

SOME ANTHROPOLOGICAL EVIDENCE
PERTINENT TO THE SHROUD OF TURIN

by

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I would like to pass along some anthropological evidence which is pertinent to our Shroud research. This information was gleaned from papers provided to me by Ms. Virginia Bortin who writes for Biblical Archaeologist, a periodical published by the American Schools of Oriental Research.

Of particular interest is a paper by N. Haas¹ which describes the contents of fifteen limestone ossuaries* found in 1968 in three burial caves at Giv'at ha-Mivtar, Jerusalem. Pottery vessels, lamps, cooking pots, and other evidence found in these burial caves date them between about the first century B.C. and about 70 A.D.²

These ossuaries contained the skeletal remains of 35 individuals. Almost all the remains found were well-preserved. Of the 35 individuals, ten were adult males, ten were adult females and fifteen were youths or children.

One of these was the only recorded anthropological evidence of a person who died by crucifixion.

A summary of the estimated ages and physical characteristics of these individuals, as determined from the skeletal remains, is given in Table 1.

Death by Crucifixion

A major item of interest is individual I/4A. According to Haas, the bones from this individual "are the only extant remains from

* Ossuaries were stone jars or containers in which the skeletal remains of deceased individuals were placed, after decomposition of the flesh. Often one ossuary would contain the remains of several individuals.

Table 1. Physical Characteristics Derived from the Skeletal Remains at Giv'at ha-Mivtar

<u>Individual</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Estimated Age yrs</u>	<u>Estimated Stature cm</u>	<u>Comments</u>
I/1A	M	45-48	170-178	A very strong and robust individual; very strongly built hand bones.
I/1B	F	30-35	162-170	Fair but robust facial skeleton.
I/2A	M	45-50	165-170	Fair but robust facial skeleton. Strongly shaped forearms and hands.
I/2B	F	25-30	150-154	Fine, slenderly-built long bones.
I/3A	F	23-25	153	Very light, smooth long bones.
I/4A	M	24-28	167	Both heel bones found transfixated by a large iron nail. The shins were found intentionally broken. Death caused by crucifixion.
I/5A	M	24-26	157	Limbs robust.
I/6A	M	over 60	167	
I/6B	M	18-19	159-161	
I/6C	F	24-30	160-164	
I/6D	F	24-26		Skull and long bones not sufficiently preserved for anthropological measurements.
I/7	F	50-60	151	Marks of well-developed muscularity.
III/2A	M	50-60	168	Plaited bundle of spikes over the skull.
IV/2A	M	40-45	162	Strong upper limbs. But a really robust type.
IV/3A	F	26-35		Fragmentary state of long bones did not permit estimation of stature.
IV/3B	M	45-50	181	Strong upper limb muscularity, marks of well-developed muscularity on the lower limb bones.
IV/3C	F	55-60	167	Marks of muscularity indicate habitual climbing of hills.
IV/4A	F	30-35	153	Died in child-birth.
IV/5A	M	over 60	167	Strong muscularity on upper limb bones; presumed to be a workman.
IV/5B	F	34-40	153	Slenderly-built.

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antiquity known to be evidence of a crucifixion". The evidence of crucifixion consists of two calcanean (heel) bones pierced by a large (6" to 7" in length) nail, broken shin bones (right tibia and left tibia and fibula) and a scratched right radius. No other marks of violence were observed on the skeleton. Fragments of wood are also impaled on the nail; these consist of a small plaque of Pistacia or Acacia wood and granular fragments of olive wood. At the time of Haas' paper (1970), these remains were in the custody of the Israel Museum (Rockefeller Section).

Physical Stature

One of the possible negative aspects of the Shroud of Turin is the fact that the figure depicted thereon is that of a man about 178 cm (5' 10") tall and weighing approximately 175 pounds.^{3,4} This would appear to be rather large for a man living in Jesus' time. (According to Haas¹ the classical mean height for Mediterranean people of that time was approximately 167 cm (5' 5-1/2").

Of interest here is the fact that of the ten adult males described in Table 1, one (Individual IV/3B) was estimated to be 181 cm (6') tall and another (Individual I/1A) was between 170 and 178 cm (5' 7" and 5' 10"). Several are described as being very robust or muscular. This would indicate that an individual of the stature imaged on the Shroud would not necessarily have been overly large for a man living in Jesus' time.

