

The Templars did not own the Shroud of Turin

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Summary: Statements by Templars about the worship of an alleged head-shaped idol, the Baphomet, were elicited under torture and do not provide any reliable hints about the possession of the Shroud of Turin by the Templar Order. Furthermore, the remarkable homonymy of Geoffroy de Charny, preceptor of Normandy – burned to death in 1314, with Geoffroy de Charny (d. 1356), the first known owner of the Shroud, is to be seen as mere coincidence. It is clearly explained by the frequency of the French aristocratic name ‘de Charny’ and first name Geoffroy during the thirteenth century. The man who died alongside Jacques de Molay most likely originated from an almost forgotten knightly family from Charny near Meaux. A member of this family named Geoffroy de Charny was a tenant of a domus Templi even after the arrest of the Templars. Above all, because of the fact that the first owners of the Shroud did not deliberately conceal its origin, there is no reason for the Templar hypothesis. The assumption of a ‘hidden agenda’ on the part of the Templars – a consequence of the scandalous possibility that the Shroud of Turin was held by the Knight Templars – lacks any foundation.

There are only hypotheses for a possible early history of the Shroud of Turin before the 14th century. This does not, however, prove that the object may not have existed earlier. The argument that it was impossible to keep secret for centuries such a great relic is not convincing in view of its unique meaning and sacredness. Even the multiple laboratories radiocarbon dating, with a date between 1260 and 1390, decides nothing, because it is questionable and precarious, and cannot be used in this case. Since, until now, there is no generally accepted explanation for the genesis of the Shroud image, the learned dispute is, in part, fiercely and absurd. Furthermore, this object does not fit into any context of medieval art production. The discourse shows almost postmodern, even post-factional features. Unfortunately, this also applies to the historical discipline, in which extreme skepticism on the one hand and speculative confidence on the other encounter each other more often than is the case with other, less emotionally charged questions. At the same time, all sides must be aware that in the case of the Shroud there can be even less historical certainty than usual.

A popular hypothesis about the Shroud of Turin were formulated by the English journalist Ian Wilson about forty years ago, supported in a series of well-researched books and many essays in following years. According to Wilson and his followers, the eventual sequence of events can be sketched as follows:

Relatively early, the precious linen (today mostly named “*Shroud of Turin*”) came from Jerusalem to the great Mesopotamian city of Edessa (Sanliurfa), where it was kept secret by religious traditions, and still has been deeply venerated - reduced to the image of the face - even when the Christian communities of the place lived under Muslim rule. In 944,

conquered by the Byzantines and exchanged against Muslim prisoners, it was transferred to Constantinople and raised as "*Mandyllion*" as palladium of the imperial capital. Shortly before the attacks by the Latins in the devastating Fourth Crusade of 1204, the French knight Robert de Clari is said to have seen in the church Blachernae the linen (sydoines) "into which our lord was wrapped". And in this linen every Friday the "Lord's whole figure was seen." It had disappeared without a trace during the conquest. Today some assume that the Shroud was in Athens in 1205 and was called the "most holy shroud (*linteum*), into which our Lord Jesus Christ was wrapped after his death and before his resurrection." Later, perhaps, after staying in Athens, the Shroud came in the hands of the Templars. The knights long revered the relic secretly and finally used it in their initiation ceremonies. After the dissolution of the Order in 1314, however, it had been concealed and extended in the Burgundian family of Charny, where it reappeared later about forty years approximately in 1355.

This so called "Templar hypothesis" is one among many other suggested ways of bridging the 'obscure gap' between the alleged disappearance of the Shroud in Constantinople in 1204 and its re-emergence in France around the middle of the 14th century. However, it enjoys special favour because it combines two seeming mysteries: the mysterious destruction of the Templar Order and the mystery-tormented emergence of the Shroud of Turin only a few decades later. In addition, the only leading Templar, who had died in the fire at the stake with his Grand Master Jacques de Molay, shared the same name with the first owner of the Shroud. Wilson, too, evidently pointed to this remarkable link. Furthermore, he outlined the identity of the order's idol, the Baphomet, with the Shroud¹, which the Templars supposedly worshiped.

