

THE THREE MARYS

by Mircea A. Tamas

In Hindu tradition, in the Judaic Kabbalah, in Greek mythology and in fairy tales, the initiatory stories present a supreme endeavour, the finding of the divine Maiden. The Virgin (even if, historically, she doesn't appear as such) has various names: Helen of Troy, Beatrice, Pistis Sophia, Madonna Intelligenza, Sita, Ariadne, etc., symbolizing the absolute Knowledge, the divine Light and the heavenly Love.

Dante's love for Beatrice, for example, is an initiatory way; this way (*dao*, in Chinese tradition, *marga*, in Hindu tradition), developed under the sign of *rajas*, corresponds to the royal caste, *Kshatriya*, for whom the Virgin had a most high significance, as proved by different initiatory organizations of the Western Middle Ages, like *Fedeli d'Amore* and the Templars. When Beatrice resumes her throne in the third tier of the Mystic Rose,¹ a bright triad is unveiled to us: Virgin Mary at the top, Eve in the second tier, and in the third tier, beside Beatrice, Rachel (symbolizing contemplation); St. Bernard de Clairvaux, servant of the Blessed Mary and the patron of the Templars, is Dante's supreme guide who facilitates the vision of the Virgin.

Luigi Valli, in an important work about Dante,² focuses on *Donna Sapienza*, the Sophia.³ He stresses that Dante identified Beatrice with the active Intelligence or the Wisdom (p. 82).⁴ Such symbolism, he writes, can be found, much earlier, among the Gnostics, who have introduced in their doctrine the feminine characters Ennoia and Sophia, but also in the Bible, where Rachel has the same significance (pp. 86, 91). However, René Guénon, praising Valli's study and his extraordinary documentation,

underlines the author's lack of an "initiatory mentality" and his rather "historicist" point of view; "it is not enough «to make history,» and, besides, did the people of the Middle Ages make «history for the sake of history?»" (*Ésot. Chrét.*, pp. 55-56). Chivalry, to adjust to the human mentality, Guénon writes, had a preponderant feminine principle, the *Madonna*. This feminine aspect of Divinity can be found in India, where it is called Shakti, an equivalent, in some respects, of the Hebrew Shekinah. The function of the feminine principle, Guénon says, appears also in Catholic exotericism, due to the importance of the Virgin. The Mystic Rose from St. Mary's litanies is of initiatory origins and is motivated by the connection to Wisdom (Sophia) and to Shekinah (*Ésot. Chrét.*, p. 63).⁵

Orthodoxy praised the Virgin equally, calling her "the Mother of God" (*Theotokos*), the Orthodox icons with the Mother of God being famous. There are also churches bearing the name "Mother of God," yet the most important church was called Hagia Sophia. Obviously, "the Holy Wisdom" is the equivalent of *Notre Dame*, of the Virgin. In the Middle Ages, in Western Europe, the Virgin was a symbol for esoteric spirituality; she was *Madonna Intelligenza*. Much earlier, in the Near East, the divine Sophia became part of the Christian tradition, an expression of an esoteric core. The Holy Sophia, in a higher perspective, came down as Jesus, the first earthly "house of wisdom" being the Mother of God, the Virgin, the holy womb of the *Logos*. The old Syriac manuscript we mentioned presents an icon of the Mother of God carrying Jesus inside an oval form (the World's Egg), the Virgin having King Solomon at her right and Holy Wisdom at her left.⁶ Solomon himself is an emblem of Wisdom, being considered the wisest king and the builder of the Temple.⁷

For the Christian Church, the Saintly Virgin is, first of all, *Theotokos*. The “paternity” of the Heavenly Father, corresponds to the “maternity” of the Mother of God, *Theotokos*, in the human domain.⁸ That is why Guénon considered the symbolism of the Black Virgin as referring in the first place to Prakriti. He writes: “We have to understand that the Christian tradition, not considering separately the «maternal» aspect of the Principle, has to adopt, at least explicitly, in respect to the conception about Theotokos, only the second point of view we just indicated.”⁹ The two points of view are: the Virgin considered as Shakti (*Natura naturans*, the Black Virgin as Supernal Darkness), and the Virgin considered as Prakriti (*Natura naturata*, the Black Virgin as *materia prima*). We see, though, that the Orthodox Church, even if considers the Virgin as *Theotokos*, that is, as Prakriti, praises even more the Virgin as the Saint Sophia, that is, as Shakti, as the Black Virgin of the Super-luminous Darkness. Guénon and Coomaraswamy stress that Shakti, the divine “art” of the Principle, is identical to Wisdom, Sophia, in which case she is the celestial mother of the *avatâra* (Guénon, **Hind.**, p. 102). And only as Saint Sophia, is the Virgin equivalent to Jesus, the same way Shekinah is to Messiah.

Sophia played an important role in the Gnostic sects; the most famous Gnostic text, **Pistis Sophia**, states that *Pistis Sophia*, that is, “The Faith in Wisdom,” had her home in the 13th *Æon*, between Light and the World, yet a deceitful light tempted her down, into the obscure world, where she became a prisoner. Jesus’ mission is to descend and save her, bringing Sophia back home to the 13th *Æon*.

No doubt, the Gnostics highlighted, sometimes to the maximum, the function of the feminine principle. Without understanding the Church’s perspective of promoting the Holy Trinity better than a Great Triad, the Gnostics expressed their disaccord and

sectarianism by strongly endorsing the feminine aspect. Again, they are at the edge between truth and falsehood, because Saint Mary, we saw, is a fundamental element in the Christian exotericism and esotericism.

Marcos, one of Valentinus' disciples, claimed that the "naked" truth descended upon him in the shape of a woman: "I would like to show you the Truth, herself; I brought her down, so you can see her without a veil and you can comprehend her beauty."¹⁰ The symbolism of the Truth as a nude woman is not something heretical and belongs to the esoteric domain, being known in various traditions; that is the hidden meaning of Acteon's punishment, after he surprised Diana naked, and the blinding of Teiresias, who saw Pallas-Athena naked, bathing in the Hippocrene fountain. Unfortunately, Marcos exposes and uses this symbolism for his individual goals.¹¹

Simon Magus, who proclaimed himself the supreme power of God, declared a prostitute, Helen, the Wisdom descended from Heaven, Ennoia, Mother of All; he suggested a pair Father-Mother (Brahma-Shakti), their union bringing universal salvation.¹² In the Valentinian doctrine, the pairs multiply exuberantly: Bythos and Sophia generate Christ. Christ and the Holy Spirit (who is feminine, sister and wife) engender Jesus (Leisegang 27). In **The Gospel of Thomas**, Jesus has, beside the terrestrial parents (Joseph and Mary), divine parents: The Father of the Truth and the Holy Spirit (feminine)¹³; in **The Gospel of Philip**, the Holy Spirit is the Mother of All.¹⁴

