

SANCTUS AGOBARDUS, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Some lessons from the 9th century abductions in France

Dr. Jacques Vallée, FSR Consultant ©

1. The Abduction Question

In these days of intense turmoil and speculation among American ufologists the problem of abduction reports has finally assumed the central position it deserves.

On one hand the skeptics like Mr. Klass brush aside any notion that the reported abductions might be real: since UFOs cannot exist, they argue, these reports must be coming from overheated imaginations or pure hoaxes, precipitated by the credulity of many investigators.

On the other hand experienced researchers like Dr. David Jacobs and Mr. Budd Hopkins are presenting evidence from their own hypnotic regressions of abductees. In their view the cases are not only real, but they represent a genuine indication that contact between mankind and an extraterrestrial civilization visiting us is entering a new phase. This new phase is characterized, they claim, by medical and genetic experimentation on unsuspecting human victims.

Many researchers of the field find themselves somewhere between these two extreme positions. Those who have followed the work of François Meheust, or my own *Passport to Magonia*, may acknowledge that the study of folklore is replete with accounts of abductions by objects coming from the sky, with stories of intermarriage with beings of light, and with theories about the genetic and racial motivations of the beings in question: If experimentation is going on, it must have been under way for a very long time.

The UFO community in the U.S. has generally discounted this information, arguing that folklore is too vague to be useful and that the parallel between our modern, technically-equipped ufonauts and the elves or the sylphs of old is so tenuous as to be irrelevant. In the words of Budd Hopkins it represents "an odd confluence of UFO case studies, free-wheeling speculation and folklore of obviously uncertain authenticity."

I submit that, on the contrary, it is extremely important to look for any historical antecedents to the reports we are studying today. The guidance we find in such accounts may help in resolving some of the research issues in modern ufology. It will be recalled that the very title of *Passport to Magonia*, which was published nearly 20 years ago, was inspired by an account in the French medieval archives. This account was attributed to Archbishop Agobard. It concerned a series of sightings of "cloudships" and the local speculation that these objects carried sorcerers from Magonia, a magical region situated somewhere between the earth and the sky.

There is nothing uncertain about the authenticity of the belief in Magonia.

In recent months I have spent some time in Lyons, France, to locate the original text of the Agobard statement. The purpose of this short article is to show that, far from being a simple rumour or a piece of fairy tale, the Magonia account is clearly established in history.

2. Who was Saint Agobard?

Agobard was born about 779 near Narbonne, came to Lyons at age 20, was ordained in 804, and suc-

ceeded Archbishop Leidrade when the latter retired to the Saint-Médard monastery in 814.

Archbishop Agobard was an enlightened, intelligent man who took an active role in the political feuds of his time: he became involved on Lothaire's side in his fight against his father, and even wrote a book supporting him. This cost him his position when Louis the Pious came back to power, but he was reinstated two years later, in 837.

As an early-day "rationalist", Saint Agobard has left no less than 22 books, including several treatises against superstitions and heretical beliefs, along with political pamphlets and volumes of poetry. The anonymous translator of his work entitled *De Grandine et Tonitruis* ("About Hail and Thunder") notes in his introduction:

All of his writings, whose style is consistently correct and often elegant, deserve the honor of being translated, for they make known to us the mores and customs of the first half of the ninth century, better than those of any other writer of the time.

In particular one must acknowledge that he fought the prejudices and superstitions of his time more strongly and with a higher sense of reason than anyone else. It is against one of these prejudices that he compiled "About Hail and Thunder".

The book was first partially translated from the Latin as a piece published in *L'Annuaire de Lyon* for 1837. The translation was then revised and reprinted as an essay, with very limited distribution, in 1841 (Lyon: Imprimerie de Dumoulin, Ronet et Sibuet, Quai St. Antoine). It is this volume I was able to study in the Lyons municipal library.

3. About Hail and Thunder

The main purpose of the "De Grandine et Tonitruis" is to debunk some popular misconceptions about the weather. In particular, the good Archbishop of Lyons fought against the idea that winds and storms were due to the influence of sorcerers (appropriately named "tempestaires" by the vulgar people): His main argument is that "Whoever takes away from God His admirable and terrible works, and attributes them to Man, is a false witness against God Himself."

It is in this context that he raises his voice against those who are insane enough to believe that there could be ships ("naves") flying through the clouds. To avoid any suggestion that I might have bent the meaning of the terms used in the original, and given the rarity of the book itself, I think it is important to put on record the key passages of the Latin text:

Plerosque autem vidimus et audivimus tanta dementia obrutos, tanta stultitia alienatos, ut credant et dicant: quandam esse regionem, quae dicatur MAGONIA, ex qua naves veniant in nubibus, in quibus fruges, quae grandinibus decidunt, et tempestatibus pereunt, vehantur in eandem regionem, ipsis videlicet nautis aereis dantibus pretia tempestariis, et accipientibus frumenta vel ceteras fruges.

