

SHADOW OF THE

Grail



**MAGIC AND MYSTERY AT
MONTSEGUR**

RICHARD STANLEY

VIDEO EDITION

SHADOW OF THE GRAIL

Magic and Mystery at Montsegur

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About the Author



Richard Stanley with Scarlett Amaris

Richard Stanley is an award winning film-maker, anthropologist and esoteric scholar. He has written and directed such feature films as *Hardware* and *Dust Devil*.

The iconic writer-director is currently in production on *Mother Of Toads*, his segment in the upcoming horror anthology, *The Theatre Bizarre*.

Introduction

What follows is not a fantasy or work of speculative fiction. It is a faithful account of recent events in the south of France drawn from first hand testimony, letters and journal entries. Whenever possible I have left the original texts unchanged. The names of some of those involved have been changed to protect their privacy but otherwise what follows are the facts of the case as clearly as we can establish them.



Old Occitania – the hour between the dog and the wolf

Darkness Visible

From the travel journals of Richard Stanley - September 1992

I first came to the remote Pyrenean settlement of Montsegur and scaled the mountain overlooking the village in the dog days of the summer of '92. Britain's Channel Four Television had recently broadcast a hit show entitled 'The Real Jurassic Park', concerning efforts to extract dinosaur DNA from amber and were looking at a potential follow-up, provisionally entitled 'The Real Raiders of the Lost Ark', for a similar child-friendly early evening slot. They say the devil makes work for idle hands and when their religion department offered me a healthy advance to research the story I jumped at the chance, being shy of a few pence at the time.

My companions on this ill-advised junket were a researcher and occasional writer for the 'Fortean Times', named Mike Dee, and my then partner, a young artist and designer named Cat Knightly. Having come to the conclusion that a material hoax rather than a supernatural treasure lay at the core of the celebrated 'Rennes mystery', I had no reason to believe that I might have been putting Cat in danger by bringing her with me. Our relationship had been on the skids at the time and I suppose I had been hoping that the light and space of Southern France would help get our lives back on track. We arrived in the village of Montsegur late in the day and resolved to hike up to the ruined castle on the mountaintop to watch the sun go down. We were due to make an early start the following morning, so this would be my one and only chance to take in the remains of the 12th century citadel fancifully identified by the American army colonel Howard A. Buechner as the 'Grail Castle'.



Montsegur, east gate, known by some as 'the gate of the gods' (photo by Richard Stanley)

The fortress of Montsegur clings to a spur of rock, 1207 meters (3960 feet) above the hills of Plantaurel on the northern face of the Saint Barthelemy massif. Thanks largely to its inaccessible location it was among the very last of the so-called 'Cathar' castles to fall to the crusaders.

During a ten month siege, the castle's defenders, a core group of little more than three hundred knights and men at arms, held at bay an army of up to ten thousand battle hardened dogs of war.

Despite the individual heroism (some might say fanaticism) of the defenders, the siege's outcome was sadly inevitable. The beleaguered garrison capitulated in the spring of 1244, and after a brief ceasefire to allow the surviving heretics to celebrate the spring equinox, a date synonymous with the Cathar feast day of 'Bema', some two hundred and twenty five martyrs walked willingly into the fires kindled by their persecutors on the 'camp de cremat', the 'field of the stake', at the base of the mountain.

This action effectively marked the end of any real political resistance to the patriarchal rule of the Holy Roman Church, and rang the death knell for the mysterious dualist faith of old Occitania.



The trees crowded in around the narrow, snaking path and as we climbed higher Mike seemed to grow visibly more nervous. Perhaps it was simply his, quite reasonable, fear of the coming night which was already creeping up out of the cracks around us but, for whatever reason, by the time we came in sight of the walls of the keep Mike was feeling too uncomfortable to go any further. When he realized I had no intention of turning back he rounded on Cat.

“Are you coming with me or staying with him?”

“Staying with him, I guess...”

She cast me an uneasy side long glance, confused by the change that had come over our companion.

“Then give me the car keys.”

Mike thrust out his hand and with the slightest of frowns, I did as he asked. Then, turning wordlessly, he hurried away down the mountain as swiftly as possible. We watched him go, confused and a little unnerved, wondering what it was about this place that could have had so deleterious an effect on our friend’s normal good humour. Shrugging it off we found our way to the highest point in the castle, the broad white battlement overlooking the gorge of the Lasset far below.



Even then it occurred to me that there was something a little strange about the castle's architecture, but there was so little left of it other than those oddly calcinated walls, that it offered scant clues as to the true purpose of its creation. While immediately impressed by the fact that anyone could have built such a beautiful and complex construction at this altitude to begin with, I nonetheless suffered from the typically smug 21st century assumption that the inhabitants of 12th century Occitania had been our scientific and intellectual inferiors, rustic, unlettered, superstitious, essentially 'medieval' with all the mud-spattered, gurning, Pythonesque barbarity that word implies. For good or for bad, I was about to have that misconception shattered forever.

As the sun settled behind the Pic de Saint Barthelemy, a golden spume of cloud boiled up out of the west, moving so fast it was as if we were watching real-time animation or some form of time lapse photography. In fact, this being the nineties and UFO's being all the rage, we half-expected the 'mothership' from Close Encounters to show up at any moment.



Electric Montsegur (photo by Scarlett Amaris)

But it wasn't a bunch of benevolent aliens. It was a sudden, violent late summer storm and it was coming right at us. Forked lightning flickered within the thunderhead and realizing we were perched on the very highest point in the landscape, we decided to make ourselves scarce.

As we started down the time worn steps we realized we were no longer alone in the castle. A newcomer was standing silently in the courtyard below, seemingly unperturbed by the gathering tempest. He wore a black, hooded cloak or djellaba and judging by his long hair and beard I assumed him to be one of the locals, some kind of far out hermit or survivor of the hippy wars, who had grown so used to the mountain's ways that the thought of all that incoming voltage didn't phase him one little bit.

We got as far as the natural buttress just below the castle wall when the storm closed around us and lightning began to strike into the walls of the keep.

Other bolts seemed to be licking horizontally at the flanks of the mountain below, close enough to make our hair stand on end. The cloud swirled about the peak as if the castle were somehow sucking in the lightning, four or five streamers of writhing white hot plasma intertwining at a time, reaching down out of the vortex like a vast inhuman hand, and all the while a blinding light streamed from the keep's doors and curiously angled 'arrow slits' - a light so bright I thought I might never see anything again.

Warm rain squalled over us as night descended and we huddled together like trapped animals, trying to make ourselves as small as possible. Let's face it, we know very little about lightning to begin with and if the 'supernatural' is merely the natural to the power of ten, then this was the genuine article. A single bolt of lightning can kill you without even touching you. The electro-magnetic pulse alone is enough to stop the human heart, even at a distance, and there were literally hundreds of thousands of volts earthing themselves within a few feet of us.

The sheer existential terror of it came upon us as suddenly as if we had been caught in a violent riptide, the belittling sensation of being trapped helplessly in the jaws of something far bigger and more powerful than ourselves.

I sniffed the air, catching a strange, half-familiar smell that I took at first to be the scent of the wet mountainside, a sweet smell vaguely reminiscent of rosebay or the icing on a wedding cake - a hint of almonds.

Cat had been whimpering in sheer panic, but when that smell began to grow stronger she curled more tightly against me and fell silent as if she were too scared to make a noise, too frightened to even breathe or open her eyes.

And there were other sounds that seemed to come from out of the storm. Hard as this is to believe or accept, there were sounds like voices, like the cries of human souls burning in hellfire.

Later I tried to justify this absurdity by telling myself it was merely the bellowing of the cattle in the fields far below, their lowing amplified and distorted by the weird Alpine acoustics but at the time I was reduced to a state of cowering, 'medieval' terror, which is doubtless what I deserved for having been dumb enough to take the Holy Grail as a joke to begin with.

"What did they do here? What did they f*****g do in this place?!" Cat whispered. Those were the only words I can recall her saying, repeated over and over like a mantra in my mind through the long years to come, but at that time I had no answer for her.

The only way out was the way we had come. We tried to insulate ourselves as best we could, getting rid of all the metallic objects on our bodies, discarding money, watches and jewellery before crawling on our hands and knees towards the maw of the keep and the source of that strobing incandescence.

The hooded man we had seen earlier was standing stock still in the midst of the vortex of light but there seemed to be other figures moving around him, shadowy outlines that were a little harder to get a fix on.

I rubbed my eyes, realizing that there were whole sections of the courtyard that I couldn't quite bring into focus, the details of the architecture obscured by an odd, shifting gloom that I rationalized as the shadows of dense, fast-moving clouds, projected by random flashes of lightning against the stonework. Then Cat began to scream.

Later I would learn that the walls of the castle form a 'Faraday cage' and the voltage coursing through them that night would have inevitably effected the electromagnetic field within the keep.

All I knew at the time was that as Cat stepped through the archway, she began to quiver and thrash, eyes rolling up in their sockets, her body shuddering with such violence that I truly believed she was being attacked by some unseen presence from out of the dark. My eyesight is normally 20:20, but the lightning was playing hell with my night vision and between bursts the gloom was impenetrable.

Grabbing her flailing figure, I tried in vain to put myself between her and whatever seemed to be attacking her. Somehow I managed to drag her out of the courtyard and part way down the mountainside where her pulse and breathing seemed to gradually stabilize. Strange, drifting points of green light filled the night around us and when we reached the tree line, we realized the woods were alive with glow worms, presumably roused by the sudden rain. Cat's breathing grew more tortured as we reached the base of the slope and she began to tremble again, unable to move any further on her own. Then there was another fusillade of lightning and she collapsed into what I would have taken to be a fully blown grand mal had she had any previous history of epilepsy.

I caught hold of her and she raged against me, but I refused to leave her to lie. Legend has it that after the fall of the castle in 1244 the last of the faithful of Montsegur had been burned in that very spot, the first level place where the crusaders could build a stockade and gather the necessary brushwood. Cat didn't know the history of the castle yet and I had no intention of telling her or allowing her stay where she was. Hauling her to her feet we started, inch by inch, down the winding road towards the village.

Whatever it was that had found us on the mountaintop, seemed to follow as we struggled back to the tiny auberge where we had taken lodging. I banged frantically on the door of Mike's room, demanding he give back the car keys. Although I sensed movement within and knew he couldn't possibly be asleep he refused, for whatever reason, to acknowledge my presence.

"Rich...ard..."

I heard Cat utter my name and as I turned the clasps that held back the window's steel shutters were torn free by the storm and her voice tailed off into a moan. The shutters slammed against the quivering frame, lashing crazily backwards and forwards in the grip of the tempest, like something out of 'The Amityville Horror', white light blazing in at us as if whatever we had encountered in the keep was right there outside the window or perhaps already in the room.

Cat's flailing hand caught hold of my right arm, gripping me so tightly the bruise took more than a week to fade, her body shuddering as if something were being forced out of her. Or into her...

“Cat...”

Her eyes bulged, her veins seem to force their way to the surface of her purpling skin.

“Nuhhhhh...”

“You’ve gotta...”

In that strange, flickering, shifting light Cat’s face seemed as livid and engorged as a week old corpse.

“...fight it...”

Digging her nails from my flesh, I lunged towards the window. Narrowing my eyes I reached blindly out into the roaring void and caught the wildly swinging shutters. Drawing them closed I wedged them sensibly in place with a steel bar. At that very moment Cat caught her breath and folded to the floor, losing consciousness as if the plug had been pulled on whatever force had animated her.

Crouching beside her I checked her pulse, relieved to find normal colour already returning to her cheeks. Lifting her onto the bed I placed her in the recovery position before settling myself in one of the ancient, threadbare armchairs, too shaken to sleep and while the storm still howled outside I began to read everything I could find on the castle’s history.

Dawn was clear and cloudless, as if the night before had never happened.

Mike was sullen and withdrawn at breakfast, refusing to discuss what had happened the previous evening other than to complain about all the screaming and banging having interrupted his sleep. When pushed on the subject, he eventually suggested we had probably suffered some form of ‘shared hallucination’, not the last time I would hear such an explanation in the course of my enquiries, but for now it seemed to fit the bill.

The only person who believed us was our hostess, the auberge’s aging landlady. We were lodging in what turned out to be the oldest house in the village and Madame Couquet had lived there all her life, as had her father before her. She had seen enough to know we weren’t play-acting or ‘hallucinating’. After all, she explained, we had been sleeping in Otto’s room.



Madame Couquet's auberge (photo by James 'JB' Bourne)

Who the hell was Otto?

Then for the first time I heard the story of the young SS officer, who had come to Montsegur in the days before the war, in search of the most sacred relic in Christendom, the Holy Grail.

Some believed he had attained that quest. Madame Couquet had been a little girl at the time, but she remembered the tall, silent German well and had kept his room just as it had been back in the day he had taken lodging there.

Otto Rahn had seen something in the keep on his first visit, something that failed to gel with his rational, typically German intellect, something he couldn't adequately explain that drew him back to the castle again and again and ultimately turned him against the corrupt regime he had initially served.

It was commonly believed that Otto Rahn had perished either immediately before or during the war but when I made my initial enquiries in the village of Montsegur I was told by the former mayor, Marius Mounie, that the elusive SS officer was indeed still alive. He was an old man by now but apparently still visited the area frequently and I resolved to try and track him down in the hope of interviewing him for British television.

If Otto Rahn really had found the mysterious treasure of the Cathars, as some folk seemed to believe, then he was evidently a man worth talking to.

VIDEO 1



Extract from THE SECRET GLORY

Otto Rahn and the Cathars

The Cathars

Once upon a time, more than seven centuries ago, there existed between France and Spain a land known as Occitania. It was not a nation state as we currently understand a democracy to be, but a patchwork of feudal demesnes and warrior dukedoms with every river valley under the sway of its own warlord and the whole bound together by complex ties of blood, marriage and a common tongue.

It seems to have been an oddly enlightened culture for its time, perhaps too enlightened, and the high concentration of Jews and Muslims among the population bears silent testimony to an unusual degree of religious tolerance. Doubtless it was this overlapping of ideas and cross-fertilization of Christian and Moorish culture that gave rise to the South's artistic and scientific achievements. By the dawn of the 13th century the world was lit only by fire, yet there was a school of Jewish medicine in Toulouse and a school of magic in Salamanca. Several of the cornerstone works of the Kabbalah were written during that period in northern Spain and the area saw the first flowering of gothic art and architecture.

While not actively matriarchal, as some have claimed, Occitania at least embraced equal rights to the extent of offering a level playing field to both genders and democracy of a sort in the form of elected 'magistrates', or 'capitouls', who acted as a check on the power of the church and the aristocracy.

Above all the citizens of Occitania embraced the code of chivalry. Any burgher or serf could become a knight if he was valiant and loyal or knew how to compose music or poetry. Elsewhere in Europe knighthood was inconceivable without nobility, but the attributes of Occitan knighthood – accessible to anyone regardless of race, country or class – were nothing less than the sword, the word and the harp.

A troubadour would swear fidelity to his lady as if she were a feudal lord and from then on she would receive him according to the statutes of chivalry determined by the 'Court of Love' at Puivert. While honor and loyalty were cherished, 'truth' remained the essential quality of knighthood, for it was believed in those fair days that a knight that was true in heart could never fail in single combat.

It was the tolerance of the south that proved to be its undoing. The mountainous cradle of the Pyrenees became a haven for free thinkers and the nurturing ground of a variant form of Christianity that admitted no intermediaries between man and God and entertained eastern concepts such as reincarnation and vegetarianism, perceiving animals to have souls similar if not identical to our own.

Some believe that 'Catharism' was an older surviving form of Christianity similar to the original faith said to have been practised by John the Baptist and the Essenes, while others maintain it was essentially a form of Manichean Christianity introduced to the south by the

legendary Bogomil missionary Nicetas who is said to have walked all the way from Lombardy, carrying with him the mythical grande grimoire known as the 'Book of Love' or the 'Book of the Seven Seals'. Indeed the very word 'Cathar' is a calumny, a fighting word or insult, that simply betokens one who does not believe in the one God and which turns up in apartheid era South Africa and present-day Afghanistan with variant spellings but always the same meaning – 'kafirs', 'heretics' or 'devil worshippers'.

By the end of the 12th century the rise of the so-called 'Cathar' faith in Occitania represented a genuine challenge to the faltering hegemony of the Roman Church which was still trying to consolidate its hold over mainland Europe after the fiasco of the Third Crusade. In 1209 Pope Innocent III authorized a punitive military campaign against the so-called heretics that would become a war of extermination, ultimately claiming some eight million lives.

The brilliant military strategist Simon de Montfort was placed in overall martial command of the crusade. De Montfort was very much the Dick Cheney of his day, having honed his talents during his time in the Holy Lands where he showed an extraordinary aptitude for re-organizing and methodically asset-stripping conquered cities and nations. Religious authority was vested in the Spaniard Dominic de Guzman who was later to be canonized as 'Saint Dominic'- founder of the Dominican order, the black garbed monks who oversaw the bureaucracy of the Inquisition; the system of terror, interrogation and persecution that would provide the template for the modern police state.

The short supply lines and Occitania's lack of a unified political identity promised an easy victory for the dogs of war that followed de Montfort although, lacking the mechanization of the Nazis, it took the crusaders more than a generation to achieve their aims. Not only were libraries and records burned and the written word outlawed, but the Occitan people were literally bred into extinction by new laws making it illegal to marry or procreate with anyone who did not eat meat or speak French. By the time the dust settled, the kingdom of Occitania had been wiped from the map and its language, Romansh, a form of Anglo-Saxon not entirely dissimilar to English, that came to be known to later historians as 'Occitan', passed into oblivion along with the tarnished ideals of chivalry.

I suspect the kings of France were motivated more by greed than anything else, by the desire to possess the fertile lands and the notoriously beautiful daughters of the south. Possibly the Holy See needed a psychological band-aid to help boost confidence in the church after the shock of losing Jerusalem to the Moors, just as the United States saw fit to wage war on Iraq to make up for the trauma of 9/11.

The last stand of the Cathars took place at Montsegur, literally the safe or 'secure' mountain. It was the highest, oldest and least accessible of the castles that we now recognize as the first examples of gothic stonework to be found in Europe. The supreme act of resistance lasted for almost a year and there were battles fought every day. Many of the great heroes of chivalry made their final stand there - 'men such as Lantar, Belissen and Caraman' who rallied to the aid of the lord of the castle, Raymond de Pereilha, and the commander of the castle garrison, Pierre Roger de Mirepoix.

De Mirepoix was nicknamed the 'peacock' because of his foppish good looks which he claimed were the result of his family being directly descended from the pagan moon Goddess. In those days 'divine monarchy' was no joke with many monarchs and nobles believing they were literally the offspring of supernatural beings or minor divinities. De Mirepoix is a particularly intriguing case in point. He was as brave as he was learned with an abiding interest in alchemy that apparently led him to perfect a form of phosphorescent paint that was used to decorate the skin and armor of the garrison so that they would resemble ghosts or glowing skeletons in order to strike fear into the hearts of the superstitious Christian crusaders. It is thanks to de Mirepoix's efforts and the ancient traditions of Goddess worship surrounding the mountain of Montsegur that the castle's defenders came to be known and feared as the 'sons and daughters of Belisenna'.

According to a romantic tradition, first recorded by the 13th century troubadour Guilhelm Montanhagol and later popularized by Napoleon Peyrat's 'Histoire des Albigeois' (1872) the castle's final chatelaine was the mesmerisingly beautiful Esclarmonde d'Alion, the bastard daughter of the Comte de Foix and niece to her equally legendary namesake, the last high priestess of the Cathars, the venerable Esclarmonde de Foix. It is said that the ageing high priestess foresaw the doom that would overtake the south and instructed the castle's lord, Raymond de Pereilha, to fortify the old ruins that stood on the mountain's summit and prepare for the coming siege.

In the fullness of time the saintly high priestess became one with the spirit and the castle was granted to the younger Esclarmonde as part of her dowry. Born out of wedlock after her father's dalliance with a nun during a wolf hunt in the high Ariège this Esclarmonde d'Alion was rumored to be a sorceress who consorted with 'certain dethroned pagan divinities whose language she spoke and whom she called down from the mountains to do her bidding.'

When the crusaders finally ventured past the 'forest of toads' and the 'mountain of fear' to bring war to her woodland kingdom Esclarmonde is said to have donned man's armor to fight alongside her twin brother, Loup.

Many a knight dreamed of this ardent girl and because she overflowed with passion it is said that 'she gave herself to more than one of them, beside her horse and her sword, in the shade of the Pyrenean pines'.

She organized the shepherds to roll rocks down on the soldiers in the gorges below, guarded the supply lines to the beleaguered castle and lit the night beacons so that the barons and peasants that remained loyal to her cause would know that the truth lay up there, where the last of the faithful still held firm, on the slopes where the snows began.

In the end the last of the Cathar holy men or 'perfecti' made common cause with the pagan defenders and the Jews, Moors and other outcasts of the Roman faith in a final stand against their mutual nemesis. Through two winters the defenders of Montsegur held out against the Pope, against the Inquisition, the Teutonic knights and the kings of France, effectively against the world.



Richard Stanley with ballista ammunition (projectiles launched by medieval missile weapons)

The castle fell to treachery just before the spring equinox in the second year of the siege, when shepherds from the neighboring village of Camon showed the Teutonic knights, who were accustomed to the icy Alpine conditions, the secret path up the sheer side of the mountain by which the defenders smuggled in their supplies. The attack brought the keep within range of the crusader ballistas forcing a general ceasefire.

During the fifteen day truce that followed it is generally believed that something was smuggled out of the castle. Surviving documents make it clear that the treasures of the Cathar faith were taken to Montsegur for safe keeping yet when the crusaders entered the castle they found its coffers empty and storerooms bare. De Mirepoix and his men at arms were allowed to go free but all those who refused to recant were sentenced to die at the stake.



*The memorial on the 'Camp de Cremat' commemorating the martyrs who were burned here in
1244*

On March 16th, the last of the Albigensians, some 225 surviving men, women and children perished in the flames on the Camp de Cremat.

No trace of the castle's vanished chatelaine were ever found and the date and circumstances of her demise have not come down to us. Some accounts have it that she escaped to the Aude valley while others insist that Esclarmonde and her earthly lover fled across the Tabor to take refuge in the caverns of Ussat where they were eventually entombed alive by the pursuing crusaders. Over the years a myth grew up that Esclarmonde had been the living avatar of the Goddess, the immortal 'white lady' of the Pyrenees and that the castle once sheltered the most high Holy Grail. When the legions of Satan laid siege to the castle Esclarmonde is said to have turned into a dove. The dove split the rock with its beak before flying away to the east and the holy treasure was cast into the mountain which closed around it. So, according to popular tradition, the Grail was saved...

Some believe that the immortal Esclarmonde and her knights still sleep within the hollow hill, awaiting the day when after the passage of seven centuries, according to an ancient prophecy:

'The laurel will turn green again.'

Crusade Against The Grail

OTTO RAHN
**La Croisade
contre le Graal**
GRANDEUR ET CHUTE DES ALBIGEOIS



J.-P. Laurens. Les exécutés de Carcassonne.

Traduit de l'allemand par Robert Pitrou

FIGURES ET DRAMES DU PASSÉ
LIBRAIRIE STOCK

Title page of the first edition of 'Crusade Against the Grail', 1933

Otto Rahn's *Crusade Against the Grail* (1933, Urban Verlag) was the first account of the murderous campaign against the south to be published outside France. Despite the title, surprisingly little reference to the Grail itself is made in Otto's opus. Like the Moors, the 'Cathari' admitted to the existence of Christ, but their evident disdain for the material world is at odds with the Catholic veneration of earthly relics, such as the folkloric Cup of the Last Supper.

Besides, nobody seems to know what a Grail is, let alone who the damned thing belongs to. This surprisingly enduring symbol seems to have been around since the dawn of time, having its roots in oral tradition and pagan conceits such as Bran's cauldron or the horn of plenty, the fabled cornucopia.

Chretien de Troyes, who first recorded the myth in his 'Les contes del graal' or 'The story of the Grail', described the holy relic as a sort of dish or serving platter emblazoned with the Christian fish symbol.

By the time Wolfram von Eschenbach retold the saga in his 13th century epic, Parzival the Grail had been reconfigured into a 'hard, dark stone' symbolizing Christ's suffering and mankind's possible redemption.

Other legends portray the sacred treasure as a book or a graven tablet, possibly the lost Gospel of Saint John or the 'Book of Love', the vanished grande grimoire of the Cathars, which was said to reveal the true origins of the world.

Present day conspiracy theories inspired by Baigent, Lincoln and Leigh's 'The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail' (1982) insist that the Sangraal or Sang Real is literally the bloodline of Christ. According to this somewhat fanciful bestseller Jesus is supposed to have married Mary Magdalene and founded a dynasty whose modern day descendants are still guarded by their fanatical cohorts, the Priory of Sion.

Otto Rahn's contribution to the field was almost certainly influenced by the equally sensational work of the pseudo-archaeologist, Heinrich Schliemann, whose theory that Homer's 'Iliad' reflected actual historical events led to his much disputed 'discovery' of the ruins of Troy.

Otto Rahn seems to have dreamed of achieving similar results by proving that there was a factual basis to Wolfram von Eschenbach's epic narrative poem. Interest in this chivalric romance had been revived in the nineteenth century by the popular opera and Richard Wagner is supposed to have personally visited Montsegur in 1881. In those days the mountain was accessible only by foot or by horseback, an arduous journey that possibly reflects the ageing composer's determination to trace the myth to its source.

Otto Rahn seems to have followed Wagner's lead, believing the secret of the Grail to have been lost when the last of the Cathar 'parfaits' had died at the hands of the pope and the kings of France. Seeking to establish a direct link between Montsalvache, the Grail castle of Parzival, and the Cathar fortress of Montsegur, Otto set out to write a dissertation on Master Kyot, the Languedocian troubadour whose long lost Grail ballads were said to have inspired Wolfram's masterpiece.

He observed that the culture of the medieval Cathars bore a strong resemblance to the ancient Druids and that their secret wisdom might have been preserved by the troubadours or 'minnesingers', the traveling poets and minstrels of medieval Europe.

According to Otto, the war of the Roman Catholic Church against the Albigensians was simply a material manifestation of the ongoing apocalyptic struggle between the forces of Light and Darkness on whose violent interaction everything in our illusory material universe was apparently predicated.

Infinite goodness, the Cathar perfecti reasoned, was incapable of creating evil, hence the darkness, pain and misery in our world was not the will of God, but the work of the devil, the

demiurge who had hijacked creation, a symbolic figure they referred to as 'Rex Mundi', the ruler of the transient, material world.

They identified all clerical and secular rulers, principally the Catholic Church, as the personification of this Darkness and believed that it was possible either through multiple incarnations or a form of direct initiation known as the 'consolamentum' to eventually escape from the cycle of time and the deterministic prison of the material world. The 'consolamentum' was a form of absolution or extreme unction given at the approach of death that apparently involved the laying on of hands in a rite said to date back to the days of Christ and his apostles.

After receiving the consolamentum the Cathar 'credentes' would enter a state of 'endura', a form of ritual suicide in which the faithful would literally fast themselves to death or perish by deliberately exposing themselves to the elements in the hope of abandoning their physical bodies and returning to the stars, the domain of the true good God.



Portrait of Otto Rahn by Frau Hartmann (nee) Goetz, 1937

In his published writings Otto Rahn frequently identifies the Grail with the ‘Crown of Lucifer’, the diadem that fell from the peacock angel’s brow when he was cast out of heaven. According to tradition the crown fell to Earth in the Hindu Kush, where it was fashioned by master Afghan craftsmen into the cup used by Salem to consecrate the temple Abraham, built in Ur of the Chaldees. The cup became part of the sacred treasure of the temple of Solomon and was said to have been borne back to Europe by those pesky Romans who looted the Holy of Holies.

According to Otto, the servants of Lucifer still search for their master's lost diadem so that he might one day regain his rightful place in the kingdom of heaven. Searching from one lifetime to the next, down through the ages...

The Grotto of Ormolac

The long, dry summer of 1992 was drawing to a close in a suitably Biblical manner. There was another storm the night after we left Montsegur but this time Cat, Mike and myself took shelter in a cave in the glacial valley of Ussat in the upper reaches of the Ariège.

Manhandling the hollow trunk of a fallen tree into the mouth of the grotto we kindled a comforting blaze that burned throughout the night, keeping us surprisingly warm and dry. We were just laying out our sleeping bags when we were surprised by the appearance of a stranger who stepped silently out of the dark, a bearded man swathed in a hooded cloak very similar to the one we had seen that shadowy figure wearing in the castle's courtyard during the tempest the night before.

The newcomer was seemingly unable to converse in either English or French but from what little we could work out his name was apparently 'Uriel'. Judging from his mane of unkempt hair, medieval clothes and zoned out eyes we assumed he was some sort of hermit who must have been living rough on the hillside and was presumably drawn to the light of our fire in the hope of finding sanctuary from the torrential downpour that had overtaken us. He seemed happy enough and exuded such an aura of calm that we did not hesitate to admit him to our circle.

The lack of any common tongue put further conversation out of the question but as we made ourselves comfortable Uriel slipped a wooden flute from the folds of his robe and began to play. It was the first time I had heard the folk music of the region and to my untrained ear the ballads and laments of old Occitania had a distinctly middle eastern sound, their coiling, mesmeric cadences redolent of distant lands and vanished kingdoms.

As the storm raged outside and the candles flickered in the sconces cut into the cavern walls for some unguessable ritual purpose in times gone by I curled deeper into my sleeping bag, allowing my thoughts to drift, realizing I had come to the beginning of something I could scarcely comprehend.

For the first time my waking mind had begun to admit to the possibility that something genuinely inexplicable was at work in the area, something that couldn't readily be put down to the antics of the cranks and treasure hunters we had encountered during the earlier phases of our research, yet I lacked the necessary perspective and maturity to have any real chance of joining the dots.

It was no surprise to find the next morning that 'Uriel' had disappeared, quietly taking his leave while we slept as if he had never really been there. The sun was already high in the sky. The storms had passed, at least for now, and the meridional firmament was a rich, deep, cloudless blue.

We rolled up our sleeping bags and returned to the car, our flight connections and respective lives. Later when we got our heads together back in the so-called 'real' world I grudgingly agreed

to omit all mention of the Rahn affair from the report subsequently submitted to our sponsors at Channel Four. The memory of what had happened on the mountain however continued to haunt me.

A few years later I found myself drawn back to the area, this time with a camera crew in tow, determined to get to the bottom of the mystery once and for all...

