

THE PILGRIM BADGE OF LIREY

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The entry of Louis XI into Paris in 1461 was the occasion of an indescribable extravaganza amid the revelry and acclamations of the populace. When the newly-crowned king passed over the Pont au Change—all canopied with silk between the rooftops of the houses where banners floated from balconies and tapestries carpeted the wooden crosswalk—, "200 dozens" of birds were set free by the bird-sellers who lived on the bridge. These were lusty times; the passage of a king just come from Reims was merely a higher pitch to the quotidian tempo along this Bridge of the Money Changers. Since the IXth century, thanks to King Charles the Bald, the Seine had been spanned at this place, tying the Cité to the burgeoning commercial quarter on the right bank. After Louis VII (1119-1180) decreed that jewelers, goldsmiths and money changers should have their dwellings along this bridge and at their doorways set up their benches, the bridge came to be called the *Pont au Change*. Business was conducted here until 1786.

Over the tranquil flowing of the river, in the stream of persons pushing ahead against the surge of others bustling in the opposite direction, every language could be heard, every outlandish costume seen, for—then as now—the first concern of every traveler was to change his money or letters of credit for the local currency. "In 1400, when the City was in flower, so many people passed over this bridge that every day one could encounter a white [clad] monk or a white horse..."¹

In the midst of these noisy, jostling crowds, someone, one day, there on the bridge, lost his pilgrim badge of the Holy Shroud of Lirey.

Background

When Arthur Forgeais published his description of the objects in his collection,² he identified one as a representation of the Holy Shroud of Besançon. "There seem to be two personages", he begins, "nude, their heads close together, one lying on his back, the other on his stomach...." On reflection, he muses, one would recognize the bloodied body of Jesus-Christ, though he doubts that the dorsal imprint of the Man-God was ever exposed in the

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Actual size of the Cluny medallion.

Franche-Comté. Forgeais recognizes the Vergy arms and hazards a connection with the late-XIVth century archbishop of Besançon, Guillaume de Vergy.

This emblem, he states, "was found at the Pont au Change in 1855." It was the year Secondo Pia was born.

Forgeais, founder of the *Société de Sphragistique*, assembled small objects retrieved from the Seine at various times between 1848 and 1860. Sold to the Cluny Museum in 1862, his collection consists of leaden religious objects turned up from river-dredging and construction work. All of these tiny medals and badges, paper-thin fragments of lead, were found with counterparts; but the medallion of the Shroud is the only one of its kind. Absolutely unique, although, like the others, it would have been stamped out in some quantity.

In many cities large enough to have a cathedral, particularly one that housed a famous relic, there was a district called the *bondieuserie*: that is, a section inhabited by artisans specializing in the design and manufacture of devotional articles: statues and pictures of the Virgin, the saints, crucifixes, etc. Troyes, only 13 miles from Lirey, supported a flourishing *bondieuserie* (shops of Almighty God).

It was a talented and skilful artisan, confident of his abilities, who was commissioned to fashion the Lirey medal. The delicacy and detail of this minuscule copy are remarkable, and all the more astounding when one considers that this thin slip of lead reduces the dimensions of a linen sheet from 4,36m x 1,10m (14'3" x 3'7") to mere millimeters; 61mm x 45mm (2 3/8" x 1 3/4"). As the first unequivocally "True Copy" of the Holy Shroud and indisputable witness to a public exposition in Europe, it is a very precious treasure. Because of its extreme fragility, it has been glued to a fabric mount.

There is no mention of what, if anything, was observed on the side now forever inaccessible. Was there once a pin on the back?

While imagination is no match for what might have happened in XIVth century France, one might glance across the most heavily trafficked roadways to pick out somebody who might have carried the badge from Lirey to Paris. Our first guess would be that he was, in fact, a pilgrim. A pilgrim to Santiago de Compostela pinned a cockle-shell to his cloak or hat; one who went to Jerusalem sewed a cross on the shoulder of his cloak; another, by pinning a Vernicle to his hat, proved that he had made his pilgrimage to Holy Rome. Indeed, the owner of the Lirey badge could well have been a Parisian who made a station at Lirey on his way home from the Church of St. Peter or maybe from the Virgin's House at Loretto.

The badge might even have jingled with others of its kind in some pilgrim's scrip, to be sold as souvenirs when alms were slim; it could have been carried by someone who made a pilgrimage to

Lirey by proxy, all expenses paid by another person who had made a vow he could not fulfill, or had left money and instructions in his will for this pilgrimage to be made for the repose of his soul.

Then again, he might have been a merchant from the East, bearing exotic goods to sell in the great fair of Troyes and markets of Paris; or maybe an *atelier voyageur*—a company of traveling craftsmen—was passing through Burgundy just in time to take in an exposition of the Holy Shroud of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

If the tiny wooden church of St. Mary of the Annunciation was indicated on a contemporary pilgrims' itinerary, no record remains. One looks in vain for traces of a trackway or for the foundation of a hospice in the vicinity of this hamlet of 50 hearths. That thousands of pilgrims came, "from all over the world", to quote the Bishop of Troyes, Pierre d'Arcis, we must believe. However, there is nothing to indicate that provisions had been made toward accommodating crowds, great or small.

