

GEOFFROY DE CHARNY IN PARIS

DOROTHY CRISPINO

Looking at an early plan of a city we have known is not unlike looking at a baby picture of someone we love. Growth and development have wrought changes, but the individuality is recognizable. There are features we may not have noticed in their latent form; some traits completely forgotten. Other characteristics are so persistent that we linger over them with joy and wonder.

In the Library of the University of Basel, Switzerland, there is a XIVth century plan of Paris, called the *Plan de Bâle*, delightfully depicting the city as it was under King Charles V, the learned son of John II the Brave.¹ Charles was barely nineteen when he grasped the flying reins of the kingdom after his father, by whose side he was fighting, was taken captive at the Battle of Poitiers on 19 September 1356. Geoffroy de Charny, too, was by the king's side, holding high the Oriflamme; but Geoffroy's fate was death. Charles never forgot the loyalty and heroism of the "perfect knight".

On the *Plan de Bâle*² we can trace the streets that Geoffroy may have walked, see the churches where he may have attended Mass, and ponder which of the houses might have been his: although this knight—who always, in the documents, modestly designates himself as *miles*—, camping constantly on the battlefields, must have spent precious little time in his luxurious Parisian mansions.

On 17 January 1349, Geoffroy de Charny was at the Abbey de Lis, near Melun, in council with King Philip VI of Valois, the Archbishop of Rouen, the Bishop of Laon, the Abbot of Corbie and others. Three months later, on 19 April 1349, Philip granted to Geoffroy, for himself and his heirs, an income of 500 livres to be paid from the first forfeitures which might occur in the senechausses of Toulouse, Beaucaire, and Carcassonne. This was in lieu of a previous contract granting Geoffroy a lifelong annuity of 1000 livres; funds which Philip had to draw from his treasury: ("au lieu du mille livres de rente a vie, qu'il lui avait donne sur le tresor, 500 livres de rente a heritage a prendre sur les premiers forfeitures qui pourraient lui echoir dans les senechausses de Toulouse, de Beaucaire, et de Carcassonne." Archives Nationales JJ77 #395, folio 245).

At first glance, one might wonder why the king thus seemed to be cutting Geoffroy's personal income in half. Certainly, for Philip,

granting 500 livres out of the rents from these jurisdictions in Languedoc was one way to reduce the drain on his treasury; for Geoffroy, the agreement guaranteed revenues for his heirs.

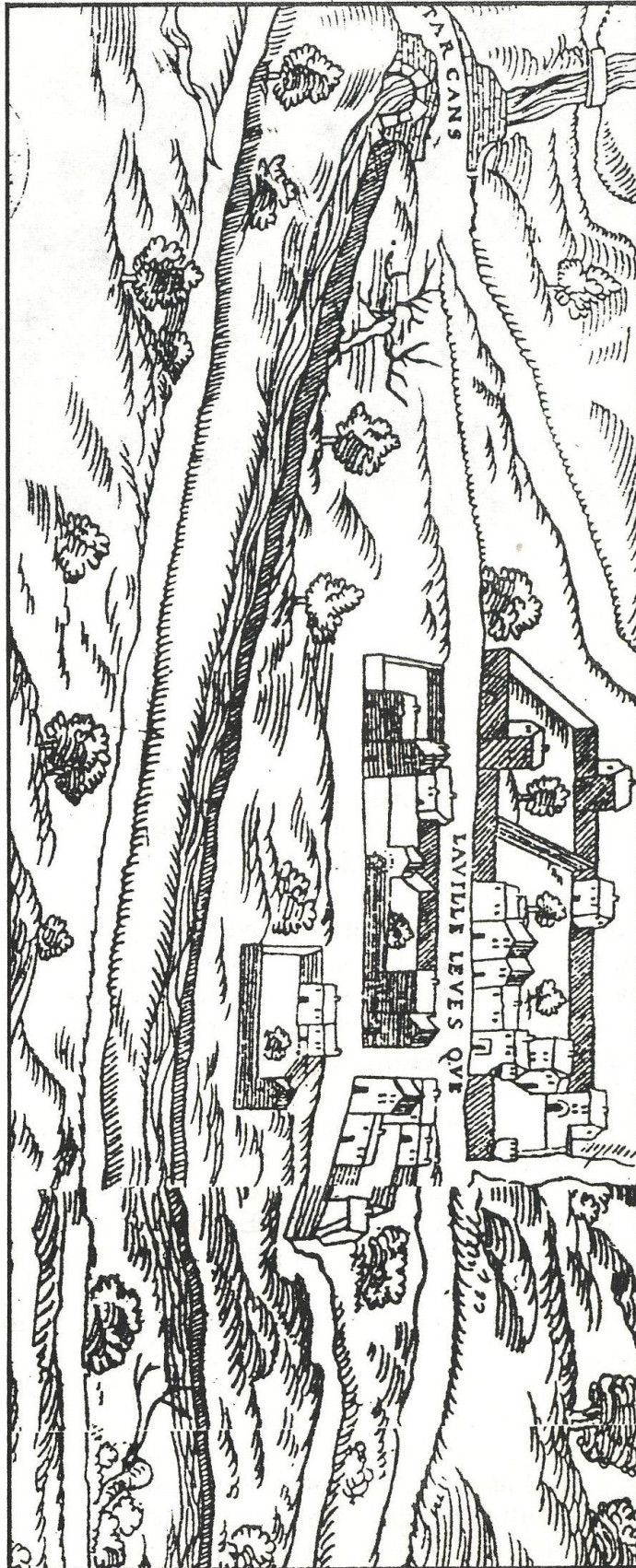
This concern to provide for his heirs is an entirely new element emerging in 1349:

