

THE WISH-GRANTING JEWEL: EXPLORING THE BUDDHIST ORIGINS OF THE HOLY GRAIL

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Abstract: It is argued that the specific portrayal of the Holy Grail as a miraculous gemstone, first found in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, was ultimately inspired by the concept of the *cintāmani* or "wish-granting jewel" in the literature of India. Traditions regarding this object were popular in Buddhist folklore and parallels with the Grail literature are drawn from Japan, Indonesia, Śrī Lankā, and especially Tibet. Lha Thothori Nyentsen, king of Tibet, is identified as a plausible model for Titurel, the Fisher King. Parallels drawn from the legendary biography and the extant allegorical writings of Padmasambhava, a Gnostic, alchemist and warrior-monk revered as the principal founder of Tibetan Buddhism, extend to the entire core narrative of Parzival's quest. It is suggested that these traditions reached medieval literati as a part of the astronomical, astrological, and alchemical corpus that was conveyed from India to Baghdad by Kanaka, translated into Arabic by Māshā'allāh, and rendered into Hebrew by Abraham ibn 'Ezra.

Keywords: Grail, Parzival, Tantra, Tibet, India, Spain, Baghdad, jewel, astrology, alchemy, relic.

INTRODUCTION

A modern quest for the origin and the meaning of the Holy Grail should begin as an exercise in the history of literature. The present study demonstrates that the literature of India and other regions affected by Hindūism and Buddhism has contributed much to Wolfram von Eschenbach's conception of the Grail as a gemstone descended from the sky. Due to space limitations, the reader's familiarity with Wolfram von Eschenbach's portrayal of the Grail, as laid down in his *Parzival* and *Titurel*, and continued in Albrecht's *Younger Titurel*, must here be assumed. As the discussion progresses, parallels with Indian literary motifs will be seen to extend beyond the Grail itself to other themes found in Wolfram's prose, and ultimately to the basic plot of Parzival's quest as a whole.

THE *CINTĀMANI* OR THE "WISH-GRANTING JEWEL"

Wolfram's portrayal of the Holy Grail as a stone is one of the most distinguishing aspects of his version of the Parzival legend, seemingly a world away from the more familiar image of the Grail as a Christian icon such as a platter or a chalice filled with the blood of Jesus of Nazareth. An important key to the origins of Wolfram's *lapis exilis* may be held by Indian folk beliefs concerning magical stones, which were carried further into eastern and southeastern Asia with the spread of Hindūism and Buddhism. In Sanskrit, the two most common generic terms for jewels, sacred or not, are *rātna* and *manī*.¹ The latter, or its variants *manika* and *maniva*,² spread from southern India to many regions, including the north and east of India, Tibet, Cambodia, and Java; in China, the meaning of the corresponding term *mo-ni* was confined to a

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¹ Louis Finot, *Les Lapidaires Indiens* (Paris 1896) XV; Sir Monier Monier-Williams, ed., *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages* (Oxford 1979) 774 s. v. "manī," 864 s. v. "rātna."

² *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (n. 1 above) 775 s. v. "Manika."

“pearl”³ and the word could be combined with *zhū*, “bead.”⁴ The magical gem *par excellence* is the so-called *cintāmani*, commonly rendered as “the jewel that grants all desires” or the “wish-granting jewel,” although the literal meaning of this composite word in Sanskrit is “thought-jewel.”⁵ A prominent element of Buddhist lore, this magical object was typically conceived as a fiery or a luminous pearl and traditions concerning it spread from India and Śrī Lankā to Tibet, Central Asia, China, Japan, and Korea. The Tibetan equivalent, for instance, is called *yid bzhin nor bu* or *Yeshey Norbu*,⁶ the Chinese *rúyìzhū* (如意珠), “wish-jewel,” or *rúyìbǎozhū* (如意寶珠), “precious wish-jewel,” terms taken into Korea as *yeouuiju* (여의주) and into Japan as *nyoi shu* or *nyoi hōju*, *nyoihō* or *nyoiju*.⁷ As the name indicates, the defining characteristic of this legendary talismanic wishing stone is its alleged propensity to fulfill all its owner’s desires, no matter how fantastic, and be they spiritual or material in nature. “It can create wealth, drive away evil, cure illness, purify water, and perform other marvels.”⁸ The fulfillment of wishes is just one of eight qualities attributed to the precious jewel:

its radiance illuminates the darkness of night;
 it cools when the days are hot, and warms when the days are cold;
 it causes rain to fall or a spring to appear when one is thirsty;
 it brings to fruition everything that its holder desires;
 it controls the *nagas*, preventing floods, hailstorms, and torrential rain;
 it emits various colored lights which heal emotional afflictions;
 its radiance cures all of the diseases of those who are in its range of healing light;
 it prevents untimely death, ensuring that death by natural causes occurs in the auspicious sequence of grandfather, father, and finally son.⁹

Positive concepts symbolized by the gem are “purity and truth,”¹⁰ enlightenment or Buddhism itself,¹¹ and—at least in China—“wealth and prosperity” and “a protection against fire.”¹² In terms of appearance, the *cintāmani* is conceived as “smooth, eight-faceted, as radiant as the sun, and fashioned of lapis lazuli,”¹³ which implies a blue

³ Robin Arthur Donkin, *Beyond Price; Pearls and Pearl-Fishing: Origins to the Age of Discoveries* (Philadelphia 1998) 153.

⁴ *Ibid.* 193.

⁵ *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (n. 1 above) 398 s. v. “Cintā,” “Cintāmani.” The *cintāmani* is also referred to as the *maniratna*, Tibetan *nor bu rin po che*, Robert Beer, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs* (London 2004) 162.

⁶ Patrul Rinpoche, *Kunzai Lama'i Shelung: The Words of my Perfect Teacher*, trans. Padmakara Translation Group (Walnut Creek 1998²) s. v. “Wish-fulfilling jewel”; Beer, *Encyclopedia* (n. 5 above) 212.

⁷ Karen Ann Smyers, “The Fox and the Jewel; A Study of Shared and Private Meanings in Japanese *Inari* Worship” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University 1993) 326.

⁸ Damien Keown, ed., *A Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford 2003) 62 s. v. “cintāmani (Skt.)”; compare Erik Pema Kunsang, trans., *The Lotus-Born; The Life Story of Padmasambhava; Composed by Yeshe Tsogyal; Revealed by Nyang Ral Nyima Öser* (Hong Kong 2004) 296 s. v. “Wish-fulfilling jewel (*yid bzhin nor bu*)”; Smyers, “Fox and the Jewel” (n. 7 above) 315, 326; Donkin, *Beyond Price* (n. 3 above) 12, 154, 179.

⁹ *Encyclopedia* (n. 5 above) 162, paragraphing added.

¹⁰ Donkin, *Beyond Price* (n. 3 above) 154.

¹¹ Smyers, *Fox and the Jewel* (n. 7 above) 327; Beer, *Encyclopedia* (n. 5 above) 208.

¹² Smyers, *Fox and the Jewel* (n. 7 above) 327.

¹³ Beer, *Encyclopedia* (n. 5 above) 162.

color. In art, the sacred jewel is often stylized and “may be perfectly spherical, or more onion shaped, tapering at the top. ... The jewel often depicted in Buddhist iconography is onion shaped, often with flames burning at the top.”¹⁴ A typical representation of the flaming *cintāmani* depicts it with “a spiral curl of flame at its base,” resting “upon a lotus stand,” and with a “radiance ... which shines forth in five rays of colored light as the Five Buddha wisdoms.”¹⁵

If at least one of the medieval romancers of the Grail could have had access to Buddhist traditions, directly or indirectly, stories surrounding the *cintāmani* could have fed into the conception of the Grail as an extraordinary stone with the ability to extend life, to restore health, and to provide sustenance to its owner. Indeed, the *Younger Titurel* quite explicitly presented the Grail as a wishing stone: “And the Grail gave them whatever one might wish ...”¹⁶ Some, though certainly not all, of the other functions ascribed to the jewel find ready counterparts in the mythology of the Grail.¹⁷ The jewel’s sun-like radiance befits the luminosity of the Grail, that, though not explicitly stated in Wolfram’s texts, must have been imagined, if only because Chrétien de Troyes had dwelled upon it in detail.¹⁸ And King Titurel’s life was magically lengthened through devotion to the Grail,¹⁹ in keeping with the capacity of the *cintāmani* to prolong life.

The additional theme of a legendary custodian is paramount in Indian traditions surrounding the wish-granting jewel. In Buddhist lore, the affinity of the jewel with a dragon—widely expressed iconographically—was so close that the former often formed part and parcel of the creature’s anatomy: “Pearls were variously located in the head, forehead, brain, mouth, and near the throat or under the chin of dragons. Exceptionally, in one Buddhist account, luminous pearls were said to be the product of dragons’ hair.”²⁰ In Sanskrit, the mythical keeper of the gem was widely known as the *Nāga*, a generic word for “snake,” *Vāsuki*, a particular mythical serpent, or *Makara*, a monstrous fish.²¹ As the epitome of treasured gems, the fabulous *mani*, too, “was believed to belong to the *nāga* (serpent) king of the sea ... The sacred cobra carried a

¹⁴ Smyers, *Fox and the Jewel* (n. 7 above) 315, 326.

¹⁵ Beer, *Encyclopedia* (n. 5 above) 212 and 211 pl. 98.

¹⁶ “Und was der gral in gebende, swaz man haben solde ...” Albrecht, *Younger Titurel*, ed. Werner Wolf, *Albrechts von Scharfenberg Jüngerer Titurel*, vol. 1 (Berlin 1955) 78, trans. with the assistance of Cyril Edwards and Annette Volfing. Even apart from this passage, Paul Hagen, *Der Gral* (Strassburg 1900) 79 n. 1, typified Wolfram’s version of the Grail as “ein Wünschelding.”

¹⁷ The extreme heaviness of the Grail is a trait that appears to lack analogues in the mythology of the *cintāmani*. This may be explained as indicative of a meteorite; cf. G. Ronald Murphy, *Gemstone of Paradise: The Holy Grail in Wolfram’s Parzival* (Oxford 2006) 9; Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism; Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. W. R. Trask (London 1989) 139; Hagen, *Der Gral* (n. 16 above) 62, 72, 79 n. 1. Possible associations between the *cintāmani* and “thunderstones” come to mind; Donkin, *Beyond Price* (n. 3 above) 12; *Encyclopedia* (n. 5 above) 63, 65.

¹⁸ Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval*, 6; *Second Continuation*. Note that the Grail is here a dish rather than a gemstone.

¹⁹ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* 9 (501).

²⁰ Donkin, *Beyond Price* (n. 3 above) 12.

²¹ *Ibid.* 10; compare Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (New York 1962) 63.

luminous stone in its hood ...”²² Like such precious stones, the *cintāmani* was commonly thought to be under the control of a mythical dragon.²³

Comparison with the presentation of the wish-granting jewel in Buddhist art suggests a solution to the superficial discrepancy between the alternative forms assigned in medieval literature to the Grail—a jewel versus a cup or a platter. The apparent contradiction is easily resolved in the common Catholic practice to store or embed precious beads or gems into ornate cups, dishes, crowns, or other receptacles, known as reliquaries when they contain relics. In Buddhism, similarly, supposed relics of the bodies of Buddha and other saints, often “beads, pearls, coral, semi-precious stones” and so on, are retained in containers comparable to reliquaries.²⁴ Across east Asia, Buddha relics in the form of “transmogrified somatic substances that could be as small as mustard-seeds and appear as jewel-like beads” eventually “came to be associated with magical wish-granting gems [*cintāmani*].”²⁵ Perhaps Wolfram’s version of the Grail, a gemstone resting on a cloth made of a green fabric called *achmardi*,²⁶ was at some time incorporated in a chalice or dish, as if to reinforce its nutritive agency. Certainly the Buddhist belief that different body parts of Buddha, even including samples of his blood, were transformed into beads may have influenced the Christian idea that Jesus’s blood survived in the form of relics preserved in protective reliquaries—of which the Grail was a supreme example.

These analogies notwithstanding, the assumption that the phenomenology of the Grail owed some input to Buddhist ideas cannot exist on the strength of this evidence alone. Was the *cintāmani* also believed to have come down from the sky? Was it ever described as the object of a quest, placed in a mysterious castle or temple, discovered by a capable voyager, and lifting the tribulations suffered in a wasteland with an incompetent ruler? In three folk-tales from Japan, Śrī Lankā and Java,²⁷ the wish-granting jewel is radiant and splendid, is the original property of a darkish blue sky being who vies with his bright twin brother, or is attached to the head or the hair of a palace-dwelling sea dragon. The motif of a serpentine Nāga clutching the wish-granting jewel or carrying it in its crown compares to Wolfram’s understanding of the Grail as a gem in the crown of Lucifer,²⁸ especially if Lucifer was conceived as a snake or a dragon. In the same three stories, the wish-granting jewel becomes the object of a quest by mortals requiring a certain mental fitness to earn it, bears an intimate relationship to a virgin or a goddess, and is dropped down into the depths of the watery under-

²² Donkin, *Beyond Price* (n. 3 above) 179; Smyers, *Fox and the Jewel* (n. 7 above) 326.

²³ Marinus Willem de Visser, *The Dragon in China and Japan* (Amsterdam 1913) 107.

²⁴ John S. Strong, *Relics of the Buddha* (Princeton 2004) 12–13.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 10.

²⁶ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* 5 (235), 16 (810).

²⁷ Tendai (bishop) Kōen of Enryakuji, *Fusō Ryakki (Brief History of Fusang): Shōmu Tennō*, in de Visser, *The Dragon* (n. 23 above) 189; *Sutta Pitaka: Khuddaka Nikāya: Jātaka: Bhūridatta Jātaka*, #543. 1–8 (157–219); *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha’s Former Births; Translated from the Pāli by Various Hands; Vol. VI*, trans. Edward Byles Cowell and William Henry Denham Rouse (Cambridge 1907) 80–113; *Manik Maya*, ed. Jan Jacob de Hollander, *Manik Mājā: Een Javaansch Gedicht* (Batavia 1852); *The History of Java*, vol. 2, trans. Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles (1817; Oxford 1978) 206–215.

²⁸ *Parzival* 9 (453–455, 471), 16 (798); Albrecht, *Younger Titurel*, 6292; Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Der Wartburgkrieg* 143, trans. Karl Simrock, *Der Wartburgkrieg* (Stuttgart 1858) 176–177.

world, in one instance from the highest heaven. The analogy with respectively the questing knights of the Grail, the female bearer of the Grail,²⁹ and its original fall from the sky³⁰ is striking. In the present study, however, the emphasis will be on Tibetan materials concerning the *cintāmani*, which present an even closer similarity to Grail lore.

KING LHA THOTHORI NYENTSEN AND THE “AWESOME SECRET”

In Tibetan literature, the mythology of the *cintāmani* appears to bear a close affinity to the arrival of Buddhism, which occurred in waves. A widespread legend, recorded in several different versions, told that Buddhism made its first, largely fruitless presence in Tibet when some of its characteristic texts and symbols mysteriously descended from the sky in the form of an “Awesome Secret.” This reputedly transpired in the year 433 CE, during the reign of King Lha Thothori Nyentsen:

... when Lha Thotori Nyentsen, the twenty-eighth hereditary king, who was an emanation of the bodhisattva Samantabhadra, was residing in the Yumbu Lagang Palace, a casket fell down upon the palace roof. It was opened, and revealed the *Sūtra of the Rites of Renunciation and Fulfilment* (*spang-skong phyag-brgya-pa'i mdo*, T 267), a mould engraved with the *Dhāranī of the Wish-fulfilling Gem* (*Cintāmanidhāranī*), the *Sūtra of the Cornucopia of Avalokīteśvara's Attributes* (*Āryakarandavyūhasūtra*, T 116), the Six-Syllable Mantra, and a golden stūpa.³¹

In this version of the legend, the celestial treasure-trove contained five items. These were two Buddhist texts, respectively the one entitled *Āryakārandavyūha Sūtra* in Sanskrit and *mdo sde za ma tog bkod pa* in Tibetan, and the one called *Saksipūranasūdrakanamā Sūtra* in Sanskrit and *dpang skong phyag brgya pa'i mdo* in Tibetan,³² the well-known mantra *om mani padme hūm*,³³ a “golden stūpa,” and “a mould” engraved with the *dhāranī* or mantra of the wish-granting jewel. The latter cannot be equated physically with the jewel itself, yet a variant of the story does precisely that. According to this, four objects landed from the sky onto the golden altar of the palace.³⁴ Of these four items, the miniature stūpa and the book entitled *Szamadok* correspond to the “golden stūpa” and the *Āryakarandavyūhasūtra* of the first account, while the latter’s “Six-Syllable Mantra” and the “mould” engraved with a text called the *Cintāmanidhāranī* have been combined into a single treasure—a casket that contained the *cintāmani* not as a text, but in the form of a gemstone, with the familiar

²⁹ Parzival 5 (235–236), 16 (810).

³⁰ Parzival 9 (453–455, 471), 16 (798); Albrecht, *Younger Titurel* 6292.

³¹ Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism; Its Fundamentals and History*, vol. 1: *The Translations*, trans. Gyurme Dorje (Boston 1991) 508. The Tibetan spelling of the king’s name is *lHa tho-tho ri gnan-btsan*; Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism; Its Fundamentals and History*, vol. 2: *Reference Material* (Boston 1991) 41 n. 535; Erik Haarh, *The Yar-Lun Dynasty; A Study with Particular Regard to the Contribution by Myths and Legends to the History of Ancient Tibet and the Origin and Nature of its Kings* (Copenhagen 1969) 85. According to the history of Chungtaidschi Ssanang Ssetsen, *Geschichte der Ost-Mongolen*, this king was born in 348 and discovered the secret in 367, just after he had ascended to the throne. On the probable historicity of this king, see Haarh, *The Yar-Lun Dynasty* 85.

³² Rinpoche, *Kunzai Lama'i Shelung* (n. 6 above) 398 nn. 291 and 292.

³³ Dorje and Kapstein, *Nyingma School* (n. 31 above) 41 n. 537.

³⁴ Ssanang Ssetsen, *Geschichte der Ost-Mongolen* (n. 31 above) 24–27.

mantra inscribed either on the box or on the jewel itself.³⁵ By default, the *Saksipūra-nasūdrakanamā Sūtra* of the first variant must somehow correspond to the *mudra* of two praying hands of the second. In a third enumeration, the *cintāmani* is more closely related to the miniature *stūpa*, which is distinguished from the object with the size of an ell.^{36, 37}

All variants of the story agree that Thothori was initially at a loss with respect to the significance of these heavenly gifts: “The king did not know what they were, but understood them to be auspicious, and so called them the ‘Awesome Secret’ (*gnyan-po gsang-ba*).”³⁸ The accounts diverge again in their descriptions of the way clarification was obtained. One version relates that Thothori neglected the treasures at first, bringing a curse over the land.³⁹ Peace and prosperity were only restored when, forty years afterwards, five foreign visitors alerted the sovereign to his dereliction and the mysterious objects were retrieved from the treasury and accorded proper veneration.⁴⁰ A tradition according to which Thothori received the treasures at the age of eighty years omits the episode of neglect and misfortune and replaces it with a prophecy, uttered on the same occasion, of revelation after five generations.⁴¹ Thothori’s reverent attitude produced desirable results, as the pious monarch experienced a miraculous extension of his allotted life span by means of rejuvenation.⁴²

This tale of an early king on the boundary between legend and history who discovered a sky-fallen receptacle with treasures and received the gift of longevity for worshipping it is in accord with the portrait of Titurel, as painted by Wolfram and his successor Albrecht. If the treatise or the image called the *Cintāmani* has anything to do with the talismanic gem of that name, a parallel can be drawn between the celestial provenance and subsequent veneration of this object and Titurel’s discovery of the Grail shortly after angels abandoned it, prompting him to erect the first version of the

³⁵ Cf. Emil Schlagintweit, *Buddhism in Tibet Illustrated by Literary Documents and Objects of Religious Worship with an Account of the Buddhist Systems Preceding it in India* (London 1863) 64; Jig-me Gyal-wai Nyu-gu (1765–1843), in Rinpoche, *Kunzai Lama’i Shelung* (n. 6 above) 341–342, with 398 n. 289.

³⁶ bLo-bzan Chhos-kyi rGyal-mts’an (1570–1662), *Bodhi Mör-ün Jerge-yin Ulagan Kötelbüri Gamug-yi Ayiladugci-dur Odqui Amur Mör Kemegdekü Orusiba*, paraphrased in Ssanang Ssetsen, *Geschichte* (n. 31 above) 320 n. 11.

