



**THE GRAND COMMANDERY OF KNIGHTS TEMPLAR
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Modern Masonry By SK P.D. Newman, Continued from August 2024

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?

PART II

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." **To be continued**