



**THE GRAND COMMANDERY OF KNIGHTS TEMPLAR
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Ever since the early to mid-13th century, when German Knight Wolfram von Eschenbach identified them as such in his epic poem Parzival, the legendary Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, or, as they are more popularly known, the Knights Templar, have been closely associated with the mythical Knights of the Holy Grail. In the paragraphs which follow, we will examine some rather compelling evidence which suggests that Von Eschenbach's association between these two chivalric orders may have influenced the development of the Templar knighting ceremony as it is currently practiced by the Commandery of the York Rite of Freemasonry. It is on this account that the author has come to view Masonic Templary as something of a modern guardian of the authentic grail tradition.

Let us take a moment to briefly touch upon some of what it is that the grail tradition actually entails. It will also be helpful to examine a couple of the primary literary precursors which some scholars believe may have contributed to the rich lore surrounding the grail tradition. The Holy Grail is most commonly depicted as the cup from which Jesus Christ drank during his "Last Supper" prior to being crucified.¹ According to legend, this cup was later used by Joseph of Arimathea, the secret disciple of Christ who donated the tomb wherein Jesus was laid following his crucifixion. The cup was used to collect the mixture of blood and water which flowed from the laceration in Jesus' side made by the lance or spear of the Roman soldier, Longinus. Being thus sanctified, the cup was then said to have been imbued with miraculous virtues such as curative powers and the ability to make barren land fertile, and it was for the purpose of preserving this sacred vessel that the order of the Knights of the Holy Grail was originally founded. This of course has been a severely abbreviated recapitulation of the complex cycle which constitutes the grail tradition, but the author is nonetheless content that the above will prove sufficient for the present purposes.

As a literary precursor to this tale, several scholars have sought to identify the legend of the Holy Grail with the Welsh legend of King Bran, the mythical king of Britain, and his magical cauldron² - the latter of which was said, similar to the qualities attributed to the Holy Grail, to be able to mysteriously restore the dead to life. Magical characteristics such as this were not limited to King Bran's cauldron alone but were also attributed to Bran himself. According to The Mabinogion, an ancient book of Welsh folklore, after realizing his impending fate, the king ordered that his head be severed and returned to Britain where miraculously it continued to speak and, in some cases, even prophesy. After some

eighty years, the head ceased speaking, at which time it was taken to a place called "White Hill" and buried facing the direction of France in order to protect the British from French invasion. The legend even goes on to declare that it was none other than King Arthur, the same who features prominently in the grail tradition, who recovered the skull from its place of rest.³ In more recent times, certain scholars have sought to align the Holy Grail with the golden platter on which the severed head of St. John the Baptist was served to the dancing Salome by the remorseful King Herod. The reader is asked to note that in both of the cases cited, the object identified as a forerunner of the Holy Grail is directly associated with the motif of a severed head.

The Knights Templar were formed in the 12th century for the noble purpose of escorting Christians on their pilgrimages throughout the Holy Land during the Crusades. After inventing a system which is widely recognized as the forerunner of modern banking, the Templars grew exceedingly wealthy to the point that the powers that were, i.e., the crown and the tiara, sought to relieve them of their riches, and in 1307, a statement was issued by the debt-ridden King Philip IV of France declaring the Templars to be heretics. A great many of them were subsequently arrested, interrogated, tortured, and executed - their wealth then claimed by the greedy Philip. While no "holy cup" was reported to have ever been discovered amongst the Templars' treasures, the most widespread of the confessions allegedly made by the knights during their interrogation was the collective veneration of a mysterious severed head, reportedly called Baphomet, which was supposedly used by them during their ceremonies of initiation.

According to Von Hammer, the word Baphomet is most likely a combination of the two Greek words Baphe and Metis, the English translation of which is the Baptism of Wisdom - but as we shall see, the use of the word "baptism" here may have less to do with the physical act of submerging the body and raising it up out of water, and more to do with the ritualized act of imbibing of a certain libation from a sacred "cup." Such is the case in The Corpus Hermeticum, a collection of writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, the famed author of the Tabula Smaragdina or Emerald Tablet, wherein we read the following: "Reason indeed... among all men hath [Deity] distributed, but mind not yet; not that he grudgeth any, for grudging cometh not from him, but hath its place below, within the souls of men who have no mind... He willed, my son, to have it set up in the midst for souls, just as if it were a prize... He filled a mighty cup with it, and sent it down, joining a Herald [to it], to whom He gave command to make this proclamation to the hearts of men: Baptize thyself with this cup's baptism,⁴ what heart can do so, thou that hast faith thou canst ascend to him that hath sent down the cup, thou that doest know for what thou didst come into being!" (The Cup or Monad, vv. 3 & 4)

Thus, we see that the term "baptism" can be a reference to the well-known ritual of bodily submersion in water and, more obscurely, a sacred cup or libation. Baphomet, therefore, the severed head allegedly venerated by the Templars, may in reality be a cryptic reference to a secret initiatory rite known to them as the Baptism of Wisdom, the mysterious proceedings of which having very probably made use of a ritualistic cup or libation. Interestingly, Von Eschenbach specifically refers to the Knights of the Holy Grail as "baptized men" Part 1 of 4 From KnightsTemplar.org Archives of Articles 2014

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