

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE LIREY DOCUMENTS

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Everyone who studies the Shroud knows that it entered official history — that is, the history of written documents — under the sign of polemics. The opponents of the controversy are well-known; on one side, Geoffroy II de Charny, proprietor of the Shroud; on the other, Pierre d'Arcis, Bishop of Troyes, who believed the Shroud to be a painting. The judge in the case was Clement VII, antipope at Avignon.

The affair was not easy for Clement VII. In the space of a few months he changed his opinion more than once. After the lapse of centuries, the historian can weigh the question with serenity and detachment, and can maintain a uniform line of judgment. Furthermore, he has the possibility to compare the written documents with the figured document, the Shroud itself. It does not appear that the Bishop or the Pope ever saw the Shroud.

The Canon Ulysse Chevalier began writing against the authenticity of the Shroud one year after the photograph of 1898, officially made by Secondo Pia, revealed that the imprints on the Shroud are a perfect negative of the body it covered. In 1899, in *Le Saint Suaire de Turin, est-il l'original ou une copie?*¹ he commented on a study by the Abbé Lalore: *Historique de l'image du Saint Suaire de Jésus-Christ primitivement à Lirey (Aube) et maintenant à Turin*, that first appeared in 1877 and was reprinted in 1895 and again in 1899.² Chevalier's major text, *Étude critique sur l'origine du Saint Suaire de Lirey-Chambéry-Turin*³ was amply criticized by Eschbach⁴ and by Sanna Solaro,⁵ who dedicated three chapters (16, 17, 18) to refute the affirmations of Pierre d'Arcis, of Clement VII and Chevalier.

In 1902, Chevalier returned to the argument in a publication directed against the defenders of authenticity:⁶ "You tell me it's a matter of photography?" he wrote. "Since I have no personal competence in that, and in the face of discordant explanations ... I can only repeat that I will abide by the solution that the Academy of Sciences will obtain. May I hope that my adversaries will make the same promise? But with the unshakeable conviction that no one will be able to contradict the documents of the XIVth and XVth centuries."

Even in the face of growing acquiescence of the Shroud's authenticity in scientific circles, especially after several members of the Academy of Sciences attended Delage's demonstration at the Sorbonne a few days after the unfortunate events of 21 April 1902,

Chevalier remained loyal to his documents and blind to the photographic evidence that was convincing others.

But what documents and how many did Chevalier find, ninety-odd years ago, that are contrary to the authenticity of the Shroud? The first collection of documents appeared as an appendix in his *Étude critique*.... There are thirty-three items.

1. Four documents that are not concerned with authenticity, in fact they presume the Shroud to be authentic:

- a) the liturgical office approved by Julius II (1506);
- b) part of a text by a canon of Lirey who laments that the church no longer possesses the Holy Shroud of Our Lord;
- c) a text of Sixtus IV that indirectly mentions the Holy Shroud (1473);
- d) a brief report of an exposition (1503).

2. Eleven notarial and judicial documents concerning a litigation lasting several years between the canons of Lirey for the return of the Holy Shroud to their church, and the legitimate proprietor of the Shroud, Marguerite de Charny;

3. Five labels wrapped around the documents;

4. Calvin's derisory passage in *Treatise on relics* (1563).

That leaves twelve documents. One is of very little interest because it is only a XVIth or XVIIth century résumé of an original. But not all of the remaining eleven can be considered contrary to authenticity:

1. The *Memorandum* of Pierre d'Arcis (1389);

2, 3, 4. The first version of the Bull of 6 January 1390 and the related letters to Pierre d'Arcis and the ecclesiastical officials of Autun, Langres and Châlons-sur-Marne;

5. The Report of the Liege investigation, which merely confirms what Clement VII had established, without giving any personal judgment. This includes the remaining six documents:

- a) the letter of Charles VI, king of France, to the bailiff of Troyes instructing him to requisition the Shroud (1389);
- b, c, d) the report of the bailiff, with two accompanying letters (1389);
- e) an official letter from the king's sergeant (1389);
- f) the letter from Clement VII to Geoffroy II de Charny, which is not concerned with authenticity (1390).

The second collection is included in *Autour des origines du Suaire de Lirey, avec documents inédits*.⁷ The seventeen documents can be catalogued thus:

1. Seven documents do not mention the Shroud. Five are petitions concerning the Church of St. Mary of Lirey, and two are memoranda

concerning the anniversaries and foundations that must be performed.

