

The Land of the Sun¹

by

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Among the places, so difficult to identify, that are associated with the legend of the Holy Grail, particular importance is given by some authorities to Glastonbury, where Joseph of Arimathaea is said to have settled after coming to Britain.

Into the history of Glastonbury many ideas have been woven. Many of these present comparisons and likenesses are questionable; some appear to be simple confusions. But in these very confusions there may be found certain rational thoughts that are not without interest from the viewpoint of “sacred geography,” and from the successive sites that, in the course of time, certain traditional centers have held.

Such ideas are indicated in the strange discoveries set forth in *A Guide to Glastonbury's Temple of the Stars, its Giant Effigies described from air views*, and from *The High History of The Holy Graal*, by K. E. Maltwood, reprinted by J. Clarke, Cambridge. The discoveries in this book may be taken perhaps with some reserve, and certain ideas queried, such as the interpretation of place-names, some of which point to an origin of more recent date than that suggested by the author. But the main part of the book, with the maps that bear out its theme, cannot be easily dismissed as pure fantasy.

The theme is this: at a period remote enough to be called prehistoric, Glastonbury, and its adjoining district in Somerset, was the site of an immense stellar temple which was laid out by tracing gigantic effigies representing the constellations on the ground; these effigies, which were arranged in a circle, formed an image of the vault of the sky projected upon the surface of the earth.

It is a complex of works that taken together could be compared with those of the ancient mound-builders of North America. The layout of the forms was aided by the natural lie of rivers and hills, showing that the site was not chosen at random but, to a certain extent, by “predetermination”. Nonetheless, it is true that what the writer calls “an art founded on the

1. Editor's Note: To improve its readability, this essay has been substantially re-edited from the original version which appeared in *Studies*. Nothing substantive has been changed. Readers may wish to consult another translation of the essay found in *Symbols of Sacred Science* (Sophia Perennis, 2004).

principles of Geometry” was needed in order to complete and perfect the design. Clearly, this expression is used to show that the tradition inspiring this art was the Masonic one.

If it is true that these forms have been so well preserved as to be still recognizable today, it must be supposed that the monks of Glastonbury carefully preserved them up to the Reformation. This implies that they cherished the knowledge handed down by their distant predecessors, the Druids, and by others of even more remote times for, if the conclusions drawn by the author from the positions of the constellations are correct, the origin of these forms goes back to nearly 3,000 years before the Christian Era. Moreover, it would seem that, according to various indications, the Templars had a certain share in their preservation. This fact would correspond with the Templar’s supposed connection with the Knights of the Round Table and with the role of “Guardians of the Grail” that was attributed to them. Furthermore, it should be noted that the settlements of the Templars appear to have often been placed where megalithic monuments or other prehistoric traces are now found. Perhaps this is not entirely coincidence.

Taken as a whole, this circle is a vast Zodiac, which the author sees as the prototype of the Round Table which, as the place of assembly of the twelve chief characters of the Grail Legend, seems certain to be linked with a representation of the Zodiacal circle. This does not imply, however, that the Grail characters are simply constellations; that is too naturalistic an interpretation, for the truth is that the constellations themselves are only symbols; moreover, it is important to bear in mind that the zodiacal scheme is often found linked with more than one type of tradition and attached to various mystery cults.

Again, it appears to us very doubtful that all the stories concerning the “Knights of the Round Table” and the Grail Quest should be nothing more than a description that is “dramatized” [or given life], as it were, from the stellar effigies of Glastonbury and the surrounding land. It far more likely that these stories simply show a correspondence with them. Such an idea is fundamentally quite conformable to the general laws of symbolism. Indeed, it would not be at all surprising if the connection were precise enough to include secondary details of the legends, which we shall examine.

Having said this, it must be mentioned that the Glastonbury Zodiac shows certain characteristics which may be regarded as marks of its authenticity. For one thing, it appears that the sign of the Balance is absent. Now, as we have explained in another article, the constellation of the Balance was not always zodiacal; in primitive times it was polar; its name was applied either to the Great Bear, or to the Great Bear and Little Bear together. By a strange coincidence, the name of Arthur is directly connected with these two constellations: “The Dragon is in the middle of the sky like a king upon his throne.”

