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Also by Philip Gardiner:

Proof? Does God Exist?

The Shining Ones

THE
SERPENT
GRAIL

The Truth behind the Holy Grail, the Philosopher's Stone and the Elixir
of Life

Philip Gardiner with **Gary Osborn**



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To my long-suffering wife Julie, who stood by me the whole time and journeyed from one 'quarry' to another

Philip Gardiner

My contribution to this book is dedicated to my parents, Eric Osborn and June Day and my daughter

Gary Osborn

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Preface

This book has its own story, which began when I was reading in bed one night. The warm glow from the bedside lamp dispelled any idea of time. The dim red blinking light of the digital clock-radio revealed that it was 1 a.m., yet both my wife and I were wide awake, deeply immersed in what we were reading. During our night-time reading sessions we often tell each other about the fruits of our research, and on this particular night I was reading through the final proofs of my second book, *The Shining Ones*. I was totally absorbed in the history and mythology of ancient civilizations when my wife brought me back to the present with a comment about T-cells and how snake venom could assist in the production. Since she is a prolific amateur medical historian, this was not an unusual comment. But to me T-cells meant nothing, so I asked her to explain.

‘T-cells,’ she replied, ‘are part of our immune system. They help people to heal faster.’ As she said this I experienced a bizarre sensation that I can only liken to what is known as the shamanic ‘enlightenment experience’. It was as if, in a moment of profound illumination, I had received an insight into some ancient secret. And then, without warning, my mind began to race. Jumping out of bed at a speed that surprised my wife and even myself considering the late hour, I ran down the darkened stairs and into my library. I switched on the light and headed straight for three reference books in which I instinctively knew I would find confirmation of the insight I had just received. Grabbing the books off the shelves, I ran back up the stairs to explain my strange behaviour to my wife. As I read out the relevant passages from the books, her look of disbelief mirrored my own growing sense of incredulity. Neither of us slept that night.

The insight I had received in that moment of ‘enlightenment’ concerned the mysterious phenomena known as the Elixir of Life, the Philosopher’s Stone and the Holy Grail. Over the next few days I scrambled my way through hundreds of books, searching until late every night for the inevitable flaw in the theory that was now taking shape in my mind. And yet everything merely seemed to confirm it, and more.

Shortly afterwards, I happened to meet writer and researcher Gary Osborn, who had uncovered some ancient secrets pertaining to shamanism, the enlightenment experience, the Great Pyramid of Giza and what we would come to call the ‘cult of the serpent’. This chance meeting led to our collaboration in what was to become a joint quest to find the truth behind the enigmatic Holy Grail. Together we researched, cross-referenced and collated the mounting evidence to support our theory that the Elixir of

Life, the Philosopher's Stone and the Holy Grail were not only 'ideals' but had real substance. Moreover they worked in precisely the way described in ancient myths and legends. Indeed, they were one and the same thing.

According to traditional myths and legends, these three mysterious phenomena cured all manner of illnesses and brought great riches. They were also said to be the source of profound knowledge, enlightenment and even eternal life. As we were to discover, these three mythical objects were the result of humankind's earliest association with one of the most poisonous and dangerous creatures on the planet – the snake. This creature, which in ancient times was worshipped, has since been demonized by Western religion. But this was just one of the many contradictions we came across as our quest for the truth behind the Elixir, the Stone and the Grail led us to the very origins of civilization and the root of our modern belief systems.

We hope you enjoy reading about the discoveries we made during our many years of research. In addition to the information given here, regular updates can be found on our website, www.gardinersborn.com, along with many related articles.

We wish you an enlightening Grail journey. *Qui on en servoit?*

Introduction

If you have bought this book, you are doubtless already intrigued by the Holy Grail and the many myths that surround it. Perhaps you see the Grail as an esoteric or mystical symbol, a key to the secrets of self-discovery. You may also have formulated some ideas about the Philosopher's Stone and the Elixir of Life.

