

GUBBIO: THE ITALIAN RENNES-LE-CHÂTEAU

by Mario Farneti and Bruno Bartoletti

Even when Rome was an agglomerate of shacks which overlooked an insalubrious marsh near a bend in the Tiber, our mount was considered sacred. We are talking about Monte Ingino or *Monte di S. Ubaldo*, the hill on whose slopes rises the town of Gubbio, known in ancient times as *Ikuvium*, city-state built by the Umbrians, an Indo-European people who had come down from Germany towards the end of the second millennium before our era. Their language, engraved in the bronze of the seven tables, the *Tabulae Iguvinae*, reverberates the solemn echoes of ancient Germanic dialects. It is here that the “discovery” was made; a quite unexpected event in which we were left entangled, as if in a big web, whose stretched and slender weave link distant events in time and space.

Central to the story are a painter from the nineteenth century, a painting of disquieting features and a man obsessed with that painting and then a grotto halfway up the mount Ingino, under a steep ridge of grey rock which emerges from the greenery, like the fleshless knee of a titan, hurled into the bowels of the mountain by the wrath of the gods and, among the rocks in the grotto, appears the enigmatic intersection of incomprehensible words, even though they are set out according to a mathematical logic, according to a symmetry that is as perfect as it is evasive, arranged in a magic square:

NIGER

INARE

GALAG

ERANI

REGIN

Not very far, on a wall of rock, a plaque records several verses from Dante’s ‘Paradise’: *Intra Tupino e l’acqua che discende / Del colle eletto dal Beato Ubaldo / Fertile costa d’alto monte pende,*

(Between Tupino and the stream that falls / Down from the hill elect of blessed Ubaldo, / A fertile slope of lofty mountain hangs,)

not forgetting that that place, at the time of the divine Poet, was source of pleasant waters, very different to how it is today.

What strikes us immediately is NIGER REGIN, the first and last word of the palindromic square, very similar to the more well-known one of *Sator*. Could it be a reference to a Black Queen? Perhaps an ancient cult linked to Isis. Immediately, the paintings by *that painter* pass before our eyes and, in particular, *that painting*, and then the terrible image of the man who was obsessed with it for the best part of his life: Adolf Hitler.

The Island of the Dead

The painting we refer to is *The Island of the Dead* by Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901), an artist of Swiss origin, who stayed a long time in Italy and died near Fiesole. Cutting across the flat surface of

the sea, a boat carrying an individual wrapped in a white shroud approaches a sharp projection of rock emerging from the water, on which stand several rock tombs, which surround the tapered outlines of a wood of cypresses. Anxiety, solitude, mystery, a sense of indomitable dizziness towards the unknown is the sensation one feels before that image. It had to be the same dizziness that swallowed up Hitler's mind, who could no longer leave that awful painting.

Those who said that Böcklin was inspired by the *Faraglioni* of Capri have never seen that area of Monte Ingino. If they had, they would have been left astounded, as we were that afternoon at the end of summer. The rock, the cypresses, the anxiety generated by the silence of the Umbrian locality, send us back to *The Island of the Dead* surrounded by a liquid presence that isn't sea, but crystallised silence, total standstill.

Not far above, the grotto of S. Agnese, formerly known by the name of *S. Agata Sub Grotta*, rises at the base of a cleft which cuts the ridge of grey rock which ends in a ledge facing south. The narrow entrance to the grotto opens over a calcareous platform from which a ramp branches off and goes up towards the ledge above. On the left wall there is an acronym engraved: HRSA. On the wall opposite the entrance, there is a small opening made in the rock, perhaps what remains of a holy shrine or simply a cabinet used by hermits. We examine the shrine and we realise that the stone forming its bottom, is nothing but a big boulder walled with lime. Why? On the right, near the ceiling runs a drainage canal that seems to come from the inside of the mountain. A crazy idea springs to our minds: could there be another room beyond that wall? We have to check, but how? After inserting a miniature camera for a couple of metres beyond the wall, what appear on the monitor are clear images of stones and fragments; then several forms become clear on the rocks: small swastikas. We count at least three, distinct, clear-cut. Who drew them? When? We don't know the answers. We decide then to extend our search to what, for convenience, we will call the "ledge of the augur". We go up further by about twenty metres, going along the whole ramp cut in the rock of the mount, until it is interrupted next to a path with an indefinite route which winds between the stones and goes up to the ledge, a clearing from where the flat country opposite Gubbio and part of the town itself can easily be observed. The compass confirms to us that the platform of rock perfectly faces South, towards the small church of *Vittorina* which, in the stretch of level ground in Gubbio, commemorates the place where St. Francis tamed the legendary wolf.

