


Article

Pure or Noble Materials for Jewish Ritual Vessels: Passover Meal and the First Eucharistic Chalice (Holy Grail)

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Abstract: Very little is known about the chalice used by Jesus of Nazareth at the Last Supper. The first Christians used a cup of blessing for the Eucharistic celebration (1Cor 10:16), which insinuates that Jesus used a ritual cup. An exegetical study of the synoptic gospels reveals that this ritual dinner was celebrated in the home of a wealthy disciple of Jesus, who would have lent him the most valuable cup of blessing owned by the family. Hence, it is unlikely that this cup was made of common and cheap materials, such as ceramic or wood. The only mention of this cup in the early centuries is due to St. John Chrysostom, who states (ca. 395 AD) that it was not made of silver. However, its veracity is not reliable due to the lack of earlier comments. In recent decades, archaeological excavations in the Holy Land have revealed that, at the time of Jesus, the use of vessels carved in limestone was common in Jerusalem for ritual practices in the domestic sphere because they were considered unsusceptible to impurity. This fact suggests that the chalice of the Last Supper might have been a valued cup of carved stone, which is consistent with the use of such bowls in the Hellenistic–Roman period among the aristocratic classes.

Keywords: Eucharist; Last Supper; cup of blessing; chalice; Cenacle; Passover meal



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1. Introduction

The Synoptic Gospels narrate regarding Jesus of Nazareth that, during the Last Supper, after blessing and breaking the bread, “then he took a cup” (Mt 26:27; Mk 14:23) and said “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you” (Lk 22:20). In these biblical quotes and others that also mention the Eucharistic chalice (Lk 22:17; 1Cor 10:16.21; 11:25–28), the word in the original Greek text referring to this cup is ποτήριον (potérion). This term derives from the verb πίνω (pínō), “to drink”, and etymologically means “drinking instrument” ([Dicciogriego Online Greek Dictionary 2023](#)), such as a glass, cup, goblet, mug, or bowl. In English, a cup is a small round container from which one drinks, usually with handles. By contrast, in Spanish, “copa” means a “glass with a foot to drink” ([Diccionario de la Real Academia 2014a](#)) (i.e., goblet), but the Greek term ποτήριον does not necessarily imply that it had a foot.

The chalice used by Jesus at the Last Supper is commonly referred to as the Holy Grail, though some mythical connotations often associated with this designation will be disregarded in the present work. The material from which this chalice was made and how it looked are unknown due to the lack of written sources from the first centuries. One of the few allusions—perhaps the only one—is that of Saint John Chrysostom (ca. 395 AD). In his homily 50:3 on Saint Matthew, he writes:

“At the last supper, it was not of silver that table, nor the chalice in which the Lord gave his disciples his own blood. Instead, how precious it all was and how venerable, how filled it was with the Holy Spirit!” ([Ruiz-Bueno 1956](#)).

The information provided is very limited because this author only mentions that it was not a silver chalice. The present study discusses which materials would have been

more worthy or appropriate for that occasion according to biblical exegesis, theological considerations, analysis of the protocol of the Passover dinner during which the Eucharist was instituted, and based on archaeological evidence. The materials that were considered nobler for ritual and sacred purposes in Jewish culture are discussed, as are those that were or were not regarded as susceptible to legal impurity.

Section 2 states that the use of ritual cups was not mandatory for the Passover dinner according to the Mishnah Pesachim. However, Saint Paul asserts that the early Christian communities used a “cup of blessing” (i.e., a ritual chalice) for the Eucharistic celebrations (1Cor 10:16), probably in imitation of Jesus himself.

Section 3 debates the biblical exegesis regarding the place chosen by Jesus to celebrate the Last Supper. It was the house of a wealthy disciple, who would have lent him the most valuable cup of blessing owned by the family. Thus, it is ruled out that the Holy Grail was an ordinary vessel or made of cheap materials.

Section 4 discusses the difference between noble and pure materials according to the Jewish tradition of that time. Archaeological findings in the Holy Land from the last decades bring to light the use of vessels of carved stone for ritual purposes in the domestic sphere (Section 5).

Section 6 presents a pious tradition, endorsed by medieval historical sources, according to which the Holy Grail is a cup of carved agate stone that has been venerated since 1437 AD in the Cathedral of Valencia, Spain. It was supposedly sent from Rome to Osca (present-day Huesca, Spain) by Saint Lawrence in 258 AD. The suggested dating for this gemstone is discussed, as is its alleged journey from Jerusalem to Valencia.

2. The Cup of the Last Supper: Profane Glass or Ritual Chalice?

2.1. The Kiddush Ritual on the Sabbath

According to the Torah, the Sabbath is “a day of rest” consecrated to God (Ex 16:23) because “in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth (. . .); but on the seventh day he rested” (Ex 20:11). Aside from resting and refraining from work, a liturgical ritual was developed for this day (Tabory 2006, p. 560). The Gospels provide evidence of people gathering together on the Sabbath in order to read the Torah (Lk 4:16; 6:6).

The Sabbath was a holy day of rest but also of enjoyment, which was mainly expressed by eating good food and three meals: one on Friday night, after the onset, and two on the Sabbath. The use of wine was prescribed for rituals marking the onset of the Sabbath and its conclusion (Tabory 2006, p. 562). This practice of drinking wine is cited in the *Midrash Tannaim on Deuteronomy* (n.d., 5:12), which was written in the 3rd century AD. Drinking wine during certain meals was customary in Palestine, as was typical of Mediterranean countries (Dt 32:14; Sir 39:26). Wine is a figure of the goods of the messianic covenant (Is 25:6; Jl 4:18) (Maldonado 1967, p. 229).

The onset of the Sabbath was celebrated during the meal on Friday night with a liturgy for declaring the sanctity of the day, known as kiddush, which was recited over a cup of wine. For this blessing to sanctify the Sabbath and Jewish festivals, it would be customary for each family to use a ritual cup, which is often referred to as the Cup of Kiddush. The ending of the Sabbath was also marked by a liturgy called havdalah. These ceremonies seemed to have developed during the Second Temple period (i.e., before 70 AD) (Tabory 2006, p. 562).

2.2. The Passover Seder

The Jewish festival of Passover (Pesach) commemorates the liberation of the Jews from slavery in Egypt (Ex 12:11–17). Celebrated at the beginning of the grain harvest in spring, it lasted for seven days: “On the first day you will hold a sacred assembly, and likewise on the seventh. On these days no sort of work shall be done” (Ex 12:16). It was a pilgrimage festival given the obligation to go to Jerusalem and carry out special offerings at the Temple. One of them was the grain from the first sheaves of the new barley crop (omer) (Lv 23:10–12) (Tabory 2006, p. 565).

Pesach had two main rituals connected with it: the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb and the obligation to eat unleavened bread (mazzah). This sacrifice took place on the 14th of the month of Nisan (Ex 12:6–11), which was a fast day. The lamb was eaten on the eve of the 15th, which was also the beginning of the mazzah festival, lasting for seven days. In this meal, the Paschal lamb was eaten together with mazzah and bitter herbs (Ex 12:8).

