





The Pontremoli
Labyrinth,
marble, about
3 x 2 ft,
found recently
near Carrara,
Italy
(see p 15)



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SIC CVRRITE VT

COMPREHENDATIS

Kate Pollard
Patricia Villiers-Stuart
Steven Banks
Chris Lovegrove
R A Gilbert

PENDRAGON JOURNAL OF THE PENDRAGON SOCIETY



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Pendragon investigates Arthurian
history and archaeology and the
mystery and mythology of the
Matter of Britain. Opinions stat-
ed are those of the writers con-
cerned.

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EDITORIAL

AMAZING GRAILS

Some of the news and reviews held
over from the last issue appear
here, coalescing to form the ad
hoc themes of MAZES & GRAILS.
Member Michael Baigent has co-
authored a controversial book (on
the links between the Grail and
descendants of Jesus) which re-
ceives much space here, and John
Matthews, author of an excellent
recent book titled, simply, The
Grail, reviews new Arthurian fic-
tion. In addition, Paul Devereux
recounts a strange link between
Arthur's Table and a crystal said
to be the grail of the Cathars,
and Lind Griffiths comments on
the Nanteos "grail". As for mazes
Kate Pollard reports on the Pen-
dragon Maze Weekend, Patricia
Villiers-Stuart muses on a re-
cently discovered Italian laby-
rinth and Steven Banks investi-
gates the long and winding road
in southern Africa.

THEMES

The next two featured themes
will be HELEN and GLASTONBURY,
and we invite contributions
for these. We also welcome
items of all kinds, particu-
larly reviews: there seems to
be a spate of recent books on
Arthurian matters (eg by Andrew
Collins, Trevor Ravenscroft,
John Darrah etc) and we can't
keep track of them all! With
any luck BADON will--at last--
be the theme of the next
issue, and the following
issue will include as many
long outstanding articles as
possible.

BACK ISSUES

These are available at 30p
each (except those marked †
which are 50p) from the Sec-
retary:

Vol	No	Theme
X	4	Dragons
XII	2	Gawain
	4	Motley*
XIII	1	Arthur
	2	Mysteries
	3	Patterns*
	4	Cornwall
XIV	1	Grail Heresy
	2	Galahad
	3	Timeslip
	4	Old Stones
XV	1†	News & Views*

A for Arthur**

* Miscellanies

** Informal history of the
Pendragon Society

CHRIS LOVEGROVE
Editor





NOTICEBOARD

ACTIVITIES

Members wishing to take part in Pendragon functions organised in and around Bristol should write to the Secretary to ask to be put on the mailing list. A sample of recent / future events includes:

13-14 February: Bristol Maze Weekend (see report)

4 April: Outing to Hetty Pegler's Tump (Bette Midler's Stump as the natives don't call it) and Uleybury hillfort (bracing)

23 April: St George's Day outing to see "Beowulf" narrated by Julian Glover at Bristol Old Vic's Theatre Royal (enthraling)

25 April: An illustrated talk "The Future of the Past" by Dick Marsh on the conservation of the West Front of Wells Cathedral (stimulated much discussion on the ethics of 'restoration')

12 June: Joint Sangreal-Pendragon outing to Bath and the Roman excavations (revealing)

29 May-6 June: Llanelen Whitsun dig (see report)

8 August: Outing to Silchester and its Roman excavations, meeting at the Calleva Arms, Silchester at 12 pm (travelling)

Late August: Llanelen summer dig (promising)

THE MYTHOLOGY OF BRITAIN AND IRELAND

Two weekends of lectures, illustrated with readings and slides by Tim Porter at Highnam Court near Gloucester.

Dates: July 9-11, September 10-12. Fees: £34 residential, £29 non residential (all plus VAT). Details: Course Secretary, Highnam Court, Gloucester GL2 8DP (Tel 0452-22703).

GREEN BRANCH OPERA

The forthcoming production is The Irish Blackbird, a new ballad opera by Tim Porter, on tour in early August in the West Country. Details: Hans Hill Farm, Sezincote, Moreton-in-Marsh, Glos GL56 9TB (Tel 0386-700664).

28-30 October: Premiere of The Parliament of Fools, a new opera by Julian Broughton at the Camden Works Museum, Bath.

4-8 January 1983: The pantomime, The Marvels of Merlin by Tim Porter at the Folk House, Bristol.

THE INTERNATIONAL ARTHURIAN SOCIETY

We are asked occasionally about this Society aimed towards those with "a serious and scholarly interest in Arthurian studies". Founded in 1948 (at the second Arthurian Congress in Brittany) its objects are to hold congresses every three years with working sessions and excursions, to publish a Bibliographical Bulletin, and to maintain a Documentation Centre in Paris.

Application for membership of the British branch has to be supported by two members of the Society.

Details: Dr Alison Rawles (Secretary), French Department, The University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QL.

...continued p 6



THE HOLY SHROUD (continued)

It's possible that the famous Turin Shroud may have contributed to the legends of the "idol" or "head" revered by the Templars. It's even possible it contributed to certain aspects of the Holy Grail (see Ian Wilson The Turin Shroud, Penguin 1979 p 210; and Pendragon XII 3, 1979).



Wilson believes the image was imprinted by a burst of heat--perhaps evidence of the Resurrection --and this idea is taken up in Curious Facts Monthly (No 5 Sept 1981). The caption to a picture

of the Shroud in an article on Lightning Photography (or Keraunography) asks whether the image can be explained by "the ability of lightning to imprint 'photographic images' on human skin and other surfaces".

A recent Sunday Mirror report by Frank Durham on the Shroud Commission's findings suggests a more mundane explanation. Physicist Samuel Pellicori assumed that "putting a foreign substance on the cloth would make the image of the substance age at a different rate to its background." He therefore applied perspiration, olive oil, myrrh and other substances to a piece of modern linen.

Made of cellulose (like paper), linen yellows naturally when exposed to air, so Pellicori baked his sample to accelerate the process. "Lo and behold! I got an image. I got this darkened area where the foreign material had touched the cellulose... What caused the hauntingly mysterious (Shroud) image... was the accelerated structural degeneration of cellulose fibrils as a result of natural changes in the material."

Moreover, the Shroud tests have shown that it is stained with real, human blood. "This is a natural, logical explanation. It requires nothing supernatural, or pigments or paint stains..."

REDUNDANCY NOTICE

The parish church of St Mary, Gateshead stands on the site of a church founded by the Venerable Bede in the 8th century (though the present church is largely medieval). It was closed in 1978. Vandalised. Set on fire. Declared

"redundant" in 1980. Now the Diocese of Durham wants to demolish it, despite the alternative uses offered for it. "The go-ahead C of E HATES old buildings," says Piloti (of Private Eye's Nooks & Corners, 9.10.81) and notes these relative statistics for Church Commission spending:

Church buildings	3%
Administration	11%

IN MERRY CARLISLE

"King Arthur lives in merry Carleile, And seemly is to see; And there with him Queene Guenever, That bride so bright of blee..." So recounted the ballad, The Marriage of Sir Gawaine.

But current rescue excavations (in advance of a £12m shopping centre in part of the 5 acre historic town centre) have mostly revealed its Roman past, a past it appears of international archaeological importance. Not only have a temple and sophisticated mansio come to light, but also (uniquely for Britain) Roman timber buildings standing above floor level. Having established that Carlisle was founded about 82 AD, director Mike McCarthy could hope that modern Carlisle will redeem its poor conservation record by celebrating its 1900th birthday with style.

As for Arthurian Carlisle, we await news.

CULT OF THE HEAD

A fine stone head is causing headaches for investigators trying to find its origins. It was claimed to have been dug up on a farm near Llandyssul in West Wales before the last war but enquiries had drawn a blank.