2. Ten documents mention the Holy Shroud. Five of these presume authenticity although they do not specifically address the question.

- a) in two writings the Lirey canons claim their rights to have the Shroud in the church;
- b) the detailed report of the Poor Clare nuns of Chambery who mended the Cloth after the fire of 1532;
- c) the letter of the Roman pope, Clement VII, for the recognition of the Shroud after the fire;
- d) extended concessions of indulgences by Clement VII, antipope at Avignon, by reason of the Holy Shroud.

The remaining five documents could be considered unfavorable to authenticity. They include four already published in the first collection but now presented in other copies with slight variations; and a passage from *Tractatus dogmatico-moralis de Indulgentiis* (Rome, 1743), by Theodorus a Spiritu Sancto.

As can be seen, the second collection of documents does not offer any new decisive element. All things considered, the documents contrary to authenticity, those that support a manual origin of the imprints, are reduced to one only: the so-called *Memorandum* of Pierre d'Arcis.

Having listed the documents as they were published by Chevalier, we have to say that, in general, we agree in the reconstruction of the events they refer to in the controversy between Geoffroy II de Charny and the Bishop of Troyes. We differ, however, in the evaluation of the documents since they can be interpreted differently according to the observer's point of view:

+ one could go no farther than what is stated in the *Memorandum*,

+ or, one could compare the written documents with the figured document, that is, the Shroud, with its negative imprints.

The conclusions are bound to be different. If only the written documents existed, the case of the Shroud would never have arisen. The interesting thing is that the figured document contradicts the written documents and obliges a revision of the judgments expressed about it. For that matter, this appears also in the dispositions of Clement VII: they do not keep to a uniform interpretation, but in the short space between 28 July 1389 to 1 June 1390, they change.

To give weight and value to the written documents alone and to ascribe to them an absolute, probative value, as Chevalier and others, even recently, have done; and to disregard the figured document, is to consider facts under one single point of view and to close one's mind to a wider understanding of the situation.⁸

The following highlights can give a more global vision of the texts and the Object under discussion.

1. **Lack of documents from the Charnys and the canons.**

Chevalier does not emphasize the fact that documents from the Charnys, the papal legate Pierre de Thury, the king of France, and the canons, are all lacking. The *Memorandum* and the Bulls of Clement VII refer to seven of these missing pieces.

Let me list them briefly, referring the reader to my study of 1961 (pp. 28-31), *La Santa Sindone: Nuove luce su antichi documenti*, where the relevant passages are inferred from existing documents.

- a) the petition of Geoffroy II de Charny to the papal legate;
- b) the legate's concession;
- c) petition from Geoffroy II and the dean of the collegiate church to the Holy See at the time the terms and limits of the concessions granted by the legate were under discussion;
- d) petition of Geoffroy II to Charles VI king of France;
- e) probable letter of Charles VI to Geoffroy II;
- f) the canons' recourse to the Holy See;
- g) another recourse of Geoffroy II to Clement VII after the investigation ordered by the king at the request of Pierre d'Arcis.

Have all these documents been destroyed? Or simply not yet found? Or perhaps — carelessly or intentionally — not yet considered? It is hardly necessary to remark how serious this lack is for an overall evaluation of the controversy.

2. **Lack of the Proceedings against Geoffroy I de Charny under Bishop Henri de Poitiers; *Memorandum* of Pierre d'Arcis.**

A detail rarely considered, that at the curia of Troyes no dossier existed on the case brought, according to Pierre d'Arcis, against Geoffroy I de Charny and the canons for the removal of the Shroud from the church and the prohibition of expositions.

Is it possible that after 34 years there was nothing written about this affair, and one could be satisfied with hearsay? The only person who refers to such a court case is Pierre d'Arcis in his *Memorandum*.

What can we say about this document? "Its authenticity", states Chevalier,⁹ "is beyond doubt because I found the notes for it, separated a long time ago from the archives of the bishopric of Troyes." However, this affirmation is not shared by other scholars. According to one historian, not named but quoted by Eschbach,¹⁰ the notes found by Chevalier are not original, but copies.

"My curiosity led me to the Bibliothèque Nationale to examine the famous evidence and I did not come away convinced. This so-called 'original memorandum', in XVth century calligraphy, bore neither date nor signature; nothing that could permit a guarantee of authenticity nor attribution to an author.... It must

be remarked, furthermore, that no authentic document of the period alludes to a commission named by Henri de Poitiers, nor any confession [of a painter]. Who are these experts who have decreed that this document is complete and certainly the handwriting of Pierre d'Arcis?"

