

Character Research for *Unholy Grail*

By: Richard B. Sorensen

April 27, 2011

rich@westernesse.com

www.richardsorensen.com

www.unholygrail.net



Unholy Grail



If you steal from one author, it's plagiarism. If you steal from two, it's research.
~ John Burke

In J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy masterpiece *The Silmarillion*, the author introduces the character of Feanor. He is essentially the protagonist, and even though he dies near the beginning of the story, virtually everything that comes afterward is related to his actions, both good and evil. Feanor spent a long time studying his craft of mining and gemology, and it was said that when he finally made the holy jewels – the silmarils that are the heart of the story – that they were “crystals which contained divine light,” and in making them “he summoned all of his skill and all of his lore.”

Unholy Grail can in no way be compared to the silmarils in value, nor do I think myself fit to be compared with a genius like Tolkien. But there are certain similarities: the premise of this book was a divine inspiration, it was written over a period of years, and all of the underlying themes have developed over a lifetime of study and experience. Niccolo Machiavelli, an author of the fifteenth century, said of his writing,

At nightfall I return home and enter my study. There on the threshold, I remove my dirty, mud-spattered clothes, slip into my courtly robes, and thus fittingly attired, I enter the ancient court of bygone men...I am not ashamed to speak with them and to inquire into the reasons for their actions, and they answer me in kindly fashion. I become entirely one of them.

I personally fall short of Machiavelli as well, as I am often dressed rather poorly while sitting up late at night, typing at my computer, with a space heater to keep my feet warm in the winter. But I like to think that I have at least preserved the spirit of Machiavelli's efforts.

There is another and more important comparison between Tolkien's works and this one – both attempt to span virtually the entire history of the worlds in which they are set. In the case of the former, it is the imaginary world of Valinor, Middle Earth, and Westeros, whereas this story is set in the real world, and is involved with events covering approximately 5,000 years of history, from around 3000 BC until the near future. As in the case of *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*, this novel is an attempt to unify history, expose the footprints of God and Satan, and provide inklings to where they will ultimately lead.

As with most historical novels, the framework for Book One of *Unholy Grail* is largely based on history as we currently know it. Although some of the characters are fictitious and the dialogue has been almost entirely constructed, it was my conscious attempt to meld the story fully into known history – into history as it may well have happened if all of the facts were known, rather than attempting to create an alternative reality. Any historical errors in the flow of the story are unintentional.

Some of the events in Christ's ministry with his disciples, however, have been rearranged and some of Christ's words were truncated and/or expanded to provide more drama and clarity, and for the sake of re-telling the story from Judas' perspective. There are separate articles for the main characters – Judas Iscariot and Mary Magdalene. Following are notes on others in this story:

Lazarus

There are several stories of the deeds of Lazarus after he was raised from the dead by Jesus. According to the *Lengenda Aurea*, Lazarus traveled to Cyprus where he became the first bishop and lived there for thirty years. The church leaders of Cyprus later claimed the mantle of Lazarus and became self-governing in AD 413. Lazarus was said to have been buried in Cyprus at the site of the first church in Larnaka, which is still a place of pilgrimage today. His bones and other relics were supposedly removed to Constantinople in 898, and then taken to France after the sack of Constantinople during the fourth crusade in 1204. In 1972, however, ancient human remains were discovered in a marble sarcophagus under the alter of the Larnaka church, and these are thought by some to be the bones of Lazarus.

The most popular story of Lazarus, however, is his voyage with Mary Magdalene to France. He was said to have been the first bishop of Marseille and buried at Saint Lazaire, the Cathedral of Autun, which is dedicated to him. This is undoubtedly what Roger of Howden, chronicler of the Third Crusade, was referring to in the quote appearing above.

