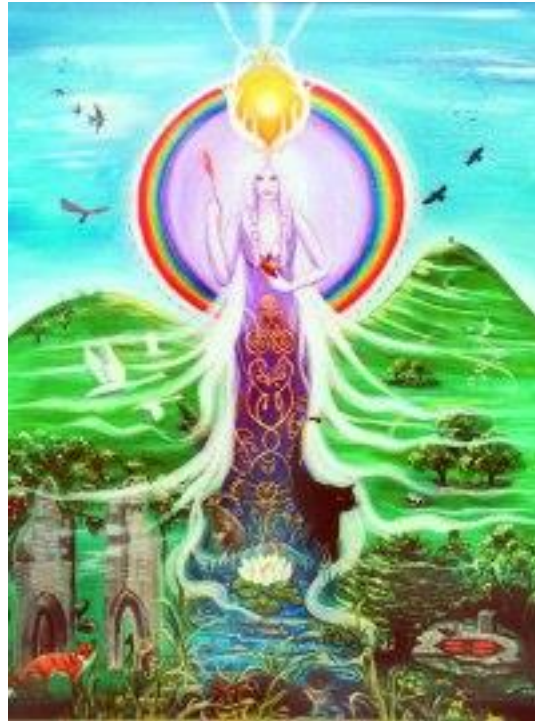


# **What are the Ancient Roots of Goddess Culture in Which Our Modern Goddess Spirituality is Based?**

**By Rachel Harris Dec 2017**

**Holy Grail. Holy Womb.**



I have long been fascinated with The Holy Grail, long before I had consciously been introduced to The Lady of Avalon. It was with great intrigue and surprise, although, I'm not sure why, that there, in a verse of my song to the Lady I sing every day, it is, unabashed, mysterious and without a hint of a cover up:

Third Verse:

“Lady, Lady of The Holy Grae  
Lady, Lady of The Red Chalice,  
Lady, Lady of the Cauldron round  
Unveil Your Mystery”

How is this supposedly Christian phenomenon, there in print for all Priestesses/Priests of the Goddess training to be Priestesses/Priests of Avalon to see, directly connected to The beloved Lady of Avalon and therefore, our modern-day Goddess spirituality?

This essay seeks to explain how The Holy Grail, is both ancient and new with roots going back thousands of years before the birth of Christianity. Furthermore, how it has lasted, often in secret and through symbolism for very good reasons, to be a cornerstone of our modern-day Goddess based spirituality.

The Holy Grail has been described as many things. In Alan Butler's fascinating book; *The Goddess, The Grail & The Lodge*, he writes about it being described as a stone, or even a plate and more commonly a cup of some sort. He covers thousands of years of herstory including the much written about Holy Grail as being the chalice used by Jesus at The Last Supper. Of course, The Holy Grail is synonymous with The Knights Templar and Arthurian legends of Knights of The Holy Grail. In recent herstory a great deal of speculation and research has been given to the 'real' meaning of The Holy Grail with the heretical and conspiracy-based books such as *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* by Baigent, Michael, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln and the blockbuster Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* claiming that The Holy Grail is lineal and that of the blood line, and Royal Family of Jesus and more importantly Mary Magdalene. Although I read the former book years ago and have seen the film based on Dan Brown's *Da Vinci* book, this essay will mostly be created from knowledge gleaned from the pages of Alan Butler's book with the occasional inclusion of Margaret Starbird's findings in her book; *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar*. Alan Butler is clear that The Holy Grail is "The Sacred Womb" of the Great Goddess symbolizing the life/death cycle of which all life is born from and returns to. This Goddess was once openly worshipped throughout Europe thousands of years ago and has withstood the tests of time.

Whatever The Holy Grail is; and it still is beautifully mysterious as much of Goddess Spirituality is; it is without a doubt firmly rooted in ancient Goddess Spirituality and is still a key symbol for our present-day Goddess spirituality.

