

APOSTLE AND SINNER: MEDIÉVAL RECEPTIONS OF MARY OF MAGDALA

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To investigate the medieval reception history of Mary of Magdala is to examine the roots of a legendary figure in the Western church whose significance in cultural consciousness can hardly be underestimated, despite intensive and frequent research employing historical-critical as well as feminist methods. Although the multilayered medieval portrait with its ambivalences would permit a comprehensive description of the reception of Mary during this period, the constraints of the present context require a certain selectivity with regard to this abundance of material. Thus, the present study focuses primarily on the reception of the genuinely biblical role of Mary of Magdala as prophetic Easter messenger.¹ To what extent can traces of this apostle be followed until the beginning of the modern age?

1. MARY MAGDALENE: A COMPOSITE OF SEVERAL NEW TESTAMENT WOMEN

Following the pathways marked out by patristic tradition,² the starting point for the receptions of the medieval Magdalene in the West is not exclusively the biblical figure of Mary of Magdala. Instead, the history of Mary's recep-

1. On the New Testament portrait of Mary of Magdala and further literature, see Andrea Taschl-Erber, *Maria von Magdala—erste Apostolin? John 20:1–18: Tradition und Relecture*, Herders Biblische Studien 51 (Freiburg: Herder, 2007), as well as my “Mary of Magdala: First Apostle?” in *Gospels: Narrative and History*, ed. Mercedes Navarro Puerto and Marinella Perroni, Bible and Women 2.1 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 431–54.

2. On this, see Andrea Taschl-Erber, “Eva wird Apostel! Rezeptionslinien des Osterapostolats Marias von Magdala in der lateinischen Patristik,” in *Geschlechterverhältnisse und Macht: Lebensformen in der Zeit des frühen Christentums*, ed. Irmtraud Fischer and Christoph Heil; Exegese in unserer Zeit 21 (Münster: LIT, 2010), 161–96; Taschl-Erber, “Between Recognition and Testimony: Johannine *Relecture* of the First Easter Witness and Patristic Readings,” in *Noli me tangere in Interdisciplinary Perspective: Textual, Iconographic*

tion weaves together three originally different New Testament women. Due to the tendency to equate women of the same name and to harmonize similar narratives, in this case the diverse anointing stories (see Matt 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; 16:1; Luke 7:36–50; 24:1; John 11:1–2; 12:1–8), Mary of Magdala, whose attribute as paschal myrophore is represented by the vial of ointment, is equated especially with her namesake from Bethany, the sister of Martha (see Luke 10:38–42; John 11:1–45; 12:1–8), as well as with the anonymous sinner in Luke 7:36–50.³ In addition, this unified image is augmented by a corresponding interpretation of the seven demons mentioned in Luke 8:2 and in the secondary conclusion to Mark (16:9–11).

Jerome (ca. 347–420), who in another passage extols the first testimony of the female Easter witnesses by calling them “female apostles among the apostles,”⁴ already makes a connection with sinfulness in his citation of Rom 5:20:

Maria Magdalene ipsa est, a qua septem daemonia expulerat, ut, ubi abundauerat peccatum, superabundaret gratia.

Mary Magdalene is exactly that one out of which he had driven seven demons, so that where there was sin in overabundance, there was grace in overabundant measure. (*Ep.* 59.4)⁵

The same citation is found in Ambrose (ca. 340–397), but in the context of the Eve motif, which since the time of Hippolytus⁶ (early third century) interprets the Easter apostolate of “the woman” as recompense for Eve’s guilt (*De Spiritu Sancto* 3.11.74).⁷ For this reason, we must assume first of all a tradi-

and Contemporary Interpretations, ed. Reimund Bieringer, Barbara Baert, and Karlijn Demasure, BETL 286 (Leuven: Peeters, forthcoming).

3. The anonymous woman in whose memory, according to Mark 14:9 and Matt 26:13, the messianic anointing of the head of Jesus is told was likewise merged with this figure.

4. *Comm. Soph.* 1, prologue: “apostolorum illas fuisse apostolas.” See Jerome, *Commentarii in prophetas minores*, ed. M. Adriaen, CCSL 76A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1969), 655,26–28.

5. Jerome, *Epistulae*, ed. Isidorus Hilberg, CSEL 54–56, 3 vols. (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1910–1918), 1:545,1–3.

6. See ch. 15 of Hippolytus’s commentary on the Song of Songs: “Eva wird Apostel!” See the edition of the text translated by Gottlieb Nathanael Bonwetsch: *Hippolyts Kommentar zum Hohenlied auf Grund von N. Marrs Ausgabe des grusinischen Textes*, TU 23 NS 8.2c (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1902), 68.

7. Ambrose, *De spiritu sancto, De incarnationis dominicae sacramento*, ed. O. Faller, CSEL 79 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1964), 180–81; but see also Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam* 7.35 (*Expositio evan-*

tional patriarchal gender symbolism instead of an individualizing interpretation referring concretely to Mary of Magdala.

An explicit identification with the figure of the sinful woman, however, is offered by Gregory the Great (ca. 540–604). Because of the strength of his authority in the Western church, his identification prevailed:

Hanc uero quam Lucas peccatricem mulierem, Iohannes Mariam nominat, illam esse Mariam credimus de qua Marcus septem daemonia eiecta fuisse testator. Et quid septem daemonia, nisi universa uitia designantur.

Of this woman, whom Luke calls a sinful woman and John calls Mary, we believe that she is that Mary out of whom, as Mark testifies, seven demons had been driven. And what do the seven demons [mean] if not that all iniquity is described by them? (*Hom.* 33.1, on Luke 7)⁸

With his homilies, which also were employed in the medieval liturgy, especially on the feast day for Mary Magdalene (July 22),⁹ Gregory created the basis for the development of the legend, as far as the “biblical” *vita* of the saint was concerned, and influenced to a great extent the medieval preaching and poetry concerned with the Magdalene.¹⁰ Later the Samaritan woman in John 4:7–19 as well as the adulteress in John 8:3–11 were also partially “fused to the Magdalene motif.”¹¹ In contrast to this Western unified image, the Eastern ecclesiastical tradition held fast to the differentiation of the individual

gelii secundum Lucam. Fragmenta in Esaïam, ed. M. Adriaen and P. A. Ballerini, CCSL 14 [Turnhout: Brepols, 1957], 187).

8. *Homiliae in euangelia*, ed. R. Étaix, CCSL 141 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 288,7–10. See also *Hom.* 25 (on John 20), especially 25.1 and 25.10, where Mary Magdalene is *peccatrix* (205,1 and 215,287–88).

9. Verified for the first time in the West in the martyrology of Beda Venerabilis, ca. 720. On this, see Victor Saxer, *Le culte de Marie Madeleine en Occident des origines à la fin du moyen âge*, 2 vols., Cahiers d'archéologie et d'histoire 3 (Auxerre: Publications de la Société des Fouilles Archéologiques et des Monuments Historiques de l'Yonne; Paris: Clavreuil, 1959), 1:57: “le natale de la sainte est d'importation byzantine.”

10. The reference to the bride in Song of Songs 3 (*Hom.* 25) inspired the later Magdalene lamentation, for example.

11. Elisabeth Gössmann, “Maria Magdalena als Typus der Kirche: Zur Aktualität mittelalterlicher Reflexionen,” in *Maria Magdalena: Zu einem Bild der Frau in der christlichen Verkündigung*, ed. Dietmar Bader, Schriftenreihe der Katholischen Akademie der Erzdiözese Freiburg (Munich: Schnell & Steiner, 1990), 51–71, here 52. Hans Hansel, *Die Maria-Magdalena-Legende: Eine Quellen-Untersuchung*, GBLS 16.1 (Greifswald: Dallmeyer, 1937), 94–96, 128, reports about a widespread late medieval folk ballad.

women, and to the present the East reveres Mary of Magdala as an “apostle-like” (ἰσαπόστολος) Easter witness.