Mary Magdalene had a special position in the Gnostic doctrines. The same way Simon Magus had the prostitute Helen as a partner, Jesus was associated with Mary Magdalene. **The Gospel of Philip** says: "And the companion of the [Savior] is Mary Magdalene. Jesus loved her more than [all] the disciples [and used to] kiss her often on her [mouth]"

(63. 32, **Nag Hammadi** 148). In another Gnostic text, **The Gospel of Mary**, Mary Magdalene is the first one to have the vision of the risen Christ, and to her Jesus talks first. Yet also in the **New Testament**, it is written that

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow... The angel said to the women, «Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: “He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.” Now I have told you.» So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. (**Matthew** 28:1-10)¹⁵

“When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it” (**Mark** 16:9-11). And St. John remarks the same thing: the risen Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene first (**John** 20:1-18).

If in the **New Testament** we don't find any disputes, besides the one referring to the Apostles' mistrust, the Gnostics suggest a rivalry between Mary Magdalene and Peter; the latter has the following reaction at Mary's words: “Did he really speak with a woman

without our knowledge and not openly? Are we to turn about and all listen to her? Did he prefer her to us?” (**The Gospel of Mary**, 17:18, **Nag Hammadi** 526).

We should not be surprised by this rivalry, because the Gnostics opposed, very often, the official Church, and we understand from Saint Paul’s letters that Christianity, just born, had as its main enemy, not Roman and Judaic persecutions, but sectarianism, rivalry and disagreements within itself. This sectarianism was, of course, generated by humanistic and individualistic views, and from this perspective we will never understand why Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene first. However, the statement that Mary Magdalene was the prostitute who washed Jesus’ feet and dried them with her hair (**Luke** 7:44) has no other base but the fact that this event was followed in **The Gospel of Luke** by the first mention of Mary Magdalene, together with the twelve disciples, “After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out” (**Luke** 8:1-3).

“Who is, in fact, Mary Magdalene?” is the logical question that immediately surfaces in our minds. The Gospels contain statements such as: “Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas [Cleophas], and Mary Magdalene” (**John** 19:25); “Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons” (**Matthew** 27:56); “After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb” (**Matthew** 28:1); “Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome”

(**Mark** 15:40). Consequently, the question should be reformulated thus: “Who, in fact, is Mary?” since many Marys surrounded and accompanied Jesus.

It is interesting that, as there are two James, James the Greater (Zebedee's son) and James the Lesser (Jesus' “brother”), the same way the Christian Church celebrates two Marys: Saint Mary the Greater and Saint Mary the Lesser. The difference is, compared to James, that here there are not two different Marys, but one and only, the Blessed Virgin, Saint Mary the Greater marking *the Assumption* of the Saint Virgin (August 15th) and Saint Mary the Lesser marking her *Nativity* (September 8th). Such a partition of the Virgin into two Marys, as well as the multitude of Marys in the Gospels, has nothing to do with a “historicist” point of view (which cannot function without concrete data and for whom the multiplication of Mary creates an irremediable confusion), but belongs to the sacred science of the traditional symbols. In respect of this science, the multitude of Marys represents just aspects or attributes of the unique feminine principle, which, in its turn, is not different from the Supreme Principle.

The partition of the feminine principle into two aspects can be found in various traditions. In the Hindu tradition, the Principle's divine spouse is not only Shakti (in heaven), but also Prakriti (on earth). In the Judaic Kabbalah, the Bride or *Matrona* is, both, the higher Shekinah and the lower Shekinah. The Moon, writes Guénon, is, at the same time, *Janua Coeli* and *Janua Inferni*, Diana and Hecate, corresponding to the solstitial doors.¹⁶ In the same way, Mary the Greater corresponds to heaven, where the Saint Virgin rises (*the Assumption*), and Mary the Lesser to earth, where Christian tradition transmits, even if in a veiled manner, the same meanings as any other orthodox tradition; more than that, this symbolism illustrates the Evangelic adage “on earth as it is

in heaven” (**Matthew** 6:10).¹⁷

In the **Bible**, the partition in “heaven” and “earth” (“the world above” and “the world below”) is stated from the beginning: “And God said, «Let there be an expanse between the waters (*hammayim*) to separate water from water (*mayim lamayim*).» So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. God called the expanse «sky»” (**Genesis** 1: 6-8).¹⁸ The symbolism of waters as Universal Possibility was well explained by René Guénon and is common to different traditions. The Babylonian cosmogony, recorded in the **Enuma Elish**, starts with: “When in the height heaven was not named,/ And the earth beneath did not yet bear a name,/ And the primeval Apsu, who begat them,/ And chaos, Tiamat, the mother of them both/ Their waters were mingled together...”; yet another translation goes like this:

When there was no heaven, no earth, no height, no depth, no name, when Apsu was alone, the sweet water, the first begetter; and Tiamat the bitter water, and that return to the womb, her Mummu, when there were no gods. When sweet and bitter mingled together, no reed was plaited no rushes muddied the water, the gods were nameless, natureless, futureless, then from Apsu and Tiamat in the waters gods were created...

The freshwaters or sweet waters stand for Apsu, the abyss, a masculine principle; the saltwaters of the seas or the bitter waters represent Tiamat, the feminine principle. In the Judaic Kabbalah, *Malkuth* (the lower Shekinah)¹⁹ is “the reservoir where the waters coming from the supernal river [the higher, celestial river] mingle together,”²⁰ and we can

assume that the celestial river originates from a supernal reservoir (the higher Shekinah).²¹ The bitter and sweet waters of the Babylonian cosmogony could be compared to the two aspects of *Malkuth*, but also to the episode of **Exodus** (15:23-25): “When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter [*marah*].²² That is why the place is called Marah... Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.” Some authors regard the name Mary (Miryam or Mariam) derived from *mar-yam*, “bitter sea”; even if etymologically it seems less than probable, from a symbolic perspective it makes a lot of sense, considering what we just said. We discover two Marys: a bitter one (the Virgin without the *avatâra*, barren)²³ and a sweet one (the Virgin as mother of *avatâra*).²⁴ In fact, the sweet Mary (the freshwaters) represents Shakti and the bitter Mary (the saltwaters) is Prakriti.