³⁷ In a 15th-c. narration, the only two objects listed are treatises: “In the reign of Lha-tho-tho-ri-gñan-btsan the *Cintāmani-dhāranī* (Tsinta-ma-ni’i gzuns) and the sPan-bkon phyag-rgya-ma ... fell from Heaven, and were worshipped.” *The Blue Annals: Part One*, trans. George Nikolaevich Roerich (Calcutta 1949) 38.

³⁸ Rinpoche, *Nyingma School* (n. 31 above) 508.

³⁹ Ssanang Ssetsen, *Geschichte der Ost-Mongolen* (n. 31 above) 26–27.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 26–27; compare Schlagintweit, *Buddhism in Tibet* (n. 35 above) 64.

⁴¹ bLo-bzan Chhos-kyi rGyal-mts’an, *Bodhi Mör-ün Jerge-yin Ulagan Kötelbüri Gamug-yi Ayiladugci-dur Odqui Amur Mör Kemegdekü Orusiba*, paraphrased in Ssanang Ssetsen, *Geschichte der Ost-Mongolen* (n. 31 above) 320 n. 11; compare Rinpoche, *Nyingma School* (n. 31 above) 509.

⁴² bLo-bzan Chhos-kyi rGyal-mts’an, *Bodhi Mör-ün Jerge-yin Ulagan Kötelbüri Gamug-yi Ayiladugci-dur Odqui Amur Mör Kemegdekü Orusiba*, paraphrased in Ssanang Ssetsen, *Geschichte der Ost-Mongolen* (n. 31 above) 320 n. 11. Compare: “Because of this, the life-span of the king and that of the kingdom increased.” *Blue Annals*, trans. Roerich (n. 37 above) 38. “By the blessing that came from worshipping and venerating them the king, a man of sixty-one years, was rejuvenated and became a sixteen-year-old youth once more. He lived on sixty more years, and so reached the age of one hundred and twenty.” Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School* (n. 31 above) 509; compare Rinpoche, *Kunzai Lama’i Shelung* (n. 6 above) 398 n. 289; Rolf Alfred Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, trans. John E. Stapleton Driver (Stanford 1972) 51.

Grail temple as a sanctuary for it.⁴³ Just as the *cintāmani* was only one of a set of four or five religious treasures, so the authors of the Grail narratives invariably portrayed the Grail as the chief item among a small collection of religious articles, held in the highest regard. Tibetan descriptions of this cache differ among themselves regarding the exact identity of the icons that had descended from the sky, in the same way that European sources offer different catalogues of the items included in the Grail procession, such as a spear or lance, a silver trencher, and a decapitated head. The six syllables engraved on the *cintāmani* or its receptacle may correspond to the magical form of writing associated with the Grail, though for Wolfram the inscription did not function as a mantra, but served to identify those that were called to the Grail.⁴⁴ The supernatural character of Thothori's finds is enhanced by a tradition that the descent was accompanied "mit einem, der Sonne ähnlichen, Glanze,"⁴⁵ a luster that would well have suited Titurel's Grail. The visitation of the land by a series of disasters lifted only when the *cintāmani* and the other treasures were paid due devotion is strongly resonant with the theme of Arthur's wasteland⁴⁶ and the return of health and fertility with Parzival's recognition of the Grail, towards the end of Titurel's extended lifetime. Essentially the same motif as Thothori's rejuvenation, though taken to biological extremes, is perceived in the old age attained by Titurel due to his ascetic life-style in the immediate vicinity of the Grail.⁴⁷ Finally, the intriguing possibility of direct historical dependence is raised by the close phonological similarity between the name of this Tibetan ruler, "Thothori," and "Titurel." The prefixing syllable in the Tibetan name, *Lha*, is not a part of the proper name, but an honorific title indicating divinity, that can be rendered as "divine."⁴⁸ In it, a Jewish—or perhaps a Christian—ear would undoubtedly have detected a Tibetan equivalent of the Hebrew *-'ēl*, "god," which is commonly used in theophorous proper names of the type Israel, Gabriel, and Daniel. If, in a source of the Grail text, *Lha* could have appeared after Thothori's name, an original *Thothori Lha* could have inspired a Hebraizing adaptation *Titurel*.⁴⁹

⁴³ *Der Wartburgkrieg* 145, trans. Simrock (n. 28 above) 178–179; Albrecht, *Younger Titurel* 312, 327, 329, 370, with Richard Barber and Cyril Edwards, "The Grail Temple in *Der Jüngere Titurel*," *Arthurian Literature* 20 (2003) 85–102.

⁴⁴ *Parzival* 9 (470–471), 16 (796); Albrecht, *Younger Titurel*, 6321.

⁴⁵ bLo-bzan Chhos-kyi rGyal-mts'an, *Bodhi Mör-ün Jerge-yin Ulagan Kötēlbüri Gamug-yi Ayiladugci-dur Odqui Amur Mör Kemegdekü Orusiba*, paraphrased in Ssanang Ssetsen, *Geschichte der Ost-Mongolen* (n. 31 above) 320 n. 11.

⁴⁶ Compare Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* 3 (118); *Third Continuation of Chrétien de Troyes' Perceval*, trans. Nigel Bryant, *Perceval: The Story of the Grail; Chretien de Troyes*, trans. Nigel Bryant (Cambridge 1982) 297.

⁴⁷ *Parzival* 9 (501–502), 5 (240–241), 16 (813). "When the building of the Temple was completed he was four hundred years old, but such was the power of the Holy Grail that he looked—says the tradition—only forty"; Isabel Cooper-Oakley, *Traces of a Hidden Tradition in Masonry and Medieval Mysticism* (London 1900) 175.

⁴⁸ Thus, in Mongolian it was rendered as *Tenggeri*, the word for "god": *Tenggeri-Totori-sNjan-schal*, Ssanang Ssetsen, *Geschichte der Ost-Mongolen* (n. 31 above) 319 n. 11.

⁴⁹ Albrecht's *Younger Titurel* 91, ed. Wolf (n. 16 above) 25, is unique in assigning Titurel an otherwise unknown father Titurione. Could this trace to a variant of the name "Titurel," based on Thothori's full title *Thothori Nyentsen*? A speaker of a Semitic language, such as Hebrew or Arabic, would likely have perceived a pronunciation such as *Totoriyassen*, with assimilated consonant clusters; a variant manuscript of the *Younger Titurel* offers "Tyturiose." Although Albrecht associated this pedigree with *Kapadoze* or "Cappadocia," the name he attributed to the first *stam*, "Senabor," bears some resemblance to *Tsenpo*, Tibetan *btsan-po*, the dynastic title of the first nine legendary kings of Tibet.

THE BIOGRAPHY OF PADMASAMBHAVA

The Historical Padmasambhava

The prolonged life of king Lha Thothori leads on to a second group of Tibetan traditions associated with the *cintāmani*. Just as the early life of Titurel allegedly preceded Parzival's quest for the Grail by a considerable span of time, so a few centuries separated the first arrival of the sacred *cintāmani* on earth from the events surrounding a much more influential introduction of Buddhism into Tibet. The illustrious figure known in Sanskrit as Padmasambhava, "lotus-born," and in Tibetan as Padma 'byung-gnas or Pe-ma lung-ne (ca. 730–ca. 805)—though the Tibetans more commonly refer to him as Guru Rinpoche, "precious master"—was a historical "saint," somewhat like the missionaries of early Christendom, who played a pivotal role in a more thorough establishment of Buddhism in Tibet. As it happens, the *cintāmani* forms an integral part of the cycle of legends associated with Padmasambhava's birth and discovery.

For a proper appreciation of the source material it is necessary to understand something of the historical background. The Tibetan annals state that Khri-srong lde'u-btsan, the thirty-eighth king of the land, "at the age of seventeen, consulting his ancestors' archives, ... became aware that the Dharma had first come to Tibet during the reign of Lha-Thothori Nyentsen and had been firmly established by Songtsen Gampo."⁵⁰ In 747, this king proceeded to dispatch Padmasambhava from his homeland Oddiyāna as he was "at present, the most powerful in the world."⁵¹ He did so both in a bid to revive the form of Buddhism that had arrived in Tibet earlier and in order to "subdue the savage spirits and demons of Tibet" that had caused destruction of Potala palace, a flood, a famine, and "great calamities"—as the *Blue Annals* (1476–1478) record: "But the great gods and demons of Tibet became wrathful. Lightning struck the palace on the dMar-po-ri, and the royal palace of 'Phan-than was carried away by water ... Harvest was damaged, and a great epidemic took place."⁵² It was the summoning of Padmasambhava that led to the definitive establishment in Tibet of a particular branch of Buddhism known as Vajrayāna, Tantrayāna, Tantrism, or Tantra Buddhism, which is a modified version of Mahāyāna, the northern one of the two main divisions of Buddhism, with a much stronger emphasis on spiritual growth through meditation than the southern brand. The lineage perpetuating Padmasambhava's intellectual teachings is known as Nyingmapa, the Nyingma school, and is the oldest school of Tibetan Buddhism as well as the earliest one of the three sects collectively known as the Red Hats.

A fifteenth-century source indicates that Padmasambhava "stayed in Tibet fifty-four years and, during this time, converted all the gods (*lha*) and noxious demons (*klu*) to Buddhism, turned many stretches of the wild country and its mountainous terrains into habitable areas, and concealed innumerable treasures of a spiritual and material

⁵⁰ Rinpoche, *Kunzai Lama'i Shelung* (n. 6 above) 342.

⁵¹ Rinpoche, *Nyingma School* (n. 31 above) 513.

⁵² 'Gos lo-tsa-ba gZhon-nu-dpal, ed., *Deb-ther snon-po* 1 (21a–b); *Blue Annals*, trans. Roerich (n. 37 above) 43. In Tibetan tradition, these disasters appear to be unrelated to the perils of Thothori's time.

nature.”⁵³ “Padmasambhava, upon seeing that his followers were not yet ready to receive all of the many teachings he had to reveal, hid hundreds of treasures—scriptures, images, and ritual implements—throughout Tibet, including instructions for their revelation for the benefit of future generations. The Nyingma school holds that hundreds of masters have revealed the treasures over the centuries to their disciples, thereby maintaining a direct link to Padmasambhava himself.”⁵⁴ Such “treasures,” deposited by Padmasambhava and others in secret places in lakes, caves, fields and forests, are called *gter-ma*’s or “hidden texts,” and the “treasure revealers” of subsequent generations, who would find them, interpret them according to their own insights or spiritual preferences, and disseminate them, are styled *tertöns*.⁵⁵

Padmasambhava’s chief disciple was his second wife *mKhar-chen bza’ Ye-shes mtsho-rgyal*, or Yeshe Tsogyal (757–817), the daughter of king Khri-srong lde’u-btsan, who is on record as a *dākinī*, a sensual dancer conceived as a goddess of a lower rank and acting as a sort of muse to the ascetic. Following Padmasambhava’s death, this lady composed his biography, which is now called *Padma bKa’i Thang* or “the life and liberation of Padmasambhava.” In conformity with Tibetan custom, different copies of this text, too, were hidden in various locations to be discovered at future times. “Many of these biographies were concealed as terma treasures to protect them against the changes of time. Centuries later they would be revealed by a *tertön*, a reincarnation of an accomplished student of Padmasambhava who had made the aspiration to benefit people in future generations.”⁵⁶ The respective manuscripts of the original text thus found, each with their own embellishments, are collectively known as *Padma bKa’-thang* literature. I have examined three of these versions, translated into English.⁵⁷

The earliest version, known as the *Sanglingma* or the *Padma bKa’-thang zangs gling ma*, was allegedly concealed by Yeshe Tsogyal under the statue of the Tantric deity Hayagrīva in the temple’s shrine and was revealed by Nyang Ral Nyima ’od-ser (1124–1192); an English translation was published in 2004 by Erik Pema Kunsang.⁵⁸ It is praised as “the most authoritative scripture regarding how the teachings of Sutra and Mantra spread to the Snowy Land of Tibet.”⁵⁹ A second version, on which most of the following analysis is based, is the *Sheldrakma* or the *Padma bKa’-thang Shel-brag-ma*, that claimed to be based on a rediscovery by a *tertön* called Urgyan Lingpa in 1326.⁶⁰ Seemingly “about three centuries old,” it was acquired by the French jurist

⁵³ sTag-tshang rdzong-pa dPal-sbyor bzang-po, *rGya-bod yig-tshang* (1434) 186–187, in Herbert Guenther, *The Teachings of Padmasambhava* (Leiden 1996) 1 n. 1.

⁵⁴ Jacob Nicholas Kinnard, *The Emergence of Buddhism* (Westport 2006) 90; cf. Rinpoche, *Kunzai Lama’i Shelung* (n. 6 above) xxxii; Keith Dowman, trans., *The Legend of the Great Stupa and The Life Story of the Lotus Born Guru* (Berkeley 1973) 17.

⁵⁵ Keown, *Dictionary of Buddhism* (n. 8 above) 299 s. v. “terma (Tib., gter-ma).”

⁵⁶ Pema Kunsang, *Lotus-Born* (n. 8 above) 3.

⁵⁷ Anne-Marie Blondeau, “Analysis of the Biographies of Padmasambhava According to Tibetan Tradition: Classification of Sources,” *Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson*, ed. Michael Aris, Aung San Suu Kyi (Warminster 1980) 45–52, offers a helpful overview of the respective versions of the biography of Padmasambhava uncovered to date. See also the summary in Rinpoche, *Nyingma School* (n. 31 above) 468–469.

⁵⁸ Pema Kunsang, *Lotus-Born* (n. 8 above) 3. ’Od-ser is also transcribed as *Öser*. The name *Sanglingma*, “Copper Temple,” “refers to a temple built at Samye by one of King Trisong Deutsen’s queens.”

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 1.

⁶⁰ The name of Urgyan Lingpa is also spelled *O-rgyan gling-pa*.

and Sinologist Gustave-Charles Toussaint (1869–1938) at the Monastery of Lithang in 1911 and published in a French translation, *Le Dict de Padma*, in 1933. In 1978 Kenneth Douglas and Gwendolyn Bays presented an English translation of this text, corrected with the original Tibetan manuscripts by Tarthang Tulku, who clarified: “In 1326 Urgyan Lingpa, preordained revealer of the terma, took from the heart of the fierce deity guarding the door of the Crystal Rock Cave of Yarlung, the *Padma bKa'i Thang*—which had remained concealed within the image for over five centuries. This terma (treasure) was one of the many biographies of Padmasambhava which were psychically sealed and placed in safe-keeping by Padmasambhava and his disciples in the eighth century for the sake of future generations.”⁶¹ A third version perused here, “written down by Yeshey Tsogyal and then concealed in a Secret Lode” and identified in Tibetan as *zab. pa. skor. bdon. las. o. rgyen. rnam. thar. dpag. bsan. lyong. sing. bshugs. so*, was discovered by “The Great Tertön Orgyen Chokgyur Lingpa” (1829–1870), who “withdrew this Terma from the Karmai Damchen Rock.”⁶² An English translation of this version was presented by Keith Dowman in 1973.

The Legend of Indrabhūti and Padmasambhava

The portion of Padmasambhava’s biographies concerned with the *cintāmani* takes one back to the time before his mission to Tibet and concentrates on a legendary king of a legendary land to the west of central India called Oddiyāna.⁶³ Although no local evidence has been found to document the historicity of a country by this name, its existence has been verified in historical records from China, as the Chinese traveler, Xuán Zàng (ca. 602–664), knew the region as *Udyāna*, which he translated as “garden, orchard.”⁶⁴ Despite a southern instead of a western location, compelling evidence points to modern Kāñcī or Kanchipuram, in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, as its historical location.⁶⁵ Kāñcī was “one of the seven greatest metropolitan centers of Indian culture,” a great focus of learning that had been “a cradle of Buddhism” since the third century BCE, due to its close connections with Śrī Lankā.⁶⁶ As it was from this city that

⁶¹ Kenneth Douglas and Gwendolyn Bays, trans., *The Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava*; Padma bKani Thang; *Part I: India* (Emeryville 1978) xxviii, xxiii. Is this version identical to the one entitled *Padma bka'i thang yig*, “the injunctions of Padma,” trans. Laden La & Bsod nams seng ge, in Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz, trans., *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation; The Method of Reaching Nirvana through Knowing the Mind* (Oxford 2000) 105–108, who did not identify the *tertön*?

⁶² Dowman, *Legend* (n. 54 above) 118, 107.

⁶³ Yeshe Tsogyal, *Padma bKa'i Thang* 11–12 (*Sheldrakma*), *The Life and Liberation*, trans. Douglas and Bays (n. 61 above) 73, 78.

⁶⁴ *Oddiyāna* is the Middle Indic form of *Udyāna*; Keown, *Dictionary of Buddhism* (n. 8 above) 203 s. v. “Oddiyāna.” Compare Christopher I. Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia: A History of the Struggle for Great Power among Tibetans, Turks, Arabs, and Chinese During the Early Middle Ages* (Princeton 1987) 89, 91.

⁶⁵ Lokesh Chandra, “Oddiyāna: A New Interpretation,” *Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson*, ed. Michael Aris, Aung San Suu Kyi (Warminster 1980) 73–78. In the Tibetan language, the name is modified to *Urgyān* or *Orgyen*, the second half of the compound being a calque: “the U/O-ornament,” *ibid.* 75. Chandra’s analysis supersedes the second-best option, the Swāt Valley, at the northwestern frontier of Pakistan; cf. Rinpoche, *Kunzai Lama'i Shelung* (n. 6 above) 468, which Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 4 n. 6, deemed “groundless.”

⁶⁶ Chandra, “Oddiyāna” (n. 65 above) 73, 76; Keown, *Dictionary of Buddhism* (n. 8 above) 136 s. v. “Kāñcī.”

the Buddhist monk, Vajrabodhi (671–732), ventured to introduce Vajrayāna Buddhism into China,⁶⁷ one or two generations before Padmasambhava’s lifetime, it would make sense if Padmasambhava, responsible for the transmission of Vajrayāna beliefs into Tibet, had originated from the same cultural hub.

It was in one of the five larger districts of this sizeable nation that Yeshe Tsogyal situated the palace of an equally elusive king Indrabhūti, which she described in glorious terms.⁶⁸ But in stark contrast to the splendor of his palace, the king’s condition was in dire straits. The three predicaments identified by the author are his blindness, his lack of an heir, and a famine scourging his land.⁶⁹ As the king lamented his unhappy fate and the treasury had been emptied in a generous gesture to the populace, a council was convened in a desperate hope for a solution.⁷⁰ A vain attempt to allow a group of seven sorcerers to work their magic led to a disastrous series of natural calamities:

Now another sacerdotal personage, the seer Asenya,
a lofty magician who discerned the truth,
came before the king with six acolytes and said: “Give us alms!” ...
And they prepared a site for the sacrificial fire
which redeems from discouragement and despair
and banishes the noxious spirits.
But all the demons simultaneously unleashed perturbations.
Thunder flashed and hail lashed, and there resounded sonorous thunders and black winds.
Earthquakes, torrents of stones, wars, and gnawing sicknesses
aroused panic and overwhelmed Uddiyāna’s regions.⁷¹

At long last, the virtuous king resorted to an extreme measure—a quest for the *cintāmani*, which was apparently widely known to be situated somewhere in the sea:

Then the king decided that these happenings
were not in keeping with the Dharma.
With a sea journey to win the Wish-Fulfilling Gem,
he could effectuate an almsgiving to satisfy the heart.
So he resolved to set out by sea and obtain the Gem.⁷²

A passage in the *Sanglingma*, missing in the *Sheldrakma*, clarifies the king’s knowledge of the whereabouts of the gem:

On an island in the great ocean lives the naga king’s daughter known as Lovely Maiden, in whose possession there is a precious jewel that knows no limits for granting all needs and

⁶⁷ Chandra, “Oddiyāna” (n. 65 above) 77. “The South Indian monks were great wanderers who roamed far and wide disseminating Buddhism”; *ibid.* 78.

⁶⁸ Yeshe Tsogyal, *Padma bKa’i Thang*, 12 (*Sheldrakma*), *Life and Liberation*, trans. Douglas and Bays (n. 61 above) 78, 80–81. In the *Sanglingma* 1, *Lotus-Born*, trans. Pema Kunsang (n. 8 above) 31, the city was called “Glowing Jewels.” Pema Kunsang and Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book* (n. 61 above) 105–108, consistently render the name of the king as “Indrabodhi.”

⁶⁹ *Padma bKa’i Thang* 13 (*Sheldrakma*), *Life and Liberation* (n. 61 above) 82. The *Sanglingma* 1, *Lotus-Born*, trans. Pema Kunsang (n. 8 above) 31, limits the “evils” to the lack of an heir.

⁷⁰ *Padma bKa’i Thang* 13 (*Sheldrakma*), *Life and Liberation* (n. 61 above) 83–84.

⁷¹ *Padma bKa’i Thang* 15 (*Sheldrakma*), *Life and Liberation* (n. 61 above) 88–89.