An outline of the complex medieval image of the Magdalene in broad strokes includes three aspects that now essentially characterize “Magdalenology” in the West. First, as a converted and redeemed *sinner*, Mary Magdalene represents the answer to the basic question posed by the medieval person concerning the salvation of the soul, and she rises to become one of the most popular saints. The development runs the course from the biblical symbol to the individual model and, finally, to the powerful intercessor. Likewise, she also functions as an archetype for the sinning and repenting church and, accordingly, as a symbolic figure for ecclesiastical self-criticism, as well as for the reform movements undertaken by monastic orders. Thereby, the patristic *ecclesia* theology, which sees the church embodied in this female witness to the resurrected Christ, is continued. However, the focus necessarily shifts from proclamation to the themes of repentance and conversion. Second, starting from the *vita contemplativa* of the Bethanian Mary, the figure of the penitent woman becomes the patroness of the eremitic movement, a model for asceticism and escape from the world. Third, the tradition of her as the first witness to the resurrected Christ also remained alive. The aspect of the *Apostola* and proclaimer is developed further in the legends about the apostolate of Mary Magdalene in France. Her *vita apostolica* reflects various sides (poverty, itinerant preaching) of the identity of the newly emerging mendicant orders; such a controlled Magdalene figure contains the potential for reforms. Various protest movements against the ecclesiastical hierarchy are shifted into internal ecclesiastical channels by means of this characterization.

2. SOURCES FOR THE MEDIEVAL VENERATION OF THE MAGDALENE

2.1. MAGDALENE CULT, CHURCH REFORM, AND DISPUTES ABOUT RELICS

The Cluniac reform movement made an essential contribution to the medieval development of the veneration of the Magdalene. Under its influence, the model of the contrite and repentant sinner as an example of human guilt and divine compassion was taken up into and disseminated in penitential preaching and poetry. The sermon about Mary Magdalene in which she became an individual personality was attributed traditionally to Odo of Cluny (ca. 878–942), the second abbot of the monastery founded in 910, and received a wide reception. His *Sermo II: In veneratione sanctae Mariae Magdalenae* is not merely a homily on a certain pericope but rather was written “in veneration of the holy Mary Magdalene.” The biblical *vita* of the saint results from the exegesis of the episodes that are traditionally associated with her (anointing

by the sinful woman; Mary and Martha; resurrection of Lazarus; passion and Easter), which continues the patristic exegesis and is expanded through the addition of legendary embellishments and allegorical digressions.¹² The role of Mary Magdalene as a figure of the church is emphasized repeatedly. In an etymological excursus, for example, the term *Magdalum* was interpreted as a castle, *castellum*, after which Mary Magdalene was named (the first reference to her aristocratic origins in medieval legends).¹³ This castle then became “the tower of the church that offers resistance to the enemies.”¹⁴

Like Gregory’s homilies, this text primarily influenced the monastic liturgy and was included, beginning in the eleventh century, in the Latin collections of the lives of the saints as the *vita* of the Magdalene.¹⁵ A special role in this process was played in particular by the Benedictine monastery in Vézelay (Burgundy), affiliated with Cluny and the first significant cult center for Mary Magdalene in the West.¹⁶

The abbey was founded circa 860 by Count Girart de Roussillon and his wife Bertha. In 1037, Abbot Geoffroi was elected, and he implemented the Cluniac reform and established the Magdalene cult in the course of monastic renewal.¹⁷ The patronage of Mary Magdalene (which later completely replaced an old Marian patronage) was mentioned for the first time in a papal bull issued by Leo IX in 1050. Above and beyond this, Pope Stephan IX in 1058 confirmed the location of her grave at this place. Therewith, Vézelay gradually developed from a station on the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela into an independent, economically thriving, and (especially in connection with the Crusade movement) politically significant pilgrimage center with a competing apostle’s grave. The development of legends flourished, some of which were partially contradictory. They explained the possession of the relics of

12. See the more detailed commentary of this sermon in Taschl-Erber, *Maria von Magdala*, 616–20.

13. See PL 133:714B. Odo adds that a dissolute life style follows from her wealth.

14. Gössmann, “Maria Magdalena,” 61; see PL 133:716B–C.

15. See Hansel, *Maria-Magdalena-Legende*, 51, 100–113.

16. On the development and extension in more detail of the Magdalene cult eventually spreading out from France, as well as on the historical sketch offered here, see Saxer, *Culte*. On the following, in addition, Saxer, *Le dossier vézelien de Marie Madeleine: Invention et translation des reliques en 1265–1267: Contribution à l’histoire du culte de la sainte à Vézelay à l’apogée du moyen âge*, SHG 57 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1975). See also Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (London: Harper Collins, 1993).

17. The abbot was in contact with other promoters of the Magdalene cult in France. The fact that Leo IX also consecrated churches dedicated to the Magdalene in Verdun and Besançon in 1049/50 indicates the popularity of the saint, who was politically instrumental in promoting church reform.

the “Apostle of France” (sea journey of the saint from Palestine to southern France,¹⁸ transportation of the relics from the original grave in Provence, and miracle stories). While in a phase of decline in 1265, the monks, in the presence of papal legates, staged the discovery of the saint’s bones as a demonstration against rival Provençal claims. In 1267 they were put on ceremonious display before Louis IX as well as clerical and secular dignitaries.

But the zenith for Vézelay was long past. After an analogous “discovery” of the corpse of the saint in 1279 in the crypt of Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume (ca. 40 km east of Aix-en-Provence), the center of the Magdalene cult shifted to Provence.¹⁹ Under the leadership of Prince Charles of Salerno, later the Count of Provence and King Charles II of Naples, the official elevation of the relics occurred in 1280. Their authenticity was confirmed by Pope Boniface VIII in 1295. A document that claimed to certify a reburial of the genuine Magdalene relics at the time of the Saracenes refuted the claims of Vézelay based on the legend of her transportation, since the wrong body, it was claimed, had been robbed. A reliquary procession still takes place today, in July, during which the reliquary, with the skull of the saint covered with a golden mask, is carried through the streets of the city.

A Dominican convent under the patronage of Charles II was founded in 1295 for the management of the pilgrimage site. Mary Magdalene became the patroness of the order and of the House of Anjou. Thus, after the Cluniacs, the Mendicants determined the medieval image of the Magdalene beginning in the thirteenth century.²⁰ Along with the central themes of the *Ordo Fratrum Praedicatorum*, Franciscan piety emphasized the crucifixion and penitence.²¹

The *vita eremitica*, the legend of the saint’s thirty-year-long life of penitence, developed under the influence of the *vita* of Maria Aegyptiaca and spread from southern Italy beginning in the ninth century. It was localized

18. In Les-Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in the Camargue, there still exists a lively tradition.

19. The hagiographic tradition about the grave in Provence alternated between Aix and Saint-Maximin. Against the Provençal traditions, Saxer, *Culte*, 2:356, emphasizes “que le culte magdalénien n’est pas en Provence un culte indigène. Il s’y est implanté par suite des revendications aixoises contre les prétentions vézéliennes.”

