The Resurrection of Mari Magdalene

Mari P Ziolkowski, PhD, © 2000

Introduction

Who IS Mary Magdalene?? A woman known to most only through the Christian biblical story of 2000 years ago, in the last quarter century she has been a focus of attention in the popular imagination of the West, and been a controversial subject in ecclesiastical circles. In the emerging field of feminist spirituality, she is a “hot topic.” Who IS this woman who commands such interest 2000 years after she lived? Is she the Magdalene portrayed in the Bible? A follower of Jesus often thought of as the sexual one, the one whom he forgives? Is she the Magdalene of the Gnostic gospels – the companion of Christ and a leader among the apostles? Could she have been a priestess of the Goddess traditions who initiated Christ? Was she the twin soul of Christ, come to help him realize his mission? Was SHE the Holy Grail, the stuff of medieval legends, carrying the bloodline of Christ to France? Is SHE the face we see reflected in the Black Madonnas all over Europe? These are fascinating and controversial questions that will be explored in this paper, as we focus on the RESURRECTION of Magdalene……

Biblical Magdalene

Where shall we start in this exploration? I believe we must start at the beginning. Let us go back two thousand years in time and examine the role of Mary Magdalene in the biblical tradition. The first way we know about Magdalene is through the New Testament of the bible (accepted by orthodox Christianity as the true account of Jesus’)
The four books of the New Testament tell his story - whether of a man-god, ascended master, avatar, prophet, or teacher - I am not sure which. However, the bible claims him to be the divine incarnation of God…. So, we get to know Magdalene through his story. This is what we hear about her (by name) from the authors of the gospels: she is “among the women who accompanied Christ and ministered to him (Luke 8: 2-3), also said that seven devils had been cast out of her (Mark 16:9), standing at the foot of the cross (Mark 15:40, Matthew 27:56, John 19:25, Luke 23:49), saw Christ laid in the tomb (Matthew 27:56, Mark 15:47), and the first recorded witness of the Resurrection (Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:9, Luke 24:10, John 20:1).1

For those of us familiar with Christianity, these passages may seem cut and dried, but let us look a little closer. Research shows, for example in the first passage, that Hebrew women at that time could not have traveled with a teacher without being married to someone in the retinue. If “ministered to” means “touch” in any way, then Magdalene could not have ministered to Jesus unless she was married to him.2 Already the picture is slightly more complicated than one has been led to believe. We have a question here that is not discussed in orthodox Christianity. Was Magdalene married to Jesus? Sandra Rushing in The Magdalene Legacy states that per the standards of the day that required a rabbi/teacher to have a wife (and Jesus is addressed with this title many times in the gospels), it would have been likely for Magdalene and Jesus to have been married.3 And there is no statement in the Bible that says Jesus was NOT married. Or that advocated

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celibacy. If Jesus was celibate, it would have had to be explained, as Jewish law of the time stated that an unmarried man may not be a teacher.\textsuperscript{4} And it would most certainly have been used to back up the Roman Catholic requirement of celibacy that evolved around the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Century A.D., according to Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln.\textsuperscript{5} With an absence of attention drawn to this issue, we are left to make our own conclusions…. So we are hardly out of the gate before a controversial issue that has huge import gains our attention. An issue that would relate to how sexuality and the role of women is viewed in EVERY tradition of Christianity.

However there is more. Now let us look at the issue of seven devils being cast out of Magdalene. Some researchers say this could be a link to epilepsy, schizophrenia or something else we would refer to as mental illness today.\textsuperscript{6} Others, more recently have asked the question, could these seven devils be related to the seven stages of initiation required in various goddess spiritual traditions of the times? (for example, the traditions of Isis, Ishtar, Astarte documented in \textit{The Cult of the Black Virgin})\textsuperscript{7}. Could Magdalene have been an initiate of these traditions, and wouldn’t the Jewish followers of Jesus have looked on such a faith as heretical? (There are many biblical exhortations in the Old Testament against the “whore of Babylon” that could refer to such Goddess worshipping cultures).\textsuperscript{8} Wouldn’t they have been likely to label this worship as evil, and even requiring exorcism? Before going much further, we have unearthed another question that certainly was not addressed in the biblical tradition, and that would have HUGE

\textsuperscript{3} Rushing, p. 148
\textsuperscript{4} Baigent, et al., p. 331
\textsuperscript{5} ibid, p. 331-332
\textsuperscript{6} op cit., p. 47
ramifications for the connection of Jesus to other spiritual traditions honoring the feminine.

And now let us review the last three biblical passages. Here, it is clear that Magdalene was very involved in the death and resurrection part of Christ’s story. As this is such a pivotal point of Christian doctrine, it is interesting that in spite of the fact that women were not able to hold leadership roles within Judaism at the time, Magdalene’s name again stands out. She is repeatedly present at crucial turning points of the story….in fact, the FIRST to see the resurrected Jesus. The honor is given to a woman -- is given to Magdalene…. Curious that this is not reflected in the role women play in the early Christian church. Or is it? We will examine this in a moment….

However, before leaving review of orthodox biblical passages, there is more to consider. Though not mentioned by name, Magdalene is officially recognized by the Roman Catholic tradition of Christianity as being the same person as “the sinner of Luke 7:36-50, and the sister of Martha and Lazarus, Luke 10:38-42 and John 10”. As there continues to be scholarly debate about whether or not these passages speak of the same person, it appears from the beginning that the followers of Jesus have not always agreed on Magdalene’s role in the whole affair.

What about the other images of Magdalene, for example, as the one with the alabaster jar, the woman who anointed Jesus’ feet with oil and then dried them with her hair? Where is the specific passage in the bible that links Magdalene with this action? Margaret Starbird states after exhaustive research that she can not prove that this woman is Magdalene, but that it is part of a heresy widely believed in the middle ages, and vehemently attacked by the Roman Catholic church.11 (This has links to the Grail heresy we will explore later, and to the sacred marriage tradition of goddess centered cultures as well.) How is it that this is an image that many Christians associate with Magdalene? Where have all these images of Magdalene come from?

