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THE BESANÇON CLOTH

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Was the Holy Shroud brought into Europe in 1208 or not? Was it enshrined at Besançon for 141 years or not? What purpose was served by sending the forged copy of the Shroud back to Besançon from Lirey? Who did that? It was a crude forgery of the frontal aspect only of the Shroud so why was it accepted? What are the known facts, as distinct from suppositions of modern authors?

Three primary characters are involved, the first of whom is *Ortho de la Roche*. He is named as the man who by tradition looted the Shroud in Constantinople in 1204. A modern author claims that this man was loyal to his superiors; conscientious in his duties; an honourable man. He was the leader of the Burgundians in the 4th Crusade; he deliberately and knowingly incurred excommunication three times by flagrantly disobeying the strict orders of the Pope that no Christian state was to be attacked in payment of old scores. Cairo the centre of the Moham-medan world, and the Turks were the focus of the Crusade. Yet the leaders attacked and looted first Zara, then they plundered Chalcedon, and finally the great Christian city of Constantinople was besieged and taken. This last was one of the most shameful episodes in human history, not only in the treatment of nuns, monks and civilians but also in the degradations which followed. I quote from Gibbon's *'Decline and Fall'*: « They trampled under foot the most venerable objects of Christian worship. In the Cathedral of Sta. Sophia the ample veil of the Sanctuary was rent assunder for the sake of the gold fringe, and the High Altar, a monument of art and riches, was broken into pieces and shared among the captors. Their mules and horses were laden with the wrought silver and gold carvings which they tore from the doors and pulpit ... a prostitute was seated in the throne of the Patriarch... and sang and danced in the aisles to ridicule the hymns and processions of the orientals ».

Other disgusting details can be quoted, but here it suffices to say that in three days the treasures of Christianity accumulated, guarded and revered over hundreds of years, were plundered and utterly despoiled. « Loyal to his superiors, innocent, of unblemished integrity » these

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are not the words used by the Pope and posterity in outright condemnation of the horde and its leaders. Despite the fact that orders were given that all relics were to be handed back, very few obeyed, and it is de la Roche who would appear to be the greatest thief of them all since he knew what he was stealing, and was willing to commit sacrilege in so doing. In Besançon his father seems to have had the right instinct if we are to judge by the fact that he handed the Holy Shroud into the safe keeping of Archbishop Amadeus.

Geoffroy de Charny

It is difficult to know why this man's name is ever brought into the discussion concerning the Holy Shroud. He never once claimed to have had anything to do with it. On the contrary, he never once alludes to it in his many writings, but seems to be totally ignorant of its existence. One undeniable fact is that during the operative period he was a thousand miles away in more senses than one, and was very much preoccupied with the siege of Calais occupied by the English, and he was in command of the French troops! Whether he knew what was happening at home in Lirey is impossible to say.

He is depicted (vide Wilson's Shroud of Turin) as a poverty stricken nobleman of doubtful ancestry. He was in fact Seigneur of Savoisy, Lirey and Montfort: he was councillor to two kings of France: porte-oriflame to his country: Captain General and Commander in Chief of the French Army. He owned several castles of which the one at Montfort-en Auxois was an enormous place, with its out bailey to the south, stables, graneries and barracks all enclosed by its towering walls; the hexagonal three fronted towers of the castle itself lie further to the north, each of them more than four stories high. Not only did he own the place but he built it. In its time it was impregnable. The nearby castle at Genay, also owned by the lords of Montfort, was attacked and taken, but Montfort never. It should be obvious that he was an important and a rich man. At the same time it is curious that he made his home base at Lirey, and here also he built a castle where he and his wife lived, a mere stump is all that remains today. Lirey village was then, and still is, a cluster of about fifty small holdings, and yet for them and himself de Charny built a chapel, a small wooden puzzle of a chapel, and for it he asked the king to supply revenue, and to which he wished to have five monks attached! *Six years* later he reported to the Pope that *he had built* the chapel, which was not true. Nor was it even begun for another four years. The Acta of the Foundation states that the building was completed in four months. There is nothing left of it today since it was probably a wooden building of no great size. Did it ever contain the Holy Shroud? The answer is a firm *no!* This we may say without fear of contradiction since there is no mention of

the Shroud in the Acta, and there would have been if it had been a cause of the building. Even on May 28, 1356 when Bishop Henry preached at the liturgical blessing of the chapel there is no mention of the Shroud. Finally when in 1357 a list of the relics and indulgences granted to those who prayed in the chapel was officially signed, there is no mention of the Shroud either. Nowhere is there the slightest suggestion, hint, record or evidence, much less proof that Geoffroy de Charny ever made any claim to possession or guardianship of the Holy Shroud at any time.

