

The Gnostic Science of Alchemy

Part I - from its origins in Alexandria to the Black Death

Chapter One

According to Zosimus of Panopolis, a fourth century alchemical apologist, the "sons of God" mentioned briefly in Genesis taught the alchemical arts to their human lovers in gratitude for having sex with them. Tertullian, an early Church Father, agreed with this and thought that these "fallen angels," or Nephilim, had the evil intention of seducing human woman with the joys of "mundane pleasures."

Zosimus was just repeating the accepted wisdom of the Jewish and Christian sages of that era. As he warmed to his subject though, Zosimus related the story of the first alchemist, Chemes, who wrote the teachings of the fallen angels in a book called Chema. The nephilim used this book to instruct the daughters of men in the spagyric arts and therefore the art itself came to be called Chemia. This was indeed the Greek word for alchemy, to which the Arabs added the article, al, of their own language. As clever as this explanation is, like all statements in the study of alchemy, it should not be taken too literally. If we take it as a parable wrapped in a fable and disguised as an allegory, we would be closer to the truth.

"Al Chemia," as a name for the substance of the mystery, is both revealing and concealing of the true nature of the work. "Al-khemi," another Arabic derivation from the Egyptian for "the black," also refers to the darkness of the unconsciousness, the most prima of all materia, and to the "Black Land" of Egypt. In this sense, we can see Zosimus' "Khemes" as simply the "Black One," or Osiris. (Perhaps even taken from Osiris' original title of Khenti-Amenti, "Lord of the Western Darkness.") His "Khema" is no mere book, but the civilization of Egypt itself, its monuments, history and literature.

What Zosimus' fable seems to be telling us, then, is this:

In the dim pre-history of mankind, a god-like race of beings inter-bred with humanity and taught them creative and generative forms of cultural wisdom. The first human master of this science codified the canon of its knowledge (wrote the book on it we might say) from which the children of gods and men built an advanced civilization. As we know from the Bible, this civilization was wiped out by the great flood. But its wisdom survived to start a new pattern of civilization in Egypt, the Black Land of the wise Osiris.

Zosimus is suggesting therefore that alchemy is at the core of an ancient pre-deluge science, one that was revealed to mankind through sexual contact with semi-divine entities. Before we dismiss this out of hand as some sort of religious paraphilia, let's look at what is possibly the earliest surviving alchemical manuscript, "Isis the Prophetess to Her Son Horus" found in the Codex Marcianus, a medieval (11th century) collection of Greek fragments. This work seems to be a unique blend of Hebrew mysticism and Egyptian mythology that could only have come from Alexandria early in the first century of the Christian Era.

Isis tells Horus that while he was away fighting and defeating Set, she was in Hermopolis studying angelic magick and alchemy. She relates that "after a certain passing of the kairoi and the necessary movement of the heavenly sphere, it happened that one of the angels who dwelt in the first

firmament saw me from above. . ." The angel, a being of the lower realm between the earth and the moon, is enflamed by passion, but can't answer her questions about alchemy. He bargains on another encounter by offering to bring a higher angel who will tell her everything she wants to know. The first angel shows Isis the magickal sign of the higher angel, a bowl of shining water and a moon sign that resembles the emblem of the moon-god Khonsu of Thebes.

At noon the next day, the angel returns with the higher angel, here called Amnael, who also finds Isis desirable and is willing to trade information for sex. He reveals the mystery of his sign and then swears her to a great oath. In this oath, we find echoes of the great mystery and the keys to its explication. "I conjure you in the name of Fire, of Water, of Air, and of the Earth; I conjure you in the name of the Height of Heaven and the Depths of Earth's Underworld; I conjure you in the name of Hermes and Anubis, the howling of Kerkoros and the guardian dragon; I conjure you in the name of the boat and its ferryman, Acharontos; and I conjure you in the name of the three necessities and the whip and the sword."

After this oath, Isis is never to reveal the secret to anyone but her son, Horus, her closest friend. The knowledge will make them one, as the knowledge has now made Isis and the angel one.

And then a curious thing occurs. When the mystery is revealed, it seems strangely flat, as if something is left unsaid in the answer. Horus is told to watch the peasant, who may or may not have been the boatman Acharontos, and then is given a lecture on "as you sow, so shall you reap." Horus is told to realize "that this is the whole creation and the whole process of coming into being, and know that a man is only able to produce a man, and a lion a lion, and a dog a dog, and if something happens contrary to nature, then it is a miracle and cannot continue to exist, because nature enjoys nature and only nature overcomes nature."

Isis goes on to relate that she will now give the secret of preparing certain "sands." She says that "one must stay with existing nature and the matter one has in hand in order to prepare things. Just as I said before, wheat creates wheat, a man begets a man and thus gold will harvest gold, like produces like. Now I have manifested the mystery to you."

The instruction then passes to hands-on lab work in melting and preparing metals such as quicksilver, copper, lead and of course gold. At the end of this lengthy preparation, Isis exclaims: "Now realize the mystery, my son, the drug, the elixir of the widow."

Chapter Two

What are we to make of this strange story with its curiously flat revelations? Our very earliest alchemical text presents us with the same problems and ambiguities that we will find throughout the entire alchemical corpus. There seems to be something in the very subject itself that forces its images toward the surreality of pathological metaphor. Is it merely diseased imagination or are there meanings beneath the fantasy?

[Marie-Louise von Franz](#), one of Carl Jung's disciples, thought that this story in particular represented the emerging anima, of the individual and of the world itself. In her 1959 lecture on Alchemy at the Jung Institute, Ms. von Franz notes that "we can recognize the symbolism of the anima, for the story of Eve is even more true for the anima than just for women, and here there is the same idea expressed symbolically from the unconscious. The goddess Isis has beside her the sign of the moon. In these late times, Isis was identified with Hathor, the cow goddess and the moon goddess, and the sky goddess Nuit."

Ms. von Franz then goes on at great lengths to explicate the life giving power of the divine female, drawing a connection between instinct and archetype. From her discussion, it is hard not to see the basic alchemy of the psychological process, the internal darkness of the "black," as somehow a psycho-sexual one. In that sense, we can recognize the internal component of Alchemy, the key to the lost science of the last epoch, as essentially sexual. Perhaps this accounts for the ambiguity of the metaphor, its insistence on the transubstantiation of the ordinary into the sacred. Even Ms. von Franz lapses on occasion into a kind of guarded incomprehensibility, as if she dared not say it too openly.

With all of this in mind, we can see that "Alchemy" points to the ancient science, as revived by the Egyptians, and to the darkness of the unconsciousness where powerful psycho-sexual forces can be encountered and used in the process of transformation. Egyptian science, with its concern for stellar movements as the background of mythical dramas, points us another step down the road toward solving the mystery.

We will return to the story of Isis and the angel, the origin of "alchemy" in so many ways. But first, we need to briefly follow the trail of those who held this information, the Hru Shemsu, the Followers of Horus, the Widow's Son.

According to Mantheo, the 2nd century Egyptian historian, the Hru Shemsu were the pre-dynastic rulers of Egypt. The Builder Texts of the Horus Temple at Edfu call them "Blacksmiths," -- literally "metal-makers" -- and declare that all human knowledge came from their endeavors. They invented the institution of Kingship, and every Pharaoh from Menes to the Emperor Trajan ruled Egypt in their name. The winged disk was their symbol and a special ceremony, "The Union of the Disk," was held once a year in every temple in the land to symbolize the union of the state with the source of Egyptian civilization.

A multi-volume work would be needed to tell the story of the Hru Shemsu during the course of Egyptian history. The high points include the early dynastic conflicts between the kings ruling in the name of Horus and those ruling in the name of Set; the role of Edfu in the rise of Middle Kingdom Thebes; the defeat of the Hyksos and the founding of the New Kingdom; the Sphinx and Thutmose IV; the rule of Herihor, High Priest of Thebes and Edfu; the 26th Saite Dynasty renaissance; and the opening of Egypt to Greece and later Rome under the Ptolomeys. Through three thousand years of history, the thread of the Hru Shemsu stands out, clearly interwoven with the basic themes of Egyptian culture and its lost science.

With the coming of the Roman Empire and then the Imperial Christian Church, the old religion and culture began to melt away. However, it did not simply disappear, but was absorbed into the spiritual background of the new, emerging mass mystery religions. Christianity in particular was aided in its growth by its similarity to the Isis cult which preceded it. Alexandria, one of Alexander's new cities, epitomized this new Egypt and became the center of learning in the late classical world. Alchemy, in a recognizably modern form, seems to have developed in its workshops and academies as the Isis story from the Codex Marcianus demonstrates.

The author of "Isis the Prophetess" was probably an Alexandrian Greek who lived somewhere between 50 BC and 50 AD. He was familiar with Hebrew angelology, seems to have understood the importance of his material, and, above all, was trying to communicate something very specific, like a recipe. Undoubtedly, he considered himself one of the Followers of the Widow's Son, the Company of Horus.

In another century or so, this would become a Christian metaphor, with Jesus in the role of Horus. The Gnostic Christians of Egypt were a powerful force in the early Christian movement. It wasn't until the fourth century, when the church became an organ of the state, that gnostic forms were driven underground. In these intervening centuries, gnostic ideas had traveled throughout the Roman empire, reaching southern France and the west coast of England. As Christianity became an organized orthodoxy, these earlier forms were persecuted.

The Coptic or Gnostic Christianity of Egypt tried to retain the inner core of the ancient Egyptian wisdom, while discarding everything that did not fit a Christian mold. It succeeded

enormously well, creating an image of the very essence of the mystery in the symbol of the Rose Cross.

On the walls of the Coptic Museum in Cairo, it is possible to trace the evolution of this symbol through the first and second centuries. Beginning with a first century gravestone, from Luxor, which contains the combination of a Chi-Rho emblem and the ankh with the solar boat, we move rapidly to ankh crosses which blossom into roses on the loop of the ankh. By the second century, this has become the accepted rendering of the cross as a mystical symbol. In this we have a connection with the esoteric side of the Coptic tradition which managed to survive the shift to orthodoxy. These rose crosses traveled along with gnostic concepts, throughout the Empire.

As the Empire fell apart in the fifth and sixth centuries, the various groups of Gnostic Christians were left stranded. Like limbs withering away from a dying tree, the Gnostic centers of Alexandria and the east lost touch with the west. There were brief flickerings of a new gnostic culture in the west -- the failed attempt at restoring the Empire by the historical "King Arthur," Rhiothamus, King of the Britons, for example -- but for the most part it was a very dark age. In the seventh century, the breeze from Arabia, the new force of Islam, blew the old cultures away and conquered half the known world.

With the coming of Islam, the darkness lifts slightly, and we see that Arab scholars have rediscovered the Greeks, long since lost to the west. Jabir, in the eighth century, collected the ancient alchemical wisdom into a volume that became the cornerstone of all future alchemical research. The Sufi alchemists of the tenth and eleventh centuries collaborated with the Kabbalists of Spain, and reestablished medicine and philosophy.

By The Crusades, The Arabs were far ahead of the west. A few of the Crusaders, most prominently the Knights of the Temple, were smart enough to know this and learned all they could from Arab culture. Part of this learning contained the secret knowledge. This knowledge became the focus of a spiritual revolution back in Europe. Great churches in a new style, the Gothic Cathedrals, sprang up, influenced and in some cases financed by, the Templars.

When the Knights of the Temple were destroyed in the early fourteenth century, many of their manuscripts found their way onto the esoteric market. This triggered an up-surge of interest in hermetic subjects. And so began the great age of individual alchemists, starting with Nicholas Flammel and his wife. By the early seventeenth century, when the Rosicrucians appeared, alchemy had become accepted, if still somewhat suspect. In the next hundred years, practical alchemy became chemistry and the inner core of the secret knowledge became the property of the Freemasons and the occultists.

Chapter Three

But what is Alchemy? So far, we have traced a channel of transmission from the Company of the Widow's Son (Horus) to the Freemasons of the 18th and 19th century. The question then becomes: What were they transmitting?

In the modern mind, "alchemy" conjures up the image of a mis-guided proto-chemist locked away with his ovens and his retorts in a never-ending quest to make gold from lead, bubbling off some noxious mercury fumes from which he derives hallucinogenic images. In this view, the secret knowledge is pure superstition and the alchemist is a deluded fool.

Could such a delusion have held the interest of so many brilliant minds over so many centuries? It seems doubtful. There must have been some concrete goal to all this work.

As we noted above, the "Isis the Prophetess" fragment is in many ways the origin point of alchemy in its modern sense. It is the first text in which mysticism becomes confused with laboratory procedures. In the text, though, it is clear that Isis first imparts a philosophical understanding, then conducts a physical operation, supposedly along with Horus, in order to demonstrate the principle and illustrate her mastery of the process of transmutation.

We might even think of this as the Alchemical Method: revelation, demonstration and transmutation. The key then becomes the source of the revelation. Where is the information coming from?

In the Isis fragment, the knowledge comes from a higher order of angel, implying at least a planetary level being, who bears the signs of Nuit and Khonsu and is called "Amnael." This angel is of course unique, appearing nowhere else in Hebrew angelology. There is a faint resemblance in name to the angel of Venus, Hanael or Anael. However, this line of conjecture quickly comes to a dead end; Isis is the Morning Star, is she learning from Herself?

An easier solution, without straining at angelic spellings, is to take the name as it is: Amn - el, the angel of Amon. This makes sense within the fragment's Egyptian background, giving us an image of the triple divinity of ancient Thebes. Isis learned the secrets of alchemy from a complex angelic being who combined the aspects of the star, Nuit, the moon, Khonsu, and the sun, Amon-Ra. The Hebrew spelling gives us a clue to the nature of this composite being. The name spelled in full adds to 123, the number of the three part name of God, AHH YHVH ALHYS, attributed to the top three sepherot on the tree of life, Binah, Hokmah and Kether. If we break the name into Amn and ael, we get 91 and 32, both references to the Tree of Life as a whole.

This composite being can be seen as the sum of all the knowledge in the Kabbalah, the very spirit of transcendence. But before it will share the secret with Isis, it swears her to a great oath. The first part of the oath creates the cube of space, a sort of matrix for reality. And then the great angel goes: "I conjure you in the name of Hermes and Anubis, the howling of Kerkoros and the guardian dragon; I conjure you in the name of the boat and its ferryman, Acharontos; and I conjure you in the name of the three necessities and the whip and the sword."

Hermes and Anubis are plain enough; they are Thoth, or Tehuti, and Anubis, two Egyptian god-forms who preside over the act of Judgment by Osiris. The "howling of Kerkoros" suggests the Keres, a dog-like form of Greek Valkyrie. Ker is fear or malice, and koros can be rendered as cross. This makes the oath conjured by the "Evil Cross" and the guardian dragon, an interesting combination. The boat and ferryman are the vehicle and the guide, a motif that would later become one of the foundational concepts of several Sufi orders. The three necessities and the whip and the sword suggest countless Masonic initiations.

After this oath, which is really an initiation, the great Being tells Isis the secret: "Only Nature can overcome Nature." She demonstrates this to Horus by means of a physical, transformational process. The transmutation is successful and she produces "the drug, the elixir of the widow."

From this we can determine that the alchemical secret is three-fold, or rather three transformations in one. The inner transmutation involves the conscious refining of the psycho-sexual energies and fluids. The outer is the ability to use those energies to effect transmutations of physical states, including the elements. The third transmutation is that of time itself, from the darkness of the iron age to the splendor of the golden age. Remember, Isis could not begin the process until the stars were in the proper place.

We are now prepared to see the nature of the transmutation at the core of alchemy. It is not only a transmutation involving a personal or local effect to our environment. It is global and universal, involving the nature of time, and the times, in a completely unique way. Our earliest alchemical text confirms this perspective. A big part of the secret involved time: ". . .after a certain passing of the kairoi and the necessary movement of the heavenly sphere. . ."

As the secret was passed down through the various forms of the Company of the Widow's Son, the information fragmented. In this way, some initiates received only the internal and transformational processes without the full understanding of how the parts related to the whole of the ancient science. The most guarded secret was that of time itself, and the secret

of all secrets, according to the Builder texts at Edfu, involved the beginning and end of "time."

Chapter Four

Our earliest alchemical sources show us a glimpse of an ancient science with the core of something we can recognize as alchemy as its deepest secret. Alchemy as a separate subject emerged from the intellectual and spiritual ferment of Alexandria in the first three centuries of the modern era. As it developed, it became part of the spiritual tradition of Gnostic, as opposed to orthodox and apostolic, Christianity.

Gnosis, the Greek word for knowledge, implies a direct mystical experience, such as those encountered within the pagan mystery schools. Indeed, early Christianity appeared as a type of Hebrew mystery school, which, given the Hebrew reputation in the classical world for magical powers, helped fuel its expansion. In Egypt, Christianity was accepted as another form of the Isis/Horus current which had swept through the ancient world in the centuries immediately prior to the beginning of the Common Era.

As with the Isian mysteries, early Christianity and alchemy were dominated by women. We need only read the New Testament, The Book of Acts in particular, to see how influential women were in the founding of Christianity. A key figure it seems, in both alchemy and Gnostic Christianity, was the mysterious Mary, called the Jewess.

The New Testament is filled with Marys, causing considerable confusion. There is Mary, Jesus' mother, and Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus and first witness to the resurrection, and Mary Magdalene, the whore at the well, and so on. The Gnostics avoided the confusion by focusing on Mary Magdalene as the wife and closest confidant of Jesus. According to The Gospel of Mary, one of the Nag Hammadi texts discovered in 1947, Jesus taught her secrets that He failed to reveal to his apostles. Interestingly enough, several Gnostic sects, such as the Ophites, held that Mary Magdalene and the noted first century alchemical author known as Mary the Jewess were one and the same individual.

Whoever she was, Mary the Jewess was an accomplished practical alchemist and the inventor of a series of technical devices still in use today, such as the hot ash box for steady heat, the dung box for prolonged heat and the double boiler, still called the "bain-marie" in French. None of her writings have survived, but she is quoted with the utmost respect by Zosimus and the other early compilers of alchemical texts. (Zosimus considered her to be Miriam, the sister of Moses. He was of course, as always, going for the most ancient tradition.)

Zosimus' own sister, Theosebia, had a considerable reputation as an alchemist in her own right. But the most important of all the early female alchemists is Cleopatra, author of the classical Chrysopeia, or Gold-Making. In this work, collected with the "Isis the Prophetess" story in the 11th century Codex Marcianus, we find the earliest image of the Ouroboros serpent, biting its own tail. This masterful symbol of the cosmic cycle is half black and half white and encloses a brief Greek phrase meaning "the sum of all philosophy." On the same manuscript page, under a serpent-like crescent moon, we find a line of eight-rayed stars. This is similar to the Gnostic Ogdoas, a grouping of the celestial forces, the ancient Egyptian neters, in an eight-fold pattern.

Reminiscent of both the Ogoad of Hermopolis, city of the god Thoth, or Tehuti, and the gnostic systems of Basilides and Valentinus, the eight-rayed star would also become the special symbol of Mary, mother of Jesus. To the Pythagoreans it symbolized the regeneration of the cosmos, being, as Eratosthenes declared, the "double polarity of the elements, producing a stability." The seventeenth century alchemist Basil Valentine (note the combination of Basilides and Valentinus) claimed that the eight-rayed star symbolized the philosophic mercury and the completion of the first stage of the Great Work.

The most famous of all early alchemical texts, The Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistos, became through the centuries the very credo of the alchemical adept. Tradition claimed that the tablet had been found clutched in the mummified hands of Hermes himself "in an

obscure pit, where his interred body lay," as Jabir tells us, somewhere within the great pyramid of Gizeh. The text, as Jabir gives it, is very short and obscure. It is so important, in both a historic and symbolic sense, that the full text is required for our examination. (This version was prepared by comparing the three earliest known Latin translations with the Arabic original and its subsequent English translations. The goal was to give as clear and simple a version as possible with such an obscure text.)

"In Truth, without falsehood and most real: that which is above is like that which is below, to generate the miracles of the one thing. And as all things have been derived from that one, by the thought of that one, so all things are born from that one thing by adoption. The sun is its father, the moon its mother. Wind has carried it in its belly and the earth is its nurse. Here is the origin point of every perfection in the world. Its strength and power are absolute when changed into earth; separate the earth from the fire, the subtle from the gross, gently and with great care. It ascends from the earth to the heavens, and descends again to the earth to receive the power of the superior and the inferior things. By this means, you will attain the glory of the world. And because of this, all darkness will flee from you. Within this is the power, the force of all forces. For it will overcome all subtle things and penetrate every solid thing. Thus was the universe created. From this will be, and will emerge, admirable adaptations. For this reason I am called Hermes Trismegistos, having three parts of the wisdom of the world. What I have said of the sun's operation is accomplished."

Whatever the origin of this text, (we find a version of it in the divinatory invocation to Amon-Ra given in Column XXIX, lines 5 -20 of the Leyden Papyrus, a 2nd century Greco-Egyptian magickal text buried with its anonymous owner in the noble necropolis on the west bank of Thebes) its value as an alchemical blueprint is obvious in light of our examination of the "Isis the Prophetess" fragment. In fact, "light" is the operative point.

In line 6 of the Amon-Ra invocation we read: "Lotus-of-the Stars, heaven, in its height and breadth, is open; I am become the pure light. . .in truth, without falsehood." In the Arabic version of Jabir, this has become: "Because of this event, obscurity (darkness) will flee from you." The "glory of the world" is the animated glow of the living gold, the generative radiation, the "pure light," seen by the alchemists as the great work was completed and gold appeared in their athanors. Once they had grasped this truth, The Emerald Tablet seems to tell us, the alchemists radiated light and the darkness fled from them, figuratively and literally.

The anonymous magician of Thebes was an early 2nd century contemporary of the pseudo-Cleopatra and his wisdom papyrus provides a much needed practical counterpoint to the late classical alchemical theorists such as Olympiodorus and Stephanus of Alexandria. The 7th century Stephanus, who dedicated his *Nine Lessons in Chemia* to the eastern Emperor Heraclius, represents the dividing line between the classical period, that of alchemy's emergence, and the new world of Christian orthodoxy. While Christianized Greek Hermeticism continued in the east as a spiritual indulgence for mystical and scholarly monks, the tradition in the west was ruthlessly persecuted. The Church saw it as irrevocably tainted with pagan ideals.

Western Christianity, and even some of the alchemists, believed that investigation into the hidden works of nature was sacrilegious. It smacked of the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden, and was after all part of the illicit arts given to humanity by the fallen angels. Acquiring knowledge, like eating the fruit, allowed man to become more like God. If we are to believe Hermes' Tablet, then alchemy contained the very secret of independent creation.

From this, it not hard to see how the later alchemists, from Olympiodorus in the fifth century on down, were obsessed with the symbols of the Tree of Knowledge and the serpent, its guardian and initiator. Part of this is the influence of Gnostic sects such as the Ophites, who worshipped the snake in the garden as the author of wisdom, given to man in

order to free him from the domination of the demiurge Iadlboath. Over time, these symbols would become the most cherished of all in the alchemical tradition. However, this perspective did not help them survive the onslaught of orthodoxy in the fourth and fifth centuries. In the late fourth century, The Emperor Theodosius ordered the pagan temples destroyed. The Serapeum in Alexandria and its library of ancient texts were burned. Hypatia, the last great women alchemical philosopher, was able to save some of the library and for a while studies continued. Hypatia's murder in 415 CE put an end to all pagan learning in Egypt. The remnants of the scholars fled to Athens, where they were finally destroyed by Justinian in 529 CE.

As the darkness fell over Europe and the west, a brief Hermetic Renaissance flowered in Constantinople. Some of these compilations from the pagan Greeks would eventually make their way to France, purchased by that enigmatic late medieval King, Francis I. Centuries later, a young student of the art would find these manuscripts extremely valuable. From them, we can speculate, he found some of the same symbolic keys that we have just elucidated. However, without the conquering Arabs, most of the secret would have died in the persecutions of the fifth and sixth centuries.

