

RESEARCHES ON THE SHROUD'S HISTORY

Special Feature

The Shroud in Montfort, 1418-?

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Where was the Shroud located during the first quarter of the fifteenth century? In 1415 all France was in turmoil following English king Henry V's victory at Agincourt. Directly as a result of that battle Marguerite de Charny, who had inherited the Shroud from her father Geoffroi II de Charny on his death in 1398, lost her young husband, Jean de Bauffremont, and his father Burgundian chamberlain Philibert de Bauffremont, both of them killed in the fray. As young widows often did at that time, Marguerite quickly remarried, in her case to nobleman Humbert de Villersexel, whose territories were to the east, bordering Savoy. And because Marguerite's seigneurie of Lirey was in great danger from roving bands of English marauders, she and her husband decided that the Shroud should be removed to a safer location.

From a document preserved in the Archives of France's Department of the Aube, we seem to know where Marguerite and Humbert chose for that safer location. The document in question, dated 6 July 1418, is a receipt for the Shroud that Humbert drew up for Lirey's community of canons, and it is worded:

Hombart, comte de la Roche, seigneur de Velar-Cessey et de Lirey, scavoir faisons a tous que, pour la guerre qui a present est, et pour la doubte des gens de mal volunte, avons receu par la main de nos amez chappelains, doyen et chappitre de Nostre-Dame de Lirey des jouyaulx et sanctuaires de ladicte eglise, les choses qui s'ensuivent : premierement, ung drap ou quel est la figure ou representation du Suaire Nostre Seigneur Jesuchrist, lequel est ung coffre armoyé des armes de Charny.... lesquels joyaulx et reliquaires pour la seuté d'estre bien et seurement gardes en notre chastel de Montfort avons prins et receus en gardeet promettons en bonne foy ... de les restituer et bailler a ladicte eglise, toutefois que la tribulation qui a present est en France sera finée.... (1)

Translated from the Middle French, this reads as follows:

Humbert, Count de la Roche, Lord of Villersexel and Lirey, makes known that due to the war which is waging at present and fearing persons of evil intent, we have received from the hands of our beloved chaplains and dean of the chapter of Our Lady of Lirey, the jewels and relics of the said church as follows: first of all, a sheet on which is the figure or representation of the Shroud of Our Lord Jesus Christ, which is in a coffer emblazoned with the Charny arms....[a list of further items follows] which jewels and relics, for the surety that they will be well and securely protected in

our castle of Montfort, we have taken and received under guard and we promise in good faith ...to restore these to the said church forthwith when the present tribulation in France is finished.(2)

So where was the Montfort that is referred to in this document? There is actually some confusion over this, because France has more than one location of that name, and whichever one it was it cannot have stayed there long. This is because of strong evidence that the Shroud spent some decades of the early fifteenth century at St Hippolyte-sur-Doubs (3), Humbert de Villersexel's main domain, until Humbert's widow Marguerite handed it over to the Savoy family in 1453. This evidence has already been covered in a previous article (4), though at the time of writing it, I was not aware of just how far Montfort Castle was from St Hippolyte, which I had assumed was close by.

In fact an early twentieth century Italian authority, Gianmaria Sanna Solaro (6) discovered that there was a Castle of Montfort, also called Roche-Saint-Hippolyte, very close to Humbert de Villersexel's Hippolyte-sur-Doubs. However this castle is no longer in existence, while the de Charny castle of Montfort, acquired by Marguerite de Charny's grandfather on his marriage to Jeanne de Vergy, undoubtedly survives, albeit as a ruin, and is located in France's region known as the Côte d'Or.

In 1983 Dorothy Crispino, in her sadly now defunct Shroud magazine *Shroud Spectrum International*, wrote a delightful article about this castle (6). When she visited it in 1983, it was two years before the owner Jean- Marie Feriès started important protection work (7). This work involved clearing away the six foot of rubble that lay throughout the ground floor area. In 1996 a society to protect the castle was formed under the name 'Mons-Forti' with the aim to continue Monsieur Feriès' work. The organization published all their work and findings (8) in 2000 and they reached their fourth edition by 2008, plus growing to a membership of 220 at the time of writing.

