

WHY DID GEOFFROY DE CHARNY CHANGE HIS MIND?

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Crusaders, Templars, knights and knaves have been stalked by sleuths intent on identifying the man who carried the Holy Shroud away from Constantinople in 1204 and—presumably but not necessarily—took it to France. Some investigators have even alleged that the deed was done by Geoffroy de Charny, forgetting that he was not born until the next century. But no crusader, Templar, knight or knave left fingerprints on Exhibit A; so in default of evidence the case, for the moment, hangs suspended. We can confidently eliminate those who took part in the Fourth Crusade: the Shroud is still listed in Constantinople's inventory of treasures as late as 1247.

In his monumental opus "Ricerche Storiche sulla Santa Sindone"¹, Mons. Pietro Savio examines documents which almost certainly point to that crucially important moment in which Geoffroy de Charny receives the Holy Shroud. Other sindonologists —notably Luigi Fossati, S.D.B.,² — have added evidence from the same period, and the search goes on.

Andre Perret³ remarks that the military career of Geoffroy carried him to too many places for us to determine, in the present state of our knowledge, where the relic came into his possession. From 1337, when he first distinguished himself in a battle in Guyenne, until his death at Poitiers in 1356, Geoffroy was constantly crisscrossing France from Flanders to Vannes on the Atlantic, from Picardy and Normandy to Anjou. Twice he was outside France: in 1345 he joined the Dauphin Humbert II on the Smyrna crusade and some authors have suggested that it was there the Shroud came into his hands. Undoubtedly he sailed; only first-hand experience could have dictated his descriptions, in his long poem, of the perils of the sea. But the problem of his participation in the Smyrna campaign has not yet been fully investigated; and since the documents we are about to consider in this essay pertain to a later period, the Smyrna question is chronologically not relevant.

The gallant soldier decidedly did not volunteer for his second departure from France. In 1350, villainously betrayed and after a furious battle at Calais, he was taken to London as Edward III's prisoner-of-war.

Not until 20 December 1350 did the English king give safe-conduct to a servant and two valets of Geoffroy to go to France to raise money

for his release. In the meantime, Philip VI had died (1350) and on 31 July 1351 his son and successor, John II, paid the enormous ransom—a resounding 12,000 gold scudis. Geoffroy, however, had been allowed to return to France beforehand, for on 28 June 1351, John II appointed him Bearer of the sacred Oriflamme of St. Denis. In that same month, Geoffroy renewed his efforts to take Calais, attacking at Ardres.

In October of 1351, there were other combats in the Calais area. On 6 January 1352, at the ceremony inaugurating King John's new Order, Geoffroy was one of the first to be created Knight of the Star. Then, in February, he went to St. Omer as captain-general of the army, invested with all the authority of the king himself. At this time, he was counsellor to John II, as he had been to Philip VI from 1348 until Philip's death. The seigneur of three modest domains had risen to be one of the foremost figures in France.

Fighting the English again in June and September of 1352; in 1353, Picardy; 1354, Normandy; and after the battle of Breteuil in July of 1356, John II rewarded him with two houses in Paris.

He had precious little time to enjoy them; on 19 September 1356, at the disaster of Poitiers, Geoffroy de Charny was killed, holding aloft the Oriflamme until he fell. Charles V gave him a hero's funeral at the church of the Celestins in Paris.

That the *preux chevalier* did receive the Shroud in connection with a battle seems implied in the statement of his granddaughter, Marguerite de Charny, who claimed that the Shroud was "conquered" by the late messire de Charny.⁴ A slightly different account was recorded in a Bull of Clement VII (1390) in which Geoffroy II attests that the Shroud was given to his father *sibi liberaliter oblatam*; freely or generously presented to him.

The statements given by Geoffroy II (1389 & 1390) and by his daughter Marguerite (1443) are not necessarily incompatible. They might both be correct, each one but a glimpse of the whole story. They do agree in this: that the Shroud was personal property, legitimately acquired, and legitimately held by Geoffroy's heirs. Neither Geoffroy II nor Marguerite makes any mention of the place, the donor, the circumstances; these are still totally unknown.

But Geoffroy himself, according to Mons. Savio's demonstration, may have circumscribed the time-frame in which the transfer took place.

Geoffroy de Charny was the second son and third child of Jean de Charny and great-grandson of Ponce de Mont-Saint-Jean, who founded the Charny branch in the XIIIth century. Geoffroy's elder brother Dreux became sire of Charny. Geoffroy inherited the property which had been his mother's dowry, consisting of the lands and tiny hamlet of Lirey,⁵ nearly a hundred miles away.

