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# *The Cult of Mary Magdalene in the Medieval West**

Theresa Gross-Diaz

## Introduction

Throughout the European Middle Ages, Christians widely accepted Gregory the Great's conflation of various named and unnamed Gospel women into a single Mary.[1] Our examination of this "blessedly polysemous"[2] Mary Magdalene's place in Western medieval culture assumes this conflation. *Who* Mary was - an unproblematic aggregate of various persons - makes the specific *who* of Mary to theologians, to preachers, to artists, to religious and to lay men and women, the best possible Mary for each of their distinct purposes. "I do not trouble myself about chronology in my meditation," writes an anonymous 14th-century Italian; "it delights me to tell of the Magdalene and what she did at this time according to my fancy";[3] according, that is, to his purpose and the needs of his audience. This chapter will summarize what is known of the development of the cult of Mary Magdalene in Western Europe and explore the various purposes to which devotion to the saint lent itself.

## 1. Earliest evidence of devotion to Mary Magdalene

The cult of Mary Magdalene did not exist in the early Christian West.[4] While, since the sixth century, the sisters Mary and Martha of Bethany (cf. Luke 10:38–42, John 11:1–45) shared a feast day on 19 January,[5] the feast of Mary Magdalene with a *dies natalis* of 22 July was only added to Western hieronymian martyrologies around the year 720, by Bede. His inspiration may have been Greek liturgical books or calendars of saints' feasts: 22 July was the date of her feast in Ephesus, where she was believed to have been buried.[6] Several Easter-season homilies by Bede further reflect his respect for the saint.[7] The fact that Bede was moved to include her in the church calendar suggests that awareness of Mary Magdalene was already on the rise in Britain. Perhaps this was due to the fame of Bede's compatriot and contemporary, St. Willibald, who had

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* I would like to thank Meghanne Phillips (Loyola University Chicago, class of 2010) for her contributions to this chapter.

[1] See especially homilies 25 and 33 in Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Evangelia*, ed. Raymond Étaix, CCSL 141 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), or, in English, idem, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. David Hurst (Piscataway: Gorgias, 2009). See also Kunder, ch. 5 in this volume. The Samaritan woman, the *sponsa* of the Song of Songs, Mary of Egypt, Thaïs, and other women (biblical and not) also infiltrate the persona of Mary Magdalene.

[2] Dominique Iogna-Prat, "La femme, métaphores et 'réalité' (VIIIe–XIe siècles)," *BMNAC* 2 (1994): 3–10 (5).

[3] Cited in Benedicta Ward, S.L.G., *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources*, CistSS 106 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1987), 11.

[4] Victor Saxer, *Le culte de Marie Madeleine en Occident: Des origines à la fin du moyen âge*, Cahiers d'archéologie et d'histoire 3 (Paris: Clavreuil, 1959), 31.

[5] Victor Saxer, *Le culte de Marie Madeleine en Occident*, 35.

[6] Victor Saxer, *Le culte de Marie Madeleine en Occident*, 41. The earliest manuscript of Bede's martyrology is Cod. Sang. 451: Martyrology, located at Stiftsbibliothek in St. Gallen, Switzerland, where the Magdalene appears on folio 49 recto. On Bede's martyrology see Jacques Dubois, *Les Martyrologes du Moyen Âge Latin*, TSMÂO 26 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1978), 38–9.

[7] Veronica Ortenberg, "Le culte de sainte Marie Madeleine dans l'Angleterre anglo-saxonne," *MEFRM* 104 (1992):13–35, esp. 14 n.4.

traveled to Ephesus and the village of Magdalene as part of a ten year-long pilgrimage to Rome and the Holy Land; [8] Willibald himself was ordained priest on the feast day of Mary Magdalene.[9]

Interest in Mary Magdalene in Anglo-Saxon England is further attested by the depiction of her on the Ruthwell Cross (ca. 700; fig. 8.1) and on the later Gosforth Cross.[10] The scene on the Ruthwell Cross shows her anointing Christ's feet and drying them with her hair, and the Latin inscription echoes her actions. [11] Although this cross with its Latin and runic inscriptions has long been associated with the Anglo-Saxon poem "The Dream of the Rood", a recent study has revived an older argument that the cross is, rather, instruction on the "proper response to Christ's incarnation" and that the speaker or "protagonist" of the Ruthwell Cross is none other than Mary Magdalene herself.[12] Carved in England at roughly the same time as the Ruthwell Cross is an ivory plaque, now in the Musée national du Moyen Âge, formerly Musée de Cluny, Paris. It depicts the Magdalene meeting Christ after his resurrection (fig. 8.2).[13] In these early English examples, the emphasis is on Mary's close association with Christ, connecting her to the passion cycle and the veneration of the cross.

A second emphasis also appears at this time in England and Ireland: a focus on the saint's ascetic withdrawal into the desert, her conversion from the luxuries of the world to a life of penance. This is an early witness of the theme that later infused the *Vita eremitica,* the earliest *Vita* of Mary Magdalene, which was heavily influenced by the legend of Mary of Egypt. The conflation of these two Marys occurs already in an eighth century Old Irish sermon and in the Old English Martyrology of the early ninth century. These pre-date the translation of Mary of Egypt's *Vita* into Latin by Paul the "Deacon of Naples" (ca. 876) and the composition of the *Vita eremitica* (probably in southern Italy) at about the same time, so this Byzantine-influenced theme of Mary's conversion and penance must have arrived in Britain more directly. It may have been brought to Britain by the Greek-speaking Hadrian (d. 710), who arrived via Naples to became abbot of Sts. Peter and Paul, Canterbury, and who had close ties to Northumbria; or even earlier, by Theodore, native of Tarsus and archbishop of Canterbury (d. 690).[14] In Ireland, a century

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[8] Ortenberg, "Le culte," 13.

[9] Huneberc of Heidenheim, "The *Hodoeporicon* of St. Willibald," in C. H. Talbot, ed. and trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany: being the Lives of SS. Willibrord, Boniface, Sturm, Leoba, and Lebuin, together with the* Hodoeporicon *of St. Willibald and a Selection from the Correspondence of St. Boniface* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1954), 153–77. Huneberc does not mention Mary Magdalene when she describes Willibald visiting the tomb of St. John the Evangelist near Ephesus or the "village of Magdalene" (160, 164), but only mentions her once as the saint on whose feast day, July 22, Willibald was ordained priest by St. Boniface (175).

