The Mysterious Marie Laveau

The mysterious Marie Laveau, the most famous voodoo queen in the South, has a background that still seems to be vastly under-researched, but all authorities on this woman start with her grandmother, Catherine Henry, whom after a long procession of different owners was finally emancipated by her last one, a free woman of color. Catherine’s original master was the white Creole Henry Roche Belaire, whom Catherine later took his name as her surname. Catherine’s daughter and Marie’s mother, Marguerite remained with Roche until his death and was sold to another owner who then gave her freedom. After gaining freedom, Marguerite became the *placée* of the Frenchman Henri D’Arcantel. The exact date that marks Marguerite’s relationship with Charles Laveaux is unknown, but the result of this couple was the birth of a daughter, Marie. On September 10, 1801 Marie was born as a “free mulatto.” Her father, Charles Laveaux, is sometimes referred to as a wealthy white planter, but it has been discovered that he was a free person of color –*gen de couleur libre*- whose mother’s name was also Marie Laveaux. Nothing is known of Marie’s childhood, but it is believed that she lived in the St. Ann Street cottage of her maternal grandmother, Catherine Henry.

Marie was a striking figure and dressed like a gypsy with a bandana on her head, flashy rings on her fingers and ear, and gold bracelets on her wrists. Her dress was always a dark color, long and full hanging gracefully from her shoulders. Her eyes, which were large and hazel, sparked like emeralds against her dark skin and it was widely agreed that she was exceptionally beautiful.

Archival records show that Marie Laveau entered into a marriage contract with Jacques Paris on July 27. 1819. They were married on August 4, 1819. It is widely believed and affirmed that no children came of the marriage, but some discoveries show that there were two daughters born of this union, however, it is unsure if this has been verified. Contradictory reports such as this add to the mystery and allure of Marie. The fate of Jacques Paris remains unknown and his death was never documented. Whatever truly happened to her husband, Marie was still officially known as the “widow Paris.” The marriage mass was performed by Father Antonio De Sadella, the capuchin priest known as Pere Antonio. After becoming a widow, Laveau became a hairdresser who catered to wealthy white families.

After Jacques Paris, Marie began a relationship with Louis Christophe Dominic Duminy de Glapion that lasted until his death in 1885. All credible records indicate that he was born in Louisiana as the legitimate son of white parents and the descendant of an aristocratic French family. Christophe Glapion was a veteran of the Battle of New Orleans, which took place below the city at Chalmette on January 8, 1815. It is unclear when or how these two met. Christophe Glapion died on June 26, 1855 and the cause of his death is unknown. Marie Laveau and Christophe Glapion were a couple for approximately thirty years. Marie lived for another twenty-six years and is not known to have taken another partner. It is widely believed that fifteen children came from this marriage, but there is only documentation of seven. Marie and Christophe’s first child, Marie Heloise, was born February 2, 1827. This is the daughter that became known as Marie II. At a young age Marie II entered a relationship with Pierre Crokere, a free man of color. Pierre was commission broker, builder, and architect. Pierre was twenty-four years older than Marie and died in 1857 at the age of fifty-six.

Voodoo thrived in Haiti and Louisiana and over the years it absorbed influences from French, and Spanish Catholicism, American Indian spiritual practices, and even masonic tradition. Voodoo is not just a religion. It is about finding ways to survive conflict. This has not been verified. Voodoo involved singing, dancing, chanting, and drumming. Voodoo comes from slaves who brought it to the Americas from West Africa. Marie began her Voodoo (sometimes spelled Voudou) career sometime in the 1820s and she is sometimes said to be a descendant of a long line of Voodoo priestesses all named Marie Laveau. Marie is said to have given private consultations and made and sold *gris-gris*. Later in life, Marie turned away from her Voodoo practices to dedicate her life to the Church and charitable works, however, it is affirmed by the scholarly community that Marie Laveau was a devout Catholic her entire life.

During her final years Marie continued her charitable works and surrounded herself with family. One of which was her youngest daughter, Marie Philomene Glapion, and her children. Philomene entered a relationship with a white man, Emile Alexandre Legendre, who was thrity-two years older than her and married. Philomene and Emile had seven children together, all whom were classified as “colored,” and they remained a couple until his death in 1872. Marie died at home in her sleep, on June 15, 1881 in her cottage on St. Ann Street, where she had spent more than half a century. Marie’s daughter Philomene made funeral arrangements for the following evening. Her funeral was conducted according to the dignified structure of the Catholic Church, without sign of any voodooist demonstration.

**Glossary**

1. *Placée:* Plaçage was a recognized extralegal system in which white French and Spanish and later Creole men entered into the equivalent of common-law marriages with women of African, Indian and white (European) Creole descent. The term comes from the French placer meaning "to place with". The women were not legally recognized as wives but were known as placées; their relationships were recognized among the free people of color as mariages de la main gauche or left-handed marriages. Many were often quarteronnes or quadroons, the offspring of a European and a mulatto, but plaçage did occur between whites and mulattoes and blacks. The system flourished throughout the French and Spanish colonial periods and apparently reached its zenith during the latter, between 1769 and 1803. It was not limited to Louisiana, but also flourished in the cities of Natchez and Biloxi, Mississippi; Mobile, Alabama; St. Augustine and Pensacola, Florida;[1] as well as Saint-Domingue (present-day Haiti). Plaçage, however, drew most of its fame, and notoriety, from its open application in New Orleans.

"Plaçage." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 13 July 2013. Web.

1. Gris-Gris: The gris-gris are both the physical objects that used (such as gris-gris bags, Voodoo dolls, love potions, etc.) and the verbal invocations that are made to effect the magical properties of Voodoo. There are an infinite variety of gris-gris and no “how to” text can accurately or completely encompass all the formulas and petitions. Most are inspired by the spirits through whom the Voodoo Queen or Doctor is working, and are very individual. In working, the inanimate object often becomes, or is inhabited by the spirit. The gris-gris are usually used for mattes of love, finance, luck, legal matters or to uncross a hex.

"Gris-Gris." *Voodoo Museum*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 Aug. 2013.

Works Cited

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2. "Voodoo Museum." *Voodoo Museum*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 Aug. 2013.

Glapion, Marie Heloise Euchariste: (1827 – 1862?)

1. "Plaçage." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 13 July 2013. Web.
2. "Gris-Gris." Voodoo Museum. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 Aug. 2013.