

## The Book of Geoffroi de Charny by Ian Wilson

Reviewed by Dr. Mark Guscini

For those of us with a keen interest in the Shroud's history, there is never enough information available. We want to know everything about everyone who was ever involved with the cloth, why, how, where and when. This is why Shroud researchers have books on palynology, numismatics, textile studies, the Crusades and a whole range of other related subjects.

Geoffroi de Charny is known to Shroud researchers as the cloth's first owner in Europe, in the mid-fourteenth century. He built the church at Lirey to house the relic.

Ian Wilson has produced a biography of de Charny that is both profoundly academic and yet at the same time a good and pleasant read. A picture is gradually built up of an honest and noble knight in the service of his country, a fascinating person who lived through fascinating events.

A major part of the book is taken up by the *Livre Charny*, a poem authored by Geoffroi on how to be a good knight, explaining all the different situations that a man at arms might find himself in.

The original French text of the poem is given, based mainly on the Oxford manuscript (Holkham Misc. 43), showing the differences in the other two main witnesses (Madrid, BN MS 9270 and Brussels BR MS 11124-26). An excellent translation is provided by Nigel Bryant. As Wilson says in the introduction, Bryant translates the poem "into straight continuous prose, as a result of which he has enabled Charny to speak across six and a half centuries in such an utterly direct, down-to-earth and 'natural' manner that it is as if it was only yesterday".

The conclusions regarding Charny's tenure and ownership of the Shroud are surprising. As Ian says, "The conclusion which therefore makes the most sense is that whilst Charny did possess the Shroud during his lifetime, he never held any showing of it, but kept it quietly to himself and made no move to give it any kind of ecclesiastical approval". The reasons as to why he would keep his ownership of such a relic in silence are what bring the book to a close, a "secret custody arrangement, possibly involving eastern Christendom".

All in all, this is a truly excellent book and an essential addition to any book collection based on the Shroud.

