

Was the Shroud in Languedoc during the missing years ?

Jack MARKWARDT

Historian, U.S.A.

In 1204, a sydoine, bearing a full-length figure of Christ and a possible Apostolic pedigree, disappeared from Constantinople. Matching that cloth with the Shroud which appeared in Lirey (France) a century and a half later requires an accounting of its hidden movements and an explanation for its acquisition by Geoffrey de Charny. This paper focuses upon the "Missing Years" in the history of the Shroud of Turin, presents a hypothetical reconstruction of several of the more mysterious chapters in the cloth's biography, and suggests that the sindonic path between Constantinople and Lirey runs directly through Languedoc.

1204 : From Constantinople to Languedoc

In April of 1204, the Fourth Crusade attacked Byzantine Constantinople and, in the resultant chaos, someone pilfered the Emperor's cloth. If the thief had held orthodox beliefs or had viewed the Shroud as a sacred relic, he would not have kept it concealed for long, but, instead, would have promptly claimed the credit and wealth attendant to its ownership. Thus, the perpetrator probably had no affiliation to either the Crusade or the Church of Rome and probably considered the cloth to be something other than a purely religious artifact. In this regard, it is critical to note that, at the precise time of its disappearance, the Shroud was being treated less as a holy relic than as a palladium wielded by the Emperor, in weekly public exhibitions, against the military threat posed by the crusaders. In fact, for the preceding six and a half centuries, the Shroud, assuming its affinity to the Mandylion, had enjoyed a fabled reputation as a cloth possessing great powers of protection. In 544, it had reportedly saved the city of Edessa from a siege by the Persian army.

Thereafter, the cloth not only maintained its status as Edessa's holy palladium, but it also served as the model for numerous copies which were similarly employed as palladia throughout the Eastern empire. The protective virtues of such images were described by Edward Gibbon as follows: " In the hour of danger or tumult their

venerable presence could revive the hope, rekindle the courage, or repress the fury of the Roman legions ". In the sixth century, Pope Gregory commissioned his own copy of the image and had it brought to Rome where it was subsequently invoked for protection by Popes of the eighth and ninth centuries. In 944, the Byzantine Emperor forcibly compelled the transfer of the original image from Edessa to Constantinople in order to obtain " a new, powerful source of divine protection " for the capital city. Consequently, the peoples of Edessa and Constantinople came to view relics as possessing " palladian virtues which could protect them from their enemies ". In 1204, when the Shroud disappeared, two sects of religious dualists, the Bogomils and the Paulicians, were openly practicing their faith in Constantinople and, as will be shown, possessed both the opportunity and the motive to take and conceal the cloth.

During the preceding century, Eastern dualism had made its way to Western Europe and, by 1160, permeated Languedoc in the form of Catharism. Condemned by the Council of Tours in 1163, the heresy continued to spread despite everincreasing persecution by the Church. All the while, the Cathars remained part of a single dualist communion with their brethren in the East and maintained such extremely close ties with them that they themselves were frequently referred to as Bogomile or Paulician. In 1172, Nicetas, the dualist bishop of Constantinople, travelled to Languedoc as a representative of the Eastern mother church, and, presiding over a Synod, persuaded the Cathars to adopt an absolute form of dualism, reconsecrated Cathar bishops, and approved reformation of the Cathar hierarchy. The dualists of the East provided Cathars with scriptures and answers to their religious questions and some moved West and became involved in the political and religious affairs of Languedoc. This federation of Eastern and Western dualists was maintained for many decades and, in 1224, the Easterners were to offer their homes to Cathar refugees and send them a spiritual leader. In 1198, Innocent III became Pope and promptly demonstrated a proclivity to use military force whenever convenient to accomplish his religious and political goals and his fanatical hatred of heresy drove him to seek the elimination of Catharism

