

By Dana Micucci

# The South of France with Mary Magdalene and the Cathars

## AS I ENTERED THE MASSIVE GOTHIC BASILICA

at Saint-Maximin in the southern French countryside near Aix-en-Provence, I felt I had entered another dimension. My pulse quickened, and I understood that I was about to embark on a sacred journey through time and memory to the very center of my being. Dwarfed by the basilica's soaring, vaulted interior — illuminated by numerous votive candles and beams of rainbow light filtering through stained glass



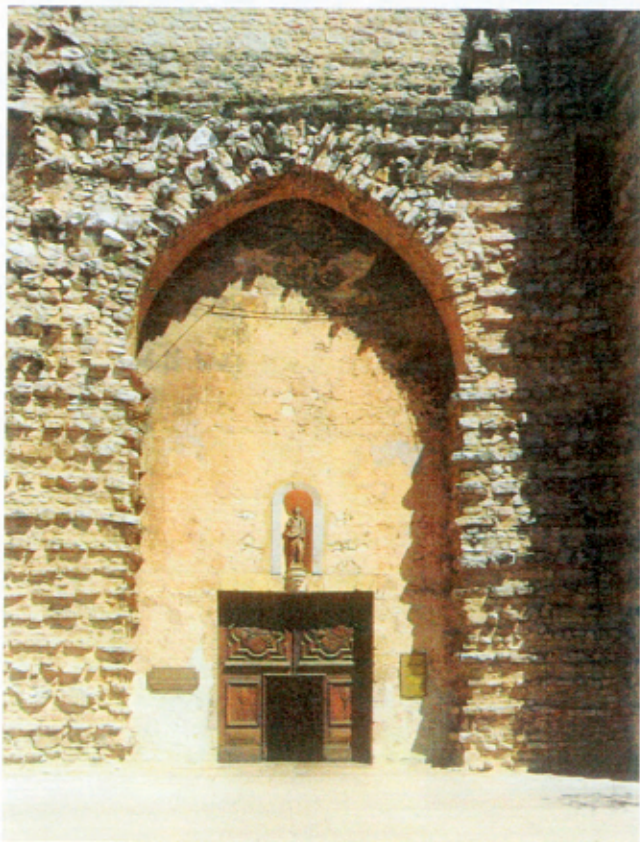
— I found my way down a small staircase to a marble sarcophagus containing the relics of Mary Magdalene and a bronze reliquary said to hold her skull.

Gazing upon the beautiful sculpture of the saint adorning the sarcophagus, I was instantly overcome with emotion. I began weeping softly and soon fell to my knees, bowing in prayer. Not one to engage in public displays of any sort, I questioned this sudden outpouring. I knew only that my heart had expanded in love, a current of energy that, for a rare moment, connected me with the source of all that is. A fellow traveler from our small group helped me back up to my feet and embraced me. "I didn't think this kind of love was possible," I whispered, seeming to access a long-buried memory. "I loved her so much. How I miss her."

And so began my reconnection with the remarkable woman at the heart of the Christian mysteries — Mary of Magdala (a small Galilean town north of Jerusalem). Teacher, healer, mystic, divine feminine archetype, apostle, and beloved companion of Jesus of Nazareth, she was eventually maligned by the church as a sinner

and prostitute, but her legend has always maintained a strong following. More recently, Dan Brown's best-selling novel *The Da Vinci Code* sparked renewed interest, exemplified by the masses of pilgrims who continue to flock to the South of France, where she allegedly lived out her last days.

I and seven other women were among these pilgrims, having traveled for nine days last summer to sacred sites in the Camargue, Provence, and Languedoc regions associated with Mary Magdalene and the Cathars, a sect of mystical Christians branded as heretics and brutally exterminated by the church in the thirteenth century.







Our mission was to reconnect with the divine feminine and Christ consciousness energies, in order to become vessels for both personal and collective healing and spiritual growth. Organized by Julie Gullick-Wiley, founder of Spirit and Adventure tours, which specializes in small-group sacred journeys, our mystical sojourn began in the bustling seaport of Marseille, a launching pad to the tiny, picturesque village of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer south of Arles in the Camargue — a wild, rustic area of salty wetlands and rough pasture, pink flamingos and cattle ranches, bulls and white horses.

