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THE GRAIL
ARTHURIAN MYSTERIES & THE GRAIL QUEST

LAMPETER WALES

AUGUST 8–13, 1998

A CONFERENCE

AND

AN EXPERIENTIAL WEEK OF CELTIC STUDIES ON THE WEST COAST OF IRELAND

AUGUST 22–29, 1998

The Quest for the Holy Grail is an eternal symbol of the search for meaning and transcendence and speaks to the deepest yearnings of the psyche. The first references to Arthur and hints of the Grail appear in the stories, early histories and legends of Wales, perhaps the most mysterious and least familiar of the Celtic countries to Americans. The cauldron of regeneration and the figure of the warrior King Arthur first emerge in world literature in the early collections of Welsh mythic tales. It seems fitting, then, to present an international conference on the theme of The Holy Grail in the beautiful hills and valleys of Welsh-speaking West Wales. Following in the tradition of our two unforgettable summer conferences in Bohemia on Alchemy and the Rosicrucian Enlightenment, we will bring together scholars, writers, artists and visionaries to explore this most evocative and elusive of themes.

The Holy Grail persists as a powerful image in contemporary culture and has remained a profound motif of Western spiritual life since the work of Chretien de Troyes and Wolfram von Eschenbach in the Middle Ages. Parsifal's quest continues to be a challenge to the understanding after hundreds of years, and urges the modern reader to reach a spiritual comprehension suitable to our time. Sung in the castle halls of the 13th century, its echoes increasingly haunt psychology and literature. From the pre-Raphaelite painters to T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* to more recent major films, the Grail theme continues to speak to us. What special relevance does the quest for the Grail have for the present day? What unique mythic potency does it possess that has enabled it to endure so long?

Join us for a profound week in the enchanting tranquillity of rural Wales. This conference suggests that humanity is still inwardly in search of the Holy Grail and its meaning.

Cover: Frederick Judd Waugh, *The Knight of the Holy Grail*, 1912. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

plenary sessions

The Arthur of the Welsh

SIONED DAVIES, PH.D.

This talk examines the way that Arthur is portrayed in Welsh texts before Geoffrey of Monmouth – in poetry, prose tales (including the *Mabinogion*), *Saints' Lives* and the *Triads of the island of Britain*.

The Wasteland & the Wounded King

JOHN MATTHEWS

One of the central themes in the literature of the Grail deals with the idea of the guardian of the Grail who suffers from a wound that will only be cured when the destined seeker comes to bring healing. And, while the king suffers, the land over which he rules suffers also, becoming a wasted land – a far reaching theme which predates our modern ecological concerns by a thousand years. Working from the principle that we are all wounded beings, this presentation explores the literature of the Grail myth and demonstrates how an understanding of this material can help us identify, acknowledge and come to terms with our own contemporary wounds.

The Cauldrons of Regeneration

MIRANDA GREEN, PH.D.

During the last millennium B.C. cauldrons were apparently the focus of repeated ceremonial activity, involving their deliberate deposition in watery contexts. The medieval mythic texts of Wales and Ireland contain references to cauldrons as instruments of death and resurrection. A possible link between allusions to sacred cauldrons in the early vernacular myths and their presence in the archaeological contexts is proposed, and models are cited to explain such connections.

The Grail of the Golden Age

GEOFFREY ASHE

While the Grail stories are Christian, their Christianity is outside the mainstream. They embody a "Sense of Something Else": a belief in a mystery eluding the official church, known once, then lost sight of, but perhaps recoverable. This corresponds to a recurring pattern of human aspiration, related to the myth of the vanished Golden Age. Many reformers and revolutionaries have been inspired not by ideas of progress, but by the dream of reinstating some long-lost glory.

The Head in the Dish: Ancestral Vengeance & Christian Redemption in the Grail Corpus

CAITLIN MATTHEWS

From the Head in the Dish in Peredur and ancient concepts of tribal honor and ancestral revenge, to the Grail of later medieval legend with its themes of spiritual chivalry and redemption, this talk traces the song of the Grail from its Celtic roots to its Christian manifestations. We consider humanity's evolving consciousness in the light of the voice of need and the Grail question. Today, we continue to ask the same needful question: Whom does the Grail serve? Does the power to bring healing to the human heart and to the wasteland of our Earth still lie between the borderlands of ancestral hatred and mature service?

