

THE ROUTE OF THE HOLY GRAIL: FROM SAN JUAN DE LA PEÑA TO VALENCIA. THE STRUCTURING OF A TERRITORY BASED ON ORAL TRADITION

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ABSTRACT

The Route of the Holy Grail was presented FITUR 2017 (Madrid, January 2017) by the *Agència Valenciana del Turisme*. It involves structuring a route that connects the communities of Aragon and Valencia by use of touristic description that encompasses history, art, rituals and oral traditions and which is based on the knowledge of what was known in the Middle Ages as the “search for the Grail”.

In this article we wish to show the importance of the oral tradition that has been received and perpetuated through an object of fundamental importance: *the Holy Chalice*, safeguarded in the Cathedral of Valencia. In addition to presenting its history and verifying it as a tangible patrimonial asset, the Holy Chalice is underpinned by intangible oral traditions that allow us to establish a route, a new path of knowledge from San Juan de la Peña to Valencia.

The methodology of our work is centered on reviewing the available documented sources about the Route of the Holy Grail and contrasting them with those agents who have intervened in them - their contributions and promotion of this heritage - with the aim of clearly identifying the principal force behind the generation of this historic, artistic and religious route. At the same time, we are contributing to cultural tourism from the perspective of art history by constructing a touristic description based on the knowledge and study of the local heritage. We also present the work carried out by the Association of the *Camino del Santo Grial* to structure this overland route from San Juan de la Peña to the Cathedral of Valencia.

In the Conclusion section, we close our research article with an explanation of how *Valencia, Territorio Grial* can offer a new type of tourism full of intangible richness for the intrepid visitor who wishes to learn about and experience the search for the Grail.

Keywords: Holy Grail; Holy Grail Route; Cultural Tourism; Intangible Patrimony.

JEL Classification: Z32

1. INTRODUCTION

This research work is part of the doctorate² research that we are carrying out on the touristic description of the Route of the Holy Grail and the relationship between art history and tourist activity. In this work, we are developing specific studies on the Holy Chalice of Valencia and its influence on the lands of Valencia and Aragon.

The present article consists of three fundamental focal points. The first answers the question of intangible patrimony and its direct relationship in the building of a touristic explanation of the Holy Chalice.

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The second point directs us to the methodology that we are using in the argument relating to launching the route from the perspective of the study of art history through the knowledge of tradition. It is fundamental to research the primary sources that provide information on the development of the route in order to be able to comment on it.

The third point is about the participating actors and agents. We briefly present the Cultural Association of the Route of the Holy Grail and its contributions to the value of cultural heritage.

The last section contains our conclusions which cover some of the thoughts that we consider imperative when establishing inventories of touristic resources collected under natural and patrimonial resources, again in reference to an intangible concept. It concludes with a bibliography.

2. INTANGIBLE TOURISTIC PATRIMONY DEFINED

The current concept of *patrimony* is a notion that has been linked in its etymology and meaning to law and economics from the times of antiquity. In fact, in the Roman Empire, *patrimonium* defined the goods and rights that a person possessed and those that were inherited, in this case from the father *Patri* (father) and *onium* (received).

However, we can ascertain that the meaning of this concept, after centuries of Romanization and the endless invasions and border repositioning that crossed the Mediterranean Sea, has varied for reasons other than said war conflicts. We could suggest that it was, without a doubt, the societal capitalization of production and the associated business tendencies that changed the known western world³.

In his work *The Psychology of Social Class*, Maurice Halbwachs analyses the industrial civilization from the beginnings of ancient society up to the modern era. According to his thinking, “the spirit of business involves three complementary dynamics: a) the greed of gain for gain’s sake, b) the tendency toward combat and competition and c) the analysis of results and the search for efficiency”. (Korstanj, 2007: 12)

Korstanj explains in his work, *Tratado Turístico*, that Halbwachs maintains that capitalism began very early in the West, specifically after the conquest of America in the XV Century with the mining of its precious metals, gold and silver principally, and their later introduction into Europe (Halbwachs, 1954: 67-83).

These changes of social paradigms, of revolutions slowly assimilated by a silent society have produced irreversible changes, principally those linked to the *time-work* binomial and referenced to the concept *production*. So much so that everything that is related to what potentially means *possession* – material as well as intangible goods – automatically acquires today an economic meaning comparable to any other initial nuance it could have.

Referring to what we currently understand by patrimony, according to Korstanj (2007: 13), “the word is used to designate the set of tangible and intangible goods possessed by a group or an individual. Thus, we talk about cultural patrimony, industrial, ethnologic, gastronomic, educational, historic and, since it cannot be of any other way, touristic patrimony”.