The Pentateuch (Ex 12–13, Dt 16) does not prescribe any blessings, hymns, or fixed order in the eating of these foods (Marcus 2013, p. 305). However, the ritual celebration evolved into strict rules about this domestic dinner, which became known in later Jewish liturgy as the seder. This Hebrew term, which literally means “order”, implies that there was a strict order and rules for the presentation and consumption of wine, appetizers, the main course, and dessert (Kulp 2005, p. 111). The seder also included a domestic liturgy, known as the haggadah, which was a ritual retelling of the story about the exodus from Egypt (Tabory 2006, p. 564). Some authors consider that the Passover meal may have become (or reemerged as) a leisurely celebration held at home by the beginning of the 1st century AD, which is consistent with Jesus’ Last Supper according to the Synoptic Gospels (Marcus 2013, pp. 309–11).

2.3. The Use of Wine at Passover

An ancient Jewish apocryphal text dated to 160–150 BC describes the Passover meal as a leisurely repast to be enjoyed with wine: “And all Israel was eating the flesh of the paschal lamb, and drinking the wine, and was lauding, and blessing, and giving thanks to the Lord God” (*Book of Jubilees* n.d., 49:6). This is the earliest reference to the use of wine in this festival (Marcus 2013, p. 308).

The law of drinking wine in the seder of Pesach has no sources in the Pentateuch. This rule is related to the precept of celebrating the kiddush on the Sabbath and the holidays with wine (Tabory 2006, p. 562; Arnon 2013). It is regulated in the Mishnah, in which the Jewish oral tradition about the Torah is collected. The Mishnah and its companion work, the Tosefta, comprise the main body of the Tannaim. This Talmudic literature, most of which was composed in the Land of Israel (Tabory 2006, p. 557), corresponds to rabbinic sages who lived from ca. 10 to 220 AD. The Mishnah is structured into six divisions, which are known as Orders. The third tractate of Order Moed, called Pesachim, deals mainly with the laws of Pesach.

The *Mishnah Pesachim* (n.d., 10:1–7) establishes that the Passover meal is to be organized around four toasts with wine: “The distributors of charity should not give a poor person less than four cups of wine for the festival meal of Passover night”. In other words, even the poorest Jews had to be provided with enough wine to pour a glass four times at specific moments of the ritual celebration. The first cup accompanies kiddush, i.e., the sanctification of God’s name with which every festive meal begins (Kulp 2005, p. 111).

According to Tabory (1999, pp. 64–65), the Passover seder more or less as it was described in the Mishnah already existed at the time of Jesus, and it included the framework of four cups of wine and their accompanying benedictions, the eating of the Paschal lamb, the telling of the story, and the recitation of the Hallel (i.e., Psalms 113–18). However, these assumptions are less accepted today.

Tosefta Pesachim (10:4) explains that the purpose of the wine is to be “happy during the holiday (. . .) as it is written” (Psalm 104:15), given that happiness was an essential element of any festival. This need to explain the significance of wine concerning its prescription may reflect an awareness of wine’s new role in ensuring festivity once the Temple did not exist (Bokser 1984, p. 45). Hence, it is insinuated that, before the Temple’s destruction in 70 AD, the liturgy of Pesach with the structure of four cups of wine might not have existed yet.

Since the work of Bokser (1984), philological and socio-historical studies of the rabbinic literature have led to a near consensus among scholars that the Passover seder and haggadah, as described in the 10th chapters of Mishnah and Tosefta Pesachim, did not yet exist during the Second Temple period. They would have been an adaptation of former practices to the needs of Judaism developed in the period of 70–220 AD—after the Tem-

ple's destruction—in an attempt to maintain continuity with earlier periods (Kulp 2005, pp. 116, 130).

While the Temple still stood, mazzah and bitter herbs would have taken a secondary role in the meal. However, when the Romans destroyed the Temple in 70 AD, no sacrifices could be performed, which was a serious objection given the intimate relationship between Pesach and the sacrificial lamb (Ex 12:21). Hence, the Tosefta reflects the necessity of a ritualized assembly on the first night of Passover consisting of the eating of a communal meal comprised of mazzah, bitter herbs, and wine, as well as the recitation of Hallel (Bokser 1984, p. 41; Kulp 2005, pp. 116, 127). The *Mishnah Pesachim* (n.d., 10:8) applies the term *havurah* to designate a group of people gathered together to celebrate the seder.

During the Passover seder, one can imagine that deprived people would have surely used an ordinary vessel. It was not mandatory to drink from ritual cups, although it can be guessed that wealthy families would have had luxurious tableware reserved for this dinner, since Passover was one of the three main festivals of the Jewish year (Tabory 2006, p. 564) and because nothing in the ritual protocol prohibited a ritual chalice.

2.4. Why Did Jesus Distribute the Chalice among the Dinner Guests?

At his last Passover supper, Jesus consecrated his blood in a wine cup, the first Eucharistic chalice, which is the object of reflection in this study. The apostles understood that what Jesus did with that chalice was something extraordinarily unique: "Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them: «This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many»" (Mk 14:23–24). Jesus indicates that his blood will seal the covenant between God and humanity, creating a parallel with the scene on Sinai (Ex 24:8). By specifying that "they all drank", perhaps the intention was to highlight something unusual, since it was forbidden to drink blood (Lv 17:14; Acts 15:29) and, therefore, the pairing of wine and blood must have been uncomfortable.

The fact that Jesus distributed a cup of wine among the dinner guests during the Last Supper (Mk 14:23) is not consistent with the *Mishnah Pesachim* (n.d., 10:1–7), which insinuates that each guest was to use their own vessel. One explanation would be that the seder of Passover was developed as a domestic celebration after the destruction of the Temple, and this seder would have existed in only a rudimentary form (i.e., not in a fixed ritual order) at the Last Supper (Marcus 2013, p. 303). Therefore, it cannot be determined if handing out a cup of wine among the guests was common in the Paschal dinners at the time of Jesus (Maldonado 1967, p. 170). Several scholars believe that the custom was for each one to drink from their own cup at the Passover dinner, as implied by the *Mishnah*, but a novelty introduced by Jesus would be that everyone drank from the same cup as a sign of fraternal unity (Fitzmyer 2005, p. 331; Aldazábal 2006).

On the other hand, as the Gospel of Mark seems to speak about a single cup (Mk 14: 23–26), Taylor (1980, p. 659) considers that the Last Supper might have been the kiddush celebration on the eve of Saturday, for which a ritual cup was distributed among all of the dinner guests. Hence, the Holy Grail would be a Cup of Kiddush.

The Last Supper might also have been a fraternal banquet, as it was customary for groups of about 10 to 20 friends to gather for a pious purpose (*havurah*) on the eve of a Saturday or the main festivals; the presider would perform a collective blessing with a glass of wine at the end of dinner to give thanks for the whole meal (Maldonado 1967, pp. 176–77).

The destruction of the Jerusalem Temple stimulated the rabbis to develop an innovative seder ritual, and they assimilated customs, manners, and literary forms from the Greco-Roman culture—mainly from the symposia (Leyerle 1999). A symposium was a Greco-Roman drinking party that followed the evening meal, and it often provided an occasion for intellectual discussions, the singing of drinking songs, and the recitation of pieces of verse from traditional classics (Bokser 1984, p. 49).

