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**[Vojtíšek, Zdeněk. Hnutí Grálu: příběh nového náboženství (The Grail Movement: the story of a new religion)]**

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haustive compendium. I fully understand – and do not question – the legitimacy of this decision. Nevertheless, I would argue that the title itself ought to more accurately reflect the scope of the subject as presented. The phrase *A Spiritual History* carries the weight of universality, which the book, quite consciously, does not attempt to fulfil. Introducing a geographical or cultural qualifier would help avoid this minor dissonance.

While *Water: A Spiritual History* does not entirely avoid certain simplifications and may leave the reader wanting more in terms of the universal scope suggested by its title, it remains a reliable, well-written, and simply enjoyable book to read. Bradley does not advance groundbreaking theses, but he organizes familiar motifs with sensitivity and guides the reader through the spiritual landscapes of water with due attentiveness. It is a publication worthy of attention and one that may serve as a valuable starting point for further reflection on the place of this singular element in the religious imagination of the Christian West.



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**Zdeněk Vojtíšek.**  
***Hnutí Grálu. Příběh nového náboženství***  
***(The Grail Movement.***  
***The Story of a New Religion).***

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Zdeněk Vojtíšek, associate professor and current Head of the Religious Studies Department at the Hussite Theological Faculty of Charles University, Prague, has long been recognized as one of the foremost Czech scholars of new religious movements. In his latest book, he turns his attention to the Grail Movement, a millenarian religious group founded in early twentieth-century Germany. This is not the first time Vojtíšek has examined the movement, but *The Grail Movement. The Story of a New Religion* represents the most comprehensive and systematic treatment of the subject to date.

The Grail Movement revolves around the teachings of Oskar Ernst Bernhardt, who came to be known among his followers as Abd-ru-shin. Self-positioned as a messianic figure sent to prepare the faithful for the Day of Judgment, Abd-ru-shin created a religious system that combined elements of Christian esotericism, millennial expectation, and German nationalist thought. Despite persecution under the Nazi regime, the movement survived both the upheavals of the Second World War and later suppression under state socialism in Central Europe. In the process, it expanded well beyond its German and Austrian roots, establishing communities in many parts of the world. Today, the Grail Movement is in its third and fourth generations of adherents, with an estimated membership exceeding 50,000. This places it among the relatively rare cases of new religious movements that have not only endured for a century but also consolidated their identity across multiple transitions.

Vojtíšek notes that his interest in the Grail Movement began already in 1993, though other academic responsibilities prevented him from exploring it in depth for many years. After more than two decades, he has returned to the topic, and the present volume can be seen as the culmination of that long-delayed project. The result is a book of more than 500 pages, offering a wide-ranging and multidimensional account of the movement's history, teachings, organization, and contemporary situation.

One of the book's principal strengths is its extensive and diverse source base. Vojtíšek employs not only external publications, but also internal documents originally intended for members, curricula of leading figures, memoirs of Abd-ru-shin's contemporaries, and archival material from repositories in Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. This blend of insider and outsider perspectives allows him to reconstruct both the self-understanding of the Grail Movement and its interactions with the surrounding society. In a field where access to internal sources is often limited, this methodological breadth represents a significant achievement.

The nine chapters proceed both chronologically and thematically. The opening chapter traces the life of Oskar Ernst Bernhardt from his youth as a merchant and writer, through financial and legal difficulties, to his emergence as Abd-ru-shin, the "Son of Man." This biographical approach sets the stage for understanding how his personal trajectory shaped the movement's theological claims. The second chapter situates the Grail Movement in its interwar German context, emphasizing how currents of esotericism, cultural disillusionment, and nationalism provided fertile ground for its emergence. By demonstrating that the movement's ideology arose in dialogue with wider social currents, Vojtíšek avoids portraying it as an isolated phenomenon.

The third chapter turns to the Grail Movement's confrontation with the Nazi regime. Abd-ru-shin himself faced persecution, and the movement endured sig-

nificant external pressure. Yet rather than dissolving, it adapted, and Vojtíšek carefully traces how its leaders navigated this dangerous environment. Chapters four and five are devoted to doctrine. Here Vojtíšek examines the Grail Movement's cosmology, anthropology, and soteriology, as well as its millennial hopes and the privileged role it ascribed to the German nation in both history and the anticipated thousand-year kingdom. These chapters are particularly valuable for scholars of comparative religion, as they situate the Grail Movement's teachings alongside broader currents of Christian and esoteric thought. Vojtíšek also shows how these ideas evolved after Abd-ru-shin's death, highlighting both continuity and adaptation.

Chapter six shifts focus to the social and cultural life of the early community. Vojtíšek explores the movement's hierarchy, rituals, and celebrations, as well as the organization of its communal settlement in Vomperberg, Tyrol. This ethnographic perspective illuminates how doctrine was embodied in practice and how community life sustained adherents through times of uncertainty. Chapter seven then examines two crises that nearly tore the movement apart: the disputed new edition of Abd-ru-shin's *In the Light of Truth* and conflicts over succession following the death of his last family member. Both episodes generated intense internal debate and ultimately led to schism, but they also illustrate the movement's capacity for survival.

The eighth chapter broadens the lens to consider the Grail Movement's global expansion. Though gradual, its spread across Europe, the Americas, and Africa demonstrates the adaptability of Abd-ru-shin's teachings beyond their original German-speaking context. Particular attention is devoted to Czechoslovakia and the later Czech lands, where the movement has found especially fertile ground. Vojtíšek's treatment here is invaluable, as scholarship on NRMs in Central and Eastern Europe often remains underrepresented in the international literature. The final chapter synthesizes the findings and situates the Grail Movement within theories of new religious movements, especially denomination theory. For Vojtíšek, the movement's survival of external repression and internal division demonstrates its successful transition from a fragile sectarian community to a small but resilient denomination.

As a whole, the book offers a nuanced portrait of a group that has long remained on the margins of scholarly attention. Vojtíšek's rigorous use of sources, his balanced combination of biography, theology, and sociology, and his ability to link the Grail Movement to wider European developments all make the book a major contribution. For scholars of new religious movements, it provides a case study of millenarianism, resilience, and adaptation. For those interested in central European religion, it fills a significant gap by examining a group often overshadowed by better-known movements.

If there are limitations, they lie partly in the book's heavy focus on the Czech

and German contexts, which may leave readers wanting more on the movement's development in Africa or the Americas. Yet this reflects the author's archival strengths and does not diminish the work's overall value. The style is accessible, and the structure makes the book usable for both specialists and a broader academic readership.

*The Grail Movement. The Story of a New Religion* is therefore an admirable effort to introduce a little-known group to a wider audience. It succeeds not only in documenting the Grail Movement's complex history but also in highlighting the challenges and strategies of new religions in the modern world. This book is highly recommended for scholars of religion, historians of Central Europe, and anyone interested in the dynamics of new religious movements in the twentieth century.



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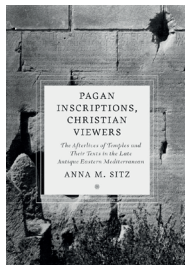
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**Anna M. Sitz.**

***Pagan Inscriptions, Christian Viewers:  
 The Afterlives of Temples and Their Texts  
 in the Late Antique Eastern Mediterranean.***

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Tato monografie Anny M. Sitzové je dosud vůbec prvním uceleným dílem věnovaným otázce pozdně antické recepcce nápisů z předchozích období. Pozornost věnuje jejich recepci v dobové literární tvorbě, ale zejména jejich stavu v archeologickém materiálu. Kdo byl schopen staré nápisy číst? Jakým způsobem a proč

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