There are many ways of perceiving these mysteries. We may see the Grail as being a historical object, for example, such as a vessel or cup. Or our vision of it may derive from this traditional description, but be influenced by our personal focus in life. For a mystic or alchemist, this 'ace of all cups' represents the spiritual perfection of man. For an archaeologist, it might be the sacred vessel excavated from the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. For a Formula One racing driver, it could be the 'victory cup' from which he quaffs champagne, while for a soccer player or fan, it would be the World Cup. Some marketing gurus would have us believe that it is a simple pint glass containing a certain brand of 'amber nectar'.

For many of us, the words 'Holy Grail' express supreme perfection or ultimate discovery and can be applied to just about anything and everything, whether spiritual or mundane. In a quick search of the Internet, we found that the words are even used by teenage computer programmers to describe some pre-eminent computer language. So it seems that there is no end to the usage of the term: whatever field we are working in, the Holy Grail is the ultimate goal.

Perhaps it is the inherent ambiguity of the Grail that has captured our imagination. One thing is certain, however: recent interest in the Grail reveals a deep-seated desire to break free from the constraints imposed by orthodox traditions and institutions. For whatever its real secret may be, the Grail has come to symbolize self-empowerment.

Before we go any further, we would like you to picture the Holy Grail in your mind. Close your eyes and allow yourself to travel back through history. Fly over Norman-conquered territory, over Anglo-Saxon fields to Roman Britain and back through Celtic lands to a time that remains a mystery. Let the mystery clear and see your own vision of the Grail before you.

What have you visualized?

A plain and simple cup, made from clay or wood?

A golden chalice, inlaid with jewels and sparkling in the sunlight? Does a glowing mist surround this magical, almost musical chalice?

A plate or dish, edged with Celtic knotwork? Or perhaps a platter that once held the head of John the Baptist?

A cauldron, with images of dragons and mythological beasts prancing around its outer face that recall Celtic tales from ages past?

A blood-red lance that once pierced Christ's side and was sought after by Napoleon, Hitler and others who aspired to rule the known world?

An Eastern sacrificial cup containing the Vedic Soma, the Mazdean Haoma or the Greek Ambrosia? Or does it contain the blood of Christ?

These examples are how many of us in the Western world visualize the Grail. Most of us, however, are inclined to think of it as a cup or chalice that once held the blood of Christ, and we tend to look no further.

The reasons for this are simple. Our image of the Grail derives from popular folk tradition, mass-market books or the silver screens of cinema and television. And now, with the proliferation of the worldwide web, all manner of wonderful new ideas are streaming into popular and cult circles – a veritable cornucopia of modern folklore and modern confusion.

However, there are those for whom the answers to the deeper mysteries of the Grail are to be found instead in esoteric or mystery schools. Finding these answers involves a journey into the unknown – a journey that leads to eternal life, which is itself the Grail.

Our initial research led us to conclude that the Grail had emerged from several different sources, all of which derived from the same generic source, if not from the same geographical location. In our quest we searched through ancient texts, etymology, history, religion and science, and considered them from every possible viewpoint. We also made a conscious decision not to accept the conventional interpretations of the myths we encountered, since we wished to avoid going down the same old road that others had travelled before us and that many more keep travelling.

Although the Holy Grail is now fundamentally a European ideal, we discovered that it was originally a worldwide phenomenon. The familiar Celtic and Christian Grail legends were simply adaptations of the original story, new ideas overlaid on old truths. Whether by design or accident, they served to bury the real facts ever deeper.

In our search for the real meaning of the Grail, we could not help but touch upon the esoteric explanation of the Grail myth as a spiritual quest of self-fulfilment and discovery, and it is perhaps this interpretation that the modern reader can most relate to. However, the origins of the Grail myth lie in a different age, when such ideas were the remit of a select few: the priests and 'masters of the craft'. This élite employed an arcane and symbolic language to hide the real identity of the Grail in much the same way that 'practical' alchemical texts concealed the path to spiritual transformation and enlightenment.

