luke 24:37 and 45:

“Led therefore by so many examples of virtue, we believe that Peter could not have doubted. That John too believed is manifest (Jn 20:8), when he saw the Saviour: who even then believed, after he saw the tomb empty of the body.”²¹

So the earliest Latin witness to touch the question says that Peter did not doubt—and grounds the beloved disciple’s faith in the emptiness of the tomb, not in the disposition of the cloths, which he never mentions. Ambrose supports half of the claim under test and supplies none of its mechanism.

7.3 Augustine: the cloths signify, but not now

Augustine’s refusal has been given in section 4. What belongs here is its shape. Quoting the description of the linen cloths and the face-cloth in full, he says: “Do we suppose these things have no meaning? I can suppose no such thing. But we hasten on to other points . . . For in such things as are self-manifest, the inquiry into the meaning even of individual details is, indeed, a subject of holy delight, but only for those who have leisure, which is not the case with us.”

He is not denying that the arrangement is significant. He is declining, on grounds of time, to say how—and he never returns to it, since Tractate 121 begins at verse 10. What matters for the present question is that the most influential Latin exposition of this passage contains no argument from the cloths against theft. That is a material negative, and it is not an accident of brevity: Augustine had the verse in front of him and said he was passing over it.

7.4 Gregory the Great: the whole pericope, and no theft

Gregory preached on exactly these verses. The rubric of the twenty-second homily on the Gospels records the occasion: delivered to the people in the basilica of Saint John called the Constantinian—the Lateran—on the Saturday after Easter, on John 20:1–9.

He expounds the arrangement at length, and every word of it is allegory:

“What are we to believe it means, brethren, that the napkin of the Lord’s head is not found in the tomb with the linen cloths, unless that, as Paul attests, the head of Christ is God, and the incomprehensible mysteries of the Godhead are set apart from the knowledge of our weakness? . . . And it is to be noted that it is said to be found not only apart but also wrapped up in one place. For of a linen cloth that is wrapped up, neither the beginning nor the end is seen. Rightly then was the napkin of the head found wrapped up, because the height of the Godhead neither began to be nor ceases . . . And well is it added, *into one place*, because God is not in the division of minds.”²²

Then, because a *sudarium* is what wipes away sweat, Gregory reads it as the *labor Dei*: “the napkin which had been over his head is found apart, because the passion of our Redeemer is far removed from our passion, since he bore without fault what we endure with fault. He willed to submit to death of his own accord, to which we come unwilling.”

Nowhere in the homily does the word theft occur in connection with the cloths. And on verse 8 Gregory follows Augustine exactly, adding a reason of his own:

“And he saw and believed. What, brethren, what are we to think that he believed? Surely not that the Lord whom he sought had risen? Not at all, because it was still dark at the tomb, and the words joined to it contradict it, when it is said, *For as yet they knew not the scriptures, that he must rise from the dead*. What then did he see, and what did he believe? He saw the linen cloths lying, and he believed what the woman had said, that the Lord had been taken away from the tomb.”²³

The Latin West’s two greatest expositors of this pericope therefore agree against the claim under test, and Gregory—who had the whole homily to make the anti-theft argument and every occasion to make it, preaching on Easter Saturday in the Lateran—did not make it.

7.5 Bede: a harmonizer, not an apologist

Bede has no homily on John 20:1–10. A search of Migne’s Bede homiliary found no occurrence of the stem *sudari*- in books I and II, and Migne’s own index gives II.9 as the homily for the Ascension.²⁴ What Bede does have is a note on Luke 24:12, and it is a piece of harmonizing, in the manner of Augustine’s *De consensu evangelistarum*:

“Luke records Peter’s running briefly; but John sets out more fully how it was done . . . Whence it is asked how Luke says of Peter, *And stooping down he saw the linen cloths laid by themselves*, whereas John indicates rather that he himself did this, and that Peter on entering the tomb saw not only the linen cloths but also the napkin which had been over his head. But it is to be understood that Peter first stooped down and saw what Luke records and John passes over; and afterwards entered, so as to examine the interior more carefully—entered, however, before John entered.”²⁵

Two things follow. Bede is the earliest witness located here who notices the Luke–John difficulty at this exact point and works at it. And what he harmonizes is the *seeing*: he reconciles who saw what, in what order, from outside and from within. He does not touch the believing, and he does not suggest that anything followed from the arrangement. A commentator who has just established that Peter examined the tomb interior more carefully than his companion—*ut diligentius interiora dignosceret*—and who says nothing about what Peter concluded, is a witness against the claim in the mildest and most credible way: by having no occasion to mention it.

Bede does make an anti-theft argument in the same commentary, and its shape is instructive because it is not about the cloths. On Luke 23:53 he observes that the tomb was new, so that no one could pretend another body had risen, and cut from the rock, “lest, if it had been built up out of many stones, it might be said that the body had been taken away by theft with the foundations of the tomb dug out from beneath.”

7.6 Theophylact: both arguments, held together

Theophylact of Ohrid, writing in the eleventh century, gives the single most interesting position in the dossier, because he holds both halves at once.

On John 20 he reproduces Chrysostom’s anti-theft argument almost verbatim, including the myrrh: neither would anyone moving the body have stripped it, “nor, if they had stolen it, would they have taken the trouble of taking off the napkin, of wrapping it and placing it *apart in one place*, but they would simply have taken the body as best they could”; and the evangelist mentioned the myrrh, “which makes the linen cloths adhere to the body no less than pitch,” so that “when we hear that the napkins were placed there apart, we should not believe those who say that he was taken away by theft.” He adds Chrysostom’s psychological point: a thief would not have been so foolish as to spend so much care and time on a superfluous thing, without suspecting that while he was busy at it he might be caught in the act.²⁶ On Luke 24:12 he adds the guards: what leisure would a thief have had, to leave these things wrapped up separately and carry off the body, and that with soldiers sitting by?

And yet, on verse 8, Theophylact is with Augustine—and goes further:

“He ‘saw’ the burial cloths placed separately, ‘and believed’: not that the Lord had risen, but that he had been taken away by theft. For he believed Mary when she said, ‘They have taken away the Lord.’”²⁷

The combination is not incoherent, and it is worth stating carefully because it is exactly the distinction this study needs. Theophylact holds that the arrangement objectively excludes theft—for us, now, reading the Gospel with the Scriptures opened—and that the disciple who saw it on the morning itself concluded theft, because the Scriptures were not yet opened to him. The evidential value of the cloths and the disciples’ recognition of that value are two different questions. Theophylact separates them. Almost nobody since has.

7.7 Aquinas: the argument endorsed, the belief left open

Aquinas handles both questions twice, and the two treatments differ in a way that repays attention.

In the *Catena aurea* he assembles the tradition on Jn 20:1–10 from Chrysostom, Augustine, Bede, Theophylact, Gregory, and the Gloss. The anti-theft argument appears there under Chrysostom’s name, where it belongs; the note on “he saw and believed” is Augustine’s, given in full, including the refutation.

In his own *Lectura super Ioannem* he does something more interesting. Asking why the evangelist narrates everything so carefully, he answers that it was “according to Chrysostom, in order to exclude the false opinion spread abroad by the Jews, that the body of Christ had been taken away by theft, as is had in the last chapter of Matthew”—and then reproduces the argument, with one addition of his own: that those moving the body would have had to work in haste *propter praesentiam custodum*, because of the presence of the guards.²⁸ The addition is Theophylact’s Lucan supplement, absorbed into a commentary on John.

Then he reaches “and he saw, and believed”:

“... at first glance it could have this sense, that he saw those things and believed that Christ had risen. But according to Augustine this cannot stand, because there follows *for as yet they knew not the scripture*, and so on. Therefore it must be said that he saw the empty tomb, and believed the things the woman had said, namely that some persons had carried off the Lord ...

Or, according to Chrysostom, he saw the linen cloths placed in such order as would not have been done if the body had been taken away by theft, and he believed—with true faith, that is—that Christ had risen from the dead. And then what follows, *for as yet they knew not the scripture*, refers back to *he saw and believed*, as if to say: before he saw, he did not know the scripture that he must rise from the dead; but when he saw, he believed that he had risen from the dead.”

The structure of that passage should be read exactly. Aquinas gives Augustine’s reading as the resolution—*ideo dicendum*, “therefore it must be said”—and then offers Chrysostom’s as an alternative, *vel*, with a reading of the syntax of verse 9 that would make it work. He does not choose between them, and he does not treat Chrysostom’s as refuted.

