

Did You Know? An Anglican Glossary

The Flagon and “Why So Much Gold and Silver?”



A 19th century
pewter flagon
From Bristol,
England.

Today, chalices
ought not to be
made of pewter
unless the bowl
is lined with
gold.

The Flagon (*Bureta*, or the larger *Anax*) contained a supply of wine needed for a large number of communicants and was deemed more appropriate for altar use than a wine bottle.

Altar vessels: chalices and ciboria originally may have been made of wood, but by the 2nd century they were made of glass or crystal. Wood was porous, glass was subject to breakage and bronze had an unpleasant smell, so as the church grew wealthier it was able to substitute gold and silver by purchase or gift. Pewter was used in England, but in 1175 the Council of Westminster forbade bishops "to bless a chalice of pewter." Until the 15th century it was customary to bury a priest with a pewter chalice.

[St. Athanasius, who wrote the famous *De Incarnatione (The Incarnation of the Son of God)*, was accused of ordering an altar to be overthrown and the chalice “broken” when he learned that a layman was performing priestly functions. This story was proved to be untrue. If true, the chalice probably was made of glass. (Socrates i. 27; Sozomen. ii. 22)]