

John 20:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.

Analysis

And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. John records this specific detail about the grave clothes found in Jesus's empty tomb. The Greek word for "napkin" (soudarion, σουδάριον) refers to a face cloth or head covering used in Jewish burial customs to bind the jaw shut and cover the face. The linen clothes (othonia, ὀθόνια) were long strips used to wrap the body with spices (John 19:40).

The significance lies in the careful arrangement: the head cloth was "wrapped together" (entetuligmenon, ἐντετυλιγμένον—rolled up or folded) and placed separately from the body wrappings. This detail refutes the theft theory—grave robbers wouldn't waste time carefully arranging burial cloths. The orderly scene suggests Jesus's body passed through the wrappings without disturbing them, leaving the collapsed grave clothes in position while the head cloth remained in its original location, still wrapped but now empty.

Theologically, this detail demonstrates John's eyewitness testimony—he remembers specific visual details from that transformative morning. The careful arrangement reflects Jesus's sovereignty even in resurrection; this wasn't a frantic escape but a deliberate, ordered departure. Some interpreters see symbolic significance: removing the head covering symbolizes death's defeat, as death could no longer veil Christ's face. The empty, arranged grave clothes testify that Jesus conquered death, rose bodily, and left evidence convincing eyewitnesses of

resurrection reality. This small detail carries apologetic weight, supporting resurrection historicity through circumstantial evidence.

Historical Context

John's Gospel records events of Sunday morning, the first day of the week following Jesus's Friday crucifixion and Saturday Sabbath rest (John 20:1). Jewish burial customs involved washing the body, anointing with spices (myrrh, aloes), wrapping in linen strips, and covering the face with a separate cloth. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had performed hasty burial preparations before Sabbath began (John 19:38-42), placing Jesus in a new tomb carved from rock.

Archaeological discoveries of first-century Jewish tombs in Jerusalem confirm burial practices described in the Gospels: stone-cut chambers with benches for body preparation, rolling stones sealing entrances, and ossuaries for secondary burial. The Turin Shroud, while controversial regarding authenticity, demonstrates ancient burial cloth patterns consistent with Gospel accounts. Roman guards had sealed and secured the tomb (Matthew 27:62-66), making the empty tomb and undisturbed grave clothes even more remarkable.

Early Christian apologetics emphasized resurrection eyewitness testimony, with 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 listing numerous witnesses. The empty tomb and grave clothes became foundational evidence for resurrection preaching. Jewish opponents never produced Jesus's body—instead claiming disciples stole it (Matthew 28:11-15), an explanation contradicted by the arranged grave clothes and disciples' transformation from fearful fugitives to bold martyrs. Church history records countless testimonies of transformed lives based on resurrection reality, flowing from the historical event John witnessed and carefully documented, including this small but significant detail of the folded face cloth.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How do small details in resurrection accounts strengthen confidence in the historical reliability of the Gospels?
2. What does the orderly arrangement of grave clothes reveal about Jesus's character and the nature of His resurrection?
3. How should the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus affect our understanding of Christian hope for our own resurrection?
4. In what ways does resurrection evidence address modern skepticism about Christianity's supernatural claims?
5. How can we effectively use historical evidence like the empty tomb and grave clothes in evangelistic conversations?

Interlinear Text

καὶ τὸ σουδάριον ὃ ἦν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ
And G3588 **the napkin** G3739 **that was** G2258 **about** G1909 **his head** G2776 G846
G2532 G4676

οὐ μετὰ τῶν ὀθονίων κείμενον ἀλλὰ χωρὶς
not G3756 **with** G3326 G3588 **the linen clothes** G3608 **lying** G2749 **but** G235 G5565

ἐντετυλιγμένον εἰς ἓνα τόπον
wrapped together G1794 **in** G1519 **by itself** G1520 **a place** G5117

Additional Cross-References

John 11:44 (Parallel theme): And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.