The curator of Carmarthen museum resorted to a newspaper ap-



peal for help (South Wales Evening Post 8.4.82). Mrs E M Griffiths, who brought the article to our notice, writes "There is a story that this particular skull (sic) was brought to the Llandyssul area and whoever possessed it had had luck..."

A paper about the head is due to appear in the Journal of the Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society by the curator of Carmarthen Museum.

THE MAGIC CROSS

On April Fool's Day Pendragon's secretary Kate Pollard was visited by a couple claiming to be from The Western Daily Press. They then asked her for her views on the Glastonbury cross found in a lake in North London and now buried somewhere in England by its discoverer.

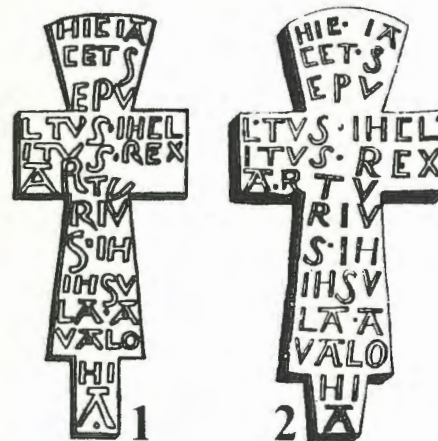
This highly unlikely story was reported in the national press the next day too, so it wasn't after all a hoax. But the story remains rather weird.

Derek Mahoney, dubbed as an

"amateur archaeologist" (more suspiciously, an unemployed pattern-maker) found what he claimed was the famous lead cross unearthed by monks in 1191 from King Arthur's grave at Glastonbury. His brother saw it, the British Museum's expert, a Mrs Webster saw it--but because of a dispute with the legal profession, and his belief in the cross's magical powers, Mr Mahoney buried it secretly. Enfield Council successfully prosecuted him for retaining an object discovered on their land (near Forty Hall, Enfield) and he was jailed for two years for contempt of court.

"I will not hand the cross over. While I have it I have power and authority," he said. "I will not hand it over until such time as the rule of law is reinstated in this country..."

"I will not take any responsibility for anything which happens to the cross, which I have buried. I am the only person who knows where it is..."



The cross alleged to have been found by Mr Mahoney is about 7 inches long. This ties in with

the only known illustration of the cross which comes from the 6th edition of William Camden's Britannia (1607) where it measures six and seven-eighths inches, presumably a full-scale facsimile (Fig 1). Contemporary descriptions say it was fixed below a stone placed above Arthur's coffin. The lettering in Camden's illustration has suggested to some that it was made and placed there in the 10th century by St Dunstan.² Interestingly a similar sized lead pectoral cross was rediscovered recently in nearby Wells Cathedral in the tomb of its last Saxon bishop, Giso (1061-88).³

Mr Mahoney's "power and authority" rest in his withholding of a valuable testimony to the historicity of Arthur. It also could point to the earliest known link between Glastonbury and Avalon, for the Latin inscription, traslated, reads "Here lies buried the famous King Arthur in the Isle of Avalon."

Or it could merely indicate the skill of a former pattern-maker for without material evidence we shall never know whether it is a 6th century or 10th century mortuary cross, a 12th century pious fraud, a late medieval copy or a 20th century hoax. And however did it get to Enfield after its last reported whereabouts with Chancellor Hughes of Wells in the 18th century?⁴

1 R Gledhill & A Laker "The Rebel of Camelot" WDP 2.4.82

2 L Alcock Arthur's Britain (Penguin 1973 73ff)

3 W Rodwell Wells Cathedral: Excavations & Discoveries 1980 17ff

4 G Ashe "The story behind Arthur's lost cross" Western Daily Press 3.4.82.

Note on illustrations

Whether the Enfield cross claimed by Derek Mahoney as genuine is so or not, it will be interesting to see how closely it resembles the various depictions since the 1607 edition of Camden's *Britannia*. There were altered versions in the 18th century translations of Camden (eg R Gough's 1789 3 volume translation) when the cross was last known to be in Wells; note the curved shoulders for example (fig 3). *The Avalonian Guide to the town of Glastonbury and its Environs* (8th ed 1839) clearly owes some debts to these 18th century versions: note the extra "blips", maybe nails, in Fig 2.



Fig 3 courtesy Bristol Museum, from Gough Vol I Pl V p 59 Fig 2.

Credits Steve Paske, Peter Ratazzi, Enid Griffiths, D Edwards.

COUNCIL FOR BRITISH ARCHAEOLOGY

The CBA publishes a Newsletter and Calendar of conferences, courses and excavations in Britain nine times a year. Those interested in obtaining experience on digs should consult the calendar; the initials MEM (Migration & Early Medieval) indicate excavations which are of most interest to Dark Age enthusiasts. Details: CBA, 112 Kennington Rd, London SE11 6RE



Silhouette of Wells Cathedral

Kate Pollard

Letters

* In the "Timeslip" issue I wondered if it was likely that Thomas Becket was not only a surrogate victim but also a Cathar as claimed in a recent novel. From Ivor Snook, Exmouth, Devon:

"The idea of the ritual murder of a king to promote the fertility of the land is widespread amongst the early nature/fertility religions. Stories about the 'wasted lands' in the Grail stories and British legends are connected with it. But there is no reason to connect it with the Cathars as though it was special to them. Students of wicca would include William the Conqueror, William Rufus, Henry II, Edward II, and even Henry VIII as kings who were either ritually murdered or made use of substitutes to die on their behalf."

From Patricia Villiers-Stuart
London:

"Reading your Editorial brings to mind a bit of, shall we say, Low History that has always stuck in my mind. After poor Beckett was murdered (ritually or just in plain annoyance or jealousy), as his body cooled an abundance of fleas were seen to be leaving his hair shirt. No doubt in search of warmer lodgings. This wasn't from a romantic novel but in some factual account of a nearby monk."

Crystal grail

* From Paul Devereux, Welshpool, Powys, Wales:

"I found the 'Old Stones & Megaliths' issue good reading as usual, and I can add a bit of a postscript to Chris Lovegrove's 'The Grail as Stone'

piece: I don't think I've ever committed it to writing before.

He refers to the crystal unearthed by Colin Bloy in SE France in circumstances that indicated that it may be a grail associated with the Albigensians, Templars or what-have-you.

In 1979 Colin kindly gave me a fragment of this unusual crystal. I took this with me when I joined John Steele for a 2-man expedition to the Moel-ty-Uchaf circle on the Berwyn, north-mid-Wales, as part of the Dragon Project, in the July of that year. Moel-ty-Uchaf, some *Pen-dragon* readers might recall, sits on the side of Arthur's Table mountain which was shown to be the epicentre of an extraordinary fireball/tremor/explosion/geophysical display in January 1974. Subsequent investigation by scientists failed to explain what had occurred.

The circle displays some sophisticated groundplan geometry and is one of the best-preserved in the British Isles according to Professor Thom. It has two gaps in its circumference which are believed to be original to the construction and not occasioned by missing stones. The stones themselves are relatively small with one that seems to have a perfectly horizontal top. The site is most impressive by virtue of its stunning location and its protective ambience. It is a good site to be at. When I first visited it in the mid-70s it had a quartz block set inside the ring of stones, but by 1979 someone had taken it away leaving only the socket hole made by the small lump of crystal.

Steele and I were visiting the site as part of the Dragon Project's programme of taking readings at a variety of sites other than the Rollright Stone.

in Oxfordshire. On this occasion we were to concentrate on infra-red photography and ultrasonic monitoring. We set up camp on the mountainside within sight of the stones, and spent about three days at the site.