⁷² *Padma bKa’i Thang* 16 (*Sheldrakma*), *Life and Liberation* (n. 61 above) 90.

wants. She will give it if asked by a bodhisattva practicing generosity for the sake of Dharma. I must therefore request it and continue to give alms to the people.⁷³

The king then hired a captain “who had fetched precious stones from the great ocean often in the past”⁷⁴ and recruited a crew, with a due warning that few people would return from such an arduous journey. The ensuing account of the voyage suggests that it was a straightforward task to reach the destination, the “Land of Gems.”⁷⁵ In another passage in the *Sanglingma*, also missing in the *Sheldrakma*, the captain explains to the king in considerable depth how to proceed from there:

The captain then told the king, “You should proceed while I stay here. The castle is surrounded by seven rings of lakes. When crossing them, you will meet many vicious animals, such as poisonous snakes, so contemplate bodhichitta while walking. In the center of the lakes is a wall made of iron and many different precious substances, which has four gates. A naga girl is the gatekeeper. Beseech her and she will open the gate. On the door of the palace inside, there is a vajra knocker. Use it to knock. One hundred deva maidens will then appear and present you with precious stones. Do not converse with them; knock again on the door. Finally the naga girl, a beautiful bluish girl, decorated with gem-studded ornaments and called Lovely Maiden, will arrive. Ask her to lend her ears to your story, and then request the jewel from her. She will present you with the precious jewel that is blue and shines with five-colored rays of light. Accept it immediately and without letting it slip away, wrap it respectfully in your sleeve and return here. That is the precious gem that will fulfill all your wishes.” Thus the captain instructed the king and sent him on his way.⁷⁶

In the typical manner of fairy-tales, the subsequent acquisition of the wish-granting jewel follows the exact outline advised by the captain. The king “knocked on the door of the palace. After a short while the naga girl Lovely Maiden appeared. ‘Few people have ever reached my palace. You must be a man of great merit. What do you want?’ she said. After the king had told his whole story in detail, he said, ‘I have come to get the precious jewel.’ The girl rejoiced and, pulling out the precious gem from the crown on her head, she gave it to the king who took it and departed. By the power of the jewel he did not need to walk back. Instantly reaching where the captain was, he said, ‘You have been most kind, captain!’”⁷⁷

An immediate effect of the possession of the *cintāmani* was that it instantly relieved the king from his blindness: “With the Gem hidden in his garments, the king uttered a prayer and his blind left eye opened ...”⁷⁸ The crew were rewarded with the other riches the island had to offer. On the way back to Oddiyāna, the king for the first time encountered the juvenile Padmasambhava, born from a lotus flower and here called Guru Tsokyi Dorje, and promptly desired to adopt him to provide for an heir to

⁷³ *Padma bKa'i Thang 1 (Sanglingma), Lotus-Born* (n. 8 above) 31.

⁷⁴ *Padma bKa'i Thang 1 (Sanglingma), Lotus-Born* (n. 8 above) 32.

⁷⁵ *Padma bKa'i Thang 16 (Sheldrakma), Life and Liberation* (n. 61 above) 92.

⁷⁶ *Padma bKa'i Thang 1 (Sanglingma), Lotus-Born* (n. 8 above) 32–33.

⁷⁷ *Padma bKa'i Thang 1 (Sanglingma), Lotus-Born* (n. 8 above) 33. In the *Sheldrakma*, this episode is much more compact: “Amidst the many castles of precious stones / he came to the castle of the seven precious substances. / He knocked against the door with the diamond knocker. / The door opened by itself, and the Gem was brought / by the goddess of azure, who gave him the blue gem. / And the nāgas also gave him many precious stones.” *Padma bKa'i Thang 16 (Sheldrakma), Life and Liberation* (n. 61 above) 92.

⁷⁸ *Padma bKa'i Thang 16 (Sheldrakma), Life and Liberation* (n. 61 above) 92–93.

the throne. The latter, however, felt inconvenienced by the offer and, in a curious incident, compared the position to that of a fish on a hook:

On the way the travelers reached a lake shore
 where fish had been caught by a hook and drawn to the bank
 were being thrown into a net by an old, white-headed man.
 The fish were jumping with fear and trembling,
 and the Guru Tsokyi Dorje reflected:
 “When I hold the king’s kingdom,
 I will suffer like a fish caught on a hook.”
 With such a symbol, bordering upon the Dharma, he understood the causal facts.⁷⁹

Back in Oddiyāna, the king wasted no time applying the *cintāmani* to his outstanding problems, beginning with the installation of his successor:

Now King Indrabhūti,
 having washed well in salty water
 the precious Gem, dispenser of whatever might be needed,
 and having polished it with Benares cotton,
 placed it on a cushion of fine silk:
 “If this rare Gem which I have acquired
 is really the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel,
 may the chair of my son become
 the high throne with the seven jewels of a king,
 also adorned with the parasol of the seven jewels!”
 And the seated child was proclaimed king
 and received the name of Padma Gyalpo.⁸⁰

With a measure of generosity worthy of the *cintāmani*, the king finally proceeded to restore the wealth of the country and meet all the demands of his citizens, as told in considerable detail; “Whoever was under the scepter of the king ceased to suffer hunger or misery.”⁸¹ Eventually, the *cintāmani* disappeared from the scene, as the king furtively passed it on to the prince:

Then King Indrabhūti said:
 ‘Without the ministers seeing it, take away the Gem!
 It suppresses poverty, hunger and thirst, cold and pain.
 It raises up all that one could want out of necessity or desire.
 Let it lend its help to the prince!’
 The prince then said to his father:
 “It is the Wish-Fulfilling Gem of my appearance. . . .”⁸²

Parallels with the Grail Literature

As in the *Bhūridatta Jātaka* and the *Manik Maya*, these excerpts from the biography of Padmasambhava are concerned with a journey undertaken to acquire the wish-granting

⁷⁹ *Padma bKa'i Thang* 17 (*Sheldrakma*), *Life and Liberation* (n. 61 above) 96.

⁸⁰ *Padma bKa'i Thang*, 18 (*Sheldrakma*), *Life and Liberation* (n. 61 above) 98. In the *Sanglingma* 1, the name is *Padma Vajra; Lotus-Born* (n. 8 above) 35.

⁸¹ *Padma bKa'i Thang* 18 (*Sheldrakma*), trans. Douglas & Bays, *The Life and Liberation* (n. 61 above) 98–100.

⁸² Yeshe Tsogyal, *Padma bKa'i Thang*, 21 (*Sheldrakma*), *Life and Liberation* (n. 61 above) 136.

jewel from the headdress or the hair of a Nāga in the midst of the sea; yet unlike these stories, there is a genuinely happy ending to the venture as the quester successfully completes his mission to obtain the *cintāmani*. Again, Padmasambhava's biography agrees with the *Bhūridatta Jātaka* in respect of the mortal nature of the adventurers—king Indrabhūti, in this case—while it stands alone in describing the Nāga keeper of the gem as female rather than male.

The legend of Indrabhūti's quest for the *cintāmani* converges even more markedly with the repertoire of motifs featured in the Grail romances than with the *Bhūridatta Jātaka* and the *Manik Maya*. The qualification of the *cintāmani* as “the precious jewel that is blue” sits comfortably with Wolfram's apparent understanding of the Grail as a gemstone. An abundance of epithets demonstrates that the properties of the *cintāmani* strongly resembled those assigned to the Grail by Wolfram von Eschenbach: “a precious jewel that knows no limits for granting all needs and wants,” “that will fulfill all your wishes,” “dispenser of whatever might be needed,” “infallible in answering wishes,” which “suppresses poverty, hunger and thirst, cold and pain”—these characteristics are strikingly reminiscent of Wolfram's report that the Grail provided unlimited food for its guardians and prevented its owner from ageing, obviously by keeping undesired diseases and discomforts at bay, as well as of the statement in the *Younger Titurel* that “the Grail gave them whatever one might wish ...” While the *cintāmani* was destined not for an avaricious warrior, but for a sage or “bodhisattva practicing generosity for the sake of Dharma,” the Grail was exclusively reserved for a worthy knight capable of asking who was served by it. Just like Indrabhūti recognized that he thus ought to “request it and continue to give alms to the people,” so the enquiry Parzival was expected to make could have pointed to a requirement of magnanimity on behalf of the ailing king and kingdom, chivalry over greed. The king's deposition of the wish-granting jewel on a “cushion of fine silk” compares to Wolfram's intimation that the Grail was carried upon *einem grüenen achmardî* or “a green achmardî,”⁸³ which is a type of deep green silk familiar from the Orient. As a benevolent, but blind and childless ruler of a land ravaged by famine and natural disasters, Indrabhūti resembles King Arthur, who, equally benign, had come to be the luckless overseer of a similar “wasteland.”⁸⁴ In jeopardy, Indrabhūti received counseling from “the seer Asenya, a lofty magician,” while Arthur was assisted by Merlin, a similar type of court magician, though in later works than Wolfram's *Parzival*. Both rulers initiated a quest for the desired panacea, Indrabhūti sailing out in person and Arthur—in most accounts—merely dispatching “knights” of Parzival's ilk—though Arthur witnesses the Grail in person in *Perlesvaus* and the *Third Continuation of Chrétien de Troyes' Perceval*.⁸⁵ In both cases, the treasure is kept in a remote and exceedingly

⁸³ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* 5 (235), ed. Karl Lachmann, *Wolfram von Eschenbach* (Berlin 1930⁹) 118; Cyril Edwards, trans., *Wolfram von Eschenbach: Parzival and Titurel* (Oxford 2006) 99; compare 16 (810).

⁸⁴ Similar adversities were associated with the reign of the Tibetan king who invited Padmasambhava in real history, as well as with Thothori's legendary reign, some time earlier.

⁸⁵ “When King Arthur had been disarmed, Perlesvaus led him to the chapel where the Grail was kept.” *Perlesvaus* 10, *The High Book of the Grail: A Translation of the Thirteenth-Century Romance of Perlesvaus*, trans. Nigel Bryant (Cambridge 2007) 195.

opulent castle. In the Tibetan tale, the jewel was in the care of the “naga girl, a beautiful bluish girl, decorated with gem-studded ornaments and called Lovely Maiden,” who was “the gatekeeper” and “the naga king’s daughter.” Following Chrétien de Troyes, Wolfram similarly identified a royal maiden, the sister of the smitten king, as the caretaker of the Grail: “Repanse de Schoye tends the Grail ...”⁸⁶ And just as the protectors of the Grail seemed perfectly willing to offer it to a fitting knight, so there was distinct pleasure on the side of the Nāga princess to let go of the *cintāmani* for the sake of a deserving recipient. Indrabhūti’s instant adoption of the young Padmasambhava as his son and intended successor to the throne compares to Parzival’s unexpected identification as the nephew of Anfortas and a member of the Grail family, followed by his eventual installation as the new Fisher King: “He fell in genuflection in the direction of the Grail ... Parzival was soon recognized as king and lord there.”⁸⁷ Just as Padmasambhava renounced this position rather soon in favor of a career as an ascetic and a missionary of Tantra Buddhism, so one of the second generation of Grail narratives outlines Parzival’s voluntary conversion to a more reclusive life-style:

Perceval remained in his own land, and for seven years he held it in peace, free of war, untroubled by any man. He rebuilt castles and fortresses, and all his neighbors were in awe of him and honored him. ... In the seven years that he reigned as king Perceval achieved all these things. ... Then Perceval summoned the king of Margone and bequeathed his land to him, passing it entirely into his hands, and retired from this world. In a forest nearby a worthy man dwelt in a little hermitage, living a most solitary life. It was there that Perceval went and stayed, intent upon serving God.⁸⁸

The intriguing, yet very speculative possibility that Padmasambhava provided the model for Parzival himself can be fortified with various arguments of varying strength, none of which constitute particularly convincing proof of a historical connection on their own. For example, though Padmasambhava is best known as a sage, some traditions expressed his unparalleled prowess in physical skills. Both heroes led largely itinerant lives, extirpating evil wherever they travelled. Padmasambhava, though disliked by the Tibetan nobility, “seems to have captured the imagination of a large section of the populace by his flamboyant appearances in public and, above all, by his magical feats of subduing countless demons who made life miserable for all living in Tibet and its adjacent regions.”⁸⁹ This reads just like Parzival, presented by Grail writers as a detestable fool from the perspective of the settled and chivalrous knights of Arthur’s court, but a celebrity and paragon of strength and handsomeness nonetheless. Severed heads figure in some versions of the Parzival legend, either as a part of the

⁸⁶ *Parzival* 9 (477), trans. Edwards (n. 83 above) 201, cf. 16 (809).

⁸⁷ *Parzival* 16 (795–796), trans. Edwards (n. 83 above) 333.

⁸⁸ *Third Continuation of Chrétien de Troyes’ Perceval*, trans. Bryant (n. 46 above) 301.

⁸⁹ Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 203. Compare: “On his way (to Tibet), the twelve guardian goddesses (bsTan-ma bču-gñis) at first made an attempt to harm him, but he subdued them, and then after initiating them, he entrusted them to the guardianship of the Doctrine. He (Padmasambhava) then journeyed gradually towards the northern upland, and there subdued the gods of Than-lha, and other deities.” ’Gos lot-sā-ba gZon-nu-dpal, ed., *Deb-ther snon-po* 1 (21b), *Blue Annals* (n. 37 above) 43.

Grail procession or in other contexts.⁹⁰ This trait may be considered in relation to the unique emphasis placed on the symbolism of skulls in Tibetan iconography. Thus, Parzival's evolution from a buffoon to a wise and respected tenant of the Grail measures up to Padmasambhava's succession of initiations, culminating in "his most important and characteristic form," in which he is decked with "the insignia of spiritual realization." These include a *kapala* or "skull-bowl," defined as "a vessel, containing the elixir of immortality (*amrita-kalasa*)," as well as "two human heads and a skull, symbolizing greed, hatred and ignorance, which have been overcome by the knowledge of the Three Worlds."⁹¹ Moreover, Parzival and Padmasambhava were both thought to have ascended into the sky: according to some Tibetan texts, Padmasambhava did not die an ordinary death, but "his escorts saw him fly into the sky from the summit of the mountain on the frontier of India and Tibet, across the narrow pass of Tongbap. He departed through the clouds, with his robe fluttering, and the rings of his staff jingling."⁹² And Parzival, in one tradition, "was carried off to heaven, most certainly. And the Holy Grail and the lance and the beautiful silver trencher went with him, in full view of everyone."⁹³ Whereas Parzival earned fame as the "red knight,"⁹⁴ one of Padmasambhava's eight stylized manifestations is the wrathful *Guru rDo-rJe Gro-lod*, "red in color, surrounded by flames (symbolizing knowledge in its 'terrible' illusion-devouring aspect)" and "riding on a tiger, holding a vajra in his outstretched right hand, and in his left hand a *phur-bu*, a magical dagger, which destroys evil influences, exorcises demons and drives away the powers of darkness."⁹⁵ Furthermore, Tibetan artists would surmount Padmasambhava's head with "the red Dhyani-Buddha Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light," who is "the spiritual source of Padmasambhava" and "may be called an embodied ray of Amitabha on the earthly plane."⁹⁶ The latter convention may also shed light on Padmasambhava's role as the founder of the Red Hat sect, specifically of Nyingma, which is the earliest form of this branch of Tibetan Buddhism. And finally, while Parzival, by virtue of his association with Arthur, is traditionally dated to the sixth century, one passage in Wolfram's text puzzlingly "implies that he thinks of Parzival as living in the ninth century,"⁹⁷ in a time slot much closer to the Tibetan saint.

Various other motifs shared between the biography of Padmasambhava and the Grail stories occupy different slots in the narrative, as if they have been shuffled around in either version. Some aspects of Indrabhūti's biography read more like a

⁹⁰ E.g., *Perlesvaus; First Continuation of Chrétien de Troyes' Perceval; Mabinogion: Peredur*. In *Peredur*, the head on the platter is revealed to be that of Peredur's cousin.

⁹¹ Lama Anagarika Govinda, "The Eight Forms of Guru Padmasambhava," *The Bulletin of Tibetology* 11.2 (1974) 21.

⁹² "But his real body remained in solitary hermitages, and in mountain caves in Zhotō Tidro, Chimpu, and elsewhere." *Testament of Ba* paraphrased, and other texts, in Rinpoche, *Nyingma School* (n. 31 above) 517.

⁹³ *Third Continuation of Chrétien de Troyes' Perceval*, trans. Bryant (n. 46 above) 302.

⁹⁴ E.g., *Parzival* 3 (145–151).

⁹⁵ Govinda, "The Eight Forms" (n. 91 above) 24.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 22.

⁹⁷ Walter Johannes Stein, *The Ninth Century and the Holy Grail*, trans. Irene Groves (London 1988) 64, cf. 69, citing Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* 3 (128), where eleven generations are implied to have passed between the time of Parzival's mother and the "present."

description of the lame Fisher King, Anfortas, than of Arthur. The motif of Indrabhūti's lack of an heir seems absent in the prosopography of Arthur in the Grail romances, but does remind of the groin affliction—a possible euphemism for infertility—suffered by the Fisher King or the Grail keeper, possibly earning him the name *Anfortas*, which may just mean “the infirm,” in broken Latin. If, in the Grail tradition, the Fisher King and the “Maimed King” were originally distinct figures, as theorists have argued,⁹⁸ a reconciliatory approach might tentatively compare the former to the Nāga ruler and the latter to Indrabhūti as the questing king. And returning to comparisons centered on the role of the precious gem, Indrabhūti's blindness, lifted by his acquisition of the splendid *cintāmani*, is not matched in either Parzival's or the Fisher King's biography, but Wolfram does include a curious incident in which Parzival's “heathenish” half-brother, Feirefiz, is first able to discern the Grail after receiving baptism.⁹⁹ Insofar as Feirefiz, in Wolfram's narrative, is a “king of the east” with very close blood-ties to the finder of the Grail, it may be supposed that he stands in for Indrabhūti in respect of his blindness. Further, the Fisher King was the original owner of the Grail, yet Indrabhūti must acquire it and it is Indrabhūti's adopted son who compared the tenure of kingship to “a fish caught on a hook.” While Wolfram regarded the Grail prior to its fall as a sparkling stone on the crown of Lucifer, the Nāga princess of the Tibetan account was seen “pulling out the precious gem from the crown on her head” when she prepared to hand it to Indrabhūti. And although the *Sheldrakma* does not include a report of a primordial tumble of the *cintāmani* from the sky, along the lines of the descent of the Grail, it does presuppose such an occurrence, as an earlier chapter in the text relates how, long ago in heaven, the *cintāmani* participated in the selection procedure of the deities that would descend to the earth to be incarnated as future Buddhas:

The chalice of the seven precious substances was prepared, and after purification, milk was scattered, as were carved jewels, and fragrant flowers. The names of the princes were written and placed in the chalice which was decorated and made beautiful to behold by peacocks' plumes, necklaces, a profusion of rare things, many water lilies, and the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel itself. The chalice was placed on a lotus and, having opened the mandala which included the Precepts, Nuden Dorje made entreaty for seven days.¹⁰⁰

The names drawn from the chalice were those of the deities subsequently appointed as twenty-four future incarnations of Buddha. Although, on present knowledge, the story does not explain how the *cintāmani* ended up under the jurisdiction of the Nāgas in the sea, it is reasonable to suppose that the downfall of the gem was once detailed in an episode like the one seen in the *Manik Maya* or the Tibetan version of the descent of four or five treasures on the roof of the king's palace, discussed above. Nor does it escape notice that the placement of the *cintāmani* within the chalice forges a connection with the shared Buddhist and Catholic practice to deposit or encase sacred gems

⁹⁸ “Unlike the early Maimed King, who is simply doomed to live until the Grail Knight appears, the Fisher King always appears as the guardian of the Grail, which is kept in his castle.” C. Scott Littleton and Linda Ann Malcor, *From Scythia to Camelot: A Radical Reassessment of the Legends of King Arthur, the Knights of the Round Table, and the Holy Grail* (New York 1994) 270, cf. 263.

⁹⁹ *Parzival* 16 (818).

¹⁰⁰ *Padma bKa'i Thang 7 (Sheldrakma), Life and Liberation* (n. 61 above) 49–50.

into reliquaries or cups, possibly opening a way of reconciling Wolfram's description of the Grail as a precious stone with the more common understanding of it as a chalice or platter. The drawing of lots from the chalice, turning the *cintāmani* into an agent of predestination, comes close to Wolfram's puzzling elaboration on the way the Grail had the names of its future guardians inscribed on its surface by means of a mysterious "epitaph of characters."¹⁰¹ While the symmetry between the Tibetan tale and this aspect of Wolfram's account is not exact, it is certainly noteworthy that both feature the precious stone or its container as being endowed with the names of its future attendants.