Chapter Five

As we saw in the "Isis The Prophetess" fragment, gnostic ideas, alchemy among them, predate Christianity. The earliest version of the Emerald Tablet, buried with its anonymous owner at Thebes, is but a fragment of what is basically a "gnostic" magickal text. Alchemy represents a specific delineation of an ancient creative science, that of the triple transmutation. In its broadest sense, Gnosticism represents the world view in which these transformations can occur.

Our examination of the earliest known alchemical texts has shown us that time and timing was a key component in the alchemical process, however the texts themselves do not link that process directly to the end of the world. That link is provided, as subtext, by the gnostic framework from which the idea of alchemy emerged. At the core of Gnosticism lies a vision of the end of the world. Even before Christianity supplied it with a brand-new mythos, Gnosticism had developed its own unique eschatological flavor.

Almost every culture on the planet has some kind of catastrophe myth, usually concerning a flood. In many traditions, the disaster represents the fall of a golden age; in a few, it represents the punishment of God for mankind's evil ways. Gnosticism's peculiar blend of Persian Zoroastrianism, Hebrew eschatology and Egyptian cosmology with Greek philosophical methods is an attempt to synthesize all the ancient catastrophic perspectives into an apocalyptic unity.

While keeping in mind that the label "Gnosticism" covers an enormous number of different and often contradictory belief systems, it is possible to sort through its spiritual kaleidoscope and arrive at an overview of a basic gnostic cosmology. Gnosticism's main tenets contain both good and evil gods, sometimes inverting the usual perceptions, and a sophisticated version of the End of the World.

At the creation of the world, the spirit of Light was imprisoned by the powers of Darkness, trapped in human bodies as separate sparks of light. The gnostic sects held that the goal of their knowledge was the path of return, the ability of the individual sparks to return to the Light through a process of redemption. This world and its history are the work of the evil demiurge, sometimes called Iadlboath, designed to hold mankind back from its transcendent destiny.

As each soul is redeemed, it travels back to the shattered source of the divine Light. The soul returns its own small spark of light to the source, which slowly, as more and more souls return to it, becomes whole again. Eventually, when all souls have returned, the physical universe, being now completely without Light, will end. This "eschatology of Light," synthesized from Egyptian, Persian and Hebrew elements, can be seen as the framework supporting the vast diversity of gnostic traditions, including the new messianic form of Judaism that would become Christianity a century or so later.

Indeed, the gnostic sects quite naturally believed that they possessed the true meaning of Christ's teachings. Most of them did not believe in a literal Jesus, born of flesh and blood who suffered and died. To the Gnostics, Jesus was a divine messenger, an angelic being disguised as a man, sent to reveal the secret knowledge of the path of return, the way out of this world of Darkness. In this view, Christ's return will not be physical, but spiritual. The resurrection becomes a metaphor for the experience of a spiritual triumph over death, and therefore available to everyone.

The gnostic insistence on a direct experience of salvation, a personal return to the Light, contrasted sharply with the emerging orthodox position that held that only the apostles, who witnessed the resurrection, could hold and attribute spiritual authority. The Gnostics raised the ante, so to speak, by adopting Mary Magdalene, in their view Jesus's wife and the sister of Martha and Lazarus and therefore the first witness to the resurrection, as a key gnostic theorist. As we noted above, some of the gnostic sects held that Mary the 1st century Hebrew alchemist was in reality Mary Magdalene. For many more gnostic sects, Mary, mother, wife and sister of the god/man, was simply Isis, the Queen of Heaven. It seems strange at first to think of Mary Magdalene as one of the founders of alchemy, Mary the Jewess. Orthodox Christianity became the only Christianity, obscuring much of the truth about the 1st century's incredible intellectual and spiritual renaissance. Behind that efflorescence, however, lay the gnostic world view with its eschatology of Light offering a hope of return to the divine source. It would not be too far from the truth to say that orthodox Christianity was a political development designed to control access to that spiritual reality.

And yet, the more one studies the Gospels and the early gnostic alchemical literature, the harder it is to deny that Christianity is an expression of the same spiritual tradition. Only in the Gospels, and other early Christian texts, are the transformational process and eschatology portrayed as part of the same seamless whole. If we can see Jesus in his original context as a magician, then it isn't much of a stretch to see his wife as an alchemist.

Chapter Six

At the core of Christianity is a mystery. The Gnostic Christians embraced the mystery, while the Imperial Orthodoxy sought to minimize, control and literalize it. But the mystery persisted and not even the church councils of the fourth century could completely banish or obscure it.

Our modern view of the end of the world is entangled with the magickal mystery at the heart of Christianity. To understand this mystery and its alchemical and apocalyptic importance, we must first look at how the Hebrew culture of Palestine in the first century came to develop its unique perspective on the end of all things.

The existence of The Old Testament is not, by itself, remarkable. Many other ancient sources are just as obsessed with the end of the world. Flood narratives, such as that of Noah in Genesis, are common to almost every traditional culture on the planet. The Noah story originally comes from a Mesopotamian tale woven into the Epic of Gilgamesh. But the Old Testament is unique. Instead of treating its story as a chronicle or a collection of myths, The Old Testament was put together as a way to demonstrate the supernatural intervention of God in the course of human affairs.

The early books of the Old Testament display a kind of historical unity, as if they were intended to make sense together, even if they were written at different times and under different circumstances. Thus the passage of time is given meaning by its fulfillment of God's purpose. This sense of historical spirituality made the Hebrew world view, and the Christian which grew from it, highly susceptible to the idea of an end to all things. However, this sense of unity was itself the product of an apocalyptic event, the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 587 BCE and the subsequent return of the exiles a generation later. The Book of the Law of Moses, which Ezra read to the assembled Israelites

at the dedication of the re-built Temple in 445 BCE, was a combination of ancient texts found in the ruins of the Temple and Mesopotamian myths absorbed during the exile. This new version emphasized the power of the Hebrew's God to punish or reward His people. The historical nature of God's effect was not lost on the survivors of the exile who heard this version of the Book of the Law.

In addition to a new sense of God's involvement with the workings of history, the exile added another element to the emerging religion of Judaism. Where before the exile, the Hebrew prophets had been mainly concerned with the social issues of Israel and its relationship to God's plan for it, after the return the focus shifted to an even greater apocalypse, one of cosmic proportions.

The Old Testament prophets, from the Greek word for ecstatic utterance, appeared around 1000 BCE as a type of monotheistic shaman. The "nevi'im," or God-speakers, were considered, along with the priests and the sages, to be crucial for the spiritual health of the Hebrew people. There were great numbers of these prophets who performed frenzied rituals of dancing and chanting for large and enthusiastic crowds, which, not unlike the rituals that accompanied the State Oracle of Tibet, ended with a prophetic announcement. Taking their cue from Adam and Eve's banishment from the Garden and the Flood, the prophets soon began to focus on the sinful nature of Israel and God's approaching Day of Wrath.

Amos started the trend around 760 BCE, which continued in increasing urgency until the prophecies came true. Jeremiah, the prophet of the Babylonian conquest, was the first to connect the fate of Israel with the ultimate destiny of the cosmos. He predicted that "the heavens will shudder" with pure horror at God's punishment. For those who experienced the Babylonian conquest, it certainly felt like the end of the world. What had been the essentials of God's favor, a homeland, a temple and the right of Kingship, had all been taken away and destroyed.

Ezekiel, who was a priest of the temple at the time of the conquest, marks the beginning of the new apocalyptic prophets. Like Jeremiah, he predicted the end of the Israelite nation and the destruction of the temple. Ezekiel however used an amazing variety of symbols -- fiery wheels, dry bones, chariots and multi-headed angels of marvelous countenance -- to create a surreal image of transformative and apocalyptic processes. He brings together almost all of the elements used by future prophets to describe the End of the World, and adds a few new ones: a king from the house of David who will rule all mankind, the idea of a purified elect who will survive and, most important of all, the re-building of the great Temple at Jerusalem as God intended it to be. This image of a physical New Jerusalem laid the foundations for the Temple imagery in the Book of Revelation and contributed to the gnostic idea of chiliasm.

But it was the Second Isaiah, a contemporary in exile of Ezekiel's, who created the image of the apocalyptic messiah. The messiah will come, as Ezekiel said, from the House of David and be scourged and rejected. His message will be taken up more by the Gentiles than Jews, but in the end the Jews will be proclaimed as God's chosen ones. A new covenant will be declared and a new heaven and a new earth will be created. The wasteland will be fertile once again, and the sun will never set.

It was this image of the messiah that informed the thinking and actions of Jesus. He seems to have designed his teaching experiences to meet the expectations of 2nd Isaiah's prophecies. And those around him, who thought he was the messiah, knew and understood these apocalyptic connotations.

The common beliefs about the end of the world at the time Jesus began his teachings included several key components. The first sign of the End would be the rebellion of Israel, God's people, against the evil forces of Gog, the evil king of Darkness, identified by all as the Roman Empire. In the hundred years or so prior to Jesus' birth, several such rebellions had taken place. One, led Judah Maccabee, had almost succeeded. However, every attempt at revolt served only to tighten Rome's grip.

Following the rebellion would come the Day of the Lord, the Last Judgment, the manifestation of God's Wrath on the wicked. Then, the nation of Israel would be re-united and all the exiles would return. The dead would be resurrected so that they could experience the final stage, the reign of the Messiah in the new earthly paradise. With, of course, the divinely re-built Temple at the center.

In this context, the role of the Messiah was simple. Defeat the evil King of the World and usher in the golden age. It is difficult to know how Jesus saw himself against these expectations. No one recorded Jesus' teachings during his lifetime. For 35 years after his death, his ideas lived on only in the spoken words of missionaries and teachers. Jesus' teachings adapted themselves spontaneously to the expectation of their listeners.

To his contemporaries, Jesus appeared to be a miracle working magi of a sort all too common in troubled Palestine. He is seen by outsiders as similar to other great magicians such Apollonius of Tyana, who also had several Gospel-like Lives written about him. Galilee, Jesus' homeland, was only recently, a hundred years or so, converted to Judaism and still retained a strong flavor of native paganism. In this background, Jesus' primary significance derived from his ability to work miracles.

The magi, such as we are told in the Gospel of Matthew followed a Star to Jesus' birth, were prophet-like figures with distinct ethical and eschatological teachings. Jesus was a similar figure who taught of the Kingdom of Heaven, attracted followers and performed feats of magick. The difference was the specific emphasis on Jewish messianic concepts. Jesus declared himself as the "Son of Man," 2nd Isaiah's title for the suffering and triumphant savior.

But the mystery at the core of his teaching was the nature and timing of the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven. There can be no doubt that Jesus left his early followers with the impression that the world would soon end. His death and resurrection symbolized the triumph of the righteous over the evil King of the World, and His return would herald the beginning of the next phase, the Day of Judgment. He even declared that some living at that moment would still be alive when he returned.

If the end was expected at any moment, then there was no need to record Jesus' teachings. After many years, when the return still had not happened, the older members of the community began to record their memories. The Gospels came from these early sources. Mark's Gospel, written around 70 CE, used a common teaching document, known as Q, as the source around which the author wove the story of Jesus' life. Matthew, the next Gospel to be written down, between 80 and 100 CE, used a similar technique and sources, but applied to them a much greater level of understanding.

Matthew gives us the most complete glimpse of Jesus' teachings on the End of the World and the coming Kingdom of Heaven. It was written by someone who had grasped the mystery at the core of Christianity. From Matthew we hear of Jesus' Egyptian connections, the Star of Bethlehem and the journey of the Wise Men from the east, the Massacre of the Innocents, the temptation of the Messiah, and many other stories with deep esoteric significance.

The mystery is openly proclaimed in Matthew at the beginning of Jesus' career. Matthew quotes the 2nd Isaiah: "the people living in darkness have seen a great light, on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." To fulfill this prophecy, Matthew tells us, Jesus began to preach; "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

To see this a little more clearly, we need to step outside Christianity for a moment and look at another Egyptian magical text, this one from the Paris Papyrus, one of the gems discovered in Egypt by Napoleon's savants. In papyrus IV, lines 475-830, we find a ritual to attain immortality through inhaling Light. The aspirants is first told to perform seven days of rituals, and then three days of dark retreat. On the morning of the eleventh day, the aspirant is to face the rising sun and perform an invocation: " First source of all sources. . .perfect my body. . .(so) that I may participate again in the immortal beginning. . .that I may be reborn in thought. . .and that the holy spirit may breathe in me."

With this the aspirant inhales the first rays of the rising sun, and then leaves his body behind and rises into the heavens, filled with Light. "For I am the Son (of the Sun), I surpass the limits of my souls, I am (magical symbol for Light)."

In Matthew 5:14, Jesus declares: "You are the light of the world." This also echoes the Emerald Tablet in equating successful transformation with the spontaneous emission of light or illumination. The Lord's Prayer, which appears in Matthew 6: 9-13, also suggests the Emerald Tablet. When the Kingdom of Heaven is achieved, Jesus suggests, then heaven and earth, above and below, will be the same. Chapters 24 and 25 provide a blueprint to the coming apocalypse, telling us: "The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky." He also tells us that it will be "like in the days of Noah" before the return of the Son of Man, except that no one will know the exact day or hour. No one that is except the initiated.

Matthew 24: verse 43 and 44 suggests that those who follow the Son of Man will indeed be able to calculate the time, and so be waiting in preparation. When he returns, chapter 25: verse 31 tells us, he will separate the sheep from the goats, the subtle from the gross, on the basis of their compassion for their fellow men.

In Matthew, we also find the account of Mary Magdalene's witness to the resurrection, complete with its own light metaphor. "His appearance was like lightning," we are told, and Mary does not at first recognize him. Matthew's account of the resurrection ends with Christ's ascension in Galilee and his pronouncement of the Great Commission. The last line of which goes to the heart of the mystery: "And surely I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

At the core of Christianity we find an alchemical transformation and the knowledge of the end of time. The Gnostics understood and embraced this view of Christianity. For a brief, shining moment, it seemed as if the knowledge of the path of return was about to triumph over the evil demiurge and his prison of matter. The hope it offered remains the promise at the heart of Jesus' teachings. As the Gnostics thought, the Messiah opened the way. And just as quickly, the demiurge closed it again.

Chapter Seven

Not long after the Gospels were written, an author who identified himself as John, perhaps the same as the Apostle John, son of Zebedee, recorded a vision he had while imprisoned on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea. John's apocalyptic vision became the official and orthodox version of the end of the world mainly because of this identification with the beloved apostle of the Gospel of John. His revelation would become The Revelation as the apostolic church closed ranks against the Gnostics and the pagan Romans.

The early church had many different versions of the apocalypse, just as there were many different Gospels. A entire literature of prophetic apocalypses had developed since the time of Ezekiel and Daniel. Many of these texts, such as the Dead Sea scrolls, thought now to be the remnants of the Temple's library, have only surfaced in the 20th century. From these sources, we can see that the early church, struggling toward some sort of unity, chose John's vision as the authentic image of the end of the world.

Jewish Christianity did not survive the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem in 70 CE. The Gospels, all written after this apocalyptic event, reflect a Christianity that had lost its local messianic roots and become instead a universal mystery religion. The three so-called Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, were all composed in response to the central question of who had authority within the movement. The answer of the Gospels is clear: only the apostles and their spiritual descendants could claim legitimate authority over the church.

Early in the second century we can detect the beginnings of orthodoxy. As the apostolic Gospels spread, an organization developed that included deacons to look after the people, priests to perform the ceremonies and bishops to administer the authority of the apostles in their absence. The chain of command was very clear and simple. God had sent Christ, who

had called the apostles. To them, He gave the responsibility for His church, and they in turn ordained the leaders of the individual Christian communities.

However, the mystical aspects of Christianity had spread throughout the Empire, blending with various other currents, such as the essentially pagan beliefs of Gnosticism. This created a vast Christian movement that was far from content with the simple apostolic interpretation of spiritual authority. The Gnostics in particular insisted on a direct experience of Christ that was unmediated by any priest or bishop. This was of course much more exclusive and difficult to obtain than the apostolic guarantee of instant salvation conferred by belief and obedience.

Orthodox, apostolic Christianity became a mass movement in the late second century, while Gnostic groups dwindled into closed societies of adepts. Other salvationist religions, such as the Christian look-alike known as Mithraism, competed for adherents and Imperial support. By 180 CE, when Irenaeus compiled his authoritative list of books in the New Testament canon, with St. John's Revelation as its official apocalypse, orthodox Christianity had solidified into a powerful social and political force. For over a century, in the face of periodic persecutions from various Emperors, the orthodox church had gained in strength and influence. The extreme persecutions of the early fourth century were a last ditch attempt to halt the erosion of Imperial and pagan authority caused by the growth of Christianity with its appeal to God's authority as administered by the apostolic bishops.

The Book of Revelation has the authority of the Apostle John, the beloved disciple who sat next to Christ at the Last Supper, behind it. In it, Christ speaks, through John, directly to the seven churches of Asia, lecturing and scolding the Christians while warning them of a coming period of persecution. And then, Christ invites John to "Come up here and I will show you what must take place after this." John ascends to the throne of Heaven and sees the seraphim mentioned by Ezekiel. He also sees a Lamb, who breaks open the seven seals and reveals the future.

This long, complex and bizarre vision seems intended to encourage the faithful in their resistance to the pressures of Emperor worship. Some of the churches which Christ addresses through John were advocating a policy of compromise with the Roman authorities. This must be stopped, because the final showdown between God and Satan was imminent. Satan, in the form of the Roman state, will increase its persecution of believers, but they must stand fast, even in the face of death. They are sealed from any spiritual harm, though their bodies may suffer, and they will in any case be vindicated when Christ returns to destroy the wicked.

Rome is seen in Revelation as the great beast, the whore of Babylon and its Emperor as the Anti-Christ. When Christ returns as King of Kings, he will lead the heavenly host in battle against the Beast and the kings of the earth. Christ wins and then rules for a millennium, the only place in the New Testament where a thousand year reign of Christ is mentioned. After this, Satan re-emerges from his pit and challenges Christ. God sends fire from the sky and Satan, the beast and the false prophet all end up roasting in the lake of fire.

This ushers in the final day of judgment. After punishing the wicked and resurrecting the saints, God decides to dwell among men and therefore creates a new heaven and a new earth, along with a New Jerusalem. There is no visible Temple in this New Jerusalem and no need of the sun or the moon. The presence of God and Christ provide so much Light that it is never dark. From the middle of the new city flow the waters of the river of life, and on its bank stands the Tree of Life, which produces fruit continually. The elect will see the face of God and therefore be immortal, reigning "forever and forever."

Clementine, a Gnostic poet of the early second century, knew of John's Revelation and wove it into his own work, now long lost except for disapproving quotes from Origen, on Chiliasm. He gained a large following by teaching that the millennium foretold in John's Revelation would be a physical earthly paradise where the senses "would be subject to delights and pleasures. . . There would be a space of 1000 years for celebrating nuptial festivals."

Origen was the first important Christian to discredit the common notion of a physical paradise as the Kingdom of Heaven. He substituted a spiritual and individual kingdom for the literal and collective apocalypse described by John's Revelation. Origen explained that the heavenly feasting prophesied in Revelation, and that so delighted the Chilaists, should be understood as spiritual nourishment from Christ.

But the idea of a physical New Jerusalem of gold and precious stones proved hard to displace. Chilaism would continue to crop up around the edges of orthodoxy for more than a thousand years. As we will see, the idea of a physical transformation that accompanies the end of the world would become the inner secret of all western occultism. In alchemy, the process of transformation would be studied in isolation from its Gnostic and Chialist origins. This fragmentation of the ancient knowledge led to many dead ends and vain quests. The timing of the transformation became more important than the transformation of time.

Even the Chilaists and other Gnostics agreed with Hippolytus, Bishop of Porto, who calculated the history of the world and found that Rome could only be the Empire of the Anti-Christ. He thought that his calculations proved that a century or so was left before the apocalypse. This was heralded as good news. The Christians had so far not been doing too well in their mission of converting the world. They felt they could use a bit more time before the End.

For the first two and a half centuries of Christianity's existence, Imperial Rome had been the great enemy, the Government of the Evil King of the World, the Anti-Christ. And then, in the second decade of the fourth century, something very strange happened. A would-be King of the World won a battle outside the gates of Rome and attributed his victory to the power of Christ. The Battle of Mulvian Bridge made Constantine an Emperor, and with him, Christianity became the Imperial religion.

This sudden reversal must have seemed truly miraculous to the Christians themselves. The early years of the fourth century saw the worst Christian persecutions of the Roman era. Even Bishops of the Church had been forced to renounce their faith, and Christianity had begun to disappear in large portions of the eastern Empire. In the west, the persecutions had actually served to increase the number of Christians, and Constantine used this fact as a political tool. At Mulvian Bridge, his convenient espousal of Christianity was worth a dozen legions, he later remarked to Eusebius, his biographer.

Flavius Valerius Constantinus was an Imperial freebooter in the grand tradition of Julius Caesar and Octavius Augustus. Born the son of one of the four Imperial "Caesars" appointed by the last great pagan Emperor, Diocletian, Constantine plowed his way through the political intrigue that resulted from Diocletian's abdication in 305 CE until, on the afternoon of October 27, 312 CE, Constantine trapped his last opponent, the Christian hating Maxentius, against the Tiber at Saxa Rubra (Red Rocks) with only one avenue of escape, over Mulvian Bridge.

In effect, this battle decided the fate of both the Empire and Christianity. The two had become inexplicably entwined on the afternoon before the battle, when Constantine had seen a vision. While positioning his legions for the next day's battle, Constantine saw a great flaming cross in the sky with the Greek words *en toutoi nika*, "in this sign, victory." That night, he dreamed that Christ appeared and commanded him to make the flaming cross his battle standard. Constantine awoke and called for his metalsmiths. He told them his dream and ordered them to prepare a new standard, one composed of the first two Greek letters of "Christ," chi, an X and ro, a sort of crooked staff.

Under this new standard, the labarum, Constantine's army drove Maxentius' legions into the Tiber, where most of them, including Maxentius, died. Constantine entered Rome and was proclaimed the Emperor of the West. Gog, of Gog and Magog, the evil rulers of the world according to Hebrew eschatology, was now at least nominally a Christian.

Soon after his victory, in early 313, Constantine met with the eastern Emperor, Lucinius, at Milan and issued an edict confirming the religious toleration proclaimed by one of the earlier "Caesars" or tetrachs of Diocletian and expanded it to include all religions, even the

Christians. This was the end of the great persecutions and the beginning of the meteoric rise in the fortunes of orthodox Christianity. By 323 CE, when Constantine had finally united by conquest both halves of the Empire and moved the capital to Byzantium, soon to become Constantinople, orthodox Christianity had become the official religion of the state.

Constantine, guided by his ambiguous vision, chose the winning side. It was the orthodox church's insistence on obedience and conformity that appealed to Constantine. He needed a new form of universal religion with which to unify his vast Empire, and Orthodox Christianity filled the bill nicely.

But almost as soon as Constantine embraced orthodoxy, it was threatened by the most challenging heresy in the history of the Church. A pious and ascetic Egyptian priest by the name of Arius startled his bishop with his strange opinions about the nature of Christ. Arius argued that Christ could not be one with the Creator, but was rather the Logos, the first and best of all created beings. Since Christ had inhabited time, been born, lived and died, then he could not be co-eternal with God. A creation had occurred somewhere, and therefore Christ was not the same substance as His Father. The Holy Spirit, Arius insisted, was even less God than Christ, since it was a creation of Christ's, and therefore twice removed from the substance of God.

