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A Multitude of Holy Grails – Part II
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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 was revealed that the Cup of Christ, alleged 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. Now, 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.

Besides Joseph's two cruets that are reputed to have been deposited in Glastonbury, England, there was another famous pair of cruets filled with the blood and sweat of Christ that were taken out of the Middle East following the Messiah's death. The owner of these vials was Nicodemus, who, like his close friend Joseph, similarly gathered up the blood and sweat that rolled off the Messiah's body while assisting in the preparation of Jesus' body before its internment. In order to hide his precious cruets, Nicodemus is said to have secreted them inside an image of the crucified Christ that he carved himself. Many scholars today claim it is still in existence as the **Volto Santo**, a wooden crucifix that currently hangs in Saint Martin's Cathedral in Lucca, Italy. Identified as a legitimate Holy Grail manifestation in the mediaeval Grail legend known as the *First Continuation*, the Volto Santo arrived in Italy after being hidden for many years in Palestine, during which time it was in the care of the descendants of one Isaac or Isaachar, a member of the early Church whom Nicodemus hand picked to guard the Volto Santo just before he died. Following their arrival in Italy, the two cruets of blood were quickly discovered within the image's head by the bishops of Luni and Lucca, each of whom took one and placed it within his respective cathedral.

Complicating the identity of the true Holy Grail even further is the third person who assisted Joseph and Nicodemus in wiping down the crucified body of Jesus. This was Mary Magdalene, who used a white alabaster jar to collect the blood and sweat of Jesus. According to the *Golden Legend* written by the French Archbishop Jacobus de Voragine, Mary transported her jar to France in a boat crewed by her sister Martha and her brother Lazarus. Mary was also accompanied on her journey west by Jesus' aunts, Mary Jacobi and Mary Salome, and one of Jesus' seventy-two disciples, St. Maximim. The *Golden Legend* states that Mary and her companions originally set sail against their will right after the Ascension, when "heathens" sent them aimlessly adrift on the turbulent Mediterranean Sea "without any

tackle or rudder...for to be drowned." Fortunately, states the legend, "by the purveyance of Almighty God" they eventually landed safely in the French coastal city of Marseilles.

The accepted French legend has it that Mary Magdalene died around 75 A.D. after spending the last forty years of her life as a hermit in a cave in the French hill region of Saint Baume. After her transition, Mary's body was interred by her brother disciple, St. Maximim, in the chapel he administered in the village of Villalata, later renamed St. Maximim in his honor. Between the 3rd and 4th centuries, Mary's body was placed in an ornate white marble coffin, where it remained until 710 A.D., when Saracens invading southern France compelled Cassian monks to move Mary's remains into a less ostentatious coffin, and then secretly bury it. Finally, in 1279, Mary's tomb was re-discovered by Charles, a nephew of King Louis IX of France. Her bones and accompanying sacred objects were dug up and became part of her Sacred Relics, which were subsequently interred in the Basilique Sainte Madeleine. Today, Mary's Relics reside within in the French village of Vezelay, and her skull is the centerpiece of an annual procession through the streets of St. Maximim.

Unfortunately, the whereabouts of Mary's alabaster jar currently remains a mystery. One legend suggests that it eventually became one of the prized possessions of the Cathars, a group of Gnostics who were exterminated in 1244 by a crusade organized by Pope Innocent and his Inquisition. According to this legend, leading up to their final decimation on March 1, the Cathars took their most sacred books and artifacts, which included both the Holy Shroud and a version of the Holy Grail – possibly Mary's alabaster jar – and then sought refuge in their nearly impenetrable mountain-top fortress of Montsegur, the principal seat of the Cathar Church since the year 1230. While their fortress was under siege by soldiers of the Inquisition, two or more Cathars are believed to have clandestinely escaped down the side of the mountain with many of the Cathar treasures, including both the Shroud and Mary's Holy Grail, and then to have hid them in the surrounding countryside. The recovery of the Cathar relics in southern France has been an obsession of treasure hunters ever since.

