



# The Fly in the Ointment: The Mysteries of Mary Magdalene

*Jennifer Smith*

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Mary Magdalene was the principle witness of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus as told in the Christian gospels: the grief-stricken scarlet woman at the foot of the cross, clutching her jar of ointment, her hair loose like that of the maenads. Yet by the sixth century, Mary, once called the Tower, had fallen into disrepute as a sinner and prostitute. Mary was never a martyr, but tradition has her exiled to a solitary cave, where she was not a threat to the established church until she emerged after the rediscovery of the heretical Gnostic texts. In these, Mary Magdalene is the beloved companion of Jesus, the disciple who "knew the all." As with her predecessor Eve, she bears the sin of desiring knowledge and is condemned for it. The question of whether Mary Magdalene can be identified with Mary of Bethany has become merely another means of reducing her authority. In the gospels, Jesus said that his anointer should be remembered for all generations, yet she remains maligned and undefended-until now.

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