

THE LIREY CONTROVERSY

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Somewhere between 20 June 1353 and 19 September 1356, the day of his death, Geoffroy de Charny consigned a precious Relic to the canons of the collegiate church, St. Mary of the Annunciation, which he had founded in Lirey, Diocese of Troyes. He undoubtedly displayed the Relic to the public before his death, claiming it to be the very Shroud which enveloped Our Savior Jesus Christ in the tomb, and on which his whole image and his wounds had remained impressed.

And then the Shroud was removed from the church; when or why is not clearly known.

The official history of the Relic can be dated from 1390, the year in which the official dossier began to swell with innumerable bureaucratic documents, accepted by all critics, both those who are favorable and those who are opposed to the Relic's authenticity. Occasioned by a painful polemic which broke out between the Charny heirs, owners of the Linen, and the Bishop of Troyes, these documents speak precisely of that Object, again present in the Lirey church, as the property of Geoffroy II of Charny, son of the above. Thus the year 1390 is the point of division before which the Holy Shroud lived in comparative obscurity and after which it entered into the certainty of documented history.

In mid-1389, Geoffroy II de Charny, having inherited the Shroud, requested permission from the papal legate from Rome, Card. Pierre de Thury, to return the Shroud to the church after its long absence and to resume the expositions for public veneration. The legate granted permission only to deposit the Relic in the church.

The Bishop of Troyes, Pierre d'Arcis, incensed that the dispensation had been granted without his being consulted and without his knowledge, then intervened. While Geoffroy II, referring to what he had learned from his father, maintained that the Shroud had wrapped the body of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who had left upon it the imprint of his sacred body, Bishop d'Arcis maintained that the Linen was a painting created to collect offerings.

As the controversy grew, it involved the authority of the papal legate as well as decisions of Charles VI, King of France, and the antipope Clement VII (residing at Avignon and considered in France as the legitimate pope), who became the arbiter in the dispute, at least as far as we can learn from the documents which have come down to us.

Thence followed excommunications, orders of requisition, disappearance of the Shroud, prudent waiting, contradictory judgments and, in the end, renewal of the expositions.

Having prepared the ground with these brief introductory remarks, let us list and examine the documents on the basis of which one can reconstruct the events which have disturbed the history of the Holy Shroud. The documents, insofar as they are already known, have been "exhumed and dusted off", as the canon Ulysse Chevalier used to say; and Chevalier, that known opponent of authenticity, waved them like banners as irrefutable proof of the manual origin of the Shroud. A few years ago these documents were republished^{*}; not only the complete texts but also reproductions of the copies in the Vatican Archives, in order to show, with appropriate comments, the weaknesses in Chevalier's affirmations. These documents absolutely do not prove what Chevalier maintained or what some historians in his wake are determined to maintain today.

Here is the list of documents which interest us:

1. Letter of Clement VII to Geoffroy II de Charny, dated 28 July 1389
2. Bull of Clement VII, 6 January 1390
3. Letter of Clement VII to Pierre d'Arcis, 6 January 1390
4. Letter of Clement VII to the ecclesiastical officials of Autun, Langres and Chalons-sur-Marne, 6 January 1390
5. Bull of Clement VII, dated 1 June 1390
6. The so-called Memorandum of Pierre d'Arcis (undated) which, in Chevalier's opinion, dates from the end of 1389.

Various Measures of Clement VII

The various measures of Clement VII do not follow a single linear interpretation: in fact they contradict each other, ranging from ample permission to display the Linen (28 July 1389) to rigorous rules to be observed in its public exposition (6 Jan. 1390) and finally numerous indulgences conceded to those who visit the Lirey church expressly on account of the Relic which was there "preserved with veneration" (*venerabiliter conservata*), in the Bull of 1 June 1390.

The letter of Clement VII to Geoffroy II, dated 28 July 1389, ratifies the dispensation granted by the papal legate (before 19 June) and grants maximum liberty to display the Shroud "whenever opportune".

