

**Hidden Manna and the Holy Grail:  
The Psychedelic Sacrament in Arthurian Romance  
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In 1136, Geoffrey of Monmouth published *Historia Regum Britanniae*, "History of the Kings of Britain," a Latin text that retailed for an international audience the Welsh legend of King Arthur.<sup>1</sup> Historically, Arthur may have lived in the fifth or early sixth century and been involved with the British resistance to invading Saxons.<sup>2</sup> Over the centuries, Welsh poets and story-tellers elaborated his legend into wonder stories. The narratives routinely drew on plots and motifs of pagan Celtic origin<sup>3</sup> that they thoroughly Christianized. From perhaps the fifth century onward, Irish ascetics had adopted the Desert Fathers' extravagant description of the ascetic life as an Edenic or paradisaic state; but they transferred the location of the terrestrial paradise from the deserts of the Middle East to barren islands off the coasts of Ireland and western Scotland. Beginning no later than the seventh century, the topos of the terrestrial paradise gave rise to a considerable Irish literature about paradise islands, complete with the wondrous fruits of Eden.<sup>4</sup> Future research will be needed to determine whether the terrestrial paradise tradition, which concerned the ecstatic state that Adam and Eve knew in Eden prior to their expulsion from Paradise, was associated with the doctrines of Pelagius regarding the fall, which had been condemned as heresy in Rome in the early fifth century but nevertheless persisted within Celtic Christianity as late as the tenth century.<sup>5</sup> The early Welsh poem, "The Spoils of the Otherworld," is our oldest surviving example of a literary innovation that drew on these Irish ecclesiastic foundations in crafting tales for a lay audience of aristocrats, warriors, and their retainers. The poem alludes to a more complete story, now lost, of Arthur leading an expedition into a fairy-fortress in order to free a prisoner and plunder the fortress of its cauldron. The story described the fairy-fortress after its conquest in terms that were appropriate to the terrestrial paradise of Irish sea voyage (*immram*) stories, and so appropriated the motifs and plot episodes of the Celtic otherworld for the terrestrial paradise tradition.<sup>6</sup> The Welsh prose narrative, "Culhwch and Olwen," which is similarly of pre-Norman date, represents a somewhat later stage in the development toward Arthurian romance, when the Arthurian mythos had become free-standing. In "Culhwch and Olwen," the lands of adventure were simply Wales and Ireland. No references were made to the otherworld; and although terrestrial paradise motifs were present, they were not the focus of the narrative. The tale was no longer self-evidently allegorical. If it contained a subtext, it was well-concealed and esoteric.

Scholars are generally agreed that Arthurian wonder tales like "Culhwch and Olwen" must have been widely distributed in Wales, Cornwall, and Brittany in advance of the Norman conquest of England in 1066. Belief in a living Arthur was then in the air. Eight canons of Laon, who travelled through northern France and southern England in order to raise funds to rebuild the cathedral after a fire in 1112, were shown Arthur's chair and oven in Devon and Cornwall and were told that they were in Arthur's country. One of their party got into a quarrel with a Cornish native as to whether Arthur was still alive.<sup>7</sup> These beliefs, which are nowhere attested earlier, indicate that Arthurian wonder stories had become sufficiently popular in Cornwall that persisting folk beliefs about fairies<sup>8</sup> had invested them with neo-pagan meanings. Welsh and Breton story-tellers and poets who sought employment at Norman courts during this period presumably retold Arthurian tales in Old French. Also to be considered in the transmission process were both clerks such as Geoffrey of Monmouth and Walter Map,<sup>9</sup> and professional translators (sometimes called *latimers* or *latiners*) who had political and juridical functions in the government and tended to be appointed from the aristocracy.<sup>10</sup> A bilingual story-teller named Bledhericus (Welsh *Bleddri*), who was active between 1100 and 1140 and may have been a *latimer*, was remembered in a variety of twelfth and early thirteenth century texts.<sup>11</sup> It may have been he who broke the ice, creating an audience for Geoffrey of Monmouth.

The shift from bilingual Celtic story-tellers to their French peers brought with it a refashioning of oral traditions as poetic and prose literature. Chrétien de Troyes penned the first romances concerning knights at Arthur's court in the 1170s. Unfinished at Chrétien's death in 1180 was *Li Conte del Graal*, "The Story of the Grail," the first written tale ever to mention the holy grail.<sup>12</sup> The grail quest introduced a distinctly Christian element into Arthurian romance. The quest for the Arthurian lady, which has given us the adjective "romantic," was displaced by a spiritual search for a mysterious object called the grail.<sup>13</sup> The grail quest was retold several times over the next seventy-five years before the medieval vogue of the Matter of Britain began to pass.

There were three types of grail narrative in the middle ages.<sup>14</sup> In the Perceval quest, a youth gradually learned to be a knight, found but failed to qualify for the grail, became increasingly devout, and eventually recovered the grail, becoming its priestly keeper and a hermit. A regular part of the story was its counterpoint with the tale of Gawain, who similarly found the grail but failed irretrievably to qualify for it. Success at the quest involved finding the grail and, upon seeing it, asking the question whom it served.

Grail histories were a second type of narrative. They traced the ownership and adventures of the grail from the Last Supper, through Joseph of Arimathea and his son Josephus, to their descendant, the fisher king who was the grail keeper at the beginning of the Perceval quest.

The third type of grail narrative, the Galahad quest, superseded the Perceval quest. It had all of the knights of the Round Table set out in quest of the grail. Most never found it. Gawain's failure and Perceval's success were reduced to subplots, while the main action concerned Lancelot and his son Galahad. Lancelot saw the grail but lapsed into paralysis and catatonia for his sins. Galahad's success at the grail resulted in the assumption of both his soul and the grail into heaven. Both the development of the hero in the Perceval quest and his question of the grail were absent from the Galahad quest, whose protagonist was already the best knight in the world from the moment of his first appearance. Not only was the character of Galahad a figure of Christ,<sup>15</sup> but the name "Galahad" alluded to Christ. In Christian teaching, Jeremiah's references to the "balm of Gilead" that would heal God's people (Jer 8:22; 46:11) had been interpreted as prophecies of Jesus.<sup>16</sup> The Latin Vulgate Bible had spelled the Hebrew name Gilead as *Galaad*, as did Old French writers, including the author of the *Queste del Saint Graal*. *Galaad* became Galahad in English transliteration.

The description of the grail varied considerably from tale to tale. Loomis remarked that "the authors of the Grail texts seem to delight in contradicting each other on the most important points" including "the very form and attributes of the Grail itself."<sup>17</sup> The *Elucidation*, an anonymous poem composed as a foreward to Chrétien's *Li Conte del Graal*, asserted that a secret surrounded the grail, not only in the romances, but in reality.

The Grail's secret must be concealed  
And never by any man revealed,  
For as soon as this tale is told,  
It could happen to one so bold,  
If the teller should have a wife,  
Evil will follow him all his life.

.....  
If Master Blihis does not lie  
This secret none should ever tell.<sup>18</sup>

It has been conventional to distinguish three groups of theories regarding the origin of the grail. The so-called "Celtic hypothesis" argues that a cauldron that had ritual use in ancient Celtic paganism was remembered in Irish and Welsh folklore as a vessel of plenty and later made its way into Arthurian romance under the name of the grail.<sup>19</sup> The hypothesis

fails on two counts. Although the debt of Arthurian romance to Irish and Welsh storytelling has been amply demonstrated, the specific question of the origin of the grail cannot be inferred from the general circumstance of Arthurian wonder stories as a genre. Not only is the grail nowhere described as a cauldron, but nowhere in the grail literature is a cauldron so much as mentioned. The omission is comprehensible in view of the surviving Celtic tales of the pre-Norman period, where we find efforts to disenchant a cauldron or basket, in order to end its intrinsically pagan or demonic supernaturalism. Both the cauldron and the grail were objects of quests that sought to accomplish disenchantments; but their powers were opposite. Where the cauldron was the unwanted cause of an enchantment, the grail was a necessary but insufficient means to accomplish disenchantment. The grail may have *replaced* the cauldron, but cannot plausibly be *derived from* it.

The Celtic hypothesis also fails because the cauldron was only one among a great many different objects in Irish and Welsh folklore that functioned as vessels of plenty. A cauldron was listed among the four jewels of the Irish fairies, the Tuatha Dé Danaan, and also among the Thirteen Treasures of the Island of Britain; but saints' lives included a variety of alternative motifs. Several antedated the Norman period; but the chief alternative to the grail, the Welsh motif of a horn of plenty is not provably older than 1460.<sup>20</sup> It was probably derivative of the grail literature, rather than its inspiration. Most importantly, Celtic folklore motifs of foods that had whatever taste a person wished did not derive from Celtic paganism. The pagan deity anterior to the Fisher King was presumably a god responsible for marine life, an "owner of nature"<sup>21</sup> that was portrayed as a fisherman because he provided sea-farers with success and failure at fishing.<sup>22</sup> This god became the character of Manannan son of Ler in Irish paradise island stories and was translated into Welsh as Bran son of Llyr, whose name persisted as the Fisher King in some of the Old French romances. Integral to the concept of such a deity is its relation to a natural phenomenon, in this instance, the sea. In his bountiful capacity, he would have provided a never-ending supply of the species for which he was responsible. When sinned against, he would have withheld the same species, causing starvation, until the ritual demands of his cult were met. The introduction of monotheism, both historically in ancient Israel and again in fifth century Ireland, transformed polytheistic ideas of bounty and deprivation pertaining to a single natural domain, such as sea life, into a universal concept of the one God's providence and punishment everywhere. Monotheism was reflected in a rabbinic midrash that maintained that manna had whatever taste one most preferred. Manna was not a never-ending supply of one particular food; it was a never-ending supply of the mystical all. The Jewish midrash entered the early Church and became a Christian possession. St Basil of Caesarea (c. 329-379) cited Philo as his source of the motif<sup>23</sup> and St Augustine of Hippo mentioned the miraculous flavors of manna as well.<sup>24</sup> The motif of a food or food container that provided whatever foods and/or drinks a person might wish was present in both Celtic saints' lives and the terrestrial paradise tradition, centuries prior to the invention of the grail. Formulations of the Celtic hypothesis that tie the grail to Celtic paganism, and not to Celtic Christianity lack clarity about the distinction between the two.

Further caution to the Celtic hypothesis was provided by Leslie Jones, who drew attention to historical practices at medieval feasts.

The grail and its accompanying objects seem to hold the same place in the grail feast that elaborate culinary showpieces, called subtleties, held in regular feasts....These subtleties were often food made to look like something else: castles, heraldic emblems, animals; sometimes they were surprises like a pie with live birds baked in it, which flew out when the crust was cut. Subtleties were the precursors of today's carved ice swan and girl popping out of the cake; they were meant to be admired and arouse comment.<sup>25</sup>

The grail differed from subtleties in being an inedible container of edibles, rather than inedible edibles;<sup>26</sup> but the comparison provides caution against unearned assumptions that the grail procession was a formal ceremony or rite, rather than a social custom or convention.

Further theories of the origin of the grail have been treated together as the so-called "Christian hypothesis." A majority of the grail romances portray the grail as a Christian relic. The grail is generally said to have been either the meat platter or the cup that Jesus used at the Last Supper. Like medieval saints' relics,<sup>27</sup> the grail was sometimes credited with the blessings of human, agricultural, and livestock fertility and health that God promised the obedient in Deuteronomy 7:13-15. These elements have led to the supposition that the grail romances originated as legends that surrounded a Christian relic. The difficulties with the hypothesis are several. The very oldest grail romances, the *Conte del Graal* of Chrétien de Troyes and, in German, the *Parzival* of Wolfram von Eschenbach, do not portray the grail as a relic. In these stories, the grail is not said to be old, and a historical legend is not connected with it. The grail's portrayal as a relic commenced only with the *Joseph of Arimathea* of Robert de Boron. Prior to Robert, there was no legend in Christendom of a grail that was used at the Last Supper.<sup>28</sup> No church or abbey claimed to possess any such relic, either before or after the composition of the grail romances. Not only was there no historical relic on whose legend the grail romances can have drawn, but the grail was not treated in the romances as though it were a Christian relic. In most romances, the grail was kept in a hall in a king's castle. It was not kept in a church or an abbey, nor even in a chapel that had been built alongside a castle. Again, the grail was not a widely advertised, well known, and much venerated object that attracted visitors on pilgrimage and provided tourist income for the religious institution that owned it. It was instead an ill-understood, little seen object that was hidden away in a disappearing castle that few people could find. It was owned by a layman, the Fisher King; and it was generally handled by laypeople.

Not to be confused with the relic hypothesis are scholarly arguments that associate the grail with the Eucharist. Here again, the hypothesis is untenable with respect to the oldest extant grail romance, Chrétien's *Conte del Graal*, because it had the grail carried by a maiden and a host taken from it was eaten without being consecrated. If Chrétien intended to portray the Eucharist, these features would have been sacrilegious violations of the rite.<sup>29</sup> It would then become necessary to postulate an intention of heresy, as is inconsistent with Chrétien's dedication of the poem to Philip of Flanders, who collected Christian relics, zealously persecuted heretics, and died a martyr on crusade. After Chrétien, the grail procession was often made to conform more closely with the Eucharistic rite; but the medieval Church never approved any of the grail romances. The Church indulged Arthurian romance as a popular secular literature whose teachings about love and war were unacceptable, and whose accounts of the Church's practices were unreliable. Recent proponents of the Eucharist hypothesis have nevertheless sought to rehabilitate the romances by claiming them to have been doctrinally correct expressions of medieval Catholic teachings. Holmes treated the grail in Chrétien as a vessel that contained not the Eucharist but manna as discussed in the Letters to the Hebrew. Unlike the Eucharist, manna had been available to the Israelites without the mediation of Christ; it was also available to sinners.<sup>30</sup> Understanding manna in the traditional typological fashion as a miracle anticipatory of the Eucharist, Tuve interpreted the grail as "symbolic of more abundant life, of supernatural benediction and nourishment, and communion."<sup>31</sup> More recently, Barber noted that "the prayer at the consecration of the Eucharist was called the 'secreta' in the early Middle Ages," so that "the Mass itself...constitutes the 'secrets.'"<sup>32</sup> "The supposed 'secrets' of the Grail are the hidden meanings within the ritual of the Mass...and relate to the symbolic interpretation of the unfolding of the sacrament."<sup>33</sup>

These variations of the Eucharistic hypothesis fail to rescue it. The hypothesis remains untenable because the sacrament must be distinguished from its mystical elaborations. In both the *Perlesvaus* and the *Queste del Saint Graal*, sight of the grail included a

vision of the infant Jesus being divided and consumed. The *Perlesvaus*, which is usually dated around 1210, employs the term “transsubstantiation,” suggesting support for the doctrine of the Real Presence, which was reaffirmed at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 as a means to oppose the Cathar heresy.<sup>34</sup> These features of the two romances disconfirm the Eucharist hypothesis, because the Real Presence in the host is not to be confused with a vision to the same effect. In Catholic teaching, the unleavened bread of the wafer invisibly undergoes transsubstantiation into God precisely as did the physical body of the historical Jesus at his conception. The doctrine of the Real Presence does not involve visions of the divine presence. The perception of God’s presence in a consecrated host is intellectual; it is an act of faith in Church doctrine. A vision in connection with the Eucharist, such as the *Perlesvaus* and the *Queste* portrayed, was something different. A vision was, at minimum, a gift of grace that was additional to the Real Presence in the host. Visions that were experienced during the Eucharist have been reported from patristic times onward.<sup>35</sup> The *Perlesvaus* and the *Queste* implied that the grail involved something other than the Eucharist, because Eucharistic visions attended the grail. Visionary experiences are not reducible to symbolic interpretations of the Eucharist rite.

Less popular among scholars than the Celtic and Christian hypotheses is the misnamed “ritual hypothesis,” which maintained that the grail was used ritually in the initiation rites of a mystery religion that persisted secretly from Hellenistic times onward in Celtic lands. Jessie L. Weston suggested the clandestine persistence of the classical mysteries of Adonis,<sup>36</sup> while William A. Nitze opted for the Eleusinian mysteries.<sup>37</sup> Occultists soon joined these students of Arthurian literature in proposing further candidates. Arthur Edward Waite speculated that the ancient British Druids had possessed mysteries of their own,<sup>38</sup> while Rudolf Steiner interpreted the *Parzival* as an account of a historical Parzival’s initiation into the “Holy Mysteries” of Christian anthroposophy.<sup>39</sup> Occult and New Age speculations have since multiplied. Improbable as these candidates were, they were expressions of a reasonable paradigm. For the academic purposes of the comparative study of religion, initiation has been defined in terms of a transmission of *secret* religious teachings by an initiator to an initiand;<sup>40</sup> and grail quests of the Perceval type amply meet the defining criteria. In the course of his quest, Perceval learns the secret lore of the grail, visits the secret castle in which the grail is kept, and is admitted to the company of the few who are permitted to see the grail. The initiatory character of the Perceval quest is manifest and unequivocal. In the course of the romance, Perceval is initiated into the secrets of the grail.

In the general history of religion, both the extent to which different initiations are secret and their specific contents are variable cross-culturally. In some cases, the very fact of initiation is secret. In others, the fact of initiation is public, but the contents of the initiation are secret. In further cases, only some of the contents are reserved to initiates. Importantly, although an initiation may include or coincide with a rite, initiation is not itself a rite. Initiation may involve but does not consist of an entrance into an esoteric social group or tradition. Rather, initiation provides familiarity with secrets whose possession may be prerequisite for membership in the group or participation in the tradition. In the general history of religion, the vast majority of initiations are puberty rites for boys and/or girls, or else they are educations that are given to professional ecstasies, such as shamans, mystics, occultists, alchemists, and so forth, or to members of ecstatic associations, such as warrior’s societies, the Hellenistic mystery cults, and mystical fraternities.<sup>41</sup> Because the secrets of the grail in both the *Perlesvaus* and the *Queste* included visionary experiences that were associated with the Eucharist, these versions of Perceval’s quest may be said to have blended the two types of initiation. They portrayed both a boy’s coming of age and his introduction to visionary experience.

Granting that Perceval is initiated into the secrets of the grail, are we, the readers, initiated along with Perceval, or do some secrets that he learned remain unknown to us at the story’s end? The enormous body of both academic and popular scholarship on the grail itself

amply proves, I suggest, that like Irish wonder stories that drew attention to a fairy-apple but never identified the species botanically, the grail romances create an interest in the grail that they never satisfy in full. In contrast with mainstream Christianity, which denies that it possesses mysteries or secrets that were not made public through Jesus, the grail literature concerns an abiding mystery.