Numerous parallels have been reported between the symposia and the Passover seder: the festive character, reclining at the meal, the drinking of wine according to an agreed procedure, the pedagogic use of questions and intellectual discussion, singing and praises to

God, etc. (Bokser 1984, pp. 50–66; Kulp 2005, p. 117). Nonetheless, several of these analogs are general characteristics of dinners in antiquity (Bokser 1984, p. 53). Another parallel found between the seder and the Synoptic Last Supper is that words of interpretation, not just blessings, were spoken over the bread (mazzah) and wine. This sort of table talk has precedents in the Greco-Roman symposium, but it has no precedents in ancient Jewish contexts, except for the Passover seder. The earliest rabbinic reference to this custom is found in the *Mishnah Pesachim* (n.d., 10:5), in which mazzah is one of the foods that must be interpreted at every Passover meal (Marcus 2013, pp. 313–14).

Scholars have concluded that the rabbis borrowed external customs from Greek culture when establishing the seder (Kulp 2005, p. 118) but created distinctions to prevent participants from confusing the cultural identity of the meal (Bokser 1984, p. 66). For example, the drinking of wine in the Passover ceremony is attached to key parts of the ritual.

In short, the Last Supper was celebrated in the context of the Passover dinner, but some indications insinuate that Jesus did not strictly follow an established protocol, since the seder did not yet formally exist. The washing of the feet is a clear example of this (Jn 13:2–5). Moreover, if Jesus had scrupulously adhered to ritual canons when he commanded the apostles to “do this in memory of me” (Lk 22:19), they would surely have understood that this celebration should be held once a year, as was done with the Passover dinner (Ex 12:1–11) (Marcus 2013, p. 322). However, this was not the case because, according to Acts 2:42 (written ca. 85–90 AD), the first Christians “were continually devoting themselves (. . .) to the breaking of the bread”. This comment makes sense because mazzah became the main ritual food in the Last Supper, as the Paschal lamb was absent.

2.5. *The Eucharistic Cup of Blessing Mentioned by Saint Paul*

Regarding the chalice used by the first Christian communities for the Eucharistic celebration, Saint Paul (ca. 53 AD) describes it as a “cup of blessing” (1Cor 10:16). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1997, #1334) and various authors (Maldonado 1967, p. 160; De Baciocchi 1979; Cantera and Iglesias 2000; Fitzmyer 2005, pp. 321–22, 338; Aldazábal 2006) consider that this expression is the name of the third pouring of the cup during the Passover dinner. It received this denomination because the head of the family pronounced the main blessing over the cup after dinner as praise and thanksgiving for the entire meal and what it meant (Maldonado 1967, pp. 160, 170). In fact, it was “after supper” when Jesus consecrated his blood (Lk 22:20; 1Cor 11:25).

However, as discussed in Section 2.2, there is no evidence that Jesus’ Last Supper strictly followed the seder as it is described in the *Mishnah* because most scholars consider that the seder was basically developed after the destruction of the Temple (i.e., later than the aforementioned quote from Saint Paul) (Kulp 2005, p. 130). If Jesus did not follow a ritual dinner with the structure of four cups of wine, it cannot be affirmed that the “cup of blessing” (1Cor 10:16) refers to the third pouring, and another interpretation has to be provided.

Saint Paul wonders: “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?” (1Cor 10:16). The way this sentence starts seems to be a pleonasm, tautology, or unnecessary redundancy, but it reveals that the early communities used a ritual chalice to celebrate the Eucharist (i.e., not a conventional cup), which was probably in imitation of Jesus himself. This “cup of blessing” might refer to a Cup of Kiddush.

3. Jesus Chose the House of a Disciple to Celebrate the Last Supper

3.1. *The Cenacle Belonged to a Rich Follower of Jesus*

The chamber in which the Last Supper took place was “a large upper room” (Mk 14:15; Lk 22:12). This term “room” is translated in the Vulgate as “cenaculum”, from which the word “Cenacle” comes. Jesus, who was in Bethany in the days before the celebration of his last Passover (Mt 26:2.6), gave specific instructions about the place and preparations for that festival dinner: “Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, «The Teacher says: My appointed time is near; in your house I will celebrate the Passover with my

disciples»” (Mt 26:18). The expression “to a certain man”, written in the Vulgate as “ad quemdam”, could also be translated as “to such a man” or “to a certain someone”. It could be someone unknown, but this is not the case because the Latin word *quemdam* (i.e., accusative masculine singular of *quidam*) can also be translated as “to whom you know” (Glosbe Online Latin Dictionary 2023).

Interestingly, Jesus designates himself as “the Teacher” (Lk 22:11; Mk 14:14), the term opposite of “disciple”, which reveals that this man was a follower of his (Gill 1980; Henry 1991; Fitzmyer 2005, p. 310). It cannot be excluded that Jesus and the owner of the Cenacle had already reached a prior agreement (Taylor 1980, p. 650; Pronzato 1984; Fitzmyer 2005, p. 309; Morla 2009). Therefore, an appropriate translation would be: “Go to the city, to the house of whom you know” (Mt 26:18) (Conferencia Episcopal Española 2010). Curiously, the term *διδάσκαλος* (*didáskalos*, teacher) appears 15 times in the New Testament but only once in Mark’s gospel (Mk 14:14) when addressing the house owner, whereby the expression acquires greater significance and majesty (Gnilka 2005, p. 273).

Jesus had commanded Peter and John (Lk 22:8) to meet a man carrying a pitcher of water (Mk 14:13; Lk 22:10), whom they would recognize, or else he would recognize them, and they should accompany him to find the house’s owner. According to some scholars, at that time, men carried water in wineskins and women carried it in pitchers from the fountain of Siloam (Lagrangé 1929; Taylor 1980, p. 649). This encounter might reflect an autobiographical incident of the evangelist Mark, which is appealing because modern exegetes consider that the Cenacle was the home of Mark’s family (Zarzo 2023).

Perhaps it was Mark himself who recognized Peter and John while he accompanied the servants transporting water and who, being a teenager, carried a pitcher, which was less heavy than the wineskins. The original Greek word in Mk 14:13 that is often translated as pitcher is *κεράμιον* (*kerámion*), which can also be translated as jar or jug (Bible Hub 2023), meaning a ceramic container that is not necessarily large. When the Gospel of Matthew was composed, which is subsequent to that of Mark, the evangelist got rid of these instructions to find the house owner, sending the disciples directly “to the house of whom you know” (Mt 26:18). There would be no reason for these omissions by Matthew except if the evangelist did not see anything extraordinary in the incident recorded in Mk 14:13 (McKenzie 1972).

This exegesis reveals that the Last Supper was celebrated in the house of someone known, as commented by Saint Augustine (n.d.). The gospels probably do not name the owner because he preferred to remain anonymous or because they intended not to embarrass him. It might have been the place where Jesus had celebrated the Passover dinner on other occasions with the apostles (De Tuya 1968), since Jesus went up to Jerusalem every year for this festival (Lk 2:41; Jn 2:13). The Cenacle must have been the residence of a rich family because it was a large two-story house with servants (Lk 22:10.12) located in the upper part of Jerusalem, the aristocratic neighborhood. This topic was discussed in a recent work (Zarzo 2023).

