

THE EMPEROR'S SCISSORS

DOROTHY CRISPINO

As emperors go, Baudouin II de Courtenay did not make much of a dent in history. He is almost never mentioned except as "the last Latin emperor of Byzantium". Perhaps if circumstances had been different, he might have been remembered for something besides that inglorious end.

Baudouin, born in 1217, was two years younger than his cousin Louis IX of France. Louis and Baudouin both descended from Louis VI and Alix of Savoy. Louis was a grandson of Philippe II Augustus and Isabelle, daughter of Baudouin V, Count of Hainaut; Baudouin, of the Courtenay line, also was of Hainaut through his mother, Yolande. She was sister to Baudouin IX, Count of Flanders and Hainaut, who became Baudouin I, first Latin emperor of the East. As things turned out, Baudouin II eventually succeeded his uncle as emperor of what little was left of Romania.

Louis became king of France (1226) at the age of eleven; Baudouin came to his unsteady throne (1228) at the age of eleven. The two were good friends; they often had occasion to be together during the course of their lives. In 1249, Louis, before Damiette, had at his side his brother, Prince Charles, Count of Anjou, and his cousin, the emperor Baudouin II. But their destinies, as their capitals, were poles apart.

Baudouin's empire was on the verge of collapse; Constantinople was strangled between Bulgars, Turks and Greeks. Was the City on the Bosphorus important to the kingdoms of the West? Was the heritage of Constantine's New Rome to be sheared away from the Holy See? One must give the man credit for sacrificing his own life to the ignominious role of an emperor begging western monarchs for money and military support as he strove to defend European power in the Orient.

In the end, of course, it was no use. In 1261, he barely escaped with his life—and a few choice relics—when a Greek force took Constantinople by surprise and put it to the torch. The first stop in this hasty flight was at Negrepont; in 1246, Geoffroy de Charny spent the winter there before proceeding to Smyrna. If indeed he ever went that far. From Negrepont, Baudouin reached the kingdom of the Two Sicilys and the hospitality of King Charles I, none other than his cousin Charles of

Anjou.* He died in 1272 (other dates given, 1273, 1274), still following his cousin Louis, victim of the plague at Tunis in 1270.

It was due precisely to the constant peril, the chronic need of money, that Baudouin II de Courtenay enters into the history of the Shroud. He is the last person known to have had the Shroud in his very hands until, a century or so later, it turned up in Lirey in the possession of Geoffroy de Charny. (I would even venture to say that he was the first person, after Joseph of Arimathea, known to have had the Shroud in his hands, as he wielded the imperial scissors.)

Heir to the fiefs of Namur, Flanders and Courtenay, in 1237, to finance his defense against the combined armies of Bulgaria and Nicea, he gave Namur to Louis for 50,000 livres. While he was in France on this errand, the Greeks attacked Constantinople. In this emergency, the Venetians advanced a huge loan, and from the treasury of the Boucoleon took the Crown of Thorns as surety, depositing it in one of their churches in Constantinople.

It was, to Louis and Baudouin, a shameful barter and in 1239 Louis paid the ransom and sent trusted envoys to Constantinople to make sure that the Venetians would not substitute some fraud.

Louis had already begun a collection of relics; Syrian, Egyptian, Jewish and Greek merchants knew their recompense if they found some holy item the King would accept. In 1235, under the architect Philippe de Montereaux, construction had begun on a Sainte-Chapelle at the Castle of St.-Germain-en-Laye, where the king was pleased to spend many summers. Although this chapel was completed in 1238, the newly-acquired Crown of Thorns was not taken there, but was kept in the Royal Chapel until, from the faith of King St. Louis and the genius of Philippe de Montereaux, the incredible Sainte-Chapelle rose beside the king's palace in Paris, with a gallery linking it to Louis' private apartments.

Again in 1241 and 1242, Louis redeemed other relics from the Venetians, holding them all as pledges until Baudouin could pay off his mounting debts.

But the fortunes of the penniless emperor never improved, and in 1247, returning to France, Baudouin ceded all the ransomed relics to Louis. Among them was a piece of the Shroud.

* According to some French sources, Baudouin's son Philippe married Beatrice of Sicily; their daughter Catherine married Charles of Valois. Therefore, Catherine de Valois-Courtenay was mother of Philippe VI, first king of the Valois dynasty. Other sources, more reliable, give the wife of Charles of Valois (and mother of Philippe VI) as Margaret of Sicily, daughter of Charles II, King of Naples and son of Charles I (Anjou) in whose court Baudouin II found refuge.