Tucked in a joyous dip of undulating Champagne in the diocese of Troyes, parish of St. Jean Bonneval, the Lirey fief provided very little

revenue. At the end of the XIIIth century, there were fifty hearths; today the total population is less than sixty souls. To take up residence there, Geoffroy had to build himself a castle; of which nothing now remains but the stump of a tower buried in brambles and weeds.

And the village had no church.

Early in 1343, Geoffroy appealed to King Philip VI for revenues, land or other, which would accrue to 140 livres annually; as it was his desire to found a chapel with five chaplains, so that he and his family might hear Mass and benefit from the good works of the clergy. In an Act of June 1343, Philip donates to his *amé et féal Geoffroy de Charny chevalier* 140 livres of land, tax exempt, for financing the project.

These documents, dated seven years before Geoffroy's captivity, refute the romantic legend that the "perfect knight" was miraculously freed from prison after making a vow to the Virgin to build a church in her honor.

A document in the Lirey archives, dated 3 January 1349, confirms Philip's donation. Geoffroy himself contributed his inheritance from an aunt (undated).

Three months later, in a petition to Clement VI dated 16 April 1349,⁶ Geoffroy announced to the Pope that he has constructed a chapel dedicated to Blessed Virgin Mary of the Annunciation and therein established five canons, each to receive a stipend of 30 livres. He requests that the church be raised to a collegiate. In the petition dated 26 April 1349,⁶ he requests an indulgence of 100 days for all who, in devotion and penitence, visit the church on the feasts of the Virgin; that the church have its own cemetery beside it for the canons, chaplains and whosoever desires. As for the disposition of his own remains, he desires that, after the dissolution of his body, his bones be divided and buried in diverse places.

Item eidem supplicanti concedere dignemini, ut post dissolutionem corporis sui, quod idem corpus possit dividi et diversis locis sepeliri, prout duxerit ordinandem, et alias ut in forma.

All these requests were granted; but Item 1, concerning the collegiate status, was not accomplished because Geoffroy left again for Calais where, in the night between 31 December 1349 and 1 January 1350, he was taken prisoner.

There is some perplexity about Geoffroy's statement of 16 April 1349 that a church had been built:

Significat Sanctitati vestre devotus filius vester Joffridus de Charny miles dominus de Lirey Trecensis diocesis, quod ipse in villa de Lirey infra limites parrochie Sancti Johannis de Bonnevaux eiusdem diocesis de bonis sibi a Deo collatis quandam ecclesiam in honore beate Virginis Marie et precipue Annunciationis Jhesu Christi fecit construi..

It is inconceivable that Geoffroy would have announced to the Pope (in 1349) that he had built a church if he had in fact not done so. Yet,

according to the extant Act of Foundation,² construction was begun on 20 February 1353 and completed on 20 June 1353. Remarkably short time to build a church.⁷

And further surprises follow: on 30 January 1354, addressing himself to Innocent VI, who had succeeded Clement, Geoffroy renews his request to raise the church to a collegiate. This time, he asks that an indulgence of 1 year 40 days be granted to those who visit the church on the four principal feasts of the Virgin. Geoffroy requests that *ius patronatus* be accorded to him and his successors. He repeats his petition for a cemetery, but with an arresting modification: he begs permission for himself and his successors to be buried in the cemetery beside the church.⁸ Geoffroy has changed his mind.

Item quod eisdem ...decano et capitulo concedere dignemini, ut cymiterium iuxta ipsam eccleseam habere valeant consecratum et in quod in eodem cimiterio ipsum dominum et successores suos dominos de Lireyo ... sepeliri possint.

This petition is followed on 3 August of the same year by another which repeats Geoffroy's request to be buried in the cemetery beside the church, and asks the indulgence of 1 year 40 days for all who visit on Christmas, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost.

Furthermore, according to the Act of Foundation, the church is erected in honor of the Holy Trinity, dedicated to the Virgin of the Annunciation. It has six canons, one of whom is to be elected dean, and three clerics. Every day at Matins there was to be a Low Mass of the Virgin and, at 9 o'clock, a High Mass to invoke God's protection on the founder. And the Chapter's income was increased, as we learn from an Act dated 1 October 1353, in which John II concedes another 62 livres of revenue.⁹

Thus, the rural chapel dedicated to the Virgin—typical of countless thousands which dotted medieval Europe—appears to have grown to major dimensions. In fact, Geoffroy's foundation in a country village of fifty hearths became a center of pilgrimage for people "from all over the world,"¹⁰ where indulgences were to be gained—not only on the feasts of the Virgin, but also on those holy days commemorating the great events of Redemption.

