

# The Mysterious Head of St Teilo

## *An untold tale with far reaching implications*

By Philip Gardiner

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A traditional story relates how one fine day a group of monks were transporting the bones of a Dark Age Welsh Saint from one shrine to another. Having grown weary, the monks rested at a house along the way. One of the other residents of the house was moaning pitifully in pain and so the good prior took some water and blessed it solemnly.



Then most strangely the Prior took a little of the "earth" he found in the skull of a saint and "caused the party to drink it; which was no sooner passed downe into the sicke mans stomack, but he fell soundly asleep, and when he awaked, found himselfe of his daungerous and painefull infirmity perfectly recovered."

This little story reveals succinctly the existence of a perception that the skull or head of a holy or blessed person could heal – or at least, the contents could. It is also part and parcel of the 'skull and well' phenomena, which has perplexed scholars for decades. No distinct idea has come through all the research and scholarly reasoning to clearly explain the reason for the link between the well and the skull or head. So let's just turn to Skull Cups for a moment and see if there is anything peculiar to help us on our way.

### **Skull Cups**

In Sanskrit these mysterious objects are known as kapala (hence cap and cuppella for cup[1]) and they are generally formed from the oval section of the upper cranium. They served as libation vessels for large numbers of deities, which were mostly wrathful. However, these skull cups are not always associated with wrathful deities, they are also seen with gods such as Padmasambhava who holds

the 'skull cup' described as holding an ocean of nectar (Elixir) which floats in the longevity vase.

The selection of the right skull is paramount and the users were looking for Tantric powers. Therefore a violent death would always be better, such as decapitation. The symbolism of the Tantric Skull Cups is very similar to the Grail in that they are symbolic of immortality. Even some western alchemical writings advise the use of skull cups in the process of the "great work." Whereas the Chinese alchemists used cups or vessels made from the "gold" of the great work.

In Old German skull is *Scala*, which is also a seashell; the symbol used by pilgrims on their way to the shrine of St. James in Spain – a symbol of life. Old Norse it is *Skel*, which means, "to have scales" or be "scale-like." The word *skoal*, now a fairly common drinking cry is also closely related and means to "toast from a skull." This alone shows the deep-seated element of the skull in Western Europe of the use of a skull for drinking, as *skoal* was also used to refer to chalice! (The Ukrainian word *Cherep* refers both to skull and chalice.)

We must not forget the Christian Messiah was also crucified at the 'place of the Skull,' Golgotha. That is, his blood was spilt into the skull! But there is more to this than meets the eye.

This place, Golgotha, is also connected to the sign *Capricorn* – the half-goat, half-fish or serpent. *Capri* is from Latin, meaning "goat" or "head," and *corn* is "horn." This then, is the 'horn of the head' or 'goat' – the Golgotha.

So Jesus spilt his blood into the secret Grail on that fateful day – the secret Grail being the horn or cup of the skull.

Like the serpent blood is found in the Skull Cups, so too is the blood of Jesus.

Now we can see why the Baphomet head of the Templars was seen as a skull AND a goat; it was a hidden mystery; a mystery which has been misunderstood ever since. The Brazen Serpent, the healing snake, Christ, was lifted up at the place of the skull and his offering of blood was collected – the ultimate sacrifice on the tree of life for the ultimate prize of immortality.

The Tantric skull cups are said to parallel the clay pots of the Vedic sacrifices and the begging bowl of Buddha, which we found in one myth contained the serpent. It is there to serve as a constant reminder of death. The contents of which are often blood, but also the blood of Rudra – the 'Lord of wild animals' like Cernunnos.

Rudra's etymological origins are uncertain. It could mean "the red one" or "the weeper", or as we have seen previously *Rhad* means serpent. In other areas it also means the removal of pain or healer. Rudra is identified with Siva and he is the divine healer and we know that Siva is seen as a 'horned god' and is connected with the serpent worship. Both Siva, and 'Siva in the form of Rudra' are seen in their dynamic aspect as being entwined with serpents. These are serpent deities of old and are connected here with the cup of the head, bringing several disparate elements together – probably because of their being closer to the origin. They have the element of being associated with serpents and they are regenerative serpent deities offering longevity via their blood within a cup.

Livy in *Historae* mentions a similar Celtic operation from the 3rd century and simply must be connected to the Indian skull cups. Apparently the Boii tribe when they got hold of a victim "cut off the head, and carried their spoils in triumph to

*the most hallowed of their temples. There they cleaned out the head, as is their custom, and gilded the skull, which thereafter served them as a holy vessel to pour libations from and as a drinking cup for the priest and the temple attendants."*

The sacred water used in the skull cups was often taken from a holy well, where we have established were places linked intrinsically with the worship of the ancient serpent – the idea here is that this ritual practice goes back beyond even the total memory recall of the Celts to a time when the cups employed the real power of the serpent, not just symbolic water. And this is where the story of the serpent and that of St Teilo merge and fuse into one.