We completed our infra-red session, using black and white and colour IR film and a range of exotic IR filters loaned by Hasler of Kodak. Some odd results were obtained, but nothing comparable to effects recorded at the Kingstone, Rollright (see The Ley Hunter 87). The ultrasonic monitoring was, however, disappointing. The meter registered no activity at all for the first couple of days. Then I suddenly remembered the fragment of crystal grail (as opposed to Crystal Gale!) that I had brought along. What was there to lose? We placed the fragment in the hole vacated by the original quartz lump that had inhabited the circle, and left it there throughout the day. AT NO TIME DID ANYONE ELSE VISIT THE SITE--the stones were never out of our view. As sunset approached, I took the ultrasonic detector and walked up the rise from the camp to the stone ring. Within yards of the circle I saw the meter registering a response. Although the movement was small it was extremely noticeable after the 48 hours of inactivity up to that point. I called to Steele, and we surveyed the whole site, registering distinct ultrasonic emissions.

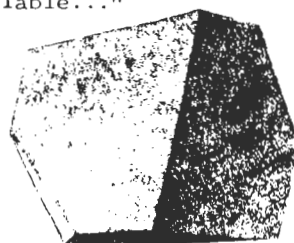
It was only after 20 minutes that we remembered the crystal fragment we had placed in the circle. Could it really have had an effect? We were

sceptical. We moved over to the hole and were shocked to find the crystal in a hundred fragments--shattered. Apart from being amazed, I was somewhat perturbed that the crystal was in such a state after it had been entrusted to my care--I must say that Colin was most understanding about the incident, seeing its potential significance as we did.

To this day I cannot decide what happened. It has to be an extraordinary energy effect or else, as a mundane explanation, a sheep put its foot in the hole and beat hell out of the crystal--an explanation that borders on the absurd, but has to be put in for a balancing viewpoint.

Shortly after the 1974 incident, Keith Critchlow witnessed a geiger counter going berserk at Moel-ty-Uchaf, and in 1981 the Dragon Project was able to find a geiger "hotspot" on the perimeter of the stone ring. Odd energies are clearly present at the site. The ultrasonic detector did function for the first time only after the deposit of the crystal within the circle. And subsequent analysis at Leicester University by Don Robins of a piece of the crystal did confirm that the material was highly energetic in electronic terms.

So there you have it--make of it what you will... the events of the day we took the grail to Arthur's Table..."



Nanteos Cup

* From E M Griffiths, Llanmorlais, Gower:

"Re the Nanteos cup (Timeslip Olde News), I knew Mrs Powell very well. She told me that The Cup had been taken from Glastonbury to Strata Florida by monks for safe-keeping at the time of

the dissolution of the monasteries and there is a brass tablet in a Cotswold Church (Ozleworth, Glos. Ed) stating that it had rested there one night on its way to Wales.

When it was Strata Florida's time to be demolished the monks fled to Nanteos and begged the family to keep The Cup until its return was requested by Glastonbury. A replica was made, and is still at Nanteos. Mrs Powell had been offered £30,000 for the cup from America and refused it! The Cup was last in the custody of her grand-daughter, a Mirylees, who moved to somewhere in Herefordshire when last heard of. This is the true story of 'The Cup' as far as we know in Wales...

I did not think the Nanteos Cup was what it was claimed to be, it looked more like a monk monk's begging-bowl. It has 2 gold rivets holding the badly cracked parts together, but when a silver band had been put around the rim to further strengthen it Mrs Powell claimed the healing stopped. So she had to remove the silver rim. Knowing how the priests had hoodwinked superstitious people in the past, and the need for funds to restore the Glastonbury Library, one doubts very much the real truth behind half the miraculous claims made. Nanteos it-

self was sold to scrap merchants, and is again up for sale."



Chariots of the...?

* From Steve Blackburn, 25A Lowdon Court, Richardson Rd, Newcastle NC2 4BL:

"On behalf of Newcastle University Arthurian Society I have a couple of pressing problems to mention. By devious and diverse methods we have acquired two solid 5ft diameter wheels and were wondering if chariot designs might be forthcoming from members. It's just that we have these wheels which we do not want to waste and that this is the only purpose to which they can be put. I would also like to find out if chariots were a contemporary vehicle in Post-Roman Britain.

We have also acquired a considerable amount of tent material and I would also be very interested to find out about the designs of tents used on campaign. If any members feel they can help in either of these ways please write to me at this address and I will try to refund postage. This will almost certainly be done unless I am the victim of an avalanche of letters..."

Welsh circle

* From Chris Turner, Llandewi Brefi, Dyfed:

"Most peeved to have missed the maze-weekend. While you were making your maze, I went for a country walk to console myself and commune with you all. I went up the mountains behind Llan-gollen and walked across some spectacular limestone cliffs that go by the name Craig Arthur to see a couple of Standing Stones shown on the map. The smaller stone is sweet, about four feet tall. The local farmer has treated it with the contempt that the Welsh treat anything BW (before Wesley) and drilled a hole through it to tie his fence on to. There seemed to be a dowsable line between them. Making a triangle with them is the sweetest Stone Circle. about 45-50 feet diameter. About 20 stones. I had no paper or pencil and was short on time, but intend going back soon with compass and all. The circle, of course, isn't mentioned on the map.

OS refs: Craig Arthur SJ 225472
Stone Circle SJ 228452

Sheet 117 Chester
1 : 50,000 Landranger Series."

King Jesus...

* From Rosanne H Graham, N Northampton:

"Holy Blood, Holy Grail is really strange. On first reading it is shatteringly convincing. On a second reading, one wonders. It is still a tremendous effort of research and I am glad to have it, but I see a few weaknesses which I missed before. (Has anyone noticed that they repeat

whole sentences in some places, with a chapter or two in between?)...

One thing strikes me too: the authors ignore the Turin Shroud. They mention it (I think from memory) once, and only in passing. But it is a fact. True, we do not know what it is, but there seems no escaping the fact that it is not a forgery in the sense of being painted or dyed. If HB/HG is right, the Shroud is meaningless...

The evidence for Jesus' marriage does seem convincing, and here I agree with the view expressed. Celibacy and spirituality are not synonymous terms...

This is a very different matter from putting the Merovingians back on the throne just because they happened to be descended from him--and they are surely not the only ones who were, if he had children at all. Jesus' descendants are only his descendants: not himself; and have no more right to rule countries other than their own than have the descendants of Montezuma or Buffalo Bill..."

...and Arthur too

* From Roy Nickerson, Carmel (California):

"In Pendragon Vol XV No 1 I notice a letter which suggests HRH the Prince Charles should perhaps become King Arthur upon his accession to the Throne. May I suggest we might rather ask that he become Arthur II?"

Holy Thorn:

Timeslip slip-ups

* From Isolde Wigram, Little Horsted, Sussex:

"Just one point I wanted to take up from the last Pendragon, viz the reference on p 2 to the Holy Thorn in the grounds of Washington Cathedral which blossoms 'whenever someone from the British Royal Family visits there' (XIV, 3). The comment was that it blossomed when Prince Charles was there in May (1981), but as that is its normal flowering time anyway, the royal guests only have to go at the right time for this to happen!

However this does not explain a similar flowering when the Queen went there in July 1976, and I am inclined to think there is more in this than meets the eye. Even if the story of the thorn's origin was made up by a Glastonbury innkeeper in the 18th century (which I don't entirely believe), there is something very special about the thorn, and I am not all that surprised that as an expatriate in Washington, it pays tribute to our Royal Family. The Queen symbolises the soul of this nation which, if the prickles up my spine which I get on royal occasions did not prove to me how deep this goes, would be proved by the miraculous good-humoured response which they evoke. Compare the behaviour of the crowds (the majority young at the Royal Wedding) with the riots and football hooliganism!"