Wilson's argument was soon examined by Malcolm Barber, a very prominent historian of the Templar Order, and found that the hypothesis was not sustainable. But with all its speculation, the hypothesis stubbornly persists. Wilson, who himself has re-presented it slightly modified in 2010, progressively found sympathies among the Templar specialists. Especially Barbara Frale from the Vatican Secret Archives repeated the hypothesis in a book published in 2009 and allegedly confirmed it "most likely". She claimed to have found indisputable references to the identity of the Templar idol with the Shroud. It is understandable that in Italy she reaped a whirlwind of indignant criticism. A protagonist on the opposite side is the patristic Andrea Nicolotti from Turin, who

¹ [Ed: Wilson also assume that copies of the Shroud were made, because the Templars had supposedly secret ceremonies at various far apart locations. We never found such copies.]

has responded to Frale more than once, including his arguments in a whole book of his own. Both diligence and emotionality of this debate are unusual. Unfortunately, they are characteristic for the studies of the Shroud of Turin. There is mostly a prejudgement about the synthesis of this object, and the decision about it is made already in the lobby of rationality.

Unfortunately, Frale has added little to Wilson, despite her expertise, and that is difficult to accept. The interrogation records from Carcassonne of November 1307, which have been partially edited by Heinrich Finke and most recently in full by Nicolotti, are most important. Two cases are particularly significant for Frale. In the first case, a Templar payed tribute to a "linen (*lineum*) with an image of a man" which he revered and kissed three times. It is extremely difficult to derive from the received text that the worshiped object was a "linen with the whole-body shape of a man". A Temple idol of linen would be something unique. That may seem insignificant, but in several other cases the idol was of wood, Latin *ligneum*, which during an oral interrogation could easily be confused with *lineum*. On the other hand, the so-called kissing of the feet cannot be taken literally in all cases. What was meant was the ritual knee flexion derived from ancient *proskynesis*. Because this act of extreme self-sublimation could also be carried out in front of a 'footless' object, for example, a picture, it does not call for the worship of a whole-body shape. Moreover, one cannot really kiss the feet of the Shroud on the front because they are not visible on this side. On the other hand, the worship of a wooden idol in the interrogation records of Carcassonne is shown twice, one of which was a painted "figure (*figura*) of Baphomet". Regrettably, in the second text which is emphasized by Frale, there is no sign of a kind of drawing in a "cotton-cloth" (*signum fustanium*), but a more cultivated term for a "wooden image" (*signum fusteum* instead of the more usual *signum ligneum*).

Most of the other arguments for Frale's thesis are from Wilson and are such that they do not prove anything but are not falsifiable either. This applies to Baphomet, the head or idol of the Templars, mentioned only a few times in the interrogation protocols. Many of the respondents had never heard of it, and the existing testimonies provide a fantastic kaleidoscope without any credibility. The much-hyped painting of Templecombe, a Templar chapel in Somerset, which, according to Wilson and Frale, is supposed to be the head honoured by the Templars, could also have come from the following order of St. John, therefore representing John the Baptist and not Jesus Christ. Curiously, a strongly sculptural head of John Baptist from about 1200, apart from the long chin beard, looks much more like the man of the Shroud than the Templecombe face.



Left: 'Christ' of Templecombe; right: John Baptist on the counterseal of a *prior hospitalis in Anglia*.

Thus, what remains is Wilson's emphasis on the identity of the family names of the two protagonists. Both men were called "*Geoffroy de Charny*" disregarding the usual orthographic fluctuations in those days. Both aristocratic families, both of whom were knights, both died violently and heroically before their natural end: the Templar was burned in 1314 on a Parisian island with his master and friend, condemned by martial law. The owner of the Shroud was only a little younger when, in the battle of Poitiers 1356, he protected his wounded friend king Jean II, embracing the sacred Oriflamme of France even in death. From such similarities, however, there is no relationship between these two.

The name *Charny*, *Charnay*, *Charné* and the orthographic variants were quite frequent in the Middle Ages and they are still in France. In its origin, the name is derived from latin **Carpinetum*, that is 'hornbeam forrests'. According to modern topographical encyclopedias, there were nine major *Charn(a)y* sites distributed to eight departments around 1320. This is only a rough indication, because in addition to the ordinary use misspellings like *Charmeio*, *Charpi*, *Charnit*, *Char(i)gny*, *Charay*, *Carni*, *Karni* or *Charay* are to be found, and we read in one and the same document *de Charniaco* next to *de Cerniaco*, which is just as good for *de Sarnay*. The popularity of the first name *Gaufridus* = *Geoffroy* is aggravated by this less encouraging finding. As a result, a quick search reveals no less than nine documents for bearers of the name *Geoffroy de Charny* between 1194 and 1314. In addition to the Templar and *praeceptor Normandiae* burned in the last year, there are still three more documents in direct connection with the Templar Order. The identification of these bearers with the homonymous executed knight is unlikely because it seems that the latter quickly rose into the central leadership set up by the Templars in the East, where he was finally appointed Drapier of the Order.