As we have already seen the Tricephalic deity heads of Celtic times were hidden, or lodged in wells and watery holy places. The same is true of many cultures, from across the world and across time. Why?

There seems to be a pattern of the offering of heads and skulls of "special people" into a well or spring, followed by the drinking of the water of the well, or indeed the immersion of the body or parts of the body within the water. This placing of the head was not necessarily therefore an offering – more a medical practice . . . the giving of a sacred head, in exchange for health benefits. A votive offering of the most important part of the sacrificial human - like the head of the Baptist on a plate - but which was then altered into items that were human made in similar fashion as we got a little more civilized.

This process became even more direct when the drinking of the water straight from the skull was initiated. We had to wonder, just how far back did this practice go? Especially as we were to discover the practice was universal, with the previously mentioned Tantric Skull Cups also being found in Hindu cultures and similar practices in the Middle East. The question remained however, was it the skull, or the water, which was the healer? And, although it is fairly obvious that neither can heal, what origin did these strange practices point back to?

### **Back to St Teilo**

As far back as the Roman period, Livy – writing in around 17 AD – described how Celtic warriors decorated skulls with gold and used them for drinking cups and for offerings to their gods. It is believed that this was the origin of such practices as those seen not too long ago with the famous St. Teilo's skull.

St. Teilo's well is in Wales, at Llandeilo Llwydarth, where the water is renowned the world over for its healing abilities. The skull, Penglog Teilo, is said to be the oldest surviving Welsh skull, still used for healing purposes – indicating the fact that there were indeed many others. At Carmarthen the skull of Ffynnon Llandyfaen was used in the same way – as was the skull of a Welsh nobleman named Gruffydd ap Adda ap Dafydd.

In a paper published in 1893 Sir John Thys cited the examples of Ffynnon Elian and Ffynnon Deilo as remnants of the *priestly caste* of 'well keepers', which had survived into modern times. But why would this practice have occurred? Why would it be so widespread and so ancient?

The answer is to be found in several places but firstly, and as we discovered in *The Serpent Grail* [2] – the wells and springs of the world are almost entirely linked with the serpent – especially in the healing aspect.

In cultures around the globe the Elixir of Life is hidden beneath the seas and is guarded by the serpent. In the Celtic culture the water is the hiding place and realm of the 'serpent goddess.' It is an ancient and wide-ranging association. But, why is the head also associated with these healing waters?

The answer to this one has been made increasingly more difficult with the inception of the Christian church. The church simply could not put up with the paganism found at these places, and, unable to stop the beliefs, which were thousands of years old, they simply hijacked them. Now there are wells across Europe, which are known as the 'wells of the saints.' The local pagan cult (which was more universal than local) was adopted into the fold of the Christian church and a "local" saint reinstated in its place. The most common Celtic goddess associated with the serpent and the wells was Brigid, who rapidly became St. Bridget.

Now, scraping back the years of Christian mold which has overgrown the true meaning of the wells and heads is ever more difficult, but not impossible. In order to do this we decided that we needed to go through some of the stories for ourselves.

Although we in no way agree that there was a head cult as such, it can be easily seen, why some scholars have gone down this path. Take St. Julian for example: From Brioude in the Auvergne, his cult is first mentioned by Gregory of Tours in the sixth century – the same period that Arthur Pendragon is said to have lived. St. Julian is said to have been beheaded next to a spring and later this spring is then said to begin to heal people. None of this is necessarily true in a literal sense. What it may indeed be is a survival of a much older folktale, stolen once again by the church and therefore almost losing its original meaning. But, we can still see the skull or head being associated with the healing waters of the serpent deity. We were amazed to discover that virtually the same story is to be discovered in the stories of the founding Saint of the Sinclair family – the same family intricately linked with the Templars, the Holy Grail, Rosslyn Chapel and the Masons.

The name Sinclair comes from the hermit St. Clare or St. Clere who lived in the town, which is now known as St. Claire sur l'Epte and is located to the northwest of Paris. The area is now known as Normandy, after the Norse invaders, some of whom would later become the actual Sinclair's.

Clare was born in Kent, England, to a noble family in the ninth century. It is said that his father wanted him to marry a rich heiress. But Clare was austere and aloof. He was too holy to be considered for such things. The lady however took no notice and pursued him with her wily charms. Finally Clare escaped her clutches, but she promised revenge and he had to run to Neustria (Normandy) where he began to live as a hermit.

Eventually the healing abilities of this Buddha like character made him famous and people flocked to him from far and wide. Moving his hut from first 'this place' and then 'that,' there was no escaping the people seeking cures.

Clare's past was about to catch up on him however, as the rich heiress, seeking her revenge sent her agents to France to find him. On the 4th November 884, Clare was found in his hut at the side of the River Epte. He had been beheaded. This became the symbol for St. Clare, as it was for St. Denis – the figure of a man with his decapitated head in his arms. And St. Clare's head and bones are said to reside in the local church, separated by the Altar.

