

Salome

E Bruce Brooks

University of Massachusetts at Amherst

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The usual picture of Jesus wandering over Galilee does not include details such as food and lodging. Who paid the bills? The short answer seems to be: rich women.¹ Officially, under Greco-Roman law, women were subject to fathers, husbands, or sons. The economic facts were sometimes different. As witness the case of Salome.

The Women at the Cross. According to Mark 15:40-41, these women witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus: “both Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jacob the less and of Joseph, and Salome; who when he was in Galilee, followed him and ministered to him; and many other women that came up with him unto Jerusalem.” Notice the flashback to Galilee; it is their *ministering there* that defines them for Mark. Further:

- **Mk 15:47.** And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph beheld where he was laid.

- **Mk 16:1.** And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jacob, and Salome, brought spices, that they might come and anoint him.

That is, two located the tomb, but all three came to anoint Jesus. In Luke we have:

- **Lk 23:49.** And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed with him from Galilee, stood afar off, seeing these things . . .

- **Lk 23:55.** And the women, who had come with him out of Galilee, followed after, and beheld the tomb, and how his body was laid.

- **Lk 24:1.** But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came unto the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared . . . [9] and returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven . . . [10] Now they were Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of Jacob; and the other women with them told these things unto the apostles.

There are always three, but their names are partly different. Elsewhere in Luke:

- **Lk 8:1.** And it came to pass soon afterwards that he went about through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good tidings of the Kingdom of God, and with him the Twelve, [2] and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary that was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, [3] and Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others, who ministered unto them of their substance.

That is, the economic function has been transferred to a slightly different group, introduced earlier, some of whom are said to have been *previously healed by Jesus*. They are no longer *benefactors*, but *beneficiaries*, of Jesus. Jesus is supreme.

¹For rich women as donors in Judaism, see Brooten **Women** 141f, 157f.

In Lk 8, then, Mary the mother of Jacob and Salome were replaced by Joanna and Susanna, but in Lk 24, the mother of Jacob is again restored to the group at the Cross. This is something often seen: an author makes a change, but not *consistently*, and a detail in the original text reappears in the derivative text.² The intermittent consistency of the rewrite is one way we can distinguish it from the earlier version. Luke puts this Galilee information where it belongs chronologically, and reidentifies the women. But Luke's changes are not maintained, and the earlier tradition of the Women at the Cross shows through when Luke reaches that point in the rewritten narrative. This is one way we know that Luke is later than Mark.³

So far Luke. The Women at the Cross passage in Matthew reads this way:

- **Mt 27:55.** And many women were there beholding from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him; [56] among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of Jacob and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

Matthew here subtly eliminates Mark's Galilee information (Mark: "who *when he was in Galilee*, followed him and ministered to him"); in Matthew, their ministering is confined to the present journey. Matthew also omits Salome's name and contrasts the Jacobs in another way. Mark tells us that one Jacob is "the less;" Matthew tells us that the other Jacob is the son of Zebedee – a far more important figure.

Matthew may have felt uncomfortable with the name Salome,⁴ and in his later references to the Women at the Cross, she drops out altogether, leaving the two Marys:

Mt 27:61. And Mary Magdalene was there [at the burial], and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulcher.

Mt 28:1. Now late on the Sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

²For further examples of this phenomenon, see Goodacre **Fatigue**.

³Another reason may be Luke's inclusion of "Joanna, the wife of Chuza Herod's steward." Joanna appears nowhere else in the early literature, and her high political connection may be a result of Lukan social reaching. It would have been very advantageous to the early Christians to have this degree of acceptance in high places. Luke in Acts shows Paul as kindly received by many of the Romans before whom he appears, perhaps a further instance of this technique, meant to show that Christianity is harmless to Rome. Php 4:22 ("those of Caesar's household greet you") claims similar connections. This letter is genuine, but the personalia of all the letters are subject to tampering; in this case, probably by Paul's editors (see Brooks **Philippi** 112), who wished to make both Paul and Christianity more acceptable to Rome.

