

THE HEIGHT OF CHRIST

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The dimensions of the place where the body of the Lord was laid for burial, known as "*locus Dominici Corporis*";¹ the height attributed to Christ in the traditions of both the Oriental and Western Churches; and the height calculated by anthropometric observations made on the Holy Shroud; all agree on a height of 183 cm.

The dimensions of the Holy Sepulchre were given in ancient reports from the Holy Land; specifically the reports of Adamnano (Arculph) (c. 670); Venerable Bede (735); Aimone, Bishop of Halberstadt (840-853); the Russian Abbot Daniele (1106-1107); Burcardo di Monte Sion (1283); the Irish friar Simone (1322-1324);² Ludolfus di Sudheim, Rector of the parish church of Suchen (1336-1341); fra Niccolo da Poggibonsi (1347-1349);³ Giorgio Bucci (1384);⁴ Ignatius of Smolensk (1389-1405); the Archimandrite Grethenius (c. 1400); Mariano da Siena (1431);⁵ Louis de Rochechouart (1461);⁶ and Basil Posniakov (1558-1561).

The Oriental tradition on the height of Christ is based on the "measuring Cross" of Justinian (VI c.). The Emperor sent "capable and trustworthy" men to Jerusalem for the purpose of ascertaining the height of Christ; the cross was then made on the basis of the envoys' findings and erected in the sacristy of the church of Hagia Sophia, rebuilt (532-537) by Justinian.

According to Codice III of Pluteus XXV in the Laurentian Library, the cross was made "ad formam corporis Christi", *viz.*, exactly the dimensions which the form of the Lord presented.

Therefore one can conclude that the "experts" sent to Jerusalem by Justinian made their measurements on the Holy Shroud.

The tradition of the Oriental Church concerning the tall stature of Christ was collated and reckoned as "seven ample palms" by Nicephorus Callistus, in his *Storia Ecclesiastica*.

The same tradition is found in Nicolas Mesarites. In his inventory of the relics of the Passion conserved in St. Mary of the Beacon in Constantinople, Mesarites lists: "The Lord's soles, also called sandals, cut from leather and well-adapted to those beautiful divine feet; the length and the breadth of the soles extend to a palm of considerable length, palm of a man who has a long hand, but which reveals to us the proportion because the Lord also loved proportion and was averse to



The *mensura Christi* parchment of the XII century, in the Laurentian archives, Florence. The inscription says that twelve times this line (beneath figure) shows the measure of the Lord's body; and that the line was taken from the gold cross of Constantinople, made according to the image of the body.

disproportion (excesses)."⁷ From the size of the sandals, Mesarites deduced the stature of Christ.

The tradition of the Western Church on the height of Christ has been memorialized in the "*mensura Christi*" (183 cm) in the ambulatory of St. John in Lateran.

The Latin Apocrypha agree with this ancient monument; "homo quidem staturae proceris mediocris et spectabilis [moderately tall and imposing]; "in statura corporis rectus et propagatus";⁸ "vir est altae staturae"; "protracta statura corporis."

The medieval Latin mystical literature holds the same tradition of Christ's tall stature: "procera rigent brachia."

NOTES

1. The dimensions of the "locus Dominici Corporis" are not the same as those of the cave or grotto where the "locus Dominici Corporis" is located.

In the XV century, Giovanni di Paolo Rucellai (1403-1481) sent a ship to Palestine so that a trusted friend could go to Jerusalem to make a drawing and take the exact measurements of the chapel which housed the Lord's Sepulchre (locus Dominici Corporis). The noble Florentine commissioned Leon Battista Alberti to design a chapel similar to the one in Jerusalem, and in 1467 the "Tempietto del Santo Sepolcro" was constructed in the Church of San Pancrazio. [The chapel is on Via della Spada, near the Palazzo Rucellai. Ed.]

Rucellai's chapel "is 3 *braccia* wide, the length 4 and five-sixths, the height from the pavement to the center of the vault 4½ *braccia*."

Calculating from the Florentine *braccio* (0.5836 m), the interior measured 1.7508 m wide, 2.8204 m long, 2.6362 m high. The height of this chapel corresponds to that of the cave or grotto as given by ancient writers. Cfr. my *Ricerche sulla Santa Sindone*I, 9-10.

