



Miniature by Christopher Duch, from the prayer book of Marguerite of France (circa 1559). Exactly as they are shown on the Charny pilgrim badge two centuries earlier, and for who knows how long afterwards, three prelates display the Shroud, rumpling the corners for a firmer grip.

AN EXPOSITION OF THE HOLY SHROUD  
IN THE MARKET PLACE OF BOURG-EN-BRESSE  
14 APRIL 1503

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The "great and holy Friday" of the year of grace 1503 was, despite the traditional mourning of the Church, a festive day for our Bressan ancestors.

Two days earlier had seen the solemn entry into Bourg of the Governor of the Netherlands, the archduke Philippe, the father of Charles V. By a singular coincidence, the admiration of his contemporaries had imposed upon him the same surname of "Handsome" that they had given to the duke of Savoy, Philibert II, the last husband of his sister Marguerite of Austria. Philippe was returning from Spain where he had gone to reclaim, from the elderly Ferdinand, the crown of Castile, which, by the death of Queen Isabel, had fallen to his poor young wife, Jeanne the Mad. The heir to the Catholic sovereigns had stopped in Lyon, for he wanted to greet the good king Louis XII; but the principal aim of his voyage in our regions was to pay a visit, for a whole lovely week, to his brother-in-law and his well-beloved sister, our gracious duchess.

Bourg therefore had been celebrating joyously for two days when the criers of Holy Friday, at the doorway of all the churches, lanced their plaintive appeals: *Good folk, come in to see our sweet Lord who is going to die!* The gaiety of the populace became more discreet.

Nevertheless, at the wide arched bays of their portals, on the mullions of their windows, at all their columns, at all their ledges, on the houses still hung the shields of the arms of the princes, garlands of foliage and banderoles, even rich tapestries. In the tortuous streets, all shining with the fair sun of April, a tumultuous crowd was hastening, not at all too melancholy; gentlemen and noble ladies, merchants and bourgeois, peasants and villeins, flocking from all the villages of Bresse. Everyone seemed to have a rendezvous in the immense covered halls of the market place, justly considered by our forebears as the most beautiful in the duchy of Savoy, and indeed in all the country round about. At three o'clock, a Cordelier, renowned for eloquence, was to preach the Passion. But even more than the reputation of the good Father, that which attracted citizens and villagers to this place was the news, published at the sound of the trumpet in all the crossroads, that, after hearing the sermon, the princes would proceed to the market place to publicly render homage to the Holy Shroud of our Redeemer.

Marguerite of Austria, her brother and her husband, in fact assisted, in the chapel of the castle, at the poignant recital of the death of Jesus that the confessor of the duchess gave with much emotion. After that, with great devotion, the three princes repaired to the market place. Ahead of them marched the arbalesters, themselves preceded by a good dozen heralds, of all the lords and ladies of the court, the officers and domestics of the palace, and finally the councilors and functionaries of the town. The mayor and city councilors had wanted to hold over Marguerite's head a canopy of scarlet velvet adorned with white plumes, but she declined this honor.

The young lady was dressed tastefully but without the least hint of studied elegance. Her dress of fine linen, diapered with silk, with fluted sleeves trailing to the ground, bore upon the bodice a silver cross of St. Andrew. A scarlet head-dress, with neither jewels nor egret; a veil of Brussels lace letting one catch a glimpse of her pretty face framed in long blond tresses. At her right and at her left, Philippe and Philibert, like Marguerite, kept a meditative deportment. Both were dressed simply, in gray serge; so that in the sombre color of their surcoats and even in the big beads of the paternosters that they told between their fingers as they walked, you would have taken them for hermits if it had not been for the glint of their armor flashing through the slashes of their penitential garb.

Long before the ducal retinue entered the market place, the five avenues of the dusty edifice was glutted with people to such a point that the ragamuffins and other folk of low condition who were recklessly perched on the rafters ran no risk of kissing the ground in case they would suddenly begin to tumble. The guards and sergeants of Her Most Serene Highness encountered great difficulties in liberating the central triforium of this new-style church, where grains of wheat sprouted golden in the fissures of the pavement.

