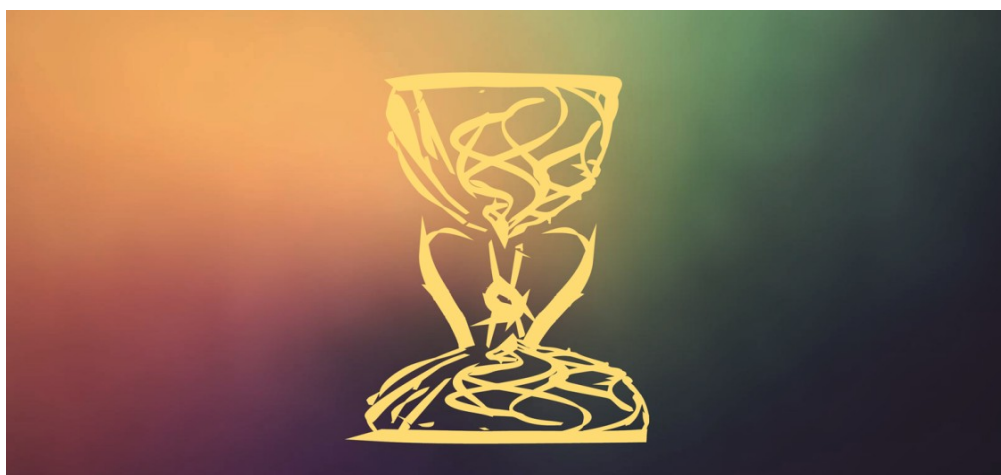


TURISMO RELIGIOSO

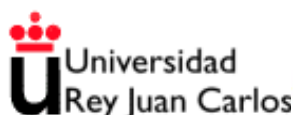
Camino Europeo del Santo Grial y otras
Rutas Culturales para el Desarrollo

RELIGIOUS TOURISM

The European Way of the Holy Grail and
other Cultural Routes for Development



Ángeles Rubio Gil y Victoria Sanagustín Fons
(Directoras)



TURISMO RELIGIOSO

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RELIGIOUS TOURISM

**European Way of the Holy Grail, and other
Cultural Routes for Development**

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Capítulo/ Chapter 13

THE HOLY GRAIL TRAIL OF MALTA. A FANTASTIC INTERPRETATION

EL RASTRO DEL SANTO GRIAL EN MALTA: UNA INTREPRETACIÓN FANTÁSTICA

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Abstract

Malta is a set of small islands in the centre of the Mediterranean, and as such, a true crossroad of cultures. Tourism is an important part of Malta's economy and especially the legacy of the Neolithic period and the Christian era. Notably the influence of the Hospitaller Knights of the Malta to the Maltese culture is a main attraction. As a contribution to tourism in Malta and the Holy Grail Trail, this paper purely hypothesizes that the True Holy Grail originated from Malta's Neolithic culture and returned there eventually. This hypothesis then allows the 7,200 years of cultural heritage of Malta to be included in its totality into the Holy Grail programme, widening the scope for tourism purposes tremendously. Thus, the Holy Grail originates from Malta's Neolithic culture and it was circulated throughout the Neolithic era, the Bronze Age and the Classical world before it ended up in the Holy Land. It was brought into the entourage of Christ's disciples and, much later, via the Knights Templars, it landed in the possession of the Hospitaller Knights of Malta for its protection. This paper, in view of the connectivity of Malta, with various strands of history and human development, theorises that the Holy Grail was originally a reward for exemplary persons, with outstanding achievements regarding both humanity and divinity. The True Holy Grail, the cup from which Christ drank, is one of many Holy Grails. These cups are still kept and managed by the very elusive Sisterhood of the Great Mother Goddess, which existence is another invention.

Keywords: Holy Grail, tourism, Sisterhood, Knights Templars, Order of St John, Neolithic, Malta, Jesus Christ, Great Mother Goddess, New Religious Movements.

