

## **Extracts taken from the book : “The holy shroud of Lirey and the collegiate church”**

The Holy Shroud first appears in French history in 1356 inside a collegiate church built in Lirey, a village some 20 kilometers to the south of Troyes. Jeanne de Vergy deposited it there in conformity with the wishes of her deceased husband, Geoffroy de Charny. He was the standard-bearer and an adviser to the King of France, Jean le Bon.

But the history of the Holy Shroud did not end when it left Lirey in 1418. Even several hundred kilometres away, its souvenir continued to fill the coffers of the collegiate, thanks to the coins left by wave upon wave of pilgrims. The canons never despaired of seeing the relic restored to their new church built in the 16th century.

After centuries of decline, the Revolution dealt a fatal blow to the community of monks.

This booklet draws on extracts from a book which concentrates on the local context taking into account foreign invasions, epidemics, climate, religious movements, the history of the lords of Lirey, of the canons and monks...which all were to influence the daily life of the collegiate. It is part of our local history, which is unfolded in this small country village.

An unexpected archeological find completes this study: a mould for a pilgrim's medallion, discovered a few kilometers away from Lirey. It is a witness to the great extent of the pilgrimages and the revenue they brought to the church.

Ian Wilson thinks *“in all sincerity, that this is the most interesting find about the Holy Shroud for some considerable time.”*

There are 264 pages and several illustrations in the book.

## THE HISTORY OF THE HOLY SHROUD

The shroud is a piece of linen 4.30m by 1.10m on which there is a life size imprint of the front and back of the body of a naked man.

Some second century apocryphal texts refer to it as being the burial shroud of Jesus Christ. The evangelists Mark, John and Luke had previously described the details of Christ's shrouding.

In the third and sixth centuries, the Church Fathers, including pope Sylvester 1st, mention the shroud. Eusebius of Caesarea relates that a disciple of Jesus called Addai went to Edessa with a mysterious portrait, just after Christ's crucifixion. The king, Abgar V, Ushana, was cured of an illness and became a Christian convert.

When the town was being rebuilt after a severe flood, in 525 AD, a piece of linen was discovered in a niche above the west gate, the Kappe Gate. It was hidden under a tile with Christ's face on it in a place shaped like a cylindrical semi-circle. The piece of linen was given the name of '*Mandylion*' (a Greek word, derived from the Arab, meaning a large piece of material.) In the '*Actes of Thadysseus*' a manuscript dating from the sixth or seventh century, the image of Edessa is described as '*tetradiplon*', that is to say '*four times double*'.

It was recorded that it bore the facial image of a man thought to be Jesus Christ. This image was called '*acheiropoietos*' (not created by human hands).

Around 680, the Frankish bishop Arculfe saw and kissed the '*Shroud of Our Lord*' in Jerusalem. His testimony can be more precisely dated to 682, three years after the earthquake which destroyed the town of Edessa and part of the cathedral on the 3rd April, 679.

In the year 700 or thereabouts, the Holy Shroud was purchased from some Moslem Tadjiks for the sum of 50000 tehegans by a wealthy merchant from Edessa.

In 787, Leo the Reader vouches for its presence.

## CONSTANTINOPLE

In 943, the Emperor of Constantinople, Romanus Lekapenos, invaded Western Turkey and laid siege to Edessa. He hoped to gain popularity by completing the collection of relics begun by St Helen, the mother of Constantine the Great.

The sacred cloth left the town in the summer of 944 and was deposited in the sacristy of the monastery of St Eusebius on the 15th August.

There are other testimonies to its existence.

In 1058, an Egyptian Melkite Christian historian, Yahya of Antioch, mentions its presence in the Church of the Holy Wisdom, Hagia Sophia.

In 1143, the emperor Manuel 1st Komnenos showed the Holy Shroud to Amaury 1st, the King of Jerusalem, in the company of William of Tyre who bore witness to it.

The most extraordinary document remains the '*Pray Codex*', of around 1150, to be found in the Budapest National Library. It is clear that the author must have seen the Holy Shroud in person for him to have made his drawing: the body details, its position, the herring-bone weave, but especially the four little holes in the middle of the cloth in the form of an L, which are still visible on the Turin shroud. It is the proof that the winding sheet venerated at Constantinople before the twelfth century is one and the same shroud.

The fate of the Holy Shroud changes dramatically with the fourth crusade. After four days of siege Constantinople capitulated on 15th April 1204. The town was literally sacked, pillaged and dispossessed of all its treasures and relics as related by chroniclers such as Geoffroy de Villehardouin or Robert de Clary. At this time, the Holy Shroud was kept in the church of St Mary of the Blachernes.

