



## Reviews

LIONEL SMITHETT LEWIS, *St. Joseph of Arimathea at Glastonbury or The Apostolic Church of Britain*. Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2004. Pp. 211. ISBN: 0-7188-9165-1. \$25.

The book is a reprint of a work originally published in 1922, written by an author who became Vicar of Glastonbury in that same year. It is prefaced with a copy of William Blake's 'Jerusalem,' here entitled 'The Glastonbury Hymn.' The various traditions of Glastonbury and their relation to British national identity are the focus of the work. Lewis writes for a popular audience, and his purpose is clear. He is presenting the evidence for 'the immense antiquity and apostolic origin of our National Church, and of Glastonbury as being the Mother Church of the Island' (p. 17).

Lewis groups his materials into sections on the traditions themselves, supporting authorities, and other evidences, although there is not always a clear separation in content. He is concerned with factuality and tends to argue from authority, citing Church fathers and ecclesiastical historians of earlier eras, as well as local belief. This concern with fact and the focus on Glastonbury in turn determine the perspectives. Lewis does not recognize the traditions as dynamic, changing over time; the stories of Arthur and Joseph are merely rediscovered in the twelfth century, due to the finding of Arthur's grave (pp. 17, 59–60, 70). Arthurian literature itself is 'nothing less than Glastonbury's two great stories of St. Joseph and King Arthur strangely and inextricably interwoven' (p. 59).

Lewis's handling of the work of the medieval historian William of Malmesbury is a particular problem. William's work and an altered version are central to an understanding of the earlier development of Glastonbury's storytelling. It is true that Lewis was working without the benefit of more recent editions and translations: John Scott's edition and translation of *The Early History of Glastonbury* (1981); the Mynors, Thomson, and Winterbottom edition of *The History of the English Kings* (1998–99); and David Preest's translation of *The Deeds of the Bishops of England* (2002). Even with that consideration, Lewis is still misinterpreting the medieval texts. There are similar issues with his use of Irish and Welsh sources, as well as his reconstructions of Romano-British history.

However, the Vicar of Glastonbury did have a good sense of central characteristics of the traditions, cultural features that have shown an enduring strength. Lewis perceived 'a tinge of the divine' (p. 97) in Glastonbury's associations, a direct connection to faith and spirituality. Marion Bowman's recent article, 'Procession and Possession in Glastonbury,' discusses the current displays of religious and

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spiritual belief acted out in two annual Glastonbury pilgrimages, the Anglican and the Catholic, as well as in a procession associated with Goddess spirituality (*Folklore* 115.3 [Dec 2004]: 273–285). The vicar also saw a central link between Glastonbury's narratives and the British nation itself. In an article dated September 17, 2005, English songwriter Billy Bragg has chronicled the spontaneous singing of the hymn 'Jerusalem' by fans of the England cricket teams (<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/>). 'Jerusalem' is again in use as an expression of English, if not British, national identity. The importance of Lewis's work indeed may be that he recorded his perceptions, at a given point in time, of a rich and dynamic set of related traditions.

Those searching for a reliable introduction to the issues in the Glastonbury scholarship will not find it in Lewis's book. The medieval texts are addressed in James Carley's edition of John of Glastonbury's *The Chronicle of Glastonbury Abbey* (1985) and the editions and translations previously mentioned. The only comprehensive presentation of the medieval storytelling is Carley's *Glastonbury Abbey: The Holy House at the head of the Moors Adventurous* (revised edition 1996). Two collections of essays and reprinted articles cover the widely divergent views of a series of scholars: *The Archaeology and History of Glastonbury Abbey* (Abrams and Carley, 1991) and *Glastonbury Abbey and the Arthurian Tradition* (Carley, 2001). The medieval abbey as a land-owning institution is addressed in Lesley Abrams's *Anglo-Saxon Glastonbury: Church and Endowment* (1996) and N.E. Stacy's *Surveys of the Estates of Glastonbury Abbey c. 1135–1201* (2001). Philip Rahtz and Lorna Watts have summarized the archaeological evidence for Glastonbury and its environs in *Glastonbury: Myth & Archaeology* (2003). My own article, 'St Joseph and Britain: The Old French Origins,' appeared in *ARTHURIANA* 11.3 (Fall 2001): 1–20, with additional footnotes in 11.4 (Winter 2001): sheet 18a.

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