

## THE SHROUD IN THE SOVIET UNION

BSTS member Bryce Cook of Radio Piccadilly, Manchester, recently visited the Soviet Union where he was surprised to discover a lively interest in the Shroud on the part of Dr. Valery Soyfer, a Jew who gives lectures and has written a book on the subject. Apparently Dr. Soyfer's Shroud researches are tolerated by the Soviet authorities, the main difficulty being one of maintaining correspondence with the West.

## MEMBERS' LETTERS

Mr. Seal-Coon writes:

"...whilst the evidence for the authenticity of the Turin Shroud is impressive, it could not stand up ... if the impressions on the cloth could not possibly be those of Jesus due to a large disparity in height, for whilst these indicate a height of about 5 feet 10 inches, there is some evidence that Jesus was in fact of small stature - and indeed somewhat ill-favoured and possibly lame.

This evidence is cited by the late Robert Graves in his *The Nazarene Gospel Restored*:

St. Ephraim the Syrian records in his Gospel Commentaries: 'God took human form and appeared in a form of three human ells; he came down to us in small stature' ... Jesus apparently refers to the missing ell of his own stature in Matthew 6: 27. Tertullian mentions Jesus's *corpusculum*, his 'insignificant little body' (*Against Marcion* 3.17)

Of those quoted, St. Ephraim was a poet and theologian born at Nisibis c.306 AD who in 363 emigrated to Edessa (now in Iraq) where there was a famed theological school and where he died in 373. Tertullian was a Roman theologian (c.160-230 AD) who was converted to Christianity c.197. These writers may well have had access to records contemporary with or soon after Christ that are no longer extant, but vanished during the first millennium AD, possibly when the great library at Alexandria was destroyed in the 7th. century.

There is also the possibility that the Jewish authorities, having been asked by a powerful prince for a relic of Christ and having nothing to give him, fitted out a condemned criminal to die in imitation of Christ and sent his shroud to Edessa."

F.W. Seal-Coon,  
32 Hungate Street,  
Aylsham Norfolk

Ian Wilson responds:

Mr. Seal-Coon's points are interesting, but can be readily answered. There simply is no reliable early information on Jesus' human appearance, and those who speculated on it, such as the authors quoted by Robert Graves, usually did so by turning to texts of the Old Testament. Those who chose to believe Jesus was base and unattractive chose Isaiah 53: 2,3 ("Without beauty, without majesty"); those who preferred to believe otherwise turned to the Forty-fifth Psalm "Of all men you are the most handsome." The fact that during the early

centuries there was no authority for information on Jesus' human appearance is quite clear from St. Augustine, who wrote in the 5th. century "We do not know of his external appearance, nor that of his mother." So far as the apparent St. Matthew reference to Jesus' height is concerned, (1), even if one accepts the King James translation "Which of you by taking though can add one cubit to his stature?" it is by no means clear that Jesus was referring to his own lack of height, (2) it is noteworthy that the modern *Jerusalem Bible* translates this same passage by "Can any of you, for all his worrying, add one single cubit to his span of life?".

The idea that the Shroud might be that of some unknown condemned criminal, even one executed in imitation of Christ, is readily answered by the point that the Shroud image is not explicable by it having been any ordinary grave-wrapping, because no amount of experimentation has yet produced a totally satisfactory replication of the image. It is either a remarkable forgery, or a genuine grave-wrapping to which something remarkable has happened.

One incidental factual point: Edessa, today Urfa, is in south-eastern Turkey, not Iraq.