That is where the tradition leaves the question: with the greatest of the Latin systematizers reporting both readings, preferring one, and declining to close the other off.

7.8 Two further witnesses, and what they show

Two texts outside the commentary tradition are worth a sentence each, because both bear on how early the cloths became a problem.

Jerome, cataloguing the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*, reports that after the account of the resurrection it says “the Lord, after he had given his grave clothes to the servant of the priest, appeared to James.”²⁹ That is a second-century tradition which knew the wrappings had been left behind and felt the need to account for them—and accounted for them narratively, by having the risen Lord dispose of them himself, rather than evidentially.

The *Gospel of Peter*, by contrast, is intensely concerned with the theft explanation—it has the elders ask for a guard “lest his disciples come and steal him away”—and answers it with seals, soldiers, and a resurrection witnessed directly by the guards. Its account of the women at the tomb mentions no burial cloths at all.³⁰ A text that wanted the anti-theft argument as much as any in antiquity did not have it, because it did not have John’s detail.

7.9 The reception, tabulated

Witness	Argument from the cloths against theft?	Who believed at Jn 20:8, and what?
Chrysostom, <i>Hom. in Io.</i> 85 (c. 390)	Yes; the fullest ancient statement	“They” believed—both disciples—in the Resurrection
Ambrose, <i>In Lucam</i> X (c. 389)	No; never mentions the cloths at the tomb	Peter could not have doubted; John believed, from the empty tomb
Augustine, <i>Tract. in Io.</i> 120 (c. 419)	No; grants the cloths signify, declines to expound	The other disciple, and he believed the body had been removed
Cyril of Alexandria, <i>In Io.</i> 12 (c. 425)	No as polemic; but the cloths are evidence	Both, and they infer the Resurrection
Gregory the Great, <i>Hom. in Ev.</i> 22 (591)	No; allegory throughout	The other disciple; he believed the body had been taken away
Bede, <i>In Lucam</i> VI (c. 715)	No at the cloths; yes about the rock-cut tomb	Not addressed; harmonizes the seeing only
Theophylact, <i>In Io.</i> 20 (c. 1100)	Yes, epitomizing Chrysostom	The other disciple, and he believed it had been stolen
Aquinas, <i>Catena and Lectura</i> (c. 1260–72)	Yes, expressly on Chrysostom’s authority	Augustine’s reading given as the answer, Chrysostom’s offered as an alternative

7.10 What the reception shows

Three conclusions follow, and they are not the ones a reader of the popular sentence would expect.

The anti-theft argument is genuinely ancient but narrowly transmitted. It has one ancient source of any length—Chrysostom—and travels from him through Theophylact to Aquinas and thence into the Latin tradition. It is not a patristic consensus. Augustine, Ambrose, Cyril, Gregory, and Bede all handle this material and none of them makes it.

The tradition is genuinely divided on the believing, and the division is not East against West. Chrysostom and Cyril, both Greek, extend the belief to both disciples and make it resurrection faith. Augustine, Gregory, and Theophylact—two Latins and a Greek—restrict it to the other disciple and lower its content to belief in a removal. Ambrose, a Latin, says both believed but grounds it in the empty tomb.

Nobody in the tradition read the arrangement as a message. Every ancient and medieval witness that treats the cloths at all treats them either as physical evidence about what did or did not happen (Chrysostom, Theophylact, Aquinas), or as an allegory of divine things (Gregory, and Aquinas after him). Not one treats them as a communication left behind on purpose to be read. The modern folded-napkin claim is not a revival of anything; it is new.

8 The Folded Napkin: A Claim and a Search

8.1 The claim, in its earliest datable words

The version of the story that circulates has a fixed shape. Here it is as it was quoted by a reader writing to *Jerusalem Perspective* on 7 October 2006—the earliest dated appearance this study located:

“In order to understand the significance of the folded napkin, you have to understand a little bit about Hebrew tradition of that day. The folded napkin had to do with the master and servant, and every Jewish boy knew this tradition.

When the servant set the dinner table for the master, he made sure that it was exactly the way the master wanted it . . . If the master was done eating, he would rise from the table, wipe his fingers, his mouth, and clean his beard, and would wad up that napkin and toss it onto the table. The servant would then know to clear the table. For in those days, the wadded napkin meant, ‘I’m done.’

But if the master got up from the table, folded his napkin, and laid it beside his plate, the servant would not dare touch the table because the servant knew that the folded napkin meant, ‘I’m not finished yet.’ The folded napkin meant, ‘I’m coming back!’ ”³¹

The claim is admirably specific, and its specificity is what makes it testable. For it to be true, four things must hold: that table napkins were in domestic use in first-century Jewish Palestine; that a master’s disposal of his napkin functioned as a signal to a servant; that the signal carried the two contrasting meanings alleged; and that the Greek word at Jn 20:7 means “folded.” If any one of the four fails, the claim fails.

8.2 What was searched, and how

The rabbinic corpus was searched through Sefaria’s public text and search interfaces on 25 July 2026. English phrase searches across the indexed corpus returned the following, each independently re-run for this study:

Query	Total hits	Comment
"folded napkin"	0	
"folds the napkin"	0	
"folds his napkin"	0	
"crumpled napkin"	0	
"napkin" "servant" "signal"	0	
"sign to his servant"	0	
"I am coming back"	0	
"I am not finished"	0	
soudarion	0	the Greek loanword’s own form
napkin	49	every hit inspected; see below
sudarium	43	every hit’s locus inspected

The forty-nine “napkin” hits fall into four groups, and not one of them is a signal: the Mishnah Berakhot 8:3 dispute discussed below and its commentaries; lexicon entries (Klein, Jastrow) for *mappah*, *mappit*, *mitpahat*; ritual-purity material about cloths and vessels in Kelim, Chagigah, and Yadayim, and the parallel discussion at Sukkah about a cloth wrapped round a man; and modern halakhic and responsa literature far outside the period.

The limits of this search must be stated with the result. Sefaria’s index does not contain every rabbinic work. A phrase search in English cannot find a custom described in words the searcher did not think of, and it depends on the translations indexed. What the search establishes is bounded: within the indexed corpus, in the phrasings tried, there is nothing.

What raises that bounded negative into something stronger is that the places where such a custom *would* have to be recorded do survive, are indexed, and were read.

8.3 The one real napkin text, and what it is about

There is exactly one ancient rabbinic discussion of a cloth used at table, and it is the third item in a list of disputes between the House of Shammai and the House of Hillel “concerning the meal.” In the public-domain Hebrew of

Mishnah Berakhot 8:3 the ruling runs, in transliteration: *Beth Shammai omerim, meqanne'ah yadav ba-mappah u-mannihah al ha-shulhan. U-Veth Hillel omerim, al ha-keseth.*³²

The Talmud's discussion of it, in A. Cohen's public-domain 1921 Cambridge translation, shows what the dispute is for:

“Our Rabbis have taught: Bet Shammai say: One wipes his hands with a napkin which he lays upon the table; for if thou sayest that [he lays it] upon the bolster, there is a fear lest the moisture on the napkin may contract defilement on account of the bolster and this in turn may render the hands ritually unclean. . . . But Bet Hillel say: [He lays it] upon the bolster; for if thou sayest that [he lays it] upon the table, there is a fear lest the moisture on the napkin may contract defilement on account of the table and in its turn defile the food.”³³

This is the whole of the ancient Jewish law of the table napkin. The question is where a damp hand-towel may be put so that it does not transmit ritual impurity. There is no folding and no crumpling. There is no servant. There is no signal. And the cloth is laid down *during* the meal, after the hand-washing, not at its end.

8.4 What actually signalled that a meal was over

The rabbis did have a marker for the end of a meal, and it was legally operative, which is why it is discussed. It was the removal of the table. Cohen's translation of Berakhot 42a:

“Rab Pappa went on a visit to the house of Rab Huna b. Rab Nathan. After they had finished their meal, they set before them several things to eat. Rab Pappa took of them and ate. They said to him, ‘Does not the master hold that if one has finished [his meal], he must not eat anything further?’ He replied, ‘This has only been said when the table has been cleared.’”³⁴

This is the decisive negative. Here is the exact legal question the alleged custom would answer—how does anyone know the meal is over?—being answered, in a household with servants, by a physical act; and the act is the removal of the table, not a gesture with a cloth. A custom of the kind alleged, if it had existed, would have had to be reckoned with on this page. It is not there.