Starting with this generality, we can say that the incursion of Patrimony and Tourism is completely justified in the different research works that we, in the capacity of art historians, have elaborated throughout our university studies in the Department of History of Art from the presentation of the TFG⁴ up to the TFM or the different publications.

In the 2003 Convention For The Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, article 2 of the UNESCO treaty states:

³ In this case, we are referring the expression Old Europe as opposed to other parts of the globe: New World (America), Oriental World (Asia), etc.

⁴ See bibliography: Mafé García, A (2014, June) y Mafé García, A. (2013, June)

The “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development.

Once situated in this theoretic framework, we should explain that the starting point we are using is a very real object known as the Holy Chalice. It is kept alive as a true intangible patrimony by the Valencian collective thinking thanks to the accepted tradition that for more than two thousand years has affirmed that this, and no other, is the chalice known as the Holy Grail.

Figure 1. Holy Chalice of the Cathedral of Valencia. February 2017



Source: Photograph by Ana Mafé García

3. ORAL TRADITION AND THE HOLY CHALICE

The most important historic relic of Christianity according to oral tradition is presently found in the Cathedral of Valencia⁵. We are specifically referring to the Holy Chalice which was presumed to be used by Jesus at the Last Supper. It is the same holy cup that in the imagination of medieval literature involved adventures full of heroics and knowledge in the search for the Holy Grail.

Today we find many documents that have verified that a Jewish blessing cup used by Jesus at the supper of Pesach or Passover really existed. We refer here to the medieval literature about the Grail and to the thousands of artistic images in the form of paintings and reliefs that characterize all Christianity, and also to the knowledge of the Hebrew tradition that has very specific ritual characteristics for its celebrations.

When, in many instances, we cannot verify historic details with a written document, we have to rely on oral tradition, the tradition that nourished human imagination for thousands of years. It was not until the IV millennium B.C. that the first tablets of clay and stone began to be used as graphic supports. Therefore, our intangible patrimony is found in the uninterrupted oral tradition that has come down to the present. This legitimizes our exposition, in the same way as local oral tradition supports the texts of the *Misteri d'Elx*⁶.

Starting chronologically with the Gospels, we have the Paschal celebration of the Last Supper that takes place around the year 33 A.D. According to the apostles themselves, the disciples of Jesus who were present there recognize that something extraordinary happened in said *Pésaj*⁷. Physically, the blessing cup used by Jesus signifies a direct reference to His words: *Do this in memory of Me*.

This new conception of the Jewish religion gives rise to a way plagued with perils in the conservation and custody of an object⁸ which implies a direct paradigm of the persecutions of the primitive Christian assemblies.

In the year 50 A.D. the first Council was held in Jerusalem. There Peter was recognized as responsible for the mission to continue spreading the message of Jesus, together with the other apostles. Tradition says that Peter died in Rome, martyred for his beliefs. Therefore if he was the visible head and ultimately responsible for that primitive assembly, it is logical to think that he would have had in his ministry the same blessing cup that Jesus used.

In 70 A.D. Titus Livius leveled Jerusalem; he destroyed the temple and ordered so many crucifixions that according to the historian Titus Flavius Josephus (c. 38-101), there was no wood left in the forests. (Josephus, HISTORY, 1791: 213-214) in Book VI, Chapter XVI, describes the facts "of the sacrilege that was committed in the Temple and the number of deaths in the city and of the great hunger that those there suffered".

This situation leads us to believe the upper cup of the Holy Chalice traveled to Rome with Saint Peter because in comparison with the instability of Judea in that era, Rome was one of the safest cities. The first Christian communities celebrated the paschal rites in Roman homes, not in temples. Nevertheless and in spite of the discretion of the worship, the emperors soon looked at this new religion with suspicion and the persecutions began. We can say that the Christian community spent the first two centuries trying to avoid incarcerations, public scorning and death in the Roman circus for the amusement of the Roman citizens depending on the whims of the emperor of the moment.

Then, in 258 A.D. Valerian, who had declared bankruptcy, ordered the Christians to be persecuted and put to death and demanded that they give him all of the riches they

⁵ The Vatican has conferred on Valencia since 2015 the title of Holy City in perpetuity every 5 years as custodian of this distinguished historic relic.

⁶ Proclaimed in 2001 Intangible Patrimony of the UNESCO and inscribed in 2008.

⁷ Means Easter in Hebrew.