Conversely, there is always a three-way partition, like, for example, in the case of the three Wise Men. The Magi are the regents of the Three Worlds, which in the Hindu tradition are symbolized as Earth (corresponding, in microcosms, to *Corpus*), Atmosphere (the intermediary realm, *Anima*) and Heaven (*Spiritus*),²⁵ and in Dante’s work as: *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. A three-way partition can be found in the Judaic Kabbalah: “These are the three supreme Names, which «no eye hath seen, apart from thee, God» (**Isa.** LXIV, 8)” (**Zohar**, II, 97 b)²⁶; “The *beth* has two parallel lines and a third joining them. What do these signify? One for heaven, one for earth, and one for the Holy One, blessed be He, who unites and receives them... These represent three supernal and closely connected holy lights” (**Zohar**, III, 36 a).²⁷ These three invisible lights suggest a striking similarity with the three (invisible) roots of the “Inverted Tree.”

Yet, even in the domain of the *sephiroth* we can distinguish this configuration “light upon light.” The first three *sephiroth* (*Kether*, *Hokhmah* and *Binah*) compose *Arikh Anpin* (“the longer face,” similar to Mary the Greater) and correspond to the three heavenly lights (*tri rocani*), mentioned by Shri Aurobindo in his works. The other seven *sephiroth* compose *Ze’eir Anpin* (“the shorter face,” similar to Mary the Lesser).²⁸ The letters *Aleph*, *Yod* and *Nun* symbolize the three supernal lights and they constitute the word *Ain*; in consequence, *Arikh Anpin* means the Non-Being (*Ain*), the invisible face, God as Being not yet manifested (before the creation of the “six days”); *Ze’eir Anpin* signifies the visible, revealed face, the six days of the Creation and the *Sabbath*.

Light upon light upon light. It represents the altar of the fire, in three degrees, belonging to the Vedic sacrifice, *agnihotra*, where there is built an altar of five bricks, in three degrees. The sacrifice, as **Maitrâyanîya Up.** unveils, symbolizes a more profound one, an inner sacrifice, the sacrificer erecting the altar within himself, when he decides to leave this world and become a *sannyasin*. Through *agnihotra* is kindled the flame in Ishtar’s heart (as a Babylonian hymn says); *jīvâtma* becomes fire that consumes *jîva* revealing *âtma*, the upper light, in its splendour.

The laying of the altar of the fire by the ancients was a brahman-sacrifice. Therefore the sacrificer, while laying these fires, must think upon them as the âtman. ... The fire [Self] which, abiding in the heart-lotus, eats food is the same as the fire which, abiding in the sky, the solar fire [Brahma], eats all creatures for its food. For this lotus is âkâsha. The four regions and the four intermediate regions constitute its leaves. ... Brahma has two forms, an embodied form and a disembodied one. The

embodied form is the untrue form; the disembodied form is the True, it is Brahman, it is Light.²⁹ The Light is the Sun. The Sun is OM. That became the Self. This Self separated himself into three. OM has three mâtâs. Through these three mâtâs all this is woven on Brahman, warp and woof. The world was at first unuttered. Prajâpati, who is the Truth, having performed tapas, uttered one after the other Bhûr! Bhuvar! Swar! These three mâtâs are the essence of Prajâpati's body. Swar is the head, bhuvar the navel, and bhûr the feet, the sun the eye of this body... The Eye is Prajâpati-Truth.³⁰

The three Lights could be, consequently, related to the Three Worlds. In Greek mythology, Theseus had three luminous wives (sometimes considered sisters): Ariadne ("the pure one"), Phaedra ("the radiant, beaming one") and Aigle ("the shining, luminous one").³¹ Various groups of three maidens are often present in Greek myths. On a cameo we see the three Charites perched between a bull's horns (above the bull are also seven stars),³² the triplet of maidens being an "explication" (in Nicholas of Cusa's view of the word) of the one-and-only Virgin; the bull is not any bull, but "the noble Bull" symbolizing Dionysus.³³ The Greeks deemed also that the three Horae represented the three phases of the moon (the moon waxing, full and waning) and probably the same three-way partition of the moon was recognized in Crete, where Minos (Pasiphaë's husband) sacrificed to the three Charites (Harrison, **Themis**, pp. 189, 192, 389)³⁴; it is acceptable to think that Ariadne, Phaedra and Aigle are, in the same way, aspects of the one-and-only lunar Virgin. Yet in the Greek tradition, besides the three Horae, Charites and Moirae, the symbolism directly connected to the moon is the one of the triple Hecate, the

queen of the Three Worlds: Selene (Heaven), Artemis (Earth) and Persephone or Hecate (Hell); Hecate was described as having three heads or faces, which were associated to the phases of the moon.

Expressing the Three Lights as the three phases of the moon has the important advantage of suggesting that, in fact, the triplet is One, and only from an exterior point of view appears multiple. On the other hand, the Three Lights could be related to the sun, moon and stars as described in the fairy tales,³⁵ but even then we are told that these three lights are equivalent to the three fairies (or swans) manifesting themselves at the summer solstice.³⁶

We read in **The Book of Revelation**: “A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth” (12:1-2). The Christian tradition applied this apocalyptical image, partially, to the Virgin Mary, who was pictured standing or sitting (on a throne) on a lunar crescent, identified with the moon.³⁷ Sometimes, in these illustrations, a cross replaced the Virgin and a “historicist” explanation supposed that it represented a token of the Christians’ victory against the Turks. In fact, the meaning belongs to the domain of sacred symbolism.³⁸ It is important also to understand that, even though Saint Mary is associated with the moon, implicitly she, as in **The Book of Revelation**, is also related to the sun and the stars.³⁹

The lunar crescent is the symbolic equivalent of the cup (or vessel)⁴⁰; the cup signifies also Christ’s heart (solar), and the sacred meaning of the Holy Grail is well-known (Guénon, **Symbols**, p. 39). Coomaraswamy writes: “Usually, the Grail Cup is identified to the Moon (Soma); in fact, the moon (soma) is nourishment for the Sun, who receives and assimilates it, this food corresponding to the one found in Buddha’s begging vessel, this vessel being,

like the sun, the Grail Cup.”⁴¹ There is, as we see, a continuous *hierogamos* between the sun and the moon and we shouldn’t be surprised that the Virgin, symbolizing the supreme Sophia, appears as a lunar Maiden.⁴² Coomaraswamy also writes:

King Soma is a victim: down here, Agni is the eater, Soma the food; above there, the Sun is the eater and the Moon his food⁴³; when the eater and the food (*adya*, *purodâsha*, the sacrifice cake) are united, we talk about the eater and not about the food. ... It is a wedding consummated in the night before the rising of the new moon... There are inseparable connections between initiation, wedding, death and digestive assimilation; ... there are many terms used in the texts, related to the unification of the multiple in One, which imply at the same time death and wedding, such, for example: *api-i*, *êko bhû*, *sambhû*, *samgam*, *samdhâ*, cf. *teleo*, to get married, to die, to perfect [Greek *teleo* corresponds to Latin *initiari*, being utilized in *Mysteries* to define the spiritual initiation]. (Coom., **Sacrifice**, pp. 195-6)

