

A (Very Tangled) Tale of Two Pilgrim Badges

Fresh insights into the only two known versions of souvenir badges as created for sale to medieval pilgrims who visited showings of the Shroud at Lirey during the period when the Charny family were the Shroud's custodians. Ian Wilson.



Medieval pilgrim wearing souvenir badges on his hat. The top, Christ face badge shows that the pilgrim had been to Rome to view the Veronica, the shell badge at right that he had visited the relics of St James at Santiago de Compostela, Galicia, Spain.

Five years ago I alerted this Newsletter's readers to the then relatively recent discovery of a new version of a Charny era badge created for sale to pilgrims visiting showings of the Shroud at Lirey. This took the form of a mould for making such badges that had been found by a jogger lying in a field at Machy, a next-door village to Lirey, in 2009. A fascinating feature of this mould was that the badge that would have been made from it differed in certain key respects from the only other known example of a Shroud pilgrimage badge identifiable to the Charny era - the badge proper, made from lead, found in the mud of the Seine in Paris back in the mid nineteenth century, and for the last century and a half preserved as part of the Forgeais collection in Paris' Musée du Moyen Age. In Newsletters, 76, 77 and 78 I wrote three successive articles struggling to interpret the reasons for the differences between the two badge versions, concluding in the third article (December 2013) *'the issues that have been raised by the Machy mould's discovery are far*

from exhausted even now.' This remark has indeed proved to be the case, as a result of which this fourth - and hopefully last - article explains the revisions to my earlier thinking.

Making this revised thinking necessary have been the ongoing, and sometimes quite radical, findings of what I call 'Project Charny', an exhaustive trawl through every known surviving original document pertaining to the lives of the Geoffroi de Charny who died in 1356, also his son of the same name (hereafter to be called Charny II) who died 1398, and his grand-daughter Marguerite de Charny who died in 1460. This project, undertaken essentially as a hobby following my theoretical 'retirement' from book-writing in 2010, has been in very happy partnership with France-based Hugh Duncan, who is no stranger as a fellow-contributor to this Newsletter.

Although Hugh and I have never met, he has done some most herculean work photographing literally hundreds of Charny-related original documents in various French departmental archive collections, and has also been of enormous help and encouragement as we together grapple with all the complexities of translating medieval Latin and French and deciphering scribes' handwriting and abbreviations. The Charny project's overall aim has been to try to turn up any overlooked clue to how, when, where and from whom Charny might have acquired the Shroud before he was so tragically hacked to death by the English at Poitiers on September 19, 1356. And although the project remains a work in progress - my current intention is to publish it as a two volume academic study of which only the first volume has yet been written - a number of firm interim conclusions have been drawn that are relevant to a better understanding of the two Shroud pilgrim badges, and in particular to their dates.

One of the most fundamental of those conclusions is that during his lifetime Charny - for reasons best known to himself - deliberately shied from ever publicly disclosing his ownership of the Shroud. This non-disclosure on Charny's part was even towards, or perhaps especially towards, the ecclesiastical hierarchy who were his immediate contemporaries i.e. the Avignon popes Clement VI and Innocent VI and his local bishop of Troyes Henri de Poitiers. This policy was maintained despite the fact that he freely and respectfully communicated with these individuals on other matters.

Another firm finding is that when Charny formally founded the Lirey church - which he did between 1353 and May 1356 via an Act of Foundation so tedious and so lengthy that it has never been translated from its original Latin - he made not the slightest mention of the Shroud, let alone stipulated how and when he intended it to be displayed, or how best it should be kept safe within the church. Such 'elephant in the room' omissions, from a document otherwise micromanaging in its detail, contrasts so markedly with an otherwise very equivalent document, King Louis IX of France's 1246 Act of Foundation of the Paris Sainte Chapelle, built to house Christ's Crown of Thorns, that Charny's quite deliberate withholding the information that he had the Shroud in his custody (however long that period of custody may have been), now seems self-evident.

Furthermore when Charny's very full and colourful career is viewed without the distorting prism of any Shroud considerations, readily apparent becomes the highly misleading nature of the low-ranking, Lirey-centric view of Charny that so many have so long and often assumed, including myself. In a nutshell, the perception that Charny must have founded the Lirey church principally to house the Shroud and to stage money-making showings from it - the fundamental assumption that lay

behind carbon dating scientist Professor Hall's so glib assertion 'Someone [i.e. Charny] just got a piece of linen, faked it up, and flogged it' - now needs to be firmly rejected as lacking the slightest historical support or foundation

Paradoxically, this is not to deny that Charny *did* have some kind of custody of the Shroud throughout some as yet undetermined period leading up to his death. This is quite evident not only from the speed with which Shroud showings were staged very soon after his death (as may be inferred from the very confusions that the showings had occurred during his lifetime), but also from the emphatic declarations that he was the Shroud's acquirer which would be made by his son Charny II in a communication to papal legate Cardinal Pierre de Thury in 1389, and by his granddaughter Marguerite de Charny before a court of law at Besancon in 1443.