Could Mary's Holy Grail still exist somewhere in the south of France? As strange as it sounds, Mary's Grail may have been discovered and moved to another location by Hitler's Nazis. In 1931, Otto Rahn, a German who believed himself to have been a Cathar in a previous incarnation, was sent to Montsegur by Hienrich Himmler to search for the lost Cathar treasures. Rahn discovered tunnels and caverns beneath Montsegur, but he died mysteriously before he was able to extract any of the treasure interred within them. Another

SS officer, Otto Skorzeny, was then dispatched by Himmler to complete the job, and according to one eye-witness account he was later seen leaving Montsegur with a plane load of relics headed for Himmler's secret mountain fortress of Berchtesgaden. Then, states an additional eye witness account from the end of World War II, a German Heinkel 277 V-1 left Salzburg, Austria, bound for the East, possibly Nepal or Tibet, with a plane load of cargo believed to include the ancient Cathar relics. According to Howard Buechner, a retired U.S. Army Colonel, on board the German plane were also "twelve stone tablets of the Germanic Grail, which contained the key to ultimate knowledge."

Mary's Holy Grail could, therefore, currently either reside in either southern France or in the Far East. But one alternate ending of its odyssey asserts that the Nazis eventually transported Mary's Holy Grail from Berchtesgaden to Antarctica by a clandestine submarine and it now resides within a stone obelisk marking a cave in the Muhlig-Hoffman Mountains. This mysterious cave, known as the Emerald Cave, is supposedly linked by tunnels to caverns inside the Earth, where legends imply a subterranean civilization may exist. Interestingly, the Antarctic cave's association with an emerald links Mary's Holy Grail with the Stone of Heaven, a large emerald referred to by Wolfram Eschenbach in *Parzival* as being the true Holy Grail.

Mary Magdalene is also associated with a chalice that may, instead of her jar, be the real Holy Grail of legend. Some scholars contend that Mary's chalice was part of the **Arma Christi**, the "Weapons of Christ," a name for the relics of the Passion that were discovered in Jerusalem where Jesus was supposedly crucified. According to the 5th century historian Olympiodorous, Mary's Grail, referred to as the **Marian Chalice**, was discovered by excavators working for the Empress Helena, the mother of King Constantine, as they sifted through the earth in the area of Golgotha, the reputed location of the Crucifixion. After its retrieval the cup was first taken to Constantinople and then to Rome, where it resided until the city was sacked by the Visigoths, at which point it was transferred to a secret location in England, possibly Glastonbury. According to Graham Philips, British author of *The Search for the Grail*, the Marian Chalice was taken to the English Midlands, where for centuries, as a stone cup made of onyx, it was carefully preserved by the Peverel family of Whittington Castle. Sometime in the mid 19th century, a Peverel descendent transferred the cup to a hidden stone grotto, where it was later found by Walter Langham in the early 20th century and kept by his family. When Philips discovered the location of the Langham family nearly one hundred years later, he also found the onyx vessel. Since then, the jar has been dated

by the British Museum and found to be a spice jar used during the first century after Christ.



But Philips' conclusion that the Peverel cup is the Marian Chalice has not gained wide acceptance. Many Grail scholars maintain that after reaching England the Marian Chalice became known as the **Nanteos Cup**, which is a vessel made of olive wood and therefore a better candidate for being a household drinking cup used in Jerusalem during the time of Jesus than one made out of metal or stone. Supposedly the Nanteos Cup, currently owned by the Powel family of Wales, was hidden within one of the walls of Glastonbury Abbey for many years after arriving in England from Rome, where it had previously resided for hundreds of years following its sequester in Palestine. When Glastonbury Abbey was threatened with complete destruction at the hands of the iconoclastic King Henry VIII, the wooden cup was taken by the Abbey's monks to the

Nanteos Manor in Wales and kept there by them for safekeeping. When the last guardian monk was near death he asked the Lord of Nanteos Manor to safeguard the wooden cup "until the church claims her own."¹¹ Later, in 1878, the Powels of Nanteos Manor put the Nanteos Cup on public display and it has since become a national treasure.

Another chalice that may be Mary Magdalene's cup is the **Great Chalice of Antioch**. This chalice, which was discovered in Antioch during the last century along with a smaller chalice and a cross, has been dated from the first to the fourth centuries and now resides in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Antioch Chalice has been set into an ornate silver reliquary and decorated with images of Jesus and the Apostles. Some antiquarians maintain that the Chalice of Antioch arrived in the city of Antioch via the Crusaders, who were returning a sacred chalice, perhaps Joseph's Cup of Christ, to its rightful place in the Holy Land. Although the cup is very old, most experts have concluded that the Chalice of Antioch is too large and not antiquated enough to be the original Cup of Christ.