The most crucial of the documents is the Bull of 6 Jan. 1390: Chevalier indicates six copies of it, including the one in the Vatican Archives. In this Bull, Clement VII prohibits the liturgical solemnities customary in the veneration of relics and stipulates that it should be announced "in loud and intelligible voice" that "the Linen with the imprints is not the true Shroud of Christ but a copy and representation made in imitation of the Shroud of the same Lord Jesus Christ".

^{*} Luigi Fossati: *La Santa Sindone: Nuova Luce su Antichi Documenti*, Borla Editore, Turin, 1961. [Ed.]

Reading this Bull alongside the Pope's letter to Geoffroy II, we find that some parts are exactly the same while others are totally different. The central portion of the Bull seems to have been copied word for word from the letter; the introduction and conclusion of the Bull reveal, instead, another set of ideas which, perhaps by the necessity of circumstances, was imposed upon the previous point of view. The introductory sentence undoubtedly explains this change: "The watchful attention of the Apostolic See sometimes modifies that which it was once able to allow and concerning these same concessions disposes that which it believes best in the Lord, according to the demands of the times and the circumstances".

Thus Clement VII annulled in part the concessions made in the letter of 28 July 1389.

The diversity of the two dispositions is so noticeable that one is quite at loss to explain it; first the greatest freedom and then the rigorous prescriptions to be scrupulously observed. For his part, Geoffroy II felt quite securely guaranteed by the dispensation of the papal legate and by the Pope's letter of July 28, and precisely on this account he had resisted the protests of the Bishop, transgressing his orders to remove the holy Relic.

In his first study (1900), Chevalier published Clement's letter to Geoffroy II under the date of 6 Jan. 1390. In his second study (1903), he republished the same letter with the date of 28 July 1389—which is correct—without explaining the correction and without mentioning the very obvious differences between the dispositions contained in the letter and those contained in the other documents of 6 Jan. 1390. So the impression remained that all the writings of Clement VII contained perfectly consistent and univocal dispositions. There was no mention of the fact that the original copy of the Bull of 6 Jan. 1390, the official document conserved in the Vatican Archives, bore important corrections dated 30 May 1390; nor was any account given of the indulgences granted to those who visit the Lirey church and venerate the Relic, as determined in the new Bull of 1 June 1390.

But it must be asked: how does it happen that the letter of 28 July 1389 does not have a corresponding Bull stating the papal decisions? And why were the contents of the Bull of 6 Jan. 1390 not communicated to Geoffroy II with a letter similar to those sent to Bishop d'Arcis and to the church officials of Autun, Langres and Chalons-surMarne? While it is difficult to answer these queries, it is also too facile to say that the documents could have been lost. However, the perplexity and uncertainty of Clement VII in taking decisions is quite evident, as successive provisions will show even more clearly.

Letter to d'Arcis

The essential parts of the Pope's letter to Bishop d'Arcis (6 Jan. 1390) are drafted from the Bull of the same date. The letter is very incisive. Referring to the Bull, it reminds the Bishop of his future responsibility concerning the prescriptions to be observed in displaying

the Linen, i.e., not according to d'Arcis' judgment but according to what is laid down in the Bull. And it threatens the Bishop with excommunication if he does not allow exposition of the Linen, always so long as the rules fixed in the Bull are scrupulously observed. It also clearly mentions a communication from Geoffroy II which has not been found: "*Pro parte dicti Gaufridi petitio ...*".

These aspects of the letter to d'Arcis match those in the Pope's letter to the church officials at Autun, Langres and Chalons-sur-Marne, ecclesiastics who could be considered neutral in the litigations. While bureaucratic in tone, this letter contains much more than at first appears. It expressly charges the officials to see that the provisions in the Bull are observed, both by Geoffroy II and Bishop d'Arcis. And all the provisions were favorable to the chapter of the Lirey church, whose members, custodians of the Shroud, cannot be subject to interdict, suspension or excommunication—the Bishop had already excommunicated the Dean of the Lirey church—unless by a decision of the Apostolic See.

