

RESEARCH ARTICLES (2)
THE MACHY VERSION OF THE LIREY PILGRIM'S BADGE
A Revised Reconstruction
Ian Wilson

It may seem excessive for me to be writing yet again about that so uninspiring-looking mould of a Shroud pilgrim badge found at Machy near Lirey in 2009. My justification, however, is the badge's strong potential - if only we can interpret it correctly - to throw much needed fresh light on the ever problematic expositions of the Shroud apparently conducted by French knight Geoffroi de Charny in his tiny home village of Lirey at the very inception of the Shroud's appearance in western Europe.

As Shroud historians have long recognised, the big problem about the Lirey expositions is that the surviving documentation about them is so fragmentary and so seemingly contradictory. Thus there is no mention of the Shroud in the documents relating to the foundation of the Lirey church in 1353. Then in May 1356 we have local bishop of Troyes Henri de Poitiers on record as warmly approving an unspecified 'cult' - often assumed to be showings of the Shroud - that Geoffroi had instituted at Lirey. Only four months later Geoffroi was dead on the battlefield of Poitiers, he and all others in France having been far too preoccupied with battling invading English for any Shroud showings to have been staged during that time. And yet from 1389 we have the famous memorandum of Bishop Pierre d'Arcis, a successor to Henri as Bishop of Troyes, claiming that 'thirty-four years or thereabouts' earlier (i.e circa 1355) Bishop Henri had taken great exception to some showings of the Shroud that were being held at Geoffroi de Charny's Lirey church, and on diligently investigating the matter, Henri had apparently found evidence of fraud, duly putting an end to any expositions being held in Lirey for well over three decades.

Now one important fact deriving from the Machy mould find is that we now have two different examples of pilgrim badges self-evidently

associated with Geoffroi de Charny, (1) the already well-known badge that was found in Paris in the 1850s and is now in that city's Musée de Cluny; and (2 - albeit in the form of a badge mould), that which was found much more recently at Machy, a village sited little more than a stone's-throw from Lirey. Both pilgrim badges depict clergy holding up the Shroud as if for public exhibition. And both prominently feature immediately below the depiction of the Shroud the heraldry of Geoffroi de Charny and his second wife Jeanne de Vergy, a union that can be broadly dated to between 1349/1350 (the likeliest date for the Charny-Vergy marriage), and Geoffroi's well-documented death at Poitiers on 19 September 1356.

But the potentially far more significant fact about the two badges is that they exhibit some quite unmistakable differences from each other. Thus on the Paris badge we see Geoffroi de Charny's coat of arms on the left and Jeanne de Vergy's on the right, while on the Machy badge these positions are reversed. On the Paris badge we see below the depiction of the Shroud a roundel of Christ's empty tomb accompanied by instruments of the Passion: the crown of thorns, the scourge whip, etc, whereas on the Machy badge this same position is occupied only by a disembodied Christ face with what appear to be stars each side. On the Paris badge the Shroud's herringbone weave is depicted with astonishing fidelity, while on the Machy version the weave runs in the wrong direction. Another important difference, one which I am particularly indebted to Thomas de Wesselow for drawing to my attention, is that whoever created the Paris badge was someone of significantly superior artistry to whoever created the Machy version.

Amongst these observations, the one most immediately deserving of our attention is that switching of the positioning of the de Charny and the de Vergy coats of arms between one badge and another. When only one example of a pilgrim badge was known there was always the possibility that Bishop Henri de Poitiers' May 1356 eulogising on Geoffroi de Charny's cult at Lirey had had nothing whatsoever to do with any Shroud expositions conducted by Geoffroi, and that all the furore described by Bishop d'Arcis had arisen as a result of the widowed Jeanne de Vergy having given her approval to showings of the Shroud held by

The Pilgrim Badges
(not to scale)

Top: The badge found under the Pont-au-Change, Paris, in 1855.



Middle: The mould found in Machy, near Lirey, 2009



Bottom Left: Ian Wilson's first reconstruction of the badge derived from the Machy mould (Reconstruction B in the text)

Bottom Right: Denis Launay's reconstruction of the badge derived from the Machy mould (Reconstruction A in the text)



Lirey's clergy shortly after her husband's death. But the fact that we see a change of positioning of coats of arms between the two badges, also that someone made other design changes to whichever of the badges was the earlier of the two, strongly suggests that at least one of the badges was definitely issued during Geoffroi's lifetime, ostensibly as a souvenir for Shroud expositions that he had directly sanctioned, while the second badge may well have been issued after his death, in association with showings over which he had no control.

