



*A personal selection of Salisbury, Wiltshire, Wessex, British and world, history*

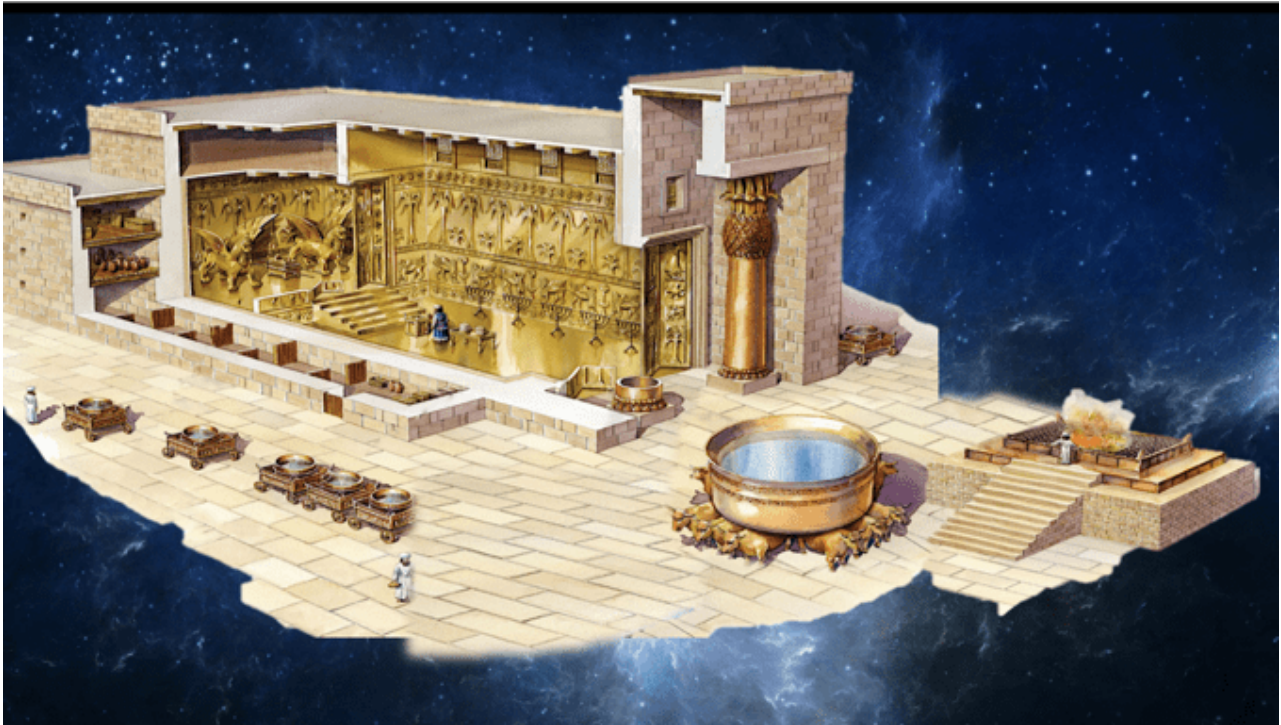
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## JEDIDIAH\*

**W**e have looked at Salisbury Cathedral's Gorges tomb on a number of occasions and noted the 4 twisted helical columns that are reminiscent of Gian Lorenzo Bernini's *baldacchino* (a ciborium - columns supporting a canopy over the altar, see below) in St. Peter's, Rome. I believe it was the cathedral's chancellor that pointed out that the connection could be that the Gorges tomb was erected on the site of St.Peter's chapel.

In recent architectural reading I found that such columns were referred to as *Solomonic* as they were supposed to be the same as in Solomon's temple. However, you do not need a degree in Art History to realise that the temple could never have incorporated so baroque a style. I looked into the background and found that Emperor Constantine had brought back from the Holy Land columns of this type that he claimed were from the original Temple. As the Romans had destroyed the temple such a story was not very likely. When you realise that it was his mother, the sainted Helena, that was the Christian in the family and who brought back fragments of the 'true cross' which she had discovered, then the Constantines are not exactly a reliable source of information.





\* Jedidiah was the birth name of Solomon given by the prophet Nathan, it means *Beloved of the Lord*.

Above, one of the many attempts at depicting Solomon's Temple (*courtesy of Meridian Magazine*).

#### AGA SAGA

Everyone has heard of the Aga Kahn but who is he and what does he represent?

*Your name it is heard in high places*  
*You know the Aga Khan*  
*He sent you a race horse for Christmas*  
*And you keep it just for fun, for a laugh, ha-ha-ha*

The lyric is from Peter Sarstedt's 1969 song *Where do you go to my lovely*. In the back of my mind the Aga Kahn was linked not just to racing but also to *The Old man of the Mountains* and the original Assassins of the Crusader period. So, research again was called for.

