

CORRESPONDENCE

Dr. John P. Jackson, Vice-President of STURP, has communicated to Spectrum his views on Dr. John Heller's recent book, *Report on the Shroud of Turin*.

The recent reviews of Dr. John Heller's book *Report on the Shroud of Turin*, in *Shroud Spectrum International* (#9, Dec. 1983) suggests that comments by STURP members are appropriate. I would like to preface my remarks by noting that this book is not in any way an official book of STURP, nor has STURP received any financial income whatsoever from it.

Generally, I think the book captures some of the excitement, problems and frustrations of the project. It is quite readable. I was particularly amused at the often humorous character studies, including my own, which Heller presents; I could find a ring of truth in each of his portrayals. His conclusion that the nature of the Shroud image remains a mystery but that it might be the burial Shroud of Jesus is in accord with my perception of the Shroud problem. I think the book accurately presents the generally unbiased, objective and multidisciplinary attitude that I have experienced in STURP.

However, there are some aspects which I think need critical review. First, the historically inclined reader should not look to this book as an accurately detailed, STURP-endorsed chronology of the project. Facts are sometimes convoluted, out of sequence, in error; and dates of many significant events are absent from the text. However, if the reader can be forgiving with respect to fine detail, the historical presentation is reasonably accurate.

There is one small portion of the book which does not represent my perceptions and feelings, and that is the discussion of the Turin Centro as highlighted in the following paragraph from page 90: "The American team had no idea of the political intrigue behind this cable, or any conception that many at the Centro were virulent anti-Americans ... Apparently the Centro's intention was to chop us off at the ankles, and one of the key architects of this policy was Dr. Baima." Although I cannot deny that within the Centro there was some opposition to STURP's examining the Shroud in 1978, I think it is a gross distortion to present the Centro, dedicated as it is to the enrichment of sindonology, as a group which would compromise serious investigations of the Shroud, an object of worldwide interest, on the grounds of national prejudice or even malice. I personally interpret the resistance of the Centro to STURP's 1978 testing as due to their unfamiliarity at that time with our group and their sense of responsibility not to allow the Shroud to become victim of a group whose own sense of

responsibility was as yet unknown. To me, in retrospect, such an attitude is understandable and does not merit the treatment provided to the Centro in *Report on the Shroud of Turin*. I do believe, however, that STURP has proven itself to be scientifically responsible by presenting its findings via the only recognized format for reporting scientific work, the peer-reviewed scientific journal. Thus, I would hope that if STURP ever has an opportunity to again examine the Shroud, that the Centro would be supportive and would collaborate in a spirit of collegiality.

Another small portion of the book about which I would like to comment concerns the cavalier dismissal of Wilson's book as a "fanciful collage". I presume this refers to Wilson's Shroud/Mandylion theory. Although I do not think that the Shroud/Mandylion hypothesis has been adequately demonstrated, I am also not convinced that it has been satisfactorily rejected by historical criticism which considers the "Mandylion object" as pure myth. (See my paper, "Foldmarks as a Historical Record of the Turin Shroud", *Spectrum*, June 1984). I think it is still possible that behind the mythical façade there is a genuine physical object; and it is conceivable, given what little we know about the Shroud's history, that the physical object could be what we now know as the Shroud of Turin. Thus, I am critical of Heller's attempt to dismiss a potentially important theory without providing the reader with at least the reasons for considering it a "fanciful collage"; this is not the method of proper scientific inquiry.

Although I have been critical of the book in certain areas, I do want to end my comments on a note of praise. Except for my caveats as expressed above, I will continue to recommend this book as a description of the activities surrounding the 1978 testings. I am proud of the scientific contributions which Dr. Heller has made to STURP and the Shroud, and I consider it a privilege to have been able to work with him.

JOHN JACKSON