

and Mary lay lines, the 'heart chakra' of Earth itself (Bowman, 2005: 163) and what might be described as a thin place, where 'the veil between this world and the "other world" is at its thinnest' (Bowman, 2005: 159).

### *Naqshbandis in Glastonbury*

This sense of sacred space and place is undeniably significant to the Naqshbandi experience of Glastonbury, beginning with Shaykh Nazim's experience, as one of my participants describes: 'he went into the Abbey, that was something else. He stood there and he was almost transfixed, you can say. He was so infused with this energy...he said "now I know why I came to England. It is because of this place. This is the spiritual heart and it is here that Jesus came. And he put the foundations to this Abbey and it is here that he will return"'.<sup>162</sup>

Two of my interviewees, Yunus and Rabiah elaborated on this sense of sacredness and sacred space in Glastonbury. Yunus explained to me that Glastonbury is a 'spiritual power centre' and according to Shaykh Nazim, this is to do with the 'presence of many saints who are buried here'.<sup>163</sup> Similarly, Rabiah pointed me in the direction of the omphalos, a large stone that sits alongside the Abbots kitchen in the grounds of Glastonbury Abbey. The stone is weathered and has a groove in its surface that vaguely resembles a shallow footprint.

Rabiah described how Shaykh Abdul Hamid, the *imam* of the mosque at St. Anne's in London visited Glastonbury was struck by the similarities between the omphalos and the *Maqam Ibrahim* at the Kaaba in Mecca. After praying on this insight he revealed the footprint was actually that of Isa. This was in turn confirmed by Shaykh Nazim. Later, another shaykh visited revealed that the stone was not only the footprint of Jesus but that it was connected directly to Jerusalem and from there, Heaven, like Jacob's Ladder. Glastonbury thus becomes connected to the sacred places of Islam.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> In Naqshbandi understanding, however, Jesus did not come with Joseph of Aramathia, but on his own in his early thirties, by transporting himself with his fully awoken spiritual powers.

<sup>163</sup> Interview with 'Yunus', 12/04/14.

<sup>164</sup> This story was told to me several times by Rabiah but I was not able to gauge how widely known it was in the *tariqa*. However, the subject of Haqqani sacred space and sacred geography in general is fascinating yet very understudied in this field. Throughout my time with

Essentially in both of these examples and the stories of Shaykh Nazim in Glastonbury, Glastonbury sacred space is subsumed into Naqshbandi spirituality and cosmology. Glastonbury makes sense because of Shaykh Nazim's esoteric knowledge. Indeed, Yunus describes how Shaykh Nazim 'confirmed' the 'special spiritual power of Glastonbury'.<sup>165</sup> It is interesting to compare here to Bowman's (2005: 163) observation that 'whatever the prevailing myth or worldview, Glastonbury somehow claims a central place in it'. I would suggest rather than Glastonbury taking a central place in the Naqshbandi worldview, the Naqshbandi's have reinterpreted much of Glastonbury's significance to be made clear only truly by Shaykh Nazim's knowledge.



1.1: The omphalos, Glastonbury Abbey. Author's image, taken 27/05/13.

The places of significance do seem to be, as Draper observes, associated with Christian legends and history. The Tor, however, for example, was described to me by Rabiah as being quite a '*jinn*' place. Indeed, Glastonbury as a whole is described as quite a difficult place to live due to the high level of *jinn* in the town. There may, however, be some marginal interest in the King Arthur narrative. On the tour of Britain that would lead Shaykh Nazim to Glastonbury, a *murid* describes how 'the night before Shaykh came here to Glastonbury, we were in this very beautiful place called St. Donats...and that's where he sat

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the *tariqa* I have been told about many special places in the UK and around the world, and conversely, those which are more spiritually challenging. One of the most interesting is the cave of the *Arbaeen*, the Forty. This cave on Mount Qasioun in Syria near Damascus is reportedly the length of forty prayer mats and every night saints of the world gather to pray to God for mercy on humanity. Next to this is the cave of blood, where legend has it, Cain murdered Abel. The water in the cave, rich with iron, reportedly runs red with blood as a reminder of the world's first murder. Thus, my interviewee explained, heaven and hell meet on earth.