The author alludes to the “Wisdom of the Serpent” which, in a certain sense, could here be identified with that of the seven polar *Rishis*. It is curious also to note that among the Celts the dragon is the symbol of the chief, and that Arthur is the son of Uther Pendragon. In the center of the Balance, the Pole is marked by the head of a serpent, plainly referring to the “Celestial

Dragon”. There would, therefore, be good reason to conclude that the Dragon goes back to a time before the Balance became part of the Zodiac.

On the other hand, and this is very important, the symbol of the Polar Scales is connected with the name *Thule*, originally given to the Hyperborean center of the primordial Tradition. At this center we may suppose that there was a stellar temple, one of those many places that, in the course of time, came to be seats of spiritual powers emanating or deriving more or less directly from this same primordial Tradition. Hence it is easier to understand certain connections noted by the writer between the symbolism of the Pole and that of the “Earthly Paradise”, particularly in regard to the Tree and the Serpent. In all this it is the representation of the Primordial Center that is always primary. The three points of the triangle are also related to this symbolism.

In connection with calling the “Adamic” language Syriac, we have written elsewhere about “primitive” Syria; this name, properly speaking, signifies the “solar land” of which Homer writes as being an island situated “beyond Ogygia”; this allows of no other identification than Hyperborean *Thule* or *Tula*. There, he says, “are the revolutions of the sun”, which is a puzzling expression, but which naturally refers to the “circumpolar” nature of its revolutions. Yet, at the same time, this may also allude to a tracing of the zodiacal cycle on the land itself, thus explaining how similar forms have been reproduced in a region (i.e. Glastonbury) which was destined to be an image of this Hyperborean center.

Here we reach an explanation of those confusions that we indicated at the beginning of our review, which could have arisen somewhat naturally from likening the copy to the original. It is very difficult to see anything but a misunderstanding of this kind in the identification of Glastonbury with the Isle of Avalon, and again with the “Isle of Glass”, mentioned in certain parts of the Grail Legend; here too, there is probably a confusion with some other spiritual center that is more obscure or, shall we say, further away in space and time, although it is certain that the designation does not apply to the “Primordial Center” itself. To identify Glastonbury with the “Isle of Glass” is incompatible with the fact that this island is always considered to have been an inaccessible spot; furthermore, such an identification is contrary to the much more plausible view that the region of Somerset is the “Kingdom of Logres”, for this kingdom is supposed to have been situated in Britain. Logres would surely have been regarded as a sacred territory, and may have drawn its name from that of the Celtic *Lug*, a word that evokes both the idea of the “Logos”, that is, God, and the idea of Light. As to the name of Avalon, it is clearly the same as *Ablun* or *Belen*, that is, the Celtic or Hyperborean Apollo, so that the Isle of Avalon is only another name for the “Land of the Sun”, which, moreover, was at a certain period transported symbolically from the north to the west, a movement that is in conjunction with one of the principal changes that occurred in the traditional forms in the course of our *Manvantara*.

We know that Mont Saint-Michel was once called Tombelaine, that is to say, the *Tumulus* or mount of *Belen* (and not the “tomb of Eden”, according to an entirely modern and fantastic notion). It is clear that the substitution of the name of the solar archangel for that of *Belen* does

not in any way modify the meaning. (Curiously enough, one can find a St. Michael's Hill in England in the district corresponding to the ancient Kingdom of Logres.)

This transference, like that of the *sapta-riksha* from the Great Bear to the Pleiades, corresponds notably with a change of the starting-point of the year: at first the solstice, and then the equinox.

The secondary meaning of "apple" which is attached to the name *Avalon* in Celtic languages in no way contradicts what we have just said, for it refers to the golden apples of the garden of the Hesperides; that is to say, the solar fruits of the Tree of Life.