[10] The Gosforth Cross (ca. 930–950) shows Mary Magdalene holding an alabastron and standing at the foot of the crucified Christ. The iconography of this "bilingual" (pagan and Christian) cross is debated. See Knut Berg, "The Gosforth Cross," *JWCI* 21 (1958): 27–43. Berg argues persuasively that the cross depicts Ragnarök and the end of pagan religion followed by the rebirth of the world through the crucifixion.

[11] Cf. Luke 7:37–38 , John 12:1–3.

[12] Pamela O'Neill, *'A Pillar Curiously Engraven; With Some Inscriptions upon It': What is the Ruthwell Cross?*, BAR.B 397 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2005).

[13] Ortenberg, "Le culte," 14–5. It is item no. 393 in the catalogue by Edmond du Sommerard, *Musée des Thermes et de l'Hôtel de Cluny: Catalogue et description des objets d'art et de l'antiquité, du moyen-âge, et de la renaissance* (Paris: Hôtel de Cluny, 1855), 62–3.

[14] Ortenberg, "Le culte," 16–7; Christopher Hohler, "Theodore and the Liturgy," in Michael Lapidge, ed., *Archbishop Theodore: Commemorative Studies on His Life and Influence*, CSASE 11 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 225. For the most recent work on Old English Martyrology, see Christine Rauer, ed. and

later, the Old Irish prose martyrology of Tallaght and the metrical martyrology of Oengus based on it both mention the Magdalene. In both of these her feast day is given as 28 March, the usual date for the feast of Mary the Egyptian, further cementing the conflation of these two Marys.[15]

In Ireland and England, therefore, we find some of the earliest evidence of devotion to the Magdalene in Western Europe, with Byzantine influence in both, but with Irish sources seeming to favor the eremitical side of the saint's later life while in England the focus was somewhat more heavily on the Magdalene as a witness to the life and resurrection of Christ. Critical to the future of the saint's cult in Europe, Bede's addition of Mary Magdalene to the calendar on 22 July eventually spread throughout the Carolingian world. Around 860 Ado, bishop of Vienne, composed a martyrology which added brief "histories" to the notices of the saints' feasts, including the Magdalene's. This was picked up by Usuard's martyrology and from there was incorporated into the Roman Martyrology by the tenth century. From that point, the date of Mary Magdalene's feast was stabilized in the Western Church calendar.

## 2. The Magdalene in Medieval Liturgy

Liturgically, Mary Magdalene's debut in the West was in connection with the Easter cycle, thus supporting the "Mary as witness" emphasis rather than "Mary as ascetic penitent." Saint Gregory preached two influential homilies which mention Mary Magdalene's devotion to Christ during his ministry and after his resurrection: one the Friday after Easter and the other the Friday of the autumnal Ember Days.[16] These homilies were swiftly adapted for liturgical use in the offices of Holy Week and Easter. Paul the Deacon (d. ca. 799) included these sermons in his own homeliary, whence they spread through the Carolingian realm. Masses with prayers proper to the feast of Mary and Martha of Bethany on 19 January are attested from the late eighth century, but the earliest mass specifically for the 22 July feast of Mary Magdalene is a century later, at St. Martin of Tours, followed by one at the church of St. Père, Chartres, in the tenth century.[17] Sometime before ca.1040, by which time it was adapted for the liturgy and included in the Magdalene's hagiographic dossier at Vézelay, the influential sermon once attributed to Odo of Cluny (d. 942) was composed. This sermon (unknown at Cluny) consists largely of Easter-related materials from the homeliary of Haimo of Auxerre (fl. 860), reworked to focus on Mary Magdalene. It is addressed to a monastic audience and dwells on her as a type of the Church on earth and as a model of repentance.[18] Divided into eleven "lessons," it provided widely-used readings for her 22 July feast. By the tenth century, Mary's connection to the Easter liturgical cycle also indirectly provided the subject of the earliest medieval drama: tropes (musical and sometimes textual embellishment of a liturgical passage) on the verse *quem quaeritis*, "whom do

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trans., *The Old English Martyrology: Edition, Translation and Commentary*, Anglo Saxon Texts 10 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[15] Saxer mistakenly identifies the language as "Anglo-Saxon" (*Le culte*, 41). See also Jane Cartwright, *Feminine Sanctity and Spirituality in Medieval Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), 130.

[16] Saxer, *Le culte*, 33. Ember days (or *Tempora*) are four short periods of abstinence connected to the change of the seasons.

[17] Saxer, *Le culte*, 37, 43.

[18] See Jacques Dalarun, "The Clerical Gaze," trans. Arthur Goldhammer, in Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, ed., *Silences of the Middle Ages*, vol. 2 of Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot, eds., *A History of Women in the West* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1992), 15–42, esp. 34; see also the important article by Dominique Iogna-Prat, "La Madeleine du *Sermo in Veneratione Sanctae Mariae Magdalenae* attribué à Odon de Cluny," *MEFRM* 104 (1992): 37–70, esp. 38–42.

you seek" (from Luke 24:5), were added to the Easter celebrations at the monasteries of St. Martial in Limoges, St. Gallen, and Winchester.[19]

Mention of Mary Magdalene is frequently found in commentaries on the Gospels, of course, but early medieval sermons and homilies specifically for her feast day not only illustrate the growing popularity of the saint, but also often move beyond Patristic-era misogynist tendencies and rather lifeless allegorical treatments of the Magdalene as Ecclesia.[20] Instead, many illustrate a variety of ways that the saint proved to be a useful and inspirational subject matter, addressed both to monastic and to lay audiences. Most useful pastorally are Mary's major virtues of repentance and of love: both are offered as models for Christians (men and women) to follow. The Benedictine Ratherius of Verona (d. 974), in a sermon on the feast of Mary and Martha of Bethany, uses Mary Magdalene to show the superiority of the contemplative (monastic) life over the active life, but in the process he emphasizes the great love Christ has for her as well as the extremes of her pre-and post-conversion lifestyles, holding out hope for more mundane sinners.[21] Similarly, Geoffrey, abbot of Vendôme (d. 1132), dwells on the fruitful paradox _peccatrix-praedicatrix_: from "famous sinner" she becomes "glorious preacher." Geoffrey considers her preaching itself as a paradox, considering her lack of words during her moment of conversion, when her tears spoke more eloquently than any human words could. Here the "silence" of the Magdalene is less a natural and appropriate function of her sex than a recognition that having sinned through words (!), she now does not trust them to express her repentance.[22] Her great love – she loved Christ more than did Peter,[23] according to Geoffrey – and her great repentance conduct her from silence to speech: Christ orders Mary to spread the news of his resurrection, making her "pious tongue" a "gateway to heaven."