3.2. The Tableware and Arrangements for the Last Supper

The Jewish Law established that the sacrifice of the lamb and the Paschal dinner should take place in Jerusalem (Dt 16:5–7). The city must have been very crowded in those days before the Passover festival. It is considered that more than 125,000 pilgrims could go there, multiplying the total population by several times, estimated at 30,000–50,000 people (García 2016, p. 22). All of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, according to their possibilities, believed in the duty of hosting the pilgrims for the Paschal banquet. Only one lamb could be prepared for each group (Ex 12:4). This hospitality was free since there was a legal tradition according to which houses in Jerusalem could not be rented for money (Maldonado 1967, p. 162; Gnilka 2005, p. 272). It was customary for guests to leave the skin of the immolated lamb as compensation.

In the account of the Last Supper, it is narrated that “Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table” (Lk 22:14). It was mandatory to eat Passover in a recumbent position (M. Pe-

sachim 10:1) by reclining (Mk 14:18; Jn 21:20) on a small couch or divan, resting the left arm on it, and leaving the right for service (De Tuya 1968). The tradition of eating while reclining on klinai instead of sitting became popular among the Greeks in the early 7th century BC and spread to the Greek colonies.

With the city crowded with pilgrims, Jesus gave the instructions to prepare the festival dinner: “The Teacher says: «Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?» Then he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready” (Mk 14:14–15) (Sociedad Bíblica Católica Internacional 2002). The expression “furnished and ready” does not necessarily imply that the guest room contained furniture but that it was “laid out and prepared” or “arranged and ready”. Some authors think that this quote insinuates the presence of divans and use the following translation: “arranged with divans” (Taylor 1980, p. 648; Alonso-Schökel 2011, p. 1610). However, the recumbent position could also be reached by reclining on the ground on mats, which justifies other proposed translations, such as “covered with a carpet” (Gnilka 2005, pp. 270, 273) or “carpeted, ready” (Nácar and Colunga 1980).

In short, Mark indicates that the guest room was arranged and equipped with everything necessary to receive a group of pilgrims for the Passover dinner. Only the ritual foodstuffs were missing. Jesus’ Last Supper probably took place on the night before Passover (Marcus 2013, pp. 303–4), and he was crucified on Friday, on the afternoon of the day of preparation for the Passover (Jn 19:14.31). By advancing the Last Supper to Thursday, which was allowed in case of a serious impediment, they could not eat the Paschal lamb, since it was only sacrificed in the Temple on that Friday. Nonetheless, strict adherence to the pattern prescribed in Exodus 12 was not required for a meal to be considered a Passover repast, since the rabbis recognized that their Passover meals differed from the hurried Passover of Egypt (Ex 12:11–12) (Marcus 2013, p. 312).

In the case of hosting unknown pilgrims, the family who owned the Cenacle would have lent the upper room with everything prepared, which might have included conventional tableware of little value, since it was not mandatory to use ritual vessels. Another possibility is that pilgrims carried their own glasses or cups. However, the case of Jesus was very different: He presented himself as the Teacher, which implied that the house’s owner was a disciple of his. Faced with such an unusual guest and being of a wealthy family, the homeowner would have lent them the most valuable ritual cup—perhaps the precious blessing cup (Cup of Kiddush) used by that family to sanctify the Sabbath and the main holidays (Arnon 2013) or even the same ritual tableware that the members of the household would themselves use for the Passover dinner.

Assuming that Jesus had already celebrated the Passover meal in that same place on other occasions with the apostles (Jn 2:13), he would be aware of the most precious ritual cup of that home. Therefore, it can be asserted that, indirectly, Jesus chose a particular cup for the Last Supper, which would have been made of a material worthy and appropriate for something as transcendental as the institution of the Eucharist. It could not have been an ordinary vessel, since Jesus solemnly designated it as the “cup of the New Covenant” (Lk 22:20), and because Saint Paul talks about a “cup of blessing” (i.e., a ritual cup). Hence, common materials of little value such as ceramics or wood can be disregarded.

4. Differences between Noble and Pure Materials in Jewish Culture

4.1. Noble Materials According to the Old Testament

According to the Cambridge English Dictionary (2023), something noble is defined as “causing admiration because of a particular appearance or quality”. Likewise, in Spanish, this term designates something singular (i.e., extraordinary, rare, or excellent) or particular in its kind or something that excels others in terms of its qualities (Diccionario de la Real Academia 2014b). Gold is typically considered a noble metal due to its unique yellow color, its rarity (i.e., scarce availability), which has a high impact on the price, and its quality of remaining unaltered without oxidizing. In fact, in chemistry, a metal is considered noble if it is inactive (inert) or difficult to attack.

The noble or superior character of different materials is compared by Isaiah (60:17): “Instead of bronze I will bring gold, instead of iron I will bring silver, instead of wood, bronze; and instead of stones, iron”. From this quote, it turns out that the gradation of materials in terms of their nobility would be in the following order: gold, silver, bronze, iron, and wood/stone. Interestingly, the same order is currently considered for these materials regarding their noble character.

The Ark of the Old Covenant, which God ordered to be made after the exodus from Egypt, contained what was most sacred to the Jews. It was made of acacia wood overlaid with pure gold, with a gold molding and a cover (mercy seat) of pure gold, and it was decorated with two solid gold cherubs (Ex 25:10–18). In contrast, the “cup of the New Covenant”, which contained what was most sacred for Christians, i.e., the very blood of the son of God, would also have been of a noble material. Although many centuries have passed since the Last Supper, this liturgical principle still remains in the Catholic Church: The [General Instruction of the Roman Missal](#) (2003, #327–330) and the [Instruction Redemptionis Sacramentum](#) (2004, #117) establish that the Eucharistic chalices devoted to liturgical use must be made of noble materials.

4.2. Theological Considerations of Noble Metals for Sacred Uses

Regarding the use of sacred vessels, God commands “pitchers and bowls for pouring libations” (Ex 25:29; 37:16) to be made of gold. Libation was a sacred rite (Ex 29:40; Lv 23:13; Nm 15:5–10; 28:14) that consisted of pouring a glass of wine or oil on the ground—or on a stela (Gn 28:18; 35:14)—as a sacrificial offering to God in a gesture of gratuity for the fruits of human labor ([Maldonado 1967](#), pp. 224–26). Jesus, by taking the cup of wine and pronouncing “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you” (Lk 22:20), is expressing that this cup was like a bowl for libation. Therefore, if such vessels were made of pure gold in the Jewish tradition, the hypothesis that Jesus used a gold chalice at the Last Supper cannot be rejected.

In the Temple of Solomon, among the sacred utensils, the Bible mentions knives, pots, glasses, and braziers of pure gold (1Ki 7:50; 2Chr 4:22). God orders that plates and cups be made of pure gold (Ex 37:16), which evidences that gold was regarded as the noblest material for sacred purposes. On the other hand, when the Paschal lambs were sacrificed in the Temple of Jerusalem, the priests stood in two rows between the place of sacrifice and the altar, holding silver and gold bowls in their hands to receive the blood of the offerings (M. Pesachim 5:5).