According to the Mons Forti researches the main work on the present castle, dating from around 1289, was commissioned by one Geraud de Maulmont. On Geraud's death it went to his nephew Helie de Maulmont. Helie died in 1305 and it was another nephew and a first cousin once removed, Guillaume and Pierre, who came into the lordship of Montfort. Exactly what happened next is unclear, but quite definite is that when recently widowed Shroud- owner Geoffroy de Charny married Jeanne de Vergy sometime around 1350. Jeanne brought with her as dowry the Côte d'Or castles of Montfort and Savoisy, together with Lirey in Champagne. After Geoffroy died in 1356, leaving Jeanne with two very young children, Geoffroy II and Charlotte, Geoffroy II took over all three castles as his inheritance. By his wife Marguerite de Poitiers, he had three daughters, Marguerite, Henriette and Jeanne, and upon his death in 1398 the majority of his properties went to Marguerite, the eldest daughter, who in 1400 married Jean de Bauffremont, son of the Chamberlain of Burgundy. By this marriage Jean de Bauffremont became Lord of Montfort, Savoisy, Lirey, Roffet and Ligny. When Jean tragically died at Agincourt in 1415, he left no direct living descendant, so the castle of Mont- fort went to his nephew Pierre de Bauffremont, in whose possession it remained until his death in 1472.

I had the good fortune to pass near the Côte d'Or castle of Montfort on my annual return from the UK to my home in the South of France in August 2012. It is about an hour's drive from Dijon. The name, which literally means 'steep climb', rather accurately describes the road that leads from the main route in the canal valley up to the castle. I was particularly lucky when I called into the local tourist office and asked about visits to the castle. It seems one had to book in advance and be a party of at least ten. We were only three and only had a few hours to spend there. A certain Mme Kousal from the Mons-Forti organisation agreed to see us.

My wife, daughter and I were to spend a fascinating couple of hours in the company of Mme Kousal, who gave us a gentle and enthusiastic guided tour round the Montfort Castle. The assemblage of details included in the Mons-Forti book, plus the explanations from our guide Mme Kousal, have revealed the following information:

To the right of the main entrance is the east tower (*see fig 1, right*). On the first floor just behind the east tower was the position of the castle chapel. If the Shroud stayed in Montfort Castle, then the chapel is one of the most likely places where it would have been kept. The chapel was discovered when the ground floor room below it was cleared of rubble, the rubble being chapel material that had fallen through! Nothing remains in the original position of the chapel as the ground floor room no longer has its ceiling and all three levels above no longer exist either. The chapel material has so far been stacked in the ground floor room behind the one below the chapel.



Fig 1: Present view of the castle of Montfort

Room 91 was approximately 10m long by 6m wide (*see figs 2 and 4, next page*), The floor is known to have been covered with hexagonal green tiles. The ribbed stones found in the rubble, plus the descriptions made when the castle was for sale, describe the chapel with a vaulted ceiling with two intersecting ribs of a much better workmanship than the other vaults. It probably looked similar to the recently repaired ceiling in the Amélie tower ground floor room (*see fig 3*), actually labeled 5 on the floor plan. The actual dimensions of the chapel are extrapolated from the size of the room below though the wall separating the chapel from the east tower on the first floor no longer exists. However it is a reasonable assumption that it was directly above the wall of the ground floor.

