

Masonic Templary:

Part I: Modern Guardians of the Authentic Grail Tradition

Part II: The Name and Nature of Baphomet

by Sir Knight P. D. Newman

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 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."

As demonstrated above, the lore surrounding the grail tradition is intimately connected with legends involving severed heads. These two seemingly separate themes, a sacred cup and a severed head, would appear somewhat irreconcilable if it was not for the historical precedent provided by the potentially shocking ritual once observed by the Goths of Scandinavia who, according to the research of English Freemason Rev. George Oliver, were prone to drink alcoholic libations from the caps of human skulls, thereby uniting perfectly the theme of the sacred cup or libation with that of the skull or severed head. Paraphrasing from Oliver's 1840 work *The History of Initiation*, Gen. Albert Pike, 33° explains that the initiatory rituals of this eastern Germanic tribe included "[a] long probation, of fasting and mortification, circular processions, [and] many fearful tests and trials...[The candidate] was obligated upon a naked sword (as is still the custom in the *Rit Moderne*5), and sealed his obligation by drinking mead out of a human skull."6

Turning our attention to the Far East, we find that the ritual motif of drinking spirits from a human skull is by no means limited to the West. This practice also plays a central role in the ceremonial observances of the reclusive Shiva worshipping Aghora of India as well as the remote Vajrayana Buddhists of Tibet, both of whom preserve the curious rite of imbibing spirits from a sacred kapala or skullcup.⁷ These kapalas are often employed by the practitioners of Vajrayana Buddhism for the additional purpose of making religious offerings to the deific Dharmapalas, who themselves are frequently depicted as bearing these strange yet fascinating relics. The word Dharmapala literally translated means Defender of the Faith, which itself is a phrase that should be particularly meaningful to every Masonic Templar.

Sir Knight Frederick Shade, in his welcomed article *The Quest for the Holy Grail and the Modern Knights Templar*,⁸ provides an outline of several other similarities between what he calls the Templar hallows and the lesser hallows of the grail tradition. The lesser hallows of the grail tradition are described as being certain sacred relics for which the Grail Knights are searching in addition to the Holy Grail. The similarities between the so-called Templar hallows and the lesser hallows of the grail tradition include, among other things "[t]he dish of bread, which is the food given to the pilgrim on his arrival" and "[t]he skull of mortality, with which the novice undertakes a year of penance and with which the imprecations are made." Sir Knight Shade goes on to say that

"[t]here are several other hallows and sacred signs in the Templar tradition. Some of the lesser hallows of the grail cycle are suggested here, such as the Templar crucifix, with the nails prominently displayed thereon. There is the knight's sword, which is to be wielded in defense of the faith and also his shield, all which are beautifully explained in the quotation from St. Paul. They may not necessarily come directly from the grail legend, but they certainly evoke many aspects of that tradition and resonate as hallows in their own right."

Thus we see that Von Eschenbach's identification of the mythical Knights of the Holy Grail with the Knights Templar may very well have had more than a minor influence on the development of the Templar knighting ceremony as it is currently practiced by the Commandery of the York Rite of Freemasonry. Because of the probability of said influence, it is the author's opinion that Masonic Templary can rightly be called a modern

guardian of the authentic grail tradition, furnished with all that entails. This is true even for the Candidate who sits silently contemplating in the grim Chamber of Reflection at the commencement of the Templar ceremony, where the human skull present there still has the potential to exhibit that miraculous power of prophetic speech attributed to the severed head of the mythical King Bran. Surrounded oftentimes with oracular messages such as "I was what you are" and, more importantly, "I am what you will be,"⁹ does not the skull in the Chamber of Reflection speak something of our fate to us all? Is not the bitter cup of death that from which every man must sooner or later partake?