The same way a vessel can be a cup or a boat, the lunar crescent is the symbolic equivalent not only of the cup but also of the boat. In Mesopotamia, the lunar god, Nanna, was depicted traveling in a boat having the shape of the lunar crescent, and the ends of the boat were compared to the horns of a young bull.⁴⁴ The bull’s horns allude to a lunar symbolism and we saw that Dionysus was compared to a bull. However, there are images of Dionysus in a boat, and some legends tell about the god coming from the waters; it is said that, at the festival of his epiphany, Dionysus comes back from the waters in a black boat.⁴⁵ The Romans considered that Saturn, the regent of the Golden

Age, came from the seas, and was received with a lot of respect by Janus, the lunar god; that is why a ship was engraved on Roman coins (Macrobius, **Saturnalia**, I, 7, 21-22). The symbolism of the boat coming into the harbour with a precious load (a redeemer god, an initiator, or a miraculous child, for example) is similar to the meaning of Noah's Ark that carried the sacred kernel of the new world.

The Christian tradition took over the saint tokens of Janus. First, his keys (Janus being the “janitor” of the solar doors) became Saint Peter's (and the Pope's) golden and silver keys; the golden key belongs to the *Greater Mysteries*, the silver one to the *Lesser Mysteries*, corresponding to the Sun and the Moon.⁴⁶ Secondly, Janus' boat became one of Saint Peter's emblems and that of the Church itself (Guénon, **Autorité**, p. 106). More than that, the Blessed Mary was considered to be a living Ark that contained the Logos.⁴⁷ As Guénon stressed, the symbol of navigation, used also by Dante, represents a spiritual journey, in the Christian tradition, Saint Peter's boat leading to the Celestial Paradise. Guénon writes: “The harbour towards which humankind should aim is «the sacred island» that stands immovable in the middle of the agitated waters, and which is «the Salvation Mountain,» «the Peace Sanctuary»” (Guénon, **Autorité**, p. 108).⁴⁸ The symbolism of navigation towards the Island-Center can be found also in the Rosicrucian texts; Christian Rosenkreutz, in his fifth day of initiation, after he saw the naked Venus, is invited to a journey on the sea, to assist the rebirth of the royal victims, and the ships will navigate as a pentagon to a square island. Yet, the sea-journey (to which Dante alludes in **Monarchy**) could symbolize, as we have suggested already, a “descent” (*avatarana*) of a divine messenger or of an *avatâra*, in order to establish a new tradition or a new secondary center, the annual rites celebrating this event renewing the world

every time. The Christian tradition contains such a sacred significance, related to the foundation of Christianity in Western Europe.

A legend tells that, after Christ's crucifixion, some of his disciples, who were direct witnesses of His glory and power, were forced to leave the Holy Land. They were embarked, against their will, on a boat (without paddles or sails) and abandoned to the sea. Such a symbolic gesture is not new. It can be found in different traditions, usually related to the birth of an *avatâra*. Moses, Perseus, Sargon, Dionysus,⁴⁹ heroes of the fairy tales, etc. are forced into an ark and thrown into the waters to perish. In the Christian case, the abandoned ones were: Mary Jacobé, Mary Salomé, Mary Magdalene, Lazarus and Martha, Maximinus and Sidonius (the blind from Jericho). The boat floated with them, reaching the shore at the mouth of the Rhône River, to a place which today is called Saintes-Marys-de-la-Mer (Provence, France). From there, Mary Magdalene and the others spread the Word of the Lord in Gaul, leaving behind only the two Marys, Salomé and Jacobé. Here, over an ancient temple, was built a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary, called at the beginning *Sancta-Maria-de-Ratis*, that is, "the Saint Mary of the Boat," and then *Sancta-Maria-de Mari*, "the Saint Mary of the Sea" (Sainte-Marie-de-la-Mer).⁵⁰

From a historical point of view, it is not known exactly who the two Marys were; we saw already the confusion regarding the name Mary. Mary Jacobé is considered to be either Cleopha's wife and the Virgin's sister (**John** 19:25), or the mother of James (Jacob) and Joses (**Matthew** 15:40), or just the mother of James (Jacob) (**Luke** 24:10), which explains her nickname Jacobé. Salomé is supposed to be the wife of Zebedee and the mother of John and Jacob (**Matthew** 20:20).

Yet the story of the two Marys has an additional important episode. The legend says that, when they were forced to embark, a black maiden, Sarah, begged to be taken in the boat and, using Salomé's cloak as a boardwalk, she stepped, like Christ, on the waters, reaching the boat; one version considers that Sarah was the handmaid of the two Marys, Jacobé and Salomé.⁵¹

This social position of "handmaid" is, of course, a symbolic one. The colour black refers to the symbolism of the Black Virgin and the "servitude" refers to humility in respect to God. "Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, «If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.»" (**Mark** 9:35). In the same way, Sarah is a "handmaid" only from a spiritual point of view, her name meaning in fact "princess"; she is an aspect of the Black Virgin.

The cult of the Black Virgin is well-known. It is said that the "official" start of this cult occurred in the XI Century (Hani 23). Generally, the immediate explanation of the Black Virgin is the one that considers her as *Terra Mater*, *Magna Mater*, or *terra nigra* of the Alchemists; this interpretation is not wrong, of course, but it could be deceiving, because it is close to all those fantasies that regard the "chthonian gods" and "gods of vegetations." René Guénon also writes that the Christian Virgin "is a perfect image of Prakriti, designated by the Far-Eastern tradition as «Earth»; we can see this especially in the symbolical images of «the black virgins,» the colour black symbolizing here *materia prima* and its indistinct character."⁵²

Guénon's statement requires a clarification, indispensable for the economy of the present work. René Guénon later wrote more thoroughly about an important subject, after Coomaraswamy published some articles regarding the symbolism of "the two nights."