And what about the sexual image we have of her (e.g. in Jesus Christ Superstar and Last Temptation of Christ)? Is there a biblical basis for the view of Magdalene as repentant whore, prostitute, etc.? Aren’t there specific biblical passages that link her to the this “penitent whore” image that becomes so well known in the middle ages in western Europe, and has come down to us in western culture? The link could have come from the passage about seven devils being exorcised (one devil possibly being the devil of sexuality), or being considered Luke’s “sinner” (sexuality outside of marriage is certainly a sin in these times for a woman) – say the researchers.12 But it is interesting that no direct link in the bible can be found to the very sexual image we generally have of Magdalene…..

11 Starbird, Margaret, The Woman with the Alabaster Jar, (Santa Fe, Bear & Co., 1993), p. xxi
12 Baigent, et al., p. 331-332
So. Simply by considering where she is mentioned in the bible, and the biblical images we generally associate with her, many questions have been raised. Is she one woman or is she a composite of three women? Is she sexual or not? Married or not? A practicing Jew or from another religion? The questions mount…..Now let us move to consideration of Magdalene’s role in the Gnostic gospels, and see if further light can be shed on who this woman is…..

As we leave the biblical gospels, a relevant point for consideration is the following: Baigent, Leigh and Lincoln document that examples of tampering with the gospels (biblical) are accepted by scholars as demonstrable and proven. How does this impact our exploration? Well, first of all we may want to consider what reasons might exist for tampering with the gospels. We may also want to consider what this means about what Christians accept as ‘doctrine?’ Finally, as we review different tenets of Gnosticism, we may want to consider why they were considered heretical and who decided what was included in the ‘doctrinal canon’ of Christianity.

_Gnostic Magdalene_

O.K. so what are these Gnostic gospels? Well, these are papyrus scrolls found in the last century at several different places: Nag Hammabi in the area of Egypt is one important site. Some scrolls were found in the 1890’s (e.g. Gospel of Mary, Gospel of Thomas), and some were found around 1945 (Gospel of Philip, Gospel of Truth, Gospel to the Egyptians, Secret Book of James - to name only a few of the fifty-two texts found).14

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13bid., p. 322
These scrolls have been dated by experts as early as 140 A.D., with parts of the Gospel of Thomas thought to have been written around the same time as the biblical gospels (50-100 A.D.). Imagine – there are ‘other’ gospels! Many of those familiar with Christianity are not aware of this. Who were the authors? And a gospel written by a woman? By a Mary! And if they were written about the same time as the other gospels, couldn’t they have important things to tell us about early Christianity? Provocative questions that will lead us to another picture of Magdalene…..

So now we know that there were other groups of people following Jesus’ teaching besides those spoken about in the Bible. We know this from the Gnostic gospels and we also know this from the documentation of bishops and writers in the early Roman Catholic Church, who discuss numerous gospels circulating among early Christian groups and who “railed against the heretics” (e.g. Iranaeus, Bishop of Lyons, and Tertullian – a writer who defended orthodox Christianity). Tertullian states: these heretical women, how audacious they are! …they are bold enough to teach, to engage in argument, to enact exorcisms, to undertake cures, and….even to baptize! Iranaeus points out that “contrary to his teachings, they also ate meat, attended pagan festivals and violated warnings on sexual abstinence and monogamy.” Doesn’t this raise one’s curiosity? What was going on in these other groups that called themselves Christians too? And WHAT was the role of women in these groups? Obviously somewhat different

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15 ibid, p. xvii
16 ibid, p. xxiii
17 ibid., p. 59
18 ibid., p. 42, 60
19 ibid., p. 60
20 ibid., p 43
than what has been handed down to us in the biblical gospels….Let us examine them more closely…. 

Initial readings of the Gnostic gospels by several scholars identify several points of agreement that relate to our inquiry. The Gnostics did not believe in ‘being saved’ through doctrine, but that spiritual truth is encountered within oneself, through experience or insight. They looked at God as father AND mother. They considered the possibility of the resurrection as symbolic rather than literal. And they questioned the concept of human sin marring the ‘perfect world’ and causing suffering.

Interesting counterpoints to what Christians consider as doctrine.

So now we have discovered that there were groups of Christians who disagreed on how to live out Jesus’ teachings. Different groups even interpreted his life events in different ways (e.g. the resurrection). And some of these groups honored a different concept of the feminine than what has been passed down in orthodox Christian teachings.

Consider that in some threads of Gnostic thought, the divine mother was considered part of the original couple. That the trinity included the mother. For example, in the Gospel to the Hebrews, Jesus is described as speaking of “My Mother, the Spirit.” Consider also the following poetic excerpts from two different Gnostic texts: “I am Thought that dwells in the Light….She who exists before the All….I move in every creature… I am

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21 ibid., p. xix
22 ibid., p. 49
23 ibid., p. 379
24 ibid., p. xxxv
the Invisible One within the All. I am the first and the last….. I am the honored one and
the scorned one. I am the whore and the holy one……” (from the Trimorphic
Protennoia and Thunder, Perfect Mind, Nag Hammadi Library).26

Contemplating the latter, we see that in various groups that professed to follow Jesus,
there were VERY DIFFERENT concepts of the divine feminine than have come to us in
orthodox Christianity! An amazing thing….. And how does this relate to Magdalene?
Did she influence this way of thinking, or did it influence her presentation. You decide.
Here are some of the ways she is spoken of in the Gnostic gospels…..

