THE DA VINCI CODE
& THE HISTORICAL MAGDALENE

The Developing Tradition
of Mary Magdalene

- Close Analysis (synopsis)

- Tendencies in the gospels
  - Female companions are marginalized
    - Ignored until they can't be avoided (Mark, Matthew)
    - Or turned into respectable women (Luke)
  - Role at resurrection grows

- Tendencies *after* the gospels

WAS MARY MAGDALENE
MRS. JESUS?

THE DAVINCI CODE

Dan Brown published his book in 2003

Ron Howard directed the 2006 film, starring Tom Hanks

In the book, Brown's characters discover:

- that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married and had a child
- that their descendents and those who protect them:
  - worshipped the divine feminine
  - celebrated the union of Jesus and Mary through a ritual sexual act (the bridechamber)
  - allowed women to have leadership positions
  - remembered the sexual union of Jesus and Mary in texts that mentioned their frequent kisses
- that the Catholic Church has tried to suppress this truth
- that the gnostic gospels reveal it, and gnostic Christians

Leonardo da Vinci
The Last Supper
1495-1498   Fresco in the dining hall at Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, Italy

The Definition of the Canon

- **Definition**   a Greek word for a tool of measurement; in scripture studies a list or catalogue of books that "measure up" to the standards of the church as authoritative texts

- **Time-Frame**   4-gospel limit in some communities by 180 CE; earliest canon that matches our NT's is in 367 CE (Athanasius' *Easter Letter*).

- **Criteria**
  - apostolic, or traceable to one of the apostles
  - in traditional use, or in use from an early period in many churches
  - catholic, or universal in appeal
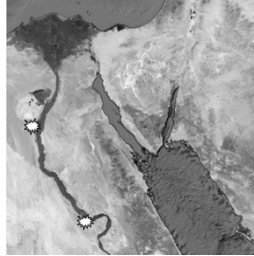 - orthodox, or in conformity with emerging mainstream teaching

The Great Discoveries

Oxyrhynchus
1895–1930
50,000+ fragmentary Greek mss,
some of them Christian

Nag Hammadi
1945
13 books with 57 separate "tractates" —
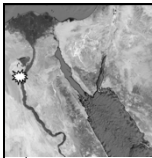4th century copies of earlier gnostic works

Oxyrhynchus

Grenfell   Hunt
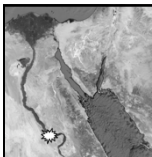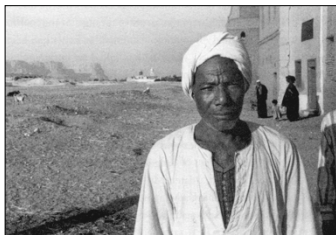
Nag Hammadi

Muhammad Ali Samman,
who discovered the
codices
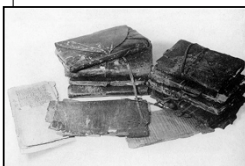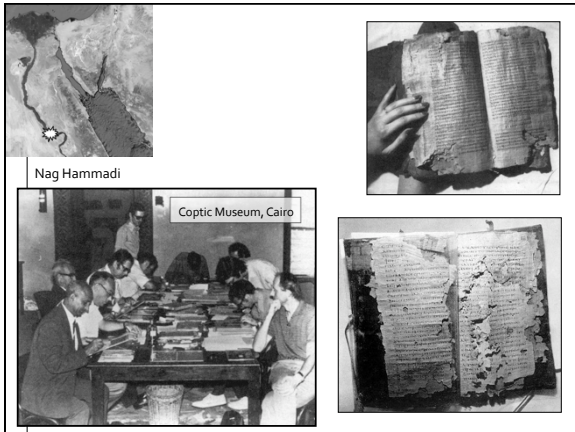
Nag Hammadi