In the end, whichever particular image we personally have of the Grail, they all point to one unique and simple conclusion: *we can obtain eternal life through the Grail.*

Philip Gardiner and Gary Osborn [May 2005, London]

The Grail, the Elixir and the Stone

Alpha-Omega

The very nature of myth is such that one level of meaning leads to yet deeper levels. Therefore whether we are simply reading a mythical story or researching its origins, a myth has the potential to take us on a journey.

The mythical journey we have come to know as the ‘quest for the Holy Grail’ belongs in part to the mystical tradition, a tradition that conceals its knowledge of enlightenment and other mystical experiences behind symbolic images and enigmatic language. If this knowledge were expressed in more literal language, it would be met with misunderstanding or even hostility. Also, it cannot be disclosed directly, because this would be to reveal the goal of the journey before the journey had even begun. It is therefore little wonder that many of us have difficulty understanding the mystical aspect of the Grail. Moreover, the popular themes surrounding the Holy Grail date from a time when life revolved around religion, fuelled by the spiritual impulse that seems to be an intrinsic part of human nature.

History and propaganda have also contributed to the story of the Grail. At any given point in history, is always the most popular stories that are grafted onto an original legend. Sometimes stories are popularized for propaganda purposes. At others, stories that are either unpopular or suppressed by those in power are forgotten, cast upon the funeral pyre of time. Just as we today are persuaded to vote for certain political parties by the mass media, so in ages gone by our ancestors were persuaded to follow certain beliefs. It is in this way that the Grail came to be seen as the vessel that caught the blood of Christ as he hung from the tree. It was also said to be the cup used by Christ at the Last Supper. Known as the ‘relic of passion’,¹ it has become more important than the original message. But these interpretations share a common symbolism in that they associate the Grail with the blood of Christ.

The most frequently quoted medieval author on the subject of the Grail is Helinand (c.1150–c.1227), Cistercian abbot from Froidmont in the diocese of Beauvais. However, we noted that Helinand was one of the most ardent preachers of the Albigensian Crusade (1209–44), a crusade in southern France against the Cathars (from the Greek *καθάρωι*, meaning ‘Pure Ones’), a Gnostic sect who were regarded as heretics by the Church. This must surely have influenced anything Helinand had to say about the Grail since the Cathars were said to possess the secret of the Holy Grail and to have spirited it away from the town of Montségur before it fell to the Crusaders. They are supposed to have then deposited it in the Ormolac caves in a valley in the Ariège before they themselves became victims of the crusade launched on the orders of Pope Innocent III.

Helinand presupposes the Grail to be a real object, like a chalice or cup. But the secret spirited away from Montségur by the Cathars is more likely to have been written texts that contained the real knowledge of the Grail, or perhaps ritual accoutrements and other paraphernalia associated with this knowledge. These could very well have included a symbolic cup or chalice.

Others believe that the Grail is the platter or Paschal Dish which was present at the Last Supper. In this case we should not look to Christianity or Celtic mythology for the blood element associated with the Grail, but to Judaism. This idea can be proven incorrect, however, although in the story of the Grail there is truth in all.

For Dr Linda Malcor, ‘The connection between the Grail and the Eucharistic chalice is generally implicit and often explicit. One exception to this occurs in the metrical Joseph [Joseph of Arimathea] where ... the poet describes the Grail as containing the “blood of the slain god” and compares this vessel to the Eucharistic chalice.’²

The Holy Eucharist, which is one of Seven Sacraments of the Christian Church, is celebrated during the Mass or Holy Communion. The ritual involves the distribution of white bread and red wine. In some variations, the bread or circular communion wafer is dipped into the red wine contained in a large cup or chalice before being given to each communicant to eat. The bread is said to represent the body of Christ and the wine his blood. The connection between the Grail and the Eucharist is particularly interesting in that the ritual symbolizes the individual’s communion with the Christian God, thus revealing how one can establish a personal and conscious connection with that collective centre of intelligence to which all of us are theoretically already linked.

While opinions may vary about the identity of the Grail as an object, the meaning of the word ‘Grail’ has itself provoked a surge of theories.

