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Holy Blood, Holy Grail. By Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln (New York, Delacourt Press, 1982) 46. pp. \$15.95

The Murdered Magicians: The Templars and their Myth. By Peter Partner (New York, Oxford University Press, T982) .209 pp. \$29.50

The engaging thesis of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* holds that, instead of being crucified, Christ married Mary Magdalen, moved to the Riviera, and there engendered the ancestors of France's Merovingian dynasty. Even today, it seems, a lineal descendant stands in the wings, one whose advent might be, as the book's final sentence puts it, "a kind of Second Coming" (p.387). This interpretation finds little support, however, in *The Murdered Magicians*, a study first of the "real" Templars and then of the myths to which their suppression subsequently gave rise. As Partner shows, the Merovingian tale presented by Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln is little more than one small aspect of the modern Templar legend as filtered through centuries of Rosicrucianism and through some of the more occult layers of freemasonry.

Insofar as *The Murdered Magicians* is a serious scholarly book whereas *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* is not, one assumes instinctively that the approach, methodology, and research design of the former must stand head and shoulders above those of the latter. And within the traditional canons of history, that is undoubtedly so: one accepts Partner's conclusions in ways that would be unthinkable in the case of his rivals, authors whose previous work gives each credentials primarily as a photographer, a novelist, and a television producer. Still, it is not entirely perverse to argue that, for readers of this journal, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* is conceptually by far the more interesting book. This is not to suggest that anyone should actually read it: the improbability of its thesis is fully matched by the wretchedness of its style. At the same time; though, both in spite and because of such obvious shortcomings, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* ends up raising many more interdisciplinary issues than does *The Murdered Magicians*.

The Merovingians were hardly alone in having a creation myth. Across the Channel, for example, Yorkists and Tudors alike could trace their lineage back to progenitors who included, among others, King Arthur, Joseph of Arimathea, the emperor Constantine, assorted Trojans too numerous to name, and (wife to King Lear) a half-sister of the Virgin Mary. Such family trees became a commonplace throughout Europe by the end of the Middle Ages, and if it was alleged in Spain that the first

man to preach the Gospel there had been St. James the Greater, the English could counter with the claim that the first church at Glastonbury had been built by Jesus himself, thus neatly accounting for what he had been doing during those otherwise unchronicled years between his appearance in the temple at twelve and the beginning of his ministry at thirty.

Such myths have never been taken seriously by historians, but they should be. King Arthur did not belong just to the world of literature, and Mary Magdalen should not be dismissed out of hand as queen mother to the Merovingians. Such claims become ludicrous, of course, when accepted seriously, as *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* claims to do, but history which is blind to the role of myth can be equally misleading. The challenge is how to understand it properly, how to convey to the modern reader the importance of phenomena which are usually dismissed as either irrelevant or nonexistent.

Partner senses this reality and even understands that when Jacques de Molay, Grand Master of the Knights Templar, was burned at the stake for magic, heresy, blasphemy, and witchcraft in 1314, that was more the beginning of his story than its end. That it is, for example, that every year the White Mountain Priory #1 of the New Hampshire chapter of De Molay marches proudly in the parade which precedes the annual Vermont-New Hampshire all-star football game, sponsored by the Shriners. Yet Partner has no methodology or theory to help him explain why that should be. All he can do is to name names and site facts. In so doing, he becomes a good reference source, but not an author from whom one seeks significant or significantly new insights. As Partner himself recognizes, “The shifting history of Templarism . . . reflects the original Masonic confusion between the parable and the truth the parable was supposed to represent” (p.179). That is a reasonable thesis, unlike that of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, and one wishes only that he had been able to write a book illustrating it.

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