

OBITUARY

DOROTHY CRISPINO

(1916-2014)

by Ian Wilson



Dorothy Crispino
photo by Barrie Schwartz

Most of us, at one time or other, will have lost a friend or relative, then perhaps years later, have thought of a question they really should have asked that person when they were alive, only all too sadly to realise that it is now too late. Certainly that is my experience of Dorothy Crispino who died in Cavour, Italy, on August 16 at the age of 98.

Born Dorothy Zimmer on January 17 1916, Dorothy was one of three sisters and a brother, all of whom predeceased her. She grew up with the great gift of being fluent in English, French, Italian and even Latin. By her first marriage she had a son Anthony ('Nino') Bercel. Her second marriage was to Luigi Crispino, who taught art and architecture at the local Indiana University. Undoubtedly her great contribution to Shroud studies was her creation, as prime publication of the Indiana Center for Shroud Studies, of the Shroud journal *Shroud Spectrum International*. This she edited between 1981 and 1993, making it undoubtedly the quality English Language forum for Shroud studies throughout those years. This venture came into being as a result of a conversation in the late 1970s with Don Piero Coero Borga, at that time the already veteran secretary of Centro Internazionale di Sindonologia, Turin. As Dorothy recalled in 1997:

The good don, the "Walking Dictionary of Sindonology", was lamenting the fact that so much European research, published primarily in Italian, French and German, was not reaching America. Concern fixing his

face in a frown, Don Coero said. "There ought to be a journal published in the English language with translations of some of the major European research." I nodded answering, "Yes, there really should be." Don Coero glared at me. "And you," he said peremptorily, "are the one to do it."

Dorothy duly 'did it', publishing forty-two beautifully-produced issues for those who subscribed to these, issues that now, thanks to Dorothy's late-in-life permission and the patient digital scanning efforts of West Australian Stephen E. Jones, can be freely read online alongside back issues of the BSTS Newsletter on Barrie Schwartz's website www.shroud.com.

Each Shroud Spectrum essentially comprised four or five scholarly articles, the topics of which ranged right across the various specialist fields that the Shroud touches on. A significant proportion of these articles Dorothy specially translated on their author's behalf. For the historian particularly valuable are her excellent translations of prime historical documents such as the 1534 report on the work of the Poor Clare nuns, which she translated from the original sixteenth century French, also authoritative Salesian Don Luigi Fossati's definitive series of articles on the Lirey controversy and on devotional copies made of the Shroud, which Dorothy translated from Fossati's modern Italian.

Alongside such translation work Dorothy patiently pursued, and published, her own enquiries into locations and personalities associated with the Shroud's early history in France and Italy: the Charny castle of Montfort; the Charny genealogy, a mini-biography of Duke Louis of Savoy, and much more. With characteristic modesty, she remarked of these ventures in a final, valedictory and as yet unpublished miscellany of jottings that she called Spicelegium, which she completed in 1996, when she had already reached eighty years of age:

I have done what I could; every year a revenant to France, but a few weeks here a few weeks there, can only result in truncated research and unconnected fragments. Nevertheless a respectable volume of Charny

material garnered over two decades, the start and source of a serious study, waits to be composed.

Subsequently moving to Europe, Dorothy and her husband Luigi settled in Babano, just outside the Italian town of Cavour, some thirty miles from Turin. Her very last years, when she crippled by a broken hip and loss of eyesight, she spent in the Residenza San Lorenzo in Cavour.

Which brings me to my deep personal regret that I did not pay more attention to Dorothy's researches back at the time that I had the opportunity to be in proper communication with her. Back in the 1980s and 1990s, indeed extending to as recently as 2010, my preoccupation was with Shroud scientific issues, also with researching the Shroud's history as the 'Image of Edessa'. It has been only during the last three years that I have begun properly to appreciate just how unknown remains that supposedly 'known' Charny century from the mid-fourteenth century to when the Shroud becomes handed on to the Savoys in 1453. And as I now realise, if we only could somehow satisfactorily answer the questions of exactly how, when, where and from whom Geoffroi de Charny obtained the Shroud, the entirety of Shroud studies might be enabled a stronger foothold towards authenticity than has been achieved hitherto.

Hence I find myself, now in my mid-seventies, and in theoretical retirement, engaged in precisely the kind of 'serious study' of Charny material that Dorothy was clearly looking for and doing her best to pioneer by all her international sleuthing and her annual forays around France. And of course there are questions that I now want to ask her. Although Spicelegium, some of which we hope to digitise in succession to Shroud Spectrum, supplements some of the historical information in the latter, as Dorothy was all too well aware, much sifting of dusty archives and translation of untranslated documents is still needed.

Dorothy concluded one of the earliest snippets in Spicelegium [p.7] with these words on the Shroud:

When we realise ...and acknowledge that every injury on the Body of Christ was fore-ordained and willingly accepted; that every wound inflicted, every flow of blood, was intended and controlled, then we must admit, to ourselves and to each other, that this astonishing Object was created to remain a visible, tangible, powerful yet ineffable Presence in our lives.'

No-one could have expressed better that which drives so many of us to continue to grapple with the Shroud mystery, whatever the sceptical scoffs and sneers that we, in our altogether lesser way, may need to endure. In Dorothy's case she has indeed, in her 98 years, done all that she could. She can rightly claim a very prominent and well-deserved place in any sindonological Hall of Fame. May she rest in peace.



Jacopo di Cione 1370
(nationalgallery.org.uk)



St Alban's Psalter 1130
(medievalartresearch.co)



Pray Codex 1190
(en.wikipedia.org)

Examples of the 'Three Marys'
iconographical tradition.