Parallels with the Wartburgkrieg

Some other parallels between the biographies of Padmasambhava and Wolfram's narrative of the Grail emerge when Wolfram's enunciations in the so-called *Wartburgkrieg* (1240–1260), a minstrel's contest, are taken into account. According to these, an ancient Babylonian skywatcher inferred from the stars the future birth after 1200 years of a Jewish savior—possibly the eponymous Zabulon—and embedded this prophecy in the *Book of Zabulon*.¹⁰² The description of this obscure prophet as an astronomer who worshipped a calf and was Jewish on his mother's side, pagan on his father's side is so close to that of Flegetanis, the source Wolfram claimed in *Parzival*,¹⁰³ that the same character must be intended. If so, the coming child discerned in the stars by the author of the *Book of Zabulon* might correspond to "the Grail" that Flegetanis "read immediately in the constellation."¹⁰⁴ Did the "name of the Grail" written in the stars amount to the same thing as the impending birth of a culture hero? And if it did, was this coming savior Jesus Christ, as one would expect from a Christian tale of this type,¹⁰⁵ or the noble Parzival, elected to inherit the Grail? Though any answers to these questions are likely to remain speculative, an instructive thematic parallel is furnished by the coming of Padmasambhava as seen within the framework of Buddhist and Hindū theories of cyclical divine incarnations. Messianic prophecies are, of course, a familiar feature in many religions, including the ancient Hebrew tradition. Nevertheless, in the light of the specific parallels already discovered between Wolfram's oeuvre and the biography of Padmasambhava, it is remarkable that the narrative of Indrabhūti's quest for the wish-granting jewel allocates a prominent position to Padmasambhava's "birth" from a lotus flower and his subsequent adoption by the king. Indrabhūti's recognition of this lad as "the incarnation of a Celestial Being"¹⁰⁶ is matched by the Nyingma Lamaist consideration of Padmasambhava as an *avatar* of the *dhyāna* Buddha Amitābha, embodying *sangs-rgyas gnyis-pa* or a "second Buddha," whose coming was predicted by the first one, Buddha Śākyamuni alias

¹⁰¹ *Parzival* 9 (470), trans. Edwards (n. 83 above) 198, translating *von karacten ein epitafulm*, ed. Lachmann, *Wolfram von Eschenbach* (n. 83 above) 226; compare 16 (796).

¹⁰² *Der Wartburgkrieg*, 156, trans. Simrock (n. 28 above) 194–195.

¹⁰³ *Parzival* 9 (453–454).

¹⁰⁴ *Parzival* 9 (454), trans. Edwards (n. 83 above) 192.

¹⁰⁵ E.g., *Le Tournoi Poétique de la Wartburg; Poème Allemand du Treizième Siècle*, trans. Louis-Charles Emmanuel Artaud-Haussmann (Paris 1865) 258 n. 2.

¹⁰⁶ *Padma bKa'i Thang*, 17 (*Sheldrakma*), *Life and Liberation* (n. 61 above) 96.

Siddhārtha Gautama (ca. 563–483).¹⁰⁷ Moreover, the Tibetan tradition regarded the advent of Buddhism in Tibet as the fulfillment of a prophecy: “Now, it says in the *Prophecy Addressed to Vimaladevī (Iha-mo dri-ma med-pa lung bstan-pa)*: Two thousand and five hundred years after my final nirvāna the true doctrine will be propagated in the land of red-faced beings.”¹⁰⁸ It is difficult to judge from the context whether the reference is to the arrival of Padmasambhava in Tibet or to the descent of the chest with the “Awesome Secret” from the sky, which occurred nearly 400 years earlier. Chronological inconsistencies aside, if the *Book of Zabulon* had contained a prophecy concerning the birth of a “Grail keeper” that was fulfilled in Parzival or, perhaps, his son Lohengrin, supposedly 1,200 years before the event, an interesting parallel arises with the miraculous birth of Padmasambhava at the time the wish-granting jewel was obtained, some 1,213 years after the death of his earlier incarnation, the original Buddha. Although the exact dates for Padmasambhava’s birth as well as Gautama’s death are uncertain, the question arises whether the prophet-astronomer and supposed author of the *Book of Zabulon* could have been a contemporary of Gautama?

In the *Wartburgkrieg*, Wolfram went on to explain the measures the stargazing prophet took to save his divination from oblivion. In order to help the Jews avert the dangers that were to beset this event—and that the text never cares to specify—the seer developed into an accomplished astronomer and sorcerer, who wrote the *Book of Zabulon* to accommodate the prophecy and placed it in the nose of an iron statue specially crafted for the purpose, so as to safeguard its survival for future generations.¹⁰⁹ The concealment of the precious document in the orifice of a statue vividly reminds of the Tibetan practice to conceal *gter-ma* or “religious treasures,” including versions of the biography of Padmasambhava, in different parts of the landscape as well as in statues; the *Sheldrakma*, as seen, appeared “from the heart of the fierce deity” stationed in a cave, while the *Sanglingma* was retrieved from underneath the statue of the god Hayagrīva. If Wolfram’s arcane hints are to be trusted, the *Book of Zabulon* was ultimately discovered in the statue and, in one form or another, made it to a library Wolfram or his source could access. The *Sanglingma* happens to have been uncovered by Nyang Ral Nyima ’od-ser, at a time between 1124 and 1192—which is during Wolfram’s lifetime. The clues dropped by Wolfram regarding the provenance of his ‘heathen’ source thus read very much like the discovery of a copy of the *Life of Padmasambhava* in a hallowed place in Tibet. Wolfram himself evidently believed that the prophet had lived ca. 1200 BCE, that his book was discovered by the Roman poet Virgil, and, presumably, that Jesus Christ was the prophesied redeemer. But this interpretation may well have been his own, fuelled by the common medieval portrayal of Virgil as a magician, involved with mysterious statues and contraptions of various kinds, and a knee-jerk conviction that any promise of a future savior must have referred to the central figure in Christianity. On the strength of the Tibetan parallels, it

¹⁰⁷ Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 205; Kinnard, *Emergence of Buddhism* (n. 54 above) 89; *Dictionary of Buddhism* (n. 8 above) 207 s. v. “Padmasambhava”; Rinpoche, *Kunzai Lama’i Shelung* (n. 6 above) 427 s. v. “Padmasambhava of Oddiyāna”; Giuseppe Tucci, *The Religions of Tibet*, trans. Geoffrey Samuel (Bombay 1980) 7; Helmut Hoffmann, *The Religions of Tibet*, trans. E. Fitzgerald (London 1961) 58.

¹⁰⁸ Rinpoche, *Nyingma School* (n. 31 above) 508. The “red-faced beings” are the Tibetans.

¹⁰⁹ *Der Wartburgkrieg* 159–160, trans. Simrock (n. 28 above) 200–203.

may be justified to speculate that the *Book of Zabulon* was in reality considerably younger and of Buddhist provenance. Its protagonist exhibits traits that curiously remind of Flegetanis on one hand and Padmasambhava on the other.

Precursors

In view of the profusion of similarities found between the legend of Padmasambhava and the European accounts of the Grail, particularly in the *Parzival* romances, it is perhaps surprising that only a couple of authorities appear to have glimpsed the connection. Paraphrasing the story of Indrabhūti, an anonymous spokesman for “the Dharma Fellowship of His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa,” based in British Columbia, Canada, noted that “Those familiar with medieval European culture will recognize that this story is, in fact, an early source of that great collection of aristocratic literature and poetry commonly known as the Grail Myth, which began to circulate in the West shortly after the first Crusades. ... Here we are dealing with an early source of the Grail Myth. ... It is quite remarkable to be able, in this manner, to trace backwards from the troubadour songs of medieval Europe to the legends surrounding a mystic King of eighth century Uddiyana ...”¹¹⁰ This is a momentous observation that has apparently escaped the notice of historians of literature. Further, the Russian painter and philosopher Nicholas Roerich (1874–1947) recorded an—imaginary?—conversation he held in 1928 with a Tibetan Lama showing his conviction that the *cintāmani* corresponded to the Grail, a theme he unfortunately did not elaborate:

“... Do you in the West know something about the Great Stone in which magic powers are concentrated? And do you know from which planet came this stone? And who possessed this treasure?” “Lama, about the Great Stone we have as many legends as you have images of Chintamani. From the old Druidic times many nations remember these legends of truth about the natural energies concealed in this strange visitor to our planet. Very often in such fallen stones are hidden diamonds, but these are nothing in comparison with some other unknown metals and energies which are found every day in the stones and in the numerous currents and rays. *Lapis Exilis*, thus is named the stone, which is mentioned by the old Meistersingers. ...”¹¹¹

PADMASAMBHAVA’S ALLEGORIES OF THE *CINTĀMANI*

Padmasambhava as an Esotericist

Unlike famous characters of European Grail literature such as Parzival, Gawain, and Lancelot, the Tantric master Padmasambhava is firmly rooted in history, despite the presence of folklore elements in biographies of him that were, in their present forms, composed some centuries after his decease. It has been established that the “real” Padmasambhava was a magisterial teacher, sorcerer, and necromancer from the elusive land of Oddiyāna, almost certainly not Tibetan himself, who excelled in the pursuit of spiritual illumination. In doing so, he made far less use of traditional Brahmanic literature than one might imagine, as he consciously placed himself in the esoteric tradition of the Near East, blending together aspects of Gnosticism, Neo-

¹¹⁰ Anonymous, “The Website of the Dharma Fellowship of His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa,” <http://www.dharmafellowship.org/biographies/historicalsaints/lord-padmasambhava.htm#legend>.

¹¹¹ Nicholas Roerich, *Shambhala* (New York 1930) 22.

Platonism, Manichaeism, and alchemy in an interesting cocktail of mystical discourse. "... Padmasambhava was well aware of the Gnostic schools of thought, the Sethian and the Valentinian ... Gnostic (Sethian and Valentinian) as well as other ideas (Manichaeism and Neo-Platonic) are found in Padmasambhava's writings."¹¹² This can be stated with confidence, as some of Padmasambhava's own writings have withstood time. In these precious texts, Padmasambhava "emerges as a visionary thinker who has little patience with the stolid and dull disquisitions of the reductionist thinkers and the fastidious but tedious ritualists."¹¹³

Paradoxically, Padmasambhava's Gnostic and alchemical inclinations as expressed in his own oeuvre are little known. The German Buddhist scholar, Herbert V. Guenther (1917–2006), stated the question: "None of his works are ever quoted, not even by Tibetan authors who otherwise are full of praise of him. Why? Was it too dangerous in an intellectual climate in which everything had to be 'Indian,' to quote a person who was not of 'pure' Indian ancestry? We do not know what was the language of Urygan or what was Padmasambhava's mother tongue ..."¹¹⁴ The apparent aversion felt by Tibetan writers towards the "real" Padmasambhava, causing the biased impression of him in modern books, is perhaps best explained with the obscure and magical nature of the sage's interests and teachings: "This secrecy-mongering that surrounds this group of Padmasambhava's writings may have been due to the fact that his ideas were too unorthodox and that, after all, as a foreigner he was an intruder in an already tense situation in which the antagonism between the various Buddhist and non-Buddhist (Bon) factions was on the increase."¹¹⁵

Padmasambhava's Allegories

Needless to say, Padmasambhava's writings provide the valuable opportunity to test the present thesis regarding the origin of the quest for the Grail, particularly as told in Wolfram von Eschenbach's account, and balance the legendary versions of Padmasambhava's life against his own words. Significantly, Padmasambhava's extant work reveals a striking fondness for the *cintāmani* as a symbol for the purified state of the soul a mystic desires to attain. Tapping into an ancient Gnostic reservoir of traditions, Padmasambhava compared the search for one's self to a quest for the wish-granting jewel. As a "thought" jewel, the *cintāmani* could serve as an ideal exponent of the Gnostic ideology that a pure, god-like mind is capable of turning all its undefiled thoughts into immediate reality. To convey this philosophy, Padmasambhava made abundant use of allegorical stanzas, five of which are particularly instructive in connection with the Grail literature.

In the first of these, Padmasambhava introduces the *rang-gsal khye'u-chung* or "self-luminescent Little Man/Anthropos," who is symbolic of anyone in search of his cosmic identity or "self." The exploration comes to an end when the Little Man ob-

¹¹² Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 4 n. 5, 11. Consequently, the Tantrist movement more than any other has served as the vehicle of conveying alchemical ideas between Tibet, India and China; Peter G. Maxwell-Stuart, *The Chemical Choir* (London 2008) 24–28.

¹¹³ Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 205.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 5.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 7 n. 13.

tains the *norbu* or wish-granting jewel: "... having tied the Jewel (*nor-bu*) to his heart, all his desires were fulfilled instantly."¹¹⁶ Guenther explained that "Behind the reference to it in this passage, a lengthy story lies hidden: the search for and the retrieval of one's true value."¹¹⁷

In a second parable, a boy by the hardly euphonious name of *ngang-dangs rin-chen-'od*, "Precious Light," alias *khye'u-chung ngang-dangs*, "Little Man of luminous disposition," appears as the only child of "Archetypal Father (*yab*) *Kun-tu bzang-po* (He who is goodness *par excellence*) and Archetypal Mother (*yum*) *Kun-tu bzang-mo* (She who is goodness *par excellence*)," dwelling in a castle called *mi-'gyur bsam-gtan mkhar* or "invariant concentration," "whose disposition was to become alight and (whose name was) Precious Light."¹¹⁸ All that was missing in the lives of these prosperous beings was possession of the wish-granting jewel: "They owned the castle and its storeys, but they did not possess the [Wish-fulfilling] Jewel."¹¹⁹ The lad is told by his parents of the existence of the jewel in a "no man's land":

In the no man's land (*so-mtshams*) between darkness and brightness,
 In a (hidden) valley where whatever has been seeded grows,
 There lies a precious, thoroughly luminous gem, ablaze all by itself.
 With this precious (*rin-chen*), thoroughly luminous gem, thinking's thinking (*sems-nyid*),
 There are (found) sun and moon dispelling darkness, and
 A sword cutting through [and thereby putting an end to one's] going astray, and [all this]
 Is there [as] the precious Jewel (*nor-bu*) that sustains the life of all that comes about.
 Get possession of this inexhaustible treasure.¹²⁰

The effulgent infant learns that the jewel he is asked to purchase is emplaced in a mysterious liminal zone where light and darkness meet:

Once, you Little Man of luminous disposition and radiant spirituality have arrived there,
 (You will find that) one side (of the country) lies in brightness
 (While) the other side lies in darkness.
 In the no man's land between darkness and brightness (there lies)
 Not found by anyone, invisible,
 Not recognized by anyone, concealed,
 Not understood by anyone, invariant,
 Not obtained by anyone, ineffable,
 This precious Jewel (*nor-bu rin-chen*) that, invariant, is
 The enormous and inexhaustible treasure of all that comes about:
 Thinking's thinking (*sems-nyid*), a superb and priceless Jewel (*nor-bu rin-thang che*).
 Little Man of luminous disposition, buy this Radiant-Light Jewel (*'od-gsal nor*).¹²¹

The parents implore the boy to obtain the magical talisman "from the Lady (*bdag-mo*), a blind old woman," revealing the symbolic nature of the quest with their indications

¹¹⁶ Padmasambhava, *Nyi-zla'i snying-po* 3. 29a, trans. Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 69.

¹¹⁷ Guenther, *The Teachings* (n. 53 above) 69 note 70.

¹¹⁸ Padmasambhava, *sNang-srid kha-sbyor*, 2. 251b, trans. Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 105–106.

¹¹⁹ *sNang-srid kha-sbyor* 2. 251b, trans. Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 106. The Tibetan term used here for the "Jewel" is *nor-bu*.

¹²⁰ *sNang-srid kha-sbyor* 2. 251b, trans. Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 107.

¹²¹ *sNang-srid kha-sbyor* 2. 251b–252a, trans. Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 108.

that moral vices are the price to pay.¹²² As Guenther notes, “This beautiful allegorical account of a young person being sent to find his existential value and, after having found it, of returning to his spiritual home, ... uniquely blends the ‘worldly’ with the ‘spiritual.’ ... Written in verse form, this allegory of being sent out to find one’s existential value, has in Padmasambhava’s capable hands become a mystical-spiritual poem ...”¹²³ The designation of the gem as *sems-nyid* or “Thinking’s thinking” irrefragably refers back to the Sanskrit title *cintāmani* or “thought jewel.”

In a third exhortation to trace the wish-granting jewel, which is quite similar to the passage concerning the “Little Man of Light,” Padmasambhava develops his description of the manner in which the adventurer should go about the task. He was to dress like a warrior and embark on the perilous and very arduous journey:

In a garden of (what is the) common plateau of our experienceable world
 There exists a precious wish-granting Jewel.
 From it derives the enjoyment of whatever one desires.
 If you get this Jewel, whatever you intend will come to pass.
 If you whose self-originated originary awareness is disposed to become alight
 Want to obtain this Jewel
 You must mount an eagle, hold a sword (in your hand),
 Cover your body with a solid armor,
 Look for a fearless escort, and
 Carry along an inexhaustible supply of provisions. ...
 When you have overcome (the dangers posed by) the three cul-de-sacs and the four rivers
 and come
 To the no man’s land between darkness and brightness,
 Dispel the pitch black darkness with (the light of) sun and moon (and)
 Drive the myriarch “crown-jewel of the universe” from his realm.
 Once you have opened the eyes of the old woman who is quite confused ...
 Obtain (from her) the wish-granting Jewel.¹²⁴

In a fourth passage, Padmasambhava expounds on the identity of the old, blind woman and the “myriarch,” placing the hero’s search for the jewel in the framework of the allegorical “experience of winning a kingdom.” The king who must be expelled was the custodian of the wish-granting jewel:

In the country “Enormous vastness” there resided in the city “Lotus-bliss-radiance” a king whose name was “He who is of the nature of the luminosity of the (wish-granting) Jewel.” ... he had a huge basket in which was lying the precious (wish-granting) Jewel and which was also full of many smaller precious stones ...¹²⁵

Misfortune and depression fell upon the king when the *cintāmani* was purloined by a band of thieves during his absence:

¹²² *sNang-srid kha-sbyor* 2. 252a, trans. Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 109–110.

¹²³ Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 112.

¹²⁴ Padmasambhava, *Nyi-zla 'bar-ba* 2. 348b, trans. Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 155–157. The Tibetan term used here for “precious wish-granting Jewel” is *nor-bu rin-chen*. The “myriarch” is “archetypal Father, the myriarch (*khri-rje*) *gTsug-brtan* by name,” *Nyi-zla'i snying-po* 3. 23a–b, trans. Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 40.

¹²⁵ Padmasambhava, *sPros-bral don-gsal* 1. 12b–13a, trans. Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 179.

... he (once) went outside to take a stroll and to have a look at his country. There he met an old woman whose name was “She who is of the nature of amaurosis.” This old woman easily seduced him. In the meantime five female thieves stole the basket and sold it to six male persons of darkness in the six cities of the unclean. The six male persons of darkness discontinued to show respect to and to honor the (wish-granting) Jewel and, in turn, this Jewel no longer provided what one desired. The king, too, became faint-hearted and depressed.¹²⁶

The tribulations came to an end with the arrival of “a charismatic person,” who apparently gained the throne as well:

Later, on behalf of the king a charismatic person turned up. The king’s (non-egological) mind started dancing (with joy). He killed the old woman, subjugated the six cities, lustrated the six male persons of darkness, and employed the five female thieves as servants. This is the telling experience of winning a kingdom by recovering the precious (wish-granting) Jewel.¹²⁷

In the fifth important text fragment, the hero is portrayed as *rlung-smyo* or “insane”: “In a temple that was an utter nothingness-radiance (*stong-gsal*) an insane demiurgic person looked around (and since) there was no-thing (whatsoever) in it, he did not see any-thing.”¹²⁸ The “insane demiurgic person” evolves into a sword-wielding horseman and the text highlights the splendor of the *lha-khang* or “temple” within which the warrior discovers the jewel: “In a temple (with) precious (walls) radiating in five colors, a “rainbow”-person, riding on a “mirage”-horse, looked around and saw in this temple (another) temple (made) of light that was (both) radiating (and) symbolically pregnant.”¹²⁹

Riding on a stallion (that is the) lightning flashing in the (five-colored) light of a rainbow,
A human person of an overly brilliant (appearance) and a disposition to be (permanently) alight,
Held the sun in his right hand,
Held the moon in his left hand, and
Brandished a sword over his head.¹³⁰

In terms of Padmasambhava’s scheme, the symbol of the “rider” reflects “the whole’s unfolding ‘intelligence,’ imaged as a human person (*mi*) on a ‘stallion’ (*rta-pho*) who racing reflects the speed, the storminess, the vehemence, and turbulence (*rlung*) with which the instinctual-emotional stratum in us moves.”¹³¹ Inside the radiant edifice, the protagonist encounters two *lha* or “divine figures,” of opposite tempers:

... looking around, he saw
A certain divine figure sitting stock-still and immobile, and
Another divine figure being restless and agitable.