Not only does it appear in our songs as outlined above but also in our books. Kathy Jones describes The Ancient British Goddess in her book of the same title as “The Holy Graal of Immortality, the Chalice of Love and the Cauldron of Transformation....” She goes on to write about Maiden Brigit’s three principal talismans – the Spindle or Spinning Wheel, the Bell and the Graal of the Maiden.” “The magical Graal of the Innocence of the Maiden Goddess, that space of openness, complete trust, fearlessness and virtue.” Kathy goes on to describe Arthurian legend of the Graal, “....which will always be in the hands of women.” She quotes based on the original, great story of Perceval written by Chretien de Troyes circa 1188: “On the Graal Quest those who enter the Castle of the Graal must ask the right question,

“Whom does the Graal serve?”

And know the answer, before the Graal of the Maiden becomes their own.”

## **Old and Ancient Roots of The Holy Grail**



According to Alan Butler, The Holy Grail is first written about around 1188, in Troyes, Champagne, France by Chretien de Troyes. Although its roots go back thousands of years before that, its medieval connection started here when the Cistercian monks and Knights Templar were at their most powerful. The book is entitled Le Roman de Perceval. Butler

argues that “the work of Chretien de Troyes is the obvious starting point in terms of Grail stories in medieval times, since nothing before it carrying the word “Grail” exists.”

The tale is of a young man names Perceval who sets off on a mysterious journey, leaving behind his widowed mother. He wishes to gain his knighthood. On his travels he meets an old man who is the famous “Fisher King” of all later Grail stories. The fisher King owns a castle, to which the young Perceval is invited, The Grail first appears at a banquet held at the castle and we are told is created from gold and is studded with precious jewels. Whenever the Grail appears it is carried by a beautiful young virgin. This aligns with Kathy Jones description of the grael as Birigit’s talisman “.... . which was always held in the hands of women.”

Back to Chretien’s story; Perceval is ignorant of having to ask a question relating to the grail, translated as accurately as possible to be: “ Whom does one serve with it?”

Perceval fails to ask the question and wakes up the next day to discover that the Fisher King and everyone in the castle has disappeared. He staggers from the castle to find that a terrible blight has come upon the land. Later he learns that the Fisher King is his own Uncle at which point he undergoes a sort of religious crisis regarding the events in the castle which has a bearing on his subsequent belief in God.

Why did this seemingly inconsequential story lead the world into a frenzy about The Holy Grail?

Troyes in Champagne at the time was a rich city with a reputation for learning. It was considered one of the most “civilized” places in the whole of Europe. More over a relatively powerful group living there and in Burgundy had taken it upon themselves to oppose the developing repression from both State and Church. Butler calls them The Troyes Fraternity whom he describes as “The Golden Thread through the tapestry of time.” Troyes was also the home base of The Knights Templar. There is no doubt in Butlers mind that it was no coincidence that they were both there at the same time and that they were connected by bloodlines and purpose. They were of Merovingian

descent, which meant they were also ultimately of Benjamite Jewish blood. In addition, the bloodline of Jesus, via Mary Magdalene, had passed into that of Merovingians at an early date. The Troyes Fraternity had ancient wisdom with the Goddess at its centre and patience on its side.

However, at the time, The Troyes Fraternity although powerful was no match for the ever increasing repressive Catholic Church so they had to keep their real agenda secret. "It sought to:

1. Destroy the power-base of the Roman ruled Church.
2. Replace it with a Church based in Jerusalem.
3. Institute organizations that were specifically intended to destroy feudalism and to restore the rights of individuals.
4. **Elevate the "feminine" within established beliefs to such an extent that Christianity effectively changed its nature altogether.**
5. Effectively destroy national boundaries and create a form of internationalism that would restrict the power of individual rulers."

Butler argues that Chretien was more than likely a member of The Troyes Fraternity and Philippe d' Alcace, Count of Flanders to whom the story was dedicated, definitely was.

The story of Perceval was adopted by the Roman church itself to reinforce its position. Stories started to come out about the Grail being the Grail of The Last Supper that Jesus drank from. The same Holy Grail Arthur's Knights were in search for.

Joseph of Arimathea, is said to have brought The Grail that had caught the blood of Jesus after his crucifixion over to Glastonbury. Interestingly it was he who 'built' the first Christian church in Glastonbury. Prior to that Britain was mostly a Celtic Pagan worshipping land filled with honouring of The Great Mother Goddess.

