

Some Paradoxical Documents underpinning the Shroud's 'Middle' History

Here, in a brand-new series Ian Wilson introduces fresh approaches to some of the original documents from the enigmatic 'middle' phase of the Shroud's history, arguably that of its transfer from the Byzantine east to the Roman Catholic west. Some of these documents will be new and unfamiliar to mainstream Shroud studies. However, there are others which, although already well-known, may have long tended to mislead researchers, as in the case of the first in this series presented here.

1: The Act of Foundation of the Lirey church, 20 June 1356

Sometimes a historical document can be instructive not so much for what it contains as what it does not, a mode of reasoning that historians call an *argumentum ex silentio*, an argument from silence. Whilst such a paradoxical argument needs always to be applied cautiously, nevertheless it seems particularly pertinent to the mid-fourteenth century Act of Foundation for the church at Lirey in Champagne, the church where the Shroud reportedly received its first ever public showings in western Europe.

Drawn up on parchment, in legal Latin, on location at Lirey in the presence of lord of Lirey Geoffroi de Charny, the Act is kept amidst a file of related documents¹ at the Archives of the département of the Aube in Troyes, the Aube region's capital and Lirey's nearest main town. Recently it formed part of an exhibition of Shroud-related documents that was staged at the Archives. Whilst the French scholar Ulysse Chevalier more than a century ago transcribed the full texts of many such documents for the two exhaustive historical studies of the Shroud that he published in 1900 and 1902,² this one he did not include, probably because it contains no mention of the Shroud, even though this is precisely what is so important about it.

Thankfully a transcription of the Act was published over four centuries ago by a canon of the cathedral of Troyes, Nicolas Camusat,³ and this has obviated the invariably difficult task of transcribing its text from medieval handwriting. Nevertheless I am deeply indebted to BSTS member Hugh Duncan who on my behalf very kindly stopped off at the Aube archives to photograph the original, along with other documents in the file, in the course of one of his annual drives from the south of France to visit family in

¹ Archives of the Aube, file 9.G.1

² Ulysse Chevalier, *Etude Critique sur l'Origine du St Suaire de Lirey-Chambéry-Turin*, (Paris, 1900) and *Autour des origines du Suaire de Lirey, avec documents inédits*, (Paris, 1903)

³ Nicolas Camusat, *Promptuarium sacrarum antiquitatum Tricassinae dioecesis*, Troyes, 1610

England. Such is the sheer size of the document that Hugh found he needed to position it on the floor to gain the optimum focus.

For many Shroud authors past and present, and whether they are pro or anti-authenticity, the Act's principal historical value lies in the fact that it was initiated on 20 June 1353, a date they regard as the determinator for when the Shroud first made a 'firm'



Fig.1 *The Act of Foundation for the Lirey Church*. Photo by Hugh Duncan

appearance in history. They have assumed that if Geoffroi de Charny founded the church in this year, three years before his death, with showings of the enigmatic cloth reported to have been held at this same church very soon after, then whether the Shroud is authentic or a fake this must have been the date when it was deposited in the Lirey church.

The problem to any such assumption, however, is the Act's actual written content. Despite its sheer size, and its tiresomely long-winded word-matter, it makes not the slightest reference to the Shroud. Readily demonstrative of the glaring oddity of this omission, likewise arguably of its strong potential instructive value, is a comparison of

the Lirey Act's opening paragraphs (which have here received some slight textual re-arrangement for better comparison purposes), with those composed a hundred years earlier for the Act of Foundation of the Sainte Chapelle, Paris, the stunningly beautiful edifice that France's King Louis IX (a.k.a. Saint Louis), ordered for housing the alleged Crown of Thorns and other Passion relics.