Bishop Alexander called a council and excommunicated Arius and his followers. This created such wide spread religious turmoil that Constantine himself had to step in and settle it. In a letter to both parties, Constantine declared that the dispute was "trifling and unworthy of such fierce contests." But the orthodox church did not see it that way. To them, the matter of consubstantiality versus similarity, a matter of an iota in the Greek words homoousia and homoiousia, was vital both politically and theologically. If Christ were not seen as God, the whole structure of the orthodox chain of command would crumble. And if anything happened to the unity of the Church, it destroyed its usefulness to the Imperial state. Settling this issue of an iota became a matter of life and death for the new Imperial orthodoxy.

Constantine resolved to end the dispute by calling the first ecumenical, or universal, church council at Nicaea in 325 CE. Constantine presided in person over the debates and according to Eusebius "moderated the violence of the contending parties." Arius presented his view, but Athanasius, the hired theological gunslinger brought in by Bishop Alexander, made it absolutely clear that if Christ and the Holy Spirit were not considered the same substance as God, then polytheism would triumph. With that, the Bishops folded and agreed on a new universal creed that declared the trinity to be of one essence, that is, the same substance. Unity was enforced by banishment and anathema. The orthodox Imperial church had embarked on its own pattern of persecution. All books by or about Arius were burned, and by Imperial decree, concealment of such a book was punishable by death. The Dark Ages had begun.

Constantine, the most nominal of Christians and a good candidate for the Anti-Christ, became instead the new Christ-model of the Catholic Orthodox Imperial Church, the Christos Pantocrater, Christ the Ruler of the Universe. The Demiurge had become the Messiah and a thousand and more years of spiritual oppression and persecution lay ahead. The End of the World had become an Institution of the Church.

Chapter Eight

In the divinely rebuilt New Jerusalem, as we saw in John's Revelation, The Tree of Life will stand on the banks of the river of the waters of life. This suggests that the new heaven and the new earth promised to John would in fact be a return to the Garden of Paradise. The Chilaists thought so, and saw in this divine re-creation a chance to indulge in the innocent joys of a purified humanity. They quite naturally assumed that, since the re-created Paradise had no Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the original cause of the fall of man into sinfulness, there could be no such thing as sin in the New Jerusalem.

Origen and the other fathers of the orthodox church disliked this interpretation, of course, but even they could not completely remove the idea of a transformed reality, complete with a transformed body, from the orthodox eschatology. The Gnostic concept of matter redeemed or animated by an apocalyptic event, the sparks of light returning to The Light, remained at the heart of the official orthodox apocalypse.

Christianity emerged from the political turmoil of 1st century Palestine, a truly apocalyptic moment in Jewish history. Christianity did not become a universalist religion until after the End of the World for the Jews. Six and a half centuries to the day after Nebuchadnezzar's armies destroyed Solomon's Temple, Roman forces under the soon-to-be Emperor Titus sacked and burned the Temple of Herod. This was an End of the World far greater than the Babylonian Captivity. Cyrus the Great allowed the Jews to return from Babylon after a generation or so. The New Babylon on the Tiber never allowed the Jews to return. One thousand eight hundred seventy eight years, and many more apocalypses, would pass before a Jewish nation returned to Palestine.

We saw how Christianity slowly became an orthodoxy and then, miraculously, the Imperial religion of the hated Romans. By the late sixth century, when Imperial Orthodoxy was firmly in the driver's seat of the Roman military machine, Judaism was the only tolerated non-orthodox form of religion. This does not mean that the Roman Christians saw the Jews as equals -- it was against the law to intermarry and for Jews to own real property such as land -- but they were at least accepted as serving a useful function in society, as scapegoats. Since the Christians could no longer blame the Romans for Christ's death, the blame shifted to the Jews, creating the basic rationalization for a thousand years of Christian persecution.

After the fall of the Temple, the largest Jewish communities centered around Alexandria in Egypt and the old city of Babylon in Mesopotamia. A few Jewish communities remained in Palestine, mostly notably the spiritual community at Saafid, near Tel-Aviv, on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean. The mystical Jews of Saafid would retain their foothold in the Holy Land right down to the 20th century.

But other than this, the Jewish people were dispersed throughout the Roman Empire, and in the east, far beyond it. This gap between the western Jews and those in the East eventually became the two broad currents of Judaism, Sephardic and Ashkenazi. In the early centuries of the Dispersion, Jewish culture and religion re-formed itself. The portable Tanakh, the books of scriptures, (The Torah, the Nevi'im and the Kethuvim are the three major divisions, hence the name TaNaKh) could travel with them. It became the centerpiece of every synagogue, and in many ways, took the place of the Temple.

The Tanakh is recognizable to Christians as the Old Testament, having assumed its final form less than fifty years after Jesus' birth. The core of the Tanakh is the Books of the Law of Moses, the Torah. This is essentially the same as the work read to the crowd before the restored Temple in 587 BCE. The Nevi'im are the works of the prophets, which developed alongside the later versions of the Torah, but were added to the canon a few centuries later. Kethuvim, or writings, are the extra scriptural books that do not fall under either category. These contain some of the last works added to the canon, such as The Song of Songs attributed to Solomon.

In the centuries after the Dispersion, commentaries of various rabbis on the Tanakh, known as the Talmud, attained an importance second only to the Torah. Along with these evolved several collections of the sayings of the sages, known as the Midrash. Finally, The Mishnah, or legalistic texts interpreting various points of scripture for the Jews of the Dispersion, developed in response to the problem posed by the absence of the Temple.

Unlike Christianity, which denounced its mystical origins as heresy, Judaism retained a powerful connection with those same mystical roots. Our earliest alchemical text, "Isis the Prophetess to her son Horus," points to an Egypto-Hebraic source for its transformational philosophy. Interestingly enough, a Hebrew contemporary of the author of the "Isis the Prophetess" story, Rabbi Nehuniah ben HaKana, revealed to his students the magical

technology behind these transformational processes. In the later centuries of the Dispersion, his teachings would form the basis of the traditional Kabbalah.

Compared to the anonymous author of "Isis the Prophetess," Rabbi Nehuniah ben HaKana was a well known and respected Jewish sage. His few mentions in the Talmud leave no doubt about the important position he occupied in the early Talmudic era. His mystical teachings inspired a whole generation of Jewish sages. However, from the perspective of our inquiry into the origins of alchemy, his importance lies in his authorship of the teaching document known as The Bahir.

The oldest and most influential of all Kabbalistic texts, The Bahir, or The Illumination, (from Job 37:21 -- "And now they do not see light, it is illumination (bahir) in the skies.") was also called the "Midrash of Rabbi Nehuniah," to emphasize his authorship. This is unusual, since Rabbi Nehuniah is quoted only once, in the first verse. However, a Rabbi Amorai, perhaps a pseudonym for Rabbi Nehuniah, is cited nine times. Amorai means "speakers," and indicates that he was the spokesman of a committee or group of sages. If this was Rabbi Nehuniah, then he must have felt he was speaking for the whole tradition, as well as his immediate group.

This could well be the case. Around the time of the completion of Herod's Temple, a young Rabbi Nehuniah joined the school of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, even though he was already an ordained Rabbi. Nehuniah had come to learn the mystic arts of the work of creation from the acknowledged master of the age.

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai was born before the construction of Herod's Temple, lived to see the destruction of that Temple and finally became the leader of the early Dispersion era Jews. He was a renowned expert in the occult arts, particularly that of the work of creation, the oral teaching that would become the Sepher Yetzirah under Rabbi Akiva in the second century CE. This oral teaching contained nothing less than the secret of animating matter, the transformative process at the heart of alchemy.

According to tradition, Abraham learned these secrets from Shem, the son of Noah, also known as Melchizedek, The Righteous King of Ur and Salem, thought to be Jerusalem. The most important mysteries of the work of creation concerned the significance of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and their relationship to astrology and the mysteries of the calendar, or time itself. Attributing this wisdom to Abraham and Melchizedek places its origin in the 18th century BCE, the time of the rise of the New Kingdom in Egypt as well as the Vedic scholars of India. Abraham was considered to be the greatest magician and astrologer of his age. The Talmud tells us that "all the kings of East and West (Egypt and India) arose early (to wait) at his door." The teachings of the work of creation are one of the primary ancient astrological texts and incorporates the astrological wisdom Abraham was said to have known "in his heart," that is, revealed to him through meditative or magical means.

The secret work of creation is mentioned several more times in the Torah. Jacob and his sons, including Joseph, were adepts of the work. After the Exodus, the Israelites called upon the architect Betzalel, who "knew how to permutate the letters with which heaven and earth were created," to build the Tabernacle in the desert. The Tabernacle needed to be a microcosm of the universe, a physical container for the hermetic idea of "as above, so below," and only a knowledge of the work of creation could achieve this.

Jeremiah, the prophet of the Babylonian Captivity was also an adept of the work of creation. From his teachings on the subject arose the traditions that would evolve into the Sepher Yetzirah as taught by Rabbi Yochanan in the early first century CE. The oral teachings on the work of creation received by Rabbi Nehuniah from Rabbi Yochanan originated in the early years of the Second Temple, the late 6th century BCE, and as such are as much a part of Judaism as the Hebrew prayer service which developed at the same time and was also not put into writing until much later.

The Sepher Yetzirah is mentioned in the Talmud. The first such reference involves Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya, and credits him with the statement: "I can take squashes and pumpkins, and with the Sepher Yetzirah, make them beautiful trees. These will in turn

produce other beautiful trees." This echoes the statement in the "Isis the Prophetess" story: "Only Nature can overcome Nature."

The reference to Rabbi Jehoshua is highly significant. He was a disciple of both Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Nehuniah and is therefore a connecting link between the schools of the Sepher Yetzirah and The Bahir. There is an interesting Midrash from "The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer" in which the young Jehoshua astounds the leading scholars of the day and is acclaimed a Rabbi in spite of his age. Since Jehoshua, Joshua, is Jesus in Greek, we find here a faint echo of Luke's tale of the young Jesus amazing the elders of Temple (Luke 2: 41 -51). In his citations in the Talmud, Rabbi Jehoshua also appears to be similar to the image of an aristocratic Jesus given in the Gospel of Matthew.

In addition to studying the work of creation with Rabbi Yochanan, Rabbi Nehuniah went on to study the other major current of Jewish mysticism, the Work of the Chariot, with the Essene Menachem, a former High Priest of the Temple and deputy of the Sanhedrin, or supreme council, under Hillel. Menachem is the Essene teacher mentioned by Josephus, the great Jewish traitor and apologist historian of the Fall of Jerusalem. As a child, Menachem had seen Herod and prophesied that he would be king. Herod remembered this, and placed Menachem and the Essenes in honored positions at his court.

Josephus tells us that the Essenes were skilled in angelic magick and could foresee the future. He also likens them to the Pythagoreans. Indeed there is much that is similar in both the Bahir and the Sepher Yetzirah to the teachings of Pythagoras. Rabbi Nehuniah, master of the mystic arts in first century Palestine, served as the junction point where all the major currents of Hebraic and classical magick intersected and interacted. The result of this eclecticism can be seen in the brilliance of the Bahir.

Although the Bahir is the primary text of the Kabbalah, it does not use that term. Kabbalah, from the Hebrew root QBL meaning received or given, came into fashion much later when the teachings of the first century mystics were indeed just "received traditions." The sages of the Bahir preferred the more ancient term Maaseh Merkabah, literally "Workings of the Chariot," with its connotations of active mystical experience as opposed to received tradition. The Bahir combines the ideas of the work of creation, animating matter, with the radical concept of celestial projection as a way to return to the divine source. By juxtaposing these ideas, The Bahir reveals the secret at the heart of alchemy.

The key concept is the Tree of Life, Etz Chaim, described in the work of creation traditions. The Bahir adds an important point to the discussion by suggesting that portions of the celestial sphere can be equated with the spheres of each sepherot, or globe, on the Tree of Life. In verses 179 and 180 of the Bahir we learn that our physical world "is like a mustard seed in a ring." In a sphere around the ring are the ten spheres and their animating statements, which verse 180 locates in space around a center point, supposedly the mustard seed.

This of course suggests the parable of the mustard seed found in Matthew 13: 31-33 and Mark 4:30-32. "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and planted in his field. Though it was the smallest of seeds, yet when it grows it becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches." In Matthew, Jesus goes on to relate the parable of the yeast, a metaphor for the kingdom of heaven as a transformative force that spreads throughout all matter. Matthew ends the section with another quote from 2nd Isaiah explaining why Jesus spoke in parables: "I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world."

This also suggests the Talmudic saying of Rabbi Jehoshua mentioned above, where garden vegetables are transformed into trees by the work of creation. Since Rabbi Jehoshua studied with Rabbi Nehuniah's mystical group, we can also suppose that he understood the metaphor in the same way as the sages of the Bahir did. From this we can see that Jesus, who ever he was, was indeed revealing "things hidden since the creation of the world."

Verses 63, 95 and 106 of the Bahir, describe the Tree which grows from this mustard seed in terms of the ancient ideas later written down in the Sepher Yetzirah and the Sepher

Zohar. Here, the emphasis is on an esoteric and practical application of these ideas. In verse 63, we find the revelation of the Thirty Two paths of the Tree of Life coupled with a strange story of a king's secret chambers and his love for a daughter who is also his sister and his mother. Since 32 is the number of the heart (leb in Hebrew), the verse suggests looking to the heart as a way to go inside the hidden chambers.

We must remember that works such as the Bahir were written for the initiated few who could understand its complex metaphors. If we take it literally, we are sure to misunderstand its meaning. Verses 95 and 96 of the Bahir make this quite apparent. Attributed to Rabbi Amoraï, the spokesman for the traditional viewpoint, verse 95 reveals the structure of the Cube of Space and the jewel of the celestial Tree within it. This structure is based on the ancient concepts of the Axis, the Sphere and the Heart. If we know the secret, then this is one of the most straightforward verses in the Bahir. Without the key however, it is merely an incomprehensible string of numbers.

The first three verses of the sixth chapter of Rabbi Akiva's Sepher Yetzirah supplies the key, although in a truly oblique fashion. The first verse informs us that as proof of the existence of the Tree of Life, the twelve, the seven and the three, "He set them in the Teli, the Cycle and the Heart."

The secret lies in the mysterious word Teli. It occurs in neither the Torah nor the Talmud, although it is used in the Bahir. There is considerable dispute among scholars as to its precise meaning. The only similar word in the scriptures is a single reference to some kind of weapon in Genesis. Apparently, from the root of the word, talah or to hang, it must have been some kind of bolo, or a weight suspended on a rope for throwing. This suggests that the celestial axis around which the heavens rotate is a kind of imaginary string from which the celestial globe hangs.

But what is it hanging from? An ancient Midrash, "The Prayers of Rabbi 'In The Beginning,' " tells us that it "hangs (by a thread) from the fin of the Leviathan." This ancient serpent is nothing other than the constellation of Draco, the Pole Serpent mentioned in Job 26:13 -- "By His Spirit the heavens were calmed, His hand pierced the Pole Serpent" -- and in 2nd Isaiah 27:1 -- "On that day (the day of judgment) with His great sharp sword, God will visit and overcome the Leviathan, the Pole Serpent, and the Leviathan, the Coiled Serpent, and He will kill the dragon of the sea." Note that three such dragons are mentioned here.

To understand this, we must look up at the stars. We can all find the Pole Star, Polaris in the tail of Ursa Minor, the Little Bear. This marks our north celestial pole and is directly above the north pole of our planet. There is another pole in the sky however. This the pole of the solar ecliptic, the path of the sun through the constellations. The earth is tilted on its axis against the ecliptic, so that the celestial pole above our planetary pole describes a great circle in the sky over time. In 4500 BCE, Thuban, a star in the tail of Draco, marked the celestial pole.

The ecliptic pole however does not change, since the path of the sun through the sky never changes. Around this point, which has no star visible to the naked eye to mark it, the constellation of Draco, the Great Dragon, spirals through all of the zodiacal signs, with the stars appearing to hang, talah, from it. Draco thereby becomes the Teli, which the Sepher Yetzirah in chapter 6:3 tells us, is "over the universe like a king on his throne." This is perhaps an echo of an ancient form of worship, that of the God Most High identified with Baal, that predated the arrival of the Hebrews in Palestine. It is also the serpent of the garden, climbing its way up the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the brazen serpent used by Moses in the wilderness and even Hermes' caduceus staff.

The Gnostic Ophities, who worshipped the serpent for giving us freedom from the Demiurge and thought that Mary Magdalene was one of the founding women of alchemy, formulated the image of a snake spiraling around an egg. In simple terms, this is the serpent of Draco coiled around the elliptical circle made by the celestial pole. The image expands however when we think of the egg as the celestial sphere and the serpent as the spiral connecting the projected spheres of the Tree of Life. The Teli here would be the axis of the ecliptic

poles through the head and tail of the dragon at Keter and Malkut, and the center of the celestial sphere. This is the first dragon, the Pole Serpent.

There are however two other ways to interpret the dragon-axis of the Teli. Hebrew astronomers used the term Teli to denote the inclination of the orbit of a planet from the ecliptic. In the case of the moon, this allows you track eclipses, since eclipses occur only when the sun and moon arrive at the nodes, the head and tail of the dragon to the ancient astronomers, at the same time. Solar eclipses were seen as occasions where the dragon caught and swallowed the sun for a period of time. The concept of ascending and descending nodes, the head and tail of the dragon, or Teli, is also used with the other planets. The major nodes for the sun are the vernal and autumnal equinox, the point where the celestial equator crosses the ecliptic. This is the Coiled Serpent.

And there is still another way to look at the concept of the Teli. If we think of the Milky Way as the Leviathan, then the Teli, or axis of the dragon of the sea, our third dragon-axis, then becomes the galactic axis, running through the ecliptic from Sagittarius/Scorpio to Gemini/Taurus. Like the ecliptic axis, the galactic axis is constant and unmoving. Within these pillars, or perpendicular axis, the coiled dragon of the equinox, the crossing point of ecliptic and equator, spins slowly backward through time, one degree of arc every 72 years. A Talmudic example makes this even clearer: "The stormwind hangs (talach) between the arms of God like an amulet." The hanging is of course the Teli, the axis of its suspension. The stormwind is the slowly backward turning spiral of the equinoxes and a metaphor for the mystical experience itself. The arms of the universe are the unmoving Teli, the ecliptic and galactic axis, from which the initiatory spiral of the equinoxes is suspended like an amulet.

The Bahir, in verse 106, announces that the Teli is nothing but "the likeness before the Blessed Holy One," or the face of God. And then the Bahir quotes the Song of Songs 5: 11 - "His head is a treasure of gold, his locks are hanging, black like a raven." It is somewhat shocking to find the Teli referred to an image that is so suggestive of alchemical motifs. But, as we will discover later from Fulcanelli, these are indeed very important symbols. Verse 96 of the Bahir addresses other key alchemical symbols, and may in fact be our earliest mention of that medieval alchemical standard, The Philosopher's Stone. It begins: "What is the earth from which the heavens were graven (created)? It is the throne of the Blessed Holy One. It is the Precious Stone and the Sea of Wisdom." The verse continues to suggest the spiritual value of the color blue, the traditional color of kingship, by associating the sea with the sky, and the sky with the higher light coming from the Throne of Creation. From the Bahir, we learn that the Tree of Life is actually the Precious Stone whose facets are projected onto the celestial sphere and which is part of the continuous flow of the Sea of Wisdom. John's Revelation is a version of this, with the Tree of Life on the banks of the flowing river, deep inside New Jerusalem's Cube of Space.

But what did in fact happen to the Tree of Knowledge? Is it banished from the perfected schema? The Bahir suggests, in many subtle references, that the Tree of Knowledge forms itself round the axis of the celestial pole, whose Teli or dragon-axis would be the backward spiraling axis of the equinox. The celestial pole, as it circles around the fixed point of the ecliptic pole, first leans in toward the angle of the galactic axis, that is toward the center of the galaxy, and then moves away in a large precessional cycle. The timing of the Fall, when the Tree is tilted away from the galactic axis, and the timing of the resurrection and redemption, the arrival of the kingdom of heaven when the Tree tilts toward the galactic axis, is regulated by the cycles of the intersecting Teli.

The whirlwind, sufah, of our Talmudic reference is the mystical experience of the galgal, or cycle, of the Tree of Knowledge. The galgal is also spoken of in the Bahir as a womb, that is a cycle of time in which the future is born. All of time happens within the Sphere defined by the Teli, and, the Bahir tells us, is revealed in the Heart of Heaven. This is both our own personal spiritual center, the heart, and the heart of our galaxy, pulsating in harmonic fractals of the same wave.

Rabbi Nehuniah and his followers developed a complex system of illumination based on a deep understanding of the cycles inherent in the three Teli of the projected Tree of Life, the Precious Stone of the celestial sphere. The good Rabbi himself died or disappeared around the time of the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, but his students kept the work going until late in the 2nd century. After that point, the teaching of the Bahir went deep underground for a thousand years. In the late 12th century, a manuscript version began to circulate among the Jewish mystical community of Moslem Spain.

Two hundred years later, a Parisian bookseller would find an illustrated copy of the Bahir and come to Spain in search of its meaning. With the help of an elderly Jewish sage, he would rediscover the inner secret of alchemy and the nature of time. Nicholas Flamel was perhaps the most famous and believable of all historical alchemists, and it is hard to deny that he found a transmutational secret of great value.

What happened to the secret during the thousand years it was lost to the west? The answer is simple: What the orthodox Christians and the legalistic Jews rejected, the gnostic Sufis of Islam embraced. One possible derivation of the word Sufi, in fact, comes from sufah, whirlwind, meaning those who have experienced the illuminating whirlwind of the cycle of time. Within the framework of the apocalyptic religion of Islam, the ancient wisdom survived, and true to the process itself, was transformed.

Chapter Nine

To understand Islam, we must look away from the urban centers of the late classical world. After the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, Jerusalem was a Roman city in a Roman/Greek world. Constantinople, the jewel of the eastern Empire, was the center of Christian civilization, while Rome had been sacked and Vandalized to the point where nothing much remained except depopulated ruins, the Church and the echoes of its ancient glories. The west still struggled to recover from the collapse of the Empire, a political disaster which left the Imperial Church in charge of what was left. Even the spiritual currents which had held such promise in the first century CE, Gnosticism, Christianity, mystical Judaism and so on, had been destroyed, marginalized or co-opted by its avowed enemy, the Roman State.

But out in the wilderness, in the depths of that vast desert known as the Arabian peninsula, something very old was stirring. It would have a new, improved form, one that acknowledged the Judeo-Christian world view. Stamped with the imprint of its founder, his hometown and the culture of his family, Islam would become something very different from anything that had gone before.

One of those differences is that, of all the major world religions, Islam is most clearly and profoundly the work of one man, Mohammed ibn Abdallah, grandson of the Great Abd al'Muttalib, Sharif of the Beni Quraish, protector of the Shrine of The God and the altars of His eight wives, the Kaaba of Meccah. Therefore, it is to Meccah that we must look to understand Islam.

Forty miles or so inland from Jiddah, its ancient port, Meccah sits at the juncture of pre-Islamic Arabia's most important trade routes. The mile-long caravans from the spice kingdoms of southern Arabia, on their way to the world markets of Mesopotamia, turned north and east through the gap in the Hejaz Mountains near Meccah. Cargo from Africa -- Abyssinia lies just across the Red Sea -- landed at Jiddah and moved inland for its first stop-over at Meccah. The town thrived on trade and travelers. This is significant, because from its founding Meccah was also an important sacred site and a destination for pilgrims.

The ancient Arabs were pantheist who worshipped the spirit, or genius, of place in a large variety of ways, including pilgrimage and animal -- and sometimes human -- sacrifice. They personified the sun and the moon, the sky, stars and the desert and lived in a world filled with jinns and afreets, or spirits and ghosts. In the vast darkness of the desert, the stars became the backdrop against which the mythological drama of life played itself out.