Which our translator renders in the following terms:

We have seen and heard many people crazy enough and insane enough to believe and to state that there exists a certain region called MAGONIA, out of which ships come out and sail upon the

clouds; these ships (are said to) transport to that same region the fruits that have fallen because of the hail and have been destroyed by the storm, after the value of the wheat and other fruits have been paid to the "Tempestaires" by the aerial navigators who have received them.

And Saint Agobard continues:

Ex his item tam profunda stultitia excoecatis, ut haec posse fieri credant, vidimus plures in quodam conventu hominum exhibere vinctos quatuor homines, tres viros, et unam feminam, quasi qui de ipsis navibus ceciderint: quos scilicet per aliquot dies in vinculis detentos, tandem collecto conventu hominum exhibuerunt, ut dixi, in nostra praesentia, tanquam lapidandos. Sed tamen vincente veritate, post multam ratiocinationem, ipsi qui eos exhibuerant, secundum

De Grandine et Tonitruis

The first page of Agobard's book, in the Lyons edition of 1841.

I. In his regionibus¹ penè omnes homines, nobiles et ignobiles, urbani et rustici, senes et juvenes, putant grandines et tonitrua hominum libitu posse fieri. Dicunt enim, mox ut audierint tonitrua et viderint fulgura: *Aura levatitia est*². Interrogati verò quid sit aura levatitia, alii cum verecundia, parum remordente conscientia, alii autem confidenter, ut imperitorum moris esse solet, confirmant incantationibus hominum, qui dicuntur tempestarii, esse levatam, et ideo dici levatitiam auram. Quod utrum verum sit, ut vulgò creditur, ex auctoritate divinarum Scripturarum probetur necesse est. Sin autem falsum est, utabsque ambiguo credimus, summopere exaggerandum est, quanti mendacii reus sit, qui opus divinum homini tribuit. Nam per hoc inter duo mortifera maximaque mendacia constringitur, dum testificatur hominem facere posse quod solius Dei est posse, et Deum non facere quae facit. Si verò in mendaciis minorum rerum veraciter est propheticum illud confusi sunt, sicut *confunditur fur quando deprehenditur*.

¹ In agro nimirum Lugdunensi et circumpositis regionibus. Stephanus Baluzius.

² Vide Adelung, *Glossarium manuale*, verbo *Aura*.

Which gets translated as follows:

We have even seen several of these crazy individuals who, believing in the reality of such absurd things, exhibited before the assembled crowd four people in chains, three men and one woman, said to have fallen from these ships. They had been holding them bound for a few days when they

brought them before me, followed by the multitude, in order to lapidate them. After a long argument, truth having prevailed at last, those who had shown them to the people found themselves, as a prophet says, in the same state of confusion as a robber who has been caught. (Jerem.2:26)

Since we do not have access to the statements made on the other side of the argument, we will never know what the "cloud ships" looked like, or why the witnesses thought that the three men and one woman had in fact come from these ships, and should be stoned to death. Naturally the mere fact of alighting from a "cloudship" may have been proof of sorcery. Stoned to death. Naturally the mere fact of alighting from a "cloudship" may have been proof of sorcery.

In one of his books the French physicist Arago states that until the time of Charlemagne it was a common custom to erect long poles in the fields to protect them from the hail and the thunderstorms. These poles were not lightning rods, as one might suppose, but magical devices which were only effective when they held aloft certain parchments. In his *Capitularies*, published in 789, emperor Charlemagne forbade this "superstitious" practice.

4. A Patron Saint of Abductees?

I nominate Saint Agobard as the Patron Saint of abductees. His statement teaches us that interaction between us and the ships that sail through the clouds is not a new phenomenon. It also indicates to me that the vision of these "ships" was linked, in the minds of the people, to atmospheric disturbances and to the stealing of fruits, plants and possibly even animals by beings from the sky.

The reference to animals comes from a passage in a book by J.-J. Ampère (in *Histoire Littéraire de la France*, III, 178): "It was believed that certain men, called "Tempestarii", raised storms in order to sell the fruits hit by hail and the animals who had died as a result of storms and floods to mysterious buyers who came by way of the air."

Most importantly, Agobard's book shows that as early as the ninth century there was a belief in Western culture about a separate region of the universe from whence these vessels sailed, and about the possibility for men and women to travel with them.