Despite the popular appeal of this tale, there is no documentary evidence for Lazarus in either Cyprus or France. Like the story of Mary Magdalene in Provence, the first evidence is from over nine hundred years later. Pope Benedict IX wrote a letter in 1040 in which Lazarus' relics are mentioned, but the first known document that clearly refers to an episcopacy of Lazarus in France was the *Otia Imperialia* written by Gervase of Tilbury in 1212.

In an ancient tomb an epitaph from the fifth century was recently discovered, indicating that a bishop named Lazarus was buried there. But in the opinion of archeologists, this man was Lazarus, Bishop of Aix, who was consecrated at Marseilles about 407. He was said to have left Marseille in 411, traveled to Palestine, and then returned to Marseille, where he later died.

As with Mary Magdalene, the lack of early evidence does not disprove these stories but places them in the realm of legend rather than fact. However, as mentioned above, there is another possibility that could redeem the legend, and have Lazarus and Mary come to France. The two of them could have landed first on Cyprus and stayed for several years, becoming involved in planting churches there, as indicated above. The journey to France could have been made later, and both could have died during the voyage or soon afterward. This could explain the lack of historical accounts of their ministry in France and would also allow for Mary's child to intermarry with an influential family that eventually became the Merovingian dynasty of kings.

Martha

Martha, the sister of Mary and Lazarus, is interpreted in this novel as being somewhat jealous of her sister Mary. She is the "good daughter" who stays home while the "bad daughter" Mary goes off and supposedly has her fun. But Martha has a good heart and is eventually reconciled.

Martha's briefly mentioned romance and marriage are constructed, as nothing more is known about her. According to one tradition, she sails with Lazarus and Mary Magdalene to Gaul, where she supposedly helps Lazarus plant the church in France. But that scenario seems unconvincing for several reasons:

1. Unlike Lazarus, Martha was not a threat to the religious authorities.
2. Martha's conflicts and differences of temperament with her sister make it less likely that they would go together.
3. It would make sense that someone in the family would stay to keep and maintain the extensive family property in Bethany (what has traditionally been thought to be their house can still be seen today).

Although we do not know who the parents of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary were, there have been many theories advanced that connect people in various ways, for example:

1. Their parents were wealthy Jews, as in this story. The *Lengenda Aurea* names them as Cyrus and Eucharis who supposedly owned a castle ("migdol" or "magdalo") near Jerusalem, and also held land in both Bethany and Jerusalem.
2. Their parents were wealthy Romans, perhaps even the "Theophilus" to whom Luke dedicated his Gospel as well as the Book of Acts.

3. That “Simon the Leper” who gave the dinner for Jesus at his home in Bethany (the dinner at which Martha was serving and where Mary anointed Jesus), was their brother (i.e., this was supposedly the home of the entire family).
4. Their parents owned property in Magdala of Galilee where Mary went, and perhaps this was the town in which she was married.
5. That the family was somehow related to Jesus and/or Joseph of Arimathea.

It seems that Jesus had a love for this family and indeed, for the entire region – Bethany, the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, Mount Olivet where the ascension to heaven takes place, etc. – that goes beyond what is told in the Gospels. It seems reasonable that there were specific and perhaps long-standing friendships and/or familial connections that were not documented in the biblical accounts. Hence the addition of the fictional Eleazar and Naomi and their connection with Jesus’ parents in this novel.

Joseph of Arimathea

There are many stories about this unusual man, who was a wealthy iconoclast and willing to jeopardize his religious and business connections with the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem because of his faith in Christ. Joseph was therefore relatively unknown but nevertheless a towering figure, and it is not surprising that many stories sprang up about him.

The Bible has little to say about Joseph, and indicates only five things: 1) he was from the town of Arimathea; 2) he was a wealthy Jew and a member of the Jewish leadership; 3) he asked Pontius Pilate for the body of Jesus after the crucifixion; 4) he owned the tomb that Jesus was placed in; and 5) that he buried Jesus with the help of Nicodemus, another Pharisee and fellow member of the Sanhedrin.

