



The Quest for Mary Magdalene

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From the international bestselling author of *The Templars* and *The Tragedy of the Templars* comes a fascinating account of one of the most mysterious and controversial figures in religious history.

Mary Magdalene is a larger figure than any text, larger than the Bible or the Church; she has taken on a life of her own. She has been portrayed as a penitent whore, a wealthy woman, Christ's wife, an adulteress, a symbol of the frailty of women, and an object of veneration. And, to this day, she remains a potent and mysterious figure.

In the manner of a quest, this book follows Mary Magdalene through the centuries, explores how she has been reinterpreted for every age, and examines what she herself reveals about woman and man and the divine. It seeks the real Mary Magdalene in the New Testament and in the gnostic gospels, where she is extolled as the chief disciple of Christ. It investigates how and why the Church recast her as a fallen woman, traces her story through the Renaissance when she became a goddess of beauty and love, and looks at Mary Magdalene as the feminist icon she has become today.

The Quest for Mary Magdalene Details

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From Reader Review The Quest for Mary Magdalene for online ebook

Paul Kerr says

An extremely interesting trip through the convoluted history - or more likely fiction - that is Mary Magdalene. From brief mentions in the gospel, through to the Cathars and her Renaissance reinvention, Haag gives due consideration to the muddled path of this mysterious lady. Oftentimes this book feels like a direct retelling of certain bible passages and some further views and perspectives from the author himself would have been good, but overall a great book that sheds light of an often overlooked and under-represented but ever present bible protagonist.

Steven Belanger says

Extremely readable history of Mary Magdalene, from the Bible to Dan Brown, that will teach you some things even if, like me, you've read a lot about her already, from the likes of Vermes, Ehrman, etc.

The book lags a little in the last few chapters as Haag embarks on a quick trip through present day renditions. It's a little better when it describes Mary Magdalene in paintings from the Renaissance and the Middle Ages, though I think it worked for me more because I'm interested in those times, and not so much because of what Haag had to say about Mary Magdalene in those times. It's at its best when it covers the Bible and the gnostics--ironic, because Haag describes himself as more of a historian on the Templars and Crusades, and not so much as a biblical scholar. But that's where he's at his best here.

His research is exhaustive and he deals a lot in common sense--things you would think go hand in hand with historians, but that hasn't been my reading experience. Often they're either too much one or the other, but they need to be combined to make sense of something that happened thousands of years ago. Haag does that well with the Bible. For example, after I thought I'd read everything there is to read about Mary, the mother of Jesus, I see this:

"There are indeed hints in the gospels that stories were going round in the lifetimes of Jesus and of Mary his mother saying that he was a bastard and she was an adulteress. 'Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? [A]nd are not his sisters here with us?' says Mark 6:3. In Judaism a son would be identified by naming his father even if Joseph had been dead for a long while, but Mark, who mentions every other member of the family, leaves Jesus' father unknown. Nor does Mark mention Joseph in any other part of his gospel. And in John 8:41 during a confrontation at the Temple[,] the Pharisees say to Jesus, 'We be not born of fornication', insinuating that he was."

I just looked those passages up again in my New Testament. Mine replaces Joses with Joseph, and Juda with Jude, but all the rest is the same. And you can't disagree with the logic Haag uses. I've known all the stories before: I don't believe there was a census, because at no other time in the history of the world has a leader told his people that, for a census, everybody has to pack up and move back where their original ancestors came from. Can you imagine that happening in America today? What a nightmare! And the story of the slaughtering of the firstborn? No other writers writing at the time--and even in antiquity, there were many--mention anything like that. You would think it would make headlines, that everyone would have a comment to say about it, even someone in a court, in his private diary, never mind actual historians (apparently there

have always been historians translating history, even in ancient history). But nobody did, outside of that one biblical passage, Matthew 2:1-16. So, yeah, I'd already known and thought about that, and somewhere in my blog you can read about my thoughts of Mary and Pantera, but this was the first time my attention was drawn to that one passage, of Jesus, "the son of Mary." Of course Haag is right. From ancient times, in the Middle East, in the Nordic stories, in Beowulf, in the Odyssey, possibly all over, a young man is defined as being the son of his father, not his mother. Beowulf and Odysseus were referred to like that long after their fathers had died. But when the father is unknown? Or the man had been born out of wedlock, for whatever reason?

Haag shows some good research and some good common sense, in equal measure. (And I have to add that, for a very long time, I've been put off my Jesus's only biblical conversation with his mother, at the wedding at Cana, in John 2:1-5. Yes, she seems to have been nagging him, but he is still rather curt and annoyed with her. No other writer has mentioned the same slight surprise at this that I have always felt. Until now. So thanks, Mr. Haag. Just a little thing, but it bothered me. And how do we feel about that conversation being the only one between Jesus and his mother? Doesn't it seem like she's been rather scissored out?)