20. On this, Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

21. When, in late medieval portrayals of the passion, Mary Magdalene kneels at the cross (corresponding to the place at Jesus’s feet inherited by the sinful woman as well as the Bethanian Mary), she then functions as the archetype of the sinful and remorseful human being that, through his or her sinful life, bears guilt for Jesus’s death, and as an identification figure for both male and female believers.

in the later twelfth century in the Magdalene grotto in the massif of Sainte-Baume, originally a Marian shrine.²²

2.2. EASTER AND PASSION PLAYS

Along with the Magdalene sermons and legends, religious drama functioned especially as the driving force in the veneration of the saint, primarily linked to the Latin liturgy of Easter. This dramatic performance started in the tenth century with the *visitatio sepulchri*, showing the women's visit of the tomb (see Matt 28:1–10, Mark 16:1–11, Luke 24:1–12). The introduction of the sequence *Victimae paschali laudes* (Wipo of Burgundy, ca. 995–1050)²³ set Mary Magdalene apart from the group, as she alone was portrayed as the herald of the Easter event. She gained even more ground in the liturgical-biblical dialogue with the resurrected Christ because of the appearance scene in John 20. The religious dramas, which developed from the antiphonies of the Easter liturgy, were presented at first by the clerics in the choir of the church. However, from about the thirteenth century onward these portrayals gradually outgrew the ecclesial space. They expanded and became folk dramas with numerous imaginative scenes. While the early Easter plays (*ludi paschales*) accentuated Mary Magdalene's function as herald of the resurrection (e.g., the Prague Easter Play or even also the German-Latin Easter play in Trier at the end of the thirteenth century), the later passion plays emphasized much more strongly her role as a sinner by adding scenes from her worldly life and her conversion (the so-called Magdalene Play) to the already-existing Magdalene scenes in the Easter celebration and Easter plays. These additions appeared for the first time in the oldest-preserved passion play from Benediktbeuern at the end of the thirteenth century. In the passion plays from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, the element of entertainment became more and more significant, with a corresponding effect on pictorial art. The so-called "worldly life" of the sinner, together with her conversion, was increasingly highlighted and further developed.²⁴

22. This was, up until the middle of the thirteenth century, the only significant place of cultic worship for the saint in Provence, although the veneration of Mary Magdalene had steadily spread from here since the end of the twelfth century.

23. See below in §4.2.

24. See Gössmann, *Maria Magdalena*, 68–69; Eva-Maria Adam, *Maria Magdalena in geistlichen Spielen des Mittelalters* (Zürich: Druckstelle der Studentenschaft der Universität Zürich, 1996), 85ff.

3. BIBLICAL RECEPTION BY WOMEN: LADY AVA AND CHRISTINE DE PIZAN

This section explores whether the accents and emphases differ from conventional exegesis when women interpret the relevant biblical texts.

In the *Leben Jesu* by Lady Ava (ca. 1060–1127),²⁵ the first poetess in the German language known by name, the original biblical figure becomes the focus of attention. Mary of Magdala is mentioned by name first at the crucifixion, while no explicit identification with the sinner or Mary of Bethany is made. The saint is addressed directly here, and her compassion in the face of her bleeding Lord hanging on the cross is made clear.²⁶ The expulsion of the demons mentioned in Luke 8:2 is inserted into the presentation of the women bearing ointments on Easter morning, with Mary Magdalene in the lead. The poetess interprets this as salvation from evil spirits and not as a release from sin.²⁷ Thus, Mary Magdalene's role as sinner (which, of course, is assumed in the medieval tradition)²⁸ shifts into the background in comparison with other portrayals.²⁹

In her harmonized rendering of the various Easter accounts in the Gospels, presented in chronological order, Lady Ava focuses particularly on Mary Magdalene, who, after the appearance of the angel at the tomb and her notification of the apostles (*boten*), goes back, this time alone, to the tomb and there finally encounters the resurrected Christ. This narrative, which depends heavily on John 20 (especially vv. 1, 11, 15–17),³⁰ whereby Jesus's word of commission incorporates the announcement of his appearance in Galilee (see Mark 16:7; Matt 28:7, 10), is attached to the *proskynesis* scene in Matt 28:9. Subsequent to this, Mary Magdalene articulates the only Easter

25. She is generally identified with an *inclusa* (recluse) who lived in the Wachau (Lower Austria) and whose day of death is registered in several annals or necrologies (which again documents her importance). For an introduction to Lady Ava's complete works, see the essay by Magda Motté in this volume.

26. See 1693ff. (strophe 156).

27. See 1821–1826 (strophe 168).

28. At the end of the poem, the shared tears of remorse "with the sainted Mary" also are discussed (see 2320–2323, strophe 213).

29. See also Ingrid Maisch, *Maria Magdalena: Zwischen Verachtung und Verehrung: Das Bild einer Frau im Spiegel der Jahrhunderte* (Freiburg: Herder, 1996), 63–34.

30. The scene dealing with Peter and the "other disciple" inserted in John 20:3–10 follows immediately after the proclamation by Mary of Magdala (strophes 179–80). In the account by Lady Ava, the two take with them the linen cloth wrapped around the corpse in order to show it to the people (see 1941–1944), presumably a reflection of the dramatic performance in the Easter celebration.

confession contained in this Early Middle High German poetry (compare here John 20:18):

iz sahen miniu ougen, ir sult iz wol gelouben,

surrexit dominus, daz ist: erstanden ist unser herre Jesus.³¹

In a similar way, Christine de Pizan (1365–1430/32), in *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* (Paris, 1405), also accentuates the Easter messenger more than the sinful woman. This humanistically educated French writer of Italian origin³² began her literary activity after the death of her husband Etienne du Castel in 1390, out of necessity as a means of livelihood for herself and her family. In her writings she expressed her views on current social and political subjects, as well as on gender issues. In the “Book of the City of Women,” she describes the allegorical erection of a fortress against the slanderers of the female sex with the help of three distinguished women, the embodiments of the three virtues: *Raison*, *Droiture*, and *Justice* (Reason, Integrity, and Justice). In order to defend women against prejudices and defamation by misogynist men, and to offer material for argument as well as role models, she points to great women figures of mythology and history, Bible and legend. Thereby she also provides indirect evidence for the conventional androcentric scriptural exegesis, which she resists by offering her own biblical interpretation.

She deals straightaway with Mary Magdalene in the first of the three parts of the book in order to refute charges that concern the weeping and talking of women. The implicit author or protagonist, in conversation with the allegorical figure of Reason, laments:

My lady, men have burdened me with a heavy charge taken from a Latin proverb, which runs, “God made women to speak, weep and sew,” which they use to attack women. (1.10.3)

Prejudices concerning women’s tears that are tied up with gender stereotypes are already frequently found in patristic exegesis of John 20. Such an interpretation is especially for the purpose of denigrating Mary Magdalene’s

31. 1923–1926 (strophe 178). Quoted from Friedrich Maurer, ed., *Die Dichtungen der Frau Ava*, ADTB 66 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1966), 48. In modern English translation: “My eyes saw it, you should believe it indeed, / surrexit dominus, that is: risen is our Lord Jesus.”