Among the crusader knights were William of Champlitte and Othon de la Roche. After the capture of Constantinople, Othon de la Roche became the first duke of the Duchy of Athens

by submitting to and giving his possessions to the King of Thessalonica. Thus the Holy Shroud was to be found at Athens in 1205.

It disappeared for a century and reappeared in 1357 at Lirey, 20 kilometers to the south of Troyes, in the possession of the widow of Geoffroy de Charny, related to the family of Othon de la Roche.

### **GEOFFROY DE CHARNY**

Born around 1305, the second son of Jean de Charny, Geoffroy inherited the fiefdom and domains of Lirey, Savoisy and Montfort on the death of his father circa 1320. He married Jeanne de Toucy, Dame of Pierre-Perthus. He went to live in her newly built castle and doubtless, he came from time to time to his castle in Lirey, situated at the place known as 'La Motte'.

The Hundred Years war began on the 7th October 1337. Geoffroy de Charny took part in the early battles, in Gascony and then in the North. In Froissart's Chronicles Geoffroy is cited as one of the valiant knights responsible for the liberation of the town of Cambrai after an eleven-month siege. His battle cry was 'Charny' and his motto ' He who accomplishes more, is of more worth'.

In June 1340, Geoffroy lay siege to Montay, in the North, and then to St Omer in the Pas de Calais. A truce was eventually drawn up at Esplechin.

In October 1341, Geoffroy took part in the Brittany Campaign. During the course of a battle near Morlaix he was captured and was taken to England. He was freed on the undertaking that he would collect the funds for his ransom, which he duly paid in October 1343.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> September he set sail from Marseille on the so-called 'Humbert Crusade'. The knights were based on the island of Euboia. A first skirmish took place at Mytilenus which was won by the Turks in February 1346. There was a second battle at Smyrna around 24th June of the same year.

Immediately after his return to France he rejoined the royal army which was in difficulty. at Aiguillon (Lot and Garonne). The Duke of Normandy knighted him in recognition of his services to the royal cause on the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1346.

In 1347, Geoffroy, probably a widower, returned to his domains and married Jeanne de Vergy, the castles of Savoisy and Montfort being part of the dowry.

Geoffroy was launched on a diplomatic career thanks to the support of his wife's family and Guillaume Flote, who appreciated his skills.

On the 6th June 1347 his fame as a negotiator led to his being appointed to the highly-coveted post as an adviser to the King. From December 1347, he was countersigning royal documents.

Between two diplomatic missions he returned to the battlefield in the North. He helped to save the town of Bethune which was under attack from Flemish troops and the same year, 1347, the King appointed him Governor of Picardy and Captain of Saint-Omer.

In autumn 1349, he took up arms again to try to recapture the town of Calais. He attempted to draw up a secret pact with the 'guardian of the town', a Lombard called Aimery de Pavie. Unfortunately his scheme was denounced by de Pavie and he and other companions were taken prisoner and sent to the Tower of London.

A considerable ransom (12000 golden écus) was demanded to free him. Once again he was liberated on his word of honour , a few weeks later on 6th February 1350, having promised, in accordance with the usual practice, that he would pay the ransom money as soon as he had collected it.

On his return to Saint-Omer, Geoffroy and his companions in arms organised counter-attacks against the English.

He took part in some discussions aimed at prolonging a truce with the English in a village between Guînes and Calais.

It was during this period of truce that Geoffroy wrote three books.

The most important of his works was "*The Book of Chivalry*", written in prose around 1350 and it constitutes with the works of Chrétien de Troyes one of the best sources of information about chivalric codes and values.

The "*Book of Charny*", in verse, describes the life of a knight and the values he should possess.

His last work written around 1352, "*Questions on jousting, tournaments and war*" was written for newly created knights. It falls into three parts: 20 questions about jousting, 21 about tournaments and 96 about warfare.

Geoffroy was created a knight of the Order of the Star at the inaugural ceremony at Saint-Ouen on the 6th January 1352.

## **THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE COLLEGIATE CHURCH**

In June 1343, at Châteauneuf-sur-Loire, taking full advantage of a lull in the war, Geoffroy drew up a charter with the King, Philip VI of Valois, indicating his intention to build a chapel in his village of Lirey, which would be staffed by a college of five canons.