8.5 A real *sudar* signal, and what it signalled

The search did turn up one genuine, ancient, Jewish use of a *sudar*—the same word, in its Aramaic-Hebrew form, that Greek borrowed as *soudarion*—as a deliberate signal. It is worth reporting, both because it is a positive finding and because it shows that the corpus is perfectly capable of recording such a thing when one exists.

Mishnah Sanhedrin 6:1 describes the procession to a stoning:

“One would stand before the entrance to the courthouse, his scarf in his hand; and another would ride on a horse before them at a distance, in order to see him. [If] one says, ‘I have an argument for acquittal,’ then he waves the scarf, and the horse runs to stop him.”³⁵

So the corpus knows a *sudar* used as a signal. The signal is judicial, public, and made by waving; its meaning is “stop the execution”; and it has nothing whatever to do with a table, a master, a servant, folding, or a promise to return. A search capable of finding this would have found the alleged dining custom if the corpus contained it.

8.6 The Greco-Roman side

The claim is about Jewish custom, but the Roman world is where table napkins as such are best documented, and it should be checked for completeness.

The Roman dinner napkin, *mappa*, was a personal possession that guests brought to the table and took home again—in Petronius the guests fill their napkins with fruit, and one of them has apples tied up in his to take back to his slave. Smith's *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (1875) describes the *mappa* as “a smaller kind of napkin, or a handkerchief, which the guests carried with them to the table,” and its article on the subject—which covers materials, sizes, and even the wearing of napkins as head-dress—says nothing about any signalling function at table.³⁶ The

same article notes in passing that at a Greek or Roman meal it was the boy or slave pouring the water who “also held the napkin or towel for wiping the hands dry”—so that the cloth the claim imagines a master manipulating was, in the setting where such cloths are best documented, in the servant’s hands already. An object each diner brings and takes away is in any case the least available thing at a Roman table to serve as the host’s signal.

There is one famous ancient napkin signal, and its sense is the reverse of the claim’s. Suetonius reports that Nero gave the public the chance to watch him drive in the Circus Maximus, “one of his freedmen dropping the napkin from the place usually occupied by the magistrates.”³⁷ The dropped *mappa* started the races. It meant “go,” not “I am returning.”

8.7 Lightfoot’s silence

One more negative deserves separate statement, because of who produced it.

John Lightfoot’s *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae* is the seventeenth century’s great attempt to explain the Gospels out of rabbinic literature. It proceeds verse by verse and cites Talmudic material relentlessly; on John 20 alone Lightfoot pauses to quote Bava Bathra on the depth of burial niches at verse 5. If a rabbinic custom of the table napkin bore on John 20:7, Lightfoot is the man in the history of scholarship most likely to have said so.

All four volumes of Robert Gandell’s Oxford edition of 1859 were retrieved and searched for this study. The word “napkin” occurs twice in the whole work, both times in the note on John 11:44 and both times about the Lazarus miracle rather than any custom: “The dead man came forth, though bound hand and foot with his graveclothes, and blinded with the napkin.” And on John 20 Lightfoot comments on verses 1, 5, 12, 17, 23, 24, 25, 26, and 29. He has no note on verse 7 at all.³⁸

8.8 The Greek, once more, and the English splice

The fourth condition the claim requires is that *entetyligmenon* means “folded.” Section 3 established that it does not: Thayer glosses it at this verse “to roll up, wrap together,” and its only other New Testament uses describe the wrapping of a corpse in a shroud.

There is a further point about English that explains a great deal. The word “napkin” at Jn 20:7 comes from the Authorized Version and the Douay, both of which use an archaic English word for a wiping-cloth. But the Authorized Version does not say “folded”—it says “wrapped together in a place by itself.” The word “folded” comes from twentieth-century versions. The claim therefore requires the noun from one translation and the verb from another, and holds together in no single English Bible.

David Bivin, answering the reader in 2006, reached the same conclusion from the other end: he noted that the case requires all of “if first-century Jewish residents of the land of Israel used table napkins, and if there were such a custom as described, and if the handkerchief mentioned in John 20:7 were a table napkin, and if the Greek word *entetyligmenon* meant ‘having been folded’ rather than ‘having been wrapped up’,” and guessed that “the detailed description of this supposed custom is an invention triggered in someone’s fertile mind by the archaic KJV translation, ‘napkin.’” He added that no version of the claim “cites a biblical or rabbinic source.” Bivin also records a smaller negative worth keeping: “Apparently, there is no early rabbinic source that discusses how the hands were dried after washing them.”³⁹

8.9 Where the claim came from

The following account is offered as this study’s own reconstruction, bounded by what could be reached.

The earliest datable appearance is the October 2006 *Jerusalem Perspective* page, and what appears there is not the origin but a reader’s report of something already circulating: the claim arrives already in its finished form, in a reader’s question, and is refuted on the spot by a specialist in the Jewish background of the Gospels. Its medium was the forwarded email; the earliest independently archived instance located is a mailing-list forward of 21 May 2007 carrying the now-standard wording.

A correction to the received account should be recorded. The date usually given for the claim's origin is 2007, and it traces to a single sentence in TruthOrFiction's assessment of January 2008: "The only references to this story that we found are from Internet postings and emails that seem to have originated in 2007." That sentence was copied, nearly verbatim, into GotQuestions' treatment—"The only references to this story seem to be from internet postings and emails that appear to have originated in 2007"—and from there into a good deal of Catholic and Evangelical apologetic writing. It was a guess, honestly labelled as one by its author, and the *Jerusalem Perspective* page pushes the claim back at least to October 2006. Whether it circulated in print earlier could not be established: Google Books, HathiTrust, and the Usenet archives were unreachable during this research, and that limit is recorded here rather than papered over.

What can be said with confidence is the thing that matters. Across every instance located—the 2006 and 2007 texts, the assessments at TruthOrFiction and GotQuestions, and the devotional and newspaper retellings that continue to appear—no version of the claim has ever cited a Jewish source. Its entire evidentiary apparatus consists of the assertion that "every Jewish boy knew this tradition."

8.10 The finding

Project synthesis: the master-and-servant napkin custom

Judgment. The custom is unattested. No Mishnaic, Talmudic, Toseftan, midrashic, or minor-tractate text known to this study describes a napkin gesture as a signal from a master to a servant, or attaches the meanings "I am finished" and "I am coming back" to any disposal of a cloth. The claim is a modern devotional legend, in circulation by 2006, resting on an archaic English noun from one Bible version and a mistranslated verb from another.

Reasons. (1) Targeted searches of the indexed rabbinic corpus for the claim's own vocabulary return nothing. (2) The one ancient rabbinic discussion of a napkin at a meal, Mishnah Berakhot 8:3 with Berakhot 52b, is a ritual-purity dispute about where a damp hand-towel may be laid; it has no servant, no signal, and no folding. (3) The rabbis' actual end-of-meal marker, discussed at Berakhot 42a in exactly the household context the claim imagines, is the removal of the table. (4) The corpus does record a *sudar* used as a deliberate signal—at Mishnah Sanhedrin 6:1, to halt an execution—which shows that the search would have found a dining signal had one existed. (5) Lightfoot, hunting rabbinic parallels through John verse by verse, has no note on Jn 20:7 and no napkin custom anywhere in four volumes. (6) The Greek participle means wrapped or rolled, not folded, and is the verb used of swathing a corpse. (7) No proponent of the claim, in any instance located from 2006 to the present, has ever cited a source.

The strongest counterargument, at full strength. Absence of evidence in a literature that is fragmentary, selectively preserved, and concerned with law rather than with manners is genuinely weak evidence of absence. The rabbinic corpus records what was disputed, and an uncontroversial domestic gesture would generate no dispute and therefore no text. Ordinary table manners of the sort everyone knows are exactly what such literature does *not* record: the Mishnah preserves the Shammai-Hillel argument about where the napkin goes precisely because it was contested, and passes over in silence a hundred things about the same meal that were not. Furthermore the searches performed here were in English, over an incomplete index, in phrasings a modern researcher chose.