The article **Les deux nuits** was published in 1939⁵³ and, compared to what he wrote in 1937-1938, brought deeper teachings; here Guénon unveiled the symbolic correspondence between the three initiatory deaths (and the three rebirths) and the “three nights,” related to the three levels: corporeal, psychical, and spiritual. Considering that “the night” was the phase of darkness needed to pass from one initiatory degree to another, or from a degree of the universal manifestation to another, Guénon underlined the essential significance of the two extreme “nights”: one, understood as infernal darkness, as chaos, the other one, understood as supernal darkness (the super-luminous darkness of the non-manifestation), this second meaning being usually ignored. The night of chaos referred to the “material” indifference, as an inverted reflex of the principal indifference of the non-manifestation, of the supernal night. This night with its chaotic indifference, applied to the whole universal manifestation, is precisely that of Prakriti, the maternal pole identical to *materia prima* of the ancient cosmological doctrines of the Occident, signifying the state of pure potentiality, the reflected inverted image of the principal state of the non-manifested possibilities.⁵⁴ Guénon went even further in his articles published at the end of his life, in 1947-8, when he unveiled, without any restraints, the metaphysical symbolism of the colour black and the difference between Shakti and Prakriti.⁵⁵ Of course, he wrote that the Black Virgin of the Christian tradition is Prakriti (“the Earth” of the Far-Eastern tradition), but only in the context of the Great Triad, the Holy Spirit being the divine Activity of Purusha (“the Heaven”) and Christ the Universal Man, the Mediator between Heaven and Earth (Guénon, **Triade**, p. 21); also, this equivalence is particularly Christian (especially related to Christian exotericism, which can not see the supernal significance of the colour black and of the Black Virgin,

as a universal symbol) (Guénon, **Hind.**, p. 103).

To permit the human mind to grasp somehow what is impossible to understand in a rational, discursive way, the Principle (even if unchangeable and immutable, without duality and immovable) is considered to act through his “energy” (*shakti*), which is feminine compared to him. Shakti is the divine Maiden, the lunar Virgin, Sophia, Helen of Troy, *Madonna Intelligenza*, Dante’s Beatrice, as target of the spiritual realization. Shakti is the “dark cloud” of the Judaic tradition, the Black Virgin as celestial Queen who, due to the Principle’s “non-active activity” (*wei wu-wei* of the Far-Eastern tradition), generates the spiritual influences. These influences descend upon Prakriti, representing the divine Activity of Purusha, and in consequence, Prakriti emerges from her indifference and produces the universal manifestation. Prakriti is Shakti’s projection and the Black Virgin is, at the same time, Shakti and Prakriti.⁵⁶

“Dark am I, yet lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, dark like the tents of Kedar, like the tent curtains of Solomon. Do not stare at me because I am dark, because I am darkened by the sun” (**Song** 1:5-6); this Biblical text represents the Christian motivation for the cult of the Black Virgin; Sarah of Saintes-Marys-de-la-Mer is such a Black Virgin.

Yet more than that, Sarah, or better yet, the Saint Sarah, is the protector of the Gypsies. Every year the Gypsies from all around the world gather at Saintes-Marys-de-la-Mer, in the vault of the church, where the black statue of Saint Sarah is, and celebrate her. As Guénon shows, the elected queen of the Gypsies bears the name Sarah.⁵⁷ A legend tells that Sarah, called also *Kâli* (“the dark one”), was a Gypsy woman, the leader of a tribe living on the shores of the Rhône River. In those times, a ritual was celebrated every year, in which the Gypsies carried the statue of goddess Ishtar into the sea-waters;

one day, Sarah had a vision that revealed to her the coming of the three Marys. And when they arrived, Sarah helped them and the saints baptized her (Clébert 179). In memory of this event, in May, every year, the Gypsies gather at Saintes-Marys-de-la-Mer and carry the black statue of Saint Sarah into the sea. Actually, they join the Christian festival that celebrates the two Marys, Salomé and Jacobé, whose statues are also carried to the sea.⁵⁸

One who enters the church at Saintes-Marys-de-la-Mer is impressed by the sacred simplicity of the temple. Yet what amazes one mostly is that, upon entering, one's eyes perceive not one altar, as is usual, but three. There are three altars, arranged vertically, symbolically marking the Three Worlds. The middle altar, that at the floor level, has the statue of the Blessed Virgin nearby. Up close to the ceiling, there is a niche with a chest containing the relics of the Saints Marys suggesting the high altar. Eventually, in the subterranean vault there is a very old altar, having the black statue of Sarah nearby. Here we rediscover the "lights" of the Three Worlds. Sarah's subterranean vault and the colour black could make us believe that we are dealing with Prakriti's or Hecate's domain. In fact, to understand completely the symbolic meaning, we have to consider also the significance of the underground spiritual center and of the super-luminous darkness. Actually, we may say that Sarah is "the black face" of the Virgin Mary and, therefore, subtly identical with her.⁵⁹ However, the church was consecrated to the Blessed Virgin, and so, even if apparently there is no correspondence, we are allowed to think that the three altars, that is, the Three Worlds, are in direct association with the Three Marys: Sarah – the Virgin Mary, Mary Salomé and Mary Jacobé.⁶⁰ Yet we can go even further: from a symbolic point of view there is only one and the same Virgin, the Three Marys being, as in the case of Hecate, her three faces.⁶¹

The Romanian tradition brings a confirmation, apparently unexpected, to our conclusion. A Christmas carol says: “And it was built a White Great Monastery/ With nine altars/ And nine golden thrones./ In the greater altar/ Is Saint Mary the Greater,/ In the lesser altar/ Is Saint Mary the Lesser./ In the middle altar/ the Mother of God sat.”⁶² We should note, first, that the White Monastery, as we showed in another work, is an equivalent of Agarthā, the Center of the World⁶³; any church, like the one of Saintes-Marys-de-la-Mer, is a projection of the Monastery in the world. Then, we observe that the White Monastery has three altars: a greater, a lesser and a central one, similar to the church of the Saints Marys from the south of France. Eventually, we remark that the three altars belong to the Three Marys: Saint Mary the Greater, Saint Mary the Lesser and the Mother of God; yet all the three names refer to one and the same Mary, the Blessed Virgin, the mother of Christ.

¹ See Dante, **The Divine Comedy**, Paradiso, XXX-XXXII.

² Luigi Valli, **Il linguaggio segreto di Dante e dei “Fedeli d’Amore,”** Roma, “Optima,” 1928.

³ Valli’s work has as *motto* Compagni’s verses: “L’amorosa Madonna Intelligenza,/ Che fa nell’alma la sua residenza,/ Che co la sua bieltà m’ha ’nnamorato” (p. 79).

⁴ Guénon writes: “«The active Intellect,» represented by *Madonna*, is «the celestial Ray,» which constitutes the link between God and man and which leads the human being to God: it is the Hindu *Buddhi*.” (René Guénon, **Aperçus sur L’Ésotérisme Chrétien**, Éd. Traditionnelles, 1983, p. 63).

