

1204: DEADLOCK OR SPRINGBOARD?*

DOROTHY CRISPINO

The lament went up from every city of the empire: We have been stripped bare to adorn Constantinople! Indeed no earthly treasure, be it art or gold or the genius of men, but was garnered into the Golden Horn. For Helen and her son had systematically set out to achieve a two-fold objective: 1) to create a New Rome for the administration of the empire and, 2) to make that capital Christian, a project which they had failed to accomplish where *Senatus Populusque Romanus* were still predominantly pagan.¹ On this underlying pattern rose a Christian empire which dominated history for centuries. The sacred relics which the Augusta brought from Jerusalem were a fertile nucleus, multiplying in the fervid religious climate until Constantinople could be considered one enormous reliquary. The wealth of the city, by the beginning of the 13th century, has been estimated at fabulous figures, and her splendor surpassed description.

The armies of the Fourth Crusade, during long months of military inactivity, had ample leisure to admire the wondrous sights, and one French soldier, Robert de Clari, brings them to life again in his *Chronicles*. Of the palace of the Bouche de Lion, he writes that there were 500 mansions, all made of gold mosaic; 30 chapels with extremely precious relics. The palace of Blakerna had 20 chapels and "200 mansions, or 300", all made of gold mosaic. "So rich and noble was this palace, Clari says, that one cannot describe it, and a huge and rich treasure; rich crowns which had belonged to the emperors; rich gold jewellery, rich cloth of gold silk, rich robes of emperors, rich precious stones...so many other riches that one could never enumerate them all".² The very dearth of variety in his vocabulary emphasizes the impotence of words in the presence of such marvels.

A man singularly devout even for his times, Clari sought out all the relics exposed in the churches.³ Those which impressed him the most, he describes carefully, adding whatever he had learned of their history.⁴ In the chapel of the Bouche de Lion, he saw the True Cross, the blade of the Lance, two Nails, the Crown of Thorns, the Tunic, and a vial of Christ's Blood; the Virgin's dress, the head of John the Baptist, etc. In the monastery of the Seven Apostles, Clari evidently saw the seven bodies for in the same list he remarks: "and it was said also the bodies of Constantine and Helen".

In the monastery of the great Blakerna complex, he goes on, there

*Reprinted from *SINDON* #29, Dec. 1980, by kind permission of the Centro Internazionale di Sindonologia. The present text has been slightly revised, and new notes added.

was a shroud; and his description of it tallies unmistakably with the Holy Shroud now preserved in Turin. The testimony is pivotal; for if we do not know with certainty how or when this Shroud arrived in Constantinople, we have no information whatever about the circumstances in which it was removed thence. Clari's witness is a sure point of departure for investigation in both directions. In Chapter XCII he writes:

Et entre ches autres en eut un autre des moustiers que on apeloit medame Sainte Marie de Blakerne, ou li sydoines, la ou Nostres Sires fu envolepés, i estoit, qui cascuns des venres se drechoit tous drois, si que on i pooit bien veir le figure Nostre Seigneur, ne ne seut on onques, ne Griu, ne Franchois, que chis sydoines devint quant le vile fu prise.

In English⁵: And among those other there was another church which was called My Lady Saint Mary of Blachernae, where there was the shroud (sydoines) in which Our Lord had been wrapped, which every Friday raised itself upright so that one could see the form of Our Lord on it, and no one, either Greek or French, ever knew what became of this shroud (sydoines) when the city was taken.

That last phrase, "nor did anyone ever know", has become a stock quotation in the recitals of Shroud history. It is dramatic. It leaves one in suspense. And it does give one pause to wonder ...

Unfortunately, for too many Shroud writers the phrase is not a pause but a dead-end. The comment is accepted as the final word. "Nor did anyone ever know" was interpreted to mean "the Shroud disappeared in 1204." And that is that. Robert de Clari locutus est, causa finita est.

Who was Robert de Clari? A simple knight of the Amienois, vassal of Pierre of Amiens. He was very poor, possessing a bare fraction over 16 acres of land in the region of Peronne. His chronicle reflects a youthful personality, cultured, inquisitive, intelligent, of a bright disposition — and religious.⁶ When Innocent III appealed for soldiers to deliver the Holy Land from the infidel, Clari took the Cross and departed with his liege lord. This was the Fourth Crusade, destination Palestine; but under pressure from the Venetians, who supplied the transport, the expedition set sail for Constantinople.