Resumen

Malta es un conjunto de pequeñas islas en el centro del Mediterráneo, y como tal, un verdadero cruce de culturas. El turismo es una parte importante de la economía de Malta, especialmente el legado del período neolítico y la era cristiana. Siendo notable la influencia de los Caballeros Hospitalarios de Malta, como atracción principal de la cultura maltesa. Como contribución al turismo en Malta y el rastro seguido por el santo

grial, existe la hipótesis de que el verdadero Santo Grial se originó de la cultura neolítica de Malta y regresó allí con el tiempo. Esta hipótesis permite entonces que los 7.200 años del patrimonio cultural de Malta, sean incluidos en su totalidad en el programa del Santo Grial, ampliando enormemente el alcance de los propósitos turísticos.

Así, el Santo Grial se originaría en la cultura neolítica de Malta y se distribuyéndose a lo largo del Neolítico, la Edad de Bronce y el mundo Clásico, antes de que terminara en Tierra Santa. Se introdujo en el séquito de los discípulos de Cristo y, mucho después, a través de los Caballeros Templarios, habría terminado en posesión de los Caballeros Hospitalarios de Malta para su protección. Este trabajo trata de la conectividad de Malta, con diversas corrientes de la historia y el desarrollo humano, teoriza que el Santo Grial fue originalmente una recompensa para las personas ejemplares, con destacados logros en lo que respecta a la humanidad y la divinidad; el Santo Grial, la copa de la que Cristo bebió, es uno de los muchos Santos Griales. Estas copas, todavía son guardadas y manejadas por la misteriosa Hermandad de la Gran Diosa Madre, cuya existencia sería, otra invención.

Palabras clave: Santo Grial, turismo, Hermandad, Caballeros Templarios, Orden de San Juan, Neolítico, Malta, Jesucristo, Gran Diosa Madre, Nuevos Movimientos Religiosos.

1. Prehistory

From Palaeolithic times onwards, many figurines and cups related to ancient religions, have been unearthed by **The Holy Grail Trail of Malta**

A fantastic interpretation archaeologists. They vary in size, shape and material and are found all over the ancient world. Readily, a number of sites come to mind, Willensdorf, Çatalhöyük and Malta. There is still much on-going debate about the interpretation of such figurines and cups.

For the sake of this paper, both figurines and cups play an important role as objects in a reward system. Some particular figurines were given as a personal reward, to be kept by the recipient, just as the Grammy awards, for excellent and outstanding service to the Mater Magna, the ancient Great Mother Goddess, goddess of all perennial human needs and values. The cups, however, were given from one recipient to another, to the most rewarding person of the times, roughly comparable to a World Cup of sorts. Some grails were rewarded to women who stood model for later goddesses, such as Isis, Aphrodite or Persephone.

2. Vestigium

Over time, these cups changed from wood to stone to earthenware, but never metal. This has to do with the phenomenon of *vestigium*, the intangible residue a worthy person leaves on a grail when touching or drinking from it. Since these grails touched the hands

or the lips of many rewarding and deserving persons, they became imbued with *vestigium*, traces of greatness and of exemplary humanity. Such objects were attributed great powers, such as healing or looking into the future.

The idea of tangibility and transfer of good qualities and personal virtues, from a holy person via an object to another bearer, was developed in Christianity through *brandea* and relics.

A *brandeum* is any piece of cloth which has come in physical contact with a divine or holy person or object, acquiring its holy aspect in its own right. In a wider sense, it could be any item with which one, for instance, touches the tomb of a saint. Even water blessed by the vicinity of the divine will keep its vestige of holiness.

A relic was often hair, a bone or a skull of a holy person, or any item having belonged to one, such as clothing. As an example, the whole body of Don Bosco is a relic and it is on a world tour. Recently it was in Malta and people were allowed to touch the transparent cover with their hands, or even place their babies on it, for healing or protection. Religion is here one of the great emotional events of a lifetime.

