

## The Forbidden Secrets of the Black Madonna



About five or six years ago my wife, Andrea, and I toured some of the sacred sites of France which are famous for their Black Madonnas. Our most impactful experience came within the towering walls of the famous Chartres Cathedral, arguably the most beautiful Gothic cathedral in Europe and possibly the continent's premier headquarters of Goddess and Madonna worship (it even contains the *Sancta Camisia*, the cloth that the Virgin Mary was supposedly wearing when she gave birth to Jesus). At Chartres we found ourselves transfixed for more than an hour while sitting in front of a striking Black Madonna known as "Our Lady of the Pillar." There are no words to adequately describe the elevating sensations we felt in the presence of this remarkable idol. Having traveled to the remote temples of Egypt, India, and Peru and been in close proximity to some of the most spiritually dynamic saints and shamans on the planet, we never dreamed of experiencing this magnitude of power in a European church. We could definitely feel our consciousness being expanded as subtle currents of energy radiated from the majestic figure and into our auric fields. The magic of its presence sympathetically uplifted us into ecstasy, and we were soon swaying to the rhythmic chant of a family sitting close by who had traveled all the way from their homeland of Sri Lanka just to be in the presence of this unique idol. Half jokingly, my wife and I decided that we would return to the Lady of the Pillar in the future and plant ourselves in front of it for at least two or three days straight – just to see what would happen to us. But first, I decided, I needed to know much more about the history and symbolism of the Black Madonna image.

It is an understatement to say that my search into the history of the Black Madonna has been very revealing. Throughout the ages this innocuous black image has elicited profound veneration, but also intense trepidation and even abhorrence from its observers. While members of Catholicism have sought to denigrate it - even deliberately

shunning the numerous Black Madonnas scattered throughout their own European churches - the followers of the older, paganistic and alternative faiths have traditionally heaped praises upon its majestic beauty and uplifting power. Representatives of the Church made their feelings irrefutably clear in 1952 during a convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Science when a paper on the Black Madonna was presented to the forum. All at once the attendant priests and nuns rose from their seats and walked out of the hall in protest. Their shocking distain towards the Black Madonna left reporters scrambling for clues that would explain what “skeleton in the (Church) closet” the mere mention of the Black Madonna had invoked. It has since been speculated among researchers that the paganistic origins of the Black Madonna could have created such surprising behavior, and more recently, with the controversy stirred up by the *The Da Vinci Code*, it has been conjectured that it was somehow connected to the forbidden secrets of Mary Magdalene.

Fortunately, as a Knight Templar I am allowed to speak and research liberally about both the Black Madonna and Mary Magdalene, who is venerated as one of our beloved patrons. Wisdom regarding both forms of the Goddess or female principle has been passed down within our organization for many generations. Our history as lovers of Mary and the Black Madonna began at our origin, when the founder of our Rule, St. Bernard of Clairvaux composed literally hundreds of songs and sermons in honor of Mary Magdalene, and even mobilized the Second Crusade from Mary’s headquarters at Vezelay. But besides Mary Magdalene, St. Bernard has also been acknowledged to be a worshipper of the Goddess in her other forms, including that of the Gnostic Sophia.

When we Templars arrived in the Middle East our “Goddess” education was furthered by the Goddess-worshipping Sufis, the Islamic adepts who originally created Mecca to be a Goddess shrine and later inspired the Moslems’ “Goddess” flag with its Goddess symbology of eight or five pointed stars and crescent moons. These great adepts were the guardians of a Goddess tradition that had been faithfully preserved for many thousands of years in the Middle East. From them we learned that beginning as far back as 4,000 BCE in ancient Anatolia and Sumeria, the Goddess had been worshipped as Cybele, Inanna, Ishtar, Astarte, and Artemis, to name but a few of her manifold personifications. But although our Sufi indoctrination opened new vistas for us, this wisdom was not entirely foreign to us. We Templars had already become familiar with some of the Goddess’s Middle Eastern manifestations back home in our native France. The image of Cybele had returned from Asia many years previously with the Roman legions and she was then enthusiastically adopted by our ancestors of Lyons as their patroness. Artemis had similarly found a home as patroness of Marseilles, and the Egyptian Isis had been crowned Queen of Paris. But even though her black images had been part of our French culture for many years, it was not until we arrived in the Middle East that we truly understood the essence of the Goddess.