Why the counterargument does not carry. It would carry against a merely quiet negative. It does not carry against this one, for three reasons. First, the claim is not about a quiet gesture: it asserts a codified signalling convention with two contrasting meanings, operative between masters and servants, that "every Jewish boy" knew—something on that scale leaves traces. Second, the corpus does address the exact governing question, at Berakhot 42a, and answers it with a different mechanism; a rival signal cannot hide behind silence on a page where the question is being decided. Third, the claim's own defenders have never produced a text, and the absence has been publicly noted by specialists since 2006 without any source emerging.

What would change this judgment. A single ancient Jewish text—tannaitic, amoraic, midrashic, or from the minor tractates—in which the disposal, folding, or crumpling of a cloth at table communicates anything to a servant about whether the meal is over. Failing that, a Second Temple or Greco-Roman source attesting a napkin signal with the alleged meanings would substantially weaken the negative even if it were not Jewish. Nothing less would do; a modern author repeating the claim, however respectable, adds nothing, since the whole difficulty is that the modern authors have no source either.

8.11 A note on tone

It should be said plainly that the people who repeat this story are not being dishonest, and that what they are trying to say with it is true. Christ is coming back. The Church has always said so, and says so in the Creed. The objection to the folded-napkin story is not that its conclusion is false but that its premise is invented, and that a true doctrine defended by a manufactured custom is worse defended than not defended at all—because the person who eventually discovers that no Jewish boy ever knew any such tradition is left wondering what else was made up.

There is also a loss of a different kind. The verse has a real strangeness in it, attested in every manuscript and every version, which the invented custom covers over: a burial cloth still in the shape a head gave it, lying by itself in a place where a body is not. That is stranger than the legend, and it is actually there.

9 The Question Answered

9.1 Separating the claim into its parts

The sentence under test bundles four assertions, and they do not stand or fall together. Separating them is most of the work.

- (i) That the burial cloths were left in a particular and noticeable arrangement.
- (ii) That Peter was the one who noticed it.
- (iii) That the arrangement was evidence from which something could be inferred.
- (iv) That Peter drew the inference, and that what he inferred was the Resurrection.

(i) **is what the text says**, in every Greek manuscript tradition, in the Latin the Church read for fifteen centuries, and in the English translated from that Latin. The linen cloths were lying; the face-cloth was not lying with them, but apart, in a wrapped-up state, in one place. That is not an inference; it is the verse.

(ii) **is also what the text says**, and this is the part of the popular claim that is usually defended badly and happens to be right. Verses 6 and 7 form one sentence whose subject is Simon Peter and whose verb is *theōrei*. The face-cloth and everything said about it lie inside what Peter beholds. The other disciple, in verse 5, saw the *othonia* from outside and did not go in; the evangelist says so twice. On the evidence of the Fourth Gospel, the man who noticed how the burial cloths were left was Peter. Chrysostom saw this and made a point of it—the evangelist “witnesses to the exactness of Peter’s search”—and Theophylact and Aquinas repeat him. It is a real feature of the text and the claim is entitled to it.

(iii) **is defensible, ancient, and not certain**. Chrysostom’s case that the arrangement tells against theft is a real argument with three independent steps—motive, physical difficulty, exposure—and it is directed against an explanation the Gospels themselves record as current. Theophylact reproduces it; Aquinas endorses it by name. But it was made by a minority of the commentators who had the occasion, it depends on a reconstruction of how the spices were used, and it eliminates theft rather than removal. The strongest form of it is not Chrysostom’s but the modern one—that the cloths had collapsed where the body had been and the face-cloth still held the shape of a head—and that form is an inference from what the text does not say as much as from what it does.

(iv) **is what neither evangelist says, and what one of them denies**.

9.2 Project synthesis

Project synthesis: does the premise survive?

Judgment. The maintainer’s premise survives in part and fails in its operative half. Peter is, on the Fourth Gospel’s own showing, the disciple to whom the observation of the cloths is attributed: he entered first, he saw most, and the description of the face-cloth is grammatically inside what he beheld. But no evangelist attributes the inference to him. John assigns the believing of Jn 20:8 to the other disciple, in the singular, by name-in-effect; Luke has Peter leave the tomb *thaumazōn*, wondering, a participle Luke pairs twenty-nine verses later with

apistountōn, not believing. The insight, so far as Scripture assigns one, belongs to the beloved disciple. What belongs to Peter is the looking.

Reasons. (1) Jn 20:8 has a singular verb and a named subject that is not Peter, in a sentence the evangelist could have written in the plural and did not. (2) Jn 20:9, joined by *gar*, says of both men that they did not yet know the scripture that he must rise—which is why Augustine, Gregory, and Theophylact all lower the content of the believing rather than extend its subject. (3) Luke, independently or in the earliest surviving compression of John, ends Peter’s visit in wonder, not faith. (4) The Johannine pattern of delayed understanding (Jn 2:22; 12:16) is the evangelist’s own explanation of how his disciples receive events. (5) Every harmonization that would deliver the claim either concedes it (belief came later), or costs more than it buys (deleting Lk 24:12 supplies a better witness against the claim than it removes), or requires reading one Father’s construal of John against another evangelist’s plain sense.

The strongest counterargument, at full strength. It is not a sceptical argument but a patristic one, and it is considerable. Two Greek Fathers of the first rank read verse 8 collectively and evidentially. Chrysostom: “From this they believed in the Resurrection.” Cyril of Alexandria, more explicitly still: the two disciples, being competent witnesses because “two in number, as the Law enjoined,” did not yet meet the risen Christ “but infer His Resurrection from the bundle of linen clothes, and henceforth believed that He had burst asunder the bonds of death.” Ambrose, in Latin, says flatly that Peter could not have doubted. Chrysostom generalizes his reading into an account of Easter faith itself: the apostles “from the proof of the napkins . . . straightway received the word concerning the Resurrection, and before they saw the body, exhibited all faith.” And Aquinas, having given Augustine’s reading as the resolution, sets Chrysostom’s beside it—*vel, secundum Chrysostomum . . . credidit, scilicet vera fide*—with a reading of the syntax of verse 9 that would carry it, and does not close it off. On this account the maintainer’s sentence is not a popular error at all: it is the Antiochene and Alexandrian reading of the passage, and the man who transmitted it to the Latin West was Thomas Aquinas.

Why the counterargument does not carry, and what it does establish. It does not carry, for three reasons. Chrysostom’s and Cyril’s collective reading is reached by expounding John continuously without Luke in view; neither addresses Peter’s wondering, because neither is commenting on Luke at that point. Both pass Jn 20:9 without the weight Augustine puts on it—Cyril in fact reverses it, having the disciples read the events “in the light of the prophecies,” which is close to the opposite of what the verse says. And even at its strongest the counterargument delivers (iv) for *both* disciples on the strength of the *othonia*; Cyril never mentions the face-cloth, and the peculiar arrangement of the *soudarion*—the whole point of the popular sentence—plays no part in his argument at all.

What the counterargument does establish is that the maintainer’s premise is a respectable minority reading of the Fourth Gospel with excellent patristic credentials, not a modern devotional invention. That distinction should be kept sharp, because the other claim examined in this study is a modern devotional invention, and the two should not be filed together.

What would change this judgment. A textual witness of weight reading the verbs of Jn 20:8 in the plural would settle it the other way at a stroke; none is known to this study, and the apparatus of the registered Greek edition records no variant there. Failing that, a demonstration that Lk 24:12 is neither Lucan nor an early compression of John—that is, a late and dependent gloss with no independent standing—would remove the only text that says anything at all about Peter’s state of mind, and would leave the field to the Chrysostom–Cyril reading of a Gospel that never denies Peter’s faith, only declines to assert it. Conversely, the judgment would be strengthened past argument by any early witness that read Jn 20:8 as this study reads it *and* engaged Luke while doing so; no such witness was located.

9.3 Why the attribution to Peter arose

If the insight belongs to the beloved disciple, the popular sentence needs explaining, and four causes are visible in the evidence gathered here. They are offered as this study’s reconstruction.

The text gives Peter the observation. This is the largest cause and the most respectable. A reader of Jn 20:3–10 comes away with a vivid picture of Peter inside the tomb looking at things, and a very thin picture of the other disciple, who is described almost entirely by what he did not do—did not go in, did not know the scripture. The verse that assigns the believing is seven words long and has no object. It is easy to read the paragraph and remember Peter.

Luke 24:12, whatever its origin, concentrates the episode on Peter. Westcott and Hort’s account of the verse, if right, makes it the earliest surviving instance of the move: a reader condensing John 20:3–10 “with omission

of all that relates to ‘the other disciple.’” Whether that is what happened or whether Luke wrote it, the canonical result is the same—one Gospel in which the tomb visit is Peter’s alone.