Expressions Used to Indicate the Relic

In the documents of Clement VII, the Linen with the imprints is always called a *figura seu representacio Sudarii Domini Nostri Jhesu Christi* (a figure or representation of the Shroud of Our Lord Jesus Christ). The expression does not seem to embrace the idea of a reproduction by hand; we ourselves say "the imprint, the image on the Shroud". Only once in all the documents do we find a phrase which seems to support the idea that the Shroud was painted. The words used are *pictura seu tabula* (picture or painting) and they appear only in the Bull of Jan. 6.

It seems possible to conclude that Clement VII, in his letter to Geoffroy II, using the phrase *figura seu representacio* did not intend to define the Shroud as a painting, so much the more since almost a year later, in the Bull of 1 June 1390, the same expression *figura seu representacio* returns with the concession of indulgences connected with the Object preserved *venerabiliter* in the church. Therefore, from the documents it would seem that to indicate a manual copy one uses the phrase *pictura seu tabula*, and to indicate the Shroud the expression *figura seu representacio* (an admission that, at least in theory, a Shroud of Christ could possibly exist ...). From these statements we might conclude that when he wrote the first document, the letter of 28 July 1389, Clement VII was not thinking of a copy. Only when the polemics developed between Geoffroy II and the Bishop, doubts arose and the Pope had recourse to the second expression.

It should be emphasized that, on the original Vatican copies of the Jan. 6 Bull and the letter to the church officials of the same date, the expression *pictura seu tabula* was cancelled so that the text reads *figuram seu representacionem Sudarii quod fore dicitur eiusdem Domini Nostri Jhesu Christi*, and in the margin is a note dated 30 May 1390: *Correctum de mandato Jo. de Neapoli* (corrected by order of

John of Naples).

It is perhaps a unique instance in the papal chancery in which the copy sent to the addressee has one text while that in the Archives has another, and that later copies are not concordant depending on, whether they derive from the one text or the other.

The corrected document of Jan. 6 and the Bull of June 1 approve the tradition and the belief that the Cloth could be the True Shroud of Christ, and show that the fundamental thought behind the Bull of Jan. 6 was not so much concerned with the authenticity of the Shroud as it was with the mode of its exposition.

The Bull of 1 June 1390, issued five months after the dispositions taken on Jan. 6, grants new indulgences to encourage pilgrims to the Lirey church because, as the Bull affirmed, "the Shroud with the imprint of Our Lord Jesus Christ is there preserved with veneration". And the expression used is *figura seu representacio*. It may be added that an object known to have been manually produced is not preserved with veneration.

This last decision of Clement VII seems to rely on a communication from Geoffroy II, there where it says "*sicut accepimus*" (as we have been informed). The Charny document might have helped to clarify this point, but unfortunately it is missing.

Memorandum of Pierre d'Arcis

Having analyzed the papal documents, let us now examine the Memorandum attributed to Bishop d'Arcis. Various details in this document provide other elements which, despite contrary assertions contained in it, militate against a theory of a manual origin of the Relic.

The Bibliotheque Nationale of Paris possesses two copies of the Memorandum. Neither is dated. One is complete, the other incomplete. No trace of the Memorandum is found in the *Promptuarium Tricassinae Diocesis* of the canon Nicolas Camusat, assiduous collector of the ancient archives of the Diocese of Troyes, even though he expressly wrote of the Lirey church, of Henri de Poitiers, the bishop who approved the activities of Geoffroy I, and of Pierre d'Arcis and his dispute with Geoffroy II. It is not possible to know why Camusat chose to omit a transcription of the Memorandum. Perhaps it is not far from the truth to suppose that the omission is due to the fact that the document seemed to be only a rough draft never put in final form to be sent to the Pope. Even Chevalier defines it as a pro-memoria. Eschback remarks, "With neither date nor signature, it is a rough draft of such faulty style that one could not attribute it to an episcopal pen".

The question arises: did the Memorandum as we have it arrive in official form to the Avignon court? Or was it only a personal memorandum which subsequently entered history as an official document motivating papal prescriptions without its being so in reality?

What is more, the writings of Clement VII do not seem to be motivated

by a communication from Bishop d'Arcis, as pointed out above.