32. Her father, Tommaso di Benvenuto da Pizzano, received an appointment to the French court as a renowned astrologer but lost favor following the death of Charles V in 1380.

involvement in comparison to that of the male disciples. Against this, however, Reason here objects:

if our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom no thought is hidden and who knows every heart, had believed that women's tears come only from weakness and simplemindedness, the dignity of His most great Highness would never have been so inclined through compassion to shed tears Himself from the eyes of His worthy and glorious body when He saw Mary Magdalene and her sister Martha weep for their dead brother Lazarus the leper and then to resurrect him. What special favors has God bestowed on women because of their tears! He did not despise the tears of Mary Magdalene, but accepted them and forgave her sins, and through the merits of those tears she is in glory in Heaven.³³

In this passage it becomes clear that Christine de Pizan takes the mixed figure in the Western church as her starting point when she refers first to the Mary of Bethany in John 11, then to the sinful woman in Luke 7. The key word "tears," which connects Mary Magdalene (John 20:11, 13, 15) with the sinful woman (Luke 7:38, 44), as well as with Martha's sister (John 11:33), proves to be firmly connected to the medieval image of the Magdalene.

In response to the second part of the proverb, the argumentation starts with Mary Magdalene's role as first herald of the news of the resurrection:

Similarly, God endowed women with the faculty of speech, may he be praised for it, for had He not done so, they would be speechless. But in refutation of what this proverb says (which someone, I don't know whom, invented deliberately to attack them), if women's language had been so blameworthy and of such small authority, as some men argue, our Lord Jesus Christ would never have deigned to wish that so worthy a mystery as His most gracious resurrection be first announced by a woman, just as He commanded the blessed Magdalene, to whom He first appeared on Easter, to report and announce it to His apostles and to Peter. Blessed God, may you be praised, who, among the other infinite boons and favors which You have bestowed upon the feminine sex, desired that woman carry such lofty and worthy news. (1.10.5)

Christine clearly states that the resurrected Christ's appearance first to a woman and her proclamation of the Easter message represents a fundamental challenge to the gender hierarchy of traditional patriarchy:

33. Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Earl Jeffrey Richards (New York: Persea Books, 1982), 27.

All those who are jealous of me would do best to be silent if they had any real insight, my lady, I said, but I smile at the folly which some men have expressed and I even remember that I heard some foolish preachers teach that God first appeared to a woman because He knew well that she did not know how to keep quiet so that this way the news of His resurrection would be spread more rapidly. She answered, My daughter, you have spoken well when you call them fools who said this. It is not enough for them to attack women. They impute even to Jesus Christ such blasphemy, as if to say that He wished to reveal this great perfection and dignity through a vice.³⁴

The third part of the book makes a short reference to Mary Magdalene as a witness to the crucifixion and demonstrates that the stereotypes regarding the love felt by women (which already appear in patristic exegesis) are rejected:

What strong faith and deep love those women possess who did not forsake the Son of God who had been abandoned and deserted by all his Apostles. God has never reproached the love of women as weakness, as some men contend, for He placed the spark of fervent love in the hearts of the blessed Magdalene and of other ladies, indeed His approval of this love is clearly to be seen.³⁵ (3.2.1)

But what importance does Mary Magdalene assume in the male-dominated theology of the epoch framed by the work of these two female authors? Are there other theologians who differ from the mainstream of that time?

4. MARY MAGDALENE AS *APOSTOLA APOSTOLORUM*

4.1. LITERARY EVIDENCE IN THEOLOGICAL TEXTS

The characterization of Mary Magdalene as *Apostola Apostolorum* proves to be a firm figure of speech in Latin literature beginning in the eleventh to the twelfth century.³⁶ The phrase, common into the Late Middle Ages, concisely summarizes earlier statements on her role as the first Easter witness. Mary of Magdalene's apostolic status is also verified by the recitation of the *Credo* (suppressed by a liturgical reform in 1955) in the Mass on her feast day, a major celebration in the church's annual liturgy since the middle of the twelfth cen-

34. *Ibid.*, 28–29.

35. *Ibid.*, 219.

36. This title is occasionally attributed to Augustine but appears only in the Pseudo-Augustine *Belgicus*, where the identification with the sinful woman and with the sister of Martha is already accomplished (*Sermo ad fratres in eremo commorantes* 35; PL 40:1298).

ture. Otherwise the *Credo* was recited only during feasts for the apostles and Mary, the mother of Jesus.

At the same time, reference is made frequently to the sinful women in Luke 7:36–50. Peter Damian (ca. 1006–1072) also combines this *peccatrix* with Mary of Magdala's seven demons (Luke 8:2) and characterizes Mary Magdalene as:

illa mulier, quae septem daemioniis, id est universis vitiis cumulata fuit, cui multum amanti, multum dimittitur, quae prima videt Dominum a mortuis resurgentem, apostolorum apostola, dilecta proprie Salvatoris.

That woman who was overwhelmed with seven demons, that is, with all possible vices, for whom much is remitted because she loves much and who, as the first one, sees that the Lord rises from the dead, the apostle of the apostles, the one especially loved by the Savior.³⁷

Similarly, Peter of Blois (ca. 1135–1204) places the figure of the apostle over against the sinful woman and explains her role as first witness with her love and remorse:

Quae ergo fuerat in civitate peccatrix dilectione et lacrymis non solum liberari meruit a peccatis sed fieri apostola et evangelista imo (quod majus est), apostolorum apostola festinans ad annuntiandum apostolis resurrectionem Domini.

She thus who had been a sinful woman in the city made herself through love and tears not only worthy to be freed of her sins but also to become an apostle and a herald, indeed (which is more important), the apostle of the apostles by hurrying to announce the resurrection of the Lord to the apostles.³⁸

The sermon on the Magdalene by the south German hermit Honorius Augustodunensis (ca. 1090–1150/1160), *De sancta Maria Magdalena*, which is contained in his widely read collection of sermons *Speculum ecclesiae*, shifts the sinful woman to the foreground. Accordingly, the scene in Luke 7 is broadly developed along the lines of the reception in *Hom.* 33 by Gregory the Great.

37. *Sermo* 56, PL 144:820B. On this, Jane Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 89: "The counterweight of her sinfulness had made it safe to speak of her power and authority."

38. *Ep.* 234, PL 207:537A. Further examples (e.g., Hugo I of Cluny, Marbod of Rennes, Petrus Comestor, Petrus of Celle, Innocent III, and Catherine of Siena) are found in Taschl-Erber, *Maria von Magdala*, 624–25; Saxer, *Culte* 2:344–48; Jansen, *Making*, 62–65, 80, 271–77 (on the protophany, Jansen, *Making*, 58–59).

In the summary of the Easter role played by Mary Magdalene, the title of *apostola* is undermined by the use of the classical Eve typology:

Domino quoque pro nobis in cruce pendente et discipulorum grege perempto pastore in diversa fugiente ipsa imperterrita astabat atque in sepulchro positum cum aromatibus visitabat Unde et angelum videre meruit Dominusque resurgens primo omnium ei publice apparuit eamque apostolam apostolis suis misit ut sicut prima femina mortem viro traderet, ita nunc femina perennem vitam viris nunciaret.

