

The Pilgrim's Badge of Shroud Expositions at Lirey

From Ian Wilson's History Notebooks

A document of c.1389, from Pierre d'Arcis, bishop of Troyes, to Avignon Pope Clement VII, refers to the holding of pilgrim-attracting expositions of this shroud in the village of Lirey, near Troyes, circa 1355, under the auspices of the local de Charny family.¹ The two coats of arms on the badge leave little doubt that it was created as a souvenir specifically for these particular expositions, subsequently discontinued for over three decades. Below the Shroud the shield at the left features the arms of Geoffrey de Charny, *seigneur* of Lirey, and *porte-oriflamme* of France, who was killed at the battle of Poitiers in 1356. The shield at the right depicts the arms of Jeanne de Vergy, Geoffrey's second wife. The roundel between these contains the Empty Tomb accompanied by instruments of the Passion: the crown of thorns; the lance, with behind this the bars of a cross; the pincers and nails of the crucifixion; the *flagrum* or scourge; to the right of Jeanne de Vergy's shield the column of the scourging; to the left of Geoffrey's what is probably the stick bearing the sponge.

The Shroud's unusual herring-bone weave is conveyed with great clarity. Faithful to the original, the man of the Shroud is shown fully nude, unlike in some later Shroud 'copies', and his right hand is shown overlying his left wrist exactly as depicted on the Shroud. Also his left foot is correctly shown twisted inwards on both the frontal and the dorsal views. Of the Shroud's blood-stains, the spillage across the small of the back, also that in the area of the soles of the feet, are reproduced with great clarity. Of the so-called 'poker holes' there is the faintest suggestion of these alongside the elbows on the frontal image, the regularity of the herring-bone pattern certainly being broken off either side in a way that it is not elsewhere. But it is impossible to be sure that these are what the artist was trying to represent.

The cloth is depicted being displayed by two clerics wearing capes with a wide trim, fastened by square buckles, below which can be seen the vertical pleats of their albs. Unfortunately the clerics' heads and shoulders have been broken off and lost, but that there were only two is suggested by the two pairs of hands. Against this interpretation, later depictions of Shroud expositions often show the cloth being held by three bishops (see illustration), and the horizontal lines between the two clerics suggest that the full badge originally included a third figure. If so, however, this figure was wearing something quite different from an alb.

Does the medallion convey that Geoffrey de Charny was still alive when it was created? There has been some suggestion that because his arms appear, in heraldic terms, on the sinister or left side, with Jeanne de Vergy's on the more important dexter, or right side, he may have been already dead. The British genealogy and heraldry specialist Noel Curren-Briggs has disputed this:

¹ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Collection de Champagne, v.154, fol. 138.

It is true that the dexter side in heraldry is the more important, but only when two or more arms are quartered together ... On the Lirey medallion the arms of Charny and Vergy are quartered, but each shown separately, with Charny on the left and Vergy on the right. Perversely in heraldry, sinister and dexter mean left and right as seen from behind the shield, not as the observer sees it, so when the shield was carried across the knight's chest to protect him, his right side was protected by the dexter side of the shield, and his left by the sinister. So far from the medallion telling us that Geoffrey was dead, it tells us that he was very much alive when the medallion was made, and that his wife was equally involved as himself.²

Pilgrims' medallions of this kind enjoyed a great vogue in the fourteenth century, as souvenirs of any great place of pilgrimage, such as Thomas a Becket's shrine at Canterbury in England, and the shrine of the Virgin Mary at Walsingham.³

Bibliography:

Arthur Forgeais, *Collection de Plombs trouvées dans la Seine*, Paris, 1865

Dorothy Crispino 'The Pilgrim Badge of Lirey', *Shroud Spectrum International* no.25, Dec. 1987, pp: 13-18

² Letter to the author June 22, 1992

³ See: Alexander, Jonathan, and Paul Binski (eds.), *The Age of Chivalry, Art in Plantagenet England 1200-1400*, London, Royal Academy of Arts/Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987, pp.220-24