A complex riddle

We move to right above the grotto and we notice anomalies in the earth's magnetic field. A few centimetres from the ledge, the needle goes haywire and deviates, for no apparent reason, by 20-25°. On the edge of the platform, several engraved letters appear: RREG. We remember the magic square, found not more than 50 metres away from there. Those letters could be a fragment of the expression NIGER REGIN. Another reference to the Black Queen...

The time comes to stop and reflect. We have to make a digression of over 150 years, go back to the beginning of the 1800s, when a character appeared in Gubbio leaving an indelible mark on most of the city. We are talking about Matilde Hobhouse, the wife of marquis Francesco Ranghiasi Brancaloni. In 1850 the English noblewoman stayed for some time in Olevano, on the Albani hills in the company of Dorotea Gabrielli and there she mixed with a group of German painters including Heinrich Dreber, Ludwig Thiersch and Arnold Böcklin, all members of the "League of Virtue" or *Tugendbund*.

That same *Tugendbund* of which a clear trace remains in the neoclassic temple which a few years earlier Matilde wanted to have built in the splendid Parco Ranghiasi studded with alchemic and esoteric references. Placed in the centre of the gable is the Ranghiasi coat of arms, quartered with

that of the Brancaleoni, circumscribed by the motto: “Virtus vincit invidiam” (Virtue overcomes envy).

It’s undeniable that the *Tugendbund* is one of the rivulets that flowed into the largest river of the Arianism which at the time set the premises for Pan-Germanic neo-paganism and, several decades later, for the initiation of Adolf Hitler, sinister devotee of the goddess Ostara and member of the Thule Society (compare the special issue on esoteric Nazism *HERA* n° 32).

But let us look more carefully at the artistic interests of Böcklin. He seemed to be fascinated by the pagan worship of trees and waters. His visit to the park of Bomarzo had shocked him, for Pallavicino Orsini’s masterly ability to create a garden so packed with chromatic contrasts, pagan ruins and alchemic buildings. In his works he makes use of various components which combine in a hermetic blend able to convey the ineffable to the observer. We can see it well in *The Sacred Wood*, where he uses light as an element that is absolute and not linked to the presence of the Sun, which he never portrays. But better still let us appreciate his ability to transmute matter through light in the *The Island of the Dead*, which he painted in 1880 and produced in as many as five versions until 1886. The interpretation of this picture haunted the minds of the rulers of England, of De Chirico, Freud, D’Annunzio and, as we have already mentioned, Hitler who possessed one of the five originals, the one that has been lost. But where had Böcklin drawn inspiration from for this work? Reference is made to the Faraglioni of Capri, a credible hypothesis, if one doesn’t notice a detail which leads towards another track. The painting portrays the light of sunset.

A rather strange twilight, because in the Gulf of Naples at that time of day the light comes from the other way. A little unusual for a painter who loves sunsets to depict dawn on the *The Island of the Dead*. And so where must we go to find the same point of light, the same rocks, the same cypresses? To another place that doesn’t stand in the midst of water even if it was its old source, so much that Dante himself witnessed it and, in 1921, someone who “knew” wanted to confirm it by putting the plaque there with the verses of the divine Poet: that “*Intra Tupino...*” which we mentioned at the beginning.