in Languedoc. Thus, in 1204, and at the precise time when the Cathars desperately required protection from Innocent, their religious brethren in the East were, week after week, witnessing the exhibition and representation of the Shroud as a tried, true and mighty palladium. As Ian Wilson observed, the opportunity to take the cloth presented itself to some Byzantine who had access to it during the confusion of the crusader attack upon the City. Greek dualists enjoyed friendly contacts with the upper classes of the capital and harbored little love for a Church which had not only sent a Crusade to lay siege to their city, but had resolved to exterminate their fellow religionists in Languedoc. This paper suggests that it was they who snatched the relic, concealed it, and sent it to their persecuted brethren in Languedoc, not as an object of religious veneration, but as a powerful palladium which could be employed against the fanatically militant Church of Rome. If these Greek dualists did send the Shroud to Languedoc, they would have entrusted it only to someone who could provide for its safekeeping and ultimate deployment in the hour of need. Fortunately for the Cathars, they had a wealthy, powerful, and pugnacious champion who could do so. Esclarmonde de Foix, the widowed sister of the count of Foix, was a vociferous opponent of the Church and the patroness of a great complex of heretical workshops, schools, and hostels in Pamiers. In 1204, the year of the Shroud's disappearance, she was ordained a Perfect, the highest order of the Cathar hierarchy, and sponsored the fortification of Montsegur, a castle stronghold which had collapsed into ruins. If the coincidental kidnapping of the Shroud and the fortification of Montségur were, in fact, part and parcel of the same Cathar defense program, the cloth would likely have been sent to Esclarmonde, in Pamiers, with the expectation that, when needed, she would take it to Montségur where its fabled powers of protection could be invoked to save Cathars, just as they had once been unleashed to rescue Edessa from the Persian army.

1204-1244 : The Palladium of heretics

There is circumstantial and anecdotal evidence that, from 1204 to 1244, the Shroud was kept as a palladium by the Cathars of Languedoc:

1) 1205-1207:

The Appearance of the Grail in Languedoc.

The Holy Grail has been connected to the Shroud, the Cathars and Esclarmonde. Between approximately 1205 and 1207, Wolfram von Eschenbach wrote a Grail legend, *Parzival*, which contained several apparent allusions to the Shroud and placed the Grail in Munsalvaesche, a name denoting a mountainous region of safety, very much like Languedoc, in general, and Montsegur, in particular. Wolfram's Grail was guarded by Tem-

plars who wore white surcoats with red crosses and, at that precise time, the Temple Order in Languedoc had been thoroughly infiltrated by persons from Cathar families or holding Cathar sympathies. In another poem, Wolfram named the lord of the Grail castle as Perilla, a transparent nameplay on Raymond de Perella, the lord of Montsegur from at least 1204 to 1244. Finally, in an unfinished work, Wolfram situated the Grail castle in the Pyrenees which border on Languedoc and lie quite near to Montsegur.

2) 1207 :

The Pope's Call for a Languedoc Crusade.

In 1203, the so-called cult of relics influenced the diversion of the Fourth Crusade to Constantinople for purposes of rescuing relics from the schismatic Greeks. By 1207, as *Parzival* clearly demonstrates, some had concluded that the Shroud was held captive by the heretics of Languedoc. On November 12, 1207, Innocent called for a crusade against the Cathars; however, a palpable pretext for crusade did not materialize until two months later when a papal legate was murdered by a servant of Raymond VI, the count of Toulouse. Raymond's pleas for absolution were rejected by the Church in what Jonathan Sumption called " a scandalous breach of ecclesiastical law accomplished solely to excuse a military invasion of Raymond's dominions ". Despite the Cathars having nothing to do with the murder, the Pope urged military action against them. By 1209, Raymond had completely capitulated to the Church and the Pope's plan to punish him was officially abandoned. Nevertheless, Innocent pushed forward with his war against the heretics, thus establishing that this crusade had always been designed to attack the Cathars, possibly to liberate the Shroud in furtherance of the goals of the cult of relics.