In the Gospel of Mary, Magdalene is noted “as the one favored with visions and insight
that far surpass Peter’s.” Another text, Dialogue of the Savior, praises her “not only as a
visionary, but as the apostle who excels all the rest. She is the woman who knew the All”
(from the Nag Hammadi Library).27 The Gospel of Philip speaks of her as “companion
of the savior, who loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on the
mouth….”.28 Another passage in the Gospel of Mary relates that when the disciples,
disheartened and terrified after the crucifixion, asked Mary to encourage them by telling
them what the Lord had told her secretly, her teachings are interrupted by Peter. Furious,
he asks ‘did he really speak privately with a woman, and not openly to us?’” Mary
replies, and later Levi mediates, saying “Peter, you have always been hot-tempered. Now
I see you contending against the woman like an adversary. But if the Savior made her

25 ibid., p. 52
26 ibid., p. 55, xvii
27 ibid., p. 22
28 ibid., p. 64
worthy, who are you to reject her? Surely the Lord knew her very well. That is why he loved her more than us....\textsuperscript{29} So. Though these are but a few excerpts from the Gnostic readings, they certainly imply a different relationship between Magdalene and Jesus than the biblical gospels! As such they also relate to our earlier discussion of the possibility of Jesus being married. As well they imply a higher status of Magdalene within the apostolic community than biblical texts document. And was there disagreement and competition between the apostles – even between Magdalene and Peter?\textsuperscript{30} Some Gnostic groups even claimed to have received secret traditions from Magdalene!\textsuperscript{31} Do these varying claims and disagreements relate to different groups splintering off early on in Christian times? As we know that Peter’s group won the debate, and that the line of bishops, and later popes in Roman Catholicism started with him, what could have been left out of the canonical gospels, the ones that made the cut? And why? Could it have affected how Magdalene was portrayed? There is more....

Marjorie Malvern, in her discussion of the Gnostic Magdalene in \textit{Venus in Sackcloth}, makes a case for Magdalene being the actual feminine counterpart to Christ, and attributes to her the role of prophetess, citing further support in the Gospel of Mary and the Gospel of Philip (as well as two other Gnostic texts - the Pistis Sophia and the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies).\textsuperscript{32} Marjanen, in \textit{The Woman Jesus Loved}, also cites passages which document Magdalene having visions directly from Christ, including a scene from the Gnostic text “The Great Questions of Mary.” Her vision, which depicts

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\textsuperscript{29} ibid., p. 65
\textsuperscript{30} ibid., p. 64
\textsuperscript{31} ibid., p. 49
\textsuperscript{32} ibid., p. 51
“Christ praying, producing a woman from his side, having sexual relations with her, even partaking of bodily emissions,” 33 could relate to the honoring of sexuality (my words) as a way of “terminating imprisonment of the soul in the body” (Marjanen’s words). Now, this is intense stuff! Though many of the Gnostics believed in celibacy for men and women – with this passage we must consider that not all of them did!....And apart from interpreting the nature of this controversial vision, some scholars would caution us here, reminding that the Gnostics believed in a division of matter and spirit, and did not honor the divine feminine principle across the board. 34 If that is the case, all the more remarkable that we encounter all these passages honoring Magdalene in the role of teacher, visionary, most beloved disciple, and companion of Christ!.

Now let us look more closely at the aforementioned vision. This passage is challenging to many who come from the Christian tradition. What could sexual intimacy and the consuming the emission of bodily fluids possibly have to do with the role of Magdalene and the message of Jesus? Well. There are traditions of Buddhism called Tantra that honor the sacredness of sexuality. Scholars discussing the Gnostic gospels document that it is likely that some of the writers may have traveled to India, where Buddhism was known. Or may have come into contact with Buddhist missionaries in Alexandria, Egypt. They even raise the question on whether or not Jesus sojourned in India. 35 The discussion of sacred sexuality would not be so strange in the context of the influence of

34 Pagels, p. 66
Baigent, et al., p. 377
35 Pagels, p. xxi
Begg, p. 97
these other spiritual traditions. This vision could also be related to the oldest religion in
the world, shamanism, where Vicki Noble states that the first blood on the altar was not
blood sacrifice, but menstrual blood. After all, some Christians believe that they drink
the blood of Christ when they receive ‘holy communion.’ Could this practice have come
from another spiritual tradition? One older even than Christianity? One that had been
practiced in one form or another for thousands, if not tens of thousands of years before
Christ? A spiritual tradition that honored the divine feminine?

In fact, some scholars studying the Gnostic gospels note that women at this time in
history, in this area of the world, participated in cults of the Great Mother, and of the
Egyptian Isis. So, what are we dealing with here? What has been left out of this
“greatest story ever told?” What new part of Magdalene will surface now? Let us go and
see…..

**Goddess Traditions Surrounding the Hebrews**

How did Isis make it to Jerusalem, you may ask? To understand this we must go further
back in time. The history of the area today called Palestine was influenced by many
different cultures. The earliest of which, claims Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum in *Dark
Mother* (2001), is Africa. She traces archeological and genetic based evidence that
documents the migration of Africans out of Africa to Har Karkom (the Mt. Sinai of the
Old Testament) in the Paleolithic Age (around 40,000 BCE). In the area of Carthage in
west Asia, we know the descendants of these early African people as Canaanites. Close

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37 Pagels, p. 62
bonds of the Canaanites with the dark mother African Isis are evident in artifacts…states Birnbaum.41

We also know from the Old Testament that there were Canaanites living in the ‘promised land’ - the land the Hebrews claimed after their exodus from Egypt. Anne Baring, in the *Myth of the Goddess* states: the Hebrews found Canaan a country with a powerful religion and cultural tradition in which queens took the role of high priestesses and ordinary women were priestesses!44 Of course, we must also consider the influence the Hebrews themselves brought as they fled from Egypt to Canaan – they were exhorted against worship of the golden calf while wandering in the desert – the cow being sacred to Goddess Isis/Hathor)!