In spite of the disparity of judgments, there are no doubts about the existence of the document. The questions to be clarified are rather these: Did the communication of the Bishop, as it is in this document, arrive through bureaucratic channels and in official form to the Avignon court? Or was it only a personal pro-memoria that later passed into history as an official document motivating the papal dispositions, without actually being such?

One of the labels reported by Chevalier¹¹ reads like this: "Extract that I made from a Latin writing without date that is (*seems to be* is cancelled) a letter or petition from a bishop of Troyes (or other *ecclesiastic* is cancelled) to a pope." No comment is needed to recognize the copyist's doubts and uncertainties and his very vague impression about the document he is transcribing.

Nicola Camusat was one of the scholars who did not accept the *Memorandum*. A canon of Troyes Cathedral, Camusat was the compiler of the *Prontuarium Tricassinæ Diocesis* where he explicitly speaks of the collegiate church of Lirey, Henri de Poitiers and Pierre d'Arcis. He did not, however, transcribe the *Memorandum*. Camusat's reason for the omission is not known; perhaps it is not far from the truth to suppose that the writing seemed to him to be a rough draft — exactly as it is defined by Chevalier — but never rewritten in official form to be sent to Avignon.

Furthermore, from the writings of Clement VII, especially the letter addressed to Pierre d'Arcis, it does not appear that the papal dispositions were motivated by any specific request of the Bishop.

A final observation concerns the text of the document. It is hardly conformable to curial style and rules, and does not seem to be from the pen of a bishop. "Without date or signature, it is a pro-memoria of such incorrect style that one cannot attribute it to an episcopal pen. "¹²

The heading over the document seems to support the idea of a first draft:

*Veritas Panni de Leryo, qui alias et diu est
ostensus fuerat et de novo iterum fuit ostensum
super quo intendo scribere Domino Nostro Pape
in forma subscripta et quam brevius potero.*

(The truth about the Cloth of Lirey, that was formerly exhibited and for a long time, and now again has been exhibited, about which I intend to write to Our Lord Pope in the following form and as briefly as I can.)

3. The various positions of Clement VII.

From beginning to end of the polemic, so to speak, Clement VII made various judgments: from ample indulgences conceded on 28 July 1389 to restrictions laid down in the Bull of 6 January 1390. Then, after changes made on the copy of the Vatican Register and dated 30 May 1390, a new Bull the very next day, 1 June 1390, grants wide indulgences to all who visit the Lirey church, where the much-discussed Object is *venerabiliter* conserved.

In his letter to Bishop Pierre d'Arcis of 6 January 1390 — the same date as the second Bull — Clement VII says nothing of a previous communication from the Bishop. It was and still is curial practice for whatever document is motivated by specific circumstances, to refer to that motivating communication. The silence in this instance leaves us perplexed and frustrated.

4. Expressions used to indicate the Shroud.

Particular emphasis should be made concerning the expressions used to indicate the Shroud with its imprints. It is an important question, never brought out, that in the brief space of one year there were motives for exceptional provisions on the part of Clement VII. He used two expressions: *figura seu representacio* and *pictura seu tabula*.

The first expression, *figura seu representacio*, used from the beginning in the Bull of 28 July 1389, does not seem to include the idea of man-made, and could be the expression used by the Charnys in their petitions to retain and display the Shroud.* (It will be remembered that no Charny documents of this period have been found.)

The second expression, instead, *pictura seu tabula*, leads one to think that the Object was painted. It is true that any shroud could have been painted, just as medals were struck¹³ as souvenirs of the Object venerated at Lirey, even though researchers have still not come across any painting completely similar to the Turin Shroud. But that the Shroud of Turin is a painting, absolutely does not accord with objective truth, as the scientific team of STURP unanimously declared.

*In the *Memorandum*, the Shroud is consistently referred to as *pannus*, cloth, except in two places; 1, where Bishop d'Arcis seems to be reporting the words of the Cardinal de Thury "dno cardinali suggestit dict. pannum fore Sudarii representationem seu figuram supplicans ut dictam Sudan representationem seu figuram representationem [sic] seu figuram Sudarii dominici in dicta ecclesia..."; and 2, toward the end, "videlicet quod pannus ille nec pro Sudario nec pro sanctuario, nec pro representatione vel figura Sudarii dominici, cum Sudarium dominicum tale non fuerit...". If such was the expression Cardinal de Thury used, he could have heard it from, or suggested it to, Geoffroy II de Charny. Ed.

