

## **The Magdalene & The Sangraal**

**Chris Lovegrove**

**Journal of the Pendragon Society, pages 22-31  
Volume 15, Issue 2, Spring 1982  
(Amazing Grails Edition)**

### **Book Review**

**Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln  
The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail (pp 445, Jonathan Cape, 1982)**

Henry Lincoln's TV films and, recently, Michael Baigent's lectures to the Pendragon Society, have already given members an inkling of the subject-matter of this book, which reveals that the Grail is not quite what we may have thought...

In the 12th century a spate of Grail romances appeared, one after the other. The first was Chrétien de Troyes' unfinished *Le Roman de Perceval* or *Le Conte del Graal* in the 1180s. Chrétien was attached to the court of Champagne, but dedicated this work to Philippe d'Alsace, Count of Flanders. Next came Robert de Boron's *Roman de l'Estoire dou Saint Graal* (1190-99) which claimed, like Chrétien's romance, to be based on an earlier authority. It is Robert, not Chrétien, who claims the Grail is the cup of the Last Supper, also used by Joseph of Atimathea to catch Jesus' blood at the crucifixion.

Third comes the anonymous *Perlesvaus* or *Le Haut Livre du Graal* composed between 1190 and 1212. The Grail is guarded by Templar-like knights, and appears to Arthur in five guises – as a crowned crucified king, a child, a bleeding man wearing a crown of thorns, then in an unspecified form, and finally as a chalice. But mostly there is a secret about the grail “ought none tell openly”.

Finally there is the last of the 12th century romances that have survived, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* (1195-1216). Wolfram claims his version is superior to Chrétien's for it came from Flegetanis, an astrologer and scholar from Toledo. Flegetanis was, says Wolfram, a converted Jew descended from Solomon, whose ancestors worshipped a calf. From his astrological studies he learned of the mystery called the Grail, brought by angels to earth and guarded by Christians of noble lineage. Kyot the Provençal read this information in the original “heathen writing”,

corrected it with the story of a certain Mazadan and his family which he found in Anjou, and transmitted it all to Wolfram at Mayence in Germany in 1184.

Like Perlesvaus, Parzival has anachronistic Templar-like knights guarding the Grail, which itself is synonymous with an exclusive secret: “No man can ever win the Grail unless he is known in Heaven and he is called by name to the Grail.” In other words, the Grail is vouchsafed only to the chosen few. Those “called to the Grail” become part of the Grail company; the company in turn provide rulers for lands which have “lost” their lords, and the people there “must treat him with courtesy, for the blessing of God protects him.” But his lineage must be kept secret from the outside world – like the story of Parzival’s son Lohengrin, Knight of the Swan – for if he is asked his origins, he must leave the service to which he had been called.

This lineage is crucial to the story of Parzival and, as this book’s authors point out, Wolfram “devotes far more attention to (the Grail family) and their genealogy than to the mysterious object of which they are custodians.” Parzival is ultimately descended from Lasiliez (Lazarus?), son of Mazadan (Mazda?) and Terdelaschoye (le Terre de la Choix, The Chosen Land). Thus Parzival’s antecedents have more than a hint of the Middle East about them. Robert’s Perceval, and Perlesvaus, both have Joseph of Arimathea as an ancestor. In other words, Perceval-Perlesvaus-Parzival is a Christian of Judaic descent. This seems to have been important to the Grail romancers not just for pious reasons but because it bore some semblance of a true state of affairs.

The authors place stress on the name The Holy Grail, Sangraal in Old French. Robert de Boron first linked the Grail with Christ’s blood (in his *Joseph d’Arimathie* incidentally, not the anonymous and later *Estoire*), and it has been suggested that sangraal was not just san graal, holy grail, but sang raal, royal blood, the blood of Jesus. If Joseph was, as the story goes, entrusted with the receptacle of Jesus’ blood, are we mistaken as regarding the receptacle as a chalice or cup? Shouldn’t we instead, ask the authors, be thinking of the inheritors of a royal bloodline: the children of Jesus?

There is no space in this review to mention all the evidence – some substantial, some circumstantial – to support this book’s contention. But here, in outline, is the hypothesis it presents:

There are traces in the Old Testament of the tribe of Benjamin being persecuted by the other tribes for supporting worshippers of the goddess Belial (Judges 20-21). Some went into exile to Arcadia in Greece where they appear as the daughters of Danaus, son of King Belus in Greek myth; and these links with Arcadia, now ruled by Spartans, reappear in Maccabees 2 (5:9) and 1 (12:21). Some Benjamites migrated up the Danube and Rhine, where they intermarried with the ancestors of the Teutonic tribes which later became the Franks.

We turn now to Jesus, of the tribe of Judah, who was descended from King David and therefore in all likelihood not a poor carpenter but a Jewish aristocrat. He was also a rabbi and, as such, expected to marry. The Fourth Gospel, attributed to “John”, mentions what is probably Jesus’ own marriage, at Cana, and his wife is probably Mary of Magdala in Galilee (also known as Mary of Bethany in Judaea). Her brother, Lazarus, whom Jesus “raised from the dead,” is the otherwise anonymous “beloved disciple” of the Fourth Gospel and also its author.

Whatever the circumstances of Jesus’ death, Mary Magdalene and her children would probably have left Palestine for fear of persecution. Ninth century legends describe the Magdalene fleeing to Marseilles, and the later Grail Legends say she brought the sangraal with her, ie the holy bloodline of Jesus. She herself, the receptacle of the sangraal, traditionally died at Aix-en-Provence or Saint Baume. Jewish communities existed in southern Gaul, including Marseilles, at the time so this is not an unlikely point of disembarkation.