The origin of the motif of the grail is to be found, I suggest, in the distinctive theology of the Eucharist that Anselm, of the cathedral school of Laon, developed in the first and second decades of the twelfth century. Because God was present, albeit in different ways, both in the host and in divine visions, Anselm brought the Eucharist into a doctrinal relationship with visionary experiences. Both were presences of God, and both additionally symbolized the purely spiritual reality that God also is. The Eucharistic theology of the school of Laon followed mainstream Catholicism in identifying the host with the heavenly bread of John 7:32-35, but it spoke separately of divine visions under the motif of the hidden manna of Revelation 2:17. It is my present claim that in all of its twelfth and thirteen century variants, the motif of the grail alluded to, and implicitly signified, the hidden manna of Revelation 2:17, with all that the motif signified in the Eucharistic theology of the school of Laon.<sup>42</sup>

Interestingly, in both the *Queste del Saint Graal* and the *Estoire del Saint Graal*, the grail castle is named Corbenic, a term that Loomis interpreted as a corruption of Old French *cors benoit*, "blessed body," alluding to the Corpus Christi of the Eucharist.<sup>43</sup> Bruce instead identified Corbenic with the town of Corbény (in the Middle Ages, *Corbiniacum*), which had been the site of a Benedictine monastery from the early tenth century onward. From the early thirteenth century through the seventeenth, French kings, immediately after their coronation at Rheims, spent nine days at a royal palace in Corbény, in order to benefit supernaturally from proximity to the bones of St Marculf which were kept in a shrine at the monastery.<sup>44</sup> Not only was Corbény a place of royal initiation into the blessed body of St Marculf, but it lay nineteen kilometers northwest of Laon. On either Loomis's or Bruce's interpretation, the grail castle's name Corbenic drew attention, I suggest, to Laon and its Eucharistic theology.

Unlike the host, which was publicly celebrated in churches, the hidden manna was called a secret in Revelation; and the interpretation that medieval clerics placed on the biblical text was, as I have elsewhere shown, partly public and partly secret. References to the hidden manna were, I have argued, a way of speaking esoterically of the psychedelic sacrament of the medieval Latin Church,<sup>45</sup> and the grail was a secular literary motif to the same effect. Unlike theological writings about the hidden manna, the grail literature was composed for an audience of upper class laity, much as Celtic wonder stories had earlier been. The romances functioned not only publicly as entertainments, but secretly also as a missionizing outreach by proponents of the psychedelic sacrament in Western Christianity.

#### Chrétien de Troyes

Troyes was the ancient capital of Champagne, whose twelfth century countess, Marie de France, was the author of Arthurian romances in her own right. She was Chrétien's chief patron. Chrétien dedicated his last poem, the unfinished *Li Conte del Graal*, "*The Story of the Grail*," to Philip of Alsace, Count of Flanders. Philip was a frequent visitor to Troyes and had at one time been a suitor of Marie. Chrétien was a cleric who had had scholastic training. An effective translator from Latin, he remarked in *Cligés* on a visit to the cathedral library of Beauvais. He may have been the "Christianus, canonicus Sancti Lupi" who was signatory to a charter in 1173. The Abbey of Saint-Loup had been founded in the fifth century and reformed in 1135 by Bernard of nearby Clairvaux.<sup>46</sup>

In *The Story of the Grail*, which is also called the *Perceval*, Chrétien introduced the topos of the grail, using the term as if his audience was familiar with the concept. Etymologically, the term *graal* denoted a large food platter or basin.<sup>47</sup> Writing in the early thirteenth century, the Cistercian monk Helinandus of Froidmont, who had earlier been a court poet, explained:

*Gradalis* or *gradale* is the French name for a dish which is broad and somewhat deep (*scutella lata et aliquantulum profunda*), in which costly foods are wont to be served to rich folk together with their juice in stages (*gradatim*), one morsel after the other in various sequences. And in the vernacular it is called *graalz*, because it is pleasing (*grata*) and acceptable to the one who eats from it, both on account of the container (for it may be of silver or of another precious material), and on account of the contents (i.e., a manifold sequence of costly foods).<sup>48</sup>

Chrétien referred to precisely such a grail, which was made of gold and set with gems, and differed from another food vessel that he called a platter.

The squires were followed by a maiden  
who bore a grail, with both hands laden.  
The bearer was of noble mien,  
well dressed, and lovely, and serene,  
and when she entered with the grail,  
the candles suddenly grew pale,  
the grail cast such a brilliant light,  
as stars grow dimmer in the night  
when sun or moonrise makes them fade.  
A maiden after her conveyed  
a silver platter past the bed.  
The grail, which had been borne ahead  
was made of purest, finest gold  
and set with gems...<sup>49</sup>

The wondrous radiance of the grail was the only miraculous element in its initial description. The motif alluded to John 8:2, "Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world."<sup>50</sup> At the same time, the radiance of the grail light was not simply a metaphor that referred to intellectual understanding. The light was visible; the radiance was a corporeal vision.

A later passage in Chrétien's *Perceval* added a second miraculous element. Discussing the father of the Fisher King, who received his food from the grail, an old hermit told Perceval:

Now do not let the thought prevail  
that from the grail he takes food like  
a salmon, lamprey, or a pike,  
because from it the king obtains  
one mass wafer, and it sustains  
his life, borne in the grail they bring;  
the grail is such a holy thing.  
He is so very spiritual  
that he's required no food at all  
except the host the grail contained.<sup>51</sup>

Here we are explicitly informed that the grail was large enough to hold food such as "a salmon, lamprey, or a pike." It nevertheless held only a single mass wafer. This wafer was not an ordinary one. It was carried by a woman, contrary to the doctrine of the Latin Church.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, it was not said to be consecrated. Scowcroft concluded: "Chrétien did not, apparently, want the Grail procession to be *identified* with the liturgy but

only to *remind* his readers of it, and thus suggest the special holiness of the Grail.”<sup>53</sup> The unconsecrated wafer was implicitly symbolic. It provided sufficient nourishment that the father of the Fisher King required no other food. The biblical allusion was transparent. In its function as a complete diet, the wafer in the grail was equivalent to the manna on which the Israelites fed in the desert. It was not an ordinary Eucharist wafer that was manna in the ordinary metaphoric way. The wafer in the grail had the original miraculous nature of the manna of the wilderness. It was a miraculously plentiful foodstuff; and just as manna had been associated with the vision of the Glory of God, the grail possessed a radiance that alluded to John 8:12, “I am the light of the world.”

Chrétien’s remark that the grail did not contain a salmon alluded, I suggest, to the significance of salmon in Celtic folklore.<sup>54</sup> The *Dindsenchas*, a collection of stories in Middle-Irish prose and verse, is extant in seven manuscripts, the oldest, the *Book of Leinster*, dates to the middle of the twelfth century. Its tales are presumably older still. One of the stories speaks of the salmon of wisdom.

Sinend daughter of Lodan Lucharglan son of Ler, out of Tír Tairngire (“Land of Promise, Fairyland”) went to Connla’s Well, which is under sea, to behold it. That is a well at which are the hazels and inspirations (?) of wisdom, that is, the hazels of the science of poetry, and in the same hour their fruit, and their blossom and their foliage break forth, and these fall on the well in the same shower, which raises on the water a royal surge of purple. Then the salmon chew the fruit, and the juice of the nuts is apparent on their purple bellies. And seven streams of wisdom spring forth and turn there again.

Now Sinend went to seek the inspiration, for she wanted nothing save only wisdom.<sup>55</sup>

In this mythologem, the hazel nuts were psychoactive; and the flesh of the salmon that ate the hazel nuts became similarly psychoactive. The hazel nuts were called berries and said to be purple, presumably to hint at an esoteric concern with a different plant.

The motif of a psychoactive salmon of wisdom occurred also in *The Boyish Exploits of Finn*, a wonder tale whose extant form omitted the detail that only the first person who ate such a salmon enjoyed its psychoactive effects.

Seven years Finnécas had been on the Boyne, watching the salmon of Fec’s Pool; for it had been prophesied of him that he would eat the salmon of Féc, when nothing would remain unknown to him. The salmon was found, and Demne was then ordered to cook the salmon; and the poet told him not to eat anything of the salmon. The youth brought him the salmon after cooking it. “Hast thou eaten anything of the salmon, my lad” says the poet. “No,” says the youth, “but I burned my thumb, and put it into my mouth afterwards.” “What is thy name, my lad?” says he. “Demne,” says the youth. “Finn [the Fair] is thy name, my lad,” says he; “and to thee was the salmon given to be eaten, and verily thou art the Finn.” Thereupon the youth eats the salmon. It is that which gave the knowledge to Finn, to wit, whenever he put his thumb into his mouth, and sang through *teinnm láida* [“Illumination of song”], then whatever he had been ignorant of would be revealed to him.<sup>56</sup>

The antiquity of the nut motif is indicated by a seventh century text, Adomnán of Iona’s *Life of St Columba*. In one episode, Columba asked an enchanter named Broichan to release an Irish slave-girl. When Broichan refused, he suffered a seizure and was unable to breathe. After Broichan released the girl, Columba worked a miracle to heal him.



The stone was dipped in some water, where, in defiance of nature, it floated miraculously on the surface of the water like an apple or a nut, for that which the saint had blessed could not be made to sink. When Broichan drank from it, though he had been near to death, he recovered completely his bodily health.<sup>57</sup>

In 2 Kings 6:1-10, the prophet Elisha had made a fallen axehead float in water. Here a similar miracle was attributed to Columba, but with an added detail. The floating stone that transformed water into a medicine was equivalent to “an apple or a nut,” implicitly a fairy-apple or a hazel nut of wisdom.

The motif of psychoactive hazel nuts remained current in England as late as the fourteenth century, when Julian of Norwich envisioned Jesus offering her one.

And in this he showed me something small, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, and I perceived that it was as round as any ball. I looked at it and thought: What can this be? And I was given this general answer: It is everything which is made. I was amazed that it could last, for I thought that it was so little that it could suddenly fall into nothing. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and always will, because God loves it; and thus everything has being through the love of God.<sup>58</sup>

In Julian’s vision, the something like a hazel nut was explicitly mystical. It was “everything which is made,” the All, ever-lasting, and beloved by God.

Hazels were also associated with psychoactivity in the *Life of Saint Cadoc*, who lived in Wales in the late sixth century and was remembered, among other matters, for having studied for three years at Lismore in Ireland. When Cadoc installed his replacement as abbot of Llan-carvan in Wales, he gave him various instructions, which included a reference to the oracular power of the hazel. “And with respect to the place of judgment, let it be under the shade of the hazel tree, which I myself have planted nigh the monastery, and it will give its pledge to stand in correct judging, in the hand of the abbot in the day of trial.”<sup>59</sup>

Another tale of Finn in the *Dindsenchas* referred to two different types of psychoactive nuts. One was the sort that Finn preferred, and the other functioned as a love potion.

Maer wife of Bersa of Berramain fell in love with Find son of Cumall, and she formed nine nuts of Sergais with love-charms, and commanded Ibuirne son of Dedos to deliver them to Find, and told Find to cut and eat them. “Nay”, says Find, “for they are not nuts of knowledge, but nuts of ignorance (*cna-amrois*), and it is not know for what they are, unless an enchantment for drinking love”. So Find buried them a foot deep in the earth.<sup>60</sup>

The psychoactive ingredient in such a love potion was named in the Welsh *Life of Saint Brynach*, who lived in the middle of the fifth century. His legend related that a woman once attempted to seduce the saint by means of “wolfsbane with lustful ingredients formally prepared,” that is, in a magico-ritual manner.<sup>61</sup>

Yet a third type of psychoactive nut would seem to be indicated in an Irish tale of the poet Oengus. After “a spell mixed in a gathering of the nuts of Caill Achaid” turns six men and their wives into swine, Buichet’s wife mustered a hundred heroes to hunt the swine, and they sought help from Oengus.

Then they entreated Oengus to help them, but he said that he could not do so until they had shaken the Tree of Tarbga and eaten the salmon of Inver Umaill.

After that they went to Glascarn and remained a year with Drebreann in hiding. ‘Tis then they shook the Tree of Tarbga, and fared forth to Inver Umaill (where they arrived on the day that the mound was raised).<sup>62</sup>

The idea that the warriors went into hiding from the swine possibly implied that the transformation of the men and women into boars and sows was a mythical way of speaking about the shape-shifting of warriors; whereas Oengus was willing to help the warriors only if they underwent an initiation into a poetic ecstasy. Schrijver suggested that henbane anciently played a role in Celtic warrior bands, "either as part of a ritual or effectively as preparation for battle, in order to generate some of the typical characteristics of the warriors belonging to the warrior band."<sup>63</sup> Shape-shifting, particularly into dogs, was prominent in Irish legends about warriors.<sup>64</sup> Other Irish tales portrayed hazel wood as a weapon effective against demons and witches.<sup>65</sup>

Due to the multiplicity of psychoactive nuts in Celtic folklore, differentiating the types of nut might depend on subsidiary details, such as salmon. Mongán mac Fiachnai, a seventh century prince of east Ulster whom legend regarded as a reincarnation of Finn, was credited with the ability to travel in the form of a salmon.<sup>66</sup> In old Welsh poetry, the bard Taliesin similarly boasted "I was a blue salmon";<sup>67</sup> and the twelfth century *Acallam na Sendrach*, "Tales of the Elders of Ireland," introduced the apostle of Ireland as "Patrick, the son of Calpurn, the salmon of Heaven,"<sup>68</sup> again alluding to the significance of the salmon of wisdom in the Irish system of symbolism. Chrétien's mention of a salmon, and the designation of the grail owner as the Fisher King, similarly signalled readers who were familiar with Celtic symbolism that the wafer in the grail signified the particular psychoactive to which salmon alluded in Celtic folklore. The psychoactive to which Celts attributed poetic inspiration, as distinct from obsessive sexual interest and shape-shifting, was the particular psychoactive that could also be symbolized by a Eucharist wafer.

Further evidence that Chrétien was discussing the hidden manna, and not the ordinary wafer that is the public manna of the Eucharist, is the *leitmotif* of secrecy in *Conte del Graal*. Perceval began his adventures as an ignoramus. He did not know what a knight was, nor what a church was. He was later shown the grail without being told whom it served, nor what it was. These and other elements of secrecy were deliberate. When the hermit told Perceval about the grail, he remarked:

The man they serve is my own brother;  
my sister, and his, was your mother;  
and also the rich Fisherman  
is that king's son, son of the man  
who has himself served the grail.<sup>69</sup>

This disclosure implied that Perceval had all his life been denied knowledge not only of the grail, but also of his grandfather, who daily ate a wafer, and his two uncles, the Fisher King and the hermit who made the disclosure. The mysteries surrounding the location of the grail castle, the question to be asked of the grail, and so forth, were part of his family's knowledge; yet Perceval was kept in ignorance until after he had failed at the grail. The *leitmotif* of secrecy continued to the end of the romance. We are never, in any version of the Perceval quest, informed of the grail family's purpose in allowing Perceval to stumble about ignorantly for most of the story.

Because Chrétien left his poem unfinished, he never portrayed Perceval asking the question whom the grail served. Scholars have regularly assumed that the question pertained to the grail serving food to the Fisher King; but because the hermit disclosed the Fisher King's kinship to Perceval, a question regarding the uncle's identity would not have formed a meaningful dramatic climax to the narrative. It would not have disclosed the secret of the grail. I would like to suggest that the question whom the grail served referred instead to the service of God. In the Prologue to *Li Conte del Graal*, Chrétien had written:

Why does the Gospel so command,

"Hide thy good deeds from thy left hand,"?

.....  
The right hand stands for charity,  
which does good, seeking to conceal it,  
instead of boasting to reveal it,  
so no one knows of it but He  
whose name is God and Charity,  
for God is Charity. I've read  
the text in which Saint Paul has said,  
"Who lives in charity shall dwell  
in God and God in him as well."<sup>70</sup>

Chrétien wrongly credited to Paul the quotation from 1 John 4:16, "God is love [*caritas*], and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." Chrétien's phrase, "no one knows of it but He/ whose name is God," alluded to two further biblical texts. In Matthew 11:27, Jesus stated, "All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." Revelation 2:17b echoed the gospel's phrasing when it asserted, "To him conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it." Chrétien's association of the phrase "no one knows" with the text of 1 John 4:16 identified the grail, for those who knew that it symbolized the hidden manna, with dwelling in God. It further implied that the question, whom the grail served, was correctly answered, "God."

Chrétien hinted that the name of God was the correct answer to the grail quester's question when he explicitly discussed a secret that the hermit taught Perceval.

The hermit taught the knight a prayer  
by whispering it in his ear  
time and again, till it was clear  
that he could say it back the same.  
Such potent forms of Our Lord's name  
were in this prayer, so great and many,  
no one should utter it on any  
pretext except in fear of death.<sup>71</sup>

Olschki remarked that: "The Church has never known such an ineffable prayer or this method of teaching it to converts or the faithful."<sup>72</sup> Chrétien evidently portrayed a variant of the Jewish custom concerning the tetragrammaton, which is not ordinarily spoken. The Talmud provides, however, that the name of God be pronounced by a rabbi to his students once in seven years, in order that its correct pronunciation not be lost.