	ACT OF FOUNDATION LIREY CHURCH, 1353⁴	ACT OF FOUNDATION SAINTE CHAPELLE,1246⁵
Preamble	In the name of the Lord. Amen. Geoffroi de Charny, lord of Savoisy in the diocese of Langres and Lirey in the diocese of Troyes, greets you in the Lord, who is the true salvation of all	In the name of the sacred and indivisible Trinity, amen, Louis, by the grace of God, king of the Franks... [wishes to] make known to all both present and future who will examine the present page,
Type of foundation	Having sole ownership and patronage of our aforesaid village of Lirey, we, on behalf of our parents, our friends, our benefactors and others whom we hold and may hold [dear], have now constructed and founded [this church or chapel]	That we for the salvation of our soul, and for the remedy of the souls of King Louis of illustrious memory, our father [i.e. Louis VIII], have founded and constructed within the walls of our house in Paris...a chapel.
Purpose of foundation	to further our divine worship, and to elevate this same divine worship ... in honour of the highest [Heaven] and of the most glorious and undivided Trinity and of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ, and most particularly of her feast of the Annunciation, [elsewhere] It is our wish and intention [that this should be] a perpetual memorial shrine for the healing and salvation of souls	in honour of the all-powerful God and the holy Crown of Thorns of our lord Jesus Christ, in which the holy Crown of the Lord, the sacred Cross, and many other relics are kept safe [elsewhere] So that these relics may be continuously honoured through the office of godly praise
Staffing of foundation	our first priority is that our church or chapel should have as its permanent canonical staff no less than six canons; [In addition there will be a church warden and two junior wardens at the chapter's service throughout the year]	we wish, we establish, and we ordain that in that chapel there should be five principal presbyters, or master chaplains, and two wardens

As the Lirey Act makes clear, rather than the church's canons being responsible for looking after what, if genuine, was necessarily one of Christendom's most priceless of all Passion relics, the main activity that Charny expected of them was plain and simple prayers and Masses to be said for himself and for his family. For the Middle Ages this was nothing unusual. In Charny's time literally hundreds of other noble families across mediaeval Europe had founded, and were continuing to found, family churches and chapels that they staffed with clergy for performing similar devotional services. At Lirey two Masses were to be held daily, a Low Mass at matins (just before dawn), and a High Mass at nones (3 pm). At these Masses the Act required the canons to recite on Charny's personal behalf the traditional prayer of the Holy Spirit (the '*Veni Sancte Spiritus*'), whilst he was alive, replacing this with the Prayer for the Dead after his death. Every Feast of the Annunciation a special Mass to the Holy Spirit was to be held for his soul's benefit, likewise to be replaced by a Mass for the Dead after his death, with the same also be held on behalf of his deceased first wife Jeanne de Toucy.⁴ For each of these various religious rituals Charny even stipulated the different vestments that he expected the clergy to wear.

Many paragraphs of the Act are devoted to the scale of wages to be paid to the different ranks of the clergy for their various services on ordinary days and on particular feast days. An oil lamp was to be kept constantly burning in the church. The Act specifies how many candles and torches were to be lit on ordinary days (two of each kind), and how many on feast days (four of each kind). Each incoming canon was required to swear an oath of loyalty and obedience to Charny and to his successors. Overall, and as befitting its being drawn up by a military founder, the Act's attention to the minutiae of organisational detail is broad-ranging and highly impressive. Yet of the Shroud's very existence, let alone of how it was to be housed within the church, on what feast days it was to be brought out for veneration, and of whatever security arrangements should be made for it, on all these key points the document is strangely silent.

All of which is in very marked contrast to the set of instructions that Saint Louis laid down for his founding of the Sainte Chapelle in Paris, in which the founder's intention, that is, for the housing of Christ's Crown of Thorns and accompanying relics, is very clearly spelled out, likewise the clergy's curatorial duties towards these precious items

⁴ Another important omission from the Act that is highlighted by this provision is the lack of any reference to Geoffroi having a living second wife. Although other authors have assumed that Geoffroi was already married to his second wife Jeanne de Vergy at the time the Act was drawn up, the omission of any mention of her in the Act suggests that the marriage took place later, most probably late 1354 or early 1355.



Figure 2: *St. Louis, king of France, from a section of so-called Moralized Bible of St. Louis held in the Morgan Library, New York (MS M.240).* Unlike Charny at Lirey, St. Louis formally installed, and ordered security for, the relics that he housed in the Paris Sainte Chapelle.

along with the ... churchwardens, in order that vigils surrounding the security of the holy relics may be continuously maintained.

And whilst at Lirey Charny's main concern was merely that his clergy should swear loyalty to himself and his successors, Saint Louis specially required of all his clergy at the Saint-Chapelle the solemn oath in respect of 'each and every one of the holy relics':

... that they will well and faithfully guard [these] for us and for our successors, together with all the Chapel's treasures...

In order that these [the Chapel's sacred relics] should be continually revered with divine praises ... we wish, we institute, and we decree that this same Chapel shall have five principal priests or senior chaplains.

