

## VIRGINIA BROWN: DEAREST FRIEND AND CLOSEST COLLEAGUE

For almost 34 years – almost half my lifetime – Virginia (Ginny) has been my closest colleague and dearest friend, outside of my immediate family. We first met in 1976 when I came to the Pontifical Institute, although many people think it was sooner, since she and I received our doctorates from Harvard in the same year – 1969. But during those years in Cambridge she was in Classics and I in medieval church history, and our paths never crossed. Further, when in the late 60s as we were both in Rome, she was in the nest of classicists at the uppity American Academy while I was slaving away with other medievalists down in the Vatican Library.

So it was not until 1976 that we finally met. I will never forget my first day at the Pontifical Institute. I was assigned an office directly across from Ginny's on the third floor. Early that day, she knocked on my door and in her charming southern drawl welcomed me. Cunningly she then told me about her role and that of Fr. Reg O'Donnell's in bringing me to the Pontifical Institute and how she had pushed the president of Institute to give me an office where I could put my books (later, I suspected, directly across from hers). Then she asked if she might ask a favor of me. Having just learned that I owed her my job at Institute, I gratefully said yes. So, she turned around and brought over a stack of about 20 articles that had been submitted to *Mediaeval Studies*, of which she was the editor. All were about liturgy, which she said she knew nothing about, and after all, she reminded me, I had been brought to the Pontifical Institute as a liturgical specialist. What could I say but yes. By way of editorial instruction she went on to tell me that *Mediaeval Studies* looked dimly on 'truth and beauty' articles but accepted only articles that 'did not bounce.' I got the picture and rejected nearly all of them, for which she was grateful.

Having succeeded in this ploy, Ginny soon came to me with another 'job' -- a large stack of reproductions of manuscripts and fragments written in a medieval script that was at the time difficult for me to read – Beneventan. During the previous years she had accepted the task of revising and enlarging the 1914 work of her former mentor at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, E. A. Lowe's classic *THE BENEVENTAN SCRIPT*. Many of the items he described in that volume and in his later 'New List' (a title she often reused later) were simply registered as 'liturgica' or 'canonistica.' Ginny, always a stickler for precision, pressed me for more exact descriptions. Would I do this for her? Naturally, again, I said yes. The 'canonistica' were easy since that was my real specialty, but the 'liturgica' were more challenging. As I worked on these I involved a number of my liturgy seminar graduate students, among them Richard Gyug, and we completed the task of identification for Ginny. Beyond this, two major general conclusions came out of my work on this. First, no one had noticed that an astonishing 70% of all manuscripts in Beneventan were liturgical. Second, because they were liturgical and written in a beautiful, conservative style, Lowe and others had dated them to as much as two centuries too early. All of this was the beginning of what would become our major project over the decades, the *Monumenta liturgica beneventana*. But before I get into her 'Beneventan passion' (as she sometimes called it) I should mention other things going on in Ginny's career here.

One of her students (Frank Coulson) will talk about her as a teacher in the famous Text Editing seminar, a.k.a. the *Sapientiale* of Thomas of York. I never did fully approve of that text as a tool for teaching text

editing – and many times told her so. But she tenaciously defended it as a legacy handed down from the venerable Reg O'Donnell, who had brought her from Princeton's Institute of Advanced Study to the Pontifical Institute in 1971 and who had many years previously been given a large grant for its completion. But as Academic Secretary of the Institute overseeing course offerings, I could be as cunning as Ginny. When Fr. Boyle was elevated to the Vatican Library, several other members of Pontifical Institute took over his paleography seminar. But I always looked on Ginny with her experience in producing Lowe's CODICES LATINI ANTIQUIORES and Beneventan script and with her keen eye and almost photographic visual memory as being the Institute's most distinguished paleographer and one who should rightfully teach that seminar. So, after a number of behind the scenes compromises, she finally was persuaded to give up text editing and Thomas of York and move to the paleography seminar. There, to her surprise but not to mine, she succeeded beyond measure, and for this she won the admiration and love of countless students and was given the prestigious distinguished teacher award by the Medieval Academy of America in 2005.

