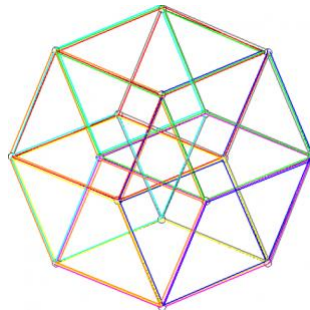


# Part 3 – The Shift from an Industrial to a Planetary Civilization: The Recovery of a Cosmic Orientation

by William Irwin Thompson

*“We Irish think otherwise”* Bishop Berkeley



\* I am indebted to Karen at Oddity Journal for this wonderful image of the tesseract.

*And there is also on the island both a magnificent sacred precinct of Apollo and a notable temple which is adorned with many votive offerings and is spherical in shape. Furthermore, a city is there which is sacred to this god, and the majority of its inhabitants are players on the cithara; and these continually play on this instrument in the temple and sing hymns of praise to the god, glorifying his deeds.*

The Hyperboreans also have a language, we are informed, which is peculiar to them, and are most friendly disposed towards the Greeks, and especially towards the Athenians and the Delians, who have inherited this good will from most ancient times. The myth also relates that certain Greeks visited the Hyperboreans and left behind them there costly votive offerings bearing inscriptions in Greek letters.\* And in the same way Abaris,\* a Hyperborean, came to

Greece in ancient times and renewed the good will and kinship of his people to the Delians. They also say that the moon, as viewed from this island, appears to be but a little distance from the earth and to have upon it prominences, like those of the earth, which are visible to the eye. The account is also given that the god visits the island every nineteen years, the period in which the return of the stars to the same place in the heavens is accomplished; and for this reason the nineteen-year period is called by the Greeks the "year of Meton." At the time of this appearance of the god he both plays on the cithara and dances continuously the night through from the vernal equinox until the rising of the Pleiades, expressing in this manner his delight in his successes. And the kings of this city and the supervisors of the sacred precinct are called Boreadae, since they are descendants of Boreas, and the succession to these positions is always kept in their family.

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\* *Abaris is apparently a purely mythical figure, who in some authors sailed on his arrow, as on a witch's broomstick, through the air over rivers and trees. Diodorus of Siculus, Volume II, trans. C. H. Oldfather, Loeb Classical Library, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), pp. 39-41.*

Halloween is the survival of the ancient Celtic feast of *Samhain* (pronounced Sawin) that marked the midpoint between the summer and winter solstices. Our secular and capitalistic giving of candy for *Trick or Treat* dimly recognizes an archaic harvest festival's celebration of the sweetness of abundance. But these ancient festivals are not simply about fertility and a spooky day in which the ancestral dead visit us to join in the dance of life; they are performances of the mysteries of time and renewed awareness of the universe. This awareness is something we will need to recover if we are to have a planetary civilization that is no longer founded on greed and industrial values.



Pleiades

Thanks to the actions of “the little people” of cyanobacteria billions of years ago, we have a blue sky and are blessed, in some places, with a grand view of the stars. If we do not recover a sense of the sacred and a renewed awe of the cosmos—and thanks to the Hubble telescope and its gorgeous images, we are—we risk living on a smog-covered planet in which the stars are a myth, like Atlantis, that no serious global businessman believes in.

The ancient Greek-speaking cultural historian Diodorus of Siculus presents us with a vision of the Hyperboreans dancing with their god through the night at their temple. The windows of their ringed temple are to highlight the appearance of their gods on the horizon, and in particular the appearance of the Pleiades, which at the time of the feast of *Samhain* reaches its zenith, and at the time of the winter solstice appears just after dark, after the sun has set in the west in the window of one trilithon and the full moon has risen in the window of the trilithon to the east. The Hyperboreans’ notable ringed temple is, most likely, Stonehenge. The procession in the Grail Castle of the Fisher King before the silent Perceval has often baffled readers of the medieval classic, Chrétien de Troyes’ *Perceval ou le Conte du Graal*. (See Eric Rohmer’s film, *Perceval*, of 1978 on Fox Lorber DVD to view a faithful rendering of the procession in the Grail Castle.) The lance with bleeding tip is a medieval Christianization of the shaft of light of the setting sun, the Celtic god Lugh. The demoiselle with the bright platter is the rising full moon. The two valets in the procession are the two stars,

Atlas and Pleione, said by the Greeks to be the parents of the Seven Sisters. The candelabrum with several to ten stars is the constellation of the Pleiades. The Pleiades rise after dark at the winter solstice, and this bleak and barren time is the time of the Waste Land of Jesse Weston and T. S. Eliot's studies.