It has been claimed that de Charny was « villainously treated and betrayed at Calais when he was taken prisoner by the English in 1349 ». That is not true. He was caught red-handed trying to corrupt an officer of the British Army by bribery into treasonably selling the keys to the main fort defending Calais. The officer quite correctly informed his Prince Edward who came across the Channel by night, waited for de Charny to walk into the trap, which he did, money in hand, and was carted off as a prisoner back to England where he lived at the King's Court with his own three servants to tend him. Those are facts.

Jeanne de Vergy-Charny

She may be third on our list but this girl tops the character list in this corner of Shroud history. She was Geoffroy's widow, and shortly after his death she made no secret at all that she had the Holy Shroud in her possession. She even started pilgrimages, and organised pilgrim's badges minting her own with the double imprints of the bodies as on the Shroud (such as the metal badge found in the silt of the Seine not long ago and now in the Cluny Museum in Paris). It is probably the earliest such record in Europe. Below the figures she had impressed her own coats of arms, i.e. de Vergy and de Charny. It would then appear that abruptly she suddenly shut down on all this activity, stopped the pilgrimages, and took the Shroud with her away from Lirey, and probably to the safe place at Montfort castle. There it was to remain for thirty years, and that is an enigma. There are so many reasons for that span of silence... some to do with the politics of the time, some due to the marauding bands of soldiers, the Hundred Years War still in being, but there may have been another voice to which she listened. Whoever and whatever was the reason she held her peace for all that time.

She was still a young woman and some eighteen months after her husband's death she married Aymon of Geneva, a rich nobleman and by that marriage she became the *aunt* of Cardinal Robert, who was quondam Commander-in chief of the papal armies, and who was later to become pope! Wilson in his book (page 173) defames the girl

maliciously. He suggests that the poor girl was poverty stricken and used the pilgrimages for the sake of filthy lucre, and this at a time, he says, « which was exactly right for the appearance of such a macabrely detailed relic of the Passion as the Shroud ». That is undeserved villification without an iota of proof.

Jeanne should not be viewed with a cynical eye, or an acid gripe of character summary. She seems to have had some inner certainty that she had the Shroud of her Lord and Master and it could be that she heard the instruction from of old « Nemini dixeritis visionem... ». It is more likely that she listened to Cardinal Bob who knew where he was going. When he became Avignon pope, and called her Auntie, it was his legate who encouraged her to begin the pilgrimages again, and the pope who reinforced her decision, so much so that when the local bishop tried to put a stop to these activities (foolish man!). Auntie's nephew crammed a mitre over his head and extinguished him with the sentence « Perpetual Silence Or Else ».

It is curious that despite Jeanne's open admission that she had the Shroud, the members of her family always avoid connecting her name with it. Geoffroy's son maintained that his father was given it as a « donum » and grand-daughter Margaret said it had been a « butin de guerre ». Others said that the king gave it to Geoffroy for services rendered. The real truth would have sounded more strange than the fictions. « Grandma calmly walked in and took it! ».

It has been argued that if the Holy Shroud had been in Besançon for a century or more, it is strange that we have no written documentary evidence of it during that time. The argument from silence never does have much backbone. Exactly the same is true of the stay of the Holy Shroud in Lirey. Mr. Avery of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London in his specialised studies of Lirey, records that there is not a single record about the Shroud in any of the District Records.

There is also the question concerning Auntie Jeanne calmly walking in and out of Besançon with the box containing the Shroud. Could she have done so? One has to remember that this year (1349) was the first of the terrible disasterous Black Death visitations. This plague swept through Europe and in twelve months it left more than half the population dead in the catastrophe. Convents were emptied, monks disappeared from the choir stalls, doors of houses were left open to cart away the dead. Death in a horrible form was everywhere. In Besançon the calamity was made worse by the Cathedral being burnt down after it had been struck by lightning. Its treasures were salvaged where possible and taken to the nearby church of St. John. The whole city was in chaos. Those were the circumstances in which Jeanne spirited away the Holy Shroud.