That the badge dates from the XIVth century would be difficult to challenge. The representation of the Charny and Vergy escutcheons strongly suggests a public exposition of the Shroud in Lirey before Geoffroy's death in 1356 and after he received the papal Fiat, dated 30 January 1354, conceding the terms of Geoffroy's petition.³ If we accept the date of 1389 for the pro-memoria of Pierre d'Arcis and his statement that the "cloth had been hidden...for about 34 years",⁴ our suppositions are reinforced.⁵

Description of the Medal

In a circle between the two escutcheons there is depicted an empty tomb, from which a Latin cross rises, decorated with a laurel wreath, classical symbol of victory. Extending into the lower part of the Shroud, the cross binds Death to the Resurrection. On each side of the tomb there is a 2-thonged flagellum; perhaps even then observers understood that there were two executioners, one on either side of Jesus, as we see so clearly on the Shroud?

Two clerics hold the Shroud for display, with the dorsal image at the viewer's right. Their hands still clasp the Shroud, but their heads and shoulders are broken off. The clerics are wearing capes with wide trim, fastened with square buckles. On each tiny area of the capes, the different textures are indicated by different strokes of the stylus. The stiff fabric of the cape sets off the softer folds of the garment underneath. Below the capes, the albs fall in loose pleats.

Not enough remains of the fragment between the two personages to distinguish what it might have been. The earliest known picture of an exposition of the Shroud is the miniature of Christopher Duch, dated 1559. Three bishops are shown holding up the Shroud. Three was the most common number of persons so honored, until, in the engraving of 1608, the artist accommodates a

crowd of eleven bishops with all their attendants. If there was a third person on the Cluny medal, then where are his hands? and what sort of vestment would it be that would be draped horizontally at the waist? Is it not tempting to ask if these two clerics might not be Jean Nichole, Geoffroy's private chaplain, and Guillaume de Baserne de Toucy, uncle of Geoffroy's first wife, Jeanne de Toucy; precisely the two priests who are the subjects of requests in Geoffroy's 1354 petition to the Pope?

Having seen the sensitive rendering of textures in such minutiae as the trim on the priests' capes, we are not surprised that the herringbone pattern of the Shroud fabric is also meticulously reproduced. What excites our admiration is the unbelievable accuracy of the chevrons, as if they had been measured and marked with a ruler. And after more than six centuries, they are still distinct.

On all photographs of this medal, one detects several white spots. They appear in the same places on all photographs, consequently they must be caused by infinitesimal black specks on the medal itself. At the top-left edge of the Shroud, at about the level of the figure's elbow, another blemish is noticeable on all photos. A careful examination of the surrounding design would lead one to accept this as a result of some slight damage rather than a fault in workmanship, much less a deliberate representation of anything seen on the Original.

The Figure

The figure is already displayed in what has become the traditional mode, i.e., with the dorsal image to the right of the viewer. Both frontal and dorsal images are in low-relief, but well-rounded, particularly at those places that are heavily marked on the Shroud; the shoulders, buttocks, thighs and calves and, on the frontal image, the chest. If indeed the artist was emphasizing there where he observed the darkest areas, we might conjecture that the upper arms, lost in the fire of 1532, were also stained with blood.

It is significant that the figure is completely nude; an honesty which later artists eschewed. Across the waistline on the dorsal image, we see what appears to be a twisted rope or perhaps a chain; although, granted the skill of this artist, it seems patent that if he had wanted to represent a chain, this would not have been the least bit difficult for him. This chain or rope extends for three links or twists beyond the body to the right and to the left. Barely perceptible are the worn-down traces of the same sort of object at the ankles, front and back; which might lend support to the identification as a rope rather than a chain. This twisting across the waist of the dorsal image and extending beyond the body (but not indicated on the frontal side) can only have been suggested by the "bloody belt". Later artists copying the Shroud were uncertain about the meandering rivulet, interpreting it in various ways.

The left hand lies over the right wrist in the same position we see on the Shroud. On the back as on the front, the left foot is contorted inwards.

Slowly ranging over every millimeter through the loupe, penetrating every crevice, every hillock, searching for answers to some of our questions (no, I could discern no suggestion of a side-strip), at last I came to the Face and there my stern inquisition was disarmed, defeated, blasted by beauty. A Face of such loveliness, such kindness, such perfection, that I could not tear myself away. True, the planes are worn away unevenly but somehow the expression of serenity, of joy and goodness still animate the finely modeled features of a handsome Face of riveting attraction. If, unlike the Face on the Shroud, it seems to smile, we can only attribute it to some mysterious inner workings of the artist's soul as he contemplated the Holy Shroud before creating this tiny souvenir.

NOTES

1. Noted by Louis-Sebastien Mercier (1740-1814) in *Tableau de Paris*.
2. Arthur Forgeais: *Collection de Plombs Historiés trouvés dans la Seine*, Paris (1865).
3. Pontifical acts do not record the date when a petition was sent or received, but when the petition is stamped with the papal *Fiat* or *Concessum*.
4. See *Spectrum* #8, "The Lirey Controversy", Luigi Fossati's capital treatment of the question; and *Spectrum* #1, "Why Did Geoffroy Change His Mind?", pp. 31, 32.
5. Other considerations have been offered for circumscribing the date of the first Lirey expositions. Paul de Gail (*Histoire Religieuse du Linceul de Christ*, p. 142), asks if displaying the Shroud might have begun only after the death (1355) of Humbert II of the Viennois. But a letter from Bishop Henri de Poitiers to Geoffroy, praising and approving "what he had done" at Lirey, is dated 28 May 1355. Henry de Poitiers became bishop of Troyes in 1354. A third date which might be of help is the remarriage of Geoffroy's widow, but this, so far, is not known with certainty.