This gives rise to the crucial question: which of the two badges came first? When just over a year ago I first learnt of the Machy badge's existence, my initial reaction was to regard it as the earlier of the two. And at the time my reasoning seemed well-enough founded. On the Machy badge the depiction of the Shroud's weave is inaccurate; on its Paris counterpart it is surprisingly faithful to the original, suggesting that whoever created the Paris version had corrected the mistake on this feature perpetrated by the creator of the Machy version. There was also, on Machy, the feature of the disembodied face of Christ with what appeared to be stars either side, the disembodied face suggesting to me a harking to the way I believe the Shroud to have been presented in the Byzantine East as the Image of Edessa, or Mandylion. As for the two 'stars', these suggested a link to the French order of chivalry known as the Company of the Star with which Geoffroi de Charny is known to have been very closely associated during the single year of the Company's active existence, 1352.

Yet what bothered me, even from the very outset, was the rather crude delineation of those 'stars'. Artists' depictions of the eight-pointed star associated with the Company of the Star are usually a lot better defined than those on the Machy mould. And because some of the features on the mould are not intended to be seen on the finished badge, but are there as flues, etc., for conducting the hot metal that would have been used during the badge-making process, there had to be a possibility that this was the true function of the apparent 'stars'.

And this latter has certainly proved to be the opinion of a French specialist in the moulding of replica medieval artefacts, Denis Launay, whose company Boutefeu Créations includes in its Internet catalogue several reproductions of pilgrim badges.

(see <http://www.boutefeucreations.com>) A few months ago Alain Hourseau, the present owner of the Machy mould, sent my original reconstruction of it (i.e. the one reproduced in Newsletter 76, p.5), to Denis Launay, as a result of which Denis produced his own alternative (two dimensional) reconstruction of what the original badge might have looked like (email correspondence of 11 June), as reproduced on Page 18.

The reconstruction immediately impressed me. However just to get a second opinion I sent the Denis Launay reconstruction (as version A) and my own reconstruction (as version B) to Dr Willi Piron, one of the world's foremost experts on medieval pilgrim badges, asking him to suggest which version he thought might be the more accurate. Dr Piron's response was clear-cut:

I think reconstruction A is the more accurate one. The holes are for attaching the counterform. I believe the spaces are empty because the star motive between the clergy is an unregular starform and, in my opinion, is not meant to be cast. The other badge from Lirey has also open arches. I asked my colleagues and they also think that reconstruction A is the most accurate one. (email from Dr Willi Piron 2nd September)

Likewise providing a valuable input on the same question was Tom de Wesselow, who in an email to me of 31 August sent me these observations on the Machy version:

The inferior quality of the Machy image is evident in several places: in the relatively simple articulation of the architecture, the flat X of the cleric's cope, the general lack of surface texture and detail, and above all, perhaps, in the simplistic design of the Vergy arms.

Furthermore, in the light of where the Machy mould was found, literally the next-door village to Lirey, Tom confidently attributes the

Machy version to the hand of a local craftsman, while in the case of the Paris example he suggested that a much superior artist had been used.

Accordingly it now looks virtually certain that in the case of the Machy badge, instead of its being the predecessor of the Paris badge, it was most likely the later of the two versions, arguably produced as a crude imitation of the Paris counterpart, and quite possibly indeed created after Geoffroi's death in the very circumstances that Bishop d'Arcis would later so trenchantly describe, i.e. fraudulently, by Lirey's then Dean, and primarily motivated for financial gain.

For in the immediate wake of the battle of Poitiers, in which Geoffroi had been killed and France's King John the Good captured and taken off to imprisonment in England, France underwent widespread social and economic chaos. Robbed so prematurely of their founder and benefactor the college of canons that Geoffroi had founded at Lirey could hardly not have been concerned about their economic future. And in the light of the huge success of showings of the Veronica cloth that had been held in Rome only six years before, maybe the Lirey dean and his canons thought up the idea of persuading Jeanne de Vergy to allow them to stage showings of the Shroud in much the same vein as those of the Veronica - and she, deeply traumatised by her husband's death, and with a very young son to nurture, unwisely acquiesced?

Whatever the original scenario, undeniably the Paris and Machy pilgrim badges are physical objects that can take us closest to those original events of the Shroud's first known appearance in western Europe, their evidential value accordingly being of the very highest order. Furthermore, if I'm right in my now thinking that the Machy badge was the later of the two versions, one put out by Lirey's canons sometime early in the period after Geoffroi's death, this raises the question of how might we now better understand the earlier, Paris version?

For if Geoffroi actually did authorise the holding of Shroud expositions during his lifetime, and if the Paris badge is the prime