More perhaps than her paradigmatic sinfulness, Mary Magdalene's paradigmatic love dominates in these sermons. Typically gentle and affective, Anselm of Canterbury's (d. 1109) prayer in honor of the Magdalene calls her Christ's beloved and "God's blessed spouse" (_beata_

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[19] William L. Smoldon, "The Origins of the '_quem quaeritis_' and the Easter Sepulchre Music-Drama, as Demonstrated by their Musical Settings," in Sandro Sticca, ed., _The Medieval Drama_ (Albany: SUNY Press, 1972), 121–54; Susan Haskins, _Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor_ (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1993), 11. The earliest unambiguous evidence of the dramatization of this sequence is in the _Regularis Concordia_ of Æthelwold, bishop of Winchester (ca. 965–975). See Richard B. Donovan, _The Liturgical Drama in Medieval Spain_, STPIMS 4 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1958), 10–13.

[20] See, for example, sermons 75, 77, 79, 82, 84, 94 by Peter Chrysologus (d. 450) (_St. Peter Chrysologus: Selected Sermons_, trans. William Palardy, vol. 3, _FC_ 110 [Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2005]). Peter does not miss an opportunity to underscore Mary Magdalene's feminine weakness and the inadequacies of her sex. See Lilia Sebastiani, _Tra/Sfigurazione: Il personaggio evangelico di Maria di Magdala e il mito della peccatrice redenta nella tradizione occidentale_ (Brescia: Queriniana, 1992), 98–105. Unfortunately Sebastiani confuses Peter's dates with those of his successor and 'editor,' Bishop Felix of Ravenna (d. 717). As mentioned above, the sermon attributed to Odo of Cluny refers to Mary Magdalene primarily as a metaphor of the Church on earth.

[21] See sermon 11 in _The Complete Works of Rather of Verona_, trans. Peter L.D. Reid, MRTS 76 (Binghamton: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1991), 455–63, and in PL 136:749b–758b. I cite the _Patrologia Latina_ editions, however inadequate, because of their ready availability online. See also Sebastiani, _Tra/Sfigurazione_, 106–7.

[22] _Sermo IX in festivitate beatae M. Magdalenae_ (in Geoffroy de Vendôme, _Œuvres_, ed. and trans. Geneviève Giordanengo, SHM 29 [Paris: CNRS, 1996], 130–9, and in PL 157:270d–274b). See also Dalarun, "The Clerical Gaze," 33–34, and Sebastiani, _Tra/Sfigurazione_, 109–10.

[23] On this subject, see Pardee, ch. 3 in this volume.

*sponsa Dei*). In a letter to the nun Adelaide, to whom he recommended this prayer, he promised that "if recited from the heart" it would "increase [divine] love's flames."[24] Even the scholastic Peter Comestor (d. ca. 1179), despite his hardline stance against women preaching, finds in Christ's '*noli me tangere*' an almost unimaginable rebuke to someone who so loved Christ and was so loved by him. Peter calls her, like the Virgin Mary, *stella maris,* our guide on our pilgrim's way, and notes that although the Virgin's light may be greater, the Magdalene's is "more ardent."[25]

Both influenced by and influencing homilies and exegetical literature, Latin hymns to Mary Magdalene appear by around the year 1000.[26] Biblical references (to all the possible Marys) vastly outnumber legendary (non-biblical) elements in 160 hymns analyzed by Szövérffy, yet those rare legendary elements play an important role. They both reflect contemporary developments in her cult and also lend a warmth and intimacy to the saint as she is presented to the laity.[27] Among the biblical references, by far the most common (showing up in over two thirds of the hymns) is Mary's conversion from her life of luxury – a topic also common in homilies – when she anoints Christ's feet with her tears and is forgiven by him because of her great love.[28] However, reflecting the early medieval emphasis on Mary's role in the Easter cycle, over half the hymns Szövérffy studied place her at the crucifixion, the resurrection, or both.[29] Together, these prevailing themes reinforce the role of the Magdalene as a patroness of repentant sinners and as an apostle (as she is frequently named in the hymns) and intimate of Christ. Reflecting the growing affection for this saint, some of the greatest poets and hymnodists of the Middle Ages wrote songs in her praise, such as Marbod of Rennes (d. 1123), Peter Abelard (d. 1142), Philip the Chancellor (d. 1236), and Petrarch (d. 1374).[30]

[24] For the sermon, see *Oratio ad sanctam Mariam Magdalenam* in Anselm of Canterbury, *Opera omnia*, ed. Francis S. Schmitt, 6 vols. (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1946–1961), 3:64–7, or in PL 158:1010a–1012c. (Note that Sebastiani [*Tra/Sfigurazione*, 114, n. 52] erroneously cites PL 58.) For the letter to Adelaide, see Walter Frohlich, trans., *The Letters of Saint Anselm of Canterbury*, 3 vols., CistSS 96, 97, 142 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1990–1994), 1:92–4. Adelaide was a daughter of William the Conqueror.

[25] *Sermo LXIX in festo Sanctae Magdalenae* (PL 171:671d–678a). The attribution is uncertain. The author of this sermon does eventually admit that Christ's admonition not to touch him may have been due to Mary Magdalene's love being still too earthly; this would fit with Comestor's stance on forbidding women to preach. See Katherine L. Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalene: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 54.

[26] Joseph Szövérffy, "'*Peccatrix quondam femina*': A Survey of the Mary Magdalen Hymns," *Tr.* 19 (1963): 79–146 (90, 138). What I call "hymns" here includes sequences, tropes, offices (all in the context of the mass) and sacred lyric poems.

[27] Szövérffy, "Survey," 92, 141.

[28] Luke 7:47. See Kunder, ch. 5 in this volume, for the development of this theme in Patristic literature.

[29] Szövérffy, "Survey," 98–9.

[30] The hymns may be found in Clemens Blume and Guido M. Dreves, eds., *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*, 55 vols. (Leipzig: Reisland, 1886–1922). See Szöverffy ("Survey," 85, n. 41) for a list of the volumes containing the hymns of Mary Magdalene. The hymns of Marbod in PL 171:1647–1649 may be spurious (Iogna-Prat, "La femme," 110, n. 229). On Abelard's admiration of Mary Magdalene as a model of a strong woman and as the apostle to the apostles, see Barbara Newman, "Flaws in the Golden Bowl: Gender and Spiritual Formation in the Twelfth Century," in *From Virile Woman to Woman Christ: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 19–45.