Is this the interval in which Geoffroy obtained the Shroud? Comparing the two petitions:

1349

- 1) 100 days indulgence on feasts of the Virgin
- 2) Geoffroy wants his bones to be distributed and buried in diverse places.
- 3) A church is built
- 4) Five canons established there
- 5) Stipends of 30 lvrs.

1353

- 1) 1 year 40 days indulgence on feasts of Virgin, and 1 year 40 days indulgence on feasts of Christ
- 2) Geoffroy and his heirs to be buried in the cemetery beside the church
- 3) Act of Foundation
- 4) There are six chaplains, three clerics
- 5) Their income is increased by 60 lvs.

Several documents leave no doubt that the Shroud was publicly exposed for veneration in the Lirey church before Geoffroy died. The above-mentioned Bull of Clement VII dated 6 January 1390 (almost identical to another from that pontiff in 1389) records that Geoffroy de Charny placed the Shroud of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the church of Lirey. A document of 6 February 1464 states that Geoffroy de Charny placed in the church, along with other relics, "the Holy Shroud bearing the effigy of Our Saviour and Redeemer Jesus Christ."

And two mute survivors from Geoffroy's own time signify the same;

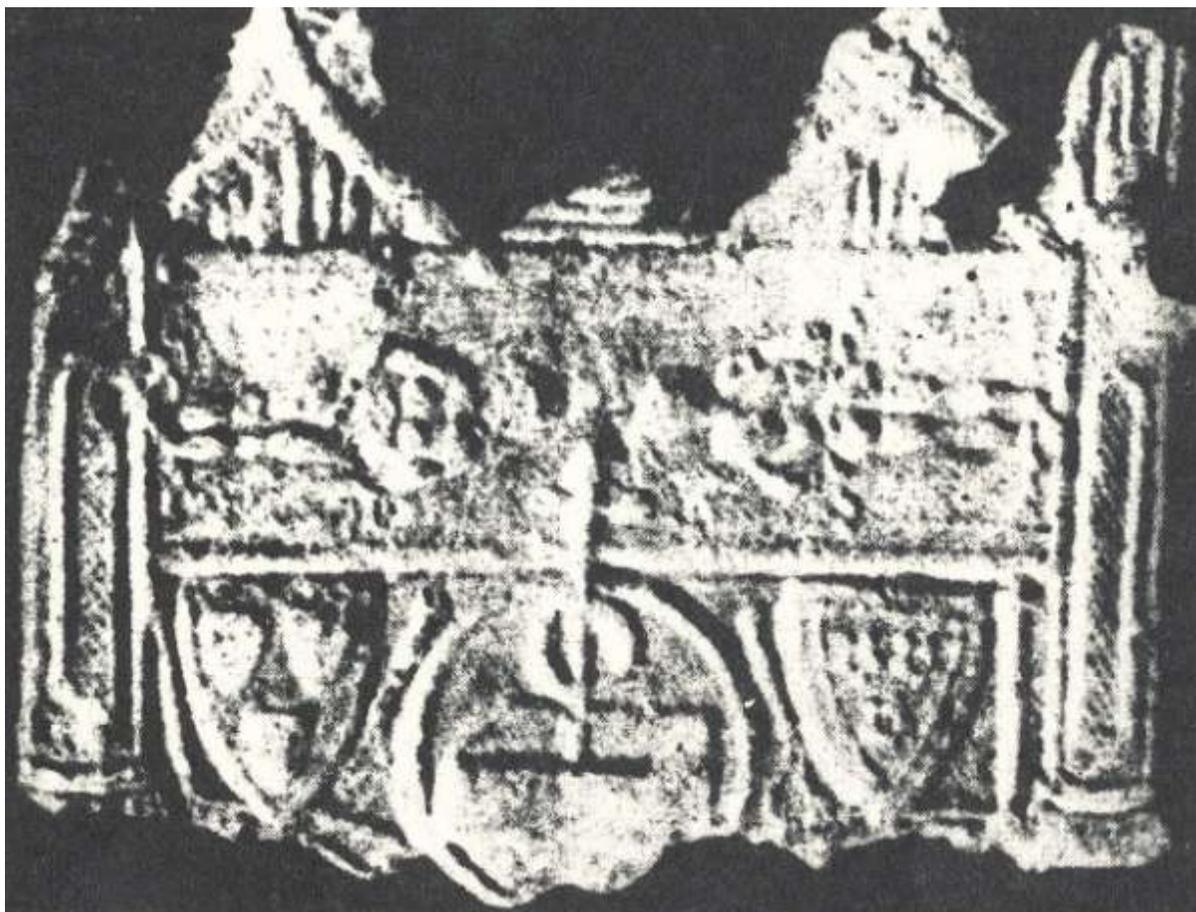
1, Henry of Poitiers, Bishop of Troyes, on 28 May 1356, sent Geoffroy a letter of praise and approval.