Chrysostom’s collective reading became the tradition’s other voice, and Aquinas carried it. A reading in which “they believed” is available in the *Catena aurea* and in the *Lectura super Ioannem*, in a commentary that has just spent a paragraph on Peter’s diligence, is one short step from a reading in which Peter believed. The step is short enough to be taken without noticing.

And Peter is the one people remember. A story about the first Pope noticing something at the empty tomb has a shape that a story about an unnamed disciple does not. This is not a criticism of anyone; it is how narrative memory works, and it is worth saying that the tradition’s own instinct here is not simply wrong. Peter did see. He is the reason we know about the face-cloth at all.

9.4 What is left, and it is not small

Stripping the sentence of what it cannot carry does not leave nothing. It leaves this.

An eyewitness tradition, written down late in the first century, reports that two men went into a tomb on a Sunday morning and found the wrappings of a corpse without the corpse; that the head-cloth was not with the rest; that it was separate, and in a place of its own, and—by the choice of a verb its own author elsewhere uses for swathing a body—still in the condition of something that had been wound round a head.

Whatever else is true, somebody thought that arrangement worth remembering for sixty years and worth a whole verse when he finally wrote it down. He does not say what he made of it. He says only that the other man went in, and saw, and believed. The Gospel’s reticence about what exactly was seen and exactly what was believed has kept the tradition arguing for sixteen centuries—Chrysostom against Augustine, Cyril against Gregory, Aquinas declining to choose—and that argument is a better thing to inherit than a manufactured custom about napkins.

The verse is stranger than the legend. It has the advantage of being there.

10 What This Study Does Not Treat

Two subjects sit close enough to this passage that a reader may expect them, and both are deliberately excluded. Stating the exclusion is more useful than a paragraph that would satisfy nobody.

10.1 The Shroud of Turin and the Sudarium of Oviedo

The Shroud of Turin is a linen cloth bearing a faint full-length image of a crucified man, kept at Turin and venerated by many as the burial cloth of Christ. The Sudarium of Oviedo is a smaller stained cloth kept in the Cámara Santa of Oviedo Cathedral and held by many to be the face-cloth of John 20:7. Both have generated a very large technical literature—radiocarbon dating and the challenges to it, textile analysis, pollen, image formation, bloodstain pattern analysis, provenance history, and the correspondence claimed between the two cloths.

They are outside this study for a reason of method rather than of judgment. This is an exegetical study of a passage: what its words mean, what its evangelists claim, and how its readers have argued about it. The authenticity of a surviving relic is a question of a different kind, decided by different evidence, and it cannot be treated responsibly in a subsection. Nothing here should be read as supporting or opposing the authenticity of either cloth. No claim in this study depends on the existence, the provenance, or the non-existence of any physical relic, and no argument here is strengthened or weakened by any finding about them.

One narrower point does belong here, because it is exegetical. The word *soudarion* at Jn 20:7 identifies a cloth by function—a sweat-cloth, used at the head—and not by dimension, weave, or provenance. Nothing in the Greek or the Latin licenses an inference from the word to the size or construction of any object. A reader who wishes to pursue the relics should do so in the literature that examines them, and should not expect this verse to settle anything about them either way.

10.2 The historicity of the Resurrection

This study takes no position on whether the tomb was empty, and offers no argument for or against the Resurrection. That is not evasion; it is the consequence of the question asked. The claim under test is a claim about what two first-century texts assert concerning one man's state of mind. Assessing it requires reading those texts, and reading them is not the same thing as adjudicating what they report.

Chrysostom's anti-theft argument is examined in section 6 as an argument—for its structure, its premises, and its limits—because it is part of the reception of this passage and because it is one of the two proposed answers to the question of why the arrangement mattered. Reporting that it has three sound steps and three real limits is not an endorsement of its conclusion, and the reader should not take it as one. An apologetic argument can be well made and still not decide the question it addresses.

10.3 Matters of fact this study leaves open

Four questions arose during the work that are genuinely unsettled and that this study does not pretend to close.

The shape of the burial wrappings. Whether *othonia* means strips, bandages, or linens in general, and how the Johannine plural relates to the Synoptic *sindōn* in the singular, cannot be settled from the New Testament's five occurrences of the word. Confident reconstructions of the burial exist in the literature; none of them is required by the lexical evidence.

The text of Luke 24:12. Westcott and Hort excluded the verse; modern editions print it. This study uses it, records the doubt, and rests no conclusion on it alone.

Whether the collapsed-cloths reading is right. Latham's proposal that the cloths lay flat where the body had been, and Westcott's later acceptance of its substance, are a coherent account that explains the one contrast the verse draws. They are also inferences from a description that does not contain them. This study reports both the case and its speculative character.

The numbering of Bede's homilies. The negative result stated in section 7—that no homily in Migne's Bede corpus expounds Jn 20:1–10—is a statement about Migne's arrangement. The modern Corpus Christianorum numbering differs and could not be verified for this study. A reader with access to a printed Corpus Christianorum volume can close this in a minute; this study could not.

Notes

¹Westcott and Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Introduction, Appendix* (Cambridge and London: Macmillan, 1882), Appendix, “Notes on Select Readings,” p. 71. The bracketed Greek is given here in transliteration; the sigla are the editors’ own. Their *Marcion* and *Eusebius* citations are reported, not independently checked.

²The apparatus note in the registered edition reads {NA *keimena* > -}: the Nestle–Aland text lacks the participle that the Byzantine text has. An apparatus recording a word-level divergence within a verse is evidence that both editions print the verse. This is an inference from the registered artifact, not a collation of Nestle–Aland, which was not consulted.

³Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti*, corrected edition (New York, Cincinnati, Chicago: American Book Company), s.v. *othonion*, p. 439. The title page carries no date; the Internet Archive record of the copy consulted dates it 1889.

⁴Thayer, s.v. *soudarion*, p. 581.

⁵Thayer, s.v. *entyliō*, p. 219. Greek transliterated; the lexicon’s abbreviations for the Gospel of Nicodemus, Aristophanes, and Athenaeus are reproduced as printed and were not independently checked at those loci.

⁶Henry Latham, *The Risen Master: A Sequel to Pastor Pastorum*, sixth thousand (Cambridge: Deighton Bell and Co.; London: George Bell and Sons, 1905), p. 43. Greek transliterated.

⁷Latham, *The Risen Master*, p. 45.

⁸B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction and Notes*, vol. 2 (London: John Murray, 1908), p. 341, marginal English and note.

⁹Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John*, vol. 2, pp. 339–340.

¹⁰Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus* CXX.9; English from John Gibb and James Innes’s translation in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first series, vol. 7 (New York: Christian Literature Co.), p. 436, read in the printed volume. The Latin, checked in a dated web state of the Latin text, runs: “Hic nonnulli parum attendentes, putant hoc Ioannem credidisse, quod Iesus resurrexit; sed quod sequitur, hoc non indicat . . . Quid ergo vidit? quid credidit? Vidit scilicet inane monumentum, et credidit quod dixerat mulier, eum de monumento esse sublatum.”

¹¹Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John*, Homily LXXXV.4; *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first series, vol. 14 (New York: Christian Literature Co.), pp. 320–321, read in the printed volume.

¹²Chrysostom, Homily LXXXVI.1, on Jn 20:10–11; NPNF, first series, vol. 14, p. 323, read in the printed volume.

¹³Chrysostom, Homily LXXXVII, on Jn 20:24–29; NPNF, first series, vol. 14, p. 327, read in the printed volume.

¹⁴Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John*, vol. 2, p. 340.

¹⁵Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John*, Homily LXXXV.4, on Jn 19:38–20:10; NPNF, first series, vol. 14, pp. 320–321, read in the printed volume. The homily’s own scriptural heading is Jn 19:16–18; the exposition runs to the end of the tomb scene.

¹⁶Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John*, vol. 2, p. 340, note on *chōr. entetyl. eis hena top.*

¹⁷Latham, *The Risen Master*, p. 34.

¹⁸Arthur Westcott’s editorial footnotes at B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John*, vol. 2, p. 339.

¹⁹Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel according to S. John*, book 12, on Jn 20:1–9; T. Randell’s translation in the Library of Fathers, vols. 43 and 48 (Oxford, 1874 and 1885), at the printed page marked |651 in the online transcription read on 25 July 2026 at tertullian.org (Cyril on John, book 12). Read in an electronic transcription of the printed translation, not in the printed volume; this ceiling is recorded.