By instituting the Eucharist, Jesus turns a domestic ritual dinner into a sacred banquet. If the sacred vessels used in the Temple to contain the blood of the immolated lamb were made of noble metals, something similar would apply to the chalice that contained the blood of Jesus, the “Lamb of God” (Jn 1:36).

In English, “cup” refers to a vessel for drinking and also to the liquid contained inside. The same applies to “copa” in Spanish and to the Greek term “potérion”, which can be deduced from the following quote: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (Lk 22:20). Similarly, when Saint Paul says that the cup of blessing is “a participation in the blood of Christ” (1Cor 10:16), the contents of the cup must be understood as being included. Based on this intimate semantic relationship between the contents and the container, given that the wine becomes sacred when Jesus institutes the Eucharist, it would be illogical to think about an ordinary profane vessel.

4.3. Pure Materials and Purification Rites

It is convenient to clarify the difference between noble and pure materials in the Jewish tradition. In the Greek version of the Old Testament, which is called the Septuagint, the adjective καθαρός (katharós) is mentioned 160 times, and it is generally translated as pure. According to [García-Santos \(2015\)](#), this term has various meanings: (i) clean and lacking stains (Lv 4:12; Jn 13:10); (ii) in a moral sense, pure, clean (with respect to injustice, evil,

etc.), free of guilt, innocent; (iii) in a ritual sense, pure, referring to people (Lv 7:19), animals (Gn 7:2), or sacrifices (Mal 1:11); (iv) unmixed, pure, genuine.

Based on these meanings, the rites of purification were intended to leave people or things free of certain impurities (i.e., to cleanse of all imperfections). Therefore, purifying and cleaning something material were two closely related concepts. Mark (7:2–3) clarifies this sense: “Some of his disciples were eating with impure hands, that is, unwashed. For the Pharisees and, in fact, all Jews, they do not eat without carefully washing their hands”. Mark also mentions many traditions of washing cups, jugs, and kettles (Mk 7:4).

Nonetheless, impurity was not understood solely as uncleanness; it was a broader concept, as “a negative state of being that should be avoided as much as possible” (Adler 2021, p. 55). Moreover, it was forbidden to eat impure food (Lv 7:19; Judg 13:4; Acts 10:14). When impurity was incurred, it had to be remedied as soon as possible in order to recover the proper state.

The Torah prescribed how to purify oneself from impurity acquired through contact with unclean animals, leprosy patients, corpses, spilled blood, etc. These rites of washings and ablutions generally required immersion or rinsing in water (Lv 11:32; 15:12; Nm 31:23); hence, “pure” was equivalent to “clean” or “washed”. All metal utensils had to be purified prior to their use: “Gold, silver, bronze, iron, tin, and lead—whatever can stand fire—you shall put into the fire, that it may become clean” (Nm 31:22–23). However, this rule of purifying metals through fire only applied if they were used—or if there was a doubt about if they had been used—for idolatry by cooking. Except in this case (i.e., regular impurity), they had to be put in water. Therefore, the cup used by Jesus should have been purified prior to the Last Supper, unless it was made of a material that was not susceptible to ritual impurity, such as stone, as discussed in Section 5.3.

5. Stone Vessels for Purification Rites in the Jewish Tradition

5.1. Archaeological Findings of Limestone Containers

In the 1970s and 1980s, large numbers of vessels carved from local limestone were discovered in multiple Roman-era archaeological excavations in Jerusalem, Sepphoris, and rural areas of Judea and Galilee. In several areas of the district of Jerusalem, quarry caves in which these vessels were made of soft or semi-hard limestone have been discovered. Such vessels differ from the Hellenistic hard limestone cups, the production of which had been in serious decline since the middle of the 1st century BC (Gibson 2022, p. 25). These cave quarries were found in Jabel Mukaber, Hizma, Tell el-Ful, and Mount Scopus (Gibson 2022, pp. 3–4). Recent excavations near Nazareth found a quarry and a workshop from the 1st century AD in which these types of objects were manufactured (Ngo 2023).

Archaeological evidence suggests that the manufacture of these calcareous stone containers arose at the end of the 1st century BC in Jerusalem, perhaps promoted by the large number of stonemasons in the time of Herod the Great, when the reconstruction and expansion of the Temple (ca. 22 BC) and the royal palace in the Upper City (ca. 25 BC) began. The presence of these quarry workers resulted in the craftwork of hand-carved or lathe-turned stone vessels, which began to be used by wealthy families in Jerusalem and the surrounding area, probably as domestic utensils associated with ordinary purification rites, since they were considered immune to ritual impurity (Adler 2021, p. 40). These products were sold in shops in the city, which had their own workshops with manual lathes.

In the middle of the 1st century AD, limestone vessels became popular because they were relatively cheap to produce and were more durable and less brittle than ceramic containers. Because of this, their manufacture spread to other cities and some rural Jewish communities. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, this industry was not abandoned and continued until the rebellion led by Simon bar Kochba in 132–136 AD. In fact, at the Shu’afat archaeological site, about 5 km north of Jerusalem, 656 fragments of limestone objects of identifiable typologies were found, dating between AD 70 and 132 (Adler 2021, p. 47). There is no evidence that the sacred vessels used in the Temple of Jerusalem were made of stone but, instead, of silver and gold.

5.2. Typology of Limestone Vessels

Regarding the stone vessels found in the archaeological excavations, the repertoire of different types is broad: bowls, cups, jugs, chalices, goblets, trays, stoppers, lids, etc. The containers that were most commonly found in domestic settings were hand-carved mugs with a nearly cylindrical pattern, a barrel shape, with one or two perforated handles. Out of a total of 162 objects, 53 cups with this typology were discovered in an excavation on the top of Mount Zion (Gibson 2022, p. 19). These cups have not been found in many sites that had ritual baths (mikves), suggesting that they were used for the daily ritual of washing hands before meals rather than for drinking wine. Undoubtedly, the Jews had a scrupulous concern for the ritual purification of everyday objects, such as glasses, jars, and trays (Mk 7:4; Lk 11:39).

In Jerusalem, hemispherical bowls crafted by lathe turning were also common as domestic tableware. They were probably used for drinking. Other smaller containers were supposedly utilized to hold scented oils. Large kraters made by lathe turning with finely carved decorations that reflected a concern for aesthetics, serving as a symbol of social status, became popular in wealthy houses. Such stone jugs were often used to store water in order to protect it from ritual impurity and to be ready for washing before meals. In fact, in the account of the wedding in Cana, the water jars used for the purifications were made of stone (Jn 2:6), despite their volume being about 70 to 100 L each (Alonso-Schökel 2011, p. 1683).

Another common typology in rural areas was the flat-based basin. They were probably used to protect olives from any ritual impurity during their processing since the successful sale of olive oil and, perhaps, wine depended on being able to demonstrate the ritual purity of the products to potential buyers (Gibson 2022, p. 16).