On the cornice of the Holy Sepulchre chapel of San Pancrazio is inscribed the Gospel text: *Yesvm qveritis Nazarenvm crvcifixvm. Svrrexit non est hic. Ecce locus vbi poservnt Evm.*

At the west door opening into the chapel (which is oriented according to the Jerusalem sepulchre), is this inscription: *Johannes Rvcellarivs Pavli fil. vt inde salvtem svam precaretvr vnde omnivm cvm Christo facta est resvrrectio sacellvm hoc ad instar Hyerosol. Sepvlcri facivmdvm cvravit MCCCCLXVII.*

GUISEPPE RICHA: *Notizie istoriche delle Chiese Fiorentine*, III, Firenze 1755.

LUIGI PASSERINI: *Genealogia e storia della Famiglia Rucellai*, Firenze 1861.

ARNALDO COCCHI: *Le Chiese di Firenze dal secolo IV al secolo XX*, Firenze 1903.

2. "Sepulchrum domini gloriosum, quod habet in longitudine tantum novem palmos." According to the Irish Minorite friar Simone, the Sepulchre of the Lord is 2.3535 m long. *Itinerarium fratrum Symonis Semeonis et Hugonis Illuminatoris Ordinis fratrum Minorurn professorurn ad Terrain Sanctarn S.D. 1322*. Edited by GIROLAMO GOLUBOVICH in *Biblioteca Bio-Bibliografica della Terra Santa*, III, 281, Firenze 1919.
3. "This is the size of the Sepulchre. It is VIII palms long, 3½ wide and 4 palms high." According to Niccolo da Poggibonsi, the Holy Sepulchre is 2.3535 m long, 0.9152 m wide, 1.046 m high. *Libro d'Oltramare di fra Niccola da Poggibonsi*, pub. by ALBERTO BACCHI DELLA LEGA, I, 66, Bologna 1881.
4. "And the sepulchre (of Christ) was there ... and it is about 1½ braccia high and about III braccia long." Since the pilgrim was Florentine, it is clear that he refers to the Florentine braccio. The sepulchre of the Lord, therefore, according to Gucci, was 0.8754 m high and 1.7509 m long. GIORGIO Gucci, *Viaggio ai Luoghi Santi*, 1862.
5. "The holy Sepulchre is at the right of the entrance, and it is of marble one braccio and a third high, wide one braccio and two-thirds, long 3 braccia and two-thirds." It is obvious to suppose that the Sienese pilgrim was using the Florentine braccio. According to the "Rector of St. Peters at Uvile, and Chaplain of the Crucifixion Chapel of the Cathedral of Siena," the Holy Sepulchre is 0.7781 m high, 0.9726 m wide, 2.1398 m long. *Del viaggio in Terra Santa fatto e descritto da Ser Mariano da Siena nel secolo XV*, Firenze 1822.
6. According to Louis de Rochechouart, the Holy Sepulchre is 7 feet and 3 palms long, 3½ ft. high: "verum sciendum (est) quod illa porcio sanctissimi loci, in qua jacuit corpus divinum Domini nostri Jesu Christi, vestita est hodie marmoreo tabulato, in modum unius sepulchri quadrati, cuius longitudo est septem pedum et trium palmarum. Altitudo autem trium pedum cum medio."

Since the French calculate the foot to be 0.324 m and the palm 0.2615 m., then the length of the Holy Sepulchre, according to the Bishop of Saintes, comes to 2.2940 m and the height 1.0360 m. In the length, which is the dimension of interest to us in relation to the Holy Shroud, Louis de Rochechouart comes closer than the others to Adamnano (Arculph) and Bede (2.2680 m.). *Journal de voyage de Louis de Rochechouart, eveque de Saintes*, in *Revue de l'Orient Latin*, I, 253.

7. Cfr. the Greek text edited by AUG. HEISENBERG, *Die Palastrevolution des Johannes Komnenos*, 28-32.
8. The "Letter of Lentulus" describes Jesus' stature as "propagatus, rectus." Vatican Library, Chigiano H. VI, 193. Cfr. my *Ricerche sulla Santa Sindone*, 355-356a.
9. *Epistola Lentuli ad Senaturn Romanum*, edited by I.A. FABRICIUS, in *Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti* III, 301-302, Hamburg 1719. The text of, this edition differs notably from that of the Codex Chigiano cited above.

The Holy Sepulchre...
Here ends the Cross
and begins the Tabernacle.
PAUL CLAUDEL