This expression, *pictura seu tabula*, in the Vatican Register (Reg. Avign. 261, f. 259v) was cancelled on 30 May 1390 and in its place was put the earlier *figura seu representacio*. It is not known what motivated the change. But a Bull of the next day, 1 June 1390, implicitly explains this unusual provision, as indicated above in #3.

The case is unique: there is a clear correction on the archival copy but it does not exist on the copies sent to the addressees on 6 January 1390. The Bull of 1 June 1390 could be considered the corrected statement that was not possible to make on the copies sent to their destinations six months earlier.

The Bull of 1 June 1390, which is a confirmation of the correction, does not appear in Chevalier's first list. Three years later, he includes the text of this Bull in his second list of documents, published in *Autour des origines....* The Bull of 6 January 1390, showing the corrections, had been published seventy years previously by Father Lazzaro Giuseppe Piano in his ample *Commentarii critico-archeologici sopra la ss. Sindone....*¹⁴ Chevalier cites this source in his variants. These are the essential points of the two texts:

Original text (Chevalier, *Etude*, p. xvii; *Autour*, p. 35):

...quodque ostendens dictam figuram, dum major ibidem convenerit populi multitudo, publice populo praedicet et dicat alta et intelligibili voce, omni fraude cessante, quod figura seu representacio praedicta non est verum Sudarium Domini nostri Jhesu Christi, sed quaedam pictura seu tabula facta in figuram seu representacionem Sudan quod fore dicitur ejusdem Domini nostri jhesu Christi.

Corrected text (Piano, v. II, p. 280):

...quodque ostendens dictam figuram dum maior ibidem concurrent populi multitudo aliquoties saltem, dum sermonem ibidem fieri contigerit publicae populo praedicet, et dicat alta, et intelligibili voce, omni fraude cessante, quod figuram, seu representacionem praedictam non ostendunt ut verum Sudarium Domini nostri Jesu Christi, sed tamquam figuram, seu representacionem dicti Sudarii, quod dicitur Domini nostri Jesu Christi.

One cannot say that the new text is an example of clarity. In any case, the expression *pictura seu tabula*, which clearly supposes the idea of a man-made picture, was cancelled and the expression *figura seu representacio*, used from the very beginning of the question, was restored to its place.

Only by keeping in mind the Bull of 1 June 1390 (to which Chevalier does not give much weight), can one understand the correction of 30 May, without knowing the motives that led Clement VII to that decision. One might be permitted to suppose that Clement VII at least had some doubt that the Shroud was really a *pictura seu tabula*,

and therefore considered that it was deserving of veneration, as in the beginning.

At the Congress of Cagliari (29-30 April 1990) Giovanni Pisanu, in his presentation "La Storia della Sindone di Torino"¹⁵ offers an explanation to justify the conduct of the Bishop of Troyes. He referred to the provisions of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) concerning the cult due to the relics of long tradition and those recently introduced. The reference does not seem completely pertinent because the decree¹⁶ concerns the relics of saints; nevertheless the unexpected appearance of an Object defined as a relic but without a previous cult tradition and without guarantees of authenticity (because it was insufficient to say that it had been received as a gift¹⁷) could not but arouse the suspicions of the pastors responsible for the safeguard of the faith, as Pierre d'Arcis protests. Nonetheless, Father Pisanu's observations give a little insight into the behavior of the Bishop of Troyes and the fluctuations of Clement VII, who, after deeper study of the question of which we do not know the arguments, conceded a continuation of the veneration of the Shroud.

From the foregoing, we can draw the following conclusions:

I - If Clement VII, in the Bull of 28 July 1389, used the expression *figura seu representacio*, then that was the expression Geoffroy II de Charny used in his petition; and the Charnys and the canons considered the Shroud a true relic.

II - If Bishop d'Arcis affirms, in the *Memorandum*, that the Shroud (he calls it *pannus*) is a "work of human hands, not miraculously made", then it is clear that he means to contradict de Charny, who maintained that the Shroud was not man-made and the imprints were not the work of an artist.