⁴Salome, the daughter of Herodias (Josephus Ant 18/5:4; Mk 6:17-29 does not name her), had by her dancing brought about the death of John the Baptist. Herodias' hatred for John was due to his disapproval of her divorce from a first husband to marry Herod Antipas (Josephus Ant 18/5:1). Salome married Philip the Tetrarch, and after his death, her kinsman Aristobolus, whose kingdoms were in Chalcis and Armenia (Josephus Ant 18/5:4; her image appears with his on coins of those realms). She may have shared her mother's hatred of John, and perhaps John's disciple Jesus, who also held strict views on divorce (emphasized in the Synoptics and in 1 Cor 7:11-13). Except for Mk 15:40 and 16:1, the name Salome never appears in the NT.

Nor does Matthew name Salome when he has *her* ask Jesus for a favor. Here is Mark:

Mk 10:35. And there came near unto him Jacob and John the sons of Zebedee, saying unto him, Teacher, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall ask of thee.

But in Matthew, who inserts her into the story, her name does not appear:

Mt 20:20. Then came to him the mother of the sons of Zebedee with her sons, worshiping him and asking a certain thing of him.

The following request for positions of power is the same in both cases.

The Families. Mark's "Jacob the less" is the Jacob who is *not* the son of Zebedee. From the Mk 3:16-19 list, he is Jacob of Alphaeus, the brother of Levi of Alphaeus; Levi is called by Jesus to be a disciple in Mk 2:14. We then have these parentages:

- Alphaeus and Mary > Levi (one of the Five), Jacob (one of the Twelve) and Joses
- Zebedee and Salome > Jacob and John (two of the Five, included in the Twelve)

These families between them supplied four of the principal followers of Jesus. We are also informed that the wives (but, as far as we are told, apparently not the husbands) were among the supporters – the day-to-day infrastructure – of the Jesus movement.

The Other Brothers among the early Jesus followers are Peter and Andrew. They were not rich. Mk 1:16-18 describes them as "casting a net" and leaving the "nets" when Jesus calls; they are seemingly working from shore, not from a boat. By contrast, Jacob and John do have boats (Mk 1:19) and employ other hands (Mk 1:20). Peter lived in his wife's mother's house; his wife accompanied him on mission (1 Cor 9:5). The economic base of both was then her mother, seemingly a widow with property.⁵

Jacob and John may have felt that their wealth entitled them to higher status than Peter. Paul and Acts both imply that at Jerusalem Jacob Zebedee *was* superior to Peter. It is thus reasonable that Jacob was the first to be killed by Herod Agrippa I in c44. Peter, who escaped, was apparently next on the hit list.⁶

Mythical Development. If from the Markan women at the tomb (Mary Magdalene, Mary of Alphaeus, and Salome of Zebedee), we follow Matthew in removing Salome, we have left two Marys and a blank. The blank promptly attracted a replacement. Given the increasing prominence of Jesus' mother in successive Gospels,⁷ it was not unlikely that developing tradition would push her into Salome's slot, giving Three Marys. This is exactly what happens. In John, only Mary Magdalene is named among the women at the tomb, but as witnesses to the Crucifixion, John has Three Marys: "[Jesus'] mother; his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas; and Mary Magdalene" (Jn 19:25).⁸ John's inclusion of Jesus' mother is sentimentally satisfying, but it is also mythologically predictable. It is probably not based on better information.

⁵We should not forget, in this connection, the mother of John Mark of Jerusalem, whose evidently large house was a rendezvous point for Christians in Jerusalem (Ac 12:12-17).

⁶Mk 10:39, cf Ac 12:1-3.

⁷For this early tendency, see Brooks **Four** 15, "The Mary Trajectory."

⁸The relationship is obviously fantastic; no family would have two daughters named Mary.

Economic Aspects. Traditions add, and traditions also discard. Matthew, in having the mother of Jacob and John make their request for them (though Jesus' plural "you" in Mt 20:22, as though addressing the brothers themselves, implies the earlier story),⁹ has relieved them of the onus of personal ambition. The women's "ministering" in Galilee also gets attenuated over time. As we have seen, it is transferred to another group of three in Lk 8:3, and is absent altogether in Matthew and John. That Jesus and company had to be fed and otherwise supported in their travels may have been too earthy a fact to survive in the increasingly ethereal (and Cross-centered) Jesus image which later tradition preferred to construct for itself.