Such was the intensity of St Louis's concern for the Sainte-Chapelle's sacred relics' security that he insisted these should be accorded the fullest round-the-clock protection by a roster of the five chaplains, additional to a guard similarly being kept by churchwardens:

It is our wish and decree that whomsoever of the above five principal chaplains should be on duty, that same night he should sleep in the Chapel

Lest it be supposed that the Shroud had been acquired by Charny perhaps after the drawing up of the Act, its omission from inclusion in its provisions therefore having been a simple accident of timing, this again is not borne out by the documentary evidence. Whilst it is true that the Act was drawn up at Lirey on 20 June 1353, three years before his death, this was merely the start of the long-drawn out legal process that French law required for a church foundation, that for the Sainte-Chapelle having



Figure 2: Charny's grandfather Jean de Joinville, who followed the correct procedures when he installed relics in his family church. From BnF MS fr. 13568, f¹

stretched from 1241 to 1248. In the case of the Lirey act an integral part of the process was its ratification by royal notaries, a procedure performed nearly three years later at the justice headquarters known as the Châtelet in Paris on Monday 20 May 1356.⁵ Had something so fundamentally important as the acquisition of Christ's Shroud happened during the intervening three years, there can be little doubt that full advantage would have been taken for some suitable extra provisions to be added to the Act, or for a codicil to be appended to the same effect, yet clearly there was nothing of this kind.

Such a difficult to explain omission is likewise in marked contrast to the actions of Charny's famous grandfather Jean Joinville, who punctiliously adhered to the appropriate formalities when he donated part of what he believed to be the skull of St. Stephen to his

family church at Joinville.⁶ Furthermore the unmistakability of Charny's marked disinclination formally to install the Shroud at the Lirey church is borne out by a further, closely related document in the Archives at Troyes, the episcopal approval of the Lirey Act of Foundation as granted by Bishop of Troyes Henri de Poitiers. just six days after the Act's notarisation:

⁵ The text of this is included in Nicolas Camusat, op.cit. note 3.

⁶ 'Je Jehans sire de Joinville...fais savoir à tous qu'il a mis en garde ...au doien et au chapitre de St. Lorent de Joinville...deux vases d'argent et de cristal, l'un de St Jasques , de la joue, et l'autre du chief de St Estienne'. From the Caurtulaire de Saint Laurent, text transcribed in J-J. Champollion-Figeac, *Documents historiques inédits tirés des collections manuscrites de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, Paris, 1841, p.627.

Henri, by the grace of God and of the Apostolic See, rightful bishop elect of Troyes, to all those who will see this be advised that we have seen and listened to the petitioning of the noble knight Geoffroi de Charny, Lord of Savoy and of Lirey, ..[and] after scrupulous examination of this documentation and more especially of the said knight's expressions of his devotion, past and present, towards divine worship, we ourselves wish to encourage such devotion as much as possible such a cult. [Therefore] we praise, we ratify and we approve the said documentation in its entirety... Given at our chateau at Aix [en-Othe] in our diocese of Troyes in the year of Our Lord 1356, on Saturday 28th of the month of May.⁷

Henri de Poitiers was, of course, the bishop famously acclaimed by his successor Bishop Pierre d'Arcis for his having forcefully suppressed showings of the Shroud that according to d'Arcis were held at Lirey 'thirty four years or thereabouts' before his 1390 year of writing (by which d'Arcis would have meant in or around the year 1356). From this glowing approval that Bishop Henri bestowed on the Lirey church on 28 May 1356, quite transparently obvious is that as at that date he was entirely happy with the foundation, hence the contentious showings of the Shroud that he would later so roundly condemn simply could not yet have taken place. Which duly makes all the more puzzling, at least from the viewpoint of Charny having any ongoing involvement in the matter, is that virtually immediately after this same end of May 1356 date Charny would **never again** return to Lirey for any purpose, let alone for orchestrating showings of the Shroud.

