



LOUIS I OF SAVOY

Silver-point drawing by Jan van Eyck (†1440). Photo courtesy of the Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

LOUIS I, DUKE OF SAVOY
1413-1465

DOROTHY CRISPINO

The end of the earthly exile of Humbert Second of Savoy is the last page, not only of an individual life, not only of a dynasty founded almost one thousand years earlier by Humbert of the White-hand, but also, as we all know, of a period of Shroud history. An amazing period because of its length, 530 years to the month and nearly to the day; an edifying period because of the veneration in which generations of Savoys held the relic. Every generation knew its worth, safely guarded and supremely honored it; generations who believed that their Palladium, in turn, protected their destiny. Who would dare to say that they were wrong?

When Humbert II entered the portals of eternity, his quiet passage shook the shadowy past and the figure of Louis I emerged, outlined for a fleeting moment on the distant historical horizon.

One scene keeps coming to mind, I cannot say why: two galleys lie in harbor at Cyprus Island. They were sent by my lord the Duke of Savoy, Amadeus VIII, to fetch the princess Anne of Lusignan to be wife to his son Louis, Prince of Piedmont, heir to the duchy. The year was 1432.

Anne was the daughter of Charlotte of Bourbon and Janus, King of Jerusalem, Cyprus and Armenia. Such, at least, was his title.

Poor Janus! One wonders if ever in his life he saw a happy day. He was born in a horrible prison in Genoa—hence his name Janus—where his father, James I King of Cyprus, was suspended in a cage while his mother, of the noble house of Brunswick, earned a precarious subsistence as a seamstress. For ten years the prison was Janus' home, until his father was released and returned to Cyprus, but the boy was retained in Genoa as a pledge.

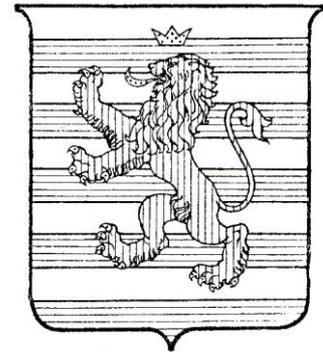
Eventually he too wore the crown of Jerusalem, Cyprus and Armenia, until Egypt invaded the island, captured Janus and took him to Cairo in chains. The revenge of the Mamelukes? Some easing, at least, of their bitter resentment against those comrades-in-arms, King Peter I Lusignan and Amadeus VI, Count of Savoy, who, six decades earlier, had demolished Alexandria.

A ruinous ransom was negotiated and in May 1427 Janus returned to his kingdom, a vassal of the Sultan. It is said he never laughed again. The unfortunate man died in June of 1432 and later that same year his fourteen-year-old daughter, accompanied by a large retinue,

boarded the waiting ship and sailed to Nice. Her brother, John II, ascended the shackled throne.

Louis fell in love with his bride, and though he later complained about her extravagance and though her Cypriote companions caused great mischief in the court, it would seem that the marriage was harmonious. Anne usually got her way, but on the other hand she presented Louis with eighteen children, fifteen of whom survived.

Anne was praised as the most beautiful and most gracious lady in the world. Beware of dismissing this description as still another of those flattering compliments paid to many ladies of chivalric times! This princess was a daughter of the Isle of Venus, and if she charmed and if she was capricious, remember that the ancestral castle of the Lusignans, deep in dreamy Poitou, was built by the fairy Melisande. And if the Savoy treasury groaned at her extravagance, her lavish prodigality, remember that she had come from a fabulously rich land where merchants made legendary fortunes overnight. Cyprus, the trading link between Europe and the Orient; the envy and the prey of Genoa, Venice, Egypt; the tiny Mediterranean island coveted by Philip IV of France, who aspired to install one of his own sons as head of a vast new eastern empire. To finance this dream, Philip planned to confiscate the revenues of the Templars and Hospitallers...