Now how could he have given Louis a "piece" of the Shroud, if someone had carried it away in 1204? It is very clear from the Chronicles of the Fourth Crusade, especially Villehardouin; and from Greek documents of 1207 (Mesarites) and numerous other indications, that the imperial treasuries, containing hoards of relics of the Passion of Christ, had not been ransacked when the crusading armies were let loose upon the town in 1204. After all, it was gold, jewels, rich fabrics—immediate source of wealth—that the barbarous troops coveted, even while relics were by no means ignored. There are a half-dozen Holy Lances in Europe's cathedrals; at least a baker's dozen of skulls of St. John the Baptist. But so much gold and jewels had been stripped and stolen, that in 1241 Baudouin had been reduced to selling the lead tiles from the roofs of his palaces, to pay his soldiers.

As for the relics of the Passion; they were still in Constantinople and Baudouin had the key to the vaults where they were kept. He surely prized the Shroud above all the rest; others, too, were aware of its unique worth, for what was pawned to the Venetians was never the Shroud, but only a portion thereof. And this portion was among the objects redeemed by Louis. The document of cession is dated St.-Germain-en-Laye, June 1247:

*Baldonus Dei gratia fidelissimus in Christo imperator a Deo coronatus...
Notum fieri volumus universis, quod carissimo amico et consanguineo nostro Ludovico Regi Franciae illustrissimo [cedimus]....
Partem Sudarii, quo involutum fuit corpus eius [scilicet Domini nostri Jesu Christi] in sepulchro....
In cuius rei testimonium et perpetuam firmitatem nos signavimus praesentes litteras nostro signo Imperiali, et bullavimus bulla nostra aurea. Actum apud Sanctum Germanum in Laya, anno Domini millesimo, ducentesimo, quadragesimo septimo, mense Junio, Imperii vero nostri anno octavo.*

Baudouin, by the grace of God, most faithful in Christ, crowned emperor before God....

We want to make known to all the world, that we cede to our dear friend and blood-relative, Louis, illustrious King of France....

A part of the Sudarium in which the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was wrapped in the sepulchre....

In testimony to these things and in perpetuity, we sign the present letter with our Imperial signature and seal it with our golden seal. Done at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, A.D. 1247, month of June, eighth year of our reign.

In May, 1248, at the pleas of Juan di Medina Pomar, archbishop of Toledo (Spain), Louis sent a "*pretiosa particula de Sindone, qua corpus ipsius [Domini] sepultum iacuit in sepulchro*".

Juan ,di Medina had only been elected archbishop of Toledo on 21 February 1248; he died July 23 of the same year. Strange interlude. But he had indeed received his "particula", as we see from St. Louis' letter:

Ludovicus, Dei gratia Francorum rex, dilectis viris in Christo canonicis et universo clero Ecclesie Toletane, salutem....Ecclesiam vestram volentis xenio preclari muneris insignire, per dilectum nostrum Joannem, venerabilem archiepiscopum Toletanum, et ad preces ipsius, de venerandis et eximiis sanctuariis nostris, que de thesauro imperii Constantinopolitani suscepti, pretiosas vobis particulas destinamus, videlicet: de ligno Crucis Domini; unam de spinis...de Sindone qua corpus ipsius sepultum iacuit in sepulcro;...

After the customary greetings, Louis says that, at the pleas of Juan, archbishop of Toledo, he gladly sends a gift from the venerable and eximious relics which he had received from the imperial treasury of Constantinople: a piece of the Cross of the Lord; one of the thorns from the Crown; the Virgin's milk; the purple tunic; the towel Jesus used when washing the disciples' feet; [a piece of] the Sindon in which [the Lord's] body lay buried in the sepulchre; some baby clothes of the Saviour.... And he prays the canons of the church to hold these sacred relics in honor, etc., and to remember him in their prayers.

In 1267, Louis sends another fragment of the Shroud which he had received from Constantinople's imperial treasury, to the monastery of Vizille, a city south of Grenoble. In 1269, he sends another fragment of the Shroud, from his own piece received from Baudouin, to Guy de la Tour, bishop of Clermont. The cathedrals of Sens and Vezelay and the monastery of Corbie also benefited from the king's generosity. Tiny scraps they must all of them have been; and none have been recovered, not even the original piece given to St. Louis. But all the gifts are documented.