Return to Montsegur

In a distant land, unreachable by your strides, a castle by the name of Mont Salvat exists...

Richard Wagner - Parsifal



Montsegur - spring 1988

It is still snowing in Montsegur.

The incline, halfway between the car park and the chateau, has become a wall of ice and the glacial wind whipping the mountain barely allows me to remain standing. In my black suit and tie I am definitely under-dressed for this altitude. Behind me rise the ramparts of Soularac and the Pic de Saint Barthelemy; known by some as the Tabor or mountain of transfiguration over which the Grail was said to have been carried on its passage to Ussat. Around its summit, nearly three thousand meters up, dances a fiery halo of cloud.

“I came to Montsegur to find the answer to one simple question”, says Guy.

“What would make a man of sound mind want to die by the worst kind of death? The death by the fire, you know.”

Guy Puysegur is strolling across the field of the stake, site of the original holocaust back in the thirteenth century. He wears a woolen jerkin and an American cavalry officer's hat. A pair of WW2 surplus field glasses dangle at his throat.

“All they had to do was recant and they would have been spared. Instead they chose...this...”

Guy is a long term stringer for the U.N. and a former administrator of the world labour organization. He cold called me at Madame Couquet's and ever since has been surreptitiously sounding me out. Back in the forties he was an operative for the OSS , the wartime precursor to the CIA, at least until the Nazi's caught him and sent him to Auschwitz. Since then he seems to have taken “Arbeid mach Vrei” as his life motto.

“I spoke with a doctor in Geneva about it and he said that after a few minutes you wouldn't feel it anymore with the smoke and everything, but even for a few minutes! I couldn't stand it! I don't know what I would do! I think that I would convert to any other kind of religion rather than die that way.”

“Do you know what happened to Rahn? Back in '39?”

“Nobody knows and nobody will ever know because he disappeared. He's gone now, alright. It's finished.”

For a moment he starts to look worried again, little lines and creases appearing all over his face as if he is being slowly sewn up from the inside.

Ussat-Les-Bains, spring 1998

“My grandfather was extremely lucky to own the only car in he region back in the thirties,” Christian Bernadac informs me, stepping on the gas.

“All the other archeologists then were either schoolteachers, lecturers or priests. They always wanted to go to the caves and my grandfather, who wasn’t a taxi driver, would take them there. Then in ‘31 a young German arrived in Ussat who wanted to carry out research concerning the Grail, Montsegur and the Cathars. Obviously, since he wanted to move about and since he was with Antonin Gadai, who was then the minister for tourism for the area and who had been interested in Grail research for many years, they came to see my grandfather about the car which was a Renault, a B-14 I think.”



Christian Bernadac at the wheel of his jeep, summer 1998 (photo by James ‘JB’ Bourne)

Christian is a vintage car freak and I am currently strapped into the passenger seat of his pride and joy, a rickety wooden WWII era jeep, plunging up a precipitous mountain road somewhere high above the valley of Ussat.

“For Rahn the Grail was a stone, fallen from the sky. It’s not a vase, a cut emerald or a grasale, which is what we, in the Pyrenees, call a dish. That is...the dish in which Joseph of Arimathea was said to have gathered the blood of Christ.”

Christian corners sharply. The aging Vietnam veteran has recently retired from his former position as the head of Television One in France to run as a candidate in the coming election. He takes the Grail business very seriously. After an expansive lunch he leads me on a winding trail up the hillside behind his grandfather’s house to a cave known as the Bethlehem Grotto.



Apparently a ray of light falls on a natural stone altar in the centre of the cave floor on the 25th of December every year, giving rise to the grotto's appropriately Biblical name.

The cavern, commanding a splendid view of the valley of Ussat, has been used as a secret place of worship since time out of mind.

Gesturing at an octagonal depression on the limestone wall Christian tells me that Otto Rahn once drew a woman's face on that stone, allegedly the face of Beatrice who guided Dante on his journey through Hell. According to Christian Otto was caught red handed by Joseph Mandement, the leader of a local historical society, who allegedly expelled the young German from the cave and 'threw his crayons after him.'

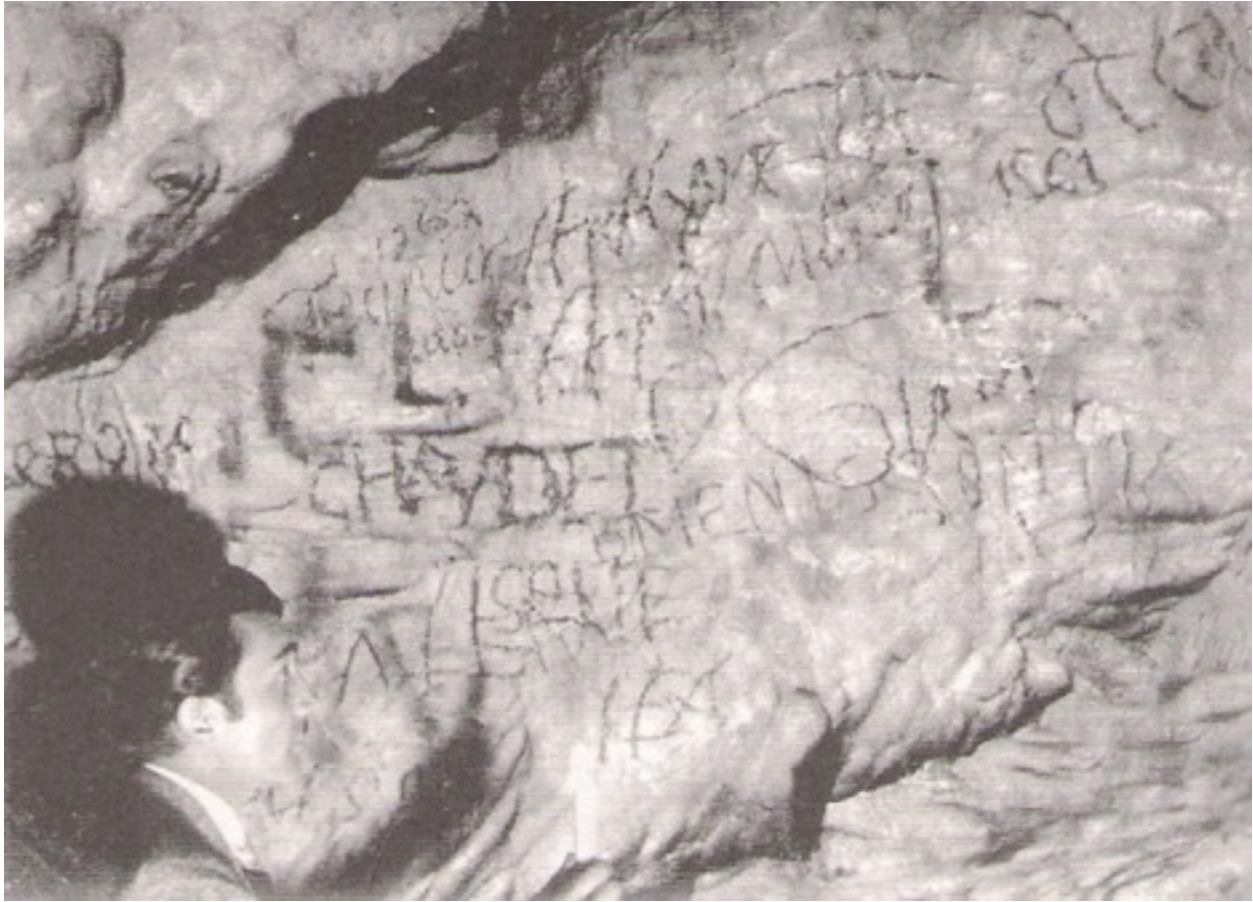
Later, Christian claims, the face was scrubbed from the wall by Rene Nelli, Rahn's translator.



"But who was she?" I ask, bewildered. Christian shakes his head.

"I don't know. An unrequited love perhaps. Who knows what drove him to come here."

Marble and crystal shimmer in our torch beams as Christian guides me into the guts of the Lombrive, the largest limestone cave system in Western Europe. The descent seems endless. It is as if I have been swallowed by the earth. The rock faces are alive with ancient graffiti and Christian points out the scrawled signature of his grandfather. Beside it I recognize the name of the former mayor of Montsegur, Marius Mounie.



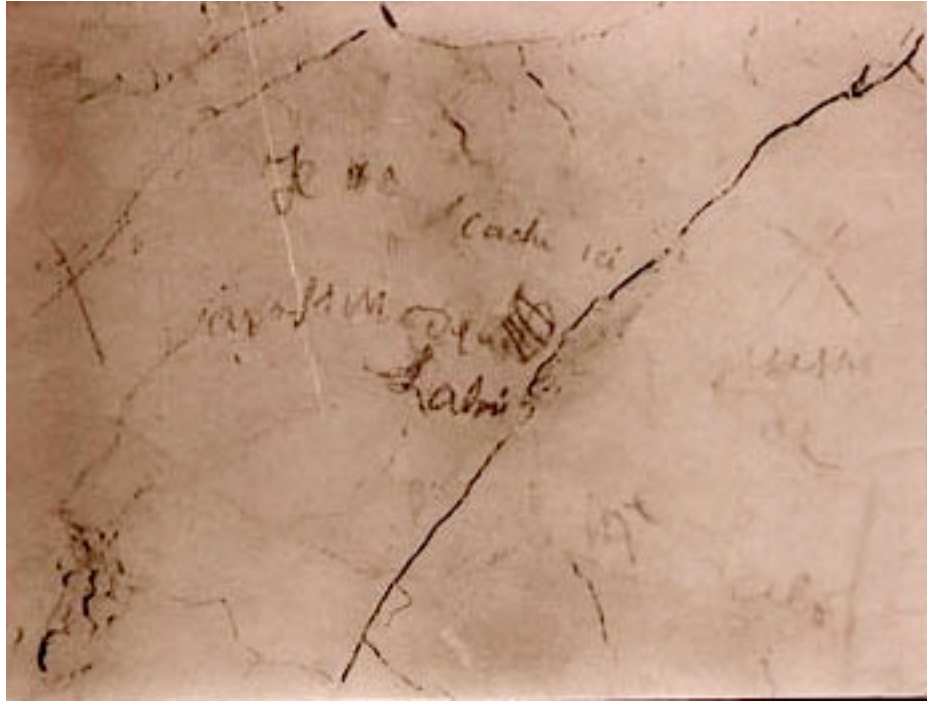
Otto Rahn in the 'cathedral' of the Lombrives, summer 1932

Otto seems to have attached a great deal of importance to the graffiti he found on these walls, taking dozens of photographs, each one neatly labelled in the vanished SS Obersturmführer's own hand.

He seemed to have believed that the Cathars and the Templars shared hiding places and that these scrawled sigils proved an obscure linkage between them, a connection apparently vital to the lineage of the modern-day Freemasons. Some, Christian included, believe that it was really Otto and Gadal who secretly tagged the cave walls with crudely rendered designer esoterica.

Everywhere I point my flashlight wilting pentagrams and stylized spiders seem to adorn the walls. One inscription is a question asked of God by a young man. He asks God why he took his wife and the mother of his children.

Another, dated 1850, still awaits a reply - "What is God?"



*This graffiti reads: "Je me caché ici, je suis l'assassin de Maitre Labori"
(I am hiding here, I am the assassin of Maitre Labori)*



Richard Stanley in the 'cathedral' of the Lombrives, summer 1998 (photo by James 'JB' Bourne)

The mountain shelters at its heart an immense chamber with an eighty meter high ceiling. The cathedral which Christian tells me was used by the Druids and visigoths as a temple.

The Cathars in turn took shelter here and were said by some to have been entombed alive by the crusaders who did not dare to follow them into the labyrinthine passageways which honeycomb the impenetrable rock.

In the silent darkness their high priests no doubt uttered the words which promised divine pardon as a result of the imminence of death, and the liberation of the spirit and stretched their hands over bowed heads in the invisible gesture of the consolamentum, as they bade one other farewell amidst the shadows.

Family Memories

THE BLACK FOREST - WINTER 1998



Ingeborgh Roemer-Rahn

“When I was very young my grandfather took me up into the hills. He told me if I closed my eyes and took his hand that I’d be able to see heaven.”

“And did you?”

Ingeborgh Roemer-Rahn smiles, avoiding my eyes.

“I took his hand and it was like a lightning flash. I don’t know what I felt. He said that feeling, that is heaven. The angels, those seraphim, they exist! It was a form of inheritance. A gift. I think the seventh sight must run in our blood. Ever since then I’ve been able to see those angels whenever I want and sometimes I hear their voices.”

I feel like asking her what happened to the sixth sense but that would be too cheeky of me. It is nice enough of her to have invited me into her home, a beautiful wooden house overlooking the black forest near Amorbach. Ingeborgh has been recently divorced, living alone now with her ailing mother, earning a pittance as a psychiatrist and naturopath. She has Otto's profile, his nose, cheekbones and icy green eyes, cold and distant as the snow melt.

The problem is that if Otto isn't exactly alive then he isn't, strictly speaking, dead either. There is no death certificate, no formal paperwork that can lay his ghost or put the seal on his baffling legacy. The only certainty is that he was born, on February 18th 1904, in the small town of Michelstadt in Southern Germany. His childhood, by all accounts, appears to have been far from normal.

"I think he must have inherited that gift from his father, my grandfather, Karl. He was a man of few words. I think he was looking for a kind of religion and perhaps he found it in nature..."

Ingeborgh looks past me at the lusterless winter sky and the wind sougning in the leafless trees that surround the rambling wooden house.

"My grandmother, Clara, however was a very materialistic woman and could never understand this side of him. After Otto died she became introspective. When the war ended she burned his books and papers and never spoke of him again..."



Otto and Rudolph

Bereaved at an early age by the death of his older brother, Rudolph, Otto grew into a solitary, introverted boy. His father Karl was a magistrate who was often transferred from town to town which made it hard for his young son to form lasting friendships.



Otto Rahn school photograph, 1920

Instead he became a precocious scholar, assimilating the bare bones of German Romanticism through his avid childhood reading of Greek, Roman and Nordic mythology. He developed a passionate interest in the stories of Parsifal, Lohengrin, the Nibelungenlied and the legends of Jacob and Benjamin Grimm, fellow denizens of the Black Forest, whom Otto must have seen as role models in his chosen career as philologist and folklorist. While attending the University of Giessen, he was encouraged by his professor, Freiherr von Gall, to focus his studies on the history of the Cathars and in the summer of 1929 decided to pursue his studies on the ground in Southern France - or as Otto put it at the time:

“My ancestors were witches and I am a heretic.... It is a subject that completely captivates me.”



Otto Rahn and classmates, summer 1919

Ingeborgh still has Otto's threadbare teddy-bear and when she was still a child she wore his hand-me-down jumpers. There is an incense burner that Otto brought back from Iceland, some crystal glasses, a handful of old photographs, curling postcards and a lump of amber the size of a hen's egg - Otto's only surviving personal effects. His last gift to Ingeborgh was a black stone, a kind of huge, dark amethyst that she found lying on his grave when she went to take him flowers. I was half hoping that Otto might have left an old cup lying around somewhere but no such luck. In the end all Ingeborgh can do is give me a hug and wish me luck.

Near Amorbach (river of love) is a very ancient church, not far from where Otto was born, surrounded by a stand of leafless trees. The name of this place is Amorsbrunn (the source of love) and it is beneath the church that the river Amor rises.



St. Jesse, Amorsbrunn Germany

Beside the source is a statue of a Christian saint, Saint Jesse, standing with one foot on a serpent. Two bronze crescent moons emerge from the water in which the serpent is coiled, reminiscent of the Tarot trump of the High Priestess.

On the wall of the church is a huge mural of Saint Christopher carrying Christ across the water, further signifying the aggressive Christianization of this pagan holy place. Inside the church the human prosthetics in wax, the children's dolls and the images which thirty years ago covered the altars and the walls have all disappeared with the exception of but a very few. The pagans never needed plaster figures, wax dolls, prayer stools or artificial grottoes to express their feelings. Their divinities had no need of family trees. Their father was himself the Father-of-All, he who simultaneously carries a number of names and has no name, who is one and multiple, who manifests himself openly and remains inconceivable. His line does not hail from Jesse, but from Heaven, of which this earth is a part.

In Heidelberg the snow is already so thick it holds us back a day and in Stuttgart we are stuck for a whole weekend when moisture gets into the van's immobilizer and shorts out the whole system. We call the AA but the polizei arrive instead and insist on inspecting our shoes - apparently something to do with foot and mouth disease. While I am making small talk with the

rather attractive lady copper I see a bunch of figures hurrying across the road behind her carrying what looks like a stereo stack system.

“The world’s gone crazy,” she tells me with a shrug, before returning to her car to radio in the incident.

A United Europe

GENEVA - WINTER 1998

The morning light is cold and clear on the fresh cut grass. There is a bronze statue in the middle distance depicting two blank eyed children standing hand and hand. Les petits amis.

“I first met Otto Rahn in 1929. I’d just finished high school and I wanted to learn a trade with my hands, to become a painter and I was told that in Berlin was the best school in Europe, de Reimannschule and I went there...”

Paul Ladame’s voice is a hoarse whisper. He has recently had his left foot amputated and in a cruel twist of fate a tracheotomy has severed all but one of his vocal cords. A former cartoonist, journalist, radio man and until recently a professor at Geneva University specializing in the methodology of information and disinformation, Paul has lived at least nine lives but even he has to admit his luck is finally starting to run out.

“Berlin was a marvellous city. Very poor, but very gay. We were very young, dancing a lot, loving the girls and music and everything, enjoying life ten years after the end of World War I and ten years before started the Second World War...”

It is as if his voice comes from very far away, from across time itself, each word costing him some terrible inner price. I am scarcely conscious of the park bench we are seated on, the hubbub of downtown Geneva becoming strangely muted as if I am drifting gradually away from it. Paul’s eyes are upturned, his hands clasped around an elegant cane bearing a silver eagle’s head.

“One night I received a telephone call from one of my pals, telling me that he had the flu and that he couldn’t go the next morning at five to play in a film for Pabst somewhere on the border of Germany and Poland. Would I be kind enough to replace him? I said yes. I go there and I played there in the first film of Pabst, “Die Vier von the Infanterie”, and we were a group of about thirty young men in French uniform of the war of Verdun playing war against the Germans. One of my little pals came from Switzerland too and one of his great friends was a German four years older than we were who had come to visit us and his name was Otto Rahn. Why did look at me and talk to me? For the very simple reason that I taught French to him and he had with me a good exercise. I don’t see more than that at the beginning.”

Around us normal life is continuing. Cyclists glide past and mothers shake rattles at prams. Couples stroll, bound to each other by their arms. Somehow Paul’s insistent whisper makes even the open brightness of the park seem treacherous.

“At the time I met Rahn I looked at him with...awe and interest and I said,

“That’s a man who has ideas about things I couldn’t dream of.””

“He was obsessed with the agendas of past times, with the inquisitors like Conrad von Marbourg who had been a very terrible man in the Middle Ages. He burned people on the streets of Rahn’s hometown just because they didn’t interpret the bible the way he did. And Rahn found that such a thing had happened also in France and he wished to discover that France, to write about those who had been crushed, about the minorities... called Cathari... to write a mystical book, a mythical book but also a political book... To write about his search for the Graal and the wisdom of past centuries. And so came the idea to Otto Rahn that one day Germany and France must be united with England and united also with Italy, united with all Europe... to form a united Europe...”

Paul’s daughter, Shiva, is strolling beneath the trees, just out of earshot, trying to appear disinterested. Like Paul she is a Buddhist, convinced that the answer to all of this lies in the mysteries of reincarnation. Weekdays, nine to five, she is a senior administrator for the Red Cross.



The three seigneurs (photo by Otto Rahn, summer 1932)

“On his first visit to Paris he met a man who was a Frenchman from the South, with the accent from the South who shared his enthusiasm and this was Magre...Maurice Magre... who

had already written books... 'Le Sang de Toulouse'... 'The blood of Toulouse' telling about the crusade... about the suffering of the South and he says,

'Look Otto, go to Montsegur and witness one thing... that the crusade went on for about a century... not a few battles... not a few people vanquished but they fought on... fought on... all the time... almost one century and the last ones to defend themselves hid themselves in grottos.'

Now I had a few years before accompanied my brother who was an engineer in mines and I had experience with all the instruments one has to have in a cavern so suddenly Rahn tells me, 'well Paul, you must come with me. You can go in these caves and help me with the lights and all that,' and I, as a feeble man, say, 'Yes, Otto, I come with so long as you pay for the trip.'

We happened then to go to Lavalanet and to go up the street and then on the second or third turn you discover Montsegur, a huge mountain watching you like it had never been touched by a human foot. First impression. Then I met the people of Montsegur. The first mountaineers of the Pyrenees..."

Summer Solstice



Montsegur summer solstice, 1998 (photo by James 'JB' Bourne)

On the evening before the solstice the castle is surrounded by at least a thousand people divided into three separate camps, Occitan, Catalan and military (mostly Legionnaires). Their camp-fires burn throughout the night and from the keep we can hear their singing voices drifting up to us, raised in curious songs, peculiar to their regions and dialects. The songs of the troubadours. The language of *Romans*.

Towards dawn a procession winds its way up to the keep. They are mostly young men in short-sleeved khaki uniforms, flat military caps on their shaven heads carrying burning brands upraised in their right hands. Their leader is about my age, a paunchy individual with close cropped peroxidized hair reminiscent of the style affected by the Croatian football team this summer. He is distinguished from the others by the leather glove he wears on his right hand. Lacking a proper introduction we take to calling him "Black Glove" and the others "the boy scouts." They are the first obvious neo-Nazis that we have encountered in the pursuit of this matter and they are definitely unhappy to see us.

Black Glove comes up the steps first, his eyes meeting mine. In that instant, in the flickering firelight, I am face to face at last with a tangible nemesis, if not with the devil then the naked face of intolerance, puffy features surrounding piggy, blue eyes I've seen a thousand times before back

in South Africa and other places south. How are you doing Satan? Been so long I almost missed you.

By dawn there are approximately three hundred people crowded into and around the keep and as the first sliver of the rising sun shows itself everything happens just the way that it's meant to. Somehow the east facing arrow slits catch and refract the faint light, glowing like hot coals, a deep vibrant red, like blood or fire, like no stone I've ever seen before. The glowing bands lengthen, lancing out of the arrow slits, as clearly defined as laser beams, crossing the center of the keep to light up two elongating rectangles on the far wall.

Everyone assembled; young and old, Occitan and Catalan alike, seem intent on reaching into the beam, trying to touch the light as if hoping to suffuse themselves with its energy. Black Glove is insulting us in French, not knowing we can understand him perfectly well.

“Fools don't know a thing. It's the secret of the Gods but only we know...”

The scene is strangely dream-like, set aside from normal time. I feel as if I am adrift in an esoteric aquarium in which the only other fish are plainly piranhas. After approximately twenty minutes sharp black shadows edge into the rectangles like fangs or the blades of a closing portcullis. Then within a few minutes the light is gone, shut off for at least another twelve months. I am told that since the industrial revolution accumulating smog over the flatlands has begun to interfere with the intensity of those first rays and coupled with the shifting weather patterns has caused the solstice effect at Montsegur to become a little erratic. It has been four years since it last took place with the same clarity as it did this year and it might be another four years until it happens again.

What any of this means is beyond me. I think that things come in cycles. Moons, times of the month, reincarnation, the whole damn thing.

VIDEO 2



Extract from THE SECRET GLORY

Solstice at Montsegur

Pagan Imperialism

In 1932 Otto Rahn left the south of France in a hurry, dogged by rumors of financial problems and possible legal proceedings against him. For a while his movements are all but impossible to track. Evidently he did not depart the country immediately for in October of that year the author Isabelle Sandy mentions in a letter that Otto is staying with her in Paris and that

“a valuable treasure has been returned to us, without diplomats and without fuss and that is the result of an incomparable success.”

Within a year of leaving France, Otto was back in Germany. He made a point of visiting the remote castle of Germelshausen, where Christian Rosenkreutz was said to have been born. His first book, ‘Crusade against the Grail’ appeared that autumn from Urban Verlag in Freiburg to critical acclaim and fair to middling sales.

The following summer found Otto in Italy, this time in the company of the Tantric magician and committed pagan imperialist, Baron Julius Evola. The eccentric Sicilian nobleman was at that time working on his magnum opus ‘Rivolta contro il mondo moderno’ (‘Revolt against the Modern World’ – 1934), a ringing denunciation of both democracy and socialism.

In Evola’s elitist world view capitalism and communism were twin aspects of the materialistic forces that had conspired since the dawn of time to subvert the spiritual ideals of the primordial Indo-Aryan tradition. It is possible that Otto played a diplomatic rôle, quietly shuttling between the leading lights of the fledgling neo-Cathar and neo-Pagan movements to see if they could be united in a common cause. Some believe that he sought to recruit the Baron and his associates to the service of his clandestine Nazi pay masters while others suspect that he naively saw the rise of National Socialism and Mussolini’s fascist regime in Italy as a golden opportunity to rebel against the hegemony of patriarchal Judaean-Christianity and what he perceived to be the dark forces of post-industrial modernity. It is unlikely that his views were shared by Evola, whose anti-liberal and anti-Semitic interpretation of the ‘primordial tradition’ essentially amounted to an unequivocal endorsement of divine monarchy and the absolute rule of a master caste, an authority to which the Baron assumed he was entitled by deign of blood.

Perhaps unsurprisingly something seems to have gone a little awry with Otto’s Italian excursion and one of his associates, Dr. Adolphe Frise, describes how he was forced to rescue his friend from Milan and drive him hastily back to his home in Bad Homburg. Dr. Frise claims that Otto seemed visibly upset and chain smoked throughout the journey, muttering darkly about how he was caught up in something he was not at liberty to explain. The true import of his words is lost to us, but back in Germany the glacial forces of history were on the move.

The German parliament, the Reichstag, had just been destroyed in a fire that would allow the National Socialist German Worker’s Party to consolidate its hold on the levers of power. Within a

few weeks, Otto would find himself summoned to Berlin for an urgent meeting with the Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler, who inducted him into the Black Order without further ado.

To what extent his Nazi masters truly believed that Otto might know the physical whereabouts of the Holy Grail remains a mystery, but his subsequent rise through the ranks cleared the way for the young adept to bring his research to its logical conclusion and ultimately set in motion the macabre and tragic events that were to follow..

Chimeras



Professor Paul A. Ladame, Geneva, summer 1998 (photo by Richard Stanley)

“Then comes the fear. At first a nagging fear and then the deep down fear that you are being followed. You pick up the phone and sometimes you hear a noise as if someone might be listening to you. You are in a café. At another table there is a man reading the newspaper. Then suddenly the newspaper goes down and he looks at you. Ah... he is a spy... and you are afraid and you stop talking with your friends. So comes the fear..”

The sun has already settled over lake Geneva and the office is vanishing into shadow. Paul Ladame’s face is almost lost in the darkness.

“I returned to Berlin for the Olympic Games of 1936. I was sent there, partly, by French radio. During the games the town was lovely to look at, clean everywhere, everywhere flags, everywhere flowers, everywhere smiling people meeting foreigners and asking them ‘Are you are a foreigner? Welcome to Berlin during the games. You’ll see how happy we are.’ And then comes September and the whole picture changes. Suddenly the people look at you and ask: ‘What does that bloody foreigner do in Berlin? Why doesn’t it go home?’”

For a moment I consider switching on the light but then decide against it. Paul has been talking for almost two days now. A long, difficult story rife with contradictions, of Grails lost and found.

“I was walking on the Kurfurstendam, the greatest street in Berlin, when suddenly, by chance, I meet, Otto Rahn in SS uniform, in black uniform, in the uniform of Himmler and I ask him in German, ‘mein liebe Otto, what are you doing in this uniform?’ And he answered, looking to the right and to the left, as if to make certain no-one was listening to what he said: ‘My dear Paul, one has to eat.’”

Otto had been mobilized as part of ‘Operation Smile’ and, possibly because of his command of the French language, found himself press-ganged into forming part of the reception committee laid on by the Nazi brass to greet the foreign teams and their supporters at the Olympic games. According to Paul he considered himself to be amongst the elite of the Nazi party. Because he had personally carried out the research on Heinrich Himmler’s genealogy to provide proof of the Reichsfurer’s Aryan ancestry Otto had come to believe he had direct access to the corridors of power. In the hierarchy of the Third Reich he was at best, however, a marginal figure, a mere cog in the machine.

“I had planned to take a flight to Leningrad or Moscow,” continues Paul, choosing his words with care. “I went to the Russian embassy to get a visa. When I returned to my lodgings my aunt told me: ‘Your friend Rahn has phoned several times’. So I ring back and he gives me the order: ‘Paul, come as quickly as you can to meet me.’ So I took the car of my uncle and drove through Berlin to his apartment where I discovered Rahn in uniform. He had a flask of French cognac and was quite a little bit drunk. He said, ‘Paul, you have been at the Russian embassy at ten minutes to twelve. You were allowed to bypass the queue and were out again ten minutes later. Proof that you are a spy. I have been asked to follow you and to report on who you meet, what telephone calls you get and what mail you receive. Paul, I can only give you one advice – get out of Germany as quickly as you can.’”

The ageing expert in the methodology of information and disinformation insists that he fell under suspicion because of a series of unflattering cartoons he had drawn of the Nazi leadership he had met during the games. Although I have not been able to access the relevant tailing report I imagine that the SS may well have had good reason to be wary of Paul Ladame. His mother was born in Russia and his political leanings before and after the war betray deep rooted socialist sympathies.

Paul shrugs. “What could I do? Just run away before I myself was taken prisoner or maybe even sent to one of the camps. He saved my life but who could help him? Who could help Rahn? Who could save him from what he had become?”

For a moment he meets my gaze and I realize that the tone of regret in his rasping voice is real, even if the facts of the story may have been blurred and softened a little over the years. It is as if Paul has been compelled to tell me this, to somehow protect Otto’s memory and set the record straight while he still has the chance.

“That was the last time I was in Germany during the Hitler dictatorship and I have never seen Otto Rahn again...”

Then he looks away, turning his pale, watery eyes towards the dossier lying before him on the desktop.

“Then in the autumn of 1939 I received an anonymous letter addressed to me at the radio station in Paris. Inside the envelope was this obituary cut out neatly with a pair of scissors, saying that he had died in a snowstorm high on the Kufstein, where he sat out the night until the blood in his veins had turned to ice...”