In early manuscripts, the Grail is referred to as the *Sangraal*. Helinand claims that the word *graal* comes from *gradalis* and sets the date of a hermit’s vision of the Grail as 717–19 (see *Speculum Historiae*, by Vincent of Beauvais). Helinand’s *gradalis* is said to resemble a dish on which fish are served, while the Grail scholar Dr Bergmann points out that the medieval Latin noun *gradail* (masculine) or *gradale* (neuter) translates as ‘vase’, ‘goblet’ or ‘basin’.

Sir Thomas Malory, author of the fifteenth-century *Morte d’Arthur*, was the first to use the words ‘Holy Grail’ and said that the *Sangkreal* was the blessed blood of Christ. But in his *English Etymology*, Walter Skeat (1835–1912), one of the greatest investigators of the roots of the English language, states that the etymology of the Holy Grail ‘was very early falsified by an intentional change from San Greal (Holy Dish) to Sang Real (Royal Blood)’.³ This is a perfect example of how the original information surrounding the Grail was later twisted and corrupted by those hoping to further their own ends, usually the pursuit of power. We found that such misinterpretations, or deliberate falsifications, have appeared ever since the Grail’s ancient origins.

The change of meaning from 'Holy Grail' to 'Royal Blood' has led various authors and researchers to suggest that the secret of the Holy Grail is that the royal bloodlines of Europe stem directly from the bloodline of Jesus.⁴ Like people of ancient Egypt, who saw their pharaohs as the sons of God, we are now encouraged to believe that the royal families of Europe are descended from a divinity. But in our view, the secret of the Holy Grail could just as easily lie in the fact that this addition to the Grail myth provides a further mystery.

Wolfram von Eschenbach, one of the earliest and most famous of Grail writers, was 'bought' by the Templars and Cistercians to ensure that they were written into this then new propaganda myth. More recently, the authors of *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* were approached by an alleged secret society, the Priory of Sion, which had decided that it was time to reveal this ancient secret.⁵ We have to ask ourselves, what kind of secret society reveals its secrets to the world? Surely such secrets would be highly questionable.

As to what the Grail really is, there are many explanations. There may also be more than one Grail, as Graham Philips, author of *The Search for the Grail*, observed:

In each romance the Grail or Grails are kept by the family of Perceval, the direct descendants of Joseph of Arimathea... Here lies the Grail's importance – it is a visible, tangible symbol of an alternative apostolic succession.⁶

The idea that there could be more than one Grail matched our own growing conviction of the underlying truth of the Grail story. We would go further than Graham Philips, however, and say that the Grail is guarded by this 'apostolic succession', not that they themselves are the Grail. And it has been guarded well. So much so that misinformation – for example, the stories surrounding the Priory of Sion – has been employed to mislead people and send many Grail researchers on a wild goose chase.

The fact that so many images have been attributed to the Grail also gives the impression that it is many things, when in reality all these images are devices to hide and protect it.

We are told, for example, that the Grail is a vessel of some kind containing the *resurrecting* blood of Christ which was brought by Joseph of Arimathea, the supposed uncle of Jesus, to Glastonbury, England. Yet the Grail is also considered to be the Pagan cauldron of Celtic and Sarmation mythology – the symbol of fertility, transformation and rebirth. This cauldron, which is mentioned in the stories of the *Cauldron of Ceridwen* (a Celtic goddess) and the *Cauldron of Annwn* (the Celtic Underworld) had many uses. It was similar to the Void of Eastern tradition, from which everything in the universe originates, in that it would spew forth copious amounts of 'wondrous food and drink' for the victors of battle. It would also resurrect the dead soldiers of the victorious side, albeit taking a part of each as an offering – either his eyesight or his speech, so that he could either not look upon the cauldron or not talk about it. It was thus impossible for him to impart its secrets to others.