Joseph’s story in the Bible ends there, but the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, probably written in the fourth century (i.e., it was not written by the actual Nicodemus), tells more tales of Joseph, and other traditions add details and embellishments. According to these sources, Joseph was supposedly the Virgin Mary’s uncle, and perhaps was involved with Jesus during the “missing years,” the time between Jesus’ twelfth birthday and his public ministry begun at age thirty.

Joseph’s occupation is not known, but it is implied in various apocryphal sources that he was involved in mining and metallurgy. The Cornwall area of Britain had long been known for its lead and tin mines, and if Joseph indeed was involved in metallurgy then he may have known something of Britain and perhaps visited the country. Also, he may have owned a fleet of vessels used to transport ore and metals.¹

According to the King Arthur tales, when Joseph came to Britain, he met with the British King Aviragus. After hearing and being moved by the story of Christ, the king gave Joseph twelve hides of land in Somerset (approximately 1,200 acres) to build a church and a monastery. Joseph supposedly built the first church in Britain at Glastonbury – a

¹ Frank C. Tribbe, *I, Joseph of Arimathea*, Blue Dolphin Publishing, 2000

“mud and wattle church” – and it is said that he went on to become the first evangelist to Britain.² He was also said to have planted his staff in the ground, and the Glastonbury thorn grew there for centuries (the thorn is native to the Middle East and not to England).³ The area around the church was called Glaston (“grassy”) and later Glastonbury. The tales also state that there was an island known as “Avalon” or “Avalonia” in a swampy area of Glastonbury, that was eventually drained. This may have been the setting for the Isle of Avalon, a metaphor for heaven in the King Arthur stories.⁴

The Celts were dominant in Britain at that time and had overcome the Britons several centuries earlier. Legends state that Joseph’s daughter Anna married a man who became king of Britain (Wales), possibly Bran Fendigaid. This presumed union led to a line of Welch Celtic Christian kings who ruled parts of Britain for the next several centuries until the Saxon invasions, and that Joseph of Arimathea was therefore an ancestor of King Arthur.⁵

The story of Joseph of Arimathea in Britain, however, rests on a tenuous historical and literary basis. It came from a marginal note made by an unknown monk around AD 530 while making a copy of the *Liber Pontificalis*, the papal chronicles. The note indicated that Pope Eleutherus (AD 170-185) had received a letter from the British King Lucius asking for a religious representative to be sent so that he could become a Christian. Later English writers seized on this as early evidence of missionary activity in Britain. The evidence was magnified and exploited by clerics of Glastonbury, who, lacking funds after the death of their patron King Henry II, and needing to make repairs to their cathedral following a fire in 1184, developed a marketing gimmick to increase pilgrim traffic and raise more revenue. In 1191 they announced the discovery of the graves of King Arthur, Guinevere, and Joseph of Arimathea. At the time of the alleged letter from the *Liber Pontificalis*, there was no king of Britain, because it was a Roman province. The “King Lucius” referred to in the marginal note was instead probably King Abgar VIII of Edessa (177–212), whose full name was Lucius Aelius Septimus Megas Abgarus VIII. He was likely the same King Abgar who was pictured centuries later in the Byzantine era holding the Shroud, and was said to have been healed by it. Also, the city of Edessa was sometimes referred to as a “citadel”; in Syriac the word used was *birtha*, and in Latin, *britium*. The tomb of St. Jude-Thaddeus in Edessa was thus said to be in *Britio Edessenorum*, the Citadel of Abgar, hence the confusion between Edessa and Britain.⁶

As with Mary and Lazarus, the lack of documentary evidence concerning Joseph of Arimathea in Britain does not mean that the tale is false, but it requires that the story be placed in the realm of legend. As in the case of other legends, the actual history has become commingled with lore, and it is now impossible to separate truth from fiction.