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Masonic Templary :

Part II: The Name and Nature of Baphomet

Baphomet, the alleged deific icon of the Knights Templar, has remained something of an enigma to scholars for centuries. The figure was described by some as having been a mysterious severed head which possessed magical qualities. However, the most well-known depiction of Baphomet comes from French occultist and Freemason Eliphas Levi's sketch of the same in his highly influential work *The Dogma and Ritual of High Magic*. In said book, Baphomet is depicted as being a winged, hermaphroditic hominid with the head and legs of a goat, but having the torso of a man. In our previous treatment of this subject (see "*Masonic Templary: Modern Guardians of the Authentic Grail*

Tradition"1), it was established that the name of Baphomet was, in all probability, a coded reference to an initiatory ritual wherein was made use of a sacred grail of libation, fashioned from the skullcap of a severed head, that is a kapala or skull-cup. The precedent for such a rite has been set by ritual observances throughout the occident and orient alike. So, why then was Eliphas Levi, an occultist of no small amount of learning, apt to depict the figure as being related to a goat? Was Levi simply confused, or was he employing a blind in order to misdirect the eyes of the profane? These are the questions which will be treated in the following paragraphs.

As stated in our previous article, the name Baphomet is a combination of the two Greek words, Baphe and Metis, which when translated into English, yields the phrase the "baptism of wisdom." As opposed to the well-known ritual of ceremonially submerging the body and raising it up out of water, the baptism referred to here is in all likelihood an allusion to the act of drinking a libation from a sacred cup, just as is the case in verses 3 and 4 of The Cup or Monad,² a Gnostic document excerpted from The Corpus Hermeticum, wherein the worshippers are commanded to "baptize" themselves with the contents of a "cup of mind." Another reference equating the ritual act of drinking from a certain cup with that of baptism can be found in The Gospel of St. Matthew, wherein Jesus says reassuringly to his disciples: "Ye shall drink indeed of my cup and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with..."³ The Baphometric skull venerated by the Knights Templar has been variously identified as the head of Bran, the mythical king of Britain, and more significantly, the head of John the Baptist. In the present article, we will examine yet another possible candidate for the historical validation of the cherished skull-grail, the head of the Gorgon Medusa, but before we get to that, let us take a moment look at still another famous skull that was said to have been in the possession of the historical Knights Templar.

In his 1921, work *Freemasonry and the Ancient Gods*, Worshipful Brother J. S. M. Ward, the founder of the Anthropological School of Masonic research, recounted a disturbing yet fascinating tale that has allegedly come down to us from the very trials of the historical Knights Templar. While the story is in all probability a fiction which was concocted in an attempt to slander our Fraternal ancestors, it is not without pertinence regarding our task at hand. According to Ward,

"[a] great lady of Maraclea was loved by a Templar, a Lord of Sidon; but she died in her youth, and on the night of her burial this wicked lover crept to the grave, dug up her body, and violated it. Then a voice from the void bade him return in nine months' time, for he would find a son. He obeyed the injunction and at the appointed time opened the grave again and found a head on the leg bones of a skeleton (skull and cross-bones). The same voice bade him "guard it well, for it would be the giver of all good things," and so he carried it away with him. It became a protecting genius, and he was able to defeat his enemies by merely showing them the magic head."⁴

Drawing from this account, Carl A. P. Ruck and his co-authors, Mark A. Hoffman and Jose Alfredo Gonzalez Celdran, added that,

"The Knights Templar adopted the Crux decussata as their flag and emblem. They depicted it as crossed leg bones beneath a skull, supposedly as a reference to Golgotha, the Hill of Skulls, but perhaps not without knowledge of the [Gorgon head]... This is especially likely because in Templar lore the skull [was used] as a magical weapon, just as Perseus used the Gorgon head." 5

It is this amazingly perceptive injunction on the part of Ruck, Hoffman, and Celdran which provides the key to understanding precisely what is being implied by the name and essential nature of Baphomet.

According to myth, Perseus was the first of the Greek heroes and was the legendary founder of the city of Mycenae. In order to win his bride, Andromeda, who was being forcefully wed to the king of the island of Seriphos, Perseus was charged with the impossible task of recovering the head of the Gorgon Medusa who, like Baphomet, was described as being part human and part beast, in this case half serpent. Perseus' quest for the Gorgon head has been rightly associated by scholars with Herakles' search for the golden apples of the Hesperides and more importantly, Jason's quest for the golden fleece. The reader is kindly asked to note that the Greek word for fleece, mela, is also translatable as apple. The golden apples of Herakles and the golden fleece of Jason therefore, in all probability, refer to the same object. In each of these cases, the prize was finally discovered in a serpent-guarded tree amidst a sacred garden or grove. Significantly, this too can be said of the hero Perseus.