* Ivor Snook also comments:

"I agree that we must treat 'ancient traditions' critically, but that is exactly what the writer did not do when he cast aside the Glastonbury Thorn

tradition as 'invented in the 18th century by an innkeeper'. Maybe he cunningly revived it for commercial reasons, but in fact it was widely believed at least two hundred years earlier (see Richard Pyerson, Life of Joseph of Arimathea, 1520 or Dr Layton's report on Glastonbury to Cromwell, 1535). It is evidently the innkeeper who has been invented. Of course this does not prove the tradition is correct, only that it has ancient origins..."

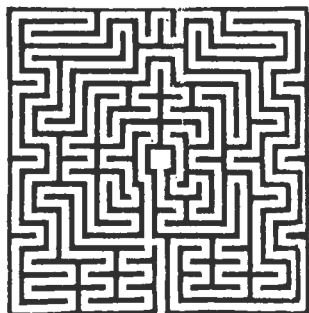
* The 18th century innkeeper appeared in Francis Hitching's World Atlas of Mysteries, perhaps not the most reliable of sources, and I am glad that readers are quick to pick up on my rather slovenly slip-ups: Ed. Another note from Ivor Snook:

A-Rome-ing

"I am sorry to hear of various people searching all over Britain for 'Roma Secunda', which is in fact Glastonbury. It was first called this by William of Malmesbury in his De Antiquitate Glastoniensis Ecclesiae c 1125, and the name clung to Glastonbury for hundreds of years afterwards."



St Joseph's Arms (16th century)
St John's. Glastonbury (window)



BRISTOL MAZE WEEKEND

February 13-14 1982
Report by KATE POLLARD

THE MWE & AGM

What was the origin--we asked in PENDRAGON November 1971--of the quote: "where in the likeness of a marigold Meridianes sitteth in a maze"?

Well--un-marigoldlike, the Pendragon Soc satteth in a maze when this year's AGM culminated the Maze Weekend Get-together in February.

And to all you members who re-torted, on receiving your maze weekend notices: "In mid-February--they have to be joking"; or "Mazes? They're off the wall this time" as you scrumpled them up and lobbed them at the bin / cat--all I can say is, shame you didn't come, it was a lovely weekend

During last December's worst snowfall, Chris Turner of Pantygarreg stone circle fame and with the previous summer's maze building experience to go on called by with a pile of the

delightful Caerdroia Project magazines to which he contributes, full of his latest researches into the maze connection.

So the idea of the Maze Weekend was born. After all, didn't Guy Underwood say that Bristol was an ancient Labyrinthine town and wasn't Pendragon born in the turf maze town of Winchester?

Adrian Fisher kindly promised to take time off from Minotaur Designs latest maze building commitments (sadly his partner was ill and couldn't join us) to come and tell us more about mazes, and specifically to describe the symbolism and the building methods of their modern mazes built for clients in England and Europe.

We hoped to lay out a permanent maze in Bristol but this proved not to be feasible at such short notice, so we settled for a temporary maze in a central park.

The weekend duly arrived and our expected visitors arrived: some of our friends from RILKO (who have supported us for ten years now during various projects: the Carmarthenshire Zodiac, the early Llanellen digs and numerous AGMs); long-distance medals should go to our members from Blackburn and S Humberside and to Mary Turner representing Llandewi Brefi

Beautifully illustrated lectures were interposed by companionable visits to the pub / Roslyn Road, and Sunday Morning found us on a hill in the middle of Bristol with the city laid out around us in brilliant sunshine.

A Cretan design had been decided on--and the materials had been kindly donated by the

Highways Department and the metal pegs specially designed by Steve Paske. It became an additional self-set problem to lay out the maze without cutting the rope.

I can only describe the actual laying out and subsequent walking of the maze as a powerful experience ending an interesting and happy weekend, and thank all those concerned for making it so --AND the warband of Vikings led by Kim Siddorn who kindly came along to lend emphasis to the fact that weaponry is no match for magic.

Since then there has been an epidemic of mazes and suggestions for permanent sites.

Illustrated is the one built by Rupert and Delfo (left) near our dig, using the Gower's cockle-shells.

Here are three suggestions for your experiment:

Try making a maze (even just inscribed on the ground) and,

once it has been thoroughly walked, dowsing the site after it has been removed.

More flippantly--improve the amenities of your holiday resort by making one on the beach!

Make one for your favourite person's birthday.

Instructions for the Cretan design to start with:

First: a cross



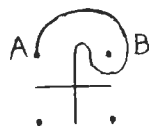
Then four dots



Colin Walls



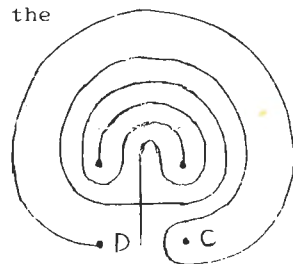
Dot A around
dot B & to its
point on the cross



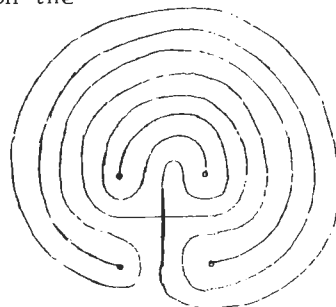
Dot B around
dot A & to its
point on the
cross



Dot D around
dot C & to its
point on the
cross



AND FINALLY
dot C around
dot D & to its
point on the
cross



Top picture: The Viking assault
on Brandon Hill!
(photo: R D Webster)

Secret of the Christian Labyrinth



PATRICIA VILLIERS-STUART

THE PONTREMOLI LABYRINTH

Recently my husband came back from a trip to see about casting in Italy near the famous Carrara marble quarries and he brought back a plaster cast of this labyrinth which had lately been excavated nearby.

Apparently his Italian caster had been the one to take casts of the find and he had been allowed to take a few extra ones. My husband asked to be given some details of exactly where it was found and what was thought of it, and was given a well-illustrated book of all the antique finds in that area published in 1972. However the labyrinth was not among them and they are all about BC 3000, very interesting Moon-cult objects and daggers, but nothing maze-like.

The daughter of the German publisher Dr Fischer, in whose house my husband saw the first reproduction of the maze, referred us to an Englishwoman who seems to have something to do with Thames & Hudson. The Englishwoman said: Write to the Museum at Spezia...

The story was quite a strange one. The bas-relief was from the 12th century, and had been on the wall of the church known as St Peter's-of-the-Confluence at Pontremoli. This was a small town in northern Italy at the confluence of pilgrim routes going both north to the shrine of St James of Compostella and south to Rome and finally the Holy Land. The bas-relief must have served as a sign to intending pilgrims that here they would be welcomed and protected (two knights greeting each other over a Christian-style labyrinth, with a quotation from St Paul, SIC CURRITE UT COMPREHENDATIS, underneath--"So course in order to comprehend"). It had lasted till the 16th century when the whole church had crumbled, and was not rebuilt till the 18th century; however it was not until its 20th century destruction by aerial bombardment that the knights and their labyrinth once more saw daylight.

THE ROAD TO JERUSALEM

The pattern of the original prehistoric labyrinth associated with Crete and Troy is also to be found among the Hopi Indians of America, as well as in Tibet and all over Europe. The more recent labyrinths (which might be called Christian, since they feature mostly in cathedrals and churches) are of a more complex pattern. The centre, which is larger, is placed in exactly the true combined centre; and this was often designated as Jerusalem, the end of the quest, in contrast to the old examples where the fearsome Minotaur was supposed to lurk at their heart. In number structure the radius is geared to 100, with subdivisions of 30, 30, 40.