Butler argues that The Troyes Fraternity had planned decades, even centuries before, their true mission and, therefore, in order to survive, the true meaning of The Holy Grail and their agenda. Only the initiated

would recognize its symbols and meanings from the ancient, preserved but hidden world of Goddess worship. Their sacred purpose was to preserve Goddess and keep this ancient belief alive until the time it could be openly practised. The Knights Templar and their off shoot, the Free Masons shared the same sacred contract. Only very few 'high up' initiates in all three groups of "The Golden Thread" as Butler has named it would have this knowledge which has been passed on since time immemorial.

### **The Sangraal**

Margaret Starbird talks of "The Sangraal" being brought to southern France by Mary Magdalene. She explores the meaning of Sangraal and how legends say it was The Holy Grail.

"Medieval poets writing in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, when the grail legends first surfaced in Europe literature, mention a "Grail Family," presumably the custodians of the chalice who were later found unworthy of this privilege. A connection is sometimes drawn by Grail Scholars between the word *sangraal* and *gradales*, a word that seems to have meant cup, platter or basin in the Provencal language. But it has also been suggested that if one breaks the word *sangraal* after the *g*, the result is *sang raal*, which in Old French means "*blood royal*."

Instead of a cup, could The Holy Grail actually be Mary Magdalen, who carried the bloodline of King David to the Mediterranean coast of France? Furthermore, the scriptures talk about the importance of an "earthen vessel". Margaret Starbird suggests that the royal blood was carried in an earthen vessel and this earthen vessel was Mary, the wife of Jesus who brought a child of his to Provence! Holy blood indeed.

Medieval literature, art, poetry, songs, astrology, salt lines and architecture hold an abundance of clues, signs, codes pointing to the The Holy Grail as Divine Feminine and symbol of The Goddess with ancient roots reaching deep in the Herstory of time.

## Ancient meanings of The Grail



Obviously, the roots of The Grail go far beyond the Mary Magdalene connection as Butler shows us in his entire book, spanning from Isis in Neolithic Egypt to the Free Masons and other Goddess loving people of today. Kathy Jones included The Grail in her song to The Lady of Avalon and in her book *The Ancient British Goddess* as one of Maiden Brigit's talismans who has been worshipped since Neolithic times in Britain.

If it is true as Butler states that the word grail wasn't written until Chretien de Troyes' story of Perceval circa 1188, then what words or drawings were used to describe it before then?

As I wrote earlier The Grail is sometimes referred to as a stone, or even a plate and most commonly a cup. In Celtic mythology magic vessels and magic cauldrons fill their stories. The magic cauldrons were a form of "cornucopia" or horns of plenty. Butler claims "The horn is yet another representation of the womb and it was also a drinking vessel. The reverse aspect of the horn, i.e. its external features, was closely

associated with the phallus. As a result, both male and female organs could be represented by the same object.”

In Greek the word for both horn and cup is Krater. In astrology “crater” is a group of six stars to the south of Virgo, the Virgin. It is the constellation closely associated with the fertility goddess. To the Greeks Crater was sacred to “Krataiis” – “The strong one”, an alternative and oft-used name for Hekate. She was the goddess who helped at time of childbirth. Butler argues that if Crater is a womb, it is the womb of “Virgo, the virgin”.

Interestingly, as you can see in the image above, the Holy Grail is often described and represented in art with a spear or sword, which represents the phallus and the cup, the vulva and womb.

## **Today’s meaning of The Holy Grail in Goddess Spirituality**

Today, the cauldron represents transformation and rebirth. At the time of Samhain, amongst others, we honour Kerridwen, Hekate and Sheila Ng Gig who is seen with her vulva open ready for our cycle of life: death and rebirth. For us the cauldron is representative of the scared womb of transformation, death and rebirth.

The herstory of The Holy Grail seems to be one of the biggest heresies of our time. The Sacred Womb of The Goddess is integral in our modern day Goddess spirituality and is being reclaimed all around the world, arguably most actively in Europe where the heresy began. We are born, die and reborn through it and all of life, which is sacred, shares this magical, transformational process. Through Her we are reborn, time and time again. This has been honoured for thousands and thousands of years and I feel so grateful to be able to honour it once more openly in my Goddess loving community. I am so grateful to all of my many sisters and brothers who throughout herstory have kept Her alive despite fear of, and some actually experiencing, barbaric torture, persecution and death. As Her Priestess I commit to bringing Her back to many more sisters and brothers.