3) 1209-1229 :

The Cathars' Three Nail Crucifixion.

In the early thirteenth century, the Crucifixion was typically depicted with Christ affixed to the cross with four nails, one placed through each of his hands and feet. During the Albigensian Crusade, reports were circulated of a three-nail crucifixion, prompting Innocent to proclaim an official four-nail dogma and resulting in the condemnation, as heretics, of anyone who asserted the use of three nails. In an attempt to win converts, some Cathars employed a crucifix which had no upper arm, the feet of Christ crossed, and three nails. There is no apparent explanation of why Cathars, who rejected the reality of Christ's death, would assert a three-nail crucifixion or employ a three-nail crucifix, particularly when attempting to proselytize orthodox believers who were accustomed to, and who were bound to believe in, a four-nail portrayal. A close examination of the Shroud reveals that only one nail pierced Christ's feet and the Cathars' possession of the cloth with its evidence of the use of one

nail through both feet would explain their assertion of a three-nail crucifixion which contradicted the traditional and papally-mandated beliefs of the orthodox.

4) 1218-1224:

The Cathars and the Flesh and Blood of Christ.

Joinville's History of Saint Louis contains an anecdotal story which, for many centuries, has been employed to strengthen faith in the sacrament of the Eucharist. According to this account, Amaury de Montfort, while leading the Albigensian Crusade, declined a Cathar invitation to come and see the body of Christ " which had become flesh and blood in the hands of the priest ". The Cathars rejected Christ's incarnation and believed that his humanity was merely symbolic. For Cathars, there never was a body of Christ which could have become flesh and blood in the hands of their priest. In addition, the Cathars rejected the sacraments, including the Eucharist, as being vain and useless and their priests did not say Mass or make sacrifices of the altar. Instead, Cathars performed a simple daily benediction of bread and wine while reciting the Lord's Prayer. For Cathars, there was no ceremony or rite by which the body of Christ could have become flesh and blood in the hands of their priest. Cathars considered lying to be abhorrent and their Perfects, who were forbidden to engage in any trade which would expose them to lying or fraud, refused to prevaricate, even to save their own lives. Since Cathars would not have fabricated any claim, especially one which would repudiate their own religious beliefs, it appears that they invited Amaury to view a cloth which, when displayed in the hands of their priest, manifested a mysterious image of the flesh and blood of Christ. The Amaury story was written prior to 1272, a mere fifty years after the event which it describes, and was related, no doubt, to inspire readers to emulate a pious virtue admired by Saint Louis; however, it appears to have a factual and historical basis, particularly in light of other circumstantial evidence which demonstrates that, during the precise period of the story's setting, the Cathars were in possession of the Shroud.

5) 1209-1244 :

The Mystical Cathar Treasure of Montsegur.

After the outbreak of the Albigensian Crusade in 1209, Esclarmonde took up residence in Montsegur and, in 1215, presided there over a Cathar court. Likewise, in 1209, the most important Cathar prelate, Guilhabert de Castres, moved to Montsegur and, for the next thirty years, used it as his base for missionary activities and the site of a Cathar Synod in 1232. In approximately 1240, Guilhabert was succeeded by Bertrand de Marty who remained at Montsegur until its fall in 1244. As previously mentioned, from at least 1204 to 1244, Raymond de Perella, a vassal to Esclarmonde's brother and a man with strong sympathies for the heretics, served as the lord of