Faery Tradition, the Crusader Kingdoms & the Holy Grail

GARETH KNIGHT

The faery tradition that stems from the Celtic lands of the British Isles passes through Brittany in Celtic France and has left an important center of influence in medieval Poitou where it found expression in the legend of the Faery Melusine. This is the realm of the Lusignan family who founded a dynasty in Cyprus, island of Aphrodite. Their castle is only a few miles from the place where Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter Marie Champagne (patroness of Chretien de Troyes) established the Courts of Love. This talk examines the hidden influences that may have contributed to the Holy Grail tradition that stems from these sources.

What Ails Thee? A Search for Grail Christianity

CHRISTOPHER BAMFORD

Many streams – Celtic and Druidic, Persian and Islamic, Arthurian, alchemical, Cathar and Christian – flow together and coalesce in the mysterious initiatory cycles of the Grail. The images, poetry and stories through which the Grail seeker must travel allow these elements to be memorized and transmitted so that now they have become transformative jewels in Western esoterism's crown: the image of the Grail itself. At the heart of the Grail path, however, lies a radical and new approach to the human future: Grail Christianity. This talk explores the deeper meaning of the Grail's Christic axis.

The Grail & the Knights Templar

PAUL BEMBRIDGE, M.PHIL.

The earliest Grail texts, especially those of Chretien and Wolfram, locate the Grail mysteries within a Templar context. There is a royal family and an order of knighthood, we gather, which is committed to the preservation and transmission of certain "mysteries." But what were these mysteries, and whom did they serve? Apart from the Templar context, the Grail has claimants amongst Celts and Christians, Arab and Jew. But which were the authentic transmission routes? And to what extent can these varying claims be reconciled?

The Gnostic Vision of the Grail

NICHOLAS GOODRICK-CLARKE, D. PHIL.

"The Grail is the only object in this world which comes from another world."

Pagan Celtic lore, Christian mysteries, medieval romances and chivalry all blend in Wolfram von Eschenbach's famous poem *Parzival* (1210), together with alchemy and magic. The Grail as a conduit for the inflowing of the Divine into our human order has also inspired T.S. Eliot and John Cowper Powys. The Welsh writer Arthur Machen, a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, reworked old Grail prophecies into Gnostic visions described in this talk.

Afternoon Workshops

In the Garden of the Grail

CHRISTOPHER BAMFORD

The Grail Stories did not arise in a vacuum. Many other manifestations of a new consciousness appeared at the same time and must be seen as part of the larger picture. In the south of France, the Cathars and Troubadors sought to create a new culture of love; at the same time alchemy was being transformed, and at the Cathedral School of Chartres a group of scholars and philosophers gave Hermetic Platonism a new form. In the north, women mystics began to incarnate the Christian message in a radical, embodied way. This workshop examines this "free spririt" that created the context from which the Grail stories emerged.

Why the Grail Now?

GEOFFREY ASHE

As one of the most knowledgeable writers and scholars on the theme of Arthur and the Grail, Geoffrey Ashe has long contemplated the contemporary appeal and significance of these stories and legends. In this workshop, he opens the floor to participants to express how and why the Grail speaks to them today and offers his own reflections and insights on the subject.

The Chess Game of Queenly Sovereignty

GARETH KNIGHT

In medieval times Jerusalem was regarded as the center of the world, thus its sovereignty took on cosmic importance. Using the basis of the symbolic chess game that appears in Celtic legend, we will meditate on some of the inner dynamics that may be applied to Queen Isabella of Jerusalem (1172-1205) and the four dynastic husbands of her short life: Humphrey IV of Toron, Conrad of Montserrat, Henry II of Champagne, and Amairic of Lusignan and Cyprus.

Relics of the Grail

TRISTAN GRAY HULSE

Numerous images come to mind when we consider the term "The Holy Grail." For some it is synonymous with the cup used by Jesus Christ at the Last Supper. Rather fewer would associate this cup with the medieval legend of Joseph of Arimathea collecting Christ's blood on Calvary, while others would connect this with the "traditions" of Glastonbury Abbey. The Celtic Churches showed a keen interest in the Last Supper cup and associated it with the martyrdom and head-relics of John the Baptist. Rival claimants to the status of the Grail cup appeared around Europe in the high middle ages, some of which survive to the present. This workshop explores the nature of these relic cults, offering an overview of the Grail-related relics themselves, and discusses their potential relevance to an increased understanding of the Grail.