² *St. Joseph of Arimathea, Ancestor of Kings*, www.britannia.com/history/articles/josanc.html

³ For example, http://brian-haughton.com/glastonbury_legend/2/

⁴ E. Raymond Capt, *The Traditions of Glastonbury*, Artisan, 1987

⁵ *Joseph of Arimathea ~ Other Characters in Arthurian Legend; King Arthur & The Knights of the Round Table*, www.kingarthursknights.com/others/joseph.asp

⁶ See: Daniel Scavone, *Joseph of Arimathea, The Holy Grail, and the Edessa Icon*, www.shroud.it/scavone1.pdf

Nimrod and Semiramis

The story of Nimrod and Semiramis in *Unholy Grail* was a dramatization of tales that are part-history, part-legend. Many strange stories surrounded this ancient queen of Babylon – that she was a daughter of the fish goddess; that she was raised by doves; that she went about armed like an Amazon; that she created the famous Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world; and so on. Some historians therefore claim that Semiramis was a legendary queen of the ancient Assyrians or Babylonians and therefore not a real figure of history.

But there are too many stories and myths about this woman for her to be fictional. In addition to the Babylonian and Assyrian stories about her, the Armenians, people from the region west of the Caspian Sea, even have a tale involving her and Ara the Beautiful, a legendary Armenian king. According to this story, Semiramis had heard of the fame of the handsome Armenian king Ara and lusted after him. She asked Ara to marry her, but he refused. Being enraged, she then gathered the armies of Assyria and marched against Armenia. The battle supposedly took place in the Ararat valley (ironically near the place where Noah’s ark landed after the flood, and near the borders of modern Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Iran), during which King Ara was slain. Semiramis, who was reputed to be a sorceress, prayed to the gods to bring Ara back from the dead, and tried by her magic arts to revive him, but to no avail. When the Armenians advanced to avenge their leader, she disguised one of her lovers and spread the rumor that the gods had brought Ara back to life. As a result, the war ended. There are many versions to the ending of the legend, but it is usually accepted that King Ara, like Nimrod and Osiris, never returned from the dead.

There are some common threads about Semiramis running through virtually all of the stories about her:

1. She appeared in the early legends and tales of all of the ancient peoples – the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Egyptians, and the Armenians.
2. She was a prostitute and sexually adept – men had an irresistible and fatal attraction to her.
3. She was power-hungry and treacherous – the first *femme fatale* of history, and “la bell dame sans merci” (the beautiful woman without mercy).
4. She betrayed and killed her man/husband.
5. She was associated with the development of goddess worship and false religion.

Nimrod, in contrast, is a definite historical figure, mentioned in Genesis 10:8-10, I Chronicles 1:10, and Micah 5:6. He was a “mighty hunter” who established the first empire in the world, consisting of the cities of Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar (the land is also known as Sumer, Sammu-Amat, and Semiramis), as well as building Ninevah and other cities in what later became the land of Assyria. His identification as the builder of the Tower of Babel is not directly mentioned in the Bible

but was recorded by Jewish and Muslim historians. According to most accounts, Nimrod was brutal, powerful, cruel, and tyrannical, and he died a violent death.

Understanding the Biblical story of the curse on Nimrod's grandfather Ham, and on his uncle Canaan by great-grandfather Noah (Genesis 9:18-27), and Ham's subsequent departure in shame, helps to explain Nimrod's motivation in forming an army to conquer the lands and the people of his ancestors. Noah planted a vineyard, made wine, drank too much, and exposed himself in his tent. While Noah was in a drunken stupor, his son Ham and his grandson Canaan did an unspecified sexual act on the inebriated Noah. When the latter awoke from the wine, he became aware of what they had done, and cursed them. Each son became the head of a tribe who left the lands of their father to journey south and westward. Canaan settled in the land that later bore his name, and the sons of Ham settled in northwestern Africa and were probably the ancestors of the African peoples. Ham's sons included Mizraim, the founder of Egypt, Put the founder of Libya, and Cush, the founder of Ethiopia and Sudan. Cush was the father of Nimrod.