¹²⁶ *sPros-bral don-gsal* 1. 13a, trans. Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 179.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Padmasambhava, *sNying-po bcud-spungs* 2. 339b, trans. Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 113.

¹²⁹ *sNying-po bcud-spungs* 2. 339b, trans. Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 116. Guenther (126) added that the temple “in its nothingness-brilliance is more of the nature of a mystery from which we as its experiencers set out and which remains with us in all our phases of growth or shrinkage.”

¹³⁰ *sNying-po bcud-spungs* 2. 340a, trans. Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 123.

¹³¹ Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 126.

This is, in symbolic language, the presentation of the (mysterious) no man's land (dividing the common ground into) specific territories.¹³²
The passage concludes with a markedly alchemical interpretation of the armed intruder's acquisition of the gem:

He became (this) immortality and stillness ...
The precious Jewel has been won.
In (your) obscurity and darkness sun and moon have risen.
Poison has been neutralized by having put a spell on it.
You possess the formula to turn base metal into gold.
You drink the elixir (of immortality found in your) food.
You sleep in the vortex of bliss supreme.
Having won the wealth-bestowing jewel you enjoy an inexhaustible treasure.¹³³

Parallels with the Grail literature

The allegorical narrative Padmasambhava developed in these sketches concerning the discovery of one's true self is in such overwhelming agreement with the central motifs of the European Grail romances that, in it, Sir Parzival himself, the likely reflex of the Padmasambhava of legend, appears to be offering a personal commentary on his quest for the Grail. The familiar Grail-like attributes of the *cintāmani*, such as its luminosity, its capacity to grant one's wishes, and its bestowal of longevity, all occupy a prominent place in Padmasambhava's writings. The "temple" of the wish-granting jewel is concealed in a "no man's land (*so-mtshams*) between darkness and brightness," covered with a "pitchblack darkness," that forcefully brings to mind the wasteland of the Grail literature. Just as Parzival's discovery of the Grail lifted the curse of the wasteland, so Padmasambhava's blazing hero dispelled the darkness "with (the light of) sun and moon," which he carried along on eagle or horseback. The theme of an errant, armed knight on a dangerous quest informs Padmasambhava's allegories as much as the Grail stories. Padmasambhava's portrayal of the questing equestrian as a "human person of an overly brilliant (appearance) and a disposition to be (permanently) alight" casts an even better light on Parzival's reputation as the red knight than Padmasambhava's association with the Tibetan Red Hat sect, mentioned earlier. Padmasambhava's knight started off as an "insane demiurgic person" of noble extraction, quite like Parzival's proverbial role as a "fool," masking his aristocratic roots. Guenther astutely compared this aspect of Padmasambhava's allegory to Parzival's role as an exemplary fool:

It may not be without interest to point out that ... Padmasambhava's whole is self-redemptive and starts from "ultimate Dullness/Darkness" (*gti-mug chen-po*), an archetypal theme that has found its personalistic expression in one of the figures in the Grail legend, *Perceval* (*Parsifal*), "a pure fool, through pity wise," as he was called by Wolfram von Eschenbach and Richard Wagner.¹³⁴

¹³² *sNying-po bcud-spungs* 2. 339b, trans. Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 118. Compare: "(In it) / There were (two) divine figures (*lha*); (the one) slightly stirring, (the other) not stirring at all. / This is, in symbolic language, a presentation of the (common) ground (*gzhi*) for (one's) becoming spiritually awake (*sangs-rgyas*) and (one's) getting caught up in opinions (*sems-can*)." 2. 339b, trans. Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 116.

¹³³ *sNying-po bcud-spungs* 2. 340a, trans. Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 124–125.

¹³⁴ Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 34 n. 84.

However, Guenther granted this observation no more than the status of a footnote and certainly did not extrapolate the comparison to the role of the precious jewel or any other Grail-related motifs. Meanwhile, Padmasambhava's theme of two divine figures of polarized dispositions constitutes a powerful parallel to Parzival's encounter with two kings in the Grail palace—the healthy, old Titurel, who calmly contemplated the Grail, and the ailing Anfortas, who was in permanent agony and went on regular fishing trips. Lha Thothori, proposed earlier as the historical template for Titurel, was expressly designated as a *lha* or “divine figure,” just like the two characters described by Padmasambhava. And Anfortas's miserable condition, which Parzival brought to an end, is reminiscent of the “faint-hearted and depressed” state of the king in Padmasambhava's tale who owned the “huge basket” with the wish-granting jewel.

Several elements in Padmasambhava's vignettes on the journey of the soul are difficult to accommodate within the stories about the Holy Grail. A striking difference concerns the cause of the king's illness: whereas Wolfram attributed Anfortas's affliction to a wound received in battle, Padmasambhava's jewel king lapsed into faint-heartedness and depression following the theft of the treasure at the hands of “five female thieves,” a motif that lacks a counterpart in the writings of Wolfram or Chrétien. Nevertheless, Padmasambhava's cryptic texts allow some scope for reconciliation. It may be significant that the larceny of the *cintāmani* occurred during the king's absence, just as Anfortas received his wound during his sojourn in a distant land. The “old woman” or *bdag-mo*, “the Lady,” cursed with blindness, from whom Padmasambhava's hero must purchase the jewel, compares on one hand to Repanse de Schoye, the lady with the sole right to carry the Grail, and on the other to the “hideous damsel,” astrologer and sorceress Cundrie, who disturbed the proceedings at king Arthur's court first to curse Parzival and later to convey the message of Parzival's renewed invitation to the Grail castle. The king's subsequent installation of “the five female thieves” as “servants” allows a cautious connection with the maidens that served with Repanse de Schoye during the procession of the Grail. In Wolfram's account, eighteen ladies preceded the queen, Repanse, with the Grail, six of whom walked directly before her “in clothing that had been dearly bought—half cloth-of-gold, the other half phellel-silk of Nineveh.”¹³⁵

Astrology in Padmasambhava's Allegories

In spite of Padmasambhava's clarifications, many details of his elaborate metaphor of mystical illumination remain obscure. If the true self is identical with the highest entity, the Platonic principle of light, the adventurous quest for this jewel may encode a spiritual ascent towards the highest level of the cosmos, akin to the climbing of a ladder with seven rungs in the initiation ritual of Mithraists.¹³⁶ Perhaps the magical wasteland through which the horseman passes signified the planetary and starry heavens as an intermediate region between the darkness of the imperfect terrestrial sphere and the perfect bliss existing outside the material cosmos. That this is the original intention of

¹³⁵ *Parzival* 5 (235), trans. Edwards (n. 83 above) 99.

¹³⁶ Celsus, *The Book of Truth*, in Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6. 22.

the allegory receives considerable support from the striking resemblance between the key players in Padmasambhava's drama, duplicated in the romances of Parzival, and the traditional characteristics of the planets in astrology: the calm, aged king fits the astrological nature of Saturn; the agile second king might represent Jupiter, Saturn's truculent successor; the sword-brandishing warrior could be Mars, considering his reckless belligerence and his inflammatory nature the redness of Parzival; the sun and the moon rest in the warrior's hands, expelling the darkness;¹³⁷ as the only true planet deemed female, Venus naturally compares to the Grail-bearing maiden, the blue color of the *cintāmani* and the green hue of the *achmardi* on which sat the Grail according well with the blue-green color traditionally associated with Venus;¹³⁸ Mercury, known in astrology for its ambiguous disposition, reminds of Parzival's half-brother Feirefiz, benevolent yet pagan, whose half-black, half-white countenance Wolfram repeatedly pointed out;¹³⁹ and the five women and six men responsible for the embezzlement of the jewel may refer to asterisms such as the Pleiades or Ursa Minor. On this interpretation, the warrior's quest for the Grail, which the soul of a mystic will mimic, boils down to the hoary theme of Mars's pursuit of Venus, the celestial gem and fulfiller of desires *par excellence*. This scheme would only work against a classical background, as, in Vedic astrology, Venus is invariably portrayed as male and lacks the familiar mythological association with love and desire. It is also in the Greco-Roman literature that one finds ready analogues for the dark lady, the knowledgeable mistress of the underworld who guides the hero on his spiritual quest; the old hag as well as Wolfram's figure of Cundrie structurally correspond to Dikē, "Justice," tutoring Parmenides,¹⁴⁰ or the Sibyl instructing Aeneas.¹⁴¹

Gnosticism in Padmasambhava's Allegories

While such an astrological interpretation remains entirely speculative, the richness of Padmasambhava's parables also suggests that the sage was creatively retelling existing folklore material. Qualifying matter could have included any pre-existing tales concerning the wish-granting jewel, such as the ones collected from Japan, Śrī Lanka and Java, as well as Gnostic themes. Indeed, Padmasambhava's entire *Leitmotiv* of a youth charged with the task to retrieve his self in the form of a desirable pearl appears to have been coopted from the Gnostic *Hymn of the Pearl*, which is encapsulated in the *Acts of Thomas* (early 3rd c.) and with which Padmasambhava "seems to have

¹³⁷ According to Govinda, "The Eight Forms" (n. 91 above) 23, Tantric philosophers associated the two luminaries with the symbolism of energy coursing through the *susumna* or spine: "Sun and moon, seen in the upper space of every *Thangka*, represent the spiritual forces of *Pingala* and *ida*, which move the universe and flow as two currents of energy through the human body."

¹³⁸ For blue-green as the symbolic colour of Venus, see Peter James and Marinus Anthony van der Sluijs, "Ziggurats, Colours and Planets—Rawlinson Revisited," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 60 (2008) 67–68; Pseudo-Callisthenes, *Vita Alexandri Magni* (Armenian and Syriac versions), 1.8; al-Dīmašqī (1256–1327), *Nuḥbat al-Dahr* 1.10.1–8; 2.4.1.

¹³⁹ E.g., *Parzival* 1 (57), 6 (317, 328), 15 (747, 758, 782), 16 (793, 805).

¹⁴⁰ Parmenides, *On Nature; Parmenides of Elea—A Text and Translation with an Introduction*, trans. David Gallop (Toronto 1984).

¹⁴¹ Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.

been familiar.”¹⁴² The latter’s “beautiful allegorical account of a young person being sent to find his existential value and, after having found it, of returning to his spiritual home, reminiscent of the gnostic *Hymn of the Pearl*, uniquely blends the worldly with the spiritual.”¹⁴³ In addition, when Padmasambhava introduces his allegorical hero as an “insane demiurgic person,” it does not take much effort to recognize the Platonic character of the demiurge, painted in terms of malevolence and ignorance in the Gnostic literature.¹⁴⁴ Padmasambhava’s metaphorical “little man of light” might share a common origin with scattered references to various members of Jesus’s party as “little men,” which may have originated as ritual titles: James, the brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church, could not have owed his sobriquet *Iakobos ho Mikros* or “James the Little” to his socio-political status;¹⁴⁵ John the Baptist used the appellation “Little One” for Jesus when summoning him to be baptized;¹⁴⁶ and Jesus’s twin brother Thomas was addressed as a “little man,”¹⁴⁷ comparing his limited stature, which he shared with that of all people, to the ‘unelevated’ state that precedes spiritual enlightenment.¹⁴⁸

Guenther took the convergence of Neo-Platonic, Gnostic and Manichaeic traditions as an indication of the geographic position of Padmasambhava’s homeland, Oddiyāna, “the name for a vast, but vaguely defined and definable, region in which by the time of Padmasambhava Christian, Gnostic, and Manichaeic ideas were very much alive.”¹⁴⁹ But rather than situating this area to the northwest of India, the fact that the *Hymn of the Pearl* is embedded in the *Acts of Thomas*, a Gnostic Christian work, suggests that this theme, as well as that of the luminous *homunculus*, was transported from Syria to India along with the expansion of Thomasine Christianity. The focal point of this branch of Christianity, where the apostle Thomas himself was believed to have been martyred and buried, was the city of Chennai, formerly known as Madras, on the southeast coast of India.¹⁵⁰ It can hardly be coincidence that this is only some fifty kilometers east of Kāñcī, the most plausible candidate for the elusive region of Oddiyāna, as seen. As a native citizen of Kāñcī, Padmasambhava could thus have acquired an intimate familiarity with surviving elements of the Gnostic philosophy espoused by the Christians of Thomas in Chennai. He might have proceeded to interweave the Gnostic themes of the pearl and the radiant youth with local traditions about gem-

¹⁴² Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 69 n. 70. “In any case, the theme of the *Hymn of the Pearl* seems to have been familiar to the followers of the rDzogs-chen teaching.” Ibid. 106 n. 92.

¹⁴³ Ibid. 112.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 113 n. 111.

¹⁴⁵ Compare Richard Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* (Edinburgh 1990) 14; Rendel Harris, *The Twelve Apostles* (Cambridge 1927) 60. The title occurs in Mark 15.40.

¹⁴⁶ *Tractate of the Right-Hand Geniza (Codex Nasaraeus, Mandaean)* 11. *Did Jesus Live 100 B.C.? An Enquiry into the Talmud Jesus Stories, the Toldoth Jeschu, and Some Curious Statements of Epiphanius—Being a Contribution to the Study of Christian Origins*, George Robert Stowe Mead (London 1903) 144.

¹⁴⁷ “Hail Thomas, thou little man! ... Verily I say unto thee, O Thomas, thou little man, ...”; Bartholomew, *The Resurrection of Christ* (Coptic), in Harris, *Twelve Apostles* (n. 145 above) 61.

¹⁴⁸ *Acts of Thomas* 3.37, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, trans. James Keith Elliott (Oxford 1993) 463.

¹⁴⁹ Guenther, *Teachings* (n. 53 above) 4.

¹⁵⁰ Sources are given in John Nicol Farquhar, “The Apostle Thomas in North India,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 10 (1926) 108–109; Hagen, *Der Gral* (n. 16 above) 36; Harris, *Twelve Apostles* (n. 145 above) 40, 43, 55, 113–114; Ronald Brownrigg, *The Twelve Apostles* (London 1974) 132, 186–192.

stones in order to produce the series of allegorical sketches on the initiatory journey of the soul that he was to introduce into Tibet afterwards. Specifically, the entanglement of the gem in the hair or crown of a serpentine custodian in the sea might rest on native Indian folklore. Whereas Padmasambhava clearly intended the quest for the wish-granting jewel as a complex metaphor for spiritual progress, people around him, from Tamil Nadu and Śrī Lankā to Tibet and Java, may have soon forgotten or failed to grasp the deeper meaning of the stories. In this way, Indrabhūti's legendary quest for the talisman, after which he first discovered Padmasambhava, may really be a garbled memory of the king's own engagement with Padmasambhava's esoteric teachings; the guru's Tibetan biographers would have mistaken the soul quest of Indrabhūti, guided by Padmasambhava and transpiring outside Tibet, for a literal, historical voyage, as would the romancers of the Grail. Alternative scenarios are that Indrabhūti himself was a fictional king, based on Padmasambhava's allegories, or, giving greater credence to the legends, that Padmasambhava modeled his allegories of a questing prince on his patron, Indrabhūti. As for Parzival's literary origins, it is argued that he corresponds to Padmasambhava in the legends, but to the little man of light in the allegories. While this may again mean that the legends are a distorted perspective on Padmasambhava's teachings, a reasonable hypothesis is that Padmasambhava, as a mystic visionary, based his allegorical itinerary of the developing mind on his own spiritual path of growth. His writings can then be seen as his own spiritual diary, as if, in them, Parzival himself is seen to reflect on his quest for the Grail.

Alchemy in Padmasambhava's Allegories

Moreover, if Padmasambhava was an alchemist, it stands to reason that the wish-granting jewel he was concerned with corresponds to the famed *lapis philosophorum* or "philosophers' stone," which likewise doubled as a genuine object and an image of the soul or, in a Christian context, the redeeming role of Christ. Modern scholars have sometimes remarked on the close parallels between Wolfram's Grail and the philosophers' stone, notably the gem's propensity to rejuvenate and to radiate light.¹⁵¹ This discussion can be seamlessly incorporated in Padmasambhava's handling of alchemical concepts of this kind, all the more if it may be conceded that Wolfram was aware of the alchemical aspect. If the original reading of Wolfram's Latin title of the Grail is *lapis exilis* or "trivial stone,"¹⁵² a convincing link arises with the philosophers' stone, which was addressed in the selfsame terms by Arnold of Villanova (1235–1311), an apparently Catalan alchemist not too far removed in time from Wolfram.¹⁵³ On one

¹⁵¹ E.g., Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Grail Legend*, trans. A. Dykes (Boston 1986²) 152–153.

¹⁵² Cf. Latin *exilis*, "small, thin, slender, lank, meagre, poor, feeble"; *A Latin Dictionary Founded on Andrew's Edition of Freund's Latin Dictionary*, ed. Charlton Thomas Lewis and Charles Short (Oxford 1966) 687 s. v. "exilis." This reading is allowed by some of the manuscripts, besides *lapsit exillis*, poor Latin for "fallen in exile," and *lapis exillis*, for "exiled stone"; Lachmann, *Wolfram von Eschenbach* (n. 83 above) 226. Cf. Latin *exilium*, "banishment, exile," Lewis and Short, *Latin Dictionary* 702 s. v. "exsilium or exilium."

¹⁵³ "Hic lapis exilis extat precio quoque vilis, / Spernitur a stultis, amator plus ab edoctis." Arnold of Villanova, *Rosarium Philosophorum* 9 (14th or 15th c.); in *Rosarium Philosophorum; ein alchemistisches Florilegium des Spätmittelalters; Faksimile der illustrierten Erstausgabe; Frankfurt 1550*, trans. Lutz Claren and Joachim Huber (Weinheim 1992) 1.9, 2.15. Compare: "The epithet *exilis* (poor, mean) hints at a

level, Parzival's peregrinations can be read as the gradual maturation of a fool who, at first, is too obtuse to fathom the importance of the Grail; in this respect, Parzival can be seen as a reflex of Padmasambhava's "radiant youth," who completes the same course of mental growth and comes to appreciate the jewel as a vehicle of wisdom. Wolfram's association of the Grail with the bird Phoenix points in the same direction: "That Wolfram was not unacquainted with the alchemical ideas may also be deduced from the description of the Grail as the stone through whose power the phoenix is consumed by fire in order to arise rejuvenated from the ashes. . . . The motif of the phoenix and the stone in Wolfram therefore links the image of the Grail with ideas of a decidedly alchemical nature."¹⁵⁴

Conclusion

Specialists of the Grail literature have repeatedly drawn attention to Gnostic and alchemical aspects of the Grail stories, particularly in Wolfram's *Parzival*, but a direct, historical link remained out of reach. An exact historical mechanism by which Wolfram von Eschenbach—or his source—could have familiarized himself with Gnostic and Manichaean materials was never convincingly identified. The spiritual father of Tibetan Buddhism, Padmasambhava, now appears to embody the missing link in this chain of traditional dependence. Padmasambhava was a renowned mystic and alchemist, who consciously combined esoteric ideas of Platonic extraction with elements of Dravidian or Hindū folklore to produce a unique cosmivision that he then relayed in the form of elaborate metaphorical stories. One way or another, the evidence for Padmasambhava's role as a hub between ancient Gnostic lore and medieval troubadours seems practically definitive. Specialists of the Grail literature are exonerated from overlooking Padmasambhava's significance because of the obscurity of the seer's writings and the unavailability of a translation in any modern European language until 1996.

INDIAN ORIGINS ALL ALONG

Taken as a whole, the above material warrants the hypothesis that facets of the Buddhist mythology of the wish-granting jewel, blended with esoteric traditions from antiquity, have somehow made their way into the European folklore surrounding the Holy Grail, especially into the work of Wolfram von Eschenbach. As the biography and the *ipsissima verba* of Padmasambhava contain such striking parallels to the core narrative of Parzival's quest, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Grail writers were not only indebted to the Indian subcontinent for the motif of the Grail as a gemstone itself, but for the entire story of Parzival. The various versions of the Parzival legend have the appearance of being a relatively late addition to the cycle of Arthurian romances. This impression receives a striking confirmation in Parzival's absence from

well-known feature of the philosopher's stone, which is repeatedly described by the authors as worthless, as having been thrown out on to the dunghill or as trodden underfoot in the street. In antiquity the alchemist Zosimos had already stated that the *lapis* was 'despised and highly honoured, not given and given by God'; Jung and von Franz, *Grail Legend* (n. 151 above) 153.

¹⁵⁴ *Grail Legend* (n. 151 above) 152–153.

the presentation of Arthurian characters on the arch of the Porta della Pescheria on the northern façade of the cathedral at Modena, Italy. Possibly the earliest monumental sculpture to feature the Arthurian legend, this scene is thought to date from the period between 1120 and 1140 and to reflect a Breton tradition. The exclusion of Parzival from a series that includes Arthur, Guinevere, Gawain, and Kay may be read as an indication that, at this early time, the tale of Parzival was not yet associated with the Arthurian saga—if it was at all known, some half a century before the appearance of Chrétien's *Perceval*.

