

## **Interview with Mechthild Flury-Lemberg in Oviedo**

Born in Hamburg in 1929, Mechthild Flury-Lemberg studied textile art at the Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Hamburg under Else Mögelin. From 1952 – 56 she studied archaeology and art history at the Universities of Munich and Kiel. These studies were succeeded by a training in textile conservation at the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum in Munich under the tutorship of Sigrid Müller-Christensen.

In 1957 Mechthild Flury-Lemberg was asked by Michael Stettler, then director of the Bernisches Historisches Museum of Berne, to take care of its unique textile treasures. At the same time she worked with Felix Guicherd on weaving techniques at the Centre International d'Études des textiles Anciens (CIETA) in Lyons. From 1963 she was in charge of planning and preparing the textile department of the newly established Abegg Foundation.

In 1967 the Museum of the Abegg Foundation was opened and Mechthild Flury-Lemberg took charge of the textile department that includes a workshop where students fulfil their training by working with important textiles from all over the world.

Mechthild Flury-Lemberg directed the restoration work of the Shroud in 2002. I briefly interviewed her at the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Congress on the Sudarium of Oviedo in April this year.

### **How did you react to the violent reactions of some people after the restoration work in 2002?**

They have no knowledge of what we did. It was so necessary to do the restoration, there was more than one reason. When we discovered on the Holland backing cloth the situation of the patches, it was quite clear there was something under them, as we had supposed long ago. It was only visible when it was turned. The thing is the oxidation of linen, it is a light yellowing in the whole Shroud. This is progressive – slow but progressive. The image is only a little darker – if the background gets darker then in the future the image will no longer be visible. We had to avoid all possibilities of oxidising or yellowing. We had to get rid of all things causing this, the main thing was the argon case. Under the patches was supposed carbon dust, so we had to get rid of the patches and the Holland cloth. The residues were one teaspoon of dust under each patch. In case of fire and needing to use water, the whole Shroud would have been darkened, as carbon dust is a dye. It didn't happen, but it could have done.

### **What are your opinions about the Sudarium and the Congress?**

It is very well organised and very instructive. My opinion of the Sudarium has not changed – it is the only cloth as far as I know that has a real chance to be connected to the Shroud. I didn't know enough when I came but the connection seems near. I was involved with the Argenteuil tunic but I left it when I couldn't see it. You can only say something if you have seen the piece, you can't work with just photographs. The detail is less important than the whole. The linen seems dry like on tunics from dry sand in Egypt. I know the touch and need to touch it. My judging goes with eyes and fingers and if I see something interesting, that is when I go deeper with the microscope.

Just half an hour after I spoke to Mechthild, I managed to organise a private viewing of the Sudarium for her and Michael Hesemann. It was enough for her to confirm her opinion that the cloth could very well be authentic.