Coat of Arms
of the Lusignan Family

Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, who later became Pope Pius II, said of Anne: "A woman incapable of obeying married to a man incapable of commanding".

If this was a failing on Louis' part, perhaps he was simply too enamored of his wife. Besides, he had inherited that Savoy trait for which several of his forbears had earned the appellation "the Peaceful". One imagines him an affectionate father, a quiet man and thoughtful, for he liked the arts, and was particularly fond of music. Cultivated if not scholarly, Louis founded a university at Turin and instituted a special Court of Justice for his subjects "on the other side of the mountains". On the other hand, when circumstances called for action, he was forceful and decisive, though unfortunately many things seemed to turn out amiss for him.

Sandwiched between a father of monastic inclinations and a son who lived as a saint, Louis himself was deeply religious. Franciscan friars surrounded him; a Franciscan was his confessor; the coarse Franciscan habit was his burial dress.

Very early, Louis had the opportunity to exercise his talent for administration, for about a year after his marriage to Anne, his father,

Duke Amadeus VIII, retired to a monastic life, leaving the government of the duchy to his son. Seven years later, Amadeus abdicated because he had become Pope Felix V.

The Council of Basel, intent on radical church reform, had been convinced by the eloquence of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini that Amadeus VIII was the man most eminently qualified to resolve the crisis in the church. As the future Pius II declared: (Duke Amadeus VIII) "who has one foot in Italy and the other in France; who is related or friend to all the princes of Christendom ... "

Of course, Amadeus was a layman, but his profound piety satisfied the councilors, who were looking for a man of sufficient power, ability and prestige to rally Christendom against Eugenius IV, whom they had in fact deposed as a heretic. But Eugenius IV managed to stay where he was, the reforms were unrealized, and shortly after Nicholas V came to the crumbling Vatican, Felix V stepped down to a cardinalate.

Scores of other Savoyes became princes of the church through the normal ecclesiastical process. The most distinguished, perhaps, was the 13th century Blessed Boniface of Savoy, Archbishop of Canterbury; but three of Louis' sons were also mitred while his eldest, Amadeus IX, received from the church the crown of beatification. Amadeus' daughter was also beatified, as were the sisters Catherine and Mary of Savoy a century later. Another granddaughter of Louis and Anne, Jeanne, queen of France, was declared a saint by Pope Pius XII in 1950.

Let me try to put this clearly. Charles VII Valois was king of France. Louis I was Duke of Savoy. Charles VII had a daughter, Yolande, who, betrothed to Louis' firstborn, Amadeus IX, was living at the Savoy court, as was the custom in those days. After their marriage, the devout couple walked from Vercelli (near Turin) to Chambéry to venerate the Holy Shroud. As late as the 17th century, that humble and pious journey was still vivid in the memory and the art of Piedmont. In 1476, Yolande founded the convent of the Poor Clare nuns where, in 1534, the damaged Shroud was mended.

It was their daughter Louise who, like her father, was beatified.

Charles VII had a son, Louis, dauphin of France: a rebellious son, a thorn in his father's side. On 9 March 1451, he married the ten-year-old Charlotte, daughter of Louis and Anne, informing his father after the deed was done. The Dauphin had persuaded Louis of Savoy to proceed, in all haste, with this marriage by seizing some Savoy properties in the Dauphine. Under the circumstances, Louis of Savoy ought never to have given his daughter to this scheming prince, and indeed it got him into trouble with the king. The Dauphin later reigned as Louis XI with Charlotte as his queen, and their union was blessed—if not by Charles VII—at least by heaven, for their daughter Jeanne was canonized, as I mentioned above. Jeanne's brother,

Charles VIII, reigned fifteen years and at his death her husband, Louis XII of Orleans, became king and she queen of France.