- April 16, in a petition from Geoffroy to Clement VI;
- April 19, the new contract with Philip VI;
- April 26, another petition from Geoffroy to Clement VI.

Already in October of 1348, Philip had given Charny a manor house in Paris with all its appurtenances and ban rights, confiscated from Gerard d'Ormes, the king's notary. The house was in the elegant quarter on the right bank, on the Rue Petit Marais, a very short street starting from the Rue du Roi de Sicile; today, from Rue Saint-Antoine it runs into Rue Payenne. Its name is now Rue Pavée because in the XVth century it was one of the first streets in the quarter to be paved. It is understandable that this short narrow street should be paved before some of the larger thoroughfares, for the rich and the noble had build elaborate town houses here; the Hotel de Lamoignon, better known as the Bibliotheque Historique de la Ville de Paris, was erected for Diane of France and called then the Hotel d'Angouleme. In this quarter, the aristocracy of the Renaissance raised their palaces where medieval manors, with their corner turrets, dormer windows and stone gateways, had established an aura of social prestige. Under Philip IV (r. 1285-1314), it had become customary for powerful lords to have a town house, even though they lived in their distant castles most of the year. For those who must attend royal ceremonies and festivities, a residence in Paris was a necessity. It must be remembered that houses of this importance could yield enormous rents.

Two more residences came to Geoffroy in 1356, in the heat of the July-August Battle of Breteuil. Perret⁴ remarks: "The king [now John II] must have been satisfied with the services rendered by the lord of Lirey, because during the campaign he gave him two houses." The Act of Donation is dated July, 1356. One was a seigniorial mansion close by the king's palace and "facing St. Eustace"; or, as it was written in Geoffroy's time, Saint-Huitache, the most fashionable church in Paris right through the times of Napoleon III. The XIIIth century edifice was raised over an earlier church dedicated to Saint Agnes; the Crypt of Saint Agnes, now used as an intimate theatre, is the only remaining vestige of those times, smothered as it is beneath the ponderous reconstruction of 1532-1640.

Along with the town house, Geoffroy was given a residence in the country, at Ville-l'Eveque, outside the city walls. Today this is the busy 8th *arrondissement*. Near the church of the Madeleine, Rue Ville-l'Eveque runs into the Rue des Saussaies; now the Ministry of the Interior stands where willow groves (*saussaies*), in medieval times, swayed over the limpid stream of Menilmontant.



Ville-Évêque in the XIVth century. From the *Plan de Bâle*. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris.