In retrospect, the conclusion that the heroic adventure of Parzival, including the leading subplot concerning the Grail, was an import from Tibet or India is perhaps not as surprising as it might seem at first blush, as a reading of Wolfram's *Parzival* actually demonstrates that Wolfram has been explicit about the Indian connection throughout. Although he opted to remain vague with respect to the location of Munsalvaesche, Wolfram presented Parzival's half-brother Feirefiz as a pagan nobleman residing in India, giving the name of his country as "Tribalibot."¹⁵⁵ In the aftermath of the meetings with Parzival, Repanse de Schoye retreated to this land in Feirefiz' company, presumably carrying the Grail with her, and she "gave birth afterwards, in India, to a son, who was called Johan. Prester John they called him; forever after they retained that name for the kings there. Feirefiz had letters sent all over the land of India, telling them about the Christian way of life. It had not been so strong there before. We call that land India here; there it is called Tribalibot."¹⁵⁶ The widespread medieval intrigue concerning Prester John and his elusive Christian nation in the east usually located this legendary priest-king in Ethiopia, yet in some of the earliest reports, including this one, the reference is to India. That Wolfram undoubtedly specifies Prester John's place of origin as India proper follows from the fact that *Tribalibot* is an unmistakable reference to Pataliputra, the ancient name of Patna and, at the time of the Gupta dynasty (240–550), the capital of the region Magadha, in northeast India, stretched out along the south bank of the river Ganges. The world's largest city during the reign of emperor Asoka (3rd c. BCE), it served as the capital of the Maurya empire, under king Chandragupta, of the Gupta dynasty, and—in the present day—of the state of Bihar. The impression that the Grail "disappeared" to India with Repanse de Schoye is confirmed by Wolfram's intimation that the Grail is "still hidden."¹⁵⁷

By and large, the picture is consistent with that offered in the fragments of Wolfram's other play, *Titirel*, as allegedly collated in Albrecht's *Younger Titirel* (ca. 1272): this text describes how Parzival and his "Templar" knights, towards the end of the adventure, transferred the Grail *gen orient* or "to the orient,"¹⁵⁸ to the palace of Prester John in India.¹⁵⁹ The palace of Prester John—as well as a sanctuary erected in the otherwise unknown land of "Pitimont," erected as the Grail passed through¹⁶⁰—

¹⁵⁵ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* 15 (735, 750).

¹⁵⁶ *Parzival* 16 (822–823), trans. Edwards (n. 83 above) 344–345.

¹⁵⁷ *Parzival* 16 (786), trans. Edwards (n. 83 above) 329.

¹⁵⁸ Albrecht, *Younger Titirel* 6052 (cf. 6060), ed. Kurt Nyholm, *Albrechts Jüngerer Titirel*, vol. 3.2 (Berlin 1992) 416.

¹⁵⁹ *Younger Titirel* 325, ed. Wolf, *Jüngerer Titirel* (n. 16 above) 82.

¹⁶⁰ *Younger Titirel* 6090, ed. Nyholm, *Jüngerer Titirel* (n. 158 above) 426.

was claimed to be a replica of the Grail temple—domed, round and high, roofed with gold and on the interior encrusted with sapphires, representing the blue sky, and set with glistening carbuncles to mark the stars.¹⁶¹ The *Lohengrin*, composed between 1283 and 1289 by a certain “Nouhusius” or “Nouhuwius,”¹⁶² made King Arthur responsible for the return of the relic to the Far East.¹⁶³ The *Younger Titurel* further relates that Titurel eventually died in this place,¹⁶⁴ while an inscription on the Grail ordered Parzival to succeed Prester John for the duration of ten years, adopting the same title.¹⁶⁵ Following Parzival’s eventual abdication, the next “Prester John” in line was the son of Feirefiz and Repanse de Schoye, as both Wolfram and Albrecht indicated.

When the theosophist Isabel Cooper-Oakley (1854–1914) interpreted Prester John, to whose Indian territory Parzival retreated, as “the Grand Lama, the incarnation of Wisdom or Gnyâna,”¹⁶⁶ she may just have followed a hunch without much in the way of historical evidence, but her general identification of the Christian land of Prester John with the Nestorian communities stretching from Persia to China, including Tibet, remains an attractive option, especially in view of the known incorporation of the Thomasine Christians of the Coromandel Coast into the Nestorian movement.

TRANSMISSION FROM THE EAST

The first romancer of the Grail, Chrétien de Troyes, identified the source of his revelations as an elusive book supplied to him by his patron, Count Philip of Flanders (1143–1191).¹⁶⁷ Wolfram von Eschenbach claimed to have derived his information from a certain “Kyot the Provençal,” who discovered “this adventure’s fundament” in a manuscript in Toledo, Spain; the manuscript was composed in “heathen” language and attributed to Flegetanis, an astrologer who was Jewish on his mother’s side and pagan on his father’s, worshipping a calf.¹⁶⁸ The discovery of a literary predecessor to the story of Parzival and the Grail would lend weight to these source attributions, contrary to the prevailing sentiment among scholars.¹⁶⁹ Yet granting that threads of the Indian mythology of the wish-granting jewel and of Padmasambhava’s activities informed elements of the Grail tradition, how could such traditions have reached the likes of Chrétien and Wolfram? The strength of the literary parallels notwithstanding, the argument that India or Tibet furnished a literary precursor to Parzival’s quest for the Grail can only be valid if it is historically viable. In what way could diverse ac-

¹⁶¹ *Younger Titurel* 6268, ed. Nyholm, *Jüngerer Titurel* (n. 158 above) 471. The story of the transportation of the Grail is in 6268–6286, ed. Nyholm 471–475.

¹⁶² Thomas Cramer, ed., *Lohengrin: Edition und Untersuchungen* (München 1971) 154.

¹⁶³ Nouhusius or Nouhuwius, *Lohengrin* 715 (7141–7144), ed. Cramer (n. 162 above) 546. “Am Anfang liegt das Gralreich in einem nicht näher bestimmten Land, möglicherweise in Frankreich, am Schluß aber in der innern India ...”; Cramer, *Lohengrin* 34.

¹⁶⁴ Albrecht, *Younger Titurel* 6305, ed. Nyholm, *Jüngerer Titurel* (n. 158 above) 480. Perhaps a parallel can be seen with the death of the historical king Lha Thothori in Tibet.

¹⁶⁵ Albrecht, *Younger Titurel* 6321–6322, ed. Nyholm, *Jüngerer Titurel* (n. 158 above) 484.

¹⁶⁶ Cooper-Oakley, *Traces* (n. 47 above) 183.

¹⁶⁷ Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval*, prologue, trans. Bryant (n. 46 above) 1.

¹⁶⁸ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* 8 (416), 9 (453–455), 16 (827), trans. Edwards (n. 83 above) 176, 191–192, 346.

¹⁶⁹ E.g., Edwards, *Parzival* (n. 83 above) xvii.

counts of the *cintāmani*, including Padmasambhava's allegorical treasure maps to locate it, have coalesced into a single stream of traditions and made their way into the intellectual heritage of Europe?

Within the Buddhist World

The wider cultural-historical background of international trade networks certainly favors the possibility of such a migration of ideas. The first part of the process, concerning the manner in which Śrī Lankā, Javanese and Tibetan tales of the *cintāmani* could have met, is easily answered. As early as the time of King Asoka Maurya (d. 232 BCE), established routes linked Pātaliputra with the port at Champā, now in Vietnam, and from there to Śrī Lankā, Malaysia, and the Far East. Moreover, Tibetan historiography contends that Padmasambhava, towards the end of his life, in 804, retreated to a place called “the sacred red mountain of Lankapuri,” which Indologists confidently identify as a place in Śrī Lankā.¹⁷⁰ In addition, this avid traveler is on record as having visited a host of other places, including China, Turkestan, and Sumatra.¹⁷¹ Others followed in his wake; though in the reverse direction, the Buddhist scholar, Atiśa Dipankara Srijnana (982–1054), who was a major instrument in the second wave of development of Vajrayāna Buddhism in Tibet after Padmasambhava, had earlier spent no less than twelve years in Śrī Vijaya—an ancient Malay kingdom spanning from the third to the fourteenth century that was centered on Sumatra, but extended deep into the Indonesian archipelago, including all of Java at least at the end of the twelfth century. Inhabiting a stronghold of Vajrayāna Buddhism, the same school promulgated by Padmasambhava in Tibet, it is perfectly possible that the Javanese scholars composing the *Manik Maya* or its prototypes were aware of the legends of the *cintāmani* associated with Padmasambhava as well as Bhūridatta. Indeed, if Padmasambhava's visits both to Śrī Lankā and Sumatra are genuine, all elements of the mythology of the *cintāmani* that were discussed above could in theory have been known in Indonesia and Śrī Lankā as early as the ninth century, but certainly by the eleventh century.

Persian and Arabic Intermediaries

Nor does the infrastructure of inter-cultural relationships between the Far East and western Europe during medieval times prove to be an obstacle: “The evidence shows that, during the Early Middle Ages, the Tibetan Empire and Frankish Western Europe were integral parts of a civilized world which included the Islamic caliphate and T'ang China and was ‘focused’ ... on Central Eurasia.”¹⁷² Traversing both seas and land, the Arabic trade network extended all the way from Sumatra and Java to Spain. A closer look at the cross-cultural exchange of literature at the time suggests that literary prototypes for Parzival's quest for the Grail could have been carried from the Far East into Spain along at least two different, though overlapping channels: the Persians and the Arabs. Khosrau I (d. 579), the Sassanian king, sponsored the importation and transla-

¹⁷⁰ “Dharma Fellowship” (n. 110 above).

¹⁷¹ T. Tulku, in *Life and Liberation* (n. 61 above) xxx.

¹⁷² Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire* (n. 64 above) 196.

tion of Indian collections of tales, such as the *Jātakas* and the *Pañcatantra*. Over time, much of this material was eventually translated into current European vernaculars, including the German language: “The Pañcatantra as a whole was translated into German from Latin as early as 1480 by Antonius von Pfor ... The Buddha Legend was adapted in the famous story of ‘Barlaam and Josaphat’ by Rudolph von Ems.”¹⁷³ A few centuries later, Arab savants embarked on a large-scale translation project of astrological and astronomical documents. The “primary direct infusion of Indian material into Islam” occurred during the second half of the eighth century, which was also the formative phase of Arab astrology.¹⁷⁴ During this time, the first ‘Abbāsīd caliphs displayed an extraordinary interest in Persian and Indian science and took concrete measures to acquire some of this information for the Arabic world. For 753 or 754, an Arabic historian recorded an embassy from Sind to the court of Abu al-‘Abbas as-Saffāh (721–754), the first ‘Abbāsīd caliph.¹⁷⁵ In 771 or 773, Abu Ja‘far al-Mansūr (712–775), the caliph’s brother, who founded Baghdād and its renowned “House of Wisdom,” received another embassy from Sind, which led him to order the translation of two astronomical books written by the formidable Indian mathematician and astronomer Brahmagupta (598–668).¹⁷⁶

If the role of Arabic intermediaries in the transmission of stories from India to Europe is highly likely, twelfth-century Toledo, replete with libraries and pinpointed by Wolfram von Eschenbach as the place where his informant, Kyot, encountered the book of Flegetanis, certainly qualifies as the best place for such a discovery to have been made. A veritable crucible merging Arabic, Jewish, and Christian ideas in a fruitful joint quest for true scientific knowledge and a promised land of the sciences, Toledo’s paramount contribution to science was its extensive translation program of foreign—predominantly Arabic and Hebrew—texts into Latin, that was initiated by archbishop Raymond of Toledo (d. 1180). The pinnacle of this admirable intellectual pursuit was reached in the thirteenth century, when king Alfonso X of Castile (1221–1284) acted as the principal sponsor of a similar translation project, placing a keen emphasis on astronomy and cosmology. Of special importance is the common participation of Jewish consultants in cases where the translator himself was not Jewish: “‘Translation,’ however, can be misunderstood in this context. What often (but not invariably) happened was that the European scholar did not have good enough Arabic to be able to work directly from his text, so someone, often a Jewish convert, would

¹⁷³ Friedrich Wilhelm, “The German Response to Indian Culture,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 81.4 (1961) 395.

¹⁷⁴ David Pingree, “The Indian and Pseudo-Indian Passages in Greek and Latin Astronomical and Astrological Texts,” *Viator* 7 (1976) 151.

¹⁷⁵ al-Ya‘qūbī, in David Pingree, “The Fragments of the Works of Ya‘qūb ibn Tāriq,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 27.2 (1968) 102.

¹⁷⁶ Burjor Avari, *India: The Ancient Past; A History of the Indian-Subcontinent from 7000 BC to AD 1200* (London 2007) 219. The primary sources are Ibn al-Adamī (ca. 920), *Nizām al-‘iqd*, in Abū ‘l-Qāsim Sā‘id bin Ahmad bin Sā‘id al-Qurtubī; al-Andalusī of Toledo (1029–1070), *Kitāb Tabaqāt al-Umam* (1067–1068); Ibn al-Qiftī (ca. 1172–1248), s. v. “Kankah.” David Pingree, “Kanaka,” *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, ed. Charles Coulston Gillispie, vol. 7 (New York 1973) 223. Compare Pingree, “Fragments” (n. 175 above) 102. Parallel accounts are given in al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj* 1.150; *Tanbih* 220; see John F. P. Hopkins, “Geographical and Navigational Literature,” *Religion, Learning and Science in the ‘Abbasid Period*, ed. Michael J. L. Young, John Derek Latham, Robert Bertram Serjeant (Cambridge 1990) 302.

render the Arabic into Castilian or Catalan, and from this the scholar would produce his Latin version.”¹⁷⁷ Other Jewish writers worked as independent translators. Rabbi Abraham ibn ‘Ezra (ca. 1090–ca. 1167) was one of the foremost Spanish scholars of the time, who gained notoriety as one of the most learned men of his time, a well-traveled scholar, a poet, and the author of countless books. Born and bred in ‘Islāmic Spain, ibn ‘Ezra left his native country sometime before 1140 in order to escape anti-Semitic persecution. He spent the rest of his life as an itinerant scholar passing through numerous places, including Egypt, Palestine and Baghdād, where he may well have collected manuscripts, as well as Italy, England and France. Ibn ‘Ezra is the first known authority to have identified the Indian astrologer who travelled to Baghdād in 773, who had remained anonymous in the earliest two historical descriptions of the embassy, as Kanaka, a renowned Indian astronomer-mathematician and diplomat.¹⁷⁸ Kanaka, of whom precious little is known, was called *Kankah al-Hindī* in the Arabic bibliographical tradition,¹⁷⁹ while King Alfonso in his *Astromagia* referred to him as “Kancaf the Indian,” who authored a list of lunar mansions.¹⁸⁰ As an astrologer practicing his art at Baghdād, Kanaka continued to serve the ‘Abbāsid court through several caliphates until the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd (786–809),¹⁸¹ the great patron of the arts and sciences, who is best known today from his role in the *Arabian Nights*. The passage in which ibn ‘Ezra makes the identification is a detailed statement of Arabic debt to Indian astronomy found in the preface to ibn ‘Ezra’s Hebrew translation of an Arabic astronomical treatise. Crucially, this passage also reveals the involvement of a Jew in the Arabic acquisition of Hindū scriptures. Ibn ‘Ezra relates how an Arabic ruler by the name of es-Saffa‘h had commissioned a certain Jew, who was conversant in both Arabic and the Indian language, to translate “one of the books of their wisdom” into Arabic.¹⁸² Afterwards, the same Jew was dispatched to the Indian city of Ujjayinī, where he secured the assistance of Kanaka for the translation of a book that must have contained a considerable body of astronomical knowledge:

Then the wise man, whose name was Kankah, was brought to the king, and taught the Arabs the basis of number, which lies in nine characters. Then a learned man named Ya‘qūb ibn Sharah (Tāriq) translated from the language of this learned (Indian), through the medium of the Jew who translated in Arabic, a book of tables of the seven planets, all operations relating to the earth, rising-times, declination, the ascendant, the determination of the beginnings of the astrological houses, the knowledge of the superior planets (?), and solar and lunar eclipses.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁷ Maxwell-Stuart, *Chemical Choir* (n. 112 above) 56.

¹⁷⁸ Avari, *India* (n. 176 above) 219.

¹⁷⁹ Pingree, “Kanaka” (n. 176 above) 222.

¹⁸⁰ Ewa Śnieżyńska-Stolot, “‘The Indo-European Grail’ or the Constellation Crater?” *Collectanea Eurasiatica Cracoviensia*, ed. J. Pstrusińska, P. Stalmaszczyk (Kraków 2003) 337.

¹⁸¹ Thus Al-Bīrūnī, *Chronology*, in Pingree, “Kanaka” (n. 176 above) 222.

¹⁸² Abraham ibn ‘Ezra, trans., *Ibn al-Muthanna’s Fī‘ilal Zij al-Khwārizmī*, preface, trans. Moritz Steinschneider, “Zur Geschichte der Uebersetzungen aus dem Indischen in’s Arabische und ihres Einflusses auf die arabische Literatur,” *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 24 (1870) 353. According to Steinschneider (326), the only extant copy of this prologue was the one in the *Codex de Rossi*, 212.

¹⁸³ *Ibn al-Muthanna’s Fī‘ilal Zij al-Khwārizmī*, preface, trans. Pingree, “Fragments” (n. 175 above) 101.

Pingree may have stated that “there is no real basis for this invention, although it is dutifully repeated by Steinschneider, Suter, and Sarton,”¹⁸⁴ but the arrival of an embassy from Sind to the court of Abu al-‘Abbas as-Saffāh is well anchored in known history. The critical role of Kanaka and the anonymous Jew in the transmission of Indian literature, including astronomy, to the Arabic world was clearly well acknowledged in twelfth-century Spain and, indeed, Toledo. In addition to ibn ‘Ezra’s testimony, al-Adamī’s account of the embassy from Sind (ca. 920) was cited in 1067 or 1068 by Abū ‘l-Qāsim Sā‘id bin Ahmad bin Sā‘id al-Qurtubī or al-Andalusī (1029–1070), who spent the final years of his life in Toledo. Ibn ‘Ezra identified the first Indian book translated by the Jew under as-Saffāh as the *Kalilah and Dimnah*,¹⁸⁵ which is none other than the Arabic equivalent of the *Pañcatantra*. During the late twelfth or the early thirteenth century, the Jewish grammarian, Jacob ben Eleazar of Toledo, translated this work from Arabic into Hebrew as the *Sēpher Kalilah wa-Dimnah*, in rhymed prose—and the first part of this translation is still extant. Clearly, throughout the period from ibn ‘Ezra’s lifetime to that of Wolfram von Eschenbach, the Jewish element of the population of Toledo displayed a profound interest in the literature that had come from India.

Māshā’allāh

On a purely speculative note, it is worthwhile to ponder whether Wolfram’s obscure Flegetanis or Zabulon may have been the anonymous Jew who reputedly rendered the *Pañcatantra*—and perhaps other works—from Sanskrit into Arabic. A promising candidate is the celebrated astrologer and astronomer, Māshā’allāh ibn Atharī (ca. 740–815), a Persian Jew from Basra, known as “Messala” or “Messahalla” in Latin texts, as Menaššeh in Hebrew, and as Yazdān Khwāst in Persian,¹⁸⁶ who seems to have converted to Islām in the course of his life. Māshā’allāh was active as an astrologer in Irāq from 762 to 809 and was one of the men who cast a horoscope for a propitious foundation of the city of Baghdād on 30 July 762. Mainly for his work on astrolabes, he became the leading astrologer of the late eighth century, influential in west and east alike and serving in the courts of several caliphs, most notably under al-Manšūr. As he was active in the same place and at the same time as Kanaka, “One may tentatively conclude ... that Kanaka ... was an associate of Māshāllāh.”¹⁸⁷ For his astrological doctrines, Māshā’allāh relied on texts in Syriac, Greek, and Pahlavi, while he probably owed some acquaintance with Indian science to the influence of Kanaka. Of the more than twenty works Māshā’allāh produced on astrology, *De Scientia Motus Orbis* was rendered into Latin by Gerard of Cremona in Toledo, *De Rationale Circuli et Stellarum* was handled by his colleague, John of Seville, and ibn ‘Ezra translated

¹⁸⁴ Pingree, “Kanaka” (n. 176 above) 223.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibn al-Muthanna’s Fī ‘ilal Zīj al-Khwārizmī*, preface, trans. Steinschneider (n. 182 above) 353.