We are talking about the very Monte Ingino of Gubbio, near what is vulgarly called the *Prima Cappelluccia* (first small chapel, in dialect), not far from the Grotto of Sant’Agnese and a short way away from the magic square of the Black Queen. This area, strongly guarded in 1944 by the German occupation troops and which got the attention, a few years after the end of the war, of a curious English lady who appeared in Gubbio almost from nothing in the Fifties.

The enigmatic Miss Mitford

Seemingly more than seventy years old, the woman said she was called Ellen Mitford and the daughter of the English Lord of the same name, as well as a fervent Catholic like her father. The eccentric lady would enjoy withdrawing at night near the Grotto of Sant’Agnese. There she would sleep under a tent and, in the moonlight, she liked to talk to the trees. But who exactly was this woman? We carried out some research and there doesn’t appear to be any Ellen Mitford daughter of Lord Mitford who at that time could be of that age. The picture that emerges is, in any case, more than disturbing. Lord Mitford, apart from a son who died young, had six daughters: Jessica, Debo, Nancy, Diana, Pamela and Unity Walkirie. The last-named, through a strange trick of destiny, was born in a mining town in Alaska, called Swastika, and, later on, became Adolf Hitler’s lover! It is documented, in fact, that the young woman met with the dictator as many as 140 times.

When England declared war on Germany, Unity, seized with dejection, attempted suicide, by shooting herself in the head at the Englischer Garten of Munich. She was rescued and admitted to a

clinic where she underwent a difficult operation. The doctors managed to save her and the Führer, of course, paid all the expenses of her stay in hospital.

The Miss Mitford who appeared in Gubbio couldn't be any of the six sisters, because in those years the eldest, Nancy, was little more than fifty years old. So who was she really? Why did she boast of that family name, if she ever did? What had she come to do or find in Gubbio, right in the area of Monte Ingino? For whom? These are questions that await an answer and which can have one only when the identity of the mysterious Englishwoman is explained and her true ties with the Mitford family and... with Hitler.

The cult of the Magdalene

Let us go back to the Black Queen. A historical *excursus* on the subject would certainly fill the pages of a weighty study. In short, we could identify her with Isis or with the Black Virgin of the Templars or, rather, with the Magdalene. This is certainly a much more recent acceptance of the original frequentation of the grotto of Sant'Agnese, which should date back to at least the III century B.C., but which can help us understand the importance attributed to the city of Gubbio by different esoteric circles who recognised the particular spiritual valence of this place, going back also to the sacredness expressed by the old Confraternity of the *Atiedii* Brothers, whose rites are accurately described in the seven *Tabulae Iguvinae*.

Some even maintain that the confraternity hasn't died out, but continues to work even today. What could also be linked to the cult of the Magdalene is a hill which stands by Monte Ingino to the north-west: Monte Calvo. Inside the gully into which leads the road from Bottaccione, a site known by geologists all over the world for the presence of iridium, standing halfway along the coast is the fourteenth-century hermitage of Sant'Ambrogio which, as chance would have it, faces south like the grotto of Sant'Agnese on Monte Ingino, and it stands near a cave. Preserved inside it is the tomb of the Blessed Arcangelo Canetoli and that of cardinal Agostino Steuco, a famous scholar and alchemist of the XVI century. At the entrance to the hermitage, engraved on a step are the same graffiti found in Saint Maximin-la-Sainte Baume in Provence on the entrance wall of the crypt of the Magdalene. They are symbols portraying a kind of inverted horseshoe, a sort of omega, containing a cross. Another surprise awaits us, if we observe Monte Calvo from the north-west side of Monte Ingino: the same design, this time huge, so big that it escapes notice. A Greek cross, extending for tens of metres and marked out on the slope of Monte Focè in a rugged zone above the hermitage of Sant'Ambrogio. With the least imagination, considering as the external edge the undulating profile of the hill, we get the same image, this time of gigantic proportions: the cross inscribed in the omega. But let us return briefly to the hermitage. Not far from the steps, on the external wall, we find a tombstone, perhaps of an ancient ossuary, with skull and decussate bones, the jawbone missing, where it says: "SANCTA ET SALUBRIS EST COGITATIO PRO DEFUNCTIS EXORARE UT A PECCATIS SOLVANTUR – IL MACH XII".