So what effect does this revised thinking on Charny the man, and his behaviour in respect of the Shroud, have on our understanding of the two differing versions of Shroud pilgrim souvenir badges?

First, clearly visible on both badge versions, despite the damage that each has suffered, is the distinctive Charny heraldry, three small (silver) shields on a larger (red) shield, and that of his second wife Jeanne de Vergy, three five-petalled flowers on a (red) shield. According to Project Charny's findings this second, Jeanne de Vergy, marriage is unlikely to have taken place any earlier than 1354, at which point Charny cannot have been any younger than his late forties because his mother had died no later than 1306. As for second wife Jeanne de Vergy, astonishingly, she can hardly have been much older outliving Charny by an eye-watering seventy-two years! This means that - all other considerations aside - neither badge version is likely to date any earlier than 1354.

Second, already noted from my earlier articles is that whilst on the Paris badge - hereafter to be called badge P - the Charny shield is on the left and the Vergy shield on the right, on the Machy version - hereafter to be called badge M - (See next page) this positioning is reversed. Hitherto it has seemed logical to infer that one badge was created late during Charney's lifetime and the other shortly after his death, in this second one Jeanne de lifetime and the other shortly after his death, in this second one Jeanne de Vergy featuring as the 'lead' patron in succession to her late husband.



Pilgrim Badge P, the example found in the mud of the Seine in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century. Photo: Niels Svensson/ Musée du Moyen Age.

But now, in the light of Project Charny's findings that the Shroud was kept out of sight and mind during Charny's lifetime, some different explanation becomes needed for how there should be two different badge versions, both bearing Charny-Vergy heraldry.

Necessarily needing to be invoked on this matter is the famous memorandum of Bishop Pierre d'Arcis of Troyes, written to Pope Clement VII in 1390, that is all too often claimed by opponents of the Shroud's authenticity to be the proof positive of the Shroud's fraudulence. Well known from this memorandum is that Bishop d'Arcis refers to two different occasions when Shroud showings were staged. The first of these was 'thirty-four years or thereabouts' prior to d'Arcis' time of writing. i.e. sometime around 1356, during the episcopacy of bishop Henri de Poitiers, on which occasion Lirey's clergy aroused Bishop Henri's wrath by 'falsely' declaring the Shroud to be Jesus' true *suaire* or *sudarium*. The second occasion was in 1389 during Bishop d'Arcis' own episcopacy. On this second occasion it would seem that Charny's now grown-up son Charny II (who had been but an infant back in the late 1350s), had played an active role in staging these showings, formally applying for papal permission to hold them, and in doing so describing the Shroud as merely an artist's copy of Christ's true *suaire* or *sudarium*, whilst privately letting it be whispered that it was the genuine article.



Pilgrim badge M, as reconstructed from the badge-making mould that was found at Machy near Lirey in 2009.

Notable about the first, i.e. late 1350s. round of showings is that although Bishop d'Arcis appears to have possessed no formal contemporary documentation about them - hence his vagueness about their exact date, even when he was writing an otherwise highly detailed memorandum to the pope - he represents Lirey's dean as having been their main instigator, the dean's motive reputedly having been one of crude money-raising. Of the two badges, the mould found at Machy, the next door village to Lirey, seems to be the logical version to attribute to this late 1350s set of showings. This is not only because the badge was clearly made locally, as evident from the find location of the mould used for making it, its inscription SVAIRE IhV, sweat-cloth of Jesus, readily corresponds to Bishop d'Arcis' allegation that the Lirey clergy had unequivocally declared it to be Christ's true *suaire/sudarium* back in the time of his predecessor Bishop Henri de Poitiers.

In which circumstance, to which of the two sets of showings of the Shroud should be attributed badge P, i.e. the altogether more well-known badge proper preserved in the Musée du Moyen Age? Hitherto this badge has never been associated with the Charny II set of showings in 1389. Not least because as at 1389 Charny II was already married, to Marguerite de Poitiers, by whom he produced two daughters. So any badge dated to 1389 we would expect to carry Poitiers, rather than Vergy heraldry alongside the Charny coat of arms.

However as was noted earlier Geoffroi I de Charny's widow Jeanne de Vergy was remarkably long lived, and still very much alive as at 1389. Raising the question: could badge P have been created in 1389 under the auspices of Charny II, but with heraldry harking back to Charny II's late father and still living mother? In which light might there be stylistic features to badge P which could support such a revised dating for it?