Even when the Lord hung on the cross for us and the flock of the disciples flew in different directions because of the death of the shepherd, she herself stood there undaunted and visited the one buried in the tomb and brought aromatic oils. For this reason, she made herself worthy to see an angel, and when the Lord rose from the dead, he appeared publicly to her first of all and sent her as an apostle to the apostles so that, just like the first woman delivered death to the man, now a woman proclaimed eternal life to the men. (PL 172:979–82, here 981A–B)

On the other hand, the Magdalene reception by Peter Abaelard (1079–1142) appears to undertake distinct changes in the conventional patriarchal discourse.³⁹ In his *Sermo* 13, *In die Paschae*, a far more positive typology than the widespread classification of Mary Magdalene as the new Eve dominates the first part in as much as he compares her with *Maria prophetissa, soror Aaron* (PL 178:484C; quotation from Exod 15:20–21). The typological connection between the Old Testament prophetess Miriam and her New Testament namesake lies in their public prophetic proclamation of divine revelation. Thereby, Abaelard explicitly emphasizes the precedence of the women in the Easter experience, beginning with the explicitly emphasized status of Mary Magdalene as first witness:

Apostolorum autem apostola dicta est, hoc est legatorum legata quod eam Dominus ad apostolos primum direxit ut eis resurrectionis gaudium nuntiaret ... et haec prima nuntiando praecinit quod prima viderat Post ipsam vero, ad caeteras feminas hoc gaudium resurrectionis priusquam ad apostolos vel quoslibet viros pervenit.

But, she has been called the apostle of the apostles, that is, the ambassador of the ambassadors, because the Lord sent her as the first one to the apostles, so that she might proclaim the joy of the resurrection to them ... and

39. The question arises to what extent his perspective is to be ascribed to the influence of Héloïse. See the essay by Constant J. Mews und Carmel Posa in this volume.

this woman, as the first one, tells in her proclamation what she, as the first one, had seen. After she herself received it, though, this joy of the resurrection reached the other women, before it reached the apostles or any other men. (PL 178:485B)⁴⁰

A further challenge to the established schools of thought lies in Abaelard's reference to the authority of Paul when discussing the Easter apostolate of Mary Magdalene. While the proclamation of the female Easter witness frequently was minimized by quoting 1 Cor 14:34, Abaelard comes back at the end of his sermon to Gal 3:28 in a comparison of Phoenix and Christ:

Quis enim unicus et dignitate singularis ita ut Christus? In quo quoque nec masculum, nec feminam Apostolus esse dicit quia in Christi corpore, quod est Ecclesia, nullam dignitatem diversitas sexuum operatur nec sexuum qualitatem, sed meritorum Christus attendit.

Who, namely, is so unique and so outstanding in dignity as Christ? In this, says the apostle, is neither male nor female, because in the body of Christ, which is the church, the diversity of the sexes does not give rise to dignity; Christ does not take note of the quality of the sexes but rather of that of the merits. (PL 178:488C–D)

The title of apostle can also be verified for Mary Magdalene in Byzantine literature. According to Theophanes Kerameus (twelfth century), she became the “apostle to the apostles” (ὡς γενέσθαι τοῖς ἀποστόλοις ἀπόστολον; *Hom.* 30). He uses, as is usual in Greek in regard to such functional designations, the male term. When he subsequently discusses the gender implications, he follows the classical stereotypes:

καὶ θῆλυ οὖσα τὴν φύσιν παρήλθεν ἀνδρείῳ φρονήματι

and although she was female, she transcended nature with a manly way of thinking. (PG 132:632B)

A similar statement is made in *Hom.* 31, in reference to the Easter messengers (in the plural):

καὶ γίνονται τοῖς ἀποστόλοις ἀπόστολοι καὶ τοῖς κήρυξι κήρυκες καὶ νικῶσι τὴν φύσιν καὶ τῶν ἀνδρῶν ὑπέρτεραι δείκνυνται.

40. Abaelard deals briefly with the *apostola apostolorum* title also in *Ep.* 7, PL 178:246B.

and they become apostles to the apostles and proclaimers to the proclaimers, and they overcome nature and show themselves to be superior to the men. (PG 132:644C)

Further, Theophanes Kerameus calls Mary Magdalene in *Hom.* 30 a “female disciple of the Savior” (τοῦ Σωτῆρος μαθήτρια), as well as a “female proclaimer of the resurrection” (τῆς ἀναστάσεως εὐαγγελίστρια, PG 132:632C).

In *Hom.* 31 he criticizes those theologians who want, as a consequence of the prohibition on teaching in the Pauline letters, to dispossess the myrophores of their role as “female proclaimers and preachers of the resurrection” (εὐαγγελίστριαι καὶ κήρυκες τῆς ἐγέρσεως). Also, he qualifies the claim that these women did not *teach* (ἐδίδαξαν) the apostles but merely reminded them (ὑπέμνησαν) as “inventions of a childish soul” (νηπιώδους ψυχῆς ἐφευρήματα). On the other hand, he first makes a historical argument pointing out that “the command of Paul” (ἡ Παύλου νομοθεσία) was not yet in existence at that time, adds a theological claim by bringing the familiar comparison with Eve into play, and, finally, cites Thekla, appointed by Paul himself as a teacher and preacher of the faith (διδάσκαλον καὶ κήρυκα πίστεως, PG 132:645A–B). Thus there appears a “broad spectrum of divergent schools of theological thought”⁴¹ in the Byzantine tradition in regard to the apostolic involvement of women.

4.2. ICONOGRAPHIC EXAMPLES FOR THE FEMALE PROCLAIMER

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, along with the dominant *noli me tangere* type of images,⁴² there also appear depictions that go back to John 20:18 and portray Mary Magdalene in her role as *Apostola Apostolorum*. For example, in a miniature from the *Evangeliar Heinrichs des Löwen* (second half of the twelfth century; fig. 1)⁴³ Mary Magdalene appears dynamically before seven disciples, almost all of whom turn their heads toward her, listening to her.

41. Eva Maria Synek, *Heilige Frauen der frühen Christenheit: Zu den Frauenbildern in hagiographischen Texten des christlichen Ostens*, Das östliche Christentum 43 (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1994), 206.

42. The iconography of the scene in which Mary Magdalene encounters the resurrected Christ is determined above all by John 20:17, in which the imprecise but potent Vulgate translation of Jesus’s first words, *noli me tangere* (“do not touch me!”) provides the name for this type of image. For a detailed exegetical analysis of the verse, see, e.g., Taschl-Erber, “Recognition.”

43. The *Evangeliar* (Book of Gospels) was made on behalf of Duke Henry the Lion in the Benedictine monastery of Helmarshausen and was intended as an endowment for the cathedral in Brunswick.

Thereby, the mound of earth on which she stands functions like a pedestal. The broad area of the picture allotted to her shows her in full height directly opposite Peter as the leader of the group of disciples and underscores her authority, which lies in the proclaimed word. In the medallions that form the background for the female Easter messenger, one can see eagles, which, as a symbol for the ascension, refer to Jesus's message in John 20:17. Typically for

Fig. 1: Mary Magdalene as *Apostola Apostolorum*, miniature from the *Evangeliar Heinrichs des Löwen*, Helmarshausen, second half of the twelfth century, Wolfenbüttel. Herzog August Bibliothek. Cod. Guelf. 105 Noviss. 2°, fol. 171r. Photo from Herzog August Bibliothek.

this stylistic period, Mary Magdalene is portrayed with a head covering, in a long dress of classical style, and in a cloak.⁴⁴

The influence of the Easter liturgy becomes clearly visible in the banderoles that quote a part of the Easter sequence *Victimae paschali laudes*. The banderole that Peter holds, and that the disciple on the far right points toward, says:

Dic nobis Maria,
Quid vidisti in via?

Tell us, Mary,
say, what thou didst see upon the way?