The version of the Perseus ordeal with which most are familiar describes his confrontation with Medusa as having taken place in the Gorgon's cave located far beyond the lair of the Graiae sisterhood. However, other accounts place the Gorgon Medusa in the very Garden of the Hesperides, the same locale where Herakles discovered the golden apples. An example of this stream of transmission was preserved and can be seen depicted on a Greek vase housed at the Staatliche Museum in Berlin, Germany, which has been dated back to the 3rd quarter of the 4th century B.C. This amazing artifact features the hero Perseus standing directly beneath the golden apple tree in the Garden of the Hesperides. Before him is seated a decapitated Gorgon Medusa, while the victorious Perseus bears her severed head. In the painting, however, the eyes of Perseus are not directed toward the Gorgon but instead are aimed solely at the golden fruit dangling from the tree, thereby subtly identifying the Gorgon head with the golden apples. It may therefore be safely assumed that the head of Medusa, the golden apples (mela), and the golden fleece (mela) are all three synonymous.

So, aside from the inherent notions of an epic quest, what have these to do with the Holy Grail and thus with Baphomet? Well, according to the 6th century chronographer John Malalas,

"Perseus cut off [Medusa's] head and then used it as a "skull-cup" (skyphos) to teach the rite of Zoroaster to the Persians who took the name of Medes (Medoi) in honor of the Medusa."6

The similarities do not stop there. According to both versions of the story, Perseus was aided in his task by Athena, the goddess of wisdom,⁷ who told him how to defeat Medusa. Following Perseus' victory, the Gorgon head was thus entrusted to Athena as a gift. From thenceforth she employed the skyphos or "skull-cup" as a decorative brooch used to fasten her goatskin aegis, which is considered by many to be the wise goddess' defining characteristic. In modern parlance, the word aegis has come to suggest the covering of protection offered to a worshipper by a given deity. The word itself, however, simply means goatskin and is frequently depicted as being draped over the shoulders of the goddess Athena. The association between the Gorgon skull-cup and the hide of a goat points of course directly back to Baphomet which, if the reader will recall, was depicted by Levi as being related to the goat. Furthermore, it takes no great leap of speculation to see that the golden fleece for which Jason was searching, which is consubstantial with the Gorgon head, is referring to this same goatskin covering. It is therefore demonstrable that the Holy Grail and the golden fleece are indeed implicative of the same mystery. Additionally, and perhaps more than simply a meaningful coincidence, the mother of Athena was none other than the goddess Metis. It very nearly goes without saying that this would appear to be the source of the latter half of the name of Baphomet, i.e., Baphe Metis.

Thus it becomes apparent that Levi's curious association of Baphomet with the goat is no mere confusion of symbols but rather a veritable covering serving to obscure the arcana by yet another blind. Similar to the Holy Grail in Von Eschenbach's Parzival, the Templar's initiatory baptism of wisdom has been thickly veiled from the eyes of the profane, so much so that it has even become something of a mystery to our own Initiates. The author is confident that he has been successful in his attempt to demonstrate these more than subtle connections between such apparently disparate themes as a goat, a grail, and a severed head, while at the same time proving that the quest for truth oftentimes takes on multiple forms and themes. The underlying object, on the other hand, has and will always remain identical: the sacred quest for the golden light of wisdom.

End Notes:

1 Knight Templar magazine Vol. LVIII, No. 7 (July, 2012)

2 "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 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, what heart can do so, thou that hast faith thou canst ascend to him that hath sent down the cup, thou that dost know for what thou didst come into being!"

3 Matt. 20:24

4 Freemasonry and the Ancient Gods, p. 307

5 Myth and Mithras, p. 212

6 Carl A.P. Ruck, Mark A. Hoffman, and Jose Alfredo Gonzalez Celdran, Myth and Mithras, p. 88

7 Wisdom being the literal translation of Metis

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