I glance at the simple, black rimmed obituary written by Himmler’s personal adjutant, Karl Wolff, whom Christian Bernadac had insisted had been one of the guests at the hotel ‘Des Marronniers’ in Ussat-les-Bains back in 1934. “What did you feel when you saw this?”

“I felt nothing. War had just been declared and there were other things on my mind...”

He reaches deeper into the dossier, coming up with a sheath of faded photographs.

“He had, you must admit, a very terrible life. A few years when Himmler protected him. And then came the day when Himmler could no longer protect him and that was the day that Otto Rahn made the decision, when the war broke out, to take his own life. And there, in the midst of the winter he died the death of a Cathar.”

He pushes one of the snapshots towards me.

“That was my friend ... Otto Rahn...”

I squint, holding the sepia image closer in the half-light. It shows a young man with dark hair, approximately my age, standing in the octagonal depression above the altar in the Bethlehem grotto, his arms outstretched to form a pentagram.



Photograph given to the author by Paul Ladame, Geneva, summer 1998

“Gadal took this picture back in ‘33. It was his initiation”

“What about Beatrice?”

“Who?”

“The drawing on the wall. Wasn’t there a story about some girl who refused to marry him? He’d apparently already sent out wedding invitations to Weisthor, his immediate superior in the Ahnenerbe SS and even to Himmler himself but she backed out at the last minute.”

Paul thinks it over for a moment. Then his face darkens and he pushes back his chair as if to signify that the interview is over.

“I won’t play those games. He was a good man. He deserved better...”

I try changing tack, switching the conversation to safer theological territory.

“Perhaps dying was the only way he could make his peace with God and escape the cycle of reincarnation?”

Paul shakes his head slowly, his scowl deepening.

“He never used the word ‘God’... For him Lucifer might be something like God... God could be anything to anyone... God is a chemical in which we swim...”

“If only we could find out what happened to him in that final year.. what he experienced in the camps, in Dachau and Buchenwald... I’m sure that it would be fascinating but who could tell you that? Who the hell would know a thing like that?”

Carcassonne - summer 1998



Suzie Nelli draws herself a little closer to the fire, petting her dog which is the fourth dog she's owned named Leika since the death of her husband, Rene.

“We don't know for certain what became of him. Did he disappear in the snow and the fog? Well, valleys, snow and fog often means death. Or was he killed because they found out he was Jewish? Could he have changed his identity? It was said that he assumed the identity of his deceased brother and I think that I should mention it was Christian Bernadac who told me this story. That he became a diplomat, in the Vatican, Lebanon and different places. One possible

proof that it could be true is that he had the same secretary that he had twenty or thirty years before in Germany... I think that her name was Tilda or Tita... something like that... Tita Laubert..."

Madame Nelli sighs, long-sufferingly. She was once a great beauty but now as the head of the centre for Cathar studies (a.k.a. The Rene Nelli Centre) in Carcassonne she has become a kind of a right wing dragon lady who gets up the noses of everyone who has dealings with her, myself included. In the course of befriending her I have had my tolerance tested to its limits.

"The problem of Otto Rahn is very complicated. The only thing you can be sure of is that he was a National Socialist and after a while had to prove himself to Himmler. First, by taking part in the Lebensborn programme... the experiments into genetic engineering that Himmler had initiated in an attempt to breed a new race... a Fourth Reich. Otto had this certificate so we have proof that he spent two weeks in this special clinic and left behind some essence of himself. There are probably twenty or thirty young Rahns out there, somewhere, and the biggest joke of all is that they'd all be just as Jewish as he was."

I have been in Carcassonne for a week now, spending my days with a group of knights who are holding jousting tournaments on the patch of land between the city wall and the tower of the Inquisition, where the last of the prisoners from Montsegur were interred alive. For anyone seriously interested in chivalry, in sword, lance or bow they are the best tutors one could hope to find. I feel stronger and am grateful for the blue Occitanian skies even though this is tempered by my irritation with having to endure Madame Nelli's foibles and thinly veiled insults on a daily basis.

"Those employed by Himmler were employed because they had given him guarantees. These pledges weren't only just spoken, they consisted of deeds as well. Deeds, in Otto's case, meant the writing of his first and then second book, which was full of Nazi ideology. After this the best proof that he could give was to accept the crime... I'm not saying that he killed with his own hands... but Otto Rahn agreed to serve with the deaths-head in the concentration camps. Buchenwald may not have been Auschwitz, but people died there, people were killed and he witnessed that. So it was, in a way, a journey of initiation and Otto Rahn passed through all the stages."

France wins the World Cup and the streets are filled with hooting cars and chanting youths with the French flag painted on their faces. Bastille day comes and goes in a flurry of fireworks and I take Madame Nelli shopping, walk her dog and do the dishes. My French is slowly starting to improve.

"Besides, he was apparently haunted by demons. When he was alone he would cry out. He had presences, things like that. For me he was a little like the Antichrist, a prisoner of the forces of evil. But he recounted that one time he had met some Cathars. It was a dream, he dreamt whilst awake, that he had met these Cathars, what they had told him and all that. It stirred up his profound thoughts. He thought that there wasn't only one country. That there were lots of countries. That there were different beliefs. It came about that he could not accept what the

Nazis were saying. He threw himself headlong into poetry, the songs of the troubadours, his childhood under the apple trees where he had slept and taken his siestas. But he was a Nazi. He made reports. He certainly carried out his duties. So you can't forget that he was a Nazi with all the consequences such an attitude carries with it."

The Polaires



Portrait of Otto Rahn drawn by Paul A. Ladame, 1936

When Otto Rahn first came to Paris in the summer of 1929 he had been taken under the wing of the poet, Maurice Magre, the author of several books about the crusade against the south, including ‘The Treasure of the Albigensians’ and ‘The Blood of Toulouse’ as well as a lengthy and deeply moving essay, ‘The Unknown Master of the Albigensians’, which eventually appeared as part of a treatise on the European esoteric tradition entitled ‘Magicians and Illuminati’.

...The chateau of Montsegur was destroyed. There was nothing left of it but calcined stones, save the name of Esclarmonde, which survived in the popular mind and in legend.

Esclarmonde the chaste and Esclarmonde l’amoureuse were blended in a single person, Esclarmonde de Montsegur. After six centuries her presence is still felt in the ruins of the tower that faces the north. And it will always be felt there. Her hand may be seen above the clouds. It is making a sign which means that she is there, and that she will be displaced by no

ecclesiastical tyranny, by no fury of dogma. For where the spirit has breathed it remains.

Esclarmonde came to the Pyrenees to affirm that man must strive towards spiritual perfection, and that to show the way which leads there one can gloriously sacrifice one's life...

Magre was undoubtedly a member of a quasi-Masonic secret society known as the 'Polaires', an esoteric circle who claimed to be acting under the direct instruction of the 'ascended masters', the 'secret rulers of the world' with whom they believed they could communicate via a numerical oracle known as the 'Oracle de Force Astrale'. Magre would seem to have introduced Otto to one of the society's patrons, a mysterious Countess, Miriam de Pujol-Murat, who was said to be the direct descendant, if not the living reincarnation of Montsegur's chatelaine, the immortal Esclarmonde, whom Rahn equates in his first book with the guardian of the Grail.



Otto (left) exploring with Joseph Weidigger, the Countess's chauffeur

The Countess was to become one of Otto's closest friends, allowing him access to her private library and the use of her car and chauffeur during his initial tour of the area. At first he lodged in the village of Montsegur, where he became involved with several key figures in the neo-Cathar revival including Rudolph Steiner's principal disciple, Deodat Roche, who played an instrumental rôle in disseminating the Anthroposophical Society's teachings in the south and Madame Nelli's former spouse, Rene, who would later translate Otto's work into French.

Otto's attempts to buy land on a site overlooking the ruins of the heretic citadel, were thwarted by the locals who, mobilized by Marius Mounie's father, effectively closed ranks against

him. The memory of World War I was still too fresh for the Montsegurians to admit a German into their insular community and there was, perhaps, something in Otto's manner that failed to inspire their trust. A difference of opinion with Magre and Roche led to his abrupt departure from the isolated Cathar enclave, and in the spring of 1932, Otto relocated to the crumbling spa town of Ussat-les-Bains, where he took over the lease on a small hotel that was to become his new base of operations.



Period postcard that Otto sent to his father, Karl, marking out the location of his hotel, 'Des Marronniers'

During the years he spent in the south Otto Rahn travelled widely and took hundreds of photographs although, curiously there is no evidence that he had any visible means of support during this period. His family were middle class at best and thoroughly incapable of underwriting their son's extravagant lifestyle leading one to the inescapable conclusion that Otto must have been on the payroll of some undisclosed organization or private benefactor.



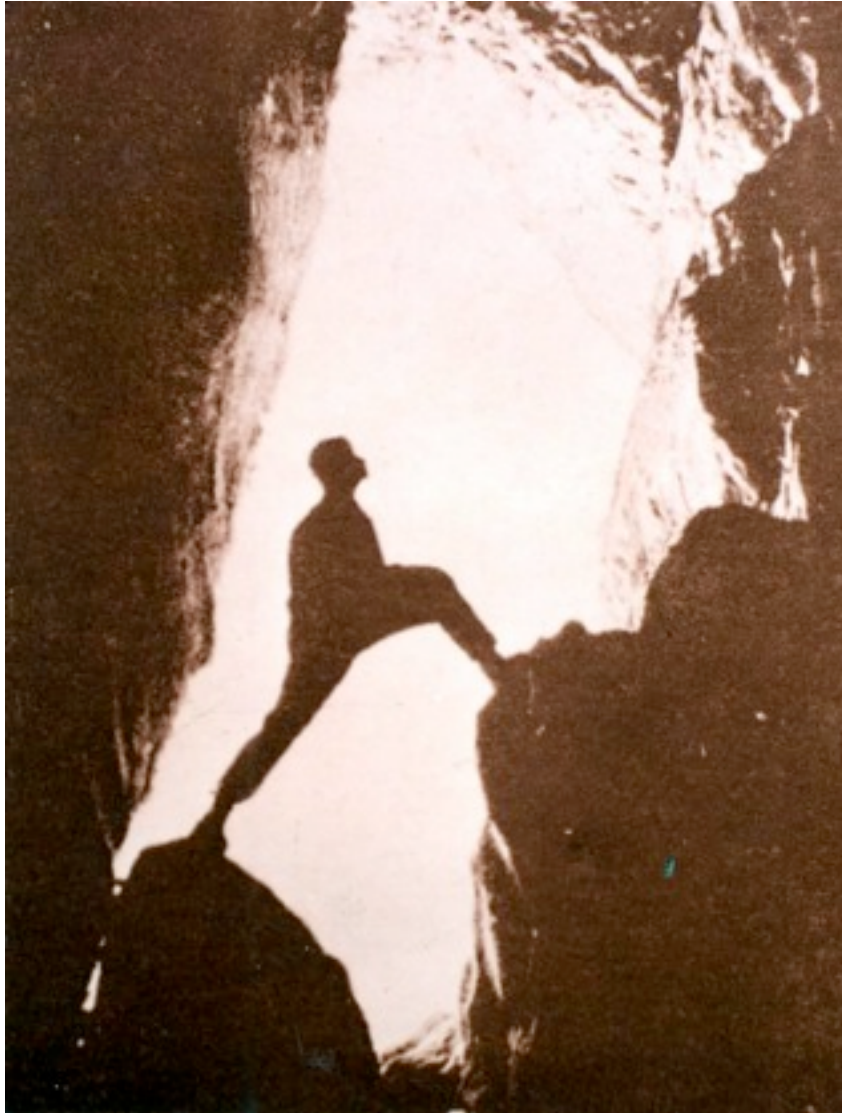
A possible clue to the source of his largesse might be found in the jumper that he can be seen to be wearing in a surviving photograph, knitted by his mother and emblazoned with a prominent lightning bolt or double '*sieg*' rune, known to be one of the symbols of the Thule Society. It has accordingly been widely supposed that Otto Rahn was dispatched to France on a secret mission to infiltrate the neo-Cathar movement and turn it towards the nascent Nazi/Aryan nationalist cause.

It is unclear whether or not Otto was ever formally initiated into the Polaires, who were conducting a series of archeological digs on the Countess's property at the chateau of Lordat at the time, apparently in the hope of uncovering the lost gnostic gospel of Saint John or even the tomb of Christian Rosenkreutz, the apocryphal founder of the true Rosicrucian Order.

On the 6th of March 1932 an article appeared in a local newspaper, 'La Depeche', under the heading 'Is this a modern gold rush?', claiming that an international secret society under the direction of a shadowy German individual named 'Rams' was energetically digging up the caves in the area. A follow-up article ran in a subsequent issue under the caption 'Who are the

Polaires? And what is Mr. Rams doing in Ussat?'. On the 10th of March the newspaper printed a lengthy rebuttal which began with the words:

“My dear sirs...you are entirely mistaken. My name is Rahn, not Rams...”



‘Otto’ in the Cave of the Hermit, summer 1932

The French ‘Polaires’ had been disbanded at the onset of the war in 1939, although a sister lodge continues to thrive in the United Kingdom. The only way to know for sure whether Rahn was either a Mason or a card-carrying envoy of the Thule Society was to try to access the surviving British order’s records. To this effect, I took to posing as a clairvoyant at the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain’s mouldering West London headquarters, a routine ably abetted by my friend, the one-time television psychic, Andre Phillippe.

The movement known as ‘The White Eagles’ maintains close ties with the SAGB, recruiting heavily from their membership. Accordingly it took me little more than 48 hours to insinuate

myself into a gathering of their West London Chapter in a lavishly converted chapel a block or two from Harrods.

Knightsbridge - summer 1999

There is a healing session in progress the day I visit the lodge. Psychics in white lab smocks attempt to draw negative energy out of a row of troubled elderly patients seated on cushions in front of the altar. There is no cross in this church. Instead the watery British sunlight falls on a massive plaster eagle resembling the *luftwaffe* symbol and the high priest and priestess wear turquoise gowns with tiny silver pentagrams around their necks, the same regalia that the Polaires wore before the war. The fact that they scrub down with holy water before and after the ceremony only adds to the oddly clinical impression.

The unisex lab smocks and those vivid blue robes bring the works of David Cronenberg to mind, as much as they recall the witch cults of Dario Argento's *Suspiria* and *Inferno*. Certainly it looks as if Cronenberg's resident production designer Carol Spier might have been responsible for the décor. I am just an observer here, seated towards the back of the assembly with my friend Andre who has come along to act as a reliable witness to my increasingly paranoid claims. We are the only ones in the congregation to be wearing black.

The high priestess turns out to be a formidable lady named Jenny Dent. She is the grand daughter of a famous platform medium from the early days of the SAGB, one Grace Cooke, a dour, Welsh woman who in the summer of 1934 was photographed having a picnic with the Polaires at the site of an obscure archaeological excavation in the ruins of the *château* of Lordat.

At the time Grace claimed to have been channeling the ascended masters in the form of dead Cathars who contacted her in a series of waking dreams, ultimately directing her to found the White Eagle Lodge, a movement joined at the hip to the French Polaires and quite possibly to the Thule Gesellschaft. By 1998 the White eagles have a strong presence at the Glastonbury festival where they do a good deal of recruiting as well as at the Rainbow festival in Scotland.



Alleged spirit photograph of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Grace Cooke had first come to prominence within the spiritualist movement by channelling the presence of the SAGB's recently deceased founder, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The private seances with the Doyle family were attended by a mysterious swami known as Zam Bhotiva. On closer inspection this flamboyantly named guru turns out to be none other than Cesar Accomani, the founder of the French Polaires. Sir Arthur's alleged message from beyond the grave was, perhaps unsurprisingly, a melange of propaganda for the ambitious secret society who were evidently seeking to expand their operations into the British Isles.

Accomani was of Franco-Italian origin although he clearly relished the opportunity to portray himself as one of the secret masters of the east and had earlier co-authored the baffling tome 'Asia Mysteriosa' with one Mario Fille, a former vaudeville and dance hall composer who claimed to have been taught the secrets of the numerical oracle by a mysterious hermit in Bagnaia, known only as 'Father Julian'.

In 1931 after the Doyle family discontinued the London sittings Grace Cooke and her husband, Ivan, joined Accomani on a kind of pilgrimage to Lordat and the Cathar castles of the south.

"Dressed in white and holding lit candles" in the ruins of Montsegur they sang songs in praise of Esclarmonde de Foix and Grace prophesied that either the book of the seven seals or the sacred treasure of the Cathars would soon be found.

Accomani set about dowsing the summit of the holy mountain with a wand which he claimed to be the famous dowsing rod of Italian Renaissance philosopher and Kabbalist Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) that supposedly shook when it detected gold.

Amazingly enough, Grace Cooke's prophecy was soon proven to be true. After forty days of illicit excavations Accomani and the Polaires noticed that one part of the wall of the castle of Montsegur was a slightly different colour than the rest of the building. When they struck it with a hammer they found a niche in which was stored a number of yellowing parchments, separated by a stone. The uppermost layers of these pages had been corroded by moisture and only one word could be read: 'Fatalité' – Fate.

The lower sections were better preserved and were found to contain numbers and geometric figures. Cesar Accomani was quick to conclude that this was some form of "divinatory oracle" and rumours rapidly spread concerning the discovery. In the second volume of his exegesis 'The Court of Lucifer' (1936), while looking over the findings of researcher Friedrich von Suhtscheck in which he compares the mountain sanctuary Koh-i-Chwadaska to Wolfram von Eschenbach's Grail Mountain, Munsalvat, Otto Rahn recalls that many of the names in Parzival might reveal Iranian origins.

"I ask myself: Could that book found in the rubble of Montsegur and written in an unknown alphabet be filled with Manichaean writing, perhaps even a copy of the original Iranian version of Parzival?"

From this passing reference we can deduce that, for a while at least, Otto too was suckered in by Accomani's claims.

The contents of the book allegedly found by the Polaires in the ruins of Montsegur were not made public until 1967 when a booklet written by Mario Fille and Rene Odin entitled 'Un Oracle Kabbalistique', revealed that rather than being the mythical Cathar holy book or the 'lost gospel of St. John' the manuscript was in fact made up of Nadi astrology. It comes as little surprise that this astrological text is one and the same as the so-called 'Oracle de Force Astrale', the numerical oracle supposedly bequeathed to Fille by the enigmatic 'Father Julian' in the Polaire's rather dubious foundation myth.

It would seem the parchments were planted in the ruins of the castle and then publicly rediscovered by Fille and Accomani who plainly felt they were in competition with the other secret societies operating in the area at the time and were under pressure to produce results. To what extent Grace Cooke was a willing accomplice or an unwitting pawn in this transparent subterfuge is impossible to know. Accomani seems to have fled Montsegur after his claims were called into doubt and continued his psychic questing in Spain. He resigned from the Polaires in the autumn of 1932 and subsequently disappeared off the esoteric map.

Otto Rahn refers to this events with evident amusement in 'The Court of Lucifer' (1936):

On my first day here I met an engineer from Bordeaux who is looking for the treasure of the Albigensians. He explained that the castle is the property of the municipality and that he obtained their permission in a

written contract, which, if his project is successful, awards to him half of the treasure (which he is convinced is gold and silver). Furthermore, he hopes to find the authentic Book of Revelations, the Apocalypse According to John, which should contain the true message of Jesus Christ and was believed to be in possession of the Albigenses. The Cathars believed that the Church of Rome wanted to destroy the only true message of the Son of God because the Catholics had falsified it.

How does he know all this? I asked. He made it clear that he couldn't tell me because he belonged to a secret association that demanded silence from its membership (the Polaires). Even though the Albigensians were exterminated almost to the last man by the Inquisition and its executioners, the true Book of Revelations was placed in a safe resting place inside the mountain, which is hollow.

Long after the castle had fallen, the Roman Catholics were still digging up the place in their search for the holy scriptures of John – but in vain.

In addition, he told me that he knew the location of Esclarmonde's grave. A man with a divining rod had revealed the place to him, and thanks to the way that the rod turned, he was able to describe the sarcophagus: It was stone with a golden dove decorating the top.

I had to stop myself from smiling...

Some sixty-seven years later I find myself lending an ear as Grace's granddaughter holds court over her devoted following, but despite the exotic, crypto-fascist bling, the essence of her address seems to be pretty much the same vacuous, feel-good gobbledygook spouted by preachers the world over, so after half an hour or so I politely excuse myself, taking the opportunity to investigate the small private library and reading room on the floor below.

Browsing through the order's bound memos and archived copies of their bimonthly periodical *Stella Polaris*, it becomes apparent that any reference to the pre-war years has been assiduously removed. Looking up I notice the high priestess' robed husband, Colum Haywood, watching me with suspicion from the doorway and decide to brazen it out, broaching my concerns directly.

“Uhm... I was wondering if either you or Jenny were familiar with the life and work of Otto Rahn?”

Colum looks somewhat upset by this.

“Well, yes... that name does ring a bell... well ... actually it's ringing quite a few bells now. Maybe we should talk outside.”

When we meet outside the lodge and I proffer my hand he gives me a Master Mason's grip and is visibly surprised when I return it. He asks how I know about Rahn and I explain that I have been conducting a study of the French Polaires. Not only is Rahn's name linked to the

movement by the article in La Depeche but he is alleged to have been the leader of the movement back before the war. Colum is quick to dispel this theory along with the persistent rumors of Rahn's alleged discovery of the Grail in the caverns of Ussat.

“He wasn't an academic. I'm sure that any professional archaeologist would find the notion absurd.”

I explain to Colum that I've already gone through the lodge's archives but can't find any documentation extending back before the war. In Europe the Nazi's deliberately deep-sixed the records of the Polaires along with those of the Masons, the Rosicrucian's and the Theosophical Society, having decided to purge the occult lodges which they had come to see as a threat.

Hastening to set my mind at rest Colum explains that earlier editions of the order's newsletter have been removed for safekeeping to their lavish new headquarters in Glastonbury. Urging me to get in touch by e-mail should I wish to view the redacted material, he politely takes his leave. I could tell my questions have rattled him so it comes as little surprise when subsequent attempts to contact the high priest at the address provided draw a blank. The Rahn affair is toxic spiritual waste and the last thing anyone needs is for some smart-ass to forge a direct, clearly established paper-trail linking the burgeoning British New Age movement to Hitler's Reich.

Parzival



Ruins of Wildenburg castle, winter 1998

At Wildenburg I climb the snow covered mountain to the old ruins of the castle where Wolfram von Eschenbach wrote his celebrated 13th century epic. The ruins at Wildenburg are far more extensive than Montsegur and the other Cathar remains, provoking thoughts of an almost unimaginable vanished grandeur. On the wall of one great chamber overlooking the misty valley far below is graven an ancient inscription in High German that mirrors a line from Wolfram's masterpiece and possibly predates it, although historians continue to argue over whether it was the scribe's source of inspiration or a latter addition carved in his honor.

The words translated read simply: "OH MOTHER, WHAT IS GOD?", mirroring a similar inscription I glimpsed on the cave wall in the Lombrives. In the same ruined chamber, its mottled stonework crawling with Masonic glyphs, is a massive hearth and the remains of a chimney, possibly the same prodigious fireplace, large enough to spit an ox, that gives rise to another line in 'Parzival' when Wolfram remarks, "In the castle of the Holy Grail there are fires even larger than Wildenburg..."

We scratch together as much brushwood as we can, salvaging a few dryish logs leftover from the autumn deadfalls, enough to build an impressive pyre in the hearth and as if on cue a troupe

of teenagers appear out of the gathering gloom, members of the German rambler's association, the 'Wandervogel' in their matching hats and animal hide back packs, their axes dangling from their belts. They have been hiking in the woods for several days and stop for a while to warm themselves by our fire. They are all too aware of the castle's history and later, producing guitars from seemingly nowhere, they treat us to a rendition of troubadour songs.



After the others have sensibly packed up and drifted off into the gloom I sit alone at Wolfram's hearth, savouring the warmth of the fire. I hang back because I want to have this moment between myself and the castle, to get a feel for what it's like when there's no one else around. The firelight spills across the snow and the serene white frost glistens on the timeworn flagstones. An owl hoots in the distance and the night wind whispers in the treetops. I am alone but not alone, looking into the embers, the same surging embers that those who came before me stared into on so many long nights across the centuries.

The story really starts here. A tale told in the Black Forest. A legend whispered as a charm against the dark. A cure for the world's pain. A medicine for melancholy. A tale of a lost love, a knight, a quest and a cup.

Trail of the Grail



Tourist maps of Germany make no mention of the SS Order Castle which was allegedly all but obliterated at the end of World War Two. It is only with the aid of a large scale map of Westphalia that I find the initials “Schhl” (oss) next to the tiny village of Wewelsburg. It is the better part of a days drive on the autobahn from Frankfurt, then a zigzag course, through ashen, withered fields and thick forest, travelling on ever smaller back roads. Mostly I remember sleet blowing through the headlights and sunlight glinting on black ice.



Richard Stanley and Immo Horn, Wewelsburg castle, winter 1998 (photo by Andrew Collins)

Wewelsburg seems as quiet and sleepy as any other German town and we have to drive through it twice before we catch sight of the castle looming out of the darkness. Although remarkably well preserved the structure is virtually invisible even from the village and there are no sign posts to help point it out. Seen from above the walls of the schloss form an Isosceles triangle with the keep at the north apex and the other two towers at the south-west and south-east corners.



Passing the small guardhouse (which bears a defaced but still legible “SS” shield atop its gate) I tiptoe over the drawbridge to discover a party in progress within. I later learn that the castle is owned and maintained by the International Youth Hostel movement, itself an off shoot of the ‘Wandervogel’” whose members serenaded us at Wildenburg.

In 1964 a branch of the Wandervogel known as the ‘Nerother Bund’ constructed in the forest of Hansruck, under the direction of a certain Pater Martin Kuhn, a curious monument dedicated to the memory of Otto Rahn. At the base of a circular pedestal of stones, taken from the heretic citadel of Montsegur, appears a simple, sobering inscription drawn from Wolfram’s ‘Parzival’ -

“Caution - these ways lead astray!”

There are lights glowing in the windows of the Wewelsburg this evening and laughter trickles out into the cold night air. Deciding not to alert the party goers to our presence, we peek through the windows of the tower that once housed the castle library and its legendary round table. Other than Himmler never more than twelve SS men at a time were allowed to sit at the table. The reasons for this are not clear, but it is possible the Reichsführer SS was either parodying the last supper or saw himself as the living symbol of the sun, surrounded by the twelve houses of the zodiac. Of course thirteen is also the number of the traditional witch's coven. Twelve witches and a high priest.



The Black Order Castle, Schloss Wewelsburg, winter 1998

We work our way down to the base of the tower, frost crunching beneath our feet, to find an open door leading to a small dark room that smells of raw sewage. A hole has been cleaved through a concrete wall dividing the room, apparently to deal with recent plumbing problems and squeezing through the gap we find ourselves in the castle sewers.

We are only able to proceed a very short way before our path is blocked by an ancient steel gate. The darkness is very thick here and, shining our flashlights through the corroded bars, we illuminate a weird arched annex leading deeper into the castle, its walls lined with chipped and discolored white tiles.

In the Dark Ages the castle cellars were used for the incarceration and torture of witches and heretics and during the war, political prisoners were briefly held here. It's hard to comprehend

how much suffering has been poured into this place. The pain seems to have curdled the air itself. Even the trees surrounding the castle are blackened and stunted, their trunks twisted as if bowed under by the sheer horror of this place. There are dark smudges on the tiling. Shapes swimming in the flash light beam. We turn the beam away and beat a hasty retreat, making no further attempt to gain access this night.

When sleep finally comes I am troubled by a recurring dream. Worst of all its not even my dream. It' a dream that was initially described to me by someone else but now I seem to be having it too which, in Freudian terms, is taking transference a little far. In the dream I am in a frozen landscape, not unlike Antarctica, walls of ice rising on all sides of me. And there is blood everywhere. So much blood. Red rivers frozen into the ice, pouring down the rocks in suspended cataracts. I am searching, turning in circles trying to find where all this blood is coming from, wanting to know and not wanting to know at the same time.

A breathless, awful sense of expectation seems to hang in the thickening air. I turn a corner in the dream and realize that I am not alone. Twelve naked men are seated at a long table facing me, their bodies entirely covered with blood and on the table is spread the remains of a human being that they seem to be feeding on. I have interrupted their supper. As I look into their eyes I know at once that they are dead and that this is hell. Then I wake up to find my body again, still on earth which is of course is a part of hell too. And hell is cold. Hell is beyond zero, beyond hypothermia. Hell is a place without love. After all evil is really only the absence of love, isn't it? A void.

In the morning the weather is cold and clear, the fields around the castle ashen and drained of color. Standing on the drawbridge once more we cannot fail to notice that the normally locked steel door leading into the base of the north tower has been left invitingly ajar. We walk across the grounds in broad daylight, passing the mouldering ping-pong tables left behind from Himmler's glory days and tip-toeing down the narrow flight of stone steps enter the Hall of the Dead .

The Hall is beehive shaped with a rune-accented swastika at the dome's apex. On the floor of the Hall of the Supreme Leadership immediately above appears a mysterious rune wheel made of green stone with a central disc of dark marble commonly known as the "Black Sun". Each rune points to one of the columns forming the arris vaults above the twelve windows framed in green sandstone.

At the center of the Hall is a shallow pit containing a disused gas faucet surrounded by twelve unoccupied pedestals. The acoustics of the chamber are such that, standing upon a pedestal, one can be heard in a whisper in any other part of the room. The central pit is not designed for bonfires. Rather it places an individual at the acoustic focus of the chamber as well as at Heinrich Himmler's hypothetical 'mittelpunkt der welt', the physical axis of his evil empire.

Heinrich Himmler's chief architect, a diabolical little man named Bartels, intended the redesigned castle to be the center of a new world made according to Himmler, with the north tower of the Wewelsburg as its axis. The establishment of a local concentration camp provided

the necessary manpower for the huge renovations envisaged. Between 1939 and 1943 the inmates of the camp at Niederhagen had to perform the necessary work on the castle in line with the principle of “extermination through labour”. 1,285 people perished during the refurbishment of the north tower alone. 1,285 souls.



Hall of the Supreme Leadership, Schloss Wewelsburg, winter 1998

In the holocaust museum I find the testimony of Joachim Escher, a former inmate of Niederhagen, who had been assigned to the North Tower Labor Unit which had performed the excavation work. “...We had to lower the floor which was made of rock. We worked with drills at times but also with crowbars, spades and pitching tools and then everything was put onto hand barrows and tipped out. The rock was pretty hard. There were only a dozen prisoners working there - a small unit...”

