

GEOFFROY DE CHARNY'S SECOND FUNERAL: PART III

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In the gray pre-dawn of Monday, the 19th of September 1356, the French host covered the fields of Maupertuis before Poitiers. King John the Brave, his sons and a few invited knights assisted at Mass in the royal pavilion, bright scarlet silk on fields not yet red with blood. Geoffroy de Charny was not in the company; he was hearing Mass in his own tent. The celebrant was Geoffroy's personal priest; in attendance were his squires, pages, servants and valets, his armorer, his cook and others of his military household.

Permission to have his own portable altar had been granted by Pope Clement VI (1342-1351) in an Act dated 7 July 1344,¹ in acquiescence to Geoffroy's petition to hear daily Mass and other divine services while he was encamped on military duty.

On the same date, Clement VI granted Geoffroy that his confessor could remit all his sins at the moment of his death.² Such provisions certainly afforded comfort to this pious knight, whose entire adult life was spent in warfare. For, as he himself wrote, in all the world there is no other profession so perilous for body and soul.

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The man-at-arms, he reminds his readers,³ is in danger every day. When he thinks he is safe, suddenly he must arm himself and many times must take on hard and perilous encounters. And one should realise that brave knights have a very hard life, for one can truly say that when they want to go to sleep, they have to keep watch, and when they want to eat they have to go hungry, and when they are thirsty, many times there is nothing to drink and when they want to rest they must work and strain, and when they feel secure, then great fear comes upon them, and when they believe they have routed the enemy, sometimes they are defeated, or dead or captured or wounded.

When it is cold, they endure the cold and when it is hot they endure the heat. Most of the time they have bad beds and many times they sleep without a bed and in all their clothes. They eat their bread and drink water wherever they find it and all that is quite sufficient for the good knight; he suffers it cheerfully for the honor that will ensue, and he accepts joyfully whatever God sends.

And in what other profession must one endure so many hardships? Who but the knight suffers the pains, labors, aches, discomforts,

great fears, perils, bruises, and wounds, when he arms himself for his lord, or for his lineage, or for Holy Church or to defend the Faith?

No one, not even those in religious orders, have such a need for a clean conscience as has the man-at-arms. Truly the order of knighthood is the most perilous of all, for the body and for the soul; there is no order in the world in which it is so important to govern a good conscience.

As for the holy orders of religion, the good religious knows the hours when he will drink and eat and sleep and when he can care for his people. Their hearts and consciences can be serene, for they need only say the service and the masses very diligently and very devotedly. In the abbeys and cloisters, their lives are so peaceably regulated, and cut out to serve and pray to Our Lord with no peril to their lives, no great labors, no putting on armor and going to the battlefield, no anxiety about getting killed. They can say their sublime service confidently, for in the Mass God is with them visibly.

Thus they can arm themselves with the arms of Our Lord, to perform this most glorious service in a holy way. But the good knights and good men-at-arms must live supremely honest lives, as much or more than any priest. These good soldiers must dress in their armor with the same purity and devotion and with as clean a conscience as any priest puts on his vestments, the arms of Our Lord.

And when there is urgent necessity for brave soldiers to dress themselves in their armor — which they could and should call the "arms of Our Lord" — , when they take their arms to uphold right and justice, they should take their armor and dress themselves confessed and repentant of all their sins; they should take their arms and dress themselves in true and pure devotion and pray to Our Lord that he pardon their misdeeds and that he would deign to help and protect them. For the religious have their rule and regulations but there can be no rules or regulations for the knight and man-at-arms, not even in their lives, except only to always love and fear God, for every day they are in danger. And that is why it is right to say that in truth among all the other people in this world, whosoever they might be and whatsoever their state in life, even those in holy orders, for no one is it so necessary to be a thoroughly good Christian. Because the lives of these people are always insecure and they must be firmly ready to die; and that without much advance notice, for many times these people die without having the leisure to have fevers, or other sickness, during which one could lie abed for awhile and have time to assess his past deeds. But soldiers can die at any hour, any day. For this reason it is supremely important that with all their hearts they serve Our Lord and the glorious Virgin Mary of good help.

And if you want to be strong and safely armed when you encounter all the perils of the soul and of the body, be advised to lead

such good lives and so pleasing to Our Lord that it is only reasonable that he should remember you when you call on him in your most perilous moments. And never arm yourself nor put your body in any kind of danger if you have not put yourself in such good condition with God that he will hear your reasonable prayers and requests and you need not be too much afraid of death.

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Fortified in heart and spirit by the Mass, the knight prepared for battle by the ritual donning of his armor.

In a sentence that by its very lack of construction betrays the depth of his sentiments, Geoffroy insists on spiritual readiness: when the knight takes up his armor, he should be ready to face God without fear.

The dressing of a knight was a lengthy and complicated procedure, accomplished by attendants who began with the shoes and worked upwards, lacing and riveting some fourteen pieces, while the armorer stood by with watchful eye, ready to make adjustments or repairs. Every piece had its religious, chivalric symbolism, and while he was being dressed the good knight would be saying the special prayer on each piece. At last, his belt girded on, he would take his sword, which had been blessed and often held a relic in the hilt. So accoutered, he was ready for the fray. He was ready, if need be, for death.

The excitement in the camp, as the sun's first rays glanced like benevolent arrows off polished armor, reflected the tension between every man's dream of the great feats he was sure to accomplish for honor and renown, and his understandable trepidation, for life is sweet.

But the glorious deeds of battle, so dear to the chronicler, have a sordid aftermath. Securing their ransomable captives, the victors load their baggage carts with the loot of once-proud tents, hastily abandoned, drooping and torn. They strip the dead of their armor and finish off the wounded for the same costly prize. Then, with heedless insouciance they leave the slaughter field, spongy with the blood of spoliated corpses. Who buries all these bodies?