⁸ Each Jewish family has a blessing cup to use in celebrating the paschal feast. It is something that is totally recognizable by all members of the family unit and has nothing to do with ordinary tableware.

possessed. Pope Sixtus II had been apprehended to be martyred and therefore asked his deacon Laurence to give away everything he had to the poor of Rome. Laurence, who was of Spanish descent, did as requested and gave away everything except the Chalice which according to oral tradition had been used by Jesus. He entrusted it to a small entourage that was leaving for Huesca, his native city. There it was safeguarded until the Saracen conquest forced the Bishop of Huesca to seek refuge in the Pyrenees.

During the Middle Ages, the cup was safeguarded in the Benedictine monastery of San Juan de la Peña, in the area around Jaca, in the Kingdom of Aragon, nucleus of the Jacobean Route. In fact, we know that the Holy Vessel remained hidden there until this Benedictine convent incorporated a Royal Pantheon at the beginning of the XI Century.

Before it became part of the collection of the Royal Treasure of the Kings of Aragon, this Chalice was coveted by the monarchs of all Europe who, after visiting the Benedictine monastery on their pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, desired the vessel to exhibit in their own royal chapels.

Also desirous of possessing the Chalice, King Martin requested that the cup be given to him. The monks decided to honor the wishes of the king and ceded the *calice lapideum* to him in 1399. In exchange and gratitude, King Martin gave the monastery a chalice of gold and precious stones to be used only for their services.

Notarized documents tell us that the Chalice went from the monastery of San Juan de La Peña to Zaragoza and Barcelona before coming to the city of Valencia. The Holy Chalice is listed in the inventory of goods (Manuscript 136 of Martin "The Human". Archive of the Aragon Crown. Barcelona), where the history of the sacred cup is described) that later was passed on to his successor Alfonso V the Magnanimous who, for economic reasons, brought his court to Valencia in 1424, also bringing with him the Royal reliquary. To finance his wars in Naples, Alfonso V asked for and received a loan from the ecclesiastic hierarchy of the cathedral upon depositing his royal relics as a guarantee. Unable to repay the loan, in 1437, King Alfonso V the Magnanimous was obliged to hand over all of his Royal Treasury and relics, among them the Chalice that according to oral tradition, Jesus Christ used at the Last Supper (Volume 3.532, fol. 36, v. Cathedral's Archive).

Since King Alfonso V never returned the loan to the cathedral, this sacred relic has remained in the Cathedral of Valencia and can be seen and venerated in the Chapel of the Holy Chalice of the cathedral where it is displayed in a heart-shaped gold reliquary which undoubtedly enhances its beauty even more.

A visit to the Holy Chalice is a unique opportunity to contemplate the treasure that the Knights of King Arthur searched for with passion and heroism.

Figure 2. Upper cup of the Holy Chalice. February 2017



Source: Photograph by Ana Mafé García

4. METHODOLOGY: SEARCH FOR SOURCES

The first time that the expression “camino del Santo Grial (route of the Holy Grail) as such appears in the *Crónica de la conmemoración valenciana y del viaje del Santo Cáliz a las antiguas sedes de su estancia en España*”, is in a publication written by Canon Jose Zahonero Vivó in 1961 for the celebration of the XVII Centennial of the arrival in Spain of the Holy Chalice of the Last Supper.

The route the Chalice followed marks the beginning of a journey that, with the passing of years, has become more important for several reasons. Perhaps, in reality, its maximum attraction is the touristic description of this history which relates the millennial tradition that links the Holy Chalice of the Cathedral of Valencia to the same object that, according to Christian tradition, was on the table of the Last Supper.

From the first medieval texts written about the Holy Grail, – in this case we start with *Li contes del graal* (ca. 1180-3) by Chrétien de Troyes (ca. 1150 - ca. 1183) – to the German composer Richard Wagner (1813-1883) who adapted the work of Troyes from the *Minnesänger*⁹ of Eschenbach (ca. 1170 - ca. 1220) for his sacred opera *Parsifal* (premiered in 1882 after 25 years work), we can find in each and every one of these works, regardless of the time period, that the common thread of reference points to a place at the foot of the Pyrenees Mountains in Visigoth Spain.

We can affirm that this place refers to the Monastery of San Juan de la Pena, situated not far from Jaca, the city that for many centuries played a fundamental role in the expansion of the Crown of Aragon.

The celebration of the Holy Chalice was founded in Valencia by Canon Honorato Figuerola in 1608 (Zahonero Vivo, 1961: 24) and since then, innumerable ecclesiastical

⁹ Name given to the German troubadours.

fraternities and brotherhoods have been established that also celebrate the feast of Corpus Christi, considered since the XV Century, the most important event in the city of Valencia.