On the 16th April 1349, he petitioned Pope Innocent VI in favour of the collegiate which he had founded 6 years previously. He added an annual income from land rents of 60 Tours pounds.

At the beginning of 1353, Geoffroy gave up his military posting in Picardy to be near his family at Lirey. Anxious to bring his project to fruition after its ten-year gestation period, he asked the Abbot of Montier-la-Celle, in whose giving was the parish of Saint-Jean-de-Bonneval next to Lirey, permission to build a church. This was on 20th February 1353. The Abbot gave him this permission.

He built a church and dedicated it to the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary. He installed

six prebendary canons, a sacristan and two other minor clerics.

The official foundation act of the Chapter took place in the newly-built church at Lirey on the 20th June 1353 in the presence of Jean de Liège, an apostolic notary. He accorded an annual rent of 260 Tours pounds in perpetuity to the Chapter.

On the first of October of the same year, the foundation was confirmed by King Jean le Bon and the sovereign pontiff, Pope Innocent VI, also confirmed it in a bull dated February 1354.

## **THE ULTIMATE BATTLE**

Geoffroy made frequent visits to Paris to advise the King during royal council sessions. In 1354 he also went to Avignon to negotiate the Treaty of Guînes. At the beginning of 1355 he was called upon to act as mediator in several affairs. In June he started negotiations with Charles the Bad ( Charles II of Navarre ) who was preparing to collaborate with the English forces. A treaty was finally drawn up on the 10th September 1355 at Valognes.

On his return to Lirey, Geoffroy confirmed the foundation of the collegiate church in the presence of the King's notaries on 20th May 1356. Henri de Poitiers, bishop of Troyes, gave his approval to the act of foundation in a letter written from his summer residence at Aix-en-Othe on Saturday 21st May.

Geoffroy returned to the war-zone on 5th July. The royal army met the English forces near Poitiers. Early on the morning of 19th September, with the royal standard in his hand, Geoffroy de Charny collapsed and died parrying a lance aimed at his king, Jean le Bon.

## **THE DEPOSITION OF THE HOLY RELIC**

Faithful to her deceased husband's project, Jeanne placed the sacred relic, which she had been closely guarding, in a chest, which she entrusted to the canons for safekeeping.

Where did the relic come from ?

There is no clear answer even today as there are no precisely documented archives.

Historians have advanced many theories as to its arrival at Lirey including that of the Knights Templar who originated from the Aube department, or the descendants of Othon II de la Roche or of Guillaume de Champlitte, related to Jeanne de Vergy, or Guillaume de Toucy, the uncle of Geoffroy's first wife. The episode of the battle of Smyrna has also been largely put forward.

Whatever its origin, the canons went ahead with the exposition of the relic in 1357. As soon as Pope Innocent VI heard about the presence of the relic at Lirey, he awarded an indulgence of a year and forty days to all who went there to venerate it.

With papal and episcopal indulgences galore, you can imagine the successive waves of pilgrims from France and all over Europe thronging the streets of Lirey, singing canticles and entering the church in great devotion and prayer.

This small peaceful village became at the time one of the most important centres of christianity in France.

Very soon, the collegiate wished to make money by selling medals and emblems as in other places of pilgrimage. Made from lead or tin, the medals were sewn onto hoods or attached to a pilgrim's staff. They testified to the journeys that the pilgrims had made.

They were mass-produced by craftsmen and sold in a sort of 'shop' at the pilgrimage centre. This commerce brought in a substantial amount of money. A parallel commerce was created : accommodation - food and lodging .

We don't know exactly why, but after a year or two the veneration of the shroud was interrupted. In order to put it in a safe place ?

The reason put forward the most often is that its display was forbidden by Henry of Poitiers, the Bishop of Troyes. It appears that the bishop doubted its authenticity. This reason was advanced by Ulysse Chevalier in the early 1900s and was based on his study of a text by a later

bishop of Troyes, Pierre d'Arcis, written more than 30 years after the event.

The absence of archives has given place to several theories but no definite conclusion has been made. The local historian Abbé Albert Prévot believed that the exposition of the relic continued during these years.

In 1370 a comrade in arms of Geoffroy, Arnoul d'Audrehem died at the age of 65. The King, Charles V, ordered a state funeral for him in the church of the Celestins in Paris. He used the occasion as a pretext to have the body of Geoffroy de Charny, who had died 15 years earlier, transferred from Poitiers to the Paris church in July 1371. The King organised and paid for the funeral himself and thereby associated Geoffroy's mortal remains with his former comrade in arms.