Mary answers:

Sepulcrum Christi viventis
Et gloriam vidi resurgentis

The tomb the Living did enclose;
I saw Christ's glory as He rose!⁴⁵

The lower series of images harken back to the preceding scenes in John 20, namely, the encounter with the resurrected Christ and the dialogue with the angels, who sit on an open sarcophagus. The rolled-up bale of cloth between them recalls, on the other hand, the alternate tomb scene that Peter and “the disciple whom Jesus loved” discover in John 20:5–7.⁴⁶ When the angels ask Mary, who holds her left hand before her sad face: “Woman, why are you weeping?” (*Mulier, quid ploras?*), Jesus’s subsequent question in John 20:15 is also included: “Whom are you seeking?” (*Quem queries?*). Mary answers as in John 20:13 (see also v. 2): “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him” (*Quia tulerunt dominum meum et nescio ubi posuerunt eum*). To the left of this, she articulates her misunderstanding

44. In addition, in all the miniatures known to me she wears shoes, in contrast to the disciples.

45. Mary’s speech is found in an abbreviated style of writing, in accordance with the usual practice.

46. This corresponds to the continuation of Mary’s Easter message in the sequence *Victimae paschali laudes*, which is still in use: “Angelicos testes, / Sudarium et vestes. / Surrexit Christus spes mea, / Praecedet suos in Galilaeam” (“The angels there attesting; / shroud with grave-clothes resting. / Christ, my hope, has risen: / He goes before you into Galilee”). The witness of the female apostle is followed by the paschal confession of faith by her audience.

once more to the resurrected Christ (cf. John 20:15): “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him” (*Domine, si tu sustulisti eum, dicito mihi, ubi posuisti eum*). Yet her posture of *proskynesis* (cf. the scene in Matt 28:9) already makes reference to her later recognition of Jesus. The *noli me tangere* motif from John 20:17 is not cited, but rather the commission given by the resurrected Christ: “Go to my brothers and say to them: ‘I ascend to my Father and your Father’” (*Vade ad fratres meos et dic eis: Ascendo ad patrem meum et patrem vestrum*).

The two lower corner medallions with the confrontation of “the church as bride” (*Ecclesia Sponsa*) and the synagogue (above: David – Solomon) illustrate, as quotations from the Song of Songs show, the typological interpretation of the female Easter messenger common since Hippolytus.

Likewise, Mary Magdalene appears as a teacher of the Eleven, for example, in a Psalter illustration from the English abbey of St. Albans (first half of the twelfth century).⁴⁷ In the *Ingeborg Psalter* (ca. 1200),⁴⁸ she proclaims to the (here seated) Twelve, *vidi dominus*, “I have seen the Lord” (John 20:18), as stated in a small banderole.⁴⁹

In the Late Middle Ages depictions occur of Mary Magdalene’s missionary preaching in accordance with the legendary tradition. From her *vita apostolica*, in which she continues her apostolic commission by evangelizing Provence, arose the narrative of the saint’s sea journey concluding with a fortuitous landing near Marseille. Portrayals of the female preacher are found, for example, in Magdalene cycles, which add to the scenes from the Gospels (above all Luke 7, John 11, and John 20) those from the southern French group of legends,⁵⁰ such as the Florentine Magdalene panel painted by an anonymous master (second half of the thirteenth century; fig. 2). The gesture of speech used by the female missionary (on the right in the second

47. The Albani Psalter originated presumably as a commission by Christina of Markyate, a female recluse and, after 1145, the first prioress of Markyate.

48. The Psalter was made for Ingeborg of Denmark, the second wife of the French King Philip II Augustus.

49. Similar miniatures are found, in addition, in the *Queen Mary Psalter* (British Library, London), for example, as well as in a manuscript in the St. John’s College Library, Cambridge (both from the early fourteenth century). Mary Magdalene appears as *apostola apostolorum* also in the Magdalene window (beginning of the thirteenth century) in the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Chartres, likewise in the Passion window under the west rose window (twelfth century, from the Romanesque cathedral).

50. The first attempts at illustrating the Magdalene *vita* turn up in the twelfth century and from the thirteenth century on, scenes taken from the legendary tradition are added. Iconographic examples of the preaching Mary Magdalene (also frequently in a pulpit) are given by Jansen, *Making*, 67–75.

Fig. 2: Master of the Magdalene, Saint Mary Magdalene and Scenes from Her Life. 1280x, 164 x 76 cm. Florence: Galleria dell'Accademia. Inventory 8466. Photo from akg-images / Rabatti – Domingie.

row of images), who teaches the faith to men and women before a background depicting an urban architecture, appears in this context parallel to that gesture displayed by the resurrected Christ in the *noli me tangere* scene found on the left. To the typical pictorial program of the Magdalene *vita* also belong, however, motifs from the *vita eremitica* of the saint, who, after missionizing Provence, retires to a rock grotto for thirty years of ascetic, penitential life, until she is finally discovered by a priest. Especially the *elevatio* scene, the

elevation of the penitent woman who is covered only by her hair⁵¹ (a transfer of motif from the legend of Maria Aegyptiaca) by the angels at the daily monastic office, is a favored motif in late medieval iconography. In addition, the Magdalene panel shows the miraculous feeding by the angels, the last communion, and the funeral of the saint. The large full frontal figure presents the hair-enshrouded female penitent, whose scroll shows her to be the archetype of the (male and female) sinner:

Ne despe(re)tis
 vos qui peccare soletis
 exemplo meo
 vos reparate Deo.

Do not despair,
 you who are accustomed to sinning,
 and, taking me as an example,
 reconcile yourselves with God!

5. IMPORTANT EXAMPLES OF LATIN AND GREEK HAGIOGRAPHY

The most significant expression of the development of the legends at that time occurred in the *Legenda aurea* (1263–1273) of the Dominican and later archbishop of Genoa Jacobus de Voragine (ca. 1230–1299). In this widely disseminated hagiographical collection, the various elements of the Magdalene legends were integrated on the basis of a comprehensive knowledge of the sources into a *vita* that soon became canonical. As general traditional material, it underlay sermons, Latin and vernacular⁵² poetry, and the major cycles

51. The type of image of the penitent female recluse that came into fashion in the thirteenth century through the influence of French spirituality changes in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries toward partial and then complete nudity and, from the Renaissance, is depicted increasingly in erotic terms.

52. For the German-speaking realm, I refer, for example, to the Middle High German *Passional* (ca. 1300), where the Magdalene *vita* is found in the second part called “der apostelen buoch” or “der boten buoch.” *Der Saelden Hort* (“The Treasure of Happiness/Salvation,” ca. 1300), also known as the “Alemannic Magdalene Legend,” explains Mary Magdalene’s worldly life by asserting that, as the bride at the wedding at Cana, she is left by John for the sake of Christ (rejected by Jacobus de Voragine). After Jesus’s ascension, the Bethanian sisters sell all their family possessions (as in the *Legenda aurea*), in order to live “als zwelf botten und zwelf bottin” (“as twelve male messengers and twelve female messengers”), that is, as male and female apostles (cf. the practice of the preaching orders; edition of the text by Heinrich Adrian, *Der Saelden Hort: Alemannisches Gedicht vom Leben Jesu, Johannes des Täufers und der Magdalena*, DTMA 26 [Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhand-

of images. The main focus here is upon the “postbiblical” events, particularly to the Marseille episode (dated from ca. 1200), including the conversion of the princely couple and the later miraculous salvation of the princess, who became pregnant following Mary Magdalene’s intercession, and her child. The first sermon delivered by the *apostola apostolorum* in Marseille is described by the *Legenda aurea* (96) as follows:

When blessed Mary Magdalene saw the people gathering at the shrine to offer sacrifice to the idols, she came forward, her manner calm and her face serene, and with well-chosen words called them away from the cult of idols and preached Christ fervidly to them. All who heard her were in admiration at her beauty, her eloquence, and the sweetness of her message ... and no wonder, that the mouth which had pressed such pious and beautiful kisses on the Saviour’s feet should breathe forth the perfume of the word of God more profusely than others could.⁵³