Chrétien's familiarity with Jewish custom has been proposed repeatedly. Weinraub noted that Chrétien de Troyes described the meal, during which the grail was displayed, in terms appropriate to the ritual meal, called a *Seder*, "order," that Jewish families have celebrated at Passover since late antiquity. The Fisher King reclined on his elbow as Jews do at a *Seder*. A young girl carried the grail platter as, among Sephardic Jews, a young girl removes the ceremonial *Seder* plate. Perceval failed to ask an expected question. In Jewish custom, four ritual questions are asked by the youngest boy present; in Sephardic practice, the boy additionally asks the girl who removes the plate where she is going and why she is removing the plate. The bleeding lance of the grail procession compares with the Jewish custom of dipping a knife in wine, so that the wine may drip down onto the table or a plate, in memorial of the plague of blood that God visited upon the Egyptians. Candelabras were

used at the grail meal, as also at the Seder. Immediately before eating, the people who had assembled for the grail washed their hands at table, as is ritually required at the Seder. Tablecloths were used at both tables. In the *Perceval*, the meal consisted of a *gastel* cake, meat, and a condiment, corresponding to the Jewish ritual obligation to eat *matzah*, "unleavened bread," lamb in commemoration of the Passover sacrifice, and bitter herbs. Not only did Chrétien's description of the *gastel* match medieval paintings of Jewish *matzah*, but the variant *gatey* was used to translate "matzah" into French in 1240 in the glossary of Joseph ben Simson. Wine was served at both meals. The repeated appearance of the grail during the course of the meal compares with the repeated uncovering of the Seder plate, which contains *matzah*, at specific ritual moments during the Seder. The exotic fruits at the grail meal compare with the *haroset*, a blend of ground apple, dried fruit, nuts, wine, and cinnamon, that forms part of the Seder. Finally, at both meals no food was consumed after the final cups of wine.<sup>73</sup> If we allow Weinraub's thesis that Chrétien described the grail meal with features appropriate to a Passover Seder, we may assume that the grail meal was intended to allude to the Last Supper, when the historical Jesus observed an early version of the Passover Seder.

Let me add a further allusion to the Passover Seder that Weinraub missed. In addition to the four questions that the youngest child asks, there is a passage in the Passover service that narrates questions by four sons and the answers that are to be given them. The sons are respectively wise, wicked, simple, and uninquiring. The instructions regarding the last state: "And he who does not know to ask, you open for him, as it is said (Exod 13:8), 'And you shall tell your son on that day, "It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt."'"<sup>74</sup> Through his allusions to the Passover Seder, Chrétien may have been making the theological point that in leaving *Perceval* ignorant, *Perceval*'s family was guilty of sin against the commandment of Exodus 13:8.

Access to Jewish Passover customs was available to Christians in twelfth century Troyes, which was the seat of an internationally celebrated rabbinical academy. Ecumenical contacts must have existed. Writing a generation prior to Chrétien, Peter Abelard (1079-1142) advised students at the Paraclete, the monastery that he built near Troyes, to learn Hebrew, the better to understand the biblical text.<sup>75</sup> Rashi's Bible commentaries, written at Troyes, occasionally responded to the views of Christian commentators; and the Bible commentaries of Rashi's grandson, the Rashbam (Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir), who succeeded his grandfather as head of the rabbinic academy in Troyes, exhibit personal familiarity with the Latin Bible and some of its Latin commentaries.<sup>76</sup>

Because Chrétien left the *Perceval* unfinished at his death, his portrait of the grail was fragmentary. It remained for others to develop the motif more fully.

#### Robert de Boron

Robert de Boron was named for a village eighteen kilometers from Montbéliard in Burgundy.<sup>77</sup> He authored what is assumed to have been a grail trilogy in Old French verse, of which only *Joseph of Arimathea* and 502 lines of *Merlin* survive in a single manuscript. Close prose redactions of the *Joseph*, the *Merlin*, and a further romance, entitled *Perceval*, survive and are dated to the early thirteenth century.<sup>78</sup> The *Joseph* is dated after Chrétien's *Perceval*. It was formerly dated before 1199, because Robert's patron, Gautier (Walter) de Montbéliard, Lord of Montfaucon, took the cross in that year. Rather than to proceed on the Fourth Crusade, however, he held an administrative post on Cyprus; and it is possible that Robert wrote *Joseph* in Cyprus. By 1205, Gautier was constable of Jerusalem; and between 1205 and 1210 he was regent of the underage Hugh, who was king of Cyprus and Jerusalem. When Hugh came of age, Gautier fell from power. He relocated in Acre and died fighting Muslims in 1212.<sup>79</sup>

The prose *Joseph of Arimathea* identified the grail with "the vessel in which He had made the sacrament" at the Last Supper.<sup>80</sup> A Jew took it and gave it to Pilate, who made a gift of it to Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph used "the vessel" to catch the drops of blood that fell

from Christ's wounds on the cross.<sup>81</sup> Later, when Joseph was imprisoned, the vessel was brought to him, and "Joseph saw a great light, and was filled with joy and with the grace of the Holy Spirit, and he marvelled and said: 'Almighty God, where can such a brilliant light come from unless from You?'"<sup>82</sup> Jesus appeared and associated the Last Supper with the Eucharist: "As I said at that table, several tables will be established in my service, to make the sacrament in my name, which will be a reminder of the cross; and the vessel of the sacrament will be a reminder of the stone tomb."<sup>83</sup> Repeated references to the motifs of "a brilliant light"<sup>84</sup> and a "great grace...which so fills man's heart"<sup>85</sup> indicate a concern with mystical experiences--the hidden manna, as distinct from the manna that was Eucharist. Robert referred also to a further wonder of the grail: its capacity to discern sinners. The *Life of Saint Brynach*, who lived in the middle of the fifth century, credited the Welsh saint with a comparable miracle. Once, when a Welsh king had sinned against him, God provided that the water that had been placed in the cauldron to boil meat remained cold, regardless of the size of the fire placed beneath it. Perceiving the miracle, the king repented. The motif was also employed in the *Life of Saint Beino*.<sup>86</sup> In adapting the motif of discernment for his *Joseph*, Robert credited the miracle to the vessel rather than the water. The grail "will allow no sinner in its presence," but it "gives such joy and delight to those who can stay in its presence that they feel as elated as a fish escaping from a man's hands into the wide water."<sup>87</sup> The passing to the salmon of wisdom may be noted.

*Joseph's* invention of a saintly lineage in Wales that descended from Joseph of Arimathea had its model in the historical lineages of Cunedda, Rychan Gycheiniog, and Caw, which had each produced a number of famous saints and whose heads were hereditary keepers of their families' relics.<sup>88</sup> In time, the fictional family of Joseph of Arimathea joined the historical ones in Welsh legend. A late variant of the triad of the "Three Kindreds of Saints of the Island of Britain," omitted the offspring of Caw and substituted the lineage of Joseph of Arimathea.<sup>89</sup> It is at least probable that the concept of the grail family in Chrétien was similarly indebted to the historical Holy Families of Wales.

The prose *Perceval*, which is assumed to have been based on a lost poem by Robert de Boron, added little further detail regarding the grail, apart from its description as "the vessel that contains Our Lord's blood, which is called the Grail."<sup>90</sup> The prose *Perceval* always referred to "the vessel." The assumption that the vessel was shaped like a cup or chalice was inferred from its function as the prototype of the chalice or cup that holds wine during the Eucharist.

The grail's portrayal as a cup traces to church art in Spain. Goering noticed art in several village churches in the eastern Pyrenees that show the Virgin Mary holding a cup, bowl, or chalice that art historians commonly term a fiery grail. "These images have no clear artistic antecedents, they seem not to have spread outside of this region, nor were similar images made after the twelfth century."<sup>91</sup> The earliest provable example can be dated to December 1123, over a half century prior to Chrétien's *Story of the Grail*. It portrays Christ seated in majesty, surrounded by the four evangelists, with the Virgin Mary and twelve apostles below. The Greek letters *alpha* and *omega* are suspended from a cross behind Christ's head, and a book open on his knees reads, "Ego sum lux mundi."<sup>92</sup> The allusion to Revelation 1:8, "I am alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, says the Lord," and the quotation of John 8:12, "I am the light of the world," provide a basis, I suggest, for understanding the "shallow bowl," held in the Virgin's left hand, "from which luminous reddish-orange rays stream."<sup>93</sup> The light was Jesus. The vessel from which the light emerged was presumably the womb of the Virgin Mary.

The grail was definitely associated with Mary in later contexts. In *The History of the Holy Grail*, which is dated around 1235, all but one references to "the vessel" concerned the grail. The unique exception was the Virgin Mary: "the Holy Spirit...descended through the maiden's ear into the glorious vessel of her blessed womb."<sup>94</sup> Similarly, in a poem written from the first person perspective of the Virgin, the German poet Frauenlob (c. 1250s-1318) had her say:

I am the Grail  
that healed the noble King's great woe.  
With my milk I nursed the hero  
from the violet vale.<sup>95</sup>

The motif of the radiant cup held by the Virgin Mary in early twelfth century church art may be attributed, I suggest, to stimulus diffusion from Islam. It was not a borrowing from Islam, but a reaction that aimed to prevent borrowing. The Light Verse of the Qur'an (24:35) states: "Allah is the Light of the Heavens and of the Earth," a concept that was taken literally in the illuminationist tradition within Muslim philosophy. Influenced by Neoplatonism, Muslim illuminists from Avicenna (980-1037) onward maintained that God is the necessarily existent light, all else being contingent light of increasing density and materiality.<sup>96</sup> The concept of preexistent light, out of which all creation was made, was sometimes termed *nur Muhammad*, "the light of Muhammad," and identified with the prophet.<sup>97</sup> Some Sufis, such as the Andalusian mystic at Tustari (d. 986), conceptualized mystical experience as the mystic's attainment of the primordial condition of *nur Muhammad*.<sup>98</sup> Al-Ghazzali (d. 1111), the mainstream philosophical theologian who became a Sufi and secured a place for mysticism within orthodox Sunni Islam, explicated the Light Verse to mean "that Allah is Light, and that beside Him there is no light, and that He is every light, and that He is the universal light."<sup>99</sup> Al-Ghazzali's doctrine was nondualist. "Each several thing other than Allah is, when considered in and by itself, pure not-being...the God-aspect is the sole thing in existence...there is no Existent except God."<sup>100</sup>

Muslim mystics' equation of God with both light and all existence was sometimes linked to the motif of a cup. In an article entitled "A Shiite Liturgy of the Grail," Corbin discussed and translated a Persian text entitled "Ritual of the Cup."<sup>101</sup> The text attributed the ritual to Abu'l-Khattab (d. 762) and reflected the teachings of the Nusayri, an Islamic secret sect whose name and origin trace to Abu Shu'ayb Mohammed Ibn Nusayr al-Namiri (d. ca 884). The Nusayri have in recent times called themselves the Alawiyya, in reference to Ali b. Abi Talib, whom they deify. Alawites are the present day rulers of Syria; in Turkey the sectarians are termed Alevis.

The protagonist of the "Ritual of the Cup," Abu'l Khattab Mohammed ibn Abi Zaynab Miqlas al-Asadi Al-Kufi was historically the first person to organize a secret or esoteric (*batini*) sect in Islam. "The Ritual of the Cup" attributes to Abu'l Khattab the institution of an initiation rite that consisted of drinking the wine of *Malakut*, the angelic world. The beverage was to be contrasted with another.

*A-Kh:* The wine of the *Malakut* is for you; the wine of the gates of Hell [*Balhut*] is for others.

*We:* And what is the wine of the *Balhut*?

*A-Kh:* The blood of Iblis [Ahriman], may God condemn him! But the drink [wine] of the *Malakut* is the pure beverage which God has described as the drink of his friends [*li-awliya'ih*] in paradise. [And Abu'l-Khattab recites the Qur'anic verse 47:16:] "Rivers of wine, and delights for those who drink of it." Therefore, drink of it in perfect knowledge and in total truth.<sup>102</sup>

When the men drank from the cup, it remained full. "He...drank until his own thirst was satisfied without any decrease in the contents of the cup. All thus drank their fill in turn. Finally, having circulated among all present, the cup returned, exactly as full as it was at the beginning."<sup>103</sup> Corbin remarked that the motif of a cup that was ever full occurred in European romances of the holy grail.<sup>104</sup> When the Muslim company had drunk the wine of *Malakut*, the men saw a vision. The cup floated visibly into the air. The deceased Imam Ja'far was seen and heard far above, where a beautiful light was also seen.

Abu'l-Khattab held the cup up, moving it around in a circle. As he traced out the form of the circle, we regarded it intently; then the cup lifted up, rising little by little, floating in space, until it came to its resting place. At this moment, we beheld the Lord [*al-Sayyid*, the Imam Ja'far], looking upon us from the heights of this space. He was underneath a red dome, built from a unique pearl, whose light shone from the East to the West. The air was filled with a perfume of musk.

The lord-companion Imam Ja'far, giver of our salvation, then proclaimed his secret: "O Mohammed [ibn Abi Zaynab, Abu'l-Khattab], I quench the thirst of my faithful adepts, the pure, the noble, the just, with this drink which I have forbidden to common libertines. I have offered it to my faithful who are present in this world and in the other world. But to the common libertines I have imposed yoke and chains, and have sent them into the desert of those who lose their way."

As for us, we were rapt in contemplation of the beauty and Light which radiated from the dome. Then my lord [the Imam] spoke to us again: "I have chosen you, I have attracted you to me, and you have come near by remaining with my Friends. If it had been otherwise, your eyes would have been torn out by the power of this Light, and you would have fainted in terror upon hearing this voice. But I have made it so that this is an honor for you and a disgrace for your adversaries...."

At this moment the cup began to re-descend towards us. But this time it was empty, with not a drop remaining.<sup>105</sup>

The Imam's secret, that the Qur'anic wine of the paradise was available to the "faithful who are present in this world," accounted for the occurrence of the company's visionary experience. The emptiness of the cup identified the wine with the vision; when the vision ended, the wine was gone too. The term "wine" indicated psychoactivity but not the specific botanical basis of the drug. In medieval Islam, marijuana was called the "green wine" and opium the "black wine."<sup>106</sup>

At the end of the text, the wine, which had already been portrayed as psychoactive, was explicitly said to be so. "Through this drink, you have tasted the knowledge of *Malakut*, the knowledge of that which was in the first of the centuries, and is throughout all the ages and cycles of the world."<sup>107</sup> When Abu'l Khattab first drank from the cup, he said, "I was thereupon filled with knowledge, wisdom and intelligence. This is why I desired that you find solace in this cup."<sup>108</sup> The wine was to be kept a secret known only to initiates. "This wine is allowed for your brothers, when they are in the company of brothers in faith and in gnosis. But this wine is forbidden to you and to them, when in the company of any but your brothers."<sup>109</sup>

A Nusayri catechism of the nineteenth century<sup>110</sup> indicates that the ritual of the cup then remained a central practice of the sect; and Birge participated in a similar ritual in the 1930s among Bektashi Sufis, a Turkish order that was founded in the late thirteenth century.<sup>111</sup> The psychoactive beverage of the Bektashi appears to be made with Syrian rue,<sup>112</sup> presumably as potentiated by one or more substances that are as yet unidentified.

In the present context, I would like to suggest that the use of psychoactive drugs in esoteric Islam was sufficiently threatening to the Church in the eastern Pyrenees in the twelfth century that church art both appropriated the Muslim motif of the cup and deliberately filled it with the light of Christ. Goering noted that Muslim warriors attacked and often occupied the southern parts of the diocese of Roda whose churches contain the artistic motif; and French military campaigns in the twelfth century aided the Spanish reconquest in the area. The motif of the grail may have been noticed by minstrels or story-tellers who were attached to French courts, while they were in the area with the troops; and the motif may have travelled north when the French forces returned home.<sup>113</sup> In particular, Guilhem, the ninth Count of Poitou and seventh Duke of Aquitaine (1071-1127), participated in the

reconquest of Andalusia, going as far as Granada and Cordova in 1115, and fighting again as an ally of Aragon in 1119. The latter campaign would have placed his court in the vicinity of the grail art in Pyrenees churches. At the same time, Guilhem was favorably impressed by aspects of Islam. He was the first troubadour; he invented the French love lyric on the model of Arabic songs of wine and love. He was also influenced by Arthurian currents. The second Continuator of Chrétien's *Perceval* credited the adventure of Gawain and the dwarf knight to the Welsh storyteller Bleheris (Bleddri), who had told the story "to the Count of Poitiers, who loved it and held it more than any other firmly in memory."<sup>114</sup> The story of the grail was implied; the Welsh Beli Mawr, a dwarf king of the otherworld, was the prototype of Pelles, the hermit uncle of Perceval in both Boron's *Perceval* and the *Perlesvaus*.<sup>115</sup> The chalice may have entered Arthurian romance at the court in Poitiers in the time of Guilhelm IX or perhaps his son Guilhem X, and then traveled north with Guilhem's family. Guilhem X was the father of Eleanor of Aquitaine and grandfather of Chrétien's patroness, Marie de France.

Just as the Irish legends of Finn and Oengus championed psychoactive hazel nuts, while depreciating other kinds of psychoactive nut, the grail romances were, I suggest, secretly part of a literary war to champion the hidden manna in opposition to the mystical wines of Islam. Consider a Muslim contribution to the controversy. Ibn 'Iyad (1083-1149), who lived in central Andalusia, wrote the following poem, which is entitled "Grainfield." It is possibly to be read as a boast of Muslim victory over Christians in the generation prior to Chrétien de Troyes.

Look at the ripe wheat  
bending before the wind  
like squadrons of horsemen  
fleeing in defeat, bleeding  
from the wounds of the poppies.<sup>116</sup>

Here plants that were associated with psychoactive substances would have symbolized the communities that used them: wheat with ergot and Christianity, versus poppies with opium and Islam.

My suggestion that there was a clandestine or esoteric controversy about the drugs of preference in medieval Christianity and Islam, dovetails with the well known controversy regarding the associated mystical theologies. In his mystical exegesis of the biblical Song of Songs, Bernard of Clairvaux privileged a mystical communion with God as the highest possible spiritual attainment. God engaged the soul in a spiritual marriage that preserved the integrity of both the soul and God. Muslim Sufis instead privileged mystical experiences that were characterized by an oblivion to self that they termed *fana*, "annihilation." The Sufi term entered Christianity in the late thirteenth century and tended to have heretical implications of self-deification and antinomianism.<sup>117</sup> The term was promoted widely through the popularity of Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls*, a heretical Beguine text that spoke of the soul's "annihilation" through "three entire deaths...the death of sin...the death of nature...[and] the death of the spirit."<sup>118</sup> Meister Eckhart echoed Porete: "The man who has annihilated himself in himself and in God and in all created things...has taken possession of the lowest place, and God must pour the whole of himself into this man, or else he is not God."<sup>119</sup> Mystical nondualism, which holds that God alone exists, so that the whole of creation, including the mystic, is divine, is inconsistent with the Jewish and Christian teaching of *creatio ex nihilo*, with its doctrine of a radically transcendent God who engages creation, including the mystic, in an intimate, loving relationship. The question whom the grail served obliged an initiate to choose between the alternatives. However heterodox their formulations of Christianity may have been, the grail romancers entered the lists on behalf of the biblical Creator.