²⁰Established by searching the complete Latin of book X in the Corpus Corporum transcription of Migne’s text, read 25 July 2026 at la.wikisource.org (Corpus Corporum, *Expositio*. . . book X); counts are of a transcription, not of a page image, and an editorial or transcription omission cannot be excluded. The text was checked for the transcription corruption known to affect some files on that site and was clean.

²¹Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* X.179: “Tot igitur adducti virtutis exemplis Petrum credimus non potuisse dubitare. Joannem quoque credidisse manifestum est (Joan. XX, 8), cum Salvatorem videret: qui jam tunc credidit, posteaquam vacuum corporis vidit sepulcrum.” English rendering supplied here is labelled a working translation of the Latin quoted, not a published translation.

²²Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Evangelia* XXII.3–4, on Jn 20:1–9; Latin read 25 July 2026 in the Corpus Corporum transcription of Migne’s text at la.wikisource.org (Corpus Corporum, homily XXII), checked clean of the transcription corruption affecting some files on that site. The English here is a labelled working translation of the Latin quoted.

²³Gregory, *Homiliae in Evangelia* XXII.5, same source; working translation.

²⁴This is a statement about the arrangement of the homilies in Migne’s *Patrologia Latina* 94. The modern *Corpus Christianorum* numbering of Bede’s homilies differs from Migne’s, and it could not be verified for this study; the negative is therefore stated of Migne’s corpus only. This limit is recorded rather than smoothed over. The finding was made by a delegated researcher and is reported at a checked-transcription ceiling.

²⁵Bede, *In Lucae evangelium expositio* VI, on Lk 24:12; Latin read 25 July 2026 in the *Corpus Corporum* transcription of Migne’s text (PL 92, col. 625A–B, the column markers embedded in the transcription) at la.wikisource.org (*Corpus Corporum*). Working translation. No page image of this column was reachable; the ceiling is recorded.

²⁶Theophylact, *Enarratio in Evangelium Ioannis*, on Jn 20; Migne’s facing Latin column, *Patrologia Graeca* 124, cols. 289–290, read 25 July 2026 in the Internet Archive’s OCR of the Migne volume. The Latin quoted here is Migne’s Latin translation, not Theophylact’s Greek; the OCR carries visible errors, and the wording is reported at an OCR ceiling. The Greek column was not independently collated by this study.

²⁷Theophylact, same locus, Migne PG 124, cols. 291–292: “*Vidit sepulcralia separatim posita, ac credidit: non quod surrexisset Dominus, sed quod furto ablati esset. Credidit enim Mariae dicenti, Sustulerunt Dominum.*” Working translation of Migne’s Latin, at the OCR ceiling stated above.

²⁸Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis lectura*, cap. 20, lect. 1, section 87552 in the Busa–Alarcón text; Latin read 25 July 2026 at corpusthomisticum.org/cih20.html. Working translations of the Latin quoted.

²⁹Jerome, *De viris illustribus* 2; Ernest Cushing Richardson’s public-domain translation in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, second series, vol. 3, read 25 July 2026 at newadvent.org/fathers/2708.htm.

³⁰Gospel of Peter, Akhmim fragment; read 25 July 2026 in M. R. James’s public-domain 1924 translation at earlychristianwritings.com. Reported at the ceiling of a single English translation consulted online; no Greek was collated. The finding was made by a delegated researcher.

³¹Reader’s question printed at the head of “Christ’s Linen Napkin (John 20:7): Is it significant that the napkin . . . was found in the empty tomb folded?”, *JerusalemPerspective.com*, first published 7 October 2006, read on 25 July 2026 in the Internet Archive capture of 7 March 2013 at web.archive.org (capture 20130307140747 of jerusalemerspective.com/3878/). The live page was unreachable at that date. The publication date is the site’s own metadata field, and the earliest capture postdates it by six years; this limit is recorded.

³²Mishnah Berakhot 8:3, Hebrew, Torat Emet 357 text, license recorded as public domain, retrieved through the Sefaria text API on 25 July 2026. Hebrew is transliterated here because this document carries no Hebrew face; the transliteration is not a translation.

³³Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 52b; A. Cohen, *Tractate Berakot*, Cambridge University Press, 1921, retrieved through the Sefaria text API on 25 July 2026, version license recorded there as public domain.

³⁴Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 42a; Cohen, *Tractate Berakot* (1921), via the Sefaria text API, 25 July 2026.

³⁵Mishnah Sanhedrin 6:1, Sefaria Community Translation, license recorded as CC0, retrieved 25 July 2026. The Hebrew, in the public-domain Torat Emet text, reads *ehad omed al petah beth din veba-sudarin beyado . . . hallaz meniph ba-sudarin veba-sus rats u-ma’amido*.

³⁶William Smith, ed., *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (1875), s.v. “Mantele,” read on 25 July 2026 at the LacusCurtius transcription, penelope.uchicago.edu. Read in an electronic transcription of the printing, not in a printed volume; that ceiling is recorded.

³⁷Suetonius, *Nero* 22.2; J. C. Rolfe’s public-domain Loeb translation, read on 25 July 2026 at the LacusCurtius transcription, penelope.uchicago.edu.

³⁸John Lightfoot, *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae: Hebrew and Talmudical Exercitations upon the Gospels*, ed. Robert Gandell (Oxford: University Press, 1859), vol. 3, the John exercitations, chapter XX; the note on Jn 11:44 is at vol. 3. Full text of all four volumes retrieved from the Internet Archive and searched on 25 July 2026. This is an OCR search of a scanned text; an OCR miss cannot be excluded, but the chapter’s own sequence of verse lemmata was read directly and contains no verse 7.

³⁹David Bivin’s response at *JerusalemPerspective.com*, as cited above. Quoted in short clauses with attribution; the page is under present copyright and is not reproduced beyond the argument’s need.

A Scope, Method, and Qualifications

A.1 Reader, question, and claim boundary

This is a close exegetical study of one passage—John 20:3–10, with Luke 24:12—for a reader who wants to know what the text says and what can honestly be built on it. No Greek, Latin, or Hebrew is presupposed; every word discussed is transliterated, glossed from a named lexicon, and traced through its other occurrences.

Its governing question is a claim, not a thesis: that St. Peter knew Jesus had risen because he noticed how the burial cloths were left. The study tests that claim, and reaches a divided verdict, stated in full in section 9—the observation is Peter’s on the Fourth Gospel’s own showing; the inference is attributed by John to the other disciple and by Luke to nobody.

Two subsidiary questions follow from it and are worked to the same standard: whether the ancient argument that the arrangement tells against grave-robbery is sound, and whether the modern claim that a folded napkin was a Jewish master-and-servant signal has any attestation. The second is answered in the negative, with the search described.

The study does not argue for or against the Resurrection, does not assess any relic, and does not adjudicate the historicity of the empty tomb. Section 10 states those boundaries and the four questions of fact left open.

A.2 Terminology fixed for this study

- **The claim under test** means the sentence quoted at the head of section 1, in the maintainer’s own words. It is treated as an object of examination throughout and is nowhere assumed.
- **The other disciple** is used throughout for the figure John calls *ho allos mathētēs*. The traditional identification with John son of Zebedee is not required by any argument here and is not assumed; where a source makes it, the source’s language is preserved.
- **Gloss** marks an explanation of a word’s range from a named lexical authority or from its occurrences. It is never a translation of Scripture. No translation of Scripture has been composed for this study.
- **Working translation** marks an English rendering of a Latin or Greek clause supplied by this study where no public-domain published translation of that clause was consulted. Every such rendering is labelled at its own place; none is offered for recitation or as a version of Scripture.
- **Transliteration** is mechanical and is not a translation. Greek long vowels are marked $\bar{e}$ and $\bar{o}$; chi is *ch*; upsilon is *y* outside diphthongs. Hebrew and Aramaic are transliterated without scholarly diacritics because this document carries no Hebrew face.
- **Material negative result** means a case in which a witness that had the occasion to make an argument, and would be expected to make it, does not. Such results are reported as findings.

A.3 Source hierarchy and evidence classes

The governing texts are the Greek New Testament, the Latin Vulgate, and the English Douay–Rheims, in that order of authority for the wording and in the reverse order of accessibility for the reader.