Montsegur. If the Shroud was taken to Montsegur, knowledge of its presence there was likely limited to a privileged few who undoubtedly ascribed the castle's survival through more than three decades of crusade and persecution to the linen palladium. So long as the Cathar hierarchy was headquartered in Montsegur, it is inconceivable that the Shroud would have been taken elsewhere. Coincidentally, throughout the Crusade, Montsegur was rumored to hold a mystical Cathar treasure which far exceeded material wealth. In January of 1244, with Montsegur under siege, all of the gold, silver and money which had been stored there was taken out and hidden in the forests of the Sabarthes mountains. In February, the Montsegur garrison left the castle and launched an attack which ended in disaster and compelled surrender on March 2. The Cathars sought and obtained a fifteen-day truce which permitted them to hold a festival and, when the truce expired on March 16, more than two hundred Perfects were thrown into a burning pyre. That same night, four Cathars, who had been concealed, used ropes to scale down Montsegur's steep western rock-face, and, according to tradition, they took with them the mystical Cathar treasure. This paper suggests that the mystical treasure was, or included, the Shroud and that the Cathars had procured the truce in a desperate, but unsuccessful, attempt to invoke their palladium's legendary powers during the closing weeks of the season of its origin-Easter.

1244-1349 : The property of heretics and their descendants

The four escapees from vanquished Montsegur carried the treasure to a valley in the Sabarthes, a region loyal to the Cathar cause and home to the heretical Auteri family. Approximately fifty years later, an Auteri descendant, Peter, assumed leadership of a Cathar organization which was still active but persecuted relentlessly by the Inquisition. After Peter Auteri was captured and executed in 1311, the heretical community began to disintegrate.

In 1320, a group of Cathars were forced to recant in Albi and, the following year, the last Cathar Perfect, William Belibasta, was lured from hiding in Catalonia and burned to death. Between 1318 and 1326, Jacques Fournier, the future Pope Benedict XII, prosecuted the Carcassonne Inquisition from Pamiers and walled up a Cathar remnant in the caves of Lombrives, located in the Sabarthes. Thereafter, scattered groups of heretics and isolated individuals carried on occasional guerrilla warfare, but, by 1350, the two-century struggle between the Church and the Cathars of Languedoc was brought to a close. This paper suggests that, from 1244 to approximately 1349, the Shroud was kept in Languedoc, most probably in the Sabarthes, by heretical families descended from the survivors of Montsegur.

Title to the relic could not legally pass from one generation to another in as much as heretics, their sympathizers, and their descendants were prohibited from making a will or receiving a legacy. In addition, all personal property of heretics, their sympathizers, and their descendants was required to be confiscated and forfeited to the crown. Consequently, for a little more than a century, the Shroud was scrupulously kept concealed in a region where survival itself depended on secrecy and, upon the deaths of its respective heretical owners, the cloth was quietly handed down to surviving family members.

In October of 1347, the Black Death swept into Europe, ultimately killing more than a third of its population. Some towns with a population of 20,000 were left with a mere 200 and, in certain of the smaller villages, only 100 out of 1,500 survived. The Plague struck Marseille in January of 1348, with mortality rates of up to 60% and, by summer, had reached Montpellier, Carcassonne, and Toulouse. Montpellier's ultimate loss of life was so extensive that Italian merchants were granted citizenship rights just to allow the city to be repopulated. In Perpignan, just north of the Spanish border and not too distant from the region of heretical safe havens, the Plague killed 90% of the municipal physicians and barber-surgeons and 65% of the notaries. In Avignon, up to two-thirds of the population died, and between February and May of 1349, as many as 400 of its people were killed every day. The Pope's physician, who advised Clement VI to flee the city-until the Plague subsided, ultimately estimated that three quarters of the entire population of France had been killed. In rural Languedoc, already devastated by famine and war, the Black Death killed close to 50% of the population. In 1350, the Plague killed King Alphonso XI of Spain, but finally ran its course in the Mediterranean Basin. By that time, however, it is statistically probable that, somewhere in the hill country of rural Languedoc, the heretical family that possessed the Shroud had been killed and that the cloth, as part of that family's possessions and personal effects, had been, or would soon be, confiscated and forfeited to the crown.