These new labyrinths presented me with a problem: who had made the change, and why? I often felt inclined to favour the Knights

Templar, that powerful and yet relatively short-lived band of warrior monks, sworn to the protection of pilgrims, who soon found themselves running a vast religio-commercial network--a harbinger of the Common Market, as one historian put it. They built round Temple churches and seemed to have strong links with mathematicians and sages of both Islamic and Jewish origin. Their knowledge was reputed to have come from excavations they made in the ruins of the Temple of Solomon.

A suggestive Templar-labyrinth link is the fact that in the splendid frescoes of the Medici Chapel in Florence a pilgrimage is shown. The Three Kings, Wise Men and their many contemporary followers are on the way to Bethlehem. Behind one of the horsemen sits a tame panther; there are altogether four panthers in this fresco, two tame and two wild. Their presence is explained by their being the emblem of the nearby town of Lucca: Lucca was an important Templar centre and in the cathedral there is a labyrinth on one of the pillars, exactly similar to the one at Pontremoli.

However, I still felt baffled. Suppose the Knights Templar did use the amended form of the labyrinth as their 'logo' or sign of their movement, what does it tell us? Does this labyrinthine sign give a more complete expression to our development than any other one? Show us that we are more complex than bees or snowflakes, have greater powers than apples or starfish, are even superior to the cruciferae family of the mustard seed: give us a glimpse of the holographic crystalline structure of our minds as they guide our bodies? Show us, in terms of numbers, how we have to reconcile ourselves to the even and the odd, to give us a whole vision that is greater and even more mysterious than its path?

Below left A roof-boss in St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol conforms to the standard Christian labyrinth type, a link perhaps with a nearby Templar church. Below right A Templar seal--two knights on one horse. CL



The Feathered Track

STEVEN BANKS

The aborigines of South Africa were the Khoisan, divided into the 'Hottentots', who herded cattle and sheep, and the 'Bushmen', who were hunters and gatherers of wild foods. The 'Hottentots'--so called by the Dutch settlers because of their clicking gulping speech--have been politically absorbed into the 'coloured' people but their small lithe bodies, sharp features, russet skin and pepper-corn hair are still among us here at the Cape. Such are the looks of an electrician working in the house as I write.

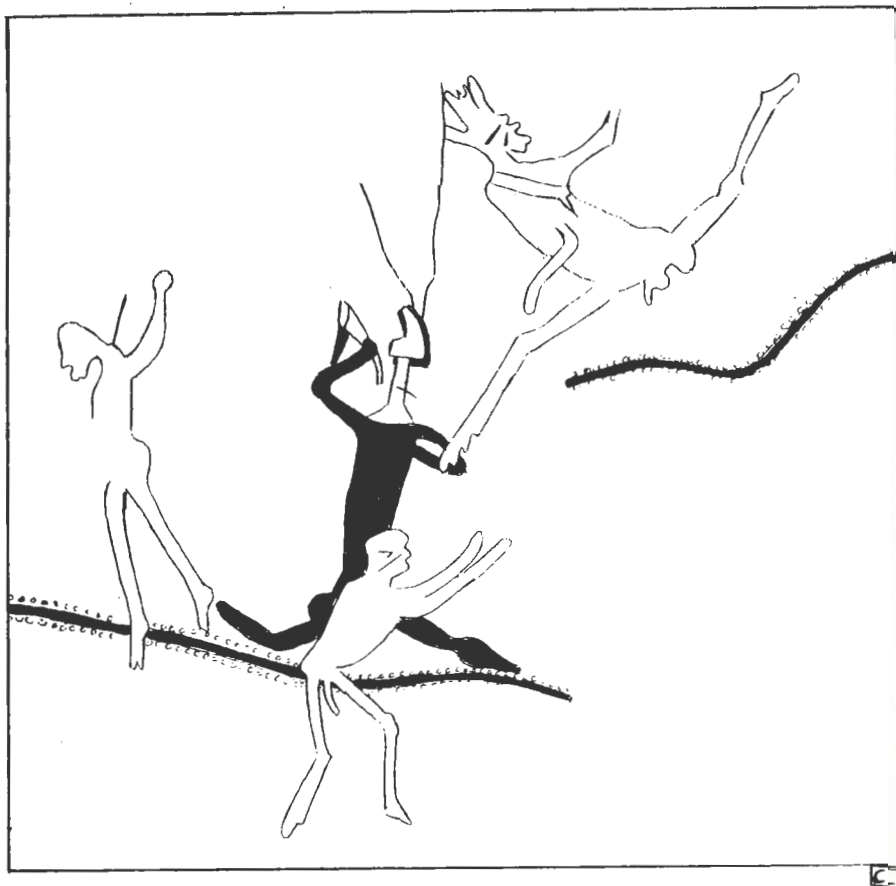
As to the Bushmen, only a few years ago few people had a good word to say for them: they were ignorant heathen, naked and idle. Early last century the nearer parts of the interior of Africa over which they roamed were settled by Europeans, consequently Bushmen only survive in the Kalahari; but they are no longer despised. Indeed such expressions as 'the harmless people', and 'a way of life perfected' are used in reference to these little people who were called 'bosjemen' because they made their temporary shelters of leafy boughs.

Like nomadic folk in other parts of the world since time began, the Bushman paints and engraves on such flat surfaces as he finds in his wanderings. Over six thousand sites of his art have been recorded, and it is estimated that thousands more remain to be found. The subjects are largely the relationship between man and the animals which are both worshipped and slain by him. This is essentially the same as at Lascaux, or in the caves painted by the Waitaha tribe on the Canterbury Plain in New Zealand.

One recurring element in Bushman pictographs, "a sinuous red line fringed with white dots", is the subject of an article in The South African Archaeological Bulletin for June 1981. The author, J D Lewis-Williams of the University of the Witwatersrand, concludes "Perhaps the line symbolised, in some but by no means all instances, the trajectory of a man on out-of-body travel and the white drops either drops of sweat... or even the footprints of a medicine man moving along the route." Earlier in the article reference is made to an Australian aboriginal ritual which uses a rope fringed with white feathers, and this alerted me as a feathered rope was also used by the Chumash Indians of the Californian coast for mystical journeys among the stars by their shamans. I believe that similar observations of the material world, at different times and places, may lead to the same supernatural truth, and here I suggest that the sinuous red line fringed with white dots, and the feathered ropes of Chumash and Australian aborigine are derived from the skeins of wildfowl which wing their purposeful way through all our skies. The Bushmen of southern Africa would see the Pygmy and Spurwing geese of the Okavango food-plain--for the Kalahari is happily not a true desert--and there would be many seasonal flights along the west coast of N America and across the interior of Australia.

It is not by chance that the "grey goose feather" was used to

fletch an arrow. Merlin would have known that the true flight of the bird and the arrow are related. I wonder if he also knew of the feathered cord for out-of-body travels.



Bushman painting (detail)
Cullen's Wood, Elliott, Cape Province
(After J D Lewis-Williams)
This is taken from the central panel of a four metre group of pictures. CL

Celtic inter-
lace and
meander, from
early medieval
Welsh crosses:



BOOK REVIEWS

Lloyd and Jennifer Laing
The Origins of Britain
RKP / Book Club Associates;
Paladin-Granada 1981

The first in a series, *Britain Before the Conquest*, this book deals with Britain and its occupants from first recorded remains to the Bronze Age and it does so extremely well. The authors have a happy knack of sticking firmly to the point both geographically and chronologically so that a coherent picture of human development in these islands emerges with a rare clarity. Particularly fascinating is a secondary theme which deals with the different ways in which antiquaries (from mediaeval monks to Mortimer Wheeler) have viewed the evidence for prehistoric man and the conclusions (some quite extraordinary) which they drew therefrom.