Greek. Robinson and Pierpont’s Byzantine Textform (2018) in the registered electronic edition of the byztxt CSV files. This is one textual tradition, not a critical eclectic text. Where its apparatus records a Nestle–Aland divergence at a verse used here, the divergence is stated. No Nestle–Aland or United Bible Societies edition was collated; where the modern critical text is mentioned, the statement rests on what the registered apparatus records and is labelled as such.

Latin. The Clementine Vulgate in Michael Hetzenauer’s 1914 Pustet printing, read from the registered page images of SacredBible’s photographed copy. Five passages were read on the page and transcribed: Jn 20:3–10, Jn 19:39–40, Jn 11:44, Lk 23:53, Lk 24:12. Hetzenauer’s editorial marginal summaries, section headings, and cross-reference letters are that edition’s apparatus and are identified as such wherever quoted.

English Scripture. The public-domain Douay–Rheims in the Challoner revision, from the registered electronic edition, in Vulgate numbering throughout. The Authorized Version is quoted twice, from the Project Gutenberg text, solely to establish what English Bibles say at Jn 20:7; it carries no authority in this study.

Lexical. Joseph Henry Thayer’s revision of Grimm’s *Clavis Novi Testamenti* (corrected edition, American Book Company), cited by headword and page and read at those pages in a facsimile. It is a nineteenth-century lexicon used as an identified working authority. No modern lexicon (Bauer–Danker–Arndt, Liddell–Scott–Jones in a current edition, or the *Diccionario Griego-Español*) was collated; where a delegated search reported their readings, the readings were not relied on for any claim in the text.

Patristic and medieval. Read at their own loci, never through a later author’s quotation, with one labelled exception: the *Catena aurea* is by its nature a quotation collection and is identified as such. Chrysostom and Augustine were read in page images of the printed Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers volumes. Augustine’s Latin, Gregory’s Latin, Bede’s Latin, and Ambrose’s Latin were read in electronic transcriptions of Migne with the transcription ceiling recorded at each place. Cyril was read in an electronic transcription of the Library of Fathers translation. Theophylact was read in the Internet Archive’s OCR of Migne’s facing Latin column, and is reported at an OCR ceiling; his Greek was not collated by this study. Aquinas’s *Lectura* was read in the Busa–Alarcón Latin at the Corpus Thomisticum.

Rabbinic. Searched and read through Sefaria’s public text and search interfaces. Quotations are taken only from versions whose recorded licence permits it: the public-domain Torat Emet Hebrew, A. Cohen’s public-domain 1921 Cambridge *Tractate Berakot*, and the CC0 Sefaria Community Translation. The William Davidson English is CC BY-NC and is not quoted anywhere in this study.

Modern secondary. Westcott’s commentary, Latham’s *Risen Master*, Westcott and Hort’s Appendix, Smith’s *Dictionary*, Lightfoot’s *Horae*, and Suetonius in Rolfe’s Loeb are all public-domain works read directly. Present-day web pages—*Jerusalem Perspective*, TruthOrFiction, GotQuestions, and one 2007 mailing-list archive—are used as dated evidence of what the modern claim says and when it circulated, quoted in short clauses with attribution, and are under their own rights.

A.4 Method, and the use of delegated research

Research proceeded claim by claim. Each consequential statement in the text was traced to a witness read for this study; where a witness could not be reached, a ceiling is recorded rather than a substitute cited.

Part of the search work was delegated to assisting research processes, and this should be visible rather than hidden. The findings so obtained were treated as leads, and every finding relied on in the argument was independently re-checked at its own source before use: the Mishnah and Talmud passages were re-retrieved and the Sefaria phrase searches re-run for this study; the *Jerusalem Perspective* page, the TruthOrFiction and GotQuestions pages, the 2007 mailing-list archive, Smith’s *Mantele* article, Suetonius, Cyril, Gregory, Ambrose, Bede on Luke, Theophylact’s Latin column, Aquinas’s *Lectura*, Jerome, and Lightfoot’s four volumes were all fetched and read directly. Three findings are reported at an explicitly delegated ceiling and are marked at their own places: the absence of the stem *sudari-* in Migne’s Bede homiliary, the reading of the *Gospel of Peter* in M. R. James’s translation, and the reported treatments in modern copyrighted Johannine commentaries, which are not relied on for any claim.

Negative results were sought deliberately and are reported with their boundaries. A phrase search cannot exclude a synonym, an unindexed work, a paraphrase, or a language not searched, and the sections that report negatives say so at the point of reporting.

A.5 Material qualifications

1. The judgment reached in section 9 is a judgment about what two first-century texts attribute to a named man. It is not a judgment about Peter’s faith, his standing, or his subsequent testimony, all of which are outside this study.
2. Chrysostom’s and Cyril’s collective reading of Jn 20:8 is a genuine patristic position held by Fathers of the first rank; the study’s disagreement with it is exegetical and is argued, not asserted, and their position is stated at full strength in the synthesis before it is answered.

3. Augustine’s minimizing reading is not adopted outright. It is reported as defensible, its two costs are stated, and the study does not decide between it and the intermediate readings.
4. The transliteration of *entetyligmenon* as “wrapped” or “rolled” rests on Thayer, on the word’s other New Testament occurrences, and on the Vulgate’s choice of *involutum*; Latham, a partisan of the arrangement argument, is quoted making the same point against interest. The claim is that “folded” is not what the word says, not that no cloth in the tomb could have been folded.
5. *Eis hena topon* is left undecided among three readings; no argument in the study depends on the choice.
6. Luke 24:12’s textual standing is disputed and the dispute is recorded. No conclusion rests on that verse alone.
7. The Latin quoted from Hetzenauer 1914 is that printing’s text; other Clementine printings may differ in accidentals, and this study collated none.
8. The rabbinic negative is bounded by the indexed corpus, the English phrasings tried, and the date of the search (25 July 2026). It is stated as a bounded and correctable negative in the synthesis block that reports it, together with the strongest argument against it and the finding that would overturn it.
9. The reconstruction of the modern claim’s origins is bounded by what could be reached. Google Books, HathiTrust, and the Usenet archives were unavailable during this research; pre-2006 print circulation could not be checked. The *Jerusalem Perspective* publication date is that site’s own metadata field, and the earliest Internet Archive capture of the page postdates it by six years.
10. Quotations from present-day web pages and from David Bivin’s response are brief, attributed, and used as evidence of what was said and when; they are not offered under this project’s licence.
11. The English renderings of Latin from Ambrose, Gregory, Bede, Theophylact, and Aquinas are this study’s labelled working translations of the clauses quoted. They are not offered as published translations and are not for recitation. Where a public-domain published English translation exists and was read—Chrysostom, Augustine, Cyril, Jerome—it is used instead and identified.
12. Every claim about what the tradition does *not* say is a claim about the witnesses named in section 7, at the loci named there. It is not a claim about the whole of patristic literature.

A.6 Coverage, currentness, rights, and review

No liturgical rite, calendar, jurisdiction, or mutable discipline governs any conclusion here, and no canonical or legal claim is made. All online witnesses were consulted on 25 July 2026; the two Vulgate page images newly registered for this study were retrieved the same day, and the earlier page images of that edition already in the repository were retrieved on 23 July 2026.

Scripture, patristic translations, third-party transcriptions, lexicon text, and the rabbinic translations retain their own rights status and are not offered under this project’s licence. The public-domain basis of each quoted witness is recorded with its source record. The Sefaria William Davidson English is CC BY-NC and is quoted nowhere.

This is an internally source-audited working study produced by an AI-assisted process. It has received no independent exegetical, patristic, rabbinic, text-critical, or ecclesiastical review, and it claims no ecclesiastical approval. It is a study aid, not a commentary of record.

B References

Scripture

- **Greek.** *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform*, ed. Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont (2018), in the byztxt Unicode CSV form of Robinson’s CCAT files with variant apparatus, repository state 27a45ff1b7be6c17ccbfeac414f3f55732ae8e28. Verses used: Jn 11:44; 19:38–42; 20:1–18; Lk 19:20; 23:53; 24:1–14, 41; Mt 27:59–60; Acts 10:11; 11:5; 19:12. Registered in the repository source library; artifacts for John, Luke, Matthew and Acts consulted directly.

