

An Introduction to Current Theories about The Holy Grail

There is a collection of theories concerning the Holy Grail and what it could be. The confusion arises because the word Grail is derived from the word “graal” which first appeared in turn of the first millennium A.D. prose and poetry. There is no confusion over the meaning of the word Graal, which was a dish or platter brought to the table at various stages during a meal. However, the things that the graal or grail has come to represent has changed from story to story throughout the word’s history.

The first story in which the word appears was written by Chretien de Troyes -- “Le Conte del Graal”. Chretien’s story was almost certainly based on an earlier one, but it is unknown what his actual source was or his meaning of the word Graal. Chretien did not finish his story and continuations and rewrites of the story are then free to embellish and invent as much as the authors saw fit.

The Grail represents many different things to many different people. No one meaning seems to explain all the strange events in the Grail stories; therefore, the reader will not find a definitive answer.

What is the Holy Grail ?

It is fair to say that to most people in the western world the Holy Grail is a cup or goblet associated in some way with Jesus Christ. This image was popularized by such writers as Sir Thomas Malory in his “Morte D'Arthur”. It is, however, not the only object that has been linked to the Grail. Indeed, it has been claimed that the Grail is not a physical object of any type but is a blood line or even a spiritual ideal presented in metaphor. One thing is certain, despite (or perhaps because of) its elusive qualities, the Grail has held and continues to hold a great fascination. The Grail promises mystery, secrecy, adventure and the obtaining of a prize or knowledge available to all but found only by a few.

The Cup of Christ.

The Cup was the cup used at the last supper from which wine was drunk as a symbol of Jesus' blood. It is also the cup which Joseph of Arimathea used to collect the actual blood of Jesus after his crucifixion while preparing the body for burial. The legend then follows many differing stories about Joseph and the Cup. The most well known is that Joseph and his sister and her husband left Jerusalem and sailed to France. Here Joseph left his sister and his brother-in-law and sailed to England where he set up the first Christian church at Glastonbury. Some legends claim that he left the cup in the care of his brother-in-law in France while most stories tell of him bringing the Cup to Glastonbury which to this day is still associated with the Grail legends.

The Arthurian stories now include stories of the Cup of Christ. It was not always so. Something called the Graal was in early Arthurian stories; it is likely later that this was Christianized and became the Cup of Christ. The Graal was a mysterious object which was not described in detail. The earliest story to mention the Grail in some form (by Chretien de Troyes) was left incomplete, enabling many writers since to place their own interpretation on the story.

The cup has certain powers associated with it. These are :

- Healing and restorative ability.
- Communication with God or knowledge of God.
- Invisibility to evil or unworthy eyes.
- Ability to feed those present.
- Immortality.
- Ability to call to it those who were worthy.

Local Legends - 1001 Grails

Nearly everywhere in the world, but especially in the West there are local legends of Grails. This is not surprising as people now associate the Grail with this Cup and thus might claim legends relating to cups to be Grail legends. One example of the many legends follows.

The Chalice Well at Glastonbury, England.

Joseph of Arimathea, so legend tells us, came to England, to Glastonbury, after the death of Jesus. With him he brought the Cup of Christ. Local legend now says that the Cup is buried somewhere under a hill called The Tor at Glastonbury. The Tor is an ancient site of ritual and religion and is still a place of pilgrimage today, standing high out of the Somerset countryside. A well, which is now a quiet place of sanctuary with surrounding gardens, flows with water from deep under The Tor. The rocks covered by the spring water are red in colour, representing the Blood of Christ, and the water itself leaves an aftertaste in the mouth much like blood. The Tor may have a network of underground tunnels, long ago sealed, and the Grail is supposed to be buried in one of these.