The first Centennial Holy Jubilee Year of the Sacred Cup was proclaimed in Valencia and coincided with the feast of Corpus Christi in 1958. It also coincided with the 17th Centennial of the martyrdom of St. Laurence and the arrival of the Holy Chalice in Spain. In preparation for the festivities, the mayor of Huesca and president of the commission of centennial festivities in honor of St Laurence petitioned the archbishop of Valencia to allow a pilgrimage through the towns that once had hosted the sacred relic. The celebration in Huesca was attended by representatives of the City Hall of Valencia, the Cathedral Chapter, the Royal Brotherhood and the Archconfraternity.

The *Asociación Cultural del Camino del Santo Grial*, founded in 2002¹⁰ under the auspices of all of the ecclesiastical fraternities connected to the Holy Chalice and of those municipalities that are located on the route from Aragon to Valencia has taken up the baton of all these traditions to promote the value of the tangible and intangible Valencian heritage.

5. THE CULTURAL ASSOCIATION OF THE ROUTE OF THE HOLY GRAIL

The Cultural Association of the Route of the Holy Grail is a non-profit association that was founded more than 15 years ago as the result of the meeting of the ecclesiastical Fraternity of the Holy Chalice in Valencia with the Tourist Management Body of San Juan de la Peña to propose the creation of a land route that would follow the journey of the Sacred Vessel to the Cathedral of Valencia.

This route would fulfill several objectives: it would recreate historically the first centennial pilgrimage and, at the same time, would serve as an effective tool for structuring a touristic territory that will encourage the social and economic development of the rural areas through which it passes.

Since the founding of the Cultural Association of the Route of the Holy Grail, the membership has consisted of a great number of the municipalities that integrate the route, as well as social and economic organizations in both the territories of Aragon and Valencia which comprise a new network of associations all working together.

The mission of the *Asociación Cultural del Camino del Santo Grial* as stated in its By-laws has three main points:

- To create and consolidate a land route which will be called “El Camino del Santo Grial” (the Route of the Holy Grail) between the Monastery of San Juan de la Peña and the Cathedral of Valencia.
- To extol and publish the history and symbolism of the Holy Chalice of the Supper of Jesus Christ that is venerated in the Cathedral of Valencia.
- To care for and maintain the continuity of this route in its cultural, recreational, religious and sport facets.

The vision of the *Asociación Cultural del Camino del Santo Grial* is characterized by:

- Assisting the pilgrims and the localities of the route
- Being the voice of the route
- Promoting the values of the association
- Encouraging altruism, commitment and transparency

¹⁰ National association inscribed in the National Registry of Associations, number 169.516 in accordance with the Resolution of the Ministry of Interior on 10 July 2002.

Since its beginning in 2002, the *Asociación Cultural del Camino del Santo Grial* has labored extensively to launch and develop the Route of the Holy Grail and in our study we wish to acknowledge our admiration for their work.

5.1 Administration and consolidation actions

With the aim of conceptualizing the project of this new tourist route, in 2002, the first pilgrimage was made under the sponsorship of the Gestora Turística de San Juan de la Peña, the Provincial Government of Teruel, the Courts of Aragon and the Directorate General of Tourism of the Government of Aragon. The specific objective of the pilgrimage was to identify and inspect the route and its possible alternatives. This first pilgrimage established contacts with the distinct authorities and institutions on the route, as well as defining their role in it.

Likewise, the brand “El Camino del Santo Grial” was registered in the Spanish Office of Patents and Trademarks, and renewed in 2014.

A registry of pilgrims who complete the route was set up and supervised.

The *Asociación Cultural del Camino del Santo Grial* made the work carried out to date available to the University of Zaragoza. It also collaborated with the university in the writing of the project that was presented to the European Union to apply for funds to aid in the creation of a transnational and trans-European route of the Holy Grail, crystallizing it with the project “Holy Grail Route” referenced in our bibliography.

5.2 Promotion and financing actions

- The brand “El Camino del Santo Grial” and its corporative identity have been created. It will serve as a tool to identify the itinerary and facilitate its promotion.
- An inventory of all the resources of the route has been created.
- The webpage www.elcaminodelsantogrial.com has been created. It contains extensive information about the route and the services found on it.
- Promotional brochures and posters of the Route of the Holy Grail have been distributed to the towns that integrate the route.
- Credentials to be issued and validated along the route have been produced.
- The Association has made a help center for pilgrims available to interested persons and involved agencies.
- A registry of pilgrims who request a pilgrim “passport” has been created and agreements made with municipalities to stamp the passport.
- A second pilgrimage was carried out in 2004 with the objective of promoting the route. It was widely covered by the press which made it highly visible in the regional media.
- One of the members of the Association has written the first guidebook. It was published with the sponsorship of the Valencia Regional Government and the City Hall of Cerda.
- The project appears on social networks.
- A informational brochure on the Route of the Holy Grail has been designed. It will be distributed to member local governments so that they have promotional materials.
- A third pilgrimage was carried out by the Massamagrell Cycling Club in 2016 to promote the Route of the Holy Grail on bicycle and to involve other organizations who might wish to collaborate with the association.
- A key date will be designated to commemorate the first pilgrims of the Route.