It is said that the blood flowed from his neck in gushes and that a new spring emerged from the ground where the blood had flowed. The hut was transformed into a chapel, the chapel into a church and eventually the quiet, remote hermits dwelling place became the town of St. Clare sur l'Epte. Now the Salle de Fete (Town Hall) at St. Clare sur l'Epte is built entirely of wood from Norway, with the gables being marked with dragon's heads.

The whole idea that a spring should emerge from where the blood of the dead healer fell is obviously nonsense. It is just not possible, and so, it must be a creation of symbolic element. The wells and springs of the day, and as far back as man can go, have been seen as places of healing and associated with the serpent. That this holy healer, who resided sometimes in caves, had his head chopped off and his blood creating holy water is full of clues. It is not, however, an unusual occurrence.

St. Julian of Brioude in the Auvergne was beheaded at the side of a spring, and later this very same spring was said to be able to cure. St. Juthware's Well at Halstock in Dorset was created where the head of the saint came to rest – strangely right beside a sacred and so called miraculous Oak Tree. St. Thomas's Well at Windleshaw was risen where the priest was decapitated during the persecution of Catholics, and there are many more.

The person said to be responsible for the death of St. Clare though was a woman; a similar tale to the Arthurian tale where a lady has a knight decapitated in-order to gain healing power. We also find that the patron Saint of the Sinclair's is actually St. Katherine, who is often pictured holding the sword, which severed her head!

There is a real reason that the Sinclair's found their origin in this place. The legacy was theirs to take, or so they believed. But just how did the Sinclair's come to claim the legacy of the healing saint?

During this ninth century period the swift ships and navigational skills of the Vikings were making life difficult for many Europeans. They were able to swoop down onto a village or town – and although outnumbered by the townsfolk – it is by their speed and surprise that they are able to pillage the area. No sooner had the people realised what had occurred than their attackers were off, back to sea.

What helped them of course was also a difference of religion. The Christians would not attack churches. The Vikings on the other hand seem to relish the prospect, as they were themselves pagans – their religion based around many gods, including the large element of dragon lore.

However, one of these Viking rulers became Christian, Rollo, the first Duke of Normandy, and it is he who became the first in a long line of Sinclair's, right down to, and beyond, the builder of Rosslyn Chapel – which has the largest collection of Green Men, heads, serpents and dragons we have ever seen in one confined space. This place is linked so deeply with the story of the Holy Grail, that it is therefore no surprise to see it linked-in with the initial stages to the 'cult of the head' – as if to see the Sinclair's associate themselves with it, and then later to hide it.

Rollo, as the first Sinclair, became known as Sanctus Clarus, the 'Shining Light' and it is this shining light, which was to become one of the biggest clues in the search for the real Holy Grails. The book, *Head of God* by Keith Laidler claims that the head of Jesus is in Rosslyn, however we checked with the Rosslyn Templars in-order get their opinion on the matter, the response very kindly came forward

"The official position regarding the possibility of the embalmed head of Jesus Christ being at Rosslyn Chapel is that no one knows what is below the chapel. The other 'official' position, from the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland, is that the head of Christ is not at Rosslyn Chapel." (Email received on 23rd May 2003.) Even though there are several attempts to find something at Rosslyn, to date, nothing like the Grail or the Head of Christ has been found.

The truth of all this? The link between the head, the water and the serpent is now simple to comprehend and once thus understood the "shining" element of Sanctus Clarus will become also apparent. You see, the serpent is a world-wide archetypal image from the Other Realm [3] of existence, the place where the ancient shaman, witch, priest, whatever, would go to on our behalf for healing and to converse with the spirits. There are many aspects to this serpent, some beneficial, some terrifying - but it is universal. Water on the other hand was the abode of the serpent as it was the access to the Other Realm. Those who could "walk on water" were adepts at holding the position between this world and the next. We cannot live beneath the waves and so it must be the place after death. The skull is the container wherein lies our consciousness and our connection to these Other Realms. All three aspects come into full union when we access the part of our mind, which induces altered states of consciousness and we become fully enlightened. The gateway to this place is known as the hpnagogic or hypnapompic, between falling asleep or waking, between this world and the next, walking on water.

This ability was special and only the "Baptist" which means to submerge in water, could access this place and therefore his head was special. For this reason the heads of those who were able to access the Other Realm became special to us and we offered their heads to the water deities or indeed upturned their skulls, gilded them and drank from them. We were then ingesting the Other Realm powers within our very selves. Simple really!

#### Notes

- 1 The A in cAp covers from above, the U in cUp is a receptor for fluid and these are shapes that have pictographic meaning.
- 2 *The Serpent Grail* by Philip Gardiner with Gary Osborn, Watkins, 2005.
- 3 When we say Other Realm it is simply cover all the myriad names for such a places, which differ slightly across the globe.

#### Biography:

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