5.3. Stone as a Material Immune to Ritual Impurity

Archaeological discoveries suggest that carved stone vessels that were used in the domestic sphere were considered immune to ritual impurity (Adler 2021, p. 40; Gibson 2022, p. 32; Feinberg 2000); therefore, they did not need to be purified, although this consideration admits certain nuances. In other words, it was understood that glasses, cups, and goblets carved in stone could be reused without fear of ritual contamination and without the need to be rinsed with water after each use. This was an advantage because the availability of water was dependent on a rainy winter. A drought could imply an actual shortage of water for drinking, and, in that case, public fasting was declared (Tabory 2006, p. 569).

On the other hand, earthen vessels were considered susceptible to impurity, which was probably due to the fact that, if they contained contaminated water, it was retained in the pores, and the container was rendered unusable and had to be destroyed (Lv 11:33; 15:12). To prevent contamination, the jars had to be conveniently closed (Nm 19:15). Likewise, glass vessels were also regarded as susceptible to impurity (Grossmark 2010, p. 197).

The Kelim tractate of the Mishnah (25:1), which deals with the laws of ritual purity related to all types of vessels, establishes that “all containers have different laws regarding the interior and exterior faces”, as is also insinuated in the Gospels (Mt 23:25–26; Lk 11:37–41). A distinction is made (M. Kelim 25:8) between the internal and external impurity of vessels, including cups: “If one was drinking from a cup whose outer side was unclean, he need not be concerned lest the liquid in his mouth contracted uncleanness from the outer side of the cup”. It is unclear whether this precept also applied to stone-carved cups since this Mishnah tractate was composed around 190–230 AD, but the industry of carving stone vessels was abandoned earlier: ca. 132–136 AD.

In short, although the Mishnah does not establish that stone is a material that is intrinsically impervious to legal impurity, the large number of limestone vessels found in Jerusalem and its surrounding areas suggests that these vessels, which were used in the domestic sphere to contain liquids in the time of Jesus, did not transmit impurity from the inside out, so they did not need to be purified each time. However, there is

uncertainty about some aspects, such as if this attribute affected only the inner face or also the outer face.

5.4. Theological–Symbolic Considerations

It is striking that a feature so appreciated by the Jews in an object such as being immune to legal impurity is attributed to vessels carved in stone but not to other noble and valuable materials, such as gold. The reason seems to be that rocks and stones are a symbol of stability and eternity in the Old Testament. Once carved, their shape remains unaltered, unlike metals, which can be shaped. God himself is designated as the “stone of Israel” (Gn 49:24) and Rock, as an honorary title, in multiple quotes (Dt 32:4.15.18.30.37; 2Sa 22:2.47; 23:3; Is 17:10; 26:4; Hab 1:12), especially in statements expressing his incomparable character (Dt 32:31; 1Sa 2:2; 2Sa 22:32; Is 44:8).

Van der Woude (1978) points out that, in the Psalms, the solid and immovable rock is, in a translative sense, a stereotyped image that is used to express God’s help (Ps 18:47; 62:3; 89:27; 95:1), his protection (Ps 28:1; 31:3; 62:8; 71:3), the security provided (Ps 18:3.32; 94:22; 144:1), and his firm loyalty (Ps 73:26; 92:16). This symbology is appealing because rocks are immovable (Jb 18:4), resistant (Jb 6:12; 41:16), and unalterable (Jb 19:24). These analogies explain why Jesus builds the Church on the rock, which is Peter (Mt 16:18). The rock that flows with honey and oil is an image of abundance (Dt 32:13; Ps 81:17; Jb 29:6).

Building on rock provides security against attacks by enemies (Jb 29:28; Ps 27:5; 31:4; 71:3; 1Ma 10:73; Pr 30:26, Am 6:12; Is 17:10). The Ark of the Covenant, which was the most sacred thing for Jews, contained the Tables of the Law (1Ki 8:9) engraved in stone by God himself (Ex 31:18; 34:1). Altars for holy sacrifices were also made of stone (Ex 20:25; Jos 13:19; Is 27:9), as were the stelae on which libations were offered (Gn 28:18; 35:14).

5.5. Use of Gemstone Vessels in the Hellenistic–Roman Period

Different hard stones, such as sardius, carnelian, opal, agate, amethyst, onyx, jasper, chalcedony, chrysoprase, and rock crystal, were regarded as gems in ancient times. Most of them are listed among the twelve gemstones of the priestly breastplate (Ex 28:17–20) and in the foundations of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:19–20). Today, we distinguish between precious and semi-precious stones, but this distinction did not exist in antiquity.

According to the archaeological evidence (Adler 2021; Gibson 2022), only limestone vessels from nearby quarries have been found, but not vessels carved from hard stones, which is probably because gemstones were much more valuable, and their use would have been much scarcer, as it would have been limited to the aristocratic classes. In addition, hard stones were more difficult to carve, and their manufacture would have corresponded to specialized workshops.

Regarding the prevalence of precious stone cups in Jerusalem, to the author’s knowledge, archaeological evidence has not been reported. One of the few exceptions is an onyx chalice that was venerated as a relic in the church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, which was mentioned by the pilgrim of Piacenza in his work *The Breviary of Jerusalem* from ca. 570 AD (Wilkinson 2002). A book published in 2016, which is currently the largest compilation of ancient gemstone vessels, does not include any vessels found or currently on display in the Holy Land (Del Bufalo 2016). Nonetheless, based on the arguments exposed in Section 5.4, the character attributed to limestone vessels of being immune to impurity would extend to all kinds of stones. Hence, gemstone cups might also have been used for ritual purposes by wealthy families.

Various writers from Roman times mentioned expensive gemstone vessels for drinking wine (Zarzo 2024, pp. 155–56). In the 1st century AD, the expression “gemma bibere” (to drink in precious stone) by the poet Vergilius (n.d.) (*Georgicorum* II: 506) became popular as a sign of ostentation and refinement. Taking this background into account, the next section discusses the pious tradition according to which Jesus used a cup crafted from agate stone to institute the Eucharist, which is reasonable because the trade of these bowls was common among the aristocratic classes in the Eastern Mediterranean.

6. The Holy Chalice of the Last Supper Venerated in Valencia

6.1. Archaeological Considerations

The hypothesis that Jesus might have used a cup of carved stone to institute the Eucharist is consistent with the relic of the Holy Chalice of the Last Supper that has been kept in the Cathedral of Valencia, Spain since 1437 AD. It consists of three parts: an upper cup made of carved agate (Figure 1a), a chalcedony stone foot with perimetric goldsmithing, and an intermediate gold piece with handles. The agate cup has an outer diameter at the rim of about 9.7 cm, with a wall thickness of approximately 4 mm, though this is quite irregular, as it is thinner at the rim (Beltrán 1984, p. 54). Its volume is around 220 mL (Zarzo 2024, p. 144). The pattern of the design of this agate cup is common in Greek bowls, which implies that this cup would fit perfectly into a ritual celebration containing elements from the Greek symposia, as was the case of the Passover dinner (Section 2.4).



Figure 1. (a) Holy Chalice of the Last Supper (upper agate cup) venerated at the Cathedral of Valencia, Spain. Photograph by J. Leyva; (b) Roman cup from a private collection, with a similar rim and pattern of design (Auction House Monte Carlo 2023).

