standing empty.

Art and music thrived, also influenced by Moorish culture from nearby Spain. Many people chose to learn Latin and Greek and to study Philosophy and the Sciences. The Cathars belief system was based in Gnostic, Dualistic roots similar to those of the Essenes. Long ago the Essenes played their part in the spiritual tuition of Jesus. In such an atmosphere of religious freedom there was no one clearly defined Cathar Belief but instead, many variations of a similar theme. But all agreed that physical existence is only a stepping-stone to our real existence, and that Reincarnation is our means of preparing ourselves for that step.

Some believed 'Rex Mundi' created and ruled the Earth and that physical matter was evil. Others believed physical matter was irrelevant to Man's real goal. Yet other Cathars believed the true role of the individual human is to spiritualise the physical matter of his or her body. But all Cathar teachers encouraged and taught Meditation as the way to discover your true self and your Creator.

After driving three to four kilometres from Couiza on the River Aude, up a twisting turning ever-climbing narrow mountain road, the visitor finally reaches Rennes le Chateau, a tiny village perched on a mountain­top. Rennes le Chateau overlooks a panorama of dramatic and mysterious countryside. Strangely shaped foothills and valleys that march away higher and higher to the sunlit snow of the not so distant Pyrenees Mountains. Though now simply another farming village with a population of less than one hundred, Rennes le Chateau was once a capital city of the Visigoth Empire that controlled most of France.

When the Visigoths were driven into the foothills, Rennes le Chateau became the northeast bastion of their empire that still straddled both sides of the Pyrenees. At that time thirty thousand people lived in and around the Citadel. Rennes le Chateau has a many-layered history and legends abound. Of Visigoth plunder including the treasure of Solomon’s Temple concealed around Rennes when the Visigoths retreated to this area. Le Eglise de la Madeleine the tiny chapel of the village has legends attached to it that reach back even further into history.

Built on the foundations of very ancient sacred structures the chapel has a crypt that is sealed. In the crypt are said to be tombs of the local nobility. Legend says that below the crypt is another chamber. This chamber was part of the previous building. Legend also tells us that it contains the tombs of Merovingian royalty and also the tomb of Mary Magdalene. It is logical that Mary would have accompanied the Family in their escape from Roman persecution.

The results of fairly recent excavations into the crypt entrance; monitored by local Roman Catholic priests, have never been revealed, though an observer mentioned that the crypt stone work was covered and decorated with beautiful gold-leaf. After the excavations were completed the crypt was resealed and the entrance steps were filled in again, so for the moment we are left only with legends.

By the twelfth century the original Message of Jesus, only slightly altered by time and interpretation, was spreading beyond the foothills into other parts of France, and also into other countries. The Church of Rome regarded this, the Cathar country, as a hotbed of Heresy that must be stamped out. Both men and women who were known

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