A fifth, previously overlooked *Geoffroy de Charny* is testified soon after the arrest of the Templars in the department of Seine-et-Marne. According to a royal order given to the royal administrators of the Templar estates in a formula book, it is advisable, as far as possible, to reduce the leasing of the Templar House of

Lagny-sur-Marne in the amount of one hundred turonensic pounds and to facilitate the payment of the arrears. Jean Renaud had been obliged to advise his brother Geoffroy de Charny, who had rented the Ferme de Lagny for a certain time and a fixed sum but had retired after the loss of his entire property and the impoverished lease. We do not know, why the lease in Lagny-sur-Marne between 1308 and 1312 was so negative for those concerned. The place, halfway between Paris and Meaux, was a prosperous economic centre in the 13th century, with a major annual trade fair where wool and cloth were traded. The old Benedictine Abbey of Saint-Pierre played an important role, and it had left property of mortmain to the Templars. In 1265, on the ground of the monastery of Lagny, the settlement had twelve houses, two barns, ten and a half hectares of meadows, seven and a half hectares of arable land, and three-quarters of a hectare of vineyards. The central house, called "Le Temple," was in front of the old church of Saint-Fursy. Like the rest of the facility, it has passed the change to the Hospitalers quite well. Although the details cannot be clarified at present, the insolvent Geoffroy de Charny is likely to be part of a largely neglected chivalry of the Charny nobility, which has been found since the 12th century in the Champagne counties. The village of Charny is located about 22 miles east-north-east of Paris between two major roads to Meaux, from where it is still 7.5 miles. This Charny was associated with Lagny-sur-Marne and (Nanteuil-lès-) Meaux by the common affiliation to the commandery of Choisy-le-Temple. After changing the coat of arms, the local aristocratic family had a similar rise in the 14th century as the Charny family from Côte-d'Or. Therefore, there were two completely different Charny families at the French royal court around 1350. The knight and lawyer Robert de Charny, who had been Lord of Charny-en-Multien since 1327, was promoted to royal requester (maître des requêtes de l'hôtel) under King Philip VI. The same office took his son Jean de Charny, who, in 1358, initiated the fall of Étienne Marcel. Robert had emotional connections to the Saint-Pierre Monastery of Lagny-sur-Marne, where his daughter Marion and another relative were buried. The son Jean, who died in 1361, was buried in the church of his hometown of Charny.

While the Charny of the Côte-d'Or had only few points of contact with the Templars, the Charny-en-Multien traditionally maintained close relations with the Order since the middle of the 12th century. This is not surprising, because the mentioned Templars of Choisy-le-Temple were housed not even 1.25 miles from Charny. The importance of the Temple of Choisy resulted, on the one hand, from its proximity to the capital, and on the other hand, from owning a rich grain-growing land, which enabled them to charitably feed three thousand persons three times a week. Due to his important career, the deputy of the Templars, Geoffroy de Charny, who had been executed with Jacques de Molay, must be a son of a very famous family. This is one reason why historians would like to join

him with the Charny from Côte-d'Or. This, however, misunderstands that this family was, by 1270, merely a younger offshoot of Mont-Saint-Jean and of regional Burgundian importance. It was only during this period that the connection with the daughter of the famous Jean de Joinville, Seneschall of the Champagne County, had made it more important and led Geoffroy de Charny, the lord of Lirey, to the vicinity of the king. Above all, the Burgundian Charny lacked close relations with the Templars, which in the Charny-en-Multien have been practically applicable in every generation since the late 12th century: in 1170, ~1181, 1211, 1221, 1224, 1228, 1247, 1262/63, twice in 1275 and finally in 1308/12, where even one (*agricola domus Templi?*) Geoffroy de Charny is testified.

In summary, there is no conclusive evidence of the possession of the Shroud of Turin by the Templars, and even less of the *praeceptor normandiae* Geoffroy de Charny, burned in 1314. His identical name to that of the Burgundian Geoffroy (I) de Charny, the first owner of the important object, is irrelevant. Thus, we must now discuss one last, sometimes implicit, presupposition for the origin of the cloth: the allegedly scandalous and even secret provenance of the revered object.