An important point to be recollected is that at this point in its history Besançon was within the borders of the dreadful Hohenstauphen empire. Hence when Jeanne brought back into wartorn France the protecti-

ve palladium, the Holy Shroud, and held it out to her king, he could not and would not accept it or acknowledge her publicly. The Hohenstauphen treacherous Emperors, ever ready to take umbrage, occupied the whole of his eastern flank. All western France was ruled by the king of England under his feudal titles of Duke of Normandy and Aquitaine. It was this latter gentleman that the French King was trying to eject from his kingdom in the Hundred Year's War! The one thing which it was imperative to avoid was having enemies on both flanks!

If Jeanne's husband knew anything of what she was doing he gave her no encouragement at all. Faced with all these difficulties and the political problems, if she had admitted defeat, and gone back to twiddling her thumbs and darning her husband's tights, few would blame her. Jeanne however was *formidable*... spelt in french! First she set about plugging the gap at Besançon, and the glowering emperor. She had a hand painted copy forged by a local artist: it was done on a piece of linen seamed down the centre, and due to the limitations of time and ability, it was only of the frontal aspect of the Shroud figures. It really was a dreadful forgery with the drawing as crude as the age could produce. This was sent back to Besançon, and the rumour was somehow spread that the Shroud at Lirey (the true Shroud with its marks of wounds and blood) showed the Lord as He was taken down from the Cross, whereas the Besançon (false) Shroud being without the wounds, was of the Body after it had been washed and prepared for burial. If she did not invent the story she was capable of it! Strangely this grotesque shroud was accepted at Besançon. Maybe those who would have known what the real Shroud was like, were dead of the Black Death, or perhaps few people were bothered enough to care. To stay alive was the only thing which mattered.

Lirey never did occupy much map-space. It was a grouping of about thirty hovels, some 200 kilometres from Besançon in the north-westerly direction. The man of the castle was away at the wars. The lady of the house the only person of any standing. It was from Lirey that the forged copy was sent back to Besançon and the inference is inescapable. It was to deceive the true owners into thinking that the Shroud was returned to them. Even at the time rumour had it that the nationalistic de Vergy family were involved in the disappearance of the Shroud. Jeanne at first did nothing to prove the contrary being busy with the pilgrimages. In the years thereafter many attempts were made to unclench her hands from the Shroud but with no success. Nor did she ever explain how the Shroud had come into her possession. Her grand-daughter Margaret was also a pearl of a woman, and when the Holy Shroud came into her hands she was quite as *formidable* as Jeanne had been. In my opinion these two women deserve the title « Bearers of Our Oriflamme the Shroud ». They protected and guarded it during one of the most testing periods of war and plague during its long history.

Why is the historical criterion always paraded as alone decisive? The

following facts brook no denial:

1. The Besançon cloth was sent back to Besançon from Lirey with one intention and that was to deceive the true owners. In the circumstances no other interpretation is acceptable.
2. The Durer drawing dated 1516 (now at Lierre in Belgium) does not carry the scorch and patch marks of the 1532 fire. It does carry the eight burn marks from a previous fire, and the only fire in which the Shroud was involved other than that at Chambéry was at Besançon in 1349.
3. In the *International Centre of Sindonology*, Turin Library, there are autograph letters from Cardinals Binet and Mathieu, Archbishops of Besançon, which confirm the presence of the Shroud in the city from documents of the early days of the 13th century.
4. In Besançon there is a localised and unique devotion to the Holy Shroud which is unequalled anywhere in the world, and that includes Turin. That demands a sufficient explanation and it may not be flicked aside.
5. The historians of the Doubs Department (which includes Besançon) are not concocting theories when they relate the « traditio » (what has been handed down in previous documents, etc.). They give names, places and dates and they quote their sources. These stand.
6. Donod de Charnage (1750), Professor of Civil and Canon Law in the University of Besançon recounts the traditio in full. He is regarded as the standard work for the city and diocese.
7. Dr. Chifflet (a shelf of books in the British Library) and his two brothers all three historians in their own right, all three natives of Besançon, recount the handing over to Archbishop Amadeus of the Shroud in 1208. The father is named as Ponce de la Roche.
8. Rohault de Fleury adds to his valuable evidence that an inventory of relics in the city (Archives of Besançon Library) made in 1253 mentions the Shroud, but there is no mention of it in the 1051 edition. Chifflet also notes this.
9. M. Pidoux, archivist and paleologist, quotes the « traditio » and he adds that in the feudal chateau of the Roche family at Rigney there is a wall plaque reminding posterity that the Holy Shroud came to Europe through the family. Count Riant and Canon Chevalier also agree that the Shroud must have come to Besançon and that therefore it had been in the city for one and a half centuries.
10. Pasquale Rinaldi reported to the II Italian Shroud Congress in Bologna 1981 that he had discovered among the documents left by Mgr. D'Acquisto (1790-1867), Archbishop of Monreale in Sicily, who had also been the High Chancellor of the Constantinian Order of Santa Sophia, a diplomatic codex written in 1205. The original had been destroyed in the massive bombing of