2, In 1855—the year Secondo Pia was born—a souvenir medallion representing the Shroud and the arms of Charny and Vergy (Geoffroy's wife) was found in the Seine at the Pont-au-Change.

The relic could not have been publicly exposed without papal permission. Geoffroy would had to have sent a report and a petition to the Pope. This document has not yet been found; but as Prof. Francesco Cognasso observed in his address to the Turin Congress of Shroud Studies in 1939,¹¹ the "documents pertaining to the installation of the Shroud in St. Mary of the Annunciation certainly exist."

At this Congress, Prof. Cognasso expressed his opinion that there were two possible periods in which the Shroud was placed in the church: either in 1349, or between 1351 and 1356, year of Geoffroy's death. At the 1950 Congress in Rome, Mons. Joseph Roserat de Melin, vicar-general, diocese of Troyes, was more definite: "Between 20 June 1353 and 19 September 1356, the collegiate church of Lirey receives a Shroud which is presented to the faithful as that which covered the Body of Our Lord ..."

It seems reasonably certain that the evidence so far accumulated applies to the time-frame in which the Shroud was placed in the Lirey church. Knowing Geoffroy's religious character,¹² we can be morally certain that he would have provided a "decent and venerable"¹³ setting for it as soon as possible after it came into his hands. It would seem to me that he obtained the Shroud surely after 1349, and not long before February 1353; that the Act of Foundation refers to an enlargement or embellishment of a church already existing since 1349; and that Geoffroy was exposing the relic prior to the congratulatory letter from Henry of Poitiers.



Medallion found in the Seine in 1855.

NOTES:

1. MONS. PIETRO SAVIO: "Ricerche Storiche sulla Santa Sindone," Societa Editrice Internazionale, Italy, 1957.
2. LUIGI FOSSATI, S.D.B.: "La Santa Sindone; Nuove Luce su Antichi Documenti," Borla, Turin, 1961.
3. ANDRE PERRET: "Essai sur l'histoire du Saint Suaire du XIVE au XVIe siècle." in Mémoires de l'Academie des Sciences Belles-Lettres et Arts de Savoie, 1960.
4. Fossati's amputated quotation, "Conquis par feu" gives the impression that the Shroud had been taken in the fire of battle. The complete phrase, given by Perret, reads that the Shroud "Fut conquis par feu messire Geoffroy de Charny;" 'feu' in French have the two meaning of 'fire' and late, lately deceased.'
5. Charny is located in the Cote-d'Or; Lirey is in the Aube.
6. Savio explains that Vatican recorders affixed the date of the Pope's Fiat to the documents they copied, without mentioning the date of the petition which preceded.
7. Is it possible that the 1353 records refer to an addition or enlargement of a building of 1349? Whatever happened, the church, erected inside the castle moat, was built of wood—a fact which would have serious repercussions a century later. The chapel which stands today is the third erected on the same site. Built in 1897 of stone and brick, it serves only for weddings and baptisms. Otherwise parishioners go 1¼ miles to St. Jean Bonneval, as they did before Geoffroy built St. Mary in the 14th century.
8. Savio adds, "ai piedi della Sindone," at the feet of the Shroud.
9. This information was found by Fossati in the Archives of the Department of the Aube. Savio, relying on Père Anselme, gives the date as July 1356, and the amount as 60 livres.
10. Memo of Pierre d'Arcis, Bishop of Troyes; undated but shortly after 6 January 1390.
11. LA SANTA SINDONE NELLE RICERCHE MODERNE; Atti dei Convegni di Studio: Torino 1939; Roma e Torino, 1950. Riedizione anastatica per cura di Pietro Scotti, S.D.B., Marietti, Alessandria, Italy.
12. Abundantly attested by documents, chronicles and Geoffroy's own poetry.
13. Bull of Clement VII, 1390.

ALSO CONSULTED:

AUGUSTE ET EMILE MOLINIER: Paris 1968, "Chronique Normande du XIVE siecle.

FROISSART : "Chroniques."

AUGUSTE LONGNON: "Documents Relatifs au Comté de Champagne et de Brie 1172-1361."

COURTEPEE: "Description du Duché de Bourgone" Editions F.E.R.M., Paris, 1968.

Notes taken by Author *sur place* at Lirey, Charny, Mt. St. Jean, etc.