So what is the story on Isis? In Egyptian mythology, Isis and Osiris were the offspring of the Sky and Earth, offspring who fell in love and mated while in their mother’s womb.46 When her brother/husband, Osiris, is killed by another jealous brother, Isis searches the world over (including the land of Canaan) to find her husband’s body. When she does, she is able to bring him back to physical life just long enough for him to impregnate her. However, her husband’s enemy finds his body and cuts it up, strewing the pieces everywhere (it was said the pieces of Osiris’ body left in the earth brought forth food for the people). Isis uses magic and shapeshifting to find the body of her husband, who then goes to reign in the underworld. Isis then gives birth to a son, Horus, who will eventually

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41 ibid., p. 66
44 ibid., p. 448
46 ibid., p. 130, 36
grow old enough to rule with her. 48 (Any of this sound familiar – a magical birth, a god that in dying gives life to the people, and who is later resurrected?)

Isis also has a sexual component. By Roman times, for example, Witt states that Isis was honored as “bereaved wife, tender mother suckling her babe, a goddess of midwifery and healing, discoverer of immortality, and a goddess of sexual passion.” 49 Some Iseum temple ruins show evidence of the erotic element of Isis worship – where Isis plays the harlot [Har is another name of the goddess – derived from Ishtar, says Fabian50]. Some shrines are not far from brothels – Witt states that the sexual side of life was not utterly taboo, as in other spiritual traditions.51 Witt also notes that the idea of sacred prostitution (prostitute originally meant to stand on behalf of, says Baring) was accepted without question, and that, around the same time as the crucifixion (of Jesus), sacred marriage rites were still known to have been going on in the temples of Isis, per Jewish historian of the times Josephus.52

Let us also get a sense of how Ishtar from Babylonia influences the picture. Another goddess known in Canaanite lands – in fact, Ishtar’s name is identical to the west Semitic goddess Astarte (mentioned in the bible), states Carl Olson in the Book of the Goddess.54 A. H. Sayce, in “Religion of the Ancient Babylonians” discusses the connections between the Babylonian and Hebrew religion, including similarities in Old Testament stories.

When Ishtar descends to the underworld, she goes to search for healing waters to restore

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48 Baring & Cashford, p. 228-232
49 Witt, p. 138,192
51 Witt, p. 85
life to her bridegroom. There she is stripped of her ornaments (power) at the seven gates (remember seven devils cast out of Magdalene?). While she is in the underworld (dead) the world above ceases to grow and bloom. Animals cease to mate. God sends a messenger requesting Ishtar’s freedom and return with the healing water. The Goddess of the underworld listens, and it is done. In this way was Ishtar linked to the earth (as was Isis), as the goddess of vegetation. The God and Goddess unite, but when the summer season waned, it was thought to be the death of the youthful God, and he was condemned to a sojourn in the lower world, from which he rose in the spring… (Again the theme of descent and rebirth…)

Similar to Isis, according to the tradition an important aspect of Ishtar was her sexual freedom. She reportedly had many partners before her bridegroom. Sayce describes her as giving “life and substance to her divine lovers.” Olson, in discussing Ishtar, notes the “dominance of the Goddess – who selects the ruler privileged to be with her sexually. The issue of the union is the fertility of the land, and the Goddess’s endorsement of the king’s fitness to rule. The active sexuality of the goddess is purely good in this tradition. She is celebrated as non-monogamous, extrafamilial and not linked to reproduction. She is related more to good fortune of the human community…. The holy women of Ishtar celebrated the specifically sexual aspects of the Goddess. But they also served as scribes,

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52 ibid., p. 203
57 Sayce, p. 255
priestesses, judges, oracles prophets, diviners, etc.”… 58 Jastrow discusses Ishtar as the mother Goddess/creator of mankind and as “kadishtu” (sacred heirodule/prostitute). He also cites Herodutus’ (a famous historian) discussion of the custom of women giving themselves at the temple (in her honor) before they were married. 59 Sayce states that under Ishtar’s Semitic worship, ‘prostitution’ in fact became a religious duty, whose wages were consecrated to the Goddess of love. As the patroness of love, worshippers had to share Ishtar’s pain and pleasures if they wished to live the divine life. For this reason the women yearly wept with Ishtar over her bridegroom’s wound, and filled her temples with sexual passion…. 60

Baring, in the Myth of the Goddess also discusses the priestesses in the temples of Ishtar as the “vehicles of her creative life in their sexual union with the men who came there to perform a sacred ritual.” 68 She prefers using the word heirodule, rather than prostitute, as mentioned, because it better conveys the sacred work done by the priestesses. She notes that for the priestesses, sexual intercourse was one of the channels through which the divine energy of the Goddess poured into life. Sexuality was sacred because of bringing life, and because its ecstasy brought humans closest to the state of divine bliss. The priestesses bestowed upon the men that came to the temple an ecstatic experience that was the “life” of the Goddess. 69

58 Olson, p. 22-26
59 Jastrow, p. 138
60 Sayce, p. 266
68 Baring & Cashford, p. 197
69 ibid
So where has the journey taken us thus far? We have discovered traditions that honor the divine feminine in cultures that were strong influences on the Hebrews: Babylonia and Egypt. These cultures have different regeneration myths than the Hebrews, with the theme of the descent of the Goddess, and a dying/rising brother/husband God. These traditions honored women as representatives of the Goddess, and in their temples had traditions of sacred sexuality to honor the connection between the physical and the spiritual. Why have we made all these links? How do we relate this all back to Magdalene? That is THE question. Could these traditions have survived until the Common Era? Could these traditions still have been in place at the time of Jesus? Could the Jewish people have also been familiar with the Goddess? Could, indeed, Magdalene have been a temple priestess, initiated in the line of Isis or Ishtar?!