¹⁸⁶ David Pingree, “Māshā’allāh,” *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, ed. Charles Coulston Gillispie, vol. 9 (New York 1974) 159; “The Indian and Pseudo-Indian Passages” (n. 174 above) 149, 181; “Astrology,” *Religion, Learning and Science in the ‘Abbasid Period* (n. 176 above) 294; Richard Lemay, “Māshā’allāh Ibn Atharī (8th Century),” *Encyclopaedia of Islamic Science and Scientists; Volume 2: I–M*, ed. M. Zaki Kirmani, Nagendra Kumar Singh (New Delhi 2005) 626–628.

¹⁸⁷ Pingree, “Kanaka” (n. 176 above) 222.

this latter—in 1148—as well as another one of his treatises into Hebrew: the *Š'elōt* and the *Qadrut*.

The little that is known today about Māshā'allāh compares favorably to the profile Wolfram von Eschenbach sketched for Flegetanis. As Jewry is traced through the maternal line, Māshā'allāh's mother will have been Jewish, while the name of his father, Athar or Atar, suggests a Zoroastrian background, *ātar* being the personification of fire, heat and light, which are esteemed highly in that religion. If astronomy was Flegetanis's field of expertise, a Persian derivation can be proposed for his name: in 1813, the German writer, Johann Joseph von Görres, who translated Persian texts into German, first suggested that the name traces to a Persian phrase *felek dānā*, “astronomer.”¹⁸⁸ Although *felek dānā* has not been attested as such, the Persian adjective *dānā*, “Learned; a learned man,” did exist and the Arabic word *falak*, “heaven, sky, firmament,” was employed in Persian composite adjectives of this type, such as *falak-parwāz* and *falak-paimā*, “Extremely swift,” *falak-jawalān* “Moving in the sky,” and *falak-wash*, “Like the heavenly sphere.”¹⁸⁹ If the chain of transmission of Grail lore included a Persian element, therefore, the person in case may well have been identified by an appellative title meaning “sky specialist,” that is, “astronomer.” Needless to say, this would suit Māshā'allāh well, not only because of his Persian roots and his affinity with Persian texts, but also because of his outstanding contributions to the development of Arabic astronomy and astrology. Wolfram's assertion that Flegetanis pioneered the science of astronomy—as he “was der erste der sich Astromie ie underwant”¹⁹⁰—would be meaningful when applied to Māshā'allāh as one of the very first astrologers operating within the Arabic-speaking world, all the more considering his description as “von Babilōnie Savelōn,” uttered by Wolfram's sparring partner, Klingsōr.¹⁹¹ A treatise Māshā'allāh wrote on the calculation of prices is in fact “the

¹⁸⁸ Johann Joseph von Görres, ed., *Lohengrin; ein alteutsches Gedicht nach der Abschrift des Vaticanischen Manuscriptes von Ferdinand Gloekle* (Heidelberg 1813) VI–VII; Hagen, *Der Gral* (n. 16 above) 33 n. 1; Helen Adolf, review of Bodo Mergell, *Der Gral in Wolframs Parzival; Entstehung und Ausbildung der Gralsage im Hochmittelalter, Speculum* 29.2.1 (1954) 299; Stein, *Ninth Century* (n. 97 above) 140. If correct, this etymology can be seen as a Persian variation on the term *al-Falakīyatun*, “astronomer,” proposed by Friedrich von Suutschek-Hauschka, “Die iranischen Quellen in Wolframs Parzival,” *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 82 (1928) LXXXII; cf. Henry Kahane, Renee Kahane, and Angelina Pietrangeli, *The Krater and the Grail: Hermetic Sources of the Parzival* (Urbana 1965) 121. Alternatively, Hagen, *Der Gral* (n. 16 above) 33–34, 47, 63–64, bolstered his identification of Flegetanis as the Arab scholar, Tābit (826–901), with the phonetic resemblance between the former's name and an imaginary Arabic phrase, *felek thāni*, “second sphere,” that could have been the title of one of Tābit's books on astronomy. However, a misinterpretation of “Flegetanis” as the name of a person rather than a book makes for an unattractive hypothesis in the absence of better circumstantial evidence. None of the titles on Tābit's extensive bibliography, as we have it, incorporates the term *Felek*; see Francis James Carmody, *The Astronomical Works of Thabit b. Qurra* (Berkeley 1960); and Régis Morelon, trans., *Thābit ibn Qurra; Œuvres d'Astronomie* (Paris 1987), for bibliographies, editions and translations of Tābit's works. As no Arabic work with the title *Felek Thāni* is actually on record, it is futile to debate whether it concerned the second one of the planetary spheres, be it Jupiter or Mercury, or the second one of a series of geographic climates, which would have included most of the Middle East.

¹⁸⁹ Francis Steingass, ed., *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary Including the Arabic Words and Phrases to be Met With in Persian Literature Being Johnson and Richardson's Persian, Arabic, and English Dictionary Revised, Enlarged, and Entirely Reconstructed* (Beirut 1970) 500 s. v. “*dānā*,” 938 s. v. “*falak*,” “*falak-parwāz*,” “*falak-jawalān*,” “*falak-wash*.”

¹⁹⁰ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Der Wartburgkrieg* 156, trans. Simrock (n. 28 above) 194–195.

¹⁹¹ *Der Wartburgkrieg* 97, trans. Simrock (n. 28 above) 350.

oldest book on science which has survived in Arabic¹⁹² and birth prophecies of the type contained in the *Book of Zabulon* would be perfectly at home in the genre of “astrological history, a science perfected in Sasanid Iran,” which inspired “the most noteworthy” of Māshā’allāh’s writings.¹⁹³ Moreover, that Flegetanis was in the habit of “worshipping a calf as if it were his god” is easily accommodated within a Zoroastrian framework, as the Zoroastrians venerated the so-called “Primal Bull” or “Sole-Created Ox” as the ancestor of all living plants and animals, excepting mankind.¹⁹⁴ Although this act was ritually commemorated in the bloody ritual of bull sacrifice, a deep sense of awe and respect for the animal lay at its core. When the French traveler, Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605–1689), visited the Zoroastrians in Persia in ca. 1632, whom the Muslims disparagingly called *Gaurs* or “infidels,” respect for the cow was one of the traits that struck him most: “There are some beasts which the Gaurs do mightily respect, and to which they give a great deal of honour. . . . The beasts which they principally admire are the cow, the ox, and the dog.”¹⁹⁵ A telling hint that Wolfram’s version of the adventures of Parzival had passed through the hands of Arabic intermediaries is the observation that Wolfram made Feirefiz cognizant of the Arabic names of the planets.¹⁹⁶ Māshā’allāh may well have been instrumental in the translation of Kanaka’s book concerning astronomy or astrology that, as seen, included sections on the seven planets. Wolfram’s famous passage about a constellation Flegetanis linked to the ‘Grail’ and the list with the Arabic names of the planets, as placed in the mouth of Feirefiz, could have belonged to this very text. That Wolfram knew of Kanaka’s existence follows from his mention of an oriental philosopher named Kancor in one breath with *Thēbit*.¹⁹⁷ That he does not mention Māshā’allāh by that name fortifies the possibility that Flegetanis represented this personage.

If the hypothesis involving Kanaka and Māshā’allāh as mediators in traditions concerning the wish-granting jewel and Padmasambhava is correct, it would need to be proved that the translations supplied by al-Mansūr’s court astrologers and later relayed to translators in Spain included portions of the autographic tracts and the biography of Padmasambhava and perhaps of myths also reflected in the *Manik Maya* and the *Jātaka*. Although Kanaka and Māshā’allāh were active as astrologers, Padmasambhava was primarily a religious teacher, miracle-worker and mystic. In what respect might Padmasambhava’s life and teachings have been of interest to Indian and Arabic sky-watchers? Crucially, all three appear to have shared an interest in esoteric traditions of a Neo-Platonic flavor and in alchemy. Padmasambhava’s marked alchemical leanings have already been discussed. One of Māshā’allāh’s astrological works, *De Scientia Motus Orbis*, which was rendered into Latin as a part of the ambi-

¹⁹² James Gerald Crowther, *The Social Relations of Science* (Lahore 2007) 143.

¹⁹³ Pingree, “Astrology” (n. 186 above) 294.

¹⁹⁴ E.g., *Bundahiš* 14.1–2, and paralleled in the Mithraic theme of the *Taurobolium*.

¹⁹⁵ J. B. Tavernier, *Collections of Travels through Turkey into Persia* (1684) 1.9: 168, in Mary Boyce, ed., *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism* (Chicago 1990) 125.

¹⁹⁶ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* 15 (782), trans. Edwards (n. 83 above) 327. Cooper-Oakley, *Traces* (n. 47 above) 141, elaborated her claim that the tradition of the Grail “can be definitely followed through Arabia to India . . .”

¹⁹⁷ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* 13 (643).

tious translation project at Toledo, is suspected to have incorporated Sabaeen doctrines,¹⁹⁸ while “Kancaf the Indian” is likewise thought to have belonged to the Sabaeen sect.¹⁹⁹ As Kankah al-Hindī also figures prominently in alchemical literature and he was both a contemporary and a compatriot of Padmasambhava, it would seem eminently plausible—though entirely conjectural—that Padmasambhava’s allegories of the soul as a wish-granting jewel were relevant to Kanaka and were passed on by him to Māshā’allāh and other Arabic practitioners of the alchemical art.²⁰⁰ In other words, Gnosticism and alchemy emerge as the key concepts that join these figures together, ultimately linking the Thomasine faction of early Christianity, which was Gnostic in outlook, to the Judaeo-Arabic astrologers of medieval Spain. The chronological window of transmission would have been tight, as Padmasambhava, Kanaka and Māshā’allāh were all contemporaries. Padmasambhava died more than half a century after 753, when Kanaka and the anonymous Jew, possibly Māshā’allāh, were first commissioned in Baghdād, but probably before Kanaka’s own death during the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd. This means that Kanaka and the Jew may have learned details concerning Padmasambhava’s dealings with king Indrabhūti and the wish-granting jewel first-hand and could have personally delivered Padmasambhava’s allegorical tracts to Baghdād.

As some of Māshā’allāh’s astrological writings were clearly present in Toledo, composed in the Arabic language, there is a reasonable a priori case that one of these was the pagan “book of Flegetanis” or the *Book of Zabulon* supposedly discovered there by Kyot. Earlier, the parallelism between Wolfram’s report of the retrieval of the *Book of Zabulon* from a statue and the common practice of Tibetan *tertöns* was proposed as a possible explanation for the discovery of the earliest version of the Parzival saga, yet it could not be determined how long after Padmasambhava’s death this find would have occurred. Is it possible that Wolfram confused the half-Jewish translator of Indian materials, arguably Māshā’allāh, with Padmasambhava himself, inspiring his belief that it was Flegetanis who hid the text inside a statue? That question aside, other clues suggest a role for Abraham ibn ‘Ezra. Some of ibn ‘Ezra’s translations of Māshā’allāh’s works into Hebrew are still extant. As a notable Neo-Platonist and Qabbālist, ibn ‘Ezra would naturally have been interested in a Gnostic work such as the allegories of Padmasambhava. His awareness of the Indian contribution to astrology surfaced again when he compared figures “stated by Ptolemy, the ‘Magistri probationum’ (830), Thābit, the ‘Hebrews’ and the ‘Indi.’”²⁰¹ And in another one of his works, ibn ‘Ezra offered a detailed discussion of the astrological theory of cold and hot planets,²⁰² which informed the rationale Wolfram offered for the successive bouts

¹⁹⁸ Pingree, “The Indian and Pseudo-Indian Passages” (n. 174 above) 160.

¹⁹⁹ Śnieżyńska-Stolot, “The Indo-European Grail” (n. 180 above) 337.

²⁰⁰ The parallel between Kanaka’s reputed alchemical connection and Padmasambhava’s documented one defies Pingree’s (“Kanaka” [n. 176 above] 223) judgment that “pure fancy has produced a fabulous Kankah al-Hindī in alchemical literature. . . . These stories have no place in serious history.”

²⁰¹ Carmody, *Astronomical Works* (n. 188 above) 44.

²⁰² ibn ‘Ezra, *Sēpher Te’amīm (Book of Reasons)* 1. 5, trans. Shlomo Sela, *Abraham Ibn Ezra: The Book of Reasons; A Parallel Hebrew-English Critical Edition of the Two Versions of the Text* (Leiden 2007) 32–37.

of pain and relief experienced by the wounded Fisher King.²⁰³ Ibn ‘Ezra’s Spanish roots and his proximity in time to Wolfram provide a credible setting for a transmission of ideas to Kyot or other originators of the Grail narratives. Given these considerations, it is tempting to suggest a collection of ibn ‘Ezra’s writings, including translations of tracts by Māshā’allāh, as the source that enabled Kyot to read Flegetanis.

Wolfram’s pithy discussion of Kyot’s activities suggests that Kyot added original research of his own to the information he encountered in the book at Toledo. In this light, it is worth reviving the largely abandoned hypothesis that Wolfram’s Kyot was none other than Guiot de Provins (d. after 1208),²⁰⁴ a French troubadour and poet, whose travels took him to places as far apart as Germany, Greece, Constantinople and Jerusalem, possibly as a part of the Third Crusade (1189–1192) or the Fourth Crusade (1202–1204). In view of these travels, it is quite possible that this Guiot combined his findings from Toledo with information collected in Jerusalem and communicated that to Wolfram von Eschenbach during a visit to Germany. If, for example, the document he discovered in Spain was the Arabic text of Māshā’allāh, it is possible that Guiot obtained a copy of ibn ‘Ezra’s translations in Jerusalem. It may also be relevant that, less than two centuries later, Sir John Mandeville (1357–1371) allegedly observed “priests of Ind” or India in Jerusalem.²⁰⁵ If these were not Buddhists, they were “probably Malabar Christians, whose faith was founded by St. Thomas of India, and who are here identified with priests of Prestre Iohnes lond.”²⁰⁶ Either way, a mingling of Indian and Judaeo-Christian thought in India as well as the Holy Land seems perfectly feasible. If such an enclave had existed at the time of the Crusades, it could well have supplied Guiot with knowledge about the remote land of Tribalbot, supplementing the Gnostic and astrological material he had gathered from Toledo’s libraries. Indeed, it may have been in this way that Guiot learned of the retrieval of the *Book of Zabulon*, possibly a *Life of Padmasambhava*, from a Tibetan statue; the *Sanglingma*, as seen, was allegedly uncovered during the twelfth century, and prior to 1192.

A Common Source for Chrétien de Troyes and Wolfram von Eschenbach

Where does this hypothesis leave the earliest exponent of the romance of Parzival, Chrétien de Troyes, and the unnamed source he allegedly received from Count Philip

²⁰³ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* 9 (489–492), cited below.

²⁰⁴ E.g., Cooper-Oakley, *Traces* (n. 47 above) 154. Von Suhtschek-Hauschka’s (“Die iranischen Quellen” [n. 188 above]) suggestion that “Kyot” is an “armen. Name” and Kyot therefore apparently Armenian himself is hard to reconcile with his acquaintance with the Provençal language and the common occurrence of the name “Guiot” or “Guyot” in medieval France, a derivative of “Guy,” cognate with the Italian name “Guido,” and tracing to a Germanic form *Wido. Presumably, von Suhtschek-Hauschka based this idea on the slender evidence that one of the earliest leaders of the Armenian church was the Catholicos Giut I Arahetzatsi (461–478)—but this is so early that the most likely historical prototypes for Arthur and Parzival would still have been alive or not even have been born, and their saga would hardly have had enough time to form. And while this date is also several centuries too early to speak of a distinct “Provençal” language, librarians at the Matenadaran or the national library of Armenia are adamant that no other author with the name “Giut” is known in their catalogues; Gevor Ter-Vardanyan and David Ghazaryan at Matenadaran, Yerevan, Armenia, personal communication 18 June 2010.

²⁰⁵ Sir John Mandeville, *Travels* 10, ed. John Mandeville, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville; The Fantastic 14th-Century Account of a Journey to the East* (Mineola 2006) 53.

²⁰⁶ Michael Charles Seymour, ed., *Mandeville’s Travels* (Oxford 1967) 243 n. 88.1.

of Flanders? If one accepts the parallels between the story of Parzival and Buddhist traditions about the wish-granting jewel, especially as related to Padmasambhava, Chrétien and Wolfram cannot have made up the substance of Parzival's adventure, but must have borrowed it from pre-existent documents. If so, there is no compelling reason to cast doubt on the statements they themselves made regarding their sources. It is known that Count Philip returned from Palestine in 1179 and went back in 1190, meeting his death in the Holy Land. As Chrétien's unfinished account of Parzival's exploits saw the light between 1180 and 1191, a plausible conjecture is that Philip handed Chrétien the book shortly after his return from the orient, specifically commissioning Chrétien to produce a French rendition or reworking of it. Wolfram's critique of Chrétien's "unjust"²⁰⁷ text seemed to imply that Chrétien's source was not written in a pagan language, unlike Kyot's better version, which was.²⁰⁸ If correct, this suggests that Chrétien may have relied directly on ibn 'Ezra's Hebrew translations of Māshā'allāh—a proposition that is especially credible if Chrétien was a baptized Jew, as has been convincingly argued,²⁰⁹ who could obviously read Hebrew. Chrétien's hometown, Troyes, had long housed a significant Jewish community, one that could count the renowned Talmūdic scholar, Raši (1040–1105), among its past members. Alternatively, if Count Philip had not acquired the pertinent book during his sojourn in Palestine, he could have obtained it directly from ibn 'Ezra, as the latter's peregrinations are known to have taken him to north France, most likely during the 1150s. Perhaps Chrétien had gained a first familiarity with ibn 'Ezra's astrological and Gnostic projects in this period and combined that knowledge with the *Ur*-version of the *Parzival* upon receipt of a book count Philip bestowed on him upon his return from Palestine. This book may have comprised a bundle of Padmasambhava's allegories, originally rendered into Arabic by Māshā'allāh, but currently formatted in Hebrew. If it may now be supposed that all of this occurred sometime before Guiot de Provins was able to lay his hands on the Arabic originals of ibn 'Ezra's writings, possibly supplemented by a version of the *Life of Padmasambhava* recently recovered from a Tibetan statue, and Guiot subsequently shared these findings with Wolfram von Eschenbach, it is seen that Wolfram would indeed have had reason to boast of a purer and more complete source of the text, in heathen tongue, than the one Chrétien had perused earlier—even though Wolfram erroneously dated the "astronomer" to 1200 BCE and credited Virgil with the discovery of the text.

"CHRISTIANIZING" THE MYTH OF THE WISH-GRANTING JEWEL

Modern interpreters have never agreed on the religious status of the subject matter narrated in the Grail legends: were the quest for the Holy Grail, the encounter with the Fisher King and the procession of the Grail originally intended as Christian or pagan

²⁰⁷ "If master Chrétien of Troyes has done this tale an injustice, Kyot, who sent us the true tidings, has good reason to wax wrath. Definitively, the Provençal tells how Herzeloyde's son won the Grail ..." Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* 16 (827), trans. Edwards (n. 83 above) 346. "Herzeloyde's son" is Parzival.

²⁰⁸ Contra von Suhtschek-Hauschka, "Die iranischen Quellen" (n. 188 above) LXXXII, who implied that Kyot's work informed Chrétien as well as Wolfram.

²⁰⁹ Urban Tigner Holmes and Mary Amelia Klenke, *Chrétien, Troyes, and the Grail* (Chapel Hill 1959) 51–61.

symbols? If pagan, what cultural background supplied the imagery? At the outset, there can be no doubt that Chrétien de Troyes and Wolfram von Eschenbach, like the later Grail writers, were themselves writing from a thoroughly Christian perspective. This is easily inferred from countless passages in their texts. For example, Wolfram portrays Parzival's half-brother Feirefiz as being engaged in a massive missionary campaign for the sake of Christianity, having "letters sent all over the land of India, telling them about the Christian way of life."²¹⁰ Regarding Kyot's perusal of the writings of Flegetanis discovered in Toledo, Wolfram opines that "It helped that baptism dwelt with him, or else this tale would still be unheard. No heathen cunning could avail us to tell about the Grail's nature—how its mysteries were perceived."²¹¹ This is to say that Christian theology alone is capable of illuminating the true meaning of the Grail. Again, ever since the Grail had been deposited onto the earth by a host of angels, "baptized fruit has had to tend it with such chaste courtesy—those human beings are always worthy whose presence is requested by the Grail."²¹² The "baptized fruit" thus in charge of the Grail are bound to refer to the impeccably Christian band of "Templars," allegedly succeeding an earlier host of lapsed angels. And in the same description of the Grail, the hermit Trevrizent identified the day of Parzival's arrival as Good Friday, to be accompanied by a most peculiar ritual taking place on the Grail:

Today a message will appear upon it, for therein lies its highest power. Today is Good Friday, and therefore they can confidently expect a dove to wing its way from Heaven. To that stone it will take a small white wafer. On that stone it will leave it. The dove is translucently white. It will make its retreat back to Heaven. Always, every Good Friday, it takes the wafer to that stone, as I tell you; by this the stone receives everything good that bears scent on this earth by way of drink and food, as if it were the perfection of Paradise—I mean, all that this earth is capable of bringing forth.²¹³

But, whereas Chrétien and Wolfram themselves irrefutably had a Christian axe to grind, opinions are divided as to whether their subject matter had also arisen in a Christian context. G. Ronald Murphy has construed a positive answer to this question, arguing that the mysterious writing on the Grail is "a characteristic of many of the reliquary-style, or box-style, altar stones. The names of apostles, prophets, saints, and kings are engraved in enamel on the portable altars' sides and tops."²¹⁴ Wolfram's Grail would correspond to the consecrated stone of such a portable altar, in particular that of the Bamberg Paradise Altar, which is dated to the late twelfth century.²¹⁵ Several particulars in the Grail story receive explanations in the same vein. Mazadan, one of Parzival's revealed ancestors, "is surely 'MacAdam,' son of Adam."²¹⁶ "Wolfram's procession with the moving altar stone, the Grail, the lights and the aloewood incense, the spear and the weeping suggest an allusion not just to an ordinary Mass but to a

²¹⁰ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* 16 (822), trans. Edwards (n. 83 above) 344–345.