III - If Clement VII in his letter to Pierre d'Arcis says absolutely nothing about having received the so-called *Memorandum*, then that writing, as it is or something similar, never arrived to the papal chancery, because it was and still is the practice always to refer to the communication of the petitioner.

IV - If Clement VII, on 30 May 1390, orders the cancellation and correction to be made on the Vatican Register (copy for the archives) of the expression *pictura seu tabula* and on 1 June 1390 publishes a new Bull granting indulgences to all who visit the collegiate church of Lirey where the Object described as *figura seu representacio* is conserved, then he had enough valid reasons for not believing the affirmations of Pierre d'Arcis but instead for considering de Charny's declarations true.

V - If the above facts are disregarded and consideration is given only to the Bull of 6 January 1390, sent to the bishops of Autun,

Langres and Châlons-sur-Marne that lack the 30 May 1390 correction, as if this were the final position of Clement VII, it is clearly a unique case for historians to reconsider, in order to rectify the conclusions reached by Chevalier and all those who still uphold them.

NOTES

1. U. CHEVALIER: *Le Saint Suaire de Turin est-il l'original ou une copie?*, Chambéry, 1899.
2. C. LALORE: "Historique de l'image du Saint Suaire de Jesus-Christ primitivement a Lirey (Aube) et maintenant a Turin", *Revue Catholique*, Troyes, 1877. Reprinted in *Mélanges liturgiques relatives au Diocese de Troyes*, 1895 and 1899.
3. U. CHEVALIER: *Étude critique sur l'origine du Saint Suaire de Lirey-Chambéry-Turin*, Picard, Paris, 1900.
4. A. ESCHBACH: *Le Saint Suaire de Notre-Seigneur venere dans la Cathédral de Turin, étude historique, critique et scientifique*, Turin, 1913.
5. G. SANNA SOLARO: *La Santa Sindone the si venera a Torino illustrata e difesa*, Turin, 1901. With photograph of the Shroud taken by the author.
6. U. CHEVALIER: *Le Saint Suaire de Lirey-Chambéry-Turin et les défenseurs de son authenticity*, Paris, 1902.
7. U. CHEVALIER: *Autour des origines du Suaire de Lirey, avec documents inédits*, Picard, Paris, 1903.
8. It is appropriate to report the following comment from the booklet by SILVIO SOLERO, *Il Duomo di Torino e la Real Cappella della Sindone*, Pinerolo, 1956. On page 211, note 1: "Since we have named Canon Ulisse Chevalier so often amongst the adversaries of the Shroud's authenticity, indeed at their very head, we would not want our readers to form an injurious judgment in his memory. The abbot Chevalier was an erudite and pious ecclesiastic, a tireless researcher and collector of documents, who rendered great service to science and history. Of his integrity and good faith there is absolutely no doubt. Perhaps he was at fault in holding too unilaterally and literally to documents, but it is certainly his merit to have unearthed many documents concerning the Shroud, and to have initiated, with his publications, the scientific controversy that grew to such grandiose proportions."
9. *Étude critique...*, op. cit. p. 28.

10. *Le Saint Suaire de Notre-Seigneur...*, op. cit. p. 93, n.2.

11. *Étude critique...*, op. cit. p. xii.

12. *Le Saint Suaire de Notre-Seigneur...*, op. cit. p. 95.

13. The Cluny Museum, Paris, possesses one little lead pilgrim badge showing the frontal and dorsal Shroud figure against a herringbone background, and the Charny and Vergy arms. Cf. I. Wilson, *The Turin Shroud*, London 1978. See also *Shroud Spectrum International*, #25, December 1987.

14. L. G. PIANO: *Commentarii critico-archeologici sopra la ss. Sindone de N.S. Gesù Cristo venerata in Torino*, Turin, 1833; Vol. II, Bk. VIII, commentary III, pp. 272-288. Regarding this text, Piano writes: "Here I report it [the Bull] exactly as it was kindly communicated to me, and it is said to be taken from a letter of the Count Vernon to the Marquis del Borgo, dated 11 January 1723."

15. *La datazione della Sindone*, Acts of the V National Congress of Sindonology, Cagliari, 1990.

16. Cf. H. DENZINGER: *Enchiridion Symbolorum*.

17. Cf. Bull of 6 January 1390, in which it is stated that the Shroud had been "freely given" (*liberaliter oblata*) to the father, Geoffroy I de Charny.