

'LOST' - AND FOUND...

Regular readers of this Newsletter will already be aware of the frequent praise that has emanated from these pages for American Dorothy Crispino's *Shroud Spectrum*, published usually quarterly from Nashville, Indiana, and arguably the best-presented of any English-language periodical in the Shroud field. *Shroud Spectrum* has now achieved its 40th issue, and Dorothy Crispino's largely single-handed achievement continues to deserve the warmest congratulations.

Unsaid amidst such praise, however, has always been one point of historical disagreement between Dorothy Crispino and this Editor, on the issue of my identification of the Shroud with the Image of Edessa, or Mandylion. Life and literature thrives on such differences of opinion, and certainly from this side of the Atlantic the issue has never seemed particularly troubling. Difficulties only arise when a fixity of attitudes prevents simple, inter-personal communication that could save much wasted effort. And unfortunately this is precisely what has happened in the case of Dorothy's latest *Shroud Spectrum* article 'A Unique Manuscript on the Image of Edessa'.

In the article Dorothy relates having to go all the way to a 'hushed, gated and secluded sanctum' within the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, to study the 'single and perhaps the only copy of *L'Image d'Edesse selon un MS du VI- ou VII- siècle*', a French publication of 1908 describing, in Dorothy's words, a long Greek scroll 'of the VIth or VIIth century ... on which the story of King Abgar and the miraculous Image of Jesus is presented in a series of miniatures.' For Dorothy the French article's revelation was that it showed, from the seemingly 'lost' 6th or 7th century manuscript, images of the Image of Edessa as a 'small piece of cloth': At such a date such images would predate by three centuries the earliest direct copies of the Image of Edessa previously known. They would also seemingly prove that the Image of Edessa could not be one and the same as the Shroud.

But oh for a little communication ... While the French publication of 1908 might indeed be obscure, along with its scholarship, the supposedly lost '6th or 7th century' long scroll to which it refers is most certainly not. Indeed, for the cost of an air mail letter, Dorothy's whole Journey across the Atlantic and exhaustive penetration of the Bibliothèque Nationale might well have been saved, since the document in question is none other than New York Pierpont Morgan Library codex M.499, well-known to scholars within the Byzantine field, and described in extenso by Professor Sirarpie Der Nersessian in *Actes du IV- Congrès intern. des Études byzantines* in *Bull. de l'Inst. Arch. Bulgare X*, 1936, also by Prof. Kurt Weitzmann in 'The Mandylion and Constantine Porphyrogennetos', *Cahiers Archéologiques XI*, 1960, pp 172 and 177.

The further fact is that the scroll, though unique in format and most quaintly illustrated, is of very little consequence to Shroud studies since, in both Prof. Der Nersessian and Prof. Weitzmann's opinions, it dates as late as the end of the 14th or beginning of the 15th centuries. This was a time when in Eastern Orthodoxy representations of the Image of Edessa as a 'small piece of cloth' were two a penny, the Image of Edessa, whatever it was, having been long lost from Constantinople, and all illustrations of it at this time being more than usually fanciful and unreliable. The very fact that the scroll describes as history events of the year 1032 AD makes an absurdity of Dorothy Crispino's French publication's attribution of it to the 6th or 7th century.

Opinions will always differ on the Shroud, but the field of those seriously interested is so small that it gives no satisfaction to set matters straight in this public way when a modicum of private communication could have saved so much.