- **Latin.** *Biblia Sacra Vulgatae Editionis*, ed. Michael Hetzenauer, O.F.M. Cap. (Ratisbon, Rome, New York and Cincinnati: Friedrich Pustet, 1914). Jn 20:3–10 and Jn 19:39–40 read on numbered scan pages 1063 and 1062; Jn 11:44 on 1054; Lk 23:53 and 24:12 on 1038. Page images from SacredBible’s photographed copy, sacredbible.org, retrieved 25 July 2026 and registered in the repository source library. The site’s technical record states that its images and files are in the public domain.
- **English.** *The Holy Bible, Douay–Rheims*, Challoner revision, in the Project Gutenberg electronic edition (eBook 1581), registered in the repository source library. Verse numbering is the Vulgate numbering throughout. The translation is an identified working witness, not a critical edition.
- **Authorized Version**, quoted only at Jn 20:7 to establish the English wording “wrapped together in a place by itself”; Project Gutenberg eBook 10, consulted 25 July 2026.

Lexical authority

- Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti*, corrected edition (New York, Cincinnati, Chicago: American Book Company; title page undated, Internet Archive record dated 1889), s.v. *entyllissō* (p. 219), *othonion* (p. 439), *soudarion* (p. 581). Read at those pages in the Internet Archive facsimile of the copy digitized as `greekenglishlex00grim`.

Textual criticism

- B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Introduction, Appendix* (Cambridge and London: Macmillan, 1882), Appendix, “Notes on Select Readings,” p. 71, on Luke xxiv 12. Read in the Internet Archive facsimile `newtestamentinor82west`.

Patristic and medieval witnesses

- St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John*, Homily LXXXV.4 (the argument against theft, and “from this they believed in the Resurrection”), Homily LXXXVI.1 (p. 323), Homily LXXXVII (p. 327); English by Charles Marriott in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first series, vol. 14 (New York: Christian Literature Co.), pp. 320–321, 323, 327. Read in the Internet Archive facsimile `selectlibraryofn14auguoft`. The Greek of PG 59 was not reached.
- St. Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* X.136, 152, 179; Latin read in the Corpus Corporum transcription of Migne at la.wikisource.org, 25 July 2026. Book X has no lemma on Lk 24:12; this material negative was established by inspecting the book’s own sequence of verse headings and by counting the stems *lnteam-*, *sudari-* and *cucurr-*, none of which occurs.
- St. Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus* CXX.8–9; English by John Gibb and James Innes in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first series, vol. 7 (New York: Christian Literature Co.), p. 436, read in the Internet Archive facsimile `selectlibraryofn07auguoft`; Latin read at `augustinus.it`, 25 July 2026, a dated web state.
- St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel according to S. John*, book 12, on Jn 20:1–9 and 20:10–11; English by T. Randell, Library of Fathers vols. 43 and 48 (Oxford, 1874 and 1885), read in the transcription at `tertullian.org`, 25 July 2026, at the pages marked |650–651. Not read in the printed volume.
- St. Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Evangelia* XXII.2–5, preached in the Lateran basilica on the Saturday after Easter on Jn 20:1–9; Latin read in the Corpus Corporum transcription of Migne at la.wikisource.org, 25 July 2026. English renderings in the text are labelled working translations.
- St. Bede, *In Lucae evangelium expositio* VI, on Lk 23:53 and Lk 24:12 (PL 92, cols. 621B and 625A–B); Latin read in the Corpus Corporum transcription of Migne at la.wikisource.org, 25 July 2026, with Migne column markers embedded in the transcription. No page image of these columns was reachable. The related negative result about Migne’s Bede homiliary is reported at a delegated ceiling in section 7.
- Theophylact of Ohrid, *Enarratio in Evangelium Ioannis*, on Jn 20 (PG 124, cols. 289–292), and *Enarratio in Evangelium Lucae*, on Lk 24 (PG 123); Migne’s facing Latin column read in the Internet Archive OCR of the Patrologia Graeca volume 124, the item whose identifier ends `patrologiae-cursus-completus-1864_124`. Reported at an OCR ceiling; the Greek column was not collated. The modern English translation is under copyright and was not consulted.
- St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis lectura*, cap. 20, lect. 1 (Busa–Alarcón section 87552); Latin read at `corpusthomisticum.org`, 25 July 2026. The *Catena aurea* on Jn 20:1–10 is identified in the text as a quotation collection.
- St. Jerome, *De viris illustribus* 2, on the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*; Ernest Cushing Richardson’s public-domain translation in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, second series, vol. 3, read at `newadvent.org`, 25 July 2026.
- *Gospel of Peter*, Akhmim fragment, VI.24 and XIII.55–57; M. R. James’s public-domain 1924 translation, read at `earlychristian-writings.com`. A delegated reading, reported at that ceiling; no Greek was collated.

Rabbinic and Second Temple sources

- Mishnah Berakhot 8:1–8, Hebrew, Torat Emet 357 text, licence recorded as public domain; retrieved through the Sefaria text API, 25 July 2026.
- Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 42a and 52b; A. Cohen, *Tractate Berakot* (Cambridge University Press, 1921), licence recorded as public domain; retrieved through the Sefaria text API, 25 July 2026.

- Mishnah Sanhedrin 6:1, Hebrew (Torat Emet 357, public domain) and English (Sefaria Community Translation, CC0); retrieved 25 July 2026. The *sudarin* waved to halt an execution.
- Sefaria phrase searches over the indexed corpus, 25 July 2026, reported with their totals and boundaries in section 8.
- John Lightfoot, *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae: Hebrew and Talmudical Exercitations upon the Gospels*, ed. Robert Gandell (Oxford: University Press, 1859), 4 vols.; full text of all four volumes retrieved from the Internet Archive and searched 25 July 2026. Two occurrences of “napkin” in the whole work, both at Jn 11:44; no note on Jn 20:7.

Greco-Roman dining

- William Smith, ed., *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (1875), s.v. “Mantele”; read 25 July 2026 at the LacusCurtius transcription, penelope.uchicago.edu.
- Suetonius, *Nero* 22.2; J. C. Rolfe’s public-domain Loeb translation, read 25 July 2026 at the LacusCurtius transcription.

Modern discussion of the passage

- B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction and Notes*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1908), vol. 2, pp. 339–341, with the editorial footnotes of Arthur Westcott recording his father’s marginal notes and a private letter. Read in the Internet Archive facsimile [gospelaccordingto2west](#).
- Henry Latham, *The Risen Master: A Sequel to Pastor Pastorum*, sixth thousand (Cambridge: Deighton Bell and Co.; London: George Bell and Sons, 1905), ch. 2–3, especially pp. 34–38 and 43–45. Latham credits the central idea to a pamphlet by the Rev. Arthur Beard of St John’s College, Cambridge, which was not located. Read in the Internet Archive facsimile [risenmaster01lath](#).

The modern folded-napkin claim: dated witnesses

- “Christ’s Linen Napkin (John 20:7)...”, *JerusalemPerspective.com*, site metadata date 7 October 2006, with the reader’s question quoting the claim and David Bivin’s response. Read 25 July 2026 in the Internet Archive capture of 7 March 2013; the live page was unreachable.
- “[RecipesAndMore] Fwd: Interesting viewpoint!”, mailing-list message of 21 May 2007, carrying the standard wording; read 25 July 2026 at [mail-archive.com](#). The scriptural text quoted within the email is from a modern copyrighted version reading “folded up”; it is described, not reproduced.
- “The meaning of the folded napkin in Jesus’ tomb—Fiction!”, TruthOrFiction, assessment dated 28 January 2008, page consulted 25 July 2026. Source of the widely copied “originated in 2007” estimate.
- “What is the significance of the folded napkin in Christ’s tomb after the resurrection?”, GotQuestions.org, page consulted 25 July 2026.

These four are cited as dated evidence of what the claim says and when it circulated. They are under their own rights and are quoted only in short attributed clauses.

Not reached

- The Greek of Chrysostom’s homilies in *Patrologia Graeca* 59.
- The Corpus Christianorum numbering and contents of Bede’s homilies.
- Modern copyrighted Johannine commentaries (Brown, Barrett, Bultmann, Keener, Beasley-Murray) and the two specialist articles on this verse by W. E. Reiser and B. Osborne, *Heythrop Journal* 14 (1973). None is relied on for any claim in this study.
- Google Books, HathiTrust and the Usenet archives, which were unavailable during the research and would have been the route to any pre-2006 print circulation of the folded-napkin claim.
- The Rev. Arthur Beard’s pamphlet, Latham’s acknowledged source.

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