⁵ As an old Syriac manuscript shows, the Blessed Virgin as Shakti is carrying Christ inside her oval form, which, from a point of view, suggests that she is the “outer” Sophia and Christ is the “inner” Sophia. Almost all of the famous statues of the Black Virgin present the Mother of God with her Son in her lap. It is interesting that, usually, the authors who studied the symbolism of the Black Virgin, in connection with the

sacred meaning of the colour black, disregarded completely the fact that the child Jesus is also black. We developed this aspect in our work **Din negura de vremi**, Mirton & Rose-Cross Books, 2003 (in Romanian, the chapter **The Black Child**).

⁶ John Meyendorff, **Byzantine Hesychasm**, Variorum Reprints, London, 1974, p. 263.

⁷ See our study, **The Near West**, in **Sophia**, The Journal of Traditional Studies, volume 9, no. 1, summer 2003, Oakton, USA.

⁸ Paul Evdokimov, **L'Orthodoxie**, Desclée de Brouwer, 1979, p. 149.

⁹ René Guénon, **Études sur l'hindouisme**, Éd. Trad., 1979, p. 103.

¹⁰ Elaine Pagels, **The Gnostic Gospels**, Vintage Books, 1989, p. 20.

¹¹ Saint Paul confesses: I “was caught up to the third heaven” (**2 Co** 12:2-4); “the third heaven” is the heaven of Venus, the goddess related to Cyprus Island, and it is believed that Saint Paul, *Lo Vas d'elezione* (**Acts** 9:15), founded the first church in Cyprus. *Fedeli d'Amore* had seven degrees, corresponding to the initiatory ladder, “the third heaven” meaning the third degree of the hierarchy, the degree where salvation (*saluto*) was obtained, a ritual celebrated on the day of the “All Saints” (Guénon, **Ésot. Chrét.**, p. 59). Guénon notes also, as Luigi Valli did, when he suggested the link between Dante and the Templars (p. 425), that the Templars' headquarter was Cyprus (at Limassol), a direct connection existing between Cyprus, Venus, “the third heaven” and the symbolism of copper (Guénon, **Ésot. Chrét.**, p. 68). In his initiatory journey, on the fifth day, Christian Rosenkreutz reaches a subterranean vault, illuminated by a huge precious stone; a triangular tomb, crowned by a *copper* vessel, hid the beautiful goddess Venus, and Rosenkreutz, opening a *copper* trap-door, could contemplate Venus naked (Jean-Valentin Andréae, **Les Noces Chymiques de Christian Rosencreutz**, Éd. Traditionnelles, 1994). The nude Venus is equivalent to the unveiled Isis, representing “the sacred love”; she is Shakti, the divine Maiden, the mother of the *avatâra*. The nude Venus is the “naked Truth,” and that is the hidden meaning of Titian's famous painting “Sacred and Profane Love.” We may note that, like Acteon and Teiresias, Christian Rosenkreutz would have been punished, because he saw Venus naked, but he escaped fulfilling the initiation (only profane people cannot see the Truth). On the other hand, the Greek Mysteries, and also the Western initiations, imposed nudity on the neophyte; Plotinus writes (I, 6, 7): “to those that approach the Holy Celebrations of

the Mysteries, there are appointed purifications and the laying aside of the garments worn before, and the entry in nakedness” (Plotinus, **The Six Enneads**, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952, p. 24).

¹² H. Leisegang, **La Gnose**, Payot, 1971, p. 49.

¹³ See **The Secret Teachings of Jesus**, Vintage Books, 1986.

¹⁴ **The Gospel of Philip** states: “Some said, «Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit.» They are in error. They do not know what they are saying. When did a woman ever conceive by a woman?” (**The Nag Hammadi Library**, Harper San Francisco, 1990, p. 143). **The Gospel According to the Hebrews** affirms: “My mother the Holy Spirit” (**The Apocryphal New Testament**, trans. Montague Rhodes James, Oxford Univ. Press, 1960, p. 2). Obviously, the Gnostics’ perspective was a Great Triad and not a Holy Trinity.

¹⁵ We find the same story in **Luke** (24:1-10).

¹⁶ René Guénon, **L’Ésoterisme de Dante**, Gallimard, 1981, p. 22. In **Vâjasanêyi Samhitâ**, the Night (*râtû*) and the Day (*ahas*) are the wives of Indra, the Sun, and they are also the mothers of Buddha, Mahâ-vîra, or Krishna (in Buddha’s case, for example, the queen Mâyâdevî is his immortal mother, and his aunt, the second wife of king Shuddhodana, is the mortal mother). Also in the Hindu tradition, Sanjnâ, Twashtri’s daughter and the Sun’s wife, being incapable of resisting the solar fire, hired Chhâyâ in her place (in Sanskrit, *chhâyâ* means “shadow,” “optical illusion” and “copy”). In Greek mythology, Ixion, in love with Hera, was deceived like the Sun was, and he gets, instead of the supreme goddess, her “shadow,” a cloud, Nephele. In the Judaic tradition, Moses has two mothers (in fact three: a corporeal one, an intermediary one who nurses him, and, eventually, the divine virgin, the Pharaoh’s daughter); Abraham has two wives, Sarah and Hagar; also in the Judaic tradition, the twelve sons of Jacob have two double mothers (the sister-wives Lea – the active way, and Rachel – the contemplative way, and their two maids).

¹⁷ Meister Eckhart writes: “The Virgin Mary, before to become Mother of God in her humanity, she was Mother of God in her divinity, and the birth in heaven is illustrated by the birth of God as human being” (quoted in Jean Hani, **La Vierge Noire et le mystère marial**, Guy Trédaniel, 1995, p. 112). Meister Eckhart writes also about Christ, “that his birth from a spiritual Mary was much more joyful than that from a corporeal Mary” (quoted in Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, **Autorité Spirituelle et Pouvoir Temporel, dans la perspective indienne du gouvernement**, Archè, 1985, p. 57). **The Gospel of Philip** says that “Adam came into being from two virgins, from the spirit and from the virgin earth” (**Nag Hammadi**, p. 152); on

the other hand, it underlines the importance of One: “Christ, therefore, was born from a virgin to rectify the fall which occurred in the beginning” (this Gnostic text, contrary to others, insists on the one-and-only origins of the duality).

¹⁸ The **Bible** starts with “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” yet the translation is not a faithful one; for example, “God” is in fact “Gods” (Hebrew *elôhîm*) and “heavens” (plural) refer to “waters” (*sâmayim*); we have to distinguish between “waters” (*mayim*) and “sea” (*yam*) or “seas” (*yam-mîm*). See William R. Harper, **Introductory Hebrew Method and Manual**, American Publication Society of Hebrew, Chicago, 1886.

¹⁹ Another equivalent of *Malkuth* is *Sabbath*, which refers to the idea of “peace”; the Arabic term *Sakînah* signifies the Great Peace, corresponding perfectly to *Pax Profunda* of Rose-Cross (René Guénon, **Le Roi du Monde**, Gallimard, 1981, pp. 24, 54).