I admit the recurrence of the number twelve gave me goose bumps.

W. Jordon writes in the “Julfest Zetitung”, the festivity newspaper of the SS Castle Unit issued on Christmas Eve 1941: “And now in the architect’s brain shines a new and brighter flame. If our tower is to stand forevermore, we must remove the evil at its core. And is the tooth with cavities,

helped by fillings, tell me please, when it stands loosely in the bone with no support, no stable home? And thus it was not so insane, to dig around the tower again. Day and night they drilled around, creating thus an awful sound, so that not a soul could sleep within an hour of the keep.” W. Jordon was an SS officer. What became of him, I don’t know.

Some believe that Rahn’s cup was transported to the Wewelsburg where it was allegedly exhibited to Himmler’s innermost circle, the twelve Obergruppenfuhrers who administered this black Camelot. It’s funny how the Arthurian parallels just run and run. Even at the end, fleeing the Allies, his empire in ruins, Himmler dispatched his surviving knight, Captain Heinz Macher, to blow up his beloved castle so that it wouldn’t fall intact into enemy hands. Macher, like the knight ordered by Arthur to throw the sword back into the lake, apparently had a singular lack of enthusiasm for what he considered to be a senseless mission of destruction and hence the castle still stands despite what the history books would have you believe. Nevertheless, Macher reported a successful mission and was promoted to Major on the spot. As he already wore the Knights Cross with the Oak leaves his word was never doubted. Himmler never knew that the mission had failed.

As soon as Macher’s team departed the area locals swarmed in and began to strip the castle of its furnishings. On April 12, 1945, when American soldiers arrived they released a number of inmates from Niederhagen concentration camp, Joachim Escher amongst them. The former prisoners and the American soldiers completed the task of picking the castle clean. Among the items that disappeared were paintings, statues, rugs, tapestries, porcelain, silverware, coats of arms, a gold bathtub, Samurai swords, antique armour, firearms, fine furniture and other objects. Thus Himmler’s personal treasure was dispersed or passed out of his control.

Gabriele Winckler-Dechend kept her children up late the night the Reichsfuher SS fled the Wewelsburg so that they might be able to see their uncle Heinrich one final time. She tells me that they were so sleepy that by the next day they had forgotten that he had ever been there. Himmler had been thoughtful enough to leave a staff car behind at Gabriele’s house so that her then husband could sleep with her one final time before hurrying to catch up with his master the next morning.

Within a month, stripped of rank and disguised as an ordinary wehrmacht soldier, Heinrich Himmler would give himself up to an Allied soldier guarding a bridge who stubbornly refused to believe that this nondescript, bespectacled man really was the dreaded leader of the Black Order. A day later he committed suicide by taking a cyanide capsule in his cell.

The treasure of the ages was unloaded into the bowels of a nearby abandoned salt mine at Merkers where it was examined and catalogued by a group of hand-picked men from the Ahnenerbe SS. The treasure included thousands of gold coins, some of which dated back to the early years of the Roman Empire and beyond as well as innumerable gold plates and vessels. It is known that seven tons of gold were shipped to the Canary Islands by submarine and much larger amounts went to South America.

When Martin Bormann's wife (Frau Gerda Buch Barmann) was arrested at the small hotel where she was staying in rural Italy she was found to have 2200 antique gold coins in her possession. Bormann himself sent gold coins to Argentina where they were apparently placed under the personal protection of Evita Peron. Countess Gisela von Westrop, the mistress of General Ernst Kaltenbrunner, made innumerable trips to Switzerland in her capacity as "Social Secretary" of various escape organizations. She is known to have carried large suitcases stuffed with virtually perfect counterfeit money but she also had numerous Swiss bank accounts containing large amounts of liquid assets some of which consisted of antique gold coins.

In 1983 a former ODESSA agent, treasurer and paymaster named Albert Willi Louis Blume, died in Brazil. Although he lived a life of near poverty his personal vault in the Bank of Brazil contained 141 000 ounces of gold, documents of great commercial value, valid currency, fine jewellery and a hoard of ancient gold coins, possibly the last vestiges of the treasure.

On my return to London things begin to slip. I start to suspect that my telephone is tapped, strangers begin to turn up on the doorsteps of people that I'd spoken to and I am summarily evicted from my flat in Bermondsey.

Spooks

Montreal – Canada – August 1

Dawn on Lammas finds me on top of the royal mountain looking out over a river choked with diesel barges. The man from the Solar Temple tells me that his ancestors founded this city and named it after another mountain in the Pyrenees, a mountain that I was standing on only two weeks ago.

He insists that the Templars fled France to the New World, to Arcadia where the first settlers descended into the Cajun and Akkadian people. In essence, the Solar Temple Movement are a Quebécois equivalent of the Masons. Just another old boys club founded on highly speculative if not downright fraudulent archaeology. Of course no one likes to talk about them much since they are murderers.

Paris - August 13

“I don’t know if there was a body. I don’t think there was a body.”

I am standing with Christian Bernadac beside a small bookstall in the shadow of Notre Dame Cathedral, a copy of Rahn’s journals under one arm.

“No death certificate was ever made out so technically he’s still alive...”

I am happy to see Paris again. The evening light on the cathedral is something that really shouldn’t be missed.

“What is extraordinary is that Rahn’s death was announced in an SS journal by Karl Wolff, Himmler’s personal adjutant who had helped act as a conduit for the funds during his excavations in Ussat. With Otto Rahn it would have been easy to create a second or third identity who could get involved in Holland, in Finland or even in the Middle East. It’s the ABC, the most well known ploy of the secret services. I don’t believe in spontaneous statements made twenty, thirty, or forty years later. They’re not true. I don’t know who found Otto Rahn’s body. I don’t know if he was buried. I don’t know if the parents were there. It would be necessary, little by little, to dig, to reconstruct and why not, exhume the corpse, the skeleton of Otto Rahn and see if it corresponds with his dental pattern, his height, his bones, maybe even his hair..”

“I can supply further proof that Rahn’s secretary, whom he needed for all his typing, left Himmler’s cabinet when he did and curiously turned up in the Vatican with a second person who went by the name of Rudolf Rahn. This Rudolf Rahn, during his youth had a brother who died named Otto and would often himself go by the name of Otto. Rahn made a deal with the head of the CIA which had been created around ‘42 or ‘43. Rahn ended up becoming the director of the Coca-Cola Company in Munich. It’s hard to imagine that a Nazi could become the Director of Coca-Cola Europe without the collusion of the CIA. Of course the SS had completely monopolized the European bottling industry before the war. By using forced labour at their

bottling plant in Dachau they were able to dramatically reduce the cost of production. That's how Rahn's other friend, Raymond Perrier, who introduced him to Ladame on the set of the Pabst film, got his foot onto the ladder."

The light is almost gone now. I take five and go looking for a soft drink.

London - summer 1998

The end of the century is in sight. Clinton's presidency has hit the skids. To distract the world from his lover's testimony he fires three hundred cruise missiles into Afghanistan's Kunar province, one of the most beautiful places on the planet. Another missile strike destroys a civilian pharmaceutical company in the Sudan. No one in the West seems to notice let alone care. The global economy is in a free-fall and cigar sex is the talk of the moment. The Russian bear is on it's knees. British M.16 agents are accused of attempting to assassinate Serbian President Slobodan Milosevitch by dazzling his limo driver with a strobe light. Renegade member of the Saudi Royal family, Osama Ben Ladin, declares a holy war on the West, determined to overthrow the existing corrupt Saudi leadership and drive America out of the holy lands. All this for the sake of the Q'aabah, the black, meteoric heart of Mecca that the royal house of Saud is traditionally bound to protect as guardians of the faith.

My old companion, Carlos Mavroleon, sets out to interview Ben Ladin and using his contacts with the Hezbi-I Islami makes it as far as the Afghan border where he is arrested by Pakistani police and promptly thrown in jail. He is released a week later but within twenty-four hours is found dead in his hotel room in Peshawar, a hypodermic needle lying beside him. There is a rumor that he had been tortured first, either by the CIA or the Pakistanis or both.

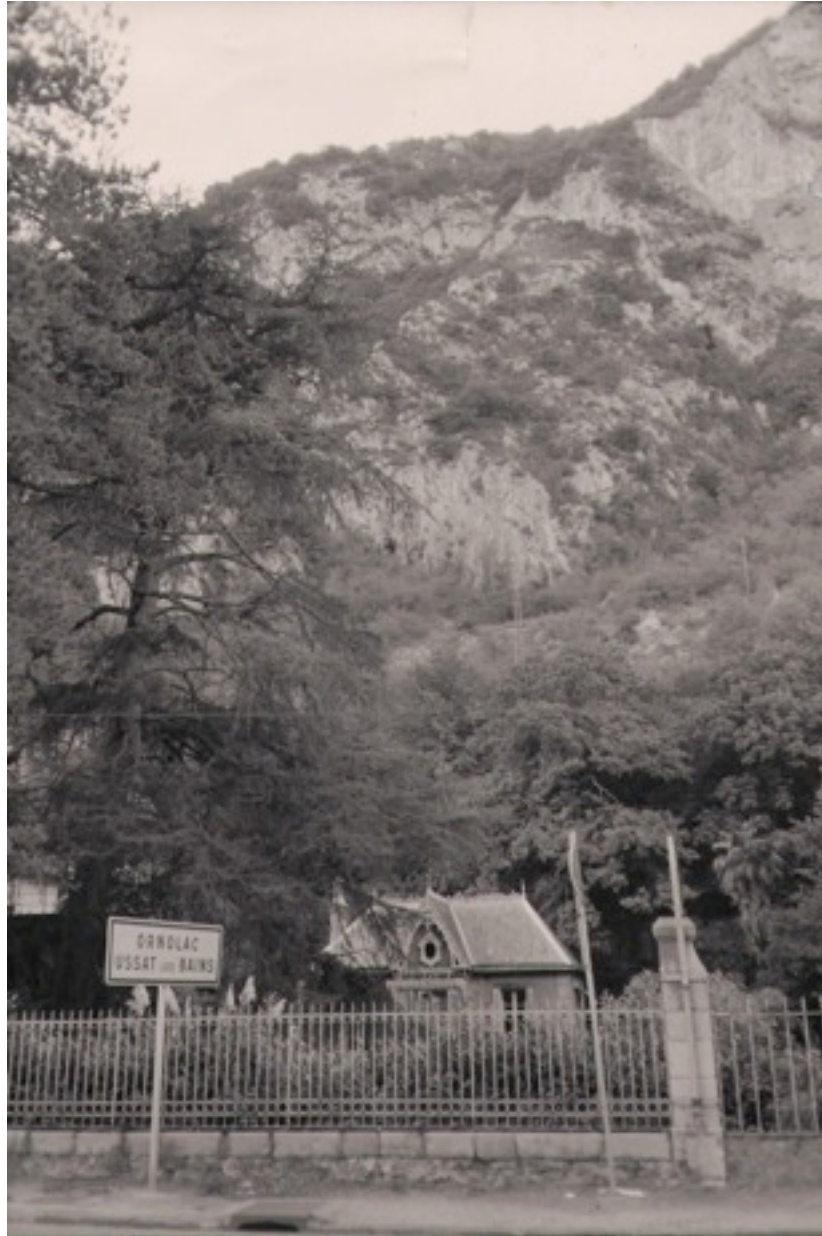
Closer to home, one of my own contacts dies just before I am due to meet him. He was an associate of Guy Puysegur, a former O.S.S. man and intelligence officer. His name was Ian Meadows. I spoke with his wife half and hour after it happened. There has been no prior history of heart disease. Apparently he had been very anxious to talk to me about something. Too anxious perhaps.

His widow put me on to a retired Egyptologist who had been working with Ian who had a lot to say about the corporate structures set up by Himmler to channel the vast revenues generated by slave labor and nationalized assets made available to him thank to the final solution. Switzerland's role in this affair is only slowly becoming apparent. The Coca-Cola Corporation's involvement remains murky. There is no concrete evidence to support Christian Bernadac's outlandish claims that Otto and Rudolf are one and the same - or indeed that Otto Rahn is still alive.



The shooting of 'The Secret Glory', Carcassonne, 1998

Summer is almost over. The knights have ridden their last joust at Carcassonne. I find myself back in Ussat-Les-Bains, haunted by ghosts at every turn. I have passed through this town half a dozen times before and each time the silence and dereliction of its streets has caused me to hurry by, always on the way to somewhere else. The town is really just a cluster of leaning, unpainted wood and brick structures, mock-Bavarian rooftops warped with age, its streets loosely ringed around the building housing the source of the abandoned spa. There are no signs of children or household pets although here and there are traces of habitation, a curtained window or the occasional battered motor-car at the curb.



Ussat-les-Bains, autumn 1998

I locate Antonin Gadal's house, a low, boarded up cottage crouching amidst a tangled, overgrown garden. The porch creaks beneath my feet as I tiptoe around the side of the building, searching for an open window. Just then one of the shutters bursts open and I realize that the ramshackle building is still inhabited. An unkempt, middle aged man, with blood shot blue eyes, glares out at me, his face almost hidden by a long, silver streaked beard that grows high on his cheeks. He initially takes me for a thief or a prowler but I hastily explain that I am researching the life of the house's former occupant. He points me in the direction of the neighbouring property and a man named Christian Koenig whom he insists is the only one who can tell me about that time. Later I learn that the man I met on the porch was in fact Gadal's grandson who

apparently makes a point of never speaking about the past or what exactly has gone wrong for Ussat-les-Bains.

It takes me the better part of a week to track down the enigmatic Monsieur Koenig who eventually agrees to meet me in a cave just outside of town.

When I get there I am surprised to find that it is the same grotto I slept in some four years ago, the night after the big electrical storm in Montsegur. As we huddled next to the fire a bearded hermit in a dark, hooded cloak, who gave his name as Uriel, had played a strange, haunting, middle eastern tune on his flute as he sat out the long night.

Christian Koenig confounds me by turning up with a set of pan-pipes and proceeding to seat himself on the rocks he plays a similar tune, telling me that the cave has very special, almost magical acoustics. Echoes linger for longer here than anyone might normally think possible.



Christian Koenig playing the flute de pan in the Grotto of Ornelac, autumn 1998

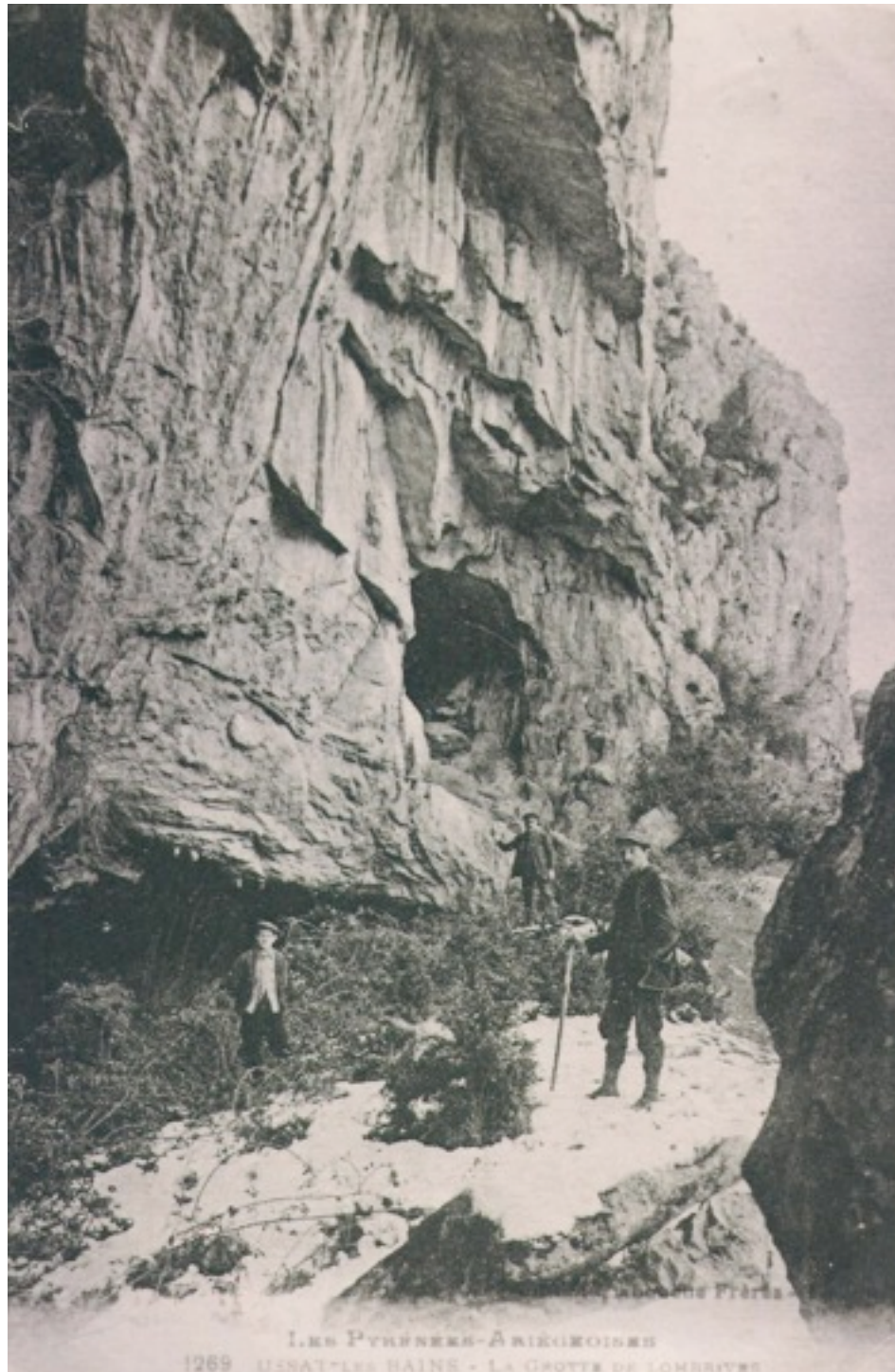
Christian turns out to be the former curator of the museum Gadal set up in Ussat-Les-Bain to house the archaeological relics found in the caves and is now a leading light in the European Rosicrucian movement.

According to Christian, the Inquisition succeeded in destroying every written record of the Cathar faith. Any historical accounts that survive were contaminated by the Inquisition ideology. The true faith survived only as an oral tradition. He suggests that Gadal may have been the recipient of this oral tradition, allegedly passed on to him by an old blind man, Adolphe 'Papa' Garigou, who had been placed in his care as a youth. Gadal described Monsieur Garigou as the 'patriarch of the Cathars' and had later assumed this mantle for himself. Throughout his life he had grown increasingly convinced that the caves had played an important initiatory role in the medieval Cathar faith and that their unexplored galleries still hid the lost treasures of their faith, possibly even the Grail itself which, according to popular tradition had been smuggled out of Montsegur shortly before the fall of the castle.



Antonin Gadal

Otto found in Gadal a fellow spirit under whose patronage he was able to carry out his investigations. They were said to have collaborated on a series of unofficial digs, unearthing a plethora of artifacts that later became the basis for the collection housed at the museum in Tarascon.



Grotte de Lombrives circa 1932

Amongst the items retrieved from the caves had been a vessel forged from meteoric iron, a sort of mortar and pestle that was said to have been able to turn water into blood. The cup was found within a hollow stalactite in the grotto of the Lombrives and had been on public display until about five years ago when the museum was closed and the relics dispersed into private

hands following a scare that the institution might be nationalized and its assets confiscated as treasure trove by the French government.

In 1957 Antonin Gadal assumed leadership of the Lectorium Rosicrucianum, a secret society originally founded in the Netherlands that he proceeded to reform along his own neo-Cathar lines. The society still hold their initiation rituals in the pentagram in the Bethlehem grotto and before his death in 1968 Gadal commissioned a rather singular monument to be erected on the banks of the icy waters of the Ariège - a stone altar, a replica of the one found in the grotto, surrounded by twelve radial marker posts. On a plinth at the base of the altar appears the legend:

“To the threefold alliance of the star, the Graal and the Rosy Cross.”

Christian glances up, drawing my attention to the vegetation climbing the walls of the cave.

“See how the leaves reach towards the light, “ he says wistfully before raising his pan pipes to pick out a tune hauntingly similar to the one I heard four years ago.

Later I translate from Otto’s journal the following words:

One of the tombs was a communal pit. Twelve skeletons were found there, disposed in a manner to mark out a sort of wheel. The heads represented the center and the bodies the spokes, evidence, in all probability, that they were linked with a sun worshipping cult.

Later still, standing again before the stone pentagram in the Bethlehem grotto, I try to put the pieces together in head. If Gadal had initiated Rahn here then why did the young German feel moved to draw a woman’s face on the wall? In any case who on earth could that woman have been?

Feeling a little worn out by it all I lie down on the stone altar, watching the blackbirds nesting in the eaves of the cavern’s vaulted roof. It is a hot afternoon and for a while I drift off to sleep.

When I come to and return my gaze to the pentagram I feel a sudden, giddy rush of déjà vu. I clamber up the wall, finding worn handholds so that I am able to draw myself up to the same height as the center of the pentagram, wiping away the dust of decades with my fingertips.



Bethlehem Grotto, the face of Beatrice?

There, exactly where I had imagined them to be are the outlines of one side of the partly obliterated face, a single angelic eye staring back at me from out of time. The image of a long lost love only partially obliterated by Rene Nelli. A hope that never quite dried up. The face of Beatrice, whose memory guided Dante like a star on his journey through hell.

Otto's Room



Richard Stanley and Madame Couquet in Otto's room during the filming of 'The Secret Glory', 1998 (photograph by James 'JB' Bourne)

“What the hell was that thing standing behind him?”

My friend, J.B, who has recently bought a farm house near Perpignan seats himself on the end of the bed as we check the camera equipment. We are back in Madame Couquet's auberge, in Otto's room where all hell broke loose on my first visit in 1992.

The room seems tranquil now in the early evening light, like any other hotel room.

“What thing?”

“That big gold candelabra thing that was standing behind Christian when he spoke to us?”

I cast my mind back. After leaving the cave we had stopped off at Christian Koenig's house for a cup of tea. The place had been packed with relics, quite possibly the former exhibits from the museum in Tarascon.

“It looked like the Menora.”

“What?”

“The Menora. That big candlestick. I think it's supposed to be part of the sacred treasure of the Jews...”

As the words leave my mouth the door handle rattles and begins to turn.

J.B. and myself exchange an uneasy glance. Neither of us is expecting company, not here, not at this hour. The door slides silently open and getting to my feet I realize there is no-one on the threshold, at least no-one I can see. I blink. Then taking off my hat I place one hand to my heart, thumb at a right angle to the palm, bowing deeply.

“You’re most welcome,” I offer.

And at that the door is sucked violently shut, slamming with sufficient force for the echo to reverberate through the ancient household.

I turn to see J.B. looking at me, eyes wide as saucers.

“Told you this place was haunted.”

“What the hell was that?”

“Some dead treasure hunter hanging about on the landing. Must have heard us mention the candelabra...”

But J.B just keeps staring.

“Hell, I don’t know. It was probably only a draught...”

The Devil's Lake



I inch forward, lying motionless as a lizard in the sun at three thousand meters, staring down into the abyss. The water is as clear as glass, the lake bed shelving away into depths beyond knowing, blue as lapis lazuli, shot through with bands of rippling green. I have never seen water so clear, so pure, Like a piece of the sky has fallen to earth. This is where the river rises. A light moves in the depths, golden, watery beams coruscating up put of the aqueous gloom. Dancing. Turning. Beckoning. A wheel of silent, liquid fire.

Above me the glacial cliffs soar upwards towards the lake of the Druids and the dim heights of the Saint-Barthelemy, the holy mountain known to the shepherds as the Tabor, the mountain of transfiguration, snow still lingering in its clefts.

J.B. is already on the far side of the peak, out of sight now, scrambling down the barren scree towards Mount D'Olme and the skiing station where his tin snail waits in the sun drenched car park, singing as he goes I imagine, his voice echoing off the rubble.

“Yippie yi yi yippie yi. She'll be coming round the mountain when she comes, When she comes...”

The Devil's lake lies half way between Montsegur and Ussat on the high, almost impassable pilgrimage route known as the path of the Bonhommes. Esclarmonde the bastard, her lover and her companions were said to have passed this way when they fled Montsegur on the night after the burning. Some maintain that they cast their treasure into the bottomless lake as they passed. Others believe that its waters hide the cursed treasure of Delphi that was dragged through the streets of Toulouse before being flung into the lake in order to lift a plague from the land. Supposedly the plague will return if divers or treasure hunters ever attempt to penetrate these azure depths or disturb the sunken hoard that lies below. According to an enduring local tradition, first recorded in the 15th century, the lake is the mouth of hell and if you throw a stone into its waters a storm will be sure to come. During the drought of 1840 a local baker was said to have thrown a cat into the water. The cat began to thrash and struggle in the middle of the lake, scratching at the water so hard that the devil was enraged and caused it to rain for seven weeks.

Ever since the far off days when the pagan gods still held sway over this land the inhabitants of the surrounding villages have made a torch-lit pilgrimage to the lake on the eve of the 23rd of August, the feast day of Saint Barthelemy, building bonfires and keeping vigil until dawn. The practise, which continued until the early years of the 20th century, had its origins in the fertility rites of their pre-Christian ancestors. Like crabs drawn to their spawning ground by the new moon so the young Ariègeois would be drawn to the shores of the Devil's lake to make love openly on the hillside, sing ribald songs and participate in naked sun worship.

This is truly one of the most unearthly landscapes I have ever set foot in, so close to the sky that it would seem to be the domain of Gods rather than men. Earlier on J.B found a pair of pale, white tentacles, presumably the mutilated remains of a squid or fresh water hydra caught in the reeds at the mouth of the lake. Squid, to the best of my knowledge, only thrive in salt water and have no place in an isolated mountain tarn such as the 'Lac du Diable'. The best available explanations, that the squid was carried up the mountain and cut up for bait by a passing fisherman or was somehow borne all the way from the Mediterranean by a stray seagull, fail to entirely convince yet I am unwilling to submit to the beguilingly freaky notion that these calm waters hide the existence of a tendrilled Lovecraftian beast, hitherto unknown to science.

For a moment I recall those nameless 'dethroned pagan divinities' that Esclarmonde, the immortal 'white lady' of Montsegur is supposed to have called down from the mountains to do her bidding but then I try to put the thought from my mind. The only borderline cryptozoological critter known to exist in these parts other than the enormous Pyrenean toads is a unique species of golden salamander, somewhat appropriately a symbol of eternal life, of man and nature made whole by their passage through the alchemical fire.

Gazing out from the precipitous crag that juts like a rocky pulpit over the silent tarn I watch as vaporous masses start to form up over the centre of the lake, clouds briefly taking on the shape of wings, hands or shrouded figures before melting back into thin air, presumably the result of some sort of temperature inversion between the water's upper layers, warmed by the afternoon sun and the freezing lower depth fed by the snows of the Pic de Saint Barthelemy.

Rahn might well have lain on this very ledge, seventy years gone by. A shoal of trout glide beneath me, their shadows crossing several objects that appear to be broken tablets that lie strewn across the lake's stony bed. Even at a distance I imagine I can almost read the glyphs scrawled on their fractured faces, almost scry their secrets like speaking a language that I've never learned.

There are old bones here too. The head of what looks like a human femur and what might just be part of a skull rotting away into the mulch. Then the wind blows and the view is lost, breaking up into dancing shadow, light flickering across the wavelets like a flight of blazing butterflies.

I am alone now. My companions have worked their way around to the far side of the lake, perhaps half a day's hard climb away from me. I ease my aching body from the rocks to stand on the very edge of the abyss and then, going with the flow I put my head down, straighten my arms behind me and push myself off into the crystal depths.

A moment in midair, a moment of falling. Then the snow melt bursts in a shower of green sparks around me and I find myself kicking my way downwards into the icy depths of the Devil's lake.

It is not a cold as I expected. The broken tablets lay strewn before me, still just beyond reach. I force myself deeper, my fingertips brushing the silt of the lake bed. For a moment I could be almost anywhere or anywhen, drifting through a huge room lit in various shades of blue, beautifully graduated from light to dark. I go towards the palest color ever though it seems to be to one side of me rather than above. An instant before I break the surface I see the disc of sun, liquid and transformed, then it explodes in my face and I pull myself from the icy water.

I am at the very edge of the lake, where it flows out over the lip of the plateau to trickle away down the mountainside towards the tree line and the undulating carpet of clouds beyond. I catch my breath, feeling as if I have been baptised afresh, looking down on the clouds and the newly created world that unfurls itself like a mirage before me.

There is something in my hand and looking down I see that I am clutching a single rusted ringlet from what looks like a piece of chain mail. I turn the bit of metal in my hand and then, closing my eyes, I make a wish.

Esclarmonde



According to popular tradition the sacred treasure was guarded by the last high priestess of the 'Cathars' - the 'White Lady' of Montsegur - the fair Esclarmonde, whose very name betokens 'light of the world' in old Occitan. When all seemed lost, a dove is said to have descended from on high and split the mountain with its beak. Esclarmonde cast the treasure into the rock, which closed around it, before turning into a dove herself and flying away to the east. When the war hounds burst into the castle they could find no trace of the Grail and in their rage they fell upon the 'pure ones' and burned them at the base of the castle crag.

The remains of the venerable Esclarmonde de Foix and her feisty niece, Esclarmonde d'Alion, who had been granted stewardship of the castle by her father were never found. The Catholics believed in the physical resurrection of the body at the end of time and had a habit of burning or otherwise mutilating the remains of the heretics.

It is possible that the defenders of Montsegur may have hidden the body of their high priestess deep within the mountain in order to prevent her remains from falling into the hands of the marauders. Popular tradition holds that, like King Arthur and his sleeping knights, she crossed over into the 'earthly paradise' or some faery otherworld where Esclarmonde still abides, awaiting the day that she will return to lead the children of the kingdom.

Other accounts have it that Esclarmonde d'Alion and her followers were eventually cornered in a cave on the banks of the Ariège and buried alive along with the treasures of their faith by their pursuers, who did not care to pursue them into the lightless tunnels. Instead, the crusaders

sealed the cavern and pitched camp, standing guard until all signs of life from within the mountain had ceased. Then they saddled their horses and rode away leaving behind them a rampart of stones that remained untouched for seven centuries.

Despite the emphasis placed on the Grail's essentially spiritual nature, a reminder that it is our sacred duty to strive towards perfection, there is a disturbing literalness to Rahn's quest - a methodical, perhaps typically German approach to the mystery.