It should be pointed out that, when in 1279 in Saint Maximin-la-Sainte Baume was discovered, through the help of Carlo II of Angiò, the tomb containing the body of Magdalene, the head didn't have the jawbone. The sarcophagus was opened in the presence of the bishops of Arles and Aix, and a statement was written of which we quote a passage: "*When the tomb is uncovered, a sweet scent of perfumes spreads, as if an entire store of aromatic essences has been opened. The tongue, between the dry bones of the head, and despite the absence of the lower jawbone, appears to be intact, desiccated but pertaining to the palate, and from this emerges a branch of verdant fennel*". Pope Boniface VIII, informed of the incredible discovery, exhumed from among the relics of St. John Lateran a jawbone, which turned out to fit the skull that had just been found by the prince. At this point, we cannot refrain from quoting a place which has roused, for many decades now, the interest of an unimaginable number of researchers, experts, and, unfortunately, visionaries: Rennes-

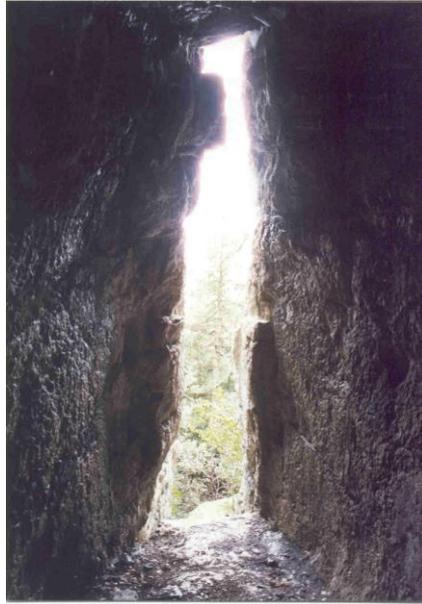
le-Château (compare *HERA* n° 22 page 20 and *HERA* n°23 page 62). There also is a precise reference to the Magdalene, there again, a funeral tombstone in the cemetery of the church of St. Mary Magdalene which the parish priest Bérenger Saunière took pains to destroy, commemorates a lady, Marie D'Ables de Negre. It's useless to point out the semantic analogy with our NIGER. And from Rennes, we can't not recall the paintings by Nicolas Poussin. In particular the self-portrait of 1650, kept at the Louvre, but painted in Italy, in which he is portrayed with his back to a painting, of which only the canvas can be seen, placed over another painting from which emerges the image of a female divinity crowned with a diadem endowed with the "third eye". Above her, the outline of a mountain which many have identified with Blanchefort, near Rennes. A shiver, however, runs down the spine, because anyone who knows Gubbio cannot deny that it's Monte Ingino, with the basilica of St. Ubaldo as it was at the time.

What if Poussin may have wanted to leave a precise indication of a twin place, where the same thing that the parish priest Bérenger Saunière found in Rennes had been sought? It's not a theory to be rejected, if two other works by the same author are examined.

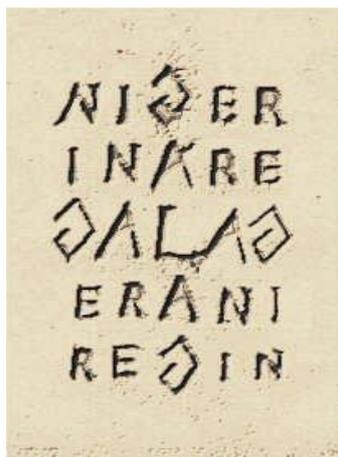
We are talking about the first version of the *Bergers d'Arcadie* and the sketch of Shugborough in the 1630 version. Portrayed in both paintings is a group of shepherds before a stone arch on which is engraved the phrase: "*Et in Arcadia Ego*". A riddle that has made enthusiasts of mysteries from all over the world write rivers of ink. In the painting, the shepherd indicates the letter "I", while in the sketch the letter "G" followed by "O"; the letter "E", the beginning of EGO is, instead covered by his hand. And yet the letters "GO" are the first two of Gobio or Gobbio, names by which the city was known in 1600s. Nevertheless the "I" indicated in the *Bergers d'Arcadie* could be identified with the beginning of the Latin name of the same city: Iguvium. The view becomes quite fascinating if we examine the second version of the *Bergers d'Arcadie*, again by Poussin. In this case the shepherd points out the letter "R", the first letter to Rennes: the crucial test of preciseness of our conclusions?

