

MARY MAGDALENE – HIGH PRIESTESS AND SACRED PROSTITUTE

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My awareness of the Goddess came to me somewhere in my early 30's and deciding to seek her out academically many years later has been an awakening, as are all major truths in our lives. To my surprise I discovered that much of the world for millennia lived in a world where their God was female and she was the Goddess – benevolent, fertile and above all sexual. Very sexual! Today we have a profound difficulty in associating the profession of the prostitute with anything vaguely associated with sacredness, but in ancient times these women were held in the highest esteem in the temples of the Great Mother Goddess. The sacred prostitute or temple priestess became the representation of the goddess in physical form and with their bodies entered into sacred sexual rituals with the men who came to worship.



My studies have shown me that long before Christianity (which has only been around 2,000 years) and as far back as stone age times (30,000 plus years), people experienced their surroundings, their heavens and earth and all forms of life in worship of the Great Primordial Mother Goddess. Their crops were grown in cycle with the changing seasons and phases of the moon and both the abundance of the harvest and the winter frosts were all experienced as aspects of her changing face.

As far back as the 4th millennium BCE the practice of sacred sexual intercourse within the temples of Innana and Ishtar in Mesopotamia were yearly rites performed between the King and the Goddess and were understood to reinvigorate the land and people with divine fertile energy. The priestess' of the temple took the title of "Hierodule of Heaven"[1] which meant 'servant of the holy' and it was a great honour to make love within the precinct of the goddess. It is not difficult then to understand that the practice of sacred prostitution became a religious act of worship where sexuality and spirituality became one and the same.

In Babylon there was a hierarchy of prostitutes from the high-ranking priestesses known by various names including *Qadishtu*, *Hereta*, *Naditu* or *Entu*, right down to the tavern or street whore called *harimtu*. The Goddess Ishtar did not differentiate in bestowing her blessings and honoured the sexual act howsoever it be performed[2]. "Who will plough my vulva?" calls Inanna in the old hymns..."Who will water the holy lap?"[3] The power of the divine feminine, embodied in the sexuality of all women both made the earth grow and was a power for transformation

So what do we know of Mary Magdalene? There is very little actual historic evidence to draw upon apart from the writings of the New Testament. They tell us that she was a prostitute from whom Jesus cast seven demons and that upon her healing she became a follower of

Christ. She is the one who washes his feet and anoints him and who witnesses his death and resurrection. She becomes the woman mentioned most often in the New Testament.

It is known that the Temples of the Goddess existed throughout biblical times and some were still to be found up to the middle ages, amongst them, temples to the Goddess Isis. One well known image shows Mary holding the alabaster jar and wearing around her waist what is known as the 'Girdle of Isis' or the Isis knot which was worn by priestesses of Isis. Many authors speak of Mary (or Mari) coming to her first menses and being sent to Egypt and the Temple of Isis to become initiated into the ways of the sacred Priestess. Here, she becomes Qadishtu and is taught the practice of sacred sexuality where she becomes the living vessel for the Goddess to enter in the ancient rite known as 'hieros gamos' or 'sacred marriage'. The Da Vinci Code speaks of this sacred rite where through ritual sex, both parties are able to experience God/dess.

Looking historically at womens' status and freedoms at the time of Jesus and particularly Jewish women, we see that they were severely limited by Jewish law and customs. In general terms they were largely confined to their father's or husband's home to raise children and keep house. Considered to be inferior to men, women were under male authority, either their father before marriage, or their husband afterwards.

It is known that women traveled with Jesus, were seen in public and attended at meals without any attachment to a specific male or household. This behaviour was highly suspect for the period, especially for women of any social standing.

It helps to explain how women seen in public with Jesus and even talking to him could be viewed as promiscuous. Mary Magdalene has been cast in the role of prostitute for public association with Jesus and behaviour that was no doubt completely at odds with the social practices of the day. Luke 8:1 though, tells us that Mary and the other women were financially underwriting the early Jesus movement out of their personal resources. This helps paint a picture of a powerful, educated woman, a High Priestess who was forthright enough to stand against the social prejudices of the day and who also had independent financial means.

Mary being cast in the role of repentant prostitute for so long, speaks of the Church's attempts to denigrate the powerful sexual attributes that can be seen in the goddesses religions of old. But like the goddesses of old, women and men related to the sexually erotic feminine archetype being represented by the Magdalene and despite the attempts of the Christian fathers to repress and manipulate her image, she remained loved and revered.

It is only recently that a reinterpretation of various texts reveals that Mary Magdalene was indeed the partner and most favoured companion of Jesus. These recently discovered writings from the Nag Hammadi library deliver up to us texts which reveal insights into the role of women and Mary Magdalene herself, at the very emergence of Christianity. The Gospel of Philip speaks of Mary Magdalene "*as the most favoured companion of Jesus who loved her more than the other disciples and would kiss her often on the mouth*". [4]

Other Nag Hammadi texts paint a story and image of Mary Magdalene as one who had an innate understanding of the teachings being given, and who had an intimate relationship not only with the man, but with the wisdom that was being spoken and that it was a joining of two equals with the Magdalene representing the divine feminine element as did Jesus the masculine.

While there is no actual historical evidence of a sexual relationship between Christ and the Magdalene as portrayed in the movie the Da Vinci Code, nor Mary bearing children and creating the supposed royal bloodline, there is now historical evidence that this was a powerful woman, an educated woman, one equal in spiritual understanding and training to partner with Jesus. Only a High Priestess or Qadishtu of the temple of the Goddess, trained in the ancient ways, a divine emissary in her own right would be able to enter into the sacred marriage of masculine and feminine as has been done throughout time. Was this person Mary Magdalene, Priestess of Goddess? I leave it up to you.

[1] Marvely, P. Women of Wisdom (p9)

[2] Cunningham, E. Sacred Prostitution: The Whore and the Holy One

[3] From "The Courtship of Innana and Dumuzi" translated by Samuel Noah Kramer

[4] Meyer, M. The Gospels of Mary Magdalene (p49)