On the stump of a gateway which once gave access to the castle of Pierre-Perthuis, the plaque reads:
 PIERRE-PERTHUIS/CHATEAU-FORT
 XII-XIII S/GEOFFROY DE CHARNY-VAUBAN

Color Photo by Diana Martin

Ville-l'Evêque, in English, is "Town of the Bishop". The village had grown up around the Culture-l'Evêque, Farms of the Bishop; for here, ever since Maurice de Sully, who initiated Notre-Dame de Paris, the bishops of Paris had possessed huge estates with sumptuous summer residences surrounded by magnificent gardens. On the land, sometimes thousands of acres, wheat, fruits and market vegetables were grown and sheep grazed; all sources of bountiful revenue. Only the very rich had property here; for instance, a villa named the *Tuileries* belonged to Pierre des Essarts, treasurer to Charles IV.

Both houses had been confiscated from Josseran de Macon. Formerly the queen's treasurer, by 1356 Josseran had shifted his allegiance to the king of Navarre, and he found it prudent to slip out of France. A year later, having joined Etienne Marcel and the king of Navarre in their insurrection, Josseran was arrested and decapitated.

The two houses were deeded to Geoffroy in July; in September he was killed. However, in response to the widow's petition, the Dauphin⁵ confirmed the donation for the benefit of Geoffroy's son, still "en bas âge" (in early infancy).

A house on Rue Petit Marais; another facing the church of St. Eustace; a third at Ville-l'Evêque. There were, besides, the barony of Montfort, with its magnificent fortified palace (see *Spectrum* #8); Maraut, with its very high tower, and nearby Pierre-Perthuis,

where a marble plaque on the ancient gateway reads, "Geoffroy de Charny-Vauban"; and, in the Côte-d'Or, the domains of Savoisy and Lirey.

If any place was "home" for Geoffroy, it would have been Lirey, where documents attest the presence of his wife, Jeanne de Vergy, and where presumably his son was born. Where he founded a little church dedicated to the Virgin of the Annunciation, depositing there a few minor relics and then, at some unknown date between 1353 and 1356, entrusting the canons with the custody of the Most Holy Shroud of Christ.

But since 1337, this knight lived in the tents of war, constantly criss-crossing the realm in regions far removed from the familial hearth.

As valiant soldier, as trusted councilor and as able diplomat, Geoffroy de Charny faithfully served two sovereigns: Philip VI of Valois and John H, his son; and in 1370 their successor, Charles V, remembering, honored their "*amé et féal*" vassal with burial at the Abbey of the Celestins, among princes and prelates; but even more significantly, the tomb, now lost, stood close to the urn which held the heart of King John II.

It was in Paris that, at last, Geoffroy de Charny, *miles*, had found rest.

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NOTES

1. "Jean le Bon" is regularly translated as John the Good, but John's contemporaries, by "*Bon*", meant what we would call "Brave". Likewise, "Charles V le Sage" is familiar to us as Charles the Wise, but "*Sage*", to be accurate in the context of his day, referred to his great learning. It pleases me to restore to these words the color they truly reflected at the time they were applied.
2. A photographic reproduction of the Basel document can be seen in the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris.
3. The petitions to Clement VI concerned the statutes for the Lirey church. The document of 16 April 1349 requests that the Lirey chapel be raised to a collegiate church; Geoffroy requests that Guillaume de Baserne de Toucy be one of the canons. This prelate was uncle to Geoffroy's first wife, Jeanne de Toucy. Could it be that about this time Geoffroy and Jeanne de Toucy were expecting a child? Or perhaps they had just been married? It will be remembered that on 3 January 1349, two weeks before the Melun meeting, Philip VI confirmed his donation of land yielding 140 livres annually for the salaries of the canons and other expenses.
4. A. FERRET: "Essai sur l'Histoire du Saint Suaire du XIV^e au XVI^e siècle", in *Mémoires de l'Académie des Sciences, Belles-Lettres et Arts de Savoie* (1960)
5. While Charles held the throne from 1356, first as lieutenant then as regent, he was still, of course, the Dauphin until 1364 when King John II died in London.

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