Clari narrates the events of that expedition from the point of view of those in the ranks. Counting himself, several times, among the "poor knights of the army", he never presumes to communicate what went on in the councils of the leaders nor on the plan of operations. He reports only what everyone in the army could know, being informed by proclamations in general assembly.

It seems clear that his converse was limited to those of his own station. Considering objectively his remark that neither Greek nor French knew what became of the Shroud, we must suppose that his inquiries never reached above the "host" and the townsfolk; and of those whom he questioned, no one knew what had become of the relic.

At the top of the military ladder, a personage of first importance also wrote his memoirs of the Fourth Crusade: Geoffroy de Villehardouin. A noble, Marshall of Champagne for ten years before becoming a crusader, he was present at the meetings before the departure, and in the deliberations his voice carried authority. Through him, Boniface de Montferrat was chosen as supreme chief of the expedition. Throughout the entire campaign, whether in councils, in diplomatic negotiations or military operations, Villehardouin played a leading role.

Diametrically opposite, then, from the "poor knight" from Peronne. We shall see how their accounts compare.

Villehardouin relates that after the night-attack on the city, morning came, a Tuesday. The Marquis Boniface de Montferrat rode along the seashore straight to the Bouche de Lion, and took possession of the palace complex. At the same time, the palace of the Blakerna surrendered to Henry, brother of the Count Baudouin of Flanders and Hainault. There was no one to offer resistance. At midnight, Murzuphle had fled without even letting down his vermilion tents. At dawn, Lascaris, emperor for a night-watch, fled. The imperial guards had fled. In the hollow halls, only women and children remained, falling on their knees to beg for their lives and their honor.

Each lord — the Marquis of Montferrat and Henry of Hainault garrisoned his castle and put the treasure under guard. "Chascuns garni le chastel... et fist le trésor garder".

From his vantage point, Robert de Clari relates that when morning came, the inhabitants of the city, led in procession by the clergy, came pleading for mercy, saying that all the Greeks had fled, that in the city there remained only the defenceless populace. The French were overjoyed.

After announcing to the armies that no one was to enter a house before it had been decided how the city was to be taken, "the high men and the rich men assembled, and took council among themselves — the little people of the host did not know a word about it, nor did the poor knight of the armies ..." and the high men decided to take the best palaces for themselves before they turned their soldiers loose upon the town. "And thus they began to betray the little people. They sent (troops) to seize all the best palaces and the richest of the town, so that all were occupied before the poor knight and the little people of the host even noticed. And when the little people found out, they went as best they could, they took that which they found; and there was enough, for the city was very big ...The Marquis took the palace of the Bouche de Lion and the other high men, like the Count, took the richest palaces and the richest abbeys".

Michaud, in his *History of the Crusades*, combines the two accounts into a single item: "Whilst Boniface occupied the palace of Bocoleon, Henry of Hainault took possession of that of Blacherna; these two palaces, filled with immense riches, were reserved from pillage, and

were exempted from the lamentable scenes which, during several days, desolated the city of Constantinople".

The date was April 12, 1204, the Tuesday before Palm Sunday.

Blakerna was neither pillaged nor robbed. Henry of Hainault, after having dined, could snore securely upon the golden divan of the Byzantine basileus, knowing that the entire district, comprising the imperial residence, the "200 mansions, or 300", the 20 chapels and the monastery of Madame Saint Mary of Blakerna, were under guard; the surrounding walls, the battlements, the gates and portals and towers bristling with his burly Flemish soldiers.

It had been decided that whoever was elected emperor should reside — Boniface de Montferrat notwithstanding — in the palace of the Bocoleon. The choice fell upon Baudouin, Count of Flanders and Hainault. He enjoyed the imperial dignity only one year, and was succeeded by his brother Henry. As Henry must have moved from the Blakerna to the Bocoleon, may we suppose that he carried the Shroud with him to his new residence? This would explain why, in subsequent documents, the Shroud is listed in the treasury of the Grand Palace.

For several documents do attest to the presence of the Shroud in Constantinople after 1204. It is included in the official list of relics compiled in 1207 by Nicolas Idruntino who, furthermore, writes that after the sack of 1204 he saw the precious relics of the Passion with his own eyes; the "othoni" and the "soudarion"⁷ among the others. In the same year, 1207, Nicolas Mesaritis mentions that the Shroud is in Constantinople. In 1201, i.e., two years before the arrival of the crusaders, he had written that the Shroud is of linen and still smells of myrrh, and that "the Body of Jesus was buried naked".

Scarce as it is, the documentary evidence that the Shroud was still in Constantinople is at least as good as the contrived fictions that it was carried away.