Coptic Museum, Cairo
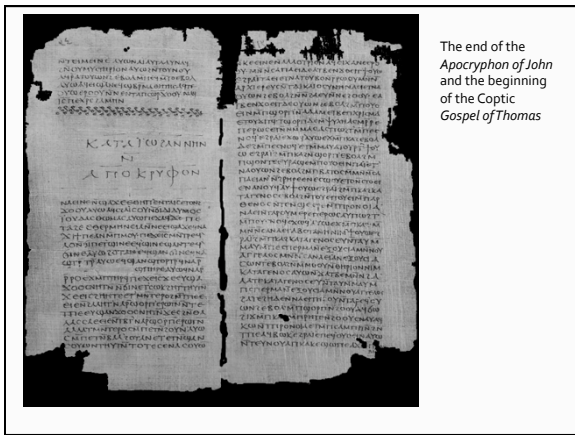

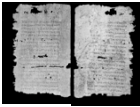The end of the *Apocryphon of John* and the beginning of the Coptic *Gospel of Thomas*

Gospel of Thomas
Manuscript Evidence

This gospel survives in 4 witnesses

❖ 3 Greek fragments from separate mss found at Oxyrhynchus (100–200s CE)

pOxy 1

pOxy 655

❖ A Coptic translation found complete in Codex II from the Nag Hammadi corpus (+ XIII 2; 400 CE)

NH II 2-3

Gospel of Thomas

- **Date** Mid-100s CE, Syria, though some sayings may go back to the first century

- **Genre** Sayings gospel, like Q; almost no narrative material

- **Gospel comparison** Some sayings are very similar to Q, but there are also unusual sayings

- **Content** Jesus reveals the secret of the disciples' origin; the world and human body are viewed negatively; the kingdom is the divine self of the disciple

Gospel of Thomas
Logion 56

Jesus said, whoever has come to know the world has discovered a carcass, and whoever has discovered a carcass, of that person the world is not worthy.

Gospel of Thomas
Logion 114

Simon Peter said to them, "Make Mary leave us, for females don't deserve life."

Jesus said, "Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the domain of heaven."

A Problem that Gnosticism Addresses
How do you account for the presence of evil in the world?

Three basic answers

**Animosity
between the gods**
at creation and ongoing

(Mesopotamian mythology)

Two Gods
one good, one evil

(Zoroastrian dualism)

One Supreme God
with a lesser "demiurge"
who creates this world

(Platonic system)

A Problem that Gnosticism Addresses
How do you account for the presence of evil in the world?

Basic Platonic Idea	Gnostic Adaptation	Orthodox Adaptation
Supreme God ⇩ Demiurge a lesser god who creates this world ⇩ this world is but a shadow of what is in the mind of the supreme God	For gnostics, creation occurs without the permission of the Supreme God *(demiurge = OT God)* So the Supreme God does a workaround, implanting humans with a spirit / soul / spark of gnosis (= knowledge of their true nature) Salvation = return to true root; return of spark to light	For orthodox Christians, the "demiurge" is Christ While "lesser" than the Father, he is of the same nature, so evil does not derive from him Nor is the world God creates evil. "Sin" is the natural state of humans, from which Christ saves people.

How Gender Maps to Platonic Ideas
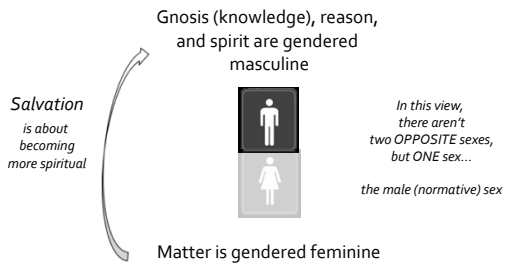
Gnosis (knowledge), reason,
and spirit are gendered
masculine

Salvation
*is about
becoming
more spiritual*

*In this view,
there aren't
two OPPOSITE sexes,
but ONE sex...*

the male (normative) sex

Matter is gendered **feminine**

Gospel of Mary
Manuscript Evidence

This gospel survives in 3 witnesses, none of them found at Nag Hammadi (but all of them from Egypt)

❖ Papyrus No. 463 in the John Rylands collection at the University of Manchester (from Oxyrhynchus; Greek, early 200s CE)

❖ POxy 3525 (Greek, 200s CE)

❖ a Coptic translation at the beginning of the Berlin Papyrus 8502 (a.k.a. the Akhmim Codex, 400s CE)

Gospel of Mary

- **Date**   100s CE, Egypt (or Syria?)