From the birth of this Association and of the Route, San Juan de la Peña has been a key agent in its launching. As we wish to continue working and joining forces for the

consolidation of the route, we consider it imperative that, as the starting point, San Juan de la Peña adhere to the association and have a relevant role in it.

Due to limited space it is not possible for us to go into more detail in this section. However, The Route of the Grail was formally presented in the International Tourism Trade Fair (FITUR) of Madrid by the Valencian Tourism Agency in January 2017 as a new tourist product which encompasses a good number of Valencian towns.

As an example, from Aragon the route enters into the Valencian Community at Barracas, a town situated at an altitude of some thousand meters on a mountain plain. The next town is the historic town of Jérica, set in an impressive Mediterranean mountain landscape. Continuing along the river Palancia, we reach Segorbe, a town that has a monumental civil and religious heritage.

On the way to Valencia, the town of Serra offers the visitor artisan products such as fruits, sweets and traditional sausages. We continue on to El Puig de Santa Maria where we can visit the Royal Monastery, declared a National Historic-Artistic Monument in 1969.

The Valencian agricultural fields accompany the visitor through the towns of the Horta Nord: among them, Massamagrell and Alboraya as far as the city of Valencia.

The route that is currently being structured presents innumerable natural as well as historic attractions and countless tangible and intangible heritage sites that make the Valencian territory singular and unique, a real experience of senses and sentiments.

6. CONCLUSION

As we have seen in our introduction, in touristic research there are currently many studies regarding *Patrimony and Tourism* as generating sources for economic feedback. The majority of them discuss the possibility of self-financing precisely as a way to sustain tangible patrimony from the return on capital that the arrival of visitors and tourists will generate.

Nevertheless, referring to the above, and as a brief conclusion, we would wish to highlight three fundamental issues to be considered before establishing routes and new touristic products:

1. Marketing description for prospective tourists should be based on the uniqueness of the route, structured by including the idiosyncrasies and the patrimony of it, both natural and human, tangible and intangible.
2. Product or route maintenance will need to be carried out by all participating agents: administrative offices, visitors and inhabitants.
3. Long-term conservation and preservation must be undertaken for the management of the route from the planning and organizational point of view based on the capabilities of environmental and social burdens.

Therefore, the creation of a touristic destination and a supportive association based on the history of the Holy Chalice, sustained by uninterrupted oral tradition considered intangible heritage, is now a reality.

All of this will mean a new endeavor which will consolidate the towns that are an intrinsic part of the route and will boost the tangible and intangible heritages linked to the collective imagination in the search for the Holy Grail and the Grail itself.

The Mediterranean diet, the Tribunal of the Waters of the Agricultural Fields of Valencia, the feast of the “Mare de Déu de la Salut” of Algemesí, the Misteri d’Elx or the Las Fallas holidays can all contribute to the development and consolidation of this traditional route,

thousands of years old. In 2015, Pope Francis designated the city of Valencia a Holy City and sanctioned the celebration of the first Holy Jubilee Year¹¹ to be repeated every five years.

The integration of social agencies, businesses, companies and the administration entities that comprise the Cultural Association of the Route of the Holy Grail is a step toward the intelligent structuring of the territory. If all of these entities collaborate in the same direction, joining synergies and efforts, without a doubt, the knowledge and value of this route by tourists and citizens will be a success.

The rationale for presenting this research article on a part of the route is to encourage others to join the associative network in its labor of organization and territorial management. We understand that for the administration to count on the autonomous communities supposes a commitment on their part and necessitates a successful alliance for the future, in our opinion a true challenge for intelligent territorial management.

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¹¹ According to the data supplied by the Archbishop's office, between October 2015 and 2016 Valencia received more than 50,000 pilgrims who obtained a plenary indulgence by visiting the four jubilee churches of the city: the Cathedral of Valencia, la Basilica of Nuestra Señora de los Desamparados, the Parrish of Resurrección del Señor and the Parrish of San Nicolás.

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