Navigating in the desert, as at sea, required a knowledge of the stars and their relationship

to time and movement. These factors gave rise to a complex astrological mythology, similar, if not exactly the same, to that found in the oldest sections of the Sepher Yetzirah, the work of creation, which are attributed to Abraham.

Abraham, as we discovered in the Talmud, was the most famous astrologer of his time. We are told that the kings of the East and the West, attributed to Egypt and India by modern scholars, waited at his door for his council. Interestingly enough, even in the 18th century BCE, Meccah was a junction point in the trade between India and Egypt. According to the tradition within the Quraish, Mohammed's clan, Meccah was also founded by Abraham and his other son Ishmael, whose name means God hears, from the same proto-semitic root as Islam.

From the Sepher Yetzirah, we learn of the Cube of Space (the twelve edges of the Cube are formed from the twelve double letters of the Hebrew alphabet which are attributed to the signs of the zodiac) within which the jewel-like Tree of Life forms. This astrological concept is attributed to Abraham just as the building of the physical Cube, the Kaaba of Meccah with its sacred Black Stone, is also claimed as his work. According to Moslem tradition, the Kaaba, or cube (from the same root), has been rebuilt ten times, completing the number of spheres on the Tree of Life. The Kether, or crown, Cube was built by the angels in heaven, we are told. It is this Cube that is described in the Sepher Yetzirah and The Bahir.

Wisdom and Understanding, the second and third Cubes, were built by Adam and his youngest son Seth. The fourth, Mercy, an after-the-Flood restoration, was built by Abraham and his son by Hagar, Ishmael. It is from this point that Meccah dates its founding. Strength and Beauty, the fifth and sixth, are attributed to kings of the Sabeian and Himyarite Kingdoms. The seventh, Victory, was built by Quasy, the patriarch of the Quraish. The eighth, Splendor, was done during Mohammed's lifetime and the ninth and tenth, Foundation and Kingdom, within sixty years of his death.

Within the Cube is the sacred Black Stone, a piece of purplish-red tektite, the stone which fell from heaven. Embedded in the wall of the southeastern corner about five feet from the floor -- at just the right height for kissing -- The Black Stone has been a part of the Cube since at least the version attributed to Abraham. Tradition states that the Stone represents the new, post-catastrophe covenant between God and the family of Abraham.

Moslem scholars also point to a verse in Matthew, chapter 21:42-43, for support. Jesus, during his last week in Jerusalem, often came to the forecourt of Herod's Temple to teach. Matthew tells us that as Jesus entered the Temple that morning, he was accosted by the chief priests and the elders who demanded by what authority he taught the scriptures. Jesus asks them a question: Was John baptized by heaven or by men? When the elders can't answer, Jesus refuses to tell them his authority and then lays into them for spiritual blindness. Even the people on the street, the obvious sinners, could see that John was a man of righteousness, Jesus tells them, but you, the spiritual leaders of the people, still can't decide on the source of John's message.

He continues, making the point even sharper, with the parable of the tenants who wouldn't share the fruits of the harvest with the landlord of the vineyard, but instead killed his servants and his son. Jesus asked the elders what did they think would happen when the owner returned? They replied that he would turn the tenants out of the vineyard, of course. Jesus then drove the point home by quoting Psalms 118: 22-23: "The stone the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes." To make sure they got it, Jesus said: "Therefore I tell you that the Kingdom of Heaven will be taken from you and given to those who will produce the fruit." This encounter was likely the motivating incident that led to Jesus' betrayal and death. From this point on, we are told by the Gospels, the Jewish elders plotted a way to arrest him without the people, who held him as a prophet according to Matthew 21:46, knowing and interfering. Christian commentators see this as the shift from Judaism to Christianity, with Christ as the Stone the builders rejected. Jesus is clearly stating that the Jewish elders no longer understood the basis of the religion they professed. To the Moslems however, who had seen

how little spiritual fruit Orthodox Christianity produced, this verse suggested another interpretation. The rejected stone is Ishmael, the part of Abraham's progeny rejected by Israel, as well as a rejected, cast out of the sky, part of heaven. Israel broke its Abrahamic covenant, therefore the kingdom of heaven reverted to the other heir, Ishmael, who will gather the fruits of the harvest.

The landlord of the vineyard of course is Allah to the Moslem, not the more Hebraic Jaweh. In Genesis 14:18, we are told that after a great battle, Abram, as he was then, worshipped the God Most High with the King of Jerusalem, Melchizedek. As we have seen in the Bahir, this was thought to be Shem, a son of Noah and a survivor of the Flood, and Abraham's teacher and collaborator in the work of creation. The titles used in the verse, "God Most High, Lord of Heaven and creator of the earth," are the same titles used for Baal, the ancient Caananite name for the Pole Serpent, the Teli, which the Sepher Yetzirah tells us is over the "universe. . .like a king on his throne."

Allah is simply the Arabic version of this Caanaite El. Baal, or rather Ba-el, is literally translated as the Space-Filling God, and is further called "He who holds the stars in place." This God Most High can only be the constellation of Draco, who fills all the signs of the zodiac and sits atop the Cube of Space very much like a king on his throne. In the pre-Islamic Kaaba, the house of Allah contained altars to his eight wives and daughters. These ancient goddesses are clearly related to the seven planets and the earth. Al-Uzza, the mighty one, was the sun and Al-Manat, the triple faced goddess, was clearly the moon. The earth goddess, Al-Lat, the goddess, is actually talah, or Teli, spelled backward. This serves to clinch our identification of Allah with the Teli, or Pole Serpent.

From the ground looking up at Draco, the ancient astronomers saw that it curved around the still point of the ecliptic pole and then its tail bent backward to form the "L" shape from which the word El was derived. Reflected on the earth however, as in the case of the earth goddess, this "L" of the Teli or Pole Serpent is reversed. If Allah is the God Most High, the "L" in the sky, then his daughter the earth is the reflection of that nature.

The Quraish, who thought of themselves as descendants of Abraham, worshipped Allah as their chief god, the Lord of the Soil to Whom they must pay a tithe of their crops and herds. This was not quite monotheism -- Allah still had his wives -- but it paved the way for Mohammed's insistence that Allah was the One and only God. Mohammed, like Abraham, decided that the God Most High was the only god worthy of worship.

Genesis tells us that, soon after Abram received the blessing of the God Most High, The Lord visited his word upon him in a vision. He commanded Abram to look up at the stars and count them if he could. Abram's descendants will be as numerous as the stars, or possibly will be as the stars, if Abram will make a covenant with the Lord by performing a peculiar ritual sacrifice. Abram is told to take five animals, split the heifer, the goat and the ram in two halves, and leave the two birds whole. The ten resulting halves can be attributed to the spheres on the Tree of Life, according to the sages of the Sepher Yetzirah.

This arrangement polarized the Tree, normally seen aligned along three parallel axis, into two groups of five, like the fingers on each hand. The spheres were then attributed by their masculine or feminine qualities. Six are clearly polarized, since they occur on the right or left pillar of the Tree, while the other four are normally on the middle axis. Attributing them this way produces a shift or split between Tiphareth and Binah on the left hand and between Yesod and Tiphareth on the right. This is the origin of the Rabbanical blessing gesture -- the gap between the third and fourth fingers made famous by Star Trek's Vulcans -- and symbolizes Abram's arrangement of offerings.

Abram made his sacrifice at sunset and fell into a deep sleep. We are told that thick and dreadful darkness came over him and the Lord spoke within it describing the future of Abram's descendants. And then a curious thing happened. A smoking firepot with a blazing torch, an ancient symbol of the presence of the God Most High according to most authorities, passed between the pieces of the sacrifice, through the gap between Binah and

Tiphareth and Yesod and Tiphareth. This, Genesis tells us, sealed the covenant between Abram and his god.

When Abram was 99 years old, The God Most High made a return appearance to confirm the covenant. This time the Lord changed Abram's name to Abraham, by adding an h, or heh, in the middle, and instituted the rite of circumcision as a physical sign of man's acceptance of the covenant. From this point on, Abraham's descendants were the chosen people of the God Most High.

Much of this makes little sense, until we remember that, in the Bahir, the twelve edges of the Cube of Space are also the zodiacal paths connecting the spheres on the Tree. The gap or aisle between the sacrifices, like the gap between the rabbi's fingers in the blessing, represents the astrological signs of Sagittarius and Gemini. These signs mark the third dragon-axis, as we noted above, which is the axis of the galaxy itself. The firepot with a blazing torch, symbol of the presence of the God Most High, travels the major axis of the galaxy, from the center out to the edge.

Abraham made his covenant then with the creative force flowing outward from the galactic core. He called this the God Most High, Mohammed's Allah, who formed our world from the intersection of the three pillars or axis of the Teli. Abraham's descendants entered the galgal, or cycle of time, through the Heh, or window, added to his name by the Lord. Heh is attributed to Aquarius, a zodiacal sign at right angles to the axis of the galaxy, and symbolizes the moving axis of the Coiled Serpent which defines the evolutionary flow of human events. Abraham's descendants would be the chosen of God as long they remembered the window into the cycle of Time which God had given them.

The Black Stone was the physical seal of this covenant, a token of God's favor. It is interesting to note that the description in Genesis 15:17, our smoking firepot with a blazing torch coming out of it, suggests the path of a meteor through the atmosphere. The place of the Black Stone within the Kaaba also suggests the northwest-southeast axis of the galaxy as seen in two dimensions. The stone which fell from heaven is a physical piece of evidence for the presence of the God Most High. With this in mind, we can understand the reference in Psalms to the rejected stone which became the head of the corner, and Jesus' denunciation of the Jewish elders for not understanding their own religion. It also helps to explain the nature of Mohammed's revelation.

If Jesus, like Rabbi Jehoshua, was a student of the Bahir then he would have known the secret of the Teli. From the elders' answer to the question of authority, Jesus knew that they no longer grasped the secret of time. John the Baptist had preached that the kingdom of heaven was near, how could he have known that? This is really what Jesus is asking the priests and elders. They of course had no answer, so Jesus refused to tell them the truth. Mohammed, like Abraham, received his wisdom directly from an angelic messenger. The Qur'an, the collection of Mohammed's revelations written down within fifty years of death by followers who had memorized them as they were pronounced, leaves little doubt of that fact. Like all successful prophets and spiritual leaders, Mohammed gave voice to the needs and longings of his time.

Many Arabs had been influenced by the Christians and the Jews who lived among them and eagerly awaited their own messenger from God. Mohammed admired the morals of Christianity and the monotheism of the Jews. He was also conscious of the power of a divinely inspired scripture to mold a religion. Others may have had similar thoughts. From Byzantine sources, we hear of several Arabs "prophets" who rose to prominence during the late sixth and early seventh centuries. Mohammed's difference, and perhaps the root of his success, lies in his connection through the Kaaba with the mysteries of creation given to Abraham. He could speak with authority because he had rediscovered the window into the cycles of time.

The revelations began on the night of the 27th of Ramadan in the year 610 CE. Mohammed was alone in the great cave at the foot of Mt. Hira, a few miles outside of Meccah. He had gone to the cave to pray and meditate, but he was asleep when the angel Gabriel appeared

and demanded that he read. Since Mohammed was illiterate, he protested that he could not read. Then the angel pressed down on him to the point that he thought he was going to smother to death. When the angel released him, Mohammed sat up and read. On awakening, Mohammed felt that words were engraved on his heart. He fled out of the cave, into the early morning sunlight, and beheld a vision of the angel Gabriel as the cosmic man. Gabriel declared that Mohammed was indeed the messenger of Allah.

Thereafter, the revelations came thick and fast. Often, when they came, Mohammed would fall to the ground in a convulsion or a swoon. He would become drenched with sweat and even his camel would become nervous and skittish when a spell hit. He was transformed by these experiences from the shy and introspective orphan who married a wealthy older woman, ran her businesses and never spoke in the Quraish councils.

His cousin and son-in-law, Ali, has left us a vivid description of Mohammed a few years after his revelations began. He describes Mohammed as "of middle stature, nether tall nor short. His complexion was rosy white; his eyes black; his hair, thick, brilliant and beautiful, fell to his shoulders. His profuse beard fell to his breast. . . There was such sweetness in his visage that no one, once in his presence, could leave him. If I hungered, a single look at the Prophet's face dispelled the hunger. Before him, all forgot their griefs and pains."

Later, when pressed to describe the process of revelation, Mohammed declared that the entire text of the Qur'an was written in heaven, and that Gabriel communicated it to him one piece at a time. Asked how he could remember these divine discourses, Mohammed replied that he repeated each phrase after the angel. The stress, he said, caused his hair to turn gray.

For a decade, Mohammed preached in Meccah, making little headway except for his immediate family and the Companions, such as Abu Beker and Omar al-Khattab. For a while he moved to al-Taif, a center of the goddess Al-Uzza, the mighty one worshipped by his mother's clan. From this brief exodus came the so-called "Satanic Verses" where the Qur'an seems to endorse goddess worship. Within the year, Mohammed was back in Meccah preaching in front of the Kaaba.

This time however, he was without protection. The control of the clan had passed to the mortal enemies of Mohammed's uncle, and the new faith found itself severely persecuted. But, just when things looked bleakest, a miracle happened, or so it seemed to Mohammed. Before he left for al-Taif, Mohammed had preached to a group of pilgrims from the garden city of Yathrab, which would afterward be forever Medina, or The City. They accepted his teaching and began to spread the word back home. Yathrab had a large Jewish population who responded to Mohammed's teachings as similar to their own. They were willing, in the garden city of Yathrab, to accept Mohammed as the messenger of a monotheistic Allah who will reign over the earth at the Last Judgment.

Eight years later, after much skirmishing and caravan raiding, Mohammed marched back into Meccah as the conquering messenger. He cleaned out the Kaaba, removing the altars to Allah's wives and daughters but keeping the Black Stone and its ritual kiss, and then proclaimed Meccah the Holy City of Islam. For the last two years of his life, Mohammed ruled from Meccah with a leisurely hand. As the faith grew, Mohammed sent letters to the capitals of the world announcing his revelation. He received no replies and watched philosophically the mutual destruction of Byzantium and Persia. There is no indication that Mohammed ever considered spreading the faith outside of Arabia.

That was not the case however with his heirs. Mohammed had appointed no successor to his power. After a brief rivalry, the Moslem leaders elected Abu Beker, the first Companion, to be Khalifa, or representative of the faithful. Abu Beker's faith and steadfastness saw the Faith through its first war and rebellion. Khalid ibn al-Walid, the most brilliant and ruthless of the Arab generals, went on from pacifying Arabia to defeat the Greek Emperor Heraclius outside Damascus. Syria became an Arab and Islamic stronghold.

By then Abu Beker had died and his fellow Companion, Omar al-Khattab, had been elected Caliph. Omar encouraged the conquest, and by 644, when Omar was cut down by a Persian

slave in the Medina mosque, Moslem armies ruled Egypt, Palestine and Persia. The conquests continued under Othman the Unfortunate, until by the time of Ali's Caliphate, 656-661, the Islamic domains extended from the Atlas Mountains in North Africa to the Black Sea and the mountains of Afghanistan.

Less than thirty years after the death of the Prophet, Islam ruled more of the earth than Rome had at its height. It is even to this day hard to imagine how a political, social and religious shift of this magnitude could have happened. The Prophet would merely have shrugged and replied Inshallah, that is, God is willing.

There is of course more to it than that. Mohammed taught of a stern yet merciful God in terms more than faintly reminiscent of the Bahir and the Sepher Yetzirah. In the Qur'an, sura II:255, the famous Throne Verse, we find Allah described in terms remarkably similar to those used to describe the Teli, or Pole Serpent. "His Throne extends over the heavens and the earth. . . He alone is Most High and Supreme."

The Qur'an is filled with references to the Last Judgment. Only Allah, the Qur'an tells us, knows the time of the Last Judgment, but certain signs will prefigure its arrival. Unbelief will be widespread along with moral chaos. There will be tumults in the sky and on the earth, sedition and great wars will occur, of such magnitude that the wise men will wish themselves dead. The final signal will be three trumpet blasts. At the first, our material universe will be destroyed. The second will uncreate all men and angels and spirits, while the third will accomplish the resurrection. Then Allah will arrive to conduct the Judgment. Only those who can cross the bridge of al-Sirat, which is finer than a hair and sharper than a sword, will be allowed to enter Paradise.

In the Qur'an, Paradise is described in ways that would make a gnostic Chilaist drool with envy. Paradise is a perfect garden where all manner of good things to eat and drink are available, including wine that exhilarates while leaving one clear-headed. These eternal feasts are attended by nubile houris whom neither age nor weariness nor death can mar. The blessed will see the face of Allah and become immortal, "never growing old." Who could resist such an image of Paradise?

The most significant sura, or chapter, in the Qur'an, from the perspective of the secret at the heart of alchemy, is sura 24, Al-Nur, or The Light. In verse 35, the secret is revealed with blinding clarity. "Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth. The semblance of His light is that of a niche in which is a lamp, the flame within a glass, the glass a glittering star as it were, lit with the oil of the blessed Tree, nether of the East nor of the West, whose oil appears to light up even though fire touches it not -- Light upon Light!"

We will wait until we have heard from Fulcanelli before we interpret this most significant verse. For now, let us note that this verse is the origin point of Islamic mysticism, illumination and gnosis. Mansur al-Hallaj, the greatest of all Sufi mystics, tells us that the Light is from "a star whose astrological house is in the empyrean," that is the mid-heaven point of the north ecliptic pole. He also suggests that the light symbolizes the peace of the tranquil heart.

Mohammed apparently gave esoteric teachings on these and other verses of the Qur'an to his son-in-law Ali, who passed them down to his son and grandson. Ali's Caliphate ended in the first great schism of Islam, when the religious and political authorities of the Arabs split away from the family of the prophet. By 680 CE, most of the family had been killed, with only an infant son of Husein's, Ali's grandson and great-grandson of the Prophet, surviving to carry on the tradition. From this came the split in Islam between Sunni and Shi'ite that still festers to this day.

For the first two hundred years or so of Islamic civilization, mysticism took a back seat -- except among the Shi'ites, the "adherents" of the family of the Prophet -- to the delights of the conquest. The Caliphs became ever more corrupt as their power grew. Persecutions of the Shi'as increased, and a general feeling developed that Islam had somehow conquered the world and lost its soul. Mansur al-Hallaj, quoted above, symbolized this defiantly mystical spirit. He was of course burned alive for blasphemy in 923 CE.

But from the time of Mansur, a new spiritual current emerged from the Islamic underground. Composed of fragments of all the conquered civilizations and religions, but held together by the teachings of the Prophet, the new Sufi movement accepted the corruption of the ruling classes and set to work to renovate the human soul. Shi'ite Sufis however, led by their Imam, a descendent of the Prophet, moved from mysticism to covert political action. Their goal was to create a theocracy based on the inner teachings of Mohammed.

The word "Sufi" -- composed of three Arabic letters, the sa, the wa and the fa -- has many different connotations and derivations. To some, it means safa, purity. Others see it as safwe, the selected ones. Other contenders are saf, line or row because the Sufis follow the "straight path" of Mohammed, and suffah, or porch, where the poor and the mystics sat outside the Medina mosque. Suf, wool, is also a good candidate because the Sufis often wore long white wool robes. But the inner meaning of sa-wa-fa, as we noted above, is sufah, or whirlwind. This inner meaning points to the process of spiritual transformation at the heart of Sufism. One of the later Sufi order, the Mevalvi Sufis of Turkey, made whirling or spinning one their spiritual disciplines.

Fifty years after Mansur's death, in the last quarter of the 10th century, Sufism blossomed. An Iranian Sufi from Nishapur, Abdar-Rahman as-Sulami, compiled a collection of the teachings of more than a hundred contemporary Sufis. The 11th century saw the rise of the first great Sufi teaching orders in the east and the west. All of these Sufi orders traced their lineage, or chain of transmission, back through the Shi'ite Imams to Ali and his secret teachings from Mohammed himself. The exception is the 14th century Naqshbandi order, which traces its lineage to Abu Beker, the first Caliph. As the Sufi movement grew, the more political Shi'ites almost succeeded in conquering the Moslem world.

After the first wave of Arab conquest swept over North Africa, its provinces soon became independent kingdoms. By the 10th century, three great Islamic kingdoms ruled in North Africa, the Idrisid dynasty in Morocco, the Aghlabid in Libya and the Tulunid in Egypt. In the first decade of the 10th century, a Shi'ite adventurer, Abu Abdallah, gained a following in Libya and Tunisia by preaching the early advent of the Maudi, the Shi'ite savior or world ruler. Within a few years, Abdallah overthrew the Aghlabid dynasty and to fulfill his claims invited a descendent of the Prophet, Obeidallah ibn Mohammed, to become King. Since Obeidallah was a descendent of Fatima's, the new dynasty called itself Fatimid.

Under the Fatimids, North Africa regained a wealth and prosperity that it had not seen since the days of Carthage and Republican Rome. Trade routes crossed the Sahara to Lake Chad and Timbuctu in central Africa. After the Fatimids conquered Egypt in 969 CE, the Sudan and Abyssinia were integrated into the Islamic trading network. Egypt became the commercial link between Europe and Asia. By the early 11th century, the Fatimid Caliph, ruling from Cairo, controlled two thirds of the Moslem world, from Fez in Morocco to Damascus in Syria.

The Fatimid mosques of Cairo provide important link, both architecturally and spiritually, to the Gothic cathedrals of Europe. The mosque of Ibn Tulun, begun before the Fatimid conquest, combines pointed arches and vaulting with rosette stained glass windows in stellar and geometrical patterns. This impulse reaches its high point with the Al-Azhar mosque.

Built between 970 and 972 by Jauhar, the converted Christian slave who conquered Egypt for the Fatimids, the Al-Azhar mosque (which means the Brilliant or the Illuminated from a similar root to the Hebrew word bahir, brilliance or illumination) contains the pointed arches and vaulting, supported by 380 pillars of marble, granite and porphyry, used in the Ibn Tulun mosque. It is also famous for its stained glass designs. The reds and blues used in the Al-Azhar mosque were duplicated in the great cathedrals of Europe, but never equaled for their depth and purity of color.

In 988, Al-Azhar mosque became the world's first university. The Caliph Aziz provided tuition and maintenance for thirty-five scholars. As this madrasah, or school, developed, it

drew students from all over the Moslem world. It continues to this day with thousands of students and hundreds of teachers. Its influence on the course of history would be profound, especially that of Medieval Europe.

Al-Azhar's most important contribution is the Moslem scientist known to the west as Alhazen. Mohammed ibn al-Haithan was a mathematician and engineer, a sort of Fatimid Leonardo, whose most important work is a book on optics that anticipates the telescope. Roger Bacon quotes his work extensively, as does Kepler and even Leonardo daVinci. We could hardly exaggerate the importance of al-Haithan, without him much of modern astronomy would never have been discovered.

Attached to the Al-Azhar mosque was the Dar al-Hikmah, or the Hall of Wisdom, where Shi'ite theology was studied alongside medicine and astronomy. Ali ibn Yunus, perhaps the greatest of Moslem astronomers, worked in the observatory of the Hall of Wisdom for 17 years compiling the first accurate tables of planetary cycles, the inclination of the ecliptic, and the precession of the equinoxes. These are all astronomical preoccupations suggested by the Bahir and the Sepher Yetzirah, and provide the key to understanding the great cycles of time.

As the Fatimid Dynasty spread, it propped up its power by gathering all of the Shi'ite sects into one grand lodge of Cairo. This vast semi-secret society was held together by complex initiations and hierarchical degrees and its members were used for political espionage and intrigue. The forms of the order, as we will see in the next section, strongly influenced the rituals and organization of the Templars. It is possible that much of western esotericism and its secret societies originated with the "Illuminated Mosque" and its Hall of Wisdom.