Grail, Sacrament & Cosmos

DENNIS EVENSON

Guarded by its own mystery, the Grail motif is itself a chalice carrying profound secrets of the human soul in its compelling archetypes. Following indications from Rudolf Steiner, this workshop examines how the tradition of the chalice which held the mystery of Golgotha illuminates the redemptive presence hiddenly at work in the world. As inheritors of the Grail impulse, how can we place its transformative forces of renewal into our hearts and lives - and carry them towards the future as a sanctifying and civilizing force?

Texts & Doorways

PAUL BEMBRIDGE, M. PHIL.

Participants will be invited to discuss a variety of key texts, such as Chretien's *Perceval*, Wolfram's *Parzifal*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Excerpts from these works will be chosen to focus the group's attention upon significant details concerning the Grail and other key symbols.

Afternoon Workshops

The Mabinogion

SIONED DAVIES, PH.D.

The *Mabinogion*, a medieval collection of Welsh tales, contains many references to Arthur and the cauldrons of regeneration which perhaps constitute an early Celtic Grail-like motif. In this workshop, a Welsh scholar describes these mysterious tales and explores their relevance to the conference theme.

The Healing of the Grail

JOHN MATTHEWS

Beginning with the idea that we are all, in some form or another, wounded beings, this workshop explores ways of working with the myths and stories of the Grail through the experience of the shamanic journey. Like the questers who went in search of the Grail and brought healing to both the Waste Land and the Wounded King, we make our own exploratory journey into our wounded state and find the promise of healing that is held out to us.

Voices of the Ancestors

CAITLIN MATTHEWS

This workshop explores practical methods of healing generational patterns and hearing the wisdom of the ancestors upon the Grail quest, through the use of shamanic song and prayer. We will explore ways of release from the inherited imperatives which often divert us from our quest and we will aim to build bridges of peace and reconciliation between ourselves, our ancestors and descendants by focusing on contemporary issues and tasks.

Optional Post Conference Tour

King Arthur & the Grail Mysteries of Wales

WITH CLARE & NICHOLAS GOODRICK-CLARKE

AUGUST 13–16, 1998

Step into the Celtic Otherworld of the *Mabinogion* and join the search for King Arthur, archetypal hero and real historical figure. Travel from St. David's across the wild, rugged and romantic Preseli mountains (Arthurian sites and origin of the magical Stonehenge bluestones). Glimpse the mysterious and enchanted lake where Arthur is said to have returned the sword Excalibur before his final sea voyage to Avalon. Ascend the hill associated with Merlin's extraordinary prophecies and visit the ancient Celtic center of Llanilltyd Fawr on the way to Caerleon, according to legend the historic site of King Arthur's Court and his Round Table.

Local guides will bring to life the lost knowledge hidden in the secret places of Arthur's kingdom. Together we will explore the symbolic and mythic landscape of Wales, land of transformation, where legends of the Grail Knights and Celtic saints continually interweave as agents of personal initiation. Along the way, there are readings from Arthurian legends, Celtic crosses, music, art and oghams, good food and fellowship. For the energetic, there is swimming in the sea and walks along one of the most spectacular coastal paths in Europe. Accommodation on this guided coach tour will be in hotels and university residences. Participants may wish to bring comfortable shoes and swimwear.

$925

AFTERNOON ACTIVITIES

On Tuesday afternoon we will journey by bus into the surrounding mountains and valleys of West Wales to visit sites of natural beauty and places with mythic relevance to Merlin, Arthur and the Grail. These will include waterfalls, the ruined abbey of Strata Florida and, with good fortune, the site of the Nanteos cup, claimant to the Grail lineage.

OTHER OPTIONAL EVENTS WILL INCLUDE A SHOWING OF THE FRENCH FILM *PERCEVAL LE GALLOIS.*

EVENING EVENTS

CULHWCH & OLWEN

A TALE FROM *THE MABINOGION*

ROBIN WILLIAMSON

Storyteller, harper and Celtic bard, Robin Williamson takes us on a journey through the mystical world of the medieval Welsh imagination. He will perform traditional and original songs, stories and music, drawn from Celtic heritage, including selections from *The Mabinogion* and *The Tain*

AN EVENING OF WELSH POETRY

DIC JONES & MENNA ELFYN

Wales is perhaps the only country in the Western world where poetry remains a living art form among the local populace. Bards are elected annually at the cultural festivals known as Eisteddfods where poetry is written and improvised in Welsh, the most widely spoken of the Celtic tongues. This evening Dic Jones, farmer and Bard of his rural locality, will offer the traditional alliterative fixed metre poetry of Wales (and translate it into English). He will be joined by Menna Elfyn, poet, playwright and translator, whose work reflects the more modern face of Welsh literature.