Here, according to an ancient French legend, Mary Magdalene landed in a small boat around 42 CE, along with a number of early Christians, including a young, dark-skinned servant named Sarah, patron saint of the gypsies and often equated with the black Madonna statues in the churches of France. They had braved a dangerous passage from the Holy Land, without sails and oars, to spread Jesus's teachings after his Crucifixion. Purportedly a great preacher in Palestine who even wrote her own Gospel (among the more recently discovered esoteric Gnostic texts being studied by scholars), Magdalene is said to have preached to the locals in Saintes-Maries, converting many.

*The Da Vinci Code* speculated that Magdalene made this overseas journey, bearing a child by Jesus. This theory, or even that Jesus and Magdalene were intimate partners, has not been proven, though much speculation and fascination continues to surround the subject.

After our stops at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, site of a Romanesque church dedicated to Magdalene, and St. Maximin, where we stayed in the thirteenth-century royal convent that is now a hotel, with beautifully preserved Gothic cloisters, garden, and chapel, we took a short drive into the countryside on the summer solstice. Our destination was the legendary cave in the Sainte-Baume Mountains, where Magdalene supposedly retired to spend the rest of her life in prayer and contemplation after performing many miracles in the region. Another story suggests that she traveled to the British Isles after France, settling for a time around Glastonbury, where she also still remains a subject of adoration.

It was a relief finally to reach the cave after a long, winding walk up the mountain. There was a special urgency to our work this day, as we had planned to engage in a sacred ceremony inside the cave at the exact moment of the solstice: 12:28 p.m., a time of heightened energy.