Like the Celtic cauldron, the Grail is associated with fertility, regeneration and the cycle of life-death-rebirth as expressed in the never-ending cycle of the seasons. Within this yearly cycle, followers of religions from around the world celebrate the Spring or Vernal Equinox which falls on or around 21 March. This is one of only two days in the year when day and night are equal in length, the other being the Autumnal Equinox, which falls exactly six months later, on or around 21 September. These celebrations are said to be Pagan in origin, but are more likely to have a shamanic foundation. For many of us, the Spring Equinox represents the victory of light over darkness – of good over evil. For others, this time marks the conception of the Son of God, whose coming to Earth or physical birth takes place at the Winter Solstice in December. For Pagans, it marks the annual death-rebirth of the ‘slain god’ or ‘vegetation god’ – gods such as the Egyptian Osiris, the Roman Attis, the Assyrian/Babylonian Tammuz or Sumerian Damuzi and the Celtic Green Man. This time in the yearly cycle is also the death-rebirth of Jesus Christ, which is celebrated at Easter.

In this annual conception or rebirth of the ‘resurrecting god’, we find a correspondence to the rebirth and resurrection of the dead soldiers of Celtic myth. Furthermore, we find that this resurrecting god also provides the yearly harvest, which corresponds to the ‘wondrous food’ produced by the Celtic cauldron. The Grail is similarly said to produce an abundance of food and drink, and to appear suddenly, as if from nowhere.

The Grail and the Alpha-Omega

The connection of the Grail with the resurrecting god led us to examine more closely the natural phenomenon of cycles and especially the crucial point in each and every cycle: the beginning-and-end point, the point at which one cycle ends and a new cycle begins, which is by implication the moment of death-rebirth and of resurrection. This point is represented by the ancient circular symbol of the *Ouroboros* (‘tail devourer’), the snake that is swallowing or biting its own tail (*see figure 1*). A universal symbol, the *Ouroboros* first appeared in Egypt around 1600 bc, but is probably much older. It carries the simple message that Creation is a cyclical process – creation, destruction, recreation, or birth, death, rebirth – in which patterns repeat themselves in a series of never-ending cycles, from the slowly changing patterns of the revolving galaxies to the more rapid spin activity that occurs at the subquantum level.



Figure 1: Ancient Graeco-Byzantine Ouroboros

The Ouroboros and other ancient symbols like it, such as the Egyptian Shen Ring (a rod and circle combined, also evident in Sumerian art), draw our attention to the most important point in the cyclical process. In the Ouroboros, this point is the place in the circle at which the snake is biting its own tail. This is the beginning-end instant known as the Alpha-Omega after the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, A (Alpha) and Ω (Omega). The significance of this point is emphasized in the words attributed to Jesus Christ, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end' (Revelation 22:13). These words have a remarkable parallel in an inscription found in the temple of the Egyptian goddess Isis at Sais in Egypt: 'I am all that has been, that is, and that will be.' The letters Alpha and Omega were also frequently applied to Goddess worship, for it was the Goddess who united us in birth and death.

The few examples given here and the many others we discovered suggested to us that the Grail was itself associated with the crucial point in every cycle at which opposing forces – for example, life–death, winter– summer, day–night – are momentarily joined, fused together and cancelled out, thus allowing a seemingly spiritual third state or third force to manifest. This is personified by the symbolic annual appearance of the resurrecting god or 'Christed one'.

This crucial point in the cycle applies to all opposites and is the *zero-point* at which positive crosses into negative and vice versa, as shown in simple wave phenomena and all periodic systems.

If we take the Spring and Autumn Equinoxes as an example, these two points in the yearly cycle – known in the ancient Pagan Wicca tradition as the ‘in-between times’ – are ‘where’ and ‘when’ the opposites are in balance. It was believed that at these two points a portal opened between the Earth and the heavenly realm, through which radiated the Infinite, the life-force, providing sustenance and nourishment. In the words of the mythologist C. Austin:

In that time of suspended activity, the conduit between the worlds yawns, the ‘veil becomes thin’. As the contents of both worlds mingle, the resulting tumult offers an opportunity for a renewed relationship with the unseen.⁷

As we were to discover, the significance of this particular point in the dynamic of the cycle is far-reaching. Every cycle has *three phases*, as can be seen in a simple sine wave (see figure 2). These three phases are: positive (peak), negative (dip) and the neutral point we would call the *Transliminal Phase*. ‘Transliminal’ is a term often used in psychology and consciousness research to describe what is known as the ‘Transliminal State’ or ‘Transliminal experience’, however applying it to the dynamic in the cycle enables us to see the deeper connections between consciousness and cyclical phenomena. The neutral point or Transliminal Phase is crossed over twice, where each half of the cycle crosses over into the other and is therefore the point at which both opposites are momentarily united or cancelled out – that is, they are *neutralized*.