Mohammed's revelation transformed a nomadic and barbarian culture into a world-class civilization. The power of that revelation, as we saw above, came from its ancient roots in the astrological magick of Abraham. With the Kaaba of Meccah as its focus, Islam managed to hold onto its ancient wisdom and even, as we will see next, transmit it to the spiritually bankrupt west. The Crusaders came looking for conquests and kingdoms. They found both, but they also discovered the secret mysteries of the alchemy of time. Because of this, Europe enjoyed an unparalleled spiritual renaissance, the era of the Gothic cathedrals.

Chapter Ten

Having examined the first thousand years of alchemy's history, it's time to take stock of what we have discovered. The earliest surviving alchemical texts all have pre-Christian Gnostic associations. The Emerald Tablet inclines toward Greco-Egyptian Gnosticism as its source, while the "Isis the Prophetess" story suggests an Egypto-Hebraic origin. The connection point is ancient Egypt.

Zosimus informed us that alchemy derived from the wisdom of the pre-catastrophe offspring of semi-divine beings and humans. In ancient Egypt, these beings were known as the Hru Shemsu, or the Company of Horus, the Follower's of the Widow's Son. The "Isis the Prophetess" story is our last unitary text of the ancient wisdom. In it, we can identify the major alchemical themes and preoccupations of the next two thousands years, which can be expressed simplistically as the triple transformation. Alchemy, as "Isis the Prophetess" tells us, is composed of an interior, psycho-sexual transformation, an exterior elemental transformation of matter and a transformation of time itself.

In the collapse of the ancient world, this unitary view of alchemy fragmented into several parallel currents. The physical transformative process was seen as separate and became confused with metallurgical and proto-chemical trickery. The internal transformation became the basis for the experiential mysticism, or gnosticism, of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. The secret of the transformation of time, the advent of the kingdom of heaven, became the inner core of early Christianity. Unfortunately, this vision was co-opted and debased by the Imperial Church into an on-going apocalypse against heretics. In Judaism, the secret of time was intimately intertwined with the work of creation, the ability to

animate matter. As we saw in the Bahir, Jewish mysticism retained intact a major portion of the secret.

With Islam, the split began to widen even further. The secret of time, which lay at the core of Mohammed's revelation, was retained as a family secret among the descendants of the Prophet. The internal transformative processes became the mystical practices of the Sufis, while the external transformation of the elements became one of the cornerstones of Islamic science, along with medicine, astronomy and mathematics. Within Islam, threads of all three transformative processes can be found, but never as one unitary system.

By the later half of the 10th century, this separation had reached a kind of maximum dispersion. The secrets of the Bahir were known only to a few small groups of Jewish mystics, mostly in Spain and Palestine. The Islamic mystics were just forming the early Sufi orders, while the Shi'ite owners of the inner secret were trying to conquer the Islamic world. Christianity of course had persecuted its alchemists and Gnostics out of existence, leaving a shroud of darkness over the entire 700 year period from the fall of Rome to the Crusades. Learning in the west sank to a level little above superstition. Such scholars as there were, Pope Gregory the Great (490-504) for instance, dwelt mainly on ecclesiastical matters with an amazing credulity for tales of marvels, miracles and the possession of man by demons. Beyond such writings, there were only confused compilations from fragments of classical authors, variously and often wrongly ascribed. These were the crumbs of ancient wisdom that nourished that dark and arid age.

This sad state of affairs began to change when the Moslem Arabs and Moors entered Spain from North Africa in the 8th century. Islam, seemingly endowed with an insatiable curiosity for foreign learning and guided by a truly Oriental imagination which contrasted sharply with the passive intellectualism of the west, revitalized the civilization of the territories it conquered. Europe was saved from this fate by Charlemagne's grandfather, Charles the Hammer, at the battle of Tours in 732. But Spain became a Moslem stronghold.

In the centuries that followed the Arab rise to world power status, its leaders, caliphs and sultans and generals, exhibited a great interest in learning and arranged for the literature of the conquered areas to be translated into Arabic. Much of the ancient wisdom was preserved in these Arabic translations. The writings of Aristotle, Archimedes, Appolonius, Euclid, Hippocrates and Galen were all saved for the west, where the knowledge had disappeared, by these Arabic collections. It was also through these Arabic sources that knowledge of alchemy was re-introduced to the west.

We have already mentioned Jabir, an 8th century collector and interpreter of Gnostic alchemical texts, but of perhaps even more significance is the treatment given to the Hermetic arts in the great 10th century Arabic encyclopedia, Kitab-Fihirst. Several pages are devoted to various Hermetic subjects, including mentions of the Egyptian Chemes, the pre-catastrophe founder of alchemy, Hermes Trismegistos, Mary the Jewess, Cleopatra and Stephan of Alexandria. The Arabs, at the close of the 10th century, created a perspective on alchemy that colored its subsequent development down to the 20th century.

Moslem Spain served as the transmission point between Islam and Christianity. As the tide of conquest receded, pockets of Christianity remained and slowly formed into Christian kingdoms. Along with the religious and political struggles, this close contact provided a convenient means of communication. After the Fatimids conquered North Africa in the 10th century, Arab Spain found itself even more isolated from the centers of Moslem life. The Spanish caliphs of the late 10th and early 11th centuries were concerned with staying even with or ahead of their Fatimid rivals, particularly in terms of culture and learning. It was from Spain, then, that Europe drew the energy and knowledge needed to re-animate its civilization.

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Largely as the result of the efforts of one individual, Pope Sylvester II, by the early years of the 11th century things had begun to change. Fueled in part by the apocalyptic yearnings centered around the thousand year anniversary of Christ's death (popularized by Sylvester's

student, Rodolphus Glaber), the Christian west began to stir itself. The Church of Rome tried a few reforms, driven by the new and growing monastic and Peace of God movements. But most significant of all, waves of pilgrims took the long and dusty road to Jerusalem. Pilgrimage, journeys of repentance and spiritual seeking, had long been an important part of popular Christianity. But, before the middle of the 11th century, pilgrimages to the Holy Land were rare. Starting around the magical year of 1033 (one thousand years after Christ's death) and continuing in an ever-increasing wave for the next 40 years, Jerusalem became the pilgrimage destination of choice. In 1071, the Seljuk Turks conquered Palestine, wrenching the Holy Land from the control of the Egyptian Fatamids who were sympathetic to the Christian pilgrims. The Turks however, were not so accommodating. By the early 1080's, pilgrimage to Jerusalem had all but stopped. The few pilgrims that were allowed to visit the Holy City were harassed, robbed and generally treated as unwanted outsiders. Most authorities tell us that this was the motivating factor behind the crusading movement that would burst over Europe after Pope Urban II's call in 1095. The pilgrim impulse, by some sort of religious transformation, turned into a Holy War. While there is a core of truth in this simplification, the real causes of the First Crusade are shrouded by the secrecy of deep political intrigue. From our thousand year distance, these shadows are almost impenetrable. However, like the sudden appearance of a star through the murk of a cloudy midnight, certain events and personalities shed an uncertain light on the outlines of the Crusades' political intrigues.

The most important of these events were the political conjunctions between east and west begun by the Pope, the Emperor and the Caliph one hundred years before the First Crusade was announced. While it is true that the First Crusade was a pilgrim movement with Jerusalem as its focus, it was also much more. It was part of a vast plan conceived and carried out by a group of secret societies for the purpose of creating a world state in the Holy Land and thereby bring on the Chilaist millennium of peace.

At the core of all the intrigue, the secret at the heart of the secret societies, lies alchemy. The Arab scholars and scientists had preserved the ideas and some of the basic texts, but the re-discovery of the secret of how to make it work was the main result of the First Crusade's conquest of Jerusalem. To tell this deeply hidden story we must go back a few hundred years and trace the tale of the Emperor, the Pope and the Caliph and the true origins of the crusades.

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The political and religious processes that led to the First Crusade actually began three hundred years before, with the rise of the Ismaili sect of Shi'ite Moslems. Within the Shi'ite community, each generation of Ali's descendants was headed by an Imam, or incarnation, who was the holder of the family secret, the secret of time at the heart of Mohammed's revelations. In the mid-eighth century, the sixth Imam, Jafar al-Sadiq, appointed his son Ismail to succeed him. Ismail however was not saintly enough (he reportedly had a taste for wine), and his father rescinded his appointment and named his other son Musa as Imam. To some, this was unacceptable. They believed that once an Imam always an Imam, and therefore Ismail was the seventh and last true Imam of the Shi'ites or adherents of the family of the Prophet. For a hundred years after the break, the Ismailis remained a marginal sect of the Shi'ites. But around the middle of the ninth century, Abdallah ibn Qaddah became the leader of the group and instituted far reaching changes. He sent missionaries throughout the Moslem world preaching the doctrine of the "Sevensers" as they were called. These missionaries were also members of a secret society. Abdallah had organized the Ismailis into a grand lodge, with nine levels of initiation, called veils, leading up to the Secret Doctrine, or the Talim. (Note that this title for the secret knowledge is from the same root as talah and Teli, and literally means "suspended," or "hanging from.") The initiate swore an oath of secrecy and absolute obedience to the Dai-d-Duat, or Grand Master of the sect and was told that attaining the ninth degree of initiation would render him above all creeds and laws. The eighth degree taught that nothing could be

known of the supreme being and that no worship of such an exalted entity was possible. From this we can speculate that the ninth degree revealed the inner secret of time and the Teli, or dragon-axis of the universe.

Abu Abdallah, the founder of the Fatimid Dynasty, was a member of the Ismaili secret society, and the inner teachings of the Seveners became the core of the Fatimid Grand Lodge of Cairo. While the Fatimids consolidated their control over North Africa and Egypt, another Ismaili group seized power in Iran with the intention of re-creating the Persian Empire along Ismaili lines. This movement burned itself out by the mid 10th century, but not before it had conquered Meccah and carried off the Black Stone itself. The Stone was presented to the Fatimid Caliph al-Mansur, who restored it to the Kaaba in 951.

After this, the Fatimids rose swiftly to dominate the Moslem world, conquering Egypt and Palestine and threatening Syria. As their power grew, the Fatimids increasingly turned to mysticism, science and the secret tradition for guidance. The late 10th century saw the founding of Al-Azhar Mosque and its Hall of Wisdom. The Fatimid astronomers were the most accomplished of their day. Alhazen may in fact have secretly invented the telescope. He certainly knew the optics required for such a construction, and his charts on the movements of the planets, the inclination of the ecliptic and the precession of the equinoxes remained invaluable down to the re-discovery of the telescope in the 17th century. Part of this knowledge could have been derived from the secret tradition of the Ismaili Shi'ites.

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As the Fatimid influence spread in the 10th and 11th centuries, some of this knowledge began to reach Europe through the schools of Moslem Spain, where science and civilization had reached a level that was almost unimaginable by European standards. The best minds of Europe traveled to Spain to study everything from music to medicine to astronomy. One such student, Gerbert of Aurillac, the future Pope Sylvester II, shines out of the murk of the Dark Ages. It was Gerbert's efforts that almost single-handedly pulled the Christian west out of its dark age stupor.

Gerbert's life is an example of how a poor intellectual prodigy could rise to the very top of early medieval society. He was born around 940 in Auvergne and at an early age entered the nearby monastery of Aurillac. At the abbot's insistence, Gerbert was sent to Spain to study mathematics.

Spain at this time, the mid-960's, was at the peak of its civilization. The Caliph Hakam II, son of the triumphant Abd-er-Rahman who forged Moslem Spain into a world power, surpassed every one of his predecessors in the love of literature and the sciences, we are told by the Moslem historian al-Maqqari. He turned all Andaluz, Moslem Spain, into a market where the wisdom and learning of the whole ancient and medieval world could be found. It was into this environment that the young prodigy, Gerbert of Aurillac found himself submerged.

He must have done very well indeed, because we find Count Borel of Barcelona introducing him to the Pope in 970. Pope John XIII, one of the few Popes of the period who seemed sincere and managed to die of old age instead of assassination, was so impressed by Gerbert's erudition that he recommended him to the up and coming world political power, Otto I, Emperor of the Roman West, and the Charlemagne of Germany.

To discuss the political history of the west from the Fall of Rome to the Crusades would make this already overlong narrative collapse of its own weight. From the point of view of our exploration of alchemy, the Dark Ages are truly dark. However, the fall of Rome and the subsequent events in Europe do effect our examination of the end of the world.

After Constantine, it was no longer heretical for Christians to look to a World Ruler as the divine solution to political problems. The Empire of Rome became the Kingdom of God, officially, and this required a shift in the myth of the apocalypse as presented by John's Revelation. This was supplied by the retro-prophecy of the various Sibyls. These Sybilline Oracles, popular from the 4th through the 10th century -- some having an influence all the way down to Nostradamus in the 16th century -- introduced a brand new apocalypse myth,

that of the Emperor of the Last Days. In this view, the world would last as long as the Empire did, therefore the world needed an Emperor to exist.

Charlemagne, at the turn of the 8th and 9th centuries, was the first of the formerly barbarian leaders to play this card. With the fraudulent "Donation of Constantine," which supposedly invested the Church of Rome with the power to appoint an Emperor, the Church and the State entered into an uneasy alliance that would effect European politics and society for half a millennium. It was this dynamic that allowed Gerbert to move so smoothly into the highest ranks of power after meeting the King of Germany and the new Holy Roman Emperor of the West, Otto I.

Various treaties in the 9th century had made Ludwig, a grandson of Charlemagne, the first king of Germany and defined its boundaries as the territory between the Rhine and the Elbe, with a few extra morsels around the edges. After 70 years of discord, Otto I, a true scion of Charlemagne in looks and temperament, became the King of Germany. At his coronation, Otto surrounded himself with the nobility of the neighboring countries, creating at the very beginning of his reign a sense of trans-national importance. No wonder he soon began to see himself as the restorer of the western Empire.

In the first 15 years of his reign, Otto strove by any means possible, from war to murder to marriage, to accomplish this goal. In 962, Pope John XII crowned Otto as the Holy Roman Emperor of the West. Within a year of his becoming Emperor, Otto had marched into Italy and made it a part of the new Holy Roman Empire, which was of course, a mere appendage of the German Crown. This was the new world power to whom the young and scholarly Gerbert was introduced in 970.

For the next 33 years, Gerbert would be the spiritual advisor and mentor to all three Otto's. His vast learning and command of all three diplomatic languages of his day, Latin (which he wrote with an elegance not seen since Sidonius in the fifth century) Greek and Arabic, made him invaluable in the diplomatic intrigues of the new Imperial court. From the mid-970's to his death in 1003, Gerbert would remain at the center of the changes sweeping through the west.

During the year he served as tutor to the young Otto II, Gerbert also helped Otto I arrange a marriage between the Greek Emperor's daughter, Theophano, and his student. This would make their son, the future Otto III, the heir of both halves of the old Roman Empire. This was the first of many such ventures into power politics by Gerbert. It may have been Otto I who was dreaming of a united Roman world, but Gerbert would come to dream of bigger things.

Hard on the heels of the successful conclusion of the marriage negotiations and the wedding, Gerbert was dispatched, at his own request, to Rheims, the ancient and royal cathedral town of Charlemagne, where every King of France (from Clovis I in the 5th century to Louis XVI in the 18th) was crowned. Soon after his arrival, he was appointed head of the cathedral's school by Otto II in appreciation for his diplomatic efforts. He held this post for a decade, and during that time he collected manuscripts from around the world, wrote works on the astrolabe, Arabic astronomy, and geometry.

Gerbert was instrumental in beginning what would become known after his death as the Peace of God movement, and wrote to other scholars and prelates in the late 970's discussing how to limit warfare and bring peace to Christendom. Working with the Archbishop of Rheims, Adalbero, Gerbert organized a series of church conferences in the 980's which instituted a Truce of God type arrangement. War was permitted only on certain days and only under strict conditions. The peasantry, which suffered the most from feudal warfare, enthusiastically embraced the concept.

Gerbert left his post as master of the cathedral school at Rheims in 982 to work full time on the peace movement. During this period we also find him writing letters to various other cathedral schools promoting the development of libraries and encouraging the addition of Greek and mathematics to the curriculum. But Gerbert's opportunity to return to power politics arrived in 987 with the death of the last Carolingian king of France, Louis V. The

unhappy Louis left no heirs, so the choice was between Charles of Lorraine, Louis' brother and a distant off-shoot of the Carolingian line, and the best candidate from the previous dynasty, the Merovingians.

This obscure Dark Age dynasty was made famous by the speculations in Holy Blood, Holy Grail that it was in fact founded by the descendants of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. There is enough evidence in support of this contention to make us wonder just how their contemporaries saw them.

Medieval tradition reports that the Merovingians had a supernatural origin. Gregory of Tours, the foremost Frankish historian, tells us that Merovee, the founder of the dynasty, was the son of two fathers. The first king of the Franks, Chlodio, was one father. The other was a strange sea creature, "similar to a Quinotaur" according to Gregory of Tours, who impregnated his mother while she was out bathing in the ocean. From this, he was given the name Merovee, "son of the sea." Merovee is also "son of the mother" and "son of Mary." Strange titles for a barbarian and pagan king. His son Clovis I became ruler over a united Gaul and eventually, after much prayer on the part of the hermit monk St. Remy, converted to orthodox Christianity. This alliance helped stabilize the western church. For 250 years, the Merovingians ruled as a kind of priest-king, strangely above and exempt from the censure of the church it supported. The actual government was handled by their "mayors of the palace." In the end, it was one of these Mayors, Charlemagne's great grandfather, Pepin the Short, who finished off the main line of the Merovingian dynasty.

But other Merovingian lines had survived, most prominently that of Neustria, the Merovingian kingdom that included Rheims and Paris. Descendants of the Merovingian kings had remained in control of the region as its Dukes and even as the Mayor of Paris. It was almost inevitable that when the Carolingian line died out that the kingship would revert to a descendent line of the Merovingians.

This issue was decided by a church council called by the Archbishop of Rheims, and organized by Gerbert of Aurillac. Gerbert may in fact have done the research to prove Hugh Capet's claim to Merovingian ancestry. The council found that Hugh Capet's family were indeed descendants of the last King of Neustria, and therefore unanimously elected him the new King of France. Archbishop Adalbero, in announcing the decision, proclaimed that Hugh should be king not just because Charles was "neither honorable nor strong," but because only Hugh could restore the rightful balance between the king, the land and the people. "If you wish ill to our country," Adalbero preached, "choose Charles. If you wish prosperity, choose Hugh. . ."

And the council chose Hugh. He immediately consolidated his authority by making his son co-ruler, thereby insuring the continuity of power in case something unfortunate should happen to him. Hugh Capet was not only of the right bloodline, but he was also wise to the ways of politics in the 10th century.

The next year Adalbero died and Gerbert rightly believed that he should be his successor as Archbishop of Rheims. Hugh Capet, ever the politician, gave the Archbishop's post to Arnulf, a bastard son of the Carolingian line. Hugh meant no insult, it was just politics. However, it was politics that backfired. Arnulf plotted against Hugh, and in 991, a French church council deposed him and put Gerbert in his place.

For the next four years, Gerbert used his position as the Archbishop of Rheims to support the growth of the peace movement. He also founded a variety of clerical orders -- known collectively as the Chroniclers, or the chronicling orders -- and libraries in places far distant from Rheims, including Provence, Aquitaine, Lorraine and Calabria in northern Italy. During this time however, the French church was fighting a fierce internal war with the current Pope, John XV, over the right to depose an Archbishop.

Faced with excommunication over the issue, Gerbert stepped down from the Archbishop's post, and moved from Rheims to join the young Otto III's emerging court in Germany. In 996, Otto III reached his majority and took over the government, with Gerbert of Aurillac by his side. John XV, in trouble as the Pope almost always was in those years with the Roman

nobles, appealed to Otto III for help. Otto marched south from Germany, but at Pavia, in northern Italy, word reached him that John XV had died. Otto, not thinking much of the Papacy at that point, appointed his cousin, a chaplain named Bruno, to be Pope Gregory V. Gregory V was a young idealist committed to reforming the church, and in his brief two and half year reign as Pope of Rome he tried his best. Unfortunately, pious Gregory was not as politically astute as Hugh Capet, and his chief rivals, the patrician Roman "mafia" of the day survived with hardly a disruption of their power base. (There really is no other way to refer to the strong arm tactics and ethic of personal power that animated the "republican" nobles who really controlled Rome in the absence of an Imperial army.)

As soon as Otto III departed, Crescentius, the Godfather of the Romans, threw Gregory V out and went looking for an anti-Pope. Unfortunately for the Godfather, he settled on a Greek Bishop named Philagathus. It seems that Philagathus, a career diplomat/spy, had just arrived in Rome from a trip to Constantinople to arrange a Greek marriage for Otto III. Crescentius was attempting an end-run around Otto III's cherished dream of reuniting the Empire, a very dangerous thing to do, as it turned out.

This time when he returned to Rome, Otto was mad. A considerable blood bath ensued. Philagathus was caught, blinded, mutilated and then paraded through Rome on an ass. Crescentius and the twelve heads of the Roman mob fortified Saint Angelo's, which was then taken by an assault. All the defenders died, creating a vast Roman underworld power vacuum. Otto III proposed to fill it by permanently moving his capital to Rome.

Gregory V died suddenly the next year, 999, and it was inevitable that Gerbert would succeed him. Gerbert had the support of the Emperor, on the spot with his troops, as well as that of the Abbot of Cluny, the leading force in both the reform movement and the peace of God movement. Gerbert saw this as the fulfillment of a long held dream and fully supported his young protégé in his Imperial designs. He became Pope Sylvester II, taking the name of Constantine's Pope to emphasize the similarity between the two Emperors. With the Emperor's support, Gerbert, or Pope Sylvester as we will now call him, plunged into a whirlwind of far reaching negotiations. He expanded the reach of the Catholic church into eastern Europe, adding the area of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary by creating Archbishops and converting Kings. Vajk, the Magyar King of Hungary, was baptized as King Stephen, and eventually became a saint. For this, Sylvester sent him a Holy Crown to symbolize his Christian kingship.

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In addition to converting Eastern Europe (perhaps as a bulwark against the press of Asiatic refugees, Jews, Kazars, Turks and so on, being pushed westward out ahead of the early Tibetan/Mongolian invasions), Sylvester was also interested in converting Islam. With that in mind, he made a diplomatic contact with the Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim, in the year 1000 (which is, in the Jewish calendars, year 1311 of the Seleucid Era, 932 Huban or years since the destruction of the Temple, and 4760 Anno Mundi or years of the world since creation; in the Moslem calendar, it is 391 years after the Hajira from Meccah to Medina).

The early Fatimid Caliphs became fabulously wealthy after conquering Egypt in the later half of the 10th century. Al-Hakim ibn Aziz, who became Caliph in 996, the same year Otto III became Emperor, inherited his wealth and power. In the end it was perhaps, along with other pressures, more than he could bear. He went mad, declared himself a god, and died, disappeared or was assassinated some time after 1021. But during his reign, far reaching changes occurred.

Al-Hakim supported the Al-Ahazar mosque and its growing university. He founded the Hall of Wisdom, hired Mohammed ibn al-Haitham, the probable inventor of the telescope, and helped Ali ibn Yunus publish his astronomical tables. As much as diplomacy, it was these subjects that Sylvester wanted to discuss. Al-Hakim, a ninth degree Ismaili initiate, might just have had something to share with the brilliant Pope.

Sylvester arranged with the Fatimid Caliph, in 1001, for a group of clerics and knights from his various chronicling orders to make an expedition to Syria and the Holy Land. Various

historians have from time to time pointed to this as the first wave of Crusaders, and just as quickly remarked on their lack of aggressive zeal. Pope Sylvester's Chroniclers, we are told in a 12th century Papal sermon by John XIX (a Roman mafia pawn), disappeared without accomplishing anything, except to serve as vassals of the Caliph. Implying of course that they converted to Islam.