Already documented are the continuing of Isis temple traditions by the Jewish historian Josephus. (Witt also documents that around the time of Jesus, altars to Isis were still allowed by heads of Rome….70) What about Ishtar/Astarte? What about a Hebrew Goddess? In *When God Was A Woman*, Merlin Stone documents that the “battle between Yahweh and Astarte – the Hebrews and the Canaanites – took place for a long time, starting with the arrival of the Hebrews in Canaan and continuing well into the Roman and Christian era (my italics).” 71 Stone quotes a professor of archeology in Jerusalem as stating the following: “although the official religion of Israel was that of Yahweh, we know both from biblical verses and archeological discoveries that the cult of Astarte … strongly influenced the local population in the form of folk beliefs…..Indeed, we

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70 Witt, p. 331
discovered quite a number of clay figurines representing Astarte, and what may be called the holy prostitutes…” 72

Baring notes that Asherah (mentioned in the bible forty times!73) may have become the wife of Yahweh in the eyes of the Hebrew people. Her other titles were ‘Mother of the Gods,’ and ‘Tree of Life.’ Her images were made of carved wood and set up next to the altar in the temples, and inside houses. 74 Besides being worshipped in the courts of King Solomon and King Ahab of the Old Testament (whose wives likely introduced her – Ahab’s wife was Jezebel!75), Baring says there are many other veiled references by the prophets of the bible to the practices in the Canaanite temples [noting that “the Canaanite priestesses and priests were skilled in the shamanic arts…”76] She then goes on to state that the Goddess Astarte is mentioned nine times in the bible, but that it is unclear whether the two (Asherah and Astarte) are one and the same. She links their names: Queen of Heaven, Virgin of the Sea, and Guardian of Ships as links to the worship of Isis in Egypt, and discusses location of Astarte temples in Israel and Judah, as well as throughout Canaan.77 Baring also notes that some figures of Astarte have two horns emerging from her head – a further link to Ishtar and Isis. 78

Finally, Merlin Stone questions whether the Hebrews inadvertently prove the existence of a Goddess by all their exhortations against her!…. Using the name Asherah and

72 ibid., p. 163
73 Baring & Cashford, p. 458
74 ibid., p. 454
75 ibid., p. 456
76 ibid
77 ibid, p. 459
78 ibid., p. 460
Ashtoreth, says Stone, she is railed against in the books of Judges, Samuel and Kings of the Hebrew Old Testament.\textsuperscript{79} King Solomon even had a statue of her in his temple.\textsuperscript{80} As well, The Song of Songs (said to be a hymn of marriage for Solomon\textsuperscript{81}) has many similarities to an earlier Sumerian hymn of the ‘sacred marriage.’\textsuperscript{82} The Goddess is also mentioned in the bible as being worshipped in Jeremiah.\textsuperscript{83} King Hezekiah (727 – 698 B.C.) is noted as breaking the ‘asherim’ and the brazen serpents (2 Kings).\textsuperscript{84} In fact, exhortations against the Goddess continue all the way to 500 years or so before Christ, Baring states, when Ezekial rails against Asherah in the temple, and the women carrying on the tradition of weeping for the dying God, Tammuz (consort of Ishtar). Though not much is heard about her after 400 BC or so, still her image remained in the Holy of Holies in the second temple of Jerusalem …..\textsuperscript{85} And, it is interesting to note that the sacred marriage hymn of Solomon, with much imagery of the Mother Goddess, was not written down until 100 B.C.\textsuperscript{86} Her influence, even with the Hebrews, was felt very close to the time of Jesus…..

So what has been determined thus far? First that it is likely that in the time of Jesus, these traditions of honoring the Goddess were still known. We saw the links in the Gnostic gospels. Then we saw the relationship the Hebrews had to the Goddess through their history and surrounding cultures - whether through the ongoing worship of Isis, through honoring of Ishtar/Astarte, or through folk traditions that continued to honor

\textsuperscript{79} Stone, p. 173
\textsuperscript{80} Baring & Cashford, p. 454
\textsuperscript{81} ibid., p. 479
\textsuperscript{82} ibid., p. 462
\textsuperscript{83} Olson, p. 72
\textsuperscript{84} Baring & Cashford, p. 463
\textsuperscript{85} ibid.
Asherah. …..We see that it IS possible that Magdalene had knowledge of these spiritual traditions, even possible that she was an initiate of the sacred sexuality tradition. Could THIS be where we get our idea of Magdalene as so sexual? As inadvertently we have discovered a link to the origin of the terms “harlot, jezebel and whores (horae) of Babylon,” have we also discovered a link to Magdalene? Words that used to refer to the goddess temple practices of sacred sexuality, these terms were used in exhortations against goddess worshipping in the bible, and have come to be derogatory terms for a woman that is too sexual. Charting the journey from sacred to profane – isn’t this also Magdalene’s journey? … Could this be because besides companion, or wife, Magdalene was also a representative of the Goddess, feminine counterpart to Christ?

Two recent authors seem to think so. Though their realm is story, the imaginal, isn’t that really what all of history is? Someone’s story. His-story. Written down. And taken to be truth. We have seen that what we received is not the whole story. Shall we see what the rest of the story could look like? What her-story could have been?