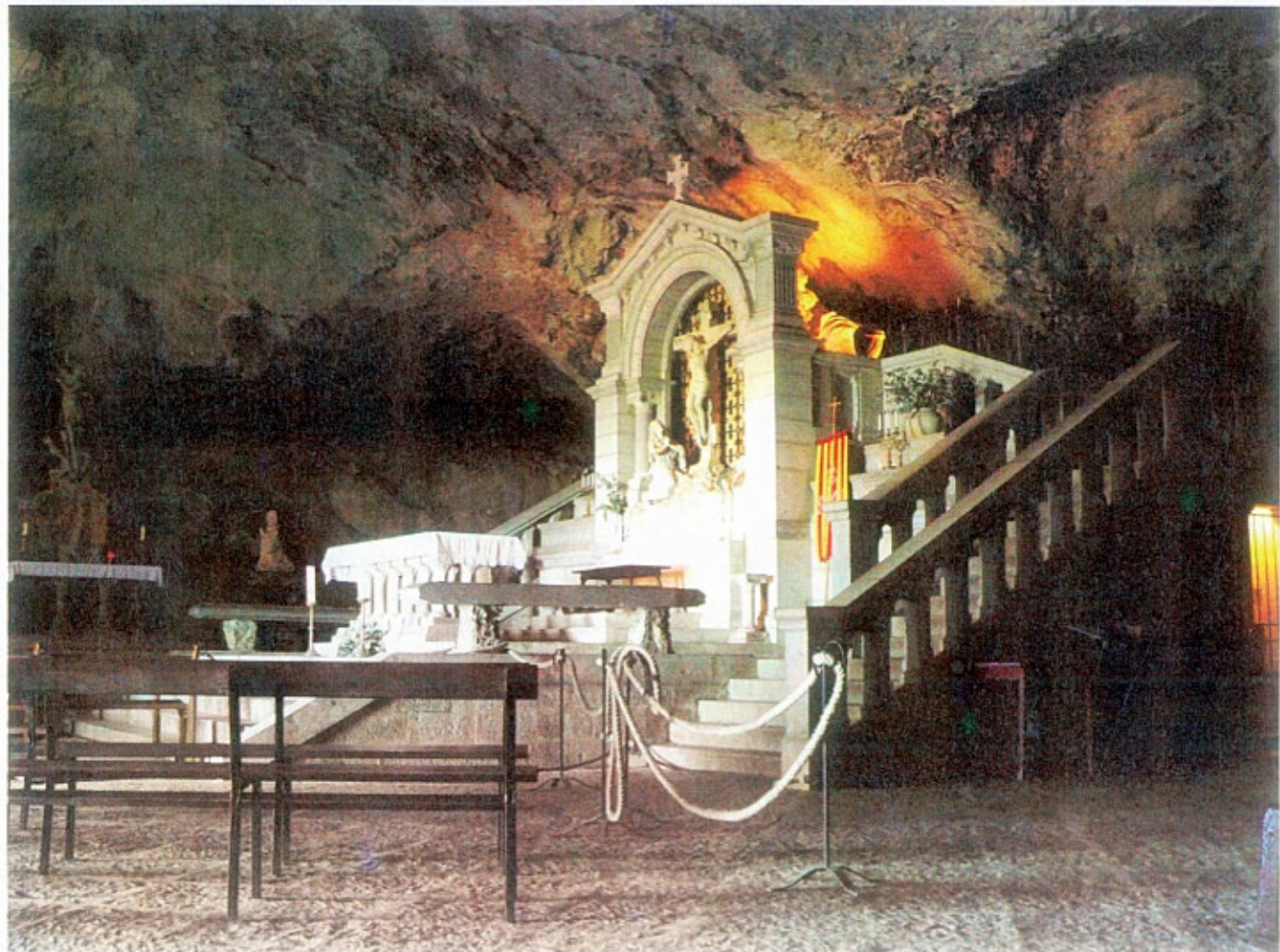


Miraculously, we were right on time! Metaphorical wombs, caves are among the most ancient places of worship of the divine feminine energies. Indeed, it was a rebirth of sorts that I experienced here, for Magdalene's presence was all encompassing, particularly in the lower-level grotto, where a statue of her likeness is flanked by flickering candles and a sculpture of a skull — a symbolic repository of knowledge with which she has often been depicted, referencing her direct access to cosmic wisdom.

As we gathered in ceremony, my entire being overflowed with the sweetest, most expansive love. I was complete with the knowledge that I existed multidimensionally, as everything everywhere. Time seemed to disappear with this solstice offering, and I felt deeply grateful to have communed again with Magdalene's legacy as the divine feminine counterpart and mystical equal of Jesus. As the first apostle to

witness his Resurrection into a light body, she was a practitioner of the unity consciousness that Jesus himself embodied, a state of being founded on the principles of unconditional love, wisdom, and compassion. Such a state of consciousness also recognized the need to integrate within ourselves the dualities of spirit and matter, head and heart, masculine and feminine, and the urgent call to forge a direct contact with Spirit and our own divinity. Before leaving the cave, I stopped at a small well to collect some holy water, a tangible reminder of my transporting experience here.

The final leg of this journey took us through the fortified medieval town of Carcassone, a UNESCO World Heritage site that was once a Cathar stronghold, and then to Rennes-le-Chateau, the fabled village of Holy Grail lore, where Magdalene also allegedly preached, and nearby Rennes-les-Bains, home to rejuvenating hot springs and







a majestic stone throne known as the seat of Isis that

brought more mystical activations as we each took our turn on it.

By the time we ended up in Cathar country in the Languedoc region, traversing through scenic rolling farmland and hay and sunflower fields, I was emotionally and spiritually spent. Yet at the same time, I felt transformed — lighter and more peaceful and present — having unlocked and released so many soul memories. At the thirteenth-century ruins of the Montsegur and Queribus castles, sublimely perched on towering rocky cliff sides, I connected with the great tragedy of the Cathars who found refuge here. Thousands were burned at the stake during the Inquisition for refusing to renounce their beliefs, rooted in direct mystical contact with the Divine. Yet their teachings, like those of Mary

Magdalene, remain with us, founded upon the true understanding of the power of love.

Dana Micucci is the author of *Sojourns of the Soul: One Woman's Journey around the World and into Her Truth* (Quest Books).

Workshops and events based on the book are posted on Facebook and [danamicucci.com](http://danamicucci.com).

## UPCOMING TOURS FROM SPIRIT AND ADVENTURE

[spiritandadventure.com](http://spiritandadventure.com)

### Journey to Mystical Avalon

June 12–24, 2012

### Fall Equinox Journey to Sacred Egypt

September 21–October 3, 2012