1349-1354 : The acquisition of shroud by Geoffrey de Charny

Wilson astutely observed that the question of how the Shroud came to be owned by Geoffrey de Charny lies at the very core of the Missing Years mystery. Historical evidence indicates that Geoffrey acquired the relic between April of 1349 and January of 1354. Yet, there is no record of a military campaign, a gift, or an inheritance which would have brought the Shroud to Geoffrey after 1349 and, in fact, throughout 1350 and during the first six months of 1351, Geoffrey was held as a prisoner of war in England. Although it may have been unusual for Geoffrey to have come to own the Shroud, the virtually

unquestionable personal integrity of " the wisest and bravest knight of them all " would never have allowed him to obtain the cloth under dishonorable circumstances or by the employment of improper means. Thus, the mystery's solution must lie along a rightful and legal path, and one such channel was opened to Geoffrey in the Spring of 1349. At that time, Geoffrey held a life annuity of 1,000 livres, payable directly from the royal treasury. On April 19, 1349, this annuity was modified to 500 livres payable to Geoffrey and his heirs from the first forfeitures which might occur in the Languedoc *se-nechausees* of Toulouse, Beaucaire, and Carcassonne.

This paper suggests that, subsequent to April 19, 1349, the Shroud was discovered among the confiscated and forfeited personal goods of a Languedoc heretical family, perhaps one victimized by the Black Death, and that Geoffrey de Charny, by right of royal grant, legally and rightfully acquired title to the relic. Given the location of the Sabarthes and the other likely areas of heretical safe havens, the Shroud forfeiture probably occurred in the *seneschalsy* of Carcassonne where Geoffrey's trusted bailiff would have confiscated the forfeited property even if Geoffrey himself was being held in captivity. In Languedoc, local bailiffs administered both high and low justice, arrested heretics, pursued lawbreakers through the mountains, and attempted to recover stolen objects. A forfeiture precipitated by the Plague would have probably taken place in 1349 or 1350 and Geoffrey could have been aware of his acquisition of the Shroud either before he was taken prisoner at Calais on December 31, 1349 or during his imprisonment in London through June of 1351. Such knowledge may have been responsible for the melancholy religious poetry which Geoffrey authored during the period of his captivity.

1349-1390 : Perpetual silence and the missing years

Geoffrey has never been quoted as relating the manner in which he acquired the Shroud and Wilson speculated that something in the cloth's biography may have caused his silence. If this is the explanation, it may have been either a Cathar or a Templar history; however, there is another possibility. Given Geoffrey's noble character and personal integrity, it is virtually certain that he fully reported the circumstances of his acquisition to the Pope in Avignon. Indeed, a report and petition, together with papal approval, was surely a prerequisite to holding the Lirey Shroud exhibitions of the 1350's, and the Pope would never have permitted the relic to become the object of worldwide pilgrimage unless he knew exactly how Geoffrey had acquired it and was convinced that it was genuine; i.e., the Shroud was the same cloth as that which had disappeared from Constantinople. Once the Pope had learned of the reasons under-

lying the Languedoc forfeiture, he would have deduced that Cathars and their descendants had been the Shroud's keepers for a century and a half and concluded that a disclosure of such information might embarrass the Church, raise questions concerning the motives for the Albigensian Crusade, create empathy for Cathars who had preserved Christianity's most precious relic, prejudice the Church's ongoing prosecution of heresy, and/or expose the relic to attack as the forgery or idol of heretics. In addition, had it become known that the cloth was only recently discovered among the personal effects of Plague victims, it may have aroused fear of contamination and a clamor for the destruction of the relic. Finally, a disclosure of the Shroud's genesis may have precipitated a demand from the Byzantine Emperor or the Eastern Orthodox Church that the relic be returned to Constantinople. This paper suggests that, for these and/or other reasons, the Pope ordered Geoffrey and his family to remain perpetually silent on the subject of how the cloth had been acquired and, on that specific condition, authorized the exhibitions of the Shroud which were held in Lirey during the 1350's. Geoffrey, ever the perfect knight and obedient servant of king and Church, would have dutifully complied with the Pope's directive and would have never publicly spoken of how he had come into possession of the relic, thereby keeping the information secure among himself, his wife and their son, Geoffrey II. In approximately 1389, Geoffrey's son initiated a new round of Shroud exhibitions and Pierre D'Arcis, the Bishop of Troyes, attempted to terminate them. In a draft memorandum, which probably never reached Pope Clement VII in Avignon, D'Arcis claimed that the cloth was a cunningly-painted fraud, offered to supply the Pope with all relevant information "from public report and otherwise", and expressed a desire to speak personally to the Pope due to his inability, in writing, to sufficiently express "the grievous nature of the scandal, the contempt brought upon the Church and ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and the danger to souls. D'Arcis' reference to ecclesiastical jurisdiction appears directly related to the Inquisition's ongoing prosecution of here-