The last mention of the Shroud's presence in Constantinople is dated 1247, Baudouin II reigning. Son of Pierre de Courtenay⁸ and Yolande de Hainault, the young emperor was nephew to Baudouin I.

By the time he ascended the throne⁹, the capital was all that remained of the Latin Empire of the East. The immense wealth of the city, thoroughly ransacked by the crusading armies, had finished in the West. Byzantium, having been partitioned and impoverished, no longer stood a mighty bulwark between the Christian west and the increasing momentum of the Moslem menace. It was Baudouin's destiny to spend his years begging the western kingdoms for aid, for men, for arms; and finally to end his days in exile.

In 1241 he obtained a loan from Louis IX (Saint Louis), his cousin, giving as pledge a cutting from the Shroud. Six years later, utterly incapable of repaying his debt and needing yet more funds, Baudouin II ceded the piece of linen to Louis. At the same time, he ceded the Crown of Thorns, which he had given to Louis in surety against a loan of 1239.

These relics gained for the world that incomparable jewel of architecture, the Ste. Chapelle of Paris. King Louis, barefoot and uncrowned, bearing one shaft of the ark which contained the sacred relics, led a solemn procession to the church he had erected. In 1248 Louis sent the Cathedral of Toledo a tiny snip of linen along with a letter certifying that the particle was from his own relic which he had received from the Imperial Treasury of Constantinople, and that it was from the Shroud that covered the Body of the Lord while it lay in the sepulchre¹⁰. And in 1296 the bishop of Mende wrote that "Tars Sindonis" could be seen in the Ste. Chapelle¹¹. These references serve merely to indicate the King-Saint's conviction that the piece he had received from Baudouin II was from the True Shroud of Christ. Only this conviction explains why he accepted a few inches of cloth in exchange for an enormous sum of money.

Baudouin II was deposed in 1261; the Latin rule was at an end. But of the Shroud there is no further record until it reappears in Lirey, France, nearly a century later, in the possession of Geoffroy de Charny. Between 1248 and 1262, then, Mons. Savio estimates the Shroud's removal from the tottering Imperial City¹³. This period could be the starting point for new and perhaps more productive paths of historical research.

Robert de Clari returned to France in 1205. In 1216, when he finished his Chronicle, he still did not know what became of the Shroud when Constantinople was taken. Let us therefore bid adieu to the amiable knight of the Amienois. His description of the Shroud stands as a monumental milestone, but at this very place our paths must part; for if we are to mark the stages in the relic's westward journey, we must not tarry at 1204, but move ahead to other times, seeking other personages to interrogate.

NOTES:

