

Jesus and Mary Magdalene: *Did they have a secret marriage?*

Mrs. Jesus

Has history been wrong for 2000 years---was there a Mrs. Jesus Christ? In, "*The Jesus Family Tomb*," (The Discovery Channel's TV documentary) director Simcha Jacobovici claims there is "evidence" that Jesus and Mary Magdalene indeed were married and had a son named Judah.

(To see what scholars say about Jacobovici's "evidence" see, "[The Jesus Family Tomb](#)") article .

Jacobovici is not the first to postulate a possible romantic relationship between Jesus and Mary. The movie, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, and books such as *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, and *The Da Vinci Code*, made a secret relationship between Jesus and Mary central to their themes.

The Da Vinci Code begins with a page of facts that makes the fictional novel appear to be true in all its assertions. The book has broken all records on the New York Times best-sellers list, and has been followed by a blockbuster movie. Author Dan Brown's clever weaving of fact with fiction has convinced many readers that Jesus and Mary Magdalene really were married and had a child (See "[Mona Lisa's Smirk](#)"). But is this romantic assertion just hype to sell books and movies, or is it supported by historical evidence.

Mysterious Mary

Before we examine the evidence for any possible romance between Jesus and Mary Magdalene, let's look into this person of Mary from the little Galilean town of Magdala. To begin we ask the question, what ancient documents shed light upon her character and her relationship with Jesus of Nazareth?

The New Testament gospels are the oldest written records of Mary of Magdala. In the gospels Mary is depicted as a woman who Jesus healed of demon possession. The gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John) present Mary as a follower of Jesus who listened to his teaching, provided for his financial needs, witnessed his crucifixion, and three days later was first to see him alive.

Some have said Mary Magdalene was a prostitute, but neither the apostles nor the early church speak of her as more than one of Jesus' close disciples. The idea that she was a prostitute originated in the sixth century, when Pope Gregory I identified her as both the woman spoken of in Luke 7:37, and the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her hair.

Although the pope's view was probably influenced by the fact that Jesus had cast seven demons out of her, no biblical scholar is able to make the connection of Mary Magdalene with the woman in Luke's passage. Additionally, the New Testament gospels don't even hint of anything romantic or sexual between Jesus and Mary.

So where do conspiracy theorists get the idea? Why all the speculation? For that we turn to documents written 100-200 years after the New Testament gospels by a non-Christian cult called the Gnostics (See "[Gnostic Gospels](#)"). These writings are not part of the New Testament, and were rejected by early Christians as heretical. Those who write of a romantic relationship between Jesus and Mary cite a few passages from two of those writings, the Gospel of Mary and the Gospel of Philip. Let's look at those passages.

The Gospel of Mary (Magdalene)

The notion that Mary Magdalene was special to Jesus is taken primarily from the Gospel of Mary. This Gnostic gospel is not part of the New Testament, and was written by an unknown author in the last half of the second century, or about one hundred fifty years after Jesus' death. No eyewitnesses, including Mary, would have been alive at the time it was written (about 150 A. D.). Such a late date means the Gospel of Mary could not have been written by an eyewitness of Jesus, and no one knows who wrote it.

One verse in the Gospel of Mary refers to Mary Magdalene as Jesus' favorite disciple, saying he loved Mary "more than us (meaning his disciples)." In another verse Peter supposedly told Mary, "Sister, we know the savior loved you more than any other woman." Yet nothing written in The Gospel of Mary speaks of a romance or sexual relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus.

The Gospel of Philip

The Da Vinci Code bases its claim that Jesus and Mary were married and had a child primarily upon one solitary verse in the Gnostic Gospel of Philip that indicates Jesus and Mary were “companions”. This verse reads: (Brackets appear where words of the document are missing or illegible)

"Three women always walked with the master: Mary his mother, [] sister, and Mary of Magdala, who is called his companion (koinonos). For “Mary” is the name of his sister, his mother and his companion (koinonos)."

In *The Da Vinci Code*, fictional expert Sir Leigh Teabing proffers that the word for companion (koinonos) could mean spouse. But according to scholars, that is an unlikely interpretation. To begin, the word generally used for wife in New Testament Greek is “gune”, not “koinonos.” Ben Witherington III, writing in *Biblical Archaeological Review*, addressed this very point:

"There was another Greek word, gune, which would have made this clear. It is much more likely that koinonos here means “sister” in the spiritual sense since that is how it is used elsewhere in this sort of literature. In any case, this text does not clearly say or even suggest that Jesus was married, much less married to Mary Magdalene.¹"

There is also a single verse in the Gospel of Philip that says Jesus kissed Mary.

"The companion of the [] is Mary of Magdala. The [] her more than [] the disciples, [] kissed her often on her []. The other []...said to him, "Why do you love her more than all of us?"

Greeting friends with a kiss was common in the first century, and had no sexual connotation. Professor Karen King explains in her book *The Gospel of Mary Magdala*, that the kiss in Philip most likely was a chaste kiss of fellowship.

But perhaps more important is the fact that the Gospel of Philip was written by an unknown author about 200 years after the New Testament eyewitness accounts (See ["Is the New Testament Reliable"](#) and ["Mona Lisa's Smirk"](#)).

It is also important to note that, aside from these few questionable passages, there is no other historical document that even insinuates Jesus and Mary had a romantic relationship. No secular historian, Jewish historian, or early Christian historian writes even one iota about such a relationship. And since both the Gospel of Mary and the Gospel of Philip were written 100-220 years after Christ by unknown authors, their statements about Jesus and Mary need to be evaluated in context of both contemporary history and the much earlier New Testament documents.

Scholars' Verdict

But could the early church have destroyed the evidence in their attempt to rewrite the history of Jesus? Of course that's what Jacobovici, Brown, and a host of other sensationalists are saying. But do scholars agree?

A *Newsweek* magazine article summarizing leading scholars' opinions, flatly states that the notion Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married has no historical basis.² Perhaps the Gnostics felt the New Testament was a bit shy on romance and decided to sauce it up a little. Whatever the reason, these isolated and obscure verses written 100-200 years after Christ aren't much to base a conspiracy theory upon. Interesting reading perhaps, but definitely not history.

But some remain unconvinced. Perhaps they just want to make history more interesting. Award-winning television journalist Frank Sesno asked a panel of historical scholars about the fascination people have with conspiracy theories. Professor Stanley Kutler from the University of Wisconsin replied, "We all love mysteries – but we love conspiracies more."³

Perhaps all the hype about Jesus and Mary has more to do with antagonists to Christianity trying to humanize the man who Christians from the very beginning have called “God.” (To read more about how the early Christians viewed Jesus (See ["Mona Lisa's Smirk"](#)). For example, the apostle Paul said of Jesus Christ:

"Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing;

he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form" (Philippians 2:6, 7a).

John, an eyewitness, and one of Jesus' closest disciples, said of him,

"In the beginning the word already existed. He was with God, and he was God....He created everything there is....so the Word became human and lived here on earth among us."(portions of John 1:1-3, 14).

Endnotes

1. Ben Witherington, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, (2004), "Reviews," 30 [3]:58-61, May/June.
 2. Barbara Kantowitz and Anne Underwood, "Decoding 'The Da Vinci Code,'" *Newsweek*, December 8, 2003, 54.
 3. Stanley Kutler, interview with Frank Sesno, "The Guilty Men: An Historical Review," History Channel, April 6, 2004.
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