We must be thankful to him for saving the lives of these four people, an episode that shows that the skeptics, in this field, can do some good after all.

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FSR CONSULTANT DR JACQUES VALLÉE ON FSR AND ON THE AMERICANS

THE MUFON UFO JOURNAL for May 1988 contains an account of an interview with Dr Vallée, by Linda J. Strand, a freelance journalist living in Boulder, Colorado, who specializes in scientific subjects

and has had her articles on a wide variety of topics published in *Science Digest*, *Astronomy*, and similar journals.

We reproduce below only part of the article which

relates to *Flying Saucer Review*. In the light of the sort of things that the MUFON UFO JOURNAL has been saying about us lately, our readers may find Dr Vallée's comments not totally devoid of interest:-

STRAND: What do you think is missing from the historical analysis?

VALLÉE: Two things: a sense of the slowly-changing positions of the key researchers rather than the big, sensational events; and the international perspective. American historians of the field have looked exclusively at the U.S. scene, probably because they had to define the subject narrowly to keep it manageable. But it was always apparent to us from the beginning that the problem could only be tackled at an international level.

STRAND: Give me some examples of that.

VALLÉE: Just look at the foreign individuals and organizations that have had a major impact. People like Olavo Fontes in Brazil, or the British *Flying Saucer Review* in London. No U.S.

magazine has ever compared with it, although a lot of money has been squandered on flashy publications that disappeared quickly...

STRAND: Obviously you think there is something wrong with U.S. research into UFOs. What is it? A parochial attitude?

VALLÉE: Too much talk and not enough research.

All of which puts me in mind of the day when, on behalf of FSR, I went to welcome Dr J. Allen Hynek for the very first time, on the occasion of (possibly) his first visit to Britain. I took him to lunch at a hotel in Kensington, and in the course of the meal he told me that the U.S. Air Force had for years done their best to prevent him seeing the foreign UFO reports that were coming in from all over the world, and that it was consequently only when he began to see my translations of foreign reports, from ten languages, published regularly in FSR, that he realized that, whatever its ultimate nature might turn out to be, the "UFO Phenomenon" was at any rate global, and not limited to North America.

EDITOR

A VISIT TO NAZCA

By Omar Fowler, FSR Consultant

Our colleague Omar Fowler, who used to live in Surrey and ran the S.I.G.A.P. UFO Investigation Group (now taken over by another FSR Consultant, Paul Whitehead), is currently living near Barcelona, in Spain. He has just returned from a trip to South America, where he was able to fulfil a life-long dream of seeing the Nazca Lines and Figures, and where he also met the famous German lady Dr. Maria Reiche, who has devoted her entire life to the study of all these strange forms and markings on the Peruvian Desert. Omar has sent us this very interesting account of what he saw.

EDITOR

I was fortunate recently in being able to fulfil one of my life-time ambitions when I visited Peru in May of this year (1988), and had the opportunity to explore and fly over the famous "Lines" and "Figures" of the Nazca Plain (around 14° 53 S., 74° 54 W.)

The road journey from Lima to Ica and then on to Nazca turned out to be a hair-raising adventure on tracks that rapidly deteriorated as the trip progressed. White crosses at the side of the road marked particularly dangerous points where various persons had been killed in accidents. At one bad corner up in the mountains, seven black crosses showed a spot where seven people had apparently misjudged the bend and disappeared into the rocky valley below.

Finally the battered old Peruvian V8 "Chevy" taxi arrived on the Nazca Plain, and we pulled up next to an observation tower that had been constructed beside the highway. This tower is some fifteen metres in height and gives a panoramic view of the desert. It was possible to make out a number of distant lines and part of a geoglyph figure nearby, but it was not until later in the day, when I flew over the Plain, that the figures and lines were completely visible.

The first impression was of the large number of lines that criss-cross over the desert, far more than I had expected. The famous figures became visible one after another, as the pilot flew over them in his *Cessna* for probably the umpteenth time this year. The figures were far duller than they appear in many photographs, and were a little difficult to distinguish. There were now car-tracks showing up, crossing over many of the Lines and some of the Figures. I was later to learn from Dr. Maria Reiche that these tyre-tracks were some fifteen years old, and had been caused by

an influx of tourists after the sensational treatment given to the Lines and Figures in the books by Erich von Däniken.

The careless drivers had badly damaged several of the lines, and their tyre-tracks would probably stay there for another two or three hundred years. I photographed numerous figures, mainly for my own interest, as they have been professionally taken by aerial cameramen many times. The desert was criss-crossed