This bleak time of the Waste Land was probably the time of human sacrifice to insure the rebirth of the sun and the return of spring. The numerous burials at Stonehenge are most likely the remains of all the kings of the year that had to die and enter the realm of the dead so that the new young king of the year could be wed to the feminine "Sovereign" of the land, who was an epiphany of the Great Goddess herself. These rituals are even more ancient than Stonehenge, Avebury, and Newgrange and go back to proto Indo-European rituals in Anatolia, and from there into Iran and India.

The Celts were a warrior society like the Maya and like them they lived in a culture of perpetual conflict. Julius Caesar describes the Druids unsympathetically, as an enemy would be expected to do, but to try to enter into the archaic mind of the Druid one can imagine that these wizards were using ritual to sublimate this violence to get the savage tribal peoples to look up at the stars and regain a sense of cosmic connection. With a belief in *metempsychosis* and with a more labile ego-formation that lived in a liminal world in which dreams were experienced also in the waking mind, death for an ancient Celt was most likely an easier crossing than for a modern Celt like Dylan Thomas who believed in raging against the dying of the light. Perhaps the Druids instituted human sacrifice as an inoculation of violence to keep the primitive tribes from the excesses we now see in the return of human sacrifice to modern society in terrorism, suicide bombers, gang violence, assassinations, our ritual-like fascination with celebrity death, and our unending gang and tribal wars funded by drugs and guns in Mexico, L.A., Columbia, Somalia, and Afghanistan. Chrétien de Troyes's medieval Grail Castle is an allusion to the ancient winter rituals of Stonehenge. The poet probably received his esoteric knowledge from his Welsh Celtic sources with their traditional Brythonic bardic recollections of ancient ritual.

Modern Sufis are in a good position to understand how such esoteric knowledge can be transmitted over centuries and millennia, for Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan told me years ago that their own esoteric traditions predate Islam and go back to ancient Egypt. And Sufis are also aware that when there is a break in the generations of cultural transmission, angels can step in to provide direct illumination to the poet. Because Chrétien de Troyes was closer to Welsh Celtic sources than many of his contemporary writers, his version is more archaic and filled with echoes of ancient Hyperborean rituals. The medieval Grail literature of the Cistercians in *La Queste del Saint Graal*, or of Robert de Boron in *Le roman de l'histoire du Graal*, was more heavily rationalized and turned myth into a conceptual Christian allegory. In the terms of my own theories of the evolution of consciousness, this shift from Gebser's Mythic structure to the Mental structure also expresses the shift from the Geometric to the Algebraic Mentality. As Eric Rohmer showed in his film version of 1978, the mythic is more to our contemporary taste.



Stonehenge

## FOOTNOTES

1 Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval ou le conte du graal*, Traduction inédit et presentation de Jean Dufournet (Paris: Flammarion, 1997), 196-201. See also Jean Maurice's vade-mecum on *Perceval ou le Conte du Graal*, Chrétien de Troyes (Bordas/Sejer, 2004) where he states on page 28: "Le défilé du Graal est d'abord mis en rapport avec des mystères initiatiques liés à des cultes de la fécondité et de la végétation." For Stonehenge, see Lionel Sims, "The Truth about Stonehenge," TV Program, not yet published. See [http://numoon.net/Soli-Luna/index.php?option=com\\_fireboard&Itemid=28&func=view&id=1&view=threaded&catid=4](http://numoon.net/Soli-Luna/index.php?option=com_fireboard&Itemid=28&func=view&id=1&view=threaded&catid=4)

2 See *The Annotated Waste Land with Eliot's Contemporary Prose*, ed. Lawrence Rainey (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), also Jesse Weston, *From Ritual to Romance* (New York: Doubleday, 1957).

3 See Calvert Watkins, "The Asamedha or Horse Sacrifice: an Indo-European Liturgical Form" in his *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 265-277.

4 Julius Caesar also says that the Druids wrote out their public messages in Greek letters but restricted their esoteric lore to oral teaching and memorization only. He also comments that the Druids in Celtic Gaul sent their disciples to Britania, where the teachings are said to have originated. It is not fanciful, I think, to look upon Stonehenge and the environs of Avebury and Glastonbury as

*the site of a Druid college with a focus on astronomical knowledge. See Caesar's Gallic War , an Interlinear Translation of the First Seven Books (New York, NY: David McKay, 1952), Liber VI, 13-16, 330-336. Since Druid lore was an oral tradition, the Welsh bards Chrétien de Troyes encountered would have been conversant with the lore and rituals of Stonehenge.*

*5 See William Irwin Thompson, "Artistic and Archetypal Mathematical Mentalities in the Evolution of Culture" in Self and Society: Studies in the Evolution of Culture (Exeter, UK: Imprint Academic, 2009), 35-50. For Jean Gebser, see Everpresent Origin (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1984).*