In the farthest background, facing the platform reserved for the princes, a scaffold was erected, covered with a sumptuous carpet and graced with a portico. There, in black and white copes, mitre on head, the bishops of Maurienne, Geneva and Lausanne stood beside a vast and splendid reliquary of gilded wood. An hour earlier, to the sound of chants and hymns, the procession of the Antonins, the Jacobins, and the Cordeliers, some priests of Saint-Pierre and the "household" of Notre-Dame, in triumph had brought the precious coffer, carried on the shoulders of the prelates and the prior of Brou, surrounded by an aureole of tapers and diaphanous clouds rising from censers.

When the divine service was over and the princes were kneeling upon velvet pads lined up before the altar where the reliquary lay, the bishops opened the enormous chest with three golden keys. They took out a long piece of cloth, supple and light, but all shabby

and as if sullied by the centuries. Slowly, with infinite precautions, they unfolded it, holding it like a veil between themselves and the breathless crowd. Upon the long grayish threads, some hachures and some shadows, and some brown stains like traces of blood long-since dried, could be seen on the two halves of the sheet. The double image of a body, seen from the front and seen from the back, was distinguished without much trouble; especially the face, the face of a tortured man, stood out sharply in the serene majesty of death, but a death, one guessed, most horrible.

With solemn voice that broke over the silence of the multitude like the slow vibrations of a death-knell, one of the bishops pronounced distinctly: "Here, my brothers, among holy things, is the most holy and contemplative on all the earth. It is the precious and noble "sindon" purchased by Joseph of Arimathea for the burial of the divine Master when, with the help of Nicodemus, he took him down from the cross."

Indeed, it was the miraculous sheet of the champenoise abbey of Lirey, that Madame de la Roche, Marguerite de Charny, gave not long ago, in exchange for substantial recompense, to Duke Louis I of Savoy; may God keep his soul! The widow of the former Count of Bresse, Claudine of Brittany, had inherited it and had kept it with great reverence for many years in her château of Billiat, on the banks of the Rhone. But, overcome by the prayers of Philibert the Handsome, she returned it to the ducal treasury. Afterwards, Marguerite of Austria and her husband enclosed it in the superb reliquary that cost them, it is said, ten-thousand gold crowns; and it was their habit to carry with them everywhere this inestimable jewel of their domestic chapel.

"You see it, my brothers," continued the solemn voice, "clearly bloody with the most precious blood of Jesus, as if the deed had been done yesterday. Here are the imprints of his face, of his breast, of his hands and feet."

A shudder went through the enormous audience. A thousand heads shook. Vainly, one tried to see over the hoods in the first rows. Murmurs broke out, swiftly repressed.

"One recognizes easily the five wounds," the bishop went on, "especially that of the side, which is a good half-a-foot long. And since our Redeemer was covered under and over in this sheet, one notices the vestiges and image of his long hair with the crown of thorns, the shoulders bruised by Pilate's lashes, his legs torn by the pebbles of Calvary, in a word, his entire holy body broken in the torments of the Passion."

In the crowd, many shed tears; poor souls, they could not stifle their sobs.

"To prove if it was the true Shroud, it was boiled in oil, tossed in fire, laundered different and numerous times. But one could not efface nor remove these imprints and marks of our sweet Lord."

With unanimous voice, the audience responded: "Praised be Jesus Christ forever and ever!"

Upon which, the prelates, holding the Shroud displayed, advanced to the edge of the platform, while the priests intoned the sorrowful and triumphal hymn: *Vexilla regis prodeunt*.... First of all, Marguerite, Philippe and Philibert came to respectfully kiss the signal relic. Their courtiers approached in their turn, then the gentlemen and members of the Council of Bresse, then the officials of the town of Bourg, then the brothers of the different trade guilds. Night already lay deep around the market resplendent with light, while the little people still filed past the Holy Shroud, carrying away in their hearts this image of Christ victorious over death right up to the moment of their own death, offering Him the homage of their simple prayers, their humble actions of grace, their poor tears, their hidden sufferings, all their faith and all their love.