Al-Maqqari, the foremost Moslem historian of the 12th century, tells us that al-Hakim greeted the Pope's entourage with honor and spent many weeks in Jerusalem discussing the virtues of Islam versus Christianity with them. He was so impressed by their sincerity that the Caliph gave them, in 1002, the use of a Byzantine Greek church on the outskirts of Jerusalem for their chapter house and library. Unfortunately, al-Maqqari doesn't name the entourage or the location of their order, merely that they were there as chroniclers or historians.

These were hardly Crusaders. The Moslem authorities do not record that they converted to Islam, but that al-Hakim honored them as Christians. They came not to conquer Jerusalem but to do research. We can only speculate on what.

By the time his delegation had established itself in Jerusalem, Sylvester himself had been forced out of Rome by the old problem of political terrorism. From northern Italy, Sylvester and Otto III struggled with a crumbling political situation. In 1003, they both, within a few months of the other, died under suspicious circumstances. The dream of a united Roman Empire, as some kind of universal world state, appeared to die with them.

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But in fact, it merely went underground for a few generations. To see this, we must look at Sylvester's legacy and his legend. Combining these perspectives allows us to glimpse the outlines of a far reaching plan and even to note the shuffling of ideas and events behind the official explanations. Sylvester died before the plan began to bear fruit, but the harvest would eventually bring a Christian King of Merovingian descent to the throne of Jerusalem. The most significant of Sylvester's legacies was the Peace of God movement which would inspire both the First Crusade and the newly emerging popular heresies, such as the Cathars and the Bogomils. Church councils and lay preachers spread the idea throughout the west in the century after Sylvester's death, preparing the way for the call to crusade. Both the Peasant's Crusade and its leader, Peter the Hermit, had their origins in the Peace of God movement. Peter the Hermit, as we will examine in the next chapter, may in fact have had connections with Sylvester's shadowy group of monks and chroniclers.

One of these monks, Richer of the Order of St. Remy (the saint who converted Clovis I to Christianity) has left us a portrait of Sylvester's teachings that contain the spark of the legend. Richer tells us, among a list of Gerbert's accomplishments, that he had long studied the Hermetic arts. From this remark grew the legend of an alchemist Pope.

One of the most persistent stories, first told in the 13th century, has Gerbert, while still Archbishop of Rheims, constructing a magickal bronze "head" that foretells the future. The "head" of course announces that Gerbert will indeed be Pope, which, considering his shaky position as Archbishop, was a bold prediction. A similar story of a bronze head would be told about other medieval magicians, including Roger Bacon and Albertus Magnus. It also suggests, in an indirect way, the "head" the Templars were supposed to have worshipped, the mysterious Baphomet.

These similarities are not accidents, but glimpses of the design behind the symbols. Richer, in his Histories, gives us the clue. In the sentence after he mentions Gerbert's Hermetic accomplishments, Richer informs us that Gerbert had also designed an armillary sphere with which he could determine the location of the sun and the planets in relation to the celestial sphere. Interestingly enough, the earth in this model was round, five hundred years before Columbus.

Later, as Pope, Sylvester designed and commissioned a new armillary sphere incorporating the information in Ali ibn Yunus' tables. The new sphere showed the plane of the ecliptic, the milky way, and the ecliptic and planetary poles. It was, in simple terms, a bronze

machine for calculating the secret of time, alchemy's third and most important component. In symbolic terms, this became the "head" possessed by all famed students of the art in the middle ages.

The mysterious name of the Templar's "head," to briefly jump ahead of our story, confirms this assumption. Baphomet, in Arabic, Aramaic and Hebrew, is simply "bet' amet," or "place of truth." The root ba or bet is the same as the ba in Baal, and can signify a house, a place, or the action of filling space. The "place of truth" used as a title could well be meant to signify the space filling "house" of the celestial sphere and the truth of its temporal indicators. Over time, the simple phrase became a code word for the secret itself. The Templars did not worship their bronze head, they meditated on it and studied it closely for clues about the secret of time and the timing of their alchemical processes.

Another of Sylvester's chronicling monks, Rodolphus Glaber, jump started the pilgrimage movement with his fanciful account of the millenarian activities surrounding the year 1033, the one thousandth anniversary of Christ's death. While not completely true, we might call it propaganda today, Glaber's tale of cosmic portents and massive pilgrimages to Jerusalem gave voice to the anxieties of its age. A great desire arose in all classes of society to participate in the on-coming millennium, not just wait passively for its arrival. It was this feeling that animated the First Crusade. Conquering Jerusalem brought the millennium one step closer.

As Sylvester's legacy and his legend intermingle, we begin to see the outlines of the great plan. Looking back, we can discern, through the mists of obscurity, the thread of meaning behind the events of Gerbert's life and the hectic activity of his Papacy. Having sorted through the historical record, we must now venture into interpretation for a more complete understanding.

Gerbert studied in Spain and absorbed there his ideas on mathematics, astronomy and geometry, subjects required for an understanding of the secret of time. Something he learned, either in Spain or during his negotiations with the Greek Emperor's courtiers, led him to choose Rheims as his homebase. The importance of the ancient town of Rheims lies in its association with St. Remy and Clovis I, its connection that is with the ancient Merovingian rites of kingship. While at Rheims, Gerbert orchestrated the transfer of royal power from the Carolingian usurpers back to the rightful line of kings, the mysterious Merovingians. The dynasty he initiated, and its collateral branches, would rule France down to the French Revolution.

It is possible that Gerbert, while researching Hugh Capet's claim, discovered the evidence uncovered by the authors of Holy Blood, Holy Grail and came to believe that the Merovingian line were the descendants of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Any evidence that did exist would have been preserved among the records of the cathedral at Rheims, where Gerbert would certainly have found them. Possession of this kind of volatile information goes a long way toward explaining the animosity of the Roman Church against Gerbert as Archbishop of Rheims.

Gerbert however used his time as Archbishop in founding libraries and clerical orders devoted to history, genealogy and chronicling. This activity increased after he became Pope and resulted in the so-called first wave of the Crusades, the group of chroniclers welcomed in Jerusalem by al-Hakim. From this perspective, it is not too hard to imagine what they were there to research. Nothing less, we can suppose with some confidence, than the genealogy of Jesus and Mary Magdalene.

As important as this kind of information would have been, there is still more to the story. The Holy Roman Empire of Otto III, who we must remember had a valid claim to be Emperor of both West and East, was poised on the edge of becoming a world state. Something more than the bloodline of Christ was at stake.

The Merovingians, from the earliest kings, had a reputation for wealth that was all out of proportion to their political situation. The grave goods of Childric I, found at Sutton Hoo, are lavish and mostly made from solid gold. Three hundred golden bees were found in his

grave, all exquisitely sculpted of pure gold. Napoleon, in the 19th century, had them sewn on his coronation robe as a sign of power and authority.

The key is of course alchemy. The early Merovingian priest-kings understood the secret, the triple transformation of the alchemical process, and could make it work. Merovee, son of two fathers, did much more than found a dynasty. He received, from his spiritual father across the sea, the secret of the triple transformation. If he was indeed "the son of Mary," that is Mary Magdalene's descendent, then the secret of alchemy might just have been a family inheritance. Merovee passed the secret to Clovis, his son, who became instantly and fabulously wealthy. Inside of a generation, the Merovingians controlled most of France and western Germany.

The secret was lost after a few generations, and the priest-kings succumbed to the more vigorous Mayors of the Palace, the Carolingians. Gerbert, uncovering the secrets of the Merovingians would also have uncovered the hints as to its alchemical wealth. From his Arabic studies, Gerbert would have known enough of the secret to realize the importance of the Merovingian connection. Hence his obsession with chroniclers and histories. He was searching for the rest of the puzzle.

It is just possible that he found it when he made contact with the Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim. Not only was al-Hakim an Ismaili initiate with the world's finest observatory and astronomical tables at his disposal, but he may in fact have had an actual piece of the secret.

When we began our research into alchemy and the end of the world, we were amazed to find so many connections to Arabic and Sufi sources, specifically those of the Shi'ite Fatimids and Ismailis. We knew that the Arab scholars had preserved most of the ancient alchemical texts, but somehow, the secret was missing from these works. As we probed deeper into the secrets of the triple transformation, and the secret of time, we realized that the Shi'ites and the Ismailis did indeed have the missing piece.

Mohammed had taught his son-in-law the secret of time, and most importantly, the secret of the timing of the Day of Judgment, the end of the world. The Shi'ites were not alchemists, they used the information as a means of provoking the inner transformation. The Ismailis turned this into a teachable system of grades within a lodge based order. But something was still missing.

And then we noticed an obscure fact. The only time the Black Stone was ever removed from the Kaaba was the work of the Iranian Ismailis in the mid 10th century. The Stone was presented to the Fatimid Caliph of North Africa, Al-Mansur, great-grandfather of al-Hakim, who returned at least a portion of it to the Kaaba in 951.

Our research into the Bahir and the early history of the Kaaba had shown us how significant the Black Stone was to the Abrahamic mysteries of animating matter. As the stone that fell from heaven, it seemed almost a model for the Philosopher's Stone described in the Emerald Tablet. A philosopher's stone in Meccah and one in the hands of a Fatimid Ismaili Caliph are two different things, and we were struck by the connection.

The world state of Otto III and Sylvester may have been intended to include the marriage of all the royal and spiritual traditions into one Empire based on Jerusalem and financed by alchemy. Since none of the separate players, the Pope, the Emperor or the Caliph had the complete secret, co-operation was required. Before it was accomplished, two of the three principles died under mysterious circumstances.

This left the Caliph holding the bag, or perhaps more correctly, the stone. Al-Hakim sank deeper into his mystical funk and in the year 400 of the Moslem calendar, 1009 in the west, he declared that he had achieved godhood. From this exalted status he took revenge on the Christians and the Jews for their perfidy and betrayals by destroying the churches and synagogues in Fatimid territory. He ruled for 12 more years as a living god and then died or disappeared in 1021, leaving the Fatimid empire in chaos. From the bare facts, we can infer that al-Hakim carried a secret that was much too large for him.

The tale of the Pope, the Emperor and the Caliph remains hidden among the debris strewn by a thousand years of secrecy and internal strife among the holders of various pieces of the secret. Pope Sylvester started a ball rolling that, in a few hundred years, would change beyond recognition the face of European culture. The Crusades opened the east directly to the west, and the hand of Sylvester's design played a part in all of it. Without Sylvester, there might never have been a Crusade. And, without Sylvester's Fatimid connections and his chroniclers in Jerusalem, there would certainly never have been an Order of the Knights of the Temple.

The Templars are the point where the deep politics started by the alchemist Pope surfaced into the historical record. The history of the Templars, particularly their mysterious origins and their unaccounted for wealth, provides a myriad of suggestive connections. Without the Templars, there wouldn't have been any cathedral building movement, or the money to pay for it. From the point of view of our research, without the Templars, there might not have been any such thing as alchemy to investigate.

Chapter Eleven

Our word crusade comes from the Spanish word *crusada*, meaning "marked with the cross." The Crusaders were indeed marked by the cross in more than just the design emblazoned on their tunics. They were inflamed by a new vision of Christianity, one in which there was work to do. The kind of work the semi-barbarian kings of the west understood best, warfare. The First Crusade stands as a kind of human monument to belief in the end of the world.

Sylvester and Otto III had tried to build a new unified world state from the fragments of the ancient world. They saw this state, which perhaps was meant to include the Fatimids as well, as a bulwark against the rising tide of barbarian Asiatics. In central Europe, these refugees appeared as Kazars and Jews, in Asia Minor, they were known as the Seljuk Turks. These migratory pressures threatened the Eastern Empire at Constantinople as well the Fatimid control of Palestine. The western Empire, reviving under Otto III and Sylvester, created the Christian kingdoms of eastern Europe, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, as a barrier to further invasions from the east.

United, the three parts of the early medieval world, the two Romes and the Fatimids, could have resisted not just the pressure of the Turks but that of the later Mongol invasions. As it happened however, the Seljuk Turks conquered Palestine in 1071 and threatened the stability of the entire world when they turned on Constantinople. After a disastrous defeat, the Eastern Empire made a humiliating peace and was left with very little of Asia Minor. The Empire had been saved, but the way to Constantinople was open to the next wave of Turkish invaders.

At this point, a mysterious figure breaks the surface of anonymity to begin his career as one of the principle movers and shakers of the First Crusade. In 1088, Peter the Hermit was an unknown monk belonging to one of the clerical or chronicling orders. Curiously, its name has not come down to us, but his appearance on the scene suggests connections at the very highest level. That year, Peter the Hermit traveled from Jerusalem to deliver an impassioned plea from Simeon, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, to the newly elected Pope Urban II. This plea, for aid from the west and its offer of a reconciliation between the churches would certainly not have been entrusted to a simple itinerant preacher. The Patriarch's letter caused years of intense discussion within the church and set the tone for Urban's Papacy.

In early 1095, Alexius I, the eastern Emperor, sensing weakness in the current Seljuk infighting, sent an envoy to Pope Urban II and the council at Piacenza asking for military aid from the west. Urban II was influenced by the opportunities these entreaties provided. Perhaps the old Sylvestrian scheme of a united world state could actually be achieved. It was a risk, but it just might be a risk worth taking. Urban departed on a six-month long tour of northern Italy and southern France collecting support. In August, from Le Puy in southern

France, a church council was called for November at Clermont in Auvergne, not far from the small monastery of Aurillac.

Exactly what Urban had in mind and what he expected from the Clermont synod is unclear. He seems to have intended a military expedition, not unlike those he had already sanctioned in Moslem Spain. What he got was something entirely different.

Urban II, born Odo of Chatillon-sur-Marne and a former Prior of Cluny, was a man of broad views, an experienced organizer and a skilled diplomat dedicated to his predecessor's, Gregory VII, program of reforms. Unlike Gregory, whose fiery intensity seemed to leave no one untouched, Urban was supremely human, tall, handsome, socially at ease and aristocratically distinguished. His overall goal was to reform the western church and re-unite it with the eastern church to create a truly catholic, or universal, Christianity. Toward that end, Alexius I's request for military aid looked like a major breakthrough. Urban was also influenced by the Peace of God movement and saw the call to arms against the "accursed race, wholly alienated from God," as he called the Turks in his speech to the crowd at Clermont, as a way to mitigate and channel the violence of the European nobility.

On that crisp Tuesday morning, the 27th of November, 1095, thousands had gathered to hear the Pope's pronouncement. Itinerant monks and lay preachers had spread the word of the public session for months. When the day arrived, the crowd was far too great for the cathedral, so the meeting was held outdoors, in a field near the eastern gate of the city. After the multitude had gathered, Urban II climbed up on a raised platform and addressed them.

Four contemporary chroniclers reported Urban's words. One of them, Robert the Monk, claimed to have been there and heard the words as Urban spoke them. It is his version which we will paraphrase. He tells us that Urban began by calling on the Franks -- "O race of Franks! race beloved and chosen by God!" Robert records -- to come to the aid of their brethren in the east. Eastern Christendom had appealed for aid, the Turks were advancing into Christian territory, killing and desecrating as they came. Urban stressed the holiness of Jerusalem and the suffering of the pilgrims who journeyed there. Having painted a somber picture of conditions in the east, Urban made his appeal: Let western Christendom march to the rescue. Let rich and poor march together, and leave off killing each other for the greater good of killing the godless Turks. This was the work of God, Urban declared, and there would be absolution and remission of sins for those who died in this most holy of causes. There must be no delay, let everyone be ready to march by the summer. God will be their guide.

Urban, speaking in French to his fellow Frenchmen, rose to levels of eloquence that the Latin of the chroniclers can not convey. The enthusiasm however was beyond anything that even Urban had expected. Roars of "Deu li volt," or God wills it, swept through the crowd even before Urban finished his speech. At its conclusion, the Bishop of Le Puy fell to his knees, begging permission to join the expedition. Thousands followed his example.

The Pope was caught off guard. No plans had been yet made, certainly no arrangements for a mass movement such as erupted over the winter of 1095-96. While Urban re-assembled his bishops to make the political arrangements, a group of wandering evangelists began to spread the word. Foremost among them was Peter the Hermit.

The shadowy figure of Peter the Hermit, an enigma even to his contemporaries, haunts the story of the First Crusade. We have seen him in 1088 delivering a message from the Patriarch of Jerusalem to Pope Urban. Later, historians would doubt this story because of Peter's humble background and apparent insignificance. And yet, there is something about the mysterious rabble rousing monk that suggests powerful connections and important supporters. Piecing together his career gives us a glimpse of the hidden machinations behind the Crusades.

Peter was born around the middle of the 11th century in Picardy, possibly near Amiens. Before becoming a monk, Peter was a minor noble who owed his fief to Eustace de Boulogne, Godfroi de Bouillon's, the future king of Jerusalem's, father. Sometime after

1070, Peter joined a monastery in the Ardennes, where for a few years he served as tutor to the young Godfroi. Sometime after 1080, he departed on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where he apparently stayed until his mission to Rome in 1088. Nothing is known of his whereabouts until the winter of 1095 when he began to preach the new crusade at Bourges, in the province of Berry. He apparently did not attend the church council at Clermont.

Keeping in mind the work of Pope Sylvester II and his various chronicling orders, a pattern emerges from the shadows of Peter's story. Peter joined the only group of monks in the Ardennes, those at Orval, near Stenay, a site with rich Merovingian connections, whose patron was Godfroi's aunt and foster mother. This group of monks were part of a mysterious order of chroniclers from Calabria in northern Italy who seemed mostly concerned with researching the bloodline of the Duke of Lorraine, Godfroi's family.

If these monks were part of the chroniclers established in many different forms by Pope Sylvester, then it is easy to understand the many curious twists in Peter's career, such as his long sojourn in Jerusalem. He could have been transferred to the order's chapter there, the one established outside the city in a basilica given to them by the mad Caliph al-Hakim. This makes sense in light of Peter's later diplomatic mission. Only a high ranking member of a clerical order, founded by the Pope himself, would be a fitting enough representative to deliver messages from the Patriarch of Jerusalem and the eastern church.

Peter's silence between 1088 and 1095 may have been enforced by the dictates of his order. Only after the church council, and its demonstration of mass approval, was Peter the Hermit given permission to begin his own crusade.

Before the year was out, Peter was in Berry preaching his own version of the Holy War, one in which the poor and the pious in Christ would sweep ahead of the nobles and conquer Jerusalem with only God's assistance. Guibert of Nogent, who knew him personally, gives us a glimpse of Peter's authority: "Everything he said or did, it seemed like something half-divine." This unkempt, fiery tempered monk, who habitually went about barefoot and in filthy rags, was also a spell-binding orator capable of moving masses of people to extremes of emotion. They took the cross by the thousands and followed this Rasputin-like character down the long road to the east.

In January, Peter left Berry and traveled through Orleans and Champagne, gathering crowds whenever he stopped. In Lorraine, he visited his old monastery near Orval and discussed the crusade with his old pupil, Godfroi de Bouillon. No record remains of their conversations, but something convinced Godfroi to join the crusade. By spring, as Peter collected his people's army in Cologne, Otto III's old capital, Godfroi took the cross at Amiens. Unlike the other nobles who participated in the First Crusade, Godfroi renounced his fiefs, sold his goods and moved with his brothers to the Holy Land. Godfroi did not intend to return, perhaps he already saw himself as the chief candidate for King of Jerusalem.

Godfroi of course wasn't the only noble of ancient lineage taking the cross that summer. The group was officially under the leadership of the Bishop of Le Puy, Adhemar, as papal legate, and included Raymond of Toulouse, an old crusader from the Spanish wars, Hugh of Vermandois and Robert II of Flanders along with Robert, the Duke of Normandy and his brother-in-law, the hapless Stephan, Count of Blois. In September of 1096, word reached Urban that the Normans of southern Italy and Sicily were ready to take up the cross. These Normans, led by Bohemund and his nephew Tancred, brought the most experienced and capable soldiers in Europe to the crusading movement. Bohemund's father, Roger of Guiscard, had almost conquered Constantinople itself a few years before, and the Normans scented opportunity in the call to the east.

The long story of the First Crusade, and its People's Crusade prologue, is told in many places. The best of all the histories is still Sir Steven Runciman's multi-volume work on the entire crusading era. We recommend it to any one wanting the complete story. For our purposes, we will concentrate on Peter the Hermit and his student, Godfroi de Bouillon.

The People's Crusade, after a torturous journey across central Europe, arrived at the gates of Constantinople, in the spring of 1097, as a hungry and uncontrollable mob. The Emperor shipped them over to the Asian side of the straits, where they rashly attacked a Turkish stronghold and were annihilated. Peter the Hermit wisely stayed in Constantinople and therefore survived. He was still there, and held in some honor, when the next wave of crusaders arrived.

As the crusading princes gathered in Constantinople, Peter joined them with the remnants of his army. Perhaps because of his old association with Godfroi, by this point the acknowledged leader of the crusade, Peter was respected as a visionary and councilor to the group. He marched on with them to Antioch, where he played a part in the drama of the Holy Spear. After Antioch, Peter joined with the Tafars, or poor ones, in calling for a speedy advance on Jerusalem.

After the fall of Jerusalem, Peter was one of the secret council, perhaps even its leader, who chose Godfroi as the King of Jerusalem. Godfroi declined the title, preferring instead that of Defender of the Holy Sepulchre, but in 1100 his younger brother Baldwin accepted it readily. During Godfroi's reign, Peter the Hermit was held in such high regard that when the crusaders pushed on to Ascalon, he was left in charge of Jerusalem. Before Godfroi left Jerusalem, almost his sole official act as king was to reconfirm the charter of an abbey on Mount Sion, south of the city and outside of its walls, and order its immediate fortification. Peter the Hermit survived until 1115 and divided his time between the court at Constantinople and the newly re-built abbey on Mount Sion, where he is believed to have died. The great French historian of the Crusades, Rene Grousset, commented that Godfroi's throne was founded on the rock of Sion, and that it indicated a royal tradition equal to that of the reigning dynasties of Europe. Grousset however, does not explain his comment, leaving of us to speculate on its meaning.

Urban's plans of military aid for the eastern church was subverted by Peter the Hermit and his followers' insistence on a people's crusade. This popular impetus swept control of the expedition out of papal hands and into the hands of the military and political leaders on the spot. When Adhemar, the papal legate, died at Antioch, a council of such leaders took over. Peter was a part of that council and was perhaps instrumental in electing Godfroi king. The crusade changed from a papal expedition to something different, a popular movement with millenial expectations and Peter the Hermit was at the heart of that change.

If Peter was indeed a high ranking member of one of the surviving chronicling orders started by Sylvester II, who were charged with researching the Merovingian bloodline, then his influence becomes readily understandable. Sylvester's chronicling orders had been working for almost a century to create a new kingdom of Jerusalem, and then, suddenly, the means were at hand. All that was needed was a candidate for king whose bloodline was such that all the kings of Europe could acknowledge him as overlord.

Godfroi may have filled the bill because the chroniclers believed him to be a descendent of the lost line of Merovingian kings, and therefore a direct descendent of Jesus himself. That would in fact, if proven, make him the rightful king of Jerusalem, and perhaps of the world. It would at least fulfill a great many apocalyptic expectations and could be seen as the first steps toward the Kingdom of Heaven on earth so beloved of the Chilaists.

The rock of Sion could be Peter, petros or rock in Latin, the Hermit of the Order of Sion, to whom both Godfroi and Baldwin directly owed their throne. So much more so if Peter, as the official representative of Sion and the chroniclers, was their guarantor as legitimate descendants of Jesus. Mount Sion itself seems the likeliest candidate for the location of the original order. Al-Hakim donated to Sylvester's chroniclers a Greek Church somewhere outside the walls, but still close enough for access to the city. Mount Sion, which contains the ruins of a 4th century basilica rebuilt in the early 11th century, seems the most obvious choice. A group of monks were apparently still there in 1099, and may have played a part in the fall of the city. This "rock of Sion" and its connections in Europe, could also be

considered the foundation of the dynasty. But, as we will see, there could in fact be another "rock of Sion" on which the Kingdom of Jerusalem was built.