Magdalene as Sacred Temple Priestess

In The Moon Under Her Feet, Clysta Kinstler tells the story of Mari Magdalene, Jesus, Mary the mother, and Judas as a replay of the Isis/Osiris story. Given to the temple priestesses at five years old, Mari begins to learn of the seven stages of initiation (dreaming, knowledge of other minds, past life memories, history and purpose of the universe, the achieving of oneness through love, and the dissolution of self in union with the One). Her “big sister” Mary (also a temple priestess) is chosen for the rite of sacred

86 ibid., p. 479
marriage to a young man who the Scribes and Pharisees wish to be a sacrifice for the
good of all. Volunteering for the ritual, the young man is killed after uniting with Mary,
in hopes that the drought will end, and his death will bring life for the people. The young
man’s hope is that he will be reincarnated in the baby conceived from the union. The big
sister (Mary) dreams of herself as Isis and the young man as the dying God Osiris. She is
married off to Joseph when it is discovered she is pregnant and must flee for her safety.

Little Mari grows up and is wed to Philip Herod in sacred marriage – to bestow kingship
on him. After some years, she plans her escape with the help of Judas-Seth and his
mother, whom she meets in Philip’s court. The current high priestess (the Magdalene) is
planning to retire, and Mari is next in line. When she returns to the temple she takes as
her lover Judas-Seth. In time, Yeshua, the son of Mary who was conceived from the
sacred marriage returns. It is clear he is Osiris personified, come to die for the people
and rise again. He has been through years of study in the wisdom schools of India, Tibet,
and Egypt.

Mari, now the Magdalene, is requested by Herod Antipas (her former brother-in-law) to
perform the sacred marriage rite. She, unable to refuse directly the powerful Herod (who
says he will kill Judas-Seth if she does not do his will), instead goes into a trance to
simulate death and journeys to the underworld through the seven gates. After fooling
Herod, she makes it back alive after three days, but just barely. She is haunted by
demons that demand a substitute for the underworld….. (like the myth of Ishtar’s
descent).
When she recovers, she finds that there has been a secret withheld from her. Judas is Yeshua’s twin. In anger she sends him away, and he becomes a follower of Yeshua (Jesus). (The good brother and the evil brother archetypes from the Isis/Osiris story). Mari realizes that Yeshua/Jesus is to be the substitute for her in the underworld. That he will be the one to drive the demons out of her. And that she is to anoint him as king and unite with him in sacred marriage so he can redeem all from the power of death.

Mari becomes a follower of Jesus, and Judas maintains his distance from her. The last supper is a rite of Egypt, eating cakes shaped like the dying god, and drinking ale as if it was his blood, in memory of Osiris giving life to the people, and becoming immortal. After the crucifixion, Jesus appears to Mari and then she must flee for her safety to Gaul (France), where Judas rejoins her. There they have children, and Mari resumes her duties as temple priestess in the new land…..

In the second book we will review, I Remember Union, Flo Aeveia Magdalena described how the story of Magdalene, Jesus, and Judas comes to her in dreams and visions. She sees them in the swing between worlds, deciding to incarnate together to help humankind remember their oneness, the unity of all souls. After they incarnated, they remembered more than most, and Magdalene began to study the lineage of Isis with her mother at an early age. She was initiated into the ways of the Goddess in her twelfth year. She was taught about merging with nature, honoring of the cycles, crystals, sharing of ritual, the pleasures of the body, the creativity of the feminine energy, and the merging of the
knowledge of the male God and the creation of the female Goddess when male and female unite.

Though she struggled with aloneness, she was bold and masterful not only in the world of women, but in the world of men. Mother Mary becomes her teacher in the ways of Mother Earth, who is sentient, and here to help the people learn free will. Mother Mary teaches her the ways of the shaman. She practices reaching into the void to disperse her aloneness and merge with the fiber of being.

The people feel her growing radiance and are drawn to her. She began to teach what she has learned, working with the energy centers of the body as a pathway to the soul, and the rising of the energy from the spine. She teaches the people to balance their male and female sides. She is tempted to put up a shield of protection, but is shown that she could really only be free to love if she lets it go.

Then Jesus comes to her, and she starts to teach and transfer knowledge to him. They merge identities on the etheric planes. He struggles with trusting the design, as she did. When he finally merged with the knowing, the elemental and devic kingdoms pledge their assistance. Magdalene sees that she will soon yield her power to him. She also sees that the time of the feminine will yield to the time of the masculine – giving power only to what was seen – matter. She sees that the union of opposites will come only after the people know war and choose peace, after we have known power and choose truth.
Her near stoning is her crucifixion, and Jesus’ declaring of his power. Then they begin their healing work together with the apostles. Magdalene and Jesus merge energetically, heart and soul, but avoid actual intercourse. As Magdalene is free to be fully sexual, however, she becomes lovers with Judas. Judas is tormented by his part in the plan, by what will be viewed as a betrayal… During the crucifixion, Magdalene, together with Mother Mary and other Isis initiates, create a field of resonance in which Christ could place his being – where he is held in union with God and the fiber of being, and his consciousness rested there until the third day. And the elements reflected the violence of the people, and there was a new beginning…..

When they fled after the resurrection, the people would think they were dead. Jesus went to India, and Magdalene went to France, both to keep the teachings alive. She had several children with Judas, and twenty years later left to find Jesus and further spread the healing. When both she and Christ transitioned from the earthly plane, they knew that the teachings would not be open to consciousness again for 2000 years…..

And so we have encountered two stories of what the life of Magdalene could have looked like. In both stories she is initiated in the ways of the Goddess, becoming adept in shamanic pursuits. In both stories she must make her own descent into the underworld. In both stories she attracts her own followers. In both stories she knows the ways of sacred sexuality, and works with Jesus to fulfill his mission. And in both stories she merges with Jesus (and Judas) – one physically and the other energetically, heart and soul. Here we have a very different picture of Magdalene, one that could link her to
being the feminine counterpart to Christ. Kinstler’s story has references and a bibliography. Should we discount Aeveia’s story because it is channeled? We could. But then we would have to discount the books of the bible that were also ‘channeled’ as the word of god. If one is possible, is the other also?....