As we all know, Ginny was a multi-faceted scholar – a classicist, medievalist, and even Renaissance expert. So, there were other things going on in her office that she would only mention to me in passing – her deep involvement as secretary and then editor-in-chief of Kristeller's CATALOGUS TRANSLATIONUM ET COMMENTARIORUM, in the edition of classical texts, and in her husband's HARVARD I TATTI RENAISSANCE LIBRARY series, for which she produced several volumes, including the first, the sell-out edition and translation of Boccaccio's Famous Women.

Ginny was a member of many academic boards and institutions, and as one close to her in these I will mention only two. In the late 70s the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library in Collegeville Minnesota was creating a formal board of advisors, of which I had been an informal member for years. I thought it appropriate that there should be a woman and a paleographical expert on that board and so proposed her name. So, one January in the depths of winter and a blinding blizzard we flew together to Minnesota. After a 12-hour layover in Chicago we rented a car in Minneapolis to drive through the blizzard to Collegeville, only to arrive at 4 a.m. in the morning when all the doors were locked. So we whiled away the next few hours until the monastery opened at a small local diner eating chili to keep us warm. The meetings of the board attended by Ginny were always lively and productive, and it was thanks to her that the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library has microfilm of all of the items in the CODICES LATINI ANTIQUIORES. The other of Ginny's memberships I mention is with the Zentraldirektion of the venerable Monumenta Germania historiae in Munich. I had been elected a member in 1987 as the first Canadian/and second native American and suggested to the inner circle there that it would be a good thing to have a Canadian woman and distinguished paleographer elected. Ginny was, after all, an elected member of the elite Comité internationale de paléographie and had worked with Bernhard Bischoff of the Monumenta on the Addenda to the CODICES LATINI ANTIQUIORES, which they published together in our Mediaeval Studies. As a result she was elected in 1998 and was always proud of this honor. This Munich Monumenta brings me back to our decades-long project at the Pontifical Institute, the Monumenta Liturgica Beneventana.

In 1981 I had proposed a project something like that which we later developed for our SSHRCC grants. Sadly, but wisely, my proposal was not approved in Ottawa. For a single person to take on a project like this for only a year's duration was clearly impossible. So, after several years of smarting and scheming, I devised another project to take advantage of Ginny's expertise in Beneventan script and mine in liturgy. It would borrow the name 'Monumenta' from the Munich Monumenta, and the rest, 'liturgica' and 'Beneventa,' was obvious. It would not be an individual project but a cooperative one, which the SSHRCC was just then promoting. Ginny would be our Capo. She was a woman, was the world's leading authority on Beneventan script, and was a classicist who would be well-known to the classicists sitting on Jury Nr. 1 in the SSHRCC grants competitions. Further, the SSHRCC was then modifying its adjudication rules to favor past 'track-records' (i.e. publishing) over brilliant project proposals that might or might not produce results. And track-record we had and would continue to have. All of this I proposed to Ginny, and she eagerly agreed to join in. The rest is history, and so for the past two decades and more we have worked together with my former doctoral student, Richard Gyug, in this project, which has had the continuous and generous support of the SSHRCC.