The women of Savoy were wed into every royal family of Europe; but I remember best the queens of France. As late as the 18th century, two Savoy sisters and their brother married into the House of Bourbon. Marie Josephine Louise was queen beside King Louis XVIII; Marie Therese became queen when Charles X succeeded his brother; and Charles Emmanuel, Duke of Savoy, was married to Clotilde of France, sister of the two kings.

A namesake of this princess, Clotilde of Savoy, daughter of Victor Emmanuel II, first king of Italy, and wife of Jerome Bonaparte, in 1868 delicately and lovingly repaired some loosened threads on the Shroud and sewed a red taffeta lining on the back, doing all the work while on her knees. This princess, on the occasion of the exposition of 1898, accurately measured the Shroud; she also gave an annoying problem to Secondo Pia by insisting on covering the Shroud with thick glass, which reflected the spotlights illuminating the relic. This was a serious hindrance for Pia, for the polaroid lens had not yet been invented.

Another granddaughter of Louis and Anne, Louise of Savoy, was never queen but some historians have called her "king" of France because of the firmness and political acumen she demonstrated as regent for her son Francis I. After his victory at Marignan, Francis I, accompanied by Claude of France, his wife and cousin, made a less rigorous pilgrimage to venerate the Shroud, walking from Lyon to Chambéry. The account of that journey shows that they had every comfort on the way. Their daughter Marguerite married Emmanuel Philibert, Duke of Savoy, who, in 1578, took his princess and the Shroud to Turin to spare the aging St Charles Borromeo his pilgrimage, barefoot, from Milan across the Alps to Chambéry, to venerate the Shroud. The Duke and all his family came to meet the saint in Turin. From that time to the present, the Shroud has remained in the city laid out to the measure of kings.

Alliances with the ruling dynasties of France date from the 12th century when Adelaide (or Alix) of Savoy was married to the Capetian Louis VI. Savoy was still only a *comté*, not quite a hundred years old. But, straddling the Alps, Savoy controlled the Mont Cenis pass to Italy, a route essential for commerce and communication. Louis VI and his advisers envisaged the advantage of joining hands with that vigorous and prolific family who held the transalpine key.

Certainly they had not forgotten that another Adelaide, regent of Savoy, had received a rich province in Burgundy from the German emperor Henry IV in exchange for her permission to cross the Mont Cenis on his journey to present his penitential self to Gregory VII at the castle of Canossa (1077). One wonders if Adelaide might have demanded a higher price if the emperor had not been her son-in-law,



As tremulous as the instant it records, this drawing portrays particular persons in a particular place and time: Duke Emmanuel Philibert, his young sons; Duchess Marguerite, saying her Rosary before the Shroud was unfurled; Chambéry, c. 1570. But it transcends these momentary fragments of history in a vivid expression of the honor and devotion paid to the Holy Shroud by generations of the Savoy family, as well as the profoundly awesome experience of nameless millions who have come face-to-face with this overwhelming Image.

Many copies of the Shroud produced after 1532 leave out the burn marks. The drawing (artist unknown) in the Louvre was commented on by Antoine Legrand in *SINDON* #22, Oct. 1975 and is reproduced by permission of the Centro Intern. di Sindonologia.

husband of her daughter Bertha.

The Mont Cenis route was already well provided with chapels and hostels for pilgrims starting out for Rome or the Holy Land. Six parishes were under the patronage of the English St Alban; the Irish relaxed at St Columbans; Normans and Bretons found their saints there in the snows ... Among the many religious orders which found Savoy congenial, there were the Cistercians who, in the 12th century, established the monastery of Hautecombe, where so many Savoys are buried. In 1520, the church was decorated with a painting of the Burial of Christ, in which the Shroud is prominently depicted.

But back to Adelaide and Louis VI. Through Peter, their seventh son, the House of Courtenay was continued, those who became emperors of Byzantium. Their son Louis VII may very well have traveled the alpine route on his voyage to Constantinople where, in 1147, he visited Manuel Comnenus. The emperor took Louis VII to the Blacherna palace where the king venerated the Holy Shroud. Louis VII reigned forty-three years and died the same year (1180) that his daughter Agnes, at the age of eight, was married to Manuel Alexius II Comnenus. The wedding celebration was recorded by William of Tyre in his book, *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum*.