## 3. The Physical Presence of the Magdalene

Calendars, martyrologies, and liturgical and homiletic texts may provide the earliest traces of devotion to Mary Magdalene, but given the importance of relics and pilgrimage in medieval culture, her physical presence in Western Europe is at the center of the development of her cult. Her alleged tomb in Ephesus was well known in the Greek-speaking world and, as we have seen, in the West; from Ephesus her remains were translated to Constantinople by Emperor Leo VI (d. 912).[31] King Æthelstan of England (924–39) offered a finger bone of the saint to the treasury of the cathedral of Exeter. Æthelstan had received many relics of Byzantine origin, some with Carolingian imperial associations, from Hugh, duke of the Franks, as part of the latter's request for the hand of Æthelstan's sister.[32] It is thus conceivable that this relic of Mary Magdalene arrived in England from Constantinople via France as part of a royal marriage arrangement. Relics of the saint were also part of the treasure brought to Germany by the Byzantine princess Theophano on the occasion of her marriage to emperor Otto II in 972. Two years later an altar was dedicated (presumably with her relics in it) to Mary Magdalene, along with "other holy virgins", including Martha of Bethany, in the crypt of the cathedral of St. Stephen, Halberstadt.[33] These dedications would make Exeter and Halberstadt among the earliest verifiable sites of the saint's cult in the West.[34] The very earliest datable relic of the Magdalene in Europe is apparently that which was recently discovered in the church of St-André, a dependent of the royal abbey of Notre-Dame in Chelles, a dozen miles east of Paris. In 1983 relics of the saint were found, carefully tagged, the script firmly dated to the eighth century.[35] [possible to insert photo here of Chelles authentique? figure 8.3] Some of the other 175 relics in this cache were relics of the Holy Land and some may have been gifts from Charlemagne or his sister Gisela, who was abbess of Chelles (757–810) and who was once betrothed to the future emperor Leo IV. Arguably, "[o]ne may assume that if a church possessed relics of some saints it probably celebrated their feasts," though we have no written evidence for the liturgical expression of Mary Magdalene's feast in Chelles.[36] All of these early attestations of Mary Magdalene's physical presence in Europe thus have Byzantine connections.

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[31] Charles Anthony Stewart, "Domes of Heaven: The Domed Basilicas of Cyprus" (PhD diss., Indiana University Bloomington, 2008), 123.

[32] Sarah Foot, *Æthelstan: First King of England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 47, 192–8. The relics of Mary Magdalene are listed first in the eleventh-century Old English and in the Latin relic lists from the cathedral (see Patrick W. Connor, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter: A Tenth-Century Cultural History* [Woodbridge: Boydell, 1993], 171–210). The Magdalene's relics are, however, not among those named later by William of Malmesbury, who described Hugh's marriage negotiations.

[33] Haskins, *Mary Magdalene,* 112. Haskins does not mention any connection between Halberstadt's altar and the Byzantine princess, but Otto and his father, Otto I, may have hoped to placate the powerful bishop of Halberstadt for having taken the eastern half of his diocese and given it to the newly created bishopric of Magdeburg a few years earlier.

[34] Earlier claims, such as chapels in Neuss and Endenich, both in Germany, are based on dubious later evidence. See Saxer, *Le culte*, 53.

[35] Jane Schulenburg, "Female Religious as Collectors of Relics: Finding Sacrality and Power in the 'Ordinary'," in Michael Frassetto, Matthew Gabriele, and John D. Hosler, ed., *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Essays on Medieval Europe in Honor of Daniel F. Callahan* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 152–77, esp. 156–7.

[36] Yitzhak Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul, AD 481–751*, Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 91, 93–5.

Right through the tenth century, then, it was accepted that Mary Magdalene was buried in the Near East, whence her relics arrived in Europe. This changes rather suddenly in the eleventh century, which witnessed a tremendous growth in the popularity of the saint. Starting with the collegiate church dedicated to Mary Magdalene sometime before 1024 in Verdun, France,[37] a flurry of dedications of churches and chapels indicate a sudden burst of popularity for the saint. Devotion to the Magdalene seems to have spread partly through a network of clerics keen on reform, such as Robert of Arbrissel (d. 1116) who like many in the late eleventh century was particularly concerned about pastoral care for women.[38] Robert's foundation (1101) of Fontevrault comprised four communities: for noblewomen, widows and virgins (dedicated to the Virgin Mary); for men (John the Evangelist); for lepers (Lazarus); and for poor women and former prostitutes (Mary Magdalene). While for some reformers the "concern" was more to control and shape women's private and public spirituality, a few, like Robert, were more generous in their estimation of women's strengths. Some of these reformers wrote about Mary Magdalene in song and sermon, as we have noted above, such as Hildebert of Lavardin, Marbode of Rennes, and Geoffroy of Vendôme; others founded abbeys, churches and monasteries in her name.

The efflorescence of new foundations dedicated to Mary Magdalene may be simply part of the general upswing of religious building in millennial Europe, which clothed itself in a "white mantle of churches" in the famous phrase of Ralph Glaber (d. 1047). But these dedications may also be a reflection of the increased dissemination throughout northern Europe of the *Vita eremitica,* the *Life* of the Magdalene influenced by that of Mary of Egypt. The additional focus on asceticism and conversion lent a new twist to the already well-established apostolic and penitential aspects of Mary Magdalene as outlined above. The complex and contradictory personality of Mary Magdalene that resulted – ascetic, penitent, apostle, contemplative, preacher, mystic – made her practically the 'patron saint' of eleventh-century reform, with its agenda of celibate clergy, outreach to laity, and proper relationship between lay and religious power structures.

At just this moment in time, at Vézelay in Burgundy, the newly elected abbot Geoffrey (ruled 1037–1052) oversaw a renewal of the monastery's fortunes.[39] Founded in 863 by Count Girart of Vienne (Girart of Roussillon) and his wife Berthe, the monastery was dedicated to the

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[37] The church of Ste. Marie Madeleine, Verdun, was confirmed by bishop Haimo (988–1024); the previous church on that site had been, interestingly, a female monastery (Jean-Pierre Brelaud, "Fiche de la collégiale Sainte-Marie-Madeleine de Verdun," *Collégiales: Base des collégiales séculières de France (816–1563)*, last modified May 12, 2017, https://web.archive.org/web/20170607013324/http://vafl-s-applirecherche.unilim.fr/collegiales/index.php?i=fiche&j=63). The archdeacon Ermenfridus (Ermenfroi) of Echternach is recognized as the founder, which is interesting because there were early relics of the Magdalene in the parish church of St. Willibrord in that city (Haskins, *Mary Magdalene*, 112). Slightly earlier dedications to Mary Magdalene may have existed, but we do not have documentary evidence (see Jacques Dalarun, "La Madeleine dans l'ouest de la France au tournant des XIe–XIIe siècles," *MEFRM* 104, No. 1 [1992]: 71–119, esp. 110, n. 229). For an extensive list of eleventh century church dedications to Mary Magdalene, see Saxer, *Le culte*, 60–81.