More interesting, however, is a Magdalene *vita* that has been handed down under the name of the abbot Hrabanus Maurus of Fulda (ca. 780–856) but that, on the basis of style and content, is dated much later, in the twelfth century.⁵⁴ In contrast to the *Legenda aurea*, this extensive *vita* is not conceived as a popular book but rather pursues theology to a greater extent. Some of the popular narrative elements are lacking, for example, the miraculous sea journey in a rudderless boat. In regard to the *vita eremitica*, which, in the hagiographical collections in general, endorses Mary Magdalene’s missionary activity,⁵⁵ Pseudo-Hrabanus is critical. The focus is on her *vita apostolica*, which, however, receives an ascetic-contemplative dimension. The idea that the saint was elevated to heaven by the angels and was strengthened with food from heaven is characterized as an *apocryphum*, but he does accept a “mystical” manner of understanding (PL 112:1496C). On the other hand, he declares

lung, 1927], 190; similar in the *Passional*). Concerning the extensive German-language material on the legends, see Madeleine Boxler, “*Ich bin ein Predigerin und Appostlorin*”: *Die deutschen Maria-Magdalena-Legenden des Mittelalters (1300–1550): Untersuchungen und Texte*, DLAS 22 (Bern: Lang, 1996). See further Maisch, *Maria Magdalena*, 57–59.

53. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 1:376–77.

54. *De vita beatae Mariae Magdalенаe et sororis ejus sanctae Marthae* (PL 112:1431–1508). Translated by David Mycoff, *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalen and Her Sister Martha* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1989). The work is also attributed to Hrabanus “first by late medieval manuscripts or catalogues of works” (Gössmann, “Maria Magdalena,” 57). See also Hansel, *Maria-Magdalena-Legende*, 17, 111 (n. 136).

55. For a different interpretation, see, e.g., Adrian, *Der Saelden Hort*.

the rest of the narrative tradition, which was borrowed from the legend of Maria Aegyptiaca, to be sheer invention.

The detailed interpretation of the biblical events shifts Mary Magdalene to the center along with Jesus and offers several theological excursuses in addition to the harmonizing presentation of the Gospel material. Thus, for example, a reflection upon the threefold anointing of Jesus's feet (Luke 7:36–50; John 12:1–8), head, and body (Matt 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9) emphasizes Mary Magdalene as an example to be imitated and as the archetype of the soul (presented as female) that, in various stages, approaches God mystically (see esp. PL 112:1480B–1481B). The partially mystical language also makes use of erotic images, fitting with the bride typology.

In the broad rendering of the various Easter narratives, which Pseudo-Hrabanus gives special significance, he repeatedly stresses Mary of Magdala's primary status and mandate.⁵⁶ She is the recipient of the first appearance of the resurrected Christ, while the competing Peter tradition (after the two Matthean Marys) is relegated to third place (see PL 112:1477B). She is the first believer, in contrast to the two disciples who merely see Mary's testimony concerning what was found at the tomb confirmed and which differs from John 20:8. She is also the first herald of the Easter gospel. She is either characterized repeatedly as *apostola*, or there is frequently an explicit reference to her apostolate.⁵⁷ Finally, Pseudo-Hrabanus summarizes:

She, namely, has been enriched with the frequent award of divine dignity,
in that she alone has been distinguished with the first appearance,
in that she has been elevated through the honor of the apostolate,
in that she has been appointed as herald of Christ's resurrection,
in that she has been chosen as prophetess of the ascension to the apostles.⁵⁸

As with Honorius (see PL 172:981B), Mary Magdalene also receives a place at Jesus's ascension (with the commission to preach) and at Pentecost. This follows the events reported in Acts (especially 1–8). After the assignment of the areas for mission, she accompanies Maximinus on the journey to the west, in order to continue her role as apostle in the evangelization of Provence:

56. John 20 is interpreted according to the traditional Eve-Magdalone typology, as used by Augustine, Gregory the Great, and Odo.

57. See PL 112:1474B, 1475A, 1476B (as in 1475B, her *coapostolis*, "apostolic colleagues," are mentioned), 1479C; in later contexts, 1485B, 1488A, 1495C, 1502C, 1503C.

58. PL 112:1479C: "Multiplici enim divinae dignationis praemio ditata est, dum prima apparitione sola glorificata est; dum apostolatus honore sublimata est; dum anastasis Christi evangelista instituta est; dum prophetissa ascensionis ad apostolos destinata est."

Oportet igitur ut sicut anastasis Christi Apostola destinata est ad apostolos et ascensionis eius prophetissa sic et credentium in toto orbe fieret evangelista.

It is thus necessary that she, as she has been appointed apostle of Christ's resurrection to the apostles and prophetess of his ascension, so she also may become the herald of the believers in the whole world. (PL 112:1495B–C)

Her preaching activity and miracles in Aix-en-Provence receive a good deal of space (see PL 112:1494–96). Before her death Jesus appears to his wistful “special friend” (*specialis amica*, see PL 112:1488A, 1502C) together with a host of angels. Maximinus buries her corpse and has a basilica erected over her grave. Meanwhile, Martha sees choirs of angels carrying the soul of her sister to heaven; before Martha herself suffers a longed-for death, the female apostle appears to her. Maximinus orders that he be buried next to Mary Magdalene. The *vita* closes with the remark that no king or prince bearing weapons may set foot on the holy ground of the monastery named after him (Saint Maximin) and that no woman may do so either. This note makes clear that Mary Magdalene in the *vita* serves as a symbolic figure with whom identification occurs in a masculine-monastic context. The focus always lies upon her example of repentance (to which she herself refers in her preaching; see PL 112:1495A), her love,⁵⁹ and her contemplation.⁶⁰ Still, her portrayal as apostle, prophetess, and preacher remains remarkable.

In contrast to the extensive Latin hagiographical sources, the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca* contains only one detailed Magdalene *vita*, namely, the praise directed “to the holy and apostle-like myrophore [bearer of ointments] Mary Magdalene”⁶¹ by Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos (ca. 1256–1335). Although the “venerable female disciple of the Word” (σεμνή τοῦ Λόγου μαθήτρια, PG 147:576A) is not referred to directly with the title of apostle, the recipient of the prophany of the resurrected Christ and the first herald of the

59. See already the sermons of Gregory the Great and Odo, as well as the gospel harmony by Otfried of Weißenburg (ca. 790–875). The first gospel citation in the prologue is John 11:5.

60. Jane Schaberg, “Thinking Back through Mary Magdalene,” *A Feminist Companion to John 2*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine, FCNTECW 5 (London: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 167–89, here 189, comments upon her ambivalent role: “she offers no real challenge to the hierarchy of the medieval Church, subordinating herself in the story to Peter and to Maximinus ... and living a life more contemplative than active. Authorized by the risen Christ, she strangely has no official authority.”

61. Λόγος εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν καὶ ἰσαπόστολον μυροφόρον Μαρίαν τὴν Μαγδαληνὴν (BHG 1162; see PG 147:539–576).