²¹¹ *Parzival* 9 (453), trans. Edwards (n. 83 above) 191.

²¹² *Parzival* 9 (454), trans. Edwards (n. 83 above) 192.

²¹³ *Parzival* 9 (469–470), trans. Edwards (n. 83 above) 198.

²¹⁴ Murphy, *Gemstone* (n. 17 above) 35.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.* 104, 181ff.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.* 194.

Holy Week liturgy with lights passing before all.”²¹⁷ The mystifying Fisher King is “naturally connected with the use of the Fish symbol in early Christianity: the *Ichthys* anagram, as applied to Christ, the title ‘Fishers of Men,’ bestowed upon the Apostles, the Papal ring of the Fisherman ...”²¹⁸ The Fisher King might just conceal a central character in the ecclesiastical hierarchy of Wolfram’s age: “In view of the Third and Fourth Crusades, it might be possible to suggest Innocent III, successor to St. Peter the fisherman, but I prefer to see Wolfram as not restricting his story to simple one-to-one correspondences.”²¹⁹ If the name given to this figure, Anfortas, can be analyzed as garbled Latin for “infirmity,” it represents “thus the embodiment of Christianity in its full human weakness ...”²²⁰

By contrast, any theory proposing a non-Christian origin for the central themes of the Grail legends, be it Celtic, Jewish, Arabic, Persian or indeed Indian, must assume that the first romancers of the Grail consciously *adapted* a set of pagan traditions to Christian values. If Wolfram’s credits to Flegetanis are to be taken seriously, a mixture of Jewish and pagan, possibly Indian or Arabic, notions must have been adjusted to fit Christian standards. That this is clearly what Wolfram intended follows from his report that Kyot, acquainted with the nucleus of Grail stories supplied by Flegetanis, went in search of suitable custodians of the Grail in Latin books: “Thus Flegetanis wrote of it. Kyot, that wise scholar, began to seek for those tidings in Latin books, of where there had been a people fitting to tend the Grail and embrace such chastity. He read the chronicles of the lands, those of Britain and elsewhere, of France and Ireland. In Anjou he found the tidings.”²²¹ Apparently, the oriental tenants of the Grail identified in the original text were not quite “fitting” enough.

The romances of the Grail reflect Christian attitudes to different degrees. Whereas Chrétien’s text is firmly Christian, Wolfram’s *Parzival* contains a much larger number of indisputably non-Christian elements. By contrast, the Welsh *Peredur*, which is incorporated in the *Mabinogion*, but is of uncertain date, does not contain a single trace of Christian influence. Although it treats the life and times of Peredur in similar terms to those of the French and German *Parzival*, featuring many identical scenes, it also contains some unique strands of material and reads like a perfectly pagan text. As it is simply inconceivable that a medieval Welsh writer would systematically strip a source, such as Chrétien’s *Perceval*, from all expressions of Christianity, an act entirely lacking in motivation and parallels, the most economic solution is that *Peredur* represents a very early offshoot from an original source, arguably a work by Māshā’allāh or ibn ‘Ezra, that had already incorporated the hero’s association with the court of king Arthur, but had not yet been assimilated to a Christian mindset. As a cultural exchange between the Judaeo-Arabic elements of Spain and the Welsh would not be surprising, this hypothesis should not be dismissed lightly.

²¹⁷ Ibid. 97.

²¹⁸ Jessie Laidlay Weston, *From Ritual to Romance* (Garden City 1957) 124.

²¹⁹ Murphy, *Gemstone* (n. 17 above) 134.

²²⁰ Ibid. 134; compare Adolf, review of Mergell (n. 188 above) 298, who discusses the theory that the prototype of the *lapis* was Christ conceived as a rock.

²²¹ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* 9 (455), trans. Edwards (n. 83 above) 192.

In addition, the theory that Wolfram or his source had reformatted oriental motifs to suit Christianity explains why the supposedly Christian aspects of the story tend to appear clumsy, forced, and imperfect. For example, Wolfram's excursion on the annual 'blessing' conferred onto the Grail by a sacred dove, cited above, bears the hallmarks of an interspersed motif in the original legend. Effectively baptizing the Holy Grail, this miraculous occurrence made the magical properties of the Grail dependent on a renewable gift from the Holy Spirit, where they had previously been intrinsic to the object without any such divine help. In what is clearly a thin Christian varnish coloring a non-Christian tradition, Wolfram thus authorizes the Grail as a worthy subject of Christian interest; considering Wolfram's passing mention of the Phoenix it is even possible that the image of the dove had only recently been introduced as a substitute for an earlier version, far less palatable to an orthodox Christian, in which the Phoenix of the alchemists would alight on the Grail for its periodic rejuvenation. A similar example of Christian spin may be seen in Wolfram's report that Feirefiz was only able to see the Grail in its nourishing quality after he had received baptism first; until that time, Feirefiz saw "nothing but an achmardi which my lady the damsel carried past us ..."²²² With a subtle Christian twist, Wolfram conceivably watered down an earlier story, exemplified in the legend of Indrabhūti, in which the Grail as a real 'eye-opener' healed someone's blindness. In Wolfram's propagandistic tale, the baptismal water performs the miracle and the Grail is reduced to a mere accessory; but as a vestigial reminder of the original account, Wolfram nonetheless retained a memory of the Grail's superiority, as it was from the Grail that the water derived: "The baptism-bowl was lowered a little towards the Grail. At once it became full of water, neither too hot nor too cold."²²³

With respect to other aspects of the Grail legend, the propounded Christian significance is equally inadequate to justify the imagery in the first place.²²⁴ Yes, the concept of the Grail as a stone fallen from the sky and now serving as an inexhaustible supply of food and health can conveniently be made to fit the conception of Christ as a foundation rock of the church, an aspect of God come down from heaven and the ultimate source of spiritual nourishment, "the bread and wine of life." Yet the orthodox Christian tradition did not customarily unite those three strands of belief into a singular package similar to Wolfram's *lapis exilis*; and the descent of Christ—in the form of a man rather than a stone—was thought to have transpired during the reign of emperor Augustus or perhaps Tiberius, not *in illo tempore*, coincident with Lucifer's fall, as the Grail did. Again, the meal and solemn procession to which the Fisher King treats Grail questers such as Parzival and Arthur may superficially resemble a proper Christian celebration of the Eucharist at Passover.²²⁵ However, "The explicit

²²² *Parzival* 16 (810), trans. Edwards (n. 83 above) 339, cf. 813.

²²³ *Parzival* 16 (817), trans. Edwards (n. 83 above) 342.

²²⁴ Hagen, *Der Gral* (n. 16 above) 26–27, 82–85, rejected any Christian interpretations of the meal with the Fisher King, the spear and the act of fishing altogether.

²²⁵ If Chrétien was a baptized Jew, the duty of the youthful Parzival to enquire about the meaning of the procession could be a narrative element reflecting the obligation of a Jewish child to query the reason for the festivities at the Passover meal. Certainly, the motif of the hero's failure to enquire lacks a parallel in traditions surrounding the Buddhist wish-granting jewel.

Christianization of the objects borne in procession in the Fisher King's castle is to be found for the first time in the fragmentary *Roman de l'Estoire dou Graal* by Robert de Boron, who came shortly after, and was perhaps a rival of, Chrétien.²²⁶ As presented by Chrétien, Wolfram, and the author of the *Peredur*, the procession cannot have been a Christian ritual by any stretch of the imagination. Any association of the emasculating wound of the Fisher King, received in battle, with the injury inflicted on Jesus's side would have been regarded as blasphemous in the extreme and most Christians would be horrified at the sight of a Eucharist featuring a severed head placed on a platter or the host being carried by a woman, symbolizing the church or not,²²⁷ not to mention the observation, "There is no cross, no liturgical gesture, not one single religious figure, to accompany the supposed relics of Christ's Passion."²²⁸ Comparative mythologists have long pointed out that the widespread mythological theme of the underworld banquet offers a much better understanding of this procession of the Grail. In this respect, "the oriental concept of the underworld influenced the legend of the Grail Castle more than the Celtic otherworld did."²²⁹ The Indian motif of the legendary invitation of mortal guests into the subaquatic, underworldly abode of a Nāga king and princess epitomizes this genre. In the original tradition, then, the bleeding spear watched by Parzival will not have been the legendary lance with which a Roman soldier retrospectively called Longinus pierced the side of Jesus at the cross, which was supposedly recovered at Antioch in 1089,²³⁰ but—as the context demands—the spear with which the Fisher King was wounded in battle:

He was wounded in the joust by a poisoned spear, so that he has never regained his health, your gentle uncle—pierced through his genitals. It was a heathen who fought there and who rode that joust against him—born in Ethnise, where the Tigris flows forth from Paradise. That same heathen was convinced that his courage would win the Grail. Its name was engraved in the spear. He sought chivalry far afield. It was solely for the sake of the Grail's power that he traversed water and land. By his battle joy vanished from us. Your uncle's fighting must be praised. He bore the spear's iron tip away with him in his body.²³¹

By mouth of the hermit, Trevrizent, Wolfram makes it quite clear that Anfortas used the bleeding spear to treat his wound at times when the planet Saturn stood high in the sky and, according to a popular astrological theory, frost descended over the land:

When the star Saturn stood at its station again, we were informed of it by the wound, and by the summerly snow. Never had the frost hurt him so much, your gentle uncle. The spear had to go into his wound. There one extremity helped against the other—at that the spear turned bloody red. . . . Great frost hurts him so much that his flesh becomes colder than snow. Ever

²²⁶ Leonardo Olschki, *The Grail Castle and its Mysteries*, trans. J. A. Scott (Manchester 1966) 13.

²²⁷ Paul's symbolic explanation of Abraham's wife, Sarah, as the "new covenant" (Gal. 4.21–31) is arguably the earliest expression of the Christian tradition personifying the church as a "goddess."

²²⁸ Olschki, *Grail Castle* (n. 226 above) 13, 34.

²²⁹ *From Scythia to Camelot* (n. 98 above) 215.

²³⁰ Olschki, *Grail Castle* (n. 226 above) 12. Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval* is ambivalent regarding this interpretation of the spear as it was left unfinished, whereas the *Third Continuation* does not allow it. "Wauchier de Denain, who wrote a sequel to the *Conte* about the year 1200, was the first to identify this lance with the spear that pierced Christ's side . . ."; Olschki, *Grail Castle* 75 n. 13c. Compare *From Scythia to Camelot* (n. 98 above) 255.

²³¹ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* 9 (479), trans. Edwards (n. 83 above) 202.

since we have known the poison on the spearhead to be hot, at these times it is placed upon the wound. It conducts the frost out of the body, all around the spear, glass-colored, like ice. ... Nephew, never since nor before has the king been in such pain, for then the star Saturn had just manifested its approach. It is capable of bringing great frost with it. Just placing the spear on the wound, as it was seen to lie on it before, could be of no avail to us—they thrust the spear into the wound. Saturn races so high aloft that the wound knew of it in advance, before the second frost followed. The snow was in no such haste. It fell only on the next night, in summer's reign.²³²

To a modern Christian mindset, the sobriquet Fisher King itself is expediently applied to Jesus Christ, traditionally symbolized by the device of a fish and wounded in his side and legs somewhat like the Fisher King; through the Grail, after all, the Fisher King “had duplicated Jesus’s miracle of feeding a multitude with a fish.”²³³ Alternatively, the true Fisher King could have represented Jesus’s apostles Peter and Andrew, who were appointed as *haleis anthropōn*, “fishers of men.”²³⁴ But although these comparisons are superficially attractive, they are not supported by the textual sources. None of the medieval romancers spell out these equations, and wherever recognizable names from the Christian tradition populate the pedigree of the Fisher King they invariably centre on Joseph of Arimathea rather than Jesus himself.²³⁵ Neither Jesus nor Peter were mutilated during a joust or inhabited a castle afterwards, being sustained by the Grail. By the virtue of their religions, neither the Jew Flegetanis nor any of his Arabic, Persian or Indian sources could have qualified Jesus or descendants of Joseph of Arimathea as fishes. The only rational explanation supplied by the Grail authors themselves is that the Fisher King, limited through his disability, was seen fishing in a river or a lake outside the castle: “But when he wants to engage in some pleasure and sport he has himself placed in a boat and goes fishing with a hook; that’s why he’s called the Fisher King.”²³⁶ The experienced eye of the folklorist has no difficulty to expose this as a folk-etymology, replacing a real, forgotten rationale. In the absence of convincing alternative prototypes in non-Christian tradition, however, theorists quickly resort to Christian mythology regardless. Jessie Weston felt attracted to the explanation offered in Robert de Boron’s *Joseph of Arimathea*: “By the command of God, Brons, Joseph’s brother-in-law, caught a Fish, which, with the Grail, provided a mystic meal of which the unworthy cannot partake; thus the sinners were separated from the righteous. Henceforward Brons was known as ‘The Rich Fisher.’”²³⁷ Although Brons betrays a connection with the pan-Celtic deity Bran, it is equally clear that, for Boron, the event “duplicates Jesus’s miracle of feeding a multitude with a single fish ...”²³⁸ A far more promising lead is supplied by the Indian body of tradi-

²³² *Parzival* 9 (489–492), trans. Edwards (n. 83 above) 206–207.

²³³ *From Scythia to Camelot* (n. 98 above) 255.

²³⁴ Matt. 4.19; Luke 5.10.

²³⁵ E.g., *Third Continuation of Chrétien de Troyes’ Perceval*. In *Perlesvaus* 10, trans. Bryant (n. 85 above) 195; “the Fisher King” is the epithet of Joseph of Arimathea himself.

²³⁶ Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval* 7, trans. Bryant (n. 46 above) 38.

²³⁷ Weston, *From Ritual to Romance* (n. 218 above) 116.

²³⁸ *From Scythia to Camelot* (n. 98 above) 269. For this reason, Littleton and Malcor (269–270) “find the explanation of the origin of the Fisher King’s name as deriving from Christian tradition far more satisfying

tions relative to the wish-granting jewel, in which the jewel is invariably in the keeping of a mythical snake or fish—a Nāga or a Makara—dwelling in a luxurious palace in the sea. If traditions of the *cintāmani* were responsible for the core of the Parzival romance, it is worth considering if the Nāga or Makara could have represented the original “fishy king” of the Grail legends. A vestige of such a connection may have survived in intimations that the Grail castle was situated beside a lake²³⁹ or indeed in the sea. “... the Grail is occasionally associated with the sea. At one point in the *Estoire Josephe* carries the Grail into the sea.”²⁴⁰ In Albrecht’s *Younger Titarel*, too, the Grail temple is set in the midst of an artificial sea, just like the island of the Nāgas from which the Tibetan king Indrabhūti retrieved the wish-granting jewel:

Great splendor of ornament was to be beheld beneath the onyx; fishes and images of all the wonders of the ocean were engraved and cut therein, each in its proper form, behaving just as if they were alive and in the wild ... The floor was covered with bright crystals; among them the creatures moved proudly, as if they were living in the waves. ... Acquaintance with the floor created the optical illusion of a lake rippling with waves, but covered with ice, and yet in such fashion that it was entirely transparent, so one could see the battles and combats of fishes, animals and sea-monsters there.²⁴¹

Finally, the hypothesis of an adaptation of pagan motifs to Christianity sheds a helpful light on the relationship between the various forms given to the Grail by medieval romancers—from Chrétien’s gem-encrusted dish and Wolfram’s gemstone to the more familiar chalice—for, as seen, Buddhists and Christians alike were wont to impress or deposit precious beads and other gems into splendid cups, dishes, crowns or reliquaries. The characteristic Grail motif of the preservation of a sample of Jesus’s life-giving blood in a goblet may just be construed as a marriage between Jesus’s visceral prayer—graphically presented in some Renaissance paintings—that “this cup may be taken from me”²⁴² and his institution of the Eucharist, with its emphasis on blood and flesh. However, given the Jewish abhorrence of blood, the notion of a blood relic of Christ could hardly have originated within a purely Christian framework. Historically, as has been abundantly documented, the rite of the Eucharist will have been an excrescence of the ancient Mediterranean cults of the gods Adonis, Osiris, Dionysus, Mithras, and so on, which could have paid specific attention to the vessel that contained the vitalizing wine or blood. If the earliest Christian community adopted a Gnostic outlook, it is conceivable that material such as the *Hymn of the Pearl* led to the use of a precious stone as a prominent symbol of the purified soul revived in and

and less of a strain on the imagination than the mental calisthenics needed to derive this Grail figure from the Celtic Bran.”

²³⁹ “Brumbane is the name of a certain lake. They carry him there, out onto its surface, for the sake of its sweet air, because of his bitter wound’s cavity. He calls that his hunting-day. No matter how much he can catch there, with such a painful wound, he has need of more at home. Because of this a tale emerged that he is a fisherman. That tale he has to bear with.” Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival* 9 (491), trans. Edwards (n. 83 above) 206–207. Compare *Mabinogion: Peredur*, trans. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, *The Mabinogion* (London 1973) 189–190.

²⁴⁰ *From Scythia to Camelot* (n. 98 above) 221.

²⁴¹ Albrecht, *Younger Titarel* 436–438, trans. Barber and Edwards, “The Grail Temple” (n. 43 above) 100.

²⁴² Matt. 26.39.

with Christ. While subsequently overshadowed by Catholic thought in Europe, the metaphor may have survived in India along with the expansion of Thomasine and, later, Nestorian Christianity, whence it eventually diffused back into the mindset of medieval European Christians. Wolfram's unique portrayal of the Grail as a gemstone of paradise and the concomitant mythology centered on the expulsion of angels from heaven and the establishment of a Grail castle with a dynasty of guardians undoubtedly sprang from contact with the oriental lore of cups and gems with magic properties. The coalescence of Wolfram's sky-fallen gem with the blood vessel of the later Grail writers makes most sense in the context of Christian relic worship, which itself may have followed the Buddhist practice to fill or decorate ostentatious reliquaries with gems and numinous beads comprised of Buddha's blood and organs and occasionally identified with the wish-granting jewel. The archetypal theme of the nutritive and vitalizing pearl was thus allowed to blossom on the intersection between Christian and Buddhist relic cults. While Flegetanis—who is arguably Māshā'allāh—would have had no interest in Christian or indeed Jewish blood symbolism, Kyot may have been instrumental in the reinterpretation of legendary potent cups and gems of eastern extraction as vessels of the Christian Eucharist.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that Buddhism furnished a literary predecessor to Wolfram's concept of the Holy Grail and to Parzival's quest more generally. Although it has not as yet been possible to reconstruct the historical path of transmission with anything approximating certainty, a tolerably plausible scenario could be pieced together. The remaining challenge is to look for versions of Padmasambhava's allegories or legend and for any traditions concerning the quest for the wish-granting jewel in the extant writings of Māshā'allāh and Abraham ibn 'Ezra, as well as the *Pañcatantra*, the *Sindhind*, the *Khandakhadyaka* and other astrological and alchemical treatises. Needless to say, a failure to find such evidence may be attributable to loss, as only a fragment of the original literature has withstood the test of time, or it may falsify the hypothesized involvement of these sources in the transmission of motifs; it would not necessarily invalidate the parallels discovered between the Grail and the *cintāmani*, or between the adventures of Parzival and of Padmasambhava. Topics that must be deferred to future publications are the relationship of the present thesis to other oriental prototypes of the Grail proposed in scholarly literature, the identity of the constellation in which Wolfram's source reputedly saw the Grail, and the mythological or symbolological significance of the Grail itself.