[38] Robert's double monastery at Fontevrault was, like all double monasteries, directed by an abbess. See Jacques Dalarun, *Robert of Arbrissel: Sex, Sin and Salvation in the Middle Ages*, trans. Bruce Venarde (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2006). See also Dalarun, "La Madeleine dans l'Ouest de la France," 71–119.

[39] See Donald Maddox, "Du déclin au renouveau: Vézelay, Girart de Roussillon, et l'*inventio* des reliques de la Madeleine," in Emmanuelle Baumgartner and Laurence Harf-Lancner, eds., *Progrès, réaction, décadence dans l'Occident médiéval*, (Geneva: Droz, 2003), 95–109.

Virgin Mary and Sts. Peter and Paul, and to the martyrs Andeux (Andeolus) and Pontian, whose relics were on site since the foundation. Somewhat similarly to Cluny, Vézelay was initially granted immunity from local secular and ecclesiastical powers and was protected, theoretically, by the pope. By 1026 however, longstanding contests over control of lands and liberties had left the monastery in a bad way; it was vulnerable to the impositions of the monastery of Cluny and of the counts of Nevers. Then it was made known that the "apostle to the apostles" and indeed the apostle of Gaul, Mary Magdalene, was the patroness of the abbey. According to the *Vita apostolica* that Vézelay began to circulate at this time, Mary Magdalene had fled Jewish persecution after the martyrdom of St. Stephen, along with Maximinus, one of the seventy disciples. They went to Marseilles and thence to Aix, evangelized and baptized the populace; Maximinus founded a church in Aix while the Magdalene retired to fast and repent. At her death on 22 July, Maximinus buried her at Aix, and in turn was laid to rest at her side; many miracles during their lives were followed by miracles after their death.[40] Mary's original burial place in Ephesus was conveniently overlooked.

This new narrative of the Magdalene's life (and death) revolutionized Vézelay's fortunes. By 1050 Pope Leo IX formally recognized that Mary Magdalene was one of the patrons of the abbey, and within eight years Pope Stephan IX acknowledged her as its sole patron.[41] The *Vita apostolica*, celebrating Mary Magdalene as the apostle of Gaul, quickly worked its way into the liturgy for the July 22 feast. Vézelay's claims to have the relics of the Magdelene must have occasioned some questioning: an account of how the relics got from Aix-en-Provence to Vézelay went through a few versions before settling down by the early twelfth century as the *Translatio posterior*. In this story the founder Girart and the pious abbot Eudes sent a monk named Badilo to rescue the body of the saint, languishing in a city almost destroyed by invading Saracens. Badilo effected a *furtum sacrum* – a sacred theft, condoned and assisted by the saint herself – and brought her safely to the abbey in Burgundy, where a new series of miracles by the "beloved of Christ" confirmed and validated her new patronage.[42] Vézelay, already a convenient stop on the pilgrimage road to the tremendously popular shrine of St. James in Compostela, Spain,[43] became a pilgrimage destination in itself. The "golden age" of Vézelay had begun.

Vézelay's claim to have the relics of the Magdalene did not go unopposed. Many churches throughout Europe claimed to have relics large and small of the saint,[44] some of which, as we have seen, predated the "theft" of her body by Badilo. Vézelay responded in 1265 by a 'rediscovery' of the relics, wrapped in costly silks and accompanied by a letter of "most glorious

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[40] See the comments and edition by Guy Lobrichon, "Le dossier magdalénien aux XIe-XIIe siècles: Édition de trois pièces majeures," _MEFRM_ 104 (1992): 163–80, esp. 163–9. Interestingly, the very earliest version of the translation of the relics to Vézelay rather ingenuously admits that it was not known how the relics got to Aix to begin with. The _Vita apostolica_ and the _Translatio posterior_ neatly solve that problem with the new biographical details mentioned here. See Élisabeth Pinto-Mathieu, _Marie-Madeleine dans la littérature du Moyen-Age_ (Paris: Beauchesne, 1997), 96–9.

[41] Haskins, _Mary Magdalene_, 114.

[42] Linda Seidel, _Legends in Limestone: Lazarus, Gislebertus, and the Cathedral of Autun_ (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 54–5; Lobrichon, "Le Dossier," 169–77.

[43] By 1140, Amaury Picaud's pilgrims' "guide" to Compostela recognizes Vézelay as an obligatory stage on the road to Santiago. See Pinto-Mathieu, _Marie-Madeleine_, 105.

[44] Charles Freeman, _Holy Bones, Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe_ (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 185.

King Charles" confirming their identity; followed by a re-translation and elevation into a new reliquary, attended by Louis IX in person.[45] But a major blow to Vézelay's prominence came from the stunning 'discovery' in 1279 that the relics of the saint had never left Provence at all. Charles of Anjou, prince of Salerno, was told by Mary Magdalene in a vision that she was not in Vézelay, but still in the church of Saint-Maximin-La-Sainte-Baume near Aix, the 'desert' where she spent thirty years in penitence. On December 9 her relics were found untouched in a sarcophagus in the crypt (fig. 8.3), and the following May were translated with great pomp into new reliquaries. Charles's devotion to the Magdalene had been nourished through his close association with the Dominicans, and through his mother, who was Provençal by birth. In addition, the ambitious house of Anjou was in need of a major saintly patron.[46] In 1295 Charles, now king of Naples, agreed with Pope Boniface VIII to make the Dominicans the custodians of the tomb in La Sainte-Baume; accounts of the *inventio* and a book of miracles took care to note the impotence of the alleged relics in Vézelay. With this dual Angevin-Dominican support, the cult of the Magdalene took on a new life in Italy; and fresco decoration in mendicant churches helped establish the Magdalene as a popular and versatile subject in the visual arts.[47]

## 4. A Many-Faceted Saint

The decline of Vézelay as the primary cult center did not detract from Mary Magdalene's popularity in Europe; in fact, one might say it released the potential of the saint to appeal to a broader range of needs. The mendicants, both Dominican and Franciscan, were able to use her to model the affective penitence and devotion to Christ's passion that are hallmarks of later medieval spirituality. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 had updated the requirements of the sacrament of penance, adding annual confession to the steps of contrition, satisfaction, and absolution before one was allowed to partake of the Eucharist. It was the special calling of the mendicants to preach and teach this, and the Magdalene's "gift of tears" was a popular sermon topic since it indicated not only her correct internal disposition but also symbolized a baptism into new life, free from sin, through penance. The Dominican Jacobus de Voragine wrote about Mary Magdalene not only in the wildly popular *Golden Legend* (written ca. 1260),[48] but also in five sermons, in which he detailed how her tears indicated compunction, compassion, contrition and love.[49] The disconcerting lack of any biblical record of the Magdalene herself confessing her sins was variously and ingeniously solved; for example, Innocent III wrote a "confession" for her, creating what was to become a reasonably popular new genre.[50] The legend of Mary's miraculous sustenance (by the Eucharist alone) in the 'desert' of La Sainte-Baume also reinforced, for the laity, the connection between penance and the Eucharist.