Pilgrims would always try to obtain a small piece of any holy object. Failing that, it would be touched by a piece of cloth or any other object which the pilgrim could carry home. Although a pilgrimage is a spiritual journey, one needed to bring back home a souvenir to last a lifetime. Sometimes, this led to extremes. Many instances are known of people who claimed to have had a piece of the True Cross in their possession. When Helena, the mother of Constantine, discovered the True Cross, many people flocked to Jerusalem to see and touch it. They kissed it too, and occasionally, bit a piece of it with their teeth. So intense was their desire to have something touched by Christ.

Hence, the Holy Grails are imbued with ancient vestige, as it has touched the lips of many exemplary persons. Both the tangibility and intangibility of the matter are of the greatest importance, as touching and feeling things are perennial human needs too. In present times, we can witness that kissing and touching objects is still very important

A cup which had touched the lips of Christ therefore would inevitably become the most desired object in the world, as there are not too many objects touched by Christ available at present. The shroud of Turin is a good example of this reasoning.

3. Some notes on the past

A growing number of people, mainly the participants of the New Religious Movements (NRM), such as Wiccans, Neo-Pagans and the Mother Goddess Movement, are of the opinion that the remote past of the Maltese Neolithic era reflected ideals of a matrifocal community for the societal functioning and dignity of women. Women were leaders of the widespread Great Mother Goddess religion, did the gathering, farming, keeping the Goddess' peace and guarded freedom and equality. They were closest connected to Nature, Earth, the underworld and the starry skies and all their spirits and divinities.

Their idea of a matrifocal society is, at present in anthropological circles, defined as a society where every one agrees that each man and woman are indeed different but that their respective contributions to society were appreciated equally. The Neolithic temples of Malta are the oldest freestanding megalithic buildings in the world, visited not only by people interested in cultural heritage but also by people who regard them as sacred buildings of that idealised past. The equality in society, the peaceful religion, the respect for Nature and Earth, are regarded as models for improving the wrongs of present society.

For the NRM participants, the Mother Goddess or Mater Magna is a form of ‘paradise lost’ and is regained by designing a modern religion to connect with the old ideals, by means of, among others, the authenticity of the Maltese Neolithic sites. It is immaterial if there was ever, or not, a Mother Goddess religion throughout the world. What is important here are the perennial human values, especially related to female dignity, which were deemed to have been lost through the coming of the patriarchal society, personified, and demonised, by means of the Bronze Age, as this age followed the Neolithic and was intrinsically different than the previous eras. Paradise lost is then the estrangement of humans from Nature and its corresponding spiritual realm.

In the Bronze Age, the source of wealth lay in selling metal objects and metal weapons instead of farming and Nature. Bronze Age warriors, with a patriarchal idea of society and religion, crushed, according to NRM opinion, female dignity and freedom, reducing them mere property in submission. Instead of goddesses of Nature and Earth, the altars were now dedicated to new, violent male gods living on lofty mountains. The peaceful Mother Goddess seemed powerless and the Sisterhood became a Secret Sisterhood, going underground. Notwithstanding, they continued rewarding stone and earthenware figurines and cups to the most deserving women, but never metal objects, the material of the forces of brutalism. Coincidentally, *vestigium* does not seem to hold very well on metal. Especially gold and silver performs quite poorly in this respect, as they are micro-hygienic in nature and nothing sticks to it except greed and ignorance.

4. The Secret Sisterhood continues

By secret ballot, the sisterhood choose every so often a deserving person, a person with unmatched merits. All of these were women of which a few gained worldwide renown in the historical period, for instance, the poetess Sappho, but certainly not Cleopatra. The Holy Grail had never before been rewarded to a man, but one man stood out above all: Jesus Christ. Through members of the Sisterhood, Mary and Mary Magdalene, a Holy Grail, made in Malta during its Neolithic era, was placed in front of Christ during the Last Supper. As the Son of God, he was aware of the importance of the Holy Grail and willingly drank from it, making it the Holiest Grail of all, the True Holy Grail. He was very well aware that he would leave no tangible matter in the world after His Resurrection, besides the Cross and the touch of his lips on this simple stone cup.