According to a pious oral tradition that has been maintained in Northern Spain since early medieval times, this agate cup is the authentic Holy Grail that was used by Jesus and later by Saint Peter and the first popes. The expression from the Roman Canon “accipiens et hunc praeclarum calicem”, which means “this same illustrious chalice”, insinuates that the successors of Peter in Rome celebrated the Eucharist with a certain specific chalice, which is supposedly that of the Last Supper (Oñate 1952).

This agate cup of the Holy Chalice has been dated from the 4th century BC to the 1st century AD but is more likely to be from the 2nd to 1st centuries BC according to an archaeological investigation published in 1960 (Beltrán 1984, p. 77). In this timeframe, a period of greater stability began with the government of Emperor Caesar Augustus in 27 BC (Pax Romana), which almost coincided with the reign of Herod the Great (37–4 BC). This period was favorable to the rise of luxury among the aristocracy of Jerusalem and, specifically, to the use of gemstone vessels.

A recent study reviewed similar gemstone bowls from the Hellenistic to the Roman period and discussed the criteria used in dating these cups (Zarzo 2024). For example, the Holy Chalice is similar to another agate bowl from a private collection, which dates from the 1st century BC (Figure 1b) (Del Bufalo 2016, p. 79). Other analogous Roman cups crafted from precious stones, all of which were dated 1st century BC–1st century AD, are included in a book published in 2016, which is currently the largest compilation of this kind of ancient vessels (Del Bufalo 2016). By comparing the agate cup of the Holy Chalice with silver goblets from the Roman period, the closest resemblance of the rim and silhouette was found with the so-called Cup with Cranes, which is dated around 25 BC–50 AD (Getty Museum 2023). In summary, the resemblance to analogous bowls

leads to a high likelihood that this cup in Valencia was carved before the Last Supper (Zarzo 2024).

The vertical disposition of parallel stripes in the Holy Chalice (Figure 1a) is rather unique and uncommon in ancient gemstone bowls. Without a doubt, it was a very expensive luxury item at that time, given its extraordinary beauty, fragility, translucent character, and relatively large size, as well as because the raw material came from far away, probably from India. Such gemstones would only be affordable for a wealthy family, which is consistent with the location of the Cenacle in the aristocratic neighborhood of Jerusalem (Zarzo 2023).

6.2. Alleged Journey of the Holy Grail from Jerusalem to Valencia

Most modern exegetes assume that the Cenacle was the house of “Mary, the mother of John who is called Mark” (Acts 12:12), that is, the house of the evangelist Mark (Zarzo 2023), who served as Peter’s interpreter and assistant for a long time (García 2016, p. 125) and accompanied him to Rome. With Mark’s family being the Grail’s owner, considering the close relationship with Saint Peter, it becomes plausible that the Holy Grail was taken to Rome and used by the first popes. This family would have considered that the liturgical use of such a significant stone relic corresponded to Saint Peter, Πέτρος (Petros), that is, the Rock on whom Jesus laid the foundation of the Church (Mt 16:18).

In 258 AD, during the persecution of Emperor Valerian, Pope Sixtus II commissioned his archdeacon Saint Lawrence to save the treasures of the Church (Peñart 1986). A pious tradition recounts that Lawrence sent the Holy Grail to his parents Saint Orentius and Saint Patientia, who lived in Loret, near the Roman city of Osca (present-day Huesca, Spain). The Sanctuary of San Lorenzo de Loret, which is located about 3.8 km from the city center, keeps the memory of both saints as the likely place of birth of Saint Lawrence.

The Abbey of San Pedro el Viejo (Saint Peter the Elder) in Huesca is considered the place where the Holy Chalice was guarded. The present Romanesque structure was built by the Benedictines in the 12th century in the place of a previous Visigoth church that predated the Moorish occupation in 713 AD. One bull of Pope Paschal II, dated 1107 AD, mentions that the old church of Saint Peter in Huesca was the only one that had been left at the disposal of Christians during the Muslim invasion, which reflects its importance (Fontana-Calvo 2003). Archaeological excavations at this site have found Roman remains (García-Macías 2019). The patronage of Saint Peter, which has probably been linked to this church since the Visigoth period, might be explained by the presence of an important relic: the Chalice used by Saint Peter (i.e., the Holy Grail).

Although the first reliable document mentioning the Holy Chalice that is currently in Valencia is a notarial deed from 1399 AD, the oldest historical source is a manuscript from the 6th century attributed to Saint Donatus (Bennett 2004). Songel (2020) reported finding a mention of the Holy Chalice in a manuscript from the late 11th century, which describes the reliquary of the monastery of San Juan de la Peña (Huesca), where this chalice was kept for about 300 years. In the Cathedral of Jaca (Huesca), a capital dated at the beginning of the 12th century depicts Sixtus II with Saint Lawrence, who delivers a wrapped object to two men before being martyred; this item is supposed to be the Holy Grail (García-Omedes 2018).

During the Muslim invasion, the Holy Chalice was hidden in different places in the Pyrenees. Around 1082 AD, it entered the Monastery of San Juan de la Peña, where this relic was guarded until 1399 AD when it was delivered to the King of Aragon. The Chalice was transported to Valencia in 1432 when the court of Aragon was moved there, and five years later, this relic became the property of the metropolitan cathedral.

6.3. Theological–Symbolic Considerations

During the exodus through the desert, God made abundant water flow from a rock (Num 20:8–11), which remained in the memory of Jews as something prodigious (Dt 8:15; Ne 9:15; Is 48:21; Ps 78:15.20; 105:41). For Paul, that rock was a figure of Christ, whom he

designates as a “spiritual drink” (1 Cor 10:4), since Jesus himself is presented as a spring of living water (Jn 4:14; 7:37). If God made a hard rock such as flint a remedy for their thirst (Ps 114:8; Wis 11:4), it is very symbolic that, according to tradition, Jesus used a chalice carved from hard stone at the Last Supper.

A unique aspect of the Holy Chalice in Valencia is that the agate banding is arranged vertically, with reddish-brown stripes alternating with others that are more translucent (Figure 1a). When the bowl is illuminated from within, it acquires reddish tones that evoke the image of a flame from a certain perspective. An exegetical study (Zarzo 2018, p. 320) suggested that a quote from the book of Revelation could make a direct allusion to the Holy Grail: “I saw something like a translucent sea mingled with fire” (Rev 15:2). If the term “sea” is interpreted as a hemispherical vessel (1Ki 7:23–25), this description fits amazingly with the agate cup that is venerated in Valencia, and it becomes proof of its authenticity because the author of the book of Revelation was aware of how the Holy Grail was.

This resemblance to a burning flame is appealing because fire is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, which is present in the transubstantiation, and because fire has a sacred (Lv 6:5–6; Heb 12:28–29) and purifying character in a spiritual sense (Mal 3:2–3; Zech 13:9). Remarkably, the purifying nature of the Eucharist is mentioned in the New Testament: “The blood of his son Jesus purifies us from all sin” (1Jn 1:7); “the blood of Christ [. . .] will purify our consciences from dead works” (Heb 9:14).