- **Genre**   Revelatory dialogue / secret instruction

- **Gospel comparison**   Entirely set after the resurrection; Q & A and commissioning of disciples; but content of conversation is gnostic

- **Content**   Post-resurrection dialogues with disciples about the destiny of matter and the nature of sin (which the Savior says "does not exist"); Mary then shares the special revelation
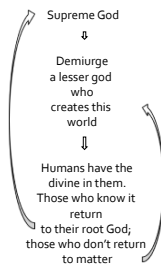

Gospel of Mary
7.1-9

[The disciples ask] "Will matter then be utterly [destroyed] or not?"

The Savior replied, "Every nature, every modeled form, every creature exists in and with each other. They will dissolve again into their own proper root. For the nature of matter is dissolved into what belongs to its nature. Whoever has ears to hear should hear."

Supreme God
⇩
Demiurge
a lesser god who creates this world
⇩
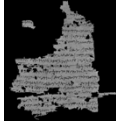Humans have the divine in them. Those who know it return to their root God; those who don't return to matter

Gospel of Mary
7.10-20

Then Peter said to him, "You have been explaining every topic to us; tell us one other thing. What is the sin of the world?"

The Savior replied, "There is no such thing as sin; rather, you yourselves are what produces sin when you act in accordance with the nature of adultery, which is called 'sin.' For this reason, the Good came among you, pursuing the good that belongs to every nature. It will set it within its root."

Gospel of Mary
17.10–19.5

Andrew responded, addressing the brothers and sisters, "Say what you will about the things she has said, but I do not believe that the Savior said these things, for indeed these teachings are strange ideas."

Peter responded, bringing up similar concerns. He questioned them about the Savior, "Did he, then, speak with a woman in private without our knowing about it? Are we to turn around and listen to her? Did he choose her over us?"

Gospel of Mary
17.10–19.5

Then Mary wept and said to Peter, "My brother Peter, what are you imagining? Do you think that I have thought up these things by myself in my heart or that I am telling lies about the Savior?"

Levi answered, speaking to Peter, "Peter, you have always been a wrathful person. Now I see you contending against the woman like the adversaries. For if the Savior made her worthy, who are you then for your part to reject her? Assuredly the Savior's knowledge is completely reliable. That is why he loved her more than us.
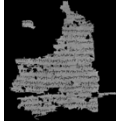
Gospel of Mary
17.10–19.5

"Rather, we should be ashamed. We should clothe ourselves with the perfect human, acquire it for ourselves as he commanded us, and announce the good news, not laying down any other rule or law that differs from what the Savior said."

After [he said these] things, they started going out [to] teach and to preach.

Gendered Metaphors in Gnostic Texts
Excerpt from Theodotus
A Valentinian Gnostic who lived in Turkey 160-170 CE

For while we were children only of the female, as though a product of illicit intercourse, incomplete and infants and senseless and weak and unformed, brought forth like abortions, we were children of the woman. But having received from the Savior, we became children of a man and a bridal chamber.