All of you have probably read on the Pontifical Institute's website my description of this project – which will continue on with Richard Gyug and me in Ginny's memory. But I want to summarize Ginny's essential role and guidance in it. First, she was very clearly our Capo. Her knowledge of the Beneventan script was unrivalled. Through her many contacts in Italy, her determination never to take 'no' from a reluctant or lazy librarian, and her innate curiosity, we gained access to depositories that no one else had heard of less dreamed of. And the results of her and our searches through them is evident in the five 'New Lists' of Beneventan items published in our Series Miscellanea Beneventana, which as editor she initiated in *Mediaeval Studies*. Then, there was her 'oculus paleographicus/paleographical eye,' as she put it, and incredible visual memory that makes a good palaeographer a truly great paleographer. 'Yes,' she would say as she examined a manuscript in Italy or Dalmatia, 'there is another fragment of this manuscript I have seen in Stockholm or Vienna or wherever.' But most impressive to me was her development from a superb editor of classical texts into a first-rate liturgical scholar and historian. Her publications on Beneventan script liturgical calendars, missals, breviaries, and the like are admired and often cited by liturgical scholars around the world. Her brilliant redating of a number of liturgical manuscripts in Naples to the sixteenth century rather than the fourteenth as Lowe argued has fundamentally altered the dating of all Beneventan manuscripts. And her archival work on the Beneventan liturgical palimpsests underlying the Boccaccio autographs in Florence is the envy of historians throughout Europe and even resulted in a major international conference in Florence. Beyond that, she has been a regular consultant to Sotheby's, Bernard Quaritch, and Christie's as to manuscripts they intend to sell. She has amassed here at Pontifical Institute, largely with her own funds, the largest collection in the world of reproductions of Beneventan script manuscripts, thus making the Pontifical Institute what Thomas Forrest Kelly of Harvard calls the 'Beneventan capital of the world.' Her work with the British Government in repatriating a magnificent liturgical manuscript 'stolen' from Benevento, now in London, resulted in her being made an honorary citizen of the real Benevento in southern Italy. And finally it was Ginny who brought don Faustino Avigliano, the archivist and prior of Montecassino, to the Pontifical Institute to receive an honorary degree here at St. Basil's and who convinced him to carry with him over 20 of the Abbey's most precious manuscripts for an exhibition in

the Institute – something that has never been done before in the venerable Abbey’s history.

Ginny was never one to wear her religion on her sleeve, but beneath her funny cap pulled over her ears and warm sweater wrapped around her slim frame was a soul devoted to her Church. She was a Sacred Heart girl from her youth at the Rosary in New Orleans through Manhattanville College and throughout her years in Toronto. Promptly at 12 noon each Friday she would excuse herself from our work together to attend Mass here at St. Basil’s, and the same thing happened each Saturday at 5 p.m. to fulfill her Sunday Mass obligation. Then there was her financial generosity to multiple worthy causes. Although for most of her career at the Pontifical Institute her salary was only a third of those in the University, she gave of what she had to charities, institutions, and individuals that only God and her taxman know about.

Finally, there was loyalty to the highest principles of the Pontifical Institute and her personal friendship to me. All academic institutions are accustomed to battles of all kinds, -- tenure decisions, personnel hiring, course assignments, financial decisions, and the like -- and the Pontifical Institute is no exception. Throughout all these battles, Ginny preferred to stay in the background saying she was but a sweet, shy, southern girl. But behind this was a backbone of steel, and through others and myself she forcefully sought to promote her ideals and values. On the very personal level, in the turbulent years of my domestic life a decade ago, Ginny was always there – to lend a sympathetic ear, to give moral support, and even to help out by lending me her home in Toronto while she was away. For obvious reasons I can’t elaborate on this, but I could never thank her enough for her friendship and help in those difficult years of my life. Then there was her assistance (and that of Jim Hankins) in bringing my wife, Luba, from Russia to Canada and the U.S. Again, I can’t elaborate but I can say that I personally witnessed their winsome invitations work wonders at the fierce U.S. consulate in Moscow, with its turn-down rate of over 90% for the visa applications of unmarried Russian women. And finally, there was her friendship and help in southern Italy and Dalmatia as we worked on our Beneventan project for over two decades – the hours of laughter and stories about the events of the day, daily drives up the 8.73 km winding road to the Abbey on Montecassino or along the spectacular Dalmatian coast, visits to historical, ecclesiastical and monastic sites, shopping each morning at the local markets for our luncheon food which we enjoyed together, daily breakfasts and dinners together at our Hotel Rocca in Cassino, festive meals with her dear friends at the Abbey and surrounds, and the list goes on and on.

I must close. ‘Frail Little Ginny Brown,’ as she used to call herself, was slight of physical stature, but for me she was a giant as a scholar, a colossus as a colleague, and a steady and firm bedrock as a friend.

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