Prince Shah Karim al-Husseni is Aga Kahn IV and the 49<sup>th</sup> Imam of the Nizari Ismaili Shias. According to Ismailis (pronounced *iz-maa-ee-lee*) is a descendent of the prophet Muhammed. Now the complexities of Muslim sects are even more difficult to follow than Christian ones. As you know, the Muslim faith is divided into Sunni and Shia. Shia's believe that Muhammed designated Ali ibn Abi Talib (his cousin and son-in-law) as his successor. Sunnis however believe that Muhammed did not appoint a successor but that senior Muslims appointed Abu Bakr as Caliph. Now the majority (85%) of Shia are known as Twelvers but there is a sub-sect of Ismailis who believe that Isma'il ibn Jafar was the appointed successor to Ja'far al-Sadiq whereas the Twelvers considering Musa al-Kadhim as the true Imam. If you are still with me, I should be surprised.

Numbering more than fifteen million, today the Nizari Ismaili heritage includes cultural contributions of the Ismailis of Central Asia, South Asia, Iran and the Arab Middle East. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, many Ismailis from South Asia migrated to Africa and settled there. In more recent times, Ismailis have also migrated to North America, Europe and Asia Pacific

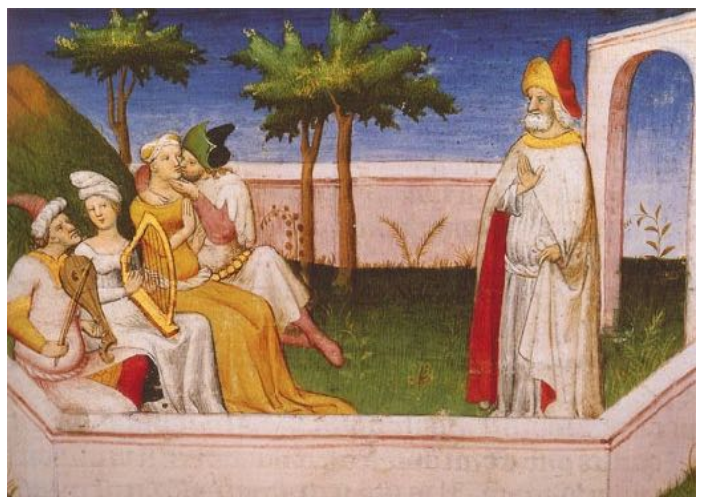


countries. However, despite such a diversity of ethnicity and cultures, the shared values that unite Nizari Ismailis are centered on their allegiance to a living Imam. The guidance and the efforts of the Ismaili Imam have enabled the Ismaili community to emerge as progressive Shi'i Muslims in more than twenty-five countries around the world, where they generally enjoy exemplary standards of living and education while retaining their distinctive religious identity.

Above: visiting the faithful in Central Asia.

Ismailis were at one time the largest branch of Shia Islam during the Fatimid Caliphate in the 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Marco Polo wrote *Book of the Marvels of the World* that included a section on Old Man of the Mountains, Hasan-i Sabbah, the grand master of the Order of the Assassins based at the castle of Alamut in Persia. He was followed as leader of the Ismailis and Assassins by Rashid ad-Din Sinan.

His chief enemy, the Sultan Saladin (1138–1193), ruled over Egypt and Syria from 1174 to 1193. Saladin managed twice to elude assassination attempts ordered by Rashid and as he was marching against Aleppo, Saladin devastated the Nizari possessions. In 1176, Saladin laid siege to Masyaf but he lifted the siege after two notable events that reputedly transpired between him and the Old Man of the Mountain. According to one version, one night, Saladin's guards noticed a spark glowing down the hill of Masyaf and then vanishing among the Ayyubid tents. Saladin awoke from his sleep to find a figure leaving the tent. He saw that the lamps in his tent were displaced and beside his bed laid hot scones of the shape peculiar to the Assassins with a note at the top pinned by a poisoned dagger. The note threatened that he would be killed if he did not withdraw from his siege. Saladin gave a loud cry, exclaiming that Sinan himself was the figure that left the tent. As such, Saladin told his guards to come to an agreement with Sinan. Realising he was unable to subdue the Assassins, he sought to align himself with them,



consequently depriving the Crusaders of aligning themselves against him.