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[45] Maddox, "Du déclin au renouveau," 102–4.
[46] Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen,* 41–4.
[47] Michelle Erhardt and Amy Morris, introduction to Michelle Erhardt and Amy Morris, eds., *Mary Magdalene: Iconographic Studies from the Middle Ages to the Baroque* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 1–20, esp. 10–11; Janis Elliott, "The Judgement of the Commune: The Frescoes of the Magdalene Chapel in Florence," *ZKunstG* 61 (1998): 509–19.
[48] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).
[49] Katherine J. Jansen, "Mary Magdalene and the Mendicants: The Preaching of Penance in the Late Middle Ages," *JMedHist* 21 (1995): 1–25. See Alexander, ch. 9 in this volume.
[50] Jansen, "Mary Magdalene," 15–6.

Social conditions in thirteenth century Italy also contributed to the immense popularity of Mary Magdalene there, where urban violence and the visibility of saintly laywomen were reflections of the "decline in confidence" of male and clerical leaders, many of whom were deeply implicated in the political unrest.[51] Thomas Renna argues convincingly that the career of Margaret of Cortona (d. 1297), who like other saintly laywomen of the era was called a "new Magdalene," reveals that, for the laity, penance had a social as well as a private utility. By modeling Christ's love and forgiveness, the Magdalene becomes herself a model of contrition and of peace, and in turn Margaret and women like her set an example for the citizens of Tuscany. By their humility and contemplative lives, they acted out true conversion, while by their active works of mercy, including service in hospitals and leprosaria, they exemplified the virtues of civic religion.

Women were far from the only devotees of the Magdalene; as in the earlier Middle Ages, she served as an exemplar of conversion and love for male monastics and secular clergy. For example, Adam of Dryburgh (d. ca. 1212) advised his fellow Carthusian monks to retreat to the desert in imitation of Mary. His *Liber de quadripartito exercitio cellae* notes specifically female virtues the monks should hold in order to best follow Mary's example.[52] However, she did play a particularly rich role in women's spirituality. Mary Magdalene could be used by preachers to point out to women (or to warn men about) their sex-specific shortcomings of lustfulness, luxury, and general light-mindedness. Even Peter Comestor had felt compelled to admit that Christ had to rebuke Mary in the garden of Gethsemane for her slowness to stop loving him as a man and start loving him as God.[53] Mary's tears were praised as an expression of her love and compunction, to be emulated by all, but were also an inescapable condemnation of her own "watery" female nature.[54] The identification of Mary Magdalene with the sinful woman in Luke 7:37–39, the identification of that sin as sexual, and the conflation of the stories of Mary of Egypt and of Thaïs with that of the Magdalene, meant that there was always the possibility of dwelling on Mary as the reformed harlot, sometimes with disturbingly prurient detail. The foundation of the Order of Penitents of Mary Magdalene in 1225 by Rudolph of Worms institutionalized the association of the Magdalene with former prostitutes, in addition to Robert of Arbrissel's earlier Fontevrault and many other communities dedicated to the reformation of fallen women.[55]

## 5. A Model for Female Leadership

On the other hand, Mary Magdalene was useful as a counterpoint to and even contradiction of the male-clerical penchant for trying to control and limit women's spiritual expression. Some male writers were more or less complicit in this, such as Jacques de Vitry, the Paris-trained theologian who in 1210 became a canon of the Augustinian priory in Oignies, near

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[51] Thomas Renna, "Mary Magdalene in the Thirteenth Century," Michigan Academician 30 (1998): 59–68.

[52] Liz Herbert McAvoy, Medieval Anchoritisms: Gender, Space, and the Solitary Life (Rochester: Brewer, 2011), 60. McAvoy notes Mary's grammatically and attributively female qualities: *gaudet autem vehementer super placida, sed tranquilla, sed quieta, sed suavi, sed dulci, sed jucunda, sed bona, sed serena, sed amoena, sed speciosa, sed luminosa, sed deliciosa sessione Mariae*.

[53] See note 25.

[54] Cf. Elizabeth Robertson, Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1990), 35–6, 189.

[55] Rebecca Lea McCarthy, Origins of the Magdalene Laundries: An Analytical History (Jefferson: McFarland, 2010), 64–86.

Liège.[56] There he made the acquaintance of Marie, a married woman who, with a small group of followers, had retired from the world to live a life of service and asceticism in houses under the shadow of the priory. In urbanized areas of northern Europe as in central Italy, women like Marie d'Oignies were evidence of the appeal of the apostolic life in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, working in hospitals and leprosaria, or organizing themselves as beguines; but since they did not live under a rule and were thus outside any ecclesiastical structure, there were those who doubted their orthodoxy. Soon after her death in 1213, Jacques wrote her *Vita,* partly at the behest of Foulques, bishop of Toulouse, who was fighting the Albigensian heresy. This heresy itself offered a tempting model of sanctity and asceticism to laywomen, and the example of Marie and her group of holy women was seen as a safely orthodox alternative.[57] In his *Vita* of Marie, Jacques never compares her directly to Mary Magdalene, but a close study of his sermons on the Magdalene and his sermons on penance shows Marie d'Oignies to be the incarnation of the Magdalene's virtues of love, of humility, of perfect penitence, and of tremendous strength in supporting adversity and self-imposed asceticism. Both Mary Magdalene and the beguines reconcile the figure of the virgin and the sinner, and ease the paradox of the woman speaking and acting in public.[58]

Interestingly, when Pope Honorius III was convinced by Jacques de Vitry to approve such groups of laywomen, he specified that they were to be allowed to "mutually exhort" each other to penitence and to good works.[59] Ever since St. Paul's prohibition of women preaching or teaching in the church[60] (taken up and embroidered by the Church Fathers, Gratian, the Paris masters, and pretty much everyone else) the only significant exception to the rule was Mary Magdalene.[61] According to the *Vita apostolica* and popularized in the *Golden Legend*, Mary had preached and converted the people in Marseilles alongside Maximinus.[62] Her career as a preacher, it was suggested, had already begun in Jerusalem when Christ told her to go and tell the disciples that He had risen (John 20:17). The non-biblical legend of Mary's predication gave pause to some redactors of the story; some versions insisted that Mary Magdalene modestly left the duties of preaching to Maximinus or to her brother Lazarus (one of the crowd from Palestine who eventually were added to the passenger list along with Maximinus and Mary). Others, with a disarming reliance on chronology, explained that since Mary was preaching before Paul's

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[56] Jacques de Vitry (d. 1240), later made bishop and cardinal, wrote several works including four sermon collections and a *Life* of Marie d'Oignies.