Perhaps the most depressing aspect of this history is the way in which Man's development appears to be determined by his ability to produce new and more destructive weapons. And it is distressing to note that, in the early stages, the most obvious attribute of his transition from savagery to embryonic civilisation is that he seems to pass from killing something and eating it to killing someone and eating theirs! Plus ça change...? On the debit side, the book--although attractively laid out--would have benefitted greatly from some colour plates, particularly of the Beaker and Wessex goldwork.

R D WEBSTER



Sandra Unerman
Trial of Three
Dobson 1981

Here is something new made of something old. Borrowing from the earliest, strangest versions of the Arthurian Mythos, Sandra Unerman has created a powerful story full of those glints of high magic one expects from a skillful handling of mythopoic elements. Arthur's three best knights: Cei, Bedwyr and Gawain (who are always amongst the heroes named in the earliest cycles of stories) are tested by power both of this world and the other. In a brilliant re-working of the earliest version of the Gawain and the Green Knight story, with elements of Irish and Welsh myth thrown in, the three heroes face each new danger with a mixture of courage and dour determination. They encounter dangers of many kinds, shape-shifting lords, monsters, the Wild Hunt with Herla its terrifying leader, and things even older and more strange. They succeed, as they must, not without suffering and loss, in upholding the good name of Arthur and his court, and each wins some new understanding of himself.

As this is Miss Unerman's first book one expects occasional flaws and lapses, and these there are. But they are rare, and she excels in the description of magical events and has a crisp firm style laced with flashes of poetry--the mixture as prescribed. There is a suggestion of further books to come, and I for one will look forward eagerly to reading them.

JOHN MATTHEWS

Andrew M Greeley
The Magic Cup
 McGraw Hill 1981

The author calls this book "an Irish Grail story", but we will find no shining cup or Christian knight engaged on the quest for the Holy Relic of Christ's passion. Instead we have the story of the High King of Ireland and his quest for the magic princess Delvecaem, which leads him through many trials before he recognizes that the object of his search was with him all the time in the shape of his servant Brigid, as fascinating a creation of the romantic notion of what an archetypal Irishwoman is really like as we are likely to come across anywhere. In his journey and adventures with her, Cormac learns more about himself than he has ever learned from his time in the monastery of the Abbot Colum--for Cormac is a Christian at a time when Ireland hovered between the New Way and the Old. His voyage with Brendan the Navigator is one of self-discovery, as is his quest. For what Mr Greeley has discovered is perhaps the most important fact about the Grail--that it is more often than not right here in front of us, familiar but unrecognized, either in the person of a loved friend, or even closer--within ourselves. The Magic Cup is both exciting and entertaining, and Mr Greeley has a firm grip of both the archaeology and culture of 6th century Ireland. Perhaps he lacks a little in the depth of his interpretation, but the dialogue is rich and salted with life and wisdom. Something of a romantic American idea of Ireland then, but a not unworthy addition to the literature of the Grail.

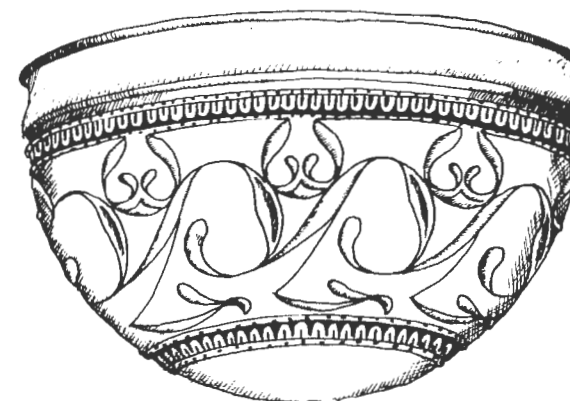
JOHN MATTHEWS

David Drake
The Dragon Lord
 Berkley / Putnam 1981

Starting with the name "Pen-dragon", and taking a further clue from the dragon standard of Arthur, David Drake reaches a startling conclusion--that Arthur, in his almost insane hatred of the Saxons, demands of Merlin that he create a dragon to burn the enemy from the land. And this Merlin does, aided by the two unlikely heroes of this strange novel. Meal, an outlawed Irish warrior, and his giant Danish companion Starkad, journey to find and bring back the skull of a lake monster, and from this the wizard creates a wyvern, at first tiny but rapidly growing to the size of a house and with no limit set to its growth. So, after a detour to describe the battle of Dubhglass, and for further adventures, the story reaches its shattering climax in a battle with the dragon.

David Drake is one of the few among writers of Arthurian novels to be aware of the military details of the period. The battle scenes and details of the armour are as authentic as they can be and carry the stamp of conviction. The story is written at breakneck speed, carrying the reader on the crest of excitement. Fantastic, tinged with more than a hint of "sword and sorcery", David Drake's novel is another in the recent manifestation of "anti-Arthurian" works. Arthur is thus a madman, Merlin a giggling fool, Lancelot a butcher. But the larger-than-life character of the two heroes more than makes up for this, and one can only hope for more of their adventures in the future.

JOHN MATTHEWS



Christine Bristow

John Matthews
The Grail: Quest for the Eternal
 Thames & Hudson 1981 £1.95
 118 illustrations, 15 in colour
 95pp

This interesting illustrated book showing the many associated facets of the Grail mystery makes a welcome addition to the library of Grail literature.

For the novice it makes a suitable source book, and for the more widely read initiate its many illustrations may open up new lines of thought--not only an art-book for those who like looking at pictures but a genuine attempt to define the Grail mystery as seen through the eyes of different cultures across the centuries.

RITA MORENO

This book is a recent addition to Thames & Hudson's Art and Imagination series, and we are grateful to author and publisher for supplying a review copy.

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Ancient & Modern
 Ed Andrew Lownie & Simon Winder

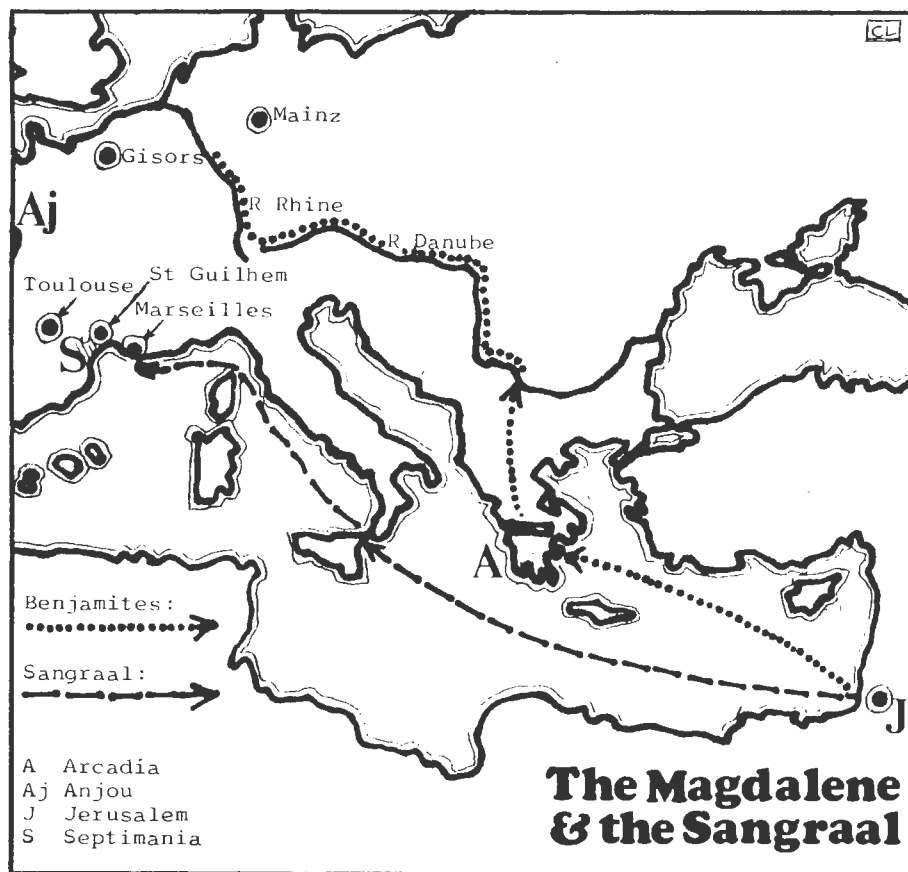
This history magazine, edited by Oxbridge undergraduates, is a delight to read for it manages

to convey some of the enthusiasm of committed historians for their subject without disguising their personal attitudes. History is about interpretation, not mere roasting of facts, and the contributors in general make no secret of their opinions or where their sympathies lie.