Is this what the church didn’t want known? Wouldn’t it have complicated their story of the all-powerful male God and his sacrificial son to honor Magdalene in her rightful role? Is this why we hear so little about her directly as sexual, and when we do, it is quickly imaged as “bad?” They had to mention her – she was at the resurrection. But we had to get the rest of the story from other Christian groups of the time, labeled heretical (and persecuted) by the Roman Catholic Church. And we had to be willing to look at the influence of other cultures’ spiritual traditions on the Hebrews (who were exhorted not to listen!) to see that Magdalene likely was a leader among the apostles, visionary, prophetess, priestess, even feminine counterpart to Christ. What a big cover-up! Under pain of death the divine feminine went underground.

*Magdalene as Holy Grail*

However, if you think we are finished, we are not. Magdalene resurfaces in yet another legend. The legend of the Holy Grail. We have already seen that in both of the above stories she is thought of as living in France after the resurrection. Even the Catholic Encyclopedia documents the same.\(^87\) France happens to also be one of the key places where the legends of the Holy Grail arose. Let us peruse why scholars and popular

\[^87\] *Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 9, p. 762
writers alike think that the grail is related to Magdalene, that she may have been the human chalice carrying the bloodline of Christ….

Margaret Starbird relays the myth of the Holy Grail legend: the king is wounded and the kingdom has become a wasteland because the grail is lost. Once the vessel is found that contains the blood of Christ, the kingdom will be healed. Many people have thought of this vessel as the chalice of the last supper of Jesus. Starbird, a theological scholar, thinks that Magdalene could be the human chalice, and Magdalene’s offspring the Holy Grail, the bloodline of Christ. She also sees links to the cults of the sacrificed king of Isis and Inanna/Ishtar traditions and the concept of the sister/bride. Baigent, Leigh and Lincoln agree with the latter point, stating that “most 20th century scholarship concurs in the belief that the Grail romances rest ultimately on a pagan foundation. In its most primordial origins it would appear to involve a vegetation cult closely related to, if not directly derived from, those of Tammuz and Osiris in the Middle East.” At the same time, they note that the grail romances allude to Jesus with names like “Son of the Widow Lady” and “Fisher King” and some of the characters see the grail as a “crowned king crucified and bleeding from his forehead, feet, palms and side.” Add the French legends that Magdalene had to flee the Holy Land and eventually set ashore near Marseilles – with a daughter! Then consider that the Catholic church verifies that this

88 Starbird, p. 23  
89 ibid., p. 26  
90 ibid., p. 31-32  
91 Baigent, et al., p. 265  
92 ibid., p 292  
93 Starbird, p. 51
is where her purported relics are still venerated…\textsuperscript{94} There are many links here! Let us go further.…

Let us remember the early turmoil of what later became the Roman Catholic church, and the fact that there was already a community of Jewish people (fleeing persecution?) in the south of France when Magdalene arrived (documented by Ean Begg)\textsuperscript{95}. Let us review that the Cathars of southern France had links to the Gnostic community and held many similar tenets.\textsuperscript{96} Let us remember that the Gnostics held Magdalene in high esteem, and that some think Jesus himself had links to the Gnostics.\textsuperscript{97} Let us note that there were zealot groups among the Gnostics who believed in the downfall of Rome.\textsuperscript{98} Let us consider the theories Baigent, et al. summarize that Jesus had a right to the Jewish throne through his Davidic bloodline, and that THAT could have been why he was crucified, as this was a death reserved only for the enemies of Rome.\textsuperscript{99} Would the Gnostic/Cathar community in the south of France want to protect the bloodline of Christ? Did this bloodline stem from the daughter Magdalene allegedly brought with her? Were the Knights Templar the guardians of this bloodline mentioned in the Grail stories?

Let us address this latter point. The Knights Templar were certainly linked to heretical sects that believed that Jesus was married and that his blood flowed in the Merovingian

\textsuperscript{94} Begg, p. 99
\textsuperscript{95} ibid., p. 147
\textsuperscript{96} Baigent, et al., p. 385
\textsuperscript{97} Starbird, p. 72
\textsuperscript{98} ibid
\textsuperscript{99} Baigent et al., p. 342
\textsuperscript{99} Starbird, p. 58
line of France notes Starbird. Since differing accounts we have reviewed so far have Magdalene with child/children, but are not clear whether the father is Jesus or Judas, is the bloodline literal or figurative? Or related to some alchemical shift that took place between Magdalene and Jesus, and that was transmitted genetically to her offspring? And/or could the grail have been the “heretical” teachings of Christ which honored the divine feminine? Is the divine feminine, in the guise of Magdalene, symbolic of what all the secret societies were guarding?

Should we also consider other threads? For example, according to Starbird, the south of France was an area of enlightenment long before the crusades, where women held many rites of inheritance. And the theory that the troubadours (and the rise of appreciation of the feminine in the early middle ages) were related to the secret cult of Magdalene, underground for a thousand years? Could any of this be related to why the Roman Catholic church launched a crusade against the south of France in the 1200’s (the Albinginsian Crusade)? And later disbanded/destroyed the Knights Templar? In order to wipe out this heresy? Were they afraid of the bloodline (literally or figuratively), and afraid of the power of the Magdalene cult there? Is this more evidence of Magdalene’s influence?… The authors Starbird and Baigent, Leigh and Lincoln certainly seem to think there is a connection.