²⁰ Paul Vulliaud, **La Kabbale juive**, Émile Nourry Éd., 1923, I, p. 509; see also Guénon, **Roi**, p. 55.

²¹ The moon has two aspects (Diana and Hecate), the same as Shekinah, the “divine presence” has: “There is a Shekinah called «handmaid,» and there is a Shekinah called «the daughter of the king»” (**Zohar** II, 94 b, **The Zohar**, Rebecca Bennet Publications, 1956, tr. by Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, vol. III, p. 283); “Nor is to be thought that the body which harbours the daughter of the king shall be sold into the power of earthly crowns of defilement... Which is the body of the King’s daughter? Metatron; and this same body is identical with the handmaid of the Shekinah.” The handmaid is the lower Shekinah; the King’s daughter is the higher Shekinah.

²² It is curious that in Latin, a similar word, *amarus*, also means “bitter.”

²³ She is equivalent to Sarah, Hannah – Samson’s mother (1 **Samuel** 1:6), and Elizabeth, John the Baptist’s mother (**Luke** 1:7); Mary “the bitter” is also comparable to the “sad” Ariadne. We should recall also the following fragment from **Numbers**: “Then the priest shall put the woman under oath and say to her, «If no other man has slept with you and you have not gone astray and become impure while married to your husband, may this bitter water that brings a curse not harm you»” (5:19).

²⁴ This one is equivalent to the “joyful” Ariadne. On the other hand, it would be interesting to refer to Ananda Coomaraswamy’s studies regarding the emptied and barren dragon (after the sacrifice) and the full one (before the sacrifice); also we may observe the correspondence with the new and the full moon.

²⁵ Here the earth and the heaven represent Worlds and not the two Poles, masculine (Heaven, Purusha) and feminine (Earth, Prakriti).

²⁶ Vol. III, p. 294.

²⁷ Vol. IV, pp. 394-5. This doesn't exclude the two-way partition: "If one lamp is placed above another and the lower one is lit, the smoke as it ascends kindles the upper one also" (**Zohar**, III, 35 b).

²⁸ See Gershom Scholem, **Kabbalah**, Meridian Book, 1978, p. 141.

²⁹ We note the partition into two; here is presented a metaphysical perspective, the supreme Principle as non-manifestation and manifestation. It is possible though to apply this symbolism to Christ as divine (disembodied) and human (embodied).

³⁰ See **La Maitrâyanîya Upanishad**, Fayard, 1973 (tr. Jean Varenne) and **The Maitrâyanîya Upanishad**, Mouton & Co., 1962 (tr. J. A. B. van Buitenen). Prajâpati is equivalent to the Hebrew *Adam Kadmon* (the synthesis of the *sephiroth*) and to the Islamic Universal Man (*al-insân al-kâmil*).

³¹ Ariadne's mother, Pasiphaë, was the Sun's daughter and also "shining." Theseus' mother, Aethra, the virgin loved by Poseidon, was, similarly, "the luminous one." Ariadne, on the other hand, has two aspects: the "bitter" one and the "sweet," joyful one (when she receives Dionysus' love), the two forms corresponding to the solstitial doors of the lunar god Janus.

³² Jane Ellen Harrison, **Themis**, Merlin Press, 1989, pp. 205-6.

³³ Dionysus is sometimes represented as a bull, having an important function in the *Mysteries*; the bull's horns bear lunar symbolism.

³⁴ Apollodorus, **The Library of Greek Mythology**, Coronado Press, 1975, p. 86, III, 210. Orpheus also has considered the triple maidens as the phases of the moon.

³⁵ The same Lights are present in the Masonic Lodge.

³⁶ In the Hindu tradition, the Three Universal Lights are: Agni, Vâyu and Aditya, each one governing a World. "The three primordial lights fertilize the worlds" (**Rig Vêda** VII, 33, 7); "The powerful bull with three faces is the husband, who fertilizes the eternal dawns" (**Rig Vêda** III, 56, 3); see Coom., **Autorité**, p. 67. Regarding the solstitial (solar) doors, it is interesting that the janitor is a lunar god, Janus. The symbolism of the triple Hecate appears stressed in Shakespeare's **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, and we

may note that the events of the play take place at summer solstice (see our work **The Everlasting Sacred Kernel**, Rose-Cross Books, 2002).

³⁷ Obviously, in all these cases we have mentioned, the maiden represents the light of *Gnosis*, of the invisible and uncreated energies, of the divine presence, and it would be a fundamental error to identify her with the physical moon; in the same way the moon and the sun symbolize higher realities, the virgin corresponds to these realities. We can see a statue of the Blessed Mary standing on the lunar crescent above the door of Saint John church, in Parma, Italy.

³⁸ A pillar having the cross on top of the lunar crescent can be seen in the Austrian city of Klagenfurt; the same symbol appears on top of the tower of an old wooden Orthodox church in Transylvania. In Alchemy, we find the Blessed Virgin sitting in the lunar crescent and nourishing the Child (Michael Maier, **Symbola aureae mensae**, Frankfurt, 1617), Christ being the “philosophical stone” (see Gareth Roberts, **The Mirror of Alchemy**, Univ. of Toronto Press, 1994, p. 80). We may note that the lunar crescent crowns the head of the Egyptian god Thoth. Sometimes, the lunar crescent holds the Pentagram, as it appears in the Islamic tradition. (**Le Voile D’Isis, Tradition Islamique**, no. 176-177, 1934, p. 327). There is the suggestion that one Gnostic sect merged Jesus with Orpheus: an engraved ring stone shows a character crucified on a cross and above that a lunar crescent and seven stars (probable the Pleiades); an adjacent inscription mentions *Orpheus Bachicos* (André Boulanger, **Orphee, rapports de l'orphisme et du christianisme**, F Rieder et cie, 1925).

³⁹ Let us observe that Joseph compares his family to the sun, moon and stars (**Genesis 37:9**). The famous painting of Saint Mary of Guadalupe shows the Virgin standing on the lunar crescent radiating solar light and dressed in a cloak full of stars. The legend says that, in 1531, Saint Mary appeared to Juan Diego, a 55 year-old Mexican (Aztec), and she gave him the mysterious painting. It is remarkable that almost at the same time, in 1519, Saint Mary standing on the lunar crescent appeared to Jean de Baume la Cotignac, in Provence, France. Cotignac became an important place of pilgrimage, as did Guadalupe (the church is close to Mexico City).

⁴⁰ René Guénon, **Symboles fondamentaux de la Science sacrée**, Gallimard, 1980, p. 45.