After his attempts to buy land in Montsegur were thwarted he moved to the nearby valley of Ussat-les-Bains to explore and excavate the caverns that honeycomb the surrounding mountains.



Inside La Grotte de Fontanet

Quite how Otto could afford to take over the lease on the hotel Des Marroniers is a matter of considerable speculation. Although he wasn't formally recruited into the SS until some two years later Christian Bernadac insists that the young Grail historian was already receiving funds from the coffers of the Black Order, possibly channeled to him either through Karl Wolf, Himmler's personal adjutant, or through the office of Gruppenführer Josef 'Sepp' Dietrich, who was to become the commander of the feared Liebstandarte SS Adolf Hitler, General of the Waffen SS and member of the Prussian State Council.

The name 'Dietrich' can also be used in German to describe a 'skeleton key', a double entendre that Otto used several times in his published works, notably in the closing paragraphs of 'The Court of Lucifer' (1934):

...The sun has at last broken through the clouds. Its oblique rays make everything shine and sparkle. Vapours rise from the steam. My little

Empire clock will soon strike seven times. At nine o'clock, it will be dark. I will go out of the house. Very near here, I know a forest path bordered by majestic pine trees. It begins in a place called the 'Free Man', then, passing through the Dornberg, it rejoins the Ransberg. There is a prairie there: the rose garden. The path is called the 'Path of the Thief' (Diebsweg). I will follow the ancient path of the thief and carry with me the key, the Dietrich ..."

According to the testimony of a local farmer, Edmund Abatout, the Reichsführer SS's adjutant, Karl Wolf stayed for some months at the hotel in Ussat les Bains and was frequently engaged in blistering verbal exchanges with Otto conducted in his native tongue. The two of them would stay out until all hours and on return would go immediately to the darkroom that Otto had constructed in the hotel's attic to develop the numerous photographs he took during his mysterious excursions.

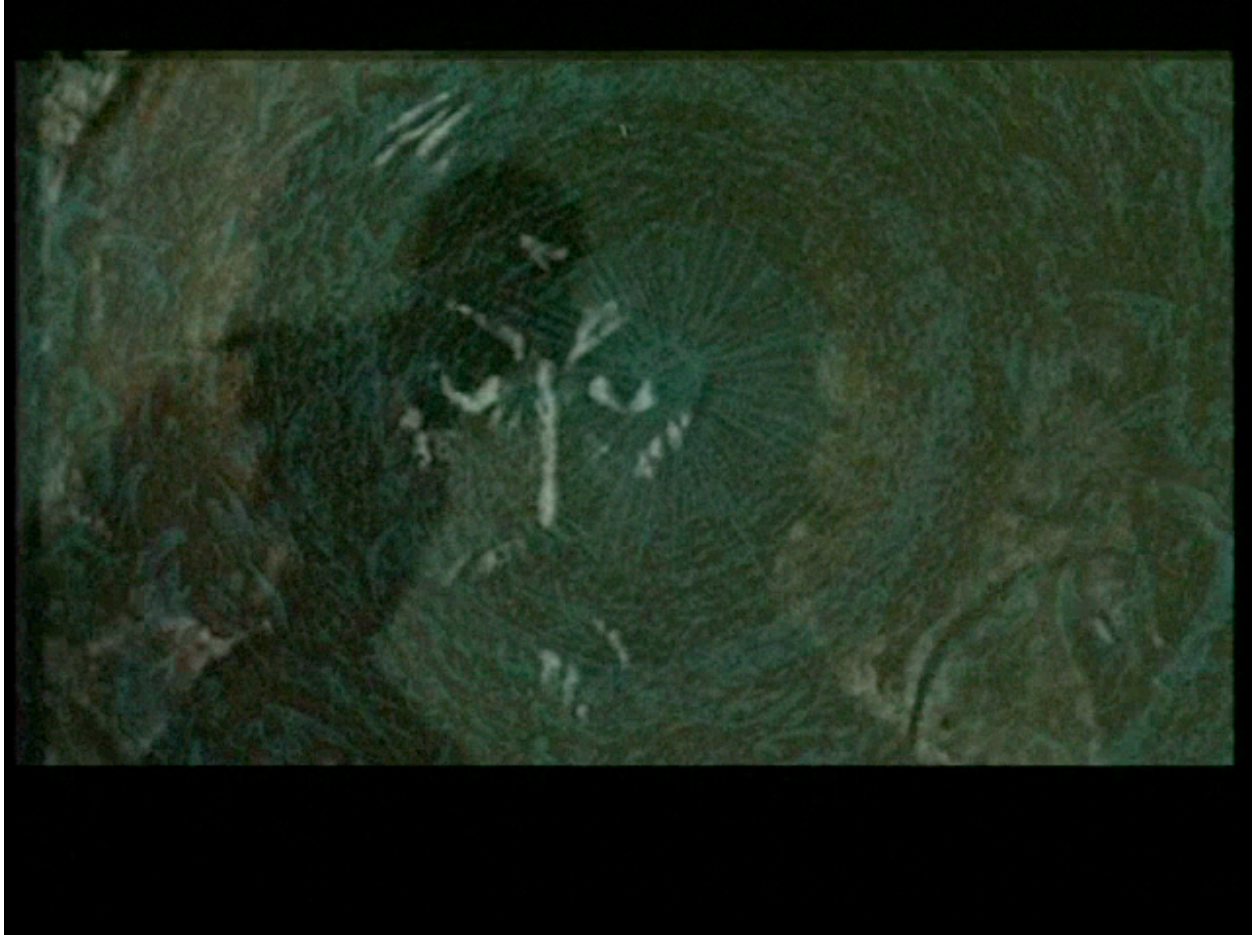
"One time Wolf came back to the hotel with blood on his face," insists Abatout.

"He seemed speechless with rage. It was only afterwards that I realized they might have been part of the notorious 'fifth column' and had come to Ussat either to keep an eye on the freeway to Andorra and the Spanish border or possibly to photograph the aluminium plant at Sakany and the other prominent industrial installations in the area..."

There are countless rumours concerning Otto's activities during this period. He was accompanied by a sizable entourage including a 'woman from Paris who wore too much makeup', a mysterious individual known as 'Mr. Baby' and a seven foot tall Somali bartender turned bodyguard named Habdu, who apparently saved Otto's life after they became trapped by rising flood waters in the grotto of Fontanet, a location of particular significance to his ongoing research.

The clientele at his establishment 'Des Marroniers' were said to include the emissaries of countless obscure lodges and vanished secret societies, fancy women from Toulouse and Paris, English psychics, Basque, Occitan and Catalan nationalists, Italian fascists and German saboteurs. Typically Otto makes no mention of any of these individuals in his published works, stating in 'The Court of Lucifer' that his sole companion during his time in France was his cat. To find the real Rahn we are forced as ever to read between the lines...

VIDEO 3



Extract from THE SECRET GLORY

Inside the Caves

The Power to Heal



Antonin Gadal, Otto and the stone that fell from the sky

It was in the grotto of Fontanet that Otto Rahn and Antonin Gadal allegedly uncovered a cache of meteorites associated with the ancient worship of Cybele or Kubaba, the mountain mother and closely linked with both the black stone of the Kaaba and the ‘hard, dark stone’ described in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s text.

These hyper-dense extraterrestrial artifacts, known to the ancients as ‘Lapis Excoercis’ or ‘Lapis Exilis’ (literally the ‘stone from the sky’), never seem to rust or tarnish and when agitated their surface secretes a bright red ferrous solution, 99% pure iron, said to possess a quasi-magical

healing virtue. Gadal described these magnetic stones as the ‘Gaal Pyrenean’ and after the war, when he assumed leadership of the Rosicrucian movement, he had the largest of the meteorites removed to the Netherlands where it currently serves as an altar in their temple in Amsterdam.

The grotto of Fontanet has reputedly been a sacred place since time immemorial. The subterranean river that flows through its lower galleries has a phreatic source, causing the water level to rise and fall unexpectedly, bringing to mind the menstrual cycle of the Goddess and linking the site in the popular imagination with ‘Fontanet de Savage’, the ‘wild fountain’, the mythical cave of the hermit Trevrizent in Wolfram’s ‘Parzival’.



Otto Rahn in 'the cathedral' of the Lombrives, 1932

Otto Rahn described his first visit to the site in dramatic terms in a broadcast recorded for Radio Geneva, provocatively entitled ‘What happened to me in the Pyrenean cave!’ Apparently Otto was trapped by the rising waters and might have drowned had he not been rescued by his seven foot tall Somali bodyguard, Habdu, who dragged the young Grail seeker out of the flooded cavern by the scruff of his neck. According to Otto’s account their acetylene torches were doused by the torrent, forcing them to retrace their steps through the cavern’s treacherous galleries in total darkness, a distance of nearly two miles, recalling the initiatory ordeals of the Eleusian mysteries.

The cavern's curious history is illustrated today by the terraces surrounding the path that leads to its entrance and the remains of a stone circle that was apparently torn down when the site was Christianized in the eight century . It is difficult to know at this distance in time what Otto and Gadal really found in this place. Access to the cavern's lower galleries is barred by a locked gate and a corroded sign warning prospective treasure hunters that they face a three hundred thousand Franc fine for trespassing. The cave is considered to be an important prehistoric site and is still being excavated by French archeologists who have uncovered the footprints of several children from the Magdalenian period preserved in the sand as well as rock art dating to the same remote epoch.



Gadal, far right, and friends, Ussat, 1932

Gadal himself is hardly the most credible of witnesses, having been caught red handed a few years later burying jade ornaments purchased at a museum auction, apparently to shore up his theories of a direct link between the Cathars and the science and sorcery of ancient Egypt.

The stones retrieved from the cave however do indeed bleed and to test their healing properties my first guinea pig was Andy Collins, one of the production assistants on the *The Secret Glory*, who burned his hand on a distress flare used in the shoot.

The wound closed and healed over in days without leaving a trace. The second beneficiary of this apparent virtue was Beltane Fire Society founder Mark Oxbrow's then-girlfriend, Liz, who was struck on the head by a bottle during the yearly May eve bash on Carlton Hill. By the time Mark had fetched help, the paramedics were no longer necessary.

In 2001, my mother was diagnosed with a particularly nasty form of lymphoma, that led to the growth of tumours behind her eyes that slowly pushed them from their sockets and ultimately

threatened the optic nerves. My mother is an author and illustrator by trade, but an artist to the core. Knowing that further attempts at surgery would possibly destroy her eyesight, I resorted to the only cure I knew. I told her to lie down and rest, while I put meteor blood in her eyes.



Lapis Exilis (photo by Scarlett Amaris)

She was so knocked out on her medication that she didn't really know what was happening and later told me that she had dreamed there were angels standing around her bed, healing her eyes, a particularly strange admission as my mother is a staunch, die-hard atheist, who then, as now, had little time for the whole Rahn fandango, believing like most people that the Holy Grail should stay in the Monty Python movie where it belongs - which tends to rule out 'placebo effect' as a logical explanation. Call it 'coincidence' then, but needless to say she made a dramatic recovery and a decade later the cancer is still in remission.

Wolfram von Eschenbach puts it more baldly, simply stating that whoever has the stones or comes into contact with them, "*will have eternal life and will be healed*".

Stones from Heaven



It was all too easy before the advent of reliable carbon-dating and other techniques common to modern archaeology to misidentify the shrapnel of a dozen time periods as the residue of a single 'old religion', as evidenced by the consistent conflation of the ancient Celts, the Druids, Beaker folk and megalith builders of Stonehenge and Avebury into a single mythic culture by the modern New Age movement.

It is a known fact that the caverns of Ussat have been continuously inhabited since the end of the last ice age making it highly likely that, rather than the 'holy grail' or the mythical 'treasure of the Cathars', Otto Rahn and Antonin Gadai, may have uncovered the relics of a far older cult that held the grottos sacred long years before Christ and his cup or Abraham and the prophets.

Before the Blessed Virgin Mary or the Black Madonna, before Kybele, or Cybele, or Sybil, the Great Mother was venerated as Kubaba, the goddess of the caves and worshipped in grottos and on mountaintops.

The Magna Mater was also identified by her adherents as Meter Orie, the 'mountain mother', by whose name we know the black stones associated with her worship Meteorites; quite literally the 'stones of the Mountain Mother'.

The stones that fell from heaven were venerated, not because of their extraterrestrial origins which primitive man could barely have guessed at, but because their alleged physical properties - the power to heal grave illness, protect against one's enemies and grant the gift of prophecy - are so closely intertwined with the veneration of the Black Mother that the two are effectively one and the same.

The ideograms for the 'mountain mother' in the Hittite alphabet range from a lozenge or cube, a double-headed axe, a dove, a cup, a door or a gate - all images of the goddess in Neolithic Europe.

The very name Kubaba may betoken a cave or empty vessel, a wombspace or possibly derive from kube or kuba, recalling the black meteoric cube of the Ka'bah, that was brought into Islam after Mohammed roused its original idolatrous worshippers out of Mecca.



It is said that in pagan times, the seven priestesses of the Ka'bah circled the black stone naked as when the world was young. Today that practice is still recalled in the tawaf, the sevenfold counterclockwise circuit of the shrine, performed by all pilgrims to take the Hadj.

The ancient ritual's roots almost certainly descend from the Sumerian goddess Inanna and her Babylonian equivalent Ishtar, who was supposed to have passed through the seven doors of death or 'seven gateways' on her journey to the underworld, each successive gate keeper demanding she remove a garment as tribute, until she finally stood naked before her elder sister

Ereshkigal, 'Queen of the Great Earth', goddess of the underworld, a dance of death clearly echoed in the later Christian myth of Salome and the 'seven veils'.

Ereshkigal is also known by the epithet 'Allatu' (literally 'the goddess'), which is beyond question an earlier form of Al'Lat or Alilat, identified by Herodotus in the fifth century B.C. as the divinity worshipped in Mecca before the coming of the prophet, Mohammed and the substitution and subsequent veneration of her patriarchal counterpart, Allah - essentially the goddess Al'Lat with a soft 't'.

Al'lat has been identified with the three-fold moon goddess codified by Robert Graves into the archetypes of virgin, hag and whore, whereas in the introduction to the Penguin edition of the Koran translator N.J. Dawood states that the three mothers Al'Lat, Al'Uzza and Manat represent 'the Sun, Venus and Fortune, respectively' and the writer Alby Stone suggests that in early Mesopotamian art the only heavenly bodies to be depicted regularly were a trinity of the Sun, the Moon and Venus, tracing the roots of the names 'Al'uzza' and 'Manat' to an even more archaic source, betokening 'strength' and 'destiny', respectively.

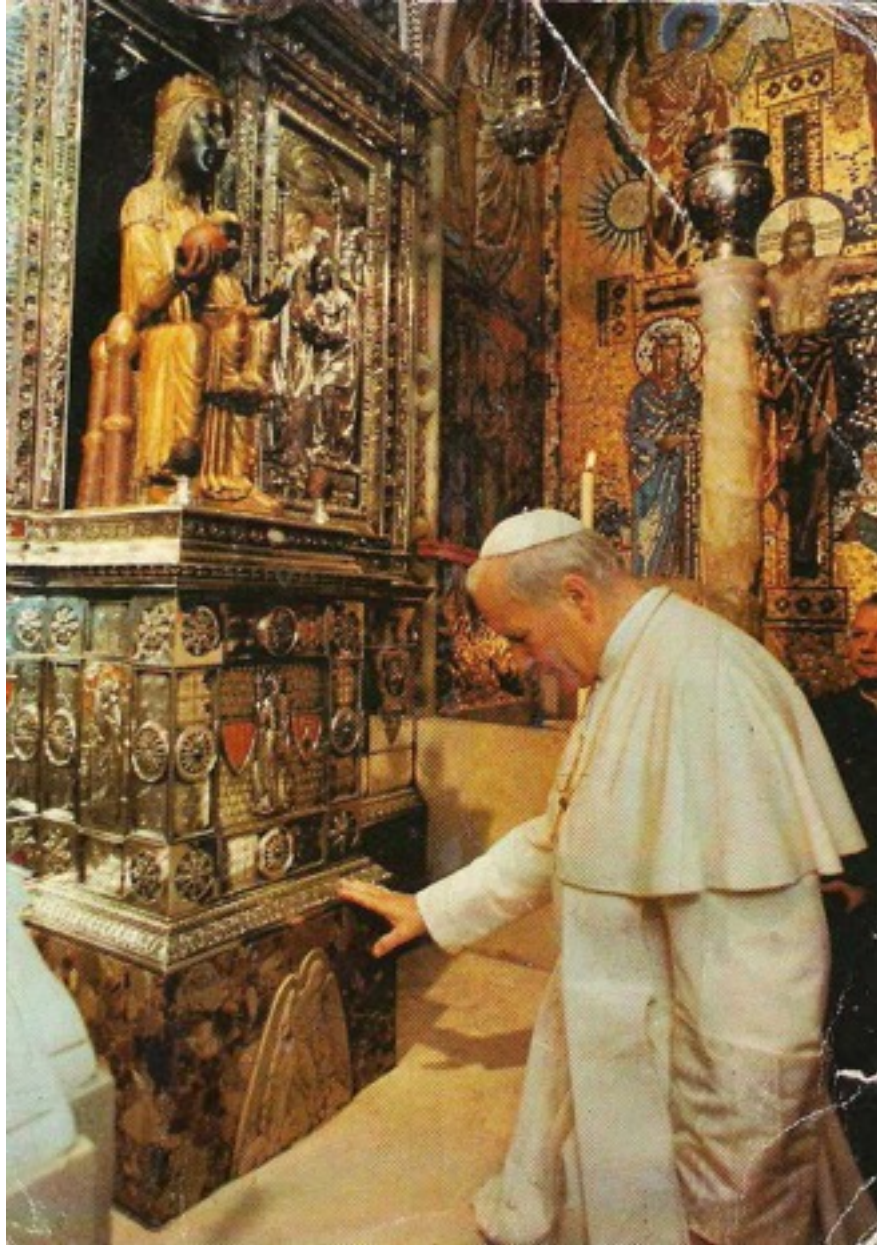
If the three 'daughters of Allah' are personifications of natural phenomena, then Al'Lat/Allatu/Ereshkigal is surely the earth, while the other two may well have stood for fire and water as in the Book of Creation, the Sefir Yetzirah or for that matter the 'banat', the three daughters of Baal, the Canaanite supreme being. Islamic oral tradition (al-Hadith: 'The Talk') has it that Mohammed's original vision initially endorsed the notion that the three mothers were goddesses, but he apparently later disowned this as a false teaching inspired by Satan. (Mircea Eliade: A History of Religious Ideas, vol.3, p.68)

At Petra, the Nabateans venerated a four-sided stone named after Allat (Arthur Cotterell, Dictionary of World Mythology, p. 24), whose son Dusura is just another take on Tammuz/Dumuzi/Du'uzi, the green man, who dies only to be reborn every spring after six months in the underworld. The Sumerians called him 'Dumu-zi'abzu' ('faithful son of the abyssal waters'), and believed that as in the later myth of Orpheus and Persephone, the goddess Ishtar/Inanna was forced to descend to the underworld to retrieve him. Her actions provoked the wrath of the Gods and she was sentenced by the seven Anunnaki, the judges of the underworld, the hellacious counterparts of the Sebettu, the seven sages venerated by the Babylonians, and associated with the seven major cities that dominated their civilization.



An aspect of Cybele

The three most sacred sites in Islam are Mecca, Medina and the Dome of the Rock on Temple mount, Jerusalem, which is identified in Judaism as the 'Eben Shettiyah', the 'stone of foundation', around which God built the world. Deep beneath the rock is a partly flooded cavity known to Muslims as 'Bir-el-Arweh', or the 'Well of Souls', and Jewish lore maintains how when David dug the foundations of the first temple he found the 'Eben Shettiyah', the block that holds back the Abyss. When he tried to move the stone, the waters of the underworld burst forth mirroring a parallel tradition in Islam, which holds that when Mohammed cast down the idol that once stood in the sacred complex at Mecca, he unblocked an ancient well beneath the Ka'bah. The idol was said to resemble the body of a 'black woman', a deity named 'Hubal', almost certainly another mask of Kubaba or Cybele, who was known to be venerated at that time in Phrygia.



The Pope bows to La Moreneta, Montserrat, Spain

In fact, a Phrygian statue of Cybele graven from a single meteoric 'aerolite' (Cumont, *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*, 1911, pp.46-7) was apparently presented to Rome by King Attalus in 204 BC. The ecstatic rites of Cybele's worship, whilst initially a little alien to the Roman temperament, seem to have caught on with the populace, who venerated her in the Phrygianum, the vast temple that once stood on the site of the present-day Vatican. The high priest who presided over those frenzied rituals was known as 'Papus', or father, the direct ancestor of the present day Pope, the head of the patriarchal Holy Roman Church. As her worship spread throughout the Empire, icons made in her image proliferated, painted black not because of the skin of the Egyptians, the dark alluvial soil of the Nile, or some obscure Arabic root word, but

because the template on which she is based, the original statue that held sway over Rome was made of a black stone. Behind the masks of Christianity and Islam the Goddess, the Grail and the bleeding stones were one all along.

The original idol may still exist somewhere deep beneath the walls of the Vatican, although it is said to have been lost in the fifth century. To some extent, the Vatican's continuing interest in the sanctuary of the black Madonna of Montserrat shows the power of the goddess cult within the edifice of the Church and the extraordinary degree of theological doublethink deployed to maintain the existing patriarchal order and keep the wool pulled over the public's eyes as to what force they truly serve.

The Black Madonna



Spain - 2001

My mother had expressed a growing desire to see all the places I had told her about during her convalescence, and when she was strong enough I took her to meet the Black Madonna.

We rode the cable car through the curling mists and joined the queue of pilgrims winding in single file through the basilica of Montserrat to touch the globe in La Moreneta's extended hand.



Our Lady of Darkness (photo by Scarlett Amaris)

If I wished for anything, it was merely for the right thing to happen, for my eyes to penetrate the toxic 21st century haze and my ears to hear her whisper, for my heart to know the Great Mother's mysteries more keenly, so that I might find the words and images to express the inexpressible.

Otto Rahn visited Montserrat shortly after his sojourn in southern France and while he availed himself of the reading room at the Benedictine monastery, which holds one of the largest collections of medieval manuscripts outside of the Vatican library, he remained insistent that the magic mountain, commonly identified with Wolfram's Montsalvat by ardent Catalan nationalists, could never have housed the Holy Grail. The Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler seems to have believed otherwise, taking time out from his meetings with Franco in 1942 to personally tour the monastery.



Opus Dei Headquarters - TorreCiudad, Spain - Summer 2007

Like uncle Heinrich, the founder of Opus Dei, the recently canonized Cardinal Escriva drew inspiration from the magic mountain and Loyolla's Knights of Heaven. In practice Opus Dei amounts to a sort of Catholic equivalent of the Taliban, and to make matters worse the organization is rich, relentless and in government right here in Europe. It's like the Spanish Civil War never even happened.

The miraculous powers of the Great Mother were sublimated into the cult of the virgin but even the Catholics are forced to admit that the mountain of Montserrat originally housed a temple consecrated to Venus in pagan times.

'Montserrat' means the 'serrated mountain' and its otherworldly topography has probably set it aside as a place of worship since the dim red dawn of creation when the rocks themselves may have inspired the superstitious awe of our primitive ancestors. That night I climbed the mountain and gazed by starlight upon the stony faces of those ante-human Gods. And I waited for a sign perhaps. And waited again. But the Gods were silent.

We made an early start and headed north across the Pyrenees by way of Andorra and the valley of Ussat to Montsegur and Madame Couquet's auberge, where the first fire of the season already smouldered on the hearth.

Madame greeted us with open arms, looking somehow younger than when I saw her last. The auberge was the closest I had come to a real home over the years, and despite the language barrier, she struck up an instant rapport with my mother. Strange and oddly reassuring as it was to see these two matriarchs together at the long table, the homecoming was not complete without a third mother, a replica of the Madonna of Montserrat that I had purchased in the basilica's gift shop the day before and which I presented now as a gift to Madame Couquet to watch over her auberge.

“Merci. It's very nice. But we already have one.”

“What?”

“She says she's already got one.”

“Thanks mom. I can... What d'you mean she's already got one?”

“Oui, oui!”

Madame nodded, trying to explain in her heavily accented Southern French.

“Notre Dame de la Lumière!”

And it was true...



The Black Mother – Montsegur

The black mother had been there all along, hidden in plain sight in the tiny church just around the corner from the auberge.

Montsegur has understandably always been a bane to the Roman Church, anathematized by successive Popes as the literal ‘synagogue of Satan’. Until the mid nineteen twenties the local clergy insisted that the townsfolk drag a cross through the village once a year on the anniversary of the castle’s capitulation before singing the Veni Creator Spiritus in the Camp de Cremat, the same song the Inquisitor’s sung as the martyrs burned in 1244 to ensure the Cathar faith would never rise again.

Even to this day the village has no parish priest and as only one mass a year is celebrated in the locked church it is hardly surprising that the icon sequestered within had hitherto escaped my attention.

And there she was. Beautiful, cryptic, proud. An exact replica of La Moreneta brought from the far side of the mountains by monks from Montserrat to symbolize their spiritual kinship with

the hardy villagers of Montsegur, explicitly drawing together and linking the initiatory mountains in a way that Otto had scarcely guessed at. He had drawn on the Benedictine library's texts in his research, but in his haste to denigrate the Catholic faith responsible for the extermination of his beloved Cathari, he blinded himself to the common pagan roots that bound these sites together, roots that ran deeper than Christianity and its 12th century Occitanian antithesis.

Perhaps in his haste to identify Montsegur with the mythical 'Grail Castle', he overlooked the fundamental contradiction of a heretical faith that viewed god's creation as an illusory veil putting its faith in a material treasure. It was not in the nature of the Cathari to venerate relics in the manner of the Catholic church, and the sight of the blood of Christ liquefying from the living rock tends to lose much of its superstitious charge if the attendant culture doesn't accept the existence of a flesh and blood messiah to begin with.

One look at the chapel's décor is enough to indicate why the locals might have decided it was best to keep this place under lock and key. Four zodiac signs, Taurus, Leo, Aquarius and Scorpio, representing the earthly elements decorate the chapel walls, aligned to the cardinal points according to the same schema as the inner court of the mind bending cabalistic puzzle box commonly known to esoteric scholars as the 'cube of space'.

As one might expect the Goddess stands at the centre of this configuration in a symbolic castle turret atop a mountainous altar adorned by a golden fleece decorated with the image of the dead lamb of God lying atop the Book of the Seven Seals, bringing to mind the lost Cathar holy book that is only supposed to be opened at the end of time.



At Montserrat the Goddess never turns her back on you. The icon is fixed in place within a sort of glass coffin. At Montsegur however it is possible to view her from all angles, revealing the back of her throne to be decorated with seven circular motifs reminiscent of the phases of the moon or the mythical seven doors to the otherworld.

I was back on the trail again, either by chance or the intervention of some unseen hand. I had asked for a sign and it seemed as if someone or something had answered my impious prayers.

The Secret of the Cathars

I am that dark, that thrice dishonored prince of Aquitaine. The star upon my scutcheon long hath faded. The black sun upon my lute doth yet remain...

Gerard de Nerval

The secret of the Cathars was thought to have died with Otto Rahn. Some believe the SS blast sealed the sacred treasure into a mineshaft at the base of a glacier near the abandoned Obersalzberg complex, or that it was shipped to a secret U-boat base in Antarctica at the end of the war, while others say it never left France at all and remained in the hands of wily old Antonin Gadal, the former director of tourism for the area.

Gadal lived on in Ussat 'til his death in the 60's, reforming the Lectorium Rosicrucianum along his own strange 'neo-cathar' lines. In all likelihood the meteoric vessel, dubbed the Graal Pyrenean, remains in their hands and is probably still used in their initiation rituals, which continue to take place in the Bethlehem Grotto although things have changed in Ussat since Otto Rahn's day. The modern freeway to Andorra has robbed the shadowy valley of its primordial tranquility and Otto's former residence, the hotel 'Des Marronniers' has been raised to the ground. The town authorities have hardened their attitude towards the secret societies operating in the region in the wake of the sensational press coverage surrounding the 'Solar Temple' affair.

'The Solar Temple' was an obscure right wing sect that drew inspiration for its teachings from the British occultist Aleister Crowley and allegedly counted Princess Grace of Monaco among its members.

The sect, headed by its top 33 members known as the Elder Brothers of the Rosy Cross, has gone underground following a series of mass murders in the early nineties. Synchronized fire bomb explosions in France, Canada and the tiny town of Sion in Switzerland lead to the discovery of a number of bodies, including bankers, politicians and town functionaries, arranged twelve to a group like the spokes of a wheel, heads pointing inwards, hands tied behind them, gunshot wounds in the backs of their heads.

All told some 74 people died in Switzerland alone and at least a further 16 in Quebec. Otto's journal mentions a similar arrangement of Cathar remains in a 12th century grave. There were twelve knights at the round table, the thirteenth chair being vacant, the Siege Perilous. Twelve disciples at the last supper, twelve houses of the zodiac, twelve little pips around the borders of the Cathar cross, twelve departments in the SS, twelve empty plinths in the circular Valhalla room or Hall of the Dead beneath the Wewelsburg, not to mention twelve men to a workgroup at Niederhagen concentration camp and twelve standing stones surrounding Gadal's mysterious monument on the banks of the Ariège.

I couldn't help but be a little unnerved by the persistent rumours that the sect was still active in the area having since merged with certain elements of the O.T.O. (The Order of the Oriental Templars).

Despite my best efforts I had failed to get within striking distance of the sacred relic and after a decade of research I knew I was still only beginning to understand what the story was really about.

I knew the stones had been prized since time out of mind, and that men might kill or give up their lives for them, yet without having conducted a full spectrograph, had few clues as to their density or the true nature of the other mysterious properties attributed to them. Chemical density is determined by the conditions prevailing within the first few seconds of the 'big bang'. On Earth, the heaviest element in the periodic table is Uranium, which can be artificially enriched to form Plutonium and of course, there's really only one thing that Plutonium is good for!

In deep space, far heavier stable elements are known to exist, some of them dense enough to bend light or literally fold space-time, each one containing the latent energy of the original light, the 'big bang', still trapped within it, awaiting some future redemption perhaps, like the souls of the 'Cathars' imprisoned in their 'tunics of flesh.' The 'Cathars' accepted Christ only as a prophet and awaited the coming of a true messiah, who would incarnate not as a human being but as pure light, a light that would liberate mankind from the 'sin of matter', cleanse the Earth, break the cycle of incarnation and bring all of us back to God.