100Starbird, p. 71
101 ibid., p. 69
102 ibid., p. 78
103 ibid., p. 71,75
104 ibid., p. 70
Besides links to heretical biblical artists representing the cult of Magdalene in coded form, Starbird also makes a link between Magdalene and the folklore of Europe (the truth surviving in the vernacular?) For example, she makes a case for the original tarot cards, circulated by the gypsies, as one of the ways the story of the Holy Grail went underground. Later she talks about the likelihood that under the inquisition, the cult of the Magdalene was channeled into the Virgin Mary, and wonders if the many folktales with the theme of the lost princess are an echo of the cult to Magdalene – that SHE is the lost princess. (And states that Cinderella, with references to ashes, and the color black, is also a link to Magdalene). She discusses these folk tales with a focus different than one we are used to - as less of a woman waiting for her prince, but a prince who is passionately seeking his counterpart. She speaks about the wounded male of society, frustrated and dangerous because he has not been able to find his other half..

**Magdalene as Black Madonna**

And now, bringing our story full circle, what about the plethora of Black Madonnas in southern France noted by Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum in *The Dark Mother* to be associated with the Cathar heresy? What light do these Black Madonnas shed on our story? Baigent et al. notes that “Black Madonnas were early in the Christian era shrines not to the Virgin, but to Magdalene!” The author Ean Begg makes a link between the above mentioned secret societies dedicated to Magdalene and the Black Virgin. He states that

105 ibid., p. 145
106 ibid., p. 104
107 ibid., p. 145
108 ibid., p. 150, 151, 153
109 ibid., p. 147
110 ibid., p. 151
111 Baigent et al., p. 400
“the age of reason and the Protestants saw the Black Virgins as the archetypal opposite, a symbol of elemental and uncontrollable source of life – possessing a spirit and wisdom of its own, older and more formidable than the king or pope.” 112 He further states: the black virgins are associated with esoteric teaching and schools of initiation. 113

Blackness is an image that was always associated with the Great Goddess Isis, states Baring. Black was said to symbolize the ineffable wisdom and mystery of life and its power to regenerate itself.114 (That sounds like Magdalene and the dark mother to me!)

Begg makes a further link to the dark mother when he goes on to notes that Magdalene was said to have arrived on the very site where Isis had earlier been worshipped, and where there are statues of the Holy Marys, and of the black Sara-Kali! 115 And wonders if the black Sara-Kali on this site is a link to the girl child said to have been brought to France VIA EGYPT by Magdalene. [Is the black Sara-Kali, honored by the gypsies (the same group who circulated the tarot),116 really a way of honoring the daughter/bloodline of Magdalene?] Marie Boucher documents more traces of the dark mother in the worship of Egyptian Isis in this region of Provence. She states that in the crypt of the church at Stes. Maries de la Mer (where Magdalene is said to have come ashore) opposite Sara-Kali, there is a bust of dark figure which appears to be a representation of Isis….117

And discussed by Deborah Rose as one of the principal secrets of French esoteric society

112 Begg, p. 27
113 ibid., p. 133
114 Baring & Cashford, p. 480
115 Begg, p. 15/16
116 Starbird, p. 105
was that Isis survived in Christianity in the personhood of MARY MAGDALENE and that it was SHE to whom the title “Notre Dame” rightfully belonged.  

Birnbaum notes MORE links to the dark mother when she states that “artifacts of Canaanite black Astarte have been found near the Black Madonna of Marseilles. And the statue of Sara-Kali at St. Maries de la Mer is noted by Deborah Rose to be in the pose of Astarte (holding her breasts)! Finally, Starbird notes that among the heretical artists after the 12th century (besides other esoteric symbols of Magdalene), there is a picture of her in the Astarte pose….

So. We have found MAJOR links to Magdalene, AND a link to the dark mother of her spiritual ancestry, Isis/Ishtar/Astarte. After having explored her possible role as temple priestess and feminine counterpart to Christ, in following her story to France, we find her linked to the legend of the Holy Grail. We find her linked to secret societies and to an underground cult of the feminine. We find her linked to the Black Madonnas, and the dark mother. We have come, in fact, full circle. Who have we been tracing all this time – Magdalene, the African dark mother, or both? Did the worship of the dark mother survive to the present day in Europe through the form of Magdalene, who took the shape of the Black Madonna, who then took the shape of the Virgin Mary? Quite a lot of shape shifting, it seems to me. But right in line with the abilities attributed to the dark mother

118 Rose, p. 7
119 Birnbaum., p. 144
120 op cit.
121 Starbird, p. 125
We started with Magdalene and Jesus, and spiraled outward to consider the apostles, other groups of Christians, the spiritual traditions of peoples nearby, a flight to another country, even present day legends. And what we found in our spiral dance was a very different picture of Magdalene. The spiral, ancient symbol for the goddess. Is that who has been leading us on this journey? Have we been, like Isis, searching the world over for the missing parts of the beloved? Is Magdalene a link to the divine feminine so long lost to us? Is she the other half of the archetypal ‘divine pair,’ heralding a new balance between the feminine and masculine? As we bring her back from her long stay in the underworld, and re-member her, are we resurrecting her, the divine feminine, or ourselves? You decide……
Magdalene, in one form or another, has been with me twenty-five years. She is the only female image from my birth religion that I could relate to growing up, and the only one that stayed with me after I left Roman Catholicism. She was the only one who seemed to be human, and to have room for a young woman questioning the rules of church and society around sexuality. The only one who wouldn’t judge me. As I went on my quest for “spirit” outside institutionalized religion, Magdalene continued to pop up. Though her medium for appearances when I was younger was popular culture: music, theatre and movies (e.g. ‘Jesus Christ Super Star’ and in ‘The Last Temptation of Christ’), as I continued my spiritual quest, she made appearances in the written word. In the 1990’s as I was drawn to the divine feminine, I read with amazement research and story that suggested Magdalene had a much bigger role than I ever imagined. She even kept pace with me as I moved into connection of sexuality and spirit. And then she began appearing in my meditations. When I was confronting some of my deepest, darkest fears, Magdalene was there. Leading me through. Wherever I go, she seems to be there. Here, as I track her through time, she brings me full circle - back to the beginning.....
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