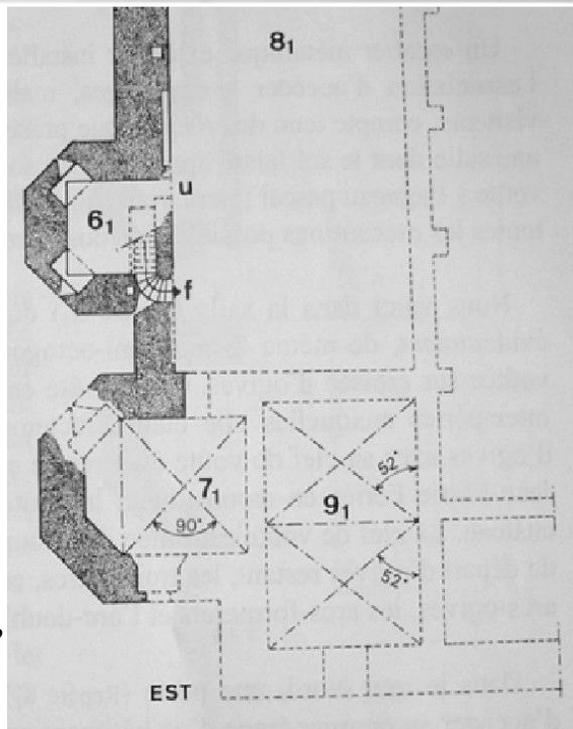
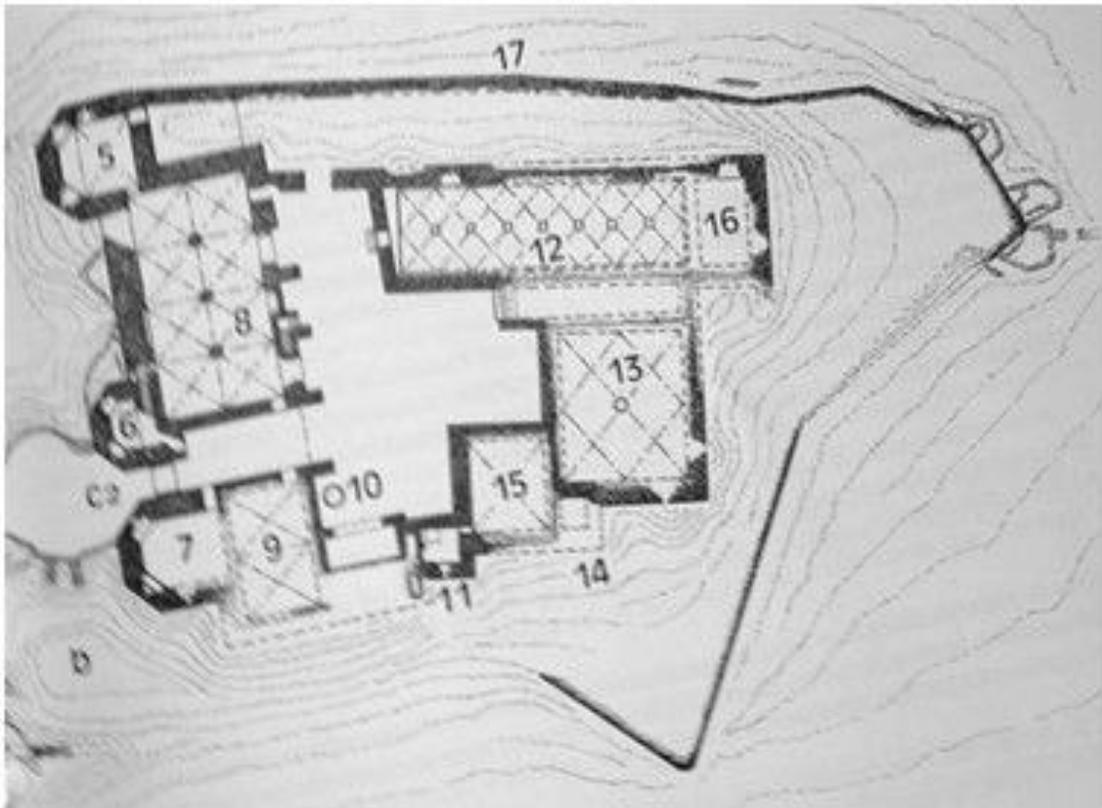


Fig. 2 (top) castle floor plan;
Fig. 3 (above) Amelie tower ceiling;
Fig. 4 (right) First floor showing chapel,
room 91