After Poitiers, the dead were buried by townspeople and monks.⁴ Sometimes the family of a wealthy noble would arrange to have their loved one brought home to rest in a church or abbey he



Stripping the dead.

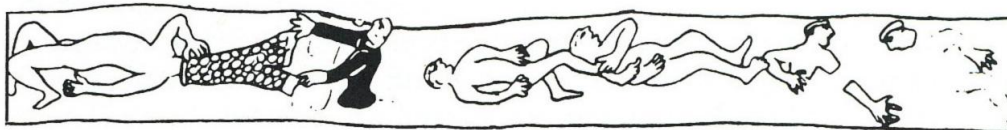
or his forebears had founded. For example, Gauthier VI, Duke of Athens — he indeed whose tyranny over Florence earned him a shameful expulsion (1343), memorialized in a fresco in the Palazzo Vecchio. His remains were translated from Poitiers to the abbey of Beaulieu, in Brienne, where his tomb carried this inscription:

*Cy gist tres excellent prince monseigneur Gauthier duc d'Athenes, comte de Brienne, seigneur de Liche et connetable de France, qui trepassa MCCCLVI en la bataille devant Poitiers quand le roi Jean fut pris.*⁵ (Here lies the very excellent prince monseigneur Gauthier Duke of Athens, Count of Brienne, seigneur of Liche and constable of France, who died in 1356 in the battle before Poitiers when King John was taken.)

It was fashionable for kings and nobles to leave instructions in their wills for the burial of the body in one place and certain of their organs (removed for embalment) in other places. Philip VI of Valois was buried in St. Denis, his heart in Bourghfontaine in Valois, his entrails at the Jacobins in Paris. In St. Denis, Francis I is entombed in an enormously elaborate monument, while his heart is preserved in a stately marble column across the aisle. The body of Charles V lies in St. Denis; his heart remains always in the Cathedral of Rouen, where he was consecrated King of France; and his entrails at the Cistercian abbey of Maubuisson, three kilometers from Pontoise. As the entrails were considered to be the seat of tender emotions, one cannot help but wonder if this good king still grieved remembering his youthful affection for one he called his friend, but whose engaging manners covered vile treachery. It was at Pontoise (1359) that Charles held out his hand to Charles, king of Navarre, surnamed the Bad, and peace was signed between them; upon which the perfidious Navarese promptly compounded an even more nefarious betrayal.

Early in 1349, Geoffroy de Charny, always a man of his times, petitioned the pope that his body be divided and buried in divers (unspecified) places.⁶ But five years later he desires to be buried in the cemetery beside the church, extending his request to include his heirs, lords of Lirey.⁷

It was somehow fitting that the first resting place for this good man and perfect knight, this tireless warrior, should be in the peace and simplicity of a Franciscan monastery. His body lay there for fourteen years.



From the Bayeux Tapestry.

NOTES

1. Hinc est quod nos tuis devotis supplicationibus inclinati, ut liceat tibi habere altare portatile, cum debita reverentia et honore, super quo in locis ad hoc congruentibus et honestis possis per proprium sacerdotem ydoneum, Missam et alia divina officia sine iuris alieni prejudicio in tua presentia facere celebrari...

Datum Avinione VII Kalendas Iulii anno tercio. Published in SAVIO: *Ricerche Storiche sulla Santa Sindone*, Turin, 1957, p. 108.

Hinc est quod nos tuis devotis precibus inclinati, ut Missam antequam illucescat dies, circa tamen diurnam lucem, ... liceat tibi per proprium vel alium sacerdotem ydoneum facere celebrari;... Datum Avinione XV Kalendas Ianuarii anno quinto. op. cit. p. 109.

2. Hinc est quod nos tuis supplicationibus inclinati, ut confessor tuus, quem duxeris eligendum omnium peccatorum tuorum, de quibus corde contritus et ore confessus fueris semel tantum in mortis articulo plenam remissionem tibi, in sinceritate fidei et unitate Sancte Romane Ecclesie, ac obedientia et devotione nostra vel successorum nostrorum Romanorum pontificum canonicè intrancium persistenti, auctoritate apostolica concedere valeat devotioni tue tenore presentium indulgemus.

Datum Avinione VII Kalendas Iulii anno tercio. op. cit. p. 109.

3. Excerpts from *Le Livre de Chevalerie*, by Geoffroi de Charny. Published by Arthur Piaget in *Romania*, vol. xxvi, 1897. The original MS is untitled. "The Book of Chivalry" is only superficially appropriate.

4. See *Spectrum* #30, "Geoffroy de Charny's Second Funeral".

5. *Archives historiques de Poitou*.

6. Item eidem supplicanti concedere dignemini, ut post dissolutionem corporis sui, quod idem corpus possit dividi, et diversis locis sepeliri, prout duxerit ordinandum, et alia ut in forma. *Fiat*. Datum Avinione XVI Kalendas Maii anno septimo (Clement VI). SAVIO, op. cit.

7. Item ... concedere dignemini, ut cymiterium iuxta ipsam ecclesiam habere ... et quod in eodem cimiterio ipsum dominum et successores suos dominos de Lireyo, sepeliri possint.... See also *Spectrum* #1, Dec. 1981: "Why Did Geoffroy Change his Mind?". The myriad aspects of these documents and what they reveal about Geoffroy de Charny can be taken only one at a time, in brief essays. They constitute, however, a chronological framework which, later perhaps, can be furnished with documented information from other contemporary sources.