Memorandum versus Papal Documents

Let us look now at the Memorandum and the documents of Clement VII, comparing their descriptions of the events connected with the public displaying of the Shroud.

The Memorandum relates that the canons of Lirey, seeing that their malice had been discovered, "hid and suppressed the cloth". It goes on to say that "because of the wars in the kingdom and other reasons", by order of the local Ordinary the cloth was deposited in another place and kept there for a long time. The Bull however says that because of the wars and the plague then rampant "and certain other reasons", the local Ordinary of the church ordered that the *figura seu representacio* be removed to a safe and decent place to be kept in venerable custody.

It is difficult to establish what the "other reasons" might have been; probably a combination of circumstances which could also include the death of Geoffroy I. In any case, the Shroud was transferred elsewhere, remaining out of sight until 1389, the year in which Geoffroy II re-consigned it to the canons of the church. The motives behind the expositions are described thus:

1. Expositions under Bishop Henri de Poitiers and Geoffroy I

The Memorial relates that the dean of the church, a man fraudulent and iniquitous, fired by avarice and cupidity rather than devotion, had gone in search of the Linen in order to solicit offerings from pilgrims.

According to the Bull, it was "the father of this Geoffroy, burning with the zeal of devotion" who had consigned the Shroud to the church.

2. Expositions under Pierre d'Arcis and Geoffroy II

According to the Memorandum, we find the same situation in 1389; the new dean, "premeditating fraud", goes to Geoffroy II, "*ut dicitur...*" requesting that the Cloth be replaced in the church, reestablishing the pilgrimages for the purpose of increasing revenues. And at the dean's suggestion, Geoffroy II "follows the footsteps of his predecessor".

The Bull, instead, states that Geoffroy II has entrusted the Shroud to the church "to increase the devotion of the people and increase the divine cult".

The divergencies are too obvious to require comment. From d'Arcis' frequent use of the parenthetical *ut dicitur* (it is said, as the rumor goes) on which he seems to base his case, one feels that the Memorandum relies less on documents and personal investigation than on the anonymous hearsay spread by possibly invidious persons.

What astonishes us, however is the identical conduct of the two deans; the first in 1355 and the second in 1389. Is it possible that both of them, so avid for money, employed the same method for acquiring it? And as Eschback justly observes: "The choice and the nomination

of the first canons was done with the greatest care, and had been confirmed by the bishop of the diocese ... And one would have us believe that in the presence of these tombs, both groups of the chapter, in the very beginning of its existence, would unanimously have continued, without remorse, to weave these infamous machinations? Truly we have here one of those impossibilities which constitute self-refutation".

Dependency of the Bull on the Memorandum

The study of all these opposing documents leads to an examination of a conjecture expressed by several authors regarding the dependency of the Jan. 6 Bull upon the Memorandum attributed to Pierre d'Arcis. According to Chevalier, the Bull would be the reply to the Memorandum, with which it shared the opinion that the imprint was of manual origin. But even if it were true that the Bull depended on the Memorandum, it must be remembered that the idea of a manual origin, at first accepted, was afterwards rejected.

Furthermore, just as the papal documents quote the Charny petitions, so also the Bishop's communications would have been quoted and summarized. The practice of taking the cue and incentive from a petition and alluding to its contents, while not absolutely de rigueur, was so customary in the style of the papal curia that it is not possible to think otherwise in this case. And this would have been evident in the letter addressed to the Bishop. Just as the Charny petition is mentioned in the letter to the Bishop, mention of the Bishop's writings would not have been omitted if such had come to the papal court in official form. However, the Memorandum is not cited in any official document while, from the official documents, one can reconstruct a list of eight petitions from Geoffroy II.

When Could the Lirey Relic Have Been Painted?

It is very important to establish in what period the Lirey Linen could have been painted, in order to determine if indeed it was possible to produce a painting at all. The Memorandum affirms that the Shroud was preserved privately or kept hidden "for about 34 years", up to 1389 (the date Chevalier gives for the writing of the Memorandum). Subtracting 34 from 1389 gives us 1355 as the year in which, according to d'Arcis, Bishop Henri de Poitiers, "at the suggestion of many prudent persons", would have conducted the inquiry which ended in the discovery that the Object had been painted, and the artist himself had confessed.

