

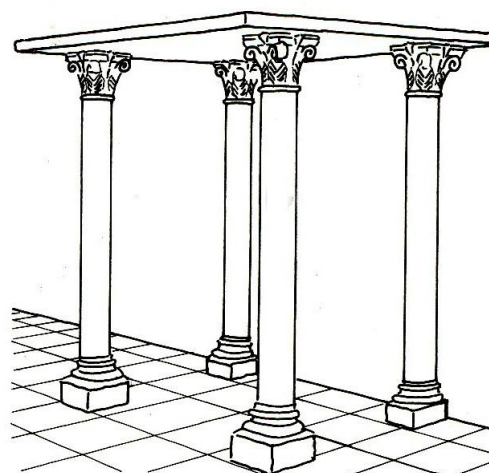
Fig. 1: The four columns, uncapped, in front of St. John Lateran. Detail of a drawing by Marten van Heemskerck, c. 1535. Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT ANSWERS

That little monument in an umbrous aisle of the cloister of St. John Lateran.... Shrouded in the silence of an unremembered past, a silence uninterrogated.... Nothing but four slender columns capped with a slab of marble. Unimposing, somehow incomplete, unrelated to anything in particular. One might wonder why it had even been preserved.

Was there once in that vacant space a statue? Never. A little Latin plaque informs us that the distance from the floor to the underside of the canopy is equal to the height of Christ. Could that emptiness contain a message for sindonology?

In medieval times the columns were outside the basilica, close by the equestrian statue of a Roman emperor of magnanimous mien (Fig. 1). When the statue was relocated in the piazza of the Campidoglio in 1538, the rider was believed to represent Antoninus Pius. Through former centuries, this bronze had escaped the melting down of so many pagan rulers astride their mounts because early Christians thought it represented Constantine the Great. The statue is now identified as Marcus Aurelius. Not even a booklet on the history of St. John Lateran tells when the columns were taken into the cloister, but the latest date would be 1588, when the Lateran piazza was redesigned.



Monument in Lateran cloister.
See also Cover, *Spectrum* #14.

From Constantine's City of New Rome (Konstantinoupolis Nea Rome), Justinian I reigned (527-565) over the Roman Empire. Syria, Palestine, Egypt and North Africa, Italy, Greece...were under his rule; all the great cities—Rome, Carthage, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, Edessa...were under his sway. One of Justinian's first deeds was the reconstruction (533-537) of the Constantinian church of Santa Sophia. And it was about that time that he sent two capable and trusted men to Jerusalem to measure the height (literally, "length") of the body of Christ. From the measurement obtained, he constructed a cross of the same size.

Before this Measuring Cross disappeared in the Sack of Constantinople (1204), Anthony, later archbishop of Novgorod, described it thus:

Ὁ δε τιμιος σταυρος ὁ ιστάμενος σημερον εν τω σκενοφυλακειῳ το μέτρον εστι της ηλικιας του Κυρίου ημων Ιησου Χριστου ὅς ακριβῶς εμετρηθη παρα πιστων και αξιολόγων ανδρων εν Ιεροσαλημ. Και δια τουτο ενέδυσεν αυτον αργυρον και λίθους παντοίους και κατεκρυσωσεν αυτον. και μέχρι της σημερον ιάσεις ποιει, και νοσηματα και δαίμονας ελαύνει.

(The precious cross which is now conserved in the sacristy [of Santa Sophia] reports the stature of Our Lord Jesus-Christ, diligently measured in Jerusalem by faithful envoys worthy of trust; and therefore it was ornamented with precious stones and silver and covered with gold, and to this day bestows health, expels evil and drives away demons.)

The description of the cross is an eye-witness account; for the information about the envoys' mission to Jerusalem, the writer cites Book VIII of *History of the Wars of Justinian* by Procopius of Caesarea, secretary to Belisarius, Justinian's general.

A decade or so before Anthony of Novgorod, an anonymous pilgrim from England wrote, in his report on the treasures of Constantinople: "In Santa Sophia.... The measure of the length of the body of Christ which was measured by faithful men in Jerusalem and the emperor Justinian made a cross according to the length of Christ and adorned it with silver and gold and precious stones and gilded it. And it stood beside the door of the sacristy where are all the sacred vessels and treasures of the great church..."

The *Crux aurea* and the measure of Christ are found again in Codex .III of the original Medici Collection in the Laurentian Library (Fig. 2). The ribbon under the figure of the Savior represents a unit on which his height can be calculated. The inscription reads:

Haec linea bis sexties ducta mensuram dominici corporis monstrat. Sumpta est autem de Constantinopoli ex aurea cruce facta ad formam corporis Christi.

(This line multiplied twice six times (i.e., twelve times) shows the measure of the body of the Lord. It was taken at Constantinople from the gold cross made to the form of the Body of Christ.)

Mons. Ricci gives the length of the measuring ribbon as 15cm.

The image on the Shroud has been measured several times through the centuries, with variable success. Results of diverse calculations apart from direct access to the Shroud range from 162cm (Ricci) to 187cm (Ferri). The measure determined by Gedda, 183cm, is generally quoted. According to the tradition of the Oriental Church, the height of Christ was 183.05cm.

What is the measure inside the Lateran monument? A French investigator in 1821 found the distance to be about 195cm. Did he discount the blocks on which the columns are cemented to the floor? Did he make allowance for the Corinthian capitals? These were not a part of the original structure, as we see in the Marten van Heemskerck drawing of c. 1535.

But the measurements of the gold cross, the Lateran monument, the Laurentian ribbon, do not concern us here, nor does the height of Christ.

The significant fact is that in Jerusalem in the VIth century there was a document which carried the image of the body of Christ; and its existence there was known.

Now why did Justinian send his envoys to Jerusalem to measure the height of Christ if the Shroud was in Edessa, folded inside a frame and showing only the Face?



Fig. 2: The Mensura Christi parchment of the XIIth century. Codex III, Pluteus XXV, Laurentian Library, Florence.