The articles range widely, as a glance at the contents show --Cicero, Renaissance city states, Napoleon III, Edwardians in love, Suez etc. Of especial interest are articles by R M Twist on the Early Celtic Church (a booklet of his was reviewed in the "Old Stones" issue) and by member Peter Ratazzi (author of In Strangest Europe), but there are also questioning articles on Alfred and William Rufus, quizzes and quotable quotes. My only real criticism echoes that of Alice: "What is the use of a book without pictures ...?"

A & M is £4.50 pa from The Editors, 9 Frant Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN2 5SD.

CHRIS LOVEGROVE



Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln £8.95
The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail (Pp 445, Jonathan Cape 1982)

Henry Lincoln's TV films and, recently, Michael Baigent's lecture 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 (see XIV, 1 p11). 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 Arimathea 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 King 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".

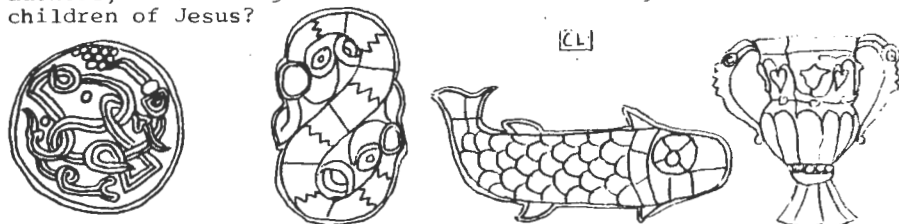
Finally there is the last of the 12th century romances that have survived, Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival (1195-1216). Wolfram claims his version is superior to Chrétien's for it came from Elegeanis, an astrologer and scholar from Toledo. Elegeanis was, says Wolfram, a converted Jew descended from 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", correlated 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 1164.

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 be 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 provides 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 (ie 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 Holy Grail, Sangraal in Old French. Robert de Boron first linked the Grail with Christ's blood (in his Joseph d'Arimathe 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 in 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?



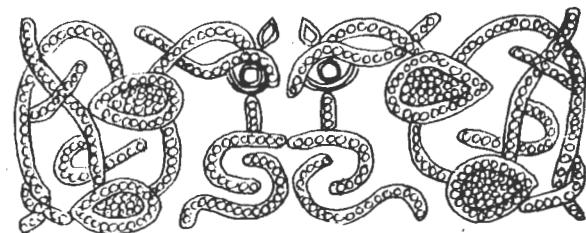
There is no space in this review to mention all the evidence--some substantial, some circumstantial--to support this book's contention. But here, in outline, is the hypothesis it presents:

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 Benjaminites 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 whom 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 re-



ligion 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--see XIII, 1 p22) 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 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 Philippe 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 (p 432n); 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



The evidence of things not seen...

Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln
The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail (Jonathan Cape £8.95) xvi 445pp

"Faith," said St Paul, "is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"¹ and on such a basis the authors of this book are rich in faith indeed, but desperately poor in facts. Not that facts are entirely absent, for there is a most curious church at Rennes-le-Château, and Béranger Saunière, its odd parish priest, undoubtedly found something at the tail end of the last century that brought his wealth. And the occasional historical fact has crept into the book elsewhere, but this is not my concern, for the book presents such a dramatic thesis that to show it for the folly it is requires substantial proof that the historical fictions on which the thesis relies really are fictions.

What is the thesis? Why, merely that Mary Magdalene had children, by her husband Jesus Christ, who survived his sojourn on the Cross, and that the descendants of these children are alive to this day. Nor have they always been obscure, for the Jesus dynasty was also the Merovingian dynasty and it has for centuries been delivered from evil by the powerful secret society known as the Prieuré de Sion. Of course, such a secret society requires careful covering of tracks and it would be quite unreasonable for the critic to demand the usual documentary evidence by which historical fact is commonly demonstrated. Instead, the authors establish their thesis by a gradual accumulation of events and people--both historical and legendary and for the most part unrelated--and by the most unlikely interpretations of the New Testament and of infant Christianity. But some documents presumably exist (even though the authors do not see fit either to reproduce or to quote extensively from them) in the form of the parchments which led Saunière to the Priory of Sion after he had discovered and deciphered them, and in the Dossiers Secrets d'Henri Lobineau which purport to show, among other things, the succession of Grand Masters of the Order. This succession is an obvious starting point for critical assessment of the book's thesis, and as it is quoted let us begin.

From Jean de Gisors in the 12th century to Jean Cocteau in the 20th, there are 26 Grand Masters, and to produce a Catalogue Raisonné of the errors, inanities and irrelevancies of the authors' accounts of all 26--plus their many associates who are brought into the tale--would be a long and dreary task beyond the requirements of any review. Some assessment, however, must be made and as some Grand Masters are famous while others are obscure, it will be as well to examine one from each category. The 19th Grand Master was Isaac Newton, whose life is so well recorded that traces of his involvement with the Priory of Sion should be easy to recover. As Grand Master, Newton would have been aware that Christ did not die on the Cross and that his descendants still lived; that Newton was more-or-less a Unitarian might seem to support this view--until his own 'Articles of Faith' are read. Here he quite unequivocally accepts the Atonement: "(Jesus) the Lamb of

God who was slain, and hath redeemed us with his blood"²; and at this point it should be said that the authors appear to have no understanding of the nature of the Atonement (the doctrine of man's reconciliation with God through the sacrificial death of Christ). The encyclical of Pope John XXIII, Inde a Primis, which they quote does not imply that "the death of Jesus on the cross is no longer a requisite tenet of the Roman Catholic faith" (p 131), but its exact opposite, for it reiterates traditional teaching on the Atonement.

Newton was indeed interested in Hermetic thought but he did not believe in the existence of the Rosicrucians, as is shown by his annotations on his copy of the Fama Fraternitatis: "This was the history of ye imposture"³; and he had no connection whatever with Freemasonry. His membership of the Gentlemen's Society (not "club") of Spalding was purely nominal, and that famous literary society was itself neither "semi-masonic" (p 385) nor "obscure" (p 116)⁴. The authors, however, are determined to link their Grand Masters with Secret Societies of one kind or another, but their knowledge of such societies (of Freemasonry at least) is minimal: no masonic scholar would agree that "The dissemination of 18th century Freemasonry owes more, ultimately, to Radclyffe than to any other man" (p 116), and one expects--but does not receive--some justification for this elevation of a relatively minor character in masonic history. In point of fact Radclyffe could not have been Grand Master of the French Lodges in 1725 for there was no Grand Lodge in France until 1736.⁵

Further down the list comes Charles Nodier (23rd Grand Master),⁶ as obscure to most people as Newton is famous. Thus few will realise just how many errors are made in the account of his life and work: Nodier died in 1844, not 1845 as on pp 121 and 391; his anti-Napoleonic poem appeared in 1804, not in 1802; he was neither colleague nor mentor of Eliphas Levi; his Histoire des Sociétés Secretes de l'Armée was published in 1815, not 1816; and he was not "one of the chief architects of that myth (of the Secret Societies)" (p 123), for that structure had been erected twenty years before by Robinson and the Abbé Barruel. And it is not by the aggregation of such errors that contentious theses are established.