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Antoine de Lalaing, secretary to the archduke Philippe II of Spain, governor of the Netherlands, assisted at the 1503 exposition in Bourg-en-Bresse, and his recollection of the event has been cited often in sindonic literature, particularly where he says the Shroud was "boiled in oil, tossed in fire, laundered several times". Disregarding the obvious fact that Lalaing does not claim to have personally witnessed these superstitious rites, modern authors have hoisted his words to the dizzy precipice of credulity, even though recent scientific analyses have been unsuccessful in detecting any oil, olive or other, on the fabric. It is therefore some consolation to read André Chagny, who places Lalaing's remark in the proper perspective; that is, as a pious apologetic, the elaboration of a legend that the priests themselves most certainly believed.

André Chagny, a son of Bresse, wrote a biography of the Duchess Marguerite of Austria. The little article for *La Croix Illustrée* (Paris) of Sunday, April 4, 1909, is a well-ripened fruit plucked from his research in the archives of Lille and Bourg-en-Bresse, as well as Lalaing's report, *Voyage de l'archiduc Philippe-le-Beau*. Chagny's account contains other surprises that will not escape the notice of *Spectrum* readers. Of course, we all know that it was Marguerite of Austria who had another reliquary made for the Shroud in 1509; the silver box that was destroyed by fire in the Holy Chapel of Chambéry in the night between the third and fourth of December 1532.

Marguerite of Austria was the daughter of Maximilian, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, and Marie of Burgundy, that lovely princess who died so young in a fall from her horse. That was in 1482; Marguerite was two years old. The following year, she was married to the future Charles VIII, thirteen-year-old son of Louis XI





Philibert, Duke of Savoy.

Marguerite of Austria.

In the collar of Savoy's Order of the Annunciation, entwined in the Savoy knot, the letters FERT, the Savoy motto, are of unknown origin. Though anachronistic, the explanation is commonly given as *Fortitudo eius Rhodum tenuit*, i.e., His force (of Amedeo VI, the Green Count) saved Rhodes. But the initials are already found on savoyard coins of 1188.

and Charlotte of Savoy. The children grew up in the French court, in the châteaux of Amboise and Gien, with little playmates, Louise and Philibert, children of Philippe II of Bresse, Duke of Savoy, and Marguerite of Bourbon, under the tutelage of Anne of Beaujeu, whose misogynist father, Louis XI, declared the only intelligent woman in the realm.

When he grew up, Charles VIII had other ideas about his life, his politics, and who it was he should marry. Marguerite, jilted, was therefore affianced (1495) to Don Juan of Aragon, only son of Ferdinand V of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, while her brother, Philippe the Handsome, was married to Don Juan's sister, Jeanne of Castile, she who was called the Mad.

But Don Juan died six months after the marriage. Now Marguerite's father proposed to strengthen alliance with Savoy, so in 1501 the royal pawn was married to Duke Philibert the Handsome, one of her childhood companions. This time, the Austrian princess found happiness, but not for long: in 1504, Philibert was killed in a hunting accident.

Thereafter, Marguerite's career in European affairs, above all her

tutelage of her nephew, the future Emperor Charles V, mark her as a woman of great energy, acumen and steadfast integrity. She died on 1 December 1530, before the completion of the church that she had commissioned on 29 March 1505 to rise on the ruins of the ancient Benedictine monastery of Brou. In her will of 20 February 1508, she gave, among other signal relics, a snippet of the Holy Shroud to the Church of Brou. And there, she and her "last husband", as Chagny calls Philibert, lie as Carrara gisants in magnificent monumental tombs.

Many thanks to Rodger Apple, who had the good fortune to spy this 1909 issue of *La Croix Illustrée* in a Paris bouquinerie and bought it, not only to add to the Albany Center collection, but also to share with *Spectrum* readers.