Palermo in 1943 but copies were extant in the archives of Naples, and in various authors. The codex was written by the brother of Michael I (Byzantine Dynasty) and addressed to the Pope on his brother's behalf. He asks the Pope to order the restoration of the many relics stolen by the Venetians and the French during the sack of Constantinople by the soldiers of the 4th Crusade. The latin text runs:

« Anno proximo mense aprilis falsa liberatione Terrae Sanctae discessus exercitus cruciatus ad vastandam Constantini Urbem venit. Inter depopulationem milites Venexiae et Galliae praedati sunt in sacris aedibus. Thesaurus ex auro, ex argento, ex ebore coeperunt, in partitione, Veneti, reliquias Sanctorum et sacerrimum inter illas linteum quo post mortem et ante Resurrectionem noster Dominus Jesus Christus involutus est, Galli. Scimus res sacras Venexiae in Gallia et ceteris locis praedatorum servari, Sacrum Linteum in Athenis. »

At one time it was thought improbable that the Shroud could have been handed over by the father of de la Roche, since Ortho was posturing as Duke of Athens and did not return to France. However we know from Riant's history that many relics and other looted property were sent back to France by messengers, so also it was with the Shroud.

Nor it is of any practical use to search Obituary notices or Lists of Donation for the Shroud. The Shroud did not belong to Ponce de la Roche but to his son, and he did not donate the Shroud but handed it to the Archbishop as the person most fitted to hold and guard it. So also it was the de Charnys who gave it into the care of the monks of Lirey, but retained their ownership. Again the Savoy family during the four centuries during which they held the Shroud, allowed the Cardinal of Turin to act as guardian but retained ownership until some years ago when the King Umberto gave it finally to Pope John-Paul II.

To summarise this monograph it must be said that the history aspect of an archaeological object is not logically a matter of first rate importance. It is the object itself which must offer proof of authenticity, and even if its history is totally lacking, or is indecisive, none of these conditions affect in the smallest degree the question of authenticity of the object itself. The adventures of the object through time have interest value but nothing more than that. This is absolutely true concerning the Holy Shroud and its near two thousand years in history.

Secondly in Europe in the 13th century there were a number of claimants to be « Shrouds ». Cadouin, Cahors, Compiègne, Xabregas all had one. There were a variety of « sudaria ». These were all of various sizes and shapes, mostly face portraits, but many were simple

linen sheets, with no marks on them, and the drawings of the whole Shroud done with varying degree of skill. All were positives.

It is here that the Holy Shroud is totally unique and differs from all the copies. It alone is in reversed light and shade, in double imprint i.e. frontal and dorsal, and in life size; the body imprints are russet brown. The Blood imprints on the Shroud are a carmine shade and look like blood which has coagulated on the skin of the Lord's Body. In both respects it is not merely different from the various replicas, copies, drawings, etc. It is unique in all mankind's history. There is nothing like it anywhere at any time.

RIASSUNTO

Ortho de la Roche, capo dei Borgognoni partecipanti alla quarta Crociata, si impadronì probabilmente della Sindone a Costantinopoli nel 1204. Suo padre, Ponce de la Roche, la consegnò all'Arcivescovo Amadeus de Tramelai che nel 1208 la mise nella Cattedrale di St. Etienne a Besançon.

Per più di un secolo non c'è evidenza documentaria della permanenza della Sindone a Besançon. Di qui deve essere stata asportata da Jeanne de Vergy, moglie di Goffredo di Charny, signore di Savoisy, Lirey e Montfort, in occasione dell'incendio della Cattedrale, all'inizio della « peste nera ». Per 30 anni la Sindone rimase nel Castello di Montfort.

L'Autore afferma che Goffredo, facendo costruire la cappella nel villaggio di Lirey, non vi portò la Sindone.

A Besançon, priva ora della Sindone, Jeanne ne mandò una falsa, dipinta da un artista locale e riportante solo l'aspetto frontale della figura sindonica.