tics and his allusion to scandal indicates that he had learned something of the relic's heretical, but not of its Byzantine, history. In any event, Clement was already familiar with the Shroud's Cathar biography and Constantinople pedigree through the records of his predecessors and/or his familial relationship with Geoffrey's son. There is no evidence of the Pope's having requested any elaboration from D'Arcis or having conducted any investigation whatsoever. Instead, Clement permitted the Shroud exhibitions to continue (subject to rather trivial conditions) and he twice sentenced D'Arcis to the same perpetual silence as that which had previously bound Geoffrey and his family. Thus, the mystery of the Missing Years was born of the papal mutation of witnesses who could have attested to a heretical forfeiture which, in turn, would have directed historians to the sindonic road from Constantinople to Languedoc.

Poscript : heretical custodians of the Shroud

It is entirely possible that, on three separate occasions, the Shroud was in the possession of heretics. It has been argued that, for at least one hundred and fifty years after the Resurrection, the cloth was in the possession of Carpocratian Gnostics before being brought to Edessa, during the reign of Abgar the Great (177-212 A.D.), and remained there in the possession of Gnostics, for an additional lengthy period. In the eighth century, and as the result of an alleged loan transaction, the cloth was given to Edessan Monophysites and/or Jacobites and remained in their possession for a period of almost two hundred and fifty years (circa 700-944 A. D.). Since this paper suggests that the cloth was in the possession of Cathars and their descendants for approximately one hundred and forty-five years (1204-1349 A.D.), the cumulative heretical history of the Shroud may exceed five centuries in length and constitute more than twenty-five per cent of its present life. ■

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Le Linceul était-il en Languedoc durant le « trou médiéval » ?

L'auteur présente une hypothèse selon laquelle, de 1204 à 1349, le Linceul aurait été conservé en Languedoc par les Cathares. D'une part, pense-t-il, ces Cathares étaient en relation avec leurs frères de l'Est, les Bogomiles et les Pauliciens. D'autre part, la légende du Saint Graal, telle qu'elle est modifiée vers 1205-1207, place cet objet qui pourrait se confondre avec le Linceul dans une région montagneuse qui pourrait être le Languedoc pyrénéen.

Les Cathares auraient, comme les habitants d'Edesse, considéré le Linceul non tant comme une relique que comme un palladium destiné à les défendre contre la croisade des Albigeois. Bien que ne croyant ni à l'Incarnation ni à la mort du Christ, ils auraient alors fabriqué des crucifix à trois clous, d'après l'image du Linceul, et non à quatre selon l'usage du temps.

Le Linceul aurait constitué le trésor de Montségur puis, après la chute du château-fort, aurait été conservé par une famille de survivants à qui Geoffroy de Charny l'aurait acheté vers 1349. Geoffroy de Charny, à la demande du pape, aurait gardé le silence sur la nature du Linceul pour éviter les réclamations des Byzantins orthodoxes. Ce qui expliquerait le mémoire de Pierre d'Arcis et la réponse de Clément VII.