My hypothesis, that the hidden manna of the Eucharistic school of Laon became a topic for literary fictions as a means to oppose the northward spread of Sufism among Christian laity in France, will account for the basic question why recourse was taken to Arthurian romance. French churchmen had been advocating the psychedelic sacrament under the trope of the hidden manna since 1110 or thereabouts, but ecclesiastic writings did not reach the audience among whom Sufism was spreading. Celtic adventure stories, with their centuries-old characters, story lines, and wonder motifs, already possessed a variety of narratives that concerned psychoactives and were admirably suited for the task. A bilingual Celtic story-teller who was privy to both Celtic and French secrets of the psychedelic sacrament apparently made his ancestral lore available to his French hosts. From his point of view, French church authorities constituted a much-desired shield for his own minority position within the Celtic church. The motif of the grail, which placed hidden manna in a type of food vessel that was favored in southern France, epitomized the ecumenical nature of the contact between initiates of different branches of the mystery of manna.

#### **The First Continuations of Chretien's *Perceval***

The First Continuation of Chretien's *Story of the Grail*, formerly called the Pseudo-Wachier Continuation, was written around 1200.<sup>120</sup> It portrayed the grail as a serving platter that miraculously moved about and served all manner of food on its own.

And without delay, as soon as the king and all of them were seated, loaves were set on all the tables. The rich Grail, without anybody carrying it, served them splendidly, coming and going swiftly before all the knights. And I tell you, the butler served them with wine most handsomely in cups of silver and fine gold. And meanwhile the Grail passed back and forth, and the good knight, I assure you, could not understand who was carrying it. It served at least seven full courses, and served them richly and handsomely to all the tables in great silver bowls: as soon as one course was removed, so the next was presented--it served them beautifully indeed. Sir Gawain gazed at it, astounded at the way it served: there one moment, here the next. He thought it truly incredible that it could come and go so rapidly, serving all the knights.<sup>121</sup>

The First Continuation portrayed the grail as a food vessel that miraculously served entire meals without human assistance. The one grail served all of the courses to everyone at the feast, but the foods were apparently conventional ones. The motif had Celtic antecedents. Household items that performed their functions without human assistance were motifs of the terrestrial paradise in Irish folklore.

The First Continuation was presumably familiar with and opposed to Robert de Boron's description of the grail as a cup from the Last Supper, in which Jesus' blood had been caught. The First Continuation treated the vessel of blood in a notably different way.

And just then, at the head of the high table, he saw a lance with a head as white as snow. It was propped upright in a rich silver vase, with two candles burning before it, shedding a great light in the hall. From the tip of the head sprang a trickle of blood which ran down the lance and into the rich basin. All around the lance, right down to the grip, were traced the paths of the drops as they fell into the vessel. But no matter how much it bled, the vase would not be filled, for the blood passed through a large and splendid pipe of dazzling green emerald into a channel of gold, which, by a brilliant and ingenious plan, flowed out of the hall--but he could not see where to.<sup>122</sup>

The vessel that caught blood from the lance was twice termed it a "vase" and once a "basin." In this way, its existence was acknowledged but kept firmly apart from the grail.

The Second Continuation, which was composed shortly after the First,<sup>123</sup> contained no scene that involved the grail. At one point, however, Gawain remarked on his experience of the grail in the First Continuation. He said:

There was also a grail, the like of which was never seen. It was carried by a girl, most elegant and beautiful, and it served the whole table and set bread before the king. I watched this in delight.<sup>124</sup>

Here a girl carried the grail as in Chrétien; but it served food on its own, as in the First Continuation.

#### Wolfram von Eschenbach

Concern with the correct telling of the grail story was also keenly important to Wolfram von Eschenbach, who composed his Middle High German poem *Parzival* between 1200 and 1210.<sup>125</sup> The poem was probably written for Hermann I, landgrave of Thuringia (ruled 1190-1217); and Nicholson argued persuasively that the departures from Chrétien's *Perceval* alluded to political events in Germany around 1208.<sup>126</sup> Wolfram's first description of the grail developed the motif of its wondrous provision of food, including the detail of the cup that was ever full.

They told me--and this I tell upon the oath of each and every one of you!--that before the Grail there was in good supply--if I am deceiving anyone in this, then you must be lying along with me!--whatever anyone stretched out his hand for, he found it all in readiness--hot food, cold food, new food and old too, tame and wild. 'Never did anyone see the like'--someone or other is about to say, but he'll have to eat his words, for the Grail was bliss's fruit, such sufficiency of this world's sweetness that it almost counterweighed what is spoken of the Heavenly Kingdom....

Whatever anyone reached out his goblet for, whatever drink he could name, he could find it in his cup, all from the Grail's plenty. The noble company was entertained at the Grail's expense.<sup>127</sup>

Wolfram's statement, "the Grail was bliss's fruit," explicitly named the grail as a psychoactive plant substance, the fruit of the terrestrial paradise. The motif of providing whatever food or drink an individual might desire traces to patristic legends of manna, presumably as they had been retold in Irish tales of the terrestrial paradise. Another small detail in Wolfram's presentation is equally notable. The character Sigurie remarked: "My meals come here from the Grail, with no delay whatever. Cundrie la Surziere brings me my food promptly from there, every Saturday night--she has taken it upon herself--all I need for the whole week."<sup>128</sup> In this detail the grail resembled the showbread of Solomon's temple, which was replaced once weekly and eaten on Saturday nights.

Wolfram resolved the controversy over platter and cup by introducing a completely appropriate but radically original motif. He described the grail as a stone.

The host said: 'It is well known to me that many a valorous hand resides by the Grail at Munsalvaesche....I will tell you of their food: they live by a stone whose nature is most pure. If you know nothing of it, it shall be named to you here: it is called *lapsit exillis*. By that stone's power the phoenix burns away, turning to ashes, yet those ashes bring it back to life. Thus the phoenix sheds its moulting plumage and thereafter gives off so much bright radiance that it becomes as beautiful as before. Moreover, never was a man in such pain but from the day he beholds the stone, he cannot die in the week that follows immediately after. Nor will his complexion every decline. He will be averred to have such colour as he possessed when he saw the stone--whether it be maid or man--as when his best season commenced. If that person saw the stone for two hundred years, his hair would never turn grey.

Such power does the stone bestow upon man that his flesh and bone immediately acquire youth. That stone is also called the Grail.

Today a message will appear upon it, for therein lies its highest power. Today is Good Friday, and therefore they can confidently expect a dove to wing its way from Heaven. To that stone it will take a small white wafer. On that stone it will leave it. The dove is translucently white. It will make its retreat back to Heaven. Always, every Good Friday, it takes the wafer to that stone, as I tell you; by this the stone receives everything good that bears scent on this earth by way of drink and food, as if it were the perfection of Paradise—I mean, all that this earth is capable of bringing forth. Furthermore, the stone is to grant them whatever game lives beneath the sky, whether it flies or runs or swims. To that knightly brotherhood the Grail's power gives such provender.

As for those who are summoned to the Grail, hear how they are made known. At one end of the stone an epitaph of characters around it tells the name and lineage of whoever is to make the blissful journey to that place. Whether it relates to maidens or boys, no-one has any need to erase that script. As soon as they have read the name, it disappears before their eyes. As children they arrived in its presence, all those who are now full-grown there. Hail to the mother who bore the child that is destined to serve there! Poor and rich alike rejoice if their child is summoned there, if they are to send him to that host. They are fetched from many lands. Against sinful disgrace they are guarded forever more, and their reward will be good in Heaven. When life perishes for them here, perfection will be granted them there.<sup>129</sup>

Not only did the grail provide food abundantly, but it had the power of death and resurrection. The reference to the phoenix and the power of rejuvenation had antecedents in the terrestrial paradise in the Irish "Voyage of Máel Dúin." Wolfram's description of the grail also alluded to Revelation 2:17, "To him who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it." Like the white stone, the grail was a stone that had writing on it. It was also associated with hidden manna: a dove annually brought a small white wafer from heaven down to the grail on earth. The color white was associated with it, in that both the wafer and the dove were white. The location of the grail temple in *Munsalvaesche* or *Munsalvatsche*, "Mount Savage," or "Wild Mountain," looked backward to the Celtic otherworld; several medieval authors who built on the *Parzival* substituted *Montsalvatsche*, "Mount of Salvation," alluding to Mount Zion in Jerusalem.<sup>130</sup>

Later in *Parzival*, Wolfram discussed "hidden tidings concerning the Grail" that his teacher Kyot asked him to conceal. References to written sources in Arthurian romances are often assumed to have been fictitious, but the assumption is unearned. Wolfram's Kyot may have been real. Wolfram claimed that "Kyot is a Provençal, he who saw this adventure of Parzival written down in heathen tongue."<sup>131</sup> A later passage added: "Kyot, the renowned scholar, found in Toledo, lying neglected, in heathen script, this adventure's fundament."<sup>132</sup> At the same time, "No heathen cunning could avail us to tell about the Grail's nature,"<sup>133</sup> implicitly because the Muslim cup was not identical with the grail. Kyot had ostensibly identified "a heathen, Flegetanis," as the author of a text about "a thing called the Grail, whose name he read immediately in the constellation—what it was called: 'A host abandoned it upon the earth, flying up, high above the stars.'"<sup>134</sup> Kahane and Kahane suggested that Wolfram alluded to the myth of the Krater in the *Corpus Hermeticum* and its association with the constellation Crater in between Cancer and Leo.<sup>135</sup> They also noted that by the philosopher "Thebit"<sup>136</sup> Wolfram referred to Thabit ibn Qurra (836-901), a famous Hermetic philosopher of Harran and Baghdad.<sup>137</sup> Because Hermeticism had deeply influenced Pythagorism, astrology, and alchemy in the Islamicate, the Kahanes' thesis does not necessarily pertain to a

persistence of pagan Hermetism in Andalusia. They may instead have detected a Hermetic trend within the same Islamic esotericism to which Corbin drew attention.

Reworking a motif of Robert de Boron,<sup>138</sup> Wolfram composed an original episode that asserted his position in the controversy. Parzival's half-brother, the heathen Feirefiz, attended the celebration over Parzival's successful quest of the grail. Once again the grail provided whatever food and drink were desired. "With courtesy they took from before the Grail dishes wild and tame, this man his mead, that man his wine, as his custom would have it--mulberry juice, sinopel, clary."<sup>139</sup> Feirefiz was unable to see the miracle.

The heathen inquired as to how the empty gold vessels became full before the table. That was a marvel it delighted him to see. Then radiant Anfortas, who had been assigned him as a companion, said: 'Sir, do you see the Grail lying before you?'  
The heathen of dappled hue replied: 'I see nothing..<sup>140</sup>

The company then realized that heathens cannot see the grail, and that baptism was a precondition of the grail quest.<sup>141</sup> Feirefiz was soon baptized and enabled to see the grail.<sup>142</sup> Wolfram's narrative implied that whatever visions a pagan can see, cannot be grace. Any claim that the grail had a Muslim origin was necessarily incorrect. The story of an initiation may have circulated in Islam, but its concern with the hidden manna had not.

### *The High Book of the Grail*

Because the name Perceval was idiosyncratically rendered "Perlesvaus" in *The High Book of the Grail*, the romance is often called the *Perlesvaus*. It was written in Old French prose in England in the early thirteenth century.<sup>143</sup> Because the *Perlesvaus* mentioned the Benedictine house at Glastonbury and described Glastonbury in detail, Nitze supposed that it was produced there; he also noted that the *Perlesvaus* espoused the militant crusader values of the Cluniac tradition.<sup>144</sup> Loomis suggested that the author's extensive familiarity with earlier Arthurian literature was inconsistent with a monastic cell or scriptorium and might better fit a chaplain or secretary "in the castle of an amateur of the *Matière de Bretagne*."<sup>145</sup> Of all of the Grail romances, the *Perlesvaus* is the nearest in texture to a Welsh wonder story and the author's intimate knowledge of oral traditions is a further possibility to consider. The *Perlesvaus* is a manifestly esoteric work. Nicholson remarked: "The subtle and intricate symbolism is an important attraction of the work, which clearly aimed not only to instruct but also to intrigue."<sup>146</sup>

The *Perlesvaus* identified the grail in the tradition stemming from Robert de Boron. "That holy vessel...is called the Grail, in which the precious blood of the Saviour was gathered on the day when He was crucified."<sup>147</sup> When the grail appeared, however, it proved to be a much more complex phenomenon.

At that moment in was brought a loin of stag and other venison in great plenty, and rich golden plate adorned the table, with great lidded goblets of gold, and magnificent golden candlesticks bearing great candles. But the light of these was dimmed by the other light in the room. Just then two maidens appeared from a chapel: in her hands one was carrying the Holy Grail, and the other held the lance with the bleeding head. Side by side they came into the hall where the knights and Sir Gawain were eating. So sweet and holy a fragrance came forth that their feasting was forgotten. Sir Gawain gazed at the Grail and thought he saw therein a chalice, which at that time was a rare sight indeed; and he saw the point of the lance from which the red blood flowed, and he thought he could see two angels bearing two golden candlesticks with candles burning. The maidens passed before Sir Gawain and into another chapel. Sir Gawain was deep in thought, so deep in joyful thought that he could think only of God. The knights stared at him, all downcast

and grieving in their hearts. But just then the two maidens came out of the chapel and passed once more before Sir Gawain. And he thought he saw three angels where before he had seen but two, and there in the centre of the Grail he thought he could see the shape of a child. The foremost knight cried out to Sir Gawain, but he, looking before him, saw three drops of blood drip on to the table, and was so captivated by the sight that he did not say a word. And so the maidens passed on by, leaving the knights looking at one another in dismay. Sir Gawain could not take his eyes off the three drops of blood, but when he tried to kiss them they moved away from him, and it grieved him deeply that he could not touch them with his hand or anything within his reach. Thereupon the two maidens passed once more before the table, and to Sir Gawain it seemed that there were three; and looking up it appeared to him that the Grail was high in the air. And above it he saw, he thought, a crowned king nailed to a cross with a spear thrust in his side. Sir Gawain was filled with sorrow at the sight and he could think of nothing save the pain that the king was suffering. Again the foremost knight cried out to him to speak, saying that if he delayed longer, the chance would be lost forever. But Sir Gawain remained gazing upwards in silence, hearing nothing that the knight had said. The maidens disappeared into the chapel with the Grail and the lance, the knights cleared the tables, left the feat and moved off into another chamber, and Sir Gawain was left there alone.

He looked all around him and saw all the doors shut tight, and then, looking towards the foot of the couch, he could see two candlesticks burning before the chessboard with all its pieces set up.<sup>148</sup>

In this presentation, the grail was a serving platter; but Gawain had five imaginative visions while he sense perceived the grail. First, he “thought he saw therein a chalice, which at that time was a rare sight indeed.” Second, “he thought he could see two angels bearing two golden candlesticks with candles burning.” Third and fourth, “he thought he saw three angels where before he had seen but two, and there in the centre of the Grail he thought he could see the shape of a child.” Lastly, “above it he saw, he thought, a crowned king nailed to a cross with a spear thrust in his side.” The grail of the *Perlesvaus* provided visionary experiences, of which the last and most important was the passion of Jesus.

When the Fisher King died and his atheistic brother, the King of Castle Mortal, seized the grail castle, Perceval was told that “the Grail has not since then appeared, and all the other relics are now hidden.”<sup>149</sup> The phrasing implied that the grail was regarded as a relic. In the sequel, when Perceval defeated the King of Castle Mortal and the rites of the grail were celebrated once again, explicit reference was made to the secondary status of the chalice.

Now, the story tells us that at that time there was no chalice in the land of King Arthur. The Grail appeared at the consecration in five forms, but they should not be revealed, for the secrets of the sacrament none should tell save he whom God has granted grace. But King Arthur saw all the transubstantiations, and last appeared the chalice; and the hermit who was conducting the mass found a memorandum upon the consecration cloth, and the letters declared that God wanted His body to be sacrificed in such a vessel in remembrance of Him. The story does not say that it was the only chalice anywhere, but in all of Britain and the neighbouring cities and kingdoms, there was none.

The king was filled with joy by what he had seen, and he bore in his heart the memory of the name and form of the holy chalice.<sup>150</sup>

The grail was here explicitly associated with the Eucharist. The five forms that were seen in the grail were termed “transubstantiations.” This formulation, which scholars often

treat as support for the doctrine of the Real Presence that was affirmed at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, is better regarded as an appropriation of the theological term for heterodox purposes. The transubstantiation of the grail into five forms is not at all equivalent to the transubstantiation of the wafer into the Body of Christ. Although imaginative visions were described, the term “form” was employed, presumably because the term “vision” had an Augustinian definition that the author wished to avoid. The “secrets of the sacrament” were to be told only to “he whom God has granted grace.” The confluence of Eucharistic language with visions, secrecy, and grace typified medieval theological discussions of the hidden manna. Arthur apparently saw the chalice last, where Perlesvaus had seen it first. It was nevertheless the body rather than the blood--alluding to the wafer rather than wine--that the vessel contained. The *Perlesvaus* portrayed chalices as an acceptable but emphatically secondary addition to the motif of the grail.

### *The Quest of the Holy Grail*

Sometimes called the Galahad quest, *La Queste del Saint Graal*, “*The Quest of the Holy Grail*,” forms part of the version of the Arthurian epic that scholars term the “prose Lancelot” or “Vulgate” cycle. The five romances that comprise the Vulgate cycle--the *History of the Holy Grail*, *The Story of Merlin*, the prose *Lancelot*, the *Queste*, and *The Death of King Arthur* (*La Mort le Roi Artu*)--claim to have been written by Walter Map, at the request of King Henry. However, the historical Walter Map, who was archdeacon of Oxford and a protégé of Henry II, died in 1209; and scholars regularly date the composition of the Vulgate cycle between 1215 and 1230. The *Queste* is dated to the beginning of the project, around 1215.<sup>151</sup> Internal evidence within the *Queste*--the references to Meaux and the feast of the Magdalen--indicate its composition in Champagne.<sup>152</sup> A distinctive feature of the *Queste* is its replacement of the wonders of Celtic folklore with wonders that were consistent with medieval Christianity. The Galahad quest moved in much the same supernatural world as the *Dialogues* of St Gregory the Great.<sup>153</sup> It deployed the normative Christian apparatus of dreams,<sup>154</sup> voices, angels, demons, relics, prophecies, and miracles.

