

Speculation about data manipulation – were the systems hacked?

Beyond the methodological and organizational problems already discussed, there is another particularly explosive hypothesis: that it was not the cloth sample itself that had been manipulated, but rather the dating devices or their computer systems. This theory is mainly advocated by Stephen E. Jones, an Australian computer scientist and long-time Shroud researcher.”¹

Jones argues that the published radiocarbon data from 1988 do not resemble genuine independent measurements and were not fully presented in the final paper. What he finds especially striking is that the results from all three laboratories clustered precisely around the period in which the Shroud first appears historically — the 14th century. To Jones, this looks less like a natural measurement outcome and more like a dataset deliberately steered into that time range. He also points to the unusually large discrepancies between the laboratories, which are statistically difficult to explain if all measurements were truly based on the same source material.

From this, Jones developed the theory that the AMS systems themselves may have been deliberately manipulated. All three laboratories were using nearly identical computer-controlled systems at the time. According to his hypothesis, a hacker program could have identified the sample codes of the Shroud specimens and replaced the actual measurements with artificially generated numbers.

Further speculation was fueled by the mysterious death of Timothy W. Linick, a software specialist at the Tucson laboratory and co-author of the later Nature paper. Linick was found dead in 1989 at the age of 42; officially, his death was ruled a suicide. Critics, however,

¹ <https://theshroudofturin.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2025-05-14T22:30:00%2B08:00&max-results=7&start=3&by-date=false>

pointed to details in the autopsy report that raised doubts about the official account.²

Jones places these events within the broader context of early hacker activities in the 1980s. He refers to the West German hacker group around Karl Koch, which is known to have sold data to Soviet intelligence contacts. Koch himself was found dead shortly before Linick; the circumstances of his death were never fully clarified. The case at least demonstrates that Western computer systems were already targets of professional espionage and manipulation attempts at that time. However, there is no concrete evidence linking Koch and Linick.

Nevertheless, Jones considers it conceivable that Soviet authorities may have had an interest in a medieval dating result. Within the officially atheistic ideology of the Soviet Union, religion was regarded as an outdated relic of the past. Scientific evidence suggesting that the Shroud might genuinely date back to the time of Jesus would hardly have fit this worldview. Still, no concrete proof of such interference exists, and the theory remains speculative.

What is undisputed, however, is that the published measurements from the three laboratories differed far more than would normally be expected from tests performed on the same sample. Critics regard these discrepancies as statistically unusual and difficult to reconcile with a homogeneous piece of cloth. The hacker theory offers one possible — though unproven — explanation for this anomaly. It could also be tested relatively easily: apparently, an unused portion of the original Tucson sample still exists. If it were dated again today under fully transparent conditions, it could reveal whether the original results are reproducible.

² <https://theshroudofturin.blogspot.com/2021/02/evidence-in-timothy-linicks-autopsy.html#1> [Jan 9, 2025]

In this context, a later statement by Cardinal Anastasio Ballestrero is noteworthy. As Archbishop of Turin, he was the Church's principal authority overseeing the C14 project and declared after the publication of the 1988 results that it had now been proven that the Shroud originated in the Middle Ages and therefore could not be the burial cloth of Jesus.

Nine years later, however, he spoke much more cautiously. The Shroud, he said, might in fact have been authentic after all; the dating process had simply "not been carried out carefully enough." In an interview, when asked whether Freemasons had been involved in producing the false result, he replied: "Without a doubt!"