This widespread view is possible because Geoffroy (I) de Charny († 1356), despite his rich literary production, has not said a word about the Shroud, and we know only a few hints from his heirs. The son of the first owner was named like his father and was still very young at the time of the patriotic heroic death. He, Geoffroy (II) de Charny († 1398), declared in 1389 to Pope Clement VII in Avignon and his legate *a latere*, Pierre de Thurey, that the linen had been donated to his father. In a striking curial style, this was: “it was left to him generously” (*sibi liberaliter oblatam*). That is nothing unusual. According to Seneca, it was customary to generously give gifts to gain someone’s grace, and we have an interpretation of Thomas Aquinas that “*liberaliter*” means totally for free, since the generosity was not to the recipient, but to the giver. Accordingly, *liberalitas* also played the essential role in the transfer of the object of Marguerite de Charny, the granddaughter of the Shroud’s first owner, to the Savoy family in 1453. This second transfer, too, was not recorded in any deed of gift to avoid the simony accusation. Before that, Marguerite had long been in dispute with the canons of Lirey for the possession of the Shroud. She had emphasized that the sacred Sudarium had been acquired by her grandfather Geoffrey de Charny (*sainct Suaire... fut conquis par feu messire Geoffrey de Charny, mon grant pere*). Her formulation *conquis par feu* caused a great confusion among later historians. In the early 17th century, Jean-Jacques Chifflet, in his book on the shrouds of Christ, interpreted Marguerite’s statement in a sense, that her grandfather had acquired the Shroud “by war”, but she did not say anything about where and when this had happened (*Sindonem illam asseruit from avo suo Gaufrido bello partam sed ubi et quo tempore minime aperit*). Since then, the “where” and “when” of the Shroud’s

conquest have been eagerly discussed. Some even believed that the Templars themselves have taken the war booty. Others favour the short “crusade” of the Geoffroy (I) de Charny to Smyrna between 1345-1347 for the martial acquisition of the Shroud. Only nowadays we slowly begin to realize that Chifflet has made a mistake. In his day, the French verb *conquérir* had the predominant importance of ‘*acquiring in a fight*’. Until the 16th century, however, it was synonymous with *acquérir* and simply meant ‘*acquire*’. In litigation, it was even preferred. In the Late Middle Ages, *conquès* referred to a property which had not been inherited by the owner, but acquired, whether by way of gift or purchase. Therefore, Marguerite de Charny did nothing else than to emphasize the legitimate rights of her family to possess the Shroud. And her testimony thus confirms the arguments of her father Geoffroy (II) de Charny. It fits with the fact that the Shroud was first acquired by Geoffroy (I) de Charny. Hence the rights of property were based on him, her deceased grandfather. It was not a war booty, but a personal gift to him. Consequently, the Shroud was no family property before him, it was no object, which had been extended on the path of inheritance. This, at the same time, excludes his passing from the Knight-Templar Geoffroy de Charny to his alleged relative, Burgundian knight Geoffroy (I) de Charny. This observation eliminates also other hypotheses involving the spouses of Geoffroy de Charny, that is, Jeanne de Toucy and Jeanne de Vergy, in the form of a dowry, for example.

At this point, a second observation gains significance because it removes the basis of an important presupposition of the ‘Templar hypothesis’. The abundantly vague indications about the Shroud’s provenance were scarcely destined to disguise the real origin of the holy object, and to carry out investigations on false tracks. Ulysse Chevalier, the most determined opponent of the Shroud, has already believed this, and, curiously enough, many Sindonophiles are following him. They all presume a “hidden agenda” behind the letter of Pierre d’Arcis, bishop of Troyes, and the decision of pope Clement VII from 1389/90; both men, so is believed, are referring at least in part to the alleged stay of the Shroud with the Templars, a fact as scandalous as secret. But in sober terms, the prescribed brevity of the curial style did not allow any extra details to be submitted to the Pope for his decision. For the same reason Marguerite de Charny did not have to justify her right to property in her letter to the canons of Lirey in more details than she did. Finally, it should not be overlooked that the heirs of the Burgundian Geoffroy might not have known very well about the exact circumstances of the Shroud’s acquisition. The incomparable Dorothy Crispino repeatedly stressed: “Don’t forget the ladies!” At the time when the Burgundian Geoffroy (I) fell in 1356, his son Geoffroy (II) was only about two years old, and when this man died in 1398, his daughter Marguerite

has been between six and eight. Most of what they knew they would have owed to their mothers, and then the question arises as to what the mothers themselves have learned and known.