The first grail romance to provide a calendar date for its adventures, the *Queste* was set four hundred and fifty-four years after the Passion,<sup>155</sup> hence in the year four hundred and eighty-four. It nevertheless referred to “an abbey of white monks,”<sup>156</sup> as the Cistercians were popularly called, even though the Cistercian reformation of the Benedictine order only began in 1098. The grail literature generally mentioned only hermits, as was consistent with the fifth century era of the Arthur, generations in advance of St Benedict of Nursia (d. 550) and the rise of the monastic movement in Europe. Both the *Queste* and its retelling in the post-Vulgate cycle nevertheless referred to abbeys<sup>157</sup> as well as solitaries. The inconsistency was presumably deliberate. Various efforts have been made to trace the theological ideas of the *Queste* to the Cistercian teachings of St Bernard of Clairvaux,<sup>158</sup> and the name “Galahad” was likely derived from the references to Jesus as Gilead in the *Sermons on the Song of Songs* by Gilbert of Hoyland, a Cistercian abbot in Lincolnshire.<sup>159</sup> At the same time, the knightly values that the *Queste* espoused were emphatically inconsistent with a Cistercian monastic life.<sup>160</sup>

When the *Queste* replaced the world of Celtic wonder stories with normative Christian supernaturalism, motifs that had expressed the ecstatic bliss of the terrestrial paradise were altered to reflect the sometimes blissful, sometimes dreadful reality of the world. The grail had initially been exclusively good, a miraculous source of food of one kind or another. Its valence was expanded only gradually. Robert de Boron had credited the grail with the capacity to exclude sinners from its presence, and the *Parzival* asserted that heathens could not see the grail even when they were in its presence. The *Queste* introduced the further idea that sinners might have a variety of adverse reactions to the grail.

When the grail first appeared at Pentecost to the full company of the knights of the Round Table, they were paralyzed for the duration of its experience.

When they were all seated and the noise was hushed, there came a clap of thunder so loud and terrible that they thought the palace must fall. Suddenly the hall was lit by a sunbeam which shed a radiance through the palace seven times brighter than had been before. In this moment they were all illumined as it might be by the grace of the Holy Ghost, and they began to look at one another, uncertain and perplexed. But not one of those present could utter a word, for all had been struck dumb, without respect of person. When they had sat a long while thus, unable to speak and gazing at one another like dumb animals, the Holy Grail appeared covered with a cloth of white samite; and yet no mortal hand was seen to bear it. It entered through the great door, and at once the palace was filled with fragrance as though all the spices of the earth had been spilled abroad. It circled the hall along the great tables and each place was furnished in its wake with the food its occupants desired. When all were served, the Holy Grail vanished, they knew not how nor whither. And those that had been mute regained the power of speech, and many gave thanks to Our Lord for the honour He had done them in filling them with the grace of the Holy Vessel.<sup>161</sup>

In this initial encounter with the grail, the knights of the Round Table had mystical experiences of light before they saw a white cloth covering a fragrant object that moved about the hall and provided whatever food they desired. No one saw the grail, but its identity was assured by the light, "the grace of the Holy Ghost," and the provision of food. The motif, common to the various Perceval quests, that knights failed at the quest when they neglected to ask a question, was replaced in the Galahad quest by the novel idea that the knights lost the power of speech. Another difference was the *Queste's* equivocation about the objective reality of the grail. The text did not affirm that it was a material relic. Its description left open the possibility that like the light, the sight of the grail moving about the hall was a corporeal vision that had been granted by divine grace. The knights' ambition to view the grail directly, without its samite covering, motivated the quest that followed.

Discussing the knights' initial encounter at the Round Table, a later passage referred in passing to "the heavenly food the Holy Ghost dispenses to such as sit at the Table of the Holy Grail."<sup>162</sup> The phrasing both alluded to manna and indicated that the grail's provision of food did not involve a miraculous production of ordinary, tangible food. The food itself was heavenly. Similar distinctions were made elsewhere. The *Queste* kept the Eucharist and the grail firmly apart. It referred to the Eucharist as "the Lord's body," "the Body of Christ," and "the host."<sup>163</sup> Where Chrétien had the Fisher King's father take no food other than a single unconsecrated wafer, the *Queste* specified that a priest sang mass before he gave the Lord's Body to the king.<sup>164</sup> At the same time, the *Queste* avoided the terms "Lord's body" and "host" in connection with the Last Supper and the grail. It also associated the grail--and not the Eucharist--with the miracle of the loaves.

[Josephus] ordered all the people to be seated, as it might be at the Last Supper. And he broke the bread and placed pieces here and there, and at the head of the table he put the Holy Grail; and as he set it in place the twelve loaves were multiplied in such miraculous profusion that those present, who numbered four thousand and more, had ever many his fill. And all who were witness to the event gave praise and thanks to Our Lord for this manifest sign of His succour.<sup>165</sup>

The implicit distinction between the Eucharist and the grail in the *Queste* agreed with the distinction between manna and the hidden manna in the Eucharistic theology of the school of Laon. The *Queste* identified the grail with divine grace: "It is the Holy Grail, the grace of the Holy Ghost....the grace of the Holy Grail."<sup>166</sup> It also referred explicitly to the heavenly manna of the Bible.

For he has given them the food of the Holy Grail which fills the soul to overflowing and sustains the body too. This is the sweet food He has filled them with, even as He sustained the Israelites for so long in the desert.....the earthly food has been changed for that of heaven.<sup>167</sup>

The *Queste's* references to "the food of heaven" and "the heavenly food"<sup>168</sup> similarly pertained to the hidden manna.

The *Queste's* opening scene, where the grail appeared at the Round Table at Pentecost, had Galahad acquire his sword by drawing it from a stone floating in a river. He next acquired his shield in an adventure at a Cistercian abbey. The adventure warrants close attention. In the abbey, Galahad met two companions of the Round Table, King Baudemagus and Owein the Bastard. They explained that pursuit of a shield had brought them to the abbey. "There is a shield in this abbey of such virtue, that the man who hangs it about his neck and bears it away prospers so ill that within one day, or two at the most, he lies dead or wounded or maimed. And we have come to test the truth of this report."<sup>169</sup> In the morning, King Baudemagus took the shield, which bore a red cross on a white ground, and left the abbey. He was promptly attacked by a knight in white armor who wounded him mortally. The knight asserted that he had exacted the Lord's vengeance, because only "the finest knight in Christendom" was permitted to wear the shield. The white knight then commanded a squire to take the shield to Galahad, "and say to him that the Master sends him word to wear it."<sup>170</sup> After Galahad accepted the shield, the white knight met him in the forest. The knight explained that the shield had originally belonged to Josephus, the son of Joseph of Arimathea, and had portrayed "the bleeding figure of a man crucified" in its centre. A man with a severed hand who touched the cross on the shield once had his hand restored. The image of the crucified man was transferred miraculously to the man's arm, leaving a blank shield. The shield acquired its present red cross when Josephus' nose bled and he traced the cross on the shield with his blood. After concluding his narrative, the white knight "vanished in such a manner that Galahad never knew what had become of him nor where he had gone."<sup>171</sup> The vanishing alluded to the angel that initiated Gideon in Judges 6:21.

This narrative in the *Queste* had a precursor in the *Perlesvaus*. A maiden brought a shield "of argent and azure bands...with a red cross and a boss of gold, covered with precious stones" to Arthur's court. She identified it as the shield of Joseph of Arimathea, and said that it was to hang on a pillar in the hall until it was claimed by the knight who would succeed at the quest of the grail.<sup>172</sup> Much later in the romance, Perceval returned to Arthur's court, exchanged his own shield for the shield on the pillar, and departed immediately.<sup>173</sup> The significance of the shield was never explained, although we eventually learn that the maiden who brought it was Perceval's own sister.<sup>174</sup>

The Cistercian shield served Galahad, I suggest, in a manner that was analogous to the role of Knights Templar in other grail romances. In the Post-Vulgate version of the *Queste*, a brief episode identified Perceval as a Templar. Once, when Perceval arrived at a hermitage, the old man fell to his knees and requested his blessing. Perceval responded, "I'm no bishop or priest of the Mass who can give you a blessing," but the hermit insisted.

When Perceval saw that it meant so much to him, he did not know what to do or say, for at that time it was not the custom that knights errant were asked to give their blessing....

Perceval said, "I'll do what you ask of me, but not willingly, for it is certainly not the custom in the kingdom of Logres that a knight meddle in such a matter." Then he raised his hand and said, "May the King of Kings give you His blessing, for that of such a poor knight as I am cannot help you; but this may help you."

Then he made the sign of the cross over him.<sup>175</sup>



Perceval's self-description as "a poor knight" alluded to the Order of the Poor Knights of Jesus and the Temple of Solomon, the formal name of the military order that was informally called the Knights Templar. It would be a mistake, however, to interpret Perceval as a Templar. Perceval was not in a holy order and took no vow of celibacy. Templars also figured prominently in Wolfram's *Parzival*, where the building that other romances called the grail castle was termed "the temple"<sup>176</sup> and the knights who guarded the temple, the surrounding forest, and the grail family were called templars.<sup>177</sup> However, Wolfram invented the neologism *Templeise*, presumably to differentiate his templars from the Knights Templar, who were commonly called *Tempelherren*.<sup>178</sup> The *Templeise's* shields bore "the Grail's device," a turtledove,<sup>179</sup> whereas a Templar shield had a white upper and a black lower section, with a small red cross on the white upper part. The device in the *Perlesvaus* and *Queste*, a red cross on a field of white, was worn by Templars on their mantles after the right was granted them by Pope Eugenius III (1145-53) in 1147, but the same device was worn on shields by knights of other military orders and brotherhoods.<sup>180</sup> The Arthurian knights resembled Templars, but they were not identified with them. Neither the *Perlesvaus* nor the *Parzival* explained the meaning of the red cross shield; but the *Queste* contained an episode that intimated the secret of "the bleeding figure of a man crucified" in the center of the red-cross shield.

On Galahad's return to the Cistercian abbey, the monks welcomed him and said, "Know then that there is a voice which proceeds from one of the tombs in our cemetery. Its power is such that those who hear it lie shorn of strength and wits for a long season."<sup>181</sup> They instructed Galahad to go to the tomb and raise its stone.

Galahad waited no more but set out towards the tomb, and as he drew near he heard a rending shriek as of a being in torment and a voice which cried:

'Stand back, Galahad, thou servant of Jesus Christ, and come not nigh me, for thou wouldst yet oust me from that place where I have lodged so long.'

But Galahad was undismayed and went up to the tomb, and as he bent forward to grasp the head he saw smoke and flame belch out, followed at once by a thing most foul and hideous, shaped like a man. At this sight he blessed himself, knowing it for the Evil One. And at the same moment he heard a voice which said to him:

'Ah! Galahad, most holy one, I see thee so girt about by angels that my power cannot endure against thee: I cede the place to thee.'

At this Galahad again made the sign of the cross and gave thanks to Our Lord. Then he raised the tombstone and discovered beneath the body of a man in armour, with a sword at his side and all that betokens a knight. When he had looked at it he called to the monks, crying:

'Come forward and see what I have found and tell me how I must proceed, for I am ready to do more if there is more to be done.'

When they drew near and saw the body lying in the grave, they said to him:

'Sir, it is not needful that you should do more than you have already accomplished...'<sup>182</sup>

Matarasso remarked that Galahad's adventure paralleled the Gospel story of Jesus' first miracle, the expulsion of demons (Mk 1:21-28; Lk 4:31-37);<sup>183</sup> but there is more to be made of the episode. King Baudemagus' death at the angelic hands of the white knight was isomorphic with the expulsion of the Devil that spoke from the grave by the angels that surrounded Galahad. Both motifs involved angels expelling evil in ways that symbolized mystical deaths. At the same time, the corpse in the Devil-haunted grave was pagan and had to be removed from hallowed ground.<sup>184</sup> The name "Baudemagus" was borrowed from Chrétien's *Lancelot*, where the original spelling may have been Brandemagu, deriving from Bran<sup>185</sup> plus the word magus, "enchanter." The etymology may otherwise have been the the Welsh name Baedan<sup>186</sup>

plus magus. By the designation "magus," the *Queste* addressed the topic of mystical deaths that were specifically demonic. At the same time, the grail's dumbfounding of the knights who beheld it at the Round Table was a mild adverse reaction of the same paralyzing type that the voice of the Devil produced in the grave at the Cistercian abbey, where "those who hear it lie shorn of strength and wits for a long season."

These intersecting symbols lead me to suggest that Cistercian mystical theology was the shield that Galahad acquired from the white monks. Like the Cistercian shield, Galahad's expulsion of the Devil from the tomb symbolized the revalorization of mystical death as a Christian devotion that precluded the heretical and pagan associations that it had previously had. From late antiquity onward, the monastic practice of meditation had involved deciding on a topic, deciding on mental imagery that would express the topic's ideas in pictorial metaphors, cultivating the mental imagery, and watching to see how the imagery might spontaneously change in one's mind.<sup>187</sup> The active procedures were regarded as the soul's meditations; the passively received, involuntary changes were considered divine gifts of cooperative grace. Daily meditations on scripture were required of monks in the sixth century Rule of St Benedict; and from the late eleventh century onward, devotional texts were composed that harmonized the gospel accounts of the passion of Jesus, to facilitate meditations on the topic. Meditations on the passion were sometimes pursued from the perspectives of witnesses of the crucifixion, such as the Virgin Mary and St John son of Zebedee. Meditators then cultivated images of the passion, but experienced themselves as on-looking observers. In a variant of the devotional practice that was advocated, among others, by the most authoritative mystics of the era, St Bernard of Clairvaux, St Francis of Assisi, and St Bonaventure, the meditations were instead performed from the perspective of Jesus. Meditators cultivated mental images of the crucifixion, but they identified themselves with their mental images of Jesus, so that they imagined themselves undergoing Christ's passion, death, and resurrection. Performed in this manner, meditation on the passion induced experiences of mystical death.<sup>188</sup>

The *Queste's* concern with meditation on the passion greatly altered its portrait of the grail. Earlier grail romances had touched only lightly on the topic of death and resurrection. The motif did not occur in Chrétien's *Perceval*. Robert de Boron's *Joseph* touched on Jesus' death only in passing, in the course of a discussion of the symbolism of the table of the grail: "As I said at that table, several tables will be established in my service, to make the sacrament in my name, which will be a reminder of the cross; and the vessel of the sacrament will be a reminder of the stone tomb in which you laid me, and the paten which will be placed on top will be a reminder of the lid with which you covered me, and the cloth called the corporal will be a reminder of the winding-sheet in which you wrapped me."<sup>189</sup> The removal of the wafer from the vessel implicitly symbolized the resurrection. The *Parzival*, as we have seen, credited the grail with the power of death and resurrection. The motif was again mentioned only in passing: "By that stone's power the phoenix burns away, turning to ashes, yet those ashes bring it back to life. Thus the phoenix sheds its moulting plumage and thereafter gives off so much bright radiance that it becomes as beautiful as before."<sup>190</sup> The *Perlesvaus* mentioned the motif with equal brevity, but made its meaning unmistakable. The passion was the fifth of the five visions that Gawain beheld in the grail: "He saw, he thought, a crowned king nailed to a cross with a spear thrust in his side. Sir Gawain was filled with sorrow at the sight and he could think of nothing save the pain that the king was suffering."<sup>191</sup>

The early romances' consistent treatment of the passion of Jesus as a topic of minor interest owed, I suggest, to the traditional preoccupation of Welsh wonder stories with the terrestrial paradise. Mystical death was not a paradisaal event. It was, however, a pagan Celtic concern. Drawing on the Old Irish tale of "The Feast of Bricriu," the First Continuation of Chrétien's *Perceval* included an episode in which an unknown knight arrived at Arthur's court and offered to exchange blows with any volunteer. "If any knight here can behead me with a single blow of this sword and I can then recover from the blow, he may be sure that, a

year from now, the blow will be returned--if he dares to wait for it." Carados accepted the challenge and beheaded the knight with a single blow. The knight promptly picked up his head and replaced it on his neck. He promised to return in a year's time to behead Carados. In the sequel, after Carados had kneeled in order to be beheaded, the knight raised his sword but then stopped, lifted Carados to his feet, and identified himself as Carados' father Eliaures. The knight then left, leaving Carados horrified.<sup>192</sup> This narrative of death and resurrection, which was reworked in the fourteenth century in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,<sup>193</sup> preserved the interior logic of Irish paganism but euhemerized the deity.<sup>194</sup> The god responsible for death and resurrection exhibited his power to die and resurrect before he invited the hero to undergo the process himself. When the hero did so, he discovered, much to his surprise, that he did not die, implicitly because the death and resurrection that he underwent was not physiological but was instead the content of a mystical experience. Because Christianity regarded Christ as a god of life who manifested resurrection in opposition to death, the latter being the work ultimately of Satan, the pagan concept of a god simultaneously of death-and-resurrection had no equivalent in the terrestrial paradise of Celtic Christianity, nor the saints' legends and wonder stories that elaborated paradisaical concepts.

There was also no place for experiences of mystical death in the early medieval monastic tradition. Contemplation was traditionally limited to two topics: in the words of Evagrius Ponticus (345-399), "the contemplation of the physical world, and...the contemplation of God,"<sup>195</sup> or, in the twelfth century formulation of Hugh of St Victor, "the consideration of created things...[and] the contemplation of the Creator."<sup>196</sup> Evagrius had forbidden monks to engage in visualization practices. "Do not by any means strive to fashion some image or visualize some form at the time of prayer."<sup>197</sup> He believed that demons were able to corrupt imaginative visions, but were unable to corrupt intellectual visions that pertained directly to God and His power in creation. Evagrius' position was argued in detail by St Augustine of Hippo and endorsed by St Benedict.

The Desert Fathers' advice to avoid visions informed an episode in the Irish *Life of Maedoc of Ferns*, which asserted that St Maedoc concealed his violation of the monastic teaching.

Another time Maedoc and an immature young child were by a cross which there was in the monastery (*lit* place) at Ferns. Presently Maedoc wrote a psalm for the child. The child saw him mount a golden ladder which reached from earth to heaven; and when he descended later, the child could not look in his face for the great brilliance and resplendence of the Deity which transfused and beautified his countenance. Maedoc said to the child: 'Beware that thou never tell to any one in the world what thou hast seen.' The child said: 'If thou tell me whither thou wentest, I will not tell any one what I have seen.' 'I went,' said he, 'with the gladness of the company of heaven, to meet the soul of Columcille as it went to join them, who was my own soul-friend (confessor) in this world.' The child related these words publicly after the death of Maedoc, when he himself had become a full-grown and devout man.<sup>198</sup>

The allusions to Jacob's ladder and Moses' appearance upon descending from Mount Sinai appealed to the precedent of the Bible for Maedoc's practice. His legend elsewhere included several motifs of the terrestrial paradise tradition that was antecedent to grail romance.