According to Clement of Alexandria

Gendered Metaphors in Gnostic Texts
Exegesis on the Soul

• fall of soul is imaged as young virgin's foolish desertion of her father's house

• she becomes sexual prey to the cosmos,
  ▪ like an exploited prostitute receiving the due reward of her error
  ▪ the soul has a womb, but it is turned inside out, resembling male genitalia

• her rescue is effected by the descent of the soul's heavenly brother/ bridegroom and her marriage to him
  ▪ now she is properly united to her superior male
  ▪ and her repentance, her turning inward again, is imaged by the return of her soul / womb inside her

• but the "marriage" metaphor is only that; this text embraces virginity

WHY DID THE ORTHODOX CHURCH MAKE MARY A PROSTITUTE?

How Mary Magdalene became a Prostitute

- The Bible *never* associates her with sexual transgression
- But…
  - Luke introduces her right after the story of a "sinful woman" who anoints Jesus' feet
  - John mentions a different Mary who anoints Jesus' feet (not a sinner, but a Mary)
  - In all 4 gospels, Mary Magdalene does try to anoint Jesus' body on the first day of the week (but it's not there)

  All those anointing women/Marys get merged

- The Gnostics liked her, which may have led the orthodox church to discourage adherents by tainting her reputation

- As virginity got really popular, stories of penitent prostitutes were all the rage, so Mary became one
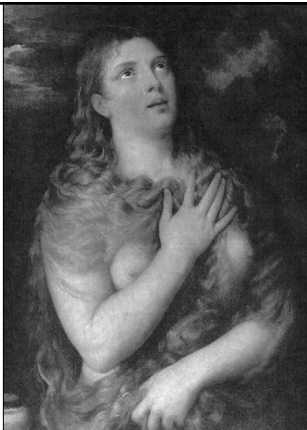

Titian
The Atoning Magdalene

1490-1576
Galleria Palatina
Palazzo Pitti, Florence

Giampietrino
Mary Magdalene

First half of 1500s
Pinacoteca di Brera
Milan
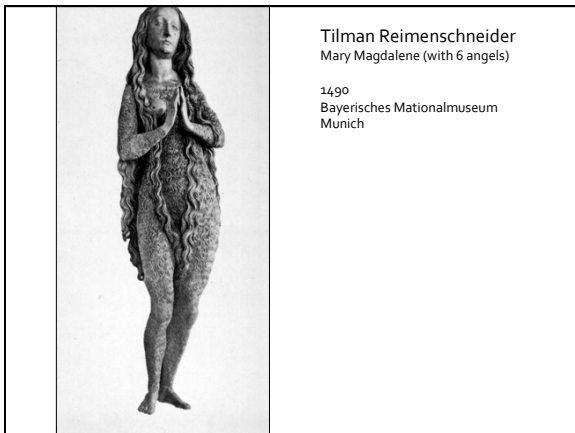
Tilman Reimenschneider
Mary Magdalene (with 6 angels)

1490
Bayerisches Mationalmuseum
Munich
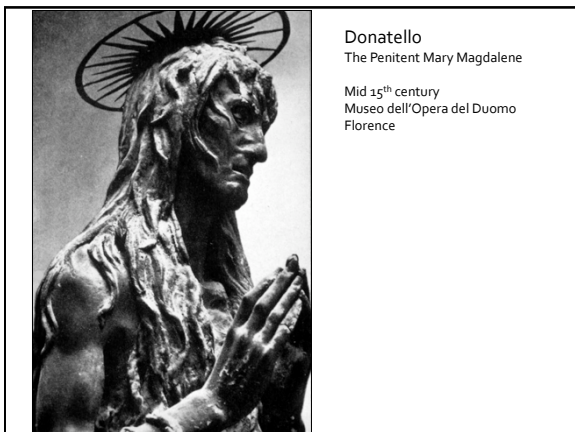
Donatello
The Penitent Mary Magdalene

Mid 15th century
Museo dell'Opera del Duomo
Florence

Quentin Metsys
The Penitent Mary Magdalene

1466-1530
John G. Johnson Collection
Philadelphia

Flemish Master of the
Magdalene Legend
Mary Magdalene Preaching

c. 1500-1520
John G. Johnson Collection
Philadelphia