It was this question that last year I put to Dr Willi Piron, a world-class authority on medieval pilgrim badges, who is responsible for the Kunera Internet website on which it is possible to view literally thousands of different examples of pilgrim badges dating from the later Middle Ages. And much to my pleasure Dr Piron responded on May 23, 2016, as follows:

“Badge P [in the Kunera reference system this features as 01063] can stylistically be dated 1350 but also 1390 or 1400. Styles do not change that much in 50 years time. We have other badges with coat of arms of a family; the badges from Aarschot (Kunera 00412, 000413, 00414, 04385, 10671, 10797 and 13146). They bear the coat of arms of the Croÿ-family [see example at right - IW]. In 1432 the family acquired Aarschot. So we know these badges date after 1432. The coats of arms are from Philip I of Croÿ and his son Willem van Croÿ-Chièvre. The son is honouring his father for his work to make Aarschot a famous place of pilgrimage. The badges are dated 1475-1525.



Pilgrim badge of the Croy family of Aarschott, featuring father and son heraldry in a manner, arguably similar to that on Shroud pilgrimage badge P.

“I showed badge P to a colleague of mine, Hanneke van Asperen, and she is the opinion that coats of arms on badges are more a feature in the fifteenth century than in the fourteenth century. So she is the opinion that 1389 is more likely than 1350. The most important coat of arms is of course the one of Vergy, a clear reference to Jeanne de Vergy. It is important that she is commemorated on the badge. As a young second wife she would not be important enough for representation on the badge. I think the option mother-son is a very plausible one, like the father-son coat of arms on the Aarschot-badges. Simultaneously it could be an ‘Ahnenprobe’ (patent of nobility) of Geoffroi II de Charny by depicting the coat of arms of his father and of his mother. Usually an ‘Ahnenprobe’ has the coats of arms of the parents and grandparents. Sometimes even more coats of arms of ancestors. But this is a little badge and there is limited space. With the coat of arms of his father and his mother, Geoffroi II kills two birds with one stone: it is his unique ‘Ahnenprobe’ and he mentions/honours his mother. I think it will now be clear that I am a supporter of the second theory: 1389/Geoffroi II.”

At a stroke Dr.Piron's so insightful email liberated me from any last clinging to the idea that badge P somehow dated from Geoffroi I de Charny's lifetime - i.e pre-1356. At last the two badges made perfect sense in relation to the two sets of showings that were reported by Bishop d'Arcis.

Thus the Machy badge 'M', artistry-wise the inferior of the two, may now confidently be dated to the late 1350s showings which so enraged Bishop Henri de Poitiers. The late 1350s was a very turbulent time throughout France in the wake of the country's 1356 defeat at Poitiers. Law and order broke down. Marauding bands of redundant soldiery created social and economic chaos. The clergy of the so newly-founded church at Lirey had not only lost their patron/benefactor, i.e. Charny I, in that same Poitiers battle, at much this same time the monks of Lirey's parent Cistercian abbey, Montier-la-Celle, had rebelled against the austerities imposed by their abbot, Aimeric Orlhuti. Arguably the Shroud had been temporarily deposited at the Lirey church shortly subsequent to Charny's death, and because of the church's economically straitened circumstances the dean decided to use it for money-making purposes. Selling locally made souvenir badges to visiting pilgrims was the classic way of doing this, as exemplified by the very successful and lucrative showings of the Veronica that had been held in Rome a few years earlier. The inclusion on badge M of a ‘Veronica’ type Christ face (abandoned on badge P in favour of a depiction of the Empty Tomb and instruments of the Passion), readily supports this element to the dean's thinking. The dean's massive blunder, one of which, according to 'Project Charny' insights, the so tragically deceased Geoffroi I de Charny would have severely disapproved, was to publicly describe the Shroud as the genuine article, information that Charny would have wanted to hold back from public knowledge precisely because of the likely questioning and undue attention that it would attract, particularly from a bishop as prickly

as Henri de Poitiers. In order to display the Charny and Vergy families' coats of arms on the badge the Lirey dean would have needed to obtain widow Jeanne de Vergy's consent. However the foundation's severely straitened financial circumstances and Jeanne's youth and inexperience at the time may well have made it all too easy for the dean to persuade her that staging the showings was the best way to resolve their difficulties.

As for Badge P, the one in the Musée du Moyen Age, this now becomes associated with the second round of showings of the Shroud that so enraged Bishop Pierre d'Arcis in 1389. The badge's quality and artistry is markedly superior to that of badge M, readily attributable to its having been directly commissioned by Charny II - a knight whose historical standing has hitherto been under-rated by both professional historians and Shroud enthusiasts alike, as Project Charny's findings are increasingly making clear. Also although the badge's inscription has been broken off, the remnant of the top left hand edge of a banner can be seen just below the Charny shield, thereby differing from the simple bar carrying badge M's inscription. Given that subsequent Shroud pilgrim badges, of undetermined date but without Charny heraldry, feature a banner simply carrying the word SVAIRE, with no identifying IhV [see example below], arguably it was Charny II's badge P of 1389 which had set this styling, in line with Charny II's cautiously representing it for official purpose as merely a copy of representation, rather than openly declaring it as the genuine article.