Certainly Louis and Anne would have been familiar with that book, particularly since the author was accompanied, on his visit to Constantinople in 1171, by one of Anne's ancestors, the founder of the cypriote Lusignans: Amaury II Lusignan, King of Jerusalem and Cyprus. In his account of the visit to Manuel I Comnenus (father-in-law to the little Agnes), the Archbishop of Tyre writes:

"Then [the emperor] did an extraordinary thing, which surprised the Greeks very much, because he showed to the king and the barons the great treasures that his ancestors had collected ... Everything was opened and shown to the king ... a large piece of the cross, the nails, the lance... the sheet which one calls 'shroud', in which Our Lord was enveloped..."

Louis too had family ties in Constantinople, for early in the 14th century, Anna of Savoy was the wife of Andronicus III Paleologus, whose great-grandfather, Michael VIII, in 1261 had seized the throne, sending Baldwin II into exile. Thus ended the Latin Empire of the Orient. It is from that time that there is no further record of the Shroud in the city of the Golden Horn.

When Andronicus died (1341) his widow resolutely held the throne as regent for her son, John V, during his minority. It was the Green Count, Amadeus VI, who diverted from Peter Lusignan's crusade to rescue John V (1366) from the Czar of Bulgaria. John and Amadeus were cousins, both grandsons of Amadeus V the Great.

Enough of these genealogical acrobatics! Permit me just one more...

Back in Cyprus, Anne's brother, John II, had died, leaving no legitimate male heir. Only one daughter survived from the union of John II and his wife, Elena Paleologus.

Charlotte, fourteen or fifteen years old, was proclaimed queen. She had been affianced to Janus, third son of Louis I and Anne, but for some reason this marriage was not carried out, and Louis, their second son, sailed to Cyprus, with a large train of savoyard attendants, and married the queen, thereupon being created Prince of Antioch.

But Charlotte had a half-brother, the bastard James II, who desired the kingdom for himself. Waging continuous battles and sieges against the queen and her Savoy spouse, finally, with the aid of outside powers, James II obtained the throne.

Coming to Europe, Charlotte continued, to the end of her days, to press her claim as legitimate ruler of Cyprus. She died in Rome and was buried in St. Peter's Church.

However, some time before her death, she had made a solemn donation of her ancient title to her nephew, Charles I of Savoy, through whom it passed on to Humbert II.

Some other day, we may explore the multiple reasons which prompted Marguerite de Charny to transfer the Shroud to Louis I of Savoy instead of some other prince; and why the Duke and Duchess were ready to acquire the most precious relic in Christendom, the Shroud of Our Lord Jesus Christ. For today, it is sufficient to note that the deed of transfer was recorded at the Duke's castle in Geneva on 22 March 1453.¹ It must have been planned some time in advance, for the very next day, 23 March 1453, Louis I issued a medal in honor of the Shroud. The long and illustrious association of the Shroud and the Savoys had begun.

NOTE

1. The year of the deed is given, about equally, as 1452 or 1453. André Perret, in "Essai sur l'histoire du Saint Suaire du XIV^e au XVI^e siècles" (*Memoires de l'Academie des Sciences Belles-lettres et Arts de Savoie*, 1960, pg 86 note 152) explains the confusion: "The Act of 22 March 1453 is inserted in the account of 1453 by Jean Guyot, chaplain of the castellany of Miribel, *Arch. dep. de la Côte-d'Or*. The summary inventory of the Archives of the Côte-d'Or erroneously date the Act to 22 March 1452. Consulting the document, we read 1453. This concerns 22 March 1453 (style of the Nativity) or maybe 1454 if it is based on the style of Easter."

Outside circumstances also indicate 1453.