The 'Gaal Pyrenean' is identified by some as the Emerald Cup, not because of its shade but because of what it holds within it, undetectable to mortal eyes, what the deranged Nazi Ariosophist Miguel Serrano described as 'the green ray' or the 'condensed light of the black sun.'

There is some evidence to suggest that several artifacts from Otto Rahn's initial excavations may have been shipped to the United States at the end of the war, where they later came to the attention of one of Albert Einstein's associates, a young physicist named Dr. Herbert Fleishmann, who had a particular interest in the fields of covalent bonds, superconductivity and supercooling. The military applications of his work remain classified, along with the details of the first and second SS Polar expeditions, in which Rahn seems to have played a role.

There is an apocryphal story of Nazi scientists in the Arctic circle aiming their radar equipment directly at the sky, allegedly in an effort to make contact with the inhabitants of the hollow earth. In all likelihood the 'hollow earth' schtick is an elaborate cover story designed to deflect attention from whatever the hell they were really up to. Conceivably they were trying to bounce radar waves off the ionosphere in an effort to come up with an imaging system to reveal the positions of Allied bunkers or shipping. Certainly the unique properties of the magnetic fields at the poles would seem to provide one possible rationale for these expeditions, not to mention the reasons why their findings remain redacted. Murky 16mm footage exists, depicting some sort of radar apparatus reminiscent of the transmitters found today at the United States installation at Gaakon, Alaska, and some believe that research into Nazi technology appropriated at the end

of the war under 'Operation Paperclip' continues in secret at the American airbase in Thule, Greenland.

But it's all speculation and without tangible evidence will remain so. Like the notorious 'verbum dismisum' of the alchemists, Otto's work remains incomplete. He speaks of three stones after all...

In the final pages of *The Court of Lucifer*, written in 1936, a good three years before his putative demise, Otto describes three manuscripts lying before him on his writing desk. On the first pile, the notes that comprised the substance of *Crusade against the Grail*, rests one of the stones he brought back from Montsegur, on the second, the text of *The Court of Lucifer*, rests a fragment of the Delphi temple oracle frieze, and on the third, what he promised would be his final and greatest work, rests a 'lump of 'amber, golden yellow', reminiscent of Masonry's three degrees and the whitened final substance of the alchemical 'great work'.

The third book of Rahn, begun at the Arctic Circle under the working title *The Testament of Prometheus or A Journey to Hell and Beyond* is of course missing, either seized by the Nazis when he fled the SS, or (as his niece Ingeborgh would have us believe) burned by his mother at the end of the war. After that the trail goes cold...

Ends of the Earth

Very far north, in the country of Fritjof Fritjofson, is a mountain of granite, one thousand meters high. Once in a thousand years a little bird lands on top of the mountain to sharpen its beak. When that mountain is finally worn to the ground one second of eternity will have passed. And this is the spirit in which to understand the story of Otto Rahn...

Paul Alexis Ladame (Geneva 1998)



THE ARCTIC CIRCLE - 2006

The glacial wind howls like the furious breath of an ice dragon. Born in a cyclonic whirling of clouds in the north Atlantic a thousand miles to the south of Reykjavik it spins polewards in a wave flattening thrust of freezing air, gathering momentum as it roars across the wilderness of moss and broken lava to beat against the impassive face of Mount Kufli, tearing off sharp-edged fragments of ice and hurling them north towards the Greenland Sea. In winter these storm winds, moving in an unfaltering blast across the ice slick surface of the rocks can touch velocities of a hundred miles an hour or more. Human flesh exposed to it would crystallise, break and crumble, then disintegrate in minutes.

Even now, in late summer, the temperature can drop to seven degrees below, numbing my flesh and causing my nose to run uncontrollably as I force myself onwards towards the looming cone of the volcano that dominates the barren skyline up ahead. Up ahead the black rocks are too hot for the snow to settle and the ground beneath my feet thrums with incessant geothermal activity.

‘This is no place for human beings’, I tell myself. ‘So why am I here? What can I possibly hope to find in this wasteland?’

I allow my mind to wander, returning to the summer of 1936 and the events that lead me to this terrible place. It had been a heady year for Otto Rahn. He was planning to collaborate with the composer Hans Pfitzner on a new opera telling the tale of the Cathars and that July embarked on his most ambitious expedition to date, setting sail with a team of fellow SS men for the Arctic circle. Women were not allowed on the ship which apparently flew a mysterious blue swastika rather than the familiar black and red sigil of Hitler’s Reich.

This voyage to the far north, to the Ultima Thule of his ancestors, was to form the final passage in his second book, a rather insubstantial travelogue thrown together under the aegis of his Nazi supervisors and delivered just in time for an arbitrarily chosen deadline of October 31- the pagan festival of Samhain.

Typically, Otto’s text is less than clear about the true purpose of his journey to the Arctic circle and speculation has been rife over the years as to whether he had hoped to find the vestiges of some long lost Hyperborean homeland hidden beneath the ice mantle, a gateway to the ‘hollow earth’ or was simply taking part in an obscure bonding exercise based on the Eddas.

I retrace Otto’s steps to Laugarvatn and Reykholt, playing ‘Stairway to Heaven’ over and over on the car stereo, the snow and lumps of ice pattering ever more thickly against the windscreen as I make my way north towards the desolate shores of the Greenland ocean. After a blow out I am forced to stop at Akuriri and purchase snow tires before continuing as far as the steaming slopes of Mount Kuffla where I strike out on foot, searching for the mouth of the cavern indicated on the chart.

A great crack runs across the mountains flanks where the earth has subsided in a titanic upheaval some years before. Pale, sulphurous vapors whirl from its abyssal depths, rising about me like reaching, tortured wraiths as I skirt the jagged edge of the fissure.

The cave mouth lies in a barren valley just below the rift. It looks pretty nondescript from the outside and is easy enough to miss on the first pass. Hunkering down on my haunches I ease myself into the gloom, shinning down a mound of rubble to the miasmatic shores of a superheated subterranean lake where Otto’s trail finally peters out.

Curious pictoglyphs swim in my probing flashlight beam and I can make out queer, Elfin faces carved into the volcanic rock. Whether or not they constitute material proof of the young SS officer’s claims or are merely vestiges of another, elaborate hoax is impossible to say without recourse to carbon dating or further academic investigation.

The Icelandic people place more credence in the existence of the ‘otherworld’ of trolls, elves and faeries than folk in the warmer more clement countries to the south but here in the veritable back of beyond it is easy to see how such whimsical notions might retain their hold on the popular unconscious.



Enigmatic carvings, Iceland, 2006

One of Otto’s Nazi peers in Heinrich Himmler’s Black Order once remarked in an internal memo that he “...half suspected Rahn of being in league with the little people...” But, if anything, it is the odd pragmatism of Otto’s quest that has kept me on the trail all these years.

Otto himself admitted that he hoped to find if not the crown of Lucifer, then at least the stone that fell from it. I have two of those extraterrestrial artefacts in my possession now, souvenirs of Otto’s earlier excavations at Fontanet but I still fail to understand how he intended to join the dots in his third book – ‘The Testament of Prometheus - a Journey to Hell and Beyond’, a final magnum opus whose opening pages were apparently written here on the North Cape of Iceland.

The manuscript of ‘The Testament of Prometheus’ is in all likelihood lost to us now although the Allied army doctor Colonel Howard Buechner references it as a secondary source in his self-published tome ‘Emerald Cup - Ark of Gold’ (1991). This odd little book is, to my knowledge, the first account of the Rahn affair to have surfaced in the English language although Buechner seems to have embellished the myth in the telling, adding a few curlicues of his own concerning the SS expedition discovering a mysterious cavern beyond the warm water lakes whose floor gave way to a bottomless abyss spanned by an emerald ice bridge on the far side of which could be seen the mouths of a number of tunnels from which emanated ‘strange whispering sounds resembling human voices’.

According to Buechner the 'Pyrenean Grail' was sealed within a specially constructed basalt obelisk and deposited in the mysterious ice cave to mark the entry point to the lost kingdom of Agharta and the world within.

While I find this fantastical conceit entertaining enough I can't help but suspect that the truth lies a lot closer to home. If the meteoric chalice really exists then it probably never left Europe, its continued presence an open secret, known only to a select few. A few years ago I would have found this notion almost as ridiculous as the notion of Agharta or the hollow earth but I had seen too much to be able to readily dismiss the rumours.

They say you can't get blood from a stone, just the same as you can't fly or breathe underwater. But it's not true.

Clambering back into the car I turn up the volume on the stereo, the keening, boreal wind buffeting the vehicle as I head south once more, into a waiting darkness that seems to stretch away and away to the uttermost ends of the earth.

The S.S.

I can heartily recommend the Gestapo to anyone

Sigmund Freud

STUTTGART - WINTER 1998



Otto Rahn's publisher, Albert von Haller

“The last time that I saw Rahn I was visiting the writer, Kurt Eggers. Maybe you have heard of him?”

Albert von Haller, Otto's publisher sits blinking at me in the wintry half-light. He is ninety-five years old and has recently written the libretto for a new opera about Eskimos. Still very active

he looks like something out of a story by the Brother's Grimm although in Otto's time he must have been very imposing, so imposing that Otto resorted to taking a full bevy of SS bodyguards with him to one of their meetings in a vain attempt to get Albert to pay him his royalties.

“He was always in financial difficulties. When I saw him that day at Kurt's house he looked tired and disheveled. His hair and clothes were a mess. He said he was on the run. On the run from the SS. My first instinct was to let him have my passport which had a stamp for France so that perhaps he could escape across the border but Kurt Eggers told me not to get involved. Rahn's downfall came as a result of a power struggle that was going on between Martin Bormann and the SS and Kurt knew that the Gestapo would be watching him for sure.”

According to Albert, Kurt warned him that Otto was already under surveillance and that “when he is caught your passport will be found and then you'll be in it just like me!”

“I understood”, mutters Albert, averting his gaze, “and did nothing..”

Westphalia - winter 1998

“Of course the story that he was on the run from the SS is completely untrue. This is something his family has put about since the war when it was not so fashionable to hold the views that were so widely held back in the thirties.”

Gabriele lights another cigarette, regarding me coldly.

Gabriele Winckler-Dechend is still an unreformed supporter of the Third Reich and a close friend of Heinrich Himmler’s surviving family. Before the war she spent a lot of time with Otto Rahn, going so far as to flirt with him.



Otto Rahn - the original man in black

She reminds me that he was possessed of some sort of inherited sixth sense and apparently used to speak to her in her mind. She regales me with a charming anecdote about how Otto accompanied her to the premier of Ernst Shafer's SS produced Tibetan documentary - Geheimnis Tibet (Secret Tibet) shot during the celebrated Ahnenerbe expedition to the Himalayas.

She claims Otto was inspired to reproduce the telepathic feats of the Llamas shown in Shafer's film , proving his point by communicating with her from the opposite side of the street on their way home. I don't have the heart to mention that Geheimnis Tibet premiered in 1942, some three years after Otto's apparent demise.

Some of what she says however rings true, or at least carries a degree of plausibility. She recalls that Otto had a loyal Nubian bodyguard whom he once sent to intimidate a local priest in Ussat-Les-Bains who had been stirring up the locals against him, accusing him of being a spy and a devil worshipper. (True, on both counts!)

She tells me that the priest had been so terrified that he eventually apologized to Rahn on his hands and knees, claiming that he had "seen the light". This still makes Gabriela chuckle.

Himmler would never have harmed Rahn whom, she insists, was totally behind the Black Order in everything they did.

She doesn't mention Otto Rahn's tour with the deaths-head at Buchenwald which came just after Kristallnacht, nor does she mention his Jewish blood or his resignation letter a few months later. Afterwards a story was circulated that Otto was forced to retire on account of bronchial catarrh from his chain smoking (80-100 a day) and the poor air in the camps which was hindering his attempts to complete work on his third and final book, 'The Testament of Prometheus - A Journal to Hell and Beyond.'

She does confirm the story that Martin Bormann was plotting to try and bring down Himmler at the time and draws my attention to the fact that Rahn was apparently engaged to a lady named Asta Bach who broke off the engagement the month before his disappearance.

"Nobody loved Otto, not Asta, not the French, perhaps not even his mother. Something must have happened to him that made him go looking for the Grail in the first place. You have to imagine why a young German would uproot himself and leave his home, friends and family to go looking for something no one even believed existed. Something must have made him go to France, to Montsegur, to learn French and Occitan, something that he kept to himself, that none of us will ever understand..."

There is no mistaking the affection in Gabriela's voice and the sadness.

Back when Gabriela was still an attractive young lady she was the personal secretary of Otto's superior, the aging Rune mage, Karl Maria Wiligut, who worked as head of Himmler's Race and Settlement Office (RUSHA) under the pseudonym 'Weisthor' - literally 'Wise Thor' or the 'wise warrior'.



Karl Maria Wiligut-Weisthor

Wiligut-Weisthor was one of the most bizarre and colourful figures to have been drawn to the black flame of Himmler's Nazi Camelot. Born as Karl Maria Wiligut in Vienna in 1866, he believed himself to be the 'secret king of Germany', the last descendant of an extinct line of Royalty stemming from the ancient Germanic sages, the Uiligotis of the Asa-Uana-Sippe.

He not only claimed to have been tutored in the runes and initiated from an early age into the secrets of his family, but to also possess clairvoyant abilities. By faith he was an Irminist, an adherent of the pagan deity Krist, whose worship he believed had been hijacked and ruthlessly distorted by the Christians. Following a family tradition he had joined the Austro-Hungarian army at the age of fourteen and held a series of commands spanning a good forty years of loyal military service.

He was repeatedly decorated for bravery in World War One and after being demobbed seems to have developed the conviction that he could remember all of his past lives, experiencing total recall

of over eight thousand years of Germanic history. His subsequent desire to father a son who might inherit his ancestral memories placed his marriage under considerable strain.

Wiligut blamed his wife's inability to conceive a healthy boy child on a Zionist-Masonic-Catholic conspiracy, which he also believed was responsible for the collapse of the Habsburg dynasty and his homeland's ignominious defeat in the war. He began to grow increasingly violent and after repeatedly threatening to kill his wife he was confined to an asylum in Salzburg and diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic with megalomaniacal tendencies.

On his release he managed to emigrate to Germany where he rapidly became a celebrity among the Volkisch groups of the day such as the Free Sons of the North and Baltic Seas and the Edda society. In 1933 his old friend Richard Anders, who was now serving as an SS officer, introduced him to Heinrich Himmler, whose growing fascination with the occult traditions of old Europe set him aside from the other, more pragmatic members of Hitler's inner circle.

Himmler was labouring under the apprehension that he was the reincarnation of King Heinrich of Saxony at the time and seems to have been deeply impressed by this weird old man who was duly recruited into the SS under the pseudonym 'Weisthor' and installed as the head of a newly created Department for Pre and Early History within the Race and Settlement Main Office in Munich.



There is no doubt that Wiligut-Weisthor, dubbed ‘Himmler’s Rasputin’ by popular historians, was seen as something of a mentor figure by the Reichsführer and accordingly came to wield considerable influence within the Black Order. He was rapidly promoted from the rank of SS-Hauptsturmführer (captain) to SSBrigadeführer (Brigadier) proving instrumental not only in the design of the SS uniform and ‘totenkopf’ (death’s head) ring which bore his family seal, but in the purchase and restoration of the Schloss Wewelsburg, the former seat of the 16th century bishops and witch hunters of Paderborn, to serve as the SS Order castle.

The rings were not the personal property of the SS elite to whom they were issued but were designed to bind them to the order. After their deaths the rings were supposed to be collected and returned to the Wewelsburg for symbolic interment in the Hall of the Dead. The castle with its round table and ritual chamber below was intended to become both the seat of Himmler’s nascent warrior knight dynasty and the geographic centre of a new world order, over whose quasi-pagan birth rites Wiligut-Weisthor presided like some deranged cross between a Nazi Aleister Crowley and ‘Uncle Fester’ from the Addams family.

It comes as little surprise that Wiligut-Weisthor adored Otto's book which was swiftly prescribed as required reading at a certain level of promotion within the SS. After a complex vetting process Otto was recruited onto Himmler's personal staff as a junior non-commissioned officer, becoming a full member of the SS in 1936.

Although he was never a card carrying member of the Nazi party and found the uniform he was forced to wear 'faintly ridiculous', he must have been elated that sufficient funding had finally been allocated for him to be able to continue his research in France, Italy and Iceland. Like Wiligut-Weisthor he saw the rise of the Hitler dictatorship as a means to an end, a golden opportunity to avenge his ancestors and oversee the destruction of organized religion and even Christianity itself, clearing the way for a new pan-European paganism designed and directed by his black garbed masters, whom he imagined to be the servitors of an unknown god whose messiah was Lucifer rather than Jesus.

Otto was only too aware of the Faustian nature of the bargain he had accepted and indeed paraphrases Goethe at length in his second book, 'The Court of Lucifer' (1937 - Schwarzhaupt Verlag, Leipzig):

Give me your hand, Faust! Let us leave Rome and seek out together the
mountain of assembly in the most distant midnight...

I was looking for divinity but instead I find myself at the gates of Hell.

Still I may continue to walk, to fall, even in flames -

If there exists a way towards heaven then it crosses Hell, at least it does for
me.

Well then, I dare!

Knowing that to refuse such an offer from Himmler would be to run the risk of possible imprisonment or even execution, Otto threw himself instead into the continued pursuit of the mysterious Cathar treasure he believed to be the Grail, communicating his findings to Weisthor in coded dispatches that were to be shared with no one else but Himmler, so secret were their contents.

In one message addressed to Weisthor in October 1935 and signed by Otto with a hearty 'heil Hitler', the young Grail historian requests permission to travel to Odenwald, Westerwald, Sporkenburg, Drutgerestein, Steimel, Hellenborn, Wilderstein and the ruins of Wildenburg castle near Amorbach, where Wolfram von Eschenbach first penned his epic Grail romance. In the same missive Otto mentions his pressing need to visit the stone circles of the Dornburg and Willendorf, the former seat of the German heretics and birth place of the mythical Christian Rosenkreutz, along with several other locations so secret that they could 'only be mentioned orally'.

The subsequent journey is noted in a report to Himmler dated 19/10/1935 and Himmler's journal for 3 November 1935 remarks:

“Report back and to be kept secret.”

Downfall

Rahn's sensational earlier work led to him being feted by the Nazi elite and for a few years, his research was lavishly funded by the Race and Settlement department. Then something went disastrously wrong. As Himmler encountered difficulties in finding hard evidence to support his Aryan theories, so he began to grow increasingly impatient with Otto's inability to come up with concrete results. Following a brief promotional tour during which he visited schools and town halls to lecture a baffled public on the 'Lucifer problem', Otto found himself posted to more conventional duties.

According to author Christian Bernadac, Otto was forced to participate in the Nazi breeding programme known as the 'lebensborn' before being enrolled into a grueling exercise regime at Buchenwald designed to 'toughen him up' for active military service.

On 1 September 1937 Otto was implicated in a disciplinary hearing held for one of his black garbed comrades, Karl Mahler of Arolsen, who was accused of 'dishonourable conduct' in an investigation backed by Martin Bormann's private office. Bormann's staff were engaged in gathering data to discredit the SS which was threatening to become a virtual state within a state.

It is hard to know at this distance what Otto's role may have been in this infraction, whether it involved mistreatment of the prisoners or alleged homosexuality as Reich historian Hans Jürgen Lange suggests. In a signed declaration Otto was forced to swear off alcohol for two years and as punishment was stripped of his rank and reassigned to guard duty at Dachau.

The issue of Otto's sexual orientation is still hotly disputed. His former publisher, Albert von Haller told me that Otto had been openly gay and insisted, perhaps a little too stridently, that this had been the true cause of his downfall.

Weisthor's former secretary Gabriele Winckler-Dechend, on the other hand, seemed to go out of her way to rebut the allegations, claiming that Otto not only flirted with her but that he had spoken of Dachau in the most glowing terms and during his time there had paid particular attention to the planting of an extensive herb garden. Otto had been very interested in naturopathy and herb lore and, according to Gabrielle, saw his tour of duty as a chance to both creatively utilize the labour force and re-educate the prisoners.

Dachau was not yet an extermination camp and only assumed those characteristics after Kristallnacht (9 Nov 1938) when the genocidal persecution of the German Jews began in earnest.

Despite Gabriele's claims to the contrary, what Otto saw and experienced in the camp under the command of his homicidal superior, Theodor Eicke, left him chronically depressed. He wrote repeatedly to Himmler's personal adjutant, Karl Wolff, asking to be released from his duties so that he might complete his third book but by now he had lost the ear of the Reichsführer and his requests were ignored. His disillusionment with the Nazi regime became complete when he was

asked to submit his 'Ahnenpass', the grotesque genealogical document that all German citizens were required to fill out in order to prove their racial purity.

Possibly Otto was unaware of his mother's Jewish roots until he conducted the necessary research to complete the form, but the irony would not have escaped him that his cherished lifework had served to further fan the flames of the holocaust that was even now bearing down on him and the old, pre-war world he held so dear. For Otto Rahn the initiatory journey ended in a precipice.

Curiously I have a copy of Otto's ahnenpass in my possession and it is evident that while he filled out the form it was never stamped or approved. Quite how it ended up on file amongst the other public records remains a mystery. Certainly to have submitted such a document, containing clear proof of his Semitic ancestry, would have been tantamount to suicide. After a reportedly staged marriage to a young divorcee from Luneberg named Asta Bach failed to 'rehabilitate' him in the eyes of his superiors, he was left with no other choice than to resign from the SS.

"It is no longer possible", wrote Otto,"to live in the country that my homeland has become. On my return to Munich it all came back to me. The bloody events to which I had borne witness. I could no longer sleep nor eat. It was as if a nightmare lay upon me..."

In a handwritten memo addressed to Karl Wolff and dated 28 February 1939 Otto asked to be allowed to leave the SS for "reasons so serious they can only be communicated orally".

His discharge was granted by Himmler on the 17th of March who pencilled a single word in the margin -"Ja" - before initializing the request which was backdated to the 22nd of February, although by then Otto Rahn was in all likelihood already dead.

The tale of the two publishers only serves to further muddy the picture of his final days. The publisher of 'The Court of Lucifer', Albert von Haller, reports having last seen him in Dortmund in early March at the home of his writer friend and fellow Luciferian, Kurt Eggars. Albert was in no doubt that Otto was on the run from the SS, adding that, "He looked terrible. His hair and his clothes were a mess."

Otto Vogelsang, the publisher of 'Crusade Against the Grail', claims to have met with his former client a few days later on the 8th of March at the Hotel Zahringer in Freiburg. He insists that Otto appeared "relaxed and happy" and seemed "confident about his future".

Otto left the hotel at approximately 11.00 pm, apparently intending to travel back to Munich although it is assumed that he must have made his way instead towards the French border. A postcard received shortly afterwards by his old friend Antonin Gadai contains only four terse words - "I miss your country."

For some reason Otto got off the bus at Zoll shortly before it reached the frontier. Perhaps they were stopping other vehicles up ahead and he knew he might be searched and sent back to the camp. He was an experienced mountaineer who could have easily made it across the border on foot. The mountains were little more than 2000 meters high, a mere walk in the park for a man like him.

The last people to speak to him were the children of a Tyrolean farmer who saw a figure dressed in black emerge from the snowbound woods outside their cottage on the evening of March 13th, 1939.

The stranger came within thirty meters of the house, stood still for a moment and looked at his golden watch. He seemed to be in a hurry and paused just long enough to ask the children if they knew the time. Then he turned and went down the valley towards the stream where they watered the cows. After that he seemed to disappear. As the shadows lengthened and a storm began to close in the children's parents tried in vain to search for the mysterious hiker but were surprised to find that he had left no foot prints in the snow.

"In mid March '39 by the Rechauerhof lay a meter of snow," explained Peter Maier, trudging uphill across the frozen pine needles.

"The next farmyard was an hour and a half away. He must have gone upstream, walking in the water so as not to leave any tracks. My brother and I found him three months later when the spring thaw came, sitting just there under the tree, covered by his coat..." Peter graciously pointed out the spot. The view was indeed breathtaking. Looking down one could see across two different valleys, as far as the frontier. "We recognized him by his coat and hat. It was the man who had passed by our house. Next to his body lay two medicine bottles, one empty and the other half empty. He was identified by his passport which was still in his breast pocket..."

I don't know what was in those medicine bottles but according to the subsequent police report filed in Zoll the pills didn't kill him. He froze to death. The 35 year old German Jewish Grail historian was buried at the base of the Kufstein where he lay until the end of the war when his body was moved to the family plot in Darmstadt although for reasons that remain unclear no formal death certificate was ever issued. Whether he was the victim of foul play or had voluntarily chosen to leave a world he saw disintegrating around him remains a matter of debate.

The fact that Wiligut-Weisthor was forced to retire from the SS that same month suggests that perhaps Otto did discover something in the course of his travels, something that led to both men being abruptly silenced.

The following May a terse obituary appeared in the *Volkische Beobachte*:

In a snowstorm in the mountains this March SS. Obersturmführer Otto Rahn tragically departed this life. We mourn our dead comrade, decent SS man and writer of noted historical scholarly works.

The obituary was signed by Karl Wolff, Himmler's Chief of Personal Staff. Wolff is an interesting choice to have penned Otto's death notice considering the role he seems to have played in bringing about Wiligut-Weisthor's downfall and the subsequently dismantling the Ahnenerbe SS's pre-history department.

The previous November, Wolff had paid a personal call on Wiligut-Weisthor's estranged wife, Malwinne, in Salzbug, taking the opportunity provided by the Anschluss, Germany's unification with Austria, to pull her husband's psychiatric records which were subsequently dumped on

Himmler's desktop, an action that made the ageing rune mage's continued presence in the SS politically untenable. It is widely assumed that Wolff had been acting in concert with a rival faction in the SS who were actively opposed to the pagan and Luciferian elements within the Black Order and systematically set out to discredit and destroy them.

Wiligit-Weisthor was too important to Himmler to be killed. Instead, he was quietly sequestered and shuffled from one SS safe house to another throughout the war before dying on his assistant's couch in the winter of 1946. He was an 80 year old man with a history of psychiatric illness whereas Otto may have been a bit more of a liability and - so the story goes - had to be eradicated and all trace of his research erased from the face of the Earth.

Karl Wolff later became the Nazi ambassador to the Vatican and survived the war. He was granted immunity for his crimes by agreeing to testify against his former comrades at Nuremberg and later became well-known as one of the principal interviewees and narrators of the BBC series *The World at War*, as well as playing an active role in discrediting the 'Hitler diaries' for *Stern Magazine* and helping bring Klaus Barbie to justice in Paraguay. I was mercifully born too late to have attended Nuremberg, but I did get to sit in on the famous libel trial in London's high court a few years ago, that resulted in the subsequent downfall of British pseudo-historian and holocaust denier David Irving.



Irving had consistently attacked the credibility of the experts introduced to counter his claims that a deliberate policy of mass extermination had never been practiced at Auschwitz or, by implication, the other camps, so when the prosecuting attorney introduced Karl Wolff's testimony, he couldn't help quipping: "Surely you would consider the Reichsfuhrer's personal adjutant to be a credible witness, would you not?" Ignoring the polite murmur of laughter from the audience, Irving screwed up his eyes and remarked: "Well, it's a bit of a curate's egg, really..." And the funny thing is I know what he means. Only it ain't funny!

In the course of my own research I collated, translated and compiled literally hundreds of pages of testimony, documents and journal entries, that charted Rahn's quest for the roots of an authentic European 'Ur- religion', a body of invaluable folkloric data from a pre-war Europe now lost to us. His work has informed my own and opened my eyes to much of what I had inadvertently stumbled across. While the body of this material has now been transferred to disc and could be downloaded at the touch of a key, Margaret Thatcher and Marie Denarnaud may have had a point. There are some things you just 'can't tell the people'.

Regardless of its merit, Rahn's work inadvertently or otherwise, contributed to the ideological underpinnings of the holocaust. The figure of six million Hebrew martyrs so hotly disputed by Irving and his dodgy ilk sadly obscures the wider picture. Let's get this straight, oh my brothers, seventy two million people lost their lives in WW2 in mainland Europe alone, and with those sort of figures you don't crap around with fate.

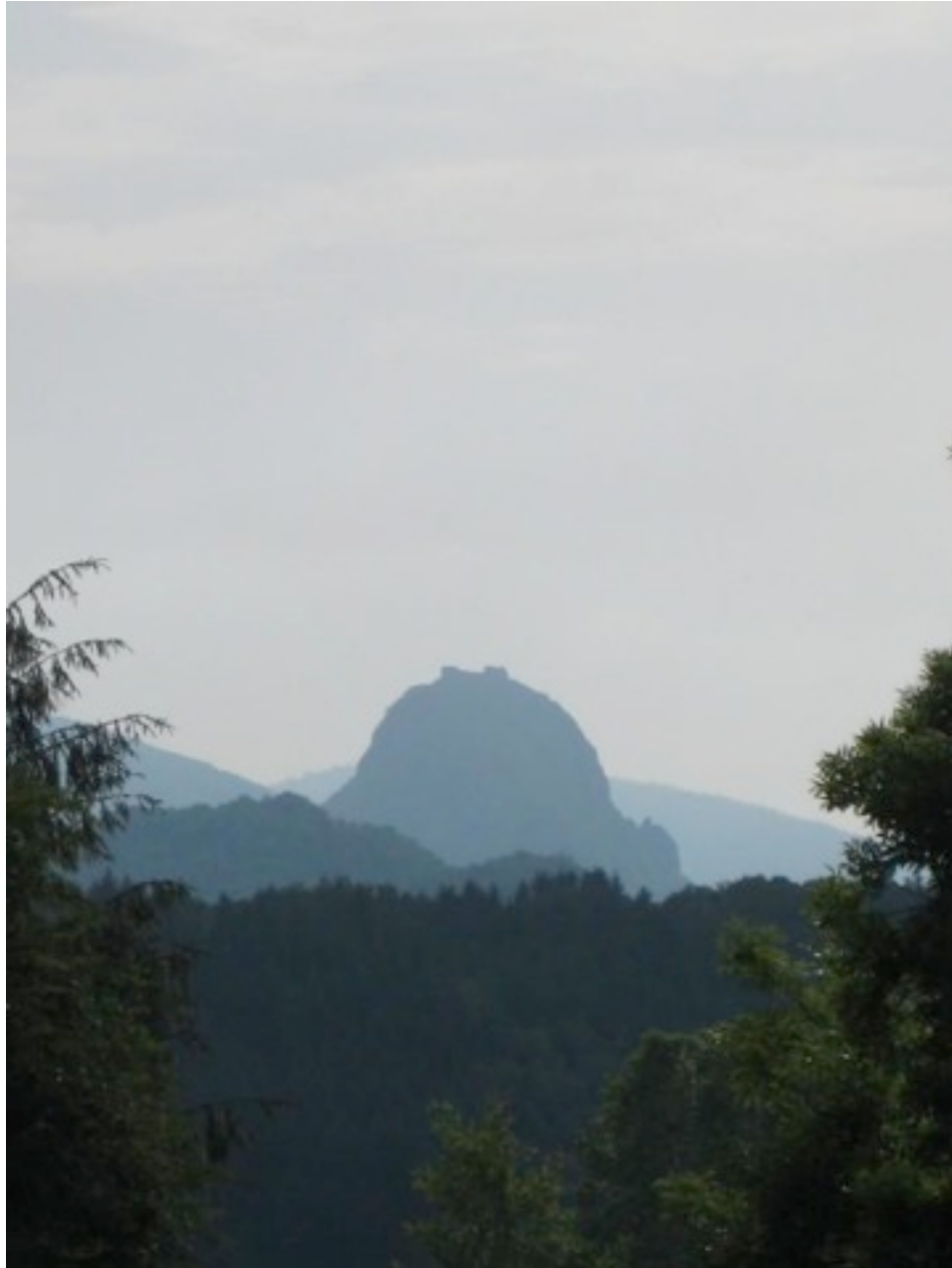
VIDEO 4



Extract from THE SECRET GLORY

Otto Rahn and the Death of the Cathari

Aftermath



“There was a certain aftermath.”