The avoidance of imaginative visions was nevertheless customary until St Bernard of Clairvaux defended the legitimacy of at least some of them.<sup>198</sup>

I cannot see what this [Song of Songs 1:11] may mean if not the construction of certain spiritual images in order to bring the purest intuitions of divine wisdom before the eyes of the soul that contemplates, to enable it to perceive, as though

puzzling reflections in a mirror, what it cannot possibly gaze on as yet face to face....when the spirit is ravished out of itself and granted a vision of God that suddenly shines into the mind with the swiftness of a lightning-flash, immediately, but whence I know not, images of earthly things fill the imagination, either as an aid to understanding or to temper the intensity of the divine light. So well-adapted are they to the divinely illumined senses, that in their shadow the utterly pure and brilliant radiance of the truth is rendered more bearable to the mind and more capable of being communicated to others. My opinion is that they are formed in our imaginations by the inspirations of the holy angels, just as on the other hand there is no doubt that evil suggestions of an opposite nature are forced upon us by the bad angels.<sup>200</sup>

In *Crucified with Christ*, I argued that the inculcation of mystical deaths by meditating on the passion of Jesus was the particular practice that motivated Bernard and his contemporaries to revise their attitude to imaginative visions. Mystical deaths were self-evidently imaginative; they were equally self-evidently wholesome. There was no possibility that demons could corrupt mystical deaths in fashions that promoted heresies. In the Cistercian teaching of William of St Thierry—who had studied with Anselm at Laon before joining Bernard at Clairvaux—mystical deaths were explained as products of guilty consciences, reacting adversely to divine grace.<sup>201</sup>

Mystical deaths had been known and portrayed not only in the Irish Ulster cycle but also in Welsh wonder stories such as “Branwen Daughter of Llyr” that antedated the invention of Arthurian romance. In both instances mystical death had been portrayed as pagan or heretical. With the Cistercian embrace of meditation on the passion and the rehabilitation of imaginative visions, the induction of mystical death became acceptable to the Latin Church—providing only that the visions were given doctrinally acceptable Christological interpretations. Because mystical theologians sometimes linked meditation on the passion with the hidden manna<sup>202</sup>—meditation on the passion is a psychedelic-compatible procedure—Cistercian mystical theology provided institutional protection for the secrets of the grail—a shield for Galahad and templars to guard the grail, its castle, and family.

The *Queste*'s account of Lancelot's next sighting of the grail continued the exploration of paralysis as a response to the grail. One night when Lancelot arrived at a castle, he found the door open, initially encountered no one, and prepared to sleep on his shield. The grail appeared, and Lancelot experienced a worse paralysis than had occurred when the grail appeared to the knights of the Round Table. “Lancelot...lay mute, as one who lies between sleeping and waking.” During Lancelot's paralysis, a sick knight was brought into the hall, complaining loudly of his illness and hoping to “see the Holy Vessel which is to ease my smart.” Lancelot was conscious of the knight's behavior. “Lancelot lay without speech or movement, as though in a trance, yet he saw him clearly and heard his words.” Lancelot presently saw a silver candlestick move on its own from the chapel toward the cross. The grail followed on a silver table. The sick knight fell to the floor, prayed for miraculous healing, dragged himself to the silver table, kissed it, and pressed his eyes to it. “And immediately he knew relief from his suffering.” The knight then fell asleep, and both the grail and the chandelier returned on their own to the chapel. Lancelot remained paralyzed. “Whether from exhaustion or from the weight of some sin that lay on him, he never stirred at the coming of the Grail, and gave no sign that he marked it; and for this he was to receive great blame and suffer many misadventures in the course of the Quest.”<sup>203</sup>

This episode contributed originally to Christian mystical theology through its portrait of the grail's power to induce trances and paralyze sinners who beheld it. Latin mystical theology traditionally regarded the *ligatura*, “binding,” or *suspensio*, “suspension,” of the senses and voluntary physical actions as reliable evidence of the onset of a divine ecstasy or rapture.<sup>204</sup> In ascribing Lancelot's paralysis not to grace but to a state of sin, the *Queste* took

exception to the conventional privileging of mysticism that manifested exclusively to the soul. The *Queste* favored a mysticism that permitted bodily sensation and activity, as is consistent with psychedelic experiences.

In its portrait of the invalid knight, the *Queste* introduced a motif that was inconsistent with the wonders of the grail in earlier romances. In the *Queste*, the grail had the power to heal infirmity, as was consistent with sacred relics quite generally. In earlier romances, by contrast, the grail had not had the power to heal. The Fisher King remained an invalid despite his constant enjoyment of the presence of the grail. The *Parzival* credited the grail with the power to rejuvenate, implicitly as a means to prolong life, but did not portray the grail temple as a terrestrial paradise where wounds and illnesses were unknown. The motif of a healing balm was an integral component of Irish wonder stories of Finn mac Cumhaill;<sup>205</sup> but a healing motif was not present in the grail literature prior to the *Queste*.

Lancelot's final encounter with the grail was the *Queste's* most severe example of a sinner's adverse reaction. After arriving at the Fisher King's castle, Lancelot began to explore the building. He soon came to a room with a door that he could not open, through which he could hear music so beautiful that he became convinced that the grail was inside. When he prayed for a sight of the grail, he found the door open, "and a great light flooding through the opening, as if the sun had its abode within. The brightness that came pouring out of the room illumined the whole palace till one would have thought that all the candles on earth were burning there."<sup>206</sup> Lancelot was about to enter the room when a voice forbade him. Then he spied the grail.

He let his gaze run round the room and observed the Holy Vessel standing beneath a cloth of bright red samite upon a silver table. And all around were ministering angels, some swinging silver censers, others holding lighted candles, crosses and other altar furnishings, each and every one intent upon some service. Before the Holy Vessel was an aged man in priestly vestments, engaged to all appearance in the consecration of the mass. When he came to elevate the host, Lancelot thought he saw, above his outstretched hands, three men, two of whom were placing the youngest in the hands of the priest who raised him aloft as though he were showing him to the people.<sup>207</sup>

Lancelot's vision of an aged man with three men above his outstretched arms, was an imaginative vision, implicitly of Josephus and two angels handing Jesus to him. Where the *Perlesvaus* had portrayed visions but called them "forms," the *Queste* made bold to offer a paradigmatic illustration of the precise sort of imaginative vision that St Bernard had approved. Bernard had asserted: "It is...within the power of each of us, even during the time of our mortal life, to hollow out a place anywhere we will in the heavenly wall: at our pleasure to visit the patriarchs now, to salute the prophets now, to mingle with the assembly of apostles now, to slip into the choirs of martyrs now, even to run with all the swiftness of mind that devotion can inspire through the orders and dwellings of the blessed spirits, from the smallest angel to the Cherubim and Seraphim."<sup>208</sup>

Lancelot nevertheless reacted badly to the vision. When the old man seemed about to fall beneath the weight of the man he was holding aloft, Lancelot neglected his prohibition and entered the room in order to give assistance. He forgot or failed to appreciate that he was having an imaginative vision and treated it literally rather than symbolically. Paralysis followed immediately.

He crossed the threshold and made towards the silver table. As he drew near he felt a puff of wind which seemed to him shot through with flame, so hot it was, and as it fanned his features with its scorching breath he thought his face was burned. He stood rooted to the ground like a man paralysed, bereft of sight and hearing and

powerless in every limb. Then he felt himself seized by many hands and carried away. And when they had grabbed him by the arms and legs they pitched him out and left him where he fell.<sup>209</sup>

The castle's inhabitants found Lancelot the next morning, lying on the floor, unable to move, to speak, or to give any indication that he could hear them. His pulse indicated that he remained alive, but he was not expected to recover. "Some said that they knew not what the cause could be, unless it were some punishment or sign from God."<sup>210</sup> Twenty-four days later he opened his eyes and lamented that God had woken him.

'I have seen,' he said, 'such glories and felicity that my tongue could never reveal their magnitude, nor could my heart conceive it. For this was no earthly but a spiritual vision. And but for my grievous sins and my most evil plight I should have seen still more, had I not lost the sight of my eyes and all power over my body, on account of the infamy that God had seen in me.'<sup>211</sup>

Lancelot did not lament the interruption or cessation of his contemplative state. He complained instead that the suspension of his sight perception and voluntary motor control during his contemplative state had limited the contents of his mystical experience. The experience itself was "a spiritual vision," the highest of Augustine's three categories of vision, in which Lancelot contemplated intellectual truths that neither words nor thoughts were adequate to express.<sup>212</sup> Lancelot lamented that had he been able to see and move, he would have been able to contemplate further glories, presumably concerning God's power in the world of sense perception.

These four episodes of increasingly severe adverse reactions--the dumbfounding at the Round Table, the paralyzing voice from the tomb, and Lancelot's experiences of waking paralysis and insensate catatonia--contrasted as a group with the climactic scene of the *Queste*, in which Galahad and eleven companions beheld the grail. The scene began with a vision that alluded to Ezekiel's vision of the chariot-throne of the Glory.

It seemed that a man came down from heaven garbed in a bishop's robes, and with a crozier in his hand and a mitre on his head; four angels bore him on a glorious throne, which they set down next to the table supporting the Holy Grail.<sup>213</sup>

In the first chapter of the biblical book of Ezekiel, four flying cherubim supported the figure of a man on a throne, who was identified as the Glory of Yahweh. Christian art appropriated the motif in its ubiquitous portraits of Jesus attended by the four evangelists. The *Queste* developed its own variant. The enthroned man proved to be Josephus, the son of Joseph of Arimathea and the first bishop of Christendom, who had died over three centuries previously. Concerning his appearance in concert with the holy grail, he remarked that the "same service I performed on earth I still discharge in heaven."<sup>214</sup>

As when Lancelot last beheld Josephus, immediately before he became catatonic, the old man used the grail sacramentally in a variant of the Eucharist ritual. The *Queste* here borrowed from Chrétien's *Perceval* the grail's function as a repository of the host. At the same time, the *Queste* drew on the *Perlesvaus* in portraying a Eucharist vision in which the bread changed form into a living child.

Next Josephus acted as though he were entering on the consecration of the mass. After pausing a moment quietly, he took from the Vessel a host made in the likeness of bread. As he raised it aloft there descended from above a figure like to a child, whose countenance glowed and blazed as bright as fire; and he entered into the bread, which quite distinctly took on human form before the eyes of those

assembled there. When Josephus had stood for some while holding his burden up to view, he replaced it in the Holy Vessel.

Having discharged the functions of a priest as it might be at the office of the mass....<sup>215</sup>

After consecrating the host, Josephus told the knights that they would receive “the most sublime food that ever knights have tasted, and this at your Saviour’s hands.”<sup>216</sup> Then he vanished. “Then the companions, raising their eyes, saw the figure of a man appear from out of the Holy Vessel, unclothed, and bleeding from his hands and feet and side.”<sup>217</sup> Again following the *Perlesvaus*, the *Queste* had each of the knights envision Christ crucified. The visions emerged from the grail, but were otherwise consistent with the medieval meditations on the passion. Jesus spoke to the knights, telling them that they had earned “some part of my secrets and my mysteries.”

Then he took the Holy Vessel in his hands, and going to Galahad, who knelt at his approach, he gave his Saviour to him. And Galahad, with both hands joined in homage, received with an overflowing heart. So too did the others, and to every one it seemed that the host placed on his tongue was made of bread.<sup>218</sup>

The crucified Christ administered the consecrated host from the grail vessel. Because communion effects a union with Christ, each knight who saw Christ crucified was implicitly envisioning himself as Christ crucified, precisely in keeping with the Cistercian approach to meditation on the passion that St Bernard had introduced.

Before blessing the knights and vanishing, Jesus identified the vessel to Galahad as “the platter in which Jesus Christ partook of the paschal lamb with His disciples.”<sup>219</sup> At the very end of the quest, after Galahad had taken possession of grail, “he had an ark of gold and precious stones built over the silver table to house the Holy Vessel.”<sup>220</sup> The placement of the grail in an ark alluded to the jar of manna that had been kept in the biblical ark of the covenant.

#### Gerbert de Montreuil’s Continuation of Chrétien’s *Perceval*

The Third and Fourth Continuations of Chrétien’s *Perceval* seem to have been written independently of each other. Both borrowed extensively from the *Perlesvaus* and the *Queste*, which date the two continuations perhaps to 1230. The continuation whose author identified himself as Gerbert de Montreuil is counted as the Fourth Continuation, even though a medieval editor placed it in the penultimate position within the complete *Perceval*.<sup>221</sup> Gerbert had characters refer to Gawain’s sighting of the grail in the Second Continuation; but Gerbert neither portrayed a further sighting of the grail nor added anything of substance to the grail’s description. At the same time, Gerbert’s Continuation is notable in the present context for its the motif of the balm of resurrection.

During his adventures, Perceval came to the assistance of Gorneman de Gorhaut, whose castle was under attack by forty knights. The knights had killed all of Gorneman’s people, apart from himself and his four sons. No matter how many of the knights Gorneman and his supporters killed and left dead in the field, “the following morning, by some miraculous power, we find them all quite safe and sound, and the battle begins all over again.”<sup>222</sup> Perceval was intrigued. “God help me, however terrible the danger, I’m not leaving here until I know the secret of how they return to life.”<sup>223</sup> His opportunity came that night.

As he peered ahead towards the foot of a hill, he saw a light appear, accompanied by such a tremendous groan that the ground all shook and trembled. Perceval was filled with wonder at the din, and he raised his hand before him and made the sign

of the cross in the name of the heavenly Father....Then he saw an open door, the source of the brilliance that was lighting up the land. And then he saw, appearing through the door, a large old woman. She was carrying two small casks of handsome ivory, bound by hoops not of silver but of gold, pure, bright and brilliant.<sup>224</sup>

Gerbert described at length how beautiful the casks were and how incomparably ugly was the woman. Perceval watched as she went about resurrecting the dead knights.

The old woman, thinking to go about her business in peace, limped up the path and in among the dead, and put down the casks that were hung about her neck. The ugly, twisted hag now picked up the head of one of the dead lying there in the field, beheaded by Perceval that night, and placed it on the torso; then she took one of the casks: it would be a lord or a noble man indeed who had such a cask in his possession. Perceval watched the old woman with rapt attention. She took the stopper from one of the casks, and poured into her palm a drop of liquid clearer than any rose water. She did not dally, but dabbed her finger in the drop, and rubbed it on the lips of the knight whose head she had replaced. And thereupon all his veins and joints were full of life, and his wounds were healed, every one, as though he had never been hurt at all; and he was up on his feet again before you could count to three. The potion had the power to restore the dead to life, for God, who delivers those He loves from Hell, was anointed and embalmed with it when he was laid in the sepulchre. The old hag replaced the heads of four and brought them back to life, which was exactly what she meant to do. She rubbed the potion on another's lips, and up he leapt.<sup>225</sup>

Perceval decided that he had best intervene quickly. When he confronted the woman, she explained that she resurrected the dead because she "was so commanded by the King of the Waste City, who cannot and will not believe in God the spiritual."<sup>226</sup> Resuming her work, she anointed a sixth knight, who returned to life. Perceval promptly beheaded the hag, at which the six knights attacked him. After killing them, Perceval experimented with the balm. He placed a drop on the lips of a fallen knight, who immediately jumped up and attacked him. Perceval killed him again. Next he touched a drop of balm to his own lips in order to heal himself of his wounds. Perceval returned to Gorneman's castle with the ivory cask, healed Gorneman and his sons, and related the story of his adventure.<sup>227</sup> At night, when all had gone to sleep, the casks proved themselves holy.

The two ivory casks that Perceval had won shed such a brilliant light in the hall that it was as bright, I promise you, as if it had been noon. Suddenly Perceval awoke and was astonished by the light, but he knew there was no danger, for the light was coming from the casks: he knew that it was a holy thing.<sup>228</sup>

Later in Gerbert's Continuation, a passing reference to Perceval "who is in search of the Grail and won the balm"<sup>229</sup> indicated the distinction in the Gerbert's mind between the two motifs. Unlike the grail, the balm had the power of death and resurrection. Because Jeremiah's references to the "balm of Gilead" (Jer 8:22; 46:11) were traditionally considered prophecies of Jesus, Gerbert was attributing the power of death and resurrection to Jesus, as distinct from the grail. At the same time, he also phrased himself in an equivocal manner: "The potion had the power to restore the dead to life, for God, who delivers those He loves from Hell, was anointed and embalmed with it when he was laid in the sepulchre."<sup>230</sup> Was he saying that the balm acquired healing powers through its contact with Jesus? Or that Jesus resurrected owing to the powers of the balm?



### Manesier's Continuation of the *Perceval*

The Third Continuation, whose author signed himself Manesier, has been dated between 1214 and 1227.<sup>231</sup> It narrated Perceval's successful completion of his grail quest. Manesier did not describe the shape of the vessel, but he stated that Joseph of Arimathea had caught Jesus' blood in it.<sup>232</sup> Perceval and Ector initially saw the grail together.

It happened that about midnight a light appeared between them, the most brilliant they had ever seen. They opened their eyes when the light appeared, and in it they saw a royal angel, all alone, and in his hands he held the Grail. He circled them three times and then vanished in the light in which he had come: they did not know what had become of him, except that the holy angel had flown heavenward, still bearing in his hands the great Grail. It filled Perceval with joy, and pleased and comforted him greatly; and he sat up, and felt completely healed and well. And sighing gently, he gave humble and heartfelt thanks to ever-truthful God and His power and His beauty for this miraculous occurrence. Then he asked Ector how he was, and he replied that his heart had been so restored by the grace of the Creator that he felt no ill or pain.<sup>233</sup>

Manesier's Continuation referred repeatedly to the grail's provision of food. "All those seated at the tables were sated and refreshed when they saw the Grail pass."<sup>234</sup> "They passed three time before the tables; and thereupon they were all laden with delectable dishes: the tables were filled so splendidly that there was no dish any man could name but it was there before his eyes, along with wines of every kind."<sup>235</sup> "Every day the Grail served them in its customary way."<sup>236</sup> "Perceval served God faithfully for fully ten years, and he ate and drank nothing but what God sent him in the Holy Grail which he saw and which served him night and day."<sup>237</sup> Manesier credited the grail with no powers beyond the provision of food that alluded to biblical manna.