It was not simply a desire for power that led Nimrod to organize his army. The real reason may have been a craving for revenge – to humble the people who in his mind had humbled his clan and had supposedly forced them to leave their ancestral homeland. His clan may have brooded on this curse for years and nurtured their animosity until a leader finally arose who had the strength and the organizational abilities to stir up the people and focus their hatred on what at the time was an enormous and unprecedented undertaking – the armed invasion of a territory that was more than one thousand miles away. This hatred would also help to explain Nimrod's rejection of God, and everything to do with Noah, and how he may have been able to recruit a large number of soldiers from the other Hamitic families (the descendents of Put and Mizraim, and the other sons of Cush).

Nimrod probably sailed his army up the Red Sea from what is now Ethiopia, Sudan, or Egypt, and landed at the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba. Semiramis was probably captured somewhere on the march northward through the land of Canaan and taken by Nimrod for entertainment. It is interesting that in the Biblical account of Noah's drunkenness, that it is primarily Canaan, Ham's son, who was cursed by Noah. Canaan (the man) was apparently a sexual deviant, and the ancient Canaanite peoples, in keeping with their forebear, have long been known for various sexual perversions: fertility cults, phallic worship, religious prostitution, infant sacrifice (e.g., the Canaanite gods Chemosh and Molech), and militant homosexuality (e.g., Sodom and Gomorrah). Semiramis may therefore well have been a Canaanite prostitute and a in the mold of Delilah, the Canaanite/Philistine woman who betrayed Sampson centuries later.

The basis of the story as told in *Unholy Grail* derives from the 1853 book *The Two Babylons*, by Alexander Hislop. His research on Semiramis and Nimrod is accepted by many scholars, although some of his conclusions are questionable, such as his identification of the Virgin Mary with Semiramis, and his association of the Roman Catholic Church with idolatry and corrupted worship (although for much of the Catholic Church's history this was certainly true).

The original name for the planet Venus was “Ishtar” (meaning “star”; the name of the Assyrian goddess “Astarte” is simply a transliteration of the Babylonian “Ishtar”). This name was given to the planet by – who else – the ancient Babylonian astrologers. Astronomers today call the northern continent of Venus the “Ishtar Terra,” and the southern continent is “Aphrodite Terra.” Semiramis thus had the “female planet of love” named after herself – the goddess whose identity she had created. The planet Venus was known to the ancients as both the morning and evening star, perhaps explaining why Semiramis created two goddesses or personifications for herself – Innana for the day and Ishtar for the night. Semiramis is thus the source of the “star within a circle” symbol – the pentagram – which is the symbol of Satan.

Note the amazing similarities of the Armenian legend mentioned above to the Osiris/Isis/Astarte/Tammuz legends, and to the story of Nimrod and Semiramis. When the etymology of the names for various god and goddess are studied in different cultures, it is often confusing because sometimes the same name from the older culture is used for the god or goddess, and later a new series of names and characteristics are developed and employed. Thus, the Babylonian “Innana” and “Ishtar” appear in Assyria and are later replaced by “Astarte.” The Assyrian “Astarte” becomes “Ashtart” in Canaan, and “Isis” in Egypt. Understanding the common and single origin of the all of these gods and goddesses helps to make sense of what is otherwise a confusing muddle.

It is clear that all of these false deities had the same root in historical reality. Even though some of the details vary from story to story and people to people, and are often stated in mythological terms, Nimrod and Semiramis were real historical figures who conquered and ruled the world’s first empire with tyranny and treachery. They launched astrology as a corruption of the Star Gospel,⁷ and under the influence of Satan, this evil couple created the first false gods and goddesses, which later metastasized into all of the others.

⁷ For more information on the Star Gospel, see the article *The Star Gospel* on the same web site as this paper.