And the author proves rather conclusively, I think, that Jesus and his disciples were financially supported by Mary of Bethany, Mary Magdalene (if they're different; many scholars think they're the same, as Haag seems to), Joanna (possibly a former wife of someone relevant in the royal court, a man named Chuza), Mary, Jesus's mother, and a few other loyal women. I've considered this, but not for too long. But, yes, there seems to have been money flowing in, and it wasn't from Jesus himself, right? And his followers were fishermen (who were not necessarily poor at that time) and others said to be destitute, so who had the money? Could the women be hiking all over the Middle East unless they had some money? And the women who were not from money, or married to it, where did they get enough money, in that time, to be financially independent? (Get my, and Haag's, drift here?) But where do the robes come from? The food? The water? The sandals? Over the few years of the biblical stories? The Bible stays rather close-lipped about this, but it makes sense. These things cost money, and the guys didn't have any. Why else would these men, as worried about women as they were (Peter, for example, was apoplectic about them, especially Mary Magdalene; you can look that up), have these women along all the time, but that they were the bank?

So, yeah, makes you think. And that's why I read books like this. To think very seriously about a book that essentially controls my government right now, and yet none of those guys (and I emphasize the guys) seem to have actually read all of it. Well, I have, Old and New. Every word. Twice. And countless times in close readings while reading books about it. Which is right, by the way, to read books like Haag's and not to just take the author's word for everything. That's part of the whole problem, right? To just take someone's word for something very important without reading it yourself? So I do that--I read the Bible, and I read about the Bible, and then I read the Bible again to better think about the things that I have read in books about the Bible.

Because, for God's sake, someone's got to. See what I did there?

Tamara Benson says

"From the point of view of what became in the fourth century the established Church, the need to construct and defend its hierarchy meant controlling Mary Magdalene...She was too close to Jesus; she knew too much. And unlike Mary the mother of Jesus, there was nothing passive about Mary Magdalene."

Michael Haag's *The Quest for Mary Magdalene* asks many questions but does not provide clear answers. However, that is not the point of this book. Instead of guiding the reader to some definite conclusion, Haag

follows Mary Magdalene through time and interpretations looking for the motives for her transformation from the close companion of Jesus who was with him from his early days of healing and teaching through his crucifixion and beyond as witness to his resurrection. Circumventing the Church by directly witnessing the empty tomb, she does not require them to act as mediator. She is a threat to the establishment.

This work gathers a number of resources and seeks to provide not answers, but questions we must wrestle with ourselves. Who was Mary Magdalene and what were the motives of the church for transforming her from the independent radical woman who was the friend of Jesus into the whore of her later personification? What does this transformation mean to the modern church and to modern women as well?

Beth says

Haag has written a book that, by its title, is dedicated solely to discovering the truth about Mary Magdalene. He fails in this aspect, and instead primarily covers Early Church history, with last minute linkings to the Magdalene, and subtle attacks on the teachings and beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church.

Despite the failure to suitably live up to the title claim, *The Quest for Mary Magdalene* is still worth a read when one is looking for a general covering of women in the Early Church, and how they have influenced the arts and writings over the ages.

James says

I really enjoy a well-researched book that is prepared to challenge the status quo, and this certainly is an eye-opener. It starts by explaining how the Catholic Church changed its position concerning Mary Magdalene during the 20th Century, and then goes into the historical likelihood of a woman living around 30CE.

The author readily explains social norms, the backgrounds of words, and where translators of texts chose one direction or another, and in doing so shaped centuries of dogma. He highlights the difficulty for the Church to maintain its patriarchal and overtly sexist positions that have evolved over the years if it were to acknowledge the textual evidence for Mary Magdalene to perhaps be more important in the life of Jesus than any of the other Disciples, even though the Gospels themselves cannot hide her leadership and her being possibly the first witness to the resurrection.

The historical trail follows across the Middle East and the time of the Ministry, exploring the towns and society during the 1st Century CE, via Alexandria and the spread of the early Christian church and the other religions they encountered, through the Cathar heresies in the south of France, the use of her name for refuges for prostitutes in Victorian England, to the present day and the possible beginnings of her reinterpretation made popular by Dan Brown (although he was repackaging research into a trashy novel).

Well worth reading for anyone with an interest in how Christian theology has been shaped over the years.

Suzanne says

I found the first part of this book fascinating and convincing. The last part of the book was about the history

from Time of Christ to 19th century Europe and how various factions manipulated the characters of Mary Magdalene and Mary mother of Jesus to suit themselves in art and politics etc. If you're interested in the subject, this is a good read. There is also a good bibliography at the end.