The Memorandum continues: the canons, "seeing their malice detected, hid the cloth for about 34 years".

At this point, a few dates can help to settle the question:

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| 20 Feb. 1353 | Construction is begun on the Lirey church; |
| 20 June 1353 | Act of Foundation; |
| 30 Jan. 1354 | Bull and letter of Pope Innocent VI recognizing the college of canons and granting various indulgences; |

3 Aug. 1354	Additional indulgences granted;
16 Oct. 1354	First meeting, election of the chapter of canons and reading of the Act of Donation;
about 1355	Period in which, according to the Memorandum, the proceedings of Bishop Henri de Poitiers against the canons and Geoffroy I occurred as a result of the disclosure of the "fraud", and the consequent removal of the Relic from the church;
28 May 1356	Letter of praise and approval from Henri de Poitiers to Geoffroy I, founder of the church, for all that he had done;
19 Sept. 1356	Death of Geoffroy I at the Battle of Poitiers;
5 June 1357	Twelve prelates of the Avignon papal court grant indulgences to the faithful who visit the Lirey church on the specified holy days.

The letter of 28 May 1356 is the only extant document of Bishop Henri de Poitiers which bears upon the question. Its contents are a direct refutation of what is alleged in the Memorandum; the Bishop informs Geoffroy I that he is satisfied with all he has done for the *divinum cultum* and adds his *laudamus, ratificamus, approbamus* (we praise, ratify and approve). Chevalier merely lists this document without reporting its text. In fact, there exists no document relating to Henri de Poitier's inquiry, no document alluding to his appointing a commission, nor the confession of an artist.

Considering the above dates, we must fix the period of the supposed painting between 16 Oct. 1354 and 1355, the year in which the removal would have occurred. Another hypothesis would place the time of the forgery between 28 May and 19 Sept. 1356.

The theory that the Shroud was painted in one of these brief periods, through the astute planning of the dean, does not coincide with the events which follow respectively the two periods. Let us then list the events which necessarily had to precede the creation of the Shroud as a painted artifact:

1. Formulation, with agreement of all the members of the college, of the original scheme for collecting money.
2. Search for that particular kind of cloth which, according to specialists, did not exist in Europe in the 14th century.
3. Conception of the unusual figuration of a naked man, back and front, in natural size.
4. Search for a painter skillful enough to create such a strange image and the time needed to prepare the masterpiece.
5. The time needed to generate the fame and notoriety described in the Memorandum: "not only from France, but from the whole world".
6. Adequate time for the intervention of Henri de Poitiers; the course of his investigation; his considerations concerning what should be done; and the taking of the relative provisions.

All this in little more than a year for the first period (16 Oct. 1354 to about 1355) and in four months for the second period (May to Sept. 1356).

Still less can this alleged conspiracy be reconciled with the events which follow each period; the letter of commendation from Henri de Poitiers to Geoffroy I (28 May 1356) for the first period; the granting of indulgences to all who piously visit the church and its relics by the twelve prelates of Avignon (5 June 1357) which closes the second period. How could these be explained if there had been any friction between the canons and their bishop, if proceedings against them had developed or was developing, or if the memory of such scandal was still alive?*

From the silence regarding these points in the letter of Henri de Poitiers and in the document of the twelve prelates, it could be argued, with Chamard, that the Shroud had not yet been deposited in the church at the time of the May 28 letter. But this hypothesis is inadmissible because the writings of Clement VII on this point are consistent. So one has to conclude that the Shroud did not excite, on its own account, so vast a polemic as the Memorandum would have us believe; and if there were questions, they would have been questions of a disciplinary order, exaggerated, perhaps, by Pierre d'Arcis in order to sustain his position against the canons and the owner of the Shroud.

The strict attitude of Bishop d'Arcis is, in a sense, understandable. The crusaders, returning from the Orient, had brought back an infinity of relics, unfortunately not all of them authentic, for which reason Church leaders felt obliged to exercise caution and vigilance to prevent the faithful from being deceived.