Easter message as teacher of the apostles must be granted “in any case, too,” an apostolic role (“that of the apostles”).⁶²

Since the Greek tradition distinguished between the three female figures who are combined in the Latin tradition, Eastern texts differ from the Western legendary sources. The increasing embellishment of the sinful woman’s earthly life stands in contrast to the Eastern sanctity of Mary Magdalene, beginning with her childhood, which is developed here. As a young woman, she chooses chastity and leads an ascetic, charitable life. She speaks on intimate terms with God and continues her study of Scripture. This eventually incites Satan’s envy so that he harries her with demons. Jesus frees the possessed woman from these when he comes to Magdala after the miraculous feeding of the five thousand (inversion of Luke 8:2 and 9:12–17). In correspondence with Peter’s confession of the Messiah in the Synoptic Gospels, Mary Magdalene acknowledges the one who healed her as the promised Savior of Israel and the Son of God. She becomes Jesus’s disciple and is portrayed as a close intimate of his family, especially of his mother,⁶³ as well as of his circle of friends. The brief biblical references to her discipleship are embroidered by inserting her into various Gospel scenes. For example, she visits Mary and Martha and is a witness to the resurrection of Lazarus.

Her status as a witness of the passion is displayed when she conducts a conversation with the crucified and, in the process, also urges him to console his mother and “John.” Later she intervenes with Joseph of Arimathea in regard to the burial. With Jesus’s mother, she mourns over his corpse and lets his mother caress his face.

Xanthopoulos harmonizes the Easter Gospels by having Mary Magdalene come to the grave several times and by narrating different encounters with Jesus. However, her role as first witness of the resurrected Christ, as *apostola apostolorum*, is clearly emphasized. In addition, she becomes a witness of the ascension announced previously by her and on Pentecost receives

62. ταύτη δότεον πάντως και τὰ τῶν ἀποστόλων (PG 147, 541c). On this, Synek, *Frauen*, 60: “The song of praise to the one who—so Xanthopoulos—in every way surpassed all other holy women, testifies in an especially beautiful way to the fact that there were theologians who, in spite of the reservations of their colleagues, did not cease to hold fast to the provoking challenge of the ‘apostolic woman’ from the ‘apostolic period’ who had become the essential founder of the ‘apostolic tradition.’”

63. Jensen, “Maria von Magdala,” 33–50, here 46, detects in the “relations with the mother of God ... the attempt ... to reconcile two competing cults of the saints with each other.” Similarly, Pseudo-Hrabanus appears to be intent on striking a balance when he discusses the mutual affection between the two after Jesus’s ascension; in PL 112:485B, the Queen of Heaven is given precedence.

the promised gifts of the Spirit together with the mother of Jesus and the (other) apostles.

In accord with Jesus's missionary commission, she, like all the other apostles, sets out on extended journeys to proclaim the gospel. That she files suit in Rome with Emperor Tiberius against Pilate because of the unjust death of Jesus recalls the apocryphal Letter of Tiberius to Pilate. When she also comes as a missionary to Gaul, among other destinations (she goes, in addition, to Phoenicia, Syria, Egypt, and Pamphylia), the southern French legendary tradition developing since the eleventh century is not mentioned at all. Rather, the *vita* ends in accord with the Eastern church tradition (from the sixth century onward), which localizes the grave of Mary Magdalene in Ephesus.⁶⁴ After her return to Palestine, she goes back to Ephesus, where she had left John and the mother of Jesus entrusted to him. In this area, she dies after a short illness and is buried by John and Mary. From there, her relics are later transported to Constantinople.⁶⁵

6. FROM HOLY APOSTLE TO EROTIC SINFUL WOMAN

The medieval evidence documents a complex and variegated reception of Mary Magdalene. The beloved saint functions no longer merely as a type of salvation history but rather is given her own individual biography and becomes the powerful intercessor and miracle-maker. Individual theological interpretations, as well as many elements of the legendary tradition, are definitely in tension with the more restrictive canonical texts and the established understanding of ecclesiastical functions.⁶⁶ While the apostolate of Mary Magdalene is accentuated as a result of the reform movements in the High

64. Jensen, "Maria von Magdala," 44–46, presents an anonymous Greek *vita* that harmonizes the southern French legendary tradition with the Ephesus tradition. After Easter, Mary Magdalene first of all accuses Pilate in Rome, but after her return to Jerusalem joins Peter, who entrusts her later to a certain Maximos; here follow the events reported in the *Legenda aurea*. When the Prince of Marseille travels to Rome, he receives the recommendation from Peter to be baptized by Mary Magdalene. She baptizes him and his household, as well as all the residents of Marseille, builds churches, administers the city, teaches, and preaches in Rome and in the surrounding area. Instead of a *vita eremitica*, however, she ends her life in Ephesus.

65. In 899, Emperor Leo VI had the mortal remains of Mary Magdalene, which were venerated in Ephesus, transported to Constantinople (along with those of Lazarus from Kition [Larnaca] on Cyprus).

66. On the various attempts at a solution on the part of the preachers, see Jansen, *Making*, 54–66.

Middle Ages (despite the ban on women's teaching and preaching),⁶⁷ at the same time her image as repentant sinner overlays the memory of the female apostle and undermines her authority. This saint is often invoked to legitimate ecclesiastical and political interests, in order to steer the emergent potential for protest and renewal into "orthodox" paths opposing heretical currents.⁶⁸

The epoch of the great veneration of the saints ends with the dawning of the Reformation and humanism. The *Zeitgeist* changes, and the quarrels about relics made all claims implausible. With the criticism directed against the allegorical exegesis of Scripture, the typological significance of the Magdalene figure fades. Doubts are expressed about the mixed sources and authenticity of the Provençal legends.⁶⁹ Beginning with the Renaissance, Mary Magdalene loses her halo. The erotic images employed in medieval mysticism are increasingly stripped of metaphorical meaning, and the portrayal of nakedness loses its innocence. Studying the dominant program of images reveals that the focus now is no longer upon the great saint as a model and patroness for all those sinning and hoping for redemption but rather upon the loving, seductively attractive sinful woman, a figure on which sexual fantasies and fears are projected. An erotic component increasingly comes into play in the obsequious posture of contrite humility. The repentant woman is brought down from heaven to the earth; the one carried on the wings of angels in mystic ecstasy becomes the fallen woman.⁷⁰

67. Already Ambrose invoked John 20 to prohibit women's preaching; *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam* 10.155–157, 165 (Adriaen and Ballerini, 390–391, 393). His exegesis became very influential.

68. Mary Magdalene served as an identification figure for the persecuted Waldensians and Cathars. Women preachers referred to her and Cathars assimilated the Gnostic ideas about this female partner of Jesus. An interesting comparison with the early Christian conflict between gnostic-charismatic circles and the Petrine hierarchical church is made by Jansen, *Making*, 85, when she analyzes Mary Magdalene's function as a (female) symbolic figure of the reform movements ecclesiastically channeled in the new monastic orders: "Symbolic disempowerment allowed the mendicants to construct an identity, gendered female, which was in and of itself a powerful critique of the wealthy and masculinized institutional Church represented by Saint Peter."

69. The note that her sinfulness is questioned appears already in a Copenhagen manuscript from 1431 in connection with the conversion of Mary Magdalene, a legend disseminated during the Late Middle Ages within the Low German linguistic domain (see Hansel, *Maria-Magdalena-Legende*, 114ff.). Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (ca. 1450–1536) provoked the first exegetical controversy at the Sorbonne; his works (*De Maria Magdalena et triduo Christi disceptatio* 1517/18, *De tribus et unica Magdalena* 1519) were placed upon the pontifical *Index librorum prohibitorum*.

70. The numerous Magdalene orders, cloisters, and asylums from the Middle Ages testify to the perception of Mary Magdalene as patron saint of "fallen" females.