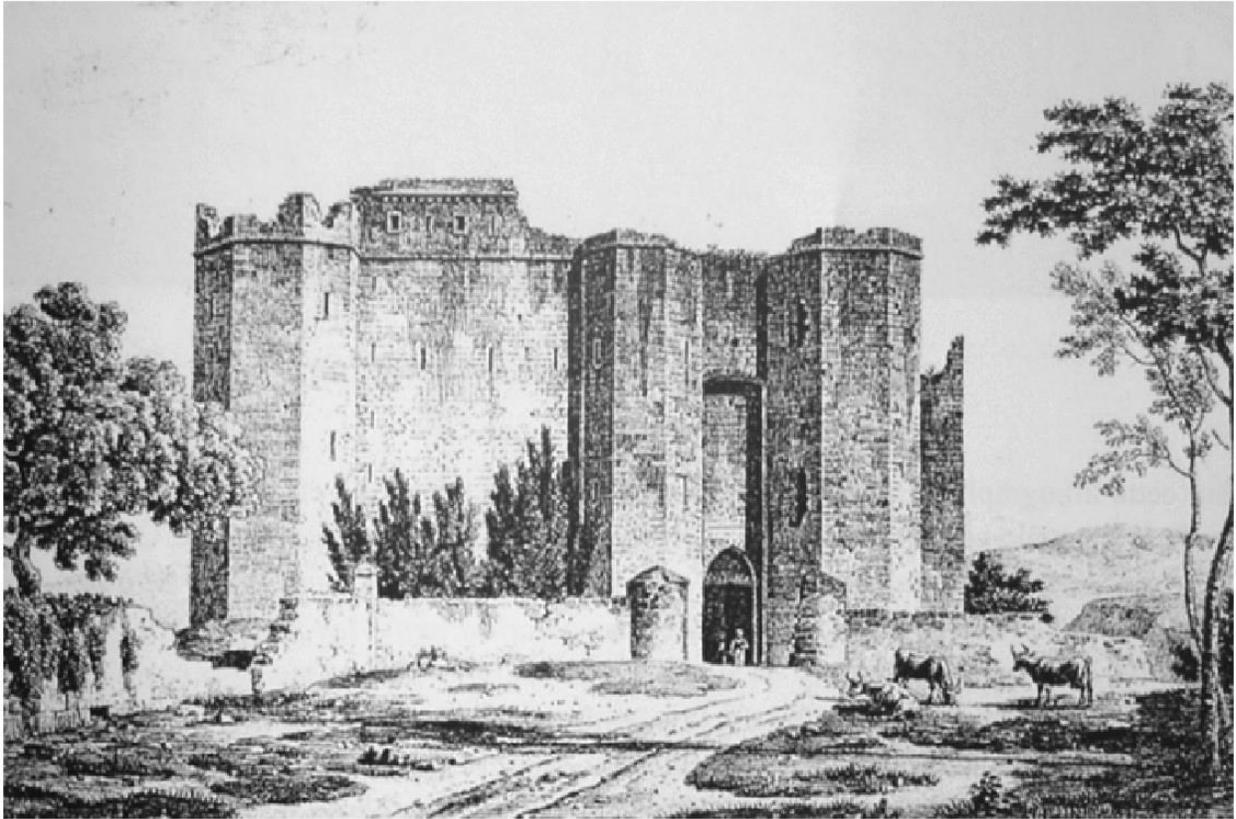


Fig. 5 Lithograph of 1819, chapel wall first floor, far right

Mme Koural said that the chapel was once filled with magnificent treasures, such as paintings, as may be judged by the descriptions in the inventories when the castle was up for sale. In a lithograph dated 1819 (*see fig 5*), part of the exterior chapel wall was still standing and the picture included one of the chapel windows. This is the east side of the castle.

However there is a discrepancy about this chapel window. The chapel was described in the past as having a rose window which is not the style depicted in this drawing. Secondly, the window style in fact looks to be identical to that of the chapel in the foreground of the picture, the chapel St Denis (*see fig 6*). Thirdly, the positioning of this window does not quite seem to fit in with a first floor level, looking somewhat too high. Fourthly, a section of the eastern wall juts out in a way that is different to the way that the remains of the wall suggest. The authors wonder how much of the painting is authentic and how much is the artist filling in at some later stage.



Fig. 6 (left) Lithograph of 1830 showing at left the external chapel of St. Denis and in the middle a remaining window of the castle chapel with (right) the same window in close-up

Whatever the case the chapel is still one of the most likely places where one would expect the Shroud to have been stored during those uncertain years in France. If it was not stored there, then it was perhaps privately exhibited there, if or when the Charny family visited Montfort, for there is no record of it being shown publicly at the castle.

To the north of the chapel and castle front, there remains the outline of a room that actually went below ground level, labeled as 12 and called The Vault. This had seven pillars holding up the ceiling. It is still full of rubble, but is thought to be a possible strong room for the castle's treasures. To the east of this is a ground floor room 13 known as The Mint (see fig 7 overleaf), which speaks for itself, while behind this and still hidden in the undergrowth is room 14 a tiny little room that may have been the treasury.

In view of the impressive work that has been done by the Mons-Forti organisation over the last three decades, I have a feeling that there could still be many more clues to unearth as they clear the remaining rooms. If the Shroud was hidden away, it is not beyond reason that further evidence for the Shroud staying in this Montfort will be found. Perhaps some pilgrims' amulets hidden away still lie amongst the rubble. Alternatively it might be worthwhile taking a closer look at whatever may be known of the Montfort Castle near St Hippolyte.



Fig 7: One of the possible sites of the treasury, ground level at the back of the castle

References

- (1) Ulysse Chevalier, *Étude Critique sur l'origine du S.Suaire de Lirey-Chambéry*- Turin, Paris, A.Picard, document Q.
- (2) English translation of (1) by Hugh Duncan.
- (3) Among many, see Ian Wilson *The Shroud*, 2010, pp.238-9.
- (4) Hugh Duncan, 'The Turin Shroud in a 15th century Fresco in St Hippolyte', *BSTS Newsletter* 63 p33 ff.
- (5) G. Sanna Solaro, *La Santa Sindone che si venera a Torino*' Vincenzo Bona, 1901.
- (6) Dorothy Crispino, 'Shroud Spectrum International', No.8 Sept 1983, p35-40
- (7) *The Castle of Montfort association Mons-Forti*, English language copy
- (8) 'La Seigneurie de Montfort en Auxois au fil des siècles', Renée et Michel Paquet, Mons-Forti, 2000