By the fifth century – the insular Arthurian period – Jesus’ lineage may have allied itself to the Franks from who sprang the Merovingian dynasty which ultimately turned ancient Gaul to modern France. But the later Merovingians could not explicitly state their ancestry, for to declare the mere humanity and mortality of Jesus was declared heretical by the Roman Church. Historically Jesus had been declared divine (by a vote) at the Council of Nicaea in 325 when Catholicism had become the orthodox state religion in succession to the cult of the “divine” Emperor; hence the secrecy which surrounded the origins of the Grail family in the romances – to claim descent from Jesus would be blasphemy.

Though the Sangraal legend became attached to the Arthurian period (the authors suggest this is due to the link between the “bear” origins of the name Arthur and the Greek myths of the bear of Arcady) the bloodline continued through the centuries. The Merovingian Franks, though ousted by the Carolingian dynasty in France, did not die out but allied

themselves by marriage with other noble families in Alsace, Anjou, Aquitaine, Brittany, Burgundy, Lorraine and other areas in Western Europe. One Merovingian, William or Guillem de Gellone, Duke of Toulouse, ruled the 9th century Semitic kingdom of Septimania (a principality straddling the Pyrenees which included Rennes-le-Château); he was, significantly, the subject of the unfinished poem *Willehalm* by Wolfram von Eschenbach; and he retired to an academy he had founded at Gellone (now St Guilhem-le-Desert), site of “one of one of the first known seats in Europe for the cult of the Magdalene” (c 792-5).

In the eleventh century the underground Merovingian dynasty made a dramatic bid to reclaim its heritage: the First Crusade was instigated in 1095 to reclaim for Christendom the Holy Land and Sepulchre from the Saracens. This was apparently a concerted plan by a Christian Jewish dynasty to gain for itself the kingship of the Jews claimed by Jesus. The otherwise obscure Godfroi de Bouillon (whose father is unknown to orthodox history) was created defender of the Holy Sepulchre, his brother Baldwin on his death becoming king of Jerusalem. They and successive kings of Jerusalem were supported by the obscure Order of Sion. This order used the Order of the Cistercians and the future Order of Knights Templar as a front for their operations in Europe and in the Holy Land, involving people like St Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter the Hermit, Hugues de Payen, Hugues count of Champagne, and Fulk count of Anjou, grandfather of Henry II of England. (It was from Anjou that some of the story of Parzival was taken at this time.)

In 1187 however Jerusalem was lost back to the Saracens. A year later, by the cutting down of an ancient elm at Gisors in France (in the presence of Henry II, his son Richard Coeur de Lion and Philip II of France) the formal links between the Order of Sion and the Templars were ritually severed. The Order of Sion became the Priory of Sion, as well as taking several other clandestine titles through history.

Much of the book traces Sion's subsequent history, and this almost reads like a *Who's Who* or *What's What* of the Occult and the Arcane – Rene d'Anjou, Joan of Arc, the Rosicrucians, Freemasons, the Royal Society, Leonardo da Vinci, Nostradamus, Richelieu, Poussin, the Protocols of the Elders of Sion/Zion, Debussy, even General de Gaulle are all, it seems, implicated with the Priory as it struggled to secure what it regarded as its rightful heritage. Because if this hypothesis is to be believed, the Priory has been slowly releasing information about itself to create a kind of universal “Grail” consciousness (the Rennes-le-Château enigma being a sprat to catch a mackerel) and the authors speculate about a “theocratic

United States of Europe...ruled by a dynasty descended from Jesus” being a present aim of Sion, “a kind of Second Coming”.

What is worrying is the number of mistakes and omissions in a book with so many shattering secrets to expose to the waiting public. For example, on p 251 it is stated that “according to one modern expert the Perlesvaus may actually have been written by a Templar.” But this argument is not actually put forward by the said expert, Richard Barber in *The Knight & Chivalry*; he merely observes that the Grail Knights’ Castle “might well be an idealised version of a castle of one of the military orders” (p 126, 1974 edition). Again, reference is frequently made to unspecified “traditions”: the Magdalene flees to Marseilles in legends “as early as the 4th century” (thus on p 248), but “the earliest written form of this tradition” is just before 856 (page 432 n); no mention is made of traditions of her death at Ephesus and re-interment at Constantinople in 899 AD.

It is true that some of the book’s arguments throw fresh light on obscure and puzzling aspects of the medieval Grail romances, and it is certainly tempting to re-read them all from this new vantage point. But it is as easy to read them all from other, equally plausible, viewpoints – vegetation cults, Celtic myth, psychological developments, social etiquette – and only Wolfram exhibits that particular “obsession” which shows itself in “the importance which he attaches to family relationship” (*Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages* p 242, ed R. S. Loomis). Grail scholarship is a morass into which the beginner strays at peril.

As to whether Jesus and the Magdalene really did begin a dynasty, two considerations apply here I think. Firstly whether or not they did is not as important as the question “Did the Priory of Sion believe that they did? ” Secondly, if there really is a Jesus dynasty – so what? This, I fear, will be the reaction of many of those prepared to accept the authors’ thesis as possible, and the book does not really satisfy one’s curiosity in this crucial area.

CHRIS LOVEGROVE