Madame Nelli returns her gaze to the embers surging on the hearth. The fire has died down and for a moment I think about putting on another log but the hour has already grown late.

“There were a few faithful of Montsegur, lead by my husband and Joseph Mandemant, who decided to celebrate the 700th anniversary of the fall of the castle. It was 1944 so public

gatherings were illegal. They might have been thrown into prison or maybe even sent to Germany. So Mandemant went to see the commandant in Toulouse by himself. Nobody wanted to go with him but he kept a level head. The commandant told him that there was no point in celebrating because soon the war would be over and the Berlin Philharmonic will come to play Parsifal at Montsegur. So he left with nothing. But they decided to do it all the same.”

“Seven or eight of them climbed the mountain. I can’t remember all their names. It was cold. Well, it was the 16th of March. Someone read a poem. After that a plane was heard passing overhead. It’s here that the myths and legends start. Maybe it was the command at Tours that sent a fighter plane to see if people were gathering at Montsegur, to start a revolution, that kind of thing.”

“It was said that there was someone German behind the pilot, maybe Himmler, I don’t know who. The plane circled above, making Celtic crosses. The Celtic cross is a cross centred in a circle. Why a Celtic cross? Because the origins of the Germans are Celtic. After the plane was sighted they came down at full speed. They took the car and went to eat a hearty dish of beans at the Couquets. That’s a detail that proves it is true...”

Outside, a freezing mist has rolled in from the mountains. Leika IV stares past me into the encroaching darkness, ears quivering.



“I never knew what became of Rahn. Somebody told me that maybe he was on that plane...”

Christian Bernadac believed that Otto had escaped Germany by assuming the identity of his dead brother, Rudolph, and survived the war to become the head of Coca-Cola Europe, a theory that has by now been widely discredited.

Others insist that Otto found the Grail and with it the secret of life eternal although personally I suspect his remains are probably interred in the family plot in Darmstadt where they were transferred after the war.

In the absence of a death certificate however the only hard evidence I have to support this claim is a photocopy of the water damaged passport found on the corpse and the body bag tag from the time of the transfer. Of course, as Christian Bernadac insists, you would have to exhume the body and compare its DNA to a swab taken from Ingeborgh to be absolutely certain.

The only thing you can really be sure of is that despite his many sins Otto Rahn died a martyr's death and hence deserves to sit amongst the elect of his unknown religion.



Rahn family plot, Darmstadt, Germany

I leave him a bunch of roses and twelve crow feathers I collected from the floor of the cave in Ussat-les-Bains. Then, turning away from his grave, I walk back towards the car.

The Coming of the White Lady



MONTSEGUR - 2007

I had been reluctant to return to Montsegur for many years for fear of what I might find there. The last thing I wanted was to see the Cathar fortress reduced to theme park status or the tiny village opened up to the influx of tourism that has eroded the character of so many other ancient sites such as Stonehenge or the great pyramids of Gizeh.

The last time I had seen Madame Couquet, some seven years previously, she was suffering, like my mother, from the early stages of cancer and the auberge had been closed to the public. I did not believe I would see her again and knew Madame's passing would mark the end of an era, the severing of the last direct link to the mysterious events that had taken place before the war.

Time however had not only stood still in the village but if anything the clock seemed to have been turned miraculously backwards. The grass looked greener on the Camp de Cremat and the trees grew taller and wilder in their profusion. Not one brick or tile had changed in my absence, the walls and roofs of the stone houses bearing a pleasingly uniform patina of age. Incredibly the auberge had not only reopened but business was quietly booming.

Madame Couquet looked ten years younger, coping single-handedly with the influx of guests, still chopping wood, cooking, cleaning and making all the beds as if she were half her age. She was delighted to see me and I found myself barely able to restrain my tears as she took me by the arm and lead me back into the house. As I walked into the dining room all heads turned. One man, a complete stranger, started abruptly to his feet as if he had literally seen a ghost. .

“But it is impossible ! What are you doing here ? You are Rich-ard Stanley! I see your documentary! I come all the way from Leipzig...”

The other tourists gazed silently and I realized that I had inadvertently become another living link in the chain, a part of the very story I had sought to tell. With the aid of my long suffering director of photography, Immo Horn, I had finally succeeded in completing a feature length documentary on the Rahn affair, ‘The Secret Glory’ (2001), whose release on DVD had had a knock-on effect on life in the village, helping to put Madame’s auberge back on the map.

While the hardy, time warped villagers had been friendly enough in the past I was nothing short of a local hero now, embraced as a prodigal son returned to the fold and plied with offers of food and drink at every turn. Where information had been guarded or withheld before I found a strange eagerness now to finally tell me everything, to let me in to the very heart of their secretive, utterly self contained world...

In our broken French we tried to catch up on the gossip. Madame Couquet told me that Madame Nelli had died earlier that year and with a flourish of hands kept repeating the word ‘brulé’ over and over again. I shook my head in confusion and looked to my partner, esoteric scholar Scarlett Amaris, whose French was only marginally better than my own at the time.

“I dunno.”

She shook her head. Then she started to giggle for a minute.

“Brulé? Do you think that they made dessert out of her?”

“Oui, oui!” said Madame enthusiastically, thinking that we had understood her.

“A la chateau...”

“Ohh - I think they cremated her...”

I nodded slowly. Returning to the holy mountain after all these years had stirred up more than a few memories but there was no time to pause right now, not even for dinner, despite the smell of Madame’s famous cassoulet simmering in the earthen pot on the hearth.

We were running late and there was only one place to be for sunset.

As we started up the narrow way from the Camp de Cremat my thoughts returned to Suzie Nelli and her little dog, Leika IV. Her ashes had been scattered here alongside the dust of the Cathar martyrs as some day might be my own. So many of the witnesses whose testimony had guided me along that pathless trail lived now, like Otto Rahn himself, only in our memories. Guy Puysegir. Christian Bernadac. Paul Ladame. Albert von Haller. All gone. I had begun this quest in the hope of finding the secret of life eternal but here I was, almost two decades later, more fully mortal than ever.

I caught my breath as I reached the summit, still not really knowing why I was there or what to expect. I had spent countless nights on this mountain during the quest for SS Obersturmführer Otto Wilhelm Rahn and although the memory of those dawns, fiery dusks and clear, cold stars stayed with me, nothing had occurred since the evening of the freak electrical storm, to make me suspect that this place was anything more than just another ruin, albeit one with a unique and tragic past.

Surely Montsegur could hold no surprises for me, not after all these years, yet the sense of weird anticipation only mounted as we climbed, like a constant low level alarm bell, urging me onwards and upwards over the darkening boulders. Bats flurried playfully in the air about us and the shadowy foliage was alive with rustlings, barks, grunts and slitherings as the night animals went about their furtive business.

About halfway up the incline we passed the largest toad I have ever seen, a monstrous yellow ochre beast with a disturbingly humanoid face and bloated torso, crashing heavily through the undergrowth as it hopped eagerly uphill towards the waiting castle, hurrying towards some secret assignation of its own.

As the light faded from the day I reacquainted myself with the castle's weird dimensions and the so-called 'arrow slits' artfully cut into the walls. Every reconstruction of the fortress I have seen in museums or history books looks different and no-one seems to have any practical suggestion as to what function those slits could possibly have served. All the shafts are cut so that it is easier to see through them from the outside than to look out from within. In fact they are impossible to even reach from the inside and easily accessible from the mountaintop, hardly useful for any defensive action.

Miss Scarlett's spider sense kept telling her that something important had happened beneath the long vertical slit that communicates between the rear wall of the courtyard and the donjon tower. I climbed up and found a sort of shelf beneath it, the only place in the vicinity where the solid rock of the castle floor seemed to have been deliberately shaped by human hands. It was obvious that this spot was the acoustical focus of the keep and the surrounding walls amplified my voice most effectively. The granite blocks in that area seemed oddly discolored as if by intense heat, the white stones scorched a murky brown.

From the personal journal of Scarlett Amaris - 27 August, 2007

Standing up on the wall of the ramparts, facing the plunging oblivion below, the night is warm. The wind blows softly through my outstretched fingers. The blackness below me looks like

an abyss, one that has laid there forever and I get the feeling that I have stood in this same spot before. Standing, bathed in the light of the moon, a lunar eclipse ready and waiting. From the rocks below my feet there is a distinct humming sensation, which is reaching up in waves, heavy through the air, electric as it washes over my skin, making the images of night landscape sharper and clearer. I am not alone. There is a woman here, unseen, yet her presence is undeniable.

From the web log of Richard Stanley - Montsegur - Approx. 11.45 pm August 27

There was a strong sense just before midnight that we were not the only ones in the courtyard. Miss Scarlett kept claiming to see a screaming woman (Cat?) standing near the inside wall of the castle gate but being a natural sceptic I didn't take her particularly seriously. She also claimed to see figures moving on the far side of the courtyard and there did seem to be something going on over there but I couldn't see what. I thought maybe it was a trick of the clouds and the moonlight, not dissimilar to what I had glimpsed during that long ago storm.

As the moon began to rise we both felt a strong urge to go around the back of the castle and climb the wooden steps into the tower room...

From the personal journal of Scarlett Amaris - 28 August

The moon is becoming shadowed by the eclipse and around my feet swarm hundreds of queen ants as I make my way carefully off of the side of the ramparts, not wanting to disturb them, and descend the steep stairs back into the keep. The footsteps that echo are not my own as I make my way, guided by instinct, through the courtyard and back to the tower room. The moonlight is just starting to peek through the arrow slit about 10 yards in front of me. I place my hand on the stone walls, needing to feel some sort of grounding. Even though they seem cool to the touch, that instant it is like being hit with a thousand volts of electricity. The castle is alive with this current. I feel no pain as the winds begin to rise, first quiet, then louder and then whipping every which way. Unable and unwilling to move, I stay glued to the spot.

From the web log of Richard Stanley - The Keep - 12.00 pm - August 27

Just then the wind changed direction. The night breeze that had been whirling down from the high pastures of the Pic de Saint Barthelemy only moments before lulled and I felt an incongruously warm gust against my face that seemed to be blowing from out of the tower itself.

I took another step towards the source of the wind, catching a sweet, half familiar smell, a warm, intoxicating blend of wet grass and rose bay. A faint hint of almonds.

At that moment all the cows began to low in the fields beneath the castle at once and I paused, remembering the sounds I'd heard on the night of the storm. I glanced back, nervously meeting Miss Scarlett's eyes. The sound of the cattle was so outlandish we both began to giggle only to fall silent a instant later as we heard the crunch of approaching footsteps from the direction of the courtyard.

"Someone's coming..." whispered Miss Scarlett.

At first I thought it was a stray tourist and I waited for them to step around the corner of the tower yet no figure appeared on the narrow wooden staircase and the path below remained utterly silent.

“What’s the matter with me?” I thought.

Over the past ten years I had spent countless nights on this mountaintop without the faintest shadow of disquietude but now I felt the short hairs rising on my arms and the back of my neck in the mysterious presentiment that takes possession of one’s senses when they are on the verge of seeing the inexplicable.

I turned, seeing a pale shape hovering before me in the gloom and realized to my astonishment that there was a young woman standing only a few feet away from me on the far side of the chamber. I narrowed my eyes but it wasn’t a trick of the light. And she wasn’t a ghost. She was a living flesh and blood human being. I could see her long dark hair haloed in the silvery luminescence pouring through the embrasure in the wall behind her.

Her tresses were worked into what appeared to be three long braids swept back from her high forehead by a shadowy torc, her proud, aristocratic face, pale muscular limbs and statuesque torso seemed to glow as if sculpted somehow from marble or living moonlight. At first I tried to tell myself that she was some kind of far out hippy chick whom we had inadvertently surprised in the midst of a secret nocturnal ritual but then I remembered there was only one entrance to the chamber and no way she could have climbed those wooden steps or gotten past myself and Miss Scarlett without us noticing. There was no escaping the fact that the woman who stood before us had just walked through solid rock, as if the wall of the tower room wasn’t really there.

And, no. I wasn’t stoned. Nor do I drink.

From the personal journal of Scarlett Amaris - August 28

Moonlight fills the well of the tower, the winds go crazy in the small space, bouncing off the walls and sending my hair every which direction. I feel a huge wave run through me, a cold wave, almost causing me to lose consciousness and out of the shadows in front of me steps the outline of a woman. At first she is barely discernible, bathed in the glow, but as she starts to take shape the winds settle. Her gaze is fathomless, almost challenging and I feel her as much as see her. This is no virgin of Fatima, no spirit of Heaven; instead she exudes the feeling of ferocious power, of love and hate.

From the web log of Richard Stanley - The Keep - 12.01 am August 28

Of course my rational mind put up a fight. I knew this place was capable of some pretty edgy natural phenomena. During the electrical storm the twisting lightning bolts had resembled a huge fiery hand reaching into the keep and I recalled sensing that same warm wind then and that same subtle smell.

While shooting ‘The Secret Glory’ I had gradually become aware of the unusual effect that proximity to the castle had on the female crew members, who without fail seemed to begin their periods prematurely. It was as if the mountain’s electro-magnetic field somehow threw their

natural cycles out of balance. This being a rather delicate matter meant that it had been a good few years before this particular aspect of the castle's unusual properties had become readily apparent to me.

I had been forced to carry Madame Nelli's dog when we first visited the magic mountain with her and couldn't help noticing that even little Leika IV had begun to bleed profusely as we crossed the Camp de Cremat.

In the summer of 1998 I had seen the east facing 'arrow-slits' channel the first faint rays of the rising sun into sanguine beams that drew a weird, shifting pattern on the walls of the chamber. If the castle's architects were capable of such almost super-human ingenuity then surely, I reasoned, it was possible that the singular longitudinal 'arrow slit' that faced towards the courtyard might be capable of capturing and funneling the moonlight into some sort of three dimensional hologram, channelling the wind even.

Then I remembered the apocryphal story of how the besieged defenders celebrating the spring equinox shortly before their deaths had sent a note to the Inquisitors camped at the bottom of the slope informing them that 'the body of our lord has become flesh' and politely asking them to come take a look. Needless to say the crusaders declined the invitation.

Even if the figure who appeared in the tower that night was a medieval hologram it would have stretched the limits of credibility but this woman who strode brazenly out of the shadows as the moon went into eclipse on the night of August 27 2007 had weight and mass and I heard the loose pebbles crunching on the flagstones beneath her feet as she approached me.

I took off my hat and bowed, instinctively placing one hand to my chest in the ancient sign of greeting. I think I was too afraid at first to meet her gaze but as she narrowed the gap between us I dimly realized that I recognized the few accouterments that she wore. Those high calfskin boots, the curious, braided belt or girdle criss-crossed about her pale midriff, the short-sword riding in its scabbard against her left thigh and the dark, hooded mantle that floated like a cloak of shadows about her shoulders seemed so deeply familiar it was as if I had finally come home. Or to my senses perhaps...

For a moment our gaze met, the old certainties of my life in the 21st century crumbling around me as I realized who she was. Standing before me was the proud, ferocious Lady of the castle - the immortal Esclarmonde, the 'light of the world' who had been granted the fortress as part of her dowry by her father, the Comte de Foix and who somehow, against all odds, had passed alive into the kingdom of heaven and attained that realm where fire has no heat, water no fluidity and matter no substance.

And she welcomed me.

A bit like waking from a dream. No way in hell the matrix can quite reassert itself after something like that. It was as if I'd finally been forgiven, for what I don't know, handed the get out jail for free card I'd been waiting for all along.

In a sudden flash of illumination I was afforded a fleeting glimpse of humanity's endless fluid passage through the mists of timeless time, of radiance and of valor. Just as the black stone of the negro gives way to the whitened final substance of the great work so I had passed from the realm of the Black Mother into the kingdom of the White Lady.

For a moment I stood transfixed, suspended between two worlds, dream and waking, reality and its reflection, past and present. Then bowing deeply, I fell to my knees before the guardian of the Grail and wept like a baby.

Empire of Shadows

Whom does the Grail serve?

- traditional

Letter from Scarlett Amaris to Richard Stanley - September 27, 2007

There's no way she would have appeared before you in the tower if you weren't somehow connected to it all. Whatever power it was made my hair stand on end. The atmosphere in the tower was supercharged. There were many presences in the keep that night but as soon as the sun went down there was one that was so strong that it felt like my skin was on fire, but in a really protective, heightened way. This description doesn't do it justice at all..

What I didn't expect was that we would see her so clearly but I knew she was coming, and I knew where she would be. I've told you this before, often I sense or hear things but rarely do I see them. We both know what we saw...a figure in a cloak, the white lady...and we both know who she really was.

There was a dark aspect to her, and light, strength and something else I can't define without sounding religious. There was true magic there that night. I fully accept this experience but just can't come up with the "what now" of it. And when you later read Magre's description of Esclarmonde's presence still being felt in the tower and how it would always be felt there, well, that definitely takes it to another level..

From the web log of Richard Stanley - August 27, 2007

I don't know if Esclarmonde deliberately summoned us to her castle and then stepped across the threshold into our world or whether we were drawn into hers. She seemed solid enough at the time but perhaps myself and Miss Scarlett were merely reliving or re-experiencing something that had already happened hundreds of years ago, somehow picking up the White Lady's thoughts, or as in Rupert Sheldrake's morphogenetic field theory, a memory of her thoughts or, more crazily, the thoughts of some other version of myself, caught up in events that either took place in the distant past or are still taking place now in another time stream. Perhaps those two worlds briefly touched.

Dr Stephen Hawking recently admitted to the theoretical possibility of time travel although he stipulated that such an operation would require a Faraday cage not dissimilar to the grid formed by the castle walls, a superconductor, not dissimilar to those blessed black stones in my pocket and more energy than your average A-bomb. Granted this feat may be beyond the limits of our current technology but what if such a thing were known to the sorcerer scientists of the past, a knowledge that the Inquisition had deliberately sought to suppress? What if the 'dark energy' so beloved of our contemporary physicists turned out to be synonymous with spiritual energy, the raw soul-fire that serves as wax to Montsegur's taper? For a while I didn't seem to

know which time period I belonged to, nor could I tell exactly how long the audience in the tower room lasted. As if in a dream our encounter seemed to take place outside of time but in all likelihood it only lasted a few minutes.

From the personal journal of Scarlett Amaris - August 27, 2007

The connection is fading and there is a smell, sweet yet with an undertone of bitter, like cake that has burned on the bottom. Her image is fading, the light is fading, and the smell grows stronger. She is all but gone and I hear footsteps, unseen, walking away, back across a walkway that has not existed for centuries, back to her world. A soft wind blows up from the valley below, the night becomes quiet, the smell fades, and the castle shuts off like a light switch. The eclipse is over and I am left there, filled with wonder, filled with power, and the knowing that life will never be the same again.

From the web log of Richard Stanley - Montsegur - August 28, 2007

Esclarmonde didn't disappear in a vortex of light and celestial choirs. She simply walked away, clear through the rear wall of the tower room and as before myself and Miss Scarlett heard her receding footsteps for a few seconds after she disappeared as if she were physically traversing some passageway that simply isn't there in our paradigm. Then the cows began to low again and I realized we were alone.

I staggered out of the chamber to find Miss Scarlett standing motionless at the top of the narrow wooden stairway, her eyes turned towards the sound of the bellowing farm animals.

"Tell me that isn't happening..."

I followed her gaze, noticing that the cattle staring up at us from the field beneath the castle had arranged themselves into a perfect circle. I muttered an incoherent curse and then began to giggle.

"Could be electro-magnetic spillage from the keep, I guess..."

"What are you talking about?"

"E.M.P. According to research conducted by scientists using Google Earth cows and sheep have a tendency to align themselves according to the Earth's magnetic fields. Kinda like iron filings..."

"You're kidding?"

"All I'm saying is maybe they're reacting to what just happened in the tower room. Same deal as the way our hair stood up in there or the way our compass needles always seem to be a little off, as if something is deflecting them when we climb the mountain. Some sort of side effect, like electromagnetic pulse after an A-bomb blast. I dunno..."

Just then a light came on in a farmhouse at the edge of the village and an angry French lady with a flashlight started up the hill to see why her cattle were kicking up such a fuss.

“Allez!” she yelled, voice rising to us as we watched her jab at the lowing animals with her flashlight beam until the circle began to break up and the beasts reluctantly back to their grazing.

“You think this happens often?”

“So what did happen back there? In the tower, I mean ...”

“That...I..I’m gonna have to think about that a li’l longer...”

“You saw her too, right?”

“Yeah.”

I turned my eyes towards the heavens but it had already begun to cloud over and the moon was lost from sight.

“Funny thing is that it felt like I already knew her. I didn’t just see her. I recognized her...”

The next morning I drew a picture of the woman we had seen in the tower on a pad and showed it to Madame Couquet, using an English/French dictionary to translate what had happened. She didn’t seem particularly surprised, taking it as a good omen, which I suppose it was.

I spent the day frenziedly pouring over every book I could lay my hands on, revisiting decades of earlier research and finding new resonances and uncanny parallels in material that I had long since dismissed as either irrelevant or utterly fanciful.

Magre’s description of the ‘White Lady’s continuing presence in the north facing tower in ‘MAGICIEN ET ILLUMINES’ seemed too on the nose to be readily dismissed . Otto and Grace Cooke’s claims to have met ‘dead Cathars’ required urgent re-evaluation and while I had assumed the Countess de Pujol Murat to have been a harmless crackpot the first time I came across her description of how proud it made her feel to see her ‘own ancestor’ standing before her in the starlight, I sure wasn’t laughing now.

From the weblog of Richard Stanley - Ussat les Bains - 29 August, 2007

It was one of Miss Scarlett’s dreams that provided the next piece of the puzzle. She recalled being in a cave overlooking a steep, glacial valley. There was some kind of ancient altar illuminated by a beam of light that fell through the cleft in the rocks and a group of ‘dead old men’ standing behind her all trying to talk at once. Coming, as it did, within 24 hours of our first encounter with the ‘White Lady’ I decided to act on her hunch and we drove south, cutting across the Plateau de Sault to the creepy, dilapidated spa town of Ussat les Bains where Otto put down roots in the summer of ‘32.

Ussat has seen better days and although it was still high summer its gothic chalets were locked and shuttered. As we trolled through the silent, deceptively sun drenched streets I couldn’t help but feel that the population were still there somewhere, hiding from the daylight like denizens of some European ‘Salem’s Lot’. There were lawn mowers and gardening equipment stored in the locked church which evidently hadn’t been used for any form of Christian worship in some time

and the spray of pock marks in the building's outer wall could only have been left by automatic gunfire.

We stopped at the only store still open and while I was enquiring after cigarettes a very old lady approached Miss Scarlett, trying to tell her something in French. She kept giggling and touching her hair whispering, "jolie, jolie.." until we both got a little spooked and decided to make ourselves scarce.

"I think she was trying to measure my neck," muttered Miss Scarlett uneasily.

It was a bit of a climb to the Bethlehem Grotto. I was first shown the site a good decade ago by the late Christian Bernadac. Monsieur Bernadac had always distrusted Rahn and his mentor Antonin Gadal and had done his best over the years to expose their links with the Nazi's and the Coca Cola company. Since I had first set foot on the path a fence and metal gate had appeared, bearing no less than three separate locks. The barrier made access to the grotto a trickier matter and marred the natural beauty of the primordial site.

It came as little surprise that Miss Scarlett had indeed been dreaming of the grotto. In her dream the dead old men had been standing a little higher than her. We observed that the floor of the cave had been recently dug away as if someone were excavating the site. Judging by the fresh wax around the altar and beneath the pentagram on the wall it was clear that the shrine had been recently used, probably on the night of the full moon while we were at Montsegur. I climbed up to the pentagram itself and washed away some of the dust with my canteen to reveal the outlines of the face that Otto had allegedly drawn on the rock.



I had an inkling now of who that crude portrait was supposed to represent as well as why it had seemed so familiar to me. After all these years only part of her countenance still remained, one eye and the edge of her mouth. Beneath it was scrawled a single, smudgy word - '*dream...*'

Otto's connection to the cave has always been obscure and there is no direct evidence other than Monsieur Bernadac's word that Otto really drew the face of 'Beatrice' on the wall yet it had the feel of Otto's work about it. The Dante gag connects neatly with his reference in the Radio Geneva broadcast to a stone at the mouth of the grotto of Fontanet allegedly resembling a three headed dog and the line in 'Court of Lucifer'- "I was looking for divinity yet I find myself at the gates of Hell..."

Dante was said to have been a member of an order known as the 'Faithful in Love' into which he had been initiated by Guido Cavalcanti, a secret society allegedly founded by Nicetas

himself, the Bulgarian mystic who first brought the dualist Manichean heresy to the south. In fact it was Dante in his monograph 'On the Eloquence of the Vulgar' who seems to have coined the term 'Occitan' or 'Lenga d'Oc' defining the all but forgotten language according to its affirmative particle 'oc'. In Esclarmonde's time her native tongue would have been known simply as '*Romans*'.

Shortly before his death in 1998, Paul Alexis Ladame, former head of the Geneva Chamber of Commerce and lecturer in the methodology of information and disinformation, had pressed a photograph into my hand showing a figure standing in the pentagram, insisting in his rasping breath that it was his friend 'Otto Rahn'.

Ingeborgh had been suspicious of the photograph right from the start. She dangled her pendulum over it before shaking her head and declaring:

"Otto would never wear tennis shoes."

It had taken the German Reich historian Hans Jurgen Lange two years and the full resources of the Bundesarchiv to prove that the man in the yellowing snapshot was in fact an individual named Karl Rinderknecht and not Rahn at all. Rinderknecht was apparently a Swiss researcher who had explored the mountains and grottoes in the vicinity of Montsegur some time prior to 1941. Although Rinderknecht was clearly a believer in the Cathar Grail myth there is no evidence to suggest that he had ever met Otto Rahn and neither man makes any mention of the other, which left me right back where I started. With precisely nothing. Just a vague prickly sensation on the back of my neck...

When I first visited the area Gadal's house had been boarded up but it was evidently in the hands of new owners. There was a fresh coat of paint on the walls and through the open shutters we could see a picture of Montsegur and rows of military style bunk beds. Just as I was craning my neck trying to get a better view through the window a car pulled up behind me and a bunch of solemn looking men piled out wearing identical black sweat shirts, each bearing a tiny red Montsegur decal on the left breast.

For a moment I thought things were about to turn ugly but then I recognized one of them as Christian Koenig, the former museum curator from Tarascon whom I had interviewed back in the nineties. He had shaved off his beard which somehow made him look years younger but there was no doubt he was the same dude. Granted Monsieur Koenig was a li'l surprised to see me. He wanted to know what the heck we were doing there so I told him the story about Miss Scarlett's dream and how the details of the cave had tallied with what she had seen in her sleep.

"But how did you get in? What about the gate?"

"I climbed over."

Christian Koenig sighed, turning in a semi-circle and judging from the look in his eyes I could see he was hiding something. Going with the flow I decided to tell him the truth about what had happened the night before in the castle. After that he had no choice but to invite us in for a cup of tea.

Christian Koenig had recently taken over the ramshackle gingerbread gothic villa where Otto's mentor, the former minister of tourism and self proclaimed 'Cathar patriarch', had once made his home. He had always been fascinated by the area's history and since the closure of the museum he'd been doing a bit of digging on his own. In fact he had just returned from the grotto of Fontanet that very morning, the same site where Otto and Gadal had unearthed a hoard of meteoric artefacts in the summer of '32.

A portrait of the White Lady took pride of place on the wall of Christian's spartan living room. The painting had been bequeathed to him by an old woman who was now one with the Spirit and depicted the 'guardian of the Grail' much as I remembered her, standing atop an odd rock formation that I recognized from the valley of the River Blanque in the haut Razes. The Lady's arms were outstretched, her face a blur. Christian had never seen her face for himself but he didn't have any trouble believing our story.

For our part it was enough to be able to tell someone what we had seen on that mountain without being dismissed as raving lunatics. If anything Christian seemed a little envious that the Lady had chosen to grant us an audience to begin with. After all what possible task could an immortal pagan sorceress possibly have that would require the services of a couple of misfits like ourselves? I didn't believe for a moment that what had happened in the tower room on the night of the eclipse was simply an accident. You don't fold space time, walk through solid matter or otherwise turn our conventional notions of physical cause and effect on its head without a darned good reason.

It felt as if Esclarmonde had been there all along but had literally waited until the last moment to show herself, as if I had been given a glimpse behind the veil to stop me from wandering away, from turning my back on the holy mountain and returning to the so-called 'real world' where Gods, sacred treasures and sorceresses weren't supposed to exist. She knew that in revealing her presence to me she would draw me further in, just as Otto had been drawn in before me, as helpless as a moth to a flame.

Had the moon been full the night Otto climbed that mountain on the German French border? Did he think perhaps that he was finally going home?

The Door into Summer

Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.