1. The double objective, political-religious, is expressed by Krautheimer, Richard; in *Rome: Profile of a City* 312-1308, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1980, pgs. 21, 28, 31, 33.
2. Passages within quotation marks are from the texts of Clari and Villehardouin in *Historiens et chroniqueurs du moyen age*.
3. Clari does not mention the Mensural Cross of Justinian. Knowing Clari's attention to accuracy in reporting, one must agree with Mons. Pietro Savio, *Ricerche storiche sulla Santa Sindone*, Societa Editrice Internazionale, Biblioteca del Salesianum, 1957, pg. 191: "che essa (la croce mensurale) venne per tempo sottratta allo sguardo del opoure chevaliers". That this Cross and probably other treasures had been temporarily removed from the public eye.
4. Chapter LXXXIII relates that in the chapel of the Bocoleon, there were "two rich vessels of gold"; in one a tile, in the other a towel. These humble objects were held in high honor because each carried an imprint of the Holy Face of Jesus. Clari relates at length the story he learned; that Our Lord appeared to a "saint man of Constantinople" and imprinted His Face upon the towel. The saint man placed the towel under a tile until vespers ... A clear echo of the immured towel of the Abgar account; of the Syrian story about the towel which caused a blaze of light at midnight; and other variants. In the report of the Archimandrite Georges Gharib, "La Festa del Santo Mandylion nella Chiesa Bizantina" published in *La Sindone e la scienza*, Atti del Congresso Internazionale di Sindonologia 1978, a cura di Piero Coero-Borga, ed. paoline, Torino, 1979, pg. 36: it is noted that a tile was brought to Constantinople from Edessa in 968. A mandylion, instead, arrived from Edessa in 944 and was collocated in the church of St. Mary of the Beacon, in the Grand Palace complex; where Clari saw the gold urn in which it was kept.
5. Translation by Dr. Peter Dembowski. See his article, "Sindon in the Old French Chronicle of Robert de Clari", *Shroud Spectrum International* #2, Mar. 1982. There are still no positive indications of the means by which the Shroud 'raised itself upright'. The Rev. A.M. Dubarle, O.P. (*SINDON* 28, Dec. 1979, pg. 45) cautions that the interpretation 'raised itself' is not to be excluded; but, as an alternative possibility he cites Brunot & Bruneau, *Precis de grammaire historique de la langue francaise*, 1956 edition, pg. 324: that in the Middle Ages the reflective verb had become "a simple substitute for the passive form", giving as example a phrase from Robert de Clari.
6. He brought a number of relics from Constantinople; one relic of the Shroud (most certainly a bit of cloth which had been touched to the Shroud, thereby rendered 'holy' and a 'true relic') he gave to the Benedictine abbey of Corbie, located between Amiens and his native Peronne; and another to the cathedral of Amiens. Mons. Pietro Savio in his *Ricerche Storiche sulla Santa Sindone*, pg. 122, cites the Count Riant, *Des dépouilles religieuses enlevées à Constantinople au XIII siècle par les Latins, et des documents historiques nés de leur transport en Occident*, which lists relics given to Corbie by de Clari.
7. A text of 1205 mentions "sindon and sudarium": Savio. op. cit. In other medieval documents, "sudarium" is frequently coupled with either "othonia", "sindon", "linteamina". Whether or not these three terms are synonymous is beside the point. It must be deduced that there were, in fact, two distinct relics and it is very tempting to identify one of them with the Shroud, the other with a mandylion.
8. The House of Courtenay originated with Pierre I, son of the capetien king Louis VI of France and Adelaide (Alix) of Savoy. Pierre I de Courtenay was lord of Champignelles and Chateaufort (Loiret) and Charny (Yonne). It must be emphasized that this village, in the Yonne, is quite independent of the Charny in the Côte d'Or from which Geoffroy de Charny receives his name. There is no feudatory connection between the several towns named Charny (variant spellings) as this name derives from the Latin Carniacum (variant spellings), areas designated by Caesar as pasture lands for cattle (carnis).

Pierre I married Isabeau of Courtenay, last descendant of the Courtenay branch

which founded the kingdom of Edessa. The son of Pierre I and Isabeau was Pierre II Courtenay, who married Yolande of Hainault, sister of Henry and Baudouin I. The crown of the Latin Empire was offered to Pierre II in 1216; he never reached Constantinople, and died in 1219. During his absence, the empire was under the regency of Nargeaud de Toucy. Robert, son of Pierre II and Yolande, reigned ineffectively from 1221 until his death in 1228, and was succeeded by his brother Baudouin II.

9. In 1228, at age 11, Baudouin became emperor under the wardship of Jean de Brienne, whose daughter Marie he subsequently married. During Baudouin's minority, regent of the empire was Philippe de Toucy, son of Nargeaud. As Baudouin II, this ill-starred emperor assumed the sceptre in 1237, was exiled in 1261 and died in 1272.
10. "de venerandis et eximiis Sanctuariis nostris quae de thesauro imperii Constantinopol. suscepimus... videlicet: ...de Syndone qua corpus ejus sepultum jacuit in sepulcro..." Quoted by Manuel Sole, S.J., in "Intorno al Frammento; De Syndone Qua Corpus Eius Sepultum Jacuit in Sepulcro", donato da S. Luigi Re di Francia alla Cattedrale de Toledo"; and published in *La Sindone e la scienza*, op. cit., pg.394.
11. It is not known what happened to this relic after the French Revolution. The reliquary with the label still exists but the receptacle is empty.
12. Savio, op. cit., pg. 122. Guillaume de Toucy de Baserne, previously canon and cantor of the Cathedral of Rheims, was appointed to the church of Lirey at the request of Geoffroy de Charny. Guillaume was uncle of Jeanne de Toucy, Geoffroy's first wife. See notes 8 and 9 for Toucy connections in Constantinople. For fully documented, in-depth studies on Geoffroy de Charny, see: Savio, op. cit.; Perret, Andre, "Essai sur l'Histoire du Saint Suaire du XIVe au XVIe siècles", which appeared in *Memoires de l'Académie des Sciences, Belles-lettres, et Arts de Savoie*, 1960; and Fossati, Luigi, *La Santa Sindone: Nuove Luci su Antichi Documenti*, Borla, Torino; 1961.
13. Mons. Pietro Savio: *Prospetto Sindonologico*, in SINDON #3, Aug. 1960.