From 1388 mention is made in archives again about the exposition of the Holy Shroud. Pierre d'Arcis, the Bishop of Troyes, bears witness to this in the early years of his episcopacy, when he goes round his diocese to see the various relics. He appeared to share the enthusiasm of the pilgrims.

## **FIRST CONTROVERSIES**

It appears that there was growing tension between the Bishop of Troyes and the collegiate canons about the presence of the Holy Shroud in the church and the income it brought in. The papal legate, Pierre de Thurey intervened and obtained a papal indult allowing the canons to continue the veneration of the relic, despite the prohibition by the bishop, at the beginning of 1389. Extra indulgences were also granted.

Furious, Pierre d'Arcis wrote to the Pope who confirmed his authorisation but asked that the canons should inform the pilgrims that the relic was a painted copy. But again, no original document has been found.

King Charles V spent a few days in Troyes at the beginning of August 1389 and sought to put an end to the public quarrel around the relic. He ordered the bailiff to confiscate the linen shroud and to take it to a church in Troyes

while he made up his mind as to what to do about the problem. Jehan de Venderesse with a band of armed men went to Lirey to carry out the sentence. He searched the chapel but was unable to find the Holy Shroud. On the 15th August a further attempt was made to take possession of the relic, but again this was unsuccessful.

By way of reply to the submissions made by Pierre d'Arcis, the Anti-Pope Clement VII edited the bull 'Apostolica Sedis' dated 6th January 1390 which modified and completed the precedent bull, especially about the presence of a fake shroud.

It was Ulysse Chevalier, well-known for his hostility to the authenticity of the shroud, who gave this information. It is now established, after the painstaking in-depth research of Emmanuel Poulle, that the document which mentioned a painted copy is not credible : it is neither dated nor signed. However it could well have been written in December 1389, ie between the bull of July 1389 and that of January 1390.

As for the reply of Clement VII, there is no original of the bull, only copies. One is to be found in the National Library, the other in the Archives of the Popedom of Avignon.

In his study published in 1900, Canon Ulysse Chevalier referred to the first copy, which differs from the second, and which contains numerous modifications and changes with words and phrases crossed out or added. It is countersigned by Jean of Naples who was responsible for the Chancery and is dated the 28th May, the day it was registered. What is more it had already been altered on the 8th February....

In the definitive version of the 28th May, there is no mention made of the prohibition of wearing canonical vestments NOR any mention of the relic being a painting or a picture !

Just like statistics, documents can be manipulated. Only the definitive version, recorded by the Papal Chancery on the 28th May 1390 can be considered as being a regulatory decree. It is clear that the Pope did

not act on the propositions of the Bishop of Troyes, Pierre d'Arcis.

The second copy of the bull, at Avignon, also registered on 28th May, takes into account the definitive version of the first copy, and thus confirms the authenticity of the official content Bull of the 6th January.. It should also be noted that the third part of the bull, addressed to church officials, had undergone the same types of correction and modification.

Once it was officially registered, the content of the bull was undoubtedly sent to the Dean of the collegiate by messenger as would be the custom. It would have taken about two days for the courier to get to Troyes from Avignon. It was sent on or about 1st June, which happens to coincide with the letter the canons received putting an end to the polemics of the previous year and confirming the indulgences accorded to all those who visited the collegiate.

One can thus call into question a goodly number of the publications relying on Canon Chevalier's writings, concerning the conditions of the exposition and veneration of the cloth. The authors of these observations have not hesitated to describe the canon-historian as being 'dishonest'.

The contested version of Canon Ulysse Chevalier called into question the first prohibition of the expositions in 1358, as we have already seen, due to the intervention of Henri de Poitiers, the Bishop of Troyes.

These errors had already been noted by M. de Mely and Baron Joseph du Teil when his work first appeared in 1901.

## **THE HOLY SHROUD LEAVES LIREY**

Fearing for the safety of their relic, the canons of Lirey entrusted it to Humbert de Villesexel, the second husband of Marguerite de Charny, the granddaughter of Geoffroy. The relic was taken to the castle at Montfort on the 6th July 1418 and straightaway transferred to the church of Notre Dame de Saint-Hippolyte on the river Doubs and placed in the Buessard chapel.

Jeanne de Vergy died in 1428.