The first conclusions

We have only scratched the surface of an enigma that spans millenniums and is crystallised in the obscure presence of a female divinity with ambiguous valencies. It's difficult to understand with precision which is the cult to which the traces emerged so far refer to, difficult to understand to understand the reason that drove disquieting figures to take interest in that grotto on Monte Ingino and the surrounding areas. Our research is at the beginning, but intuition leads us to believe that the traces followed, perhaps through a mysterious call, could lead us towards unexplored territories.



The grotto of Sant'Agnese, formerly known as the Grotto of Sant'Agata.



The palindrome NIGER REGIN of the Ingino

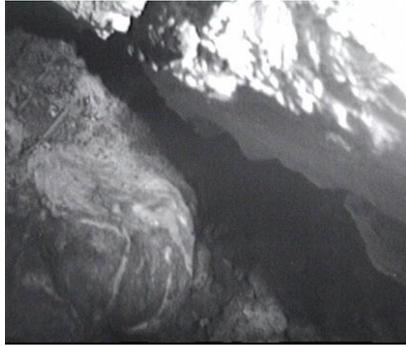


The ridge of rock that houses the Grotto of Sant'Agnese seen from Gubbio



The Island of the Dead by Arnold Böcklin





The swastikas filmed by the cameras of the authors in a place that is no longer accessible today



The rock engraved with the letters RREG, which refers to the NIGER REGIN



The neoclassic temple ordered to be built by Matilde Hobhouse in the splendid Parco Ranghiasi, full of alchemic references.



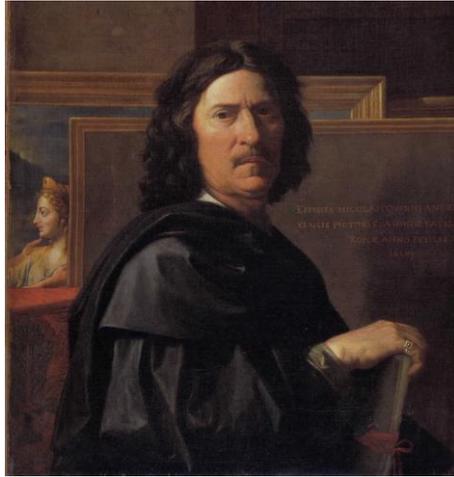
The coat of arms of the Ranghiasi-Brancaleoni on the temple



A picture of Adolf Hitler opposite one of the five original versions of the painting L'Isola dei Morti by Arnold Böcklin, now lost



Adolf Hitler together with Unity Mitford



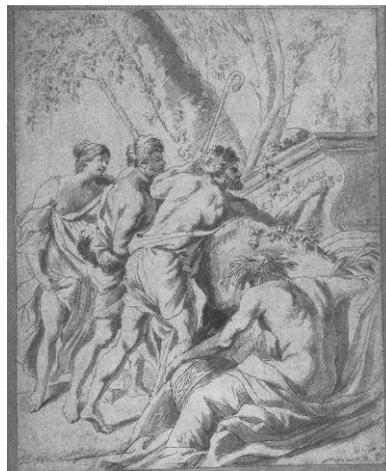
Nicolas Poussin in his self-portrait. Behind him the divinity with the third eye and the mount that authors identify with Monte Ingino



The symbols of the Magdalene revealed to the hermitage of Sant'Ambrogio



The peak of Monte Ingino in Gubbio



At the top the first version of the Pastori d'Arcadia. Above, the sketch of Shugborough with written "Et in Arcadia Ego"



The tombstone with skull without jawbone and the symbols of the Magdalen