This is because at this very point in French history two quite separate English invasion forces had become dangerously active against French territory, one prong of these advancing from the north, the other from the south. To counter these threats France's king Jean II unavoidably needed to muster a large French army, and Charny equally unavoidably needed to be present alongside him because of his integral role as bearer of France's sacred Oriflamme, the dread flame-coloured battle-standard by which the king signalled that no quarter would be given. On June 30 the Oriflamme was solemnly collected from the abbey of Saint Denis, which then lay just outside Paris, following which it was Charny's sworn duty to guard this with his life throughout all that happened next. For most of that July and August he was heavily preoccupied attempting to retake the Normandy town of Breteuil, which had earlier been captured by the very able English commander Henry of Lancaster. Then at the beginning of September his and the entire royal army's attention was diverted to countering dangerous looking

⁷ Archives of the Aube I, 17,

moves by the army of English King Edward III's son Edward the Black Prince, which seemed to be heading for Paris. On the 19th of this same month the two forces confronted each other near Poitiers at which point the French army, over-confident of its numerical superiority, attacked precipitately, disregarding cautionary warnings from Charny. For Charny the tragic outcome was that the three successive waves of the French army launched by the Black Prince were decisively routed, and he was killed virtually at his king's feet, defending the Oriflamme to his last breath. Effectively, whatever may have happened concerning the showings of the Shroud at the Lirey church that he had founded, and whenever exactly it was that these showings were held, he can have played no part in them.

From all of this, it might seem possible to argue that Charny may never have acquired the Shroud during his lifetime, it perhaps having been procured shortly after his death either by his young widow Jeanne de Vergy, or by one of the Lirey clergy. But neither such scenario is tenable because decades later his son of the same name, likewise his granddaughter Marguerite de Charny, would attest before a papal legates and before a court of law⁸ respectively that it was quite specifically he who had brought the Shroud into their family's care.

Further complicating such conflicting evidence is the now well-known Shroud pilgrim badge bearing Charny and Vergy heraldry that was found in the mud of the Seine in Paris during the mid-nineteenth century. Its pairing of the two families' coats of arms, and the fact that the Charny heraldry is on the side normally understood to indicate his being alive at the time,¹⁰ has seemed quite firmly to date it to the brief period between Charny's marriage to his second wife Jeanne de Vergy (most likely late 1354 or early 1355), and his death at Poitiers in September 1356, thereby directly contradicting the documentary evidence that has been presented earlier.

All of which might have remained imponderable but for the discovery in 2009, near Lirey, of the casting mould for making Shroud pilgrim badges that I have lengthily

⁸ That Charny II made this declaration is evident from Pope Clement VII's bull of 6 January 1390, the preamble to which clearly summarises what Clement's legate Pierre de Thury had been told by Charny II. Archives of the Vatican Reg. Aven. 261, fol. 258 verso

⁹ Archives of the Aube 9 G 4, fol 2 verso 7; Paris. BnF, Coll. De Champagne v.154, fol 147

¹⁰ Decades ago this was explained to me by heraldist the late Noel Currer-Briggs: 'Perversely in heraldry, sinister and dexter mean left and right as seen from behind the shield, not as the observer sees it, so when the shield was carried across the knight's chest to protect him, his right side was protected by the dexter side of the shield, and his left by the sinister. ... [This therefore] tells us that he [i.e. Charny] was very much alive when the medallion was made' Letter to the author 2 June 1992

discussed in earlier articles for this Newsletter.¹¹ The importance of this artefact is that its design significantly differs from that of its Paris counterpart, and in particular it includes the still extant inscription SVAIRE IhV, unequivocally claiming the cloth being shown as truly that of Jesus, and thereby directly linking it to the same set of Shroud showings that so enraged Bishop Henri of Poitiers. Furthermore, because its disposition of the Charny and Vergy coats of arms is left-to-right reversed compared to its Paris counterpart, this suggests Jeanne de Vergy to have been the prime mover for these showings, specifically supporting the concept of them having been held *after* Charny's lifetime rather than during it, exactly as has been inferred from the Act of Foundation.

Whilst on this basis of this interpretation the Act of Foundation and the recently discovered badge mould therefore seem now satisfactorily to align, this leaves still in limbo the significantly more handsomely produced Paris pilgrim badge with the Charny coat-of-arms in the prime mover position. Should this still be dated sometime before Charny's death, in the teeth of the Act of Foundation and the other documentary evidence to the contrary, or is there some other rather more rational alternative? As my earlier BSTS Newsletter article has already argued, a radical but seemingly perfectly satisfactory explanation is that the Paris version was created some thirty-four years after Charny's death, for the Shroud showings that would be held by his son of the same name (hereafter to be referred to as Charny II), at the Lirey church in 1389/90. Design-wise pilgrim badge specialists have confirmed that this is actually their preferred date for this example.¹² Charny II's heraldry was the same as that of his father. As the prime mover for the showings, and even though he was already married (notably to a member of the Poitiers family!¹³), he simply paired his coat-of-arms with that Vergy in honour of his mother, for she was still very much alive at that period, and (remarkably) would remain so through to 1428.