[57] In another attempt to counter the appeal of the Cathars, Foulques of Toulouse founded a Dominican convent for women, Notre-Dame de Prouille. M. Jean Guiraud, *Cartulaire de Notre-Dame de Prouille* (Paris: Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1907) Vol.1, cccxxxv.

[58] See the splendid and useful article by Michel Lauwers, "'*Noli me tangere*': Marie Madeleine, Marie d'Oignies et les pénitentes du XIIIe siècle," *MEFRM* 104 (1992): 209–68.

[59] Lauwers, "'*Noli me tangere*,'" 245.

[60] 1 Cor 14:34–35; cf. 1 Tim 2:11–12. Scholars debate today what Paul's actual view of women's roles was, but the medieval church held nearly unanimously the opinion that these verses forbade women to speak publicly.

[61] Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), exceptionally, was recognized by Pope Eugene III as a prophetess with authority to speak publicly. See Beverly Mayne Kienzle, "Defending the Lord's Vineyard: Hildegard of Bingen's Preaching against the Cathars," in Carolyn Muessig, ed., *Medieval Monastic Preaching*, BSIH 90 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 163–82.

[62] For a thorough treatment of the question, see Katherine L. Jansen, "Maria Magdalena: *Apostolorum Apostola*," in Beverley Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker, eds., *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 57–98.

prohibition, she was not transgressing church law. In his desire to win approval for beguines, Jacques de Vitry dodged the question by asserting that Mary merely "exhorted" the crowds in Gaul, a technical difference that separated her (and, by implication, the beguines) from heretical female and lay male preachers; Cathars and Waldensians were both alleged to claim Mary Magdalene's example as justification for allowing women preachers.[63] But most versions of the story, including that of the *Golden Legend*, blithely celebrated Mary Magdalene's preaching in Gaul without troubling about such details. Vernacular sermons and *Lives* dwell fondly on her eloquence, suggesting that the lay population of Europe was less concerned about the impropriety of women preaching in public than were the clerical elite.[64] It is possible that the Dominicans embraced Mary as the patron of their order partly to associate themselves with her appeal as a preacher. A late fifteenth-century 'virtual guide' to the Holy Land by the Franciscan friar Suriano brings the imagined pilgrim to the Holy Sepulcher. From there the 'tour' is led by the Virgin Mary to the garden of Gethsemane, where she invites Mary Magdalene to "preach" — this despite the evidence that Suriano was quite conflicted about the propriety of women preaching or even, in general, traveling.[65]

The perceived danger inherent in the model of a preaching woman, and the medieval polemical association of preaching women with prostitution or other fleshly sins,[66] brings us to the claim, so entrenched in modern popular culture, that Mary Magdalene was wife, consort or concubine of Christ, and that this was "known" but suppressed in the Middle Ages.[67] This assertion has, however, next to no medieval support. Certainly, as seen above, Mary was written about as the "beloved" and even the "spouse" of Christ. But the mystical and metaphorical description of God or Christ as spouse of the Church, of the soul, or of individual believers (male or female) is an ancient and well-attested subject in spiritual writings. The "evidence" of the Cistercian Bernard of Clairvaux's identification of Mary Magdalene as the *sponsa* in the *Song of Songs* (Sermon LVII, ca. 1125) must be weighed against, for example, Rupert of Deutz's identification of the *Song's* bride as "literally" the Virgin Mary.[68]

More tantalizing are a very few hints in medieval texts that the Cathars believed Mary Magdalene to have been the wife or concubine of Christ. Two thirteenth century sources mention the subject. The earliest is in *Contra haereticos*, a treatise attributed to Ermengaud of Béziers, a former heretic himself. Ermengaud writes that the Cathars "teach in their secret meetings that Mary Magdalene was the wife of Christ. She was the Samaritan woman… [and] the woman

[63] Beverley Mayne Kienzle, "The Prostitute-Preacher: Patterns of Polemic against Medieval Waldensian Women Preachers," in *Women Preachers and Prophets*, 99–107.
[64] The *Golden Legend* even has Mary's sister Martha preaching eloquently and efficaciously. See Joanna Mary Spreadbury, "*Gloriosa Praedicatrix*: The Origin, Development and Influence of the Medieval Legends about Saint Mary Magdalen as Preacher and Apostle" (PhD thesis, University of London, King's College, 2001).
[65] Leigh Ann Craig, *Wandering Women and Holy Matrons: Women as Pilgrims in the Later Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 243–57.
[66] Kienzle, "The Prostitute-Preacher," 99–107.
[67] For a thorough and balanced treatment, see Mary Ann Beavis, "The Cathar Mary Magdalene and the Sacred Feminine: Pop Culture Legend vs. Medieval Doctrine," *JRPC* 24 (2012): 419–31. Beavis' article informs this brief summary.
[68] E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of my Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 159–64. Rupert specifies that he is talking about the historical Mary, mother of Jesus.

taken in adultery…"[69] The second source is by Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay, a Cistercian monk who participated in the Albigensian Crusade. His *Historia Albigensis* was written between 1212 and 1218. He calls the massacre of the heretics of Béziers on 22 July, 1209, in the church dedicated to Mary Magdalene, "a splendid example of divine justice", suitable punishment for those who claimed that "Mary Magdalene was Christ's concubine".[70] His summary seems to reference Ermengaud's: "The heretics even affirmed in their secret meetings that the Christ who was born in the visible and terrestrial Bethlehem and crucified in Jerusalem was evil, and that Mary Magdalene was his concubine and the very woman who was taken in adultery… for the good Christ, they said, never ate nor drank nor took on real flesh". [71]