But the question necessarily arises: if it was the Charny family's basic policy to keep the Shroud mostly out of sight, concealed from public awareness - a policy that as made clear by Bishop had been maintained throughout the past *'thirty four years or thereabouts'* - why did Charny II suddenly decide to bring it out for public showings in 1389?

According to Bishop d'Arcis' memorandum the Charny II showings of 1389 were for money-making purposes, just as had been the case with those back in the time of his predecessor Bishop Henri de Poitiers. And if badge P, is to be dated to 1389, then self-evidently its creation and sale would have been part of those money-making endeavours. But unlike as back in the late 1350s, France was no longer in social and economic chaos. The Hundred Years War was in one of its lull phases. Furthermore when Charny II's career subsequent to 1389 becomes properly understood, as is currently being revealed by Project Charny, why Charny II might have wanted to raise significant amounts of money at this particular point in time becomes readily apparent and understandable. It was in order to follow in his father's footsteps and go on crusade against the forces of Islam, who were remorselessly tightening their grip all around Christian Europe from north Africa to the Balkans.



Shroud pilgrim badge of fifteenth century date

For throughout the next seven years the story of Charny II's life was essentially one of dashing exploits crusading first against Barbary pirates on the coast of north Africa in 1390, then Prussia in 1391, and finally taking part in the disastrous Nicopolis crusade into eastern Europe in 1396. To equip himself with the latest highly protective plate armour (which he is depicted wearing on his Froidmont tombstone - see right), and to support himself on the extended stays overseas such ventures involve, Charny II would have needed to stockpile large sums of money, just as his father, in his *Livre* poem, had written of needing 'a pile of money in order to travel abroad' (*Livre Charny* poem lines 611-13).

Charny II depicted on his Froidmont tombstone. Plate armour was hugely expensive, and the Shroud showings at Lirey may well have been staged to pay for this and for other of Charny II's crusading expenses.



Arguably, therefore, Charny II's money-making of 1389 was for such worthy ventures against the Christian faith's enemies, i.e. the forces of Islam, for which holy purpose he could regard his publicly displaying the Shroud of which he was guardian as fully justified. And cleverly, he tried avoiding the blunder of Lirey's dean back in the 1350s by the ruse of representing the Shroud both to officialdom and to the general public merely as a 'copy or representation' of the true Shroud in the hope that this might prevent the kind of unwanted questioning and obstructiveness that had come from Bishop Henri de Poitiers back in the late 1350s. Unfortunately for him, Bishop d'Arcis still smelt subterfuge and created a furore regardless. Even so Charny II held his ground and managed to achieve his objectives, in the event it only being as late as 1443 that his daughter Marguerite de Charny would 'out' the Shroud and formally declare it as the genuine article after all, a situation on which much more will be revealed when Project Charny's findings eventually achieve publication.

Meanwhile so much fussing about two pilgrim badges might seem much ado about nothing, except that getting their historical placement right is essential for Project Charny's whole inch-by-inch, document-by-document process of trying to achieve a better understanding of the Charny period of the Shroud's history. Thus, properly understanding why in 1389 Charny II should have underplayed the Shroud as merely a '*copy or representation*' in his dealings with the ecclesiastical authorities, and why Marguerite de Charny should

have behaved with it as she did between 1443 and 1453 (when she ceded it to the Savoy dynasty), may be fundamental to a better understanding of how, when, where and from whom Charny 1 had first taken charge of the Shroud a century earlier. A never-to-be-overlooked question is the determining what and where the three Shroud-possessing Charnys - father, son and granddaughter - perceived as the Shroud's rightful ultimate resting-place. Was it the tiny wooden church at Lirey? Or the already crumbling palace of Byzantium's last emperors at Constantinople? Or just conceivably could it have been the church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, home of the Empty Tomb featured on Shroud pilgrim badge P, should it ever be possible to wrest this from Islamic suzerainty?

This is why during this last seven years Hugh Duncan and I have needed - much against our original expectations - to broaden chronologically the pool of original medieval documentation that we are assembling and investigating. What is emerging is set fair to overturn certain longstanding assumptions on the part of both professional historians and supporters of the Shroud's authenticity alike. Assembling it all, then presenting it with the requisite academic rigour is a necessarily long-drawn-out process, hence it may take some years yet to achieve.

In the meantime, however, I have felt it only right to share with BSTS members my revised, and now much more confidently held, new perspectives on the two pilgrim badges...

Author's Note: Although it would be my normal policy to fully reference an article of this kind, I have not done so in this instance on the grounds that this particular article is merely an informal advance notice of arguments that will be presented altogether more fully for academic publication.