Marco Polo (illustration page 3) recounted that Hassan would feed his *fedayeen* hashish, then take them to the splendid, hidden gardens on the castle grounds. There they would be entertained by beautiful girls claiming to be the houris of Paradise - indeed, they were in Paradise, to which the Old Man alone could deliver them. With such a promise, the fedayeen became totally loyal, willing to do anything for him. This distinguishing use of hashish was what gave the original Assassins their name—*hashishin* later transformed into assassin.

### THE FIRST FEMINIST

**H**ildegard of Bingen 1098 - 1179 was not of course the first but she was a powerful feminist voice in what was very much a man's world. She was apprenticed to an anchoress, Jutta, the daughter of Count Stephan of Spanheim and walled-up with her at the age of seven. Jutta taught Hildegard to read and probably music as well. Hildegard was highly strung and often ill but must have been a naturally bright pupil.

Their fame grew and they were joined by other high-born ladies and soon became a monastery of monks with a community of nuns attached. Hildegard took her Benedictine vows when she was fifteen. Jutta died when Hildegard was thirty-eight and the nuns voted Hildegard as their Abbess. All along she had been experiencing visions that included flickering, dazzling and moving light in geometric shapes which doctors now think was the result of a type of migraine. She did not write about her visions which she believed were God-given as some would believe them to be Devil-inspired as had happened with Peter Abelard. She eventually confessed to her confessor, the monk Volmar (above right). He championed her experiences with the bishop and later became her secretary.



The book she wrote, *Scivias* (short for Know the ways of God), was investigated by Pope Eugenius who read it aloud to an assembly of archbishops and cardinals. This not only brought her approval but spread her fame as the *Rhenish Sybil*. She corresponded with popes but with Bernard of Clairvaux, Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, Conrad III, Henry II, Eleanor of Aquitaine and Empress Irene of Byzantium. She then made the bold move of transferring the nunnery to Rupertsberg, Bingen (at the confluence of the Rhein and the Nahe).

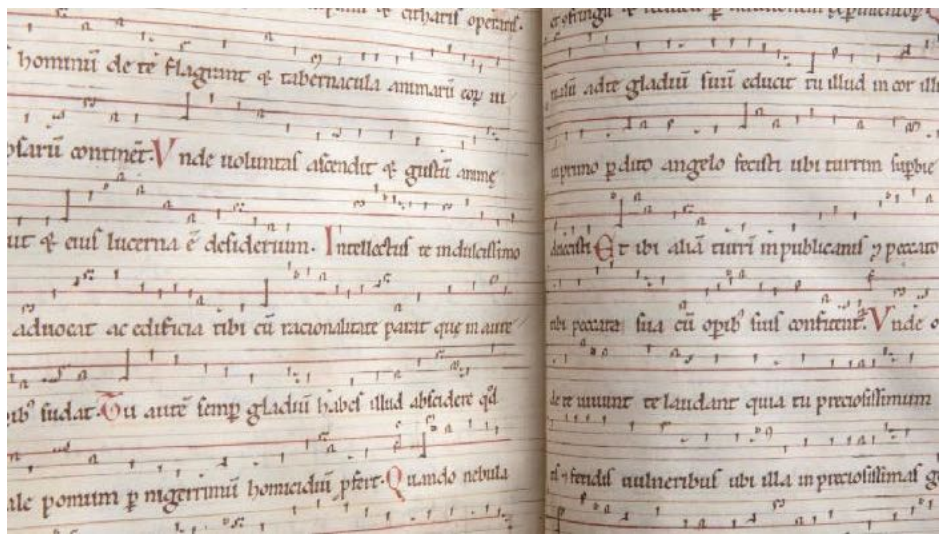


Hildegard found time to write on scientific and medical subjects and even formed deductions from her own observations. She also wrote about sex but presumably not from her own observations! These books included herbal recipes used by the nuns (think of Brother Cadfael). It is difficult to see how she fitted in all her activities with being Abbess of a Benedictine convent that was started from scratch in a far

from ideal location. Note the helm roofs on the towers (above) which you can also see at Sompting church in Sussex.

Nowadays Hildegard is more famed for her lovely music. Although it is basically plainchant, she made use of *neumes* in which a word is sung to a series of ascending

or descending notes, and *melismae* in which a single syllable is stretched over a sequence of many notes, making the chant more melodic. If you haven't got an Abbess Hildegard of Bingen recording then I urge you to try one. Mine is a CD from Hyperion with Emma Kirkby and titled *A feather on the breath of God*.



Hildegard died in September 1179 aged 81, but in the months before she had a furious argument with the clergy of Mainz over a local nobleman who she allowed to be buried in her cemetery even though he had been excommunicated. She argued that he had ended his life with all his sins confessed and absolved but the furious clergy wanted him dug up and placed an interdict on the abbey. She took this as just one more trial and eventually the Bishop relented. The Pope (or more likely the local clergy) would not agree to her being canonised but locals treated her as a Saint anyway.