With regards to bishop Pierre d'Arcis, his so-called memorandum which is available in a draft and the fair copy sent to his procurator in Avignon, *maître* Guillaume Fulconis, is completely inconsistent with any kind of 'Templar hypothesis'. Unfortunately, we don't have the version of this document in curial style which was handed to the pope. In the spring of 1389, the bishop had proceeded against the exhibition of the Shroud in Lirey without first obtaining the opinion of the Holy See, though it was authorized by the papal cardinal legate *a latere*, Pierre de Thurey. As the famous historian Guillaume Mollat has already pointed out, Geoffroy (II) de Charny cleverly used this violation of the rules of ecclesiastical jurisdiction by obtaining a royal letter of protection and appealing to the pope. Clement VII had to judge the discord personally, because bishops and a nobleman were involved. He decided this *causa maior* "upon certainty from factual knowledge" (*ex certa scientia*) and confirmed the letters of his cardinal legate. He threatened the bishop of Troyes with eternal silence, if he intervened in the future again. But Pierre, after catching first rumors, became very busy and made a very verbose use of his alleged right of objection. He argued that the cardinal legate came to his indult only after studying the supplication, that is "upon certainty from petition" (*ex certo proposito*). Since he was deceived "by suppression of truth and inference of falsity" (*veri suppressionem et falsi suggestionem*) his indult and the papal confirmation caused a "surreptitious charter" (*litterae subrepticiae*). Pierre was a lawyer and knew well, that according to canon law papal privileges obtained by concealing the truth (*veritate tacita*) were not given *ex certa scientia* and consequently invalid. Contrary to common opinion, the appeal by Pierre's procurator in Avignon remained not entirely without effect. Rather, Clement changed some minor points and really imposed the bishop eternal silence (*perpetuum silentium*) in this matter and threatened him with excommunication. Important for our question is that even according to bishop Pierre's opinion the "suppression of truth" (*veri suppressio*) clearly does not refer to the provenance of the Shroud of sinister canals, which can only be called behind closed doors. Rather, bishop Pierre said openly and unequivocally that the former scandal about the Shroud had been concealed from the cardinal and the pope. For some thirty-four years before, the former bishop of Troyes had investigated the origin of the cloth and had already forbidden its exhibition. By the discovery of the painter he had exposed it as a human work (as *non miraculose confectum vel concessum*). This statement of Pierre d'Arcis leaves no room at all for the origin of the Shroud from the Templars.

Finally, as Malcom Barber noted, the general question is whether the fate of the Templars "retained a latent power to arouse deep passions as late as 1389."

A simple observation shows that this is quite unlikely. The Aragonian version of the Chronicle of Morea, as it was preserved in a manuscript presumably written in Avignon in 1393, is an enlightening testimony. At the behest of the 32nd Grand Master of the Order of St John, Juan Fernández de Heredia, this version was compiled from various and multilingual sources and offers an independent tradition for the period after 1305. We hear that in 1315 Louis of Burgundy had given for marriage the daughter of the Lord of Vostitsa to this friend Dreux de Charny, the “brother (*hermano*) of knight Geoffrey de Charny”. It is remarkable, that Dreux is not presented, as usual, as son of Jean de Charny, but by naming his brother. Therefore, the compilers of the Aragonian chronicle presumably presupposed that their readers would know the name of Geoffroy (I) de Charny, who had fallen in battle in 1356 as bearer of the Oriflamme. However, no possibility of confusion with the executed Templar Geoffroy de Charny seems to have been thought of at the end of the fourteenth century, nor even in the Order of St. John.

The above text summarizes a detailed text that was given in February 2014 at the International Conference “The Templars, their Sources and their Competitors, 1119-1314”. It has been published: “Die Templer und das Turiner Grabtuch”, in: K. Borchardt, K. Döring, P. Josserand, H.J. Nicholson (eds.): *The Templars and their sources*. London, New York (Routledge), 2017, pp. 323-359. Here you can find all references to sources and literature, including the onomastic and prosopographic details concerning the name *Charny* and particularly *Geoffroy de Charny* in the 13th century, including an annotated list of the early testimonies of the Charny-family from the Multien, including the one Geoffroy de Charny in the formula book Paris, Bibl. Nat. Lat. 4763, dating between 1308 and 1312.