These sources are problematic in the extreme: they are brief remarks from two anti-Cathar treatises and their aim is to thoroughly discredit everything about the Cathars by shocking the reader with unheard-of charges. However, since both texts mention this belief in context of the "sinful" Magdalene, it is possible that the dualist Cathars might have conceived of a marriage between the fleshly, "evil" Christ (as Peter says) and the unrepentant Magdalene. In this case, such a "marriage" would be evil and not to be admired or emulated. Another possibility, but one that finds no direct support in these texts, is that there was a sacred, spiritual (non-physical) marriage between the "real" (good, non-material) Christ and the penitent Mary.[72] Such a marriage would, of course, have had no offspring. This speculation finds some support in the way the very popular *Golden Legend* described the sexless but intimate and fervent love between Mary and Christ.[73] The bottom line is that we do not have any direct and reliable source for what the Cathars really believed on this topic. Medieval Western (orthodox) Christians were unanimous in the belief that, once converted from her life of sin, Mary Magdalene remained utterly pure and was counted among the virgin saints.[74]

## 6. A Model of Engagement in the World

While Mary Magdalene's role as a paradigm of contemplative spirituality is well known, and her thirty years in the 'desert' of La Sainte-Baume made her a role model for anchoresses[75], her solicitude for the physical well-being of Christ, her public preaching in Gaul and her

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[69] Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, ed. and trans., *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 234.

[70] Pierre de Vaux-de-Cernay, *The History of the Albigensian Crusade: Peter of Les Vaux-de-Cernay's Historia Albigensis*, trans. W.A. Sibly and M.D. Sibly (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998), 51.

[71] Wakefield and Evans, 234.

[72] Despite similarities, it is unlikely that Gnostic beliefs had any direct impact on the theology of the Cathars. See Yuri Stoyanov, *The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 179–80. It is also notable that dualist heresies elsewhere in Europe (such as the Eastern European Bogomils) do not embrace this tradition of the Magdalene as consort of Christ. The Cathar interest in the subject may well be a reflection of her popularity in Provence (Beavis, 425).

[73] De Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 1:374–83.

[74] Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 240–4.

[75] Mari Hughes-Edwards, "'Wrapt as if to the Third Heaven': Gender and Contemplation in Late Medieval Anchoritic Guidance Writing," in Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards, eds., *Anchorites, Wombs, and Tombs: Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages*, Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages; (Cardiff: University of Wales, 2005), 131–41, esp. 134.

miraculous assistance with the fertility of the legendary royal couple of Marseilles[76] also made her a role model for those who wanted to serve God without forsaking the world. Welsh vernacular versions of the Magdalene's legend suggest an audience of laywomen and their families who looked to her as an exemplar of how to live a life of repentance, but also of generosity and hospitality; of the importance of women as healers; and of assistance with childbearing and care.[77] A particularly focused way in which the cult of Mary Magdalene encouraged the active life was through her connection to hospitals. The medieval Magdalene had a strong association with leprosy (through her brother Lazarus, identified with the leper in Luke 16:20) and with ointments or unguents (through various biblical passages of her anointing Christ's head and feet, and her desire to anoint His body at the tomb). By the thirteenth century, hospitals and pilgrim hostels were being founded and dedicated to the Magdalene; England seems to be particularly rich in such dedications, with at least 63 hospitals from the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries founded in her name, at least one by a laywoman.[78] Women who did not have the means to bequeath their wealth to hospitals or leprosaria could serve in them, as did Catherine of Siena, Margaret of Cortona, Marie d'Oignies, and countless others whose names we cannot know. Medieval medicine made faint distinction between care for the body and care for the soul; medieval hospitals cared for both, providing not only care for the ill and indigent but also spiritual remedy for both patients and patrons.

The fifteenth century East Anglian play _Mary Magdalene,_ arguably associated with one of the great hospitals of Norwich, shows how the active life of lay men and women could be celebrated in a dramatization of the saint's life.[79] The play explores contemplative piety, voluntary poverty, responsible use of wealth, and the importance of family, all the while associating spiritual and physical sickness and healing throughout the script. Moreover, the Magdalene and the other two Marys who approach the empty tomb in the play are directed to be dressed in veils as "chaste women", not merely evoking in general the beguines and other laywomen who retired from family life, but specifically the lay sisters who worked in the hospitals. Theresa Coletti draws the parallel between the Mary Magdalene of the play who cares for the pregnant queen of Marseilles, familiar from the _Golden Legend_, and the sisters vowed to chastity who cared for the pregnant women of St. Paul's hospital in Norwich.[80] The Magdalene is seen here as an example of how to negotiate the relationship of the body to the spirit, rather than simply the rejection of the body that her _Vita eremitica_ might suggest.

## 7. Conclusions

The hundreds of versions of the Magdalene legend in Latin and in the vernaculars – _vitae_, miracle collections, discoveries and translations of relics, paraliturgical dramas and plays,

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[76] This episode was adapted from romance literature and first appeared in the twelfth century. Jacobus de Voragine included it in the _Golden Legend_. In the story, Mary not only intercedes for the couple, who then have a child, but revives the mother and sustains the child when they are abandoned for dead on an island.
[77] Jane Cartwright, _Feminine Sanctity in Medieval Wales_ (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), 145–7.
[78] Jansen, _The Making of the Magdalen,_ 111.
[79] Theresa Coletti, "Social Contexts of the East Anglian Saint Play: The Digby Mary Magdalene and the Late Medieval Hospital?" _Medieval East Anglia_ (2005): 287–301. The play is found in Bodleian Library MS Digby 133.
[80] Coletti, "Social Contexts," 300.

liturgical and homeliary literature, visual representations – all manifest the remarkable diversity to which the saint lent herself. From the earliest recognition of her cult in Britain and the German lands to her later popularity in Provence and Italy, her many shrines and legends reflect strong local cults and traditions as well as nearly universal appeal. Her colorful and affective persona made her an especially accommodating example for sermons, both mendicant and secular, especially (though not solely) as the ideal penitent. As the ultimate model of interior contrition, Mary Magdalene was the *exemplar perfectae poenitentiae* for all sinners. But she was also honored as a renowned preacher and proselytizer, and as such was a powerful model of feminine strength, authority and holiness. She was the patron of kings and preachers, of anchorites, of wives and mothers, of hospital workers and midwives. Mary Magdalene was unquestionably one of the most universally loved saints of the European Middle Ages. As the apostle to the apostles and the saint closest to Christ, Mary Magdalene provided men and women, clergy and laity with a paradigm of singularly personal access to Christ.

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