Jesus Christ was then the first again to proclaim that everybody was equal in the eyes of God. Besides being the Son of God, Christ was just an exemplary man in his relationship to women and the poor. Christ's idea of equality, remarkably enough, only took firm root in Western society during the age of Enlightenment and secularism, anchored in secular law.

5. Massive misdirection

After the death and Resurrection of Christ, it was decided that he was probably the first and last deserving man, at least for a very long time. In fact, the cup has not been rewarded to any man since, and the Sisterhood claims that the *vestigium* left by Christ still lingers on that cup, making it the most desirable object in the world. It was decided that this particular cup, now also known as the True Holy Grail, should remain isolated and not given to anyone else, lest the *vestigium* of the Son of God would be polluted. The desirability of True Holy Grail is beyond belief, but alas, desired mostly by the wrong people for the wrong reasons

After his Resurrection, his disciples trusted the Holy Grail to Mary Magdalene and urged her to leave for France, taking the Grail with her. Since the Romans persecuted Christians and attempted a total *rasura memoria* on Christ and his supporters, a number of misdirections were carried out. Mary Magdalene travelled to France, but took with her own Grail, just in case. The Virgin Mary took care that the True Holy Grail remained in the Holy Land, to preserve as much as possible the divine *vestigia* of Christ and the *loci* of the Holy Land.

During the Crusades, Queen Ureca and Melisende, Queen of Jerusalem passed on the Holy Grail, to the Templar Knights, as guardians of the Holy Grail. A disaster was waiting to happen on Cyprus, were after the loss of the Holy Land, both the Knights Templars and the Hospitaller Order of St John had established their new headquarters. Philip the Fair and Pope Clement V both were informed about the True Holy Grail and had set their eyes on it. On Friday 13 October 1307, many Knights Templars were arrested, tortured and killed on false pretences. The True Holy Grail, however, was already safely in the hands of the Hospitallers. After a sojourn to Spain and Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland, it returned to Malta in 1530.

6. The Holy Grail made public knowledge

The trouble started with the Holy Grail when in the twelfth century the cat came out of the bag, when Parsifal gained knowledge of the Holy Grail. Parsifal, knight by destiny, comes to the aid of a lady in distress. The castle of the fair lady Blanche Fleur is besieged and Parsifal saves her, and her kingdom. Blanche Fleur, a member of the Secret Sisterhood, becomes Parsifal's inspiration she animates his life and gives it meaning. Parsifal is to spend one single night with Blanche Fleur, but they spend it in intimate chastity. Is it that she, in a moment of weakness, tells him about the existence

of the Holy Grail? Was this a sincere case of *felix culpa*? Maybe not. Apparently, she only told him what he needed to know, and Parsifal happily goes on his quests of the Holy Grail, with his ignorance fully intact and none the wiser. He is after a golden cup, crusted with diamonds. Parsifal must keep his chivalric vow of remaining chaste with any fair maiden and treat any woman with respect if he wants to be successful; this becomes a requisite for anyone who wants to see the Holy Grail. Needless to say, many a man has been searching for the Holy Grail in vain.

Other Holy Grails were circulated and rewarded to most deserving women, as the tradition was. A number of cups have been rewarded posthumously to, among other, Joan of Arc, Pocohontas and Anne Frank, or to literary figures such as Cordelia, youngest daughter of King Lear, famous for her honesty and sincerity.