I am indebted to *Most Wise & Valiant Ladies* by Andrea Hopkins (Collins & Brown 1997). The musical notation (right) is known as the *Symphonia armonie celestium revelationum* found in the Dendermonde Codex of 1175 which is held in the Maurits Sabbe Library at the University of Leven in Belgium.

#### MORE OR LESS

**A**t daybreak Sir Thomas More was awakened by the entrance of Sir Thomas Pope, who had come to confirm his anticipations, and to tell him it was the King's pleasure that he should suffer at nine o'clock that morning. He received the news with utter composure. *I am much bounden to the King, for the benefits and honours he has bestowed upon me; and so help me God, most of all am I bounden to him that it pleaseth his Majesty to rid me so shortly out of the miseries of this present world.*

Pope told him the King desired that he would not *use many words on the scaffold*. Mr Pope, he answered, *you do well to give me warning, for otherwise I had purposed somewhat to have spoken; but no matter wherewith his Grace should have cause to be offended. Howbeit, whatever I intended, I shall obey his Highness's command.*

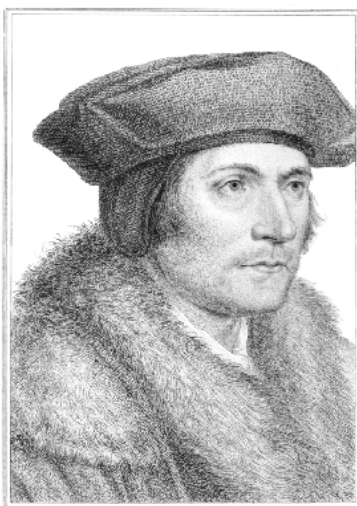
He afterwards discussed the arrangements for his funeral, at which he begged that his family might be present; and when all was settled, Pope rose to leave him. He was an old friend. He took More's hand and wrung it, and, quite overcome, burst into tears. *Quiet yourself, Mr Pope, More said, and be not discomfited, for I trust we shall once see each other full merrily, when we shall live and love together in eternal bliss.*



As soon as he was alone, he dressed in his most elaborate costume. It was for the benefit, he said, of the executioner who was to do him so great a service. Sir William Kingston remonstrated, and with some difficulty induced him to put on a plainer suit; but that his intended liberality should not fail, he sent the man a gold angel in compensation, *as a token that he maliced him nothing, but rather loved him extremely.*

So about nine of the clock he was brought by the lieutenant out of the Tower, his beard being long, which fashion he had never before used, his face pale and lean, carrying in his hands a red cross, casting his eyes often towards heaven. He had been unpopular as a judge, and one or two persona in the crowd were insolent to him; but the distance was short and soon over, as all else was nearly over now. The scaffold had been awkwardly erected, and shook as he placed his foot upon the ladder. *See me safe up,* he said to Kingston. *For my coming down I can shift for myself.* He began to speak to the people, but the sheriff begged him not to proceed, and he contented himself with asking for their prayers, and desiring them to bear witness for him that he died in the faith of the holy Catholic Church, and a faithful servant of God and the King.

He then repeated the Miserere psalm on his knees; and when he had ended and had risen, the executioner, with an emotion which promised ill for the manner in which his part in the tragedy would be accomplished, begged his forgiveness. More kissed him. *Thou art to do me the greatest benefit that I can receive,* he said. *Pluck up thy spirit, man, and be not afraid to do thine office. My neck is very short. Take heed therefore that thou strike not awry for saving of thine honesty.* The executioner offered to tie his eyes. *I will cover them myself,* he said; and binding them in a cloth which he had brought with him, he knelt and laid his head upon the block. The fatal stroke was about to fall, when he signed for a moment's delay while he moved aside his beard. *Pity that should be cut,* he murmured; *that has not committed treason.* With which strange words, the strangest perhaps ever uttered at such a time, the lips most famous through Europe for eloquence and wisdom closed for ever.



The above excerpt was taken from James Froude's *A History of England Vol II* (Longmans, Green 1872).

The painting above is *The Execution of Sir Thomas More 1535* by Antoine Caron *courtesy of the Musée de Blois.*

The portrait engraving left is from *The Life of Sir Thomas More by his son-in-law William Roper Esq.* (R Triphook 1822).

Several centuries before Edmund Burke, Thomas More warned against theorising about the perfect society and advised statesmen to do their best with the form of government their people have passed on to them. Though he himself favoured one form of government over another, he admitted that we rarely have the power to create the government we want. Tell me about it!!!!