6.4. Search for Studies Supporting That Jesus Used a Stone Chalice

A literature search was carried out to find other scholars who also argued that the cup used in the Last Supper was made of stone, but the results were not conclusive because the search led to a medieval legend about the Holy Grail, according to which it was actually a stone cup (Barb 1956). Nevertheless, further studies should review this issue in more detail.

Another approach is to search for early Eucharistic chalices carved in hard stones. In this regard, the largest collection of such chalices is exhibited in the [Treasury of St. Mark Basilica \(2024\)](#) in Venice, Italy. Many of these Byzantine chalices—19 in total—are gemstone cups covered with goldwork, and they consist of a foot and an intermediate piece to embellish the cup.

At present, there are different cups that are claimed to be the authentic Holy Grail (Zarzo 2023, p. 7210), but the arguments postulated to defend their authenticity are not solid. Basically, they are ancient precious chalices, but they lack a historical background that could be traced back to the first centuries AD. By contrast, the agate cup venerated in the Cathedral of Valencia yields stronger evidence for consideration as the true relic.

It cannot be demonstrated that this revered agate cup is the one used by Jesus because its traceability back to the Last Supper cannot be guaranteed due to the little evidence from the 1st century AD. However, this connection cannot be proven false either. If the Holy Chalice in Valencia were a medieval fake crafted in the incipient kingdom of Aragon, it is very unlikely that a medieval goldsmith would have decided to use a carved agate gemstone for the upper cup since this raw material was not available in the Iberian Peninsula, and it would have to be brought from far away. Moreover, in medieval times, there was no knowledge in Aragon about the ancient Jewish custom of using stone vessels for ritual practices.

The present discussion does not intend to prove the authenticity of the Holy Chalice revered in Valencia, which cannot be rejected, but to bring to light that this relic is precisely carved in stone, which is in agreement with the use of stone vessels for ritual practices in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus. The Holy Chalice is part of the early Christian/medieval tradition of venerating ancient containers as relics connected to Jesus’ life, such as the famous series of Cana wedding jars. It is documented that one of these jars was venerated as a relic in the 12th century at the church of Saint John the Baptist in Jerusalem, which belonged to the Hospitallers (Burgtorf 2008).

7. Conclusions

Very little is known about the chalice used by Jesus at the Last Supper. The fact that Jesus chose the house of a rich disciple of his to celebrate this ritual dinner suggests that the homeowner would have lent him the most valuable ritual cup owned by the family. Thus, according to the biblical exegesis carried out in Section 3, it is unlikely that the Holy Grail was made of common and cheap materials such as ceramic or wood. Conversely, it would have been a valuable cup—maybe made of silver or gold, which were used by rich people in Jerusalem for domestic ritual purposes. Nonetheless, other materials such as stone or glass cannot be disregarded. In fact, vessels carved in stone were routinely used for ritual practices in Jerusalem at that time, as discussed in Section 5. Unfortunately, the characteristics of the Jewish blessing cups remain unknown because Jewish art in ancient times was characterized by aniconism, as the Torah banned any visual art that could incite idolatry.

Taking into account that Jesus chose twelve ordinary men to be his closest disciples (apostles) and that he interacted with regular people (Mt 9:10–13, Lk 7:34; 15:1–2), it might be argued that the hypothesis of having used an ordinary cup at the Last Supper would not be illogical. However, this conjecture is unlikely for the reasons exposed and because it is not consistent with the “cup of blessing” mentioned by Saint Paul (1Cor 10:16), which insinuates that the first Christians used a ritual chalice in imitation of Jesus. In fact, Jesus chose common people because all of the baptized are called to be his disciples (Mt 28:19) and to make clear that the Gospel spreads through the action of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 2:12–13), not due to the exceptional qualities of those who announce it.

Isaiah (66:20) mentions that “the Israelites bring their offering in a pure vessel to the house of the Lord”, since everything impure is rejected by God and should not be touched (2Cor 6:17). Taking into account that the Eucharist is a sacramental offering ([Catechism of the Catholic Church 1997](#), #1362) and given its purifying character (1Jn 1:7; Heb 9:14), Jesus would have used a pure chalice, considering two possibilities:

- I A valuable cup made of glass or noble metal that was previously purified for the occasion.
- II A precious cup carved in stone that was considered immune to impurity—or, more properly, not transmitting impurity from the inside out. This property implies that it did not need to be purified in the context of domestic purification rites.

Regarding glass vessels, towards the middle of the 2nd century BC, the Jewish authorities decreed that glass vessels were susceptible to impurity ([Grossmark 2010](#), p. 197), as stated in the [Mishnah Kelim](#) (n.d., 30:1). At the end of the 1st century BC, the technique for manufacturing glass by blowing was developed, which led to cheaper vessels being made with this procedure, and their trade expanded drastically. The hypothesis that the Holy Grail was made of glass is questionable because this material was rather common at the time of Jesus. Nonetheless, this hypothesis cannot be rejected because the first Christian communities often used glass chalices for the Eucharistic celebration ([Zarzo 2023](#), p. 7209). In fact, the *Liber Pontificalis* mentions that Pope Zephyrinus (199–217 AD) gave orders that, in front of the celebrating bishop, the ministers should hold glass patens ([Loomis 1916](#)).

With respect to the possibility that the Holy Grail was made of a noble metal, it becomes plausible that an aristocratic family would have such a valuable cup of blessing for ritual celebrations. One objection to this hypothesis is that it is not entirely consistent with the aforementioned comment by John Chrysostom stating that the chalice used at the Last Supper was not of silver but was still precious and venerable ([Ruiz-Bueno 1956](#)). When this text was written (ca. 395 AD), Eucharistic chalices were usually made of silver. Hence, this comment insinuates that it was also not made of gold because any golden chalice would have been described as “precious”. However, this information is not reliable because it was written some centuries after the Last Supper, and it cannot be compared with analogous comments from early Christian authors. Hence, the hypothesis that the Holy Grail was a silver or gold cup cannot be rejected.

The second option that has been postulated (i.e., a valuable cup carved in stone) is reasonable because, at that time, the inhabitants of Jerusalem used stone vessels for ritual purposes in the domestic sphere according to the archaeological evidence discussed in Section 5.1. Moreover, cups crafted in precious stone were in vogue among the aristocratic classes in the Hellenistic–Roman period. A cup that was immune to impurity—with the aforementioned digressions in this regard (Section 5.3)—seems to be in accordance with the theological meaning of the Eucharist. Nonetheless, there was no reason to preferentially use utensils that were immune to impurity in the Passover dinner. The requirement was that the participants in this ritual meal were requested to keep their purity; otherwise, they could not participate.

In summary, an exegetical study of the Synoptic Gospels leads to the conclusion that the owner of the Cenacle was a rich disciple of Jesus, who would have lent him the most valuable cup of blessing owned by the family. It could be a valued vessel made of silver, gold, glass, or stone. The latter option seems the most likely because containers carved in stone were commonly used for ritual practices in the domestic sphere in Jerusalem at that time, and this is consistent with the Holy Chalice kept at Valencia’s cathedral, but the other alternatives cannot be rejected. Perhaps we will never know what material the Holy Grail was made of. However, combined analyses of the sacred books and archaeological evidence, such as the examination undertaken in the present work, may be potentially revealing in future studies.

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