Marguerite de Charny, the new owner of the Shroud, refused to give it back to the canons of Lirey who filed several long lawsuits, but the tribunal of Besançon found in HER favour. She moved from place to place with the relic, particularly in Belgium. Before the expiration of a new delay of execution, on the 22nd March 1452, she sent a letter, the so-called 'letter of Chambéry', to Duke Louis 1st of Savoy and his wife Anne de Lusignan, a princess of Cyprus. She promised to hand over the Holy Shroud over to them in return for a substantial financial and material consideration.

On 13th September 1452 the Holy Shroud was put on display at Germolles-sur-Grosne, now in the Saône et Loire department.

In 1453 it was taken from Sainte-Hippolyte to the church of St François in Chambéry.

Marguerite de Charny died on the 7th October 1460.

The canons then tried to play a trump card by petitioning King Louis XI to intervene on their behalf with his cousin the Duke of Savoy for the return of the relic or, if all else failed, to obtain an annual rent for it. The petition failed. It was understood that the Holy Shroud would never return to Lirey.

The Holy Shroud was transferred from Chambéry to Turin on the 14th September 1578.

### **THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW CHURCH**

Despite the absence of the relic, at Lirey, pilgrims still came to venerate the Virgin Mary.

Having sufficient income, the Dean, Jean Huyard, decided to have a new church built of Tonnerre stone inside the collegiate itself. It was consecrated on 27th March 1526. He also donated two magnificent altar-pieces.

The French Revolution sounded the death-knell of the collegiate. Over the course of centuries the number of canons had diminished because the collegiate had been dispossessed of much

of its land and income and the buildings were in ruins.

The church was sold as national property and finally demolished in 1828. The stones were used for building houses or enclosing walls in the village. The church furnishings were dispersed to neighbouring churches.

One of the altar-pieces was placed in the church of Crésantignes in 1828. The history of the other altar-piece is more complex. Today it is to be found in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

### **THE BUILDING OF THE PRESENT CHAPEL**

The very devout and rich Marie-Sophie-Pauline Onfroy de Bréville, the wife of the Prefect of the Aube under the July Monarchy, left a legacy for the construction of a chapel in the parish. The foundation stone was laid by Monsignor Robin, vicar-general of the diocese of Troyes, on the 18th May, 1896.

### **THE PILGRIM'S BADGES OF LIREY**

One was discovered in 1855 at the Pont aux Changes, Paris. (Cluny museum, n°CL4752)

It dates from the first half of the XVth century. Made from an alloy of tin and lead, it is 62 mm in length and 45 mm in height. Oblong shaped, the upper and lower parts are incomplete.

Two clergymen can be made out. They are showing a piece of cloth decorated with hatched alternate lines. On this woven cloth, two figures of a naked man, one on his back, the other on his stomach, show that it is one and the same man, Christ, front and back view, on his unfolded winding sheet. On the lower part of the badge can be seen a representation of the 'Arma Christi' – the Instruments of the Passion – two whips, the scourging at the pillar, the lance and the nails.

The coat of arms on the right is that of Jeanne de Vergy, gules with three gold cinquefoils and on the left the coat of arms of Geoffroy de Charny, gules with three silver shields.

## THE LIREY MEDALLION MOULD

In 2009, quite by chance, a mould for badges was found in a field near the boundary of the village of Machy.

It is made of a very fine black shalestone.

It is clearly interesting to compare the image engraved on the mould with the badge at the museum of Cluny. There are many similarities. The depiction of two canons, in cape and stole in some sort of church. The Holy Shroud has the same hatched lines reproducing the woven herring-bone cloth in the same detail.

There are some important differences.

First of all, in the middle, the face of the stylised Christ-figure is shown with his eyes open. The mould bears the inscription under the face: « *SUAIRE :IHV* » to designate the shroud.

For Ian Wilson the three letters are clearly Greek: I (iota) H (eta) and S (sigma) an abbreviation for the phrase '*the shroud of Christ*', genitive case.

Two other letters, half-visible, appear on either side of the coats of arms, under the pillars.

Sarah Blick has suggested that they could well be an E and a C which could mean '*Ecce Crucio*', ie '*Behold, the crucified*'.

An Italian specialist, Andrea Nicolotti, has proposed that the locution " *Ecce suaire Jesu Christi*" ou "Here is the shroud of our Lord Jesus Christ"

The coats of arms are inversed. It is quite possible that the arms on the right belong to the most important person. On the Lirey mould, Geoffroy de Charny's is on the right and he would still have been alive. On the Cluny badge he is presumably dead because the coat of arms of Jeanne de Vergy is on the right...But this theory does not necessarily apply!