The Apocryphal Salome

Salome never recurs in the NT after her cameo role in Mark. In the apocryphal literature, she becomes (1) a disciple, who shares attributes with Mary Magdalene,¹⁰ or slightly later, (2) an acquaintance of the family at the time of Jesus' birth.

Salome the Disciple is a parallel to the Gnostic development of Mary Magdalene, for which see the Gospel of Mary.¹¹ Here is Salome as a disciple:

- Gospel of the Egyptians (mid 2c). Salome asks when death will end; is told "when you women stop having children." Procreation as such is disprized.¹²
- Gospel of Thomas (2c) #61. "Salome said, Who are you, man? You have reclined on my couch and have eaten at my table." Jesus said to her, "I am he who derives his being from him who is undifferentiated. The things of my Father have been given to me." [She said], "I am your disciple."¹³

The intimacy here is that of sharing a meal; "undifferentiated" refers to the lack of distinction between the sexes (and the disapproval of procreation) in Gnostic belief. Wives who leave their husbands to live chastely are common in the later literature.

The disciple Salome was later referred to as a temptress:

- Book of the Resurrection by Bartholomew the Apostle (5c/6c). "Salome who tempted him" is listed among the Women at the Tomb.¹⁴

This may go back to a too enthusiastic reading of "You have reclined on my couch," in the above passage of the Gospel of Thomas.

⁹Here is another instance of second-author fatigue: Matthew reverts to his Mark source.

¹⁰Bauckham **Salome** describes Salome throughout as Jesus' disciple, entirely suppressing the economic function she has in our earliest witness, Mark. His evidence for Salome as originally Jesus' sister does not convince the present writer. The general tendency is for traditions to increasingly emphasize kinship (Bauckham p246 relies in part on Epiphanius, Panarion 78/9:6, 376, an 04c text which is perhaps quoting the late 2c Hegesippus). Bauckham also relies in part on the genuineness of the Secret Gospel of Mark, which has recently been discredited as a forgery by its supposed discoverer, Morton Smith (see Carlson **Hoax**).

¹¹Elliott 669. The Women there mentioned also include those named in Luke 8:3, plus Luke's inventions Mary and Martha, and Leah, whose son Jesus raised at Nain (Lk 7:11).

¹²Elliott 16, quoted by Clement of Alexandria (Elliott 18).

¹³Elliott 143, with adjustments.

¹⁴Elliott 669.

Salome the Family Companion is said to have been present at Christ's birth:

- Protevangelium of Jacob (late 2c). The midwife tells Salome of the virgin birth. Salome doubts, but is miraculously convinced.¹⁵
- Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew (8c?). *Two* midwives, Zelomi and Salome.¹⁶
- History of Joseph the Carpenter (4c/5c). Salome accompanies the Holy Family to Egypt.¹⁷

Salome the Disciple and Salome the Family Companion are combined in:

- Homily Attributed to Evodius: Evodius, with Salome and Joanna, and others, lived with Mary after the Passion.

which merely shows the fluidity of the later popular tradition.

Salome as the mother of the Zebedees and patroness of the Jesus movement soon vanished from Christian consciousness. It was as an intimate of Jesus, and secondarily of his mother, that she lived on. Here as elsewhere, later tradition's concentration on the figure of Jesus has led to loss of more pedestrian information which is better preserved in the earlier sources, and a change in the character, and the intensity, of the relationship which these women are imagined to have had with Jesus or his mother.

Thus does the increasingly unworldly figure of Jesus draw all to it, as time goes on. This is a familiar characteristic of all traditions, whether religious or secular.¹⁸

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¹⁵Elliott 64. The doubt of Thomas in Jn 20:27-28 is cured by placing a hand in the other's body cavity. For Salome, who doubts Mary's virginity following the birth of Jesus, the cavity is Mary's vagina. On placing her finger in it, Salome exclaims, "Woe for my wickedness and my unbelief, for I have tempted the living God, and behold, my hand falls away from me, consumed by fire!" (Elliott 65). On touching the infant as then directed, her hand is healed.

¹⁶Elliott 92. This is clearly a development from the preceding, in which Salome has been doubled as two people with identical function and nearly identical names.

¹⁷Elliott 114.

¹⁸For a political example, with explicit parallels to the life of Jesus, see Lewis **Myths**.