

# Luke the Evangelist

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While the four evangelists of the Bible, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, are well known, their final resting place is not exactly known.

Luke the Evangelist is largely thought to be the author of both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, the third and fifth books of the New Testament. According to historical records, Luke was born in Antioch, in the Roman province of Syria and died in Thebes (Greece) at the age of 84, around 150 A.D. His body was initially buried in Thebes. The body was subsequently transferred to Constantinople in 338 A.D., during the reign of emperor Constantius, and ultimately Padua, Italy, some time prior to 1177. With each exhumation or movement, there was a possibility of the body being substituted with one of local origin.

In 1998, a team opened the sarcophagus containing the alleged body of Luke in the attempt to characterize and determine if there was biological evidence indicating a Syrian origin. The skeleton in the coffin was of a male individual that demonstrated signs of osteoporosis and skeletal deformations. The team estimated the age of death at age 70 or more. Subsequently, two teeth were removed from the skeleton and analyzed using Ancient DNA methods. The DNA results were compared to that of modern Greek, Syrian and Anatolia populations.

Radiocarbon dating estimated the period of death between 72 and 416 A.D. The DNA results indicated that the body belonged to a Syrian rather than a Greek; however the likelihood of Syrian origin as compared to an origin in modern Turkey was only slightly greater. The results support a Syrian origin, but can not rule out a substitution in Constantinople.

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