

Solomon's Dream and the Ship of the Sancgrail

By Nigel Jackson

[A Note on the Symbolism of the Cover Illustration]

'Thou man, which shall enter into this ship, beware thou be in steadfast belief, for I am Faith, and therefore beware how thou interest, for an thou fail I shall not help thee.'

Le Morte d'Arthur Bk XVII, ch. ii.

Bearing in mind certain possibilities referred to by Henry Corbin regarding '*the objectivity of the imaginal world that is suggested to us, or imposed on us, by certain forms or certain symbolic emblems (hermetic, kabbalistic; or mandalas) that have the quality of effecting a magic display of mental images, such that they assume an objective reality*,' one might contemplate the especially rich imagery in Book 17 of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* of the 'Ship of Solomon' as a symbolic treasure-ark/repository of the salvation-cycle, depicting the sacred history of the Sancgrail in the light of humankind's paradisaical origin, fall, and ultimate regeneration through the achievement of the mystical Quest.

Central to the mythology of the initiatory voyage is the esoteric symbolism of the 'barque of salvation,' the visionary craft within which the 'Lower Waters' are safely traversed by the pilgrim-seeker and the 'Farther Shore' of Wisdom is attained. The symbolism can be seen, for instance, in the comparison of the Sanskrit *Nava* — boat, vessel, craft — with the ecclesiological significance of the *Nave* in Christian sacred architecture. The lore of the 'Ship of Solomon' — the vessel created by the wise king (who 'knew all the virtues of stones and trees... the course of the

stars and many other diverse things’) upon his wife’s instruction — interlaces arcane narratives and leitmotifs in a *Historia Sacra* spanning the aeons from the Garden of Paradise to the mysteries of the Temple of Jerusalem, from the paradisaical state and the subsequent fall to the ultimate ‘Redemption of Eve’ through the Royal Solomonic lineage of the Virgin Mary, from whose ancestry Sir Galahad the Haut Prince, as the ‘Christic’ exemplar of the Grail-Knight, also descends.

In chapter vii of Book XVII of *Le Morte d’Arthur* it is written,

That night lay Solomon before the ship with little fellowship. And when he was asleep him thought there came from heaven a great company of angels, and alighted into the ship, and took water which was brought by an angel, in a vessel of silver, and sprent [*sprinkled*] all the ship.’

In a visionary night-dream at the margins of sea and land, King Solomon receives divine confirmation, and he also beholds the angelic consecration of the Ship.

The tri-colored Spindles over the bed signify the ‘distaff line’ of Eve, ‘Mother of All Living’, representing the ‘Redemption of Eve’ and of all humankind through Her descendant, the archetypal Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary. The hues or ‘tinctures’ — White, Green and Red — represent the colors assumed by the bough of the Tree of the Garden from which Eve took the fruit. Later transplanted, its sprig provided the wood from which the spindles were fashioned. The narrative in *Le Morte d’Arthur* explains how these colors reappear in sacred history: from the stainless White of Edenic purity and innocence, to the verdant Green of Eve’s nuptials with Adam, and finally Red for the blood of Abel shed by the first fratricide, adumbrating the sacrificial mystery of the Precious Blood of Christ. On the cosmological plane, White, Green and Red represent the primary hermetic colors according to the heraldic and alchemical symbolism of esoteric *Chevalerie* and the Royal Art.

In linking with the Legend of the True Cross and the ‘Book of the Penitence of Adam,’ the Ship of Solomon also incorporates the esoteric narrative concerning Adam’s third son, Seth, as the original Grail-conqueror.¹ The Quest of Seth comprised his journey and entry to the

¹ See Quinn, E. C., ‘The Quest of Seth, Solomon’s ship and the Grail’ in the journal *Traditio*, No.21 [1965].

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