The Sufis taught us that the Goddess was the third “person” of our Catholic Trinity, the Holy Spirit, which was the power that descended upon the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost. We also learned from them that as the Holy Spirit the Goddess could not only bless us, but also manifest all our desires. She was the universal energy that emanated from God and possessed the ability to create, preserve, or destroy whenever called upon. Her three powers were personified by her diverse images, some of which reflected her role as the beneficent Mother Nature, while others, especially her more

grotesque forms, reflected her power to destroy. The Black Madonna, we learned, was a reflection of the Goddess's destructive power, but the Sufi practitioners of yoga and alchemy also informed us that this power was benevolent since it could alchemically transform a seeker of wisdom into an enlightened adept. It accomplished this evolution by destroying all the distorted concepts and egotistical predispositions that keep such a person from knowing the intuitive secrets of the universe that exist within his or her own heart. Such intuitive wisdom, we learned, is known as gnosis.

The Sufis revealed that the worship of the destructive/transformational power embodied within the black image of the Goddess had, over thousands of years, become common place in the Middle East. And they had been specifically made by craftsmen to amplify this force. The venerated Black Madonnas of the East had been made of a dark or black conductive and amplifying material - such as a hard wood, stone or meteorite- in order to better transmit their power to their worshippers. A huge black meteorite had been the original image of Cybele, just as it had been for Aphrodite or Venus. Meteorites found along the coast of Asia Minor had been traditionally gathered up as manifestations of Venus and installed in small temples dedicated to the Goddess. Goddess mystery school traditions eventually grew up around these black images since it was found that they exerted a magical effect on the human energy system. With our current scientific knowledge we now know that their "magic" created currents of energy that pulsed within the human electro-magnetic field, an effect caused by their high density and concentration of iron and nickel. Ultimately, their effect would have elevated a person to ecstasy while also initiating him or her into spiritual life by activating the normally dormant evolutionary force at the base of the spine. This power, known in the East as Baraka and Kundalini, can lead one to immortality, which is why in ancient times meteorites were recognized as both Holy Grails and Philosophers Stones.

The Sufi love of the Goddess and their unparalleled understanding of her alchemical power personified as the Black Madonna completely resonated with us. Thus, when we returned from our respective tours of duty in the Middle East we made a point of bringing back many statuettes of the Black Madonna for our local Templar preceptories and the Gothic cathedrals we were in the process of building. In fact, it was principally because of our influence that by the time of our demise in 1307 it is estimated that there were upwards of 190 prized images of the Black Madonna venerated throughout our native country of France.

We installed some of our choicest Black Madonnas in chapels in the Languedoc region of France. The Languedoc was a hot bed for all things heretical, and it eventually became famous for harboring perhaps the most noxious of Catholic heresies, the Cathar Gnostic faith. Interspersed among the Cathars were many practitioners of alchemy, which we learned from the Sufis - the greatest alchemists of the time - are essentially two sides of the same coin. Alchemy leads to the awakening of the inner centers of intuitive wisdom or gnosis. And the pursuit of gnosis leads to inner, alchemical transformation.

We were safe in the Languedoc to practice the alchemy we acquired from the Sufis. Alongside our alchemy experiments we observed the rites of Johannite Christianity, an ancient Gnostic tradition we had inherited in the Holy Land. The Elders of this alternate branch of Christianity taught us that Jesus had established not one but two lineages of Christians, the Catholic Christians of St. Peter and the Gnostic/alchemical or Johannite Christian lineage of John the Apostle and Mary Magdalene. Jesus had

himself become a Gnostic through his training with John the Baptist, whom we came to regard as co-Messiah with Jesus. After Jesus transmitted Gnostic Christianity to John the Divine the alternate Christian lineage had passed down a long line of Grand Masters named "John" until the First Crusade. At that time this lineage was inherited by us and our first Grand Master, Hughes de Payen, became the titular John of the lineage. From that time onwards we were married to the Gnostic path.