### The Prose *Lancelot*

The prose romance entitled *Lancelot do Lac* circulated as an independent tale<sup>238</sup> before it was expanded to become the third of the five romances that comprise the Vulgate cycle.<sup>239</sup> All of the passages in the prose *Lancelot* that refer to the grail were added in the course of its expansion, in order to fill the narrative gap between the prose *Lancelot* and the *Queste*. The prose *Lancelot* portrayed the grail as a chalice that functioned as a vessel of plenty.

And she emerged from the chamber, carrying in her two hands the most splendid vessel that had ever been seen by earthly man, which was made in the semblance of a chalice; she held it above her head so that she was constantly bowing before it.

Sir Gawain looked at the vessel and admired it more than anything he had ever seen, but he was unable to learn what it was made of, for it was composed neither of wood nor of any kind of metal, nor of stone, nor was it of horn or bone, which amazed him. Then he gazed at the maiden, marveling more at her beauty than at the vessel's, for he had never seen a woman whose beauty compared to hers; he gazed at her so intently that he thought of nothing else. As the maiden passed in front of the dining table, each knight bowed down before the holy vessel. The tables were at once replenished with all the delightful nourishment that one could describe. The hall was filled with delicious odors as if all the spices in the world had been scattered there.<sup>240</sup>

To the standard motif of the grail's providence of all manner of food, the prose *Lancelot* added a caveat. The grail neglected to feed Gawain when he was in a state of sin.

After the maiden had passed once in front of the table....Sir Gawain....looked before him at the table where he was seated, but he saw nothing for him to eat. Rather, the table lay empty in front of him, although there was no one else who did not have a great abundance of food as though it grew there. When Gawain saw this, he was too shocked to know what he should say or do. He realized that he had done something wrong, since he had nothing to eat as the others did.<sup>241</sup>

On another occasion, Gawain heard "a chorus of voices--perhaps as many as two hundred...singing glory, praise, and honor be to the King of heaven" before the maiden entered the hall carrying the grail.<sup>242</sup> When she left, the voices departed, the windows closed, "and the room became so dark that Sir Gawain saw nothing."<sup>243</sup> At the same time, Gawain discovered that the grail had worked a miracle of healing. "But it was all the more fortunate for Sir Gawain that he felt as strong and healthy as if he had never had any pain or injury; nor did he care about the shoulder wound, for he had completely healed."<sup>244</sup>

The grail exhibited similar powers when Lancelot beheld it. The same maiden carried the chalice, which provided "every fine food one could imagine, and the palace was filled with every pleasant scent."<sup>245</sup> When Bors saw the grail, the people who were present explicitly associated it with divine grace, and the infusion of grace corresponded to the wondrous food.

Shortly after they were all seated, a maiden emerged from the room carrying the Holy Grail. As soon as she entered the hall, all those present knelt down before her and said in a low voice, "Blessed be the son of God, amen, who fills us with His grace."

As the young lady passed among the tables, they were immediately covered with all the finest foods.<sup>246</sup>

After Bors went to confession, he saw the grail a second time and more fully. It remained a partial sighting.

Shortly before midnight, Bors went before the Grail room and saw a great brightness, as if the sun had made its home therein, and the brightness was constantly increasing. He at once went to the door to the room, but when he tried to go in, he saw a sharp, shining sword ready to strike him if he went any farther. At this adventure he turned back, convinced that this must be caused by God rather than anything else. He nevertheless looked into the room and saw a silver table upon four wooden supports, splendidly decorated with gold and precious stones--but they were still more wondrous, as the divine writing of the Holy Grail will relate, at the proper time and place. Upon the silver table was the Holy Grail, covered with a piece of white samite, and before the table was a kneeling man, dressed like a bishop. After he had stayed there a long time, he stood up, went to the Holy Vessel, and removed the samite that covered it. At once the room was filled with the greatest brightness that I could describe.

At the moment the holy man withdrew the samite from the Holy Grail, such a great brightness spread throughout the place that it seemed to Bors that a beam of sunshine had struck him in the eyes; he was so dazzled that he was blinded for the whole night and could not see a thing. Then he heard a voice that said, "Bors, do not come any closer, for you are unworthy of seeing more than you already have of the secret things in this place. And if you are so bold as to approach in spite of this interdiction, know that you will not escape without losing the power of your limbs, unable to come or go, forever like a piece of wood, and that would be a shame, for you are both worthy and bold."

When Bors heard these words, he was more than a little afraid, for he believed the voice was telling the truth; he turned back and went toward the bed where he had sat, but he could see nothing. Nevertheless, he felt completely recovered from the wound inflicted by the flaming lance. He went up and down in search of the bed, but could not find it. When he saw that he would not find it, he sat down on the floor, worn out from seeking what he could not find. He stayed there until morning, appalled that he had lost his sight forevermore. And if Sir Gawain, on his visit, had heard the splendid melodies of voices singing the praises of Our Lord, that night Bors heard even more joyous sounds, and was very glad that he had come. He was awake all night, neither sleeping nor resting, full of dread that Our Lord had become angry with him. But when day began to break and the light came in through the many windows and he saw it, there is no need to ask whether he was glad; he had not for a long time had such great joy as this.<sup>247</sup>

The narrative adapted to the circumstance of Bors much the same portrait of the grail and Josephus that the *Queste* had described on the occasion of Lancelot's catatonia. The theology of the episode nevertheless differed slightly. Bors' adventures implied that the grail provided sinners with wondrous food, but only a penitent additionally received spiritual vision, healing, and bliss. The physical description of the grail in the prose *Lancelot* was an inconsistent compromise of received traditions. When Perceval and Hector saw the grail, the "vessel was made like a chalice," but it was also identified as "the vessel in which Our Lord ate the lamb with his disciples."<sup>248</sup>

#### *The History of the Holy Grail*

The *Estoire del Saint Graal*, "History of the Holy Grail," is the first of the five romances that comprise the Vulgate cycle; but of the three that mention the grail, it was the last written, perhaps around 1235.<sup>249</sup> Bruce considered it a Benedictine production. Noting that in the course of the story the name "Mordrain" was conferred on Evalac, king of the Saracens, upon his conversion to Christianity, Bruce remarked that the name belonged historically to only a single famous medieval person, who had been abbot of the Benedictine monastery at Corbie in Picardy between 769 and 781. Bruce suggested that only a Benedictine monk at Corbie would have known or cared to insert the name in the romance.<sup>250</sup>

The *Estoire* is a considerable revision and expansion of Robert de Boron's *Joseph of Arimathea*. Discussing "the Last Supper, where He ate the Paschal lamb with His disciples," the *Estoire* identified "the dish from which the Son of God and two others had eaten." It referred again to a dish when it stated that "Joseph took the dish to his house and put it in an honored and beautiful place." In the context of the crucifixion, the vessel was instead called a bowl. Finding Jesus crucified, Joseph "went to his house to seek the bowl" and "used it to gather as much of the blood that dripped out as he could. Then he brought the dish back to his house."<sup>251</sup> The terms "dish" and "bowl" were both used subsequently.<sup>252</sup>

Considerably expanding Galahad's construction of an ark at the end of the *Queste*, the *Estoire* had God tell Joseph to build a large wooden ark to house the bowl. Like the biblical ark of the covenant, Joseph's ark was the locus of contact with God.

Before you leave this wood, you shall make an ark for My bowl, and you shall say your prayers in order to have the love of your Lord God. And when you wish to speak to Me, open the ark, wherever you may be, so that only you and your son Josephus see the bowl.<sup>253</sup>

When Josephus first opened the ark, he had a frightening vision of Jesus and four angels, who appeared to him as they would at the Last Judgment. The frightening quality of the vision reflected its initial or initiatory position in the narrative. When Josephus looked into the ark a second time, he saw a vision of Christ crucified that included the bowl.

He looked up and saw the man crucified on the cross that the angel held; the nails he had seen held by the other angel were on the man's feet and hands, while the sponge was pressed against His chin, and he seemed to be a man who was surely in the anguish of death.

After that Josephus saw that the lance he had seen in the hand of the third angel was embedded in the side of the crucified man; down the handle dripped a stream composed neither completely of blood nor of water, and yet it seemed to be of blood. Under the feet of the crucified man he saw the bowl that his father Joseph had placed in the ark; it seemed to him that the blood from the feet of the crucified man was dripping into the bowl, and that it was already nearly full. It appeared to Josephus that it was about to run over and that the blood would spill. Then it seemed to him that the man was about to fall to the ground; that the two arms had already slipped from the nails, so that the body was falling, with the head down. Seeing this, he tried to run forward to lift Him up. But when he was about to step inside the ark, he saw the five angels with their swords at the entrance of the door. Three of them held the points of the swords out against his coming, while the other two lifted theirs on high and made as if to strike him. Despite this, he still tried to go past, so much did he desire to raise up Him who he believed was his God and his Savior. But when he tried to put the other foot inside, he could not, but was obliged to stop, for he was held so strongly from behind by his arms that he could not go forward. He looked and saw that two angels were holding him, each with one hand, while with the other hand one held an ampulla, and the other, a censer and a box.<sup>254</sup>

In dialogue with his father Joseph, Josephus discussed his visions of the eschatological judge and the crucified man as "spiritual revelations."<sup>255</sup> Looking into the ark, Joseph saw not a vision but a group of relics and other sacramental objects: an small altar covered with white cloths, a red cloth, three nails, a bloody lance-tip, a red cross, two candles, and two further objects of present interest.

At the other end was the dish he had brought; and in the middle of the altar, there was a splendid gold vessel, in the form of a chalice with a gold cover on top. He could not see the cover very well, nor what was on it, for it was covered with a white cloth so that only the front was visible.<sup>256</sup>

In this presentation, the chalice differed emphatically from the grail and was only imperfectly seen.

Josephus' visions had occurred while he peered into the open ark, where his father Joseph could see only physical objects; but the next events took place in the open space of the room that contained the ark. Two angels flew into the room carrying stoups of water, then another two came holding "two large gold vessels just like basins." Next three angels brought censers full of incense and spices. Yet another angel arrived, bearing the grail, with the legend, "I am called the power of the supreme lord," written on his forehead. "This one carried over his hands a cloth as green as emeralds. And under this cloth was the holy dish." An eighth angel carried a book of Gospels, a ninth had a sword whose blade was fiery red. Three angels carried multicolored candles, and Joseph lastly saw the resurrected Christ, dressed in a priest's robes.

Jesus now summoned Josephus, anointed and consecrated him as a bishop, and had him administer the sacrament.<sup>257</sup>

Our Lord led Josephus up to the ark so that all the people saw him enter it. And they all saw it grow and become larger so that all were comfortably inside. And they saw the angels come and go before the door. There Josephus celebrated the first sacrament ever done for this people, but it was completed very quickly, for he said only these words, which Jesus Christ said to his disciples at the Last Supper: "Take this and eat it; this is My flesh, which for you and many other people will be delivered over to agony and torment." Likewise, he said about the wine, "Take this and drink it all, for this is the blood of My New Law, My very own, which will be shed for you, in remission of your sins." These words were said by Josephus over the bread he found prepared on the paten covering the chalice; and the bread immediately became flesh, and the wine, blood.<sup>258</sup>

The ark that contained the grail was the place of the first sacrament, but it was consistent with the gospel account of Jesus at the Last Supper, and not with conventional ecclesiastic practice.

When Josephus prepared to break the bread, he saw a living child's body. In this portrait of a Eucharist vision, the *Estoire* agreed with the *Perlesvaus* and the *Queste*. When Josephus tore the child's body on Christ's instruction, "all he saw before him on the paten was a piece in the semblance of bread." Its taste was consistent with manna and earlier romances' accounts of the grail. "After he had eaten it, it seemed to him that all the sweet and delectable things one's tongue could name had entered his body."<sup>259</sup> This harmonization of the Eucharist wafer with the visionary properties of the grail and the legendary flavors of manna indicated a concern with the hidden manna.

The *Estoire* also contained an original episode that resolved the inconsistency that the *Queste* had created by introducing the motif of healing. Nascien wished to see the grail, raised the plate that covered the vessel, and looked inside. He promptly became blind and remarked, "He who seeks his Lord's secrets is miserable and false, for he wins His anger and hatred." He stated that he would not recover his sight until Josephus was healed of a wound from a lance tip in his thigh. In response to Josephus' questions, "Nascien said that nothing more could be known for certain except that he had seen something that could not be explained by any tongue."<sup>260</sup>

Josephus remained before the ark, pensive, without saying a word, for a long time. While he was thinking in this way, a voice cried out inside the ark very loudly and said in the hearing of all, "After my great vengeance, my great remedy, and after my fury, my calm." As soon as the voice had thus spoken, an angel came out of the ark, completely dressed in a white robe...<sup>261</sup>

We are apparently to understand that Josephus engaged in the standard medieval procedure for meditation,<sup>262</sup> which culminated successfully in a contemplative state in which he both heard the word of God and had a vision of an angel. The locution asserted that God both punishes with illness and provides remedies that heal. This displacement of healing from the grail to God modified the *Queste's* symbol, better limiting the grail to the properties of psychedelics. Within the vision, the angel promptly healed the wound in Josephus' thigh.

Generalizing Gawain's experience of the grail in the prose *Lancelot*, the *Estoire* asserted that the grail provided no food to sinners. "At the coming of the Holy Vessel all the tablecloths where the religious worthy men sat were covered with the most beautiful food a mortal heart could conceive. But where the sinners were sitting, no one could see any sign of the grace of the Holy Grail. Rather, that time the sinners had nothing to eat."<sup>263</sup>

### **The Post-Vulgate *Quest of the Holy Grail***

Between 1230 and 1240, an anonymous writer retold the Vulgate cycle, eliminating much that did not pertain to the grail. Only fragments survive in Old French, but Spanish and Portuguese translations have permitted scholars to reconstruct what they term the *Roman du Graal*, "Romance of the Grail," or Post-Vulgate cycle. As extant, it consists of a continuation to *Merlin*, along with versions of the *Queste* and *The Death of Arthur*.<sup>264</sup> The Post-Vulgate *Queste* followed the original quite closely, but occasional innovations repay attention.

An important one occurs at the end of the very opening scene. After the grail appeared at the Round Table, the *Queste* had Arthur remark, "In truth, my lords, our hearts should be lifted up for joy that Our Lord has shown us so great a sign of His love in deigning to feed us with His grace at this high feast of Pentecost."<sup>265</sup> The Post-Vulgate *Queste* reworded the speech to read, "Indeed, friends, we should be glad, for God has show us this great sign of His love, that at such a high feast as that today of Pentecost He has given us to eat from His holy granary."<sup>266</sup> Uninformed readers were expected to treat the reference to the granary as an instance of synecdoche, but the literal statement concerned the derivation of the psychedelic sacrament from a granary.

The Post-Vulgate *Queste* similarly referred to "the secrets and hidden things of Our Lord," and the "marvels and great secrets that Our Lord doesn't want to let a man find who is in mortal sin." These secrets were "the good of the Holy Grail...His holy grace, and...the blessed food of which the prophets and good men of this earth--who already knew what was to come--have spoken plainly....they'll secretly be given in abundance this blessed food, which is called the grace of the Holy Grail."<sup>267</sup> Here again uninitiated readers were expected to misunderstand explicit references to psychoactive edibles by treating the language as metaphoric.

The Post-Vulgate Cycle did not include a version of the *Estoire*, but the climax of its *Queste*, when Galahad and his comrades beheld the grail, echoed the account of Josephus in the *Estoire*.

After they had entered the chamber and seen the most Holy Vessel standing on the rich table of silver, everyone recognized it as the Holy Grail, and at once they fell to their knees on the floor, so full of joy at what they saw that it seemed to them that they would never die.

As they were thus at their prayers, they saw above the silver table a man dressed in white robes, but none of them could see his face, for it was of such brightness that mortal eyes could not look at it but fell humbly, so that no one's eyesight could look at this celestial marvel.

The man, who was above the table, as I have told you, said, "Come forward, knights filled with faith and belief, and you shall have the food you desire so much. And you, son Galahad, whom I have found truer and better than any other knight, come forward."

He stood up and approached the table, but the brightness was so strong that he could hardly see where he was going.

The man said to him, "Open your mouth."

He opened it, and the man gave him the Host, and he did the same to each one. But know that each one of them thought he was putting a living man in his mouth, and each one thought he was not on earth but in heaven. Thus they felt such joy as mortal heart could not imagine. After they had been filled with the holy food and the glorious grace of the Holy Grail, as I have told you, they again fell to their knees before the table and began to ask one another how they felt.

Claudin answered, "I feel so filled with good nourishment--which belongs not to sinners but to the just, is not terrestrial but celestial--that I say that never, to my

knowledge, have sinful knights received during their lifetime such a great reward as we have in His service, if it pleases Him, for this food is joy and pleasure and spiritual grace.”

And each of the others said the same.<sup>268</sup>

In the *Estoire*, Josephus opened the ark to see the grail and instead envisioned Jesus and his angels, initially as the eschatological judge, but afterwards in bishop's robes, when Jesus installed Josephus as bishop and administered a heavenly bread that looked like a living child. Here, in the Post-Vulgate *Queste*, the knights looked at the grail and envisioned a man in white robes, who administered a heavenly host that looked like a living man. The host was explicitly psychoactive. The knights found themselves “filled” simultaneously “with the holy food and the glorious grace of the Holy Grail.”

Heinrich von dem Türlin

*The Crown* was composed in a Bavarian-Austrian dialect sometime between 1210 and 1240.<sup>269</sup> Its narrative consists of a series of episodes concerning Gawain, whose last adventure brought him to the grail castle. Forewarned to ask the question of the Grail,<sup>270</sup> he found both the stable and the hall of the castle filled with all manner of food and drink.<sup>271</sup> The romance handled the exhibition of the grail perfunctorily. Gawain had been warned not to drink wine, lest he fall asleep; but his companions drank and slept. The grail procession--maidens carrying two candlesticks, squires carrying a spear, maidens carrying a golden bowl that catches three drops of blood from the spear<sup>272</sup>--culminated in a novel description of the grail.

Behind them, stepping very lightly, walked the most beautiful lady God had created since the beginning of the world; her form and her dress were perfect. On gold-embroidered silk she held something that looked like a small gridiron of red gold, on which was as splendid an object as has ever been wrought, made of a single jewel and the finest gold; it resembled a reliquary on an altar....