At this point, we can do no better than to consider the logic of Paul de Gail, S.J., who was convinced that the great relics of the Passion were not taken from Constantinople in the Sack of 1204. Otherwise, how could Baudouin II have given in pledge the Crown of Thorns, fragments of the Cross, snippings of the Shroud, between 1238-1241? Since Louis received a portion of the Shroud from the imperial treasury, Baudouin must surely have had the entire Shroud from which to cut the piece. He must still have had it as late as 1247 when he set his golden seal to the Act of cession at St.-Germain-en-Laye. Otherwise, Louis would have come forward again, as he had done in 1238 and 1241, to pay the Venetian ransom.

Only after 1247 could Baudouin have given the Shroud in

pledge. By that time, Louis, having disbursed enormous sums to finance his first crusade, was in no position to advance further sums. It was in September of 1248, and Louis had just disembarked at Cyprus, when the empress, Marie de Brienne, Baudouin's wife, arrived to plead for aid. Jean de Joinville reports that he and a hundred other nobles promised to send three hundred knights to Constantinople. Joinville asked Louis if he would consent to send three hundred knights, and the king replied that he could not, that his resources were "already at the lees".

In 1262, Baudouin went again to France to ask aid from Louis for a scheme proposed by Charles of Anjou, now King of Naples and Sicily, to reestablish an empire in the East. What choice relics did he have to offer? If any? Louis was not interested and Baudouin went back empty-handed.

When, in 1261, Baudouin lost his crown to Michael VIII Paleologue, and with three thousand Franks sailed from the city, did he take the Shroud with him in his flight? It would not seem so; for when he arrived at Negrepoint, a lord of the island, a Venetian, gave him 15,000 gold bezants and received in return a "relic of the arm of St. John Baptist". Clearly, Baudouin, though in haste, had not neglected to gather up some relics, knowing by experience their weight in gold. For the same reason, de Gail argues, he would not have left the most valuable of all relics in one of his palaces.

Furthermore, had he perchance left the Shroud at Constantinople, the Paleologues would have inherited it; the Empress Anne of Savoy, who ruled Byzantium from 1341 to 1354, would have had it during the crucial years of 1346-1353, the period in which Geoffroy de Charny received it.

Thus, the erudite Jesuit concludes that Baudouin II gave the Shroud, as surety for yet another loan, between 1247 and 1261; that it remained somewhere in the Orient or in some land around the eastern Mediterranean. If he has guessed aright, the least we can say is that in the obscure years between Robert de Clari and Geoffroy de Charny, there are some steady glimmers of light. The paths they signal have scarcely been explored.

PRINCIPAL SOURCES:

ANTONIO DE BEATIS: *Travel Journal*, The Hakluyt Society, London 1979. Trans., Hale and Lindon. Pp. 117-119

ROBERT BROWNING: *The Byzantine Empire*, Scribners, New York 1980

COURTEPÉE: *Description du Duché de Bourgogne*, Editions F.E.R.N., Paris 1968

Histoire de Charny (Yonne): Syndicat d'Initiative de Charny, 1974

PAUL DE GAIL, S.J.: *Histoire religieuse du Linceul du Christ*, France-Empire, Paris 1973

JEAN DE JOINVILLE: *Histoire de Saint Louis*. In *Historiens et Chroniqueurs du Moyen Age*, Gallimard, Paris 1952. Pp. 236-237

RAYMOND LANTIER: *Guide Illustré...Château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye*, Musées Nationaux, Paris 1948

PIETRO SAVIO: *Ricerche Storiche sulla Santa Sindone*, SEI, Turin 1957. Pp. 123, 125

SOPHIE DE SEDE: *La Sainte-Chapelle et la Politique de la Fin des Temps*, Julliard, Paris

MANUEL SOLE, S.J.: "Sobre el Fragmento 'De Syndone Qua Corpus Ejus Sepultum jacuit in Sepulcro' Regalado por S. Luis, Rey de Francia, a la Catedral de Toledo", *La Sindone e la Scienza*, Acts of II International Congress, Turin 1978. Paoline, Turin 1979. Pp. 391-393

Souvenirs de Prunoy, Seventh Letter, 1826

RENÉ HERON DE VILLEFOSSE: *Construction de Paris*, Grasset, Paris 1938. Pp. 52-55

JACQUES WILHELM: *Paris Through The Ages*, Ed. du Chêne, Paris 1948