

QUESTIONS IN SEARCH OF ANSWERS

This is a three-part question. Had it been asked a decade ago, we might have laid it to rest. But 1978 introduced questions of much graver import, and this one, expected to die of its own debility, instead keeps popping up, sometimes in quite elaborate trappings. I refer to a penchant of authors to tap Psalm 67 for evidence that the Templars held the Shroud.

You will remember that during the trial, one poor terrorized Templar confessed that the priest had nothing to do but recite this psalm, and the Knights' response was "Séla".

The word first stirred the imagination of Ian Wilson (*The Turin Shroud*, 1978, p. 158): "... Could not the cry 'Selah', occurring twice in the Psalm [67] ... have sounded uncannily like the Saracen war cry, 'Yallah', that the Templars were accused of addressing to their idol?" [read, Shroud]. One author suggests that the word (which he spelled *Shella*), was a deformation, by the Europeans, of an Arabic ejaculation, "Insh Allah!"

Arabic ejaculation? Saracen war cry? In fact, *Séla* is a Hebrew word of such antiquity that even the great Jewish scholars of the Septuagint preferred not to translate it into Greek. If the word is untranslated, its function nevertheless is clear: occurring in 39 psalms, a total of 73 times, it comes at the end of a strophe or a clause and is perceived as a notation for instrumentalists, possibly directions for a pause in singing to allow for an instrumental interlude. The instruments to be used—and they were numerous, many of them invented by David—included flute, stringed instruments, voices of young girls.... Some instructions to the choirmaster are even more obscure and could refer to the instruments or the melody: "On the Guitthienne", for instance; or David's poem, "On Mahalat" (Psa. 53), found again in Psa. 88 by the sons of Corey, with instructions, "To sing on Mahalat". Curiously, Mahalat was the name of an Ishmaelite woman taken to wife by Esau (Gen. 28:9).

Sometimes the melody is indicated: "A Dove in the Distance", "The Roe at Dawn", "The Lilies", "Death of the Son". "Do Not Destroy" seemed to be popular.

Séla is found also in Habacuc 3:3, 9, 13 with the indication: "To the choirmaster, on my stringed instruments". In another context, *Séla* is Hebrew for "rock". It was the name of the Edomite capital (Numbers, Judges, 2 Kings, Isaiah, Obadiah), by some authorities identified with the modern Petra. Any Bible dictionary will divulge most of this esoteric information.

Of course, it would be preposterous to pretend that the

Templars had informed themselves about this word. But there it was in Holy Scripture, where neither the Knights nor their accusers would have interpreted it as a Saracen war cry or Arabic ejaculation.

A second question arises from the numeration of the psalms. In the Septuagint from Psa. 11 to Psa. 147, the numbering is one lower than in the Hebrew. After St. Jerome revised his Latin psalter, based on the LXX (before A.D.389), this version, called the *Psalterium Gallicanum*, came into use by Christians. It is the version we call the *Vulgate*. It is certainly the version used by the Templars.

Ian Wilson pointed to the two *Selah* in "Psalm 67", a song of harvest thanksgiving "with stringed instruments", beginning "God be merciful unto us and bless us". But in the *Vulgate* this psalm is number 66 and it has three *Selaha*s.

In another recent book, one finds the first verse of Psalm 67 (Vulg. 66) followed by the first six of the 36 verses of Psalm 68 (Vulg. 67), which begins "God arises; his enemies are dispersed and those who hate him flee before him!"; a sort of "mishmash" of literary allusions not fitting any definite classification. Quoting part of 67 and part of 68 confounds confusion. One imagines an inattentive amanuensis who, forgetting whether he should copy Psalm 67 or *Vulgate* 67, copied both.

A third question rankles: We quite agree with Mr. Wilson that the psalm beginning "God be merciful..." is a beautiful song of praise. But in what way might it be considered particularly appropriate to recite in the presence of the Shroud? Much less so the psalm "God arises..." although this one (Psa. 68, Vulg. 67) does speak of God's Face, *facie*, five times.

But the Face of God—and Face really signifies the Divine Presence—is invoked in 32 psalms, at least 48 times as *facie*, and more if you count *vultus* or *conspectu*. *Vultus* occurs once in Psa. 67 (Vulg. 66).

In the Templar theory, *séla* and *facie* are cobweb connections and they ought to be brushed away.

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A REMINDER...

The Feast of the Holy Shroud has not been abrogated in consequence of the results of radiocarbon dating. On May 4, churches around the world will celebrate this day in honor of the Holy Shroud, as they have done since the Feast was instituted in 1506 by Pope Julius II. In his Bull approving the Office of the Mass, Julius II wrote: "... as we venerate and adore the Holy Cross ... so ought we equally to venerate and adore, in worthy manner, the Holy Shroud on which are clearly visible the imprints of the Humanity of Christ which the Divinity had assumed, that is, of his true blood...."

Let it be, for all of us, a day of special prayer, while Catholics should attend Mass.