Jennifer says

If you've read any other books on Mary Magdalene, you realize this book has nothing new to offer. It is more a book on early Christianity and even still, it didn't offer any new insights.

Guy says

For many years I have been interested in the real history and the peoples behind the gospels. I recall being an early reader of the Holy Blood & Holy Grail and that whole genre back in the late '80s and '90s. As soon as I read a synopsis of Dan Brown's book, The DaVinci Code, I thought, "Hey, he's stolen all that from the Holy Grail team!!"

So to the elusive Mary Magdalene... who wasn't from Magdala and was NOT a whore!! This book brings up to date a lot of information that has surfaced over the recent years as well as telling the story how Mary was seen, and manipulated through the centuries. I did not know what to expect when I read the book after seeing it mentioned in the Times, but it reinforced my view that Christianity died the day Paul of Tarsus got his hand on it.

Unless further texts are found, we will never know the real story, but this book certainly sums up what is known about the Magdalene at this time. I loved the book and it will join my permanent library.

Amanda says

Very unsatisfying - Haag seemed more focused on making a point about HOW Mary was absent due to the men around her as opposed to focusing on HER in general. Well written and researched, but slightly mistitled/guided.

Courtney says

Dare I place this on the feminist shelf? I won this book through a Goodreads giveaway and really appreciate the opportunity to read it and rate it in advance of its release. At first this book wasn't really what I was expecting. It goes into a lot of detail about the story of Jesus and what the gospels say about him and who he really is, possibly someone from a pretty well off family to begin with? Mary Magdalene feels a little bit more like an afterthought through the first half of the book, but I do think it was essential to establishing the context of women in the time of Jesus and their role compared to men. I was a little surprised to hear that Judaism was a pretty repressive society when it came to women.

Then the focus kind of shifts to explain the formation of the modern Roman Catholic church, that it was

based on apostolic succession. They decided on what went into the New Testament and there was an emphasis on their need for power and control. To maintain that control they needed to use and manipulate certain characters in certain ways for different reasons. Mary Magdalene, surprise, was one of these characters, as was Mary the mother of God. They stood in contrast of each other, Mary Magdalene the repentant whore and Mary the mother of God who was a perpetual virgin and perfect in every way. I took tons of notes throughout the book, but I don't want to share them all here because if I did that then you would have no reason to read this book. . .

I learned so much about things that I wasn't aware of before, such as Gnostic Christians in Egypt, the defeated form of Christianity. The Gospel of Saint Thomas and the Gospel of Mary Magdalene. This seems to be a much more spiritual type of Christianity that believe that every human has a part of God within them and that Heaven is a place on Earth, literally. They really believed Mary Magdalene was an equal to Jesus and her companion and possible lover.

I could go on with all the new things I've learned and am now interested in learning more about. . . But, I will just conclude with Haag shows us how Mary Magdalene has been classified and changed over the years in different generations in different ways mostly following the way society treats women. When society views women as property and objects, Mary is either completely ignored or a repentant whore. As society moves towards equality between men and women (they can and are independent of men), Mary Magdalene also becomes a more important figure in Jesus's life, perhaps she was a wife? Perhaps she was a spiritual equal and companion who understood without explanation? Perhaps we are coming closer to understanding who Mary Magdalene was when she was alive, a wealthy independent woman who perhaps Jesus relied on in some ways so that he could go out and teach. Very interesting and I hope that more can be discovered!

Sarah Crawford says

Two of the things I like about this book are the illustrations and the examination of the culture of the times. The one thing that disappointed me was that Mary Magdalene was not really the focus of the book as it didn't really have that much about her, specifically, in it.

It talks the stories in Southern France that Mary Magdalene was actually the wife of Jesus. It also goes into the actual construction of the city of Magdala. There is a question whether or not she was actually from there, though.

The book says that Gentiles were 'no concern to Jesus,' and that he spoke harshly about them (and it sites particular Biblical quotes to back that up.) The book also holds that Mary Magdalene and some other women that followed Jesus were financially independent.

The author goes into the importance of the number 7 (which is the number of demons that Mary Magdalene supposedly contained.) Jesus may not have been a carpenter but an actual building (doing construction work, in other words.)

The author notes the time Jesus drove the money changes out of the Temple and says it was actually an attack on the (very profitable) practice of selling sacrifices. The book also goes into how Mary Magdalene basically disappeared from the Bible after Jesus left. (Actually, Mary, his mother, also was dropped as were the women disciples, turning the Bible into basically a man-only production with women bearing babies, being prostitutes or having some kind of illness.) This was largely due to Paul's over-influence on what was

included in the 'official' version of the Bible.

You actually have to turn to the Gnostic Gospels to find out much about Mary. There's a lot more in the book making it a very good one to read.
