

A Multitude of Holy Grails – Part I

By Mark Amaru Pinkham for *Four Corners Magazine*

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*Since the publication of the **DaVinci Code** the debate rages as to what and where the true Holy Grail exists. In Part I of this article it is revealed that the Cup of Christ, illeget to have been taken to England by Joseph of Arimathea, may in fact have been two vials or cruets filled with the blood and sweat of Jesus. In Part II, it is revealed that there were other vials and containers of Jesus' blood taken out of Palestine, any one of which could currently claim distinction as **THE** Holy Grail.*

Taken as a whole, the various renditions of the Holy Grail legend, whether they derive from Europe or Asia, imply that there are many forms that the Holy Grail can take. These legends assert that the Holy Grail can be anything from the platter mentioned by Chrétien de Troyes, the first author of the Holy Grail legend, to the Cup of Christ alluded to by Robert de Boron, or even the Stone of Heaven mentioned by Wolfram von Eschenbach in Parzival. Although it may seem confusing to those who equate the Holy Grail solely with the Cup of Christ, the Holy Grail was never only one object. In fact, states Grail researcher Emma Jung, Chrétien de Troyes was explicit in his *Le Conte du Graal* when he stated that his Grail platter was "a Grail, not the Grail," thereby opening the "doors of perception" to the existence of many Grails.

The most famous historical Holy Grail manifestation is the **Cup of Christ** or **Joseph of Arimathea's Cup**. This is the vessel that Joseph of Arimathea used to catch the blood and sweat of the Messiah after he was taken down from the Cross, and it is also the chalice that Jesus passed among his disciples as part of the first communion during the Last Supper. According to Robert de Boron's version of the Holy Grail legend, Joseph d' Arimathie, Joseph traveled to England with the Cup of Christ right after being incarcerated within a Jerusalem prison, where the Jewish authorities had placed him after the body of Jesus suspiciously disappeared from its tomb. One day while in his cell, Joseph found the Cup of Christ suddenly and miraculously placed at his feet by God, who then proceeded to explain "the secrets of the Grail," which are the secrets of the Eucharist and how the rites of that sacrament reflect the Passion of Christ. Joseph was kept alive for many years by food and drink that would spontaneously manifest within the Cup of Christ, and he continued to remain nourished by the chalice until Jerusalem was conquered by the Roman Emperor Vespasian and he was released from prison. Fearing re-imprisonment and renewed torture from both the Jews and Romans, Joseph escaped to the desert with his family, where both he and they were continually sustained by the sacred Cup of Christ. Joseph died soon after the exodus, but not before placing the Cup into the care of his brother-in-law, Bron, whose inner guidance subsequently lead him north to Glastonbury, Britain, where he was told to deposit the Grail.

Thus, in de Boron's version of the Grail it is Bron that carries the Cup of Christ to Glastonbury, however more popular versions of the same legend have it that it was Joseph himself who brought the chalice to the sacred city in England. According to one alternate version of the myth, when Joseph was still in Jerusalem the Archangel Gabriel appeared to both him and eleven other missionaries in and then instructed them to travel to Glastonbury in order to build a church in England dedicated to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Leaving Palestine with the Cup of Christ in tow, Joseph and his entourage finally reached the coast of Britain after a very long journey. Then, after sailing down an inlet leading to Glastonbury, which at the time was a marshland covered with water, they finally disembarked on an island now known as Wearyall Hill, which refers to the weary state the group arrived in. It was here that Joseph planted his famous staff into the ground and watched with jubilation as it immediately sprouted leaves and flowers, thus signaling to himself and his companions that they had completed their journey.

Once settled in their new homeland, Joseph and his companions followed Gabriel's instructions and constructed St. Mary's Chapel, which became the first Christian church in Europe. Twelve dwellings were built in a circle around this chapel, each of which faced the central Chapel, which thus became building number thirteen, the number of the Christ. It is believed that the Cup of Christ was placed within this central chapel, thereby uniting the Grail Cup with its owner, the spirit of the Christ. Joseph's little Chapel was eventually torn down and a larger chapel rose to take its place, one that would later be incorporated into the structure of Glastonbury Abbey. But before Joseph died, it is said that he buried the Cup of Christ in one of the mounds of Glastonbury now known as Chalice Hill. Or, states an alternate myth, Joseph secreted his Holy Grail in the Chalice Well, where today blood-colored water, symbolizing the blood of the Messiah, continually flows out to nourish and heal all bathe in it or drink it.

But other legends abound, including one that states that Joseph did not die in Britain as believed. Instead, he left Glastonbury soon after constructing St. Mary's Chapel and sailed south to Spain with his Holy Grail. Supposedly he landed at Barcelona and then proceeded overland to either Montserrat in the Pyrenees or Montsegur in France, two mountain refuges that later became linked to the Cup of Christ or some manifestation of the Holy Grail. Since Joseph's era, both of these mysterious mountains have often been equated with Munsalvaesche, the holy mountain of Grail legend upon which the Holy Grail is said to be interred in the Grail Castle of the Fisher King.

Which of the legends regarding Joseph can be relied upon? Discerning the truth becomes an even more odious task in light of the growing body of evidence that asserts that Joseph did even not bring a cup to Britain as thought, but instead arrived with two cruets or small flasks of "white and silver." The image of Joseph and his two cruets containing the blood and sweat of Jesus has become a popular theme of poets, historians, and artists, who have placed stained-glass images of Joseph with his two vials in strategic British churches, such as the Church of Saint John the Baptist in Glastonbury and All Saints Church in Langport. And even though one legend asserts that the flasks remain buried with Joseph in Glastonbury, some scholars claim that they have since been located and remain in the care of private collectors or in museums. According to them, Joseph's vials currently exist as the **Hawstone Park Vial** and the **Zingaro Templar Vial**. The Hawstone Park Vial, which is a small onyx flask found hidden within a statue in Hawstone Park in Shropshire, England, has the size and shape of Joseph's legendary cruets. It is also nearly identical to the Zingaro Templar Vial, Joseph's supposed second vial, the location of which first came to light in a 1995 article featured in *The Boston Globe* that proclaimed that "the Holy Grail had been discovered in Italy." The newspaper described the Zingaro Vial, which has since proven to be a close match to the vials depicted with Joseph, as a small green flask, two to three inches in length, that had for sometime been in the possession of Rocco Zingaro di San Fernando, the Grand Master of an Italian branch of the Knights Templar. Supposedly the vial had been given to Zingaro by Antonio Ambrosini, another Templar, who discovered it in a Coptic monastery in Egypt. It is probable that the Zingaro Templar Vial arrived in England with Joseph and was later taken to Egypt; or perhaps Joseph deposited the vial in Egypt on his way to England. Either way, *The Boston Globe* is conclusive that at least one Holy Grail manifestation was in the protection of the Knights Templar just as Grail legend suggests.