"Crown of Thorns"

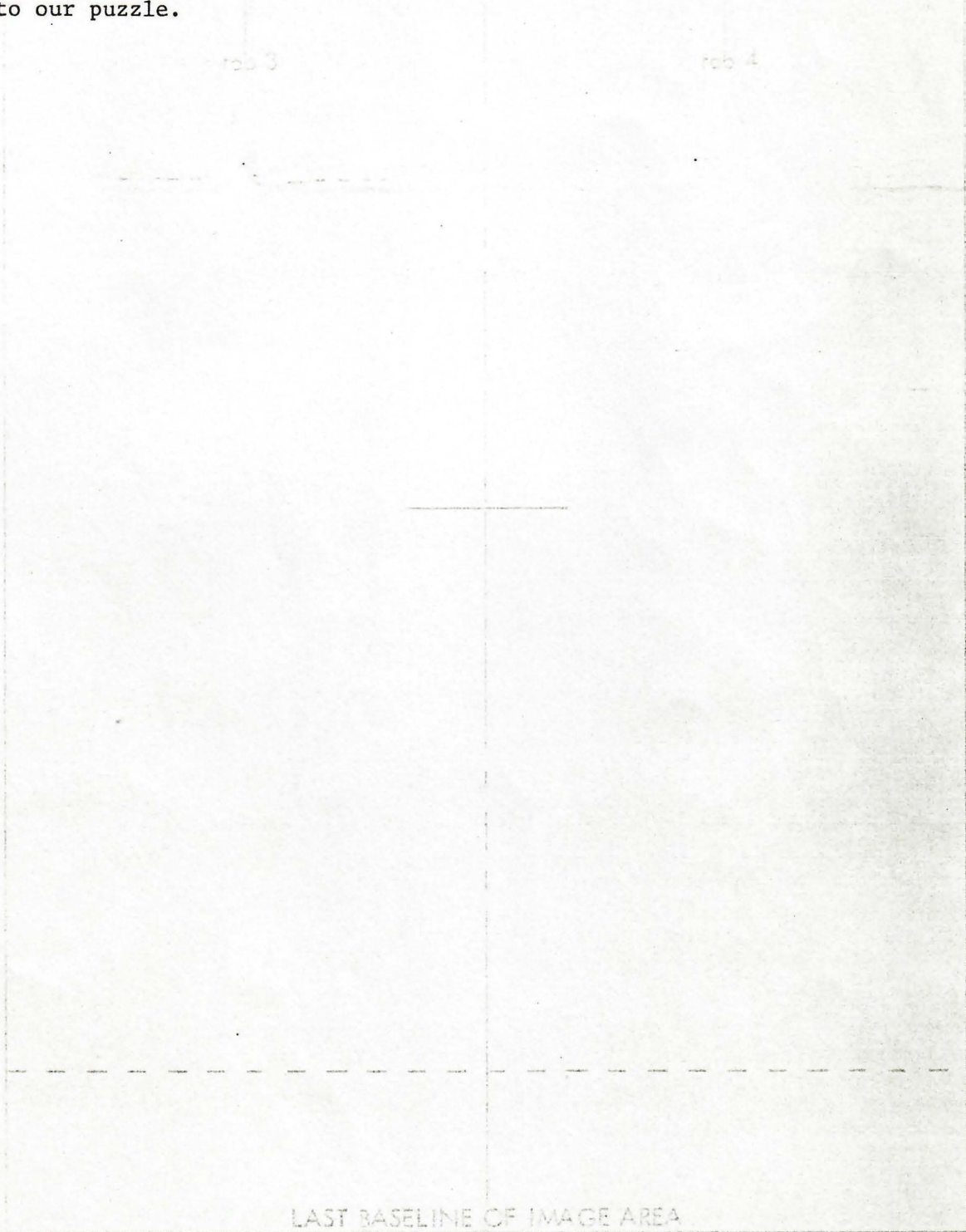
A third item of interest in Table 1 concerns Individual III/2A. This individual is stated to have a "plaited bundle of spikes" over the skull. No further information is given.

Is this evidence of a form of "Crown of Thorns"? Without further information, it is impossible to say. However, if it is true, evidence of head injuries, as depicted on the Shroud of Turin, would not be a unique identifier of the victim as Jesus Christ. Hopefully, more information can be obtained about the nature of this plaited bundle of spikes.

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Comment

It must be noted that the above observations were derived from an almost singular set of data. Thus it is difficult to accurately judge their significance. Hopefully, there is more archaeological and anthropological evidence which can be brought to light to add a piece or two to our puzzle.



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REFERENCES

1. N. Haas, "Anthropological Observations on the Skeletal Remains from Giv'at ha-Mivtar", Israel Exploration Journal*, Vol. 20, Nos. 1-2, 1970.
2. V. Tzaferis, "Jewish Tombs at and Near Giv'at ha-Mivtar, Jerusalem", Israel Exploration Journal*, Vol. 20, Nos. 1-2, 1970.
3. T. M. McCown, "Cloth-Body Distance of the Holy Shroud of Turin", Proceedings of the 1977 United States Conference of Research on The Shroud of Turin, Holy Shroud Guild **, 1977.
4. Dr. R. Bucklin, personal communication.

* The Editor, Israel Exploration Journal, P.O.B 7041, Jerusalem, Israel.

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