7. The Holy Grail Trail in Malta and Gozo

Since this paper is suggesting a touristical Holy Grail Trail in Malta and Gozo, it is suggested that one sees a visit to Malta as a pilgrimage of discovery. There are many places where *vestigia* of Malta's rich past still lingers. If you are interested in the Neolithic era, the underground burial places of the Neolithic era at the Hypogeum in Malta and Xaghra Circle in Gozo, are a must. Accessible Neolithic temples of Malta can be found at Hagar Qim, Mnajdra, Tarxien, Skorba and Ta' Hagrat. Neolithic temples of Gozo are situated at Ġgantija and its visitors centre. The catacombs of Malta are extensive underground burials rooms, from the Punic era onwards. The islands feature a number of archaeological museums and many other sites. If one's interest is for the Marian culture, there are a great number of churches and pilgrims' places to go. Likewise for those who follow the footsteps of St Paul, such as the Cathedral in Mdina dedicated to St Peter and St Paul, St Paul's Island and St Paul's Grotto, to name a few.

Most impressive is the architectural legacy of the Hospitaller Order of Malta, which covers large parts of Malta and Gozo, and St John's Co-Cathedral must be in the itinerary. This church is of a particular of the Holy Grail mystery, as a number of hints may be cleaned of the presence of the True Holy Grail in Malta. The symbolism at the more than 400 sepulchral and commemorative slabs and monuments at St John's Co-Cathedral might truly contain the clues where the True Holy Grail might be, just in case when the people in charge of the Sisterhood may no longer able to protect it. There is a caveat, however; since there are so many clues in the inscribed texts and iconography, the number of misdirections and intended meanings becomes dazzling. Until now, no one has succeeded in finding all the hints and making sense of them. Some point to the skies, some suggest an underground storage, others suggest a cup within a cup. Or is it buried within one of the monuments, or beneath one of those slabs?

- Conclusion

There were many Holy Grails made and they are still circulating. Also the figurines are still presented to deserving people. But only the True Holy Grail which has touched the

lips of Christ, is kept out of circulation. Massive misdirection is its only protection and a lot of effort is made to continuously invent new misdirection to keep tenacious journalists, the undeserving and treasure hunters of the trail. The True Holy Grail has demonstrated over time to possess a sinister capacity to protect itself against unauthorised access. Especially non-deserving people with bad attentions, and mad with power, apparently went insane, broke a leg or were swallowed up by the earth. Your guess is as good as mine, but surely, those divine retributions could not have happened to nicer people!

So, where is the True Holy Grail at present? According to the papers read at this conference, there are a number of candidates. Great emphasis is made that the Cathedral of Valencia, in Spain, now possesses the Holy Grail, a cup of agate stone, fixed on a set of golden handles and decorated with pearls. That suggestion might not be a bad idea, because that would deflect the attention to the place where the True Holy Grail really is. Or is it a copy? According to people in the know, the True Holy Grail is hidden in plain sight, in an archaeological museum somewhere in Malta, or Gozo, between many other stone cups. Or is it perhaps buried within a temple, in an unreachable place? Who knows? Only a few people in the world at the moment are able to detect the metaphysical presence of Christ's vestige and are able to identify that particular Holy Grail. Are you maybe one of them?

- **Parting note: a knock on your door**

When do you know you are a deserving person? Well, one day, there is a knock on your door, discretely but insisting. You will open the door to find a perfectly strange woman standing there, handing over a package. She will tell you to take good care of it and that it is your reward. She will tell you to touch it, kiss it, feel it and soak up its *vestigia* from all these deserving people before you and add your own to it and fill the Holy Grail with humanity and divinity, to the brim. This will enrich your life tremendously and will give you enormous insight and power to promote the well-being of society and peace, to reach fulfilment in life and continue those meritorious actions which awarded you the Holy Grail in the first place. She will also tell you that just before you die, another women will come and collect it, to bring it to the next deserving woman, changing the world Grail after Grail. And that is how the Sisterhood will continue to foster and nurture the ideal of a society where equality comes natural, and to reduce human and religious brutality.