⁴¹ Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, **La Doctrine du Sacrifice**, Dervy-Livres, 1978, p. 127.

⁴² In the Hindu tradition, Damayanti, miraculously born, with the help of a *brahmana*, represents the divine Maiden. She is described as a luminous being, a pearl, a lightning, and especially as the moon; she is compared to the full moon that drives away the darkness, to the lunar crescent, to the moon among the clouds, to the chaste Rohinî, the lunar god's favorite wife.

⁴³ See **The Śatapatha Brâhmana**, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1995, part IV, p. 398 and part V, p. 16 (X, 6, 2, 1-3, XI, 1, 6, 19).

⁴⁴ **Encyclopédie des Symboles**, Le Livre de Poche, 2000, p. 176. On the other hand, the ancient Egyptians used the well-known symbol of the solar boat, highlighting a three-way partition similar to that of the phases of the moon: child in the morning (Herpi), adult at noon (Re) and old at sunset (Atum).

⁴⁵ Otto, **Dionysus**, Indiana Univ. Press, 1965, pp. 162-3.

⁴⁶ René Guénon, **Autorité Spirituelle et Pouvoir Temporel**, Vêga, 1976, pp. 102-103. Normally, the golden key belongs to the Papacy to open the way toward the Celestial Paradise, and the silver key is given to the emperor who guides toward the Earthly Paradise.

⁴⁷ In **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, Shakespeare presents, in a very subtle mode, a "lovely boy" of "an Indian king," meant to be the regent of the new Cosmos, of the new cycle. He is the spiritual seed and the golden germ of the new world, that is why his mother, the Virgin, is compared by Shakespeare to a ship, an Ark, the "World Egg" floating on the primordial Waters (II.I.123-134); see **The Everlasting Sacred Kernel**, p. 98.

⁴⁸ Guénon notes: "If there are in the Gospels words and deeds that allow us directly to assign the keys and the boat to Saint Peter, that is because the Papacy, from its origins, was predestined to be «Roman,» due to the situation of Rome as capital of the Occident" (Guénon, **Autorité**, p. 106). We may add that Saint Paul's letter addressed to the Romans indicates the same thing.

⁴⁹ A legend of Laconia says that Cadmus, enraged by his daughter's love affair, had had her (Semele) and the boy (Dionysus) thrown into the sea (Otto 162).

⁵⁰ A. Chapelle, **Les Saintes-Marys De-la-Mer, l'église et le pèlerinage**, Bélisane, 1997, pp. 15 ff. We may note that the Grail's legends contain an episode full of substance regarding the symbolism of the vessel. There is a miraculous ship, reached by three knights of the Holy Grail: Galahad, Bors and Perceval; we note the Chivalric triad. The miraculous ship is not any vessel, but it symbolizes the spiritual center,

guarding the Tradition transmitted over the ages (**The Quest of the Holy Grail**, Penguin Books, 1969, p. 214). We add that Apuleius stated that Isis appeared from the sea, and the rites celebrating the goddess contained an episode about launching a sacred ship (Lucius Apuleius, **The Golden Ass**, Penguin Books, 1985).

⁵¹ Another version states that Sarah was the handmaid of the *three* Marys, Salomé, Jacobé and Magdalene (see Jean-Paul Clébert, **The Gypsies**, Penguin Books, 1967, p. 179).

⁵² René Guénon, **La Grande Triade**, Gallimard, 1980, p. 21.

⁵³ René Guénon, **Initiation et Réalisation spirituelle**, Éd. Traditionnelles, 1980, p. 239.

⁵⁴ Guénon presents the fundamental specification that the production of manifestation has to be seen in an ascending sense (from the maternal chaos towards cosmos and light, the *prakritian* cosmogony), as well as in a descending sense (from the super-luminous, paternal darkness, the *purushan* cosmogony).

⁵⁵ See **Le blanc et le noir** and **Les «têtes noires»** (**Symboles**, pp. 134, 306), and also **Mâyâ** (**Hind.**, p. 101).

⁵⁶ “Shakti is the maternal «power,» «the divine Activity.» Therefore, she is inherent to Brahma or to the supreme Principle; she is incomparable higher than Prakriti; Prakriti is, in fact, only a reflection of Shakti in the «cosmologic» order. We remark the inverted analogy: the supreme Activity is reflected in the pure passivity and the «almightiness» of the Principle is reflected in the potentiality of *materia prima*. Shakti, as the divine «art» abode in the Principle, is identical to the «Wisdom,» Sophia, and, in this case, she is the mother of Avatâra. Using the Western terminology, Shakti is *Natura naturans*, and Prakriti – *Natura naturata*, even though both are named *Natura*” (Guénon, **Hind.**, p. 102).

⁵⁷ René Guénon, **Études sur la Franc-Maçonnerie et le Compagnonnage**, Éd. Traditionnelles, 1980, II, pp. 31-32.

⁵⁸ Regarding May: the name of this month derives from Maia, Hermes’ mother, to whom it was consecrated; in the Christian tradition, May became “the month of Mary,” due to an assimilation, which was not only phonetic, between Mary and Maia (René Guénon, **Formes traditionnelles et cycles cosmiques**, Gallimard, 1980, p. 135). Maia was one of the seven Pleiades, the seven stars we saw above the bull.

⁵⁹ In the Islamic tradition, in the **Qur'ân**, *sûrah* called “Mary” represents Saint Mary “fasting,” not in regard to food but to speaking, that is, showing Mary mute and indicating with her finger the new-born Jesus. On the other hand, an anecdote, found at the beginning of one of Ibn ‘Arabî’s works, tells about a black handmaid, who was dumb, and who, at the question, “where is Allâh?,” indicated the sky with her finger (Charles-André Gilis, **Marie en Islam**, Éd. Trad., 1980, pp. 16-17). The similitude between the two women is, somehow, as that between Saint Mary and Sarah.

⁶⁰ In 1357, Jean de Venette even wrote a poem called *The Three Marys*, and at Mignières, a church of XI Century was consecrated to the Three Marys (Chapelle 54-55).

⁶¹ Coomaraswamy clearly shows that the Three Lights of the Hindu tradition are, in fact, the one-and-only Light, the solar Spirit that appears as Agni, Vâyu and Âditya in relation to the Three Worlds. “The three regents of the Worlds” are not different principles, but the same principle with different functions. The Three Lights are the three-headed Light, “the Sun with three heads” (Coom., **Autorité**, pp. 67-69).

⁶² Geticus, **La Dacie hyperboréenne**, Etudes Traditionnelles, 1936-1937.

⁶³ **Agarttha, the Invisible Center**, Rose-Cross Books, 2003.