The authors of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* deserve credit for their discoveries concerning the role played by the Order, or Priory, of Sion in the creation of the Templars. Just as they were right about the unusual and probably Jewish Christian origins of the Merovingians, they were correct, as far they went, about the mysterious precursors to the Templars who occupied Mount Sion. While not going far enough back to uncover the pivotal role played by Pope Sylvester II, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail's* facts about the Order of Our Lady of Sion are both correct and suggestive.

By the time the supposed Templars arrived on the scene, in 1118 or '19, the Order of Sion was already a powerful group with close ties to the Kings of Jerusalem. These ties were based, in all probability, on the Order's knowledge of the dynasty's true heritage. Therefore the secret at the heart of the Templars' sudden rise in the medieval world was due to more than just, as *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* suggests, a knowledge of Jesus's descendants. Once again, something more is involved.

The missing piece, as we noted in the last chapter, is alchemy. The Merovingians, whether or not they were descended from Christ, were indeed practical alchemists and wizard kings. Sylvester II, the Hermetic Pope, was on the verge of recovering the secret when power politics overwhelmed him. The motivation for the First Crusade, deeply hidden behind religious and political rationalizations, was actually the search for and recovery of the secret. A Merovingian king on the throne of Jerusalem was just the first step in the millenium's events. Next would come the rebuilding of the Temple, based on the Philosopher's Stone, the stone the builders' rejected.

This was the true mission of the Templars, and *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* is partly correct. The secret did involve the bloodline. Curiously, the authors of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* rarely mention alchemy, even though several supposed Grand Masters of Sion are prominent alchemists. Only once in the entire book does alchemy come to the forefront. In discussing the Templars and their mysterious "head," even the authors of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* are forced to make alchemical allusions. Whatever the Templars were trying to accomplish, the secret of alchemy was the central and critical component of their plans.

By the end of the second decade of the 12th century, most of the veterans of the First Crusade were dead. Godfroi de Bouillon, exhausted by his labors, died, the year after the fall of Jerusalem, in 1100. Peter the Hermit died in 1115 and Baldwin I, Godfroi's brother, followed him in 1118. Things were changing in Outremer, the land beyond the sea, as the Franks called Palestine. Latin kingdoms, including Jerusalem, had been established from Syria to Gaza, but if they were to remain independent, it was time to look to their collective security.

With this in mind, soon after his coronation, Baldwin II, cousin of Godfroi and Baldwin, legitimized the only standing army in the Holy Land. Not being a truly feudal lord, in the sense Europe understood it, the King of Jerusalem had only his personal retainers and whatever Crusaders happened to be available with which to form an army. This left the Kingdom of Jerusalem somewhat defenseless, as demonstrated by the Easter massacre of pilgrims by Turkish forces in 1119. As a reaction to this, Baldwin II turned to the only organized military force in the Holy Land, the militia of the Order of Our Lady of Sion, for protection.

That this 'milice du Christ' existed before 1119 is shown by the reference to it in a letter from the bishop of Chartres to Hugh, Count of Champagne, dated 1114. In the period immediately after the First Crusade's conquest of Jerusalem, the only source of authority in the devastated city was the remaining religious communities, among them the Order on Mount Sion. We know that Peter the Hermit was left in charge of the city while Godfroi went on to defeat the Egyptians at Ascalon, which, if Peter was a monk of Sion, meant that the Order was actually in control. That the existing Order of Mount Sion had some military value

is shown by Godfroi's insistence on repairing its fortifications. Someone must have manned those defenses after they were built.

Given the unstable situation in Outremer, Baldwin II made the right choice. He recognized the military arm of the Order, put them under the control of the King and the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and installed them close at hand, next door to his palace on Temple Mount. The Poor Knights of Christ, as they called themselves, gained another name from Baldwin's gift. They became the Poor Knights of the Temple of Solomon, then Knights of the Temple and finally just Templars. Their stated purpose was to protect the pilgrim routes, but their numbers were too few in the beginning to protect more than the area around the Temple ruins. And perhaps that's all they were intended to do.

To understand the Templars and their role in the Holy Land and Europe, we must see them in their proper perspective, that of a military adjunct to a much older organization. The Order of Our Lady of Sion did not create the Templars. They were created out of the Order's militia by the King of Jerusalem for a specific purpose.

The Order itself had been reconfirmed and given its new name by Godfroi in 1099. Five years later, a private conclave of nobles and clergy assembled at Troyes, the court of the Count of Champagne, to hear a mysterious abbot from Jerusalem and to discuss conditions in the Holy Land. Nothing is known of the subject of that discussion, but whatever it was, the wealthy and powerful Hugh, Count of Champagne, decided to depart immediately for Jerusalem. He spent the next four years in the Holy Land, his activities and whereabouts unknown.

The location of the conclave in Troyes is highly significant. Peter the Hermit had stopped there on his winter preaching tour in 1096, and the family of the Count of Champagne had been of interest to the chroniclers because of its connections with the Merovingian dynasty of Burgundy. Indeed, the reported nobles who attended the conclave, Brienne, Joinville, Chaumont and Montbard, all have connections to the ancient Burgundian royal family. This alone would be enough to make one suspect that the mysterious Jerusalem abbot was from the Order of Sion.

The choice of Champagne and Troyes, however, may have had other reasons behind it, reasons that point directly to the secret of alchemy. Around 1070, a group of Spanish Jews, led by a disciple of Isaac the Blind named Rabbi Rashi, settled in Troyes and founded a Cabalistic school. From this source would come the first manuscript versions of the Sepher Yetzirah and the Bahir. Interestingly enough, a century after the founding of this school, the first of the Grail Romances appeared, written by Chretien of Troyes, a chivalric poet at the court of the Count of Champagne. This connection, we will soon discover, was much more just coincidence. It contained an important clue to the hidden secret.

Here we must pause for a moment to address a question that will only become more confusing from this point onward in our examination of alchemy and the end of the world. We have seen how the wisdom of the Bahir, applying the physics of creation to create local effects such as the animation of matter, forms the theoretical core of the ancient unitary view of alchemy as a triple transformation. This wisdom is at the core of the Jewish secret mystical tradition, spelled variously as Qabala, Cabala or Kabbalah. Each version is technically correct in terms of transposing the Hebrew spelling into English, but over time, and particularly among the alchemists, certain connotations have crept in that confuse our understanding.

Hence we find Fulcanelli warning his readers against the Hebrew Kabbalah with its system of letter/number permutations, while at the same time using the Tree of Life geometry as his basic pattern and declaring that there is indeed a true "cabala." The confusion ultimately derives from the split between east and west in Judaism itself. Keep in mind that at the same moment the People's Crusade was slaughtering the Asiatic and Kazarite Ashkenazi Jews in Germany, the true leaders of the Crusade were co-existing just fine with the Sephardic Jews of France and Spain.

The school of Troyes played a major role in this climate of acceptance. The Jews of Troyes were not persecuted, but accepted as good vassals of the Count. Their teachings, based primarily around the Bahir, emphasized the Merkabah, the cubic throne or vehicle by which one ascends toward The Light on the Gnostic journey or path of return. This, by a simple phonetic transposition common to the more Arabic flavor of Sephardic Hebrew, becomes a multi-lingual pun. The vehicle is the Mer-Kaaba, or stone of the sea mentioned in the Bahir, as well as the Mer-Caballus, or the sea horse of Merovingian fame. We find this kind of multi-lingual punning most often in the Arabic literature of Iran and Persia, where many languages mingled with classical Arabic. The 13th century Sufi masterpiece, the Conference of the Birds, by Attar the Chemist, uses this device with great effect.

The alchemist then means the more Gnostic "cabala" or vehicle of the Bahir, rather than the more legalistic and mechanical formulas of the traditional Kabbalah. This essentially Christianized Cabala formed the core of medieval and renaissance esoteric science. Fulcanelli is not trying to throw the physics of creation out of the science of alchemy, far from it. He is trying to point the careful student in the right direction, toward the Bahir itself.

To return to our story, Hugh, Count of Champagne, remained in the Holy Land for four years. On his return to Champagne, things began to happen rapidly. A distant relative, Bernard de Montbard, joined the Cistercian Order. Bernard, in just a few years, would become the principle spiritual leader of western Christendom. His abbey at Clairvaux, donated by Hugh in 1112, became the center of the medieval spiritual revival, inspiring a wave of religious feeling that resulted in the glories of the Gothic cathedrals. St. Bernard, as he would come to be known, played a key role in the establishment and the legitimization of the Templars. His uncle, Andre de Montbard, was one of the militia of Sion from which the Templars were formed.

Hugh of Champagne himself wanted to return to the Holy Land and join the Order's militia. The letter from the bishop of Chartres in 1114 was part of an attempt to dissuade him. Apparently his talents were needed in Champagne, and it was not until 1124 that he officially joined the newly renamed Order of the Temple. By that time, the Templars were solidly established with the support of a now wealthy and powerful Cistercian Order, headed by St. Bernard. In 1128, the Templars were recognized by the Pope, Honorius II, and given a written rule or guide for their Order by none other than St. Bernard himself. The council at which this occurred was held, of course, in Troyes at the court of the Count of Champagne. From these meager facts we are forced to intuit the story. The Order of the Chroniclers on Mount Sion appear to be the shadowy force directing the First Crusade, mostly through the activities and influence of Peter the Hermit. After the Crusaders captured Jerusalem, the Order, through Peter, was left in virtual charge of the city and its monuments and churches. As we have seen, Godfroi and Baldwin were beholden to Sion for their thrones, and therefore would have allowed the Order free access to anywhere in the city they wanted to explore or excavate. Sometimes during the five years from the conquest to the conclave in Troyes, the Order discovered the secret it had been seeking for over a century. Sion sent word of this discovery back to Europe. Not to Rome or any of the other capitals, but to the one place in western Christendom where an essentially Jewish discovery could be evaluated -- Troyes. Whatever this discovery was, it so moved Hugh that he left for Jerusalem and spent four years in secret studying it. Immediately after his return in 1108, the wheels of power moved so that one of his adherents, the young Bernard of Montbard, became the head of an orthodox monastic order. When Bernard joined the Cistercians they were almost bankrupt. Within a decade they were the most wealthy monastic order in Europe, with money to spend on creating a whole new style of architecture, the Gothic cathedrals.

Therefore, in some way, this discovery of a Jewish secret led to a flow of unparalleled wealth a few years later. From this discovery and its flow of wealth would come the need for the Templars, whose first and basic activity seemed to be guarding the precinct of

Solomon's Temple. But the mere secrets of the Bahir alone, even if it were an ancient Solomonic version, would not of itself produce a flow of wealth. Something else was required. As the later alchemists inform us, nothing can be accomplished in the Great Work without the right prima materia. It is just possible that what the Order of Sion found, perhaps in the ruins of the Temple of Solomon, was the best prima materia possible, a piece of the Black Stone, the meteorite from Meccah. Just possibly, this was the true "rock of Sion" on which the Kingdom of Jerusalem was founded.

Some modern authors tracing the Templar connection with alchemy have suggested that the Templars discovered the Ark of the Covenant in the ruins of Solomon's Temple, which perhaps contained a stone from heaven, or meteorite, similar to the Black Stone of Meccah. This however seems highly unlikely, given that the Ark disappeared from the temple in the 7th century BCE. But a discovery of something like the stones contained in the Ark is a somewhat more likely historical proposition.

The Order of Chroniclers were given the use of Mount Sion, in all probability, by the mad Caliph al-Hakim. Al-Hakim's great grandfather, al-Mansur, was the first and only person since Mohammed known to have close personal contact with the Black Stone. It stayed in his presence for months after it was presented to him and before it was returned to the Kaaba. Most significantly, we can not be sure how much of the stone was returned.

The Iranian Ismailis, soon to become friends and allies of the Templars, may have kept a piece before it was given to al-Mansur. The Fatimid Caliph himself may have decided to keep a piece. That the stone shrank in its absence from the Kaaba is obvious. Moslem descriptions of the building of the ninth and tenth Kaabas tell us that the stone was large and filled the entire space of the southeast corner, protruding out so that one did not have to stoop to kiss it. In the current Kaaba, as described by Sir Richard Francis Burton in the 19th century, the stone is encased within the wall, leaving only a portion about seven inches long and four inches wide exposed for kissing. Since it was only removed from the Kaaba for those brief years in the mid-10th century, any carving or splitting of the stone had to have been done at that time.

The madness of al-Hakim can be explained by his possession of his great-grandfather's chunk of the stone. Shi'ite tradition claimed that at the turn of the fourth century after the Hajjah, or departure from Meccah, the Maudi or savior would appear and convert the entire world to Islam as a prologue to the Day of Judgment. In 1109, al-Hakim, the foremost Shi'ite leader of his day, announced the arrival of the Maudi in his own, now divine, person. It was the year 400 AH. If indeed al-Hakim had a piece of the rock, and had been told of its ultimate importance by the envoys of Pope Sylvester, then it is just possible that this knowledge could have unhinged the Caliph enough to convince himself of his own divinity. Fearing the stone's power, al-Hakim could have hidden it on the Dome of the Rock, perhaps within the ruins of Solomon's Temple, in Jerusalem.

If the stone was in Jerusalem all the time, why did it take a Crusade for the Order of Sion to gain possession of it? One reason lies in the madness of al-Hakim. As part of his Maudihood, he persecuted the Christians and the Jews, burning their churches and synagogues. Even though he repented of the destruction before his death or disappearance, access to the Dome of the Rock and the Temple Mount itself was restricted to Moslems from that time onward. Once the Seljuk Turks conquered the city, all access to the Holy Sites were restricted. And at that point, Peter, the Hermit of Mount Sion, departed for the west to start the political process that, 11 years later, would bring the Order back into control of the Temple and the Dome of the Rock.

Sometime between 1099 and 1104, the Order of Sion made at least two discoveries, either together or separately, in Jerusalem. The first was a text of the Bahir explaining the mechanics of the physics of creation and its application to the process of transmutation. The second could only have been the mad Caliph's piece of the Black Stone. Word of this discovery was sent back to France, where, upon receiving the information, Hugh of

Champagne and his entourage, possibly including a few Hebrew scholars, departed immediately for Jerusalem.

Between 1104 and 1112, The Order of Sion completed his work and perfected the process of transformation. From 1112 onwards, money in great quantities flowed back to France and into the coffers of St. Bernard's Cistercians. A power base was built on this wealth that forced Baldwin II to legitimize the military wing of the Order in order to protect his throne. The Templars were formed to guard the source of this wealth, the alchemical processes that were perhaps being conducted in the cellars of the great Temple.

The Templars continued to gain power in Europe at the same time as the Cistercians were beginning their cathedral building program. Both of these movements were financed from mysterious sources, and both had connections to the Order of Our Lady of Sion. It is possible to see St. Bernard and the Cistercians as the spiritual and social portions of a great plan to revitalize western culture. The Templars were the political and military components of that plan, protecting the secret and its source of wealth. The cathedrals, those vast alchemical monuments in stone, were designed to facilitate the new spiritual change necessary as a prelude to the coming thousand years of peace and prosperity.

The history of the Templars from 1128 on is well documented and too familiar to need much further elaboration. By 1143, the Templars had become the exclusive military arm of the Papacy, and remained a powerful force in Outremer even after the fall of Jerusalem to Saladin in 1187. Holy Blood, Holy Grail suggests that the Order of Sion split from the Templars at the Cutting of the Elm at Gisors in 1188, and this seems accurate given the further history of both Orders. The Order of Sion, after losing its abbey on Mount Sion, seems to have moved to France, with chapters in Orleans, Bourges, Paris and Troyes. The Templars became the bankers and financiers of the medieval world. In the early 14th century, they ran a foul of a greedy French King and his puppet of a Pope and were persecuted as heretics. However, like the Order of Sion itself, the Templars refused to disappear.

In the mid-1180's, as the shadow of Saladin lengthened over the Holy Land, a nobleman with Merovingian ancestry, Philip d'Alsace, Count of Flanders, commissioned the greatest poet of the age, Chretien of Troyes, to do a French re-working of a strange tale about a poor knight, the son of a widow, who attains the kingship of the Holy Grail. Philip supposedly found the tale in an ancient Celtic chronicle, and wanted Chretien, the medieval version of a best-selling author, to make it a hit. Chretien labored over this strange story, sometimes giving its symbolic events a sort of numinous and dream-like quality, and at other times obviously failing to grasp the importance and even the meaning of his source material.

Nonetheless, as Jerusalem fell and the Christian Kingdoms of Outremer shrank to a few coastal enclaves, poets in noble courts across Europe took up the story of Chretien's Grail. Chretien himself never completed his work, leaving the long poem unfinished at his death. Several poets tried to continue the story, with various degrees of success. Even more important, other writers took up the theme, as if from a common source, and expanded upon it.

Robert de Boron, writing between 1190 and 1199, Christianized the Grail story. He also tells us that the source of his story, in its Christian form, is a great book, the secrets of which have been revealed to him. Robert, unlike Chretien, is quite sure what the Grail is all about. The Grail is the cup of the Last Supper in which Joseph of Arimathea collected Jesus' blood at the crucifixion. After the crucifixion, Joseph's family became the keepers of the Grail. The adventures of the Grail Romances involve the members of this family and in the end the Grail comes to England with Joseph's brother-in-law, Brons the Fisher-King. As in Chretien's version, Perceval is called "The Son of the Widow Lady," but Robert also describes him as a descendent of Joseph of Arimathea.

We must keep in mind that at this same period, The Order of Our Lady of Sion was in the process of relocating its power base to Europe. Supported by the powerful Cistercians, by

1178, ten years before the schism between the Templars and the older Order, Sion was well established in Europe. A papal bull from Alexander III grants the Order possession of chapters in Picardy, France, Lombardy, Calabria, Sicily, Spain and the Holy Lands. After the loss of Jerusalem, the Order cut the Templars loose and embarked on a new program. The Grail romances can be seen as part of this new plan.

The histories collected through two centuries of patient work by Sylvester's chroniclers suddenly appeared as the content of a new kind of popular mythology, one nicely geared to the knightly aspirations of the crusading era. The source, as both Chretien and Robert de Boron inform us, is a secret book in the possession of certain nobles connected with the Merovingians, and the Order of Sion.

Another Grail romance, composed at the same time and from the same sources as Robert's History of the Grail, makes this connection even more apparent. The anonymous author of the Perlesvaus may have used the same sources as Robert (he agrees with him for instance on Perceval's lineage), but his mystical spin on the story puts it in a league by itself.

The author may have been a member of the Order of Sion, which would account for his anonymity. He certainly had a vast command of the Arthurian literature of his day and access to the Order's Merovingian research. Unlike Robert de Boron, who thought the Grail events happened in the first century after Christ's death, the anonymous author of the Perlesvaus clearly dates the events in his story to the late 5th century, the time of both the historical King Arthur and the rise of the Merovingian dynasty.

The Quest for the Holy Grail, written around the turn of the 13th century by a group of Cistercian monks as part of the so-called Vulgate Cycle of Grail Romances, gives a precise date for the events it records: 454 years after the death of Jesus on the cross, or 487 CE, the first flush of the Merovingian dynasty and just a few years before Clovis' conversion by St. Remy and his pact with the western church.

From these details alone, the hand of the Order of Our Lady of Sion, and its chronicling predecessors, can clearly be discerned in the creation and popularity of the Grail Romances. But the Perlesvaus goes further by describing the keepers of the Grail's secrets in terms that any contemporary would immediately interpret as referring to the Templars. The castle of the Grail, we are told, houses a conclave of initiates dressed in white robes with red crosses emblazoned on their breasts.

The Perlesvaus is full of strange magickal details that suggest its author's familiarity with the Cabala of the Bahir. The clearest example of this, and the most cogent to our investigation, is Perlesvaus' voyage to the Isle of Blessed Elders in the closing pages of the Romance. In this other-worldly Paradise, Perlesvaus finds a magnificent Tree with a fountain flowing out from it surrounded by twelve golden pillars. This axis mundi motif is a junction point between the Bahir and the later alchemical symbolism, as is so much of the Perlesvaus. To Perlesvaus, the Grail appeared as a complex and evolving series of five images, the last of which was the Grail cup.

The most significant of all the Grail Romances is the Parzival of Wolfram von Eschenbach, written between 1200 and 1215. Wolfram minces no words in calling the keepers of the Grail Templars, and then goes to the heart of mystery by describing the Grail as a miraculous stone. This "lapis exillis," a pun which suggests the exiled stone of Matthew, as well as the stone which fell from heaven and even the "lapis elixir" of the alchemical philosopher's stone, has miraculous powers, including healing, nourishment and the ability to communicate its wishes.

Wolfram claimed to have learned his tale from one Gyt, or Kyot, of Provence, who in turn learned it from a recovered manuscript from Toledo, in Moslem Spain. This source, according to Wolfram, is the manuscript of Flegetanis, a heathen astronomer living roughly at the time of the Exodus from Egypt, or about 1200 years before the birth of Christ. Flegetanis, which is simply the appropriate Persian phrase "familiar with the stars," claimed to read the "name" of the Grail in the stars, and thereby understood the workings of destiny. He also claimed that this astral destiny focused on the family of Christ and His

descendants. Gyot augmented this tale with his own Latin researches, indicating that he was possibly one of Sylvester II's chroniclers, before he passed it on to Wolfram.

Parzival is a masterpiece of alchemical literature, and as such is worthy of another volume at least the size of this one in order to merely do it justice. For our purposes, let us simply note that in addition to the direct reference to the Templars and the meteoric stone that fell from heaven, Parzival ends by informing us that Lohengrin, the Swan Knight of Lorraine, is the great-grandfather of Godfroi de Bouillon. With Parzival, the secret of the First Crusade and its alchemical secrets come full circle. And behind the whole process stands the Order of Sion and predecessors, Sylvester's Chroniclers.

After 1220, as the persecution of heretics in the south of France increased into a crusade, the Grail Romances began to fade from favor. The Church never challenged them directly, which is indeed curious, but by the middle of the 13th century, their imagery and symbolism had faded from literature and politics, only to be permanently engraved in stone on the porches and naves of the newly constructed Gothic cathedrals.

These books in stone contained, in symbolic form, the alchemical distillation of the Grail mysteries. Much of these decorations were paid for by Templars and Cistercians and were intended to be eternal teaching documents, available to all who could understand their meaning. It was a grand scheme, a lost golden age, and its failure impoverished us all.

Chapter Twelve

And so, at long last, we arrive at the point where Fulcanelli began, the Gothic Cathedrals of Europe. In his 1926 masterpiece, *The Mystery of the Cathedrals*, Fulcanelli claimed that the Gothic Cathedrals were Hermetic libraries in stone with the secret of alchemy displayed for all who could read it. When our investigation began, this seemed, in its own way, the most incredible of all Fulcanelli's claims. It was easier to believe that someone had stumbled privately onto the real secret behind the alchemical transformation, than it was to believe that some secret society, or societies, had encoded this information deliberately into the design and the decorations of the greatest of all Christian monuments.

For this to be true, several important preconditions would also have to be true, such as the existence of a secret, or not so secret, group with access to the highest levels of the church, bottomless wealth, connections with the Holy Land and the Moslem world, and knowledge of the inner core of alchemy. Before we, as researchers, could take Fulcanelli's claims seriously, we needed to validate the existence of such a group. The importance of this point is obvious. If Fulcanelli were merely projecting from his own unconscious the meanings he gives certain images and motifs found in the cathedrals, rather than revealing an ancient alchemical tradition, then *Mystery of the Cathedrals* is reduced to a work of symbolist fantasy. Interesting, and useful to the psychologist perhaps, but of limited value in terms of alchemy.