- **Arthur C. Clarke (1917-2008)**



Montsegur - June 21, 2010

It had been raining for weeks on end in the French Pyrenees, day after day of cold wind and grey skies. Still, even in these absolutely wretched conditions, the faithful gathered as usual on the morning of the twenty-first of June at the mountaintop castle of Montsegur to view the annual ‘solar phenomena’ in the donjon tower room.

The ranks of the onlookers had thinned somewhat since I first witnessed this curious light-show in 1998. The neo-Nazis we’d nicknamed the ‘boy-scouts’ had all grown up, gotten jobs, gotten married, gone to jail or died. Today’s turn out amounted to an odd assortment of some forty pilgrims from Argentina, England, Norway and Germany huddled in the pre-dawn darkness, praying that the clouds would part and allow a beam or two through.

A local television crew from Toulouse was conducting vox-pop interviews, asking various members of the crowd whether they were there for religious or spiritual reasons, but no-one seemed to be able to give them a straightforward answer. Most folk looked cold and a little sleepy,

but surprisingly no one seemed upset or particularly disappointed by the weather. There was a general feeling of camaraderie, a sense that having made the journey to this remote place it was enough to simply be there regardless of the outcome.



Solstice light - Approx. 6.00 am (photograph courtesy of Ivan de Castries)

Finally, the clouds parted as if on cue, affording those assembled a brief glimpse of the curious spectacle that they had come from all four corners of the earth to witness. At approximately 6.05 am the disc of the sun appeared above the horizon and the first rays began to enter the east-facing arrow slits in the lower chamber of the donjon-keep, marking out a rectangle of light on the inner side of the west-facing slit in the opposite wall. As the sun climbed higher so its rays intensified and the fiery colours visible within the West-facing balustraria seemed to deepen and brighten.



6.13 am - June 23, 2010

By 6.10 am a second rectangle had appeared in the adjacent aperture while three more ghostly squares of light began to drift across the upper reaches of the chamber's Western wall.



The Keep, 6.15 am

The yearly light show in the keep is one of the only ‘supernatural’ phenomena on this haunted Earth courteous enough to not only be repeatable, but to stick to a regular schedule. Strangely, the report filed by the Groupe de Recherches Archeologique de Montsegur et Environs (GRAME), who conducted the definitive archaeological survey of the area in 1964-1976, concludes only that:

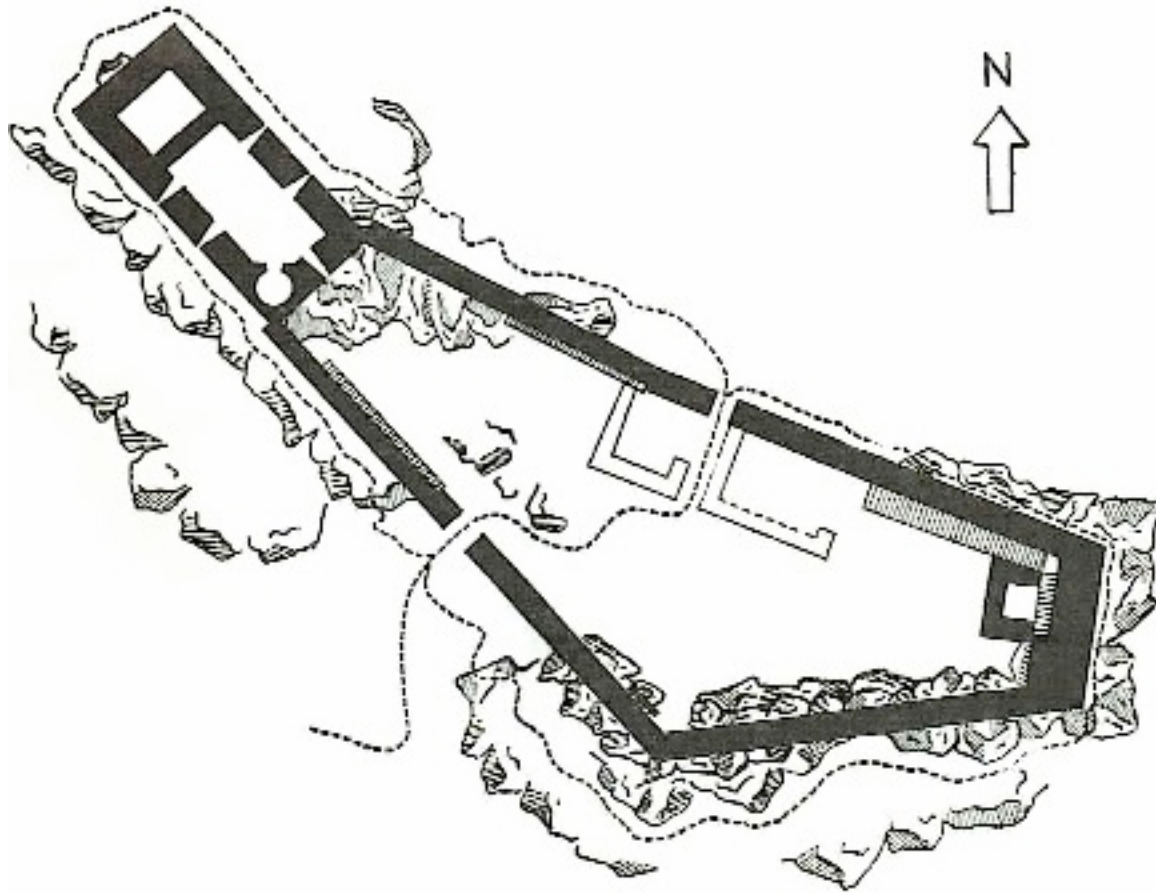
...the alleged solar phenomena in the donjon tower have not been scientifically documented, witnessed or verified...

Most of the folk assembled in the tower room on this chilly midsummer morning would have undoubtedly disagreed.

All too many ‘supernatural’ events turn out on closer inspection to be the manifestation of purely natural forces amplified to the power of ten. It follows that the castle’s nameless architects would have required both a profound understanding of the natural world and a firm grasp of the all but vanished art of sidereal geography to have created this display.

The intensity of the colours projected onto the inner surfaces of the castle’s arrow slits are in all probability achieved by making use of the density of the earth’s atmosphere as a natural prism. Air molecules in the atmosphere, whilst invisible to the naked eye, have relative substance and reflective qualities similar to more substantial objects on the earth’s surface. At dawn on the summer solstice the rays of the rising sun have to pass through a greater amount of atmosphere

before reaching the east facing arrow slits than at any other time, filtering out all other parts of the light spectrum save for those Jack-o-lantern oranges and richly infernal reds exhibited in the donjon tower.

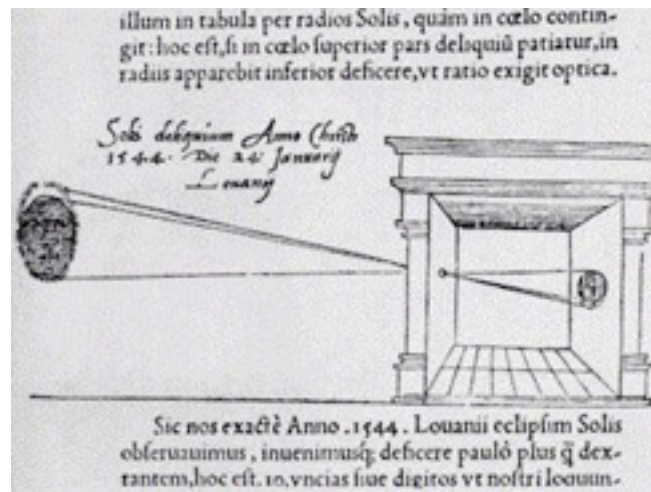


The castle is orientated towards the four points of the compass and built on such a strange plan that close study has led to the most unusual theories, including the notion that it was once a 'solar temple'. There is no documentary proof however of any connection between Catharism and sun worship any more than there is with the megalith builders of New Grange, the mysterious Mayan architects of far Chechen Itza, or the wholly fabulous civilizations of lost Atlantis and Lemuria. Moreover, the castle we see today cannot be as it was in 1204 when Raymonde de Perelha, at the request of Esclarmonde de Foix, the high priestess of the Cathar faith, first gave the orders to fortify the existing ruins of what may have originally been a pagan temple dedicated to the Ibero-Gaulic moon Goddess, Belisenna.

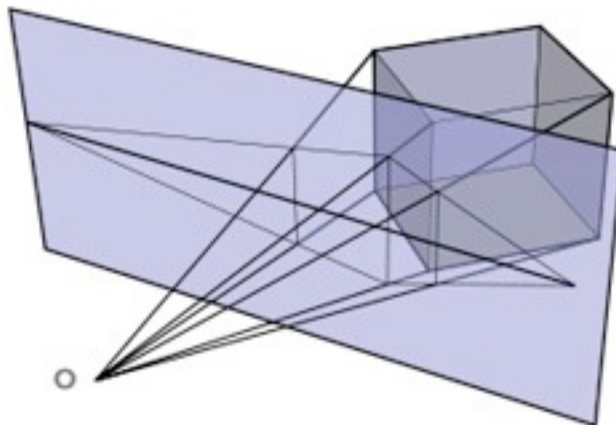
In all likelihood the yearly display in the tower room owes its origins to more earthly hands. The castle underwent a number of structural changes after the siege of 1244 when the fortress was granted to the de Levis family who used it to garrison their troops. Some historians suggest that it was possibly rebuilt on its current alignment to commemorate the reign of the 'Sun King' - Louis XIV (1638 - 1715).

There is certainly reason to doubt that the structure was designed with any conventional defensive purpose in mind. The whole place seems to be constructed backwards', as if to keep something in rather than out and no adequate explanation has been offered for the mysterious, almost vaginal slit in the far wall of the tower room which would seem to be aligned to the position of the moon at the vernal equinox (the anniversary of the fall of the castle - March 15th 1244), just as the east facing slits are designed to harness and concentrate the first faint light of the midsummer sun.

The moon and the sun literally switch azimuths between the summer and winter solstices, a difference of 23 degrees. This deliberate alignment to both the moon and the stars dispels the notion of any simple heliocentric culture having been at work, hinting at a far more complex command of the physical universe. In fact, what the castle resembles more than anything else is a vast pinhole camera...



Graphic representation of a pinhole camera.



Rays of light travel from the object, through the picture plane, and to the viewer's eye. This is the basis for graphical perspective.

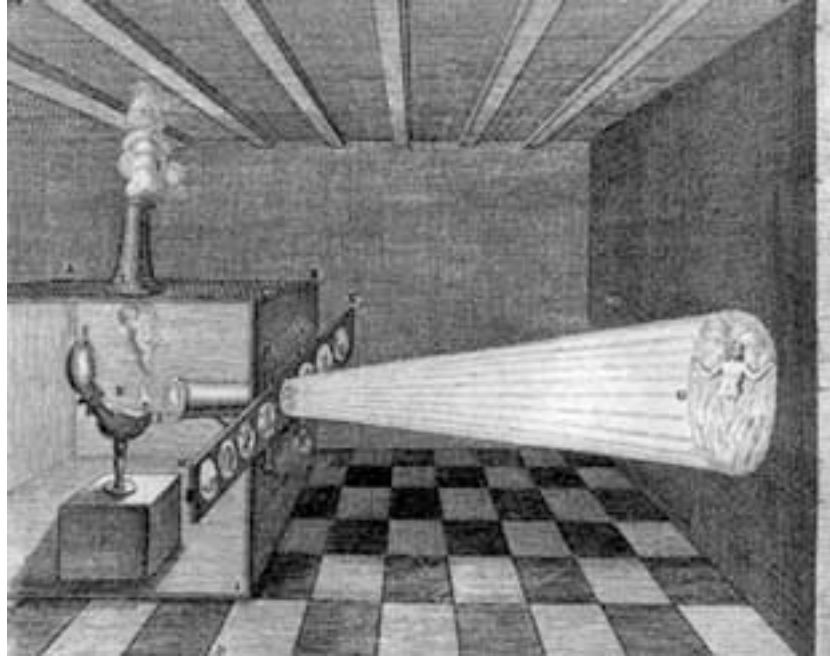
The history of the motion picture apparatus has long been intertwined with the ‘dark art’ of sorcery. The gimmick that ate the medium. A cheap conjurors trick, that eventually took over the auditorium and forced out the human performers. Stage magician George Méliès was the first to grasp the camera’s capacity to lie after licensing the apparatus from the Lumière brothers, who drew inspiration from Roget’s famous pamphlet on fusion frequency, which was in turn derived from the zoetrope or moving picture wheel, a toy of the devil shunned for centuries by the Catholic church, who, like the modern day Taliban, deemed its capacity to mimic the ‘illusion of life’ inherently heretical...



Rogue Jesuit Athanasius Kircher

The magic lantern enters the history books with Giovanbattista Della Porta’s experiments in light and shadow, using a device described as a ‘thaumaturgic’ in the *Magiae Naturalis*, probably the same early form of motion picture projector as the *Lucernae Magicae seu Thaumaturgae*, described by the Jesuit monk Athanasius Kircher in the second edition of his *Arsmagna Lucis et Umbrae*. Kircher’s work influenced the creation of the henakitoscope (1832), the zoetrope (1860), the kinemetoscope (1861), the kineograph (1861), and the praxinoscope (1877) and finally Thomas Alva Edison’s kinetoscope (1899).

Edison had a pet name for the tar-papered studio in West Orange, NJ, where all his prototypical films were made. He called it the ‘Black Maria’ - a term richly, if inadvertently, redolent of the image to whom Ignacio de Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, dedicated his life in 1522 - the Black Madonna of Montserrat.



A plate from the Arsmagna betrays not only the origins of the cinematic apparatus but a funky taste in chessboard floors - a form of esoteric shorthand that should be instantly apparent by now, even to the untrained eye.

Kircher wrote his treatise in 1646, but it is generally conceded that the device was in use long before its closely guarded secret appeared in print...

The famous Italian goldsmith, Cellini, recorded in detail his meeting with a notorious Sicilian magus during his visit to Rome in 1540. While discussing the 'magical arts' with the sorcerer, Cellini remarked that he would like to see someone invoke demons, and the older man calmly offered to produce a horde of them for his benefit. The ruins of the Colosseum were chosen by the magus as a suitable spot for such a demonstration and Cellini arranged to meet him there the following evening, bringing along one of his friends to act as a credible witness.



Within the silence of the vast amphitheater, the necromancer drew circles in the dust and kindled a fire upon which he tossed various substances that produced a dense column of perfumed smoke. He then began a lengthy incantation, while there appeared about the circle a vast array of devils, which, according to Cellini, completely filled the Colosseum.

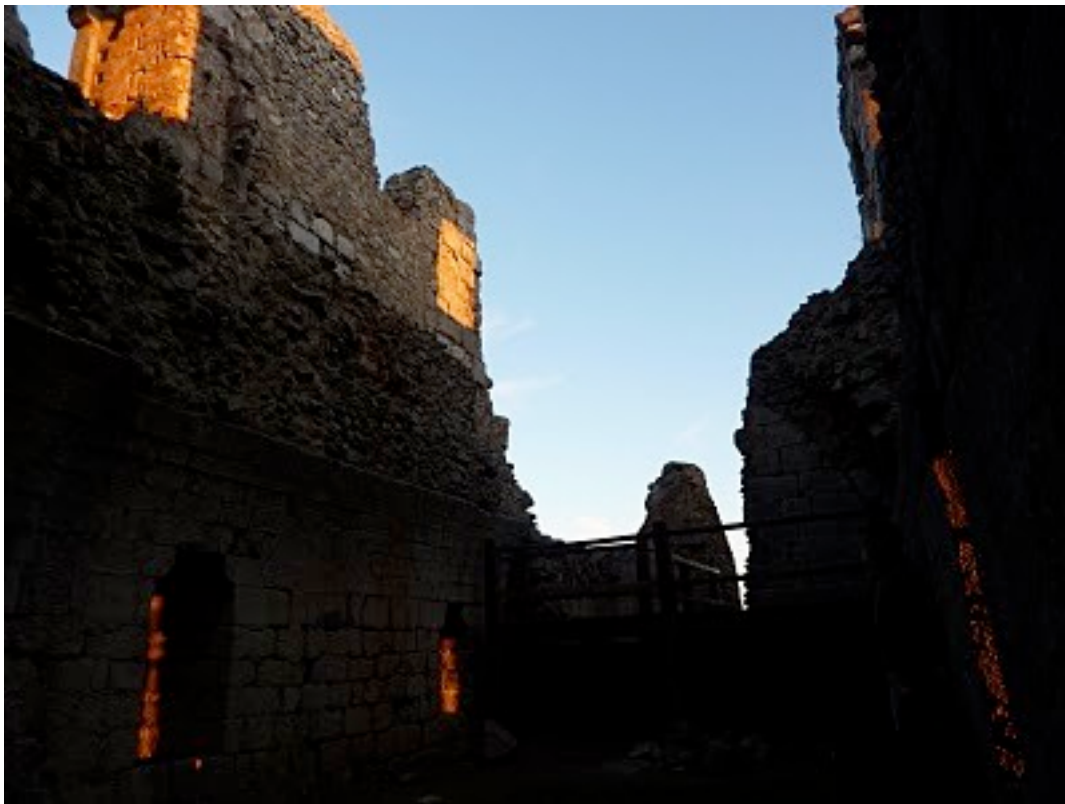


The sorcerer called the demons by name while Cellini's friend shook with fear, pointing out four gigantic devils in full armor, who seemed to be riding across the walls of the ancient auditorium. In an effort to reassure the trembling onlookers, the magus told them the demons were in fact only smoke and shadows. Indeed, they gradually diminished in number, their outlines fading from view as the smoke cleared...

While some skeptics dismiss Cellini's account as pure fiction, it seems more probable the author is simply exaggerating an actual experience, as was his custom throughout the autobiography. From the given account, it seems the Sicilian warlock was using a mechanical

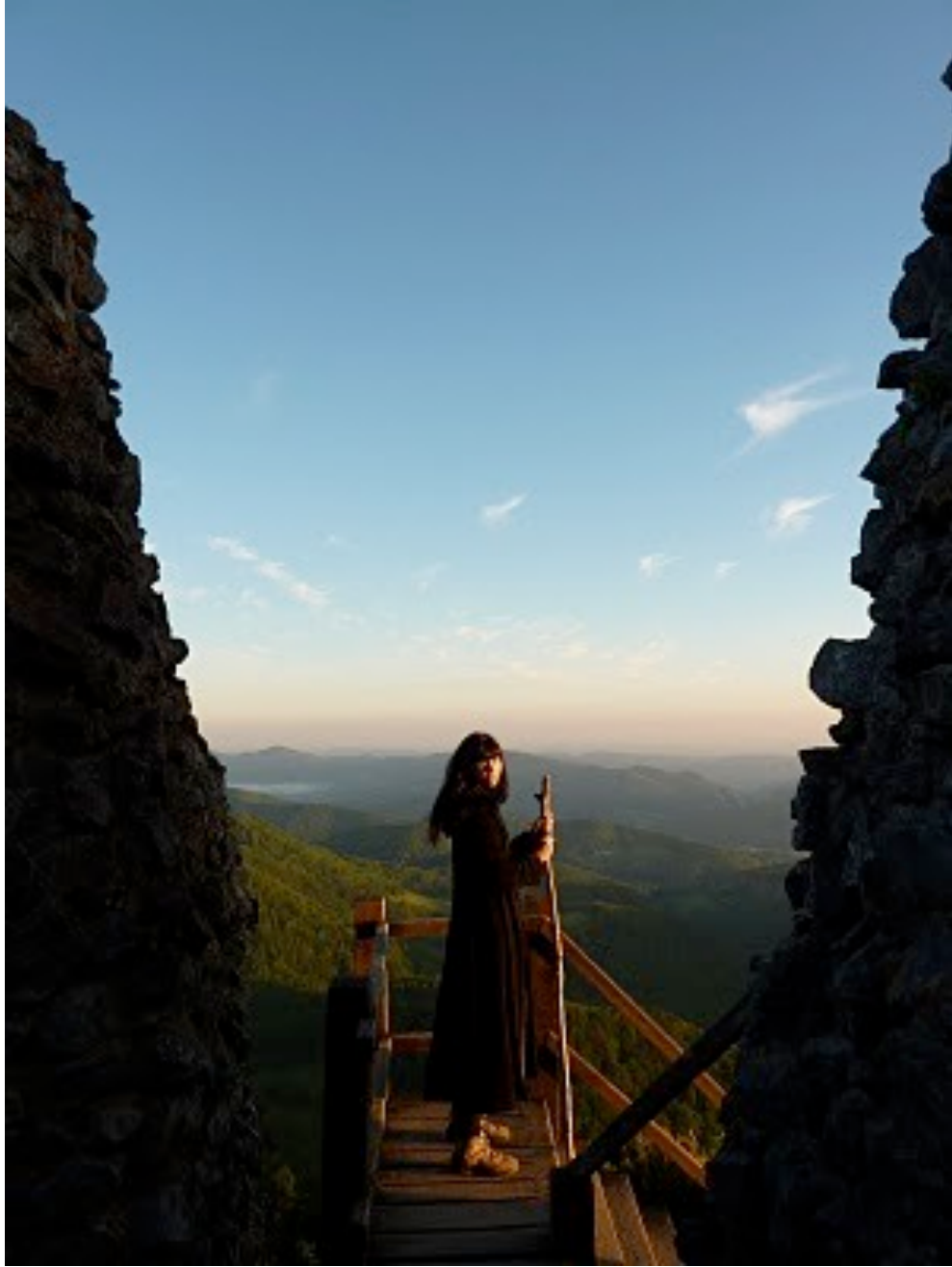
device, possibly operated by hidden accomplices to achieve the ghostly illusion. This sort of skullduggery dates back to ancient times, when concave metal mirrors were used in pagan temples to project brilliant lights and even images upon various surfaces including smoke, a theory supported by British historian and archeologist Sir David Brewster. The smoke from the fire may have caught occasional images, but the mighty background of the Colosseum itself is the only sure solution to the mystifying effect, otherwise the sorcerer would surely have chosen some other, more convenient venue. The name of the thaumaturge mentioned in Cellini's account has sadly not come down to us, but his Sicilian origins bring to mind the order of the 'Faithful in Love' allegedly funded 12th century 'Cathar' prophet Nicetas.

In the absence of any firm archaeological evidence for or against these views the actual rationale behind the phenomena must perforce remain a mystery - at least for now. In the meantime the enigmatic light show continues to manifest every year for approximately six days on either side of the summer solstice, weather allowing, with stubborn regularity. Indeed, you can practically set your watch by it...



I stood in silence, gazing wide eyed at the spectral display, knowing that I was receiving a garbled message from the other side of time whose true meaning might never be fully known to me. After reaching their apogee at approximately 6.20 am the lights in the keep began to fade.





As we made our way from the tower room we felt a hot gust of wind against our faces.



And, just like that, summer began

Miss Scarlett and myself were among the last to leave. We live at the base of the mountain now, only a short walk from the castle and spend most of our available time translating documents and compiling data, trying to prepare ourselves for what is to come.

This day, as usual, we felt reluctant to leave the holy mountain and go back down into the world but the wind was still rising and smelled of snow. We talked of many things as we hit the downward trail, of Otto Rahn and absent friends and of Belibaste, the ‘last parfait’ who perished at the stake in 1321.

I’d like to believe that Belibaste’s prophecy, that the *‘laurel will turn green again’* after 700 years, will be borne out, that the forces of evil and obscurantism will fail and that there will be a revival of interest in the history of the castle and its all but vanished faith before the anniversary in 2021 but looking about myself I couldn’t help but wonder if we were really all that was left.



The last of the faithful...

Postscript

The difference of opinion that sparked the genocidal persecution of the Cathars springs from the simple notion that infinite goodness cannot create evil. Since there is evil in the world, it follows that some other principal must be at work. The conventional monotheisms put this down to God's plan, but while pain might ennoble man, as William Peter Blatty rightly points out, "does pain ennoble a caterpillar?" Children and animals are innocent. Why should they suffer and die?

The creator of this world (God/Yahweh/Jehovah/Allah/what you will) either doesn't exist, or is quite evidently insane and does not necessarily love us nor mean the best for us. Although this force has the power to torture our physical bodies and even kill us when necessary, it has no power over our immortal souls, which the 'Cathars' believed were created by the true, good God and are eternal.

Needless to say, this idea held great appeal in the middle ages when life was by all accounts nasty, brutish and short. In order to hide the evil in this world, the Cathar holy men or 'perfecti' believed an illusory veil had been drawn over our eyes. Each of us however is supposed to have an unfallen divine counterpart, akin to a 'guardian angel' or Socrates' 'daemon', who is trying to help us awaken.

This other personality is the authentic waking self. The one we have now is asleep and minor. We are in fact asleep and in the hands of a dangerous black magician disguised as the True Good God. The bleakness, the evil and pain in this world causes us to fall asleep into delusion early in life. Like Keanu Reeves in *The Matrix*, we really do have superpowers but can't remember how to use 'em.

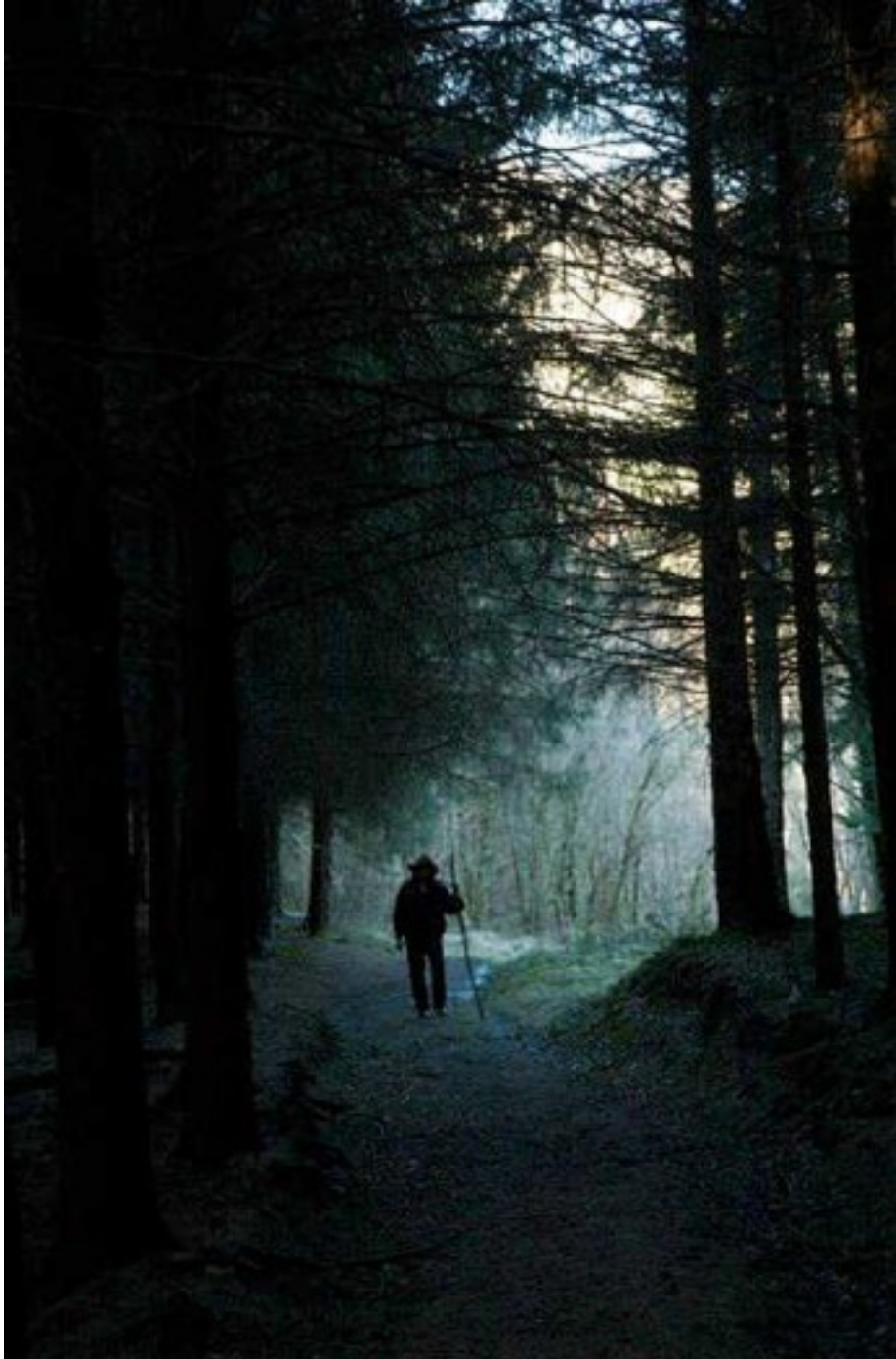
The act of awakening, of slowly becoming aware of these powers, is not so much an act of learning as an act of remembering which implies there must be something to remember and that our actual lives extend beyond our apparent births and deaths.

Yet this malign force, which deliberately manipulates and misleads us (known as 'Rex Mundi' or 'the king of the Earth' to the 'Cathari'), cannot be infallible, otherwise you wouldn't be reading this. The all-seeing eye is not all-powerful, but tries to deceive the children of the kingdom into believing so. And if the designer of the prison programme is fallible, then it can be defeated.

That is the true meaning of the first law of magic; 'As above, so below...'

'Gods' are only enlightened 'mortals', hence mortals might, through the piecing together of seemingly dissociated information accumulated through successive generations, some day regain the key to their secret.

Maybe we can make it to the next level but it ain't easy, as Gilgamesh found out. We are nothing more than an energy wave, a frequency after all. Perhaps it's possible to change channels? Christ, like Esclarmonde or the prophet Elijah, is said to have 'entered alive into the Kingdom of Heaven'. Other ascended masters are rumored to have existed over the centuries and possibly continue to exert an influence over human affairs, guiding us in the ongoing struggle to liberate our consciousness by whatever means available.



Some day this war is going to end

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Resources

Portions of this book first appeared in the website Terra Umbra, Empire of Shadows (www.shadowtheatre13.com).

Terra Umbra draws on over 20 years of research by film-maker and anthropologist Richard Stanley and his associates in the Shadow Theatre. Learn the mysteries behind the material that inspired such authors as Dan Brown, Kate Mosse, Phillip K. Dick, H.P. Lovecraft, Trevor Ravenscroft, Jules Verne and Otto Rahn.

Terra Umbra combines historical research with ongoing exploration and direct experience of the mysteries. Extraordinary claims demand extraordinary evidence, which is why Terra Umbra also features exclusive video interviews and hundreds of photographs.