From all these various indicators the now inescapable deduction therefore arises that the Charny who died so bravely at the battle of Poitiers, even though he definitely had the Shroud in his care, kept it strictly and very closely to himself, never showing it publicly and, particularly paradoxically, carefully avoiding disclosing its existence to any of the high-ranking churchmen of his time. And the sheer oddity of such secretive behaviour, at least from a western Christian perspective, is that it seems the very antithesis of what arguably should have been in his and his family's best interests.

¹¹ In particular, that of Winter 2017

¹² See my earlier article for this Newsletter

¹³ Marguerite de Poitiers, Bishop Henri de Poitiers' niece.



Figure 3 A: Detail of the recently discovered Shroud pilgrim badge mould with the label SVAIRE IhV, this indicating that it was being claimed as of Jesus and therefore produced for the first round of Shroud showings that were suppressed by Bishop Henri de Poitiers. The fact that the Vergy coat of arms (at left), is in what is heraldically the prime position, suggests that Charny's widow Jeanne de Vergy was in charge at the time of these showings, Charny himself being deceased. The likely date for these showings (and accompanying badge), is therefore circa 1357/8. **Figure 4 B:** Equivalent detail of the Shroud pilgrim badge proper that was found in the mud of the river Seine in the mid-nineteenth century. In this instance the Charny arms are in the prime position, it arguably being Charny's son Charny II who was in charge of these showings (as he is known to have been in 1389), his pairing of his arms with those of his mother being in her honour. The lost inscription to the badge, thought to have been on a banner the top corner of which is just visible below the point of the Charny shield, probably carried the single word SVAIRE. Photos Hugh Duncan and Niels Svensson.

As my recent researches of his biography have made clear, he enjoyed perfectly cordial relations with two popes, Clement VI (pontificate 1342-52), and Innocent VI (pontificate 1352-62), both of whom complied readily enough to the various minor devotional requests that he put to them. As a member of France's royal council, he regularly rubbed shoulders with archbishops and abbots, and was thereby well placed

for obtaining their support for a formal ecclesiastical recognition of the Shroud, had he actively sought this from them. And there was every reason for him doing so because such recognition would not only have brought with it indulgences for generating extra income from pilgrims who visited the Lirey church to view the Shroud, it would also have automatically avoided the furores that would erupt on the later occasions when the Shroud was later exhibited without such recognition.

Why Charny should have chosen to behave in this secretive manner is therefore an important mystery that needs to be recognised and squarely addressed in all future Shroud studies, whether these are for or against authenticity. Worth observing is that such behaviour is certainly not the kind to be expected from someone who was mendaciously intent on making money from something he knew to be a fake, the central accusation that was flung both by the two medieval Troyes bishops, and much more recently by certain scientists at the time of the carbon dating¹⁴. But neither is it the behaviour of someone who had been made a ‘windfall’ gift of it by his king or had inherited it by marriage as has been argued by some of the Shroud’s modern-day proponents.

Overall, the old way of thinking has been that the Shroud clearly and firmly entered the historical record during Charny’s lifetime and that he and his successors, in line with prevailing ecclesiastical conventions, were eager for the leaders of the western Church to recognise its authenticity and adopt it as part of their establishment. The new thinking now indicates the need for an abandonment of all such fundamentally misleading ideas in favour of Charny and his successors having very secretly inherited some profound long-term agenda and obligation for the Shroud that lay above and beyond the aegis of the western Church even at the level of the pope. Exactly what this agenda was is necessarily outside the scope of its being explored further within this single article. Convincingly determining its nature needs a lot more of the kind of weighing up of conflicting evidence that has been done here, carefully picking a well-secured path both back to what and where it had been earlier in its history, and forward in time what can be glimpsed of Charny and his immediate successors’ well-considered long-term intentions for it. But only by such steadfast challenging of the old assumptions, by repeatedly trying to think ‘outside the square’, and by building fresh, more solidly based insights into the lives of those who were historically associated with the Shroud can we begin to regenerate the one-time serious scientific interest in the subject that has too long been stifled by the 1988 carbon dating.

¹⁴ ‘Someone just got a piece of linen, faked it up, and flogged it’. Professor Edward Hall of the Oxford Research Laboratory in a press interview 14 October 1988