The elegant lady stepped forward with the grieving maiden, lifted the lid from the reliquary, and set it on the table. Gawain, who was watching everything, saw that the reliquary held a small piece of bread. When his host broke off a third of the bread and ate it, the knight waited no longer with his question, “For the sake of God and His majesty, lord, tell me the meaning of this large assembly and the miracle!” he exclaimed.<sup>273</sup>

In that the “small piece of bread” was kept in a reliquary, it was implicitly a relic, the grail. The grail king consumed a third of the bread--possibly its material reality, as distinct from its imaginable form and intelligible idea. The exhibition and consumption of the grail was analogous to a Eucharist, but it did not involve a consecrated wafer. Neither was the grail procession an ecclesiastic rite. Gawain called the Grail a “miracle,” as did his host in the course of his reply. “Meanwhile the old lord was speaking. ‘Gawain,’ he said, ‘this miracle of God must not become common knowledge: it must be kept secret....you see the Grail....’”<sup>274</sup>

In its explicit statement that the miraculous nature of the bread was a secret, *The Crown* implied that the bread manifested miraculous properties upon being consumed. The motif was perhaps the least secretive discussion in Arthurian romance of the hidden manna, the psychedelic sacrament of the medieval Church.

### Concluding Reflections

All of the original grail romances, from Chrétien's *Conte del Graal* through the Post-Vulgate *Queste* and Heinrich's *Crown*, described the grail in terms that were appropriate for the hidden manna of the medieval church. The hidden manna was the secret of the grail.

From beginning to end the primary wonder of the grail was its wondrous provision of all manner of food, a motif that had earlier been prominent in Celtic tales of the terrestrial paradise, but had pertained to manna in the writings of St Basil of Caesarea and St Augustine of Hippo. The grail was also connected with imagery appropriate to the Eucharist in Chrétien, Robert de Boron, the *Parzival*, the *Perlesvaus*, the *Queste*, the prose *Lancelot*, the *Estoire*, and the Post-Vulgate *Queste*. At the same time, the manna that was the Eucharist was not intended. The grail was regularly associated with visions, whether simply of a bright light or, in other accounts, complex images that sometimes developed as coherent narratives. Explicit portraits of visions were lacking only in some of the continuations of Chrétien's *Perceval*, together with the German contributions, Wolfram's *Parzival* and Heinrich's *Crown*. The juxtaposition of these three elements—miraculous food, associations with the Eucharist, and the occurrence of visions—attest unmistakably to the medieval concept of hidden manna.

The grail's provision of the wondrous odors of incense and spices and its capacities both to heal and to differentiate sinners and penitents, were secondary additions to its legend. Present from Chrétien onward but in contexts that differed over time was a further concern with the medieval practice of meditation on the passion of Jesus.

The grail romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries represented a significant chapter in the history of the mystery of manna. The biblical motif was attached to a literary motif that continued in use long after its explicit association with the hidden manna was forgotten. Esoteric controversies concerning the drug of reference attended the origin of the motif and led immediately to confusion concerning the validity of describing the grail as a cup. The institutional structure of the Church may have kept the ecclesiastic motif of hidden manna stable over a period of centuries; but the unstructured life of popular literature permitted the motif of the grail to accrue a variety of alternative meanings over the centuries. The hidden manna was the psychedelic sacrament. In so far as the grail alluded to the hidden manna, it too signified the psychedelic sacrament. But the grail came also to mean many different things.

Another important historical innovation was a new social locus for the practice of mysticism within Christianity. The grail narratives did not conform with the conventional medieval distinction between active and contemplative lives. The romances and histories of the grail portrayed the first practice of mysticism in Christendom by people who were neither priests, monks, nor solitaries. The grail knights were active in the secular world, yet they were occasionally also contemplatives who beheld the grail. This portrait of what, in the fourteenth century, began to be called a "mixed life" that was partly active and partly contemplative, presumably gave literary expression to the personal spirituality of the story-tellers and those in their audiences whom they initiated into the mixed life.



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30. Urban T. Holmes, Jr., *A New Interpretation of Chrétien's Conte Del Graal* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1958), pp. 13, 18.
31. Rosemond Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery: Some Mediaeval Books and Their Posterity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 436.
32. Richard Barber, *The Holy Grail: Imagination and Belief* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), p. 164.

33. Ibid., p. 166.
34. Ibid., p. 139.
35. William Roach, "Eucharistic Tradition in the *Perlesvaus*," *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 59 (1939), p. 12.
36. Jessie L. Weston, "The Grail and the Rites of Adonis," *Folklore* 18 (1907), pp. 283-305; *idem*, "Mystery Survivals in Mediaeval Romance," *The Quest* 2 (1910), pp. 228-238; reprinted in James Webb, ed., *A Quest Anthology* (New York: Arno Press - New York Times, 1976); *idem*, *The Quest of the Holy Grail* (London: G. Bell & Sons Ltd., 1913); *idem*, *From Ritual to Romance* (1920; reprinted Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957). See also Mary Williams, "Some Aspects of the Grail Problem," *Folklore* 71 (1960), p. 102.
37. William A. Nitze, "The Fisher King in the Grail Romances," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 17 (1909), pp. 365-418.
38. Arthur Edward Waite, *The Hidden Church of the Holy Graal: Its Legends and Symbolism* (1909; reprinted Des Plaines, IL: Yogi Publication Society).
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41. A. M. Hocart, "Initiation," *Folklore* 35/4 (1924), pp. 308-323; E. M. Loeb, "Tribal Initiations and Secret Societies," *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology* 25/3 (1929), pp. 249-288; Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth* [originally titled: *Birth and Rebirth*], trans. Willard R. Trask (1958; reprinted New York: Harper Colophon, 1975); John W. M. Whiting, Richard Kluckhohn, & Albert Anthony, "The Function of Male Initiation Ceremonies at Puberty," in Eleanor E. Maccoby, Theodore M. Newcomb, & Eugene L. Hartley, eds., *Readings in Social Psychology*, 3rd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1958); C. Jouco Bleeker, ed., *Initiation: Contributions to the Theme of the Study-Conference of the International Association for the History of Religions, Held at Strasburg, September 17th to 22nd 1964* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965); Bruce Lincoln, *Emerging from the Chrysalis: Studies in Rituals of Women's Initiation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).
42. My thesis is not completely unprecedented. Matarasso, *Redemption of Chivalry*, p. 192, noted that the grail was associated in *The Queste del Saint Graal* with grace, the Eucharist, and manna; and she quoted a passage from William of St. Thierry, where he referred to the hidden manna. Building on Matarasso's foundation, Anne Marie D'arcy, *Wisdom and the Grail: The Image of the Vessel in the Queste del Saint Graal and Malory's Tale of the Sankgreal* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), pp. 231-32, 294, 300, cited further medieval references to the hidden manna; but D'Arcy assumed that the expression was indebted to Hebrews 9:4, which locates manna in a golden urn in the celestial ark. Citing traditional readings of Hebrew, D'Arcy equated "the incarnate *Logos* with the *manna absconditum*" and made the urn, which was equivalent to Mary, the prototype of the grail. In other words, both Matarasso and D'Arcy noted William of St. Thierry's use of the term "hidden manna," but neither discussed his debt to Anselm of Laon and the symbolic significance of hidden manna in the Eucharistic theology of the school of Laon. For Matarasso, the grail symbolized *unio mystica*; for D'Arcy, a feminine conception of divine Wisdom.
43. Loomis, "Chastiel Bran."
44. James Douglas Bruce, "Mordrain, Corbenic, and the Vulgate Grail Romances," *Modern Language Notes* 34 (1919), 391-93; *idem*, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance: From the*

- Beginnings Down to the Year 1300*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoe & Ruprecht, 1928; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press; reprinted Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1958), Vol. I, p. 394.
45. Dan Merkur, "The Hidden Manna: The Psychedelic Sacrament in Medieval Roman Catholicism," [www.danmerkur.com](http://www.danmerkur.com).
  46. Louis-André Vignerat, "Chrétien de Troyes Rediscovered," *Modern Philology* 32/4 (1935), pp. 341-42.
  47. Loomis, "Origin of the Grail Legends," pp. 276-77.
  48. As cited and translated by Carey, p. 13.
  49. Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval, or The Story of the Grail*, trans. Ruth Harwood Cline (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), pp. 88-89.
  50. Olschki, pp. 20-22.
  51. Chrétien, p. 173.
  52. Loomis, *Grail*, p. 47.
  53. R. Mark Scowcroft, "The Hand, the Child, and the Grail," in Benjamin T. Hudson & Vickie Ziegler (Eds.), *Crossed Paths: Methodological Approaches to the Celtic Aspect of the European Middle Ages* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), p. 117.
  54. Nutt, pp. 208-211, connected the "salmon of wisdom" with "the nature of the Fisher King" and "the inexhaustible nature of the fish" in Boron's *Perceval*. He noted that "in the Welsh tradition which corresponds to that of Fionn and the salmon, it is the vessel, the cauldron, or rather the drink which it holds, which communicates the gifts of wisdom and knowledge." John Rhys, *Studies in the Arthurian Legend* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891), pp. 326-27, suggested that the Welsh cauldron motif was the pagan antecedent to the grail. He further suggested that the motif pertained to a psychoactive beverage. "The reader may perhaps...think it strange that Celtic literature, at one time, busied itself so much about vessels, and especially cauldrons. But it can be shown that such vessels may have had a spiritual or intellectual significance, as for instance in connection with the notion of poetry. Thus allusion is made in the *Book of Taliessin* to three muses rising out of the cauldron of Ogyrven the Giant, whose name is associated with bardism and the origin of writing. Outside the Celtic domain one may point to the Dwarf's Cup as one of the old Norse terms symbolic of thought, wisdom, and especially the inspiration of poetry; and one might bring into the comparison the soma of Hindu religion. All these cases connecting the sacred vessel or its contents with poetry and inspiration, point possibly back to some primitive drink brewed by the early Aryan, and taken by the medicine-man in order to produce a state of ecstasy or intoxication."
- On salmon motifs more generally, see: Joseph Nagy Falaky, "Otter, Salmon, and Eel in Traditional Gaelic Narrative," *Studia Celtica* 20-21 (1985-86), pp. 123-144; A. J. Hughes, "Some aspects of the salmon in Gaelic tradition past and present," *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 48 (1996), pp. 17-28.
55. Whitley Stokes, "The Prose Tales of the Rennes Dindsenchas" *Revue Celtique* 15 (1894), p. 457. See also *idem*, "The Bodleian Dinnsenchas," *Folklore* 3 (1892), p. 498; Edward John Gwynn, *The Metrical Dinnsenchas*, Part III (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Co., Ltd; London: Williams & Norgate, 1913), p. 293; Thomas F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1946), pp. 319-23, 329-31.
  56. Kuno Meyer, "The Boyish Exploits of Finn," *Ériu* 1 (1904), pp. 185-86. See also *idem*, "Finn and the Man in the Tree," *Revue Celtique* 25 (1904), pp. 347, 349.
  57. Adomnán of Iona, *Life of St Columba*, trans. Richard Sharpe (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books Ltd., 1995), p. 182.
  58. Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, trans. Edmund Colledge & James Walsh (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), p. 130.
  59. William Jenkins Rees, *Lives of the Cambro British Saints: Of the Fifth and Immediate Succeeding Centuries, From Ancient Welsh and Latin MSS. in the British Museum and Elsewhere*,

- with English Translations and Explanatory Notes* (Llandoverly: William Rees; London: Longman & Co.; Abergavenny: J. H. Morgan, 1853), p. 367.
60. Stokes, "Rennes Dindsenchas," p. 334.
  61. Rees, p. 292.
  62. Stokes, "Rennes Dindsenchas," p. 472. See also Gwynn, p. 389.
  63. Peter Schrijver, "On Henbane and Early European Narcotics," *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 51 (1999), p. 41.
  64. Kate Chadbourne, "The Voices of Hounds: Heroic Dogs and Men in the Finn Ballads and Tales," in Joseph Falaky Nagy & Leslie Ellen Jones (eds.), *Heroic Poets and Poetic Heroes in Celtic Tradition: A Festschrift for Patrick K. Ford (CSANA Yearbook 3-4)* (Dublin & Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 2005) p. 34.
  65. G. B. Gardner, "The Hazel as a Weapon," *Folklore* 55 (1944), p. 177; Ellen Ettlinger, "The Hazel as a Weapon," *Folklore* 56 (1945), p. 228.
  66. Dáithí O'hOgain, *The Sacred Isle: Belief and Religion in Pre-Christian Ireland* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, & Wilton, Ireland: Collins Press, 1999), pp. 120-1, 125.
  67. Marged Haycock, ed. & trans., *Legendary Poems from the Book of Taliesin* (Aberystwyth: CMCS Publications, Department of Welsh, Aberystwyth University, 2007), p. 121.
  68. Ann Dooley & Harry Roe, trans., *Tales of the Elders of Ireland: A new translation of Acalam na Senórach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 5.
  69. Chrétien, p. 173.
  70. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.
  71. *Ibid.*, p. 175.
  72. Olschki, p. 28.
  73. Eugene J. Weinraub, *Chrétien's Jewish Grail: A New Investigation of the Imagery and Significance of Chrétien de Troyes's Grail Episode Based Upon Medieval Hebraic Sources*, North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures (Chapel Hill: U.N.C. Department of Romance Languages, 1976), 52-77.
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  77. William A. Nitze, "The Home of Robert de Boron," *Modern Philology* 40 (1942), p. 114.
  78. Mahoney, p. 16.
  79. Helen Nicholson, *Love, War, and the Grail: Templars, Hospitallers, and Teutonic Knights in Medieval Epic and Romance 1150-1500* (Boston & Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004), p. 151.
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156. *Ibid.*, p. 52. The phrase was preserved in the post-Vulgate *Queste*. Norris J. Lacy, ed., *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation, Volume V. The Merlin Continuation* (end), *The Quest of the Holy Grail, The Death of Arthur*, trans. Martha Asher (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), p. 126.
157. Matarasso, *Quest of the Holy Grail*, p. 68; Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail, Vol. V*, pp. 190, 244.
158. Etienne Gilson, "La Mystique de la Grace dans la Queste del Saint Graal," *Les Idées et les Lettres* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1955), pp. 59-91; W. E. M. C. Hamilton, "L'interprétation mystique de la Queste del Saint Graal," *Neophilologus* 27 (1942), pp. 94-10; Fanni Bogdanow, "An Interpretation of the Meaning and Purpose of the Vulgate *Queste del Saint Graal* in the Light of the Mystical Theology of St Bernard," in Alison Adams, Armel H. Diverres, Karen Stern, & Kenneth Varty, eds., *The Changing Face of Arthurian Romance: Essays on Arthurian Prose Romances in memory of Cedric E. Pickford* (Cambridge: Boydell Press, 1986), pp. 23-46; Matarasso, *Redemption of Chivalry*, pp. 180-204; Karen Pratt, "The Cistercians and the *Queste del Saint Graal*," *Reading Medieval Studies* 21 (1995), pp. 69-26. These studies presuppose anachronistic readings of Bernard's mystical theology that understand Bernard's use of the term "spiritual marriage" by interpolating what the term meant for St. Teresa of Avila. For historical readings of Bernard on his own terms, see Bernard McGinn, "Love, Knowledge, and *Unio Mystica* in the Western Catholic Tradition," in Moshe Idel & Bernard McGinn, eds., *Mystical Union and Monotheistic Religion: An Ecumenical Dialogue* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 59-86; *idem*, *The Growth of Mysticism: Vol. II of The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), pp. 158-224.
- An effort has also been made to read Bernard into Chrétien's *Perceval*: Fanni Bogdanow, "The mystical theology of Bernard de Clairvaux and the meaning of Chrétien de Troyes' *Conte du Graal*," in Peter S. Noble & Linda M. Paterson (Eds.), *Chrétien de Troyes and the Troubadours: Essays in memory of the late Leslie Topsfield* (Cambridge: St. Catherine's College, 1984), pp. 249-282.
- In my own view, these arguments fail because they presuppose anachronistic readings of Bernard. Bernard and Teresa privileged different types of mystical experience. Bernard prized a sense of divine presence that included dialogue with the Word, whereas Teresa prioritized a sense of divine presence that occurs while the soul is incapable of knowing either itself or God. For Bernard, the inhibition of reflective thinking that Teresa called the soul's death, was an ecstasy of love without knowledge; whereas for Teresa, a sense of presence during which the soul continued to know itself, was a spiritual betrothal but not a marriage. See Dan Merkur, "Unitive Experiences and the State of Trance," in Moshe Idel & Bernard McGinn, eds., *Mystical Union and Monotheistic Religion: An Ecumenical Dialogue* (New York: Macmillan, 1989); *idem*, *The Psychedelic Sacrament: Manna, Meditation, and Mystical Experience*. Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2001), pp. 55-74.
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160. Isabel Mary, "The Knights of God: Citeaux and the Quest of the Holy Grail," in Benedicta Ward, ed., *The Influence of Saint Bernard: Anglican Essays* (Oxford: SLG Press, 1976), pp. 53-88.
161. Matarasso, *Quest of the Holy Grail*, pp. 43-44.
162. *Ibid.*, p. 171.
163. *Ibid.*, pp. 69, 104, 107.
164. *Ibid.*, p. 107.



165. Ibid., p. 98.
166. Ibid., p. 172.
167. Ibid., p. 176.
168. Ibid., p. 273. Discussing this passage, Matarasso, *Redemption of Chivalry*, pp. 184-86, cited a passage where Bernard of Clairvaux discussed the "hidden manna," but was apparently unaware that the expression had technical meaning in medieval theology (see also p. 192).
169. Matarasso, *Quest of the Holy Grail*, p. 53.
170. Ibid., p. 55.
171. Ibid., pp. 58-61.
172. Bryant, *High Book of the Grail*, p. 34.
173. Ibid., p. 121.
174. Ibid., pp. 142-43.
175. Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail*, Vol. V, p. 166.
176. Wolfram, p. 261.
177. Ibid., pp. 143, 253, 255, 256, 257, 261, 262.
178. Ibid., pp. 142-44.
179. Nicholson, p. 105.
180. Ibid., pp. 155-56.
181. Matarasso, *Quest of the Holy Grail*, p. 61.
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183. Matarasso, *Redemption of Chivalry*, p. 53.
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