In recognition of our Johannite Christian heritage we dedicated our churches in the Languedoc to John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene and placed alchemical images of the Black Madonna within them or in close proximity. We also built a series of Gothic cathedrals in northern Europe that were dedicated to John or Mary and installed Black Madonnas upon their main altars. The dimensions of these cathedrals, which were based upon sacred geometry taught us by the Sufis, were designed to generate the alchemical power of the Black Madonna and elicit states of gnostic awareness. In October, 2006, a group of Templars from our organization, The International Order of Gnostic Templars, had the good fortune to visit seven of these Gothic cathedrals that had been anciently built over the seven chakra points of Europe. This was an ancient pilgrimage route founded by the early Johannite Templars that was designed to activate the seven human chakra points – which are centers of gnostic awareness. Beginning at Santiago de Compostella in Spain, and then moving up the European spine to the French cities of Toulouse, Orleans, Chartres, Paris, Amiens, and then finally culminating at Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland, we found these seven cathedrals to be marked abundantly with Johannite, alchemical and Goddess symbolism. Along the route we learned that Black Madonnas were once prolific in these cathedrals, and that many of them once had labyrinths covering their floors. Even the original floor of Rosslyn Chapel had originally been covered with a labyrinth. The Templars understood that the labyrinth, a geometrical form body of the Goddess, is one of the best tools for alchemy and gnosis in existence. As one walks the back and forth maze of a labyrinth the two hemispheres of the brain begin to act in unison and then intellect unites with intuition to produce gnosis. Alchemy is also stimulated internally as the body's intrinsic polarity harmonizes and unites to activate the latent alchemical fire.

Some of sites of Europe's towering cathedrals, such as Chartres, had since the time of the Celtic Druids been places of Goddess worship and divination. Legend has it that there was a Madonna at Chartres hundreds or even thousands of years before the birth of Christ, so obviously the image could not possibly have represented the Virgin Mary holding baby Jesus. It was, no doubt, related to the pre-Christian nature religion that once covered Europe, and was, therefore, an image of the Goddess holding her Son, the Green Man or Lord of Nature. The time-worn legend of this nature cult held that the Goddess was the barren Earth who gave birth each spring to a Son manifesting as all the fledgling buds and sprouts of the season. The Son grew very quickly - reflected by the rapidly growing vegetation - and then died each year in the fall with the falling leaves. During his short life he also became the lover of his mother, who then became extremely distraught at his passing in the fall. This popular nature legend spread throughout the Europe, the Middle East and Egypt, and precipitated the creation of many nature festivals, including Easter. Within the Mesopotamian nature cult the early Madonnas represented the Goddess Inanna or Ishar, whose Son/lover was the nature god Dammuzi or Tammuz; in Anatolia they denoted Cybele and her Son/lover Attis; and in Syria they

symbolized Astarte or Aphrodite and her beloved was Adonis, a nature god who like the waxing and waning life force of the growing season was forced to spend part of the year underground. Even in Egypt, the original Black Madonna and Son - Isis and Horus – represented the Goddess and Green Man. When the Egyptian Green Man, Osiris, died each fall it was said that Isis would revive him long enough to mate with him and conceive Horus. According to one perspective, Horus was thus Green Man Osiris reborn.

When the Catholic Church was formed it borrowed many of the rites, holidays and images of the early nature cult, including the Black Madonna and her Son. They also co-opted many elements of the legend of the Lord of Nature and wove them into the life story of their savior Son, Jesus. This was possible because the legend of the Lord of Nature had, by that time, acquired both a mundane and spiritual interpretation; to some he represented the forms of nature, and to others he was the savior and archetypal initiate. In Egypt, for example, the mundane understanding of the Green Man, Osiris, maintained that he was the personification of nature that died and is then reborn each year, but the spiritual interpretation of the legend taught within the mystery schools recognized Osiris to be the archetypal initiate whose death in the fall and resurrection in the spring denoted the egoic death and spiritual rebirth of an Egyptian adept.

Thus, the archived Templar histories have revealed to me that we Templars must have known the Black Madonna and her Son as not only the Goddess and Green Man, but also as the transformative Goddess who gives “birth” to the archetypal initiate and cuddles him to spiritual maturity – or gnosis. Since the Church was no doubt aware of these early “pagan” associations then its current disdain for the Black Madonna is understandable. The Church has always sought to distance itself from the earlier pagan traditions it so abundantly borrowed from, and it has consistently opposed all alchemical paths that lead to gnosis. As some mystics have demonstrated, such a path can invariably lead to the inner revelation of “I am Infinite,” or simply “I am God,” a proclamation that goes decidedly against the grain of Catholic doctrine.

Finally, the Church’s abhorrence of the Black Madonna may also stem from the fact that in some circles she is associated with Mary Magdalene. In fact, there are those who believe it is she who is embodied and immortalized as the dark image. If this is indeed true, the Catholic Church is more likely than ever to be virulently opposed to any veneration of the image of the Black Madonna, especially now that the Nag Hammadi gospels have been found to portray Mary as the favorite disciple, wife, and even true successor of Jesus.