<sup>165</sup> Interview with 'Yunus', 12/04/14.

down and started telling these stories. He said “not far from here, King Arthur is resting”, understood by the *murids* as being in a cave in the East of Wales.<sup>166</sup> What is interesting about this element of the narrative is that it holds a certain millenarian dimension. King Arthur is effectively considered to be in occultation, like the Mahdi, and when the Mahdi reveals himself, so will King Arthur, in the restoration of monarchy. Here, we therefore see the combining of two millenarian-messianic myths.<sup>167</sup> The extent to which this belief is held, even within Glastonbury, is unclear.

Draper reports about twenty *murids* in Glastonbury at the time of this research. In 2013, the *tariqa* was described as being closer to seventy, made up of predominantly single women, many of whom are converts. This number is fluid, as not all *murids* are fully active in the *tariqa* at all times. There are a number of *zikrs*, including a weekly ladies *zikh* of about fifteen people, a semi weekly *zikh* for men, and monthly *zikrs* in Margaret Chapel and the Abbey house. The *tariqa* does not maintain active links with other branches in the UK, but is active in encouraging *murids* to visit Cyprus. The *zikrs* I attended did not particularly reflect Draper’s observations on the move towards a more universal Sufism, although the participants at these *zikrs* were primarily made up of those already *murids*, or at the least interested Muslims, rather than interested non-Muslims.

#### Interpreting apocalyptic belief

Studies of contemporary groups in Britain who hold apocalyptic beliefs are reasonably rare in religious studies and related disciplines. One notable study was undertaken by Daniel Thompson (2005b) in the run up to the millennium. Thompson undertook an ethnographic study of Kensington Temple, a Pentecostal church network based in London with 3000-15,000 members in Britain, depending on which associated congregations are counted. The church has a rich apocalyptic tradition and with the year 2000 approaching, Thompson investigated how prevalent apocalyptic beliefs were in the congregation. While he ‘did not expect to find a hotbed of millenarianism’ (2005b: 167), Thompson was nonetheless surprised to find a general disinterest in End of the World teachings from both from church leadership and church attendees.

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<sup>166</sup> Interview with a *murid*, summer 2013.

<sup>167</sup> She further outlines that at one point it seemed Shaykh Nazim considered Prince Charles to be King Arthur, but notes it is by no means certain.

Indeed, of nearly 3000 people who completed his questionnaire, only 2% rated the End Times as their primary spiritual interest. In contrast, the highest ranking priorities were prayer (51%), followed by no response (14%) and then Gifts of the Holy Spirit (11%) (Thompson, 2005b: 95). This disinterest was likewise expressed in a lack of apocalyptic material in church sermons and in interviews.

Within his interviews, Thompson observed a range of approaches to apocalyptic beliefs and teachings. The most common approach was to marginalise or ignore apocalyptic doctrines. Secondly was 'the stigmatization of "prophecy nuts"'. These Christians approached apocalyptic beliefs and those who hold them with hostility, thus distancing themselves from a set of beliefs in Christianity they perceived to be problematic. As Thompson (2005b: 100) explains, 'There was a sense that, for many worshippers, intense apocalyptic belief was a particularly unitising form of subcultural deviance, demanding a price that was not worth paying...Apocalyptic theology inspired more scepticism and even downright hostility, than other charismatic claims.'

However, Thompson did observe some receptiveness to the possibility of apocalypse. A small group found the apocalypse to be useful for explaining current events, primarily through conspiracy theories. Another group held 'apocalypticism as an option'. Thompson describes this group as occupying a 'middle ground' neither 'ignoring apocalyptic ideas nor making heavy use of them. Instead, they distinguished between helpful and unhelpful concepts, sometimes working on the End Times narrative until it made sense to them' (Thompson, 2005b: 105). They often conceded the End Times seemed likely, but were unwilling to actively look for signs or make changes to their lives. Further, they reinterpreted apocalyptic theories to fit more easily into their belief systems, like 'Debbie' who suggested 'The mark of the beast has to be something in our hearts' (Thompson, 2005b: 109). The final two approaches to apocalyptic beliefs were rhetoric and apocalyptic as entertainment. Only four to five of the forty people he interviewed expected Jesus to come in their lifetimes.

Overall, 'when they were asked about the End Times, the vast majority of members of Kensington Temple – pastors as well as ordinary worshippers – failed to strike the confident, unambiguous note of the fundamentalist Christians interviewed by Nancy Tatom Ammerman (1987) and Charles Strozier (1994),