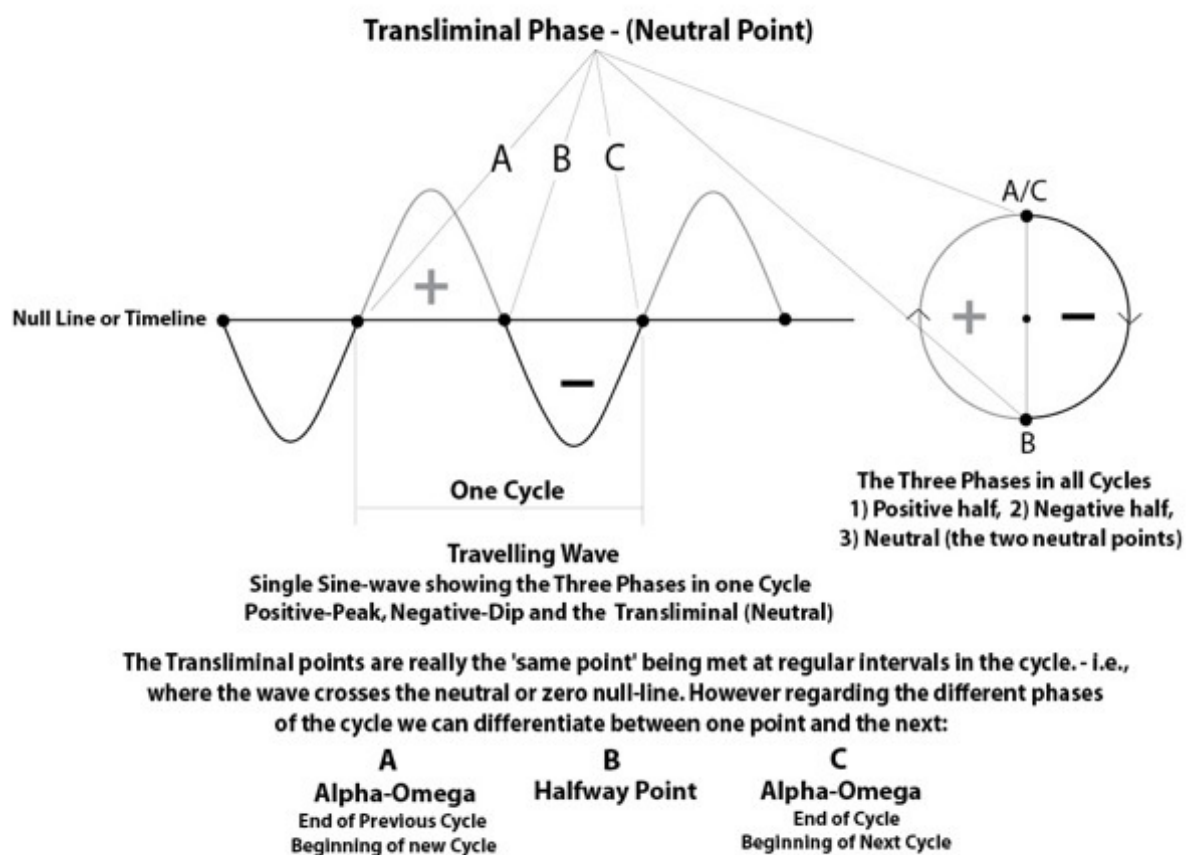


Figure 2: Travelling Wave and Cycle

A travelling wave is really a continuous cycle of energy-information stretched out linearly in time. Illustration by Gary Osborn

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