Bishop de Poitiers, according to his successor, could also have been concerned over the veneration of so singular a relic, and without taking the trouble to see the object for himself, relegated it amongst the many other paintings which helped promote piety. There is no indication from the documents that either Henri de Poitiers or Pierre d'Arcis ever examined the Shroud, or ever even saw it. Even the most uninformed in artistic matters would see the great difference between the imprints on the Shroud and the paintings of that period—a difference which served to convince the owners of the Linen, and all those who saw it, that that Linen was the *verum Christi Sudarium*, the true Shroud of Christ.

It is also possible that the Memorandum could have resulted from one of the many rivalries and jealousies arising from points of prestige. In many churches, during the Easter celebrations it was customary to display a shroud to render the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection more vivid, more intimately felt. But the canons at Lirey claimed that theirs was the true Shroud of Christ, and they displayed

* One might also ask if Henri de Poitiers would have permitted his niece to be married to Geoffroy II, if scandal followed his name. [Ed.]

it not only at Easter, but also on other holy days. This independent behavior could have caused complaints from nearby parishes, for mere decency demanded that the canons conform to the prevalent custom of an annual exposition, without pretending to be the possessors of a unique relic of the Savior. For their part, the canons and Geoffroy II were acting legally, having had permission from the papal legate and the Pope himself—both superior in authority to the Bishop.

Opinion of the Owners as to the Relic's Authenticity

This discussion would not be complete if we failed to mention the opinion about the Shroud held by its legitimate owners, their successors, and the canons who officiated in the church where the Relic was kept. Pierre d'Arcis affirms in his Memorandum that the owners were convinced that the Linen was truly the Shroud in which Our Savior Jesus Christ was wrapped in the tomb, and on which had remained the imprint of his entire body, with the marks of his wounds. And even after all his remonstrances and prohibitions, d'Arcis continues, "though in public they do not say it is the true Shroud of Christ, nevertheless privately they do say it, and this claim is spread about so that many believe it to be the true Shroud".

These two remarks made by the Bishop deserve the greatest consideration because they clearly fix the thought of the Charnys in the dispute. Nor did the canons of the Lirey church ever waver in regarding the Linen as authentic, and this is supported by the fact that, in their efforts to have the Shroud returned to the church, they continued to bring divers but always futile lawsuits against Marguerite, the last of the Charnys, from 1443 until her death in 1460. In these documents, the authenticity of the Object is implicitly recognized, for if it had been similar to the many painted cloths, it would not have been demanded with such insistence.

In all the records of the courts, the question of authenticity is never expressly mentioned; the documents are limited to matters of ownership and of depository. And the proprietor, the canons and the judges themselves, both ecclesiastical and secular, always refer to the cloth as the *Saint Suaire de Notre Seigneur Jhesuchrist; preciosissimum jocale; devotissimum et colendum Sudarium* (the Holy Shroud of Our Lord Jesus Christ; the most precious object of joy; most holy and venerable Shroud) and they set it above every other relic.

Whence comes the certainty on the part of the owners which prompted them to maintain its genuineness, even though they could not produce a single piece of evidence which in any way guaranteed it?

For those whose lot it was to deal with the precious Linen, the convincing proof and the obvious demonstration of its authenticity lay in the uniqueness of the image, a representation never imagined in art.

Conclusions

In attempting a concluding synthesis, we remain surprised; why are

all the documents of the defense lacking? Why are the opinions and judicial decisions contradictory? And, when all is said and done, why have the accusations not won the argument?

To those who give too much weight to the lack of documents for the defense, one can counter with the fact of the total silence, in the papal decisions, concerning the documents of accusation. And to those who are dissatisfied with the vagueness and disparity in the judgments, one can simply say that the Object in question still exists and it is always in our power to re-enact the trial; or, if not a trial, then an accurate study which can lead us, in serene discussion, to logical conclusions. But we have the great good fortune to possess today this figured document itself; and this Object itself has, one could say, appealed against the judgment expressed, so hastily, six centuries ago.

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