Yet this is, if anything, Fulcanelli's main point. *Mystery* is not the usual alchemical cookbook or grimoire. Fulcanelli implies that he is revealing the mystery of alchemy as it was taught to him, by reference to the Hermetic meanings embodied within the cathedrals. It is therefore a demonstration not just of the alchemical philosophy, but of how this philosophy animated a lost medieval golden age. The key to understanding Fulcanelli's importance, and not just the value of his work, lies in the reality of this lost knowledge and the fact of its emergence as symbols on the walls of these imposing Christian structures.

We began our search with the origin of alchemy and discovered that alchemy, while referencing back to the knowledge of a pre-catastrophe civilization, appeared in its modern form as part of the Gnostic ferment of the 1st century CE. This Gnostic world view, derived from the mystery cults of the rapidly collapsing ancient world, supplied a theological and mythological framework for the emerging wave of monotheistic mysticism, such as Christianity and Essene Judaism. This framework also contained the essential ideas of alchemy's triple transformation. The specific magickal technology of the triple transformation -- inner yogic psycho-sexual disciplines, magickal ceremonies combined with

manipulation of sacred metals, and the secret of time and timing, including the beginning and end of time -- developed first within the Gnostic cults, including Christianity, and then dispersed into the intellectual underground of the Dark Ages.

As part of the Gnostic paradigm, alchemy was influenced by Gnostic eschatological teachings, such as the path of return by the small lights to the One Light. Two thirds of the transmutational secret was persecuted out of Orthodox and Imperial Christianity, while the remaining third of the secret, that of time itself, was co-opted by its temporal leaders, such as Constantine, Charlemagne and Otto I. For the Christians, the whole idea of the end of time became confused with the fall of the Roman State, and the apocalypse against heretics became an institution of the church. But the idea of a transformed reality, the Chilaist vision of a new heaven and a new earth purged of sin, refused to die out.

This concept of a spiritually animated matter became the keystone of the alchemical process. The illuminated Hebrew mystics of the Bahir recorded the techniques of animating matter and related them directly to the transformational process of galactic alignment. The Shi'ites, Fatimids and Ismailis alike, believed that Mohammed had received this information and passed on the secret of time, and the coming of the Day of Judgment, through the family of Ali. The Sufis, of all persuasions, retained the most complete understanding of the internal psycho-sexual transformation.

We found that by the 10th century, alchemical knowledge had fragmented to the point that the secret had effectively been lost. The Byzantine Greek compilations of that era are composed of older material, much of it from the 1st century, such as the "Isis the Prophetess" story. The Islamic current had likewise split into the compilers and philosophers versus the mystical and the political. Among the Jews of the Dispersion, knowledge of the Bahir was limited to several small family groups in Spain and Palestine. The information was on the verge of being lost, and it was hard to see how in a few short centuries it could have been revived and then become influential enough to appear on the cathedral walls.

Working backward from the cathedrals themselves, we found that there were indeed enough mysteries to drive a small army of secret societies through. "Why did western Europe build so many churches in the three hundred years after the year 1000? What need was there, in a Europe with hardly a fifth of its present population, for temples so vast that they are now rarely filled even on the holiest days? How could an agricultural civilization afford to build such costly edifices, which a wealthy industrialism can barely maintain?" These questions were asked by no less an authority than Will Durant in his chapter, in volume IV of the History of Civilization, on the development of the Gothic cathedrals. And who designed them? Who decided on the artwork, laid out the ground plan, supervised the construction and the decoration? These are mostly unanswered, and now unanswerable, questions. We know the names of these "master masons," but their history and the story of their work has for the most part been lost. But the fact of that work, its skill and symbolic integrity, points to the sophisticated degree of organization, perhaps even on an international level, required to produce such elaborate and long term projects. Buildings of such complexity and elegance do not happen by accident.

As Durant noted, the year 1000 was a significant one to western Christendom. As we began to investigate this significance, we came face to face with one of the seminal figures in the transition from the Dark Ages to the medieval world, Pope Sylvester II. As we saw in a previous chapter, The Hermetic Pope proved to be the lynch-pin in a complex series of events that resulted in effects as wide ranging as the Crusades, the Templars, the Peace of God movement and its heretical offshoots, the Grail Romances and eventually, the cathedral building movement itself.

As we followed the tangled pattern of Sylvester's career, we found the seeds of our sophisticated international organization in the various chronicling orders established by Sylvester within, and on the edges of, the other monastic orders, the Benedictines, the Cluniacs and the Cistercians. This fluidity of organization gained a central focus with the establishment of the group of chroniclers at Jerusalem in 1002. From that point on we can

safely speak of an Order of Sion, in Jerusalem, with connections among all three major monastic orders back in Europe.

During the 11th century, all of these monastic orders began to build in the pre-Gothic style known as Romanesque. Within these monastic communities, groups of specialists developed. These were monks and scholars who knew Greek and mathematics, especially geometry, and were also skilled in building. As these "schools" grew, they were influenced by architecture from many distant places, the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, the Al-Aqsa Mosque, The Dome of the Rock, in Jerusalem, and the Mosque of ibn Tulun in Cairo. It is not hard to see the Order of Sion, with its Byzantine and Fatimid connections, as the source of that influence.

After the First Crusade conquered Jerusalem, The Order of Sion became, in various ways, the "rock" upon which the Kingdom of Jerusalem was founded. The Order used its connections back in Europe to capitalize on the discovery, around the 1102, of the alchemical and cosmological secrets. A decade later, wealth began flowing back to Europe, mostly to the Cistercians, a formerly bankrupt splinter group of Cluniac monks led by the future St. Bernard. By 1130, the Templars had been established, St. Bernard was the foremost Christian of his day, and Europe was poised on the edge of the cathedral building mania. Gothic is in the air, but has yet to be given form. For that we have to thank St. Denis and the Abbot Suger.

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A few miles north of the Ile de Citie, The Abbey of St. Denis, patron saint of Paris and by extension France itself and its Capetian kings, grew up around the tomb of the saint and his venerable relics. St. Denis had been recognized by the heirs of Charlemagne and a small Carolingian church was built on the site in the mid-9th century. The abbey itself was founded by Hugh Capet and our old friend Gerbert of Aurillac, Archbishop of Rheims, in the early 990's, and become over time the family chapel of the French dynasty. As St. Remy and Rheims became associated with the founding of the first Merovingian dynasty, St. Denis became associated with its Capetian revival.

The future Abbot Suger was born in poverty in the village of St. Denis. His innate intelligence won him a place in the local monastery school, the Prieure de l'Estree, where he became friends with the future King of France, Louis VI. Suger was noticed by the royal family. Phillip I encouraged the friendship between his son and the brilliant scholar. In the early 1120's, Suger was sent to Rome several times on diplomatic missions. During his time at the Holy Curia in the early 12th century, Suger came into contact with all the major intellectual currents of his age, including perhaps the secret discoveries in the Holy Land. During the second decade of the 12th century, Suger served as prime minister of France and was at the center of the struggle between the French state and the church. Suger naturally sided with his old school chum, Louis VI, and his son, Louis VII, against the anti-Popes of the Holy Roman Empire. He was a man who spent most of his life dealing with the intricacies of medieval power politics, and when he talked, the King of France listened. In 1123, at the height of his power and influence, Suger became the Abbot of St. Denis. Perhaps because of his knowledge of the discoveries in Jerusalem and their apparently inexhaustible wealth, Suger pressed for the re-building of the old Carolingian church into something that would be the wonder of Europe and the proper venue in which to display the relics of St. Denis and the regalia of the Capetian Kings. Abbot Suger envisioned his church as the center of the new illuminated Christianity that seemed to be overtaking the old politically compromised Roman church in the early years of the 12th century.

That St. Denis, rather than say Rheims with its much more prominent Merovingian connections, was singled out as the source point for the Gothic transformation depends as much on a mis-identification as it does on Abbot Suger energy and political savy. Not much was known of the historical saint. The abbey library contained a volume of works attributed to him, but which were actually written by the 2nd century Gnostic philosopher Dionysius the Areopagite. The book, given to one of Charlemagne's sons by the Byzantine Emperor

Michael the Stammerer, ended up in the abbey's library perhaps as the result of Pope Sylvester's chroniclers.

Abbot Suger was greatly influenced by Dionysius' Gnostic theology of light. Dionysius believed that "every creature, visible or invisible, is a light brought into being by the Father of Lights," and celebrated the Divine Light, God's holy fire, which animated the entire universe. This is amazingly similar to the basic Gnostic concept of the path of return. Abbot Suger took this theme to heart. In his three books on the building and consecration of the church, we find no less than thirteen separate inscriptions celebrating the holy Light. In one of them, a verse written to celebrate a gilded bronze gate, Suger tells us: "Bright is the noble work, this work shining nobly/ Enlightens the mind so that it may travel through the true lights/ To the True Light where Christ is the true door."

From these ideas, Abbot Suger developed his theory of *lux continua*, or continuous light. With these two words, Suger announced the birth of the Gothic style and at the same time pointed to its spiritual roots in the Gnostic illuminism of alchemy. From this point on, the walls of sanctity would be shattered to let the light in. The solemn and suffering darkness of the Romanesque would be replaced by the flow of continuous radiance at the heart of the Gothic.

By 1133, Abbot Suger informs us, he had collected artists and craftsmen "from all lands," including a contingent of Arabic glass makers. Suger did not invent stained glass; as we saw above, the Fatimids had used it in their mosques for over a century. Glass making seems to have been a component of the alchemical process. We find it mentioned in the preparations of certain "sands" described in the "Isis the Prophetess" text. The Fatimid scholars and mystics of Cairo used colored glass fashioned in geometrical patterns as a meditation tool, as seen in the remaining stained glass of the Al-Azhar mosque. The good Abbot's idea was to use the stained glass to fill the interior of his church with sparkling jewel-like color. Bright indeed is the noble work. Abbot Suger approached the building of his new church with all the enthusiasm, and attention to detail, of the Renaissance alchemist in pursuit of the Philosopher's Stone. To Abbot Suger, perhaps, his new light filled church was the true Philosopher's Stone.

It was finished in 1144, and the dedication was attended by a veritable who's who of the mid-12th century. Louis VII attended with his soon to be divorced wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, as did most of the bishops of the western church and hundreds of knighted nobles. Even St. Bernard, who was heard to grumble at the expense of gilding a church, attended, compelled perhaps by an authority greater than his own ego, the power brokers of Sion.

From its beginnings at St. Denis, the new style spread first through central France, and then all over Europe, from England to Germany, Portugal to Northern Italy. The collection of artists and craftsmen assembled by Abbot Suger developed into schools and guilds that traveled throughout Europe for the next two centuries or so creating a vast collection of Gothic churches and civic buildings. Twelve years after the good Abbot's death in 1151, his student, the Bishop of Paris, Maurice de Sully, and his "master mason," William of Paris, paid him the compliment of bettering his design.

On an island in the Seine, the new cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris rose slowly into the light filled sky. Work on the choir and transepts were begun in 1163 and not completed until 1182. By the time the construction of the nave was under way, another change was sweeping through Christendom.

Jerusalem and most of Holy Land was conquered in 1187 by the forces of the Seljuk Sultan Saladin. The west was stunned and plans began for an immediate Crusade, the Third according to modern historians. (The Second Crusade had been the unhappy affair undertaken in 1147 by Louis VII, during which the Abbot Suger of St. Denis ruled France as regent. Suger in fact did so well with the realm's finances that Louis' disastrous crusade hardly made a dent in the royal coffers.) In the midst of this political upheaval occurred the Cutting of the Elm at Gisors, the schism between the Order of Our Lady of Sion and the

Knights of the Temple of Solomon. For over a decade, Sion had been building a private power base back in Europe, and after the loss of the abbey on Mount Sion, the entire Order relocated.

This shift began in 1152, the year after Abbot Suger's death, with Louis VII's gift to the Order of the large priory at Orleans of St. Samson, another Dark Age saint with Merovingian connections. By 1178, as we noted above, the Order was confirmed by the Pope in the possession of houses and large tracts of land from the Holy Land to Spain. The Cutting of the Elm at Gisors did more than just split the Templars off from its parent Order, it defined the boundary line between the Plantagenets on one side, supported by the Templars, and the Capetians on the other, supported by Sion. This division would eventually produce not just the destruction of the Templars by the French King, Philip III and his puppet Pope, Clement V, but the catastrophe of the Hundred Years War between France and England.

As the walls of Notre Dame de Paris rose, the foundations of the new illuminated Christendom began to crumble. Loss of Jerusalem, and eventually the rest of Outremer, made the universal nature of the church questionable. The Grail Romances, whose imagery would appear in the decorations of both Notre Dame de Paris and the cathedral at Amiens, attempted an end-run around the church itself by appealing directly to a chivalric sense of destiny. With the failure of the Third Crusade and the subsequent strife among its leaders, the grand plan began to falter.

The Orthodox church fought back in the so-called crusades against Christians. First, almost by accident, Constantinople was conquered by the Fourth Crusade. This empowered Pope Innocent III to go after the heretics in southern France. Fifty years later, with southern France and its culture destroyed, the hope of a new kind of Christianity, once so promising, had been lost.

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For a century after the discoveries in the Holy Land, alchemy remained the secret preserve of the initiates within the church. The Order of Sion and the Templars seem to have had their own alchemical processes and their own individual codes for referring to it. Not until the middle of the 13th century did alchemy surface in a direct and unambiguous way. By the time the external decorations, including the magnificent bas-relief rendition of Alchemy itself on the Great Porch of Notre Dame de Paris, were finished in 1235 the reason for secrecy had passed. The Imperial Orthodox Church of Rome was in ascendancy with both the Templars and the Order of Sion struggling to find a new mission. Power politics had also stabilized, somewhat, with the Holy Roman Empire as top dog of the feudal pack. The Middle Ages were reaching for their apogee, while falling, at the same time, far short of the glorious millennial visions of Sylvester II and the pilgrim/warriors of the First Crusade. The greatest scholar of the 12th century, Albert the Great of Cologne, or Albertus Magnus, turned to alchemy in the mid century, and produced the first original work on the subject since the late fifth century. His treatise, *On Alchemy*, champions alchemy as a difficult but true art. He does not tell us if he actually made gold, but his directions to the practitioner indicates not only a knowledge of the triple nature of alchemy, but an awareness of the changes in the political winds. He warns the alchemist to choose the right hour for his operations, be patient and diligent in his prayers and exhortations, operate by the rules (here Albert gives us the necessary steps: trituration, sublimation, fixation, calcination, solution, distillation and coagulation, seven in all), and to always avoid contact with princes and rulers.

Albert was also reputed to have had a fortune-telling "head" and seems by contemporary accounts to have been an adept of the Hebraic work of creation. We are told that he had constructed an artificial man, a Golem, endowed with the ability to speak but not to reason. The golem's inane chattering so disturbed Albert's pupil, the future saint, Thomas of Aquinas, that Albert finally had to destroy it. Another interesting alchemical story, related by William II, Count of Holland, has Albert setting a feast in the frozen and snow covered

garden of the monastery, only to have it magically become summer, with birds, butterflies and blossoming trees, as the diners sat down to their meal.

Intriguing as these suggestions are, it was not the aristocratic Albert the Great who brought alchemy firmly into the mainstream of medieval thought, but the humble scholar Arnold of Villanova. Arnold was born in Valencia about the time that Notre Dame de Paris was finished. He gained his initial fame as a physician, and could be called the first psychologist, having written a surprisingly modern work on the interpretation of dreams. Although seemingly not a member of any monastic or clerical order, Arnold conducted secret missions for kings, Emperors and Popes alike.

In his works, Arnold emphasized the reality of alchemical transformation. To demonstrate this, he performed a transmutation in front of Pope Boniface VIII. It was successful, the first documented account of such a transmutation. A witness, John Andre, the Major Domo of the Papal Curia, reports that Arnold "submitted the gold sticks he produced to everyone for examination." This is very significant for the simple reason that since the second century, no one, no matter how much they seemed to know about alchemy, had actually done the transmutation in front of witnesses. Arnold's performance in front of Boniface was the turning point in alchemical history. Unfortunately, it was also the beginning of the end for the Templars, and in a lesser way, for the Order of Sion.

One of those observing Arnold's transmutation was the future Pope Clement V. Bertrand de Got, the former Archbishop of Bordeaux, became the first Pope of the so-called French captivity after the strife caused by Boniface VIII's assertion of absolute Papal rights. The King of France, asserting a higher spiritual and political authority than the Pope swooped down on Rome and literally captured the church. Eleven months later, Bertrand, a Frenchman, was finally elected as Clement V. Arnold, unfortunately, had been in the thick of the political in-fighting.

Phillip, the French King, used his power over the Pope to recall Boniface's proclamation. And then the King set in motion an idea that had stirring in his brain since Arnold's demonstration. The King called a General Council and proscribed the Templars. Pope Clement V, wanting his piece of the vast Templar wealth, went along with Phillip, even though he knew the charges against the Templars were basically groundless.

Chapter Thirteen

A few years before the Order of Sion disavowed the Knights of the Temple, one of its members began receiving a series of visions that changed how the west viewed the End of the World. Joachim of Flores was born of the minor nobility in Sicily around the time Abbot Suger began the renovation of St. Denis. In the mid-1160's he went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem where he became converted to a deeper understanding of mystical Christianity. After a few years as a hermit on Mt. Etna, Joachim returned to Italy, joined the Benedictines and became a chronicler at Sion's influential monastery of Casamari (House of Mary) in Calabria.

His visions began around 1183 and soon after he was summoned to Rome by Pope Lucius III and encouraged to record his visions and his theories. From this recognition, Joachim became a star, the most authoritative spokesman of his age on the imminent last days. He felt that his knowledge and visions imposed a heavy sense of obligation to spread the news of the impending apocalypse. In the next 18 years, he would be consulted by four Popes, as well as Kings, Queens and Emperors. In spite of this acceptance during his life, after his death in 1202, the Church condemned his views and his writings. Since that time, Joachim has been treated as a saint and as a heretic, but his view of the End of the World retained its popularity in esoteric circles down to the 20th century.

Joachim's vision encompassed a complex view of time and history. He divided time into three overlapping states or ages. The first is the age of the Father, which began with Adam and ended with Christ's death on the cross. The second, the age of the Son, began with the later Old Testament prophets, attained a climax with the life of Christ, and will last until the

victory of the Anti-Christ. The third age, that of the Holy Spirit, began with the rise of the monastic orders in the sixth century and culminates in the last days. The Third Age will last until the End of the World.

Convinced that political events, such as the schism in Sion, the encroaching power of the Roman Orthodoxy and its struggle with the Holy Roman Empire, portended an imminent close of the second age, Joachim retreated to his own mountain-top monastery on Mount Nero, high above the Sila plateau in northern Italy. There he was consulted by the great of his era, including Richard the Lion-Hearted. Joachim told Richard that the Anti-Christ had already been born. Given that the date, 1191, was roughly the time when Tamujin began his rise to become the Genghis Khan of the Mongol horde, Joachim may have been right. His calculation placed the end of the second age at around 1260. By this date, 58 years after Joachim's death, several apocalypses, such as the fall of Constantinople to the Fourth Crusade, the crusade against the Cathars and the conquest of the Middle East by the Hordes of Genghis and his sons, had happened. Eighty seven years after Joachim's target date, the worst apocalypse since Noah's flood swept over the world.

The Black Death was a disaster of unparalleled magnitude. Even now, we have nothing with which to compare it. The influenza epidemic at the end of World War I killed almost 2 million people. Added to the death toll of the war itself, we have just a little over 10 million deaths between 1914 and 1920. Horrible as this is, it is little more than a third of the toll for the first wave of the Black Death in Europe alone between 1347 and 1350. It would take the mechanized slaughter of the Second World War to approach the world wide Black Death totals. Only the actuality of a nuclear war could top its destructiveness. To even think about the Black Death is to contemplate the unthinkable.

To those who lived through it, the Black Death seemed worse than any day of judgment, because the good and evil, the just and the unjust, died just the same. The very virulence of the plague struck at the heart of civilization. Survival lay in rejecting compassion, of any kind, and embracing isolation. Civil and social ties broke down under the weight of so many dead; governments fled, parents turned from their dying children, priests no long celebrated Mass for the dead or tried to comfort the living, and only the poorest of the poor could be induced to handle the disposal of the ever-mounting pile of dead.

The most important casualty of the plague, however, was the Church itself. The institution survived, but something vital was lost. The omnipresent belief in God so important to the medieval mind could not survive the baffling problem of God's relationship to the horror. Prayers and the intercession of saints and relics had no effect on the plague, while quarantine, hygiene and isolation did. This simple observation shook the religious foundations of medieval society to its very core. The recurrence of the plague every 11 years for the next half century led many to believe that evil, in the form of the Devil, was gaining the upper hand.

Within the Church this realization played itself out in several unfortunate ways. Secular power and political control slowly replaced its spiritual motivations, until in the next century, freebooters such as Rodrigo Borgia, Alexander VI, could seize control of the Papacy and carve out a kingdom in Italy for his children. Between the Black Death and the Renaissance lay the Great Schism, a period of rival Popes and rival Cardinals split along political lines, with France, Spain, Scotland and Cyprus on one side and Germany, England, Scandinavia, Hungary, and Poland on the other side. And, through it all, The Inquisition continued to grow.

A product of the crusade against the heretical Cathars in southern France, the Inquisition had become an institution by the mid-13th century. After the Black Death, the power of the Inquisitors grew until they became, in their own view, the front-line shock troops in the Church's war against the forces of the Devil. Evil had become overwhelmingly powerful and must be fought by any means necessary, including the incorporation of evil itself, in the form of torture and violence, to the service of good. Both sides of the Great Schism

supported the Inquisition, which, by the late 15th century, had become the real power behind the Church's authority.

However, both the secularization of the Church and its rigid and inquisitorial enforcement of its dogma were symptoms of an even deeper rooted problem -- dualism. Christianity had never solved the problem of evil. Why did a good and omnipresent God allow such evil to exist? Perhaps God wasn't omnipresent after all; perhaps the Devil, the locus of evil, was the equal of God and might even win the contest? Just as this fear drove the Inquisitors to burn sinners' bodies for the sake of their souls, it turned others toward awe and worship of evil for its own sake.

It is important to realize that heretical forms of Christianity, The Cathars and so on, and pagan survivals such as the witch cults are not what we mean when we speak of worshipping evil for its own sake. While devils and demons had long been a part of the medieval psyche, only after the Black Death did the Devil become powerful enough for anyone to seek his favor. In the late 14th century, as the Black Death swept back and forth across Europe, a formal inversion of Christianity developed, substituting the Devil for Christ. (The Hebrew Satan, derived from the Egyptian Set, is actually the twin of Christ, as in some traditions Set is the twin of Horus.) At first, these tendencies existed in private, but, as the texts that turned up in the next century prove, they were widespread among the higher and more learned levels of the Church.

In addition to formal Satanism, the aftermath of the Black Death threw up another dark archetype, the vampire. Folklore of various cultures contained demonic beings who lived on blood, such as the Lamia of ancient Greece, but the undead human who drinks blood to maintain his immortality, controls the weather, and rules all rodents and other "children of the night" is a product of the post-Black Death mentality. The vampire and the Satanist represent the depth of psychic damage brought on by the Black Death. They are the new denizens of a post-apocalyptic reality. Six hundred years later, at the edge of the second millennium, Satanists are rock stars, with plenty of sympathy and taste, and vampire fashion is all the rage among teen-agers.

The Black Death was the end of the world. The ancient world and its medieval continuation came to a conclusion in the mid-14th century. The world went on, and the survivors tried to ignore the disaster, but in truth, everything was different. Many important secrets were lost and strange new forces surfaced to take charge. We are still living in the shadow of that apocalypse, and the forces it threw up are now in control of all our lives.

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