Yet is it not possible that while the Grand Masters were ignorant of their status and the Priory of Sion was itself a chimaera (the charters quoted on p 83 refer in fact to a community of Benedictine monks established on Mount Sion shortly after the First Crusade), that there is truth in the thesis of Jesus as a married Messiah? To establish that one must reject every received notion of New Testament exegesis, and this the authors manfully do. A similar rejection of established patterns of Dark Age and Medieval history is also necessary to show that the Jesus dynasty was not only founded but survived. In addition the authors have rejected the usual methods of historical enquiry, treating legend, Romance and recorded fact as of equal value, save where legend is given greater respect when it can be made to serve their ends (eg the legend of the Magdalene residing in France). No distinction is made between records of the Knights Templar before their suppression and their forced confessions under torture: claims about their blasphemous beliefs, and thus subsequent deductions, must be

treated as highly suspect,⁷ but to hurry along the thesis of Holy Blood they are taken at face value.

Even more important for the authors are the Cathars, perhaps because of their apparent similarity to early Gnostic sects, but on the Cathars the authors are remarkably ill-informed. It is not "virtually impossible to present a coherent and definitive summary of what actually constituted Cathar thought" (p 23), for not only do Inquisition records survive but they are confirmed by surviving Cathar writings.⁸ The Cathars did not "deny the validity of all clerical hierarchies" (p 23) for they had their own hierarchy with Bishops and Ministers (Ancients), and they had quite specific doctrines⁹ which makes a nonsense of the claim that there was an "absence of any fixed dogma, doctrine or theology" (p 24). Most significant of all, the majority of Cathars, being absolute dualists, would never have "regarded him (Christ) as a prophet no different from any other--a mortal being" (p 25). Indeed, far from repudiating "the significance of both the Crucifixion and the Cross" (p 25) they held Easter to be their most important festival.¹⁰ In view of this farrago of nonsense about the Cathars it is not surprising to find the authors giving a reference "linking the Cathars and the Holy Grail" (p 32) but failing to point out that the writer in question categorically rejects the connection.¹¹

On the Grail itself the authors are content to select suitable Romances and to interpret them as allegorical where necessary but as based on objective history when such interpretation furthers their own cause. There are better sources for medieval family history than Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzifal, but the authors choose not to use them. Similarly, when they attempt to link the Grail with the Hebrew Kabbalah (which they present in a grossly distorted image) they choose highly contentious authorities and ignore those more generally accepted.¹² But these issues are perhaps peripheral and we must return to that which the Grail symbolises--the blood of Jesus Christ.



Christianity must stand or fall by the reality of Christ and by the basic truth of the New Testament, which contains for all Christians the basic statements of their faith; but this does not preclude scholarly study, conducted along well-established lines, of the nature, origins and history of the documents that comprise the New Testament as we now have it. Certainly all extant manuscripts are later than the date of composition (which was between c 50 and 100 AD) but the Chester Beatty papyrus date from the 3rd century and the Bodmer papyrus of the Gospel of John dates from c 200 AD--which makes quite surprising the claim in Holy Blood that "of the 5000 extant early manuscript versions of the New Testament, not one predates the 4th century" (p 329). The further claim that the Canon of the New Testament was a somewhat "arbitrary" selection, that the excluded books were "cavalierly ignored" and that some of them "have a perfectly valid claim to historical veracity" (p 279) is a nonsense, for the eminently sound principles by which books were "ac-

knowledge" or "disputed" were established by the 2nd century and the Canon as we have it was effectively defined early in the 3rd--over a century before the list given in Athanasius' Festal Letter of 367 AD. All this is not to labour the point but to illustrate the inadequacies of the authors of Holy Blood in their analysis of the New Testament.

What, too, is their approach to the Gospels that enables them to "winnow through them, to disengage fact from fable" (p 283)? A somewhat incompetent one, for they draw most heavily upon the Fourth Gospel without offering reasons for finding it "the most reliable" save that it contains "the most persuasive evidence" (p 290) for their hypothesis. This evidence, the miracles of the Raising of Lazarus and the Wedding at Cana, together with John's account of the Crucifixion, presumably does not suffer from the "doctoring, editing, expurgation and revision" (p 290) to which they say the Gospel was subject. Presumably they also have good reasons (if unstated ones) for taking these episodes out of the context of the coherent picture of Jesus' life and mission as presented by all the Gospels. Certainly they carefully omit all reference to the teachings of Jesus as contained in the Parables, the Sermon on the Mount (which scarcely supports the notion of Jesus as a political Messiah) and the healing Miracles. In both the miracles that they do consider they ignore the obvious fact that Jesus' actions are consistent with his mission and are intended to reinforce the Old Testament prophecies that relate to him--a point made by all rational Commentaries on the Gospels.¹³

Those same commentaries also show how inept is the authors' treatment of the Crucifixion--as do the Gospels themselves, for they make it clear that many people witnessed the crucifixion close at hand, while the authors' misreading of the text is so grotesque that they claim "most people" were witnesses from 'afar off' (the women, of course, were). This is intended to support the notion of a private, mock crucifixion which further requires the assumption that awkward parts of the narrative (the two thieves crucified with Jesus, the spear thrust in the side) are part of the later doctoring and editing of the text. Perhaps, too, Jesus was not himself party to the plot, which would explain why he refused drugged wine (Mk 15:23) but accepted vinegar-soaked sponge which the authors suggest was itself drugged (p315). If plot there was, then the early Church, or some parts of it, must have been aware of it; further, being "oriented primarily towards a Roman or Romanised audience" the Church must ensure that "the role of Rome in Jesus' death was, of necessity, whitewashed, and guilt was transferred to the Jews" (p 322). But the Gospels emphasise that Jesus was executed by the Romans, who derided not only Jesus but the whole Jewish people by the mocking inscription on the cross: a dead criminal was the only king the Jews were likely to have. And death by crucifixion was a purely Roman punishment.

When they stray into early Church history the authors are equally prone to draw unwarranted conclusions from doubtful evidence. The refusal of the first Christians to compromise their faith and their stoic acceptance of savage persecution by Rome does not fit the picture of a people anxiously "pandering to a Roman audience" (p 324). Even more bizarre is the authors attempt to use Gnostic

Gospels to further their cause. Arguing from the Nag Hammadi papyri that Jesus was married is fanciful to say the least; Gnostic texts are not intended to be read as literal history and their authors looked upon the material world as evil: procreation was abhorrent, and via Jesus unthinkable. Arguing further that these papyri "can claim an authority equal to that of the Gospels" or that some of them "enjoy a claim to a unique veracity of their own" (p 341) is yet more foolish and flies in the face of the conclusions of every scholar of Gnosticism.¹⁴

What more can be said? Overturning received opinion is the authors' forte, and this course of action will doubtless endear the book to the hearts of many readers who are anxious to endorse any theory, however improbable or unproven, if it supports the notion of some gigantic conspiracy against the truth on the part of Church and State. As history the book fails, as biblical criticism it fail--it most certainly does not "stand up to the most rigorous scholarly scrutiny" claimed for it by my critics Philip Jones and Derek Burton,¹⁵ but the notion of the Priory of Sion defending the bloodline of Jesus is vastly entertaining, for history as it might have been is always more fun than history as it really was.

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