These considerations lead us to other and perhaps even stranger statements or suppositions in the book under review. One idea that is put forward appears to be inexplicable at first sight: namely, attributing the origin of the Glastonbury Zodiac to the Phoenicians. It is customary to lay at the door of this race many things that are rather hypothetical, but the assertion of their existence at a period as remote as that of the zodiacal circle appears extremely questionable. However, it must be said that the Phoenicians did inhabit the historical i.e., real, geographical Syria. Could the name of the people have been the subject of a transference similar to that of the name of the country? What makes this idea more or less credible is the connection of primitive Syria with the symbolism of the Phoenix; in fact, according to Josephus, the capital of primitive Syria was "Heliopolis", the "City of the Sun," whose name was given at a later date to the Egyptian town of *On*. It is to the first Heliopolis, and not to the one in Egypt, that the circle symbolism of the Phoenix and its re-births really should be attributed.

Now, according to Diodorus of Sicily, it was one of Helios' (or the Sun's) sons, the one who was called *Actis*, who founded the town of Heliopolis; and it so happens that the word *Actin* is the name of a place near Glastonbury, and in conditions that exactly connect it with the Phoenix, into which, according to other references, this "Prince of Heliopolis" appears to have been changed.

It is only natural that the author [i.e., Maltwood] would be deceived by the varied and successive uses of the same names, and he concludes that Heliopolis of Egypt is meant here, just as he deems it possible to write of the Phoenicians as if they were the historical figures in question; after all, this is all the more excusable when we note that the writers of the classical period had already begun to make similar errors. The true meaning of all these points can only be established by a knowledge of the origin of these traditions, which is Hyperborean. It would seem that the author did not suspect this.

In the Glastonbury Zodiac the sign of Aquarius is represented, somewhat unexpectedly, by a bird. Here the author recognizes, quite rightly, the Phoenix. The bird carries an object that is none other than "the cup of immortality", that is, the Grail itself; the connection made here with the Hindu *Garuda* is certainly correct: The sign of Aquarius is usually represented by Ganymede. We know of his connection with "ambrosia" and again with the eagle of Zeus. This

eagle is identical with *Garuda*. On the other hand, according to Arabic tradition, the *Rukh* or Phoenix never alights anywhere on earth but on the mountain of *Qāf*, which is the “polar mountain”. In Hindu and Persian traditions, it is from this polar mountain that *soma*, called by various appellations, comes. *Soma* is identical with *amrita* or ambrosia, the food or drink of immortality.

In the Glastonbury Zodiac another bird is represented which is more difficult to interpret correctly; perhaps it takes the place of the sign of the Balance; its position is, in any case, much nearer to the pole than to the Zodiac, since one of its wings corresponds with the stars of the Great Bear; this, following what we have already said, can only confirm the idea of an exchange with the Balance. Two suggestions are made as to the nature of the bird; it may be a dove and have some connection with the symbolism of the Grail; or it may be a goose or, perhaps a swan hatching the “Egg of the World”, an equivalent to the Hindu *Hamsa*. Indeed, this second interpretation appears to us to be preferable, since the symbol of the swan is closely bound up with that of Hyperborean Apollo. Such an interpretation is particularly apt in the light of everything we have discussed here. The Greeks wrote of a certain Kyknos who was the son of Apollo and of Hyria, that is to say, of the Sun and the Land of the Sun. Hyria is but another form of Syria, so we again encounter the “Sacred Island”, and it would be surprising indeed if the swan were not to be met in some form or other. The joint consideration of the figures of *Hamsa* and *Garuda* is also quite in order, since they can be found united in a single bird. In such cases one cannot but suspect the first beginnings of the heraldic two-headed eagle, even though this creature appears rather as a double *Garuda*, for the *Hamsa-Garuda* would, of course, have the heads of a swan and an eagle.

The *Guide to Glastonbury’s Temple of the Stars* raises many other points calling for consideration, such as the connection of the name “Somerset” with that of the country of the Sumerians; a link is suggested with other race-names where similarity points much less to a common parentage of race than to a common tradition. But such considerations would take us too far afield and we have already said enough to show the extent of new areas hitherto almost entirely unexplored, and to give a glimpse of the inferences to be drawn from the ties between diverse traditions and their common affiliation to the Primordial Tradition.

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(Original editorial inclusion that followed the essay:)

When you hear me talk about the Void (sunyata), do not fall into the idea of vacuity.

Hui-neng, The Sixth Patriarch.