A CONCERT WITH MALE VOICE CHOIR & HARP

The male voice choir is one of Wales' most traditional, enduring and beautiful art forms. The soul of the proverbial "Land of Song" can be heard in its cadences, harmonies and rich, spiritual themes. This evening the Cwmann Male Voice choir will be joined by local harper Delyth Medi Jones.

Biographical Information

Geoffrey Ashe is best known for his explorations of the Arthurian mythos and for his original findings on the origins of the legend. His twenty three books include *Camelot* and *The Vision of Albion* and *Mythology of the British Isles*. He was secretary of the Camelot Research Committee which excavated Cadbury Castle in Somerset, the reputed site of Camelot.

Christopher Bamford is founder of Lindisfarne Press and editor-in-chief of the Anthroposophic Press in Hudson, New York. He is the author of *The Voice of the Eagle*, a book about Celtic Christian tradition and the Gospel of John.

Paul Bembridge, M.Phil., is a university lecturer specializing in medieval and early modern literature. He has a life-long interest in the Western Mystery Tradition and was recently elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts for his controversial work identifying Andrew Marvell as a Rosicrucian poet.

Sioned Davies, Ph.D., is chair and head of the Department of Welsh at the University of Wales in Cardiff. A specialist in the *Mabinogion*, her work examines the interplay between orality and literacy in medieval Welsh narrative.

Menna Elvyn is a widely traveled Welsh poet, playwright and translator whose work reflects the modern face of Welsh literature.

Dennis Evenson has taught the Grail mysteries to adults and gifted young people for more than twenty years at Iona, the Omega Institute and the New York Open Center. He is director of education at Long Island School of Music and Art.

Clare Goodrick-Clarke is a poet, artist, writer and homeopath with a special interest in art history.

Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, D.Phil., is a historian, Germanist and author of several books on the Western esoteric tradition. He is series editor of the *Essential Readings*, with volumes on Paracelsus, Jacob Boehme and Rudolf Steiner. Brought up in Wessex and the West Country he has a long-standing interest in the countryside and heritage of England and Wales.

Tristan Gray Hulse lives in North Wales and is a researcher into Celtic hagiography and Celtic Christianity. Former editor of *Source: The Holy Wells Journal*, he is currently writing a full-length study of the life and cult of St. Winifred.

Miranda Green, Ph.D., is currently Reader in archeology and Director of the SCARAB Research Center at the University of Wales College, Newport. She was the first winner of the Legonna Celtic Research Prize awarded by the National Library of Wales and is the author of several books, among the most recent of which are *Celtic Art: Reading the Messages* and *The World of the Druids*.

Dic Jones is a farmer and Welsh poet who is past winner of the National Eisteddfod chair, a high honor in Welsh culture. He is the author of several volumes of both prose and poetry.

Gareth Knight is an author, lecturer, jazz musician and publisher whose books include *The Secret Tradition in the Arthurian Legend*, *Experience of the Inner Worlds*, and *A Practical Guide to Qabalistic Symbolism*.

Caitlin Matthews is the author of over 30 books, including *Sophia, Goddess of Wisdom*, *Celtic Devotional* and *Singing the Soul Back Home*. She teaches Celtic traditions worldwide and has a shamanic practice in Oxford.

John Matthews is an internationally acknowledged scholar in the field of Grail studies. His many books include *Healing the Wounded King*, *The Grail: Quest for Eternal Life* and (as editor) *Sources of the Grail*. He gives workshops throughout Europe and the USA and travels widely in search of further aspects of the quest for the Grail.

Robin Williamson shot to international fame in the 60's as a founding member of The Incredible String Band. Since 1975 he has worked as a Celtic performer, songwriter, author, storyteller and harper. Nominated for several Grammy awards, his music has won the Celtic Record of the Year Award from Tower Records.